

Concluding remarks
Wolfgang Husemann
Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs

at the TLN Mobility Conference
"Tackling youth unemployment through
transnational mobility - a coordinated response
under the ESF 2014-2020"

25 November 2013, 12:45 a.m.

Neue Mälzerei, Friedensstr. 91, Berlin

Ladies and Gentlemen,

when the Transnational Learning Network "Mobility" planned this conference it started out with big expectations:

- to present an entirely new approach to policy design and coordination in the framework of the European Social Fund,
- and to convince you, Ladies and Gentlemen, that this approach is a genuine opportunity to really improve the situation of unemployed youth and young adults across Europe.

Not an easy task - I learnt while looking at the conference documents folder before the beginning of the conference: Fact sheets, overview slides, a brochure - strategic objectives, specific objectives, policies, processes, policy design, policy implementation. As a political scientist this reminded me of seminars on governance which I attended as a university student - and as a civil servant in a Ministry I wonder whether the approach aiming at voluntary coordination of transnational measures within the ESF can be really implemented and whether will be of practical relevance in the future, if ever.

There is no clear answer to this question yet, because the Network has not finalized its work at this conference, but has only undertaken an interim review.

There are still numerous issues requiring clarification in connection with the coordinated call - including the important question how it can be guaranteed that the funding of a project partner abroad complies with the national or regional auditing rules - as stipulated by the ESF Regulation. [Art. 13 para. 2b Draft-Reg./ ESF PE-CONS 87/13 – 2011/0268(COD)].

Or take the question how it can be ensured that transnational project partnerships - as far as possible - organise reciprocal exchange projects - while not excluding already existing, successful partnerships from the coordinated call.

There will be even more need for clarification as soon as you, Ladies and Gentlemen, will start to implement the coordinated call in the Member States and regions - amongst other things the question will have to be answered, whether you can make use of the simplified cost options or how to design a two-stage application procedure in order to fund the preparation costs for transnational projects.

When one takes stock of the work performed by the Transnational Learning Network Mobility to date, these open questions are not decisive, however.

It is rather decisive that the Network and its external experts succeeded - by means of an intensive and thorough discussion of the topic - in systematically identifying the general questions which have to be clarified to make transnational cooperation in the ESF a success.

Firstly you can only identify success or failure if you have an **objective**. The objective of transnational mobility programmes planned by TLN Mobility, is to integrate youth and young adults into work, training or to reintegrate them into the education system after their work stays in other European countries.

Compared to many other transnational projects - including the Community Initiative EQUAL in the past - this is a very practical, measurable objective. While this approach also targets mutual learning, all efforts ultimately focus on the improvement of the personal situation of young people in Europe. I am convinced that any form of transnational cooperation in the new ESF programming period 2014 to 2020 needs such concrete objectives to underline its added value and to consolidate its importance in the long run.

With its clearly defined objective, the TLN Mobility has provided a solid benchmark for the success of transnational cooperation. Good first step!

It is on this basis that the Network has provided a systematic, detailed and step-by-step answer to the question as to **how transnational mobility programmes have to be designed in order to reach their goal**: Integration into work, training or reintegration of young people into the educational system.

To achieve this it was necessary to first of all generally identify the relevant parameters inherent in mobility programmes for the target group as well as the respective options for these parameters: the target group, phases and components of a mobility programme, possible implementation structures, financial framework conditions and so on. Without the meticulous description of all these parameters and the related design options the Network would not have been able to identify at all the decisive questions which you, Ladies and Gentlemen, discussed in the workshops yesterday and today.

But in spite of this demanding and time-consuming identification of the relevant parameters, members of the network have nonetheless succeeded in this relatively

short term since February 2013 to determine some important minimum requirements **with regard to procedures and policies of the coordinated transnational mobility measures.**

- The partners have agreed upon a **timeframe** - even though still tentative - for the coordinated calls: If everything goes according to plan, the coordinated call shall be published by mid 2014 so that the individual calls can be drafted and implemented on the national and/or regional level after the approval of the Operational Programmes by the European Commission in the autumn. Instruments to find transnational project partners - such as a database and a partner search forum shall be in operation by late 2014 / early 2015.
- Important content features of the coordinated call which the Network has agreed on concern not only the objective and the target group, but also the **quality criteria** of the mobility programmes. You already received the draft coordinated call in workshop B yesterday or this morning. It is essential that you realize in connection with the target groups of NEETs that it is not sufficient to just organise the work stay abroad, but that preparation and follow up of the stay abroad are decisive in order to make the scheme a success.
- As regards the financial framework conditions the Network has agreed on some important points too, e.g. that every Member State and/or every region assumes the costs for its own participants - even if these costs are incurred abroad. There is also agreement in the Network that preparation costs for transnational projects shall be reimbursable costs.

However, **recommendations of the Network that certain options should not be determined centrally in the coordinated call, but that the decision should be left to the Member States and the regions** are just as important as the Network's decisions on mandatory aspects in the coordinated call. The difficult task consists in finding the right balance between regulation and flexibility. The Network is drafting a manual with flexible recommendations which can serve as a support tool for Member States and regions when they conceive their individual calls. The manual will include e.g. recommendations regarding the implementation of the mobility programmes in networks, regarding the professional competence of social workers in the projects or regarding simplified cost options.

Objective, target groups, a timeframe, a draft coordinated call regarding the quality of the programmes, financial framework conditions and implementation structures as well as a manual with implementation recommendations plus a very informative conference yesterday and today - all this has been accomplished by the Network since February 2013.

From now on the experts have just over one year - until February 2015 - to finalise and publish the coordinated call and to subsequently support the implementation in the Member States and regions. A data base to find transnational project partners and a partner search forum are the two most important examples for this type of support.

If I look at all the work done, at how much energy, wit, but also sheer stamina you have already demonstrated as a partner in the TLN Mobility, I am very optimistic that in spite of all the unanswered questions you will be successful in the end. It won't be easy, but this also makes it a very exciting task - I believe - and the final result may well be truly impressive.

As the responsible Head of the ESF Group in the Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs I would like to thank all the partners in the Transnational Learning Network very cordially indeed. Unfortunately I cannot mention each and everyone - otherwise you will miss your flights and we would all miss lunch.

I would like to thank my team in the Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs for their committed work in connection with leading the Network and two working groups as well as for the organisation of this conference which has indeed fulfilled the big expectations.

I wish the Transnational Learning Network Mobility every success with its future work. All of you have really carried out substantial work since February. Keep going, I am sure it's worth the effort!

Before I now let you go to have lunch I must not forget to thank Mr Reichstein and the other participants of yesterday's round table discussion and - last but not least - Mirjam Janke for her intelligent and multilingual moderation.

I am already looking forward to meeting many of you again at the final conference of the network in Marseille in February 2015 - and I am wondering already now whether the TLN Mobility will have managed by then to present to us the first transnational partnerships in action ready to implement mobility projects for young persons in Europe.

Finally you are all invited to our small lunch snack! Have a safe trip home and enjoy the rest of your week - good bye and Auf Wiedersehen.