**EU Support for Research and Innovation**

**under the Instrument for Pre-Accession (IPA)**

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* Research and innovation contribute to making Europe a better place in which to live and work. They improve Europe’s competitiveness, boost growth and create jobs.
* At the same time, research and innovation help to make people’s lives better by improving healthcare, transport, digital services and countless new products and services.
* This credo applies obviously not only within the EU but also to those economies in the Western Balkans that are not yet members of our Union and prepare for it. Science, research and innovation are central for the successful implementation of our renewed Strategy for the region “*A credible enlargement perspective for and enhanced EU engagement with the Western Balkans*”.
* The European Commission is committed to helping exchange best practices between the six partners in the region and with the EU. Collaborative approaches will boost [research](https://twitter.com/hashtag/research?src=hash) and [innovation](https://twitter.com/hashtag/innovation?src=hash) capacities.
* We see the work of the Steering Platform on Research and Innovation as a key vehicle to make this happen.
* The EU support dedicated to research and innovation via IPA – the Instrument for Pre-Accession - provides a comprehensive set of incentives and financial support to the Western Balkans:
* from easing the participation in Horizon 2020 by covering national entry tickets,
* through supporting policy reforms, co-financing national innovation & research programs and funds, or developing national and regional instruments,
* to bringing research closer to industry.
* The Commission is working closely with a variety of partners, in order to boost the research and innovation capacities of the region, each partner having its own role: the Regional Cooperation Council, the Western Balkans 6 Chamber Investment Forum, bilateral donors, International Financing Institutions. Those partnerships are leveraging not only expertise but also additional financing.
* By supporting research and innovation capacities, we help the economies in the Western Balkans to retain scientists, to upgrade skills though education and to invest more efficiently in technical equipment.
* In addition, the European Commission engages in regular dialogue, helps with developing realistic strategies and disburses significant funds to universities and research institutes. As of this year, The European Commission also supports smart specialisation, based on the model used in EU regional policy. We promote brain circulation - we encourage participation in Erasmus + and promote that EU students come to the live and study in the Western Balkans.
* Through the EU research programme Horizon 2020 we support excellence, and we ensured that all Western Balkan countries are part of it. Their take up in terms of projects and finance is slightly below the EU average, which shows that more can be done. At the same time, the results confirm that there is excellence and that the best of the Balkans have all possibilities to work with the best in the EU.
* Undoubtedly, there is excellence in the Western Balkans: there are excellent researchers, who regularly work with world's best. There are excellent firms, particularly in the IT sector, which sell on global markets.
* Getting back to the topic that I was given for my intervention: “*IPA Support for Research and Innovation*”, I would like to present to you some concrete examples of such EU support in two important areas:
1. *Research, Innovation, Competitiveness and Growth*
* Economic development in the Western Balkans is not yet based on research and innovation. We are therefore helping to bring research closer to industry and make the Western Balkans private sector more innovative and thus competitive.
* Boosting innovation and the access to finance are core objectives of the Western Balkans Enterprise and Innovation Facility (WB EDIF), which is the EU platform for private sector development, leveraging upon the expertise and investment of bilateral donors and International Financing Institutions active in the region.
* So far, EDIF focussed on innovative businesses, including in the IT sector; but more recently we also launched activities, which help Public Research Institutions in the Western Balkans to commercialise their research products. For this purpose, we work in close cooperation with the European Commission`s Joint Research Centre (JRC) and also with the Directorate General for Research and Innovation (DG RTD).
* Via the EU-funded regional EU4Tech project (ca. EUR 1.5 million) the performance of all Western Balkan actors operating in technology transfer and innovation was screened in 2018 (local academic institutions, early stage investors, science parks, spin-out and companies). Those with potential for technology transfer were provided tailor made technical support and capacity building.
* A new EUR 2 million proposal for the development of a regional Proof of Concept Scheme was adopted under IPA 2018 to build on the EU4Tech initiative and to continue the work with the Research Organisations of the region. The Proof of Concept scheme is to be launched by the end of 2019. This new small-scale intervention aims at facilitating the validation (prototype, demonstration, etc.) and appraisal of avenues for the commercialisation of technologies developed within Public Research Organisations and micro-enterprises.
* With this we try to accelerate the process of commercialising new technologies and to have a significant impact on the generation of protected intellectual property (i.e. patents and copyright) leading in turn to increased economic activity in the form of creation of new companies as well as revenues and employment.
* Those two complementary regional actions aim to bridge the gap from idea to investable project. They are preparing the ground for our future work under IPA III, where there is potential to support innovations that are too risky for private investors. We want to help innovators create markets of the future, leverage private finance, scale up companies.
1. *Smart Specialisation (topic addressed in the first session by JRC- Seville)*
* As already mentioned, under the IPA multi-country envelope for 2018, DG NEAR signed a new project with the JRC's Smart Specialisation platform in Seville (EUR 2 million for 36 months). This contribution allows the JRC to deploy its instruments, notably the assessment of national/regional Smart Specialisation Strategies, and the conduct of peer reviews workshops, thematic seminars, etc.
* This project will kick-off with an event in Mid-October, in Belgrade, back-to-back with a EU4Tech event, as to underline the link between smart specialisation and technology transfer.
* Currently, Serbia and Montenegro are preparing their entrepreneurial discovery processes to agree on Smart Specialisation Strategies, while the other Western Balkan economies are in various stages of their smart specialisation process.

*Conclusion*

* Science, research and innovation have an important role to play in integrating the Western Balkans to the European Union.
* DG NEAR provides continuous support to the region for its participation in Horizon and via regional and bilateral initiatives tries to bring research closer to industry and boost innovation.
* To ensure more effective participation, further integration into the existing knowledge networks in the EU should be fostered, including through research and innovation capacity building.
* Moving forward, we anticipate that innovation will continue to play a central role in the European Commission’s dialogue with Western Balkan partners and in the allocation of assistance under IPA III from 2021 onwards. Already now, the Economic Reform Programmes, which Western Balkan partners submit every year to the European Commission, announce key competitiveness reform and include innovation as a key priority. It is important that respective reform proposals become more credible and that appropriate funds are deployed beyond promises on paper.
* After all, increased capacity for innovation is the best guarantee that vast economic opportunities offered in the European integration process materialise and that economies continue catching up with the EU.