



# **Task Force Education and Youth The Enhanced Graz Process**

*Progress Report November 2005 – April 2006*

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### **Introduction**

The work of Task Force Education and Youth continued in line with the long-term goal of supporting the integration of the countries of the Western Balkans into the wider European Area of Education, in particular through fostering the European dimension of education reforms in the region.

The activities of the Task Force were designed and implemented in the framework of the Education Reform Initiative of South Eastern Europe and of the Austrian EU Presidency in 2006.

Throughout the year a large but focused amount of ERI SEE activities were organised within the Work Program 2005 of the initiative. The final details concerning the establishment of the ERI SEE Secretariat were clarified as well. In parallel and in cooperation with ERI SEE the Task Force carried out a preparatory process for the participation of the Western Balkan countries in the 9<sup>th</sup> Conference of European Ministers of Education, which was held on 16 and 17 March 2006 in Vienna.

### **Education Reform Initiative of South Eastern Europe (ERI SEE)**

*The Education Reform Initiative of South Eastern Europe (ERI SEE) is a tool for supporting the development and implementation of education reforms in the region, which takes into account both country-specific needs and challenges, as well as present trends in the development of the envisaged European Area of Education. ERI SEE thus serves as a communication and capacity building interface between ongoing education reforms at national levels and European trends and developments in order to promote European standards in education. The mission and objectives of the Initiative are based on the **Memorandum of Understanding as signed between the Ministers of Education and Higher Education of South Eastern Europe** in Nicosia, Cyprus, in 2003 and Oslo, Norway in 2004. Signatories of the Memorandum are the Ministers from Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro, PISG Kosovo/UNMIK, Romania and Serbia, as well as the Task Force Education and Youth/Enhanced Graz Process and the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe.*

*Further information on ERI SEE and its activities can be obtained at [www.erisee.org](http://www.erisee.org)*

### **ERI SEE Secretariat**

The ERI SEE Agency in Croatia has been established and the ERI SEE office in Zagreb is now functional. The ERI SEE donors have reaffirmed their support for the infrastructure and work programme implementation of the Initiative in 2006. The donors are currently: KulturKontakt Austria, the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, the Ministry of Science, Education and Sports of Croatia, Bureau CROSS – The Netherlands, the Norwegian Royal Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Education and Research –

Romania as well the Ministry of Education and Science of The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

### **Work Programme 2005**

The ERI SEE Governing Board members have decided to implement the following objectives in 2005:

- Preparation of participation in the Lifelong Learning Community programme through capacity building measures
- Cooperation with the international organisation for supporting the OECD in the project „Education Development for Disabled and At Risk Students” and the ETF project on „Dissemination of Copenhagen Process for the SEE”
- Collecting relevant documents on education reforms and dissemination of information
- Increasing visibility of the activities developed within the ERISSEE framework

In accordance with the objectives established, in 2005 the ERI SEE Secretariat carried out the following activities:

1. Two international seminars for supporting the training of experts from the region in order to participate in the future Community programmes in the field of education and training, “Participation to the Community programmes in the fields of education and training- an important tool for European integration”, organised in Bucharest, Romania 6-7 May 2005 and Sofia, Bulgaria, 30 September-1 November 2005
2. Two ERI SEE Senior Officials, Governing Board and Consultative Body meetings, 27-28 May 2005, Podgorica, Montenegro and 24-25 November, Ohrid, Macedonia
3. The thematic Seminar “The Bologna Process after Bergen: the challenges of implementation”, Bucharest, 1-2 July 2005, in cooperation with the European University Association (EUA) and UNESCO-CEPES
4. The thematic seminar “Investing efficiently in education”, 24-25 November 2005, Ohrid, The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia
5. The thematic seminar, “ICT in education”, 2-3 December 2005, Zagreb, Croatia

### Results of the ERI SEE activities

Following the implementation of the 2005 working programme, the following results can be highlighted:

- More than 60 experts nominated by the ministries of education signatory of the Memorandum have benefited from training within the framework of ERI SEE and are prepared to act as know-how multipliers in their respective ministries
- Translation into Albanian, Serbian and Macedonian of the EU documents on EQF and the new Lifelong Learning programme has been provided
- Transfer of expertise and experience from international experts contracted by Bureau Cross-the Netherlands, Norway, Italy, European University Association, UNESCO-CEPES, CISCO, European Commission, Task Force Education and Youth, Romania and Bulgaria

- Collection and dissemination of best practices through the website [www.erisee.org](http://www.erisee.org) or ERI SEE electronic Newsletter
- Political support received from the members of the Governing Board for continuing and enhance the activities developed by ERI SEE in 2006
- A functional Governing Board and Consultative Body structure
- Financial support secured for all the activities, due to the firm commitment of the ERI SEE donors
- Significant involvement in the ERI SEE activities of the countries from the region that co-financed or offered expertise for several meetings: Croatia, The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Romania and Bulgaria
- National seminars offered by ministries of education or agencies, for experts from SEE, on several topics related to EU debates on education and training (Romania, Bulgaria)
- The European ministers of education acknowledged and reconfirmed ERI SEE as the main political actor in regional cooperation in the field of education in SEE.

### Feedback from the participants

The ERI SEE Secretariat gathered feedback from the participants. The results indicate that:

- Participants were largely satisfied about the content, delivery and overall added value of the training
- The ERI SEE Secretariat provided a good learning environment and the participants were satisfied with the presentations made during the workshops
- The training and information provided were useful for their professional activities
- The topics chosen were relevant for the political agenda of the respective ministries and are relevant for the national educational reforms
- Some of the participants in the capacity building activities for participation to the new Community programme in education 2007 – 2013 (lifelong learning Programme) have been indeed charged with the negotiations with the European Commission for participation to the programme on behalf of their countries.

### Detailed information on events in 2005 which took place since the last TFEY report to the Stability Pact

#### ***Investing efficiently in education, 24-25 November 2005, Ohrid, The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia***

A lot of work has been undertaken in this field within the European Union and by international organisations such as OECD, UNESCO or EUA. The topic was of particular importance for the ministries of education from South Eastern Europe. 33 experts, representing Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Romania, Serbia and Montenegro- Rep of Serbia, Serbia and Montenegro- Rep. of Montenegro and UMMIK Kosovo attended the meeting. Experts from the European Training Foundation, the Netherlands and Norway, Kulturkontakt-Austria, OECD and Stability Pact were present as well.

Decentralisation was one of the main topics debated during the meeting. The experts participating in the seminar agreed that without the political support and willingness of the Governments and local authorities, the process of decentralisation cannot be promoted successfully. It was underlined that the decentralisation of the educational systems needs to be placed within an overall reform strategy of public administration reform at local and national level and accompanied with sufficient resources for changing mentalities and developing the human resources involved in the process.

The implementation process is at different stages in each country, but there are some key issues that need to be followed and cooperation could be developed at regional level, such as: training strategies for managers, teachers and local authorities, development of the financial mechanisms as well as the establishment of quality assurance systems.

***ERI SEE Senior Officials Meeting, 25 November, Ohrid, The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia***

One of the main instruments of the ERI SEE, the Senior Officials Meeting's agenda included sessions dedicated to the presentation of the European consultation process on the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), the programme of the Austrian EU Presidency in the first half of 2006, presentation of the results and recommendations made within the expert workshop on EQF-NQF organised by the Task Force in October 2005 in Vienna as well as the ERI SEE overview of 2005 and the thematic outlook for 2006.

Mr. Anton Dobart, Chair of the Task Force Education and Youth, informed the senior officials on the programme that will be implemented during the Austrian Presidency in the first half of 2006. Under the headline "Quality is the objective", the Austrian Presidency will deal with the following dossiers: 2<sup>nd</sup> Joint Progress Report on the implementation of the Education and Training 2010 Work Programme, Lifelong Learning Programme, EQF European Parliament and Council Recommendation, European Quality Charter for Mobility, Council Conclusions on the Language Competence Indicator, European Parliament and Council Recommendations on Key Competences for LLL and a possible recommendation on Quality for Teacher Training.

***ERI SEE Governing Board and Consultative Body meeting, 26 November, Ohrid, The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia***

During the third meeting of the ERI SEE Governing Board and Consultative Body, the following topics have been discussed:

- Reports on establishment of the ERI SEE Secretariat
- Reports on ERI SEE activities – first semester 2005 (results of the workshop on LLL programme, Bucharest 6-7 May 2005),
- Preliminary financial issues 2005
- ERI SEE 2006 working programme
- Internal documents of the ERI SEE Agency

It is important to mention the support of the Governing Board and Consultative Body members offered for developing a relevant and sustainable 2006 working programme.

***ICT seminar in education, 2-3 December 2005, Zagreb, Croatia***

The seminar was developed based on a proposal and support offered by Bureau Cross-the Netherlands. A number of 19 experts, representing Ministries of Education from Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Macedonia, Romania, Serbia and Montenegro- Rep of Serbia, Serbia and Montenegro- Rep. of Montenegro attended the meeting. Experts from the Netherlands, CISCO System and SIVECO Romania were also present and had an input during the seminar.

As a general overview of the seminar, the following issues can be presented as results of the meeting:

- There are different stages of development of the ICT strategies – and based on experiences of the countries it is easier to buy computers and software but it is hard to train and use the human resources in the most efficient way.

- The development of educational software is important for increasing the attractiveness of the subjects taught in the classroom and it is an important tool for the teaching/learning process.
- Financing of the ICT strategies at national level is a problem that may jeopardize the success of the implementation process. Sustainability of the process is crucial for the success of the national programmes developed by the Ministries of education from the region. The private-public partnership developed with solid companies could be a solution in the region together with the support from the local authorities.
- The role of teachers and teacher training in ICT are of utmost importance for the success of a national ICT strategy.
- For comparing the situation in SEE and ensuring monitoring tools for the process of implementation it is necessary to support the use and development of indicators as well as collecting relevant data
- There is a gap in Europe between the demand and the offer on/of experts for networking. The survey conducted by CISCO provided some important results for educational systems in Europe and these results could be extrapolated for SEE. The development of CISCO Academies for teachers and training could be a solution for the training of human resources necessary for networking.

### **Work Programme 2006**

The Task Force Education and Youth actively participated in the design and drafting of the Working Program 2006 of the Initiative, and is closely co-operating with ERI SEE and the SOE Ministries of Education on its implementation. In 2006 ERI SEE will continue its focus on **capacity building measures** in key areas of educational reform with emphasis on ongoing and future EU integration processes and with respect to the conclusions of the 9<sup>th</sup> Ministerial Conference “Strengthening Education in Europe” (16-17 March 2006). The implementation of the 2006 programme is already underway.

At its meeting on 26 November, Ohrid, The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, the ERI SEE Governing board (Co-chair Task Force Education and Youth) hence decided that the Initiative should concentrate on the following issues:

- Preparation for participation in the Community **Integrated Lifelong Learning Programme** 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 (already scheduled) 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 offer upcoming Meetings of Senior officials from Southeast Europe to exchange information on ongoing 2006 PISA activities in Southeast 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](http://www.erisee.org)

## **Austrian EU Presidency 2006 – 9<sup>th</sup> Conference of European Ministers of Education (Vienna, 16 and 17 March 2006)**

The current Austrian EU Presidency focuses 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 a tradition which started in 1998/1999, the Austrian EU Presidency offers 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 9<sup>th</sup> Conference of European Ministers of Education "Strengthening Education in Europe" represents 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.

The communiqué of the Vienna conference was drafted with the support of the TFEY. It summarises the discussion outcomes and will serve as a point of reference for the future work of the TFEY/ERI SEE.

In the period November 2005 – April 2006 the Task Force Education and Youth was also in charge of designing and carrying out the content-level preparation of the participation of the Western Balkan countries to the conference.

### **Conference Themes and Preparation**

In line with the emphasis of the Austrian EU Presidency on quality in education, the 9<sup>th</sup> 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, 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.

A central element of this consultation process was the expert meeting “Towards a European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning – Relevance, Feasibility and Implications for SEE” which took place on 21<sup>st</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> of October 2005 in Vienna. (see TFEY Report for 2005)

Participants included experts from all Ministries of Education from SEE, of Austria (upcoming EU Presidency), Hungary, the Netherlands, Finland (EU Presidency 2<sup>nd</sup> half of 2006), Estonia and Norway and representatives from the European Commission, OECD and the European Training Foundation. Priorities for development as well as measures for supporting the debates were identified and presented to the Ministries of Education from the region.

The results of the workshop served as a basis for the preparation of the participation of the Western Balkan countries in the ministerial conference in Vienna.

A further step in the preparatory process for the conference was the high level meeting for general directors from the ERI SEE countries, organised by the Task Force on 18 February 2006 in Vienna. The issues discussed at the meeting were in line with topics of the upcoming ministerial conference, in particular strengthening the role of universities by enhancing the synergy between higher education and research, the development of a European Qualifications Framework (EQF) as a common reference instrument covering both VET and general education (secondary and higher), and the need for strengthening the European area of education and integrating the Western Balkan region in it.

### **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. The conclusions are in detail as follows

- **European Area of Education:** The adoption of European standards in the field of education and training in the countries of the Western Balkans is of vital importance for the region's European perspective. The process of integrating the region into the European Area of Education requires further and sustainable support and commitment at national, regional and EU levels, whereby national commitment is paramount, especially for the preparation for participation of each country in the new generation of Community programmes in education. The significance of ERI SEE and of regional cooperation was stressed as well
- **The European Qualifications Framework:** EQF has the potential to significantly contribute to the transparency, transferability and recognition of qualifications at the European level, and can serve as an agent for reforms to support lifelong learning in the wider European Area of Education. The EQF initiative offers a strong cooperation link between the region and the EU. Thereby the effort of setting up qualification frameworks in the region needs support, inter alia by peer learning activities at EU level, by the provision of expertise through European institutions and through networks for regional cooperation like the Education Reform Initiative of South Eastern Europe.
- **Higher Education:** The implementation of the Bologna Process objectives, the participation of higher education institutions in the new Community programmes, and the integration into the European Research Area are vital for the higher education institutions of the Western Balkan region and, with this, for strengthening education in Europe. In this context the Ministers underlined the significance of institutional and political cooperation, and welcomed the messages of the universities of the region and the respective initiatives of the European University Association.
- **Sustainability:** The need for a continuous, inclusive European dialogue on current matters in the field of European education policy was stressed, in particular for widening the European Area of Education to the Western Balkan region and for strengthening education in Europe in the light of the Lisbon strategy. Future presidencies and encouraged to continue this dialogue at ministerial level.