

ERI SEE

EDUCATION REFORM INITIATIVE
OF SOUTH EASTERN EUROPE

May 2007

Report on the Implementation of the ERI SEE working programme 2006

In the year 2006 the Education Reform Initiative of South Eastern Europe (ERI SEE) continued the act as a regional platform for co-operation in the fields of education and training. It is intended to serve as an interface between the ongoing national reforms in South Eastern Europe and current trends and developments in the education and training sector at European level. Through fostering regional co-operation and facilitating capacity building and know-how transfer, ERI SEE promotes common European standards in education, also in the light of the ongoing EU integration process of the region.

As decided by the Senior Officials of the signatory ministries and the Governing Board members, and in accordance with the stipulations of the founding documents, the ERI SEE Secretariat is responsible for the implementation of the annual programs adopted by the Governing Board within the overall objective of integrating SEE countries into the evolving Wider European Area of Education through networking, exchange of information and experience, dissemination of good practice, organisation and delivery of seminars, training, workshops etc.

The present report intends to make a synthesis of the activities that have been organised by the Secretariat of ERI SEE during the period January-December 2006. The Secretariat expresses gratitude and appreciation for the commitment to the ERI SEE tasks and for the continuous support to: Ms. Luminita Matei (the executive director of the ERI SEE Secretariat till June 2006), the Task Force Education and Youth of the Stability Pact, 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, Bulgaria as the ERI SEE country that joined the EU in January 2007, as well as to the other ERI SEE countries: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Republic of Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro, PISG Kosovo and Serbia for the realisation of the activities and the implementation of the Work Programme 2006.

Work Programme 2006

In 2006 ERI SEE continued its focus on **capacity building measures** in key areas of educational reform with emphasis to the on-going and future EU integration processes.

At its meeting on 26 November in Ohrid - FYR of Macedonia, the ERI SEE Governing Board (Co-chair Task Force Education and Youth) decided that the Initiative should concentrate on the following issues:

- Preparation for participation in the Community **Action Programme for Lifelong Learning** through capacity building measures: continuation of the training of experts and consultancy.
- **European Qualifications Framework** - National Qualifications Framework in the SEE: facilitating the flow of information on the results of the consultation process in the European Union (in partnership with the European Training Foundation) as well as on the developments in several European countries, inter alia by thematic regional seminars and providing access to relevant information.
- **Quality in Education**, in particular by organising a thematic seminar on "Assessment and evaluation" with the support of CITO-The Netherlands. The thematic seminar should facilitate the discussion on European debates and concepts (e.g. learning outcomes, transparency, and transferability), national and European experience as well as on the main principles of assessment and evaluation in the new European context.
- **Quality Assurance in VET** - Facilitating information flow for SEE ministries on the projects/programmes developed at European level; Lobbying for participation of the SEE experts in the international meetings on the topic, organising a regional seminar (scheduled) for building a regional expert network on quality assurance in vocational education and training.
- **ICT in Education** – follow up seminar (scheduled) of the workshop organised in 2005 with the support of the Bureau CROSS, on behalf of the Dutch Ministry of Education and Science on the topic of ICT in education.
- **Cooperation with OECD** - ERI SEE will continue to co-operate with OECD on the project "Education Development for Disabled and At Risk Students", financed by the World Bank, Norway and the Flemish Community of Belgium. ERI SEE will also, during the upcoming Meetings of Senior officials from South Eastern Europe, offer the opportunity to exchange information on ongoing 2006 PISA activities in South Eastern Europe (currently underway in Bulgaria, Croatia, Montenegro, Romania and Serbia).
- **Increasing the visibility of activities developed within ERI SEE** through the ERI SEE electronic Newsletters (two times per year) and through the ERI SEE website www.erisee.org.

According to these guiding lines and identified priorities the ERI SEE secretariat carried out the following activities in the year 2006 (reports are available on www.erisee.org (> calendar):

1. **Capacity Building for Participation in the Community Programmes in the Area of Education and Training:**

1.1. **The third capacity building seminar “Participation to the Community programmes in the fields of education and training - an important tool for European integration”,** took place in Sinaia, Romania, 1-5 March 2006.

A number of 24 experts, representing ministries of education from Albania, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, PISG Kosovo, Romania, and Serbia attended the meeting, as well as experts from Norway, the Netherlands, Italy and Slovenia. The Objectives of the meeting were to:

- Train the experts of the SEE ministries of education on how to write project proposals, according to the Community rules;
- Inform the participants on the roles of the national agencies in the life cycle of projects and provide other relevant information for preparing the participation into the Community Action Programme for Lifelong Learning;
- Disseminate best results, experiences and best practices.

1.2. **The first ERI SEE study visit to a national agency lead to the Romanian National Agency for Community programmes** in the field of education and training. Experts from the ministries of education from Albania, Croatia, Republic of Macedonia, and Montenegro participated in the study visit. The agenda of the meeting included discussions with the relevant institutions involved in the process, respectively: Romanian Ministry of Education and Research – as National Authority and the National Agency as managing institution.

The topics included in the discussions were related to:

- Responsibilities of the National Authorities in implementing the programmes;
- Structure and management of the National Agency;
- Organization of departments, responsibilities, life cycle: Comenius, Erasmus, Grundtvig, Leonardo da Vinci, public policies, valorisation, image and quality assurance, monitoring, audit and evaluation.

The majority of participants are currently involved in the preparation at national level for participation in the Action Programme for Lifelong learning. In this respect the event succeeded to address to the relevant key persons.

The ERI SEE study visits to different national agencies implementing Community programmes in the field of education and training are an important instrument for the learning process and complement the ERI SEE capacity building seminars for SEE experts. Therefore the study visits continued to other countries throughout 2006:

1.3. **The second study visit to a national agency dealing with Community Programmes in the field of education and training, lead to the Slovenian Centre for Mobility in European Programmes in the Field of Education and Training (CMEPIUS),** located in Ljubljana, on 4-6 September 2006. Experts from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro, Serbia and the Republic of Macedonia visited the Ministry of Education and Sport of Slovenia, CMEPIUS and the School of Electrical and Computer Engineering in Ljubljana.

The agenda of the visit covered: the national policy relevant for smooth running of the Community programmes; role of the Ministry as a national authority in the relationship European Commission-national authority-national agency; role and responsibilities of CMEPIUS as a national agency; structure and functioning of CMEPIUS; presentation of Socrates, Leonardo da Vinci and the financial procedures for both programmes.

The School of Electrical and Computer Engineering presented the experience from participation in Socrates, Leonardo da Vinci and other European or projects for bilateral cooperation.

The experience gained during the visit to Slovenia was disseminated to the participants to the fourth international workshop "Use of Logical Framework Approach – an important tool for successful participation in the Community programmes in the fields of education and training" (Belgrade - Republic of Serbia, 15 and 16 December 2006).

- 1.4. The **third study visit**, to the **Norwegian Centre for International Cooperation in Higher Education (SIU)**, Bergen, took place on 10/11 October 2006. Representatives from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro and Serbia visited the Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, SIU and the Oslo University College.

The Ministry of Education and Research presented the Norwegian higher education system, the national educational policy, internationalisation in education and training, and the European cooperation in the fields of education and training. The role of the Ministry as a national authority and its relations with the European Commission and the national agencies responsible for managing the Community programmes in education and training were discussed.

At SIU, the delegation was introduced to the structure and organization of the Centre, the Norwegian participation in the EU programmes, and the cooperation Norway-Western Balkans.

The experience gained during the visit to Norway was disseminated to the participants to the fourth international workshop "Use of Logical Framework Approach – an important tool for successful participation in the Community programmes in the fields of education and training" (Belgrade - Republic of Serbia, 15 and 16 December 2006).

- 1.5. The **fourth International workshop "Use of Logical Framework Approach – an important tool for successful participation in the Community programmes in the fields of education and training"** took place in Belgrade, Republic of Serbia, on 15 and 16 December 2006.

The agenda of the seminar covered:

- Lessons learned from the study visits to the national authorities and the national agencies responsible for Community Programmes in education and training (Romania, Slovenia and Norway);
- Revisiting the Logical Framework - introduction, objective setting, problem and stakeholder analysis;
- Assumptions and risks – understanding and assessing the external impacts on the project;
- SMART Indicators of Progress and Means of Verification – relevant for monitoring of project implementation and achievements;
- Discussion on future activities and closing remarks.

Total of 9 experts from Serbia and Croatia participated to the workshop. The experts from Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Republic of Macedonia did not reach Belgrade due to cancellation of the flights.

The training in specific aspects of Project Cycle Management was appreciated and considered relevant for successful preparation and implementation of projects in the

field of education and training. The workshop provided relevant documents that will be used in the future work of the participants and will be further disseminated in the region.

Recommendations for future activities:

- Taking into consideration the limited number of trainees that participated to the workshop, it was recommended to run another session on Project Cycle Management with similar agenda in 2007.
- In order to achieve continuity of the capacity building process that started in 2005, the ERI SEE Secretariat to assure, via the members of the ERI SEE Governing Board, the trainees who were involved in the previous workshops to participate to the workshop in 2007, too. This approach would contribute to maintaining the established network of regional experts and to create real impact on the developments at national level.
- From organisational point of view, it was recommended, when planning future ERI SEE events, to take into consideration different specific conditions (e.g. the months characterised with bad weather conditions, holiday seasons etc.), in order to avoid the risk that a substantial number of the participants are not able to take part to the event.

2. European Qualifications Framework/National Qualifications Frameworks in SEE:

The seminar on NQF and their linkage to EQF – stock-taking of current developments in the ERI SEE countries, was originally scheduled to take place in Brussels in December 2006. Following the discussion on the future prospects of the region for participation in the European programmes in education and training, the Governing Board members agreed this event to be postponed.

3. Thematic expert seminars on key issues in educational development:

- 3.1. The thematic expert seminar on quality in education “The importance of inspection in a decentralized education system”,** The Hague, 27-28 April 2006 focused on the exchange of experiences, with examples from the Dutch system of school inspection, as well as from Albania, the Republic of Macedonia and Romania, on internal and external evaluation and quality assurance, and the advantages and disadvantages of the instrument of school inspection in assuring quality at school level. A number of 30 experts, representing ministries of education from Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, the Republic of Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro, PISG Kosovo, Romania, and Serbia attended the meeting. The Ministry of Education from Bulgaria was represented at the seminar, too.

Main conclusions of the seminar:

- The role of school inspection is one of the key issues under debate at European level as well as in South Eastern Europe.
- There is a general need to clearly define the status of school inspection in the process of ensuring the quality of the educational system, the responsibilities and duties to be performed as well as the status of inspectors.
- The communication between the stakeholders is essential and should be improved.
- The training of all parties involved in the process of school inspection is one of the keys for success.
- Cooperation among institutions from different countries is recommended as well as regional cooperation for learning from best practices. Assistance has been offered both for working bilaterally or at regional level.

3.2. The 2nd thematic expert seminar “Promoting ICT for teaching and learning”, Sarajevo, Bosnia-Herzegovina, 30 June-1 July 2006 brought together 20 experts and addressed the following topics:

- introduction of education software at classroom level;
- teacher training on education software;
- exchange of experiences in the use of ICT in education in SEE;
- International cooperation for promoting ICT in education.

3.3 The thematic expert seminar “Assessment and Evaluation – Important Tools for Promoting Quality in Education and evaluation both” took place in Zagreb, 3-4 November, and brought together 16 experts from SEE and three international experts, who shared information and experiences on current developments in assessment in vocational education and training and in general secondary education at SEE and European levels.

Topics addressed in the field of VET and general secondary education (final exams):

- possibilities and consequences for modernisation of teaching and assessment in Vet and general secondary education;
- competency-based learning;
- standards;
- European Qualifications Framework;
- lifelong learning;
- the relationship between school exams and nationwide exams;
- possibilities in changing the organisation of the learning process;
- new ways to assess the outcome;
- examples of good practise from Albania, the Netherlands, Norway and Romania.

3.4. The thematic expert seminar “Quality Assurance – Trends and Perspectives in Vocational Education and Training and Higher Education” took place in Chisinau, Moldova on 30 November and 1 December 2006.

Total of 33 experts from South-Eastern Europe (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Kosovo, Moldova, Montenegro, Romania and Serbia), Austria, and from relevant international institutions/associations: ETF, European University Association (EUA), ENQA and ENQA-VET participated to the Seminar.

The agenda of the seminar addressed:

- The current trends and debates on quality assurance in the framework of the Bologna Process, including presentation of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA)
- Current trends and debates on quality assurance in VET, including presentation of the European Network on Quality Assurance on Vocational Education and Training (ENQA-VET).
- Quality assurance approaches for LLL - Cooperation between ENQA and ENQA-VET.
- The Conference on "Quality Assurance in Higher Education and Vocational Education and Training", Graz, May 2006
- Work in two parallel groups on: quality assurance in VET in SEE and quality assurance in HE in SEE, including presentations from the ERI SEE countries and examples from other European countries.

- Discussion on how can VET and HE cooperate in developing and strengthening quality assurance in SEE.
- Recommendations for future activities.

Conclusions on regional cooperation:

- The current quality assurance systems in higher education and VET vary across the countries of the region, depending on the societal constructions, specific contexts and institutional environments.
- It is possible to strengthen the regional cooperation by sharing: experiences, good practice examples, tools, instruments and human resources in quality assurance in higher education and VET.
- Regional cooperation will help to increase the quality of education in the SEE countries.

The SEE countries stipulated the interest for involvement in the ENQA and the ENQA VET networks and for active participation in capacity building measures undertaken by both networks.

The smaller countries of the region share the approach that establishing one national structure responsible for quality assurance in higher education and VET would be appropriate.

Recommended fields for future actions:

- Quality assurance is an instrument for establishing synergies between VET and higher education and identified the following priority areas for cooperation:
 - o Learning outcomes;
 - o ECTS/ECVET and
 - o Recognition of prior learning.
- Developing a pool of quality assurance experts from the region that (upon invitation) would be involved in external evaluation of the institutions, would participate in the quality assurance bodies of different countries, or would support the development of quality assurance standards, tools and instruments of the countries in need.
- Increase of cross-sectoral cooperation in development of national qualification frameworks (including the aspect of quality assurance) would contribute to strengthening the co-operation in quality assurance.

4. Other ERI SEE events from May until the end of the year 2006

4.1 8th Senior Officials meeting, The Hague, Netherlands, 28th April 2006

In accordance with the *Memorandum of Understanding*, among the instruments to be used by the ERI SEE Secretariat in order to fulfill its objectives is organisation, is the organization of Senior Officials Meetings.

The objectives of the 8th Senior Officials meeting were:

1. To offer the framework for information and dissemination on the development registered at European Union and countries from the SEE;
2. To discuss the ways for enhancing regional cooperation;
3. To make recommendations for policy makers.

A number of 35 experts, representing ministries of education from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo, the Republic of Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro, Romania, and Serbia attended the meeting. The members of the ERI SEE

Consultative Body also participated to the meeting and provided inputs during the seminar.

The participants were informed about the Austrian Presidency of the European Council: dossiers, March Ministerial Conference, other aspects; the results of the European consultations about the European Qualifications Framework. The representative of the OECD informed about the progress of the project “Education Development for Disabled and at Risk Students in Southeast Europe”, the PISA exercise and the OECD Programme for Education Building. The representative of EUA informed about the ongoing activities of the Association in the field of higher. The participants were also informed about the ERI SEE activities in the first semester of 2006.

4.2. 4th ERI SEE Governing Board and Consultative Body meeting, The Hague, Netherlands, 29th April 2006

At the meeting presented the Governing Board (GB) members and alternate experts with the observer status, as following: the Governing Board members from Albania, Moldova, Montenegro the Republic of Macedonia, PISG and UNMIK Kosovo, Romania, Task Force Education and Youth; replacement by experts with observer status from Croatia and Serbia. As regards the Consultative Body (CB) members, at the meeting were present the representatives of: Bureau Cross - The Netherlands, Ministry of Education and Research of Norway, Stability Pact Office, Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, European Training Foundation, European University Association, Kulturkontakt-Austria and OECD.

The agenda of the meeting covered the following topics:

- Reports on the establishment of the ERI SEE Agency in Croatia;
- Reports on ERI SEE activities – report of the director for 2005 activities, financial report for 2005;
- Activities developed during the first semester of 2006;
- Approval of the Rules of procedure for the GB, Rules of procedure for CB, organisational and financial guidelines for ERI SEE Agency, job description for the director, executive assistant and IT assistant;
- Election of the Chairperson of the Consultative Body;
- First discussion on ERI SEE 2007 working programme;
- Internal documents of the ERI SEE Agency - first draft for discussion.

4.3. 9th Senior Officials and Brainstorming Meeting, Belgrade, 27th October 2006 and 5th Meeting of the Governing Board and Consultative Body, Zagreb, 10/11 November 2006

One of the main tasks of the meetings of Senior Officials and the Governing Board in the second half of the year was, inter alia, to review the implementation of the Work Programme and to decide on the thematic and administrative priorities of ERI SEE. In addition, the timing and format of the last meetings of Senior Officials and Governing Board/Consultative Body for 2006 was considered suitable for a review of the themes, instruments and implementation efficiency of ERI SEE in a **mid-term, strategic perspective**.

Three years after the Memorandum of Understanding of the ministers of education from South Eastern Europe, at the 9th Conference of European Ministers of Education, ERI SEE has again been confirmed as the main instrument for regional cooperation. Yet, the year 2007 is likely to bring certain changes in the cooperation landscape in the region.

To name only few, two of the ERI SEE countries – Bulgaria and Romania – will be EU members. EU member states with a relation to the ERI SEE region like Slovenia, Hungary and Czech Republic have signalled interest for cooperation or already cooperate with the Initiative. At the same time, the effort of the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe to transfer its competencies to a regional body until 2008 will possibly generate tangible results – a process already underway, with direct implications for the political mandate and on the Task Force Education and Youth.

The Task Force Education and Youth therefore initiated an informal discussion between the ERI SEE Governing Board and Consultative Body members and educational experts on the future priorities, instruments and orientation of the Initiative until 2008 and beyond, with a special focus on the process of its integration in the new regional body which will succeed the Stability Pact.

The 9th Meeting of Senior Officials took place on 26 October in Belgrade and was co-hosted by the Ministry of Education and Sport of the Republic of Serbia. The meeting was attended by the EC Commissioner for Education and Culture Jan Figel, the Minister for Education and Sports of Serbia Mr. Vuksanovic, the Chair of WT I of the Stability Pact Mr. Svilanovic, and by the ERI SEE and Task Force partners ETF, EUA and SEE ERA NET.

The internal ERI SEE discussion started on the day following the meeting of Senior Officials. A second discussion took place on 10 November in Zagreb with an extended group of participants – experts, ERI SEE partner institutions and potential partners.

***General findings and recommendations from the discussion process
“From Assistance to Co-operation”:***

The significance of ERI SEE as facilitator of information transfer on current EU discussions to the region in accordance with its current mandate has been acknowledged. Strengthening the link to the national context of the ERI SEE member countries in terms of priorities and of efficient use of its results would be necessary. The existing ERI SEE political mandate should be updated in accordance with the changed circumstances for regional cooperation.

Recommendations were adopted for action at political, structural and content level.

- Political level: mandate discussion
 - o Clarification of the ERI SEE mandate with regards to regional cooperation in education and training and in light of the new structure for regional cooperation – the Regional Cooperation Council;
 - o Adjustment of the notion of “region” in light of the changed EU integration status of countries in South Eastern Europe;
 - o Opening ways for partnership with countries neighbouring the ERI region, i.e. the Central European Cooperation in Education (Slovenia, Hungary, Slovakia, Czech Republic, Austria);
 - o Update of the mandate of ERI SEE in terms of enhancement of the existing Memorandum of Understanding.
- Structural level: ERI SEE reform discussion for increasing efficiency
 - o Strengthening the link to the national context in the ERI SEE countries (establishment of regular reporting, institutional representation in the Governing Board, thematic alliances);
 - o Enhancing the visibility of the initiative;
 - o Establishing conditions and mechanisms for gradual financing of ERI SEE by the member countries.

- Content level: strengthening and widening the scope of ERI SEE activities
 - o Differentiation of ERI SEE support, depending on the status of the countries;
 - o Streamlining of activities in line with a core set of thematic fields;
 - o Possible thematic areas: capacity building for national authorities and agencies for upcoming cooperation and partnerships with the European Commission; quality assurance; qualification frameworks;
 - o Cooperation with other sectors and initiatives, in particular in the context of the “knowledge triangle” (research)

ERI SEE Structural event: On 10 November, the Ministry of Science, Education and Sport of the Republic of Croatia hosted the ceremony of opening of the ERI SEE Agency. The ceremony took place at the Centre for Technology Transfer of the Faculty of Mechanical Engineering and Shipbuilding of the University of Zagreb (Ivana Lučića 5). Besides the participants to the ERI SEE Governing Board and Consultative Body meeting, the national coordinator for the Stability Pact of the Republic of Croatia and representatives of some embassies in Croatia were present to the opening ceremony.

4.4. The 5th ERI SEE Governing Board and Consultative Body meeting took place in Zagreb on 11 November.

The ERI SEE activity report (January-October) 2006 was presented, as well as the planned activities till the end of the year. In order to increase the ownership of the Initiative and to ground it substantially to the needs of the region, the Governing Board members agreed a **regular national reporting on ERI SEE activities implementation** to become part of the annual ERI SEE reporting. Updating the Rules of Procedure of the ERI SEE Governing Board and adoption of a procedure for national reporting was agreed.

The first draft of the ERI SEE Work Programme 2007 was presented and discussed. An updated version of the ERI SEE draft Work Programme 2007 incorporating the suggestions given during the meeting will be prepared and submitted to the members of the Governing Board for adoption.

The members of the Governing Board agreed on the preliminary findings of the discussion process “Form Assistance to Cooperation”. Finalisation of the document was agreed by the end of 2006.

The members of the Governing Board discussed and agreed the Financial Guidelines for Experts and Participants in ERI SEE Activities.

5. Other events

5.1. Austrian EU Presidency 2006 – 9th Conference of European Ministers of Education (Vienna, 16 and 17 March 2006)

The Austrian EU Presidency in the first half of 2006 focused on ways for enhancing the quality of education in Europe and on the further integration of the countries of the Western Balkans into the European area of education and research.

Following the tradition that started in 1998/1999, the Austrian EU Presidency offered a political forum for stocktaking and setting of future priorities with respect to the European integration of the Western Balkans, in particular in the area of education and training. The 9th Conference of European Ministers of Education “Strengthening Education in Europe” represented the political highlight of the Presidency in this respect.

The Vienna Conference followed the long-standing tradition of regular meetings at ministerial level, which have served as a forum for exchange and cooperation (always including the countries of South Eastern Europe) on current matters in the field of European education policy.

In line with the emphasis of the Austrian EU Presidency on quality in education, the 9th Conference of European Ministers of Education discussed the widening of the European Area of Education to the Western Balkans, and sought ways for strengthening education by enhancing its contribution to the re-launched Lisbon agenda for growth, employability and greater social cohesion in Europe.

The main themes were the ongoing integration of the Western Balkan countries into the European Area of Education, the significance of qualifications frameworks (European and national) for education reforms in a lifelong learning perspective, and the role of the universities for the reform agenda in South Eastern Europe as a point of synergy between education, research and innovation.

As Western Balkan countries are not included in the EQF discussion process, however, they are at various stages of developing National Qualification Frameworks. The Task Force together with ERI SEE and in cooperation with the European Training Foundation initiated an expert consultation process on the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning and its implications at national level.

The Communiqué of the Vienna Conference was drafted with the support of the Task Force Education and Youth. It summarises the discussion outcomes and will serve as a point of reference for the future work of the TFEY/ERI SEE.

Outcomes of the Vienna Conference – Conference Communiqué

Education is a significant factor in the process of integrating the countries of the Western Balkans into the European Union. Education, Research and continuing investment in human capital are central for the further development and the European future of the Western Balkans and with this – for more security and stability in Europe.

The final communiqué of the conference acknowledged that the process of integrating the region of the Western Balkans into the European Area of Education is well underway, but that it “requires sustainable support and commitment at national, regional and EU levels”. The continuing „national commitment“ to education and education reforms of every single country is thereby of particular significance – it is a crucial prerequisite for the participation in the new generation of community programmes in education and with this - for the cooperation *with* and financial support *by* the European Union.

The Ministers further acknowledged the important and sustainable contribution of the Task Force Education and Youth towards widening the European Area of Education to the Western Balkans, and the significance of regional cooperation within the Education Reform Initiative of South Eastern Europe (ERI SEE) and the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe.

A „Pact for education with the Western Balkans“ was initiated by Austria, which should serve as the political framework for regional and European cooperation for and with the Western Balkans in matters of education. The efforts within the Pact for education will move along the lines of the conclusions of the Vienna conference and are reflected in the work programme of ERI SEE.

5.2. Pact for Education“ for the Western Balkans

The “Pact for Education” for the Western Balkans as an initiative and result of the Austrian EU Presidency is a political initiative for the mobilisation of existing obligations on the part of EU Member States and international partner institutions towards the region, which facilitates the timely integration of *all* the countries of the Western Balkans into the European educational area. The Pact for Education should thus increasingly support the respective

national reform efforts and thus make a contribution to the European perspective of the region of the Western Balkans via education.

The “Pact for Education” strategy serves as background for the ERI SEE discussion process and the planning of the Task Force Education and Youth, and takes into consideration the priorities within the core objective “Building Human Capital”.

The priority areas for the implementation within the “Pact” and with regards to the core objective are:

- **Access to EU knowledge networks:** Cooperation with regard to content between the region and the EU in the context in the Lisbon Process and “Education and Training 2010” should be facilitated, i.e. through institutionalised access of the countries of the Western Balkans to current EU discourses (e.g. observer status in work groups or clusters) which are of relevance for the national reforms in the region
- **Pre-accession support for education:** Safeguarding a sufficient share for education in the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA) for the preparation and participation (entry ticket) in the education programme for lifelong learning as well as for national reforms.
- **Capacity building and training:** Capacity building at institutional and expert levels for the countries of the Western Balkans as well as knowledge transfer and the exchange of experiences on topical themes in the context of national, European-orientated reforms.

5.3. IPA – instrument for pre-accession assistance

One of the central themes of both the Austrian EU Presidency and of ERI SEE has been the sufficient budget share for education in the EU Instrument for Pre-Accession assistance (IPA) as the main Community instrument for financial support for the pre-accession countries from 2007. As confirmed at the Conference of European Ministers of Education in March 2006, this budget share should be sufficient also for preparation and participation in the Community Programme for Lifelong Learning (2007 – 2013), as well as in the 7th Framework Programme for Research.

A common letter to the European Commission with this request has been initiated by the Task Force Education and Youth and signed by all Ministers of education and research from the Western Balkans region. Awareness rising among policy makers in the region on this issue remains a top priority. Commissioner Rehn has expressed his full support to ensure that adequate attention and resources will be given to allow cooperation in education and research.

5.4. In the framework of the **OECD Project “Education Development for Disabled and at Risk Students in Southeast Europe”** a teacher training seminar and meeting of project administrators took place in Jerusalem, 22-28 May 2006.

The seminar on teacher training was a follow up to a meeting of headmasters and teachers, which was held in Zagreb in June 2005. The Jerusalem meeting aimed to continue discussions on the issue of inclusive education, emphasizing the development of individual education programmes and the introduction of instruments for monitoring the progress of students in classrooms.

The gathering in Jerusalem served as a co-ordination meeting of project administrators and discussed ideas for further disseminating the results and recommendations of the OECD reviews of Education Policies for Students at Risk and those with disabilities in South Eastern Europe, which were published in March 2006. This discussion addressed activities such as the translation of reviews into local languages or other dissemination activities.