

WESTERN

WORK

BALKANS

FOR

BASED

ALLIANCE

LEARNING

JOINT STATEMENT

Endorsed by Participants of the Conference “Building a Western Balkans Alliance for Work-Based Learning”

Vienna, 18th May 2016

The Berlin Process has been demonstrating strong political support for the European perspective of the Western Balkans. It has also created a positive momentum for regional cooperation in the Western Balkans. At the second Summit Meeting on the Western Balkans, held in Vienna on 27th August 2015, the participating heads of States agreed to support the development of high quality vocational education and training systems in the region based on the ‘Roadmap to a sustainable apprentice system’.

It is in this regard that we - representatives of public and private sector entities from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, in addition Austria, Croatia, France, Germany, Italy, Slovenia, as well as representatives of the European Commission, International Financial Institutions and other multilateral and bilateral institutions - encourage greater cooperation between the public and the private sectors, with the objective of better understanding our respective contributions towards a labor market and company and practice oriented high quality vocational education and training (VET), with emphasis on work-based learning and apprenticeships. This is also in line with the European Alliance for Apprenticeships, to which the majority of these participating countries adhere.

This Joint Statement will be presented on the occasion of the third Summit Meeting on the Western Balkans, held in Paris on 4th July 2016.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We recognize that high quality vocational education and training systems contribute to the improvement of the policy framework for investments and supports economic growth by increasing the availability of qualified human resources. Youth unemployment can be reduced through attractive and inclusive VET systems which integrate well-functioning elements of dual apprenticeship systems and other forms of work based learning. High quality VET systems thus are an important instrument for promoting social cohesion. Fostering elements of dual VET is therefore among the reform priorities in all countries in the Western Balkans.

There has been considerable progress in developing partnerships with business in the process of piloting the introduction of dual elements and other forms of work based learning. While stressing that the responsibility and accountability for VET ultimately lie with governments, this Joint Statement fully recognizes the diverse forms of engagement needed by the private sector to support VET, together with VET institutions and civil society in particular social partners.

Recognizing the private sector as an equal, complementary partner in discussing and identifying solutions and actions to promote VET, we jointly agree to the shared principles presented below. Together we will consider possibilities for coordinated actions over coming years that would positively impact VET. In promoting such coordination, collaboration and effective country-grounded joint strategies, we seek to turn the diversity of VET-actors into an asset for the region.

This Western Balkan Alliance for Work Based Learning contributes to the improvement of quality and relevance of Europe's Vocational Education and Training systems as outlined in the 2015 ET2020 Joint Report, and by the Ministers in charge of VET in the 2015 Riga conclusions agreeing on a new set of medium-term deliverables for the period 2015-2020. Close links should be established with the work already being done in Europe within the context of the Copenhagen process, the European Alliance for Apprenticeships and the Pact for Youth.

SHARED PRINCIPLES

We, the participants of this conference, recognize the importance of the following principles to maximize the benefit of coordination and collaboration to support high quality, labor market relevant, attractive and inclusive VET:

- (1) Practice-orientation of Vocational Education and Training: VET should meet the demands of labor market and private sector in the countries. This would be an essential contribution to enhance the employability of people.
- (2) Providing a variety of VET offers to meet the diverse needs: The proportion of education and training provided in a vocational school or in a company depends on the general conditions in the partner country as well as on the specificities of economic sectors. Different VET offers increase the prospects for youth getting access to relevant educational services and skills development. The private sector should always be involved in order to meet the needs of local labor markets and economies.
- (3) Make VET offers accessible and inclusive: Especially in rural areas and for disadvantaged and marginalized groups of population. Sustainable development needs a broad basis and should include the highest degree possible of

man/woman empowerment within the whole country. Therefore it is essential that VET also meets the diverse needs of learners.

- (4) Programs and projects that strengthen national VET systems should ideally take into account all levels of the system (macro, meso and micro level). Therefore, VET offers should always be part of the existing VET systems. They should be planned in close collaboration with partner governments, responsible local authorities or other local institutions and the private sector.

THE WAY FORWARD

On the basis of the shared principles mentioned above, we will engage in a new process for cooperation and will encourage all interested partners to join on a voluntary basis. This process aims to be a key pillar in the Berlin Process on the path to realizing EU 2020 and SEE 2020 Goals as well as the Sustainable Development Goals, in particular Goal 4 aiming to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.

We aim to develop concrete initiatives for

- sharing lessons learned in the introduction of dual apprenticeship elements and other forms of work-based learning, including coordination with school-based programs, and on how to move from pilot projects to sustainable changes in the VET systems
- facilitating stronger regional partnership mechanisms between private sector actors, governments, VET institutions and civil society which improve the collaboration and help to identify and use synergies of ongoing activities
- attracting companies to apprenticeships and work-based learning and building the capacity of local private sector actors as partners for VET
- showcasing the powerful and positive role that innovative partnerships between the private sector and VET providers can play
- developing tools and supporting learning
- shaping a conducive environment for labor and VET learning mobility that turns brain drain into brain gain
- providing and further exploring innovative financing solutions that help to leverage investments of private capital

We ask interested representatives who support the Western Balkans Alliance for Work Based Learning, notably the Education Reform Initiative of South East Europe and the Western Balkans Chambers Investment Forum, to explore options of how to build on the momentum, further strengthen the dialogue and enhance cooperation between the public and the private sectors in the region. The Western Balkan Alliance will be linked to the European Alliance for Apprenticeships in order to ensure synergies and complementarity for a stronger impact.

ANNEX: LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

BUILDING A WESTERN BALKANS ALLIANCE FOR WORK-BASED LEARNING

TOWARDS A COMPANY- AND PRACTICE-ORIENTED HIGH-QUALITY VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING (VET)

Conference in the Framework of the Berlin Process

Wednesday, May 18th, 2016 - Thursday, May 19th, 2016

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as per May 13th, 2016

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