

Implementation of the ERI SEE Work  
Programme 2017 – 2019:  
ACTIVITY REPORT FOR 2017  
(January 2018)

# Contents

SUMMARY OF THE ERI SEE ACTIVITIES REALIZED IN 2017 – Table Overview .....	3
Thematic areas of the 2017 – 2019 Work Programme and the status/description of activities – Narrative overview .....	5
Implementation modalities – establishment of the ERI SEE Secretariat.....	5
Modernization of VET and Cooperation between VET and Business sector.....	6
Context .....	6
Activities .....	7
Quality Education (teacher training, quality assurance) .....	7
Context .....	7
Activities .....	8
Removing obstacles to Recognition of Qualifications .....	9
Context .....	9
Activities .....	9
Removing obstacles to Mobility of Professionals in SEE .....	10
Context .....	10
Activities .....	10
Organizational priority areas .....	10
Context .....	10
Activities .....	10

## SUMMARY OF THE ERI SEE ACTIVITIES REALIZED IN 2017 – Table Overview

Area of intervention	Activities	Results
Registration and operationalization of the ERI SEE	Legal establishment of the ERI SEE Secretariat	Secretariat officially established as a legal entity with the status of international organization
Governing of the ERI SEE	<p>22<sup>nd</sup> meeting of the ERI SEE Governing Board, 3<sup>rd</sup> February 2017, Belgrade</p> <p>23<sup>rd</sup> meeting of the ERI SEE Governing Board, 6<sup>th</sup> October 2017, Belgrade</p>	<p>Adoption of Work Programme 2017 – 2019</p> <p>Adoption of the Rules of Procedures of the Governing Board</p> <p>Service contracts with Centre of education policy and Director signed</p> <p>Employment contract with the GB and Director signed (December 2017)</p> <p>Monitoring of the work of the Secretariat</p> <p>Planning of future activities</p>
Modernization of VET and Cooperation between VET and Business sector	<p>SEEVET Net and Chambers Investment Forum (CIF) meeting 14<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> March 2017, Podgorica</p> <p>Cooperation planning meeting, 8<sup>th</sup> September 2017, Belgrade (KulturKontakt Austria (KKA), Chambers Investment Forum (CIF), Austrian Chamber of Commerce (WKÖ) and ERI SEE )</p> <p>Project development meeting, SEEVET Net and CIF meeting 28<sup>th</sup>-29<sup>th</sup> November 2017, Vienna</p>	<p>Established Western Balkans Alliance for Work-based learning – partnership between the SEEVET Net and Chambers Investment Forum</p> <p>Project concept note developed following the Austrian Development Agency criteria (submitted but on hold)</p> <p>Erasmus+ project proposal developed (not submitted due to the withdrawal of partners)</p> <p>Planning of the Western Balkans On-line Platform for Work-based learning started</p> <p>Cooperation and exchange of existing documents and practices regarding the Work-based learning</p>
Quality assurance in	Seminar for QA Agencies in	Established Regional group of experts

<p>general education</p>	<p>general education, 25<sup>th</sup> May 2017, Belgrade</p> <p>Seminar for QA Agencies in general education, 8<sup>th</sup> November 2017, Zagreb</p> <p>Cooperation with the Finnish Education Evaluation Centre (FINEEC)</p> <p>Initiation of cooperation with Regional School for Public Administration (RESPA) on the subject of internal quality management</p> <p>Study visit to the Croatian Centre for External Evaluation of Education (NCVVO)</p>	<p>in the area of Quality Assurance in general education</p> <p>Developed TAIEX application focusing on external assessment</p> <p>Peer learning from Finnish experts on the subject of internal quality management mechanisms</p> <p>Peer learning from Croatian Centre for External Evaluation of Education on the subject of state matura</p> <p>Adopted Activity Plan for 2018</p> <p>Initiated Communication Platform for exchanges of documents and practices</p>
<p>Teacher trainings</p>	<p>Initial creation of the regional database of relevant contacts – data gathering</p> <p>Initial arrangements with eTwinning centres for building ICT competences in the region</p> <p>Initial discussion with European Training Foundation (ETF) on possibilities for cooperation</p>	<p>Database of regional contacts (in progress)</p> <p>Using the existing platforms and resources in planning of a regional contact seminar for the enhancement of regional cooperation and ICT use (in progress)</p>
<p>Recognition of higher education qualifications</p>	<p>Call for tender and development of the Study on the current situation in the Western Balkans regarding the recognition of academic qualifications (lead by RCC)</p> <p>Seminar on automatic recognition of academic qualifications, 14<sup>th</sup> December 2017</p> <p>Meeting of the Working group on the Recognition of</p>	<p>Strong political emphasis on the topic in the framework of the Berlin process</p> <p>Draft Study on the current situation in the Western Balkans regarding the recognition of academic qualifications</p> <p>Establishment of the Working group on the Recognition of Academic Qualifications (WG RAQ)</p> <p>Adoption of the Terms of Reference for the WG RAQ</p> <p>Adoption of the Activity report for WG</p>

	Academic Qualifications, 15 <sup>th</sup> December 2017  (lead: RCC, ERI SEE partner)	RAQ
Visibility	Development of the new website  New visuals for ERI SEE  Drafting of the ERI SEE Newsletter  Initial arrangements and concept of the ERI SEE Launching conference  Participation at various events (organized by ETF, RCC, Serbian Chamber of Commerce, Croatian Chamber of Economy, Western Balkans Platform on Education and Training); meetings with various stakeholders (EU Delegation, Social Inclusion Project Unit – SIPRU, education agencies) and presenting ERI SEE	New web site running  Refreshment of the visual identity  Promotional material developed (basic)  Newsletter in preparation phase  Support of the host – Serbian Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development, and partners – ETF, KKA and RCC in the organization of the launching conference  Building stronger links with ERI SEE Partners – ETF, RCC, Chambers of Commerce, WB PET, EU Delegation, SIPRU, ENIC-NARIC offices  Participation in the RCC coordination meetings and Programming document (activities regarding ERI SEE)

## Thematic areas of the 2017 – 2019 Work Programme and the status/description of activities – Narrative overview

### Implementation modalities – establishment of the ERI SEE Secretariat

Throughout 2017, numerous activities were being undertaken with the view of finalizing the ERI SEE Secretariat establishment, in cooperation with the Centre of Education Policy (CEP) which as of 2010 had the role of the Interim ERI SEE Secretariat. The activities included intense and frequent communication with the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development and Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Serbia, investigating the necessary steps and procedures with the Tax Administration and Bureau of Statistics, commercial bank and consulting similar international organizations in Serbia and tax and accounting consultants.

In December 2017 the procedure of the establishment was officially completed, resulting in the ERI SEE Secretariat listed in the List of Diplomatic Missions in the Republic of Serbia, and having the official legal status and PIB (Tax identification number) of an international organization seated in Belgrade, Serbia.

More specifically, the related activities included (please note that due to the complexity of the procedures some started in December 2017 and are to be continued in January 2018):

- regulating the procedure of establishment of an international organization seated in Serbia with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Tax administration and commercial bank;
- development of the Internal regulation of the ERI SEE Secretariat (Structure of the Secretariat, Personnel policy, Financial Management Procedures);
- regulation of cooperation arrangements with CEP in the transition phase,
- transfer of funding from the COP account to ERI SEE bank account,
- transfer of documentation (including contracts on behalf of ERI SEE, such as phone lines, mobile phones, etc.) from CEP to ERI SEE;
- announcement of the vacancy ad for Assistant to the Director; and
- official notifications to the Member countries on the legal status of the ERI SEE Secretariat,

by finalization of which the functioning of ERI SEE Secretariat will be completely autonomous.

## **Modernization of VET and Cooperation between VET and Business sector**

### **Context**

The priority areas of Modernization of VET and Cooperation between VET and Business sector are tackled through the work of the South Eastern Europe Vocational Education and Training Network – SEEVET-NET – established by the ERI SEE initiative and formalised by the Agreement on Cooperation signed by the participating countries and institutions (the VET centres from Albania, Croatia, Montenegro, Macedonia, Serbia, Moldova and Bosnia and Herzegovina; with the associating participation of Romanian, Bulgarian and Kosovo VET centres). The focus of the work of regional experts participating in this Network is enhancing connections with the private sector, promoting work-based learning in the region, as well as adjusting the educational programmes to the acquisition of skills needed on the labour market.

There is a strong need for the vocational education and training systems being more responsive to the needs of the labour market (which is not only the situation in the region, but is a common challenge at the European level) by creating stronger links and communication channels with the business sector. Work-based learning, focusing on creating different types and formats of practical work during the education and training periods, creates opportunities for the development of practical competences, needed in the real sector, and thus increases the employability of young people.

In practice, stronger links and communication channels can be achieved through stronger cooperation between the SEEVET Net, acting as the education representatives, and regional Chambers of commerce, under the umbrella of the Western Balkans Chambers Investment Forum (WB CIF) acting as representatives of the business sectors on the other.

The cooperation between the two counterparts has been strongly supported through the work of ERI SEE, and enhanced in 2017. It is important to mention that their cooperation is endorsed under the framework the Berlin process, and joint statement resulting from the Vienna 2016 conference, where ERI SEE and WB

CIF were called upon to explore ways of joining forces for initiating a Western Balkans Alliance for Work-based learning, with the goal of promoting high quality, labour market relevant VET through strengthening elements of dual systems and other forms of WBL and enhancing the overall cooperation between the private and the public sector in VET.

## Activities

In 2017, the Western Balkans Alliance for Work-based learning was established, gathering the major partners in the field of Work-based learning – VET centres and Chambers of Commerce from the region, supported and coordinated by KulturKontakt Austria, Austrian Chamber of Economy, and ERI SEE.

As mentioned above, the cooperation between the two counterparts (education – SEEVET Net, and business – WB CIF) has been strongly supported through the work of ERI SEE, and enhanced in 2017, through the organization of joint events and formalized in the project concept note submitted to the Austrian Development Agency.

Two joint workshops were organized; one on 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> March 2017, focusing on the development of the joint project proposal, targeting 4 priority sectors identified among the partners (catering and tourism; transport and logistics; construction industry and food production and processing); for which standards of occupations, standards of qualifications and curricula are to be developed and tested in the framework of the mentioned project proposal. The other, on 28<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> of November 2017, served as the mapping exercise analysing and collecting documents relevant for Work-based learning, already existing and in use in the region; identification of the documents that are still needed; and laying basis for the development of the Western Balkans on-line platform for Work-based learning, containing relevant information on the status, modalities, documents, developments and promotion of work-based learning.

In addition, a partnership meeting was organized in September 2017, between the Chambers Investment Forum, KulturKontakt Austria, Austrian Chamber of Economy and ERI SEE, discussing potentials for the further project development, implementation and mapping exercise (implemented during the workshop on 28<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> November).

Funding opportunities were explored, through the preparation of the Erasmus+ application (which unfortunately wasn't submitted due to the withdrawal of a crucial partner, Agency for vocational education and training and adult education of Croatia); through the preparation of the concept note submitted to the Austrian Development Agency (put on hold due to the internal restructuring and re-prioritization of ADA), and introduction of the topic to the Swiss Development Agency, (to be continued in January 2018).

Activities in this area are supported by the European Training Foundation as well, by sharing of their expertise.

## Quality Education (teacher training, quality assurance)

### Context

Within the framework of ERI SEE, the activities proposed as relevant for the enhancement of regional cooperation included:

- implementation of quality assurance standards in general education
- development of teacher training activities (for basic and transversal skills, inclusive education, or other skills/themes deemed necessary),

with the purpose of addressing strategic objectives - adopting and implementing quality standards in education, introducing internal assessment and external evaluation of education, improving education systems outcomes for greater employability and greater achievements, improving access to education, skills matching the labour market needs, increasing levels of basic and transversal/soft skills among teacher and consequently students, and creating opportunities for permanent in-service teacher trainings. Increase in the level of digitalisation is also deemed necessary for the increase in the quality of education and better preparation for students for the life and work in the modern era.

## Activities

In the area of Quality assurance, what was developed in the course of 2017 included:

- Establishment of the cooperation network of education experts from the region dealing with quality assurance in general education (QA network)
- First meeting/seminar of the QA network, with the particular focus on the existing models of quality assurance mechanisms implementation in the region and identification of the needs and challenges, on 25<sup>th</sup> May 2017 in Belgrade
- The first meeting/seminar and establishment of the QA network was supported by the participation of the European Commission representative, the coordinator of the Open Method of Coordination working group on Schools. Thus the work of this QA network was being synchronized with the work of the mentioned working group.
- The cooperation was also extended to the subject of internal quality mechanisms for the Quality assurance agencies; for which Finnish experts from the Finnish Education Evaluation Centre – FINNEC - were invited to share their expertise during the second meeting of the QA network, held in Zagreb on 8<sup>th</sup> November. During the same event, regional practices of internal control and quality management systems and practices were also presented. The seminar was supported by the KulturKontakt Austria
- The seminar on 8<sup>th</sup> November 2017 resulted in the adoption of the Action plan for the Regional platform of experts in QA in general education, planning activities for the year 2018
- In December 2018, initial discussions were started with the Regional School for Public Administration – RESPA – on possibilities for cooperation, via organization of training activities on internal quality mechanisms for QA agencies staff; and initial contacts were made with the Austrian Development Agency covering these issues as well, to explore possible synergies.
- The project application for TAIEX funding scheme for the organization of conferences and seminars about QA in general education, with the goal of peer learning and exchanging knowledge about QA status and implementation in the region, was prepared and submitted by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia. However, it was not approved with the official explanation of the TAIEX office not being able to fund regional activities.
- Establishment of an on-line regional platform offering possibilities for communication and sharing between QA experts; which was created using the Yammer existing platform.

In the area of teacher trainings, and given the aim of increasing the level of digitalisation and the ever increasing role of IT on the one hand, and the financial constraints on the other, the activities were aimed at examining possibilities of using the existing tools and enhancing their regional potential. Due to financial and human capacities constraints, the activities undertaken are small-scale.

Having that in mind, initial discussions were started with the eTwinning offices from the region with the idea of ERI SEE supporting a regional contact making seminar on the use of eTwinning tools and promoting virtual project cooperation among the teachers in the region, using IT in their everyday work in classrooms.

eTwinning is known to be the most successful European Commission platform for the support of the practical use and integration of IT skills in classrooms. The network of experts in general education (from relevant ministries and/or national agencies in charge of general education) is being created, with the support of the Governing Board members, together with the network of eTwinning centres, having direct access to teacher – practitioners, as well as policy makers at national levels.

ETF was also consulted in exploring possibilities for regional activities in the area of digitalization; however possible cooperation models are yet to be agreed.

## Removing obstacles to Recognition of Qualifications

### Context

Recognition of higher education qualifications is one of the priorities of the South Eastern Europe 2020 Strategy, and a part of the Skills and Mobility Flagship Initiative of the Regional Cooperation Council.

This theme got even more visibility and importance in the framework of the Berlin Process, under which the Prime Ministers of the Western Balkans Six adopted Multiannual Action Plan on the Regional Economic Area (MAP) and committed under the Mobility component that the economies will work on removing obstacles to mobility of highly qualified workforce, in particular through joint standards and procedures for automatic recognition of quality assured academic qualifications; and removing obstacles to mobility of students, researchers and academics through joint policies, measures and instruments aimed at increasing academic and research mobility and cooperation, to be developed by 2020.

The actions on the recognition of academic qualifications outlined in the MAP build on the priorities outlined in the South East 2020 Strategy and the work already carried out by ERI SEE as part of the ERI SEE Work Programme, as well as the work within the framework of the Bologna process and the relevant recommendations adopted by the Ministers responsible for Higher Education at the Bologna Ministerial Conference in May 2015 as outlined in the Yerevan Communiqué.

### Activities

In February 2017 the Erasmus+ project was submitted to the European Commission - Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency - EACEA, proposing to carry out regional activities among project partners (Ministries of education, Higher Education Institutions, ENIC-NARIC offices), with the view of establishing joint quality assurance standards, their implementation, and procedures allowing for easier – fast-track – recognition of higher education qualifications among the countries and institutions in the region. Since the project was not approved for funding (selection results published in August 2017), new activities, to address the obligations specified in the above-mentioned MAP, were developed, and included:

- The Seminar on the automatic recognition of academic qualifications, held on 14<sup>th</sup> December 2017, and presenting existing views and practices in the subject of automatic recognition; and allowing for the exchange of the existing regional practices, improvements and challenges
- The meeting establishing the Working group on the recognition of academic qualifications (WG RAQ), held on 15<sup>th</sup> December 2017 in Belgrade, formalizing the members, mandates and activities of the WG RAQ, by adopting the Terms of Reference, and Work Programme.

## Removing obstacles to Mobility of Professionals in SEE

### Context

Removing Obstacles to Mobility of Professionals is one of the SEE 2020 priority, and one of the measures within the RCC flagship initiative Skills and Mobility.

„The action on **recognition of professional qualification** is based on the commitments spelled out in Articles 26-29 of the CEFTA 2006 Agreement, and in particular on achieving the progressive liberalisation in trade in services and gradual opening of services markets across the CEFTA region by reducing the barriers in temporary movement of natural persons (GATS Mode 4). Enhancing the intraregional trade in services depends on eliminating the barriers on (short-term) free movement of experts and professionals which include removing obstacles to recognition of professional qualifications in the region. The action aims to create conditions for recognition of professional qualifications through facilitating conclusion of mutual recognition agreements (MRAs), works towards enhancing transparency of national and regional arrangements on recognition of professional qualifications and aims to enhance regional data exchange on the mobility of professionals and future skills needs in selected professions.

### Activities

The activities in this area are lead and coordinated by Regional Cooperation Council and CEFTA, ERI SEE partnering in the implementation.

The activities in 2017 included meetings of the representatives of ministries of trade and ministries of education from the region, on the 26<sup>th</sup> April 2017 and 12<sup>th</sup> May 2017.

The Study on the recognition of professional qualifications was also presented during the 26<sup>th</sup> April meeting, and further activities were discussed.

The ‘Note on opening of negotiations on mutual recognition agreements of professional qualifications for doctors of medicine, dentists, architects and civil engineers’ was presented and discussed. No formal conclusions have been made.

## Organizational priority areas

### Context

Given the new phase in the development of the ERI SEE Initiative, hereby referring to the establishment of the ERI SEE Secretariat as a legal entity, it is necessary to increase the visibility and sustainability of the ERI SEE. More intensive activities, still respecting the current financial and human capacity restrictions, were proposed in the areas of Visibility and positioning of ERI SEE, Capacity building, as well as finding additional funding mechanisms supporting the ERI SEE activities.

### Activities

Visibility and positioning of ERI SEE was increased by several lines of action:

- Regular meetings with the Governing Board members, and joint planning of actions

- Regular meetings with the SEEVET Net members and further expanding of activities already started in the area of VET to cover the business sector, namely by cooperation with the regional Chambers of Commerce
- Establishing structured cooperation with other education experts from the region (ENIC NARIC offices, quality assurance experts)
- Meetings with the relevant regional ministries (usually back-to-back with the ERI SEE organized activities in various cities, or on the occasion of ERI SEE participating in an event in one of the cities in the region) informing them about the ERI SEE activities and potential challenges
- Cooperation with relevant international stakeholders and other organizations (ETF, RCC, Austrian Development Agency, Swiss Development Agency, Regional School for Public Administration, Finnish Education Evaluation Agency; Swedish Agency for Higher Education, UNICEF...)
- Development of the new ERI SEE website
- Development of an on-line newsletter to be published and disseminated on-line
- Participating at various international education-related events

#### Capacity building

No activities regarding capacity building in the formal way were undertaken. The announcement of the vacancy for Assistant to the Director, with the view of strengthening the Secretariat, is expected end December 2017.

#### Financial sustainability

Annual contribution fees of the participating countries were not paid on time by all the participating countries; and by some countries were paid in the last quartal of the year, which presents a risk for the realization of the planned activities and sustainability of the Secretariat itself.

Even though applications were prepared and submitted to several funding schemes – Erasmus+, Austrian Development Agency, TAIEX – none resulted in a positive feedback which shows that more focus, now that the official establishment of the ERI SEE Secretariat is finalized, needs to be put in fund-raising activities. This is only logical, since only now, by its official establishment and gaining of the legal status, can Secretariat act as an attractive partner.

Initial contacts were made with the Swiss Development Agency, presenting potential areas of cooperation. Further meeting is to be held in January 2018.