



European Alliance for Apprenticeships (EAfA) - Regional Seminar for Candidate Countries

26-27 October 2017, Budva, Montenegro

The Western Balkan countries of Albania, Montenegro, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Serbia together with Turkey joined forces in Budva on 26-27 October to strengthen the quality of apprenticeships and increase the employability of young people. The event was organised in the framework of the European Alliance for Apprenticeships (EAfA) – a platform bringing together governments and key stakeholders to strengthen the quality, supply and image of apprenticeships in Europe. With Serbia having joined in 2017, all five candidate countries are now part of the Alliance. Within the external action policy of the European Union, the seminar was organised by the European Commission; the European Training Foundation (ETF), the European Union Agency charged with supporting candidate countries' growth by enabling skills development; and the Ministry of Education of Montenegro.

Following the first regional EAfA seminar in Turkey in September 2016, Montenegro offered to host this regional seminar for candidate countries. The topic is high on the reform agenda of the Government of Montenegro which in September 2017 launched a dual education and training initiative thanks to the close co-operation between the Ministry of Education and the Chamber of Economy.

The main purpose of the seminar was to enable learning among Candidate Countries and EAfA members from the EU: governments, individual employers and employers' associations, chambers and VET providers. The thematic focus was on the latest policy developments in the area of work-based learning, in particular apprenticeships, and on teachers and trainers in work-based learning.

The seminar represents a further input into the overall reform processes in the Candidate Countries for inclusive economies, building on achievements and addressing identified challenges.

The European Alliance for Apprenticeships regional seminar is also part of the **European Vocational Skills Week**, a series of events organised all over Europe to improve the image and appeal of vocational education and training.

The meeting was attended by around 70 participants from all five candidate countries and EAfA stakeholders from almost half of the EU member states. Participants from the OECD, the EBRD, and regional bodies active in the area, such as the Education Reform Initiative of South Eastern Europe (ERI SEE) were also present.

Dr Damir Sehovic, Minister of Education of Montenegro, opened the two-day event in Montenegro on Thursday, 26 October. Minister Sehovic emphasised that the latest amendments of the legal framework provide for compulsory learning hours in a real work environment and that the reintroduction of a dual approach in vocational education and training is a big step forward for the country. According to the Minister, the newly developed dual education programmes are now implemented in 12 municipalities and 17 schools, with around 300 students and around 100 employers involved. He stressed the importance of learning within a lifelong perspective.

Mr Ivan Saveljic, Vice-President of the Chamber of Economy from Montenegro, highlighted the importance of co-operation between the private sector and educational institutions for quality apprenticeship. He referred to the agreement that the Chamber has recently signed with the Ministry of Education in Montenegro to implement the dual system.

Mr Hermann Spitz, Head of Cooperation of the EU Delegation to Montenegro, welcomed the recent steps taken by Montenegro for reintroducing a dual approach in vocational education in close cooperation with the Chamber of Economy. He also highlighted that the EU has already earmarked around € 15 Million in the next IPA envelope for human capital development.

Ms Gordana Stepic, on behalf of the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development of Serbia (new member of the EAfA), expressed commitment to EAfA referring to her Government's plan to implement the dual education and training system.

Mr Mart Laidmets, Deputy Secretary General for General and Vocational Education, Ministry of Education and Research of Estonia, presented the benchmarks of Estonia's Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020. Mr Laidmets also drew attention to the importance of regional cooperation in the Baltics using the example of a current Erasmus project that aims to strengthen communication and cooperation between VET schools and enterprises in Estonia, Finland, Latvia and Lithuania.

Mr Helmut Zelloth, Senior Specialist in VET Policies and Systems at the ETF, presented the purpose and objectives of the seminar: to enable learning among Candidate Countries and EAfA members from the EU.

During his introduction to the European Alliance for Apprenticeships, **Mr Norbert Schöbel**, Team leader in the European Commission, Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, familiarised the participants with the objectives of the Alliance, latest achievements and future developments. He made particular reference to the recent approval of the European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeship as well as the WorldSkills Coalition Conference in Abu Dhabi. He also referred to the new ErasmusPro initiative on long-term VET mobility.

Ms Tanja Bastianic, from the Directorate for Education and Skills at the OECD, presented the key policy messages that have been drawn from the latest research on work-based learning. Her presentation included conclusions on the costs and benefits of work-based learning, financial incentives, apprenticeship wages, and apprenticeship for youth at risk.

Achievements in the Candidate Countries

The main session on day 1 was dedicated to the achievements in the five candidate countries in 2017. **Ms Sonila Limaj**, Director of the National Agency for VET and Qualifications in Albania highlighted the improved legal framework in the country with reference to apprenticeship in the Law on Crafts, the revised VET Law and the draft Albanian Qualifications Framework (AQF) Law. **Mr Robert Gorgiev**, Deputy director of the VET Center, and **Ms Aneta Petrovska-Rusomaroski**, from EVN company in former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, used the example of EVN to illustrate the enhanced cooperation mechanisms between the private sector and VET schools. **Mr Dusko Rajkovic**, Director of the VET centre in Montenegro, presented the key elements of the latest reform of dual education in Montenegro, namely the introduction of the dual system in the revised VET law and its commencement in September 2017 as well as the monitoring through a specific body.

Ms Gordana Stepic from the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development in Serbia informed that the VET law has been revised to include dual education and that implementation will start in 2018/2019.

Mr Osman Nuri Gülay, General Director for VET in the Ministry of National Education in Turkey provided a comprehensive overview of the latest developments in Turkey. Among others, he highlighted the recently introduced integration of apprenticeship programmes into the compulsory education system, new financing mechanisms for internships and the training schemes for vocational teachers in industry. He also emphasised the importance of digital skills and the concept of smart schools to meet the demand of society and industry.

Newcomers to the EAfA

On behalf of the EAfA, Andreea Diana Spiridon and Norbert Schöbel welcomed three new members:

- Ms Arjana Bubeqi, Marketing Manager of **Kolonat restaurant chain** in Albania. Kolonat is planning to offer 35 additional apprenticeship places in the period 2018-2020.
- Mr Spartak Likaj, Managing Partner of **GJEO company** in Albania. GJEO will offer around 20-25 apprenticeship places between 2017-2020.
- Ms Aneta Petrovska-Rusomaroski, Head of Department of Human Resources and Organisation of **EVN** in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. EVN will offer over 100 apprenticeships in the period 2017-2020.

New member to the European Apprentices Network

Rebeka Gremi was welcomed as the first member of the European Apprentices Network that comes from a candidate country. Rebeka is 20 years old and graduated in IT from Kamza VET school in Albania. The European Apprentices Network was established in April 2017 by the European Youth Forum in partnership with the Organising Bureau of European School Student Unions (OBESSU) and with the support of the European Commission. The aim of the Network is to make sure that the voice of young apprentices is heard in discussions related to Vocational Education and Training across Europe.

Site visits

The Ministry of Education of Montenegro organized two parallel site visits during the afternoon of the first day.

Hotel Splendid in Becici. After a visit to the Hotel's premises, the participants had the opportunity to discuss with the management of the Hotel, in-company mentors, a teacher from the Hospitality VET school in Budva and around 25 students enrolled in "cook" courses. For the current academic year, Hotel Splendid has accepted students from the reformed dual education track for the first time.

Maritime School in Kotor. Participants had the opportunity to get interesting presentations of the qualifications offered by the school, which are internationally recognized. Participants showed high interest and raised many questions before heading for a tour of the premises. The group could follow learners using a navigation simulator and exchange views with them and students from other courses. The EC official thanked the host for the site visit which was as impressive as the visit of the Maritime School in Antwerp (Belgium) where Commissioner Thyssen opened the first European Vocational Week in 2016.

The second day of the regional EAfA seminar started with recap of day 1 by Ulrike Damyanovic, ETF Country Desk for Montenegro. Participants were invited to share impressions from the site visits, with particular reference to what they had learnt and what they would like to bring home. This included: the importance of relations based on trust between education, the private sector and the learner; the importance of quality placements; the inclusion of soft skills and digital skills; as well as the financing of placements. Both institutions visited are active in strategic economic sectors for Montenegro. They shared their concepts and experience with apprenticeship and discussed challenges and possible solutions with participants.

The Commission showed a short film on the findings of a recent study on VET-Business Cooperation to highlight the importance of partnerships to raise the image and attractiveness of VET, as further input to the discussion.

Western Balkan Alliance for Work-Based Learning

In her presentation, **Ms Tina Saric**, on behalf of the Education Reform Initiative of South Eastern Europe (ERI SEE), revealed the current process for setting up the Western Balkans Alliance for Work-Based Learning, within the framework of the Berlin Process. The planned activities of the Alliance were presented, with a clear and strong focus on the enhancement of work-based learning in the region in relevant economic sectors (tourism, construction, food processing and transport). A meeting is planned in Vienna at the end of November to discuss the issue further.

Presentations of current projects in the Candidate Countries

Ms Elena Dimashi, Component Manager for Business Relations and Organisational Development, presented the Swiss-funded *Skills for Jobs* project in Albania. The project works with four VET schools and around 70 companies in various regions of Albania. A major focus is to strengthen cooperation between schools and companies through the establishment of career centres in the four VET schools.

Mr Recep Altin, on behalf of Mr Ercan Demirci, Deputy Undersecretary in the Ministry of National Education in Turkey, provided insight into the various Erasmus+ projects that have been implemented in Turkey over the past years. He highlighted the impact of these projects, for instance they have increased the quality and attractiveness of VET in Turkey.

The project presentations were facilitated by Andreea Diana Spiridon from the European Commission, Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion.

Thematic sessions

The presentation of current projects in the candidate countries was followed by two thematic sessions. The sessions were facilitated by Mr Stefan Thomas, VET Specialist from the ETF.

Session 1 focused on the latest developments in the countries' regulatory frameworks that are expected to pave the road for apprenticeships. **Ms Sonila Limaj**, Director of the National Agency for VET and Qualifications in Albania explained the new regulatory framework for VET and crafts in Albania. **Ms Zora Bogicevic**, Senior Advisor for Vocational Education in the Ministry of Education of Montenegro, presented the recently developed mechanism to finance work-based learning in Montenegro. **Ms Ana Stojanovic**, Head of the Center for Dual Education at

the Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Serbia gave an insight into the new law on dual education in Serbia.

Session 2 brought into focus the professional development for teachers and trainers in work-based learning. **Ms Majda Mulic**, Coordinator of teacher training in industry in the Ministry of Education of Montenegro explained the current practice of VET teacher placements in industry in Montenegro. **Mr Sabahattin Gücin**, Manager at Ford Otosan Vocational Training Academy in Turkey, presented the different types of teacher training that take place at his company. **Mr Zoran Jovchevski**, Head of International Cooperation in the VET Center of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia illustrated how the training of in-company mentors is currently implemented in his country.

As a member of the ET 2020 Working Group on teachers and trainers, **Mr Karol Jakubik**, Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic, presented the results of a study on existing approaches in work-based learning at national, EU and transnational level with regard to teachers and trainers. He also briefly presented the roadmap of the ET 2020 Working Group for 2017-2018. In the second part of his presentation, Mr Jakubik explained the current system of VET teacher and trainer education in the Slovak Republic.

Apprenticeship in Candidate Countries: Key issues for 2018

Albania:

- Strengthen the national alliance for apprenticeships and increase the number of participating companies
- Make the National Chamber of Crafts operational, so that it is able to implement apprenticeships in line with the crafts law

Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia:

- Improve the quality assurance system for teachers, trainers and mentors
- Provide training for in-company mentors following the pilot model
- Learn from current good practice of WBL in the country, for instance with EVN, and extend it to other sectors in the country
- Monitor and evaluate the current practice of WBL

Montenegro:

- Finalise the pledges for EAfA
- Increase the number of companies which offer the new dual education track by 10%
- Evaluate the first year of the new dual education track in summer 2018
- Develop an accredited training programme for mentors

Serbia:

- Develop by-laws to support the implementation of the dual VET system
- Start the implementation of the dual VET system 2019/2020
- Provide training for in-company trainers
- Revise monitoring system with particular reference to roles and responsibilities

Turkey:

- Focus on Digital skills

- Extend further cooperation between employers and the education system and sign protocols to this aim
- Monitor the developments in 35 pilot industrial zones and establish further VET schools that provide relevant skills for the industrial zones

Conclusions of the seminar (by Ulrike Damyanovic):

The participants agreed that progress has been achieved in all the candidate countries at different levels since the 2016 meeting. It includes the introduction of the dual system in some VET laws as well as its first implementation within the school year 2017/2018, revision of financing models and teacher, mentor, and instructor training programmes.

The Commission acknowledged achievements of the countries in relation to the European Alliance for Apprenticeship. New pledges including co-operation between education-business for placements have been signed and others are under preparation in the countries in the region. The European Apprentices Network is operational with young people as ambassadors for quality education for the labour market.

The participants coming from the education and the private sector have re-confirmed their strong commitment to the implementation of apprenticeships for increased employability in their countries. They have also expressed their willingness for further contributing to the European Alliance for Apprenticeship.

The participants identified common challenges to be addressed in the strive to go forward. They include the need for quality placements to make apprenticeships an attractive option for the learner, the education system and the private sector. They refer to the importance of digital skills in a global economy. Furthermore, experience and lessons of countries from the past also point to the need to develop viable financial models for a successful apprenticeship system.

The participants advocated for continued sharing of experience among the Western Balkans and Turkey and the EU MS, and global players, to provide sustainable solutions. In this context regional initiatives like the Western Balkans Alliance for Apprenticeship under the “Berlin Process” are welcome, as are opportunities under the ERASMUS + Programme.

The ETF pointed to the Enlargement Process wherein regional co-operation and skills are key for wider socio-economic development. The 2017 Communication on Enlargement Policy is under preparation and the ERP Process 2018 has been launched in the countries. ETF encouraged the countries to continue to keep VET and co-operation between education and the private sector prominent on the agenda.

The Country Representatives presented their proposals for concrete next steps to strengthen the apprenticeship system for inclusive economies. The Commission and the ETF expressed willingness to support the countries in their endeavours including providing access to existing EU tools and instruments which would be of benefit.