



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 (SEECF), 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) 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.