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Results of the ESF Seminar on "Support to Transnational Co-operation in ESF Programmes for 2007-2013", on March 22, 2007

Purpose of the Seminar

Following on from the seminar organised on 23 January, the Commission invited Member State representatives to a further meeting on 22 March to continue the exchange on relevant issues in programming and promoting transnational cooperation. The Commission also facilitated discussion on its proposal for support at a European level relating to partner search facilities, exchange forums for ESF managers, and thematic networks, as outlined in the orientation note and action plan by the Commission.

The seminar brought together around 50 representatives from 22 Member States, and from regional governments responsible for managing transnational cooperation in an ESF programme. Participation reflected the high interest of Member States and in particular the Regions. Germany, Italy and Spain all sent representatives who contributed from a regional perspective on transnational cooperation. There was also a mix of experienced ESF managers/ practitioners and managers who would be working on the new OPs with very little experience in promoting transnational cooperation. The strong participation of officials from DG Employment's ESF units ensured the link to the ongoing negotiations of the new ESF programmes.

Main results:

↳ As a follow up to the seminar in January and an update on the Commission's orientation note and action plan, the Commission highlighted **important issues in programming:**

- Transnational Cooperation should be a tool to achieve the Lisbon targets.
- Effective use of the transnationality facility calls for a more open and flexible approach than under EQUAL or INTERREG. Transnationality can cover a broad range of potential partner countries and promote a broad range of activities.
- Inclusion of public authorities at all levels is not only a regulatory requirement but is also needed to ensure that transnational activities reflect policy needs and that results of transnational activities are used to inform employment policy and delivery.
- Transnational exchange and cooperation works best if member states establish transparency on the actors interested or involved in transnational operations, on transnational activities being promoted, and on the achievements from transnational work.

- The specific nature of working with partners from other political, cultural and linguistic context calls for the provision of effective support and orchestrated services, and for the development of specific skills amongst ESF managers and beneficiaries.

↪ The Commission presented an **overview on the state of play**. It highlighted that most of the expected 117 OPs from MS and Regions were received and analysed, with about 50 programmes having a dedicated transnational priority axis. For the rest of the Programmes, transnationality is seen as a horizontal dimension to be integrated into all or some of the priority axes. Concerning choice of themes for transnational cooperation the snap shot made at the first seminar seems to be stable; the following themes are supported by many programmes: Integration of vulnerable groups, life long learning, entrepreneurship, equal opportunities, gender mainstreaming and innovation. As regards geographical preferences some OP's, in particular regional, have clear ideas about such preferences, for instance in the context of existing cooperation agreements, while other OP's are open to cooperation with all.

↪ The Commission also gave a more detailed explanation of **how it will assess the transnational dimension in a draft OP**.

It will check if the transnational dimension has been reflected at all levels of an OP:

- Analysis
 - The choice of themes should derive from the Analysis and SWOT. The analysis must also incorporate the main lessons learnt from the previous programming period, including the Equal and Art. 6 experience.
- Strategy
 - The Strategy should outline the rationale for promoting transnational cooperation and for the modalities proposed, and provide answers to pertinent questions such as
 - What is the expected contribution of transnationality to the OP's strategic objectives?
 - Who will be the main actors involved? The main partner countries?
 - What support will be given to transnational activities?
- Priority axis
 - When transnational cooperation is integrated as a dedicated priority, the OP should clarify:
 - What are the specific objectives of transnational cooperation?
 - What are the main activities? Indicative Operations? Quantified targets? Output and result indicators?
- Implementing provisions
 - The managing authority has the clear responsibility to make transnational cooperation work and this should be demonstrated through specific support.

↪ The discussion on the Commission's "Action plan to support transnational cooperation at EU level" focused on three action lines:

- **Thematic networking**

There was a strong call for the Commission to continue its support to thematic networking, for example by financing transnational events, helping in their preparation, providing thematic expertise and involving Commission's services which are politically responsible for the theme in question. This should ensure that the ESF thematic networking at European level will support the work of the

policy units of the Commission, and that the policy units can give a political feedback to the networks under the ESF.

- **Establishing a network of ESF Managers**

Participants were asked to work in table groups and discuss the setting up of a network of contact persons who are in charge of transnational cooperation by looking at what the profile of these people should be, and the tasks and objectives of such a network.

Discussions on each table were generally positive and varied, looking at several options, and raised some important points:

- Where MS had lots of regional programmes like Italy, Spain and Germany, regional contact persons needed to be considered
- The issues dealt with by the network will go through different life "stages" linked to the programmes life cycle such as design, implementation and dissemination.
- The network needs to be kept "manageable" and not too unwieldy.

The working groups looked at skill and tasks of a contact person and several suggestions were made:

Skills

- Technical knowledge of ESF, but have some policy links
- Experience with transnational cooperation
- Inter-cultural competence
- IT, communication, management and language skills

Tasks

- Responsible for quality, effectiveness and efficiency of the programmes
- Act as information point for other MS and the Commission in order to get updates on situation of national/regional OP and ensuring that information is distributed to the different levels.
- Supporting ESF file managers on transnational cooperation
- Coordinating, facilitating and promoting transnational cooperation at all levels
- Monitoring and evaluating the process of Transnational Coordination.
- Sharing and disseminating good practice on thematic basis.

Participants felt that **the mandate of the network** of contact persons was very much reliant on the discussion on the profile of the contact person and vice-versa, thus many of the tasks of the network were the same as those of the contact person. The following option/suggestions were made:

Membership

- Two members per Member State which could include 1 National Representative and 1 Regional Representative (i.e. coordinator for the Regional OPs where this would apply).
- The selection of the member should be made legitimately within the Managing Authority and in collaboration with other levels where necessary.
- Should meet at least twice a year at EU Level

Tasks and Objectives

- Exchange information and good practice between MS and Commission, provide training and raise awareness.
- Discuss problems at the level of colleagues
- Develop an action plan and ensure its implementation.

- **Partner and information search tool**

The second interactive session was dedicated to a very practical aspect of transnational cooperation; support in finding partners via an IT-tool. On the basis of a demonstration by the Polish managing authority of a prototype for a partner search tool working groups were asked to consider the elements that were useful and where improvements were needed. Main results of the discussions were:

- Link with other Commission partner databases such as INTERREG and Leonardo.
- Keep it simple and user-friendly with easy access
- Promote the tool as widely as possible – the success of the tool, and therefore its sustainability will rely on its use
- Provide a user manual/help function and a glossary of terms
- Good facilitation of tool in terms of updating, maintenance and quality control

Follow-up

↪ **Thematic networking:** At the level of managing authorities further clarification is needed with regards to the themes on which transnational cooperation will be promoted. Once this has been clarified and a critical mass has been established the Commission will decide on which additional thematic networks to support.

↪ **Network of contact persons:** A mandate for the network of contact persons will be developed in the next three months taking on board all the comments received at the seminar – the network will then play a key role in taking forward the work on transnationality, in particular making proposals to the Commission or interested Member States/Regions on future activities concerning thematic networking. A first meeting of the network of contact persons will be arranged for just after the summer break once contacts have been nominated by their Member State.

↪ **Partner search tool:** The Commission in collaboration with the Community of Practice will ensure that the comments from the seminar will be taken on board in the development of the Partner Search tool. An elaborated version is expected to be presented at the first meeting of the network of contact persons.

Signed

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