

# **Protocol**

## **Consultations on Cooperation between Austria and Kosovo in the field of Higher Education**

**Vienna, 14 December 2005**

At the beginning of the meeting both sides - the Kosovar Ministry of Education (MEST), hereinafter "K"; and the Austrian Ministry for Foreign Affairs (MFA), the Austrian Ministry for Education and Science (BMBWK) and the Austrian Development Agency (ADA), hereinafter "A" - reiterated their intention to open a new chapter in their cooperation efforts regarding the reform of higher education in Kosovo and building an institutional partnership in order to maximise the impact and the sustainability of their programme for cooperation.

K recognized A as a strong partner in its reform efforts, reported in detail on the recent achievements and laid down the strategic priorities for 2006. After a system for higher education has been put in place, the consolidation and implementation of the Kosovar higher education system along the lines of the Bologna process is the challenge ahead. Priorities include, amongst others, the integration into European Research Area (ERA) and European Higher Education Area (EHEA), accreditation and quality assurance, the implementation of the statute of the University of Prishtina (UP), scientific research, transfer of technology and meeting the needs of minorities for higher education. Strategically, MEST will pursue further outsourcing in order to provide quality services to the citizens of Kosovo. Lack of expertise was reported to be the main problem in many fields.

A stressed the importance of the utilization and cooperation with international fora and umbrella organizations such as the Council of Europe, the European University Association (EUA) and the National Union of Students in Europe (ESIB), and multilateral programs such as CEEPUS as well as the strategic participation in the higher education reform process at the European level. Participation in conferences is crucial, thus A advised K to spend its travel money in a strategic manner. A encouraged K to make maximal use of the Bologna Promoters Network and programmes of the European Commission like TEMPUS, CARDS and TWINNING. Furthermore, A informed on the guiding principles of the Austrian development policy as a basis for the common cooperation programme including harmonization and alignment, institution-building, gender-mainstreaming and co-financing as a means to ensure the sustainability of projects. Currently needed foreign expertise shall increasingly be replaced by local capacity.

Both sides stressed the importance of functioning management structures at the UP and the decisive role of the ongoing election process also especially for the continuation or the renewal of cooperation with partner universities abroad. K, however, ensured the Austrian side that meanwhile a group of committed experts is already established and strongly encouraged A to revitalise its contacts with the UP.

In the course of the following detailed discussions both parties agreed on the following:

#### Necessities arising from ERA.

K recognizes the vital importance of research, a field that is virtually non-existent at the moment and asks for assistance in establishing the National Council of Research, particularly with regard to improving standards, mechanisms and skills in project proposal writing in the context of the Framework Programme for Research and Technological Development (FP). A suggests to develop the TEMPUS office into a hub for dealing with all EU and multilateral programs such as CEEPUS; an idea that is positively welcomed by K but would require building up of additional local expertise.

A will assess the possibility to transfer lessons learnt from A's institution building experience in Bosnia and Herzegovina in this field. A possibility would also be to link it to the Centre for Technology Transfer (CTT). A encourages K to learn from the experiences of other countries in and also to avoid their mistakes.

#### Centre for Technology Transfer (CTT).

K reports on the activities already undertaken, premises and equipment being in place. However, due to the lack of expertise it turns out to be extremely difficult to find qualified personnel. A stresses the importance of first identifying sectors that would allow for immediate application and visible linkages of research results to industry and civil society. A suggests that CTT should also offer networking programs with the local economy and training. A offers expertise in the first phase of shaping the CTT (e.g. 1 or 2 seminars in A, Prishtina and/or regional). Both sides agree on the importance of having a well-developed business plan for the CTT as soon as possible. It is anticipated that CTT will be able to generate own revenues and thus fund itself (although contributions are expected to be meagre in the beginning).

#### Research and Technological Development (RTD).

K works on establishing a Research Committee. A can offer its expertise in a limited manner as regards legal advice, the establishment of rules and procedures and RTD programme design. This would, however, not include the allocation of research funds.

#### Kosovo Accreditation Agency & Quality Assurance (KAA & QA).

K is in the process of establishing a National Board of Quality; office space, equipment, the law and rules for the board already being in place. Five of the six local board members are identified (all except the minority representative). Both sides agree that the agency should strongly draw upon international expertise in the beginning.

K informs on the wish of the Minister to have one of the three international board members appointed by Austria. A will take up this proposal and help identify a suitable person in Austria once having received detailed information on the profile needed (TOR). In addition, A offers assistance to support the executive office in becoming operational as well as co-financing of international expertise for evaluation at the UP. A suggests to make use of the expertise of Macedonia in this field, which has been strengthened through an Austrian-Macedonian cooperation program. K, having a Memorandum of Understanding with Macedonia already, welcomes this suggestion. K informs on the necessity to review private universities. A emphasises its focus on public universities.

#### ENIC/Naric.

At the end of 2004, a central committee for accreditation questions was established in MEST as well as committees in all faculties of the universities. Accreditation procedures, however, still take very long time (up to six months and more). Lack of familiarity regarding the application of rules is a major problem, especially at the faculty level. K informs on the need for training programmes for respective officers on the faculty level. A offers support in the form of traineeships in Austria (1-2 weeks stay) to gain first-hand experience as well as seminars in Prishtina. A train-the-trainer approach should be applied in order to maximize the impact of the training programme. A also invites K to contact its ENIC/Naric office in case of questions regarding procedures and established practices anytime via e-mail or telephone.

Exchange of practices is a strong point of the ENIC/Naric network that should be best used.

#### Law Reform and Statute Implementation.

K requires support in the implementation of new laws and regulations as well as in the amendment of the higher education law and proposes the extension of Mr. Wöber's contract until 30 September 2007. A acknowledges Mr. Wöber's important contributions and, in general, the value added a foreign expert can have in dealing with sensitive issues and processes. It stresses, however, to base the cooperation programme on needs and not persons and to clearly focus on local capacity building. A will carefully review the written proposal.

With regard to implementing one full round of the statutes at the UP, A strongly suggests that twinning with an Austrian university is the most appropriate option to ensure the sustainability of joint efforts.

As regards private universities A considers this issue to be best dealt within the framework of KAA. Until the KAA becomes operational, occasional advice to the Ministry can be considered to be provided by A.

As far as the minority issue is concerned, both sides agree that this is a very vital issue, also in the context of the ongoing status negotiations. K stresses the importance and the urgent need to support the process by preparing the concept and building a consensus. A is ready to review the proposal but requests that first support from the K Minister for Education as well as all other relevant institutions involved, in particular UNMIK and OSCE, must be ensured.

#### Joint Scholarship Scheme Kosovo-Austria.

Currently, there are approx. 400 students from Kosovo studying in Austria. K explains the rationale behind its proposal for a bilateral scholarship scheme, the objective being to connect students abroad with Kosovo and motivating them to return (brain gain instead of brain drain). A acknowledges the rationale and promises to review possibilities of co-financing (BMBWK). Furthermore, A refers to the successful exchange programmes offered via TEMPUS and CEEPUS as well as exchange options offered by Austrian universities (University of Vienna, University of Graz).

#### Miscellaneous.

A proposes to utilise TWINNING, an instrument of the European Commission, in order to mobilise additional funds and/or replace unilateral funds for the joint cooperation efforts.

#### Next steps.

- Signing of mutual protocol by the end of 2005.
- Exchange of information as direct follow-up:
  - K: list of all ongoing international projects and partnerships; agreement with Macedonia; action plan for CTT; TOR for the international expert on the Board of Quality; relevant contacts at UP and MEST, recommendation letters from MEST (Minister), UNMIK and OSCE concerning Mitrovica proposal.

- A: information on Austrian mobility programmes including offers from Austrian universities; information on TWINNING programme.
- Detailed review of cooperation possibilities in the course of January/February 2006.
- Meeting in Prishtina presumably in February 2006 to develop concrete working programme.
- Meeting with UP as soon as possible.

Vienna, 30 December 2005

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