



Joint seminar of the Cluster of Knowledge on Vocational Education and Training and South East Europe Regional VET Network (SEEVET-Net)

"Joint ownership of schools and companies / Raising awareness of the advantages of Work Based Learning"

17-18 November, Tirana International Hotel & Conference Centre, Albania

Report

Joint seminar of the Cluster of Knowledge on VET: Modernising VET system – improving performance, quality and attractiveness of VET (CoK on VET), led by Romania, and the South East Europe Regional VET Network (SEEVET-Net) took place on 17th and 18th November, in Tirana, Albania. It was organised by the ERI SEE interim Secretariat (Centre for Education Policy, Serbia) with support of the Romanian National Centre for TVET Development and KulturKontakt Austria and hosted by the Albanian National Agency of Vocational Education and Training & Qualifications. The seminar gathered more than 40 representatives of VET centres and relevant institutions from 9 countries: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Kosovo*, Macedonia, Montenegro, Romania and Serbia, representatives of VET schools social partners, European Training Foundation (ETF), KulturKontakt Austria, Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) and Centre for Education Policy.

The thematic focus of the seminar was work based learning – a topic that was identified as a priority by both initiatives (at the SEEVET-Net annual meeting, July 2013, Belgrade and the CoK on VET workshop, June 2013, Bucharest), and one of the meeting's purpose was to ensure more synergy between these two initiatives. Additional reason for focus on this topic was the fact that work-based learning is recognised in the South East Europe 2020 Strategy, within its Education and Competences component, as one of the strategies for ensuring that education and training systems better meet economic and labour market needs.

Day 1 – 17th November

The meeting was opened by **Ms. Gentiana Sula**, Deputy Minister of Social Welfare and Youth of Albania, **Ms. Sonila Limaj**, Director at National Agency of Vocational Education and Training & Qualifications, Albania, and **Ms. Monica Mott**, Head of Education Department at KulturKontakt Austria.

At the start of the working part of the meeting, **Mr. Gabriel Radu**, Regional coordinator at the National Centre for TVET Development, Romania, reminded participants on the **Cluster of Knowledge on VET** context for establishing, its role and objectives, membership, activities and cooperation mechanisms. He underlined that CoK on VET could play a crucial role in implementing Europe 2020 Strategy, with its key flagship initiatives that embrace education and training (Youth on the Move and The Agenda New Skills and Jobs) under the ERI SEE support. As the key output of CoK recently, Mr. Radu reminded participants on the *Compendium of Good Practices in Improving performance, quality and attractiveness of VET*. Also, he reminded participants that during the

*This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo Declaration of Independence

workshop in Vienna, in December 2013, on work based learning, following topics were identified as topics of joint interest in the SEE region: *Joint ownership of schools and companies and Raising awareness of the advantages of Work Based Learning*, and that CoK work plan for 2015 and 2016 is based on mentioned topics.

Then, Mr. Radu gave presentation on **Work Based Learning in Romanian Initial VET - goals, success factors and challenges**. He explained how the initial VET is organised through the school based system and what the challenges for company-based training are. As factors of success he underpinned the importance of labour market mechanisms and companies acting in their own interest. It is also crucial that companies and schools should share responsibility for work based learning, and that shared understanding of goals and planned outcomes is needed. Special attention should be devoted to good coordination and development of all levels of cooperation and more intensive involvement of companies. Key challenges identified along the way to work based learning are: mechanisms for increasing accountability and commitment of companies in providing effective and quality of work based learning, improving cooperation in work based learning on concrete pedagogical issues, tailor-made approach to encourage individual progress, special measures for low achievers and special needs students, question on companies' interest in recession time and financial incentives, and, for Romania, implementation of the dual system.

Mr. Catalin Bercu, Human Resources Manager, from the company COMPA SA, Romania, talked about this topic from another perspective. COMPA SA is a success story when it comes to work based learning in Romania. This company was involved in development of IVET in Romania, through development of students competencies in modern industrial management and manufacturing, training of Romanian teachers (technical fields of study), with the goal of creation of sustainable educational environment. Apart from the partnerships with educational institutions, COMPA SA has been involved in teacher training related to modern performance and acts as vocational training centre, whose goal is to integrate, maintain and develop the human resources competencies on a modern, flexible and inclusive labour market. COMPA, also, has contributed to VET development through local educational curriculum development, traditional relationship with Technological High Schools, consultancy in development of vocational training standards. Results in this aspect are: VTC-CMP – establishment and work of the Excellence Training Centre, human resources development, gained access to further projects and partnerships and high influence in adapting the VET to actual needs of economy.

Participants had the opportunity to hear about Albanian experience from **Mr. Alqi Mustafai and Ms. Ejvis Gishti** from National Agency of Vocational Education and Training & Qualifications, Albania, in the session **Work Based Learning in Albanian VET - Goals, Success Factors and Challenges**. As preconditions for successful apprenticeship on systemic level, Mr. Mustafai and Ms. Gishti stressed importance of the appropriate legal base - a clear and enforceable formulation of rights and responsibilities of the apprenticeship partners; clear and elaborated definition and division of roles of social partners: employers, employee organisation/trade unions, governments and institutional support for apprenticeship, especially in assurance of quality and standards. Just as roles, finances need to be shared between the involved parties: companies, apprentices and society. Another needed link to the system is recognition of the work based learning and connecting it to the national qualification frameworks levels.

International practice of starting work based learning was presented by **Mr. Shawn Mendes**, Senior Human Capital Development Specialist, ETF. Mr. Mendes informed the participants of the upward growth of significance of work based learning in EU neighbouring countries. He reminded that work based learning is relevant for all VET levels, in particular for initial VET, but also post-secondary VET and continuing vocational education and training. In his opinion, proper balance between school based learning and work based learning is key for development of responsive VET systems and successful transition from world of education to world of work. He agrees that employers'

commitment is significant prerequisite in this process. He, also, underlined that work based learning needs to be quality assured and priority sectors and occupations need to be identified. This should be done with close insight to national context, because policy challenges differ by types and depend on contextual factors. Mr. Mendes also presented main models of work based learning in VET in ETF partner countries, such as formal and informal apprenticeship, internships etc. Special attention in his presentation was given to the question of whether the incentives are the key to overcoming the challenges in successful implementation of apprenticeships. As useful recourses for policy makers and social partners with work based learning, ETF has prepared two publications: Benefits and obstacles for WBL; and Handbook on WBL for policy makers and social partners. In addition, ETF has contributed to the development of International Memorandum for Apprenticeships and International publication Architecture of Innovative Apprenticeship.

First day continued with **round table discussions**, during which representatives of countries delegations were invited to talk about the main issues concerning work based learning in their national context. Each country used this opportunity to present the state of play and steps undertaken on the level of policies on the one side, and on the level of projects supported by donor community on the other side. Likewise to the countries which experiences were presented, in all countries there are possibilities for work based learning in different forms (whether it is internship or some other form). However, there is a question of how to put what has been stipulated and incorporated in curricula in real context. In the establishment of partnerships between schools and companies, question of quality assurance of work based learning arises as the one of the main aspects which should be addressed. Representatives of all countries underlined the significance of training for practice mentors/coordinators (training of trainers) and their competences in this aspect. There is a need for more companies to be engaged, but their engagement should be meaningful. Speaking of engagement of companies, question of financial incentives is rather pertinent, but very sensitive one, since they can easily cause more harm than good. The third issue is the legal framework, not for pedagogical side, but the work based part - what are the elements that need to be regulated, striking the balance not to make the work based learning over bureaucratic and increasing the value for the company. Another subtopic that was earmarked is the question of the concept of work based learning, as it differs throughout the region - from internship (completely company based) to model with several hours a week in company. In addressing all of these questions, close cooperation between education and world of work is needed. Therefore, **several topics to be worked on, in the next period, are: concept of work based learning, promotion of work based learning in business sector, legal framework for work based learning (part in companies), quality assurance, company trainers' pedagogical skills, as well the question of financial incentives.**

The second part of the meeting was opened by **Ms. Jasminka Cekic Markovic**, Director of the Centre for Education Policy, acting as interim ERI SEE Secretariat. This session was devoted to the **SEEVET-Net membership, activities, cooperation and ERI SEE Work Programme for 2014**. Ms. Markovic looked back to the roots in ERI SEE initiative and establishing the network in 2011, membership and SEEVET-Net objectives, as well as some of the key network achievements. She acquainted the participants that ERI SEE has also coordination role in the development and, more importantly, implementation of dimension D. Education and Competences of the SEE 2020. Strengthening the Vocational Education and Training Systems (synergy on SEEVET - Net and CoK on VET) has been one of the ERI SEE thematic areas for 2014 and in line of the SEE 2020 Strategy targets, building upon the previous activities of ERI SEE - SEEVET- net and VET Cluster of Knowledge. For the upcoming year regional workshop on education, economy and the labour market was planned, as well as elaboration of the regional programme of action under the same topic.

Day 2 – 18th November

During the second day of the seminar, participants had the opportunity to visit the VET school “Beqir Cela” and a partner company “Doert” in Durres (examples of school based and work based learning).

Afterwards, **Mr. Mladen Dragasevic**, Senior Expert on Smart Growth, RCC presented the **Education and Competences dimension of the South East Europe 2020 Strategy**. After brief introduction to the targets, he explained the SEE 2020 programming process: from identification - setting up the process, formulation - developing regional programmes, obtaining approvals, and fundraising and getting funding commitments. Strategy SEE 2020 has set most of the targets related to economic growth and economic reforms in the region. Within the Strategy, the best use of education, respectively research and innovative scientific solutions in the economic development should be made. The Strategy SEE 2020 passed through the attention of various authorities in participating countries in 2013, followed by an adoption of document by the governments (Ministries of Economy) of countries participating in the strategy in November 2013. Partners in implementation of the SEE 2020 have been European Commission (DG Enlargement), governments of participating countries, as well as the coordinators of all 16 dimensions. Smart Growth Pillar encompasses 4 dimensions, amongst which the dimension D. Education and Competences. This dimension has been coordinated by the ERI SEE. For all 16 dimensions possible regional programmes of action, relevant to all countries participating, have been identified. For the dimension D there are 2 RAPs in the process of making: on the topic of prevention of early school leaving and drop out (1) and teacher training (2). The process of adoption after wide consultation foresees two lines of approval: first from the Governing Board of specific dimension (eg. ERI SEE Governing Board for RAPs within the dimension D. Education and Competences), after RAPs for all 16 dimension have been developed, they will be sent to the SEE 2020 Programming Committee (representatives from NIPAK offices and SEE national coordinators from ministries of economies) and they will provide final information from their governments on all the programmes delivered. After the approval of the RAPs, RCC is in charge of getting funding commitments. From MB IPA funds for 2 programmes in 2014 EUR 4 million have been allocated. However, there is time discrepancy of two years, since because of the EK mechanisms, the funds will arrive to the region only in 2016. There are also programmes aiming for IPA 2015, meaning that they will start the implementation only in 2017. In such situations, it is necessary to shift attention to existing recourses and regional organisations, especially those that align with the SEE 2020. RCC has allocated approximately EUR 1.8 million towards implementation of SEE 2020 in 2014. During 2015, RCC plans to allocate similar resources towards RCC TA Facility and RCC Small Grants Facility.

Mr. Shawn Mendes presented **the ongoing regional projects of the European Training Foundation in VET**, since ETF has been involved in the VET reform, through reinforcing the policies based on evidence. Mr. Mendes pointed out that the growth in the region has not been very high and that VET has to be made more market relevant. Main challenges the region faces concerning VET have been lack of holistic, coherent, forwards looking skills policies (although there are many policies and strategies); difficulties in implementation of legislation (although there have been successful pilot projects, mainstreaming of experiences has not been successful); stakeholder involvement is not active and dynamic; there is a skills mismatch: education systems are not providing skills that labour market needs; there are countries with 50% of youth unemployment and 40% of employers saying they cannot get skilled young people to work in the jobs; there is a lack of work based training; question of quality assurance systems and better understand of how systems are performing. ETF is addressing these challenges through numerous initiatives: FRAME project; Torino process and assessment of SMEs and business development. Moreover, ETF has been working regionally on projects that address teacher training of VET teachers and support countries in participation at EU technical working groups. ETF main intention is to support the accession process, linked to European qualification framework and European quality framework, and help the region systems to become more outcome based and generate skills that are more adequate to the labour market.

Ms. Sabine Schubert, Educational Coordinator, KKA, presented two **ongoing regional initiatives of the KulturKontakt Austria in VET**: Entrepreneurship Learning and Cooperation School and world of work – example tourism sector. The first, conducted in Albania, Kosovo and Macedonia, established training firms and new approach in teaching in order to foster entrepreneurship learning and

collaboration with business. The second project, conducted in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Serbia, was built on the previous project called TUREG (2007-2013) and it is based on modern and practice oriented training in tourism sector, aiming increasing quality in school and company based practical training. The goals of this project are enhancing the flow of information between companies and schools on internships, developing new profile for school based coordinators of internships in businesses, enhancement and development of knowledge and competences of these co-ordinators, establishing sustainable partnerships with businesses and co-operation with the business sector as part of school based quality management.

Within the **discussion on the role of SEEVET-Net in view of other regional initiatives** participants were reminded that the agreed focus of the following meetings and work will be joint work on concept of work based learning and improvement of legal framework that defines it; promotion of work based learning and quality assurance, especially of trainers' pedagogical skills, and the question of financial incentives. Country delegations were invited to propose activities or to send the proposals to interim ERI SEE Secretariat as way to collect and shared ideas for further consultations.

Election of a new Chair of the SEEVET-Net (one year mandate). According to the Article 8 of the Cooperation Agreement, chair of the network is to be elected on annual basis, so this activity took place during the end of the meeting. At the beginning of the election process, Mr. Dusko Rajkovic, Director of the VET centre in Montenegro, underlined that he has proposal which is different than established practice and proposed setting up the SEEVET-Net as independent entity with head office in Podgorica. He said that for the SEEVET-Net office, VET centre of Montenegro will provide space and necessary equipment, as well as one person, who will, on voluntary basis, work several hours a day, upon the request of the director. This proposal was followed by the strong belief of Mr. Rajkovic that the network would be more efficient should if it change the organisation and operation manner. Upon the proposal, Ms. Jasminka Cekic Markovic reminded that the SEEVET-Net is part of the ERI SEE and that its goal is peer learning and exchange of information. Bearing that in mind, SEEVET-Net "independence" will require similar establishment procedures as for establishment of ERISSEE secretariat and that ERISSEE Governing Board should be consulted and will have final say. Mr. Robert Gjorgiev, Deputy Director from the VET centre Macedonia, asked for postponing the decision making on this matter for the next meeting, knowing that few persons who have mandate to deciding on this are not present at the meeting. His proposal was adopted and election of the SEEVET-Net chair was postponed for the next meeting of the Network.

Ms. Jasminka Cekic Markovic, concluded that for the needs of submitting the proposal to network members and ERI SEE GB, it is necessary for Mr. Rajkovic to prepare written explanation on his vision of establishment of the SEEVET-Net head office, time framework, proposal of the future SEEVET-Net legal status (domestic organisation operating in the region or international organisation), explanation on how the signing of agreement between countries is foreseen, and proposal of financial plan and send it to interim ERI SEE Secretariat.

All materials from the event including the presentations are available at the ERI SEE website: <http://www.erisee.org/node/307>.