



## **Minutes of the kick-off meeting Craiova, February 26-27, 2018**

### ***February 26, 09.30 – 12.30***

Cristiana Teodorescu delivered a welcome address on behalf of the University of Craiova.

All the participants briefly introduced themselves and their research and academic interests.

Representatives of each partner delivered a presentation of their institution and the implemented quality assurance system:

- University of Craiova – presenter: Anca Bandoi;
- Plovdiv University – presenter: Jane Raykova;
- University of Latvia – presenter: Baiba Savrina;
- Simon Kuznets Kharkiv National University of Economics – presenter: Iryna Zolotaryova;
- Lviv Polytechnic National University – presenter: Ihor Oleksiv;
- Donetsk State University of Management – presenter: Iryna Sikorskaya;
- National Metallurgical Academy of Ukraine – presenter: Andriy Petrenko;
- Kazakh Ablai Khan University of International Relations and World Languages – presenter: Maigul Nugmanova;
- Kazakh University of Economics, Finance and International Trade – presenter: Ainazat Urkinbayeva.

### ***February 26, 14.00 – 17.00***

#### **1. Maksym Kolisnyk delivered a brief presentation of the EDUQAS project.**

This project is a result of a previous project, UNIQUA, which dealt with self-assessment tools for quality assurance, and five partners from within this project are now participating in EDUQAS.

The main idea of EDUQAS is to establish quality culture in the participating universities of Ukraine and Kazakhstan, with the involvement of both internal and external stakeholders. The final goal of the project is to improve quality assurance and provide transfer of knowledge for members of the consortium, so as to ultimately result in better employability for Ukrainian and Kazakh graduates.

Andriy Petrenko intervened, asking for an exact list of the results that will be obtained by the end of the project.

M. Kolisnyk stated that the goal is to build the capacity of Ukrainian universities and agencies, to establish new quality assurance strategies on the basis of this experience. Moreover, the project will launch the evaluation of 2 programmes, BA programmes and MA programmes, according to EU standards (chosen by the partners). Then, it will be seen what should be



adjusted, what should be changed. The project seeks to transform internal quality systems, as well as using some previous experience from Erasmus+ programmes.

A. Petrenko: Will each Ukrainian university work independently?

M. Kolisnyk: Together, in a consortium.

Iryna Zolotaryova: The consortium includes representatives of the Ministry, because now Ukraine has no higher education quality assurance agency. The system currently is very rigid.

M. Kolisnyk: Ukraine does not have a coherent quality assurance system, which is also a problem.

Ihor Oleksiv: Internal or external? Because an internal quality assurance system is very particular and depends on each institution.

M. Kolisnyk: Both internal and external. The quality assurance process will deal with new units or existing units; a person is chosen as head of unit, and we try to evaluate, to launch a pilot evaluation. This first stage of the project is to analyse experiences of European universities and obtain some recommendations, guidelines.

I. Zolotaryova: Project teams have to be organized within each university, and the project team should include members who are responsible for educational quality.

M. Kolisnyk: Project teams must include all personnel who could be useful for the project, academic staff, administrative staff. External stakeholders should also be involved.

## **2. Discussions on the financial management of the project and reporting issues. Questions and answers**

The session was chaired by Anca Tanasie, financial officer of the project. She invited everyone to address questions and possible issues that may have arisen/arise. She also informed that on the following day exchanges will take place with the Project Monitor from EACEA, as well as a member of the Accounting Department of the University of Craiova, where several financial issues may also be addressed.

Anca Tanasie informed that the University of Craiova is bound by EU financial rules, as well as by Romanian law. Romanian rules are very strict in terms of dealing with EU money. She also said that a platform will be available on the project website, where each partner will be asked to create a folder for financial reporting (password-protected for each partner), and upload documents according to the corresponding budget section.

She then proceeded to presenting the categories of costs entailed by this project (supported by a PowerPoint presentation), and began by detailing staff costs. For reporting purposes, staff costs must be supported by:

- a joint declaration (template);
- time sheets (XLS template): number of hours worked within this project – with the maximum limit being different from country to country (Romania: max. 80 hours/month);
- proof of formal contractual relationship – specific for the project, extra to one's usual employment contract.

I. Zolotaryova: Is it enough to have a decision of the Rector with the name of persons?

A. Tanasie: This is not the same thing.



Oksana Tsukan: We have order and a regular contract. We don't have an additional contract, because it's a civil contract, not a labour contract.

A. Tanasie: It should be some sort of formal agreement between the person and the university.

O. Tsukan: This is done every year in Ukraine, because the regular contract is done every year.

Maigul Nugmanova: Do we have a draft?

A. Tanasie: The template depends on national legislation. We don't have a draft.

A. Petrenko: Is the joint declaration the same thing as the contract?

A. Tanasie: No. Anyway, we should just provide the documents, no matter what the document is.

O. Tsukan: Is there a template for supporting documents?

A. Tanasie: No, it depends on the type of activity. If you have a course, the relevant PowerPoint presentation. If you publish a book, the book. If it would be easier, we can create a template.

I. Zolotaryova: Do you need proof of payment to staff?

A. Tanasie: No, the university has to keep them. Only if the EU asks them for auditing purposes, but we don't need to have it here.

A. Tanasie: The number of hours is declared in the timesheet. We have to make sure that the hours of labour match the hours for each working package.

Anca Tanasie then detailed other categories of costs, as follows:

- Travel costs and costs of stay:
  - o Individual travel report (template)
  - o Supporting documents – scanned versions uploaded on the website; no need of proof of actual costs, because unit costs are stipulated.
- Actual costs:
  - o Equipment – reporting documents: copy of the contract for equipment purchase, invoice, competitive offers.
  - o Subcontracting.

O. Tsukan: In Ukraine we have a special online platform where we put our order with the sum of money, where we receive the tenders. So the offers are only provided online.

A. Tanasie: An invoice, then. An invoice from the winner.

M. Kolisnyk: When we had the AUF project, AUF paid for equipment directly in Ukraine. We organized the tendering process and got 3 tenders, we chose the best one, and AUF paid the equipment directly.

O. Tsukan: Moreover, if buying through the online platform, all payments will be done in grivna.

I. Zolotaryova: Ukraine has different rules for some kind of equipment. For instance, for the conference system, where one has to buy cables, etc., this equipment can be bought directly from supplier, not through the platform.

Andrey Stoyka: We could do a three-party agreement for equipment purchase, whereby the University of Craiova makes the payment directly to the supplier.

A. Tanasie: Our rules prevent us from doing that.

I. Zolotaryova: We had this problem with an Erasmus+ agreement with a French university; they said that if they paid for the equipment, the equipment belonged to that university.

Anca Bandoi: The University of Craiova is subject to only one law: the national law.



I. Zolotaryova: We have to purchase 3 kinds of equipment. For each item we can provide the contract and the invoice, but we do not have competitive offers. Then we can provide inventory list and pictures of the equipment.

A. Tanasie: We shall ask the project monitor and our accounting department what to do if 3 competitive offers/tenders cannot be obtained.

O. Tsukan: When sending money for each partner, we would like you to mention how much is for staff costs, how much is for equipment in each transfer. Is it possible?

A. Tanasie: The partner decides how much money spends for staff. For instance, if we transfer 20% of the first amount, you can divide it as you wish.

Andrey Stoyka: When are we supposed to buy equipment? Equipment can be bought gradually?

M. Kolisnyk: If you transfer 50% of the grant (the pre-financing amount), the majority of this sum will be spent to buy equipment, and people will then need money for mobilities.

A. Tanasie: The money has to be spent depending on the Gantt diagram of the project.

M. Kolisnyk: But the costs for equipment cannot be divided, according to the Guide.

A. Tanasie: You could enter a loan agreement with your university.

Monica Tilea: In Erasmus+ KA 2 strategic partnerships we get 40% of the money at the beginning. 40% is not enough to make all the payments that we are supposed to make. What we do: I pay the researcher who does the research in the first part of the project, but I only pay him after I get the second tranche of money.

A. Tanasie: We shall ask the project monitor how to proceed given that money for buying equipment cannot be divided.

M. Kolisnyk: We have 8000 EUR for language courses. We have to know how we can organize them.

A. Tanasie: We shall be asking offers for that. The administrative department will choose a competitive offer.

M. Kolisnyk: Online courses are acceptable?

A. Tanasie: Yes, because you don't have trip money for that.

Andrey Stoyka: Can we, for instance, move money from equipment to subcontracting? We have 0 for subcontracting.

A. Tanasie: As long as you are below 10%, we don't have to ask for the approval of the Agency. It is important to obey the ceilings.

M. Nugmanova: Can we use cofinancing for staff costs?

A. Tanasie: In Work Package 3, for instance, you only have cofinancing. And we don't need any documents for cofinancing.

O. Tsukan: How can we prove the financing? What kind of documents?

A. Tanasie: For now, we don't have to submit any documents for cofinancing, as per the Guide.

O. Tsukan: Where do we mention the cofinancing?

A. Tanasie: In the final report – the XLS template that should be delivered to the Agency. The amount can also be stated in labour hours – e.g. you work, but you are paid by your university. The same thing with the amount of money we spend for bank transfers – that is also cofinancing. In the end, the total value of the project will be different from the grant awarded. And we have to prove that that amount is at least 10% higher than the awarded grant. Moreover, if you have a mobility, and you have that unit cost awarded to you – 200 EUR – but that is not enough for your



travel, the difference is cofinancing from your institution (e.g. the plane ticket was more expensive).

Andriy Petrenko: Can we transfer funds between work packages?

A. Tanasie: There might be a problem with the number of hours. If we don't deliver the number of hours, they will say we haven't fulfilled the objectives of a certain work package.

## **February 27, 10.00 – 16.00**

### **1. Exchange with Belén Enciso, Project Monitor from EACEA, via WebEx**

The Craiova team had sent to Belén Enciso, on the previous day, some questions from the partners that had arisen during the meeting.

Regarding the payment for equipment, Belén Enciso informed as follows:

- The transfers of money between the coordinators and the partners is something you have to agree upon now, in this meeting, it is not imposed. What we published is not imposed. You have to draft a new version that best reflects your needs. If you think that you need to have different instalments it's not a problem for us.
- You say that you need to buy the equipment at the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> year, according to the work plan. There are two possibilities: either the equipment is bought by the partner countries, and is paid by the coordinator directly to the seller, and you just make an international transfer to the seller. This avoids the problem of not having enough money. Other solution: you make a pre-financing payment to the partners. You could already anticipate in the PA that the first prefinancing are going to be higher than the last ones, so the partners have the equipment money already at their disposal.
- Of course, if the auditors see that you have split the purchase in order to avoid tendering, there might be a problem.
- If you make a big purchase for Kazakhstan or anything else, that is, several universities have a seller, you can negotiate with the seller that the payment instalments are done at different moments. Then, the purchase is not split, but the payment is split.
- In the Capacity Building process, it is important for the partner institutions to be able to manage their own share of the budget. But it is different for equipment. So, if it's helpful for the partners, the coordinator could make the payment.
- Ukrainian partners should contact the national Erasmus+ office for the procurement process. The national Erasmus+ office supports partners with all supporting documents they need.

A. Tanasie: There is a problem on a legal level here in Romania, in making those payments. According to the Acquisitions Law in Romania, we are not allowed to pay for equipment that is not our own.

B. Enciso: Money is coming from the EU, not the Romanian government. It is possible in other countries. Maybe you could communicate with your National Agency. In Austria, Germany, Spain it is possible. Anyway, you have the other solution, of making a bigger pre-financing to



the partners. Maybe purchase equipment in the first year for Kazakhstan, and in the second year – after receiving the second tranche of money – for Ukraine.

A. Tanasie: 50% will be transferred. There have been requests of transferring lower amounts of money, would that be possible?

B. Enciso: You have to agree among you. Of course it's much more efficient to pay bigger pre-financing, because you avoid bank charges.

B. Enciso: The European Commission only intervenes to a 10% extent in the project proposal. In 90% of the project environment we do not intervene at all. You have to decide upon it with your team. It's a pity to lose money, but if the project environment says it's no other way in our institution, then we have to accept. All the specificities have to be included in the partnership agreement, so that we know that you are aware of the project environment issues that will arise.

A. Tanasie: Situations are different, but we have to obey the law.

B. Enciso: We try to be flexible. But we know that the context is very different in each country and we do try, within the limits of the Grant Agreement, to be flexible, with the main aim of achieving the goals you have achieved in your proposal. We are working together for the same objective, we are not there as auditors in order to criticize or find problems, but to solve the problems and support you. Always try to keep a balance between flexibility and the constraints of the Grant Agreement.

A. Tanasie: Now about mobilities – how flexible we are in terms of adjusting the number of days in our mobilities from the budget?

B. Enciso: There is a flexibility, but you should not exceed the budget you have. There are 2 ways of tackling them: the EC will reimburse the unit cost corresponding to the number of mobilities that have been carried out; but you can agree with each other, instead of sending 5 people, with the same money we'll send 10 people. You'll only be reimbursed for 5 people, because that's what you asked in the budget. This will not be reflected in the financial report, but in the narrative report.

In terms of days – you have planned the mobilities 1 year and a half ago, and of course there will be a lot of changes in the meantime, activities can be longer or shorter, or can be combined. When the changes are too radical, you would have to let me know, so that I can give you a guidance to make the change, and not to have any problem at the end. But if in one mobility you have 1 day extra, and in another one, 1 day less, there's no problem.

A. Tanasie: About staff costs: we have an employment contract as part of the project. The question was whether a person can have several positions – administrative, technical, research?

B. Enciso: Yes. Because you can have an academic who works in the project and is developing teaching materials – then s/he is reimbursed as an academic. The same professor is also doing project management – then s/he is reimbursed as a manager or technical staff. You have to reimburse the staff based on the tasks that they are doing, not on their positions in the university. The budget is very generous, enabling projects to do a lot of things. If you are going to manage it in a very efficient way, you will surely be able to prove to us that you have achieved more than proposed initially. We have seen this with the previous generations, that all projects were having exceedings, and we could not reimburse all the expenditure. If you achieve all your goals, you will be a good practice example.



I. Zolotaryova: Our coordinator asked us to prepare a special contract between the persons who will work in this project inside our university. This is not applicable for Ukraine, because we already have a contract as professors. We cannot have a separate contract. In previous projects, we prepared a special order from the rector and we wrote the names and responsibilities of the persons. But it would not be possible to prepare a special contract.

B. Enciso: The auditor only checks whether you have an employment with the university. You don't need an additional contract. This is different for natural persons who are not employed with the university.

I. Zolotaryova: Now about the equipment. We are 2 years after writing the project, and the University has other needs in terms of equipment. Can we change some equipment and send the list for approval?

B. Enciso: I understand that, of course, there are changes in the equipment after some time. But you cannot suddenly change all the idea about the equipment. This would need a special authorization. If it's only about some upgrading, or number of items, it is not a problem. I appreciate to be informed, but you will have not any troubles with our financial services or the auditors. In case of radical changes – if you build a PC lab instead of a video conferencing system – we need to see why. Then, I insist on the issue of desk monitoring. I'm following up your project in the distance, support you with questions, but the real monitoring takes place in the partner countries, in the universities of Ukraine and Kazakhstan. And you have to count with at least 1 visit from colleagues from the national E+ offices in those countries to see how the project is progressing there on the spot. You are requested to reply positively to their request and gather, if possible, all universities in one single visit. Because the monitors want to see what is going on in the project in the entire country, not a single institution. The European Commission has a monitoring plan and sends it to them, so you are required to welcome them and we then provide some feedback and some recommendations. We try to see whether the progress is different in some countries and others and provide recommendations.

A. Stoyka: How do we calculate the time for travel? We have a mobility – 2 working days in Craiova, and we have 2 days for travel in the budget. For our university 1 day is not enough. It takes 2 days to get to Craiova. How many days to calculate for costs of stay?

B. Enciso: You have to agree on this among you now. We are going to reimburse the project the days of the activity + the travelling time. Maybe the consortium would prefer to save some money and make an internal decision about the travel time. You have to agree on your working modalities and reimbursement mechanisms. And it is not necessarily what we consider as eligible.

A. Stoyka: Is it a problem if we have 6 days for this mobility and less days for other mobility? If the budget stipulates 4 days for each.

B. Enciso: Yes, there is a flexibility. You can also decide to combine mobilities or you can change places and this kind of flexibility is not a problem. I think it's better for me to be informed, because this way we can provide you with guidance, but there's always a margin of flexibility.

A. Tanasie: What are the proofs we need to submit for cofinancing?



B. Enciso: No proof for cofinancing. But we understand that you need to cofinance if you need to achieve some goals.

**2. Victor Kordas from KTH Royal Institute of Technology of Stockholm delivered a presentation of his institution.**

**3. Discussions on the future meetings to take place in the project**

The session was chaired by Gabriela Iacobescu.

G. Iacobescu: We have to discuss the meetings of the project, and inform the European Commission on the meetings. A plan was drawn up according to the project proposal. We can have some changes, but please not very drastic.

Then, G. Iacobescu presented a table with the meetings schedule.

G. Iacobescu: We have to obey the budget, but we can have some freedom inside the budget. The next meeting is scheduled for Plovdiv, May 2018 and is a management meeting.

Jane Raykova (University of Plovdiv): Do the 6 days include travel?

G. Iacobescu: Yes. And we can add one day for Mariupol.

J. Raykova: We have two offers: May 14 – May 19 or May 20 – 25.

A. Stoyka: We would like not to use Sunday. We propose to use Monday for travel.

J. Raykova: Then May 15 – May 20 or May 21 – May 26.

I. Zolotaryova: May 14 is OK for the 3 people from KhNUE.

I. Oleksiv: 2 people, May 14 also OK for Lviv.

A. Stoyka: May 14, 2 people for Mariupol.

Ainazat Urkinbayeva: May 14 OK for Kazakhstan as well.

The meeting for Plovdiv was established for May 15 – May 20.

G. Iacobescu: Next meeting – Stockholm – July 2018.

V. Kordas (University of Stockholm): Impossible. I would propose starting second half of August up to September. In July we are on holiday.

I. Zolotaryova, I. Oleksiv: Beginning of September.

G. Iacobescu: What about the exact dates? Is September 10-15 OK?

September 10-15 was approved for the meeting in Stockholm.

G. Iacobescu: We also have scheduled a meeting in December in Nancy. Since the partners from Nancy are not here, we shall send them an e-mail asking them to decide between two options. Let's propose the beginning of December – to be a bit far from Christmas. So December 3-8 or December 10-15 for Nancy and this will be a management meeting with 18 people.

O. Tsukan: We would like to change the positions of Liege, Kharkiv. A meeting would be scheduled for February 2019 for 18 persons in Liege.

I. Oleksiv: I think it is too early to put the exact dates now. Maybe we can discuss it in September in Stockholm.



G. Iacobescu: Ok, in September in Stockholm we'll discuss on the meetings for the next year.

A. Stoyka: About the mobility to Mariupol. The month of August is not OK for us. Maybe September or October. Moreover, I want everybody to understand that it is 12 km from the war. Our proposal is to have the meeting in Kyiv. We will organize it and it will be less dangerous. All hotels are booked by military corps in Mariupol, etc.

M. Nugmanova: We also have a proposal. Maybe because of distance we could combine 2 mobilities to Kazakhstan. We have similar experience. It will give us opportunity to save money, as well as money for travel days.

G. Iacobescu: Do you need visa or other procedures?

M. Nugmanova: We would like to receive your permission in terms of visa. For example, in order to go to Romania we need to obtain Romanian visa. To Bulgaria as well, and it is too expensive. But if we open multi-entrance Schengen visa, this would save project money.

V. Kordas: Sweden can help with this, as neither Romania, nor Bulgaria are members of the Schengen area. We will issue an invitation, when requested.

A. Petrenko: We would like to know what is the purpose of each meeting.

L. Mandache: On the screen you have projected a calendar of activities where it mentions the purpose of every meeting.

G. Iacobescu: We would like to ask you to place the project on your websites, in a visible place. Second, it has to be visible in the media. And if you have some conference on education or quality, please have a presentation on the project. All dissemination documents should be sent by e-mail and will be published on the project website, they are a deliverable at the end of the project.

#### **4. Discussions on the financial management of the project and reporting issues. Questions and answers**

A. Tanasie: We have with us a representative of our financial department who will also answer your questions and I shall translate. Now about the payments for the equipment. As stated before, it is not possible for us to pay for your equipment. It's not legal for us to do that.

I. Zolotaryova: Why?

A. Tanasie: The invoice will be on your university's name and we cannot make a payment for something that does not belong to us. We do not have equipment in our budget and then we cannot have invoices stating that we buy equipment.

A. Stoyka: Maybe you could contact with universities which did this before.

A. Tanasie: That could have happened in the past, but it is not guaranteed that our university will allow that.

V. Kordas: You could also contact with other Romanian universities who were involved in previous similar projects.

I. Zolotaryova: French universities said the same in the beginning. And then we prepared an agreement between the Ukrainian university and the provider and the Rector of the French university wrote an engagement letter saying that the university would pay.



A. Tanasie: This is not possible.

I. Zolotaryova: I propose we send you all the documents you need and you have to prepare for this.

A. Tanasie: It is a matter of responsibility. Our institution is not going to take this responsibility and it is beyond us.

V. Kordas: Let's try to find a solution, not kind of making categorical decisions. Let's try to look from different perspectives. No one is asking to do something against the legislation, but you have to try. Maybe contact with the national E+ office.

I. Sikorskaya: We also had problems the first time a Ukrainian university was a grantholder. But the national E+ office is working a lot for this project to make it work. And it happened, the EU supported it.

A. Tanasie: Romania is very rigid.

I. Zolotaryova: As coordinator you are responsible not only for your own results, but for the results of the entire project. We have a lot of obstacles in Ukraine and we never bought equipment in this way. After 2014 we had a lot of limitations in our legislation.

V. Kordas: You will also lose money because of the exchange rate when you transfer the money to Ukrainian universities. You are not solving problems for the Ukrainians only, but also for you. When they will actually report the expenditure it would be even more difficult.

A. Tanasie: The best way would be to pay in euros.

A. Stoyka: Invoices will be in grivnas.

A. Tanasie: It is possible to have more instalments.

I. Oleksiy: That is all the more reasons to two transfers instead of one. At the moment, the project is not registered and the money will be transferred into grivnas. But we need money now to cover trips.

A. Tanasie: Then you would have to pay the bank transfer fees as cofinancing.

I. Zolotaryova: We need to write it in the Partnership Agreement.

A. Tanasie: No, in the Payment Request. You say that the 50% will be delivered in two different instalments.

A. Petrenko: If the cost of bank transfer is on the beneficiary, this should be written in the PA.

A. Tanasie: It would be better in the payment request. And at the next meeting you can give the originals.

## **5. Miscellanea**

Discussions on the project logo followed and some proposals by the University of Mariupol were discussed.

Maksym Kolisnyk presented the composition of the Project Steering Committee. This includes the national coordinators for Ukraine – Iryna Zolotaryova – and Kazakhstan – Maigul Nugmanova, as well as the regional coordinator for EU – Dominique Thewissen and the regional coordinator for Ukraine and Kazakhstan – Maksym Kolisnyk.



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The meeting ended at 15.45.