



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 7th MEETING HELD IN NIŠ, OCTOBER, 2013

The seventh meeting within the implementation of the TEMPUS ECBAC 517200 project entitled *Establishing and capacity building of the Southern Serbian Academy and the National Conference for Vocational Higher Education*, was held in Niš, 3rd - 4th October, 2013. The host of the meeting was High Technical School of Professional Education in Niš, Serbia. The meeting was attended by the representatives of Kaho Sint Lieven from Belgium (Andre Govaert and Geert De Lepeleer), IPP from Portugal (Mónica Vieira and Cristina Da Silva), Aalen, Germany (Nichola Adams), VLHORA, Belgium (Mathilde Joos) as well as School of Higher Professional Education for Preschool Teachers in Kruševac (Aleksandar Vasić, Zoran Vasić and Ivan Tomić), School of Higher Professional Education for Preschool Teachers in Pirot (Sanja Kovačević), College of Agriculture and Food Technology from Prokuplje (Nikola Stolić, Saša Petrović and Ivica Stančić), College of Textile from Leskovac (Đorđe Miltenović, Mirosljub Đelić, Suzana Đorđević and Nebojša Ristić), School of Higher Chemical Technology from Kruševac (Dragan Nikolić, Savić Slađana and Vesna Milovanović), High Medical School of Professional Studies in Čuprija (Milan Sretenović, Antić Dragan and Nikola Krstić), The School of Higher Technical Professional Education from Niš (Dejan Blagojević, Aleksandra Boričić, Radomir Cekic, Goran Milosavljević, Irina Cenić, Dušan Stefanović and Danica Milošević), School of Higher Applied Professional Education from Vranje (Nenad Janjić, Gordana Bogdanović-Dušanović, Branislav Stanisavljević, and Zoran Janjić), Business Technical College of Vocational Studies in Užice (Ana Đokić), Railway College of Vocational Studies in Belgrade (Dragica Jovanović) as well as the representatives of the Conference of Academies for Applied studies in Serbia (Borivoje Rodić and Ružica Stanković) and Student Conference Serbian Academy of Professional Studies (Nebojša Andrijević).

After the welcome speech of Mr. Dejan Blagojević and Mr. Geert De Lepeleer, the report from the previous meeting held in Porto on 27th and 28th May, 2013 was approved of unanimously. A short presentation on the results from the previous meeting was given by Danica Milošević (Niš), which focused on the realistic framework of cooperation of ACAS members within the platforms for quality policy, student organisation/parliament, international cooperation and student service.

Then, Mr. Geert De Lepeleer, the project coordinator informed the meeting participants that the project will be prolonged for one more year in order to give a chance for the new project partners to give their full contribution to the project activities within the work packages. The meeting participants were also informed about the change of the coordinator due to the process of merging which Kaho university is part of. This requires new mandate letters to be signed by each partner institution. Another change that would occur concerns the inability of the coordinator to cover directly the common costs of all the individuals on mobility. As a matter of fact, each individual will have to keep its own receipts for the common costs on the basis of which these costs would be later covered by the daily allowances.

The first presentation was prepared by Aleksandra Boričić (Niš), Gordana Knežević (Čuprija) and Aleksandar Vasić (Kruševac) with the intention to clarify the situation within the Serbian Law on Higher education and signify to the amendments made to the Law on Higher education, indicating the areas that are of specific interest for the Academy.

One of the burning issues in the area of higher education in Serbia is how to make foreign higher education qualifications recognizable with the aim to enable foreign students continue their education or find employment in Serbia. The law proposes that the evaluation of a foreign study program or a part of a foreign study program is performed by a professional body of a higher education institution to which the request for continuation of education has been sent to. Evaluation of the study program is based on the type and level of acquired knowledge and skills, taking into consideration the education system in the country where higher education qualifications were obtained, as well as the enrollment criteria, learning outcomes, and other relevant factors, without considering the formal features and structure of the study program. Recognition of foreign higher education qualifications for employment is ; however, performed by the Ministry and the National Center for recognition of foreign higher education qualifications.

Amendments to the Law have also been made in the part concerning the accreditation process. For instance, Act 16, paragraph 10 of the Law on Higher Education says that a certificate of accreditation will be issued or denied to a higher education institution within **15 months** from the date of receipt of the complete documentation for accreditation. A higher education institution whose licence has been revoked can apply for another licence after a year has passed since the moment of revocation.

Another important change in the Law is introduction of **short cycles of studies** with 60 to 150 ECTS at undergraduate and professional undergraduate level of studies (the first level of studies). A person who finishes a short cycle of studies can acquire higher education in a particular field but cannot obtain a particular professional title.

The law also proposes introduction of **master professional studies** with 120 ECTS at the second level of studies. The third level of studies; however, should encompass doctoral studies and specialist studies.

According to the Article 35, paragraph 2, The Academy of Professional Studies can perform basic professional studies, **short cycles of basic professional studies**, specialist professional studies and **master professional studies**. This is also applicable to a higher education institution of professional orientation.

Presentation on the **Evaluation of the written articles** informed the meeting participants about the success of the written articles that have been developed since the beginning of the project. Several deliverables have been prepared. The most important ones are the articles on **Comparative analysis of different aspects of Higher education in the EU and Serbia, Comparative analysis of student representations and their role in the process of management of HE institutions, Comparative analysis of HR management in Higher Education, and Comparative analysis of Quality Management in HE system**. The conclusion that can be made is that Serbian system of higher education has obviously made excellent progress over the last years. There are many similarities in the area of HE between Serbia and the EU. However, the next step Serbia has to take is to enable integration of HE institutions, taking into account economic, social and geo-strategic specificity of regions. Also, it is necessary to make permanent changes in the system and make alterations in legal regulations in order to ensure the effectiveness of HE system and its compliance with the principles established in the framework of European integrations. These written documents will be reviewed and placed on the project's website. Moreover, some of them will be published within special brochures.

The presentation on the **Quality framework of the Academy** was given by professor Dejan Blagojević. Apart from other functions, quality policy is one of the integrative functions that the future Academy should have. In order to have a unique platform on quality policy, it is necessary to harmonize the statutes and rulebooks of ACAS members but also to establish unique procedures and corrective measures within the quality policy. Quality policy of a HE institution is regulated by the Law on Higher Education, National Council, CAQA standards, Commission for quality assurance at the institution and by contribution of teaching, non-teaching staff and students. Each institution has quality assurance policy, procedures and standards. The aim is to improve quality policy of each institution. HE institutions must have formal mechanisms for the approval, monitoring and a periodic review of their programmes. Students must be assessed using criteria, regulations and procedures which are applied consistently. The responsibility of HE institution is also to provide teaching staff with adequate qualifications and competence. HE institutions should also provide adequate and appropriate resources for learning for each of the study programs offered. Institutions should ensure that they collect, analyse and use relevant information for the effective management of their study programmes and other activities. HE institutions should regularly publish up to date, impartial and objective information, both quantitative and qualitative, about the programmes and awards they are offering.

The specific areas, where it is possible to achieve integration in the field of quality policy, are the following: code of professional ethics, regulations on the election of teaching and non-teaching staff, rules of professional development and training, regulations on student evaluation of the quality of studies, regulations on taking tests, rules on recognition of foreign higher education qualifications, regulations on organization and implementation of professional practice, regulations on harmonization of professional titles and issuing new certificates, etc.)

After all the presentations planned for the first day of the meeting were given, the representatives of the NTO wanted to get a clear picture on the state-of the art of the consortium.

The project consortium informed the NTO, which came for the monitoring visit, that the proposal for the accreditation standards of the Academy will be made. Two new partners -Conference of Academies for Applied studies in Serbia and Student Conference Serbian Academy of Professional studies - will join the project. The three partners (Belgrade, Užice and Subotica) which are the representatives of the Conference of Academies will take a more active part in the project and become responsible for dissemination but also participate in the re-training programs. Due to the involvement of 2 new project partners, the budget had to be revised, which requires further analysis and discussion. All the stakeholders should be aware of these changes concerning the finances.

NTO representatives reminded the ACAS members that the Academy should focus on integrative functions. They gave suggestion that it should be decided really soon which equipment will be purchased, where it will be installed and who will use it. Right now, since the Academy has not been established yet and it does not exist as a legal entity, it is still not wise to purchase equipment. If the equipment was purchased by HE institutions, it would be difficult to transfer it to the Academy later. The institutions would be charged with special taxes on gift, which would amount to 20% of the equipment value.

When purchasing equipment, care should be taken that the equipment is in line with the integrative functions which are set as the goal of the Academy. The focus should not be on the equipment for video-conferencing, since this kind of equipment is not usually purchased for projects which deal with structural measures. The focus should be on software packages for the student service, where new databases should be installed. Also, to have a strong integrative function in the IT sector it is necessary to have a strong and a high quality server. The purchase of server is also an important segment of equipment, which needs to be considered carefully.

According to the NTO, The Conference of Academies of Applied Studies will be given finances for the equipment as well. It can contribute to the Academy by providing software support and creating new data bases. In the meantime, the activities of the Conference should be strictly defined. It should be decided who will represent the Conference and perform the activities on the project on behalf of the Conference. Suggestion is that the main role of the Conference should be to provide legal support to the Academy and be a mediator between the Academy and the government.

Representatives of the NTO also said that project partners who are not convinced in the sustainability of the project, should reconsider their future participation in the project activities, the sooner the better.

The first day of the meeting was finished with the NTO visit. The second day of the meeting started with the presentation on student services given by Mathilde Joos from VLHORA, Belgium.

Next presentation was the presentation of Nikola Stolić from College of Agriculture and Food Technology in Prokuplje. This presentation put emphasis on the **Accreditation process in Serbia**. In the Serbian system of accreditation there are 13 standards to be met for the Accreditation of a Higher Education Institution, which include the following: basic aims and outcomes of higher education institutions, planning and monitoring, organisation and management, studies, scientific research, teaching staff, non-teaching staff, students, facilities and equipment, library, textbooks and IT support, financial resources, internal mechanisms of quality assurance and the last but not the least -transparency. The accreditation of study programmes at the first and the second level of studies depends on the following 12 standards: structure of study programmes, purpose of study programmes, aims of study programmes, competencies, curriculum, quality, modernity and international recognisability of study programmes, enrolment, evaluation and improvement, teaching staff, organisation and resources, quality assurance and distance studies. For the time being, none of the colleges within ACAS has possibility to provide distance studies.

Apart from the standards mentioned above, there are standards for self-evaluation and quality control as well as standards for external quality control of higher education institutions.

The accreditation process in Serbia implies that the documentation is carefully prepared. Then an application for accreditation is made. After that, the documentation is checked by the Commission for accreditation and quality control encompassing the representatives of the Ministry, auditors and sub-commission that write a report. Commission for accreditation and quality control can approve of accreditation or it can issue an act of warning after which it suggests corrective measures to be taken before an institution sends a new request for accreditation. Also, the Commission can deny accreditation after which it is possible to make an appeal to the National council or resolve shortcomings within a year.

After this presentation, the representatives of Aalen (Nichola Adams), Porto (Cristina da Silva) and Gent (Andre Govaert) gave excellent presentations on the Accreditation of study programmes in their countries which can be used as examples of good practice for the future improvement of the Serbian accreditation standards for study programmes but also as very good guidelines that should be taken into consideration when proposing the accreditation standards for the Academy.

Next presentation was given by professor Dušan Stefanović (Niš) who spoke about the possibilities of CISCO video-conferencing system. The main idea behind this system is to enable the intergartion of the ACAS members. Currently, communication among ACAS colleges is of a protocol type and takes place only at the highest level, among the directors of colleges, which does not happen quite often. Right now there is no transfer of knowledge among college teachers and students. For instance, libraries do not share e-books, students' final papers, scientific papers of lecturers or other types of material on-line. The problem behind

it lies in the fact that there is no unique quality control among colleges, so there is a need to harmonise study programmes, student evaluation, student questionnaires, student fees, etc. That is why a common information system would be one significant step towards the integration of colleges. This IT system would enable efficient on-line trainings, lectures and meetings, share of scientific papers, student scripts and other material on-line and reduce the costs of communication over the internet.

To implement this IT system both hardware and software will be needed. CISCO video-conferencing equipment seems to be an ideal solution. It enables the system to be upgraded easily. In its package it also offers IP telephony support and the training for individuals who will be in charge of IP telephony. Also, another advantage of CISCO is a great discount of almost 50% in comparison to other manufacturers of the similar equipment. Also, another advantage is the capacity of the CISCO system, which can be increased by using stacking technology as the new users (new colleges) decide to join the network.

Software that would be obtained together with the hardware will be used for creating a web portal which would consist of the segment for teachers and the segment for students. The first one being private, would enable teachers to exchange their scientific papers through a database of papers and the second one being public would assist student services to create a data base of graduate students and their skills, which would be available to employers; moreover, it would make it possible for students to communicate on forums. This web portal would also make it possible for different companies to advertise, for free, the jobs they are offering.

The presentation on the **evaluation of the study visit to Gent** was given by Sanja Kovačević from Pirot. The training of eight people from different colleges lasted for 5 working days and it took place at the University colleges in Gent, St. Nicklas and Aalst. The trainees were divided in the groups for International cooperation, Student service, IT sector and Quality assurance sector. During the training , the trainees had the opportunity to hear many interesting lectures and visit laboratories and research centres of the institutions mentioned above. The general conclusion made by the re-training group is that the curricula in the Serbian system of HE need to be modified in order to become eligible for international student mobility as well as that teaching and non-teaching staff must improve continuously. Moreover, it is essential to focus on practical skills, projects and research in the area of HE. It is of crucial importance to establish and maintain relationships between higher education, industry and the labour market. Also, the idea that quality should be permanently improved must not be forgotten.

At the end of the meeting, the participants received questionnaires to be filled in for the evaluation of the meeting in Niš.

It was confirmed that the next training will take place in Aalen, in the week of 21th October, 2013. The preparations for this training have already started. The last training is going to be organized in Porto, in the week of 11th November.

At the end of the meeting, it was agreed that the next working meeting should take place in Belgrade in November 26th-27th and Leskovac in January. The exact date of the last meeting is still to be determined.

André Govaert presented a small report of the evaluation of the meeting in Porto. He thanks the representatives of Porto for their hospitality and the nice organization of the meeting. He thanks also the representatives of the High Technical School of Professional Education in Niš for their hospitality and perfect organization.

Next activities

Before next meeting a lot of administrative work has to be done. It is very important that all decisions will be taken as soon as possible.

Before next meeting the responsables for the international, student, quality and ICT service together with all participants of the retraining have to prepare a realistic operational plan for the tasks they will do next 12 months.

The participants of the retraining and the EU participants will give next meeting a critical review of the presented articles.

In an ICT workgroup the proposal of the purchase of the hard- and software for the academy must be prepared

ECBAC 517200 project consortium
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