



Meeting of the South Eastern Europe Regional VET Network (SEEVET-Net)

10-11 December 2009

Hotel Saraj, Nevjestina 5
Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina

Background and Justification

By signing the Istanbul Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) (May 2007), the Ministers responsible for education, science and research in South Eastern Europe (SEE) agreed that education, science and research are areas of key importance for the future of SEE and that the re-launched Lisbon agenda is the main driving force for reforms in these fields in all signatory countries. The Regional Cooperation Council (2008) identified fostering and building human capital as a priority area for economic and social development of SEE and for increased regional cooperation.

In the period of global economic crisis with serious implications on the region, SEE recognises the significant contribution of VET to jobs creation, economic growth and social development, as well as to personal development and social inclusion. It constitutes an important part of lifelong learning. VET plays a vital role in enabling young people involved in VET to acquire skills and competences relevant for labour market requirements and in promotion of labour force's skills, competence and mobility by improving training opportunities and better recognition of prior learning gained through training and work experience.

Having recognised the diversity of the VET systems in the region as an asset and a basis for mutual learning and support to future reforms, the VET agencies and institutions from the SEE countries and Turkey held the First networking conference in Tirana, Albania on 25-26 September 2008. They agreed to create a network of the VET institutions acting in the region of the South East European Cooperation Process (SEECPP) and to invite the interested parties to sign a cooperation agreement. Following the further discussions on the formalisation of the cooperation agreement during the special SEE session in the framework of the Ankara Conference "Implementation strategies for national qualifications frameworks in South Eastern Europe" (18 December 2008), a draft agreement on the establishment of the SEEVET-Net was prepared and the final form of the document was

agreed in the first half of 2009. In line with the ERI SEE commitment to support VET development and regional networking of the national institutions, the Governing Board agreed to support a meeting of the SEEVET-Net in 2009. In accordance with the stipulations of the Cooperation Agreement, the agenda of the meeting was prepared by the Chair of the SEEVET-Net and Director of the National VET Agency of Albania.

Objectives of the meeting and expected outcomes

The main objective of the meeting was to contribute to sustained dialogue and communication of the VET institutions in the SEECP region, the members of the SEEVET-Net being part of it.

The meeting focused on the aspects relevant for strengthening the work of the SEEVET-Net and provided a platform for updates on the recent European and SEE developments relevant for the role of VET in the context of lifelong learning.

As a result of the two days work, the following outcomes were achieved:

- Knowledge acquired on the lessons learned in the process of establishing of VET agencies and institutions in SEE, transfer of the experiences of some EU Member States and better understanding of the main aspects of the work of the VET agencies.
- Roadmap for development of the SEEVET-net as a sustainable platform for mutual cooperation between the VET agencies and institutions of the SEECP region;
- Updates on the current situation of VET in Europe and the recent developments important for VET in the SEECP region.

Organizers of the meeting

The meeting will be jointly organized by the national VET Agency of Albania, the Director of which is Chair of SEEVET-Net, the ERI SEE Agency, the European Training Foundation and the Ministry of Civil Affairs of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Ministry of Civil Affairs of Bosnia and Herzegovina hosted the meeting.

Participants to the meeting

The meeting brought together 24 top or high level officials of the national VET agencies and institutions of SEE and Slovenia, ETF experts and experts from the Netherlands and Switzerland as donor countries. They provided input and were involved in the discussions aiming to contribute to sustainable work of SEEVET-net.

In order to increase the visibility of the Conference, representatives of the media of the BiH Federation and Republika Srpska were invited to the seminar. Numerous interviews with the VET officials, the ERI SEE officials and the experts were given during the two days work.

Outcomes of the meeting

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The meeting focused on the aspects relevant for strengthening the work of the SEEVET-Net and provided a platform for updates on the recent European and SEE developments relevant for the role of VET in the context of lifelong learning. The agenda of the meeting covered briefings on the ETF project for sustainable networking in the SEECP region, as well as on the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework (EQARF) and the European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET), followed by the report of the Chair of SEEVET-Net. The SEE countries presented the national activities in 2009 in the areas relevant for regional networking: NQF development and contribution of the VET institutions; implementation of lifelong learning strategies; quality assurance, evaluation and accreditation processes. The contemporary challenges for the European VET agencies and the transnational experience of cooperation and networking with sister institutions was illustrated with the Slovenian example of good practice. The ETF presented the work-in-progress on preparation of a project "Cities and Lifelong Learning" with involvement of Barcelona – Spain, Glasgow – the United Kingdom, Tirana – Albania and Belgrade – Serbia.

The brainstorming session on how to develop sustainable cooperation, mutual exchanges and sharing of good practice between the SEEVET-Net members was supported with presentation of the structure and the role of the platform of European Providers of VET (EUproVET) and the Dutch association that represents all governmentally funded secondary VET and adult education institutions - MBO Raad.

The discussion on the draft SEEVET-Net Cooperation Agreement brought to the conclusion for establishment of a working group with involvement of the Chair of the network and representatives of the Montenegrin and the Serbian centres responsible for VET to prepare an updated draft of the Agreement.

Conclusions and recommendations for the future networking among the SEECP VET agencies and institutions:

Seeking innovation, developing conditions for the creativity to flourish, and strengthening complex partnerships are the mechanisms considered to be the key drivers for overcoming the crisis in SEE. The SEE region is to follow the same short-term and long-term European¹ ways of meeting the challenges: making VET a more attractive option and raising its status by improving the quality of VET programmes. Greater flexibility and individualisation are needed to reach more people. Increased interaction: cooperation with the world of work through the development of workplace-based training, and increased cooperation and mobility by implementation of the common European tools. Increased action to reach young people and vulnerable groups will continue to play an important role in VET development.

The region faces common challenges with regard to formulation of comprehensive frameworks for reforms which would aim at: avoiding fragmented reforms in different sectors of education, mainstreaming the achievements of pilot projects, consideration to private and non-formal training, the VET-Higher Education correspondence, development of NQFs for lifelong learning and implementation of the lifelong learning strategies. Important challenge for SEE is the development of adult training and continuous vocational

¹ Conference under the Swedish presidency with the European Council "The role of VET in meeting the challenges of today and tomorrow", November 2009

training in the situation of lack of public resources for substantial continuous training and adult education, low motivation of employers due to high unemployment rates, insufficient cooperation among the relevant stakeholders, little research about skill needs etc. There are challenges in governance, partnership and management related to: decentralisation, inter-ministerial coordination, school autonomy, equity in education, quality assurance systems, involvement of social partners etc., as well as the need for increased public resources for education and training.

Recommended further actions:

- The Chair of SEEVET-Net Mr. Ilija Paluka to organise a meeting with representatives of the Montenegrin Centre for Vocational Education and the Serbian Centre for Vocational and Adult Education in order to prepare a revised version of the draft SEEVET-Net Cooperation Agreement within the first three months of 2010.
- The final version of the Agreement to be sent to the SEECP countries for national consultancies and decision for signing the document.
- The Chair of the SEEVET-Net to organise and coordinate the process of signing the SEEVET-Net cooperation Agreement.
- Based upon the identified areas for cooperation and mutual learning, SEEVET-Net to develop and adopt a work programme for 2010.
- Upon a jointly agreed agenda, MBO Raad to organise a study visit of representatives of the SEE VET agencies and institutions to the Netherlands for enabling peer-learning and getting more information on the functioning of MBO Raad, other Dutch institutions and EUproNET.