



February 2008

## **Report on the Implementation of the ERI SEE Work Programme 2007**

In the year 2007, the Education Reform Initiative of South Eastern Europe (ERI SEE) continued to be a regional platform for co-operation in the education area and to serve as an interface between on-going national reforms in South Eastern Europe, the trends and developments in the education sector at EU level and to support capacity building and knowledge transfer relevant for the on-going EU integration process of the region. The ERI SEE activities also addressed more global developments in education and training, to which the SEE countries have committed themselves<sup>1</sup>.

The year 2007 was characterised with relevant developments (two ERI SEE members - Bulgaria and Romania - became EU member States in January 2007; Croatia and the Republic of Macedonia are candidate countries; the other countries of the Western Balkans are in different stages of negotiations of Stabilisation and Association Agreements with the EU; the process of transformation of the Stability Pact into a regionally owned Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) with fostering and building human capital as one of the priority areas for future regional cooperation). This strongly influenced the ERI SEE work in a way that its mandate, structure and content were largely debated in the whole region and with all partners.

This report intends to make a synthesis of the activities that were organised by the ERI SEE Agency in the period January-December 2007. The implementation of the activities was made possible and is a result of the joint efforts and work with the experts of the Stability Pact Task Force Education and Youth, the Ministry of Science, Education and Sports of the Republic of Croatia, the donors of the Initiative from Austria, The Netherlands, Norway, Romania and Switzerland, and all other SEE countries: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, the Republic of Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro, UNMIK/PISG Kosovo and Serbia. The ERI SEE Agency expresses the appreciation and gratitude for the intensive cooperation and support witnessed in the process of realisation of the activities and the implementation of the Work Programme 2007.

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<sup>1</sup> The World Declaration on Education for All and the Dakar Framework for Action, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, as well as the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development 2005 - 2014.

## **1. Political level – updated and enhanced Memorandum of Understanding between the Ministers of Education and Higher Education of South Eastern Europe (updated ERI SEE mandate)**

The first half of the year 2007 was characterised with intensive activities of the Austrian Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Culture and the Task Force Education and Youth of the Stability Pact on shaping and guiding the political dialogue and work on updating the political platform for regional cooperation in education, science and research. The members of the ERI SEE Governing Board and Consultative Body were continuously updated on the progress made and were invited to provide input in different phases of the preparation of the Memorandum. This work was in the focus of the *10-th ERI SEE meeting of Senior Officials „Updating the Mandate for Regional Cooperation in Education in SEE”,* which took place in Vienna on 2 February 2007. The draft version of the enhanced Memorandum of Understanding and Action Plan (MoU) were subject to discussion during the meeting. The meeting provided the opportunity for the participants to be briefed by top level officials on the: priorities of the German EU Presidency for education; different forms of the European Commission for support to higher education reforms in the Western Balkans and in the countries neighbouring the EU, as well as on the process of phasing-out process the Stability Pact. Following the discussion which resulted with recommendations for improvement of the draft MoU & Action Plan, the timetable for finalisation of the enhanced MoU & Action Plan and the initiation of the process of signature of the document were agreed.

### **6<sup>th</sup> meeting of the ERI SEE Governing Board and Consultative Body, Vienna - Austria, 21 May 2007**

The members of the Governing Board from: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, UNMIK/PISG Kosovo-Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, Moldova, Montenegro, Romania and the Task Force Education and Youth participated to the meeting. Croatia was presented by the financial officer of the Ministry of Science, Education and Sport.

The members of the Consultative Body from the: Task Force Education and Youth, Kultur-Kontakt Austria, Governmental Agency for International Business and Cooperation of the Ministry of Economic Affairs of Netherlands, Ministry of Education and Research of Norway, Moldova, Council of Europe, OECD participated to the meeting. Representatives of the ETF and the EUA participated to the meeting. High level officials represented the Stability Pact.

The meeting was the opportunity for the members ERI SEE Governing Board and Consultative Body to be briefed by the Director of the Working Table I of the Stability Pact on: the phased evolution of the Stability Pact into a Regional Co-operation Council (RCC) as a more regionally owned, streamlined and effective regional co-operation framework in SEE; endorsement of the Statute of the RCC; endorsement of Sarajevo as the host of the RCC Secretariat; endorsement of the proposal for the first RCC Secretary General and the timetable of activities that will be undertaken in the course of the years 2007-2008. The focus of the work of the RCC will be around the priority areas: Economic and Social Development; Infrastructure; Justice and Home Affairs; Security Co-operation; Building Human Capital and Parliamentary co-operation.

The representative of the Stability Pact endorsed the process of signing the enhanced Memorandum of Understanding between the Ministers responsible for Education, Science and Research in South Eastern Europe (started in Istanbul in May 2007). Having in view the demanding tasks of the process of increasing the regional ownership of the co-operation, the transformation will be supported by Task Forces in the areas identified as priorities. In this context, establishment of a Task Force on Fostering and Building Human Capital would be a very important step towards smooth continuation and further developments in this priority area.

The members of the ERI SEE Governing Board adopted the ERI SEE activity and financial reports for the year 2006.

### **7<sup>th</sup> meeting of the ERI SEE Governing Board and Consultative Body, Turin - Italy, 19-20 November 2007**

The 7th meeting of the ERI SEE Governing Board and Consultative Body was jointly organised by the ERI SEE Agency and the European Training Foundation.

On 19 November a common session of the ERI SEE Governing Board and Consultative Body and the Governing Board of the European Training Foundation (ETF) with Representatives of Member State Aid Agencies took place.

The novelties and critical issues of the ETF work in the region 2007-2010 and the first findings and issues of the implementation of the new IPA instrument were presented. Presentation of the ERI SEE work until 2007 as a platform for fostering regional cooperation, the ERI SEE work in 2008 in the context of increased regional ownership of the process, as well as the opportunities for collaboration followed. The members of the ERI SEE Governing Board presented the national initiatives in the IPA framework. The priorities of the: OECD, World Bank, Norway; Austria, The Netherlands, Switzerland, Council of Europe, European University Association, European Training Foundation and the Stability Pact were presented.

The ERI SEE Governing Board and Consultative Body meeting was held on 20 November. The members of the Governing Board from: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Romania, Serbia and the Task Force Education and Youth were present. The Head of the Directorate for International Cooperation of the Ministry of Science, Education and Sport and the financial officer of the Ministry of Science, Education and Sport represented Croatia. The Director of the National Vet Agency represented Albania and a staff member of the Ministry of Education and Youth represented Moldova. Countries not represented at the meeting: Bulgaria, Montenegro and the Republic of Macedonia. UNMIK/PISG Kosovo was not represented.

The members of the Consultative Body from: the Task Force Education and Youth, KulturKontakt Austria, the Ministry of Education and Research of Norway, the Council of Europe, the European Training Foundation and the OECD participated to the meeting. Representatives of CROSS/EVD, the SDC, the EUA and the Stability Pact took part to the meeting. Representatives of the Federal Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture of Austria/Task Force Education and Youth, the European Training Foundation and of the OECD Investment Compact participated to the meeting, too.

The recent developments in the setting-up of the Secretariat of the Regional Cooperation Council in Sarajevo (BiH) were presented (staffing, RCC liaison office in Brussels).

Aiming to assure smooth developments in the priority area of the RCC "Fostering and Building Human Capital", the Stability Pact and the Task Force Education and Youth have prepared a Proposal for the establishment of a Task Force "Fostering and Building Human Capital" (TFBHC) on behalf of the RCC. The purpose of the Proposal is to entrust a TFBHC as successor of the TFEY with a high-level, regional coordination process on education and research, as well as coordination of activities in this priority area of the RCC.

Switzerland stipulated the necessity to establish good coordination and relationship between ERI SEE and the RCC. Croatia informed that the country has expressed readiness to be the second Co-Chair of the TFBHC.

The Executive Director of the ERI SEE Agency presented the Activity Report 2007 and the outcomes of the national review process that address the ERI SEE activities until now. The participants to the meeting expressed appreciation for the ERI SEE work and the activities undertaken in the year 2007, as well as for the efforts of the countries (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, UNMIK/PISG Kosovo, Moldova, Montenegro, Romania and Serbia) which have completed the national review projects in 2007.

Briefings on the on-going activities in SEE in framework of the OECD Skills Development Programme for SEE and on the possibilities for inclusion of SEE countries in projects funded by the EC Social Fund followed.

The participants to the meeting provided suggestions for improvement of the first draft of the ERI SEE Work Programme 2008. The updated document is to be submitted to the ERI SEE Governing Board and Consultative Body in December 2007. Upon recommendation of Switzerland, contracting an expert in Project Cycle Management with the objective to support the Agency in the preparation of the ERI SEE planning documents 2008 was agreed.

The financial report for the period January-November 2007 was presented. It was agreed the final financial report for the period January-December 2007 to be prepared and discussed during the next ERI SEE Governing Board and Consultative Body meeting.

A distant voting procedure was launched for adoption of the following documents: "Proposal for the Decision of the ERI SEE Governing Board on the Annual National Reporting and the Financial Contributions from the ERI SEE members as of 2008" and "Update of the Financial Guidelines for Experts and Participants in ERI SEE Activities".

### **Adoption of the proposal for establishing a Task Force Fostering and Building Human Capital (Meeting of the Stability Pact Working Tables, Tirana – Albania, 3-4 December 2007)**

The last meetings of the Stability Pact Working Tables took place in Tirana-Albania on 3 and 4 December 2007. The Chair of the Task Force Education and Youth, two members of the Task Force Education and Youth and the ERI SEE Executive Director took part to the meetings.

On 3 December, the Albanian version of the History Workbooks which have been prepared in the framework of the Stability Pact financed joint participatory project involving the SEE countries was presented. Numerous representatives of the Albanian national authorities, History teachers at university, secondary and primary level, as well as History students from all over the country and representatives from all SEE countries took part to the presentation.

The meetings of the Stability Pact Working Tables marked the next milestone in the transformation process of the Stability Pact into the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC). Special attention was given to the past achievements, the lessons learnt and the challenges remaining for the RCC with regard to the Stability Pacts' various initiatives and task forces.

The meeting of the Working Table I took place on 3 December. The Minister of Education of Albania opened the meeting, followed by a video presentation of the achievements in the areas covered by this Table.

The panel discussion on the Parliamentary cooperation provided insight on the achievements and the future prospect of the cooperation.

The panel discussion Building Human Capital was the occasion to take note of the positive reaction of the SEE Ministers of Education and Research to the proposal of establishing a new Task Force Fostering and Building Human Capital. The Working Table I entrusted Romania and Austria the co-ordination activities that will lead to the elaboration of a profile and structure of the new task force. The Chairmanship and Co-chairmanship of the Task Force Fostering and Building Human Capital will be subject to a decision of the RCC meeting (scheduled for the first half of 2008).

The meetings of the Working Tables II and III took place on 4 December.

The concluding panel "The road ahead-reinforcing the regional co-operation agenda" provided conclusions and recommendations for the next steps towards increased, strongly regionally owned cooperation in SEE.

## 2. Implementation of the ERI SEE activities in the thematic areas 2007

Different activities were developed in the ERI SEE region in cooperation and with support of the respective national authorities, experts from the ERI SEE donor countries, the OECD, ETF, EUA, Council of Europe and the World Bank in the areas identified as priorities.

### Lifelong learning

#### **Regional seminar “Use of Logical Framework Approach – an important tool for successful international co-operation in the fields of education and training”, Belgrade - Serbia, 7-8 May 2007**

As part of the ERI SEE capacity building measures for participation in the Community programmes in education and training targeting the network of experts established with the workshops and study visits organised in 2005 and 2006, the seminar took place in Belgrade, Republic of Serbia, on 7-8 May 2007. It was continuation of the training on Project Cycle Management (PCM) and focused on understanding and assessment of the external impacts on the project, as well as on the indicators of progress relevant for monitoring of project implementation and achievements.

The seminar was also the opportunity for dissemination of relevant information gained during the study visits to the national authorities and the national agencies responsible for the Community programmes in education and training in Slovenia and Norway, as well as for presentation of the experience of Slovakia in establishing the structure and conditions for management of the EU programmes in education and training.

22 participants from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, UNMIK/PISG Kosovo, Moldavia, Montenegro and Serbia, and experts-trainers from The Netherlands (key expert, trainer and moderator of the event), Slovakia and Romania took part to the Seminar.

Recommendation for future regional cooperation:

- a follow-up Seminar on Logical Framework Approach covering the activity schedule and the cost schedule;
- cooperation of the ERI SEE countries which are in the process of establishing national agencies for administration of the Action Programme for Lifelong Learning with the countries members of the Initiative and the donor countries with the objective to enable placements in the respective agencies in order to support the capacity building process.

#### **Multi-country seminar on adjusting the vocational education and training towards labour markets needs, Bečići - Montenegro, 11-12 December 2007**

ERI SEE was invited to take part to the Multi-country seminar on adjusting the vocational education and training (VET) towards labour market needs. The seminar was jointly organised by the Stability Pact and the European Commission Taiex Office.

The seminar offered a platform for discussion among different stakeholders involved in the field of VET in the countries of the Western Balkans. The objective of the event was to enhance the exchange of good practices and regional cooperation in the sector, with a view of tackling persistent unemployment and brain drain from the region.

Overall presentations covered: the findings of the Stability Pact project on VET in SEE, the challenges for VET in the Lisbon Agenda and the Cross-Country review of the Western Balkans labour Market.

The panel discussion “From VET to Human Resources Development” covered: quality assurance in primary and secondary education; from VET to adult learning and the contribution to competitiveness; the role of the Parliaments and civil society in promoting an integrated and well functioning lifelong learning system. During this session, the ERI SEE

Executive Director covered the topic of transition from VET to adult learning and presented the ERI SEE work and activities in the region. The presentation was distributed to the participants and can be found on the Taixex web site.

The panel discussion “Ensuring learning promotes employability-making the right policy connections” addressed: education, training and employment support for the long-term unemployed; the adaptability of enterprises; the dual system-training on the job and the effective consultation between national Parliaments.

The panel discussion “Maximising EU HRD policy knowledge in the democratic process” covered: VET within NQF – the lifelong perspective; the Bologna Process; other initiatives in VET; the role of Chambers of Commerce for VET promotion.

## **European Qualification Framework - National Qualification Frameworks in the countries of South Eastern Europe**

### **Briefing of high level national officials on the developments at European and national level, Vienna – Austria, 21 May 2007**

During the 6-th meeting of the ERI SEE Governing Board (Vienna, 21 May), the representative of the European Training Foundation addressed the latest developments with regards to the European Qualifications Framework and provided information about the activities for development of NQF in the ERI SEE countries. Currently, all Western Balkans countries have started to work on NQF; most of them have established action plans, and work on preparation of the legislation. The Ministries of Education lead the process, but the participation of the social partners in the process is limited. The implementation of learning outcomes concept is not sufficiently present when developing the NQF. There is no practice of recognition/validation of the non-formal and in-formal learning in the Western Balkans countries.

The EUA representative provided an update on the developments of qualifications frameworks in light of the London Ministerial Conference (May 2007) and the EQF developments-the overarching framework for qualification in the EHEA. The progress in the development of NQFs has been confirmed in the national reports prepared for the London Conference, “Trends V” and “Bologna with Student Eyes”. The reports also point out the difficulties and drawbacks in the process of development of NQFs: many institutions as well as citizens are unaware of them; confusion is often present, partially explained by the existence of certain systems of qualifications. In order to have a successful process of NQF development, extensive consultation and communication with all stakeholders has to be established and a broad societal dialogue has to take place. There is no clear linkage between the NQF and the recognition of prior learning. The student involvement is limited, especially in implementing the EQF-LLL.

The representatives of the ERI SEE region informed about the latest developments at national level: Albania has started the process of NQF development in cooperation with the Council of Europe; in the process of development of NQF, Bosnia and Herzegovina has established cooperation with experts from Ireland and Scotland; in UNMIK/PISG Kosovo, the law on NQF is in a Parliamentary procedure.

### **International Conference "EDUCATION AND TRAINING: social and economic benefits within a lifelong perspective", with a special ERI SEE session, Sinaia – Romania, 8-10 October**

Upon initiative of Romania, the originally planned regional seminar on learning outcomes and their role in curricula design in secondary and tertiary education was linked to the International Conference "Education and Training: Social and Economic Benefits within a Lifelong Learning Perspective" (Sinaia, Romania 8-10 October). The participation of representatives of the ERI SEE region to the Conference was co-financed by Romania.

Having in mind that at the London Conference (May 2007) the European Ministers responsible for higher education mandated the Council of Europe for dissemination and support to sharing of good practice in the development of NQFs, coordination of the activities was assured with the participation of the Chairman of the Council of Europe Education Committee to the International Conference.

The purpose of the Conference was to disseminate the results of the first institution building project in the second multi-annual Phare programme 2004-2006 titled "Phare Project TVET RO 2004" and to focus on the perspectives of TVET modernisation including articulation with higher education at system level in the lifelong learning perspective. The Conference also aimed to contribute to strengthening the cooperation between the main social actors in TVET, industry, labour market and other relevant sectors.

Specific goals of the Conference were:

- To present the developments in the Romanian TVET and higher education system based on the national and European priorities and the ones defined with the European Commission work programme "Education and Training 2010";
- To identify the key challenges to the coherency of the response of TVET and higher education to regional development within the context of national qualification framework, national quality assurance strategies, flexible provision through recognition of prior learning and individualised education and training pathways, inclusive education and training for students with special educational needs and financing of education and training;
- To contribute to the enhancement of regional cooperation in TVET in SEE, as well as under the bilateral agreements. In particular, the Conference aimed at providing the opportunity for mutual exchange of experience in the development of the National Qualification Frameworks in SEE.

On 8 October, 15 experts participated to the special ERI SEE session on National Qualification Frameworks. The participants represented: the Delegation of the European Commission in Romania, the Council of Europe, the Task Force Education and Youth of the Stability Pact, Austria, Albania, Croatia and Romania.

The session provided the opportunity for exchange of experience of the SEE countries in the development of national qualification frameworks, to discuss the possibilities for mutual cooperation and to identify the fields for ERI SEE support to regional cooperation in this priority area.

Conclusions and recommendations for future regional cooperation:

- The process of development and implementation of NQFs to be based on permanent dialogue between the education sectors (VET and HE in particular), the labour market, trade unions and other stakeholders.
- The NQFs developed should be characterised with flexibility, simplicity, applicability and visibility.
- Joint work of the VET and HE sector in development of NQF is crucial if the objective is to be achieved for covering the lifelong learning continuum of education and training of each citizen.
- Credits that allow transfer and accumulation should be allocated in a way that will ensure progress and recognition of prior learning.
- Building on the results of the projects supported by KulturKontakt Austria for modernisation of tourism education in Albania, Croatia and Romania, a proposal for a regional project to be prepared with the objective to develop sectoral qualifications in tourism covering IVET, CVET and HE. The project should also address the elements of credit systems which are important to ensure transferability and accumulation of prior learning.
- The coming meeting of the ERI SEE Governing Board to be used as an opportunity to inform the participants about the possibilities for inclusion of SEE countries in projects funded by the Social Fund.

- The report to be submitted to the National Agency for Lifelong Learning of Romania, with the objective to stimulate consideration of possibilities for involvement of educational institutions of SEE in projects financed by the European Commission Action Programme for Lifelong Learning.

### **South East European Regional Conference on Qualification Frameworks in the European Higher Education Area, Belgrade – Serbia, 1-2 November 2007**

Under the Serbian Chairmanship of the Council of Europe, the Serbian Ministry of Education and the Council of Europe organized a regional conference on qualifications frameworks on 1 – 2 November 2007. The conference gathered Ministers of education and other high level participants from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Montenegro, Serbia, the Republic of Macedonia and Turkey, as well as a large number of university representatives from Serbia and representatives of the European Commission, and the European Agency for Reconstruction.

In line with the commitment to achieving synergy of the activities, ERI SEE representative was invited to participate to the conference.

The conference stipulated the need for regional cooperation in the exchange of experience in the development of NQFs and called the Council of Europe to play an important role in supporting the efforts of South Eastern Europe.

In order to avoid overlapping of the activities and achieve synergy, the CoE, the ETF, the ERI SEE and other institutions and organisations need to exchange information about the future activities in the region.

### **Quality education and equity in education**

#### **Regional expert seminar on national and international assessments in education, Bar – Montenegro, 28-29 September 2007**

The seminar was a follow-up to the ERI SEE seminar “Assessment and Evaluation-Important Tools for Promoting Quality in Education”, which took place in Zagreb 2006. The seminar took place in Bar – Montenegro on 28 and 29 September. It was organised jointly with the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Montenegro. The Minister of Education and Science of Montenegro welcomed the participants and closely followed the two days work of the seminar.

The seminar provided the opportunity to 27 national experts from of SEE, experts with reach international experience from the donor countries Switzerland and The Netherlands, as well as from the OECD and the World Bank, to address different components of national assessments, and to be briefed about the developments in PISA, TIMSS and PIRLS. It provided a platform for discussions and exchange of experience in national and international assessments and enabled formulation of recommendations for future regional cooperation.

Recommendations for future cooperation:

- In the second half of 2008, ERI SEE to organise a follow-up seminar on the experience from the Matura exams in SEE.
- To explore the possibility for linking with the IEA event that will take place in Sofia in 2008.
- An ERI SEE seminar on Project Cycle Management to be foreseen in 2008.
- An ERI SEE event to be organised with the objective to discuss the research and results of different approaches to teaching and learning.
- The World Bank and the ERI SEE to continue the cooperation by supporting different aspects of regional cooperation in the field of assessments in education.

## **International Conference "Education Policies for Inclusion in South Eastern Europe: Challenges and Opportunities", Vienna – Austria, 22 – 23 May 2007**

The conference was co-organised by the Austrian Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture, the OECD and the Stability Pact (Task Force Education and Youth). It took place in Vienna-Austria on 22 and 23 May 2007.

The conference provided a forum for over 70 representatives of national and international stakeholders to discuss the evaluation of the OECD activity on "Education Development for Students at Risk and those with Disabilities in South Eastern Europe (2003 – 2007)" with the objective to develop concrete perspectives for future strategic support. It provided information about relevant international and European developments with regard to education of students with special needs, and contributed to raising awareness for support of inclusive practices amongst policy makers at all levels. It was a platform for discussion between education Ministries, the donor community, International Organisations and NGOs.

The four components of the OECD activities on education development for students at risk and those with disabilities in SEE were addressed: the policy reviews, the pilot activities in the field of statistics and data collection, the capacity building activities for model schools, and data collection. The conference paid special attention to the international dimension of inclusion. The working sessions contributed the intensive exchange of experience among experts from the region and international experts.

The recommendations from the conference were that systematic support to education of students at risk and those with disabilities would integrate: the efforts on the policy and administrative levels, the available financial resources, the practicable and result oriented research and the technical assistance (establishment and monitoring of pilot projects and systematic teacher training). A continuous dialogue between national and international stakeholders including parents associations and other non governmental organisations could help to identify areas in which the enhanced cooperation would add value to already existing efforts.

## **OECD Conference on Fair and Inclusive Education, Trondheim – Norway, 4-5 June 2007**

In order to support the preparation of the regional seminar on equity in education (foreseen with the ERI SEE Work Programme to take place in Prishtina in October), the OECD and the Ministry of Education and Research of Norway enabled participation of two representatives of the ERI SEE region to the final OECD Conference on equity in education (Trondheim-Norway, 4-5 June).

The conference brought together policy makers, scholars and senior educational administrators from 22 OECD and non-member countries who deal with equity in education issues to share recent research, discuss emerging policy issues, and consider how schools and education systems could respond to these challenges.

The conference discussed the outcomes of the OECD thematic review on equity in education, including the comparative report No more failures: ten steps to equity in education and examined a proposed set of policy levers focused on fair and inclusive design, practices and resources in education. Discussions focused on key issues for equity in education, such as early childhood interventions, school choice or secondary education structures, measures to reduce dropout rates, financial or strategic policies countries have adopted or may envisage putting in place to enhance equity in their education systems. Conference participants also debated how to raise policy awareness of equity in education issues and how policies for equity in education can be best supported.

## **Regional seminar “Equity in Education – a Challenge for South Eastern Europe”, Prishtina – UNMIK/PISG Kosovo, 26-27 October 2007**

In line with the OECD request to the participants to the conference in Trondheim to develop dissemination campaigns in their respective countries, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology of UNMIK/PISG Kosovo and the ERI SEE Agency jointly worked on the organisation of the regional seminar on equity in education. The seminar took place in Prishtina on 26-27 October. The Minister of Education, Science and Technology welcomed the participants and stressed the importance of the topic for the region.

Over 50 participants from UNMIK/PISG Kosovo, experts from the donor countries: The Netherlands, Norway and Switzerland, the SEE: Romania, Croatia and the Republic of Macedonia, as well as from Finland, UNESCO, etc contributed to the seminar work. The seminar covered the aspects of fairness and inclusiveness of education with focus on The Netherlands, the Communication from the European Commission to the Council and to the European Parliament “Efficiency and equity in European education and training systems”, the OECD Report “No More Failures-Ten Steps to Equity in Education”, the experiences of Norway and Switzerland from the thematic reviews and paved the way to more detailed presentations of the experiences in the region. The on-going work in UNMIK/PISG Kosovo, Romania and Croatia were elaborated into details, as well as the work in other countries in the region.

Recommendations for future activities:

- Equity in education to continue being an ERI SEE thematic area. A follow-up event to be organised which would focus on the design of national policies, practices and resourcing for reducing failure and dropout from the education systems;
- Establishing a platform for exchange of the experience of the SEE countries, dissemination of the results of numerous projects in the field of equity in education. The network would also include the ERI SEE donor countries and provide the opportunities for dissemination of results of their experiences and good practice examples;
- In cooperation with the Zurich University of teacher training, to explore the possibility for dissemination of the results of the EU funded project “MHADIE”;
- ERI SEE to support a visit of SEE educational experts to Sibiu-Romania in order to be acquainted with the achievements in framework of the Phare funded project “A Friendly School, Open for Everybody - Inclusive Education for Disadvantaged Groups”.

## **The “knowledge triangle”: education, research and innovation**

### **Regional round table “Accreditation in Higher Education in South Eastern Europe”, Zagreb – Croatia, 28-29 June 2007**

The Round table on accreditation in higher education in South Eastern Europe was jointly organised with the Ministry of Science, Education and Sport of the Republic of Croatia and the Agency for Science and Higher Education of the Republic of Croatia. It took place in Zagreb on 28 and 29 June.

The event provided an opportunity for 33 experts from the region (including students), Austria, Norway and UNESCO to discuss into details the national systems, to share examples of good practice, exchange negative experiences and advise each other about the possible approaches to improvement of accreditation in higher education. The event also provided a wider overview on the recent European and worldwide developments relevant for increased cooperation, networking and assuring quality in the field of accreditation in higher education.

Acknowledging that accreditation in higher education is an area where regional cooperation could be fostered, the participants to the Round Table agreed that support to the continuation of the regional dialogue and cooperation in accreditation in higher education is necessary. The following conclusions and recommendations were adopted:

- Increased quality of accreditation of higher education at national level can be achieved by strengthening the cooperation between the Ministries responsible for higher education, the national bodies responsible for accreditation and the higher education institutions. Student involvement in different stages of accreditation is to be encouraged and nurtured.
- Increased understanding of the quality of the accreditation procedures in each SEE country would contribute to trust building and would pave the way to mutual recognition of accredited institutions. Having this in mind, the future regional cooperation could support:
  - Projects for bilateral comparative analysis and mutual observations similar to the TEAM (Transparent European Accreditation decisions and Mutual recognition agreements) project initiated by ECA. The analysis would provide a transparent view on the similarities and differences between the accreditation bodies of different countries.
  - ERI SEE to support exchange of visits and participation of accreditation experts from one SEE country in different accreditation procedures undertaken by the accreditation bodies of other SEE countries. In this context, the SEE countries were invited to identify their interest for participation to site visits to the national accreditation bodies of certain SEE countries. Following the express of interest, ERI SEE would work on organisation and financial support of the site visits.
- Sharing of good practice examples should become a common practice among the SEE countries. The advancement of the Republic of Croatia in the development and use of the information system for quality assurance in higher education was highly valued and this was identified as an area for future regional cooperation and (possibly) works on the development of a tool that would be used by other SEE countries, too.
- The participants appreciated the proposal of the Director of the Accreditation Agency for Higher Education of Albania to increase the relevance of the meeting of the General Assembly of the CEE Network of Quality Assurance Agencies that will take place in Durrës, Albania on 24-25 May 2008, by inviting to the meeting representatives of the SEE countries and UNMIK/PISG Kosovo which are not members of the CEE Network. It is to be expected that this opportunity will contribute to shortening the period needed for establishing the national bodies and starting the procedure for CEEN membership. All SEE representatives will have opportunities for networking with colleagues and exchange of experience and good practice examples.
- In the draft proposal for the Work Programme 2008, ERI SEE to propose organisation of an event that would be jointly organised with the Accreditation Agency for Higher Education of Albania and would take place side by side with the CEEN General Assembly meeting. The topics to be covered with the agenda should be relevant for future regional cooperation in the field of quality assurance in higher education. One of the topics was already identified during the Round Table: the European Registry of Quality Assurance Agencies and its impact on the SEE countries.
- The participants to the Round Table fully agree that “Provision of cross-border higher education offers increased access to higher education, improvement and innovations in higher education systems and contributes to the building of regional cooperation, which is essential to academic knowledge as well as, more generally, to national social and economic wealth.”<sup>2</sup> They identified different possibilities for cooperation with UNESCO:

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<sup>2</sup> UNESCO/OECD Guidelines for Quality Provision in Cross-border Higher Education, OECD 2005

- Promotion and undertaking steps for the implementation of the UNESCO/OECD Guidelines for Quality Provision in Cross-border Higher Education. The Guidelines are not legally binding and the SEE countries have the freedom to implement the Guidelines as appropriate to their national context.
- Use of the UNESCO portal on Higher Education Institutions in order to increase the transparency and visibility of the higher education institutions from SEE by providing on-line information on higher education institutions recognised or sanctioned by competent authorities in the countries.
- Elaboration of the possibilities for adaptation of the existing UNESCO capacity building tools that have been developed for other regions to the needs of SEE.
- Use of and contribution to the Higher Education Open and Distance Learning Knowledge Base.

### **Regional expert seminar "The Bologna Process after London - the challenges for implementation", Zagreb, 29-30 June 2007**

The Regional ERI SEE Thematic Expert Seminar "The Bologna Process after London: the challenges for implementation" took place in Zagreb, 29-30 June.

Thirty three participants from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, UNMIK/PISG Kosovo, Moldova, Romania, Serbia and invited experts from Austria, ESU representatives from Slovenia and Malta, the EUA, Norway, and the Stability Pact took part to the Seminar.

Topics covered with the Seminar: the London Communiqué - implications for South Eastern Europe; Trends V: Universities shaping the European Higher Education Area, with accent to the findings for South Eastern Europe; the ESU report „Bologna With Student Eyes”, with accent to the countries of South Eastern Europe; mobility of staff, students and graduates; the three cycles in the Bologna process; the Bologna tools: ECTS, Diploma Supplement and Qualifications frameworks; the public responsibility for higher education; quality assurance and a European register of Quality Assurance Agencies; Student involvement in the Bologna process; the social dimension of the Bologna process; integrated universities – the biggest challenge for SEE for coherent implementation of the Bologna and European research agendas and the challenges for Human Capital Development in SEE.

All participants to the Seminar agreed that the Bologna process is a platform for nurturing regional cooperation in different segments of its implementation. The regional cooperation will contribute to the implementation of the recommendations on the "Novi Sad Initiative", too. Synergy of the activities undertaken under the "Novi Sad Initiative" and the ERI SEE has to be achieved.

Exchange of experiences, good practice examples and peer learning would be the appropriate instruments for regional cooperation. Networking of experts in different areas of the Bologna process was recommended.

Successful implementation of the Bologna recommendations leading to inclusion of the ERI SEE region into the emerging European Higher Education Area would be possible if synergy is achieved between the actions and activities of the national, regional and local authorities, the higher education institutions and the students as pillars of the Process.

Mutual cooperation in development and implementation of joint programmes leading to joint degrees among the SEE countries was recommended.

The importance of building a network of the offices for international cooperation of the SEE universities was recognised and recommended.

Recognised as an obstacle for a more intensive regional cooperation in SEE, increase of the efforts of the national authorities to reduce the visa requirements was recommended.

### **Dubrovnik Conference “Addressing Questions of Institutional Reforms in Creating the European Higher Education Area”, Dubrovnik, 29-30 November 2007**

In framework of the cooperation with different actors in the Bologna Process, the ERI SEE supported the organisation of the Dubrovnik conference that was held on 29 and 30 November.

The Conference built on foundations laid by the Novi Sad Initiative in 2005 and focused on questions related to higher education institutional reforms in creating the European Higher Education Area and particularly the questions that have not yet been properly embedded in the Bologna Process.

The Conference provided a platform for exchange of relevant experience in: professionalisation of public management of higher education; university legal status; acceleration of higher education institutional reforms; standardisation of the student experience across the EHEA with regard to student organisations and representation.

The Conference is expected to be the first in a series of biannual conferences devoted to the process of HE institutional reforms in SEE. In order to monitor this process between two biannual events a follow-up Group will be established as a steering body.

### **Regional Conference “Sustainable Development – the Role of Education and Training”, Pržno – Montenegro, 1-2 October 2007**

Upon invitation of KulturKontakt Austria, the ERI SEE joined the organisation of the regional conference “Sustainable Development – the Role of Education and Training”. The Conference took place in Pržno-Montenegro, on 1 and 2 October.

The overall aim of the conference was to raise awareness among different actors in SEE for the issue of sustainable development and the key role education takes in the promotion of sustainable development.

The conference brought together about 80 relevant stakeholders of the educational, environmental and economic sectors from SEE, Austria, Switzerland, Finland, Norway, The Netherlands and Great Britain, as well as experts from international organisations and NGOs.

During the two-days conference different strategies and good practice examples in the field of sustainable development (SD) and education for sustainable development (ESD) were discussed with a focus on tourism, agriculture and, as a broader issue, on the role of society in promoting (education for) sustainable development.

One conclusion of the conference concerning ESD was that many activities in the field of environmental education, human rights education and other concepts are already being implemented in the SEE countries, but that further awareness-raising for ESD as a more comprehensive and holistic concept is necessary in order to make a considerable step forward in promoting sustainable development in the societies of South Eastern Europe.

### **Round Table “Fostering the Human Potential in Higher Education and research in SEE: The Challenge of Brain Circulation”, Graz - Austria, 24 November 2007**

The Graz University extended an invitation to ERI SEE for participation to the Round Table “Fostering the Human Potential in Higher Education and research in SEE: The Challenge of Brain Circulation”, which took place in Graz-Austria on 24 November. The meeting was jointly organised by the Stability Pact, the Federal Ministry of Science and Research of Austria and the University of Graz. The meeting was chaired by Mr. Erhard Busek (Stability Pact) and Mr. Johannes Hahn (Austrian Minister for Science and Research).

The national policies and the expectations of the SEE countries (Albania, Montenegro and Croatia) from the implementation of the respective policies were presented. A Comparative approach to migration from/to SEE, the EU and world-wide followed. The project ‘Web-

Mob', coordinated by CERTH - Centre for Research and Technology Hellas, Greece as a strong tool for regional networking was presented, as well as the lessons learned from the Steering Platform for Research for the Western Balkan Countries and SEE-ERA.Net.

The necessity for regional cooperation was stressed, and the need to make the collaboration more efficient on bilateral and multilateral level was stipulated. Improvement of the infrastructure and instruments in the region were addressed. Mobility (internal and external) was in the centre of the work of the round table.

## Visibility of the activities developed within ERI SEE

The fact that 2007 was the first year of functioning of the ERI SEE Agency (putting into motion the structure, staffing etc.) caused delays of the activities related to increased visibility of the Initiative.

*The ERI SEE web-site:* In March the Task Force Education and Youth started the work on the development of the ERI SEE web-site. Consultancies with the ERI SEE Agency took place regularly during the process of development of the site. In June the Agency became responsible for the ERISSEE.org domain and signed a contract for web hosting. The documentation developed in framework of ERI SEE activities is available on the site. The number of documents available on the web site increased in December 2007. Efforts need to be made in order to enrich the site with relevant information on education and training (in general, in European and in regional context).

Establishing possibilities for hosting regional forums on different educational topics, enabling networking, exchange of experiences and developing relevant databases are to be future ERI SEE tasks.

Besides the work on enriching the ERI SEE web site, the ERI SEE Agency worked on preparation of promotional materials and production of the newsletter 2007.

In 2007, regional events organised by different actors in education and training were used for presentation of the ERI SEE work. This contributed to increased ERI SEE visibility.

## National Review Process

As part of the consultation process "From Assistance to Cooperation", national review meetings with education experts were organised and took place in the ERI SEE member countries. The focus of the meetings was the relevance of the ERI SEE capacity building measures at national level. They aimed at recommendation of possible follow-up activities and identification of thematic areas relevant for future regional cooperation.

Upon signing agreements with the national institutions identified by the members of the ERI SEE Governing Board, the review exercises were carried out in the period June-October 2007 in: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Moldova, Montenegro, Serbia and UNMIK/PISG Kosovo. Romania financed the national review process from its own resources. The agreement with Albania was signed in December 2007.

Bulgaria and the Republic of Macedonia did not identify institutions to carry out national review projects.

The reports from the national review projects are part of the ERI SEE report 2007.

Over 120 experts coming from national structures responsible for educational policy planning and implementation (Ministries, agencies, offices at national, regional and local level), educational institutions at all levels of mainstream education, as well as representatives of NGOs which develop activities in the field of education and training have been involved in

the review process. The teams that implemented the projects have chosen different approaches for presentation of the findings of the review process. Nevertheless, the results and the recommendations of the review process can be summarised around the following points:

## **1. Review of ERI SEE Activities up to now**

The experts from the ERI SEE countries who have been involved in ERI SEE activities have unanimously reported that the Initiative has supported their work by enabling regional cooperation, exchange of experiences and peer learning.

With regard to the relevance of the topics, quality assurance, education policy development and the European dimension, the Bologna Process, preparations for participation in the Action Programme for Lifelong Learning, teacher training, ICT and lifelong learning have been identified as the most useful ones.

All experts involved in ERI SEE activities have profited from the participation (the grades are on the right part of the grading scale), with the following added values identified: possibility for establishing new contacts in the region, tracking of reform trends and their implementation in the region through seminars and joint events; exchange of information at regional and European level; being acquainted with the practices of other countries in the region and the ERI SEE donor countries in different educational fields, as well as sharing positive experiences.

Different approaches to dissemination of the knowledge, skills and experiences acquired from participation in ERI SEE activities are being used: providing written reports to their respective institutions; taking part in ongoing discussions on educational reforms; informal dissemination among colleagues; presentations at seminars etc

Follow-up activities of different type were reported: sharing the knowledge when working in teams which develop educational strategies and policy papers, organisation of seminars, preparation and realisation of projects.

The report of Moldova elaborates into details the impact of the ERI SEE capacity building measures to the development and implementation of national educational reforms.

Practically all experts (with small number of exceptions) have declared that the ERI SEE activities have helped them to establish contacts with experts from other ERI SEE member countries and with experts from other European countries. In most cases, the professional communication has continued (the e-mail and telephone communications being identified as the most frequently used ways of communication).

## **2. Future ERI-SEE activities at regional level**

The experts have identified the thematic areas that would require a follow-up at regional level, and therefore have recommended their inclusion into the future ERI SEE work plans. In most countries, the national strategies and policies in the field of education and training articulated in relevant documents, have been the starting points for identifying the thematic areas.

The following thematic areas have been commonly identified as important for future ERI SEE activities: European trends and national reforms; quality assurance, qualification frameworks, Bologna Process, lifelong learning and recognition of prior learning, teacher training, financing of education and decentralisation.

Montenegro has recommended ERI SEE to organise awareness sessions in the Regional Cooperation Council and its role for sustaining regional cooperation.

Recommendations for making regional cooperation through ERI SEE more intensive or improved:

- ERI-SEE to mediate in the creation of networks between relevant educational institutions, expert bodies, schools, etc, thus providing them with a possibility to exchange information and experiences in direct contacts;
- Data base of expertise in education reforms to be established;
- Establishment of a regional on-line forums;
- Establishment of a regional on-line newsletter edited and written by experts in the region;
- Increased number of opportunities to meet and exchange experiences at regional conferences and seminars;
- Launching joint regional projects tackling concrete issues in education reforms;
- Focus on thematic networks which should be free for participation according the country interests (Romania has suggested the projects ECONET and TOURREG as well as the training firm fairs);
- Inventory of good practices available including;
- Increased opportunity for peer learning by supporting longer periods of stay and concrete work with the peers;
- Organisation of video conferences on certain topics.

The review team from UNMIK/PISG Kosovo has also worked-out recommendations for improvement of the possibilities for increased regional cooperation by strengthening the national capacities:

- Before taking part to ERI SEE events, the participants to organise group discussions and consultations in the institutions and wider with experts who could provide input and help the representative to prepare themselves better for the ERI SEE event;
- Establishing an ERI SEE reference point to support the work of the member of the ERI SEE Governing Board.

The reports have identified the different visa regimes as obstacles for increased regional cooperation. UNMIK/PISG Kosovo has identified the necessity for building language competences (both in English and in the languages spoken in the ERI SEE region) as a relevant factor for boosting regional cooperation.