



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

**PROGRESS REPORT<sup>1</sup>**

**on recent developments regarding S&T cooperation in/with the WBC  
(June 2009 - October 2009)**

**1 Policy actions**

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**2 Legislative initiatives - development of the legal and strategic framework**

Update of the strategic framework: The Zagreb Plan of Action 2009-2010, outlining important strategic mid-term priorities of the Task Force Fostering and Building Human Capital, was adopted in the second meeting of the Task Force. See point 3 for further information.

**3 Important events, meetings, training activities, etc.**

Second Meeting of the Task Force Fostering and Building Human Capital

The second meeting of the Task Force took place on 24 June 2009 in Zagreb and was kindly hosted by the Croatian Co-Chairmanship. The Task Force agreed to engage in cooperative action to enable an effective and sustained implementation of its mandate now and up to 2011, focusing on three major action lines:

1. Human capital as a key factor for sustainable economic development, social cohesion and innovation
2. Partnerships for innovation – innovative partnerships
3. Regional cooperation and common areas of interest

Bearing in mind that human capital represents a key factor for sustainable economic development, for social cohesion and innovation, the importance of political lobbying and networking in the field of education, training, science and research within the framework of the RCC was reiterated.

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<sup>1</sup> The progress reports are collected in preparation of the meetings of the Steering Platform on Research for the Western Balkan Countries and will be provided for download from the WBC-INCO.Net homepage ([www.wbc-inco.net](http://www.wbc-inco.net)) about one week before the meeting takes place. Therefore please submit your report to [heribert.buchbauer@bmf.gv.at](mailto:heribert.buchbauer@bmf.gv.at) by Oct. 16, 2009.

Relevant follow-up activities to the Bucharest conference, such as the implementation of a regional workshop on evidence based policy making and the possibility of organizing clusters of knowledge in view of fostering the creation of mechanisms for sustainable cooperation and dialogue, have been agreed on and the Zagreb Plan of Action for the period 2009 – 2010, to be obtained in the appendix, was approved.

Task Force participation in the High-Level Expert Panel Meeting aimed at stimulating in-depth discussion on economic and financial measures in response to the current crisis

The meeting was held by the RCC Secretariat on 17 September 2009 in Sarajevo and started preliminary discussions on priority areas and projects of regional character in South East Europe which would ensure accelerated and sustainable economic and social development of the region and raise its infrastructural capacities. The meeting initiated discussions on the elaboration of a regional platform to be presented at a high-level conference on the Western Balkans, to be organized by the Swedish Presidency of the EU Council and the European Commission on 9 December 2009 in Brussels. As a follow-up to this high-level expert panel the Task Force was invited to forward three bullets of input regarding priority areas in which the region of South East Europe could move forward and address the consequences of the financial and economic crisis and which the RCC will formulate into conclusions of the meeting. In this context the Task Force Leadership suggested possible priority areas, taking into account the three main action lines of the Zagreb Plan of Action. The Task Force proposal regarding future priority areas “Towards SEE Innovative Knowledge Societies for the 21st Century” can be obtained in the appendix.

#### **4 Development of international cooperation and actions on integration into ERA**

Mobility Programme for Capacity Building in Regional Cooperation

The Task Force is implementing a mobility programme for capacity building in regional cooperation, which was designed as a support measure to avoid potential shortages on middle-level civil servants who are acquainted with and capable of managing regional activities and programmes in education, science and research. The programme is based on short-term placements and should provide partner Ministries in South Eastern Europe with impulses and possibilities for a sustainable development of capacities and know-how of relevance for their obligations in regional cooperation. The programme is funded by the Austrian Co-chairmanship and made available six grants for civil servants from Signatory Ministries responsible for education, science and research of the Istanbul MoU in 2009. From 21 September to 4 October 2009 three participants from the Republic of Moldova and from Montenegro had the possibility to gain an insight into the work of key institutions and networks in the area of cooperation for building human capital in Vienna, Zagreb and Sarajevo. The next placement cycle is to begin on 2 November 2009.

#### **5 Statistics - major changes / updates of relevant statistical data**

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## **6 Assessment of the developments and outlook on the next 6 months**

### Regional Workshop on “Evidence Based Policy Making”

The regional workshop on “Evidence Based Policy Making” will take place in Vienna on 9-10 November 2009 and is organised by KulturKontakt Austria, the Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development and the Education Reform Initiative of South Eastern Europe in the framework of the Task Force Fostering and Building Human Capital of the Regional Cooperation Council. The Bucharest Conference on “Fostering and Building Human Capital for Sustainable Knowledge Societies in South Eastern Europe”, organised by the Task Force in March 2009, highlighted the importance of evidence-based policy making in the field of education. Further exchange of experience amongst policy makers on effective approaches to evidence informed policy making has therefore been included as one of the priorities of the action plan of the Task Force. This regional workshop will offer a platform to continue the discussion process initiated in Bucharest. Taking research in current key areas of education development as examples the workshop will focus on the interaction between educational research and policy development in order to enhance the innovation capacity of education systems in the development towards quality, equity and efficiency. The thematic focus will be on teacher evaluation, the impact of external student assessment on education systems and the impact of international studies.

### Task Force Event dealing with the economic crisis’ impact on education, science and research

Given the current economic and financial crisis and taking into account the major action lines identified and agreed upon in the Zagreb Plan of Action, the Task Force agreed to organise a meeting dealing with the economic crisis’ impact on education, science and research. This event will take place in Zagreb, on 18 November 2009 and will offer a platform for discussing possible future priority areas, in which the region of South East Europe could move forward and address the consequences of the financial and economic crisis, also in view of establishing clusters of knowledge.

### **Appendix: additional data**

- Zagreb Plan of Action 2009 – 2010
- Task Force proposal regarding future priority areas “Towards SEE Innovative Knowledge Societies for the 21st Century”

## **ZAGREB PLAN OF ACTION 2009-2010**

*The Task Force Fostering and Building Human Capital of the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC), on the occasion of its meeting on 24 June 2009 in Zagreb,*

*Reaffirming* its aim to promote coherency and coordination between education, training, higher education, research and science by creating a platform for dialogue and cooperation of actors involved in these sectors;

*In consideration* of its working methods and instruments as endorsed by the RCC Board on 10 June 2008 and the Guidelines for its Functioning adopted by the Task Force Members on 19 February 2009;

*Taking into account* the Memorandum of Understanding between the Ministers responsible for Education, Science and Research in South Eastern Europe and its Framework for Action signed in Istanbul on 4 May 2007;

*In recognition* of the achievements of the Regional Cooperation Council in the area of Building Human Capital since its establishment in 2008 and the significant progress made in regional research cooperation via the Steering Platform on Research for the Western Balkan Countries as well as in the field of education through the regionally owned Education Reform Initiative of South Eastern Europe (ERI SEE);

*Convinced* that in the face of the current economic down-turn human capital development is a key priority for the SEE region for finding innovative ways back to economic growth, sustainable development, competitiveness and for safeguarding equitable and inclusive societies;

*Aware* of the growing impact of the “knowledge triangle” on the economic and social development in SEE;

*Taking note* of the Joint Statement of the Ministerial Conference – Developing a Regional Strategy on Research and Development for the Western Balkans, Sarajevo, 24 April 2009, and, inter alia, the agreement of the Ministers from the Western Balkans to consider education, research and innovation in a comprehensive manner, moving from a fragmented to an integrated approach;

*Taking into account* the results of the International Conference of the Task Force on “Fostering and Building Human Capital for Sustainable Knowledge Societies in South Eastern Europe” that took place on 6-7 March 2009 in Bucharest;

*Responding* to the Conference Conclusions and Recommendations prepared by the Leadership of the Task Force;

*Agrees* to engage in cooperative action to enable an effective and sustained implementation of its mandate now and up to 2011, such as:

**Action line 1: Human capital as a key factor for sustainable economic development, social cohesion and innovation**

- a) Political lobbying within the framework of the RCC on highlighting the role of education, training, science and research as paramount factors for sustainable economic development and knowledge-based growth as well as towards policy measures aiming at enhancing innovation capacities and fostering excellence in education and research in SEE;
- b) Lobbying for the further promotion of a new policy culture in order to approach education, science, research and innovation in a comprehensive manner shifting from a fragmented to a holistic approach for human capital development. This will be also of importance as regards the development of a Regional Strategy on Research and Development for the Western Balkans;
- c) Continued cooperation between the ERI SEE and the emerging networks of VET Agencies and Institutions from SEE;
- d) Facilitating and lobbying for the elaboration of Multi-Beneficiary IPA projects promoting HCD;
- e) Promoting synergies with other events and actions organised by institutions acting in SEE in the field of HCD and encouragement of the submission of project proposal under EU programmes targeting fostering and building human capital;

**Action line 2: Partnerships for innovation – innovative partnerships**

- f) Provision of a platform for debate and discussion for the promotion of new strategic partnerships and comprehensive instruments for participation and ownership of key stakeholders in fields of policy-making, generating evidence, sustainable development, local and regional development. This concerns stakeholders from public administration, the business sector, education, training and research providers and civil society, involving also students, parents, employees and employers. In this context, also Issues of social capital will need to be addressed;
- g) Enhanced lobbying with other relevant stakeholders for policy learning activities;
- h) Cooperation with European and international institutions and organizations acting in the region in view of building and fostering human capital;

- i) Implementation of relevant follow-up activities to the 2009 Bucharest Conference, such as the envisaged joint regional follow-up workshop of the ERI SEE and KulturKontakt Austria on Evidence based policy making in Vienna;
- j) Participation in relevant fora and activities, in order to strengthen human capital aspects in regional development (i.e. EREF) and in sustainable development;
- k) Implementation of a Capacity Building Programme for Regional Cooperation as a measure of stakeholder empowerment and capacity building as well as a contribution to the strengthening of sustainable regional partnerships. Funded in 2009 by the Austrian Co-chairmanship and implemented in cooperation with regional partner institutions and networks, this programme is designed as a support measure to Istanbul MoU Signatory Ministries in managing regional activities and programmes in education, science and research and consists of short-term placements at key institutions and networks in the area of cooperation for building human capital;
- l) Facilitating mobility schemes for students, teachers, education managers and researchers by providing access to information related to potential hosting institutions;

### **Action line 3: Regional cooperation and common areas of interest**

- m) Close cooperation with the RCC, in particular through its Senior Expert on Fostering and Building Human Capital and fostering strong partnerships with the respective Chairmanship-in-Office of the South East European Cooperation Process (SEEC), including potentially also the organisation of joint events;
- n) Continued activities in strengthening regional cooperation within the framework of Istanbul Memorandum of Understanding and the RCC priority area of building human capital, ensuring peer learning and developing joint best practices;
- o) Furthering close links and cooperative structures to stakeholders in the economic sector and other priority areas of the RCC in order to contribute to the coherent and sustainable approach to building human capital (e.g. eSEE Initiative, South East Regional Centre for Entrepreneurial Learning, ReSPA);
- p) Promotion and management of an innovative networking between relevant networks by providing a structure facilitating their cooperation;
- q) Close cooperation and exchange with relevant regional networks and projects, i.e. ERI SEE, Steering Platform on Research, WBC-Inco.net, See-Era.Net, in particular by jointly engaging in making existing experiences visible, supporting their dissemination as well as in fostering the exchange of experience in SEE. This also should contribute to operationalising policies as a precondition for achieving long-term development goals. Furthermore, ensuring peer learning and developing joint best practice will be of crucial importance;
- r) Continuation of the Task Force website ([www.taskforcehumancapital.info](http://www.taskforcehumancapital.info)) including an online calendar of events of relevance for regional cooperation in view of enhancing

coordination, fostering the exchange of information and experiences and contributing to cross border regional development in SEE. In this regard, also mobility and exchange programmes should be strengthened by contributing to an enhanced dissemination of information on existing instruments in cooperation with other networks and stakeholders;

- s) Assisting in the organisation of clusters of knowledge (CoKs) fostering the creation of mechanisms for sustainable cooperation and dialogue. These clusters should sustain cooperation based on shared common topics of interest (i.e. HC and regional development, policy learning, sustainable development, labour markets and competitiveness) in view of enhancing coherency and resource management. CoKs should be organized only in case a member and/or institutions from SEE is taking the initiative to lead for a particular thematic area. Their role would be to contribute to the creation of knowledge and to support policy development, policy in action and policy evaluation in view of national needs;

*Requests* the Task Force Leadership to promote and facilitate this Plan of Action and to decide on all matters pertaining its implementation;

*Invites* members and relevant institutions to take the lead and/or to actively participate in Task Force Clusters of Knowledge as well as to provide information to the TF Secretariat on relevant regional activities, events and developments for sharing via the TF Website;

*Invites* partner Ministries and institutions in a position to do so, to provide “hosting weeks” or grants for sustaining and further developing the TF Capacity Building Programme into a regional exchange and mobility programme for public administrators in education, science and research and will itself seek cooperation with the Regional School for Public Administration (ReSPA) in the context of the continuation of this initiative;

*Notes* that while sustainable international partnerships and support by donors continue to be important factors for the success of regional cooperation networks, contributions from the region should gradually be extended as a sign of shared responsibility and ownership;

*Requests* the Chairmanship to provide an update of the implementation of the Plan of Action at subsequent TF meetings;

*Takes note* of the proposed timeline to hold the next regular TF meeting in spring/summer 2010.

Annex 2: Task Force proposal regarding future priority areas “Towards SEE Innovative Knowledge Societies for the 21st Century”

**Priority areas for Regional Cooperation in the Framework of the High-Level Expert Panel aimed at stimulating in-depth discussion on economic and financial measures in response to the current crisis**

**TOWARDS SEE INNOVATIVE KNOWLEDGE SOCIETIES  
FOR THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY**

In context of the current global crisis, also SEE is confronted with a series of economic and social challenges. Immediate and efficient measures are required for finding innovative ways back to economic growth, sustainable development, competitiveness and for safeguarding equitable and inclusive societies. In particular investments in human capital - a *sine qua non* for any SEE country's long term prosperity - through education, training, science and research have a paramount role to play in this regard.

Taking into account the three main action lines of the Zagreb Plan of Action 2009-2010 endorsed by the Task Force on 24 June 2009, the following three priority areas are suggested as a contribution to fulfilling the above mentioned goals:

**Action line 1:** Human capital as a key factor for sustainable economic development, social cohesion and innovation

Proposed priority area:

**Fostering efficiency, innovation and governance: Promoting research on the economics of education, peer learning and capacity building**

In the context of budgetary constraints on the one hand and the increasing role of the human capital factor for innovation, prosperity and sustainable economic and social development in SEE on the other hand, fostering efficiency and good governance in education, training, and research is a priority.

**Action line 2:** Partnerships for innovation – innovative partnerships

Proposed priority area:

**Developing learning regions and environments: Promoting networks, partnerships for innovation and the knowledge triangle**

In order to increase the innovative capacities of SEE societies, new forms partnerships and cooperation among key stakeholders in education and training, research, business and public sectors need to be further developed. Innovative partnerships are an imperative for territorial competitiveness, sustainable development and social cohesion as part of successful regional development.

**Action line 3:** Regional cooperation and common areas of interest

Proposed priority area:

**Making lifelong learning a reality: Regional cooperation on the implementation of LLL strategies in SEE in the context of governance**

Comprehensive LLL strategies and their implementation have been identified as a priority for the development of knowledge societies. Especially in a time of quickly changing qualification requirements and increasing unemployment, it is necessary to put lifelong learning strategies into practice.