



Task Force Education and Youth The Enhanced Graz Process

Progress Report May 2006 – November 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 in line with the core objective of the Stability Pact “Building Human Capital” and the “Pact for Education” for the Western Balkans as initiated by Austria during the Austrian EU Presidency.

The activities of the Task Force are designed and implemented in the framework of the Education Reform Initiative of South Eastern Europe (ERI SEE)¹ and concentrate on **capacity building measures** in key areas of educational reform, as identified by the countries of the region.

Due to the termination of employment of the Director of the ERI SEE secretariat, Ms. Luminita Matei, in June, a call for the ERI SEE director had to be launched in summer. In September 2006 Ms. Aspasija Hadzisce, adviser to the Macedonian Minister of Education and head of the Macedonian TEMPUS office, was nominated as new ERI SEE director, and will start working from November 2006 onwards. Ms. Hadzisce will take over her duties in the course of November 2006.

Throughout the year a number of ERI SEE activities were organised within the Work Program 2006 of the initiative, focusing on educational issues relevant both at EU and SEE levels.

Under the Austrian EU Presidency in the first half of 2006 the Task Force Education and Youth carried out a preparatory process for the participation of the Western Balkan countries in the 9th Conference of European Ministers of Education, which was held on 16 and 17 March 2006 in Vienna (c.f. the last TFEY progress report on the Conference and its Communiqué). Other events during the Austrian EU presidency, for example the Conference on „Quality Assurance in Higher Education and Vocational Education and Training”, Graz, 11/12 May, will be taken into account in the next ERI SEE seminars on these thematic issues.

¹ 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, FYR 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.

Work Programme 2006

On basis of the decision of the ERI SEE Governing Board the main directions of the ERI SEE working programme 2006 were to further develop capacity building measures in the following areas:

1. Continuing the preparation for participation into the Community Integrated Lifelong Learning Program
2. European Qualifications Framework - National Qualifications Framework in SEE
3. Thematic expert seminars on key issues of education development at European and national levels, e.g. Quality in Higher Education and in Vocational Education Training, Assessment and Evaluation, ICT in Education
4. and other activities based on the recommendation of the GB and CB members e.g. promotion of the visibility of ERI SEE and its activities.

According to these guiding lines and identified priorities the ERI SEE secretariat carried out the following activities in the period between May and October, respectively which it will realise in November and December 2006 (reports are available on www.erisee.org (> **calendar**):

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

1.1. The **third capacity building seminar “Participation to the Community programmes in the fields of education and training - an important tool for European integration”**, took place in Sinaia, Romania, 1-5 March 2006. A number of 24 experts, representing ministries of education from Albania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro, PISG Kosovo, Romania, and Serbia attended the meeting, as well as experts from Norway, the Netherlands, Italy and Slovenia. The Objectives of the meeting were to:

- Train the experts of the SEE ministries of education on how to write project proposals, according to the Community rules
- Inform on roles of the national agencies in the life cycle of projects and other relevant information for preparing the participation into the LLL programme
- Disseminate best results, experiences and best practices

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

The topics included in the discussions were related to:

- Responsibilities of the National Authorities in implementing the programmes
- Structure and management of the agency

- Organization of departments, responsibilities, life cycle: Comenius, Erasmus, Grundtvig, Leonardo da Vinci, public policies, valorization, image and quality assurance, monitoring, audit and evaluation

The majority of participants are currently involved in the preparation of the participation to the new LLL programme in their countries - in this respect this event succeeded to address to the relevant key persons.

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

The **second study visit** to a national agency dealing with Community Programmes in the field of education and training, lead to the Slovenian National Agency Cmepius, located in Ljubljana, on 4-6 September 2006.

The **third study visit**, to the Norwegian Centre for International Cooperation in Higher Education, SIU, Bergen, took place on 10/11 October 2006.

- 1.3. Outlook: 4th Capacity Building Seminar on Participation in the Community Programmes – Lifelong Learning”, Belgrade, December 2006, for continuation of the institutional capacity building for project cycle management

2. European Qualifications Framework/National Qualifications Frameworks in SEE²:

A seminar on NQF and their linkage to EQF – stock-taking of current developments in the ERI SEE countries -is scheduled for December 2006 in Brussels.

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

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

The main conclusions of the seminar were:

² The European Qualifications Framework 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.

The agenda for the EQF/NQF seminar in December is currently being developed.

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

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

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

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

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

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

4. Other ERI SEE events from May until November 2006

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

In accordance with the *Memorandum of Understanding* signed by the SEE ministers of education and higher education among the instruments to be used by the ERI SEE Secretariat in order to fulfil its objectives is organisation, twice a year, of the Senior

Officials Meeting.

The objectives of the seminar were:

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

A number of 35 experts, representing ministries of education from Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro, Romania, and Serbia have attended the meeting. The members of the ERI SEE Consultative Body have been also present and had inputs during the seminar.

Participants were informed on the Austrian Presidency of the European Council: dossiers, March Ministerial Conference, other aspects; the Results of European consultations as regards the European Qualifications Framework; on the OECD project "Education Development for Disabled and at Risk Students in Southeast Europe", PISA exercise, OECD Programme for Education Building; on the ongoing activities of EUA in the field of higher and on the ERI SEE activities in the first semester of 2006.

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

At the meeting there have been present the Governing Board (GB) members and alternate experts with the observer status, as following: there were present at the meeting the Governing Board members from Albania, Rep of Montenegro, PISG and UNMIK Kosovo, FYR of Macedonia, Moldova, Romania, Task Force Education and Youth; were replaced by experts having an observer status the representatives of Croatia and Rep. of Serbia. There were not represented at the meeting the GB members from Bosnia-Herzegovina and Bulgaria. As regards the Consultative Body (CB) members, at the meeting were present the representatives of Bureau Cross- the Netherlands, Ministry of Education and Research of Norway, Stability Pact Office, Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, European Training Foundation, European University Association, Kulturkontakt-Austria and OECD.

The proposed agenda of the meeting has been approved by the participants and the following topics have been discussed during the meeting:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The internal ERI SEE discussion started on the day following the meeting of Senior Officials. A second discussion takes place on 10 November in Zagreb with an extended group of participants – experts, ERI SEE partner institutions and potential partners. The 5th meeting of the ERI SEE Governing Board and Consultative Body that follows on 11 November deals with and adopts, inter alia, the financial report for 2006, the budget for 2007 and the ERI SEE work plan for 2007. It also formalises the preliminary findings and defines the next steps of the ERI SEE discussion process.

5. Other activities and events within the framework of the Task Force Education and Youth

5.1. „Pact for Education“ for the Western Balkans

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

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

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

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

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

5.2. IPA – instrument for pre-accession assistance

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

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

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

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

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