



Joint proposal

by

Task Force Education and Youth / Enhanced Graz Process

and

Ministries of Education and Higher Education of
Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, FYR of Macedonia, Kosovo,
Moldova, Montenegro, Romania and Serbia

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1. Background:

Education and training play an important role in responding to the challenges of knowledge societies, globalisation and the enlargement of the EU. This has also been acknowledged by the European Commission and the European Council, which have requested that Education and Training be explicitly recognised as a key priority domain in the Lisbon strategy.

The Task Force Education and Youth/Enhanced Graz Process actively promotes education and youth issues in the region recognising the crucial role those issues play for CEE and SEE countries on their way to becoming member states of the European Union.

Building upon the systematic approach of the so called "Strategy 2001" the Task Force Education and Youth/Enhanced Graz Process within the framework of the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe has set two objectives for its future work:

- to continue its support of national education reform efforts in the perspective of the EU integration and
- to actively promote regional co-operation at system, expert and civil society level in support of the Stabilisation and Association Processes.

Both aims substantially promote and are fully in line with the two main strategic objectives of the Stability Pact for 2003, namely enhanced complementarity with the SAP and regional and cross-border co-operation.

Having successfully supported education reform processes in a number of SEE countries so far and the inclusion of SEE countries into the European Union becoming more tangible, the overall TFEY strategy in the field of education and youth will now lay a stronger focus on linking these developments more closely. As EU countries have now embarked for the first time on developing common European indicators and benchmarks in education, SEE countries will need to take even more strongly into account European trends and developments. Meeting European standards in education will be a precondition for the inclusion into the wider European Area of Education.

The Ministries of Education and Higher Education in South Eastern Europe and the Task Force Education and Youth/Enhanced Graz Process now propose an initiative aimed at supporting education reform implementation in South Eastern Europe, taking into account both country-specific needs and demands in education reform as well as present trends in the development of the envisaged European Area of Education, as outlined in the EU "Detailed Work Programme on the follow-up of the objectives of education and training systems in Europe"¹, the "Bologna Process" and the "Bruges-Copenhagen Process".

The Education Reform Initiative of South Eastern Europe will serve as an interface between ongoing SEE education reform at national level and European trends in order to promote common European standards in education.

¹ Hereafter referred to as "EU Work Programme"

The detailed action plan of the ERI SEE, identifying 9 priority areas for educational reform, was endorsed on the occasion of the Second Working Meeting of Senior Officials from South Eastern Europe in Predeal/Romania (May 29-31, 2003). Ministers of Education of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, FYR Macedonia, Serbia and Montenegro signed the Memorandum of Understanding at the EU Education Ministers Conference, on 28 June in Nicosia (Cyprus), in the presence of the Greek EU-Presidency and the Stability Pact, demonstrating their commitment to the ERI SEE's reform agenda. Albania and Moldova signed the Memorandum of Understanding on the ERI SEE during the Stability Pact Regional Table Meeting held in Tirana on 5. December 2003. It is expected that Croatia, Kosovo and Romania will join the Memorandum in 2004.

Supporting the idea of regional ownership, the overall co-ordination of ERI SEE will be transferred to the region by the end of 2004 through the establishment of a Secretariat. The respective selection procedure is based on a transparent tender procedure launched amongst all signatory ministries of the MoU in February 2004. Respective terms of references will be published on the SEE-ECN (<http://www.see-educoop.net>) and additionally sent out to Task Force members.

2. ERI SEE Priorities:

The following priority areas for education development and reform are based on the recommendations of two meetings of Senior Officials from Education Ministries in South Eastern Europe held in Vienna (December 2002) and Predeal (May 2003):

- Adjustment and review of existing national legal frameworks in line with ongoing European developments and national reform priorities;
- Decentralisation of education management and administration, with a focus on quality enhancement and accountability;
- Development of education management information systems and quality assurance mechanisms;
- Curriculum reform in line with European trends and developments;
- Widening access to quality education and ensuring equal opportunities - taking account of gender equality - for national minorities, especially Roma communities, and other disadvantaged groups including members of low income groups, people with disabilities, citizens from isolated rural communities, etc.
- Promotion of education for democratic citizenship in both formal and non-formal education programmes;
- Ensuring access to, and effective use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT).
- Development of opportunities for lifelong learning as a key means to stimulate economic regeneration in the region
- VET, especially establishing links between education and labour market;

These priorities specifically address the most important educational needs in the region. They are fully in line with the three strategic goals identified by the European Commission for the “Detailed Work Programme on the Follow-up of the Objectives of Education and Training Systems in Europe”² as well as the Copenhagen Declaration and the Bologna Process.

The Senior Officials also emphasised the relevance of all 13 objectives and 42 associated key issues objectives within the “EU Work Programme” to the development of quality education provision in the region. In this context, they highlighted the importance of the following issues if long-term success is to be achieved:

- Securing sufficient funding for sustainable educational development
- Ensuring general public support for education reform
- Developing improved channels for communication between institutions and governments both within the countries of the region, and at European and international level
- Developing human resources and institutional capacity

ERI SEE aims to contribute to the overall objective of educational development in the region through focusing upon improvement of structured communication, and development of institutional capacity.

3. ERI SEE instruments:

Acknowledging the strategic framework within existing Stabilisation and Association Agreements, the following instruments are envisaged to facilitate implementation:

Core activities:

- **Regular meetings (twice a year) in the region of Senior Officials** from Ministries of Education and Higher Education from South Eastern Europe and other European countries including representatives of the civil society within the framework of the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe Task Force Education and Youth. These meetings will serve as a forum to exchange experience made in the reform implementation, to foster support partnerships, to discuss issues of regional concern and to formulate joint recommendations on education reform and on concrete action plans and timetables. This forum of Senior Officials will also review the overall implementation of the “Education Reform Initiative of South Eastern Europe”. Once fully established, ERI SEE’s Governing Board and Consultative Body will convene back to back with the Senior Official Meetings.

² Priorities 1 – 4 and 9 fall within Strategic Objective 1: Improving the quality and effectiveness of education and training systems; priorities 5 – 7 and 9 are in line with Strategic Objective 2:

The next Senior Official Meeting will take place in Croatia in May 2004. Amongst other issues participants will decide on the location of the Secretariat, nominations for the GB members and will also further discuss the ERI SEE work programme.

Previous Meetings in Vienna (December 2002) and Predeal (May 2003) have defined the general framework, priority areas of this initiative and prepared a respective Memorandum of Understanding signed by the Ministers from South Eastern Europe. During the third working meeting of Senior Officials held in Belgrade (December 2003) participants discussed the results of the EU interim objective report, decided upon the ERI SEE programme for 2004 and discussed the terms of references of the ERI SEE Secretariat.

- **Build capacity in key areas of educational reform** especially with respect to the shared goals and thirteen objectives of the “EU Work Programme”.

Capacity building measures in this respect will aim at both, policy makers and education experts. Seminars and other measures for policy makers will not only provide information on evolving European indicators and benchmarks but also provide policy advice on their implementation on a national level. Capacity building measures for experts will mainly provide targeted training on educational developments in response to newly identified standards.

These measures will be supplemented by workshops offered in the framework of the South Eastern European Educational Co-operation Network (SEE-ECN), which more specifically aims at issues of national policy reform in South Eastern Europe.

On the occasion of the 2nd Working Meeting in Predeal/Romania (May 29 – 31, 2003) Senior Officials from SEE agreed that in order to implement the ERI SEE action plan, expert seminars should be organised. Such seminars will support national reform in a specified area with regard to a European perspective but also promote regional co-operation at system and expert level to support the SAP in the field of education. Thus it will contribute to the further development of a wider European area of education. In particular the aim is to bring experts from South Eastern Europe and other European countries together to encourage discussion on issues of regional interest and formulate recommendations in priority areas. Two regional capacity building seminars on Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and Teacher Training were organised by the Task Force Education and Youth with funds provided by the Austrian Ministry for Foreign Affairs in November 2003.

The OECD project on “Education Development for Disabled and At Risk Students” offers another opportunity to streamline education policy with respect to European and international standards. Based on already available information gathered during the course of policy reviews the purpose of this research activity is to initiate educational reforms that will meet the needs of students with disabilities and those at risk and to evaluate and disseminate progress made. This requires reviewing the current situation and provision, developing, implementing and evaluating national action plans and disseminating the findings. The three years project (2002 – 2005) is funded by the World Bank, Norway and the Flemish Community and organised by the OECD Secretariat.

- To further enhance regional ownership, a Secretariat **in the region** will be set up to provide a support structure for the ERI SEE (see page 9)

Other instruments:

- **Support through existing networks** (e.g. the South Eastern European Educational Co-operation Network and its nodes in the region) to build capacity and to strengthen the dissemination of information on education development and reform both in South Eastern European countries and on a wider European level.

The South Eastern European Educational Co-operation Network (SEE-ECN) in its second phase intends to continue the comprehensive, continuously updated review of the educational systems in SEE, its broad dissemination (also at least partly in local languages) and to offer information on best practices, structures and developments of educational systems in the region and in wider Europe. Reviews and exchange of information are of crucial importance for the changes and reforms in the field of education. In particular, the project will improve the exchange of information in languages accessible in the region. In this second phase the European dimension will be strengthened by increasing information on the evolving Wider European Area of Education and experience of countries in SEE in the Accession, respectively Stabilisation and Association Processes.

Furthermore, in order to ensure the sustainability of the network, the project will also focus on strengthening the networking capacity of the SEE-ECN institutions and thus empower the members of the network to sustain the network as such in the future. For that purpose the format of a service contract with the network hub CEPS has been chosen as a co-operation basis.

Since December 2003 the electronic platform of the SEE-ECN offers a special section on ERI SEE to promote internal and external exchange of information on the initiative but also to map and set up a database of good practice examples in the region. On the occasion of the Second Meeting of Senior Officials in Predeal, Albania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Moldova, Romania and Slovenia presented their examples of good practices in various fields of education and training development. It was agreed that the submitted best practice examples would be collected and presented on the SEE-ECN Homepage for future reference and dissemination.

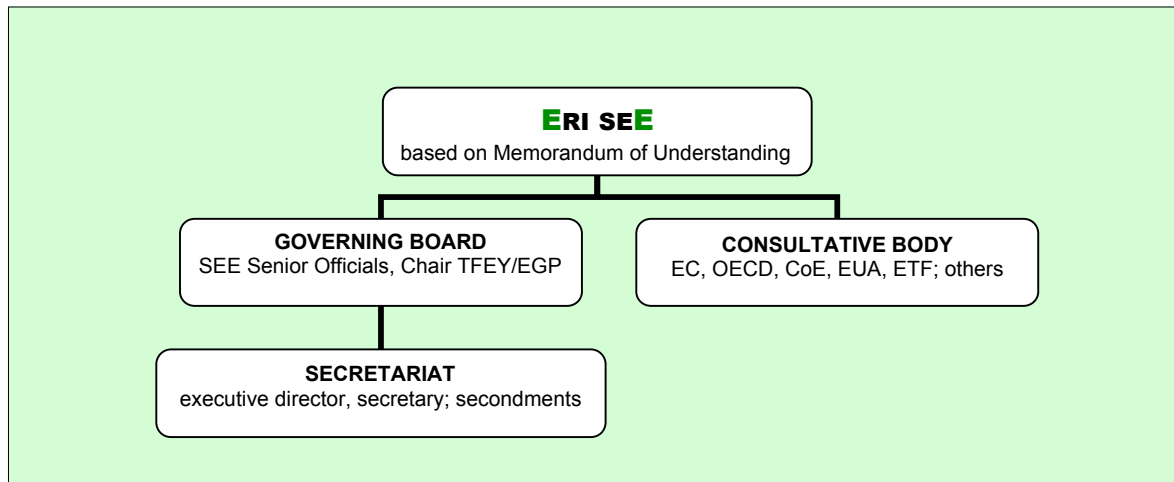
- **Twinning of institutions, and development of institutional and academic partnerships:** Twinning instruments have been regularly used in the field of Pre-Accession Assistance of the European Union to the candidate countries to strengthen their institutional and administrative capacity. Though the twinning instruments under PHARE aim at the candidate countries capability to adopt and apply the *acquis communautaire*, experiences from this exercise so far can be used for setting up a twinning network to assist the SEE ministries efforts to establish useful exchange of experience and best practise throughout Europe.

- **Reviews** for the participating South Eastern European countries drawing on expertise from organisations such as OECD, ETF, EUA, Council of Europe, World Bank, NGOs and other independent actors in this field to review achievements and provide recommendations in the respective educational development processes

Reviews such as the OECD Thematic Reviews on Educational Policies in SEE (2000-2002) and the ETF VET Reform Policy Peer Reviews (2002 – 2003) have shown the importance of such exercises for the formulation and implementation of the respective education reforms in South Eastern Europe but also for the strategic direction of available donor support. Future Reviews should even more use the expertise available in the region and in the EU to produce tailor made and demand driven recommendations.

4. ERI SEE organisational structure:

The following organisational structure is intended to be established in 2004 to further promote and support the Education Reform Initiative of South Eastern Europe.



Governing Board (GB)

The GB is composed of one representative of each signatory ministry of the Memorandum of Understanding nominated by the respective minister of Education / Higher Education for a period of at least one year. The Task Force Education and Youth/Enhanced Graz Process is represented by the Chair. The Governing Board meets twice a year on the occasion of the working meetings of Senior Officials from South Eastern Europe. All decisions by the Governing Board shall be taken by a simple majority with at least two-thirds of its members present. To change the rules of procedures a two-thirds majority is needed.

The GB shall elect from its members a Chair and one Vice Chair each appointed for one year. In close co-operation with the Executive Director of the Secretariat and Vice Chair they:

- prepare the annual work programme for adoption by the GB,
- monitor the execution of the annual work programme adopted by the GB,
- prepare the meetings of the GB,
- carry out the tasks which the GB entrusts them with.

The GB will

- develop the general policy, overall strategies and work programme of the initiative including fundraising and lobbying,
- adopt annual work programmes of ERI SEE,
- adopt and forward an annual report to the Ministers of Education/Higher Education from South Eastern Europe,
- adopt its Rules of Procedure by at least a two-thirds majority, as well as any other rules governing the operation of the Initiative.

Consultative Body (CB)

The consultative body is a board with advisory character, which will meet twice a year on the occasion of the GB meetings. It consists of

- one representative of the co-ordinating institutions of the (former) Task Force Working Groups: Council of Europe, OECD, European University Association (EUA) and the European Training Foundation;
- the European Commission;
- representatives of Education/Higher Education ministries of EU Member States
- donor countries and institutions, contributing to the ERI SEE;
- in accordance with priority areas of ERI SEE, additional education experts involved in European processes (EU Detailed Work Programme, Bologna Process, Copenhagen Process).

The CB will provide support and expertise in preparing the annual programme of the initiative as well as with regard to fundraising and lobbying on the basis of the decisions of the GB.

Secretariat

The Secretariat will be responsible for the implementation of the annual programs adopted by the GB within the overall objective of integrating SEE countries into the evolving Wider European Area of Education through networking, organisation and delivery of seminars, training, workshops etc.

The Secretariat will be responsible for the following tasks:

- co-ordination and organisation of the activities of ERI SEE on the basis of the annual work programme adopted by the Governing Board. Activities will include: providing time-

line of activities, organisational and conceptual preparation of meetings, workshops, seminars etc. (drafting agendas, making travel arrangements, financial reporting, preparation of agreements, contracts, drafting reports etc.); providing ongoing information about planned and implemented activities to Senior Officials etc.;

- financial management and budget planning for the initiative according to the financial guidelines and in close co-operation with the Chair and Vice Chair of the GB (financial administration);
- support of the Chair and the Vice Chair of the GB in fulfilling their responsibilities such as preparation of the annual work programmes;
- report to the Chair and the Vice-Chair about the execution of the annual work programme (including financial report) and about Public Relation activities twice a year;
- support the GB and the CB in lobbying and fundraising activities by identifying potential donors in consultation with the GB and the CB, based on the overall fundraising strategy to be implemented by the Secretariat (contacting donors, organising meetings, providing necessary information, etc.);
- collection and dissemination of examples of good practice in the field of education, presented within the framework of ERI SEE activities (capacity building, seminars, workshops, etc.);
- networking with other European and international institutions and initiatives thus contributing to a Wider European Area of Education (establishing, maintaining and expanding contacts) in order to facilitate the implementation of ERI SEE goals. A database should be established and regularly updated on relevant international networks;
- public relation tasks, e.g. regular update of the ERI SEE homepage, production of a regular newsletter etc.

The Secretariat will be located in the country of one signatory ministry of the Memorandum of Understanding of Ministers from South Eastern Europe, to be identified through a transparent tender procedure. The Secretariat will consist of a minimum of two full time persons, an Executive Director and a secretary, and one part time IT assistant, all predominantly from the region and with a sound experience in education issues and international co-operation. Additional internships should be provided by interested parties and have to be approved by the GB.

Tender Procedure

The TF Secretariat, based on the criteria discussed on the occasion of 3. Senior Officials Meeting and the subsequent drafting session held in Vienna, will prepare an application form for the Secretariat. All signatory ministries of the Memorandum of Understanding will have 6 weeks for submitting their applications for the Secretariat. All applications sent within the deadline will be evaluated and those meeting the criteria will be sent to Senior Officials. At the next SO Meeting envisaged to take place in Croatia in May 2004, Senior Officials will be asked to select the Secretariat's host country for a minimum period of three years by a secret ballot.

The Executive Director will be elected by the GB through a transparent procedure for at least two years based on the job profile defined below. This position will be open to nominations by all signatory ministries of the Memorandum of Understanding. The Executive Director will be responsible directly to the Governing Board of ERI SEE.

Based on the job profile defined below, the secretary will be selected jointly by the Executive Director and the host country for a period of one year, with a possibility of extension. The secretary will be financed by the host country. The decision with regard to an extension of the contract lies with the GB.

The host country will provide the premises for the Secretariat to the ERI SEE free of charge. In any case, it needs to be ensured that the programming and its delivering, staffing and financing are based solely on the decisions of the GB.

Staffing costs of the Executive Director and the IT assistant will be covered by other sources (fundraising).

Job profiles

Executive Director:

- university degree;
- five years of experience in education development and regional and international co-operation;
- proficiency in English;
- strong communication, managerial and organisational skills;
- ability to work independently and as a member of a team;
- computer skills;
- citizen of signatory Ministry.

Assistant/Secretary:

- university degree;
- knowledge and interest in educational issues;
- proficiency in English;
- experience in international co-operation;
- strong organisational and communication skills;
- computer skills;
- basic accounting skills.

IT assistant:

- excellent computer skills in all major applications;
- knowledge of database development and management;
- knowledge of homepage development and management;
- experience in network operations, support, or maintenance (responsible for installing and supporting networking hardware and software);
- Internet support services.

Job profile of the secondment will be defined in accordance with the respective annual work programme.

In order to support the Secretariat in its initial phase Austria will contribute to the ERI SEE through a secondment of an Advisor to facilitate knowledge transfer by providing expertise and contacts gathered within the Task Force Education and Youth / Enhanced Graz Process. The TF Chair will determine the secondment period.

Responsibilities of the host country

The host country will be responsible for clarifying the legal framework including the establishing procedure of the Secretariat and employment of Executive Director.

Costs of the Secretariat to be covered by the host country will include:

- venue;
- running costs;
- secretary.

5. Expenditure

Further costs such as equipment, office materials, honorary for Executive Director and IT expert, travel expenses, translations etc. will be funded by other donors including possible further contributions by a host country.

Distribution of expenditure will be based on a multilateral agreement between participating ministries, countries and institutions taking over responsibility for the core funding of the initiative.

In addition, the initiative may accept voluntary and other contribution by the donor community. Such contributions can be earmarked for a particular purpose.