

SEE QI Newsletter 7

Regional Consultancy Fund for Quality Infrastructure (QI) in South East Europe (SEE)

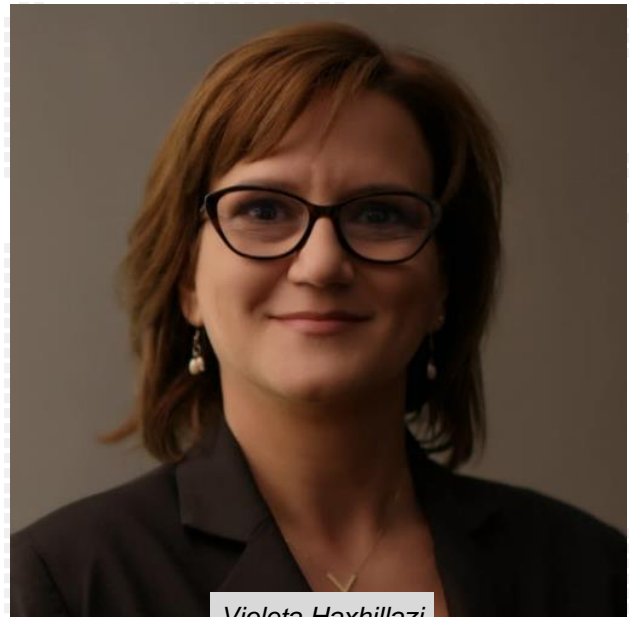
The SEE QI Fund is a demand-driven project implemented by the German national metrology institute, Physikalisch-Technische Bundesanstalt (PTB). It supports initiatives that foster the increased recognition of QI services in the Western Balkan (WB6) countries and thus facilitates their integration into the European Union (EU) common market and other markets. This newsletter provides updates on recent developments in the SEE QI Fund and the ongoing SEE QI Projects with the aim of motivating QI-stakeholders to take advantage of the opportunities and benefits of regional cooperation in this field.

1. Interview with Violeta Haxhillazi, a trainer in the SEE QI 8 Training-of- trainers course on Business resilience standards

One of the main activities of the project “WB6 QI Response to Covid-19” (SEE QI 8) is a Training-of-Trainers (ToT) course on business resilience standards. The objective of the course is to build capacity in all Western Balkan countries in order to support local businesses in mitigating the economic impact of the Covid-19 pandemic through QI services such as standards and certifications. The seven modules of the ToT course are taught by experts from WB6 countries. Violeta Haxhillazi, a Certified Management Consultant, is one of the trainers in the ToT course where she covers the modules on business continuity management (ISO 22301/ISO 22313) and supply chain management (ISO 28000).

What motivated you to become a trainer in the ToT course of SEE QI 8?

My own experience has led me to believe that a ToT programme is an essential format for recognizing that to be a trainer, it is no longer about just excelling in the technical subject matter, but also about having another set of skills to conduct a successful training session. Therefore, a trainer needs to be equipped simultaneously with the technical knowledge and good training skills. The latter has proven to be crucial in conveying the technical expertise effectively by building up the



Violeta Haxhillazi

trainer's confidence and the methods for transferring information. I embraced this opportunity to make my modest contribution, out of my personal experience, for the experts that would - just like me - dwell on educational challenges without compromising their unique and authentic trainer personality.

In your view, in what ways are business resilience standards crucial in the context of the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic situation?

In my opinion, decision-makers in business entities should accept that from time to time the worst happens. It may be a natural or man-made disaster; it may also be a pandemic. When the Covid-19 crisis hit, the fragility of businesses in our countries was exposed. The business mindset of numerous SMEs in WB6 countries was that costs stopped them from establishing any preventive, detection and corrective actions instead of considering it as an investment very likely to enable the company to recover from unexpected events and/or adapt quickly to changes in market demand, market supply and regulatory framework requirements. My recommendation to business decision-makers is along the lines of the saying: "Expect the best. Prepare for the worst." Do not wait for auditors or regulators to analyze the business processes and the validation of the business resilience programmes in a company.

The business resilience standards are requirements, guidelines and specifications which, when applied consistently, ensure that materials, products, processes and services are fit for their business purpose. The business resilience standards enhance the business quality and continuity in two ways. First, they provide a common language and understanding in measuring and evaluating the performance (internally) and secondly, they protect the consumers by ensuring safety, durability and market equity (externally).

According to you, in how far is a virtual Training-of-Trainers approach useful. Is it possible to build up an experts group online?

Since March 2020, we were faced with the challenge of online participation in virtual programmes, meetings, workshops, etc. The switch happened very rapidly and we were caught unprepared for it. But at some point you definitely start accepting the new reality and invest your efforts into coping with the situation. From that moment on, my approach was to find a way to re-invent the methods and techniques to continue to be as professional and successful as before. I believe that virtual formats can eventually offer a very good quality of professional service. It requires a lot of brainstorming and very meticulous planning and implementation. We have received great feedback from the ToT participants. The voice of our "customers" is the best reflection of what we do well and where we need to improve. In addition, the new way of working is expanding the market. There is not a confined market concept any longer. At the same time, the virtual mode of work also increases

competition in the field – as one is not only compared to what the local market may offer, but to what the global online market has to offer for everyone.

2. Training-of-Trainers course to improve business resilience in WB6 countries

On 4th March 2021 the Training of Trainers (ToT) on [Business Resilience Standards](#) commenced as a part of the economic component of the SEE QI Project 8 "WB6 response to Covid-19". The training aims to set up supporting structures for WB6 businesses to cope with economic challenges brought by the Covid-19 pandemic and other potential crisis situations.

Thirty-two trainees and six regional experts joined the interactive virtual ToT sessions, which take place weekly from 4 March to 1 July 2021. The participants who have diverse professional backgrounds (companies, consulting industry, chambers of commerce, QI institutions) and national origins are being trained and supported by the technical advisor Mr. Hanspeter Ischi and a [team of regional trainers](#) who are familiar with the business context in WB6 countries. The course consists of seven training modules on standards and topics related to business resilience including risk management, business continuity management, IT security, supply chain management, occupational health and safety, innovation management and leadership.

Participants will have the opportunity to apply the comprehensive theoretical knowledge in a practical way by designing and conducting a pilot training/consulting for a local business. WB6 businesses interested in benefiting from such a pilot training/consulting for free are welcome to contact the PTB team at see@ptb.de. In parallel, the team of regional experts is compiling a booklet on the implementation of business resilience standards in the Western Balkans based on the ToT. The SEE QI 8 project plans to introduce both the newly trained trainers and the booklet in a public event addressed to WB6 businesses and other interested parties on June 16th, 2021 (please register here: <https://see.ptb.de/see-qi-projects/wb6-qi-response-to-covid-19/see-qi-8-closing-conference/>).

3. Training on accreditation for SARS-CoV-2 virus identification

The Covid-19 pandemic pushed medical laboratories to provide tests for the novel coronavirus and to demonstrate through accreditation their competence to perform such tests. On request of the national accreditation bodies (NAB) of the Western Balkan region, a two-day virtual training was held on 9-10 February 2021 focusing on accreditation for SARS-CoV-2 virus identification.

The e-training was provided by two experts, Aiki Stathopoulou and Ioannis Sitaras, from the Hellenic Accreditation System (ESYD) and was moderated by Rózsa Ring. The first day of the training was geared towards assessors from the WB6 NAB. In addition to methods for the selection, verification and validation of the RNA/ antigen tests and the antibody tests, the participants learned about how to ensure the quality of the examinations (internal quality control, external quality assurance and continuous quality improvement), the safety and efficiency of the examination services, and the safe disposal of samples and medical waste. The second day of the training, attended by 39 participants from four SEE countries' medical laboratories, focused on the PCR test and the serology tests. First, the most widely used method for direct SARS-CoV-2 diagnosis was presented (the nucleic acid amplification using the reverse transcription polymerase chain reaction (RT-PCR)), followed by sampling methods (e.g. nasopharyngeal swab), illustrated by videos.

Additional training and exchanges of experiences are implemented in the SEE QI 6 project. For instance, on 22 March 2021 a one-day virtual training was held on decision rules and a statement of conformity.

4. Innovation in QI institutions due to the Covid-19 pandemic

On 2 March 2021, the SEE QI Project 8 conducted a virtual exchange of experience on "Innovation in QI institutions due to the Covid-19 pandemic".

The two-hour event was joined by more than thirty participants from metrology institutes and standards and accreditation bodies from several WB countries. The goal of the event was to discuss and share

short- and long-term changes to work processes and services that took place in QI institutions due to the pandemic. Examples of innovation included conducting virtual hands-on laboratory trainings (metrology), remote assessments (accreditation), the quick development of minimum requirement guidelines (standardization) or awareness-raising and promotional activities for the QI institutions.

The lessons learned were compiled in a short publication which can be found on the SEE QI website: <https://see.ptb.de/f ileadmin /documents/see/ SEE QI Visibility/ Visibility material/ SEE QI 8 Eo E Innovation.pdf>

5. Donor collaboration in the support of WB6 quality infrastructure

The PTB SEE QI team welcomes the synergies found between different donor projects, which leads to upscaling of bilateral activities to the regional level and strengthening of networks between peers from the region and EU countries.



Kosovo invited all SEE QI 4 market inspectors working on machinery to join a two-day training at the end of March organized by its bilateral Free Movement of Goods (FMG) project, which is financed by the EU and implemented by a consortium led by IBF International Consulting.

Montenegro also benefits from a bilateral project, financed by the EU and implemented by IBF. The project supports Montenegrin authorities in transposing the new EU legislation in market surveillance. In the framework of the SEE QI Fund, the Montenegrin colleagues will share and discuss their drafts and lessons learned from this legislative process with their WB6 peers in June 2021.

The SEE QI Fund encourages the running of the WB6 Network on Dangerous Product Notification System, that was established with BMZ and GIZ support, and that might be supported by a future CEFTA-EU collaboration. In the area of business resilience standards and QI in general, the PTB team cooperates with GIZ regional and bilateral

projects in Bosnia and Herzegovina. For example, two joint events are planned for June 2021.

6. E-training on participative and empowering virtual collaboration will be

Three stand-alone e-training modules, implemented in the digital transformation component of the SEE QI 8 project on WB6 response to Covid-19, introduce new concepts, methods and skills to enable participants to successfully organise and run virtual collaboration.

A year of extensive work from home and online has brought many changes, but also opportunities for virtual joint actions. Accordingly, the SEE QI 8 e-training modules conducted by the PTB external consultant Suzana Lange aim at equipping participants with knowledge and practical techniques to strengthen their competences for virtual collaboration. The first training on how to organise and run engaging virtual events was already implemented three times in the past months with very positive feedback. The next training, scheduled for May 28th at 9:00-12:00, will be offered in English with simultaneous interpretation into Albanian. Interested staff from QI institutions can register here: <https://see.ptb.de/see-qi-projects/wb6-qi-response-to-covid-19/see-qi-8-e-trainings-participative-and-empowering-virtual-collaboration/>.

Two other training modules were piloted for the first time in March 2021. The e-training on March 12, 2021 on conducting impactful virtual trainings and

remote consulting (co-trainer: Heidi Dommaschke) focused on the collaboration between a trainer or adviser and individuals or groups. It targeted training departments of QI institutions or QI staff involved in training and consulting. As a successful virtual collaboration requires skillful leadership, another e-training focused on successfully leading extended virtual collaboration (co-trainer: Prof. Dr. Marcus Bölz). It mainly targeted team leaders in QI institutions, e.g. the management level or convenors of technical committees.

7. Introducing our new trainee

Since February 15th, Sophie Salimkhani has joined the SEE QI Fund for five months as a full-time student trainee at the International Cooperation Department of PTB. She supports the SEE QI Fund team with various project activities and especially the Training-of-Trainers programme on business resilience standards. As a university student of International Development Management, she chose the PTB, and particularly the SEE QI Fund, because of her interest in international relations and in order to get valuable practical insights into the mission and operations of a German public institution working to strengthen the quality infrastructure of the WB6 countries.



Sophie Salimkhani

Annex: Overview of ongoing SEE QI Projects

Name	Coordinator	Timeframe	Objective
1. Interlaboratory comparison for small volumes		completed	
2. Adjustment of certification programs in organic production to the modified EU legal basis 2018/848	Mersida Musabegović, Organska Kontrola, BiH	10/2019–09/2021	SEE certification bodies acquire competence about the new EU Regulation 2018/848 and are able to implement the changes required and know how to work with the new list of compliant CBs
3. National normative aspects (NNA) for standardization of overhead electrical lines	Tatjana Bojanić, Institute for Standardization, Serbia	09/2019–08/2021	Standardisation institutes and technical experts develop specifications for a regionally harmonized draft NNA document for overhead electrical lines (EN 50341-1 09/2019–08/2021)
4. New EU legislation on market surveillance	Samir Bekto, Market Surveillance Agency, BiH	10/2019–12/2021	Market surveillance authorities build capacity and exchange knowledge on the safety requirements resulting from newest horizontal and vertical EU legislation: Regulation (EU) 2019/1020, Regulation (EU) 2019/515, Regulation (EU) 2016/425 on Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and Machinery Directive 2006/42/EC
5. Metrology for medical devices	Bianka Mangutova Stoilkovska, Bureau of Metrology, North Macedonia	04/2020–06/2021	The capacities of NMIs for calibration / verification / control of the most relevant types of medical devices with measuring function in WB6 countries are strengthened
6. Capacity building for harmonization of accreditation activities with the European rules in selected areas	Dejan Stojkovski, Institute for Accreditation of the Republic of North Macedonia (IARNM)	04/2020–09/2021	WB6 region implements, on market demand, accreditation schemes (policies, requirements, procedures) in compliance with the practices of the national accreditation bodies that are members of EA
7. Capacity building for the implementation of interlaboratory comparisons (ILC) and proficiency tests (PT)	Stilian Habibi, National Metrology Institute DPM, Albania	04/2020–09/2021	The goal of the project is to support the applying NMIs in gaining knowledge on the ISO 17043:2010 standard requirements and enable them to develop competence in the complementary operation of ILC/PT schemes at national and regional level
8. QI response to Covid-19 challenges	NN	11/2020–07/2021	QI institutions in the Western Balkan countries proactively tackle Covid-19 challenges related to QI

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