

ERI SEE Work Programme 2010

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Executive Summary

The year 2010 will be marked with efforts at all levels (political, organisational and content level) for moving the Education Reform Initiative of South Eastern Europe (ERI SEE) to a higher developmental stage. Those efforts will take place in the year of strengthened EU enlargement policy¹, which recognises the progress of SEE towards European intergration and supports the intensified national efforts for moving the process of rapprochement to the EU further² and the increased regional ownership of the SEE cooperation under the leadership of the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC). The region recognises that the current economic downturn calls for stronger regional partnerships, innovative networking and close cooperation in developing human capital³. In line with the commitment of the region to the European strategic objectives, the objectives of education and training in SEE need to be adusted to the objectives laid down with the new "Education and Training 2020" strategic framework for ensuring a strong role of education and training in the post-2010 Lisbon Strategy.

The achievements so far, marked with successful networking and regional cooperation in the development and implementation of lifelong learning strategies, national qualification frameworks, quality and equity in education, and in the integration of education, research and innovation in a functioning knowledge triangle, call for further strengthening and lobbying for ERI SEE as a regional platform which alines itself also to the instruments for exchange of experience within the EU (clusters of knowledge, peer-learning etc.) and supports capacity building for increased use of the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) and the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Policy Instrument (ENPI) for education and training reforms, as well as for participation of its' members into the EU programmes for external cooperation in education and training, including gradual involvement into the Lifelong Learning Programme. This in particular in light of the future successor of the Lisbon Strategy "Europe 2020"⁴ and the new strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training ("ET 2020"⁵) adopted by the Council in May 2009.

The ERI SEE Work Programme 2010 is structured around the transformation and development actions (Chapter 2) and the five outputs for the period 2008-2010, as adopted by the Governing Board in 2008 (Chapter 3).

ERI SEE DEVELOPMENT ACTIONS

Development of ERI SEE into an international organisation

- Commitment of ERI SEE members to launch transformation of the ERI SEE into an international organisation
- Transformation of ERI SEE into an international organisation – step by step
- Rotation of the seat of the ERI SEE Secretariat in 2010

¹ "Enlargement Strategy and Main Challenges 2009-2010", Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council, 14 October 2009

² Completion of the accession negotiations with Croatia is expected in 2010; the efforts for overcoming the obstacles for opening of negotiations with the Republic of Macedonia have intensified; the EC is preparing an Opinion on the Montenegrin application for EU membership. Two countries applied for membership in 2009: Albania in April and Serbia in December. Bosnia and Herzegovina needs to speed up key reforms. The stability of UNMIK/Kosovo has been maintained. The EU will negotiate a New Agreement with Moldova, which will go beyond the current Partnership and Cooperation Agreement and will promote deeper cooperation and approximation between Moldova and the EU.

³ Bucharest Conference on Fostering and Building Human Capital for Sustainable Knowledge Societies in South Eastern Europe (March 2009).

⁴ Currently under a public consultation process.

⁵ Council conclusions of 12 May 2009 on the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training ('ET 2020'), Official Journal of the European Union (2009/C 119/02).

Adjustment of the thematic areas and instruments

- Establishment of clusters of knowledge in two thematic areas relevant for SEE cooperation in education and training
- Continuation of the support to the networking of the newly established national institutions in different areas of education and training in SEE

Resources

- Forecast of the contribution of the ERI SEE members to the Initiative
- Survey on the possibilities for ERI SEE involvement in EU funded projects

Renewal of the Political Commitment

- Agreement of the SEE Ministers responsible for Education for renewal of the political commitment for regional cooperation in education and training
- Drafting of a Joint Document on the Future Role of ERI SEE (Joint Document)
- Agreement on the text of the Joint Document by the members of the ERI SEE Governing Board
- Consultation process on the Joint Document
- Adoption of the Joint Document

ERI SEE ACTIVITIES ACCORDING TO THE DEFINED OUTPUTS 2008-2010

Output 1: ERI SEE members are informed on life long learning (LLL) initiatives in the region and had the opportunity to develop a common strategy

- Signing of the SEEVET-Net Cooperation Agreement, peer-learning visit to the Netherlands and third meeting of the SEEVET Network (SEEVET-Net).
- Continuation of the networking of experts in lifelong learning, including the ERI SEE web-based forum and blog on LLL.
- Updating the information on lifelong learning on the ERI SEE website.

Output 2: Information on the European Qualification Framework and on the development of National Qualifications Frameworks in the SEE region has been provided

- Information exchange within the Governing Board members and other experts on the European and SEE developments in the area of qualifications frameworks.
- Continuation of the networking of experts in qualifications frameworks, including the ERI SEE web-based forum and blog on qualifications frameworks.
- Provision of relevant information on qualifications frameworks on the ERI SEE website.
- Synergy of the activities with the Council of Europe (CoE), the European Training Foundation (ETF) and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).

Output 3: The issues of quality and equity in education are promoted and strong networks have been established

- Seminar of the network of the SEE national institutions on assessment and evaluation in pre-university education.

- Continuation of the ERI SEE web-based forum and blog on assessment and evaluation in pre-university education.
- Continuation of the ERI SEE web-based forum and blog on quality assurance in education.
- Provision of relevant information on quality and equity in education on the ERI SEE website.

Output 4: The knowledge triangle (research, education and innovation) has strengthened in South Eastern Europe

- Enabling efficient networking of Bologna Process actors including the ERI SEE web-based forum and blog.
- Support to the networking and peer-learning among SEE bodies of quality assurance in higher education.
- Provision of relevant information on the ‘knowledge triangle’ on the ERI SEE website.

Output 5: The SEE Education Reform Initiative is recognised as a reliable regional partner in the education sector of South East Europe

- Organisation of two meetings of the ERI SEE Governing Board and Consultative Body.
- Enhanced ERI SEE visibility and networking.
- Improvement of the ERI SEE website.
- Office management and administration.
- Planning and reporting activities.

1. JUSTIFICATION

In the time of global economic downturn, the progress of SEE towards European integration is taking place in the context of serious economic and social challenges. Education and training have a crucial role to play in meeting many socio-economic, demographic, environmental and technological challenges. By encompassing innovation and creativity, the education and training systems of SEE need to adjust their role in line with the European strategic priorities for creating value by basing growth on knowledge, empowering people in inclusive societies and creating a competitive, connected and greener economy⁶. This would fit to the SEE objective of strengthening the context of the reforms to the Wider European Area of Education.

The successful networking and regional cooperation in the development and implementation of lifelong learning strategies, national qualification frameworks, quality and equity in education, and in the integration of education, research and innovation in a functioning knowledge triangle, call for further strengthening and lobbying for ERI SEE as a regional platform which aligns itself also to the instruments for exchange of experience within the EU (clusters of knowledge, peer-learning etc.) and supports capacity building for increased use of the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) and the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Policy Instrument (ENPI) for education and training reforms, as well as for parti-

⁶ “EU 2020” – the future successor of the Lisbon Strategy on growth of jobs, currently under public consultation process.

icipation of its' members into the EU programmes for external cooperation in education and training, including gradual involvement into the Lifelong Learning Programme. This in particular in light of the future successor of the new strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training ("ET 2020"⁷) adopted by the Council in May 2009.

Aiming to respond to the challenges for meeting the needs for providing added value to the changing national contexts of education and training, for linking to the trends in the wider European context, and, in the same time, to move towards increased regional ownership of the cooperation, ERI SEE will launch a transformation phase at political, organisational and content level in 2010. The foreseen transformation activities are presented in Chapter 2 of the Work Programme.

Depending on the dynamics of the transformation process, and to the extent possible, ERI SEE will also aim at implementing activities relevant for achieving the five outputs for the period 2008-2010, as adopted by the Governing Board in 2008. These activities are presented in Chapter 3 of the Work Programme.

2. ERI SEE DEVELOPMENT ACTIONS

The transformation of ERI SEE will be realised in a way which will clearly articulate the commitment of its members to regional ownership and will provide a sustainable organisational structure with capacity to become a recognised and attractive partner in EU funded projects with regional character will be top priority in 2010.

2.1. Development of ERI SEE into an international organisation

Background

The current legal structure of the ERI SEE Secretariat as a national public institution of the Republic of Croatia hinders the implementation of the full scope of cooperation, including a stronger and more balanced co-financing of ERI SEE by its' members. By hosting the Secretariat since 2004, Croatia has played this role beyond the originally foreseen period and has substantially co-financed ERI SEE.

Transformation of the ERI SEE Secretariat into an international organisation would lead to a legal basis for a sustainable, regionally owned and co-financed structure under the auspices of the RCC.

Activities foreseen:

2.1.1. Commitment of ERI SEE members to transformation of the ERI SEE into an international organisation

The Chair of the Governing Board will solicit the interest and readiness of ERI SEE members to enter into a process of transformation of ERI SEE into an international organisation. The consultation process will be initiated with an explanatory letter requesting the ERI SEE members to provide national feedback by the end of January 2010.

December 2009 - January 2010

⁷ Council conclusions of 12 May 2009 on the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training ('ET 2020'), Official Journal of the European Union (2009/C 119/02).

2.1.2. Transformation of ERI SEE into an international organisation

Based upon the commitment of the ERI SEE members to enter into a transformation process, further activities will be developed:

1. Decision of the ERI SEE Governing Board to launch such process.
2. Negotiation and drafting of a new Joint Document of SEE Ministers responsible for Education on the Future Role of ERI SEE.
3. Signing and ratification of the Joint Document of SEE Ministers responsible for Education.
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.

The transformation process will be steered by the ERI SEE Chairmanships in cooperation with the RCC Secretariat, including the active involvement of its' Legal Advisor in different phases of the process.

2.1.3. Rotation of the seat of the ERI SEE Secretariat in 2010

By hosting the Secretariat since 2004, Croatia has played this role beyond the originally foreseen period and has substantially co-financed ERI SEE. Given the regional dimension of the Initiative and the concept of a rotating seat, the potential interest of ERI SEE members to host the ERI SEE Secretariat will be solicited at the beginning of 2010.

Consideration of the Ministry of Science, Education and Sports of Croatia is that the ERI SEE Agency with legal status of a national governmental institution would cease its work by the end of May 2010.

Developing conditions for smooth handing over of the work to the interim operational structure for managing ERI SEE activities until the completion of the process of transformation of ERI SEE into an international organisation would be necessary.

Activities for closing the ERI SEE Agency in Zagreb and handing-over the responsibilities to an interim operational structure for managing ERI SEE activities (April-May 2010)

2.2. Adjustment of the thematic areas and instruments

Background

The European dimension of the education reforms in the region has become an integral part of the national priority setting. The agendas of national reforms in SEE are diversified, reflecting the individual development of the countries and the different phases of their rapprochement to the EU. By supporting exchange of information on how different policy options can help advance reforms in national education and training systems, knowledge transfer, mutual learning and sharing of best practice examples, ERI SEE provides added value to the efforts of the region to develop human capital necessary for meeting the numerous socio-economic, demographic, technological and environmental challenges.

The achievements so far, call for further strengthening and lobbying for ERI SEE as a regional platform which aligns itself also to the instruments for exchange of experience within the EU

(clusters of knowledge, peer-learning etc.) and supports capacity building for increased use of the IPA and the ENPI for education and training reforms, as well as for participation of its' members into the EU programmes for external cooperation in education and training, including gradual involvement into the Lifelong Learning Programme.

The thematic areas will be adjusted to reflect the role of education, innovation and creativity as seen in the "EU 2020" Strategy⁸ with regard to the priorities: creating value by basing growth on knowledge, empowering people in inclusive societies and creating a competitive, connected and greener economy. This would fit to the SEE objective of strengthening the context of the reforms to the Wider European Area of Education.

At content level, the thematic areas will be adjusted to the changed cooperation context both in SEE and at European level, including the Strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training ("ET 2020") and its' four strategic objectives: making lifelong learning and mobility reality; improving the quality and efficiency of education and training; promoting equity, social cohesion and active citizenship; enhancing creativity and innovation, including entrepreneurship, at all levels of education and training.

The joint work will be organised around regional clusters of knowledge (CK) as new cooperation instruments, which have proved to be valuable within the "ET2010", will promote peer-learning through regional mobility and will focus on support to networking of the newly established national institutions in education and training in SEE.

Activities foreseen:

2.2.1. Establishment of clusters of knowledge in two thematic areas relevant for SEE cooperation in education and training

Aiming to shape the regional cooperation in accordance with the diversified needs of the countries for mutual learning, regional exchange of experience & good practice and for encompassing the specific phases of national reforms in education and training, the ERI SEE Secretariat and the TFBHC Secretariat will closely cooperate in the efforts to introduce clusters of knowledge (CK) as a new instrument for cooperation⁹. This instrument, developed under the "Education and Training 2010" work programme, has brought to positive experience and praxis in the EU. CKs will support the exchange of information on different policy options, which, in addition to other activities for mutual learning, will help the advancement of the reforms of the national education systems. The peer learning activities will be organised around peer learning clusters involving different SEE countries, other European countries and other institutions/organisations interested for cooperation in specific thematic areas. In 2009 the SEE countries expressed interest for cooperation and for joint work in four CKs and identified the respective topics relevant for mutual learning:

- *Lifelong learning*, with the following topics: VET development and links with the labour market, post-secondary VET, entrepreneurial learning, adult education.
- *Qualifications Frameworks*, with the following topics: NQF development with attention to non-formal and informal learning, NQF development and references

⁸ The future successor of the Lisbon Strategy – EU future strategy for growth and jobs, currently a under public consultation process.

⁹ Zagreb Plan for Action 2009-2010, Task Force Fostering & Building Human Capital of the Regional Cooperation Council, June 2009

to the EQF, recognition of diplomas and cooperation among the ENIC/NARIC centres, Europass, links between higher education and VET.

- *Quality and equity in education*, with the following topics: quality assurance at all levels of education, equity in education, governance and efficiency in education, the role of teachers in ensuring quality and equity in education.
- *Cluster on the “knowledge triangle”*, with the following topics: change management; higher education development, the Bologna process and the role of the universities in the process of forward thinking; learning regions and evidence based policy making.

ERI SEE will support the establishment of two CKs in 2010. Its members will be invited to express interest for undertaking the role of a leading country for a particular CK and the Governing Board will decide on the establishment of the CKs. The leading countries will invite the stakeholders to review and update the thematic areas and topics for cooperation and to develop a workprogramme for 2010. The ERI SEE Secretariat will provide support to these activities and will monitor the implementation of the agreed workprogrammes of the two CKs.

Based on the experience built during the first year of implementation of the new instrument and depending on the evolved interest and needs of its members, ERI SEE and the TFBHC will continue to support the work on establishment of new CKs in jointly agreed thematic areas.

March – December 2010

2.2.2. Continuation of the support to the networking of the newly established national institutions in different areas of education and training in SEE

Ever since 2006, ERI SEE has continuously supported the regional cooperation through networking of the newly established national structures in different areas of education and training in SEE (the network of SEE VET institutions – SEEVET.Net, the network of centres for external evaluation in pre-university education, as well as the centres for quality assurance and accreditation in higher education). Sustaining this networking and widening it to the ENIC/NARIC centres will be an important task in 2010.

In 2010 ERI SEE will support one networking event for each of the three networks established so far. More information about the events is provided under chapter 3 of this document (3.1.1, 3.3.1 and 3.4.2).

2.3. Resources

Background

In order to be able to sustain its' role of a reliable platform for cooperation in education and training in the areas in which regional cooperation brings added value to the national efforts for developing of this sector as a valuable factor for overcoming the current downturn and for speeding-up the process of rapprochement to the EU, ERI SEE will pay special attention to stabilising the financial aspects of its' functioning. The efforts will focus on diversification of the funding sources by evolving from the current praxis of funding ensured by European donors outside the region and the host of the ERI SEE Secretariat, to diversified funding, ensured by ERI SEE members, European donor countries and from partnerships and involvement in EU funded projects, as well as regional projects funded by bilateral donors.

The current status of ERI SEE funding channelled by the ERI SEE Secretariat¹⁰ was not significantly affected by the national contributions of the SEE countries provided according to the Decision of the ERI SEE Governing Board on the Financial Contributions from the ERI SEE Members as of 2008¹¹. In the framework of the political process 'from assistance to cooperation' and the general trend of moving towards increased ownership of the regional cooperation, ERI SEE structures have debated the increased regional commitment, reflected both in participation in joint activities and in stronger & more balanced financial commitment to ERI SEE on different occasions since 2008.

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.

Efforts will be put for widening the scope of sources for financing ERI SEE, including involvement in EU funded projects under the multi-beneficiary IPA, ENPI, the Tempus Programme and TAIEX, as well as funding of regional projects in accordance with priorities for support and cooperation with SEE of bilateral donors.

Activities foreseen:

2.3.1. Forecast of the contribution of the ERI SEE members to the Initiative

Since ERI SEE is a regional initiative under the auspices of the RCC, forecast of the contribution of its' members (operational costs and total costs) will be prepared in accordance with the methodology developed for contributions to the RCC. The forecast will be based upon the level of gross domestic product at purchasing power parity of the SEE countries, will take into consideration the donor contribution, as well as the contribution of the future host country to the operational costs, in addition to its' annual contribution.

January 2010

2.3.2. Survey on the possibilities for ERI SEE involvement in EU funded projects

An expert from the donor countries will be commissioned to prepare a survey on ERI SEE eligibility and the modes of its involvement in EU funded projects under the Multi-Beneficiary IPA, ENPI, the Tempus Programme and TAIEX.

Equally important is ensuring ERI SEE involvement in the future IPA and ENPI planning activities.

ERI SEE will also seek opportunities for its' involvement in regional projects in the thematic areas for regional cooperation, including the priorities for cooperation of different bilateral donors with SEE.

March 2010

2.4. Renewal of the Political Commitment

Background

Since its' establishment in 2004, ERI SEE has served as a regional platform that supports sustainable education reforms through regional cooperation and has become an important facilitator of information transfer between the EU and SEE.

¹⁰ 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.

¹¹ The Decision was adopted through a distance voting procedure in March 2008.

In this period the region has developed substantially. In 2007 Bulgaria and Romania became EU Member States, what increased their role and contribution to ERI SEE. The EU enlargement process takes place against the background of a deep and widespread recession, which has affected both the EU and the enlargement countries. The EU enlargement strategy¹² highlights the progress of SEE towards European integration and presents the roadmap for the Western Balkans rapprochement to the EU¹³. The EU will negotiate a New Agreement with Moldova.

The regional cooperation in education and training has evolved in line with these developments. It has gradually moved from assistance to cooperation. 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 SEE are diversified, reflecting the individual development of the countries and the different phases of their rapprochement to the EU. By supporting exchange of information on how different policy options can help advance reforms in national education and training systems, knowledge transfer, mutual learning and sharing of best practice examples, ERI SEE provides added value to the efforts of the region to develop human capital necessary for meeting the numerous socio-economic, demographic, technological and environmental challenges.

In 2008, the new political reality of handing over the responsibility for regional cooperation to the RCC, brought into the focus human capital development and the key role of education, training, research and innovation for the long term prosperity of SEE. By moving towards increased ownership of the regional cooperation, the SEE countries have committed themselves to invest political and financial capital for further progress towards the European perspective of the region. This commitment calls for adjustment of the legal, organisational and thematic scope of ERI SEE.

These complex developments call for a renewed political commitment to strengthened and broadened cooperation in the framework of ERI SEE. The forthcoming 23rd Session of the Council of Europe Standing Conference of Ministers of Education taking place in Brdo, Slovenia in June 2010 would provide for the ministers of education of the region an opportunity to make a new and firm decision about the stable continuation of the regional cooperation in education and training and the existence of ERI SEE.

Activities foreseen:

2.4.1. Agreement of the SEE Ministers responsible for education for renewal of the political commitment for regional cooperation in education and training

Upon initiative of the Chair of the ERI SEE Governing Board, the readiness of the ERI SEE members for renewal of the political commitment by agreeing a new Joint Document on the Future Role of ERI SEE will be solicited (Joint Document). The letter of the Chair to the SEE Ministers will be supported with a strategic document describing the added value provided by ERI SEE to the efforts of the region to develop human capital necessary for meeting the numerous socio-economic, demographic, technological and environmental challenges.

February 2010

¹² Adopted by the European Commission on 14 October 2009.

¹³ Completion of the accession negotiations with Croatia is expected in 2010; the efforts for overcoming the obstacles for opening of negotiations with the Republic of Macedonia have intensified; the EC is preparing an Opinion on the Montenegrin application for EU membership. Two countries applied for membership in 2009: Albania in April and Serbia in December. Bosnia and Herzegovina needs to speed up key reforms. The stability of UNMIK/Kosovo has been maintained.

2.4.2. Drafting of the Joint Document on the Future Role of ERI SEE

The initial draft of the Joint Document will be prepared by the Chair and Co-Chairs of the ERI SEE Governing Board in cooperation with the RCC Secretariat. The initial draft will be subject to a one day drafting session with participation of representatives of all interested Ministries, the TFBHC and experts from the RCC Secretariat (beginning of March). The updated draft Joint Document will be subject to internal discussions and suggestions for improvement.

February-March 2010

*Joint Document drafting session hosted by the RCC Secretariat,
Sarajevo, 8 March 2010*

2.4.3. Agreement on the text of the Joint Document by the members of the ERI SEE Governing Board

Based upon the inputs, the final draft of the Joint Document will be prepared and communicated to the members of the ERI SEE Governing Board for discussions and adoption during the 12th meeting of this body (beginning of April).

March-April 2010

2.4.4. Consultation process on the Joint Document

April and May will be devoted to a consultation process/internal adoption by the countries interested to adopt the Joint Document.

April-May 2010

2.4.5. Adoption of the Joint Document

The Joint Document on the Future Role of ERI SEE will be officially adopted by the SEE Ministers from the countries which have decided to enter into the arrangement during the 23rd Session of the Council of Europe Standing Conference of Ministers of Education.

Brdo, Slovenia, 4-5 June 2010

3. ERI SEE ACTIVITIES ACCORDING TO THE DEFINED OUTPUTS 2008-2010

In parallel with the transformation process, ERI SEE will continue to work on achieving its' mid-term objective by implementing activities in line with the defined ERI SEE outputs 2008-2010. The activities foreseen are presented according to the five agreed outputs.

3.1. Output 1: ERI SEE members are informed on lifelong learning initiatives in the region and had the opportunity to develop a common strategy

Background

South East European commitment to lifelong learning: The Istanbul Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)¹⁴ encompasses different aspects of education in the context of lifelong learning, research and innovation. By signing this document, the SEE Ministers enhanced their commitment to the re-launched Lisbon agenda as the main driving force for reforms in education, science and research in the region. The countries are committed to and are involved in the implementation of the "Education & Training 2010" work programme

¹⁴ Memorandum of Understanding between the Ministers Responsible for Education, Science and Research in South Eastern Europe, Istanbul, May 2007

(depending on the status of their integration or rapprochement to the EU), the Copenhagen process and the Bologna process and will work on adjustment of the priorities and methods of work with the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (“ET 2020”).

Making lifelong learning and mobility reality is one of the four strategic objectives of “ET 2020”. The regular need to update and develop skills in line with changing economic circumstances call for a lifelong approach to learning and for education and training systems which are more responsive to change and more open to the wider world. Adapting the workers skills to the labour market demand and self-employment may represent solutions to fight against labour market segmentation. Integration on the world of work gives individuals an opportunity to have a full stake in society, thus contributing to their social inclusion, active citizenship and personal fulfilment.

These commitments oblige the ERI SEE countries to work on the development and implementation of lifelong learning strategies, thus setting out national policy priorities and defining how different sectors relate to each other. The lifespan education and training starting from pre-primary education; qualification frameworks; validation of non-formal and informal learning; skills for the future and key competences; innovative learning partnerships and sustainable funding for high quality, efficient and equitable education & training; promotion of creativity through lifelong learning and lifelong guidance are to be addressed with these overarching documents. The role of the higher education sector in the knowledge triangle must be taken into account when developing lifelong learning strategies at national, regional and institutional level so that the higher education institutions become more involved in the upgrading of skills relevant for the knowledge economy and admission rules sufficiently recognise the value of prior learning and working experiences¹⁵.

Bulgaria and Romania as EU Member States and Croatia as a candidate country are subject to assessment of the progress against the five reference levels of average European performance and other key indicators in education and training¹⁶. All SEE countries are involved in the Bologna Process reporting and stock-taking. In 2008, Bulgaria adopted the National Lifelong Learning Strategy 2008-2013. Romania is in the process of developing a national lifelong learning strategy. Croatia has a national lifelong learning strategy and has established a national structure for its’ implementation. Croatia, UNMIK/Kosovo, the Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia have developed adult learning strategies or policy papers¹⁷ and have identified the following priority areas: development of work-based learning, particularly management and entrepreneurship training for small businesses and development of special programmes to address particular skill shortages; improvement of basic literacy and occupational skills including key competences; expansion and development of active labour market measures for the registered unemployed and inactive people seeking work. Development of the national system of lifelong learning is a priority within the overall educational policy of Moldova¹⁸. Some of these countries have developed action plans for implementation of the strategies. National legislation on adult education has been adopted in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Republika Srpska), Croatia, UNMIK/Kosovo, the Republic of Macedonia and Montenegro. The processes of implementation of the national strategies are challenging and their success depends on the coordination and cooperation of different stakeholders. In line with the recommendations of the Bucharest Conference on Fostering and

¹⁵ Conclusions of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States on developing the role of education in a fully-functioning knowledge triangle, Council of the European Union, Brussels, November 2009.

¹⁶ Draft 2008 joint progress report of the Council and the Commission on the implementation of the ‘Education & Training 2010’ work programme ‘Developing lifelong learning for knowledge, creativity and innovation’, Council of the European Union, 5723/08, Brussels, January 2008

¹⁷ Designing Adult Learning Strategies – the Case of South Eastern Europe, European Training Foundation, Turin, 2006.

¹⁸ Bologna Process National Report of Moldova, Kishinev, 2007.

Building Human Capital for Sustainable Knowledge Societies in South Eastern Europe (March 2009), regional cooperation on the implementation of LLL strategies in SEE in the context of governance will be a priority area of strategic importance for human capital development¹⁹.

In 2009 - the European year of creativity - the ERI SEE countries debated on how to enhance the contribution of lifelong learning to creativity and innovation in society and on strengthening the innovative approaches and culture of better learning²⁰ and will work on implementation of respective activities in 2010.

Until 2013, the EU will continuously support the efforts of the region for recovering from the current crisis and for speeding-up the necessary reforms emerging from the process of SEE rapprochement to the EU with strong instruments – the IPA for the Western Balkans and the ENPI for Moldova. Human resources development will be in the focus of these efforts, including capacity building for participation in the European Social and Regional Funds. The current high level of unemployment needs to be addressed by greater social and economic development, and therefore increased job creation. The priority defined with the multiannual planning documents 2009-2011 “*creation of conducive environments for employment, friendly economic growth, enhancement of the skills of the population in line with the requirements of a market economy and support to the most vulnerable groups of the society - people with special needs, minorities and women*” paves the way to numerous actions in education and training in the context of lifelong learning. The ambitious goals demand an integrated approach and call for involvement and joint work of the structures responsible for social and economic development, employment and education, through developing effective inter-ministerial cooperation, as well as involvement of the social partners and the civil society.

Lifelong learning and the modernisation of the national educational and VET systems will continue to be the cornerstones in preventing long-term unemployment and increasing the labour force mobility. By enabling networking of people working in different aspects of lifelong learning, ERI SEE will continue to support the exchange of experiences and mutual learning. The work of the network of the SEE national VET institutions (SEEVET-Net) will be sustained by organisation and financing of the third meeting of the network in 2010. The meeting will take place side by side with the peer-learning visit of SEE VET experts and high level officials to the Netherlands, which will be co-organised and hosted by MBO Raad, the Netherlands.

The networking will also be sustained by continuation of the ERI SEE Internet based platform for expert cooperation (e-moderated forum and blog on lifelong learning).

Activities proposed:

3.1.1. Signing of the Cooperation Agreement, peer-learning visit to the Netherlands and third meeting of the SEEVET-Net

The networking of the VET agencies and institutions of SEE initiated at the First Networking Conference (Tirana-Albania, September 2008) will continue, supported by ERI SEE, the European Training Foundation and EVD/CROSS – the Netherlands.

Upon invitation of the Chair of the SEEVET-Net, an expert group from Albania, Montenegro and Serbia will prepare an updated text of the draft Agreement for Coope-

¹⁹ “Towards SEE Innovative Knowledge Societies for the 21st Century“, Task Force Fostering and Building Human Capital, October 2009.

²⁰ Decision No 1350/2008/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council concerning the European Year of Creativity and Innovation (2009), 16 December 2008.

ration by the end of March 2010. The final version of the Agreement will be agreed by the SEE VET institutions, as well as the way of signing the document.

The third meeting of SEEVET-Net will be organised in cooperation with the Chair of the network and MBO Raad – the association that represents the educational institutes for secondary VET and adult education funded by the Dutch Government. Combined with a visit to relevant Dutch institutions, the meeting will take place in the Netherlands and will be hosted by MBO Raad. Based upon a programme of the visit and an agenda of the meeting jointly agreed with the Chair of SEEVET.Net, EVD International will decide on the budget needed for co-financing the event.

*Final version of the Cooperation Agreement, March 2010
The Netherlands, 20-24 September 2010*

3.1.2. Continuation of expert networking in lifelong learning

ERI SEE will continue to support the Internet forum on lifelong learning as a platform for professional communication, exchange of experience and peer-learning among the SEE experts. Periodically, topics relevant for lifelong learning will be put forward on the ERI SEE blog.

3.1.3. Updates of the information on lifelong learning on the ERI SEE website

The updating of the library of documents on lifelong learning available on the ERI SEE website will continue in 2010.

3.2. Output 2: Information on the European Qualification Framework and the development of National Qualifications Frameworks (NQF) in the SEE region has been improved

Background

The current crisis has sharpened the necessity for development of NQFs covering the entire span of lifelong learning. Under the priority *Empowering people in inclusive societies*, the draft “EU 2020” Strategy²¹ recognises the emerging new patterns with several entries in and exits from the labour market during the working life, instead of the traditional sequence (education, work, retirement). This requires frameworks which enable organising the transitions and support them. In response to the current crisis and, in the same time, in line with the commitment to the post-Lisbon Strategy, the SEE countries have to strengthen the national efforts, to increase the regional cooperation and to work together on the development of NQFs in the perspective of lifelong learning. In October 2009, the Ministers of Education of the Western Balkans²² stressed the need for regional cooperation in different areas of education, the NQFs being one of them.

The European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning (EQF/LLL) enables co-existence with the overarching Framework for Qualifications in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). The descriptors in the EQF/LLL are generic and can be used to describe all types of learning. Reference to the Bologna descriptors is integrated in the EQF/LLL. The

²¹ “EU 2020” Strategy, European Commission working document, COM(2009)647 final, November 2009.

²² Conclusions of the 5th Informal Conference of the Ministers of Education from the Western Balkans, held under the Slovenian Chairmanship of the Council of Europe, Ljubljana, October 2009.

current work of the ERI SEE countries on the development of NQFs takes into consideration the solutions provided in the EQF/LLL.

Thanks to the intensive awareness raising campaign on the Copenhagen Process in 2005-2006²³ and the Bologna Process, the SEE countries have developed intensive work on the establishment of NQFs in VET and higher education (adoption of national legislation in majority of ERI SEE members; development and implementation of national strategies; establishment of national structures) etc. Romania is a SEE country which is well advanced in the development of the NQF with well functioning national structures. The systematic and well organised work on the development of CROQF has brought Europe-wide recognition to Croatia.

The on-going processes of development of NQFs in SEE aim to support the needs of the individuals and answer the challenges of the societies for increased access to education, transparency of the education and training systems, ensuring progression within the system, awarding qualifications based on learning outcomes, recognition of non-formal and informal learning and ensuring quality (reliability) of qualifications. In SEE, these processes require development of a culture of permanent dialogue between the education sectors, the labour market, trade unions and other stakeholders. Joint work of the VET and higher education sector is key for covering the LLL span of education and training for each citizen. The NQFs need to be flexible, simple, applicable and visible. Credits that allow transfer and accumulation are to be allocated in order to ensure progress and recognition of prior learning. The process of developing and describing learning outcomes will continue to be the greatest challenge for the SEE countries over the next few years. The complexity of NQFs requires leadership from the highest political level and commitment of all, including trade unions and employers' organisations. Consultation also must be reinforced at the local level.

Regional cooperation supported by European countries that already have made substantial progress in developing their NQF or are in the process of developing NQFs, including cooperation with neighbouring countries of SEE (e.g. Hungary), the European Training Foundation and the European Commission will contribute to capacities building and development of NQFs in accordance with the EQF/LLL. The effort of the region needs support, inter alia by peer learning activities, by provision of expertise through European institutions, etc.

SEE countries report on a regular basis to the Bologna Process Ministerial conferences. The Stocktaking Report 2009²⁴ indicates that the deadline for implementation of NQFs for higher education by 2010 has been too ambitious. It encourages the countries to continue their work without waiting the whole NQF to be developed in accordance with the EQF, and to link it with other levels of qualifications when conditions would be reached.

Based upon its' mandate for dissemination and share of good practice in the development of NQFs²⁵ the CoE initiated the establishment of the Regional Network on Higher Education Qualification Frameworks for SEE (Cetinje, Montenegro, July 2008) and coordinates its work. The second meeting of the network (Ljubljana, Slovenia, June 2009) brought to the attention similar unresolved issues in the region: classification level of pre-Bologna programmes; suitable descriptors for academic and professional study programmes and programmes of varying duration; making national frameworks comparable in international terms, comparing decisions

²³ The European Training Foundation had the leading role in this campaign.

²⁴ Bologna Process Stocktaking Report 2009, Report from working groups appointed by the Bologna Follow-up Group to the Ministerial Conference in Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve, April 2009.

²⁵ "Towards the European Higher Education Area: responding to challenges in a globalised world", London Communiqué, London Conference of the Ministers responsible for Higher Education, May 2007.

issued in different countries when recognising degrees etc. Aiming to avoid overlapping, ERI SEE and the CoE have developed a culture of coordination of the activities in the field of NQF.

In 2009 ERI SEE enabled discussions among high level officials and SEE experts, which led to the conclusion that the national progress made so far provides ground for regional co-operation and joint work on meeting the common challenges: inconsistency and confusion within the systems and in the region (finding satisfactory solutions for incorporation of the old and new degrees), developing common understanding of the concepts, development of qualifications based on learning outcomes and introduction of ECTS/ECVET, comparability of degrees, involvement of all relevant stakeholders and raising awareness on the frameworks). The need for establishing a SEE network/SEE cluster on QFs with the role to enable regular comparison of the national systems, establishing mechanisms for regular exchange of experience, documents and tools was stipulated at the 11th meeting of the ERI SEE Governing Board and Consultative Body and the TFBHC meeting of SEE Senior Officials (Zagreb, Croatia, November 2009).

The progress made in the development of NQFs will be discussed at the meetings of the ERI SEE Governing Board and Consultative Body and the SEEVET-Net on a yearly basis. The Internet based forum and blog will continue to provide a platform for expert communication and mutual learning.

Activities proposed:

3.2.1. Information exchange within the Governing Board and among experts on Qualifications Frameworks

The practice of exchange of information on the European developments in the field of qualifications frameworks and briefings on the progress in the ERI SEE region will continue. The members of the ERI SEE Consultative Body from the Council of Europe and the European Training Foundation, as well as the members of the ERI SEE Governing Board will discuss this topic during the Thirteenth Governing Board and Consultative Body meeting in the second half of 2010.

October 2010

NQFs are increasingly becoming a high priority area in SEE. The recent IPA and ENPI documents have foreseen substantial interventions in this area. ERI SEE will continue to support the professional communication, exchange of experience and peer-learning among the SEE experts via the web-based forum and blog on NQFs.

3.2.2. Provision of relevant information on Qualifications Frameworks on the ERI SEE website

The updating of the library of documents on qualifications frameworks available on the ERI SEE website will continue in 2010.

3.2.3. Synergy of the activities with the Council of Europe (CoE), the European Training Foundation (ETF) and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)

The Council of Europe, the European Training Foundation, the Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development and ERI SEE will continue the cooperation and the coordination of the activities in the region. This coordination will not be limited to qualifications frameworks, but will address all areas of education and training in which the three institutions are developing and implementing activities in the region. For activities for which joint work would lead to added value, the institutions will develop appropriate partnerships.

3.3. Output 3: The issues of quality and equity in education are promoted and strong networks have been established

Background

"In a time of global economic downturn it is essential that Europe makes full use of each individual's potential and continues to promote higher, more efficient and targeted investment in quality education and training"²⁶. In line with the strong commitment of the EU and its Member States to tackling poverty and social exclusion, the European Parliament and the Council proclaimed the European Year for combating poverty and social exclusion (2010)²⁷ and agreed the objectives and guiding principles: recognition of rights, shared responsibility and participation, cohesion, commitment and concrete action. Promotion of equity, social cohesion and active citizenship is a strategic objective of the Strategic Framework for European Cooperation in Education and Training (ET 2020)²⁸, too.

Committed to the Bologna and the Copenhagen processes as drivers of the post-Lisbon Strategy, the SEE countries work on building quality culture in education. They work on the implementation of the Common Criteria and Principles for Quality in VET and the Recommendation of the European Parliament and the Council on the establishment of a European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for VET²⁹ (within the Copenhagen Process), and of the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area and the Recommendation on Quality Assurance in Higher Education³⁰ adopted by the EU Council of ministers and the European Parliament within the Bologna Process. Improved quality of the education and research sectors is important for the development of the European Area of Knowledge and Europe's competitiveness.

As Bologna signatories, the SEE countries inform about the developments in the field of quality assurance within the regular stocktaking and national reporting processes. In light of the increased role of the knowledge triangle, the European countries should work together to develop "knowledge triangle criteria for assessing the quality". It should focus on how successfully research and innovation have been integrated with teaching and core educational functions and how successful the institutions are in creating learning environments that stimulate creativity and entrepreneurial approaches to harnessing knowledge and in preparing its students for their future social and economic lives³¹.

As a platform which supports expert communication and joint work, the ERI SEE forum on quality assurance in education (established in 2008) will continue to support the networking of SEE experts.

The SEE countries are interested, and some of them have undertaken the necessary steps for involvement in the ENQA and ENQA VET networks, including the active participation in capacity building measures organised by both networks. The current quality assurance systems in higher education and VET vary across the countries of the region, depending on the societal constructions, specific contexts and institutional environments. The countries have

²⁶ Messages from the EYC Council in the field of education as a contribution to the discussion on the post-2010 Lisbon Strategy, Council of the European Union, November 2009.

²⁷ "European Year for combating poverty and social exclusion (2010) – Strategic Framework Document –", Official Journal of the European Union L 298, 7.11.2008, p.20.

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

²⁹ Recommendation of the European Parliament and the Council on the establishment of a European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training, 18 June 2009 (2009/C 155/01).

³⁰ Recommendation on Quality Assurance in Higher Education (2006/143/EC).

³¹ Conclusions of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States on developing the role of education in a fully-functioning knowledge triangle, Council of the European Union, November 2009.

agreed to strengthen the regional cooperation by sharing experiences, good practice, QA tools and instruments in HE and VET. They recognise the need for developing a pool of quality assurance experts from the region that (upon invitation) would be involved in external evaluation or would participate in the quality assurance bodies of different countries.

By addressing different aspects of assessment and evaluation in primary and secondary education on a regular basis since 2006, ERI SEE has contributed to developing a network of experts from the region who recognise the Initiative as a platform which supports mutual learning, exchange of experience and good practice. The establishment of the ERI SEE web-based forum on assessment and evaluation (2008) has enabled use of this medium for permanent support to the network. The experience so far has proved the relevance of the continuity of the support to the networking by organising seminars/workshops on topics relevant for improvement of the processes of assessment and evaluation in SEE.

In December 2009, the Zagreb seminar held under the title "Assessment and evaluation in SEE versus future challenges", brought to the conclusion that numerous challenges call for increased regional cooperation and intensive joint work in the region:

- There is potential for developing regional projects to address: the reading and understanding of PISA results; the need to identify the reasons that cause the trend of low performance in Mathematics and Science in SEE; the development of the capacities of teachers to cope the assessment, evaluation and quality assurance processes etc.
- The use of the ERI SEE forum on assessment and evaluation as a platform for continuation of the communication and joint work will be intensified.
- SEE experts will develop a questionnaire similar to the one of TIMMS, aiming to collect an encyclopaedia of topics of interest for the region for secondary analyses of the information produced with the international surveys.
- Having in view that equity in education is priority at policy level for all ERI SEE members, there is a challenge for ensuring equity in the processes of assessment and evaluation to pupils belonging to different categories of vulnerable groups in SEE, a complex region, rich of ethnic, religious and cultural differences.
- There is a challenge for the assessments community to be actively involved in the on-going intensive processes of development of NQFs, thus enabling adaptation of the assessment and evaluation processes to the learning outcomes oriented curricula and qualifications frameworks. NQFs are cover the lifelong learning span, thus posing additional challenges for assessment and evaluation.

Quality goes hand in hand with efficiency and equity in the education and training systems. Efficient and targeted investment in quality education and training will become one of the key objectives of the post-2010 Lisbon Strategy³². The Communication from the European Commission to the Council and to the European Parliament 'Efficiency and equity in European education and training systems'³³ addresses topics relevant for shaping the future regional cooperation in SEE. The report from the OECD Thematic Reviews on equal opportunity for education 'No More Failures-Ten Steps to Equity in Education' provides useful recommendations for policy development and implementation on the ERI SEE countries, too. Education and training policies can have a significantly positive impact on economic and social outcomes,

³² Messages from the EYC Council in the field of education as a contribution to the discussion on the post-2010 Lisbon Strategy, Brussels, November 2009.

³³ Commission of the European Communities: Communication from the Commission to the Council and to the European Parliament 'Efficiency and equity in European education and training systems', COM(2006) 481 final.

including sustainable development and social cohesion. Inequities in education and training have huge hidden costs. Policies which reduce such costs can deliver equity and efficiency benefits. Pre-primary education has the highest rates of return of the whole lifelong learning continuum, especially for the most disadvantaged, and the results of this investment build up over time. Spending policies targeted at reinforcing early education and tackling disadvantage from the earliest age are highly effective in efficiency and equity terms and justify high priority in the allocation of public and private expenditure. There is a need to increase the number of specially trained pre-primary teachers. Pre-service and in-service teacher training has direct impact on increased efficiency and equity of the systems.

In May 2009 (Zagreb, Croatia), the ERI SEE seminar addressed teacher training for inclusive education in countries with diverse social and cultural contexts and provided the following recommendations:

- As part of the support to the policy learning process in the region, ERI SEE to continue the practice of dissemination of information on European policy recommendations relevant for the role of education and training for development of equitable, knowledge based societies, including the teaching profession and equity in education;
- Having in view the objectives of the OECD project "Teacher Education for Diversity" and the activities foreseen until 2010, the SEE countries to consider their interest for participation in the project as a region. In case of positive feedback, the possible modes of involvement of the ERI SEE region in the project, including the financial contribution, to be elaborated with the OECD and further communicated to the ERI SEE Governing Board and Consultative Body for agreeing the future steps.
- Having in view that key policy directions are formulated driven by the findings of the international assessments in education (PISA, TIMMS etc.), the ERI SEE members to ensure continuity in their involvement in the international assessments.
- The National Centre for Staff Training in Pre-University Education of Romania (NCTPE), in collaboration with the relevant national authorities, to consider the possibility of making available for wider use by SEE professionals, the tools and publications produced and published in English language in framework of the project number EuropeAid/121446/D/SV/RO. The modalities of dissemination as well as the availability of the tools and publications to be jointly agreed by NCTPE and the ERI SEE Agency.
- Peer-learning visit to NCTPE of SEE experts, aiming at better acquainting with the Romanian system of professional development of teachers, to be organised.
- ERI SEE to support the dissemination of information on the Index of Inclusive Schools as a tool for developing inclusive schools.
- With the objective to achieve synergy of the activities at regional level, ERI SEE to continue the cooperation with the CoE, the ETF, the OECD and other international organisations and institutions, as well as with different donors active in the region (in particular with Austria, the Netherlands, Norway and Switzerland as ERI SEE donors).

Activities proposed:

3.3.1. Seminar of the network of the SEE national institutions on assessment and evaluation in pre-university education

ERI SEE will sustain the continuity of networking and peer-learning among the national institutions on assessment and evaluation which started in 2006. The topic of the seminar will be in line with the recommendations from 2009 and will be jointly agreed with the ERI SEE Secretariat.

16-17 December 2010

3.3.2. Continuation of the ERI SEE internet forum and blog on assessment and evaluation in pre-university education

The web-based ERI SEE forum and blog established in 2008 will continue to function as a regional platform which provides support to networking of experts in assessment and evaluation in primary and secondary education.

3.3.3. Continuation of the ERI SEE internet forum and blog on quality assurance in education

The web-based ERI SEE forum and blog on quality assurance in education, established in 2008, will continue to function as a regional platform which supports the regional networking of experts in quality assurance.

3.3.4. Provision of relevant information on quality and equity in education on the ERI SEE website

The updating of the library of documents on quality and equity in education available on the ERI SEE web page will continue in 2010.

3.4. Output 4: The knowledge triangle (education, research and innovation) has strengthened in South Eastern Europe

Background

In the period of the current economic downturn, SEE is increasingly becoming aware of the growing impact of the knowledge triangle on human capital development as a key priority of the region for finding innovative ways back to economic growth, sustainable development, competitiveness and for safeguarding equitable and inclusive societies³⁴. Innovation and creativity in the economy are closely connected with the quality and efforts made within education and research. In the knowledge triangle of education, research and innovation, education and higher education play a special role in promoting European standards in education and training, especially in the countries of the Western Balkans³⁵. For education to fulfill its role in the knowledge triangle, research and innovation objectives and outcomes need to feed back into education, with teaching and learning underpinned by a strong research base, and with teaching and learning environments developed and improved through greater incorporation of creative thinking and innovative attitudes and approaches³⁶. The Europe of knowledge, as seen in the post-2010 Lisbon Strategy³⁷, calls for education and training systems which promote: creative, innovative and entrepreneurial mindsets among pupils, trainees, students, teachers and researchers; the highest possible quality of initial and continuing professional development for teaching staff at all levels; and reinforced commitment to the development of, as well as complementarity between, a European Higher Education Area and a European Research Area.

Coordinated efforts of the region towards coherent development of education, higher education and research have been sustained since the establishment of the Task Force Building Human

³⁴ "Zagreb Plan of Action 2009-2010", Task Force Fostering & Building Human Capital of the Regional Cooperation Council, June 2009.

³⁵ "Strengthening Education in Europe" – Final Communiqué on the Outcome of Discussions on 17 March 2006 – IX Conference of European Ministers of Education.

³⁶ Conclusions of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States on developing the role of education in a fully-functioning knowledge triangle, Council of the European Union, 2978th EDUCATION, YOUTH AND CULTURE Council meeting, Brussels, November 2009.

³⁷ Messages from the EYC Council in the field of education as a contribution to the discussion on the post-2010 Lisbon Strategy, Brussels, November 2009.

Capital (TFBHC) of the RCC in 2008. The steered dialogue and cooperation of actors involved in the knowledge triangle were intensified in 2009, the major event being the International Conference "Fostering and Building Human Capital for Sustainable Knowledge Societies in South Eastern Europe" (Bucharest, March). Articulated in the Zagreb Action Plan 2009-2010, the TFBHC engagement is channelled along three action lines: human capital as a key factor of sustainable economic development, social cohesion and innovation; partnerships for innovation; regional cooperation and common areas of interest. The same year, ERI SEE developed activities under the three action lines: sustained the networking of the SEE VET agencies and institutions (Action line 1); in cooperation with KulturKontakt Austria and the OECD co-organised the regional workshop "Evidence Based Policy Making" (Action line 2); organised cooperation, peer-learning and exchange of good practice under the four ERI SEE thematic areas for regional cooperation, and was involved in the initiation of CKs for enabling sustained cooperation based on shared common topics of interest (Action line 3).

SEE governments, higher education institutions and students share the common objective of creating a European Higher Education and Research Area, and of supporting the fundamentals of the renewed Lisbon Strategy that knowledge societies and economies can only be realised through strong and socially responsive higher education institutions³⁸. In October 2009 three major events³⁹ focused on regional cooperation in higher education and highlighted the importance of taking actions to address difficult realities in all countries in the region. In line with the increased role of the knowledge triangle, the ERI SEE countries have committed themselves to work on:

- *Implementation of the Bologna Process* – Increase of the number of students acquiring quality higher education and developing higher education systems offering more opportunities and a more diverse higher education should become the basis for European and regional cooperation. Areas where regional cooperation could be strengthened for the benefit of all and which are fully in line with the Bologna objectives are: quality assurance, national qualifications frameworks including recognition, and promotion of mobility of students, academic and administrative staff. With regard to the social dimension of the Bologna Process and taking into consideration the inequality of opportunities of the students, academic and administrative staff, active involvement of the institutions and students from the region in the European cooperation programmes is necessary (e.g. Erasmus Mundus, Tempus, CEEPUS, Lifelong Learning Programme).
- *Development of research and innovation* – The EU Communication on the Western Balkans⁴⁰ proposed increased efforts to support research and researchers with the objective to decrease the flow of qualified researchers out of the region. The participation of the universities, research institutions and researchers from the Western Balkans countries in the 7th Framework Programme has increased thanks to the capacity building and human resources development undertaken so far. The role of the Steering Platform on Research for the Western Balkan countries and the Western Balkan INCO-NET is significant in this context. In 2009, under the auspices of the RCC, the SEE Ministers signed a Joint State-

³⁸ "Strengthening Higher Education and Research in South East Europe – Priorities for regional and European Cooperation"-Conclusions and recommendations for action adopted by participants to the EUA meeting in March 2006.

³⁹ Council of Europe Fifth Informal Meeting of Ministers from the Western Balkans (Ljubljana-Slovenia, 20-21 October; World Bank Conference on Financing Higher Education at a Time of Economic Crisis (Budva, Montenegro, 29-30 October and the Conference of the "Novi Sad Initiative" on Building Capacity to Change (Sarajevo, 30-31 October).

⁴⁰ Communication from the Commission 'The Western Balkans on the road to the EU: consolidation stability and raising prosperity', COM(2006) 27 final.

ment on developing a regional strategy on research and development for the Western Balkans and agreed to consider education, research and innovation in a comprehensive manner, moving from a fragmented to an integrated approach.

- *Institutional reforms and development* – The countries of the region will be successful in reaching the global goal to contribute to the development of a knowledge based society if the governments exercise trust in institutions and provide incentives for reform. The education institutions need to be autonomous and accountable to society and to work on improving their governance structures and management. There is a strong potential for regional cooperation in this domain.

ERI SEE will continue to support the "Novi Sad Initiative" (co-organiser of the second conference in 2007 and the third conference in 2009) and will seek synergy with the activities undertaken in its' framework, including entering the consortium of a regional Tempus project.

The peer-learning visit (Tirana, Albania, May 2009) to the Public Accreditation Agency for Higher Education of Albania organised for officials of the recently established national agencies of Bosnia and Herzegovina, UNMIK/Kosovo brought to conclusions and recommendations relevant for the future networking of the SEE national structures for quality assurance and accreditation in higher education:

- The organization of peer learning visits to continue in the future, but to ensure involvement of representatives of a higher number of SEE countries;
- The peer-learning to be organized in small groups, since they enable more efficient work and focus on practical issues;
- Regional events to be organized with the objective to discuss different aspects of QA (e.g. the European and international perspective of QA institutions and practices; identification of the state of art of QA, common problems and difficulties, as well as possible solutions);
- ERI SEE to support round-visits in the SEE region;
- SEE QA bodies and institutions to welcome the involvement of international experts in different procedures and working processes;
- Support to be provided for exchange of expertise between the agencies and to support building and strengthening bilateral and multilateral relations between the SEE agencies for QA in HE;
- Preparation and implementation of joint, QA centred projects, involving both agencies and HE institutions from two or more countries from the region (regional projects) to be supported.

In line with the adjustment of the priorities and the instruments for regional cooperation, ERI SEE will continue to support the networking and peer-learning of the national structures for quality assurance and accreditation in higher education of the SEE countries.

Activities proposed:

3.4.1. Enabling efficient networking of Bologna Process actors including the ERI SEE web-based forum and blog

Established in 2008, the ERI SEE internet forum and blog will continue to function as a regional platform which provides support to regional networking of Bologna Process actors.

3.4.2. Support to the networking and peer-learning among SEE bodies of quality assurance in higher education

This capacity building measure will support the networking and peer-learning among the SEE bodies for quality assurance in higher education. The focus of the peer-learning and the agenda of the peer-learning visit will be jointly agreed with the national quality assurance bodies in SEE.

15-18 November 2010

3.4.3. Provision of relevant information on the 'knowledge triangle' on the ERI SEE website

The work on updating the library of documents on the 'knowledge triangle' available on the ERI SEE website will continue in 2010.

3.5. Output 5: The SEE Education Initiative is recognised as a reliable regional partner in the education sector of South Eastern Europe

3.5.1. Organisation of ERI SEE Governing Board and Consultative Body meetings

The ERI SEE Governing Board and Consultative Body will meet twice in 2010. The meetings will be organised by the ERI SEE Agency and the interim operational structure for managing ERI SEE activities after the closure of the Agency. The agenda of the second meeting will include discussion on the European developments in the field of qualifications frameworks and briefings from the region on the progress made by the SEE countries.

3.5.2. Enhanced ERI SEE visibility and networking

- The ERI SEE publication 2010 will be prepared and published.
- The work of ERI SEE will be presented at different meetings and other events relevant for the cooperation in education and training.

3.5.3. Improvement of the ERI SEE website

The ERI SEE website will be further improved and enriched with information on education and training relevant for the region and in accordance with the objectives of the Initiative.

Aiming to enable informed decision of the Governing Board on the continuation of the ERI SEE forums and the blog, an evaluation of the actual usage of these platforms will be carried out in 2010. The methodology of work will be jointly agreed and the evaluation will be carried out by the ERI SEE Secretariat and the moderators of the five existing forums. The outcomes of the evaluation will be presented to the Governing Board members for recommendations and agreement if the findings have justified further support of this ICT based platform.

3.5.4. Office management and administration

Activities for office management and administration will be implemented continuously.

3.5.5. Planning and reporting activities

Progress reports (activity and financial reports) will be elaborated and presented to the members of the ERI SEE Governing Board and Consultative Body.

Regular auditing procedures in line with the generally accepted accounting principles will take place.

Draft ERI SEE Work Programme and Budget 2011 will be prepared and submitted to the ERI SEE Governing Board and Consultative Body for discussion and approval.