

MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING

between the Ministers Responsible for Education, Science and Research in South Eastern Europe

In consideration of

- *The significance of fostering and promoting the European dimension of reforms in education encompassing all aspects of lifelong learning, science and research, and of a continuity in the reform processes in the countries of the region;*
- *The different stages in the dialogue of the countries of South Eastern Europe with the European Union and the subsequent access to EU developments in the fields of education, science and research;*
- *A changing landscape in cooperation in education, science and research in South Eastern Europe, marked by a need for a gradual shift from assistance to cooperation and partnership in support of the reform agenda, and by a need for differentiated thematic cooperation in a setting of diverse national reform agendas within an already firm commitment to ongoing EU, European and international initiatives in this field;*
- *The establishment of a Regional Cooperation Council as successor to the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe in the region of the South Eastern European Cooperation Process (further called SEECP);*
- *The identification of education, science and research and the development of human capital under the joint name "Fostering and Building Human Capital" as a priority area of the Regional Cooperation Council;*
- *The institutionalization of the Education Reform Initiative of South Eastern Europe (further called ERI SEE), its establishment as a regional platform for policy and expert cooperation in education in South Eastern Europe, and its high level of acceptance;*

- *The establishment of a Steering Platform on Research for the Western Balkan Countries;*

Whereas

- *The European Council of 14 and 15 December 2006 reaffirmed that the future of the Western Balkans lies in the European Union;*
- *The Communication from the European Commission "The Western Balkans on the road to the EU: consolidating stability and raising prosperity" indicates that the objectives of the Lisbon Agenda are relevant objectives for the region; stresses that gradual involvement in the post-2006 successor Community programmes to the current Socrates and Leonardo da Vinci will be encouraged, tailored to the needs and constraints of each country, including the advanced administrative capacity required for these programmes; reaffirms that the EU plans to continue and strengthen its actions in favour of the Western Balkans' research community under the 7th Framework Programme (2007-2013) and for the further integration of the region into the European Research Area;*
- *Decision No 1720/2006/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 November 2006 establishing an action programme in the field of lifelong learning, creates the framework for Western Balkans participation according to art. 7, c);*
- *Decision No 1982/2006/EC was taken by the European Parliament and the Council of 18 December 2006 on the Seventh Framework Programme of the European Community for research, technological development and demonstration activities (2007-2013);*
- *The "Final Communiqué" of the 9th Conference of European Ministers of Education, held on 17 March 2006 in Vienna underlines the importance of regional cooperation, of the role of ERI SEE in it, of a continuous, inclusive European dialogue on current matters in the field of European education policy, in particular for widening the European Area of Education to the Western Balkan region, as well as for strengthening education in Europe in the light of the Lisbon strategy;*

- *The conclusions of the meeting "Strengthening Higher Education and Research in Southeast Europe – Priorities for Regional and European Cooperation" held in Vienna on 3 March 2006 in view of the Ministerial Conference underline the common objective of creating a European Higher Education and Research Area, and stressed that the implementation of the Bologna objectives, the participation of higher education institutions in the new Community programmes and the integration into the European Research Area with the support of the South Eastern European ERA.NET and the Steering Platform on Research for the Western Balkan Countries, are vital for the higher education institutions of the Western Balkan Countries in the knowledge triangle of education, research and innovation;*
- *The Conclusions of the 4th Informal Conference of Ministers of Education from the Western Balkans hosted by the Council of Europe in Strasbourg on 27-28 November 2006, reaffirm the commitment of the region to the Bologna Process and its goal of establishing a European Higher Education Area by 2010, and recognize the importance of ensuring maximum mobility of students and academic staff;*
- *Based on the conclusions of the Regional Table of November 16, 2006 the discussion process "From Assistance to Cooperation" of the ERI SEE underlines the need for strengthening the link to the national context of ERI SEE Member Countries, and the necessity for an adequate political mandate for its future operation;*
- *The conclusions of the Regional Table of the Stability Pact of 16 November 2006 in Bucharest welcome the readiness of the ERI SEE structure to manage the education component of Building Human Capital, stress that education and research should remain a long term priority for regional co-operation, and that co-operation in research should be strengthened;*
- *The Joint Proposal for the Education Reform Initiative of South Eastern Europe assigns to it the task of supporting the implementation of education reform 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;*

- *In a joint letter to the European Commission from July 2006 the Ministers of education, science and research of the Western Balkan region underlined that the participation of their countries in a European area of education, higher education and research, shared quality standards and excellence requires a substantial effort by all national actors involved, but that sufficient and well targeted Community support for education and research is still crucial for ensuring the sustainability of national commitments;*

In recognition of the achievements of the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe through the Task Force Education and Youth, the ERI SEE, and the Steering Platform on Research for the Western Balkan Countries;

Renew their commitment to regional cooperation - for their mutual benefit - in education encompassing all aspects of lifelong learning, science and research;

Have agreed on strengthening and enhancing their commitment to the MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING between the Ministers of Education and Higher Education of South Eastern Europe of June 2003 as follows:

Education, science and research are areas of key importance for the future of the South Eastern European region and for the EU integration process of the Western Balkan countries in particular.

The re-launched Lisbon agenda is the main driving force for reforms in education, science and research in all signatory countries of the present Memorandum.

The present Memorandum represents a commitment to the following ongoing EU, European and international initiatives, and their (possible) follow-up:

- The implementation of the "Detailed Work Programme on the Follow-up of the Objectives of Education and Training Systems in Europe" (Education & Training 2010);

- The implementation of the objectives of the Copenhagen Declaration and follow-up communiqués (Copenhagen process), including mutual recognition of qualifications and issues of mobility;
- The implementation of the objectives of the Bologna Declaration and follow-up communiqués (of which all signatory countries are members), including mutual recognition of qualifications and issues of mobility;
- The development of sustainable research activities within the European Research Area;
- The implementation of Education for All and of the education objectives of the Millennium Development Goals;

Education and research shall remain or become a high priority on the political agenda at national and regional levels - in the existing frameworks for regional cooperation - as areas of paramount importance for building a socially cohesive and innovative knowledge society in Europe, for its sustainable development, and for the stabilization and association and the EU accession processes in the region.

In line with the priority "Building Human Capital" covering both education and research on behalf of the Regional Cooperation Council, synergies and cooperation between activities and initiatives in the field of education and research shall be enabled and facilitated in order to reach a high level of quality, efficiency and equity in education, science and research.

The scope and design of the existing frameworks for regional cooperation in education, science and research shall allow for a best possible use of expertise, knowledge and networks. Lobbying and access to relevant national, EU-level, European and international expertise, to working groups, clusters and networks shall be facilitated. This shall be achieved through partnerships and networking with other Member States of the South Eastern European Cooperation Process, with the Members of the "Central European Cooperation in Education"¹, the Steering Platform on Research for the

¹ Cooperation initiative between the ministries of education in Austria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovenia and Slovakia

Western Balkan Countries and with other EU Member and European States as well as international partners.

Regional cooperation activities in accordance with the present Memorandum shall consider relevant EU and European developments and trends in education, science and research, but also be closely linked to the national context and priorities of the signatory countries, also by involving the relevant stakeholders.

Regional cooperation activities shall also further help strengthen the implementation of commitments under the Bologna process.

Regional cooperation among all or several partner countries in education, science and research shall enable targeted support to national reforms through capacity building, networking, transfer of expertise, access to current EU, European and international discussions, activities and support, and through linking to project activities at a national level.

The Education Reform Initiative of South Eastern Europe is the main implementation framework of the present Memorandum in education. Continuing support for ERI SEE is therefore critical and shall lead to full and independent regional ownership of ERI SEE activities and structure, also including financial commitment.

The Steering Platform on Research with the Western Balkan Countries shall intensify and increase the networking of national programmes and promote cooperation between researchers from individual countries within the EU with researchers from countries in the south-east of Europe. It gives visibility to the Western Balkans, stresses the importance of research and the need for adequate support and financing for research in the region.

The present Memorandum shall be implemented on the basis of a framework for action which is part of the Memorandum.

The signatories of this Memorandum will cooperate where appropriate with all countries of the SEECP region, other EU Member and European States and international partners.

FRAMEWORK FOR ACTION

to the Memorandum of Understanding between the Ministers responsible for Education, Science and Research in South Eastern Europe

I.

The Memorandum of Understanding between the Ministers responsible for Education, Science and Research in South Eastern Europe shall be implemented

- in the context of the Regional Cooperation Council as the successor structure of the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe;
- in the framework of the Education Reform Initiative of South Eastern Europe, through its Work Plan, and under its guidance (education);
- in the context of the Steering Platform on Research for the Western Balkan Countries (research);
- in the context of the priority "Building Human Capital" of the Regional Cooperation Council;

making best possible use of the available EU, European and international frameworks, partnerships and instruments. The open method of coordination as applied by the European Union will, as appropriate, be applied as a main principle of cooperation (in particular through peer learning, exchange of good practices, indicators and benchmarks).

II.

The present ERI SEE framework of implementation will be continued and enhanced as appropriate to support regional cooperation in education and the implementation of the priority "Building Human Capital" of the Regional Cooperation Council. A regionally led, high-level Coordination Process for Fostering and Building Human Capital shall facilitate the coordination of cooperation activities in education, higher education and research at policy level.

III.

The joint identification of common priorities and implementation of joint activities is considered as being of paramount importance with a view to strengthening regional cooperation in line with the present Memorandum, in particular through efficient institutional representation in the ERI SEE Governing Board and a full use of all available ERI SEE instruments, and through a gradual increase in in-

kind and financial support to ERI SEE by the countries-signatories to the Memorandum, at a pace to be agreed by the ERI SEE Governing Board until 2008.

IV.

Regular meetings of Senior Officials from the Ministries responsible for Education, Science and Research in South Eastern Europe shall take place in the region at least twice a year, with (at least) one of them taking place in the framework of the high-level Coordination Process for Fostering and Building Human Capital. These meetings will, inter alia, serve as a forum to exchange experiences made in the implementation of reform, to foster partnerships, to discuss issues of regional concern and to formulate strategies, joint recommendations on education reform, concrete action plans and timetables, in particular for use in the planning of activities in education and research cooperation networks. To this end, the Senior Officials meetings can be joined by other European, in particular countries of the SEECP and of the Central European Cooperation in Education, partner institutions and other partners within the framework of the Regional Cooperation Council as the successor structure of the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe, and the Task Force Education and Youth and its successor structure.

V.

The Senior Officials representing the signatories of the Memorandum of Understanding between the Ministers responsible for Education, Science and Research in South Eastern Europe shall carry out an annual review of the overall implementation of priorities in line with the Memorandum and formulate recommendations for the work of ERI SEE to the Governing Board, and to the Steering Platform on Research with the Western Balkan Countries. Changes in the action plan can be decided upon only by the ERI SEE Governing Board (education).

VI.

The Secretariat of ERI SEE is currently located in Zagreb, Croatia as a host country, for a period of time and under conditions as laid down in the ERI SEE Joint Proposal.

VII.

The Steering Platform on Research for the Western Balkan Countries, the Steering Board of the SEE ERA.NET and the Governing Board of ERI SEE should at least once a year reciprocally invite representatives to their regular meetings as observers, for information and coordination purposes.

VIII.

The Memorandum of Understanding will be signed by the Ministers responsible for Education, Science and Research in South Eastern Europe or by their authorised representatives, by the Stability Pact and its successor structure (Regional Cooperation Council), and by the Task Force Education and Youth.

Istanbul, 4th of May 2007

For the Ministry of Education and
Science of the Republic of Albania


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Deputy Minister


For the Ministry of Civil Affairs of
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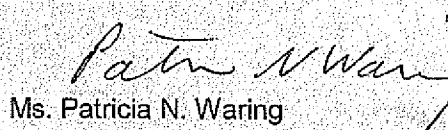
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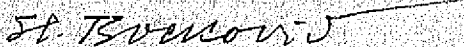

Mr. Agim Vellu
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For the United Nations Mission in
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Ms. Gabriella Pasztor
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For the Special Coordinator of the
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Ms. Marijana Grandits
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For the Task Force Education and
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Mr. Anton Dobart
Chair

