



**ACTION PLAN for 2005 – update 24-25 February 2005**

**General: Political impetus and Co-ordination**

*Ministerial meetings*

- The second Ministerial Conference on Employment in the framework of the Bucharest process is planned to take place in mid 2005 in Bulgaria, funded by the Belgian Government, with the aim to take stock of the progress made in the reviews of the employment policies, as well as to plan future regional co-operation in this field.
- The second Ministerial Forum on Health will take place on 25-26 November 2005 in Skopje, organised and co-funded by the WHO, the CoE and the CEB, to discuss the progress made so far, but even more importantly, to discuss how investments in health impact the economic development of the SEE countries. For this purpose, the participation of the Finance Ministers is also foreseen, while the CEB will prepare comprehensive background documentation on “Macroeconomics and Health in SEE”.

*Political intervention*

More frequent visits to the SEE countries by ISC Co-Chairs and discussions with national counterparts of the Initiative are also foreseen in 2005 following on visits in Bulgaria and Macedonia. Experience has shown that the Initiative has gained immensely from such “reality checks”. It has also been an opportunity for increasing the visibility of the Initiative. Furthermore, visits are envisaged whenever there is a need to break a deadlock in the development of the Initiative.

*Cross-table co-ordination*

The ISC has identified several areas of potential co-operation in the context of the efforts to enhance the convergence of Working Table II initiatives and the other ISC sectors.

- The social partners, the involvement of which is essential for the successful design and implementation of reforms in SEE, have identified various entry points to strengthen co-operation across WT II and the other ISC sectors;
- The participation of the social partners along with civil society and parliamentarians in a conference on “Establishing the Energy Community in SEE” organised by the Romanian Chairmanship-in-Office of the SEECP, under the auspices of the Stability Pact for SEE, financed by the European Commission, has marked the increased involvement of social partners in the restructuring of the energy market in SEE;
- The members of the employment network and the social partners from the region have actively participated in the workshops organized under the umbrella theme of “Entrepreneurship and Employment”. These workshops are designed to complement and enhance existing WT II initiatives in areas such as the Investment Compact, the European

Charter for Small Business and the Bucharest Employment Process. Another workshop on training and skills development for enhanced employability is foreseen for 21-22 April in Thessaloniki, in cooperation with the European Training Foundation;

- The social partners have identified the urgent need to focus on issues of fighting corruption and the shadow economy. Use would be made of existing instruments and methods (such as social corporate responsibility, codes of ethics etc.) putting them in the region specific context. Co-ordination will take place with the Stability Pact Anti-Corruption Initiative, operating under Working Table III;
- The need has been acknowledged for other WT II Initiatives, such as Trade Liberalization and Facilitation and the Investment Compact, to try to assess more accurately and to highlight the impact of their activities on the employment situation in SEE. Indeed, the development of the social sector is highly dependent and inter-related to economic development, mainly in the above mentioned areas;
- Contacts have been established with the European Transport Workers' Federation; the involvement of the social partners will be needed for the success and full implementation of the MoU on the Core Transport Network in SEE. Social partners are to be associated as observers to the meetings of the Steering Committee established under the MoU.

### **The sectoral activities**

#### **Employment Policy**

*Objective:* Continuation of the follow-up activities to the Bucharest Employment Conference, namely in-depth analysis and assessment by the ILO and the Council of Europe of the employment policies of Serbia and Moldova, while continuing the peer-review of the national employment policies among the other countries.

*Activities:* The second meeting of the Permanent High Level Committee on Employment took place in Strasbourg, 12-14 January 2005. At this meeting, the Country Report on the Employment Policies of Albania and Croatia was presented by the ILO and CoE and discussed with representatives of the two countries. Furthermore, the peer-reviews of employment policies of the other countries were undertaken with a view to further developing bilateral and multilateral cooperation, exchanges and technical assistance (learning from each other, with Romania and Bulgaria sharing with the other their experience as candidates to the EU). More specifically, Bulgaria prepared and presented comments and recommendations on the employment policy of Moldova and Romania on Bosnia and Herzegovina.

By October 2005, the ILO-CoE team will prepare in-depth analysis of the employment policies of Serbia and Moldova.

The next meeting of the Permanent High-Level Committee is scheduled for 14-15 April 2005 in Sarajevo, with two main objectives: evaluation of the cooperation process to date and preparation of the second Ministerial Conference on Employment.

Additionally, the ILO plans to organize national tripartite conferences in Albania and Croatia to discuss the reviews presented at the January meeting of their employment policies and the recommendations for improvement.

The ETF is pursuing a parallel exercise of assessment of labour market policies in the Western Balkan countries. The ISC has been instrumental in ensuring that these two processes will complement rather than duplicate themselves in 2005.

The second Ministerial Conference on Employment is foreseen for mid 2005, in Sofia.

### Health

*Objective:* Achievement of a political statement on long term regional collaboration on health at the Second Health Ministers Forum in November 2005 under the auspices of the ISC, further to the successful implementation of the Dubrovnik pledge.

*Activities:* The Network has adopted its own statutes, developed a sophisticated project management methodology and evaluation strategy, elaborated its advocacy and communication strategies and agreed on a priority setting approach. The principles of full transparency, equal participation, fair sharing of resources and benefits, consensus and dialogue have created a genuine democratic health agora.

The recent WHO Ministerial Conference on Mental Health in Helsinki (12-17 January 2005) offered a separate session to present the first tangible results of the Regional Project on Community Mental Health, one of the initiatives of the South Eastern Europe Health Network, under the auspices of the Social Cohesion Initiative of the Stability Pact.

In the run-up to the Second Health Ministers' Forum, several activities are planned for:

- Comprehensive evaluation of the regional cooperation on health, from 2001 to date;
- Upgrading relations with media and raising awareness on the occasion of the high-level event;
- Two meetings of the SEE Health Network (June and November), with main focus on the preparation of the Second Health Ministers' Forum;
- Preparation and publication of a report on "Health and Economic Development in SEE" by the CEB;
- Regional Ministerial Conference on Tobacco Control, planned for September 2005 in Sofia.

What regards the implementation of the various regional projects, the following activities are envisaged:

- Inauguration of pilot community mental health care centres in each of the SP beneficiary countries; the first one is to be opened in Strumica, Macedonia on 4 March 2005;
- The start of the first component of three projects on blood safety, tobacco control and information centres;
- Finalization of Food Safety Strategies and the preparation of legislation for Food and Nutrition Services and Surveillance and Control of Communicable Diseases;
- Finalization and launch of the project "Occupational Health and Safety", in cooperation with ILO, ETUC and IOE

The CEB-funded scholarship program for post-graduate studies in public health will start with increased funding of 200'000€. The CEB will also give loans to Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia and Albania for projects in the health sector.

The Health Division of the CoE plans to organise a workshop on "New challenges for patients and citizens in health care" in Ljubljana, Slovenia, in the first half of 2005. In order to support the implementation of the Helsinki Mental Health Declaration for Europe and its action plan, the workshop will put emphasis on mental health issues. Participant from the members of the SEE Health Network will be invited.

The CoE Health Division is also organising a conference on palliative care in Belgrade, Serbia and Montenegro, later this year. Although formally not specifically related to the activities of the SEE Health Network, the conference shall be interesting for other countries in the region.

### Housing

*Objective:* Sustaining the work of the Housing Experts' Network, in cooperation with SP Housing and Urban Management Initiative.

*Activities:* In 2004, the housing network started the preparation of regional report on "Trends and Progress in Housing Reforms in South East Europe". This report is being prepared by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe in cooperation with the Council of Europe and the Council of Europe Development Bank, funded by the CEB Norwegian Trust Fund. The report is expected to help streamline housing policies of the countries and put the data collection in line with the practice of the countries of the European Union.

The preliminary draft report was discussed at the second network meeting, which took place in Strasbourg on 6 -7 December 2004. The report will review factors influencing the performance of the housing sector, including economic, social and political transition. It will assess housing policy reforms in South-East Europe, and in particular the formulation of housing policy, and the design of regulation and of fiscal and financial instruments. It will examine the situation of the existing housing stock and trends in new construction; in particular, it will help to assess housing distribution and quality, tenure structure, housing costs and affordability and investment and provision of new housing. The report will also look into a few specific housing themes, such as housing management and maintenance, social housing and housing finance.

A new draft of the report is expected at the end of February. Following a process of consultations with the SEE countries, it is expected that the report will be finalised and approved at the network meeting in May 2005.

### Social dialogue

*Objective:* Continuing support for the freedom of association, the independence and the institutional strengthening of Employers' Organisations and their capacity to engage into collective bargaining and further develop their services; continued strengthening of the capacities of the trade unions in the SEE region; support to the labour laws experts' network and to the establishment of labour courts.

*Activities:* The major donor and supporter of the activities of the networks of employers' associations and trade unions, the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, pledged a longer-term commitment, encompassing the next 2-3 years, in its financial and technical assistance to the social dialogue sector. This will enable the networks to undertake the program of activities for 2005 they set out at their last joint meeting:

- Continuing the work on labour dispute resolution, in particular the establishment of labour courts in Bulgaria, FYR of Macedonia and possibly in Bosnia-Herzegovina;
- Raising the political influence of the networks in the various SEE Governments, mainly through the organization of a major regional conference on "The Role of Law in Labour Relations" in the first half of 2005;
- Collecting information on the different instruments and policies in the fight against corruption— particularly on the transparency of public procurement and putting it into a publication, ready for distribution in the second half of 2005; further coordination with the Stability Pact Anti-Corruption Initiative continues - the social partners will take part in the upcoming May Ministerial Conference on Anti-Corruption in SEE;

- Social partners have also raised the issue of shadow economy and will continue to discuss the possibilities to formalize it;
- Dissemination of best practices through bilateral cooperation between employers' organizations:
  - Establishment of a twinning program between Macedonian and Croatian employers;
  - Establishment of a twinning program between Montenegrin and Croatian employers;
  - Further support to the established Romanian-Moldovan partnership between employers;
  - Help Kosovar employers to establish an employers' organization;
  - Political support to the employers' organizations in FYR of Macedonia and Bosnia-Herzegovina vis-à-vis the Chambers of Commerce;
- Participation in the design and implementation of the project on "Occupational Health and Safety";
- Ensuring the participation of social partners in the various EU and Stability Pact events on various topics covering the economic development of the region (e.g. energy and transport).

The sector needs to further refine its strategy and objectives. It also needs additional funding. For this purpose, a series of consultations meetings will be held with the relevant organizations/partners/donors, which will address in more detail the complexities of social dialogue, as well as define what more can be achieved through regional cooperation in this field.

### Social Protection

*Objective:* Strengthening the coordination of social security policies, assisting the introduction of EU and CoE standards, with special attention to cross-border exchange of benefits and the restructuring of the social security and pension systems in the SEE countries.

*Activities:* The Council of Europe has started the implementation of a three-year programme in South East Europe to support social policies and institutions and promote social security coordination in the region. It is a joint CARDS project between the European Commission and the Council of Europe and DG III Social Cohesion assumed its management.

The programme is a spin-off of a previous project (co-financed by the Italian Government and the Council of Europe), carried out within the Initiative for Social Cohesion of the Stability Pact for South East Europe. This project, which was finalised last year, contributed to the creation of a network of social security professionals and set the basis for the regional cooperation in the field of social security coordination. The CARDS programme aims at strengthening the legislative framework and the policymaking process for social protection policies, improve co-ordination of social security systems for migrating and moving persons and build capacities in the public administrations with respect to social security and social policy making.

The regional office of the project, hosting the project implementation team and serving as a central point for regional social dialogue, was established in Skopje in January 2005 and the project team is currently in discussions with national authorities on the creation of liaison offices in all the countries of the region. The first meeting of the project Steering Committee is foreseen for 17 March.

Several other activities are set for 2005 under the broad theme of strengthening the social security governance and restructuring selected benefits and pension systems in SEE, implemented by the ILO: study on the disability pension reform and a seminar discussing outcomes of the study; exchanges within the region in the area of social services (Moldova, Romania), pension reform (Albania, Serbia), gender dimension of pension reform (FYR of Macedonia, Croatia), collection of contributions (countries to be identified), sickness benefits

(Albania), and occupational pensions (Romania). Experts within and outside the region with skill and knowledge will provide consultancies. Research on pension reform and social dialogue and a seminar discussing outcomes of the study are also planned for 2005.

