



Regional Platform for Benchmarking and Cooperation in
Higher Education and Research

Ljubljana Meeting of the Regional Platform Council

Venue: Ministry of Education, Science and Sport, Ljubljana, Slovenia

Date: Monday, 30 June 2014

Organised by

University of Ljubljana, Slovenia

Hosted by

Ministry of Education, Science and Sport, Slovenia

An event organised under the scheme of Regional Platform for Benchmarking and Cooperation in Higher Education and Research aiming to discuss and adopt "Articles of Association" the statutory document of the Platform, discuss and adopt an outline of the Platform Action Plan, invite a number of international organisations to participate in the Platform Advisory Board, elect first Presidency, pursue further development of the Platform with organisational, financial and logistical apparatus to support the Platform, including initiatives to register the Platform as legal entity in Croatia with permanent Office in Dubrovnik.

The invitees are senior representatives of HEAs and HEIs from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo*, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Slovenia and senior representative of the Regional Cooperation Council as an observer.

In attendance:

Platform members:

Higher Education Authorities

Mr. Jernej Pikalo, Minister, Ministry of Education, Science and Sport, Slovenia

Mr. Arbjan Mazniku, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Education and Sport, Albania

Mr. Slobodan Stupar, Assistant Minister for Higher Education, Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, Serbia (electronic voting)

Ms. Mubera Kurpejović, Assistant Minister for Higher Education, Ministry of Education, Montenegro (electronic voting)

Mr. Velimir Jukić, Deputy Director, Agency for Development of Higher Education and Quality Assurance, Bosnia and Herzegovina

Ms. Erita Blagdan, Department for International Cooperation, Agency for Science and Higher Education, Croatia

Mr. Borčo Aleksov, Head of Higher Education Sector, Ministry of Education and Science, Macedonia (electronic voting)

Ms. Darinka Vrečko, Directorate of Higher Education, Ministry of Education, Science and Sport, Slovenia

Mr. Andrej Kotnik, Ministry of Education, Science and Sport, Slovenia

Universities

Mr. Aleksa Bjeliš, Rector, University of Zagreb, Croatia

Mr. Vladimir Bumbaširević, Rector, University of Belgrade, Serbia

Mr. Ivan Svetlik, Rector, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia

Mr. Mit'hat Mema, Rector, Aleksander Moisiu University, Albania (electronic voting)

Mr. Milan Mataruga, Vice-Rector, University of Banja Luka, Bosnia and Herzegovina

Mr. Miodrag Popović, Vice-Rector, University of Belgrade, Serbia

Mr. Stanislav Pejovnik, President of the Council, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia

Mr. Ladislav Novak, Coordinator of the Platform, University of Novi Sad, Serbia

Observers:

Mr. Gazmend Turdiu, Deputy Secretary General, Head of Programme Department

Apologies:

Mr. Miroslav Vesković, Rector, University of Novi Sad (Rector Ivan Svetlik apologised him)

Mr. Dhori Kule, Rector, University of Tirana, Albania

Mr. Anton Berishaj, Acting Rector, University of Pristine, Kosovo*

Mr. Zlatko Žoglev, Rector, University St. Kliment Ohridski, Macedonia

Mr. Saša Mitrev, Rector, University Goce Delcev, Stip, Macedonia

Mr. Predrag Miranović, Rector, University of Montenegro, Podgorica, Montenegro

Ms. Melita Kovacević, Vice-Rector, University of Zagreb, Croatia

Agenda

10:30 – 10:50 Registration:

Chair:

Prof. Stane Pejovnik, Interim President of the Regional Platform

Morning Session

11:00 – 11:30 Opening Ceremony

Brief addresses of the representatives of the Platform members

11:30 – 12:00 Introduction to the Meeting Themes

Brief account on Articles of Association and the Action Plan of the Platform

Mr. Ladislav Novak, Interim Coordinator of the Platform

On the Governance Structure of the Platform

Mr. Stanislav Pejovnik, Interim President of the Council of the Platform

Activities related to the establishment of the Permanent Regional Office of the Platform

Mr. Aleksa Bjeliš, Interim Chairperson of the Executive Board of the Platform

12:00 – 13:00 Discussion: Feedback from the representatives of Platform members

Focus on Article of Association, governance structure, action plan, model of operation of the Regional Platform and establishment of permanent regional Office in Dubrovnik.

13:00 – 14:00 Light Buffet

Afternoon Session

Special Addresses

Prof. Jernej Pikalo, Minister, Ministry of Education, Science and Sport, Slovenia

Prof. Ivan Svetlik, Rector, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia

14:00 – 15:30 Closing Session

Agreement on the "Article of Association", governance structure, action plan, model of operation of the Regional Platform and establishment of permanent regional Office in Dubrovnik, at the Centre of Advanced Academic Studies of the University of Zagreb.

Draft Minutes

Morning Session

Chair's introductory remarks

Mr. Stanislav Pejovnik, interim President of the Council welcomed everybody to the first meeting of the Council of Regional Platform in Ljubljana. He pointed out that Platform is now entering its new phase where there is a need to adopt the Platform statutory document and decide on a number of issues, including, governance structure, action plan, model of operation of the Regional Platform and establishment of permanent regional Office.

Introduction to the Meeting Themes

Mr. Ladislav Novak, Interim Coordinator of the Platform has provided a brief account of the history of the Regional Platform and proposed a list of main issues to be discussed during the meeting including:

1. Membership
2. Leadership
3. Activity Plan
4. Fundraising/Funding Strategy
5. Tentative list of decisions to be made

In particular Prof. Novak proposed the following tentative list of decisions to be taken during the meeting:

- To adopt Article of Association as a statutory document of the Platform
- To elect leadership of the Platform according to Article of Association
- To agree on the establishment of permanent Regional Office in Dubrovnik
- To authorise Platform leadership to initiate the procedure for registration of Platform according to Croatian legislation (Croatian Statute)
- To agree on the Platform logo
- To agree on Activity Plan and
- To agree on fundraising /funding plan of the Platform

Mr. Stane Pejovnik, Interim President of the Council of the Platform presented details on the Governance Structure of the Platform including bodies through which the Platform will operate

- the Council,
- the Executive Board,
- the Advisory Board and
- the Secretariat

and duties of Platform leadership

- President and of the Council
- Vice-President of the Council
- Chairperson of the Executive Board

- Head of the Regional Office/Secretariat and
- Coordinator of the Platform

Mr. Aleksa Bjeliš, Interim Chairperson of the Executive Board of the Platform provided details concerning the activities related to the establishment of the Permanent Regional Office of the Platform in Dubrovnik at the Centre for Advanced Academic Studies of University of Zagreb. He also informed the Council about the activities to be taken in the course of issuing “Croatian Statute” as the prerequisite for having permanent office in Croatia.

Mr. Bjeliš explained that Regional Office of the Platform shall carry administrative, legal and fiscal responsibility for the Platform according to Croatian law, within the policies agreed by the Executive Board and the Council, according to the Rules of Procedures set up by the Council. The office will also provide assistance and guidelines to the various Working and Task Force Groups established within the Platform. He also briefly described how Regional Office and Secretariat will operate.

Discussion on the Articles of Association and Action Plan

The participants briefly introduced themselves and their respective institutions and then focused discussion on the text of the Articles of Association and the Action Plan.

Articles of Association

On the proposal of *Mr. Milan Mataruga*, Vice-Rector of the University of Banja Luka, Bosnia and Herzegovina the following change in the subsection 4.1.2 Operation has been adopted by the Council.: “Council shall meet or have electronic session/voting at least once in a year” (instead of “once in two years” as stated in the original version).

Ms. Darinka Vrečko, from the Directorate of Higher Education, Ministry of Education, Science and Sport, Slovenia, suggested extension of the subsection 4.3.1 by specifying with more details the composition of the Advisory Board. A number of other participants supported this intervention and proposed the following new formulation which was adopted by the Council: “The Advisory Board comprises up to 15 representatives of international organisations, students international organizations, affiliated institutions and organisations and prominent international experts. Members of the Advisory Board are nominated by the Council on the proposal of the Chairperson of the Advisory Board”.

For the purpose of ensuring a clear legal basis for the participation in the Regional Platform, *Ms. Darinka Vrečko*, from the Directorate of Higher Education, Ministry of Education, Science and Sport, Slovenia also suggested that a uniform ‘letter of accession’ should be prepared by the Platform leadership and sent to those parties that already expressed their intention to participate in the Platform by providing signed letters of intent or/and by signing joint letter of intent issued in Dubrovnik on 26 September 2012, on the occasion of Regional Strategic Forum. These parties will formalise their membership after signing the letters of accession, according to the respective internal institutional procedures. *Ms. Emila Blagdan*, Department for International Cooperation, Agency for Science and Higher Education, Croatia, confirmed that the same applies for the Agencies.

Activity Plan

Apart from the activities agreed in Dubrovnik on 2013, *Mr. Stanislav Pejovnik* raised few points concerning the Platform Activity Plan.

He pointed out that after ten years of active participation in the Bologna Process, higher education systems in the Region have to analyse the outputs of the Process and make and make a credible report which will serve as an input in the course of further higher education reforms. Therefore an agreement on the principles and indicators of evaluation has to be made, at least within the members of the Platform.

Mr. Stanislav Pejovnik also pledged for an agreement on doctoral studies in the Region as one of the first steps in the course of the enhancement of Regional cooperation in scientific research. In this context the University of Ljubljana is happy to offer their facilities to doctoral students across the Region including access to the complex research equipment. As a part of long term Platform *Mr. Pejovnik* also proposed an idea of launching of Regional research centres for excellence, keeping open for the moment the questions like ‘in which research area’, ‘where’ and ‘when’.

Mr. Pejovnik pointed out to a possible cooperation with the wider Mediterranean Region (e.g., through EMUNI network)

Ms. Darinka Vrečko from the Directorate of Higher Education, Ministry of Education, Science and Sport, Slovenia, noticed that integration of QA, QF, and the recognition of qualifications are important issue and reminded participants to the fact that at the moment several structures/bodies in Europe and the Region are addressing these issues. She therefore recommended a close cooperation concerning with these bodies.

Mr. Ladislav Novak informed participants on the possible provision of a strategic seminar in Dubrovnik on 7-12 September 2014, as the first bespoke professional development opportunity organised under the scheme of Regional Platform for administrators and policy-makers from ministries, agencies and rectors' offices. He underlined that this year number of attendees will be restricted to 10-12 persons. He also pointed out that funding for this Seminar is still uncertain.

Closing remarks

Mr. Gazmend Turdiu, Deputy Secretary General of the Regional Cooperation Council, stressed that the aims of the Regional Platform clearly fit in the RCC's strategic initiatives related to the education and he reaffirmed that Regional Cooperation Council will continue to provide strong support to the Platform.

Afternoon Session

Special Addresses

Mr. Jernej Pikalo, Minister, Ministry of Education, Science and Sport, Slovenia, as the host of the first meeting of the Council of the Regional Platform, welcomed all participants and expressed his great pleasure of having representatives of both higher education authorities and universities from the Region at this important meeting. He underlined the importance of international cooperation especially mobility of students and academic staff, exchanges of good practice and value of collective approaches in responding to the common challenges in further development of higher education in the Region. Minister Pikalo added that in this context internationalisation of universities plays crucial role and shall be strongly supported by higher education authorities at the national level as it has always been encouraged at the European level. Moreover, higher education institutions and authorities have to contribute together to the on-going strategic debates about the future evolution of higher education. Modern Europe is Europe of regions and creation of a collective Regional voice, through the Regional Platform for Benchmarking and Cooperation, could enhance the capacity of each of the countries in the Region to respond to global challenges. Minister also presented some actual challenges concerning the Slovenian higher education system and pointed out the importance of sustainable funding of higher education institutions.

Mr. Ivan Svetlik, Rector of the University of Ljubljana, welcomed participants to this event, on behalf of the University of Ljubljana which, along with the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport, Slovenia, acted as the co-organiser of this event. Mr. Svetlik apologised Mr. Vesković, Rector of the University of Novi Sad. He said that Mr. Vesković contacted him and informed that due to anniversary celebration of the University of Novi Sad, which unfortunately coincided with the date of Ljubljana meeting, University of Novi Sad leadership is prevented to participate. Mr. Vesković also asked Mr. Svetlik to convey the message that University of Novi Sad fully supports Regional Platform and will continue to contribute on the institutional and personal level. Mr. Svetlik in his address also pointed out that dialogue and cooperation in higher education are the key to the Region's future and therefore the University of Ljubljana strongly supports further collaborative solutions in higher education and research, through the Regional Platform for Benchmarking and Cooperation. Mr. Svetlik underlined that the University of Ljubljana has long lasting history of cooperation in the Region and currently has enrolled significant number of students from the Region. He acknowledged the common challenges that the region faces in higher education including evaluation of the outcomes of Bologna Process and inter-regional mobility of students and academics. Rector Svetlik also expressed his great satisfaction with the fact that after more than 20 years the rectors of the University of Belgrade, the University of Zagreb gathered for the first time to this Ljubljana meeting.

Closing Session

Agreement on the "Article of Association", governance structure, action plan, model of operation of the Regional Platform and establishment of permanent regional Office in Dubrovnik, at the Centre of Advanced Academic Studies of the University of Zagreb.

1: The Council agreed on the text of the Agreement on the "Articles of Association", with the interventions described above concerning the subsections 4.1.2 and 4.3.1 and decided to adopt the "Articles of Association", as the Statutory document of the Regional Platform, as an association of universities, higher educations and parliamentary committees for education.

2: The Council also elected the following persons to act as the Platform leadership:

President of the Council:

Prof. Stane Pejovnik, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia

Vice-President of the Council:

Mr. Arbjan Mazniku, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Education and Sport, Albania,

Chairperson of the Executive Board:

Prof. Aleksa Bjeliš, Rector of the University of Zagreb, Croatia

Head of Regional Office:

Prof. Melita Kovacević, Vice-Rector of the University of Zagreb, Croatia

Coordinator of the Platform:

Prof. Ladislav Novak, University of Novi Sad

Accordingly, the section 11: TRANSITION PROCEDURES of the draft text have to be deleted.

3: The Council has reaffirmed the decision made in Dubrovnik 2013 on the establishment of permanent Regional Office in Dubrovnik at the Centre of Advanced Academic Studies of the University of Zagreb and has authorised Mr. Aleksa Bjeliš, acting rector of the University of Zagreb to carry on the procedure on behalf of the Council of the Platform in communication with the University of Zagreb.

4: The Council has authorised Platform leadership to initiate the procedure for registration of the Platform in Croatia, according to the Croatian legislation (Croatian Statute), in association with the establishment of permanent Regional Office in Dubrovnik at the Centre of Advanced Academic Studies of the University of Zagreb. The registration procedure will be based on the letters of confirmation of the membership to the Platform or letters of accession to the Platform, signed by the authorised persons of respective Platform members.

5: The Council decided to invite the following International organisations to participate in the Advisory Board:

The Council of Europe (CoE)

The European University Association (EUA)

The European Students Union (ESU)

The Regional Cooperation Council (RCC)

The Education Reform Initiative of South Eastern Europe (ERI SEE)

7: The Council has discussed the issue of the LOGO of the Platform and agreed to postpone decision on this issue for some later stage. In the meantime, the Platform will use logo of the Novi Sad Initiative as an interim logo.

8: The Council has reaffirmed the decision made in Dubrovnik 2013 concerning the **Activity Plan**:

- Joint doctoral studies and mobility of doctoral students and early carrier researcher
- Further structural reform of higher education systems in the Region
- Integration of QA, QF, and the recognition of qualifications across the region;
- Bespoke professional development opportunities for administrators and policy-makers
- Development of new ideas and solutions in teaching and learning

- Establishment of permanent office in Dubrovnik
- Securing multi-annual funding for the Platform

On the suggestion of Mr. Pejovnik, the list of activities is enlarged with the following three points:

- Joint development of the principles and indicators for evaluation of the outcomes of the Bologna process
- Establishment of Regional research centres and provision of an open access to the existing capital research equipment for all doctoral students in the Region via a multilateral agreement.
- Cooperation with EMUNI network

9 The Platform shall have its own financial resources needed to carry on its work and may receive grants, gifts, endowments, bequests or other forms of donations from public or private sources. It may also charge for the services provided by the Platform to private or public persons or organisations.

The Council agreed with the following *Fundraising/ Funding Strategy*, proposed by the Coordinator of the Platform, which includes application to external funds such as:

- *World Bank* - to contribute to the WB Regional R&D strategy for innovation and to support creation of knowledge-based economies that can generate higher-value-added jobs and stronger growth
- *EC funds* including ERASMUS+ program (Capacity Building for Higher Education) - to endorse further structural reform of higher education in the Region including professionalisation of public higher education management and administration.
- *Governments of EFTA Countries* (Norway, Switzerland, Iceland and Liechtenstein) - to support activities of the permanent Office of the Regional Platform in Dubrovnik, including activities of the Council, the Executive Board and the Advisory Board of the Platform, including activities of various Working and Task Forces Groups to be launched under the scheme of the Regional Platform.
- *Qatar Foundation: 'WISE Initiative'* - to make contribution in the revitalisation of education and provide a global platform for the development of new ideas and solutions based on emerging ICT technologies.
- *King Baudouin Foundation* (KBF) for the interim funding for basic operational activities in 2014 and 2015. This application to KBF will be launched from the University of Novi Sad, in association with Novi Sad Initiative, until more permanent financial resources are found.