



Tempus project- 517200-1-2011-1-BE-TEMPUS-SMGR

Establishing and capacity building of the Southern Serbian Academy and the National Conference for Vocational Higher Education (ECBAC)

REPORT ON THE 13th ECBAC TEMPUS CONSORTIUM MEETING HELD IN NIŠ (APRIL, 2015)

Thirteenth meeting of the ECBAC Tempus project consortium was held on 27th and 28th April, 2015 in Niš, at the School of Higher Technical Professional Education. The meeting was attended by the European partners from Ku Lueven University in Belgium (Andre Govaert) and University in Alen in Germany (Nichola Adams).

Partners from Serbia who attended the meeting are the following: the School of Higher Professional Education for Preschool Teachers in Kruševac (Zoran Vasić, Aleksandar Vasić and Ivan Tomić), School of Higher Professional Education for Preschool Teachers in Pirot (Sanja Kovačević, Bojana Nikolić, Danijela Vidanović, Emilija Popović, Ivan Stamenković Zorana Simić and Ana Stefanović), College of Agriculture and Food Technology in Prokuplje (Saša Petrović, Nikola Stolić and Ivica Stančić), College of Textile in Leskovac (Novica Stanković, Nebojša Ristić, Đorđe Miltenović and Miroljub Đelić), the School of Higher Chemical Technology in Kruševac (Mladen Nikolić, Dragan Nikolić, Vesna Milovanović, Nada Ristić, Nebojša Arsić and Srđan Rakonjac), High Medical School of Professional Studies in Čuprija (Milan Sretenović, Tatjana Simović and Nikola Krstić), The School of Higher Technical Professional Education in Niš (Dejan Blagojević, Aleksandra Boričić, Zoran Milivojević, Irina Cenić, Danica Milošević, Radomir Cekić, Jelena Petković, Nenad Pejin and Suzana Jovanović), School of Higher Applied Professional Education in Vranje (Goran Petković, Ljiljana Stošić Mihajlović, Damjan Stanojević, Slobodan Stefanović and Nebojša Dimitrijević), the Business Technical College of Vocational Studies in Užice (Ljubica Diković and Predrag Popović) and the Railway College of Vocational Studies in Belgrade (Aleksandra Vuković). The representatives of the Ministry of Education, the National Tempus office, Health Center in Čuprija, as well as the representatives of the school in Subotica did not attend the meeting.

After a short welcome speech of PhD. Professor Dejan Blagojević who is the director of the School in Niš and PhD professor Mr. Andre Govaert, the academic coordinator of the project, last meeting report from Čuprija as well as the meeting report from the monitoring visit held in Belgrade in the beginning of April 2015 were unanimously approved.

Mrs. Jelena Petković, the secretary of the School in Niš then elaborated on the report from the monitoring visit. She only focused on the remarks that the ECBAC consortium got from the National Tempus Office representatives. The first remark is that the project site should be updated with the names and the contacts of all responsible persons in front of the four services at the Academy such as the IRO service, Student service, etc. The names and the contacts of these team members must be visible on the project site so that all the students, professors and representatives of the workfield could contact them if they needed information or wanted to establish some kind of cooperation. The lists of the persons responsible for the four services represent also one of the important project results and that is why it is necessary to have them announced on the web site of the project as soon as possible.

The second remark is that the key performance indicators that the members of the consortium have developed must be improved. Namely, the consortium has prepared the *Summative Analysis of the State of Colleges of vocational studies* containing the key performance indicators only for the project period. The NTO representatives ask from the consortium members to develop and submit a set of key performance indicators for the period before the start of the

project so that a comparison can be made how the colleges functioned before and how they function now when they have established close cooperation within the project. The idea is to see whether any improvements have been made in the operation of the colleges thanks to the project cooperation and achievements on the project.

Also, Mrs. Petković talked about the model for cooperation proposed by the NTO. Namely, instead of establishing the Academy of Vocational studies, the consortium members are advised by the NTO to establish a network of vocational colleges. This network would later, when the conditions for it are made, outgrow into the Academy. Since for the time being it is not possible to institutionalize the Academy, the network of this kind would be a good solution for the consortium members. Following this recommendation, the consortium members have prepared another cooperation agreement that concerns the establishment of the said network.

After this presentation, all the meeting participants were invited to watch the opening ceremony of the student fair organized by the School in Niš. All the colleges that belong to the ECBAC consortium had the opportunity to promote themselves and their study programmes during the fair. This fair was also a great opportunity for promotion of the project results, dissemination on the project and the presentation of the published material related to the Academy. One special section at the fair was devoted to the Academy as well as the posters, brochures, roll-ups and books developed on the project. The participants of the student fair had a chance to listen to the ECBAC radio whose programme is updated with the relevant project information by the members of the Student Parliament in Niš and their colleagues from other partner colleges.

After the ceremonial opening of the student fair, all the present students could hear interesting and useful presentations on how to write a CV and a motivational letter and how to prepare themselves for a job interview. They could also hear a presentation on the AISEC student association which is very active in Serbia and the Erasmus student network.

During the first day of the consortium meeting, a session of the Regional Chamber of Economy also took place at the School in Niš. This round table with the representatives of the workfields and the potential stakeholders as well as the representatives of the local authorities is of great significance for the project, especially in the domain of the project sustainability and the development of a long-term business and marketing plan. This session was also another very important project dissemination activity, having the project results, achievements and the goals directly presented to the third parties.

When the consortium meeting continued, the partners could hear the presentation of PhD prof. Ljubica Diković who gave a report on the student fair held in Užice and then presented the model of the Center for career development.

The Student fair was organized by Business Technical College (BTC) in Užice on 20th March 2015. Many students, professors, alumni, media representatives, representatives of the workfield and the local authorities participated in it. The representatives of the Regional Chamber of Economy were present together with the representatives of the National Employment Service, tourist organizations, public enterprises and all the relevant companies and industries in which the students of the BTC have their practical trainings. The fair was a great opportunity to promote the study programmes of the ECBAC partner colleges and disseminate the results of the ECBAC Tempus project. Professor Dejan Blagojević as the coordinator for the local project partners talked about the mission, vision and the results of the project, which was also one important dissemination activity. ECBAC promotional material was distributed to many of the fair participants.

Professors from the BTC and the representatives of the National Employment service in their joint effort organized a whole set of useful lectures on career development for the students who attended the student fair. The students could hear lectures in the domain of soft skills on how to develop a CV, write a motivation letter, prepare themselves for a job interview, apply for a job position abroad, or develop their skills to work in a laboratory. One of the benefits of the student fair was that some of the employers announced their job offers which were presented to the graduating students during the fair, thus offering them a chance to get information on the jobs from the first hand and send their applications in time. Many representatives of the media were present during the fair. An interview was given for the local TV station and two important articles about the

fair were published, one by the local publishing house and another one by the journal of the National Employment Service.

The occasion of the student fair was also used to present the model of the Center for Career development. One of the main missions of the Center for career development in the future is to enable cooperation and establish contacts among students and higher education institutions on one side and the workfield on the other side. Also, one of the important goals would be to train students in soft skills which our students do not have since they are not part of our regular education system. The focus should be on developing the sense for inter-disciplinary and multi-disciplinary approach in order to provide students with all the necessary competences, skills and knowledge required by the market needs. Professor Andre Govaert stated that soft skills are an integrative part of courses provided by the study programmes in Belgium. Higher education institutions in Serbia should also incorporate soft skills in the already existing courses. Language teachers and teachers who teach courses on management could take this responsibility in the future work and educate their students in soft skills which are nowadays necessary for any kind of employment.

After that, Mr. Dejan Blagojević started a presentation on the long-term business and marketing plan. He said that a survey had been conducted among almost thirty companies from Niš, Toplica and Pirot counties. The companies were asked to fill in a specially designed questionnaire where they had to provide information on the searched for profile of workers, types of competences needed for certain positions, skills and qualifications of the employees, etc. All this data has been collected for the IT sector and it has been concluded that there is a high demand for IT specialists especially in the areas of programming, computer networking, web design, technical support, system administration etc, which only justifies the need for providing vocational higher education in these areas and confirms the importance of higher education institutions offering such study programmes. The survey has proved that highly skilled and competent workers with the ability to simultaneously apply knowledge from different disciplines (multi-disciplinarity) are needed. Questionnaire that has been used in this survey can be adapted as a model for other sectors/fields and applied in other regions of Serbia where partner vocational colleges are located. The experts from the Regional Chamber of Economy in Niš give their predictions that the results would be very similar, that is very encouraging for other sectors as well.

Mr. Cekić, a former secretary of the school in Niš elaborated further on justification for establishing the Academy. Once again he stressed the idea that vocational colleges are much stronger and much more visible at the market if they are grouped together and if they cooperate closely. Although the Strategy on Higher Education until 2020 was approved three years ago, no concrete actions have yet been taken to start implementing the activities proposed by the Strategy (one of them is establishing the Academy). The strategy is still being read and discussed.

According to Mr. Cekić, we must realize the following strategic goals of the Academy. We must first harmonize our higher education with the education in the EU. For instance, nowhere in Europe do specialist studies belong to the second level of studies like in Serbia. This must be changed. Then, we must make a stronger link among high schools and higher education institutions in order to improve the quality of the curricula. The programmes at the academic and vocational studies should not overlap. Vertical and horizontal mobility at studies should be enabled. Stronger links with the workfield, industry, economy and the public sector should be made.

However, through cooperation of the project partners many changes have already been made. The greatest achievements have been made in the domain of quality assurance since one of the main aims of the Academy is to improve the quality of teaching. So far, the project partners have realized just 1/3 of the integrative functions, that is the four main functions of the Academy services, and yet the results have already been visible.

The first day of the meeting ended with the explanations concerning the tendering procedure. It was stated that one unique list of equipment with specifications was made based on the needs of each individual college. Also, a unique tendering procedure for the purchase of equipment has been started. The public procurement has been announced on the project web-site. The tendering procedure is to be finished by the 8th May and all the offers are going to be considered then.

One part of equipment is going to be purchased at the exchange rate of 102,008 dinars per euro, but the second part of equipment will be purchased at a different (higher) rate since the second installment will dictate a new exchange rate.

It was said that all the partners should expect the second installment in the amount of 30% of the total project budget since the first 60% of the project costs had already been spent. The project coordinator sent a request to the European Commission for the payment of the second instalment and now all the partners should expect to be given additional finances for the purchase of equipment. It will be determined how much each partner college has contributed to co-financing of the project activities so far and based on this calculation it will be decided how big amount each college would get additionally for the purchase of equipment.

During the second day of the meeting, the Serbian students who had participated in the study visits to Gent in Belgium, Aalen in Germany and Porto in Portugal gave their presentations on the useful information they had obtained abroad. Having learnt a lot through the models of good practice shown to them by the foreign students and their professors, our students came to a general conclusion that the students in Serbia should work more on team-building, student support, student monitoring and counselling, as well as initiating and promoting student mobility and tracking offers for different types of scholarships and internship programmes. All students from Serbia are very happy to have had a chance to participate in the study visits abroad and they will all cherish very pleasant memories of their time spent abroad, and the great hospitality of their hosts. After the study visits, they all show great enthusiasm to improve cooperation among the Student Parliaments of vocational colleges in Serbia that are partners on the project, make stronger links with the workfield and give their contribution to start with the student exchange programmes and student mobilities, eager to cooperate with students and professors from the European Union. It is absolutely essential in that sense to establish services for career development and the mobility of students.

Afterwards, all the students studying at the college in Niš and not just the representatives of the Student Parliament and the students who participated in the trainings could hear presentations of foreign students from the partner institutions in Belgium and Germany about their Student organizations and Parliaments.

Later on, Mr. Mladen Nikolić from the School of Higher Chemical Technology Education in Kruševac spoke about the activities of the ICT team. First, the team defined the quality framework for the ICT service and brought a set of rulebooks. Second, the team designed the project web site which is regularly updated. Third, it initiated the tendering procedure for equipment. The team also participated in the international conferences to disseminate the project results. Next step of the ICT service would be to install the equipment once it is purchased and to set up the information system. It is also planned to develop a web-site for the network of colleges by up-grading the existing project web-site and launch a distance learning system.

Next was the presentation of Mr. Nebojša Arsić from the School of Higher Chemical Technology education in Kruševac who gave a short presentation on the activities of the team for Quality assurance. This team was responsible for the harmonization of horizontal and vertical coordination of the Commissions and bodies in charge of quality assurance at eight vocational colleges. The first task of the team was to make its action plan and the operative structure. The second step was to harmonize all the documents necessary for the implementation of the quality assurance strategy. Significant dissemination activities have been undertaken by the QA team members as well. During the Trend conference devoted to Development Potentials in Higher Education that took place on Kopaonik in 2014, two papers of the QA team were presented.

Mrs. Sanja Kovačević stated that nothing has much changed since the last report of the IRO service. The only difference is that the members of the IRO team have started looking for new projects. There is an idea to start another project that would be related to pre-school education of teachers, as Mrs. Kovačević said. This service has already developed its action plan, the list of key performance indicators and the rulebook on the mobility of teachers and students.

After the presentations of the services, all the project partners talked about their recent dissemination activities. The conclusion is that many events were organized by the eight colleges in

view of informing the students, the teachers and the third parties about the project activities and the project aims. This is the period when most of the colleges organize their promotional activities for the high school students across Serbia in order to attract them to enrol their studies. This promotive campaign is also very effectively used for the project dissemination by many of the colleges. Then, for instance, the students from Pirot, Leskovac and Kruševac who participated in the student visits abroad made presentations for their colleagues about their training programme or appeared on TV shows where they talked about their experience and the ECBAC project in general. The school in Vranje organized the open day of the school and the competition in wood technology which were two great opportunities to promote the school and the Academy of vocational studies.

Apart from the afore mentioned activities, the project web-site is updated on regular bases, the ECBAC radio now has a much richer programme and the second issue of the e-newsletter about the ECBAC project has been prepared. All the project partners will receive the second e-newsletter via e-mail.

During the day, the first constitutive meetings of the Board of Directors, the Senate and the Council of the Academy were held as well as the constitutive meetings of the Student service and the ICT service.

Each college of vocational studies that is a member of the ECBAC consortium has its representatives in each of the afore mentioned bodies of the Academy. The Board of Directors consists of the eight college directors, the Senate consists of all the eight directors and one more representative from each of the eight colleges, whereas the Council, the Student service (6 members appointed so far), and the ICT service have each eight representatives one from each of the eight partner institutions. Almost all the appointed persons were present during the meetings. The directors from Vranje and Prokuplje could not attend the meetings due to other obligations but they assured the consortium members that they would as well sign the agreements and take responsibilities as members of the Academy bodies.

At the end of the meeting, the partners were reminded that they should prepare the entire project documentation and submit it as soon as possible to the financial secretary of the project Mrs. Sanja Kovačević. From June 2015 onwards it would not be possible to make any payments on the project. All the documentation must be ready one month before the deadline for the completion of the project.

Next meeting is scheduled for 27th and 28th of May 2015 at the Railway College of Vocational Studies in Belgrade. The next student fair, after the fairs in Čuprija, Užice and Niš is to be organized by the College in Belgrade on 27th of May, 2015.

Minutes taken by
Danica Milošević
Project secretary