

ERI SEE

EDUCATION REFORM INITIATIVE OF SOUTH EASTERN EUROPE

Minutes of the Third ERI SEE Governing Board and Consultative Body meeting 26 November 2005, Ohrid, Macedonia

The third ERI SEE Governing Board and Consultative Body meeting was organized on the 26th November 2005, in Ohrid, Macedonia by the ERI SEE Secretariat and the Macedonian Ministry of Education and Science.

At the meeting there were present the nominated representatives of the Ministries of Education and alternate experts with the observer status, as following: present at the meeting were the nominated representatives of Albania, Kosovo, FYR of Macedonia, Romania, Task Force Education and Youth; experts having an observer status- representatives of Croatia, Serbia and Montenegro- Rep. of Serbia. Not represented at the meeting: Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria and Montenegro.

As regards the Consultative Body members, at the meeting were present the ambassador of Switzerland in Skopje, representatives of the Task Force Education and Youth, the Ministry of Education and Research of Norway, the Stability Pact, Bureau Cross- the Netherlands, the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation-Switzerland, the European Training Foundation, the European University Association, Kulturkontakt-Austria and the OECD.

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

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

1. Report on establishment of the ERI SEE Secretariat

An update on the situation of the ERI SEE Secretariat legal and institutional framework has been presented by Ms. Ida Skevin, the representative of the Croatian Ministry of Science, Education and Sports.

As indicated, the ERI SEE Secretariat has been established in Croatia as a national governmental agency with the approval of the Government on 20 January 2005 (published in the Official Journal)

and entering into force by 1 February 2005. The Governing Board members have been nominated by the Government as well as the acting director- Ms. Luminita Matei. The venue of the Secretariat is provided at the Centre for Technological Transfer within the University of Zagreb. The running costs and the furniture have been paid by the Croatian Ministry of Science, Education and Sport.

A statute of the Agency has been elaborated by the legal department of the Ministry, forwarded to the representatives of the Task Force and GB members for comments and observations, the final version been agreed upon by all the GB members. The letter on the GB's consent on the text of the Statute has been sent out by the TFEY on Tuesday, 22 November.

The following steps are envisaged by the Croatian authorities:

- Endorsement of the Agency's statute by the Government based on the approval of this document at the level of the GB members by other relevant Croatian ministries and approval of the Government
- Finalizing all the legal aspects: end of December 2005

Several participants have raised the issue of a sound financial management and in this respect it was recommended to have in the Secretariat an accountant or accounting services contracted. The director of the agency indicated some possibilities for covering this service: using the accountant of CTT or contracting a company. This aspect will be clarified in accordance with the current available budget and discussions with the Croatian authorities and CTT representatives. Information on this subject will be provided to the GB and CB members.

The Norwegian representative stressed the importance of external audit to be performed in accordance with the International standards of auditing, as a request in accordance with the rules that govern the Norwegian support.

2. Reports on ERI SEE activities – first semester 2005

The executive director of the ERI SEE Secretariat has sent in advance a report on the activities promoted by the Secretariat in 2005, with elements regarding: the results of the seminars on capacity building measures, thematic seminar on higher education, forthcoming events already contracted and the first issue of the ERI SEE Newsletter.

A proposal accepted by the other members of the GB and CB has been put forward by the Romanian representative to mention specifically the impact of ERI SEE activities on the ministries of education from the region in activity reports. For fulfilling this task it has been agreed that the GB members will support the work undertaken by the director of the agency in this respect.

3. Preliminary financial issues 2005

The preliminary financial situation has been prepared in cooperation with the Task Force Education and Youth which supports ERI SEE during the transitional period, until the settlement of the Agency in Croatia. It was presented to the Governing Board in written form. The preliminary situation indicates the amounts donated by each institutions and type of spending for the events organised in 2005 and the estimation for the forthcoming events in 2005.

A complete financial report for 2005 will be presented in 2006.

4. Internal documents that regulate the activity of the ERI SEE Agency

In accordance with the stipulations of the Statute of ERI SEE Agency, several documents need to be prepared by the director and submitted for approval to the CB and GB members. For the meeting, the director has submitted a draft of the following documents:

- Internal Organizational Rules of the Agency
- Rules of Procedure for the Governing Board meeting
- Rules of Procedure for the Consultative Body meeting

The GB and CB members have made a series of observations regarding the stipulations of some articles proposed into the Internal Organizational Rules of the Agency' document. Observations referred to the text of the articles and concrete proposals have been made. It has been decided that the director of the agency makes the necessary changes and submits the document for approval to the GB and CB members.

A reserved position has been expressed by the Romanian representative – as regarding the adoption of the document since the financial responsibilities are not clear yet.

The document needs to be translated into Croatian language and observations are expected from the legal department of the Croatian Ministry of Education.

5. ERI SEE 2006 working programme

A document presenting the objectives, instruments and activities to be followed in 2006 within ERI SEE has been prepared by the director of Secretariat, taking into consideration the main directions discussed and agreed in the second meeting of the GB and CB in Podgorica, May 2005. In this respect it has been proposed to follow the main direction: continuing capacity building measures for preparing participation to the LLL Community Programme, working on European Qualification Framework and National Qualifications Framework, Quality in Education, ICT in education and other seminars to be organised based on the recommendation of the GB and CB members.

The representative of the Bureau Cross made the proposal that has been accepted by all the other members of the GB and CB to organise a meeting in the Netherlands on the topic included in the agenda of the Austrian Presidency: quality in education, with a focus on school inspection. This seminar may be combined with the GB and CB meeting in the spring of 2006.

The representative of the European Training Foundation indicated that the working programme of ETF is to be finalized in few days and the focus will be on EQF-NQF and as the main instrument: peer learning. It has been indicated that the role of ETF in the working programme of ERI SEE has been correctly defined.

In order to additionally support the implementation of the programme, the Norwegian Ministry of Education and Science is ready to support a study visit of a group of experts participating in the seminars organised by ERI SEE to the Norwegian institution managing the Community programme for education and training. It also has been indicated that Norway may contribute with extra funding taking into consideration the costs of the visit.

The European University Association (EUA) in cooperation with the Austrian Presidency will organise a meeting, following the Bucharest seminar organised in cooperation with ERI SEE in July 2005, with the main theme being the link between higher education and research.

The OECD representative indicated that the project on "Education Development for Students at Risk and those with Disabilities" will continue in 2006, policy reports will be submitted for approval to the ministries of education participating to the project. Additionally, funds will be allotted in 2006 for small national projects to improve the situation on statistics and data gathering. A teacher training activity will take possibly take place in May 2006 in co-operation with the Ministry of Education of Israel. Five countries of the region are participating, respectively: Bulgaria, Romania, Montenegro, Serbia and Croatia. Preparations to participate in PISA 2009 will already start in 2007.

The Macedonian GB representative indicated that is very important that following the developments registered within ERI SEE to be followed with bilateral projects, twinning projects, including with the countries from the region: e.g. with Romania and Bulgaria. It is also very important that within ERI SEE Senior officials meetings the issue of donor coordination is going to be approached.

Capacity building measures for project management, the issue of brain drain and the link between education and research are topics of importance for Albania, as has been indicated by the GB representative that could be followed within ERI SEE.

For increasing the effectiveness of the regional approach it is important to ensure consistency and continuity when participating to international meetings, conferences that involve developments in SEE, as indicated by the Romanian GB representative. As a consequence of the international meeting on VET, held by Romania in October 2005 where the ministries of education participating in ERI SEE activities have been invited, it was proposed for 2006 to work on establishing a network of quality in VET experts in the region.

Austria will work on projects related to EQF and NQF and concrete proposals will follow soon. The Swiss colleagues indicated their interest in being involved and supporting activities that are ensuring the link between education and employment, considering as being important for the regional approach. Having in mind the Swiss experience in VET – there are opportunities for further assistance in the field to the ministries from the region.

Several GB and CB members have indicated that ERI SEE should lobby for support and an increased participation of experts from other European countries such as Czech Republic, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia.

The ERI SEE Secretariat will include all the observations and proposal in the document detailing the 2006 working programme and will send for adoption to the GB and CB members.