



RECOMMENDATIONS REGARDING TCAS IN THE FUTURE ERASMUS PROGRAMME

*based on the research and consultations carried out
by SALTO Education and Training TCA Resource Centre*



The SALTO Education and Training TCA Resource Centre presents recommendations to the European Commission regarding the future of the transnational cooperation activities (TCAs) in this document.

The work incorporates the:

- Summary of the conclusions of the study 'Taking stock of TCAs in the field of Education and Training 2014-18'.
- The position of the TCA Education and Training Working Group on TCAs in the Future Erasmus Programme.

The messages were finalized upon consultation with the TCA E&T advisory group¹.

The recommendations tackle issues from both strategy and practice.

The research and consultations were carried out by SALTO E&T TCA Resource Centre during the period July-November 2019.



'TAKING STOCK OF TCAs IN THE FIELD OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING 2014-18'

AIM AND METHODOLOGY

In 2019 the SALTO Education and Training TCA Resource Centre contracted a **study on the transnational cooperation activities (TCAs) realized between 2014-18 in the field of education and training**. The aims were to present an overview of the named activities (meeting the relevant expectations of the European Commission and provide feedback to the national agencies) and to draw conclusions for the upcoming period in order to raise the quality and the impact of the TCAs in the next phase of the Erasmus Programme.

In terms of methodology the study combined quantitative and qualitative methods to analyse the TCA work. Quantitative data were abstracted from the EPlusLink, from SALTO E&T RC website and from a dedicated **questionnaire sent to the NAs**. Qualitative information were gathered through **interviews conducted with representatives of NAs** and via the mentioned questionnaire. **Good practice TCAs were also identified** in the qualitative part. In order to draw conclusions and form recommendations some additional related documents and websites (e.g.: SALTO Youth, Guide for NAs, previous studies of SALTO E&T TCA RC) were reviewed.

MAIN FINDINGS OF THE RESEARCH

More than two-thirds of the NAs (70.7%) filled in the questionnaire which aimed to explore the behaviour of the NAs regarding hosting, sending, organization and management aspects as well as advantages and difficulties in TCA work. The interviews served to validate the results of the questionnaire and to explore TCAs from a strategic context focusing on the NAs. The selection criteria of the interviewees were:

- number of TCA organised by the NA
- number of hosted TCA participants by the NA
- sectors represented in TCA events
- TCA collaboration with other NAs
- topics, questions raised in the questionnaire
- recurrent, regularly organised TCAs
- example for the 3 TCA types

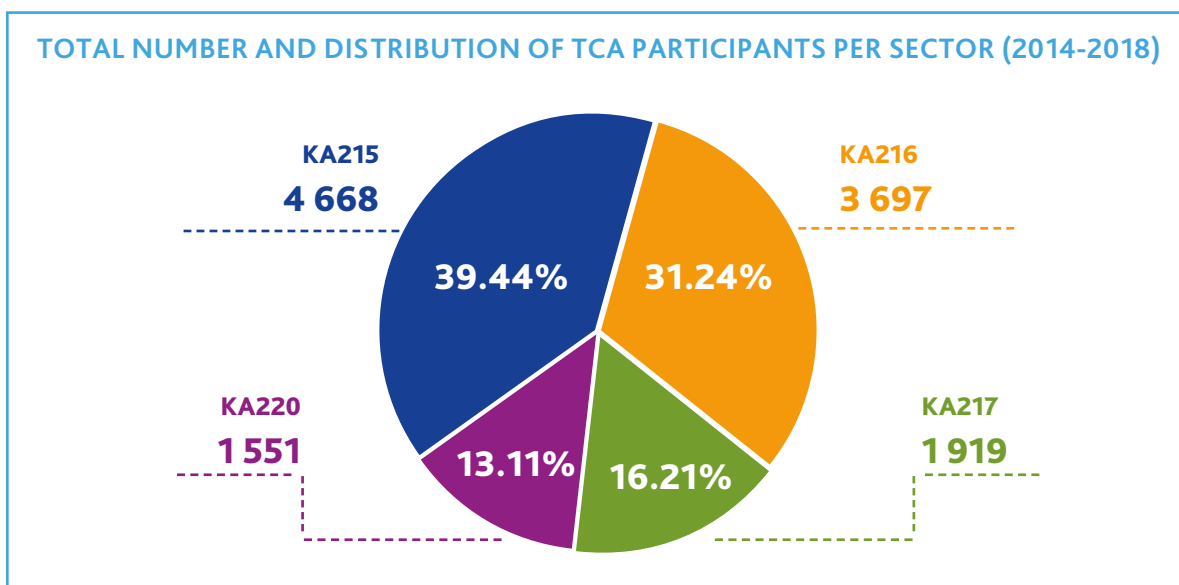
Interviews were conducted with RO01, IS01, FI01 and DE02 national agencies. The interview contained 11 questions and included a description of a good practice TCA.

1: The TCA E&T advisory group (AG) consisting of members from senior management of some national agencies is consulted by the SALTO E&T TCA Resource Centre management on a regular basis in strategic matters.

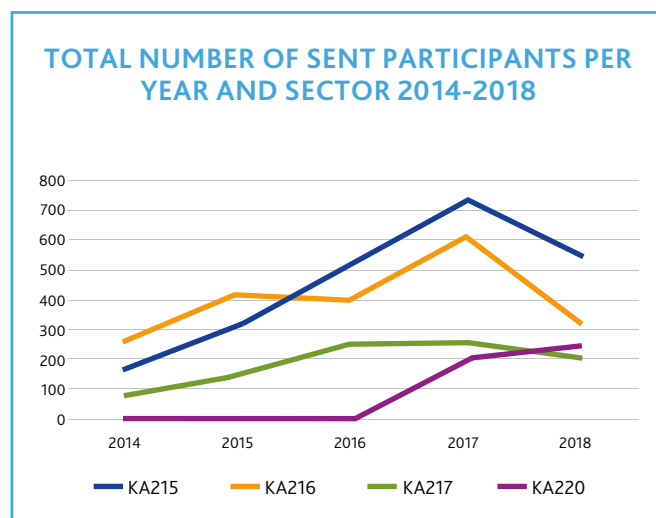
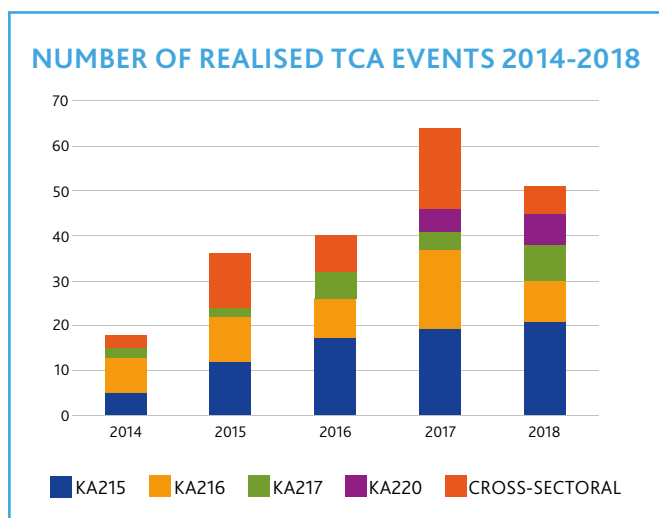
A meeting of the AG was organized in November 2019 dedicated to the discussion of the TCAs and SALTOs as described in the Commission document on Future Erasmus. The meeting also served as a platform for reflecting on and validating the conclusions of the 'Taking Stock of TCAs 2014-18' study.

IN TERMS OF NUMBERS the study concluded that **more than 220 events were carried out**, and approximately **12,000 participants were hosted**, and out of them almost **6,000 participants were sent for TCA** in the school, vocational, adult and higher education sectors. It means that the **distribution of national and international participants at TCAs is closely even**.

The **school education sector (KA215)** hosted the highest number of events and participants too. The second place is taken by the VET sector, followed by the adult and the higher education sectors. This latter, while getting the opportunity only in 2017 to organise TCAs, is catching up with the adult education TCAs in terms of hosted events and sending numbers.



The number of events and also of participants shows an increase over the years between 2014-2017; in 2018 we notice a slight fall compared to 2017.



In terms of TCA types **contact seminars (TSS) were the most popular activity** followed by the thematic events (THO). The research TCAs (EBAR) are less in number, however – due to their different nature - these cannot directly be compared to the statistics of the previous two.

Almost all the NAs were active in the hosting role, implying that TCA is an attractive and useful tool from the NAs' perspective. It was highlighted in the interviews that NAs consider TCA a flexible tool that can be valuable to fulfil both strategic and operational aims.

Regarding how the TCA serves the original aim defined by the Guide for NAs (bringing added value and increased quality in the overall Programme implementation; contributing to increasing impact of the Programme at systemic level) national agencies replied 4 on average on a 5-point scale. **NAs declared that TCAs fully or partially reached their aims.**

National agencies spend a small portion of the available TCA budget and the intensity of TCA work varies largely both in terms of time and personnel, sometimes it seems fragmented even within an individual NA.

REGARDING THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE TCA WORK of the NAs the following aspects can be identified.

Most agencies agree that TCA:

- Is an important tool to flexibly support the needs of the NAs regarding increasing the impact of the Programme.
- Brings added value and increases quality in the overall Programme implementation.
- At least partially contributes to increasing the impact of the Programme at systemic level.

The good practice collection demonstrates that the success of the TCAs is manifested in various ways.

'Enhancing Digital Competences in Education + Training' a successfully and repeatedly organized contact seminar (TSS) since 2016 by EE01

The 'Enhancing Digital Competences in Education + Training' TCA event was a cross-sectoral contact seminar organised by the Estonian NA in 2018. It was the 3rd time when the event was organised. By this time the Estonian NA had experiences on how to execute the TCA successfully. The aim of the event was to initiate new cross-sectoral KA2 Strategic Partnership projects which focus on ICT and digital skills. This TCA is recurrently embedded into the Estonian NA workplan since 2016, it is organized yearly, and it has its own [website](#) where the upcoming event -taking place in 2020- is already advertised.

'Internationalization strategies of VET institutions' a recurrently organized thematic training event (THO) since 2014. The core team members are NL01, FI01, HU01; recently new coordinators joined.

The Finish, Hungarian and Dutch NAs have a longstanding cooperation in the field of internationalization strategies in VET. They organised a seminar focusing on that topic and it was among the first TCAs in 2014. It has been organised every year since, at the beginning among the three founding countries in rotation, but after the 4th year new countries showed interest to host the event. Hence the Spanish NA in 2018 and the German DE02 NA in 2019 also hosted the event. This TCA is directly interlinked with the VET Mobility Charter and aims to help VET schools to prepare their internationalization strategies which is a pre-condition of this type of Erasmus+ application.

Study on the 'Erasmus+ Programme's Impact on Individuals in VET and HE' - evidence based analysis of results (EBAR) – LT01 2018

On the occasion of the 100th anniversary of restored Lithuania and the 20th anniversary of international education exchanges, the Lithuanian NA carried out a study on the 'Erasmus+ Programme's Impact on Individuals in VET and HE' and organised a conference to share the results under a TCA umbrella.

The study was related to other relevant European researches, such as the Finish 'Hidden Competences', the Irish 'Impact of Erasmus+ mobility placements on social and political attitudes of VET learners in Ireland' and the British 'Widening Participation in Outward Student Mobility' researches. So the Lithuanian NA gave a wider perspective of the Erasmus+ VET and HE mobility results and impacts.

The [study is available](#) in Lithuanian.

Recognizing the value of TCAs all agencies are involved to some extent in such activities.

However, the engagement in TCA work varies largely both in terms of time and personnel among the NAs and offering hosting activities is not balanced among Erasmus+ programme countries.

NAs mentioned that working on TCAs is fragmented and there is high fluctuation among the TCA officers. More NAs mentioned that they find it hard to devote time for such activities and it happens that TCA work is carried out in extra work time.

NAs mention that they face various challenges in the TCA work, namely:

- In general, NAs say that realization of TCA events are quite **time consuming** and the **administration is complicated**.
- **Clear definitions** regarding TCA partnership and terminology are missing, which makes cooperation difficult and also results in **incoherent data keeping**.
- **Lack of funding models** increases the time of preparatory work.
- **Complicated administration** puts too much burden on the officers.
- **Double administration** resulting from shortcomings (lack of synchronization) of the IT system(s) is difficult to handle.
- **Evaluation of outcomes and carrying out follow up** is challenging for the NAs.
- **It is hard to excerpt statistics** from the EPlusLink in a user friendly form.
- **Reliability of data excerpted from the EPlusLink shall be considered with caution** due to the incoherencies of the interpretation of the terminology and the timeliness and precision of the data keeping which needs improvement.

*"All in all TCA is a task on the top of everything else."
(NA director, interviewee)*

*"There is high potential in TCAs, however it remains small scale due to the limited resources and infrastructure at NA level."
(NA director, interviewee)*

*Examples of anomalies regarding terminology by the NAs:
"The 'contributing NA', the 'coordinating NA', 'partner NA' roles are not specified in the Guide for NAs; 'contributing NA' status, does not exist in the EPlusLink."
"The difference between the 'hosting' role and the 'coordinating NA' role is not explained."
"There is no clear definition of 'TCA participant'. "
"Cross-sectoral TCAs appear in several rows in the EPlus Database."
"Data about TCAs need to be recorded at different platforms not communicating with each other."
(TCA officers, questionnaire)*

- The registered data – once correctly and coherently kept – can provide quantitative overview, but does not provide information on TCAs' outcomes and impact.
- Indicators and methods to measure the success of TCAs are non-existent both on the level of individual events and at systemic level.
- Apart from the uncertainties and difficulties in administration, some NAs also noted that they would welcome more guidance, common paths in terms of TCA strategy.

"Although TCAs intend to improve the quality and the impact of the Erasmus+ programme at systemic level, the events and their topics are decided at country or country-group level. TCA priorities defined by the NA directors in Malta in 2017 give an orientation but there is no other orientation, rule or decision which could streamline the events at European level."
(NA director, interviewee)

All in all TCA projects demand high level of administration while they are short-term projects (2.2 days-long on average) and their impact is rather indirect, and in many cases it cannot be traced on the level of the individual TCA event.



SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION OF THE RESEARCH

Based on the information about the TCAs presently available at EC and at the NAs the presentation of a summative evaluation of the TCA work is possible.

There is no clear guidance on the expected outcomes of the TCAs against which their impact could be measured, however based on the research conducted by SALTO E&T most NAs consider TCAs an important tool to contribute to increasing the impact of the Erasmus+ Programme. According to the Agencies such events fully or partially reach their aims.

NAs see the potential of using this tool flexibly in various ways adjusted to their own purposes. Sending participants on contact seminars is highly valued and the most frequently applied (60% of sent participants go to TSS), while offering thematic training events for beneficiaries is also considered important (55% of participants of hosted TCAs attended THO).

NAs see the potential in a greater exploitation of the TCA opportunity by broadening type and target groups. The Agencies mentioned the importance of study visits, national events with European topics, the events organized for special target groups and also a better exploitation of the research projects.

While appreciating the value of TCAs, the Agencies face challenges in exploiting this tool on a larger scale. The administration and reporting of the activities are demanding and the allocated human resources in the present circumstances are fragmented and often insufficient.

Reducing the administrative burdens by making the financial and administrative rules more simplified and by improving the IT systems (with clear definitions of data keeping and with an integrated process management tool) behind the TCA work seem inevitable to further promote and better exploit TCAs.

CONSULTATIONS WITH THE TCA E&T WORKING GROUP

The Education and Training TCA Working Group is the voice of the TCA officers' network.

The aim of the education and training TCA Working Group is to represent the opinion, interests, experience and knowledge of TCA officers and to support the planning, implementation and the follow-up of high quality TCAs.

The WG is a self-directed committee supported by the SALTO TCA E&T RC. The Resource Centre provides assistance and structures the flow of information between TCA stakeholders (officers, NA directors, Commission) and WG by providing tools and channels.

Members² equally represent different countries of Erasmus+ Programme and equally covering the different regions of Europe, different NAs in size and budget of and all fields of education.

POSITION OF THE TCA E&T WORKING GROUP ON TCAs IN THE FUTURE ERASMUS

For the evolution of the Future Erasmus Programme the European Commission requested SALTO E&T TCA to collect the reflection of the NAs regarding TCAs in the next period. The face to face WG meeting held in October 2019 was dedicated to the discussion of the conclusions of the 'Taking Stock of TCAs 2014-18' study. Following the WG meeting the TCA RC collected the feedback from the WG members on the Commission document called Future Erasmus.

The Working group – with the leadership of the representative of the German NA (DE03) - formed its position on the paper in light of the 'Taking stock' study as follows:

COMMENT OF THE WORKING GROUP ON THE PROPOSAL / ACTION FICHE FOR



TRAINING AND COOPERATION ACTIVITIES IN THE FUTURE ERASMUS PROGRAMME

Considering the research results of the study 'Taking stock of realized TCAs 2014 – 2018' carried out by the SALTO E&T and the discussions on the annual TCA-officers' meetings, the working group comments as follows on the proposal of the Action: Training and Cooperation Activities in the Future Erasmus Programme.



OBJECTIVES:

The study confirms that a high number of National Agencies appreciate TCAs as an action that brings added value and **increases the quality in the Programme** implementation. NAs also see the potential of TCAs to **increase the impact of the Programme at systemic level**.

The proposed general objective and the two specific objectives proposed in the fiche are very much in line with the research results. The working group generally **welcomes the more strategic approach** with a focus on European policy cooperation.



MAIN ACTIVITIES:

The main activities mentioned under A) **Quality of programme implementation** and B) **Contribution to policy cooperation** correspond well to the general objective and the specific objectives. The working group proposes to add "**study visits**" under B, as this instrument is valuable for policy cooperation and could be reinforced in the next programme.

The **activities at national level** should be further clarified and clearly linked to programme priorities.

2: Present WG members: Carmel Walsh IE01, Ellen Vimberg EE01, Gaëlle Bozec NO01, Judith Dayus NL01, Katariina Petajaniemi FI01, Sara Southam UK01, Sari Huttunen FI01, Janelle Camilleri MT01, Monika Held DE03, Teresa Nogueiro PT01, Ingrid Gran SE01 (honorary member)



TARGET GROUPS:

The working group approves the broad definition of target groups.



MAIN ELIGIBILITY/ADMINISTRATION/FINANCIAL CRITERIA:

The proposal foresees that NAs develop a multi-annual strategy and activity plan taking into account the national policy context. Activities would be voluntary based on the needs of the National Agency. The working group **welcomes the bottom-up approach**. TCAs should be a **flexible instrument** that allows NAs to react on educational or programme developments and beneficiaries' needs.

To achieve transparency and equal treatment and to reduce the administrative burden, **the funding rules for TCAs should be simplified and streamlined** with other programme actions i.e. by introducing distance bands or lumpsums. For many NAs **the planning of TCA budget** with overlapping budget periods and the **administration in EPlusLink** are relevant obstacles. The working group proposes that **only hosting activities should be approved** with the work programme and that sending NAs can freely use their TCA budget for all approved activities. The eligibility period for the implementation of activities as well as for sending activities should leave maximal flexibility to NAs to enable them to exploit their budgets. **The role of hosting and sending NAs and the splitting of costs should be clarified** in the NA guide, so that the planning of the budget will be easier and cooperation agreements between NAs for single TCA events will not be necessary any more.

TCAs involve a high level of administrative work within the Agencies, and for many NAs the organization of events - hosting activities – is a challenge. In many agencies the work of TCA officers is often fragmented. **The position of TCA officers** and staff development in the field of TCA should be strengthened. The next programme should also foresee funding for the necessary human resources, so that all NAs will be able to offer hosting activities.



STAFF DEVELOPMENT is generally important to increase the impact and quality of the programme. Trainings of NA staff involved in TCAs including online trainings have already been developed as part of the work of SALTO E&T. Very often, TCAs offered by other NAs are also important learning occasions for NA staff, for example to learn about beneficiaries' needs. **The participation in TCA events should be encouraged and funding rules should include participation of NA staff** (no longer be limited to 1 NA staff that supports the organisation).

The SALTO E&T could further support NAs to raise the quality and the impact of the TCAs and to evaluate and disseminate the outcomes. In view of a more strategic approach, TCA officers and SALTO E&T should **cooperate more closely with existing European networks and platform such as the School Education Gateway and EPALE**. This would create synergies and improve the visibility of the TCA outcomes.

FEEDBACK AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE FUTURE OF TCAs AND SALTO E&T TCA

SYNTHESIS OF SALTO E&T RESEARCH – WG FEEDBACK – AG REFLECTIONS

OBJECTIVES, ACTIVITIES AND TARGET GROUPS

The **proposed general objective and the two specific objectives** described in the fiche are very much in line with the research results and are supported by the WG and SALTO E&T.

The two **main activities suggested in the document** may offer sufficient **flexibility** to the NAs to use TCAs in line with their needs. The **bottom up approach** is highly welcomed, while the more **strategic approach and long-term thinking** are important to increase impact.

Involvement of more participants could be realized by the **organization of larger and/or recurrent events** in cooperation of more NAs. **Long-term strategic cooperation of the NAs** could result in larger impact and greater efficiency. (Models applied in the field of Youth.)

In terms of activities **clear description of the types and categories** would be necessary (for coherent data keeping) and 'study visits' are suggested to be listed under event type B.

NAs suggest emphasizing the importance of the **involvement of Erasmus+ special target groups** among TCA participants.

TCA MANAGEMENT AND ADMINISTRATION

In order to precisely track the TCA work and make it possible to **generate valid and user-friendly statistics**, **clarification of the terminology** regarding the different roles and actions and **coherence in data keeping** are necessary.

The further **development of the structure of the databases** (coherence with terminology, user-friendly statistics generation) would be important and **integrated IT systems covering the entire TCA lifecycle** (planning-promotion; management-realization; evaluation-follow up) are demanded.

The **synthesis of SALTO E&T IT Platform and the Commission Platforms** is suggested to be considered in order to **avoid double work** of the TCA officers and to be able to **follow the entire lifecycle of TCAs**.

REPORTING AND FOLLOW UP, IMPACT ASSESSMENT

It is suggested to consider the **impact measurement on a consolidated (European) level and seek for success factors in the case of individual TCAs**. Investigating how TCAs make part of the impact channel of improving the Programme is recommended to be considered.

In case of individual TCAs the **definition of expected outcomes** by the hosting agencies would support a more conscious planning and evaluation methodology and thus it enables more precise report on the results and success of the event/activity.

It is suggested to **assess the success (or weakness) factors adjusted to the type of the activity** (tailored to the different type of events, research etc.). **Gathering feedback from stakeholders** (from participants in the case of events, end users, contributors in case of research etc.) immediately after the activity and at a later point in time (e.g. 6-months later) seems sensible. This could offer possibility to **apply the plan-do-check-act (PDCA) cycle**. Evaluation of the outcomes of the TCA event at a later point founds the ground for a more conscious TCA work.

Including reporting on the content and results of the TCAs (not only administrative data) in the final report of the Agencies is recommended. This could be helped by the automated **evaluation and feedback gathering tool** integrated in the SALTO E&T IT Platform.

To reduce the administrative burden of TCA work, **the simplification of administrative and financial rules** are needed as well as the **amelioration of the IT support**.

DEDICATED TIME AND TASK ASSIGNMENT TO NA STAFF, STAFF TRAINING OPPORTUNITY

Better IT support and simpler administrative rules are expected to have positive effect on the efficiency of TCA work, furthermore **ensuring the dedicated time of staff members** (TCA officer and NA staff dealing with TCAs) would be also important to contribute to the realization of activities on a larger scale.

Professional development of NA staff, either by participation on TCAs or by trainings of the SALTOs is also an important factor. **Funding rules shall be reconsidered** to make it possible for the NAs to devote resources for such purposes from the TCA budget.



ROLE AND TASKS OF SALTO E&T TCA RESOURCE CENTRE

The present role of SALTO E&T TCA Resource Centre i.e. to provide support to the NAs regarding the TCA work in the education and training sectors **is highly appreciated by the NAs.**

Trainings offered by the SALTO were found useful by NA staff; both the working group and the advisory group confirmed the necessity of such trainings. **NAs expressed their wish for dedicated time and funds to participate in such trainings.**

Beyond training provision **the activities of the Resource Centre could be widened** in terms of **coordination of trainings and development offers** for the NAs. Similarly to the example of the operation of Knowledge Management and Staff Training (KMST) in the field of Youth SALTO E&T TCA may be conducting training needs assessment on a regular basis and promote the training offers available for the NAs.

IT Platform of SALTO E&T TCA and Commission IT systems shall be made coherent and integrated.

The realized development work regarding evaluation and feedback on TCAs shall be somehow integrated into/ made coherent to with plans of the Commission regarding reporting on TCAs.

SALTO E&T shall continue supporting the evolution of long-term strategic cooperation of NAs within TCAs by various tools, e.g. E+ Academy label, preparation of suggested topics and priorities of TCAs for the NA directors, etc.

SALTO E&T shall remain active in cooperation with other existing and future SALTOs. The Commission shall take a lead role in supporting the SALTOs to define their tasks to come up with the most effective way of operation (avoiding overlaps, covering all fields etc.).

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