

Working Programme 2007

Executive Summary of the Working Programme 2007

In the year 2007, the Education Reform Initiative of South Eastern Europe (ERI SEE) will continue to be a regional platform for co-operation in the education area and to serve as an interface between ongoing national reforms in South Eastern Europe, the current trends and developments in the education sector at EU level and to support capacity building and knowledge transfer relevant for the ongoing EU integration process of the region. Wherever and whenever possible, the ERI SEE activities will address the more global developments in education and training, to which the SEE countries have committed themselves (e.g. the World Declaration on Education for All and the Dakar Framework for Action¹, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child², as well as the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development 2005 - 2014³). In parallel, the discussion process "From Assistance to Cooperation" will continue, with the objective to adjust and complement the political mandate, operation and thematic scope of ERI SEE in light of a changed and changing educational cooperation landscape in South Eastern Europe.

The work of ERI SEE will focus on **thematic areas** relevant for the increased role of education and training in the development of the SEE countries, as well as for achieving the Education and Training 2010 objectives. Within these thematic areas the following activities are foreseen:

- **Lifelong learning:**
 - Regional meeting of high level officials and national experts on the perspectives for participation in European programmes for education and training (Erasmus Mundus - window for the Western Balkans and a new scholarship scheme for the European Neighbourhood Policy region announced to be launched in 2007⁴, LLL Programme, Tempus).
 - Regional expert seminar on LLL - Continuation of the training on Project Cycle Management.
- **European Qualification Framework - National Qualification Frameworks in SEE countries:**
 - Regional expert seminar on learning outcomes and their role in curricula design in secondary and tertiary education.

¹ The Dakar Framework for Action, Education for All: Meeting our Collective Commitments, World Education Forum, Dakar-Senegal, April 2000

² Convention on the Rights of the Child, adopted and opened for signature, ratification and accession by the UN General Assembly resolution 44/25, November 1989

³ Report of the World Summit on Sustainable Development, United Nations, Johannesburg-South Africa, August-September 2002

⁴ Communication from the Commission to the Council and the Parliament on Strengthening the European Neighbourhood Policy, COM(2006)726 final, Brussels, 4 December 2006

- **Quality education and equity in education:**
 - Regional expert seminar on national and international assessment
 - Establishing a discussion group of experts in assessment and evaluation on the ERI SEE web site.
 - Establishing conditions for building a pool of quality assurance experts in the region.
 - Participation of representatives of the SEE countries to the international conference on equity in education (4-5 June 2007, Trondheim, Norway).

- **The “knowledge triangle”: education, research and innovation:**
 - Follow-up seminar of the ERI SEE member states to the London Conference of the European Ministers responsible for Higher Education (May 2007).
 - Elaboration of possibilities and modalities for cooperation among ERI SEE and the SEE-ERA.NET.

Furthermore ERI SEE will continue the following activities:

- Organisation of Senior Officials meetings.
- Organisation of Governing Board and Consultative Body meetings.
- Co-organisation together with the OECD of an event on education of special needs students with a focus on access to quality education.
- Launching the ERI SEE discussion process „From Assistance To Cooperation”.
- Study visits on relevant topics based on the suggestion of ERI SEE members and partners.
- Cooperation with the European Commission, OECD, EUA, the ETF and other relevant partners.
- Establishing regional networks/discussion groups of experts on relevant topics through the ERI SEE web site.
- Increasing the visibility of activities developed within ERI SEE.

1. JUSTIFICATION

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

Wherever and whenever possible, the ERI SEE activities will address the more global developments in education and training, to which the SEE countries have committed themselves (e.g. the World Declaration on Education for All and the Dakar Framework for Action⁵, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child⁶, as well as the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development 2005 - 2014⁷).

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 Agency⁸ 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.

2. OBJECTIVES AND ACTIVITIES OF ERISSEE IN 2007

2.1. LIFELONG LEARNING IN THE CONTEXT OF THE EDUCATION AND TRAINING 2010 OBJECTIVES

2.1.1. *EU programmes in education and training for the ERI SEE region and capacity building for European structural funds*

Background

Programmes in education and training: The Decision⁹ on the EU Action Programme in the field of Lifelong Learning 2007-2013, which includes the Western Balkans countries among the participating countries and allows participation of third

⁵ The Dakar Framework for Action, Education for All: Meeting our Collective Commitments, World Education Forum, Dakar-Senegal, April 2000

⁶ Convention on the Rights of the Child, adopted and opened for signature, ratification and accession by the UN General Assembly resolution 44/25, November 1989

⁷ Report of the World Summit on Sustainable Development, United Nations, Johannesburg-South Africa, August-September 2002

⁸ Agencija za obrazovno reformske inicijative za jugoistočnu Europu, Zagreb, Republic of Croatia

⁹ Decision N° 1720/2006/EC of the Parliament and the Council of 15 November 2006 on establishing an action programme in the field of lifelong learning, Official Journal of the European Union, 24 November 2006

countries in the partnerships developed within different projects came into force on 14 December 2006. Depending on the individual advancement of the Western Balkans countries in the relationship with the EU, the LLL Programme will be opened for participation.

Currently, continuation of participation of the countries (Western Balkans and Moldova) in Tempus is possible and an Erasmus Mundus window was opened for the Western Balkans countries. A new scholarship scheme for the countries covered with the European Neighbourhood Policy (Moldova belongs to this group of countries) under Erasmus Mundus is announced for 2007.

Following the consultations with the Directorate General for Enlargement, the Directorate General for Education and Culture of the European Commission invited representatives from Croatia and the Republic of Macedonia to preliminary consultations for preparations for opening of the LLL programme (June 2006).

Proper implementation of the LLL Programme will depend on the implementation of the Commissions' decision related to the respective responsibilities of the Member States, the Commission and the National Agencies in the implementation of the Action Programme in the field of Lifelong Learning 2007-2013. The complexity of the relationships and responsibilities between the European Commission, the National Authorities and the National Agencies calls for regional cooperation and support from the European countries previously involved in the Community programmes for education and training with the objective for capacity building of the national authorities and different categories of experts for taking over the obligations emerging from the participation in the LLL Programme.

With regards to the continuation of the capacity building for the network of experts that was established in the framework of the ERI SEE workshops and study visits in 2005 and 2006, it would be necessary to adopt a more targeted approach. The whole network of experts (around 25) could continue the training on Project Cycle Management with topics that have not been covered with the ERI SEE workshops in 2005 and 2006.

Human resources development for preparation of the countries in pre-accession: In the period 2007-2013, the Western Balkans countries will be involved in the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA), and Moldova will be involved in the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI). Human resources development will be in the focus of the countries, both as part of the efforts for economic growth and development, as well as in the framework of preparation for participation in the European Social and Regional Funds. The current high level of unemployment needs to be addressed by greater economic development and therefore increased job creation. The most important challenge is the creation of a conducive environment for employment friendly economic growth¹⁰. This will require an integrated approach among Social-Economic Development, Employment and Education through an effective inter-ministerial cooperation, as well as involvement

¹⁰ Country Analysis for IPA programming in the field of human resources development – FYR Macedonia, European Training Foundation, 2006

of social partners and civil society. The second challenge is to enhance the skills of the population in line with the requirements of a market economy. Third challenge is to support the most vulnerable groups of the society – people with special needs, minorities and women.

Activities proposed:

Following the results of the workshops and study visits organised in 2005 and 2006 and the status of the Western Balkans countries and Moldova, the following types of activities are proposed to be developed in 2007:

- 2.1.1. Meeting of high level officials and national experts on the perspectives for participation in EU Programmes in Education and Training (Erasmus Mundus window for Western Balkans a new scholarship scheme for the European Neighbourhood Policy region announced to be launched in 2007, LLL Programme, Tempus).
- 2.1.2. Continuation of the training of experts on Project Cycle Management. The persons involved in the above mentioned ERI SEE capacity building activity will have the duty to disseminate the knowledge acquired to relevant stakeholders in their respective countries.

2.2 European Qualifications Framework - National Qualifications Framework in SEE countries

Background

The European Commission proposal for a recommendation on the establishment of a European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong learning (EQF/LLL) issued in September 2006 released the concern if this framework can co-exist with the overarching Framework for Qualifications in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). The descriptors in the EQF/LLL are not higher education descriptors but generic ones that can be used to describe all types of learning and a reference to the Bologna descriptors is integrated in the EQF/LLL.

The European ministers responsible for higher education (including all ERI SEE countries) committed themselves in Bergen 2005 that work on national qualifications frameworks will start by 2007 and will be completed by 2010. Thanks to the intensive awareness raising campaign on the Copenhagen Process in 2005-2006¹¹, most of the countries of the Western Balkans have started intensive discussions and (partly) reforms are being carried out for the establishment of National Qualifications Frameworks (NQF) in VET and Higher Education. The future work will have to take into consideration the latest developments with the EQF/LLL.

Regional cooperation supported by European countries that already have made substantial progress in developing their NQF or are in the process of developing a NQF, including cooperation with neighbouring countries of the SEE countries (e.g. Hungary), the European Training Foundation and the European Commission would contribute to capacities building and development of NQFs in accordance with the EQF/LLL. The effort of the region needs

¹¹ The European Training Foundation had the leading role in this campaign.

support, inter alia by peer learning activities at EU level, by the provision of expertise through European institutions, etc.

Activities proposed:

2.2.1. Informing the ministries of education on the results of the consultation process in Europe as well as on the developments in several European countries and at the European Union level

- Continuing the practice of Senior Official Meetings to invite experts/representatives of the EU Presidency, the European Training Foundation etc. to share their experiences and the results of their activities.
- Making available through the ERI SEE website: best practice examples, documents and reports of meetings organised on this topic at European level.

2.2.2. Regional seminar on learning outcomes and their role in curricula design in secondary and tertiary education.

2.2.3. Cooperating with international donors and European institutions that are developing projects on this topic in the SEE, for making available the results (or preliminary results) of their activities by using the ERI SEE website and ERI SEE electronic Newsletter.

2.3 Quality Education and Equity in Education

Background

Quality development (building quality culture) are in the core of the Bologna and Copenhagen processes and top level priorities for the countries of South Eastern Europe.

Common criteria and principles for quality in VET are top priority of the Copenhagen process, and the on-going Bologna Process reforms are focusing on the implementation of the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (adopted by the European ministers responsible for Higher Education in Bergen 2005) and the Recommendation on Quality Assurance in Higher Education¹² adopted by the EU Council of ministers and the European Parliament in the framework of the Bologna Process. Improved quality in the education and research sectors is important for the development of the European Area of Knowledge and Europe's competitiveness.

As Bologna signatories, the countries of South Eastern Europe work on the development and improvement of quality assurance systems and take part in the regular stocktaking and reporting processes.

The regional seminar on quality assurance in VET¹³ showed that quality in VET is a clear priority in most SEE countries, but practical arrangements for developing quality assurance frameworks are often lacking. Being outside the Copenhagen Process, the SEE countries

¹² Recommendation on Quality Assurance in Higher Education (2006/143/EC)

¹³ European Training Foundation: Synthesis report from the regional seminar Quality Assurance in VET: the Way Forward to Achieve the Copenhagen Goals, Belgrade, June 2006

are bridging the gap by participation in capacity building activities linked to the Copenhagen Process dissemination.

At the ERI SEE Seminar „Quality Assurance – Trends and Perspectives in Higher Education and in Vocational Education and Training”¹⁴, the Western Balkans countries and Moldova stipulated their interest for involvement in ENQA and the ENQA VET networks and for active participation in capacity building measures undertaken by both networks. 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. The countries agreed to strengthen the regional cooperation by sharing of experiences, good practice, tools and instruments in quality assurance in higher education and VET. Having recognised quality assurance as an instrument to establish synergies between VET and higher education, the countries agreed that the learning outcomes, ECTS/ECVET and recognition of prior learning are priority areas for cooperation. 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. These countries identified the need for developing a pool of quality assurance experts from the region that (upon invitation) would be involved in external evaluation, or would participate in the quality assurance bodies of different countries. The countries agreed that cross-sectoral cooperation in development of national qualification frameworks (including the aspect of quality assurance) would contribute to strengthening the cooperation in quality assurance.

Quality assurance goes hand in hand with efficiency and equity in the education and training systems. The recently published Communication from the European Commission to the Council and to the European Parliament “Efficiency and equity in European education and training systems”¹⁵ addresses topics relevant for shaping the future regional cooperation in SEE. Education and training policies can have a significantly positive impact on economic and social outcomes, including sustainable development and social cohesion. Inequities in education and training have huge hidden costs. Policies which reduce such costs can deliver equity and efficiency benefits. Pre-primary education has the highest rates of return of the whole lifelong learning continuum, especially for the most disadvantaged, and the results of this investment build up over time. Spending policies targeted at reinforcing early education and tackling disadvantage from the earliest age are highly effective in efficiency and equity terms and justify high priority in the allocation of public and private expenditure. There is a need to increase the number of specially trained pre-primary teachers. Pre-service and in-service teacher training has direct impact on increased efficiency and equity of the systems.

Activities proposed:

2.3.1. Following the successful establishment of a network of experts in assessment and evaluation (ERI SEE Seminar on Assessment and Evaluation, November 2006) and the expressed interest for continuation of the process of learning and sharing experience, a seminar on national and international assessment will be organised. Topics to be covered with the seminar:

¹⁴ Chisinau, Republic of Moldova, 30 Nov-1 Dec 2006

¹⁵ Commission of the European Communities: Communication from the Commission to the Council and to the European Parliament “Efficiency and equity in European education and training systems”, COM(2006) 481 final

- Role of the national assessment and the aim of the international assessment
 - How to use the results of the students at national exams to improve the quality of education
 - Teacher-training faculties: how to stimulate them in the international procedures.
- 2.3.2. Establishing a discussion group of experts in assessment and evaluation on the ERI SEE web site with the objective to sustain the professional communication, exchange of experience and peer-learning.
- 2.3.3. Establishing conditions for building a pool of quality assurance experts in the region
The method and the instruments for establishing and functioning of the pool of experts will be developed in cooperation with the EUA. The experience of Belgium and the Netherlands will be taken into consideration, too.
- 2.3.4. Participation of representatives of the SEE countries to the international conference on equity in education (4-5 June 2007, Trondheim, Norway). The conference is jointly organised by Norway and the OECD.
As a follow-up, the participants to the conference will have the task to disseminate information to different stakeholders in the home countries and to elaborate if there is interest of the country to take part in a thematic review according to the methodology developed and implemented (till now) by 10 countries in framework of the OECD thematic reviews on equity in education.

2.4 Higher Education - the knowledge triangle of education, research and innovation

Background

Growth and creation of jobs are common goals of the Western Balkans countries and Moldova. Innovation and creativity in the economy are closely connected with the quality and efforts made within education and research. In the knowledge triangle of education, research and innovation, universities play a special role in promoting European standards in education and training, especially in the countries of the Western Balkans¹⁶. Governments, higher education institutions and students share the common objective of creating a European Higher Education and Research Area, and of supporting the fundamental premises of the Lisbon Strategy that knowledge societies and economies can only be realised through strong and socially responsive higher education institutions¹⁷. To reach this objective, the countries of the region have to focus on:

- *Implementation of the Bologna Process* – Increase of the number of students acquiring quality higher education and developing higher education systems offering more opportunities and a more diverse tertiary education should become the basis

¹⁶ “Strengthening Education in Europe” – Final Communiqué on the Outcome of Discussions on 17 March 2006 – IX Conference of European Ministers of Education

¹⁷ “Strengthening Higher Education and Research in South East Europe – Priorities for regional and European Cooperation”-Conclusions and recommendations for action adopted by participants to the EUA meeting in March 2006.

for European and regional cooperation. Areas where regional cooperation could be strengthened for the benefit of all and which are fully in line with the Bologna objectives are: the development of quality assurance systems and the promotion of mobility of students, academic and administrative staff. With regard to the social dimension of the Bologna Process and taking into consideration the inequality of opportunities of the students, academic and administrative staff, support to institutions and students from the region in European cooperation programmes is necessary (e.g. the Erasmus Mundus Western Balkans window and the new scholarship scheme for the European Neighbourhood Policy region under Erasmus Mundus, announced to be launched in 2007).

- *Development of research and innovation* – The EU Communication on the Western Balkans¹⁸ proposes increased efforts to support research and researchers with the objective to decrease the flow of qualified researchers out of the region. The participation of the universities, research institutions and researchers from the Western Balkans countries in the 7th Framework Programme could increase if proper measures for capacity building and human resources development are undertaken e.g. re-inforcing support to national contact points and training of research managers. There is strong potential for regional and European capacity building cooperation in this field. The regional cooperation should build on the already established and successfully functioning networks of institutions from the EU Member States, Accession and Pre – accession countries like the SEE-ERA.NET.
- *Institutional reforms and development* – The countries of the region will be successful in reaching the ambitious goal to contribute to the development of a knowledge based society if the governments exercise trust in institutions and provide incentives for reform. The higher education institutions need to be autonomous and accountable to society and to work on improving their governance structures and management. There is a strong potential for regional cooperation in this domain.

Activities proposed:

2.4.1. Organisation of a follow-up seminar of the ERI SEE member states in order to discuss the tasks and obligations that will emerge from the London Conference of the European Ministers responsible for Higher Education that will be held in 2007, focusing on the relevance of regional cooperation for achieving the goals. The London Communiqué will address the priorities set out in the Bergen Communiqué and the Bologna Follow-Up Group Work Programme 2005-2007: the social dimension and staff and student mobility (including portable grants and loans), the further development of doctoral programmes; the proposed European Register of Quality Assurance Agencies; the implementation of the overarching qualifications framework; the external dimension and Stocktaking. The seminar will be organised in cooperation with the European University Association and with members of the Bologna Follow-up group from the ERI SEE countries.

Time frame: June 2007

2.4.2. Elaboration of possibilities and modalities for cooperation among ERI SEE and the ERA-SEE.NET.

¹⁸ Communication from the Commission “The Western Balkans on the road to the EU: consolidation stability and raising prosperity”, COM(2006) 27 final

2.5 Cooperation with the European Commission, OECD, EUA, the ETF and other relevant partners

The cooperation with the European Commission, OECD, EUA, the ETF and other relevant partners will continue in framework of the activities foreseen with the ERI SEE Work Programme 2007.

In framework of the cooperation, ERI SEE will closely follow and cooperate in activities of OECD and the European Training Foundation on teacher training for education of special needs students. In accordance with the conclusions of the seminar on statistics and data collection organised in framework of the project "Education Development for Disabled and at Risk Students in South-East Europe"¹⁹, ERI SEE will provide support in making project documents and key background materials available on its website. It will also provide a special section hosting related documents in English and the languages of the region. Co-organisation of an event with OECD on teacher training, with a focus on access to quality education is foreseen.

2.6 Organising the Senior Officials meetings

The Senior Official meetings should continue to take place twice a year jointly with the Governing Board meetings with the aim to raise awareness of the decision makers from the ministries of education on the new developments of EU level, projects implemented at regional level, support for national reform developments.

2.7 Organising the Governing Board and Consultative Body meetings

In accordance with the Memorandum of Understanding, twice a year the GB and CB meetings will be organised by the ERI SEE Agency.

2.8 Increasing the visibility of activities developed within ERI SEE

- Dissemination of the knowledge and skills acquired with different capacity building instruments of ERI SEE, e.g. through regular reporting of the countries.
- Strengthened use of ICT to improve networking, sustainability of achievements and visibility of ERI SEE (e.g. establishment of discussion groups with the objective to sustain the networks established with ERI SEE activities on different topics relevant for the region).
- Increased presentation of ERI SEE to conferences and other important events in the region.
- Regular publishing of the ERI SEE newsletter.

¹⁹ Minutes of the seminar on statistics and data collection, Education Development for Disabled and at Risk Students in South-East Europe, Paris, December 2005

3. ERI SEE DISCUSSION PROCESS „FROM ASSISTANCE TO COOPERATION”

Background

The discussion process “From Assistance to Cooperation” aims at creating possibilities for a discussion as well as for eventual adjustment and complementation of the political mandate, operation and thematic scope of ERI SEE in light of a changed and changing educational cooperation landscape in South Eastern Europe:

- The notion of “region” as implied in the Memorandum of Understanding from Nicosia has developed substantially: two of the 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.
- Until 2008 the Stability Pact will be completely phased out into a new, regionally owned structure (Regional Cooperation Council) under the political guidance of the South Eastern European Cooperation Process (SEECF).
- The European dimension of education reforms in the region is increasingly becoming an integral part of the national priority setting. Still, the agendas of national reforms in the ERI SEE region are growing increasingly diversified, reflecting the individual development of the countries and their different “speeds” in terms of EU integration.
- The Belgrade and Zagreb brainstorming meetings therefore collected an initial round of ideas and suggestions on a process of adaptation, complementation and enhancement of the existing framework for regional cooperation in education, in particular ERI SEE and recommended a continuation of the discussion in 2007 a differentiated way – on political, structural and content levels. (See Appendix#1 for additional details)

Activities proposed:

- **Mandate:** The conclusions of the Bucharest Regional Table of the Stability Pact identify ERI SEE as structure which should deal with the educational component of the core objective Building Human Capital on behalf of the Regional Cooperation Council.

Proposed is a discussion process with high-level officials/Governing Board members on possible updating the mandate of ERI SEE in terms of complementation of the Memorandum of Understanding. This process will also serve for preparing for the conference of ministers of education under the German EU Presidency (1 and 2 March 2007).

- **Structure and content:** National stock-taking seminars should be held in each ERI SEE country on the effect and follow-up activities to the ERI SEE work since the founding of the initiative.

The combined outcome of these efforts will be presented in a proposal for an enhanced role, responsibilities and structure of ERI SEE, also in view of promoting cooperation with the research sector. The final set of proposal should be made available ahead of the second meeting of the Governing Board and Consultative Body in 2007 for discussion and possibly adoption.