

ERI SEE

EDUCATION REFORM INITIATIVE
OF SOUTH EASTERN EUROPE

Enhancing the Contribution of ERI SEE in Building SEE Knowledge Societies: Desirabilities, Imperatives and Development Perspectives for 2010 and beyond

1st Working Group Meeting

7 – 8 October 2009, Sarajevo
Venue: RCC Secretariat, Conference Room Athens

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The discussion on the development perspectives of ERI SEE (at political, organisational and content level) is taking place in light of a changed and changing education cooperation landscape in South Eastern Europe (SEE):

- The ERI SEE region as implied in the Istanbul Memorandum of Understanding has developed substantially: Bulgaria and Romania became EU Member States in 2007. The changed status has provided an added value to the contribution of these countries to ERI SEE. The EU enlargement process currently takes place against the background of a deep and widespread recession, which has affected both the EU and the enlargement countries. The annual strategy on EU enlargement¹ highlights the progress of SEE countries made towards European integration during a difficult year of global economic crisis and presents the roadmap for the Western Balkans rapprochement to the EU². The European Union will negotiate a New Agreement with Moldova. It will go beyond the current Partnership and Cooperation Agreement and will promote deeper cooperation and approximation between Moldova and the EU.
- Since its establishment in 2008, the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC)³ functions as a regionally owned and led framework for sustaining and boosting focused cooperation in SEE. The same year the Task Force Fostering and Building Human Capital (TFBHC) of the RCC was launched and entrusted with the promotion of coherency between education, higher education and research cooperation in SEE.
- The donor countries call for increased regional ownership of the Initiative, requesting firm commitment of the countries to the implementation of the jointly agreed ERI SEE work programmes, as well as for gradual undertaking the responsibility for co-financing ERI SEE.
- The European dimension of education reforms in the region has become an integral part of the national priority setting. The agendas of national reforms in the ERI SEE region are diversified, reflecting the individual development of the countries and the different phases of their rapprochement to the EU. This needs to be reflected in the adjustment of the ERI SEE priorities and instruments for regional cooperation.

¹ Adopted by the European Commission on 14 October 2009.

² It is expected the accession negotiations with Croatia to be concluded in 2010. Opening of negotiations with the Republic of Macedonia was recommended. The Commission is currently preparing an Opinion on the Montenegrin application for EU membership. Albania applied for membership in 2009. Bosnia and Herzegovina needs to speed up key reforms. Serbia is implementing the Interim Agreement with the EU. The stability of Kosovo (Under UNSCR 1244/99) been maintained.

³ The RCC is the successor of the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe and functions under the political umbrella of the South East European Cooperation Process (SEECP).



Task Force Fostering &
Building Human Capital
of the Regional Cooperation Council



The 1st meeting of the Working Group collected an initial round of initiatives and recommendations relevant for the process of adaptation, complementation and enhancement of the regional cooperation in education and training, in particular ERI SEE in view of strengthening the commitment and increased ownership of the process. Besides the members of the Working Group, participants to the meeting were: the Secretariat of the TFBHC, experts from the RCC Secretariat, and the ERI SEE Agency. The summary of recommendations for future development is provided below.

General Findings

The significance of ERI SEE as facilitator of information transfer on current EU discussions to the region in accordance with its current mandate has been acknowledged.

Clear commitment of SEE countries to regional ownership of ERI SEE is necessary in the upcoming period, proved by active engagement in shaping the future ERI SEE priorities and instruments for cooperation, as well as in the development and implementation of ERI SEE work programmes.

Activities for adjustment of the current organizational structure of the ERI SEE Secretariat with the objective to establishing a sustainable, regionally owned and co-financed structure are to be initiated.

ERI SEE will continue to be in need of political mandate from the region for its future operation. The existing mandate should be updated in accordance with the changed landscape for regional cooperation.

Recommendations for the ERI SEE development process

In order to efficiently manage the complex and demanding process ahead, defining of immediate and longer term priorities for the work of ERI SEE, and the need to operate on both expert and political levels, the development process should be differentiated.

Political level

- Joint lobbying efforts for keeping fostering and building human capital high on the political agenda for SEE development, with education and training as one of the key components.

Actors: Continuous efforts and use of important conferences and other events focused on the region by the Ministers responsible for Education and other high-level officials from SEE, the RCC Secretariat in particular the Building Human Capital and Parliamentary Cooperation Unit, the TFBHC, the ERI SEE donor countries (the ones which are EU Member States and the non-EU Member States).

Immediate actions:

- Following the allocation of portfolios to the new European Commission by the current President-designate José Manuel Barroso, joint letter signed by the Ministers responsible for education of SEE to be sent to the new Members of the European Commission responsible for Education, Training, Culture and Youth, for Enlargement as well as for External Relations and European Neighbourhood Policy, requesting enhanced role of education and training in the future support to SEE through the existing European instruments, notably the IPA and the ENPI. It is recommended the letter of the Ministers to address the need for support to ERI SEE as a regional platform for cooperation in the area of education and training.
- The members of the ERI SEE Governing Board to be briefed on the forthcoming high-level conference on the Western Balkans jointly organized by the Swedish Presidency of the EU Council and the European Commission (Brussels, 9 December 2009) and to be urged to inform the respective Ministers of Education with recommendation to invite the Ministers of Foreign Affairs and the Ministers of Economy to lobby for positioning human capital development highly on the political agenda of the RCC actors, including the European Commission and the EU Member States.

- Seeking involvement of the ERI SEE Consultative Body members (in particular the ERI SEE donors which are EU Member States and non-EU Member States) to use adequate channels for lobbying during the above mentioned high-level conference.
- The substantial changes in the political context and the changed cooperation landscape in SEE call for adjustment of the current political mandate of ERI SEE.

Timeline: The forthcoming 23rd Session of the Council of Europe Standing Conference of Ministers of Education (Brdo, Slovenia, 4-5 June 2010) is seen as an opportunity for official commitment of SEE Ministers.

Organisational level and funding

- Initiation of transformation of the ERI SEE Secretariat into an international organisation, thus providing the legal basis for a sustainable, regionally owned and co-financed structure under the auspices of the RCC.
- Despite no examples of practice exist in the context of international organisations, in principle, there is no legal prohibition on maintaining the principle of the rotating seat and hosting the ERI SEE Secretariat. Downside of this approach would be a necessity to negotiate and enter into series of host country agreements with interested ERI SEE members, what might be a cumbersome process. The interest of the ERI SEE members to host the Secretariat, including ensuring higher national budget for co-financing the Secretariat would be decisive in this regard.
- The current status of ERI SEE funding⁴ channelled by the ERI SEE Secretariat (for 2009 the total budget €219.726 was ensured by the Governments of Austria (20%), the Netherlands (14%), Switzerland (32%) and Croatia (34%) as the host country of the ERI SEE Secretariat) is not expected to change significantly by the national contributions of the SEE countries ensured in accordance with the Decision of the ERI SEE Governing Board on the Financial Contributions from the ERI SEE Members as of 2008⁵. Following the political process 'from assistance to cooperation' and the general trend of moving towards increased ownership of the regional cooperation as of 2008, the donors expect increased regional commitment, reflected both in participation in joint activities and in stronger & more balanced financial commitment to ERI SEE. Transformation of the legal status of the ERI SEE Secretariat into an international organisation would provide a legal basis for a balanced co-financing by the ERI SEE members.
- Ensuring accessibility of member and donor funding as well as the possibility for ensuring financial support for ERI SEE through the Multi-Beneficiary IPA
 Immediate action: The Director of the ERI SEE Agency to contact DG Enlargement of the European Commission and to clarify the ways of ERI SEE involvement and use of Multi-beneficiary IPA funds.

Content level

- The most important link between the regional ERI SEE context and the national context are the members of the ERI SEE Governing Board. Regular communication, feedback on the national developments and on the topics with potential for regional cooperation, active contribution in the period of preparation and adoption of ERI SEE Work Programmes, continuous engagement in the period of implementation of the regional activities agreed with the Work Programmes, and following-up the dissemination of the knowledge and skills acquired with the regional activities would substantially contribute to increased ownership and commitment to the Initiative. The work of the Governing Board members is supported by the National ERI SEE Contact Points.
- The Ministries responsible for education of SEE countries are invited to ensure sufficient budget for covering the costs of participation of the national member to the regular meetings of the ERI SEE Governing Board (twice a year, meetings hosted by ERI SEE members). In the context of the

⁴ The information is based upon the ERI SEE budget 2009.

⁵ The Decision was adopted through a distance voting procedure in March 2008.

current crisis and until further notice, based upon a request, costs for participation to the Governing Board meetings can be covered by the current ERI SEE donors.

Immediate action: By distribution of the Minutes of the 1st meeting of the Working Group to the members of the ERI SEE Governing Board and the briefing undertaken at national level by the members of the Working Group, good representation of SEE countries to be ensured for the Eleventh meeting of the ERI SEE Governing Board and Consultative Body (Zagreb, 16-17 November 2009).

- Ensuring proper participation and representation to ERI SEE events and other activities would increase the quality of ERI SEE work, as well as the impact of the regional cooperation at national level and will show ownership and commitment to regional cooperation. Within the context of approved ERI SEE work programmes, direct communication and cooperation with relevant SEE institutions in the implementation phase would contribute to ensuring proper participation and representation.
- Efforts to improve the functioning of the channels of communication between the ERI SEE Secretariat and the national authorities (including the completion of the network of National ERI SEE Contact Points) would increase the ERI SEE efficiency, quality of work, commitment and ownership of the Initiative. Within the context of approved ERI SEE work programmes, direct communication and cooperation with relevant SEE institutions in the implementation phase would contribute to increased efficiency.

Immediate action: Having in view the role of the National ERI SEE Contact Points, the ERI SEE Agency will urge the respective members of the ERI SEE Governing Board on the necessity for completion of the nomination process.

- Re-shaping the ERI SEE work by identifying the ways how to optimize the regional cooperation with the objective to increase its added value and the contribution to the specific processes which are on-going in different SEE countries by:
 - Identification of priority areas in which mutual learning and exchange of good practice would be valuable;
 - Fine-tuning of the ERI SEE instruments⁶ for regional cooperation:
 - The seminars and workshops which were the most frequently used ERI SEE instruments for peer-learning to be enriched with increased number of peer-learning visits, which have proved to lead to good results so far.
 - Establishing peer learning clusters of ERI SEE countries, European countries, as well as international organisations and institutions, interested in specific topics of education and training.
 - Continuation of the support to the networking of the newly established national institutions in SEE (e.g. SEE VET network, the network of centres for external evaluation in primary and secondary education, the centres for quality assurance and accreditation in higher education, the ENIC/NARIC centres).

The members of the ERI SEE Governing Board will be invited to identify updated priorities for regional cooperation and to further elaborate potential areas for SEE clustering, including identifying themes along which the peer learning would be organized within each specific cluster. The countries will be invited to articulate their interest to lead certain clusters.

Immediate action: The ERI SEE Agency to send the letter to the members of the ERI SEE Governing Board ASAP, in order to enable the countries to provide their feedback before the meeting of the ERI SEE Governing Board (Zagreb, Croatia, 16-17 November). The National ERI SEE Contact Point will be copied in the letter.

⁶ Currently, seminars, workshops on thematic areas, peer-learning visits, Internet based, e-moderated forums on thematic areas, ERI SEE blog and the most frequently used ERI SEE instruments.

The members of the Working Group will brief the members of the ERI SEE Governing Board, and, to the extent of their possibilities, will put effort to widespread information to a larger number of high level officials, including the respective Ministers responsible for education. They are ready to continue the active participation in the Working Group and, at national level, to act in cooperation with the relevant authorities in support to the regional cooperation in education and training, thus contributing to increased commitment of the region to ERI SEE.

Minutes of the meeting

The 1st Working Group Meeting was organised by the ERI SEE Agency in cooperation with the Task Force Fostering and Building Human Capital (TFBHC) of the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) and the RCC Secretariat. The RCC Secretariat hosted the meeting, which took place in the premises of the Secretariat in Sarajevo-Bosnia and Herzegovina, on 7-8 October 2009.

Ms. Ivana Puljiz, Director of the Directorate for International Cooperation and European Integration of the Croatian Ministry of Science, Education and Sports participated to the meeting on behalf of the Chair of the ERI SEE Governing Board Dr. Radovan Fuchs. The members of the Working Group from SEE: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Moldova, Montenegro and Serbia participated to the meeting. Bosnia and Herzegovina was represented by Ms. Lejla Kadusic, Adviser for European Integration of the Ministry of Civil Affairs. Ms. Yana Yotova, Junior expert from the Ministry of Education, Youth and Science represented Bulgaria. Croatia was also represented by Mr. Hrvoje Pavletic, Associate in the Directorate for International Cooperation and European Integration of the Ministry of Science, Education and Sports. Ms. Marcelina Russu, Education adviser of the Ministry of Education and Youth represented Moldova. Montenegro was represented by Ms. Ivana Petricevic, Adviser to the Minister for International Cooperation and EU Integration in the Ministry of Education and Science. Ms. Gabriela Bratic – Head of the EU Integration and Development Projects and Programming Department of the Ministry of Education represented Serbia. The ERI SEE members Albania, the Republic of Macedonia, Romania and Kosovo⁷ were not represented at the meeting. The members of the Working Group from Austria (Ms. Monika Mott, Head of Education Department of KulturKontakt Austria), the Netherlands (Mr. Michael Zimmer, Project Officer, EVD International Business and Cooperation), and the TFBHC of the RCC (Mr. Juergen Schick, Head of Cooperation with Eastern and South Eastern Europe, Austrian Ministry of Education, the Arts and Culture) participated to the meeting.

Mr Emir Adzovic represented the Council of Europe.

Mr. Mladen Dragasevic, Head of the Building Human Capital and Parliamentary Cooperation Unit and Ms. Mimika Loshi, Expert on Building Human Capital and Cross-Cutting Issues of the Building Human Capital and Parliamentary Cooperation Unit represented the RCC. Ms Jasna Arsic-Djapo, Legal adviser of the RCC, participated and contributed to the session dedicated to the development perspectives on an organisational level (7 October).

The leadership of the TFBHC was represented by the Austrian Co-Chair Mr. Anton Dobart, Director General for International Affairs from the Austrian Ministry of Education, the Arts and Culture and the Croatian Co-Chair of the TFBHC Ms. Ivana Puljiz.

The TFBHC was also represented by Ms. Katarina Miljevic from KulturKontakt Austria. Ms. Nada Kovac, grantee of the TFBHC Mobility Programme for Capacity-Building in Regional Cooperation participated to the meeting, as well.

The ERI SEE Agency was represented by the Executive Director Aspasija Hadzisce and the Secretary of the Agency Ms. Milana Romic.

⁷ Under UNSCR 1244/99

In absence of the Chair of the ERI SEE Governing Board, the meeting was chaired by Ms. Ivana Puljiz, on behalf of the Chair of the ERI SEE Governing Board, and co-chaired by Mr. Juergen Schick, Co-Chair of the ERI SEE Governing Board and member of the TFBHC Secretariat and Ms. Ivana Petricevic, in her capacity of official representative of Montenegro, the SEE country which has a seat in the Chairmanship of the ERI SEE Governing Board.

Wednesday, 7 October 2009

Welcome by the Host

On behalf of the host, Ms. Mimika Loshi, expert on Parliamentary Co-operation and Cross-Cutting issues of the RCC welcomed the participants. She reiterated the devotion of the RCC to fostering and building human capital in SEE and, in this context, to support education and training development aiming at contribution to social and economic progress of the region. In this respect, the RCC closely follows and supports the ERI SEE work, including the hosting of the first meeting of the Working Group. Ms. Loshi thanked the Croatian Government for hosting the ERI SEE Secretariat since 2004. The RCC advocates education and training to rank high on the lists of national priorities of SEE countries, thus enabling them to benefit from the funding opportunities provided by the European IPA and the ENPI instruments. It supports the efforts of SEE for participation in the European Commission Lifelong Learning programme, cooperates with higher education networks and supports the Novi Sad Initiative, regional networking in quality assurance in education etc. Coordination and synergy among the existing platforms which support regional cooperation in order to avoid overlapping of activities funded by different actors will continue to be in the focus of the RCC.

Introduction and Opening Remarks

In the opening remarks, Ms. Ivana Puljiz, representing the Chair of ERI SEE, conveyed the message of warm welcome to the participants from the Chair of the ERI SEE Governing Board Dr. Radovan Fuchs and kindly excused his absence due to numerous obligations in his capacity of Minister of Science, Education and Sports of the Republic of Croatia. Ms. Puljiz addressed the background of the establishment of the Working Group. Since its establishment in 2004 by a joint initiative of SEE Ministers of Education and the former Task Force Education & Youth, the ERI SEE has developed into an acknowledged actor supporting sustainable education reforms through regional cooperation and a significant facilitator of information transfer between the EU and the SEE region. In the light of the on-going efforts for increased regional ownership in the framework of the RCC, and the weakened participation of SEE educational experts in ERI SEE activities, including the low participation of the high level officials to the meetings of the ERI SEE Governing Board, it became evident that possible adjustments of the legal, organisational and thematic scope of ERI SEE need to be addressed. Equally important, donor countries are facing increasingly scarce funds, which imposed setting up conditionality of the future support to ERI SEE. Continuation of the support would be enabled only if SEE countries clearly demonstrate commitment to the Initiative⁸. At the tenth meeting, the ERI SEE Governing Board adopted a proposal for establishment of a Working Group entitled to: analyse the current status of the ERI SEE Agency and to elaborate possible modalities for its future organisational and legal restructuring; elaborate possible future priority areas and instruments of cooperation and to review the interest for sustaining the concept of a rotating seat of the ERI SEE Secretariat in the region. Ms.

⁸ Conclusion of the Tenth meeting of the ERI SEE Governing Board and Consultative Body (Zagreb, Croatia, 23 June 2009).

Puljiz invited the participants to take active participation and to contribute to the first meeting of the Working Group.

In the opening remarks, the current Co-Chair of the TFBHC from the Austrian Ministry of Education, the Arts and Culture and one of the initiators of the educational cooperation in SEE, Mr. Anton Dobart, presented the evolution of the process since 1998. Initiated as an assistance process steered by the Task Force Education and Youth (TFEY) of the Stability Pact, within a decade of intensive activities at political, conceptual, structural and operational level, the regional process has shifted to cooperation and partnership.

Mr. Dobart focused on the current global challenges which have strongly affected SEE, too. In meeting the many socio-economic, demographic, environmental and technological challenges the mankind is facing at global, European, regional and national level, education and training have a crucial role to play. The recent developments call for commitment to the long-term goal that can guide mankind to the equilibrium society⁹. We are increasingly witnessing efforts for an intense, interrelated and global action that would lead to a controlled, orderly transition from growth to global equilibrium. Efficient investment in human capital through education and training systems is an essential component of the Europe's Lisbon Strategy, but also a strategic objective of the SEE region to deliver sustainable, knowledge-based growth and jobs, and enabling personal fulfilment, social cohesion and active citizenship.

Development perspectives on a content level

Appreciation for the work and achievements of ERI SEE was expressed by the representatives of its members. The significance of ERI SEE as facilitator of information transfer on current EU discussions to the region and its increasingly growing role as a regional platform for mutual learning and exchange of experience was acknowledged.

In the future, the European developments in the area of education and training will continue to influence the national reforms in SEE to a great extent, and the ERI SEE role in linking the processes and in support to knowledge transfer will continue. With regard to the strategic and political level, well defined relations and cooperation with the TFBHC and the RCC are very important.

The discussion brought into the focus the role of the members of the ERI SEE Governing Board as the most important link between the regional ERI SEE context and the national context. Regular communication, feedback on the national developments and on the topics with potential for regional cooperation, active contribution in the period of preparation and adoption of ERI SEE Work Programmes, continuous engagement in the period of implementation of the regional activities agreed with the Work Programmes, and following-up the dissemination of the knowledge and skills acquired with the regional activities would substantially contribute to increased ownership and commitment to the Initiative.

Ms. Ivana Petricevic informed about the intensive work on preparation of the Fifth World Bank Education Conference, which will be hosted by the Government of Montenegro and will take place in Budva on 27-29 October. The Conference will focus on financing higher education at a time of economic crisis. It will provide a forum for exchange and learning for policy makers, leaderships of higher education institutions and other key members of the higher education community. Ms. Petricevic considers the conference as a good opportunity to discuss regional cooperation and the role of ERI SEE with the high level participants from SEE.

⁹ "The Limits of Growth", A report to The Club of Rome (1972).

Important element that would increase the quality of ERI SEE cooperation, its' relevance for the national context, and which would visibly increase the commitment to regional co-operation would be the *optimal national representation*: the SEE countries were invited to aim at maximizing the number of participants¹⁰ and to involve national experts with right expertise, thus enabling active participation and intensive networking with the peers during the regional events. Such approach would also contribute to optimal spending of the ERI SEE donor funds allocated on a yearly basis for implementation of activities agreed with the ERI SEE Work Programmes.

Mr. Michael Zimmer from CROSS/EVD, which has a seat in the ERI SEE Consultative Body representing the Netherlands, pointed out the necessity for efficient use of donor funds, one important aspect being involvement of sufficient number of educationalists with right expertise from SEE countries.

Representing the Council of Europe, Mr. Emir Adzovic conveyed the greetings and praised the RCC for the support and the active involvement in the discussions on the future of ERI SEE, including hosting the first meeting of the Working Group. Mr. Adzovic pointed out that, equally important to the formal impact of ERI SEE activities at national developments is its role as a platform for informal networking and professional communication of SEE educationalists. Adjustment of the legal status of the Initiative to a structure which would enable co-financing by its SEE members would significantly contribute to increased regional ownership of ERI SEE and would prove the commitment of its' members to regional cooperation.

In this context the representative from Serbia, Ms. Gabriela Bratic explained that due the difficult financial situation in the Serbian Ministry of Education her country could not participate in the recent GB meetings. The representative from the Republic of Moldova added that also a lack of human resources is a challenge for ensuring proper participation and representation in the ERI SEE meetings and events.

Faced with low representation of SEE members to the recent meetings of the Government Board and Consultative Body caused by the current crisis, the donors have agreed to cover the costs for participation of the members who would request financial support for the forthcoming Governing Board meetings¹¹. This exception from the rules would be applied until further notification from the donors.

The Austrian member of the ERI SEE Consultative Body, Ms. Monika Mott brought into the discussion the perspective of the on-going intensive work in all SEE countries on educational policy development and implementation, which is predominantly shaped with the specific national context and needs. European and worldwide developments are, to a great extent, brought into the national context with support of numerous projects of international cooperation (IPA/ENPI funded projects, but also bilateral projects and projects funded by other international organizations). She pointed out the need to identify the ways how to optimize the regional cooperation with the objective to increase its added value and contribution to the specific processes which are on-going in different SEE countries (identifying priority areas in which mutual learning and exchange would be valuable, fine-tuning the ERI SEE instruments for cooperation etc). With priorities identified and instruments fine-tuned, ERI SEE, as a regi-

¹⁰ Currently, ERI SEE finances participation of two national experts per event. The SEE countries often nominate one participant, or there is no representation. In some cases, the nominations come late and do not leave sufficient time for completion of the visa procedures.

¹¹ Decision of the Tenth meeting of the ERI SEE Governing Board and Consultative Body (Zagreb, Croatia, 23 June 2009).

onal platform which enables cooperation and support from relevant international organizations and institutions (CoE, ETF, OECD) and from the European donor countries, would be able to feed the process of mutual learning in a more targeted way. Targeted approach to regional cooperation would also enhance the impact at national level.

Further developing the idea of diversified ERI SEE cooperation which would be shaped around topics identified by SEE countries as relevant for mutual learning and regional exchange of experience and good practice, depending on the specific phase of national reforms in education and training, Mr. Anton Dobart referred to the positive experience and the praxis developed under the 'Education and Training 2010' work programme. Key part of the Programme is the exchange of information on different policy options, which, together with other activities for mutual learning, help the advancement of the reforms in the national education and training systems. The peer learning activities are organised around peer learning clusters of EU Member States interested in specific topics. Clustering will continue to be an important instrument within the 'ET 2020'¹², too.

The initiative of clustering the peer learning was appreciated by all participants. The discussion towards identifying priorities and specific topics around which clusters of SEE countries could be established was further encouraged by the presentation of the positive experience and the outcomes of the ERI SEE organized peer learning visits in 2008 and 2009.

All participants to the meeting, in particular the SEE members of the Working Group, took part in the brainstorming on the areas in which intensive national actions both at policy creation and implementation levels are taking place, and for which regional cooperation and clustering would bring added value in the national context:

- *Moldova* - the country has developed intensive activities to rebuild the national VET system. Important aspect of the reform is the effort to link the VET with the labour market needs. KulturKontakt Austria supports Moldova in the development of occupational standards. The country would have interest to join a VET cluster. NQF development and linking it with the EQF is another area in which Moldova would be interested for regional networking, mutual learning and joint work.
- *Montenegro* has already articulated the interest for regional cooperation in the area of recognition of diplomas¹³. The NQF development is substantially supported by an IPA funded project. Similar is the situation with other SEE countries. The project for Montenegro does not address the Europass¹⁴ and this is considered with potential regional clustering. A potential higher education cluster could cover: NQF and quality assurance in higher education, the link between higher education and VET. Postsecondary VET is an under-developed sector in SEE and would be interesting for clustering.
- *Serbia*: The NQF development will be supported with an IPA funded project. Potential for regional cooperation and clustering is seen in NQF and quality assurance in education. The link of higher education to the employment sector is another aspect of the NQF development process, as well as of the Bologna process in Serbia. Substantial effort is

¹² Council Conclusions on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training ('ET 2020'), (2009/C 119/02), Official Journal of the European Union of 28 May 2009.

¹³ Initiative submitted via the TFBHC to the RCC high-level expert panel.

¹⁴ Europass has been established by the Decision No 2241/2004/EC of the European Parliament and the Council of 15 December 2004 on a single transparency framework for qualifications and competences.

put for improvement of teacher training, both in pre-service and in-service training. For teachers who have not graduated at a teacher training higher education institution, passing additional courses of 30 credits is obligatory. The courses need to be developed and hosting universities to be agreed. In conclusion, teacher training is considered a priority area relevant for regional cooperation, with a strong potential for clustering. The country would be interested to join the cluster with postsecondary VET as thematic area. Equity in education is high on the political agenda in Serbia, with substantial efforts put for implementation and tangible results achieved. Serbia would be interested to join a regional cluster on equity in education.

- *Bosnia and Herzegovina* has started the development of NQF and pays special attention to non-formal and informal learning. Entrepreneurial learning is gaining importance. In line with the efforts to reduce the unemployment rate, Bosnia and Herzegovina pays special attention to adult education.
- *Croatia*: reforms are on-going in all above mentioned areas, but for the decision about entering a cluster, the progress of the reforms is also important. Moving ERI SEE work in clusters would be in line with the recommendations of the Bucharest conference for building knowledge clusters. Croatia also expressed its interest to cooperate more intensely with countries from the region in NQF developments.

Mr. Anton Dobart supported the initiative for establishing a cluster on teacher training and contributed with ideas for enriching the thematic areas which could be covered by this cluster (the new profile of the teachers with capabilities to conduct personalised learning and to work on preparation of the students for managing the change; career development of teachers; teacher and leadership; school governance; the role of headmasters in preparing the institutions to cope with the broader changes).

Mr. Dobart also introduced into the discussion the role of the civil society and the need for development of learning regions as one form of response to the current crisis.

In context of the efforts of the region to formulate its response to the global crisis, Mr. Anton Dobart pointed out that the region should look at the current situation as an opportunity to formulate its response to the crisis and to seek ways out in cooperation and with support of the European Commission, the World Bank and other RCC members. The developments at wider context have brought to the focus *innovation as key to future development and a building block of 'ET 2020'* and the increasingly raising awareness of the mankind on the limited growth. Increasingly important is becoming *the role of universities in the process of forward thinking*. Mr. Dobart informed the participants about the on-going work of the TFBHC on preparation of a special event on the role of human capital in responding to the current economic and financial crisis. The meeting will be held back to back to the Eleventh meeting of the ERI SEE Governing Board and Consultative Body and will take place in Zagreb on 18 November.

Having in view that the SEE countries are aiming at developing socially inclusive societies, equity in education is high on their policy agendas. The discussion called for innovative ways to bring it into regional debates, management of diversity being one of the possible approaches. The OECD expertise in equity in education and the rich experience from the implementation of different projects in SEE would bring added value to a potential regional cluster.

In the light that the logic of economic growth is increasingly called into question, Mr. Jürgen Schick from the TFBHC Secretariat addressed sustainability as one important priority area.

In addition, fostering efficiency and governance as well as promoting networks and partnerships will play a central role in enhancing the innovation dimension in education.

Networking of the newly established national institutions responsible for different areas of education and training in SEE (e.g. the SEE VET network, the network of centres for external evaluation in primary and secondary education, the centres for quality assurance and accreditation in higher education, the ENIC/NARIC centres) was identified as an important area for future regional cooperation and peer learning.

Mr. Michael Zimmer informed the participants about the on-going project in Croatia which is supported by the Netherlands. It aims at building a standardised frame for assessing the quality of schools, training of human resources in the procedures of external evaluation, and developing systems for data processing. Two Dutch institutions (CROSS/EVD and the International Department of the Netherlands' Inspectorate of School Inspection) are collaborating in the implementation of the project. The Dutch institutions are in the process of setting up a similar project in Serbia. The projects will have a serious potential for dissemination, but also for developing learning communities around topics interesting for SEE countries. Aiming to bring information on the possibilities for Dutch support to educational reforms with regional perspective, CROSS/EVD will enable participation of the project leader, Ms. Gonnie van Amelsvoort to the Eleventh meeting of the ERI SEE Governing Board (Zagreb, 16-17 November).

It was agreed the members of the ERI SEE Governing Board to be invited to further elaborate the potential areas of SEE clustering and to identify themes along which the peer learning would be organized within each specific cluster. Building smaller clusters within which the participating countries will try to formulate solutions with regard to the topics approached was recommended.

With regard to the cooperation and coordination of the activities of the RCC, the TFBHC of the RCC and the ERI SEE, Ms. Mimika Loshi and Ms. Monika Mott provided more information on the initiative of the Secretary General of the RCC, the high-level expert panel aimed at stimulating in-depth discussion on economic and financial measures in response to the current crisis. The panel is composed of the heads of regional organisations or initiatives in SEE, the activities of which are of direct relevance for the comprehensive and project-oriented elaboration of economic and financial measures in response to the crisis. Ms. Monika Mott represented the TFBHC and the ERI SEE at the first meeting of the panel (Sarajevo, 17 September). The meeting provided an opportunity to discuss a "regional platform" for the high-level conference on the Western Balkans which will focus on the impact of the financial crisis on the region, on the progress of the enlargement process, as well as on regional cooperation. The conference will be jointly organized by the Swedish Presidency of the EU Council and the European Commission in cooperation with the RCC and will take place in Brussels on 9 December 2009. The SEE Ministers of Foreign Affairs and of Economy will be invited to take part to the conference. Currently, transport, energy and infrastructure have been identified as priority areas.

Aiming to bring human capital to the attention of the Brussels conference and based upon the TFBHC Zagreb Plan of Action 2009-2010, the TFBHC has brought to the attention of the participants to the Sarajevo meeting a briefing note on three strategic priority areas for human capital development (more information on the priority areas is provided under the heading "Development perspectives on a political level" of this document). In Sarajevo, Ms. Mott has also distributed the ERI SEE note on the potential for regional cooperation in education and training in SEE in the context of human capital development.

The chair of the meeting, Ms. Ivana Puljiz closed the session by formulating the following conclusions:

- The most important link between the regional ERI SEE context and the national context are the members of the ERI SEE Governing Board. Regular communication, feedback on the national developments and on the topics with potential for regional cooperation, active contribution in the period of preparation and adoption of ERI SEE Work Programmes, continuous engagement in the period of implementation of the regional activities agreed with the Work Programmes, and following-up the dissemination of the knowledge and skills acquired with the regional activities would substantially contribute to increased ownership and commitment to the Initiative. The work of the Governing Board members is supported by the National ERI SEE Contact Points.
- Ensuring proper participation and representation to ERI SEE events and other activities would increase the quality of ERI SEE work, as well as the impact of the regional cooperation at national level and will show ownership and commitment to regional cooperation. Within the context of approved ERI SEE work programmes, direct communication and cooperation with relevant SEE institutions in the implementation phase would contribute to ensuring proper participation and representation.
- Efforts to improve the functioning of the channels of communication between the ERI SEE Secretariat and the national authorities (including the completion of the network of National ERI SEE Contact Points) would increase the ERI SEE efficiency, quality of work, commitment and ownership of the Initiative. Within the context of approved ERI SEE work programmes, direct communication and cooperation with relevant SEE institutions in the implementation phase would contribute to ensuring proper participation and representation.
- Re-shaping the ERI SEE work by identifying the ways how to optimize the regional cooperation with the objective to increase its added value and the contribution to the specific processes which are on-going in different SEE countries by:
 - Identification of priority areas in which mutual learning and exchange of good practice would be valuable;
 - Fine-tuning of the ERI SEE instruments for regional cooperation:
 - The seminars and workshops which were the most frequently used ERI SEE instruments for peer-learning to be enriched with increased number of peer-learning visits, which have proved to lead to good results.
 - Establishing peer learning clusters of ERI SEE countries, European countries, as well as international organisations and institutions, interested in specific topics of education and training.
 - Continuation of the support to the networking of the newly established national institutions in SEE (e.g. SEE VET network, the network of centres for external evaluation in primary and secondary education, the centres for quality assurance and accreditation in higher education, the ENIC/NARIC centres).
 - The members of the ERI SEE Governing Board will be invited to identify updated priorities for regional cooperation and to further elaborate potential areas for SEE clustering, including identifying themes along which the

peer learning would be organized within each specific cluster. The countries will be invited to articulate their interest to lead certain clusters.

Development perspectives on an organisational level

Two important aspects of ERI SEE functioning call for evaluation and agreement on the future arrangements: the rotating seat of the ERI SEE Secretariat (as agreed with the founding document) and the legal status of this body. The Republic of Croatia has hosted the seat of the ERI SEE Secretariat since 2004. Croatia has positive experience which builds on the intensive and fruitful cooperation developed so far between the Ministry of Science, Education and Sports and the ERI SEE Agency. The role of Croatia as a host country goes beyond the originally foreseen three-year period and the on-going discussion on the ERI SEE perspectives needs to include discussion on the possible interest of other members of the Initiative to host the Secretariat.

The legal status of the Secretariat (the current ERI SEE Agency) has been subject of discussions in the course of 2009. The RCC has been in communication with the TFBHC, the Croatian Ministry of Science, Education and Sports and the ERI SEE Agency since the Ninth meeting of the ERI SEE Governing Board and Consultative Body (December 2008). Aiming to provide a basis for informed discussions on the legal aspects of establishment of regional initiatives which allow financing by their founders, the RCC delegated the Legal Adviser Ms. Jasna Arsic-Djapo to take part and to contribute to the Tenth meeting of the ERI SEE Governing Board (June 2009).

Ms. Jasna Arsic – Djapo continued following ERI SEE and joined the Working Group meeting, when she presented the best practices of the establishment of regional initiatives as legal entities relevant for financing by their members¹⁵.

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- ¹⁵ The *Regional Cooperation Council (RCC)* is an international organisation, established with a Joint Declaration. It does not have legal personality. The Host Country Agreement of SEECP Participating States with the Government of Bosnia and Herzegovina provides legal personality to the RCC Secretariat.
 - The *Regional Anti-corruption Initiative* has a status of international organisation/diplomatic mission. The Agreement has been signed between the Office of the Special Coordinator of the Stability Pact and the Government of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Memorandum of Understanding, signed between SEE members establishes the governance and financing of operational and program budget. The Initiative receives funds from foreign donors.
 - The Migration, Asylum, Refugees Regional Initiative (MARRI) was established with the Memorandum of Understanding signed between SEE members. The Memorandum authorized the Chair in Office (Albania) to conclude the Host and Headquarters agreement with the Republic of Macedonia for the MARRI Regional Centre. The host country provides running costs and facilities. The member states also contribute to the running costs and with seconded national experts.
 - The International Sava River Basin Commission was established by the Framework Agreement on the Sava River Basin, signed by the SEE members. It has an international legal capacity and is authorized to conclude Seat (Host) Country Agreement. It is financed by direct contributions of the member states.
 - The *South-Eastern Europe Health Network* was established under the auspices of the Stability Pact and WHO Europe. SEE countries are parties of the Network. Donor countries: Belgium, France, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Norway, Slovenia, Sweden and Switzerland. The Network does not have legal capacity. The Secretariat at WHO Europe is located in Copenhagen, Denmark. In 2009 the Network has signed a Memorandum of Understanding, which determines the process and criteria for a seat and for financing by member countries.
 - The Regional School of Public Administration was established under the OECD and the European Union Protocol on Cooperation on the Creation of the Regional School of Public Administration. ReSPA

Legal entities can be established in accordance with Public International Law, in which case an international organisation is established, and within the framework of a national legal system, in which case a national organisation is established. The international organisations are financed directly by member states, in accordance with founding agreements. In most cases, there are no restrictions for direct contribution to the budget, including covering the running costs. The procedure for establishment of an international organisation is time consuming. It consists of different phases (negotiation, signing and ratification of the agreement), and lasts relatively long.

National organisations are financed in different ways, depending on the structure. In case of governmental agency, finances can be ensured from the state budget, but the foreign states can have restrictions for direct funding of the agency. The current legal status of the ERI SEE Agency (national public institution) prevents its member states to co-finance the Agency. In case of a non-governmental agency, funding with state budget is possible, but the founding states also can finance the agency. The procedure of national organisations is relatively simple. Governmental agency can be established with a governmental decision. Non-profit agency can be established in accordance with the national legislation on non-profit associations.

The discussion elaborated into more details the advantages/disadvantages of establishing an international NGO (the opinion that an international NGO would not be the appropriate structure in SEE prevailed), the option of institutional integration into the RCC Secretariat was seen as not feasible, and the option of a network without legal personality and periodically rotating Chairmanship-in-Office responsible for coordination/implementation of activities was not considered as an optimal setup.

In consultation with Ms. Arsic - Djapo, the members of the Working Group agreed that the best practice in SEE on the establishment of regional initiatives is an *international organisation* as legal entity. The legal status of an international organisation ensures institutional integrity and financial sustainability.

The envisaged process of transformation into international organisation would entail following steps:

1. Decision of the ERI SEE Governing Board to launch such process.
2. Negotiation and drafting of a Memorandum of Understanding between ERI SEE member states.
3. Signing and ratification of the Memorandum of Understanding.
4. Call for proposals for the host country for the ERI SEE Secretariat.
5. Decision on host country for the ERI SEE Secretariat.
6. Drafting and negotiation of the host country agreement.
7. Ratification of the host country agreement.

At this point it is not possible to estimate the timeline for such activities, as it would largely depend on the readiness of ERI SEE member states to undertake the necessary steps.

secretariat is within the OECD. Principally, it is financed by the EU, through CARDS and IPA funds. ReSPA is institutionalized through signing of Memorandum of Understanding between SEE members.

From a legal point of view, there is no prohibition on maintaining the principle of the rotating seat and hosting the ERI SEE Secretariat. Downside of this approach would be a necessity to negotiate and enter into series of host country agreements with interested ERI SEE members, which is a cumbersome process, and needs to be addressed in timely manner. The prevailing atmosphere and the interest of the signatories of the Istanbul Memorandum of Understanding (including the readiness of the future hosting country to ensure stable budget and to substantially co-finance the running costs of the Secretariat) would be decisive in this regard¹⁶.

The Executive Director of the ERI SEE Agency, Aspasija Hadzisce provided more information about the current status of ERI SEE funding (the budget channelled by the Agency used as an example). For 2009, the total budget of €219.726 was ensured by the Governments of Austria (20%), the Netherlands (14%), Switzerland (32%) and Croatia (34%) as the host country of the ERI SEE Secretariat. The running costs of the Agency amount 26% of the total budget and are shared by the donors (15% Austria, 15% the Netherlands, 15% Switzerland and 55% Croatia). It is not expected the national contributions of the SEE countries ensured in accordance with the Decision of the ERI SEE Governing Board on the Financial Contributions from the ERI SEE Members as of 2008¹⁷ to increase significantly the financial input by the end of 2009. Following the political process 'from assistance to cooperation' and the general trend of moving towards increased ownership of the regional cooperation as of 2008, the donors expect increased regional commitment, reflected both in participation in joint activities and in stronger & more balanced financial commitment to ERI SEE. Transformation of the legal status of the ERI SEE Secretariat into an international organisation would provide a legal basis for a balanced co-financing by the ERI SEE members. Annex 1 provides detailed information on the financing of ERI SEE.

Accessibility of donor funding and the possibility for ensuring financial support for ERI SEE through the Multi-Beneficiary IPA was also discussed during the meeting. Having in view that the Multi-Beneficiary Multi-annual Indicative Planning Document (MIPD) 2008-2010 has considered support to regional cooperation, including the ERI SEE, it was agreed the Director of the ERI SEE Agency to contact the DG Enlargement and to clarify the next steps.

Thursday, 8 October 2009

Development perspectives on a political level

ERI SEE is an Initiative with a political mandate rooted in Memoranda of Understanding signed by SEE Ministers of Education¹⁸. Lobbying in support to SEE cooperation in education and training has been on the agenda of the current TFBHC (as well as the TFEY as its predecessor), but also on the agenda of the European donor countries during the whole period of functioning of ERI SEE.

In the context of top-level political lobbying, Ms. Ivana Petricevic recommended, upon completion of the allocation of portfolios to the new European Commission by the current Pre-

¹⁶ The current host, Republic of Croatia, covers over 50% of the running costs of the ERI SEE Agency.

¹⁷ The Decision was adopted through a distance voting procedure in March 2008.

¹⁸ Memorandum of Understanding between the Ministers of Education and Higher Education of South Eastern Europe, Nicosia, Cyprus, June 2003 and Memorandum of Understanding between the Ministers Responsible for Education, Science and Research in South Eastern Europe, Istanbul, Turkey, May 2007.

sident-designate José Manuel Barroso, a joint letter signed by the Ministers responsible for education of South Eastern Europe to be sent to the new Member of the European Commission responsible for Education, Training, Culture and Youth, requesting enhanced role of education and training in the continuation of the support to SEE through the existing European instruments, notably the IPA and the ENPI. In this context, addressing the need for support to the ERI SEE as a regional platform for cooperation in the area of education and training was recommended. The initiative was endorsed by all participants to the meeting.

The forthcoming high-level conference on the Western Balkans, jointly organized by the Swedish Presidency of the EU Council and the European Commission in cooperation with the RCC (Brussels, 9 December 2009) is considered as an excellent opportunity for lobbying human capital development in SEE to be positioned highly on the political agenda of the RCC actors, including the European Union. Representing the TFBHC Secretariat, Mr. Juergen Schick briefed the participants on the Task Force proposal regarding possible future priority areas entitled “Towards SEE Innovative Knowledge Societies for the 21st Century”, submitted after the high-level expert panel meeting (Sarajevo, 17 September) to the RCC in view of the Brussels conference.

The document identifies three priority areas along the three action lines of the Zagreb Action Plan 2009-2010:

Under Action line 1 Human capital as a key factor for sustainable economic development, social cohesion and innovation, *fostering efficiency, innovation and governance: promoting research on the economics of education, peer learning and capacity building* is the proposed priority area.

Under Action line 2 Partnerships for innovation – innovative partnerships, *developing learning regions and environments: promoting networks, partnerships for innovation and the knowledge triangle* is the proposed priority area.

Under Action line 3 Regional cooperation and common areas of interest, *making lifelong learning a reality: regional cooperation on the implementation of LLL strategies in SEE in the context of governance* is the proposed priority area. This priority area was jointly agreed with ERI SEE.

The participants expressed appreciation for the proposal and agreed lobbying channels to be sought both by ERI SEE members and the donor countries, aiming human capital development to join the currently identified priorities of transport, energy and infrastructure at the Brussels conference.

Ms. Ivana Petricevic invited the ERI SEE members to use the regional meetings of high level officials (e.g. the upcoming Fifth World Bank conference) for promotion of regional cooperation in education and training and the role of ERI SEE in that context. This is particularly relevant because new Ministers responsible for education have been appointed in a significant number of ERI SEE member countries recently.

The participants agreed that the substantial changes in the political context and the changed cooperation landscape in SEE call for adjustment of the current political mandate of ERI SEE. The forthcoming 23rd Session of the Council of Europe Standing Conference of Ministers of Education (Brdo, Slovenia, 4-5 June 2010) was seen as an opportunity for official commitment of SEE Ministers.

Setting priorities for development, summary and outlook

Based on the discussions on the development perspectives on a content level, at organisational level and on a political level, recommendations for future action were formulated:

Recommendations on a political level

- Joint lobbying efforts for keeping fostering and building human capital high on the political agenda for SEE development, with education and training as one of the key components.

Actors: Continuous efforts and use of important conferences and other events focused on the region by the Ministers responsible for Education and other high-level officials from SEE, the RCC Secretariat in particular the Building Human Capital and Parliamentary Cooperation Unit, the TFBHC, the ERI SEE donor countries (the ones which are EU Member States and the non-EU Member States).

Immediate actions:

- Following the allocation of portfolios to the new European Commission by the current President-designate José Manuel Barroso, a joint letter signed by the Ministers responsible for education of SEE to be sent to the new Member of the European Commission responsible for Education, Training, Culture and Youth, for Enlargement and for External Relations and European Neighbourhood Policy requesting enhanced role of education and training in the future the support to SEE through the existing European instruments, notably the IPA and the ENPI. It is recommended the letter of the Ministers to address the need for support to ERI SEE as a regional platform for cooperation in the area of education and training.
- The members of the ERI SEE Governing Board to be briefed on the forthcoming high-level conference on the Western Balkans jointly organized by the Swedish Presidency of the EU Council and the European Commission (Brussels, 9 December 2009) and to be urged to inform the respective Ministers of Education with recommendation to invite the Ministers of Foreign Affairs and the Ministers of Economy to lobby for positioning human capital development highly on the political agenda of the RCC actors, including the European Commission and the EU Member States.
- Seeking involvement of the ERI SEE Consultative Body members (in particular the ERI SEE donors which are EU Member States and non-EU Member States) to use adequate channels for lobbying during the above mentioned high-level conference.
- The substantial changes in the political context and the changed cooperation landscape in SEE call for adjustment of the current political mandate of ERI SEE.

Timeline: The forthcoming 23rd Session of the Council of Europe Standing Conference of Ministers of Education (Brdo, Slovenia, 4-5 June 2010) is seen as an opportunity for official commitment of SEE Ministers.

Recommendations on an organisational level

- Initiation of transformation of the ERI SEE Secretariat into an international organisation, thus providing the legal basis for a sustainable, regionally owned and co-financed structure under the auspices of the RCC.

- There are no legal constraints on maintaining the principle of the rotating seat and hosting the ERI SEE Secretariat. The interest of the ERI SEE members to host the Secretariat, including ensuring higher national budget for co-financing the Secretariat would be decisive in this regard.
- Ensuring accessibility of donor funding and the possibility for ensuring financial support for ERI SEE through the Multi-Beneficiary IPA

Immediate action: The Director of the ERI SEE Agency to contact DG Enlargement of the European Commission and to clarify the ways of ERI SEE involvement and use of Multi-beneficiary IPA funds.

Recommendations on a content level

- The most important link between the regional ERI SEE context and the national context are the members of the ERI SEE Governing Board. Regular communication, feedback on the national developments and on the topics with potential for regional cooperation, active contribution in the period of preparation and adoption of ERI SEE Work Programmes, continuous engagement in the period of implementation of the regional activities agreed with the Work Programmes, and following-up the dissemination of the knowledge and skills acquired with the regional activities would substantially contribute to increased ownership and commitment to the Initiative. The work of the Governing Board members is supported by the National ERI SEE Contact Points.
- The Ministries responsible for education of SEE countries are invited to ensure sufficient budget for covering the costs of participation of the national member to the regular meetings of the ERI SEE Governing Board (twice a year, meetings hosted by ERI SEE members).

Immediate action: By distribution of the Minutes of the 1st meeting of the Working Group to the members of the ERI SEE Governing Board and the briefing undertaken at national level by the members of the Working Group, good representation of SEE countries to be ensured for the Eleventh meeting of the ERI SEE Governing Board and Consultative Body (Zagreb, 16-17 November 2009).

- Ensuring proper participation and representation to ERI SEE events and other activities would increase the quality of ERI SEE work, as well as the impact of the regional cooperation at national level and will show ownership and commitment to regional cooperation. Within the context of approved ERI SEE work programmes, direct communication and cooperation with relevant SEE institutions in the implementation phase would contribute to ensuring proper participation and representation.
- Efforts to improve the functioning of the channels of communication between the ERI SEE Secretariat and the national authorities (including the completion of the network of National ERI SEE Contact Points) would increase the ERI SEE efficiency, quality of work, commitment and ownership of the Initiative. Within the context of approved ERI SEE work programmes, direct communication and cooperation with relevant SEE institutions in the implementation phase would contribute to increased efficiency.

- Re-shaping the ERI SEE work by identifying the ways how to optimize the regional co-operation with the objective to increase its added value and the contribution to the specific processes which are on-going in different SEE countries by:
 - Identification of priority areas in which mutual learning and exchange of good practice would be valuable;
 - Fine-tuning of the ERI SEE instruments¹⁹ for regional cooperation:
 - The seminars and workshops which were the most frequently used ERI SEE instruments for peer-learning to be enriched with increased number of peer-learning visits, which have proved to lead to good results.
 - Establishing peer learning clusters of ERI SEE countries, European countries, as well as international organisations and institutions, interested in specific topics of education and training.
 - Continuation of the support to the networking of the newly established national institutions in SEE (e.g. SEE VET network, the network of centres for external evaluation in primary and secondary education, the centres for quality assurance and accreditation in higher education, the ENIC/NARIC centres).
 - The members of the ERI SEE Governing Board will be invited to identify updated priorities for regional cooperation and to further elaborate potential areas for SEE clustering, including identifying themes along which the peer learning would be organized within each specific cluster. The countries will be invited to articulate their interest to lead certain clusters.

Immediate action: The ERI SEE Agency to send the letter to the members of the ERI SEE Governing Board ASAP, in order to enable the countries to provide their feedback before the meeting of the ERI SEE Governing Board (Zagreb, Croatia, 16-17 November). The National ERI SEE Contact Point will be copied in the letter.

The members of the Working Group will brief the members of the ERI SEE Governing Board, and, to the extent of their possibilities, will put effort to widespread information to a larger number of high level officials, including the respective Ministers responsible for education. They are ready to continue the active participation in the Working Group and, at national level, to act in cooperation with the relevant authorities in support to the regional cooperation in education and training, thus contributing to increased commitment of the region to ERI SEE.

The meeting was closed with warm thanks from all participants to the RCC Secretariat for the continuous expert support in the period of discussions on the future of ERI SEE and for having ensured excellent working conditions combined with hospitable free time in the authentic ambience of Sarajevo.

The participants expressed special thanks to the Ms. Ivana Puljiz, who chaired the meeting with a difficult agenda in a way that enabled open and constructive discussion and exchange of opinions and efficiently brought to conclusions and recommendations important for shaping the future organization, structure and functioning of ERI SEE as a platform for co-operation and mutual learning, well rooted in and owned by the region.

¹⁹ Currently, seminars, workshops on thematic areas, peer-learning visits, Internet based, e-moderated forums on thematic areas, ERI SEE blog and the most frequently used ERI SEE instruments.

The ERI SEE Financing Scheme

The work of ERI SEE is financed with budget approved by the Governing Board on a yearly basis, based upon work programme approved for the respective year of operation.

ERI SEE work is financially supported by:

- The donor countries which are members of the ERI SEE Consultative Body: Austria, The Netherlands, Norway²⁰ and Switzerland.
- Croatia as the SEE country which hosts the ERI SEE Agency.
- The ERI SEE members. The financial contribution depends on the membership status to the EU:
 - The EU Member States Bulgaria and Romania co-finance the ERI SEE activities in which these countries are involved.
 - The ERI SEE members which are not EU Member States: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo²¹, the Republic of Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro and Serbia co-finance the Initiative in accordance with the *Decision of the ERI SEE Governing Board on the Financial Contribution from the ERI SEE Members as of 2008*²².
- The international organisations, associations and agencies members of the ERI SEE Consultative Body: Council of Europe, European Training Foundation and OECD co-finance expert participation and contribution to the events, including the meetings of the ERI SEE Governing Board and Consultative Body.

The ERI SEE budget is channelled and administered twofold:

- Through the ERI SEE Agency.
- By the ERI SEE members and the members of the Consultative Body.

The legal status of the ERI SEE Secretariat as a national public institution of the Republic of Croatia prevents the Governments of the members of the Initiative to co-finance the running costs of the Agency.

ERI SEE budget channeled and administered by the ERI SEE Agency²³

The donor countries Austria, the Netherlands and Switzerland sign co-financing agreements with the ERI SEE Agency on a yearly basis. The Ministry of Science, Education and Sports

²⁰ As of 2008, Norway finances expert participation and contribution to ERI SEE events and to the meetings of the Governing Board and Consultative Body.

²¹ Under UNSCR 1244/99

²² Adopted in March 2008.

²³ Besides the financial support channelled via the ERI SEE Agencies, Austria, the Netherlands and Norway ensure budget for the participation and contribution of national experts to different ERI SEE events (seminars, conferences, as well as to the meetings of the ERI SEE Governing Board and Consultative Body).

of the Republic of Croatia ensures national budget for ERI SEE which is transferred to the ERI SEE bank account in portions, upon written request of the Agency.

The distribution of the ERI SEE budget per donors is illustrated with the allocations in 2009. The total budget of €219.726 was ensured by the Governments of Austria (20%), the Netherlands (14%), Switzerland (32%) and Croatia (34%) as the host country of the ERI SEE Secretariat. The running costs of the Agency amount 26% of the total budget and are shared by the donors (15% Austria, 15% the Netherlands, 15% Switzerland and 55% Croatia).

Financial contributions of the ERI SEE members

In line with the demands for increased ownership of the Initiative, the ERI SEE Governing Board adopted the *Decision for Financial Contributions from the ERI SEE Members as of 2008*. With this Decision, the SEE countries agreed to gradually extend their contributions to the ERI SEE annual budget, in particular by

1. Hosting at least one regional event per year (seminar, study visit etc.). In this case, the following costs should be covered as a minimum contribution:
 - Venue/premises
 - Local transfers of participants and experts
 - Production of workshop materials
 - One reception/dinner.
2. Covering costs or parts thereof (e.g. travel costs) for participation of their GB representative at GB and CB meetings.
3. In accordance with their possibilities by
 - Hosting additional regional events;
 - Covering additional costs of regional events, such as accommodation, subsistence, travel costs of the participants;
 - Co-financing the structural costs of the ERI SEE Secretariat.

The SEE co-financing to the Initiative is illustrated with information from 2008:

- **Bulgaria and Romania, as EU Member States**

The countries contributed to sharing of experience and to capacity building measures by financing the participation and contribution of respective experts to different ERI SEE events and took part to the ERI SEE Governing Board meetings. Bulgaria hosted one ERI SEE seminar. The total financial contribution of Bulgaria and Romania is presented on Table 1:

Country	Co-financing to ERI SEE per country in €
Bulgaria	3,350.70
Romania	4,366.00
TOTAL:	7,716.70

Table 1: Financial support to ERI SEE from the SEE countries which are EU Member States

- **Co-financing by the other ERI SEE members**

The other ERI SEE members financed the participation of the members of the ERI SEE Governing Board to the meetings of the Board and co-financed the events which were

hosted by the respective members. The total contribution to co-financing of ERI SEE is provided in Table 2:

ERI SEE memebr country	Co-financing to ERI SEE per country in €
Albania	3,271.00
UNMIK/Kosovo	1,017.29
Moldova	535.00
Montenegro	1,556.00
Serbia	1,876.31
TOTAL:	8.255,60

Table 2: Co-financing of ERI SEE by ERI SEE members which are not EU Member States

Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Republic of Macedonia did not have budget for co-financing ERI SEE activities in 2008.

Co-financing of ERI SEE by the organisations, associations and agencies members of the ERI SEE Consultative Body

By ensuring regular participation of the members of the ERI SEE Consultative Body to the respective meetings and by financing expert participation and contribution to ERI SEE events, the Council of Europe, the European Training Foundation and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development substantially co-financed ERI SEE in 2008.