

16th Steering Group Meeting

Priority Area 9 “Investing in People and Skills” (PA9)

Date: 9th – 10th May 2019

Venue: K+K Hotel Maria Theresia, Kirchberggasse 6, 1070 Vienna

Participants: *see annex 1*

Minutes by Ulrike Sedlmayr, KulturKontakt Austria

Chair:

Roland Hanak; Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Health and Consumer Protection, Austria

Jürgen Schick; Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research, Austria

Anna Gherganova; Ministry of Labour, Social Protection and Family, Republic of Moldova

Welcome and Introduction

Hanak, Gherganova and Schick opened the Steering Group Meeting and welcomed the participants as Priority Area Coordinators of PA 9. Hanak expressed his delight about the participation of so many new steering group members at this 16th PA9 Steering Group Meeting, apart from the familiar members, that already are attending the meetings regularly. Hanak shortly reflected on the preceding PA9 Danube Region Monitor Workshop and thanked again the participating steering group members for their efforts in nominating experts and their highly valued input.

Adoption of Agenda

The Agenda was adopted unanimously.

State of Play EUSDR and PA9

Schick and Hanak informed the participants about:

EUSDR general developments

- The EUSDR National Coordinators and Priority Area Coordinators Joint Meeting will take place on 23-24 May 2019 in Bucharest. The main topic of discussion will be the consolidated input for the revision of the action plan, that will be disseminated during the week before the meeting.
- Romania is currently holding the EUSDR presidency. The 8th Annual Forum of the EUSDR will take place on 27 - 28 June 2018 in Bucharest, organised by Romania and the European Commission. The registration is now open. The event will revolve around the topic "Building cohesion for a shared prosperity in the Danube Region". The Forum is focussing on connectivity and regional mobility, economy, ICT, environment, tourism, links between Macro-regional strategies, ESIF programs and the

new Cohesion Policy. The second day of the Forum will be dedicated to post-2020 EU policy design, with a focus on the role of the DTP and EU mainstream programs for the region.

- On January 29th the EC published the report on the implementation of EU macro-regional strategies, that can be found on the Website of the EUSDR. (see https://www.danube-region.eu/images/EC_Report_to_EP_ECouncil_EESC_CoR_Jan2019.pdf)
- Change of personnel: Marco Onida, EUSDR coordinator from the Directorate General for Regional and Urban Policy, will now work at the 'Natural Capital Directorate of DG Environment', his former colleague Roland Mayer-Frei will overtake his position on an interim basis.

Danube Strategy Point

- Florea gave an overview on current activities of the DSP (*see annex 2*). Currently the DSP is working on the consolidated input of the revision of the action plan, that is going to be disseminated and discussed during the meeting in Bucharest on May 23 - 24. She thanked for the input that they have received from the PACs. The DSP has gathered all the inputs received from the PACs and the NCs and are compiling them to produce a consolidated input. Public consultations on evaluation and on the revision of the action plan have been launched and the links can both be found on the EUSDR website. The deadline for submission is on May 20th (review of the Action Plan) and for the evaluation the deadline it's on May 13. She also mentioned a monitoring workshop that took place on April 4th in Vienna, where the PACs have participated and discussed the monitoring of the strategy. Florea further talked about the communication strategy of the DSP, as the PACs and NCs have considered it as being very important. They now have a communication plan, approved by the NCs. A communication webinar for the PACs took place in March with the aim to find a common vision. Further the DSP have established an EUSDR calendar and achieved a significant increase on social media. A workshop on communication and storytelling is being planned by the DSP, date tbc. At the Annual Forum of the EUSDR the DSP has planned a session dedicated to the involvement of stakeholders.

New PA 9 Projects

- Willsberger informed about the 3rd call of the Danube Transnational Programme, that has been launched in January and has been open until March 2019. It is a two-step evaluation and for the first step there have been 276 submissions that are still being evaluated and only the best project ideas will be invited for the 2nd step.
- Schick informed about one DTP project that is of particular interest of PA9, as it evolved from the workshop, that took place on 17-18 December in Vienna on the topic 'Early School Leaving and NEETs across the Danube Region – towards new regional perspectives'. The workshop served as a platform for project development with several experts and stakeholders from the Danube Region. The project application is called 'Preventing Early School Leaving', the project lead is the 'Development and Education Centre Novo Mesto' and the Austrian Ministry of Education, Science and Research has expressed interest to become Associated Strategic Partner.
- Willsberger talked about the application of the project 'Improving innovation-friendly framework conditions in Danube Cities bay focusing on creative industries'. The lead partner is from Austria and other involved countries are Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia, Hungary, Romania, Serbia, Bulgaria and Germany.
- Willsberger informed about another relevant project from Croatia and Austria, which is financed by DG Justice. The project will be added to the work programme and is focusing on changing discrimination and implication of possible parenthood for women and men and gender pay gap

issues. On board is the O.E.T. - ombud for equal treatment from Austria and Croatia on board, L&R Research from Austria and a Croatian Gender Institution.

- Hanak then talked about the labelling process in general and invited the PA9 steering group members to approach leaders of transnational projects of their country and tell them about the possibility of PA9 project labelling. The team of PA9 would then check, if these projects would meet the requirements in accordance with the whole steering group and if so, they can be added to the new edition of the PA9 brochure. This way the spectrum of PA9 stakeholders can be further broadened.

Current PA9 events

- Gherganova informed about the workshop on "Solving future skills challenges in the Danube Region", that will take place on 11 - 12 June 2019 in Chisinau and she reminds to delegate relevant stakeholders from diverse backgrounds to participate at the workshop. Travel and accommodation costs can be covered by PA9 under specific circumstances.
- Schick informed about the upcoming eTwinning Danube Region Conference, that will take place on 13 - 14 June in Vienna and announced, that there will be a presentation later by a representative of the National Agency Erasmus +.
- Gherganova announced that the next PA9 Stakeholder Conference and Steering Group Meeting will take place at the beginning of October in Chisinau. There will be three events in a row with the Danube Region Monitor workshop planned on the third day. The steering group members will be informed about the exact dates in the course of June.
- Willsberger informed about the next Meeting of ESF Managing Authority in the Danube Region, that will be taking place in September with the goal to better correlate the activities of the countries in the Danube Region. At the moment the programming phase of the European Social Funds is starting i.a. has already started in some countries. Common topics will be discussed at the meeting, as well as some text phrases to include the transnational component in some ESF Operational Programs of the Danube Region.

Findings of the Danube Region Monitor Workshop

- Willsberger stated that most participants of the SG meeting have also attended the Danube Region Monitor workshop the day before. She expressed her delight about the high interest on the Danube Region Monitor, there where 31 people from 11 countries participating at the workshop. The idea of the workshop was the discussion of the draft report, based on the indicators, which the PA9 steering group members have developed together with the participating experts at the first workshop in December 2017. The contractor has now made the desk research about these indicators, based on the PA9 targets, showing the numbers of 2011 to 2017. At yesterday's workshop it has been decided, that there will be a short introduction about the general economic development based on the GDP of the countries. Further it has been decided to include the regional data from the two regions of Germany belonging to the Danube Region and only where this is not possible, PA9 would use the national wide data material from Germany. Till end of June the participants are invited to send written comments to the report and suggestions for recommendations. The draft version of the report will be finished by the end of July and then there is a second phase of written comments till 15th of September. The final version of the report and conclusions will be presented and discussed at the final conference in Chisinau in October 2019.
- Hanak underlined that collecting the relevant data from different sources has been a good success, though its validity shouldn't be overemphasized. It started of 2011 because the strategy was launched in 2011. As a systematic analysis of causes and difference in framework conditions in the field of

education and labour market in the Danube Region is very complex, the DRM shouldn't be considered as an exercise with questions of causes and effect.

- Florea offered to advertise the DRM via the DSP communication, the DSP could forward it to group of stakeholders.

Revision of the 2010 EUSDR Action Plan – State of Play

- Florea presented the process of the revision of action plan and its updated timeline (*see annex 3*). She focused specifically on the consolidated input, that prospectively will be circulating on May 14th and will be discussed in the framework of the EUSDR National Coordinators and Priority Area Coordinators Joint Meeting, that will take place on 23./24.06.2019 in Bucharest.
- Schick thanked again the SG members for their feedback to the document FINALISING THE CONSULTATION PHASE - PACs INPUT TO AP REVISION - THEMATIC ANNEX that was intended to directly feed into the “Annex 1: Revised actions and projects with strategic impact for the EUSDR region proposed by PACs after consulting SGs” of the Consolidated Input for the Revision of the EUSDR Action Plan. The final version has been sent to the DSP within the deadline.
- Schick asked the SG members to contact their NCs to support the common consolidated PA9 interests and ideas concerning the review of the action plan.
- Florea added that she considered it to be very important to take part in the online public consultation.

Presentation of PA9 Projects and Events

- Vesna Babaja (Austrian National Agency Erasmus+ | Erasmus+ School Education | eTwinning) presented the eTwinning Danube Region Conference (*see annex 4*)
- Irene Lucius (Regional - Conservation Director at WWF Danube-Carpathian Programme) presented the Generation Earth Initiative (*see annex 5*)
- Tanja Vicas (ÖGB - Austrian Trade Union Federation) presented the project “Danube@work” (*see annex 6*)
- Clara Zika (Caritas Vienna) presented the project “Open Space for Learning and Counselling Initiative” with a focus on the target group of Roma (*see annex 7*)

Question and Answers

- Irene Lucius noted that she was participating in the Danube Local Actors Platform of PA10 and has heard about the considerations that in the framework of the revision of the EUSDR action plan, youth engagement should become a cross cutting theme.
- Hanak announced that youth empowerment will, among others, also be a topic at the Participation Day on June 26th in Bucharest and there would be the possibility to meet people from PA10. He noted that working on a trilateral basis with one PA being in a co-leadership position entails the risk of further complicating cooperation, as shared responsibility often lowers efficiency and quality. It works well though, when the projects work together with the different PAs.

Schick stated that the presentations showed the variety of topics that are all under the common umbrella of PA9. It is important to note, that besides the exchange on ministerial level, several PA9 activities actually reach the citizens and young people of the Danube Region.

Update on Reform Priorities in Education & Labour Market Policies in each Country

Tour de table

UA (labour market): Churkina talked about a new law concerning the unemployment insurance that has been developed. A focus is being laid on better matching the skills of employees and the needs of employers as well as the implementation of lifelong learning systems. The implementation of career advisor institutes has started since January 2019. Further a pilot project has started to train students from mixed inclusion groups in computer information technology.

UA (education): Izhyk stated that the reporting of the secondary school system in Ukraine has started. In 2017 the framework law on education has been adopted, where a reform of Ukrainian schools has been introduced. The reform introduced a competence-based approach and the approach of inclusion. A new standard in primary education has been adopted, 40000 teachers have been reskilled and the budget in education was raised in 2018, which is 7% of the GDP. Further there has been launched a VET education reform in 2015, working together with the ETF. An EU project 'EU for skills' will contribute to the modernization of VET education with the goal to make the skills provided more responsive to labour market needs. Further a draft law on adult education and amendments of the qualification framework are being prepared.

HU (labour market): Tölgyes stated that the most challenging question in Hungary is labour shortage, ensuring adequate skilled labour force supply. The labour market situation is improving, which means that according to the long term economic growth and the initiatives of the government employment level is higher than ever: in 2018 number of employed nearly reached 4.5 million. Employment has been increased in all age groups, which means a three generation increase in employment. Unemployment and labour shortage are present at the same time. Reasons for labour shortage are variable: territorial differences, structural divergences, quality of training and vocational training, lack of work experience. Initiatives ensuring flexibility in the labour market: incentives of mobility, summer student work, flexible labour law, dissemination of a typical employment forms. A special project has been launched to increase the number of employees in the primary labour market. The target of the project is to integrate 77 000 job seekers in to the labour market in 18 months in 3 counties. (Szabolcs, Hajdú Bihar, Borsod).

SK (education): Auxtova stated that the new national reform programme for educational upbringing has been adopted, which sets out education measures and indicates also the financing according to the 2 years action plan, that has been approved in June 2018. It proposes the changes to the inclusion of disadvantaged students and strengthening educational outcomes. In the next two years, priority will be given to the teachers' salaries as a measure to improve the attractiveness of the profession. The salaries have been raised 10% in 2019 and another 10% in 2020. Another focus is being put on the increase of kindergarden places. Further an amendment to the higher education act has been approved and an amendment of quality education in higher education, which should completely create a new system of accreditation and a new system for evaluating research. The age of compulsive education should be lowered to the age of 5 years-olds as of September 2020.

SK (labour market): Kalmanova stated that the current situation on Slovak labour market was characterised for a longer time by a mismatch between demand and supply of the labour force. The problem of shortage of skilled labour force in some professions still persists. One reason is that a large proportion of university graduates found work outside the field they've studied. Between 2018 and 2024 employers in Slovakia will need more than 400 000 employees especially in industrial commerce. A great labour shortage is expected to be in the IT sector and the agricultural sector.

DE (education): Eberz stated that the focus of school and adult education lies on digitalisation and the usage of new media in the class room with tablet pilot projects in the field of VET in upper secondary VET and general schools. They are linked to the elaboration of didactic materials and methods and to the development of teacher training. In this regard Industry 4.0 and Learning 4.0 have to be mentioned as important issues. There is a lack of primary school teachers and measures to raise the attractiveness of this profession. Measures to support headmasters with administrative tasks will hopefully be finished by the end of this year. Another topic for primary and secondary schools is the focus on democracy and civic education in all subjects and there are specific materials being developed. There is a trend in the tertiary sector towards an increase in the number of participants in academic causes. There also is a constant decline of apprentices, therefore the attractiveness of the dual system of VET is an important issue.

MD (education): Gherganova presented a project, aiming at increasing the efficiency of VET education, improving the quality of VET and especially improving the functionality of the national agency for quality insurance. Another aim of this project is to develop partnerships in schools, teachers and companies. This project aims to support the Republic to implement national VET strategy, that will be implemented until 2020. All activities are focusing on increasing the quality of education, implementing a qualification framework, developing partnerships on a sectoral level and on the development of educational standards.

MD (labour market): Gherganova stated that three months ago Moldova has implemented a new employment law, that is introducing active labour market measures like on the job training and subsidised employment for people from vulnerable groups. Subsidised companies are adapting work places to the needs of people with disabilities. With the support of Swiss cooperation Moldova is reforming labour migration management and improving the legal and institutional framework related to migration as well as improving private employment services, that are involved very much in the republic of Moldova. Around 30% of people are employed in agriculture. There is an increasing inactivity rate and high shares of NEETS and early school leavers.

BG (education): Kostadinov stated that the government has a special priority on education and especially on dual education. There is also a focus in different sectors of education to be more reactive to the labour market needs. There are two horizontal priorities - digitalisation, innovation and innovative investment - to prepare people to the new requirements of the labour market. STEM skills are also very important.

BG (labour market): Kostadinov informed that unemployment was less than 5 % in Bulgaria. It is a priority to increase highly evaluated labour skills for the industry - like IT, machine building, mechatronics, laserotics, biotechnology - to increase the competitiveness.

CZ (labour market): Malakova stated that the ministry is preparing an employment package based on the revision of tools and active labour market measures. Through this, the needs of the labour market should be met more precisely. This changes should, among others, increase the flexibility of requalification and make the professional development of employees more feasible. This should support employees affected by automatisisation. A social enterprise act introduces measures to support enterprises that try to employ long term unemployed people. Further a family package reform is being prepared and there is an amendment on the act of children groups. The advances of maintainance should be paid by the state and the parental allowance should be increased. There is also a new law on shared jobs for people who work part time and a strategy of social inclusion is being developed.

CZ (education): Malakova stated that there are ongoing preparations for the strategy of education policy until 2030 and beyond. A concept document is being prepared that should set the main features of education in the republic. A national programme has been approved by the government that is connected with the European semester. There are reforms being planned to start in 2019. People with SEN should get support with entrance exams for high schools. There are also some reforms prepared regarding the financing of regional education and the financing of higher education.

HR (labour market): Milicevic talked about the current process of drafting a national development strategy for 2030. A different system of mentorship in Croatian employment service is being developed as part of this strategy. The focus will lie on upskilling and reskilling and better matching education programs for the labour market. Certain projects like developing standards of occupation and qualification are being developed. Current trend of Croatian labour market numbers are positive, but mainly due to the very increased emigration since EU accession. Especially fields of construction and tourism are affected.

HR (education): Milicevic stated that there was a curricular reform currently in Croatia and the further development of the qualification framework is an ongoing process. Roughly 80% of public investments in Croatia are from EU funds.

AT (education): Schick talked about current developments in Austria concerning early childhood education and care, where a new agreement between the federation and provincial levels has been reached. 180 million Euro are being invested each year from now on until 2021/22. A strong focus is being laid on strengthening basis competences. In the framework of the project “Ensuring basic skills”, schools that fail to meet expectations regarding educational outcomes get multi-annual support in terms of education specialists, school development processes, social workers and psychologists. Furthermore, curricula are being revised regarding basic competences. The school entry phase is being revised and the transition for kindergarten into the school system should be improved. There is also a continued focus on the expansion of all-day school forms. In the area of digitalisation, the ministry is working on a master plan for digital education. Finally, there

is a strong effort in the field adult education with offers of free courses in basic education and to complete lower secondary education.

AT (labour market): Hanak presented the labour market objectives in Austria in 2019. After a strong focus on the integration of refugees, there is a shift towards the integration of long-term unemployed, elderly people, youth, women and handicapped people. In 2019 a focus lies on the support of youth, there is an obligation to attend education or training until the age of 18 and there is a guarantee from the labour market service to get a qualification until the age of 25. These two actions have been prolonged. The dual system is stronger emphasized. The implementation of new dual system apprenticeship jobs is being envisaged. A focus is being put on the improvement of skills that are specifically relevant considering digitalisation. There is a growing need for people working in elderly care and care for handicapped people. Since the migration crisis, 33000 asylum seekers are unemployed, labour market services is putting a great emphasis on integrating them into the labour market. Unemployment in April went down in general, except for elderly, foreign and handicapped people.

ETF

Zisimos presented the work of the European Training Foundation, one of 45 EU agencies. ETF is located in Turin and is the only EU agency with a strong international dimension, working with non-members states. All EU member states are part of the Governing Board. At the moment the ETF is launching a new strategy and trying to get closer to the needs of the member states and at the same time is trying to address the needs of the non-member states. The ETF is working in 29 countries in 4 different regions: East partnership region (Ukraine and Moldova), the Western Balkans (RS, ME, BiH) and Turkey, South partnership (North African countries all the way up to Israel and Palestine) and Central Asian countries. The EU has interest to invest in human capital in VET in Africa, the ETF is going beyond its geographic mandate and is putting an emphasis there. In this regard the recent call of the EC for VET mobility for Africa and enlargement region is very important - 4 million Euro are dedicated to a pilot project this year only. VET mobility is focused on learners, teachers and trainers. Another big topic is the Centre of Vocational Excellence (6 million Euro are scheduled for this year). Almost all member states and a few non-member states are involved. A Centre of Vocational Excellence combines partnerships with other institutions in order to develop VET to a higher level. This is linked with the aim of the EC to create partnership on an international level. The ETF has finished a mapping exercise identifying the centres of excellence. One of the flagship initiatives of the ETF is the Torino process that is linked to this exercise. The ETF collects information of all partner countries in all areas of human capital development since 2010, they have entered now the 5th round of Torino Process and are looking into an assessment. The ETF is specifically interested in the results of the reforms.

The ETF is in the service of the EC, and a partner in developing EU policies related to VET and human capital development. The big discussion at the moment is the next framework of cooperation beyond 2020. All Danube Region countries are involved in the discussion. A transition period of the EU is coming up with the upcoming elections and the new EC taking office in November 2019. This is also linked with funding tools, like Erasmus +. There is huge increase in the funds and there is of course pressure from the EP to get an even further increase in the funds. In the future development, future framework cooperation will affect big processes in VET like the Copenhagen process. The Copenhagen process started in 2002 and the last period,

that has started in 2015 is the river process that will expire next year. The discussion is ongoing on further development after 2020.

Zisimos talked about his impression of the last two days. There have been interesting discussions yesterday about the Danube Region Monitor and the ETF is willing to contribute to the development. The DRM is relevant to the ETF and EC through its different way on how to look at regions. A geographical region like the Danube sometimes might be an artificial construction. Even though the ETF has 4 established regions, the ETF is looking into different ways of working with the countries. Countries in the same region often have more in common than countries from different regions. The concept of region is a very fluent concept and needs to be addressed from different angles.

Adoption of the Work Programme

The update of the Work Programme was unanimously adopted by the SG.