

**Steering Platform on Research for Western Balkan
countries**

Agenda | Conclusions | Minutes 2006-2016

Executive Summary

This document provides more detailed information about Steering Platforms on Research for Western Balkan Countries since its establishment in 2006 and it builds upon Deliverable D1.1 of WBC-INCO.NET project. The official conclusions have been prepared for the most of the meetings (starting with the Paris meeting), which summarized main points of the discussion and highlighted specific follow-up activities.

- 1st Steering Platform Meeting and Launch Event: Vienna, June 26, 2006
- 2nd Steering Platform Meeting: Berlin, March 29, 2007
- 3rd Steering Platform Meeting: Thessaloniki, October 29, 2007
- 4th Steering Platform Meeting: Ljubljana, June 26, 2008
- 5th Steering Platform Meeting: Paris, December 19, 2008
- 6th Steering Platform Meeting: Liblice, May 28, 2009
- 7th Steering Platform Meeting: Zagreb, October 29, 2009
- 8th Steering Platform Meeting: Belgrade, June 24, 2010
- 9th Steering Platform Meeting: Becici, November 11, 2010
- 10th Steering Platform Meeting: Ohrid, May 26, 2011
- 11th Steering Platform Meeting: Sarajevo, December 1, 2011
- 12th Steering Platform Meeting: Tirana, June 12-13, 2012
- 13th Steering Platform Meeting: Belgrade, December 6, 2012
- 14th Steering Platform Meeting: Budva, June 5-6, 2013
- 15th Steering Platform Meeting: Zagreb, December 11-12, 2013
- 16th Steering Platform Meeting: Trieste, September 24, 2014
- 17th Steering Platform Meeting: Budapest, June 8-9, 2015

2014 was a period of transition for the platform - with the closure of WBC-INCO.NET project, a major pillar of support for the SP is no longer available, including the responsibility for logistics and administrative management as "Information Office of the Steering Platform". Now a different mechanism of support needs to be defined for the years to come. Fortunately – thanks to the European Commission, DG Research and Innovation, Regional Cooperation Council (RCC), Italian Presidency and Central European Initiative (CEI), as well as Hungarian Institute of Foreign Affairs and Trade and RCISD and thanks to the commitment of all Ministries in charge for Science and Technology from Western Balkans, two more meetings of the Steering Platform have been organised since the closure of WBC-INCO.NET – in Trieste and Budapest.

It is expected that the Steering Platform will continue with its work also in the years to come. Updates will be available at WBC-RTI.info website (<http://wbc-rti.info/>) - Information Platform funded by the Austrian Federal Ministry of Science, Research and Economy (BMWFV) and implemented by Centre for Social Innovation (ZSI) – both in this way actively supporting the Steering Platform meetings.

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1st Steering Platform meeting and Launch Event, Vienna – June 26, 2006

Commissioner Potočnik's speech at the launch event

Potočnik, Janez (2006): Steering Platform on Research: a step forward for the Western Balkans towards the ERA. Address at the launch event of the Steering Platform on Research for Western Balkan Countries.

Please find the pdf document here: <http://wbc-rti.info/object/document/7529>

See also: Vienna Memorandum on the Western Balkan countries in future European RTD activities, Online: <http://wbc-rti.info/object/document/7588>

2nd Steering Platform meeting, Berlin – March 29, 2007

Event review

The second meeting of the Steering Platform on Research for Western Balkan countries was held on March 29, 2007 in Berlin upon invitation of the European Commission and the German Council presidency. The representatives from the science ministries of the Western Balkan countries discussed their initiatives with several EU Member States (i.e. Austria, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Poland, Slovenia, Slovakia, Romania, the UK, etc.) and representatives from the European Commission (Directorate General Research and Directorate General Joint Research Centre).

After presentations on the state-of-the-art of S&T policy in the region, the European Commission confirmed its support for and outlined the latest developments on the procedures of association to the Seventh Framework Programme and other activities in the region.

Representatives of the supporting Information Office of the Platform see-science.eu and the Southeast European Era-Net presented their current activities and future plans.

One important outcome of the meeting was that the Steering Platform will convene twice a year in the future. A strong impetus is expected through the implementation of an INCO-NET for the region, which shall be a project to provide logistical and analytical support to the bi-regional dialogue. The participants thank the German organisers for the organisation of the meeting and their hospitality. A date for the next meeting was not set, but the Slovenian colleagues expressed their interest to host a meeting during their presidency.

3rd Steering Platform meeting, Thessaloniki – October 29, 2007

Agenda & Minutes

Agenda and Minutes of the meeting in Thessaloniki are available here: <http://wbc-rti.info/object/document/7452>

See also: The European future of the Western Balkans - Thessaloniki@10,

In June 2003 the EU-Western Balkans summit resulted in the Thessaloniki Declaration, affirming unequivocally that 'the future of the Balkans is within the European Union'.

On the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the declaration, and on the eve of Croatia's accession to the EU, this publication assesses the progress that the countries of the Western Balkans have made on the path to European integration in the past decade. It notes the positive momentum generated by the Thessaloniki Agenda but highlights the various challenges faced by both the EU and the countries of the region, ranging from security issues, the consolidation of democracy and the rule of law to economic development and regional cooperation. It also looks ahead and discusses foreseeable or desirable prospects for both sides.

This book offers an illuminating and distinctive perspective by featuring contributions from exclusively female authors - academics as well as policy practitioners - from both the EU and the Western Balkans.

Online: <http://wbc-rti.info/object/document/12397>

12.15 - 12.45	Information on WBC-INCO.NET
12.45 - 14.00	<i>Lunch</i>
14.00 - 14.45	The SEE-ERA-NET White Paper and Joint Action Plan: Recommendations for enhanced S&T cooperation between EU-Member States and Western Balkan Countries
14.45 - 15.45	Cooperation opportunities for WBCs under EUREKA and COST and Croatian experiences
15.45 - 16.15	<i>Coffee break</i>
16.15 - 17.00	Strengthening research capacity: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - possibilities under IPA (including fact-finding task by the Information Office); - some successful applications; - outcome & follow-up of the Infrastructure conference in Brdo; - ESFRI (European Strategy Forum on Research Infrastructures): state of play
17.00 - 17.15	AOB/Closing Remarks
	Announcement of the next Steering Platform Meeting

17.15 - 18:30

After the Steering Platform meeting: Constituent Meeting of the Task Force Fostering and Building Human Capital of the Regional Cooperation Council

Minutes

The meeting was co-chaired by:

- Slovenia as EU presidency (Mr Peter Volasko)
- Montenegro as WBC co-chair (Ms Mira Vukčević)
- European Commission (Mr Alessandro Damiani)

The presentations held during the meeting and WBC country reports can be downloaded from the WBC-INCO.Net homepage at: <http://www.wbc-inco.net/object/document/5930.html>

I. Opening Statements

Co-chair EU presidency - Slovenia:

In his welcome statement Peter Volasko affirmed that the European Research Area (ERA) is very high on the agenda of the Slovenian EU presidency and he highlighted the role of the Steering Platform on Research for the Western Balkan Countries (WBC-SP) as an important platform to discuss and further develop common activities of the EC, the Western Balkan Countries (WBCs) and the EU Member States (EU-MS) to closer cooperate in the field of science and research.

He referred to the remarkable progress made in the WBCs in the last years leading to the association of most of the WBCs to the 7th EU Framework Programme for Research and Technological Development (FP7). Volasko expects all WBCs to be EU candidate countries with concrete accession options in the near future.

Co-chair European Commission:

Alessandro Damiani thanked Slovenia for the efforts during the EU presidency to systematically further develop the ERA and for raising awareness on its importance on a high political level. He confirmed the weight of the WBC-SP in terms of information sharing and in steering the cooperation of EU-MS and WBCs in science and research. He said that association to FP7 is no point of arrival but of departure. Stocktaking of WBCs participation in FP7 is valuable for further development. Association of WBCs to FP7 means to participate with full rights but also to loose special benefits of being a third country.

The steering aspect of the WBC-SP is crucial; information sharing is important but not enough. The SEE-ERA.Net White Paper is a useful input for the steering process. He also paid tribute to the WBC-INCO.Net project which provides a stable and productive basis for the work of the WBC-SP.

Significant progress was made on association to FP7: since January 1, 2008, all WBCs except Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) are associated. BiH is expected to finalise the procedure soon and to be associated to FP7 as of January 1, 2009.

Messages from Commissioner Potočnik to the WBC-SP:

- Potočnik supports the WBC-SP and would have liked to participate in this meeting
- WBCs' ownership of the WBC-SP is important
- WBC-SP shall stronger steer the process of integration
- Potočnik reaffirmed his commitment to take up good ideas and input from the WBC-SP to better integrate the WBCs into ERA

Volasko: ERA entered into a new phase since it had been established eight years ago. Its new concept developed strongly during the past months. Vivid, dynamic and trusted partnerships have been established also with third countries (Russia, Mediterranean countries, etc.). In this regards, the crucial term for the Slovenian presidency is "partnership".

Co-chair WBC - Montenegro:

Mira Vukčević stated that the association of Montenegro and the other WBCs to FP7 will be fruitful. Accompanying evaluations of the WBCs participation in FP7 will help to permanently improve their performance. The WBC-SP provides valuable input for the development of the research sector in the WBCs as well as for further integrating the WBCs into ERA.

II. Approval of the Agenda of the current meeting and approval of the minutes of the last WBC-SP meeting in Thessalonica 2007

The agenda of the current meeting as well as the minutes of the last meeting of the WBC-SP held in Thessalonica/Greece on October 29, 2007, (download link: <http://www.wbc-inco.net/object/document/3172.html>) were approved without objections. Special thanks were expressed to GSRT for organising the meeting and providing the minutes.

III. What has been done since October 2007

(Information by European Commission)

Volasko adverted to the book "Science and Technology in the Western Balkans" edited by Elke Dall (Information Office), containing reports of the Information Office of the WBC-SP which was handed out to the participants. Damiani thanked Dall for her work for the Information Office of the WBC-SP.

Information by the European Commission:

Tania Friederichs informed about recent developments regarding EU-WBCs relations.

- BiH: the association procedure is underway with the aim of signing after the summer and entry into effect as of January 1, 2009. This should offer more research opportunities at regional level;

- several visits in the region took place: Comm. Potočnik was in Montenegro, Albania and DG RTD did a first fact-finding meeting in UNMIK/Kosovo;
- explicit reference is made to the WBC-SP in the recent Communication from the Commission on Western Balkan Countries: Enhancing the European perspective;
- in this Communication several other initiatives on research for WBCs are announced which demonstrated importance of research in the enlargement process;
- more contacts with DG Elarg took place to explore the possibilities under IPA (Instrument for Pre-Accession) for research capacity. Some progress is made under the regional component which could serve to support the regional dimension of research cooperation among WBCs;
- at the Research Infrastructure Conference in Brdo in March 2008, the EC participated to present research opportunities under IPA aiming at a similar development as under the Structural Funds for Member States;
- in the “Declaration on the Western Balkans” annexed to the Presidency Conclusions of the European Council on June 19/20, 2008, the important role of the WBC-SP for the development of the region was underlined. This was of course the direct result of the Presidency's commitment to the region.

With respect to issues to focus on, Ms Friederichs reiterated the need to further develop an integrated research policy and certainly establish national research strategies. The observership in CREST as associated country should help in this objective.

Information by the Information Office of the Steering Platform:

Elke Dall: The Information Office of the WBC-SP was supported by an FP6 project from May 2006 until April 2008. Its products are visible, its website is intensively used, its mailing list contains approximately 3000 entries and its activities have been recognised. To continue its work and its support for the WBC-SP the major part of the Information Office has been integrated in the FP7 project WBC-INCO.Net which is supported by the EC from January 2008 until December 2011. Dall asks the members of the WBC-SP to provide news and information on recent activities and initiatives in their countries to be spread via WBC-INCO.Net (contact Elke Dall – dall@zsi.at). She thanked the EC and the WBCs for their support.

Information on the results of “HERMAN POTOČNIK- NOORDUNG AWARD” initiative for RTD donations for WBCs:

Peter Volasko informed about the history and the outcome of the award and especially pointed out that

- the measure supported through the project SEE-ERA.NET have been implemented in many lines
- information on the needs of the WBCs has been collected
- a homepage was created with the support of the Austrian Science Office in Ljubljana
- leaflets on the award together with invitations to participate were distributed to stakeholders all over Europe but caused little response
- so far two donors provided substantial donations who will be honoured at a ceremony after the meeting of the WBC-SP:

- DG JRC donates several pieces of equipment: Volasko thanked the JRC for always having been very helpful and proactively supporting the WBCs
- the Slovenian Enterprise SAVA also donated equipment

Slovenia will further support this initiative until November 2008 and proposes to continue supporting the award to the forthcoming EU presidencies. Volasko pointed out that in the future the private sector has to be approached more intensively.

Milena Raykovska (JRC) announced further support from the JRC for the region in terms of providing information and trainings as well as supporting the development of S&T based legislation. She encouraged the WBCs to actively use JRC's offers to be an entry point into its networks and projects.

Information by the Western Balkan countries:

Serbia:

Viktor Nedović informed about recent developments in Serbia. He mentioned numerous FP7 info days and training workshops, especially the successful training workshop for research managers carried out in the frame of the WBC-INCO.Net project in Belgrade on May 8, 2008. Besides he highlighted especially the installation of a new Consultation Office in the Department for International Cooperation in the Serbian Ministry of Science which will help to further increase the FP7 participation of Serbian researchers. He also named several strategically important FP projects which Serbia is involved in and stated an increase in bilateral cooperation.

Comment Romania: The Consultation Office is very important; Romania would be interested in getting insights into the process of establishing the office as a good practice example. Serbia agreed to present it at one of the forthcoming WBC-INCO.Net meetings.

Croatia:

Damir Jeličić informed about recent developments in Croatia. For 2008 about 35 info events and workshops are foreseen to be held in Croatia of which he highlighted two trans disciplinary events with the participation of high level experts: one on ICT/health/social sciences-humanities and the other on chemistry/food-agriculture/environment. Jeličić said that workshops for young scientists on how to write good proposals for EU programmes are very important. Croatia currently considers opening a liaison office in Brussels and is in the process of improving its network of National Contact Points and Programme Committee members.

Montenegro:

Slobodanka Koprivica informed about recent developments in Montenegro. She accentuated the further integration of Montenegro into ERA and the association to FP7 as of January 1, 2008, to be of highest importance. The necessary capital for the participation in FP7 will fully come from the state budget in 2008 and as of 2009 until the end of FP7 50% will be financed via IPA funds. FP7 participation increased in the last year but is not satisfying in collaborative

research. So far seven projects involving Montenegrin researchers have been approved for funding. The NCP network organised call oriented info days and provided support to researchers in writing concrete proposals. The ministry continues its incentive scheme for researchers involved in FP7 projects. The nomination of representatives for the FP7 Programme Committees and the JRC Committee is about to be completed.

Montenegro joined the Entrepreneurship Programme which is one of the components of the Competitiveness and Innovation Programme CIP. In December 2007 a Memorandum was signed to join CERN as an observer.

On the national level a draft strategy for scientific research activities had been prepared and is now in the phase of public discussion. The estimation of the general expenditure on R&D in Montenegro (GERD) foresees to reach 1.4 % of the GDP in 2013 and 2% of GDP by 2020. First steps have been taken to reform the statistical system and to build up a database of research institutions and researchers. The national statistical system shall be harmonised with the one used by the EU.

Montenegro will host a UNESCO ministerial forum on research in South East Europe. At this occasion bilateral cooperation agreements are to be signed with Serbia, Croatia, Albania, Slovenia and Greece.

Bosnia-Herzegovina:

Alma Hasanović informed about recent developments in Bosnia-Herzegovina. She highlighted especially the high importance of international cooperation for BiH, especially within FP7. Therefore the NCP provides information to the scientific community on a daily basis. The Ministry of Civil Affairs will employ new staff in the near future with the aim to support active participation of BiH in FP7. In addition, an ongoing CARDS project on capacity building tends to identify the best BiH structure in the light of upcoming FP7 association. The ministry also provides funds to the research community for preparing FP7 projects. A successful training workshop for research managers has been carried out in the frame of the WBC-INCO.Net project in Sarajevo on May 9, 2008. On the state level a strategy for research development is in preparation.

FYR of Macedonia:

Jovanka Tuteska informed about recent developments in the FYR of Macedonia. Three new laws for the S&T sector (act on higher education; science and research act; act on technological development) are currently prepared and will be an important step to especially improve the position of the researchers in FYR of Macedonia and to identify priority areas. She also mentioned that substantial progress has been made in institutional building, in linking science with industry and on all levels of cooperative research. Currently 5 Centres of Excellence are defined in the country.

Bilateral cooperation is very active as currently 120 projects with 18 countries are supported. Multilateral cooperation focuses on FP7, SEE-ERA.Net, COST, UNESCO and the International Atomic Agency. Since June 2008, FYR of Macedonia is a full member of

EUREKA. Currently 0.25 % of the GDP is spent for research. This amount shall reach 1.8% in 2010.

Albania:

Gjergji Gjinko informed about recent developments in Albania. He confirmed Albania's engagement in FP7 and its commitment to the WBC-SP which is an important platform for the exchange of information. The WBCs should take over the ownership of the WBC-SP more and more. Albania is associated to FP7 as of January 1, 2008. So far five FP7 projects with Albanian participation are main-listed – all together 71 proposals with Albanian participation have been submitted. Several big information events have been carried out in 2008. The participation of Commissioner Potočnik at the Research Information Event in Tirana on May 6, 2008, helped to raise awareness in the government on the relevance of science and research also for the economic development of Albania. The expenditure for research in 2008 was twice as high as in 2007, for the budgets 2009-2011 a 35% increase of budget is proposed. Remaining challenges are research capacities, infrastructure and the development of an integrated policy. Strategy development started with involvement of UNESCO and Worldbank, furthermore projects on S&T indicators and on brain gain. IPA funds shall help to further develop the infrastructure sector.

Information by the other Steering Platform Members (as appropriate):

Greece:

Nikos Sidiropoulos informed that Greece is about to develop a new strategy for the cooperation with the WBCs as part of new Greek initiatives in the field of third country cooperation. Financing of research groups in the target countries is foreseen in addition to training and support of international mobility for PhD candidates and post-docs.

The GSRT is still waiting for the decision of the EC on the project proposal "SEE-ERA.Net on Innovation" which is of utmost importance to further link the sectors of research and innovation in the region.

Austria (BMWF):

Anneliese Stoklaska reaffirmed the Austrian commitment to the region and to the ongoing activities in science and research. The Austrian policy puts new accents on better linking research and higher education to support the creation of a regional knowledge area. Added value could be created by combining already existing instruments. This is part of the activities of the Austrian Science and Research Liaison Offices in Ljubljana and Sofia. Austria expressed its gratitude to the EC for being a very active and supportive partner in the region.

Turkey:

Fatih Sahin complimented the WBCs on the achievement made in the past months. He pointed out that the challenges for the WBCs are similar to the ones Turkey faces because their research systems and also their needs for further developments are comparable. One of Turkey's strengths is its developed system of state and private universities.

Competitiveness should be increased in the WBCs. Turkey proposes that the research potential activity “Research Potential of Convergence Regions” in the Capacities programme of FP7 should be kept available for the WBCs and Turkey because it is still highly necessary for these regions. Sahin adverted to COST and EUREKA being complementary to FP7 and very useful for the WBCs.

Italy:

Maria Uccellatore expressed the interest of the Italian Ministry of Education, Universities and Research in the work of the WBC-SP and its appreciation to the WBCs for their recent achievements.

France:

Jean Luc Clement stated that France will do its best to increase the integration of the WBCs into the ERA during its forthcoming EU presidency. France will support all initiative of capacity building and would like to see more cooperation between French and WBCs universities. Especially young researchers should be encouraged and supported to cooperate. The establishment of joint labs should be supported. He congratulated the WBCs for the achievements made during the past months.

Spain:

Armela Dino said that it is important to share good practice in the EU and Spain. Spain developed a new national plan on RTD containing a new concept of internationalisation that could be interesting for the WBCs.

Austria (SEE-ERA.Net):

Evelina Santa informed the WBC-SP that the ZSI in its role as the project coordinator had been invited by the EC to enter into negotiations of the grant agreement “Further integrating key research institutions from Southeast Europe into the European Research Area (SEE-ERA.Net Plus)”. The project proposal SEE-ERA.Net Plus successfully passed the evaluation process with top scores.

EC:

Alessandro Damiani proposed that the members of the WBC-SP should provide in advance of future meetings short progress reports on recent developments regarding S&T cooperation in/with the WBCs (one page summary of latest developments and achievements in the WBCs). This would allow to better prepare for the meetings and to focus the presentations on-site on most important developments.

This suggestion was welcomed by the WBC-SP members. In this context, Heribert Buchbauer (Austria, WBC-INCO.Net), mentioned that a first step had already been made within the Work Package “European and regional dialogue” of the WBC-INCO.Net project. In preparation of the project Steering Board meeting in Ljubljana, June 12, 2008, such information had been collected and forwarded to the members of the WBC-INCO.Net

Steering Board. He announced that a template for the progress reports will be designed within WBC-INCO.Net.

Information on the Task Force Fostering and Building Human Capital:

Barbara Weitgruber (Austria) gave a short overview on the development of the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) from the Stability Pact and on the aims of creating the “Task Force Fostering and Building Human Capital”. She highlighted the core importance of developing human capital for the research sector and the need to actively coordinate the work of involved ministries on national level if the competences for science and education lie with more than one ministry.

IV. First Results of Participation of WBCs in FP7

(Information by European Commission)

Tania Friederichs presented some preliminary data on participation in FP7. So far not all FP7 calls have been evaluated; data relates to mainlisted (not contracted) projects and in the key specific programmes. There was no indication on funding. The statistics gave however good indication of trends and allowed for some preliminary observations as follows:

- Overall, since WBCs are associated, much more submissions are made which in itself was to be welcomed;
- the success rate was much below the EU average success rate but this was not surprising for a first year association;
- all participated in the Specific Programme Cooperation (10 thematic areas) but not enough and yet there is the bulk of the research cooperation and opportunities for WBCs since they are associated;
- participation of SMEs in general is much too low;
- several projects submitted under the Specific Programme Ideas but none retained. This programme was highly competitive but WBCs, given their scientific potential, should not give up to aim at participating in Ideas. The WBCs’ participation was a demonstration of the ambition to be excellent;
- very low/too low participation in the Specific Programme People/Marie Curie Action and very low success rate. This needed special attention/analysis on how to improve;
- WBCs are very successful under Research Potential in particular the call dedicated to Western Balkan Countries.

Comments:

Ulle Must (Estonia) pointed out that the FP7 calls on mobility are highly oversubscribed already which explains probably the very low success rate of the WBCs in People.

The EC (Friederichs) explained that under People it was not so much a question of not being retained it was in the first place a question of not enough requests for grants. This in itself needed to be analysed: what are the obstacles to participation. On the submission, the scientific excellence did not allow to be retained. This could be a question of presentation in

the grant request. She promised to consider the possibility to organise a special information session on Marie Curie Actions.

Mr Damiani (EC) added that it would be interesting to go into more detail and periodically update these statistics to continually improve the FP7 participation of the WBCs. Damiani also brought to the attention a new scheme under the People Programme, the "International Research Staff Exchange Scheme" (IRSES) aiming at strengthening research partnerships through staff exchanges and networking between European research organisations and organisations from countries having an S&T agreement with the EU or being covered under the European neighbourhood policy. Possibly IRSES could help to reduce brain drain in the WBCs. The next call will be published in autumn 2008.

Reply Volasko (Slovenia): The low success rate is not negative only; it also shows the high number of participations.

Viktor Nedović: Serbia will work on its low success rate in Ideas. He underlined the necessity of a regional potential programme for the WBCs and recommended to the EC to open REGPOT 3 to WBCs again. This proposal was strongly supported by the WBC-SP members from the WBCs as well as by other WBC-SP members.

Friederichs (EC) took note of the request to consider more calls under Research Potential aiming at strengthening the research capacity in the region which was a real need. In that case, projects on real research capacity needs should be submitted and not on organising networking conferences or workshops.

V. Information on WBC-INCO.Net

Elke Dall presented the WBC-INCO.Net project which started on January 1, 2008, and is dedicated to further support the WBCs to better integrate into the ERA. One of the main tasks of WBC-INCO.Net is to provide logistic and content wise support to the deliberations and meetings of the WBC-SP as it has been done by the Information Office of the WBC-SP until April 30, 2008.

Genovese (EC) expressed great satisfaction with the launch of the project and agreed that it was a good idea to grant one INCO.Net on the Western Balkan region despite its double status i.e. non member state/third country but at the same time associated to FP7. In principle, one of the tasks of an INCO.Net is to make recommendations on organising special calls for the international country partners in the form of SICAs (new FP7 instrument). But as most WBCs are by now associated to FP7, there will be no more specific calls for the WBCs in FP7 (nor SICAs neither SSA targeting the region). Association to FP7 is a dramatic jump for the WBCs, but the statistics demonstrate that the WBCs, although being small countries, already reached good competitive results in FP7. It was expected that the WBC-INCO.Net project will therefore come up with other recommendations aiming at strengthening the research capacity and participation under FP7.

VI. The SEE-ERA.Net White Paper and Joint Action Plan: Recommendations for enhanced S&T cooperation between EU-Member States and Western Balkan Countries

Andreas Kahle (BMBF, Germany) presented the main lines of the White Paper with its supplemented Joint Action Plan produced by the SEE-ERA.Net project. Ralf Hanatschek (PT-DLR, Germany) gave detailed insights into the single elements of the documents.

The main pillars of the activities proposed in the Joint Action Plan will be implemented in the context of different projects (SEE-ERA.Net, SEE-ERA.Net PLUS, WBC-INCO.Net, SEE-ERA.Net INNO, et al.) involving important stakeholders for the region. Kahle made clear that the WBCs themselves are the main players in the process of enhancing international S&T cooperation in the WBCs and asked the members of the WBC-SP to actively take up the recommendations of the White Paper and the Joint Action Plan. Hanatschek mentioned that the documents had been presented at an EC intra service consultation meeting in Brussels on February 28, 2008. The SEE-ERA.Net White Paper can be downloaded from <http://www.see-era.net/doc/otherdocs/view?id=22025>.

Must (Estonia) claimed that all these different activities carried out in parallel should be linked to each other.

Stoklaska (Austria) replied that linking so many different activities is impossible. Also the question “Who shall carry out all this?” must remain open. The White Paper is an excellent paper that could be handed over to Ministers in charge of S&T and used as a guideline providing concrete options for further developing the S&T sector and the cooperation in and with the WBCs. She stated that many of the proposed measures are already being implemented and the White Paper surely will remain the basis of activities to be implemented in the years to come.

Santa (Austria): SEE-ERA.Net continues to implement measures foreseen in the White Paper. Currently the implementation of a mobility programme for young scientists which is recommended in the Joint Action Plan is being discussed.

Iulia Mihail (Romania) mentioned that Technology Platforms and EUREKA projects are dedicated to bring research to the market. The business and industrial sector must be closer connected to science and research. Mihail was supported by Sidiropoulos (Greece) who said that more activities towards innovation are necessary.

Hanatschek (Germany) said that the recommendations of the Joint Action Plan aim at national R&D policy and international cooperation. They don't provide advice on how to open national research programmes for international cooperation. The Joint Action Plan is a working paper and foreseen to be updated whereas the work on the White Paper itself is completed.

Raykovska (JRC) stated that the JRC is very positive on the White Paper and sees the WBCs to be stakeholders in JRC.

Damiani (EC): The White Paper is a tool that should be used as much as possible. Some of its proposed activities are already being implemented, some will be and some are not possible under the current conditions. He proposes to note down what has been done so far and what is intended in the future.

Must (Estonia) said that Slovenia has the best research output stock taking system. *Volasko (Slovenia) replied* that the Slovenian SICRIS system which is based on the euroCRIS system (Current Research Information System) allows better identifying the future needs on the basis of what is already there.

VII. Cooperation opportunities for WBCs under EUREKA and COST and Croatian experiences

Moderator: Anneliese Stoklaska (Austria)

COST:

Albena Vutsova (Bulgaria) presented the basic concept and general outline of COST (European Co-operation in the field of Scientific and Technical Research). She pointed out that one of the most important effects of COST is preventing the fragmentation of national research activities. Furthermore it is a bridge for scientific communities to the EU neighbouring countries and the whole world.

Günter Siegel (COST office Brussels) reiterated Ms Vutsova's comments, invites the WBC-SP members to join COST activities and asked them to provide contacts in their countries.

Nedović (Serbia) announced that the 171st COST committee meeting will be held from June 18-19, 2008 in Belgrade. He drew the attention of the WBC-SP members to the fact that COST changed the rules for applications within the past years and asked if there will be more changes in 2008. The success rate of COST actions is 5-6 %.

Must (Estonia) supported COST because it steers the international cooperation and is exactly what researchers in Estonia as well as in new EU-MS need. She said that there is an obvious correlation of partnerships in COST and in FP7 afterwards.

EUREKA:

Andrej Cvelbar (Slovenia) presented the EUREKA initiative. EUREKA is intergovernmental, nationally financed, bottom up and market oriented. It supports the competitiveness of European companies through international cooperation in creating links and networks of innovation. It currently counts 39 full members; several countries such as Albania participate in EUREKA projects through a network of National Information Points (NIPs). FYR of Macedonia became EUREKA member with support of Serbia in 2008. Montenegro and Bosnia/Herzegovina are no EUREKA members so far. As an example he said that for an input of 1M€ an output of 2,5M€ private funds can be obtained.

Mihail (Romania) invited EUREKA to participate in the technical fair in Romania in October 2008 and suggested to the WBC-SP members to participate in EUREKA's EUROSTARS programme.

Croatia's experience with COST and EUREKA:

Damir Jeličić presented Croatia's experience with COST and EUREKA. Croatia has been successfully cooperating within COST in all scientific fields since the 70s. He stated that COST is open for everybody to become part of the huge European network and to cooperate with the best institutions in Europe. COST deals with basic research and is one of the three pillars of the ERA together with EUREKA and FP7.

Jeličić said that EUREKA is market oriented, searching for new technologies and products. Croatia has been participating since 2000. The Croatian experience in establishing a EUREKA office shows that therefore strong support from state institutions is needed. Jeličić said: "EUREKA brings you to the European market, it brings you to the ones who need you and whom you need. To participate in EUREKA you have to be prepared to actively cooperate with partners from all over the world. You will not be especially invited to participate – the initiative is up to you."

VIII. Strengthening research capacity

Possibilities under IPA (including fact-finding task by the Information Office):

Elke Dall (Information Office) presented an overview of the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA), its components and eligible countries. She introduced the "Multi-annual indicative planning documents" (MIPD) for 2007-2009 and 2008-2010 and their chapters on research. Expectations from IPA include political aspects (public administration reform for Ministries of Science, National Contact Points, etc.), institution building and capacity building (in science and research) through technical assistance, trainings, study visits, etc. and a focus on structural economic reforms, entrepreneurship, support to business and innovation infrastructures (clusters, incubators, etc.), support to innovative SMEs, support to the adoption of the *acquis* (S&T strategy and action plans, reinforce capacities at ministries – e.g. to develop an integrated research policy), assistance for the participation in Community Programmes and Agencies (co-financing the participation in FP7, CIP, etc. („entrance fee“), development and improvement of appropriate statistics (for science and research), establishment of and support to IPR systems, development of a database on researchers, research projects, etc. (research information system), networking of research centres/CoE to stimulate cross border cooperation, investment in laboratories, funds for specific centres of excellence, etc.

Missing coordination was diagnosed: Senior Programme Officers (SPO) for research and their assistants should communicate on a regular basis (exchange ideas, good/bad practice), prepare joint inputs to documents and proposed actions for multibeneficiary IPA, exchange experience on success/failure stories as regards national IPA, define measures for capacity building for SPOs and assistants (e.g. through training, networking, consulting, etc.), etc.

Finally, a proposal of the Western Balkan countries of WBC-INCO.Net was introduced: to launch a high-level initiative on the regional strategy through a ministerial conference on the regional strategy in 2009. The project idea included preparatory meetings, a study to give the main input for the conference (strategic recommendations), a roadmap and a

dissemination campaign. Further dialogue with DG Enlargement and the Regional Cooperation Council will be sought.

Tania Friederichs (EC) mentioned the ESFRI meeting in Brdo/Slovenia from 6-7 March, 2008, where the Lisbon objectives and synergies with structural funds/IPA funds were analysed.

She said that research related activities can also be funded e.g. within component I (Transition assistance and institution building) of IPA, there is room to justify financing increase of research capacity. Furthermore, the so-called entry-fee to FP7 is being supported under this component. Also under IPA's multibeneficiary programme research capacity can be funded.

She highlighted an ambitious programme by Serbia to prepare for EU integration to comply with the EU standards/acquis and enforcement of the NCP system as an example for improving the absorption capacity of the RTD system. For the latter, Turkey already received IPA funds. Further examples were highlighted in the field of innovation centres, energy efficiency, etc.

Component II (Cross border cooperation) is dedicated to enforce regional cooperation e.g. networking of centres of excellence on regional level could be supported. Candidate countries should use components III (Regional development) and IV (Human resources development) more.

The EC proposed to organise workshops on how the WBCs could make use of IPA funds for RTD capacity building.

In order to use the funds of the different components of IPA the national experts in the ministries need relevant know-how on how to bring up proposals for IPA and need to know the strengths and weaknesses. Regional ownership and the identification of priorities are of high relevance.

Comments:

Raykovska (JRC) said that

- about 1/5 of the EU legislation is S&T based (environment, food, energy,...) and close links with relevant ministries of other policy areas are important to support the S&T agenda;
- JRC has positive experience with IPA and is ready to share the knowledge on how to use IPA funds successfully for research;
- Training needs are identified on all levels on how to use the funds best, also on the side of the local EC delegations.

Wedde-Mühlhausen (Germany) asks Friederichs (EC): Is it feasible to use IPA funds to build regional competence centres? Reply Friederichs (EC): They can be financed through component II.

Alma Hasanovic (BiH) strongly supports the idea of joint workshops as suggested by Friederichs to bring together all stakeholders who often lack information.

Some successful applications:

Nataša Maršić (Croatia) presented how Croatia uses IPA funds for science and research. The area of research falls under the third component of IPA “Regional competitiveness operational programme”, priority axis 2 “Enhancing the competitiveness of the Croatian economy”, measure 2.2 “Technology transfer and support services for knowledge-based start-ups”. Specific objectives for Croatia are to build technology transfer and commercialization capacities of higher education institutions and public research organizations in order to contribute to sustainable regional development and industry competitiveness of high value added sectors of the economy and knowledge-based SMEs.

Measure 2.2 consists of two operations. The first operation seeks to build entrepreneurial and intellectual property management skills in public institutions. The second operation seeks to support the creation and growth of technology- and knowledge-based spin-offs (mostly from universities and research organizations) and SMEs by enabling infrastructure and access to technology and business development services, particularly for high value added sectors (biosciences, biotechnology) and especially in weaker regions.

After several rounds of audits the preparation phase is finished and the financing agreement will be signed soon. Tender documentation is already being prepared.

Within CARDS and PHARE nine pilot centres were established, most of them are advanced now and will further be supported under IPA. Fine tuning of these activities is time consuming but necessary to make them fit to IPA.

Comments:

Raykovska (JRC): “Today’s research – tomorrow’s results” conference in Slovenia today addresses IPA for WBCs.

Sidiropoulos (Greece): How far has Croatia gone in developing spin offs? *Answer:* Close to implementation.

ESFRI (European Strategy Forum on Research Infrastructures) - state of play:

Presentation “ESFRI – European Strategy Forum on Research Infrastructures - Working Group on Regional Issues – WG Regio” by Anneliese Stoklaska (Austria):

The scope of ESFRI is to support a coherent and strategy-led approach to policy making on research infrastructures (RI) in Europe and to facilitate multilateral initiatives leading to the better use and development of research infrastructures.

The scope of ESFRI-WG Regio is to

- better understand the role and importance of regions and for regions in the development of a strategic European policy on RI based on concrete example of

- policies, institutional arrangements, and/or of existing or planned regional research infrastructures open to international use;
- promote cooperation in different regions of Europe;
- monitor the involvement of the "newer" EU-MS in the roadmap to strengthen and exploit the human resources and intellectual potential from these countries which continues to be recognised as a priority for ESFRI.

Stoklaska referred to the differences between bigger and smaller EU countries in terms of RI and pointed out that especially for smaller countries regional and European cooperation is very important. ESFRI installed a special working group for CEE/SEE where the involvement of new members in large facilities is discussed. WBCs are in the focus of ESFRI.

Stoklaska pointed out that countries already associated to FP7 can participate in ESFRI and also in the ESFRI WG Regio. Contact details can be found in her presentation (see link above).

Lora Pavlova (Bulgaria) announced that the ESFRI regional report will include a WBC chapter. An overview on the topics will be sent by email to the WBCs. Until mid July all reports need to be compiled and finalised by December 2008. Topics are history of science, lacks of coverage, infrastructures of pan-European dimension, etc.

Bulgaria sent out a questionnaire to the WBCs asking for input on:

- which WBC lacks thematic coverage
- inventory of scientific capacity and research infrastructures
- where scientific capacity and RI is missing
- where roadmaps are being developed
- major scientific breakthroughs, RI, etc.
- future steps on national basis, spotlights of what could be implemented

WBC input is necessary until the end of June 2008.

Pavlova also announced a database to be available online for the next WBC-SP meeting including information on institutions and equipment, which can be enlarged for WBCs. The responsibility to insert data needs to be clarified. She informed that the invitation to nominate representatives for ESFRI is of high importance.

Comments:

Friederichs (EC) highlighted the necessity of fact finding on research infrastructures as a basis to steer the development and to intensify the communication with donors and relevant stakeholders. It's important to open the doors to each other.

Dall (Information Office) introduced the idea of a high level regional research strategy development process in the WBCs which was proposed by DG Enlargement to the WBCs to access funds from IPA's multibeneficiary programme for the research sector. This idea was discussed during the WBC-INCO.Net Steering Board meeting on June 12, 2008. The WBC members of the WBC-INCO.Net Steering Board considered the idea to develop a regional

research strategy to be feasible and decided to introduce it as a proposal to the WBC-SP. The process could be launched at the ministerial conference “SEE Science, Higher Education and Innovation Policy Forum” taking place in Montenegro from July 1-4, 2008. Serbia offered to organise a conference in 2009 as a follow up activity.

Wedde-Mühlhausen (Germany) explained in more detail: The idea to develop a regional research strategy for the WBCs was raised by Mr Visser (DG Enlargement) who was consulted within WBC-INCO.Net to discuss IPA issues and options for the WBCs to better use IPA funds for the research sector. To access multibeneficiary IPA funds he proposed to carry out a research strategy development process on regional level in the WBCs and to organise a ministerial conference on this issue. Mr Visser said that a regional research strategy would help the WBCs, all of them being rather small countries, to overcome the limitations of pure national research strategies and strengthen the competitiveness of the whole region. Therefore an amount of 1 M€ had been earmarked by DG Enlargement. Since there has been no demand for this money by now this amount is still available. This proposal was discussed at the WBC-INCO.Net Steering Board meeting amongst other options on how to use available IPA funds. The WBC-INCO.Net Steering Board was aware that additional preparatory steps and the appointment of a senior officials working group would be necessary to properly prepare such a high level strategy process. The high level forum in Montenegro in July which was mentioned above could be linked to this regional strategy process.

The WBC-SP will be informed in written procedure about the development of the initiative for further endorsement.

It was made clear that the follow-up meeting proposed to be held in Serbia in 2009 is not connected to the meetings in the frame of UNESCO's strategic development process of which the next meeting is foreseen to be held in Albania.

Comments:

Weitgruber (Austria) emphasised that overlaps with the SEE-ERA.Net White Paper need to be avoided. *Dall (Information Office) replied* that the initiative could develop an overall regional research strategy based on national strategies.

Vutsova (Bulgaria) said that it is up to the WBCs to decide upon a regional strategy. But if EU-MS shall be involved a huge consultation process will be necessary. It has to be clarified how the regional strategy is connected to national WBC strategies and what the roles of the EU-MS, the WBC-SP and the WBC-INCO.Net are in this process.

Stoklaska (Austria) said that it is unfortunate that this topic was introduced only at the end of the WBC-SP meeting because of a necessary change of agenda items. Therefore there is not enough time to discuss it in detail.

Vukčević (Montenegro) and Nedović (Serbia) emphasised the need for synergies and stated that this issue has to be clarified soon, because of the date of the planned meeting it is not possible to wait for the next WBC-SP meeting.

Dall (Information Office) said that further concrete steps to develop such a regional strategy will be taken in cooperation with DG Enlargement and the WBCs.

IX. AOB/Closing Remarks; announcement of the next Steering Platform Meeting

Next WBC-SP meetings:

The chair asked WBC-SP members from France and Czech Republic about their plans concerning the meetings of the WBC-SP to be held during their EU presidencies.

France is glad to host the next WBC-SP meeting in Paris in December 2008 during the French EU presidency. The meeting will be co-chaired by the EC, Serbia and France. In view of the impatience of the researchers in the WBCs the WBC-SP has work very efficiently to help to improve their situation. The exact date of the WBC-SP meeting will be fixed soon.¹

Jindřich Babický (Czech Republic) announced that the WBC-SP meeting during the Czech EU presidency in the first half of 2009 will be held in Libelice near Prague provisionally on May 28, 2009. It will be organised back-to-back with other WBCs related meetings by the Czech Academy of Sciences.

Minutes of last WBC-SP meeting in Thessalonica on Oct. 29, 2007:

Lora Pavlova (Bulgaria) said that the minutes of the previous WBC-SP meeting had been provided only shortly before this meeting. *Slovenia replied* that the minutes were submitted together with the invitation to the WBC-SP meeting already at the beginning of May 2008. *Dall* (Information Office): The minutes have been available at the homepage of the Information Office of the WBC-SP for more than four months before the meeting.

WBC-SP co-chairmanship of Accession Countries:

Fatih Sahin (Turkey) complemented Greece for the high quality of the minutes of the last WBC-SP meeting. He drew the attention of the WBC-SP to the fact that Accession Countries are not mentioned in the guidelines of the WBC-SP to co-chair the WBC-SP meetings. As Turkey does not count to the WBCs this is an important question for Turkey because it has no possibility to co-chair the WBC-SP meetings. A similar intervention was made during the meeting in Greece but not included in the minutes. Therefore he requested to include a sentence in the minutes. This proposal was accepted by the WBC-SP members.

¹ Meanwhile the date was set for December 19, 2008.

5th Steering Platform meeting, Paris – December 19, 2008

Agenda

Meeting of Steering Platform on Research for Western Balkan Countries

Paris, December 19, 2008

Venue: OECD building - 2, rue André Pascal, 75016 Paris

1: 9.00 - 9.30

Opening Statements by:

- French Presidency;
- European Commission;
- Representative from Serbian Ministry

2: 9.30 - 9.45

- Approval of the Agenda
- Approval of the Minutes of the last Steering Platform Meeting (Ljubljana, 13. June 2008)

3: 9.45 - 11.15

What has been done since June 2008:

Presentation of **recent developments regarding S&T cooperation in/with the WBC**, extracted from information sheets, by:

- European Commission;
- Western Balkan countries;
- other Steering Platform Members: Member states and countries associated to FP7
- representatives from SEE-ERA.NET and WBC-INCO.NET

4: 11.15 - 11.30

Coffee break

5: 11.30 - 12.30	<p>Discussion on specific topics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mobility including presentation of Young Scientist Programme - Statistics and S&T indicators: state of play
6: 12.30 - 14.00	Lunch
7: 14.00 - 15.30	<p>IPA and Research:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Stocktaking on use of IPA for national research capacity projects and preparation for coming years; - Debriefing of regional dialogue project; - Presentation of successful national projects
8: 15.30 - 15.45	<i>Coffee break</i>
9: 15.45 - 16.15	<p>UNESCO</p> <p>Presentation of past and future research activities with WBCs</p>
10: 16.15 - 17.15	<p>Concluding Remarks</p> <p>Presentation and adoption of conclusions including recommendations on future actions and work</p> <p>AOB</p> <p>Announcement of the next Steering Platform Meeting</p>
<hr/>	
11: 20.00 - 21.30	Dinner

Conclusions

Conclusions of meeting of Steering Platform on Research for Western Balkan Countries

Paris, 19 December 2008

The Steering Platform for Research for the Western Balkan Countries met in Paris on 19 December 2008. The Platform was co-chaired by the French Presidency of the Council of the European Union – which hosted it – the Republic of Serbia on behalf of the Western Balkan Countries, and the European Commission.

The discussion on recent developments on Science and Technology in and for the Western Balkan Countries gave an overview of the different actions taken during the last six months. It also took note of the growing cooperation within the region and with the European Union Member States, the FP7 Associated States, as well as with organisations such as RCC, EUREKA, COST and UNESCO.

The discussion took place on the basis of prior received information sheets. This exercise should be continued to allow for a more focussed discussion on key actions and events which are important for the Region.

While many of the actions evoked aim at reinforcing the participation of the Western Balkan Countries in the 7th Framework programme, bilateral and multilateral programmes, other initiatives address the need to reinforce national S&T strategies and governance structures. The Platform took note that further work with regard to this last topic is particularly needed.

The specific discussion on mobility of scientists in the context of setting up the Young Scientist Programme in the frame of the SEE-ERA.NET project showed that scientists from the Western Balkan Countries are still hampered by the obstacles to the free circulation of persons in the entire European Research Area. To be able to react to this issue, the Platform underlines the importance to be specific in the identification of obstacles in order to be able to address them properly.

The Platform recommended that the Scientific Visa package should be implemented, as a matter of priority, in order to facilitate the circulation of researchers coming from the Western Balkan Countries in the European Research Area. The Platform also invites the Western Balkan Countries to report on the specific difficulties encountered.

From the presentation of the work done on statistics and indicators, the Platform recognised that substantial further efforts are necessary in order to obtain good statistics and indicators which are essential for a sound and effective S&T policy. In particular the Platform emphasised the need to train national experts and to improve infrastructure. In that regard, the Platform encourages the EU Member States to organise training of statisticians and the exchange of experts between the Western Balkan Countries and the Member States of the European Union.

The Platform noted the progress made in planning the use of IPA (Instrument for Pre-Accession (IPA)) funding for research capacity building.

On the possibility to implement a regional research strategy, further clarifications are necessary because the European Commission also offered a different option within IPA (on regional competitiveness). Further clarifications are necessary before a study on the role of research in regional competitiveness may be fully supported. Western Balkan Countries reiterated their interest for establishment of the Regional Research Strategy for the Western Balkans.

The Western Balkan Countries will actively consider how they can programme a better use of IPA funding to support the efforts necessary to design and implement integrated research policies. This synergy was considered as a critical aspect for the further participation of the WBCs in the Research Framework Programme and their integration into the European Research Area.

The Platform took note that the report of the ESFRI regional issues Working Group will be presented during the conference “*research infrastructures and the regional dimension of ERA*” (24-25th of March 2009) in Prague, will be held under the Czech Presidency of the Council of the European Union. The importance of the regional partner facilities complementing large pan-European research infrastructures will be stressed during this occasion.

The Platform stated their encouragement for scientific cooperation between the Western Balkan Countries and the European Union to be dealt within the dedicated Forum established by the recent Conclusions of the Council on the European partnership for international scientific and technological cooperation.

6th Steering Platform meeting, Liblice – May 28, 2009

Agenda

Meeting of Steering Platform on Research for Western Balkan Countries

May 28, 2009

Marble Hall, Château Liblice, Czech Republic

9.00 - 9.30

Opening Statements by:

- Czech Presidency;
- European Commission;
- Representative from Albania

9.30 - 9.45

- Approval of the Agenda
- Approval of the Minutes of the last Steering Platform Meeting (Paris, 19 December 2008)

9.45 - 11.15

What has been done since December 2008:

Presentation of **recent developments regarding S&T cooperation in/with the WBC** (see Information sheets for more details), by:

- European Commission (DG RTD and JRC)
- Western Balkan countries;
- other Steering Platform Members: Member states and countries associated to FP7;
- representatives from SEE-ERA.NET, WBC-INCO.NET, COST, RCC and Eureka.

11.15 - 11.30

Family photo - Coffee break

11.30 - 12. 45

Participation of WBCs in FP7:

- Statistics (presentation by Commission);
- Presentation of WBC-INCO.NET Study on Barriers to research cooperation in WBCs (by Ivo Pilar Zagreb)
- Debriefing on EUFORDIA Conference: what is in for WBCs (CZ PRES)

12.30 - 14.00

Lunch

14.00 - 15.30

Researchers without Barriers – Mobility of scientists

Presentation of Brain gain programme in Albania (Prof. Myqerem Tafaj, Albania)

State of play on work package on mobility in SEE-ERA.NET (Project Officer SEE-ERA.NET)

Debriefing on Conference on Building Human Capital Task Force in Bucharest, 5-7 March 2009 (RCC)

Debriefing on Euraxess Conference: Researchers in motion in Potsdam, 16-18 March 2009 (Commission)

15.30 - 15.45

Coffee break

15.45 - 16.15

Debriefing on Research Infrastructures and the Regional Dimension of ERA Conference in Prague on 24-25 March (CZ PRES)

16.15 - 17.15

Concluding Remarks

Presentation and adoption of conclusions including recommendations on future actions and work

AOB

Announcement of the next Steering Platform Meeting

18:00

Departure to Social Event

18:30 – 21:30

Tour + Buffet Dinner at Château Mělník

Conclusions

Conclusions of meeting of 6th Steering Platform on Research for Western Balkan Countries

The Steering Platform for Research for the Western Balkan Countries met in Liblice on 28 May 2009. The Platform was co-chaired by the Czech Presidency of the Council of the European Union – which hosted it – the Republic of Albania on behalf of the Western Balkan Countries, and the European Commission.

The Conclusions of the Platform meeting are published in the following article. The chairs and participants are dedicated to follow-up on the conclusions and invite all readers to also contribute with their activities. Further integration of the Western Balkans to the European Research Area is an aim to be jointly achieved!

The presentations of the recent developments regarding cooperation on research and technological development in and with the Western Balkan Countries acknowledged the trend of growing cooperation with the European Commission, the European Union Member States, the FP7 Associated States, as well as with other stakeholders, and in particular with COST, EUREKA, the Regional Cooperation Council and UNESCO. Actions have been taken in the last six months on two levels: encouraging and increasing common research cooperation as well as support and effort to strengthen the research capacity in the region. As we are now facing the economic crisis impacts, the risk of decreasing investments in research and development and innovation should be avoided, also because these investments are largely aimed at overcoming the present economic crisis and steering stabilization process and growth.

The Platform welcomed, in particular, the willingness to strengthen the cooperation at regional level under the auspices of the Regional Cooperation Council.

The Platform is very supportive of the newly established Strategic Forum for International S&T Cooperation (SFIC) and encourages the Western Balkan Countries to nominate their delegates and participate actively in the work of the Forum.

The Commission presented the statistics on participation of Western Balkan Countries in the Seventh Framework Programme of the European Community for Research, Technological Development and Demonstration activities (FP7) followed by a presentation of the study on barriers to research

cooperation by the WBC-INCO.NET project. The presentations and discussion demonstrated a number of important aspects of research cooperation with and in the Balkan Region. The results of the WBCs participation are mixed: strong participation in Cooperation – in particular in ICT, Food, Agriculture, Fisheries and Biotechnology (FAB) and Transport themes, but generally very weak in the SP People. With respect to the SP Ideas, it was acknowledged that the participation in the latter needs to be considered separately and on its own merits. The share of SME's participation is also too low. The data also demonstrated the preference of WBCs for coordination and support actions over collaborative research projects. The findings of the study on barriers in WBCs and Turkey disclosed that the major barrier to cooperation and the EC Framework Programmes related to the management and administrative conditions and hence the importance of further simplification. The lack of critical mass and infrastructures, including research equipment, is also seen as a barrier to compete on the basis of scientific excellence. In this context, the WBCs reiterated the importance of progressive research potential building and repeated the request to include special calls for WBCs into the Capacities – Specific Research Potential Programme. The Platform discussed the study and the statistics and acknowledged that the results should be carefully considered and could certainly contribute to improving the research capacity in the Balkan region. The Platform also takes note of the conclusions of the EUFORDIA Conference aiming at making research cooperation under the Framework Programme more effective.

Following the discussion on mobility of researchers, the Platform asked to actively consider how to improve the participation of WBCs in the FP7 Specific Programme on People. Visa and stay permits are still important obstacles to mobility of researchers. The need to build further upon human capital and balanced "brain circulation" was also emphasized. The Platform welcomed the recent work of the Task Force on Fostering and Building Human Capital under the Regional Cooperation Council and will follow up the improvement on interface between research and building human capital. The programme presented by Albania on brain gain was seen as a good practice on how to reintegrate the scientists in their countries.

With respect to research infrastructure the Platform expressed satisfaction with the outcome of the conference on "Research infrastructures and the Regional dimension of ERA" (24-25 March 2009) held in Prague under the Czech Presidency of the Council of the European Union which, amongst others, highlighted the regional aspects of the development of large EU infrastructures in new, small and associated countries. The Platform is looking forward to the work to be undertaken in the 2008 Regional Issues Working Group. The Platform is committed to cooperate wherever it can, to ensure that regional partner facilities, distributed infrastructures and e-infrastructures will be duly considered in addition to large pan-European research infrastructures, in order to reduce the imbalanced distribution in Europe and increase the possibility of brain circulation leading to reduction of unemployment.

The Platform takes due note of the Joint Statement on Developing a Regional Strategy on Research and Development for the Western Balkans adopted at the Ministerial meeting held in Sarajevo on 24 April 2009. Considering the identification of regional research priorities, through a high standard methodology, in the frame of the WBC-INCO-NET project, the Platform supports the idea that emphasis should be given to the ICT, Agro-food, Health, Transport and Environment themes when setting priorities in the FP7 Management Committees and their future work programmes. The Platform confirmed its willingness to contribute to the elaboration of the regional dimension of the research policy with the Regional Cooperation Council and encouraged the idea that this initiative

would also be supported by an IPA project. In general, the Platform encourages the Western Balkan Countries to use IPA in synergy with FP7.

7th Steering Platform meeting, Zagreb – October 29, 2009

Agenda

Meeting of Steering Platform on Research for Western Balkan Countries

October 29, 2009

Meeting in Hotel Dubrovnik

Zagreb, Republic of Croatia

9.00 - 9.30

Opening Statements by:

- Swedish Presidency;
- European Commission;
- Representative from Croatia

9.30 - 9.45

Approval of the Agenda

Approval of the Minutes of the last Steering Platform Meeting (Liblice, 28 May 2009)

9.45 - 11.30

What has been done since May 2009:

Presentation of **recent developments regarding S&T cooperation in/with the WBCs** (see Information sheets for more details), by:

- European Commission (DG RTD and JRC)
- Western Balkan countries;
- Other Steering Platform members: EU Member States and countries associated to FP7;
- Representatives from SEE-ERA.NET PLUS, WBC-INCO.NET, COST, RCC and Eureka.

11. 30 – 11.45

Family photo

Coffee break

11. 45 - 12.45

ERA - Vision: what is in for WBCs:

- Presentation of ERA-Vision (Swedish Presidency)
- Integration of WBCs in ERA: state of play (European Commission)
- Accession negotiations on Chapter 25 "Science and research": sharing Croatia's experience (Croatia – tbc)

12.45 - 14.00

Lunch

14.00 - 14.30

Participation in FP7:

- First results of the call on research potential for WBC (RegPot 2010/5);
- Information on FP7 Evaluators from WBCs.

14.30 – 15.45

Enhancing research cooperation:

- Presentation of results of WBC-INCO.NET W/G on regional research priorities;
- SEE-ERA.NET: presentation of Updated Joint Action Plan;
- Presentation of study on evaluation and benchmarking research institutes.

15.45 – 16.00

Coffee break

16.00 - 17.00

Research Infrastructure:

- Presentation and discussion of WBC-INCO.NET study on research

infrastructures;

Debriefing on work in ESFRI Regional Issues Work Group;

17.00 – 17.30

Concluding Remarks

Presentation and adoption of conclusions including recommendations on future actions and work

AOB

Announcement of the next Steering Platform Meeting

19.00 –

Social event

Conclusions

Conclusions of meeting of Steering Platform on Research for Western Balkan Countries

Zagreb, 29 October 2009

The Steering Platform on Research for the Western Balkan Countries met in Zagreb on 29 October 2009. The meeting was co-chaired by the Swedish Presidency of the Council of the European Union, the Republic of Croatia on behalf of the Western Balkan Countries – the host of the event, – and the European Commission.

The presentations of the progress reports allowed taking stock of activities recently undertaken with respect to S&T policy and research cooperation in and with the Western Balkan Region. Many actions relate to the participation in the Seventh Research Framework Programme, but also other targeted actions have been organised by Member States and other stakeholders, and notably the Regional Cooperation Council, aiming at strengthening research capacities in the Region.

The Platform also welcomed the fact that a number of Western Balkan Countries made progress towards strengthening their national research capacities and designing or implementing their national research policies.

The Platform recognised in particular the important role of the WBC-INCO.NET project in supporting and carrying forward the work of the Platform and in helping consolidate research capabilities and cooperation opportunities in the Balkan Region. This was well illustrated by the presentation of Work package 2 of the project on regional priority setting.

The Platform agrees to continue relying on the analytical outcomes of this work to foster research cooperation particularly in the priority areas identified, both through all possibilities offered by the EU Framework Programme and through other means as appropriate.

The Platform supports also the initiative to enhance and prolong the WBC-INCO.NET project in response to the call INCO-2010-1.

The Platform also acknowledged the positive role played by the SEE-ERA.NET project and welcomes the fact that its activities continue with SEE-ERA.NET PLUS, which offers additional research cooperation opportunities of interest to the region. In this regard, the updated Joint Action Plan is a useful source of guidance for future work.

The presentation by the Swedish Presidency of the ERA Vision 2020 and the ensuing discussion showed both the magnitude of the challenge and the potential of the endeavour of building a broad, cohesive, open and effective ERA. With respect to the engagement of the Western Balkan Countries with the European Research Area, it was noted that the WBCs should take advantage of the ERA opportunities and the possibilities already existing to participate in various ERA governance structures. The WBCs are encouraged to designate their representatives and participate actively in the relevant bodies of ERA initiatives. As demonstrated by the presentation from Croatia on their experience with preparing for the accession to the EU, participation in the ERA activities can help in pursuing the compliance with the EU *acquis* on Science and research (chapter 25).

The large participation of Western Balkan research institutes in the recent FP7 targeted call on Research Potential shows that there is a strong need for support to research capacity building in the Region. The Steering Platform took note of the wish of the Western Balkan countries to explore further opportunities to support enlargement countries.

The study on opportunities to access S&T Infrastructures demonstrates that there exist already many opportunities to access research infrastructures in the Balkan Region. The report was welcomed and seen as a useful source of information on the existing infrastructures in the Region. Regular dissemination of information and creating awareness of existing facilities would be instrumental to the optimisation of their use. Further efforts to share facilities and equipment and facilitate access to infrastructure in the Region should be considered, including the possibility of virtual Infrastructures.

The work in the ESFRI Regional Work Group could contribute to pursue these objectives.

The Steering Platform welcomes the conclusions of the regional dialogue meeting on the Regional Strategy on Research and Development for Innovation.

The Steering Platform agrees to have at its next meeting (in Belgrade, Serbia on June 24, 2010) a discussion on its priorities for coming years in the light of the work so far.

8th Steering Platform meeting, Belgrade – June 24, 2010

Agenda

Meeting of Steering Platform on Research for Western Balkan Countries

June 24, 2010

Meeting in Belgrade, Republic of Serbia

9.00 - 9.30

Opening Statements by:

- Spanish Presidency;
- European Commission;
- Representative from Serbia

9.30 - 9.45

Approval of the Agenda

Approval of the Minutes of the last Steering Platform Meeting (Zagreb, 29 October 2009)

9.45 - 11.15

What has been done since October 2009:

Presentation of **recent developments regarding S&T cooperation in/with the WBCs** (see Information sheets for more details), by:

- European Commission (DG RTD and JRC)
- Western Balkan countries;
- Steering Platform members: EU Member States and countries associated to FP7;
- Representatives from WBC-INCO.NET, SEE-ERA.NET PLUS, COST, RCC and Eureka.

11. 15 – 11.30

Family photo

Coffee break

11. 30 - 12.45

Enhancing research cooperation:

- stocktaking after 3 years of FP7 participation: overview (T. Friederichs, DG RTD D)
research Potential Programme (S. Weiers, DG RTD B)
- patterns of cooperation (ZSI);

- SEE-ERA.NET PLUS: outcome of joint call (ZSI)

12.45 - 14.00

Lunch

14.00 – 15.30

Synergy between FP7 and other EU programmes:

IPA:

- Presentation of programme (DG ELARG)
- Best practices/projects (representatives from WBC)
- Debriefing Granada Conference (Spanish Presidency)
- Follow-up

CIP:

- Presentation of the programme and the Enterprise Europe Network; Examples of activities to support SME participation in FP7 (G. Popovic, EACI)
- Examples of projects (by WBCs)

15.30 – 15.45

Coffee break

15:45 – 16:45

Regional dimension:

- RCC: debriefing on follow-up to Ministerial declaration Sarajevo April 2009;
- Debriefing on regional workshop in Istanbul on role of public research institutes in S.E.E (Turkey/Tübitak);
- ESFRI Regional Issues Work Group: what can be done for Balkan region (Lora Pavlova, Ministry of Education, Youth and Science, Bulgaria)
- Presentation of CEI (Central European Initiative) by Mr. Alessandro Lombardo.

16.45 – 17.30

Concluding Remarks

Presentation and adoption of conclusions including recommendations on future actions and work

Announcement of the next Steering Platform Meeting

19.00 –

Social event

Conclusions

of meeting of Steering Platform on Research for Western Balkan Countries

Belgrade, 24 June 2010

The Steering Platform on Research for the Western Balkan Countries met in Belgrade on 24 June 2010. The meeting was co-chaired by the Spanish Presidency of the Council of the European Union, the Republic of Serbia on behalf of the Western Balkan Countries – who hosted the event – and the European Commission.

The presentations of the progress reports again showed that both the Balkan countries and the other platform members and stakeholders had taken many actions over the last six months to strengthen their research capacity. Actions varied from research funding activities and promotion of research cooperation at national level, to that with other countries in the region as well as under FP7. All Balkan countries announced further measures and actions aimed at reinforcing their national research strategy. An increasing number of bilateral S&T agreements have been concluded over the last six months, which is another indication of the interest and potential in developing further international research cooperation. From the progress reports it was established that strengthening the research capacity requires measures at various levels – national, regional, European - and in different areas - including higher education, infrastructure, science technology and innovation. The importance for the Steering Platform of focussing more on innovation in the future was mentioned in this context.

The Platform discussed, on the basis of concrete examples of projects supported by the EU Pre-Accession Instrument (IPA), the possibility to strengthen the research capacity in the Balkans through IPA. This issue could be brought to the attention of the Hungarian Presidency, for possible further consideration at the WIRE II Conference. The Competitiveness and Innovation Programme (CIP) is another instrument that offers good opportunities for the Balkan countries, as well as the Enterprise Europe Network which offers support to SMEs throughout the EU and partner countries, including all the Balkan Countries.

From the presentation of the data it emerged that since their association to FP7, the participation of the WBCs in the Framework Programme has increased. Further improvements are needed, particularly in the area of researchers' mobility. It is important that, as highlighted in the study on patterns of cooperation, the research entities from the Balkan countries participate more actively in collaborative research projects, including taking on the role of coordinators. In addition, particular attention should be devoted to the involvement of SMEs and industry in general in research cooperation.

The outcome of the evaluation of the call for joint European research projects organized under the SEE.ERA.NET Plus FP7 project is a good demonstration of the high potential for effective research collaboration in the region. The presentation of the outcome of the FP7 Research Potential programme showed that this action meets the real needs of the research institutions in the Balkan countries and hence the importance to continue with such actions in the future.

The Steering Platform took stock of the present level of participation of Western Balkan Countries in COST activities and welcomed their increased and further involvement.

The Steering Platform also welcomed progress in the project “Regional Strategy for Research and Development for Innovation for WB”, supported by the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) and to be funded by the EU IPA fund, and expects that the project will contribute to an effective implementation of the Ministerial declaration on the regional dimension of research adopted in Sarajevo on 24 April 2009. The Platform acknowledged the successful organization by the Turkish authorities and the RCC of a regional workshop on public research institutes, held in Istanbul on 8-9 March 2010, which was part of an effort to enhance the role of public research institutions in technological development of WBCs and their integration into the ERA.

The presentation of the Central European Initiative (CEI) offered a good overview of the cooperation opportunities offered by this regional forum, in particular on human resource development. The Platform welcomed the prospect of possible cooperation in the future.

The Platform welcomed the progress made within ESFRI’s Regional issues working group with respect to research infrastructures at regional level and encouraged active WBC involvement in the ongoing discussions on how to foster development of regional partner facilities at South-Eastern-European level.

The Steering Platform started reviewing, based on its conclusions of the previous meeting, its working methods and practices with a view to improving the effectiveness and impact of deliberations. This should be done, inter alia, through more focused meeting agendas, allowing for sufficient time for debate, through involvement of the members in the preparation of the agendas, and through follow-up on conclusions.

9th Steering Platform meeting, Becici – November 11, 2010

Agenda

AGENDA

Meeting of Steering Platform on Research for Western Balkan Countries

November 11, 2010

Meeting in Becici (Budva), Montenegro

- 9.00 - 9.30 **Opening Statements** by:
- Belgian Presidency (including presentation of Presidency activities);
 - European Commission;
 - Representative from Montenegro: Igor Radusinovic, Deputy Minister for Science, Research and Technological Development.
- 9.30 - 9.45 Approval of the Agenda.
- Approval of the Minutes of the last Steering Platform Meeting (Belgrade, 24 June 2010).
- 9.45 - 11.15 **What has been done since June 2010:**
- Stocktaking on implementation Conclusions Steering Platform meeting in Belgrade (WBC-INCO.NET).
- Presentation of **recent developments regarding S&T cooperation in/with the WBCs** (see Information sheets for more details) by:
- European Commission (DG RTD and JRC);
 - Western Balkan countries;
 - Steering Platform members: EU Member States and countries associated to FP7;
 - Representatives from WBC-INCO.NET, SEE-ERA.NET PLUS, COST, RCC and EUREKA.
11. 15 – 11.30 *Family photo*
- Coffee break*
11. 30 - 12.30 **Involving private sector/SMEs in research cooperation:**
- General presentation by representative from UEAPME, Christian Lister, Communications Director of The Genesis Initiative in the UK: Why should SMEs invest in research? How to attract SMEs into

research and how to cooperate with FP7 and other instruments?

12.45 - 14.00

Lunch

14.00 – 15.15

Research for the benefit of SMEs:

- Presentation of specific SME Programme and statistics and best practices (Mr Bernd Reichert, DG RTD/T.3);
- Presentation of Eurostars Programme (Mr S. Halada, Eureka secretariat);
- Role of European Technology Platforms (Ms Patricia Postigo-Mclaughlin DG RTD/C.2) and presentation of National Competence and Technology sector and national programme for SMEs (Platform member to volunteer).

15.15 – 15.30

Coffee break

15:30 – 16:45

From Research to Innovation:

- Report of WBC-INCO.NET-Enhanced: debriefing on 1st Innovation Dialogue Forum;
- Presentation of European Innovation Scoreboard;
- Competitiveness programme (CIP): presentation of programme (DG Entr.) and of project NUMIX on Eco-Innovation by Ms Ivana Glisevic (local project manager);
- Central European Initiative (CEI): past experiences, current financial instruments and a strategic project for the future” by Mr. Giorgio Rosso Cicogna, Alternate Secretary General.

16.45 – 17.30

Concluding Remarks

- Presentation and adoption of conclusions including recommendations on future actions and work.

AOB

Announcement of the next Steering Platform Meeting

19.00 –

Social event

Conclusions

Conclusions of meeting of Steering Platform on Research for
Western Balkan Countries
Becici, 11 November 2010

The Steering Platform on Research for the Western Balkan Countries met in Becici on 11 November 2010. The meeting was co-chaired by the Belgian Presidency of the Council of the European Union, Montenegro on behalf of the Western Balkan Countries – who hosted the event – and the European Commission.

The Steering Platform heard the introductory statements from Montenegro, the Belgian Presidency and the European Commission, highlighting the recent policy actions taken at EU and regional level and notably on the proposed Innovation Union and the impact this will have on future activities in research cooperation already now in the upcoming FP7 calls and certainly in FP8. Platform members asked how actions in support to facilitating integration in the European Research Area and in particular on research capacity building, such as the research potential programme, will be addressed in the future. In this context it was recalled how important it is for the scientific community and innovation actors from the Balkan region to have specific actions in the research potential programme within FP7. The Platform took note of this request. As to FP8, the WBCs announced a contribution to the FP8 consultation process which is to be welcomed. The Steering Platform welcomed the progress noted on the research chapter in the “enlargement package” adopted by the Commission. The package also showed the overall progress made towards future integration into the EU.

The presentations of the Progress reports showed that both the Balkan countries and the other Platform members were actively promoting research cooperation under FP7, which is very much to be welcomed, and indeed necessary in order to increase participation and strengthen research capacity. Several actions had also been taken to facilitate future integration in the European Research Area. This was also demonstrated by the activities of COST and Eureka. With respect to regional cooperation, the Platform took note of the further progress announced by the RCC on the support under IPA for the development of a regional R&D strategy for innovation. The Steering Platform also took note of the progress made on research cooperation in the SEE.ERA.NET Plus project.

The Platform discussed, on the basis of several presentations, how to engage more and better the SMEs and industry in research. It was recognized that this is a core priority for the EU and thus also for the candidate and potential candidate countries. All the presentations were very informative and should stimulate the WBCs to pro-actively consider the participation of SMEs in EU research projects and programmes. The Platform was very much stimulated by the presentation made by UEAPME (The Genesis Initiative) which outlined that it is of key importance to create more awareness on the research possibilities for SMEs through all forms of communication and that FP7 offers such opportunities but that this should be made known to a wider audience, in the first place, at national level. The presentation on European Technology Platforms showed that this instrument also offered possibilities for the WBCs and they will analyze the opportunities in given markets, where industry and academia could contribute to the objectives of ERA through ETPs.

The presentation of the CIP project 'Numix' demonstrated that CIP has good potential for WBCs but that further efforts are required to stimulate the industry and service sector into participating in research and to take more CIP projects.

The Steering Platform welcomed a first introduction to the Innovation Union (IU) and will analyze the policy Communication further so as to contribute to the objectives set and integrate into the IU, as is expected from the candidate and potential candidate countries. In this context, the work of the WBC-INCO.NET, which has recently been enhanced with a strong focus on innovation issues, will be instrumental. The results of the first Innovation Dialogue Forum will feed into the process of strengthening innovation capacities, learning from good practices, and offering training and networking possibilities.

The Steering Platform welcomed the concrete cooperation possibilities offered by the Central European Initiative (CEI) on facilitating the networking of all stakeholders of the region committed to facilitate technological development. To ensure effective cooperation it was agreed that CEI, as well as the OECD, will be invited as an observer delegate to the Platform meetings on a regular basis.

The Steering Platform recognised that the reviewed guidelines allowed for a smoother and more focused agenda and discussion.

Information on the next meeting will be announced in due time.

10th Steering Platform meeting, Ohrid – May 26, 2011

Agenda

Meeting of Steering Platform on Research for Western Balkan Countries

Meeting in Ohrid, 26 May 2011

- 9.00 - 9.30 **Opening Statements by:**
- Hungarian Presidency (including presentation of Presidency activities);
 - European Commission;
 - Representative from the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.
- 9.30 - 9.45 Approval of the Agenda.
- Approval of the Minutes of the last Steering Platform Meeting (Becici, 11 November 2010).
- 9.45 - 11.15 **What has been done since November 2010:**
Stocktaking on implementation Conclusions Steering Platform meeting in Becici (WBC-INCO.NET).
- Presentation of **recent developments regarding S&T cooperation in/with the WBCs** (see Information Sheets for more details) by:
- European Commission (DG RTD and JRC);
 - Western Balkan countries;
 - Steering Platform members: EU Member States and countries associated to FP7;
 - Representatives from WBC-INCO.NET, SEE-ERA.NET PLUS, COST, RCC, EUREKA, UNESCO and CEI.
11. 15 – 11.30 *Family photo*
- Coffee break*
11. 30 – 12.30 **Common Strategic Framework for research & innovation:**
- Report on preparations: Presidency and European Commission;

	- Presentation position paper Enlargement Countries by Filiz HAYIRLI from Tübitak.
12. 30-13.00	Presentation of Danube Strategy and research opportunities for the region (Priority Area Coordinators from Serbia, Miroslav VESKOVIC, and Slovakia, Lubomir FALTAN).
13.00 - 14.15	Lunch
14.15 – 15.15	<p>Synergy between Research and Innovation and Pre-Accession Instrument (IPA):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Presentation by COM (DG Elarg, H. VISSER) on use of IPA for research and innovation based on MIPD for 2011-2013; - Presentation of Regional Competitiveness Initiative (IPA project) by Milan KONOPEK from OECD; - Implementation of Regional Strategy on R&D for Innovation (IPA project) by Paulo CORREA from World Bank and Mladen DRAGASEVIC from RCC.
15.30- 15.45	<i>Coffee break</i>
15.45-16.30	<p>Innovation Union:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Comparative analysis of the National Innovation System in the Western Balkan Region (Zoran Aralica from The Institute of Economics Zagreb / WBC-INCO.NET); - Progress report work package on Innovation Support and survey of Innovation Infrastructures (Elke DALL from Centre for Social Innovation / WBC-INCO.NET); - Stocktaking on implementation of IU and expectations from Enlargement Countries (European Commission).
16.30 – 17.30	<p>Concluding Remarks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Presentation and adoption of conclusions including recommendations on future actions and work. <p>AOB</p> <p>Announcement of the next Steering Platform Meeting</p>
19.00 –	Social event

Conclusions

Conclusions of meeting of Steering Platform on Research for

Western Balkan Countries

Ohrid, 26 May 2011

The Steering Platform on Research for the Western Balkan Countries met in Ohrid on 26 May 2011. The meeting was co-chaired by the Hungarian Presidency of the Council of the European Union, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia on behalf of the Western Balkan Countries – who hosted the event – and the European Commission.

The Steering Platform heard the introductory statements from FYR of Macedonia, the Hungarian Presidency and the European Commission, from which it became clear that innovation is very high on the political agenda at EU and regional level as well as the preparation for the future Common Strategic Framework.

From the presentations of the Progress Reports the Platform welcomed that all Members are actively implementing ongoing research funding activities. In this context, the work of SEE-ERA.NET PLUS was very much welcomed. The Platform was very encouraged by the different actions and measures taken by the Balkan countries to strengthen the research and innovation capacity at national level. Cooperation with both COST and Eureka has successfully continued.

Several members also stressed the importance of future cooperation such as strengthening cooperation with the JRC for enlargement countries and implementation of the Danube Strategy. The UNESCO and CEI mentioned also several possibilities for future cooperation.

The Platform welcomed the presentation of the Strategy for the Danube Region by the Priority Area 7 Co-Coordinator from Serbia and Slovakia. All expressed interest in pooling research efforts to meet the objectives of the Strategy and asked which actions (e.g. ERA-NET or ERA-NET PLUS) the Commission could consider under FP7 or later to support the objectives of the Danube Strategy.

The Platform welcomed the continuous support of WBC-INCO.NET which is an essential tool for the integration of the region in the European Research Area and the contribution to the Innovation Union. The Platform also encouraged all enlargement countries to continue their cooperation.

On the future Common Strategic Framework (CSF), the Platform took note of the Consultation Process on the Green Paper and the Follow-up.

The interest was expressed to be present at the Stakeholder Conference on June 10, 2011 in Brussels. The Platform welcomed the contribution on behalf of all enlargement countries as presented by Tubitak.

Several members offered to pursue the discussion in particular on the type of capacity building required and on the balance between small and larger research projects.

With respect to synergy between R&I funding and the Pre-Accession Instrument (IPA), the beneficiary countries were encouraged to deploy more IPA for research capacity building under all components.

The Platform asked that the post-2013 IPA would support more clearly the EU 2020 priorities and in particular support for building the Innovation Union and competitiveness in general.

All members were encouraged to exchange ideas and best practices on IPA support granted so far.

The Platform took note of the progress presented by OECD on the regional competitiveness initiative (RCI) which supports national pilot projects on development of innovation and human capital.

The Platform welcomed the presentation from RCC and the Worldbank outlining the preliminary ideas on how to implement the project “Regional Strategy on Research and Development for Innovation for Western Balkans” on the basis of the Joint Statement of the Ministerial Conference held in April 2009 in Sarajevo.

The need to mobilize knowledge and create more leverage was underlined building upon work that has been done so far in particular in the WBC-INCO.NET project and input from beneficiary countries.

The Platform welcomed the presentation made on survey on the research and innovation agenda in the region presented by the Institute of Economics in Zagreb. In this context, the importance of retrieving statistics, data and indicators was underlined. The Platform also welcomed the opportunity and ideas presented to enhance innovation.

The Platform took note of the progress made on the innovation support work package in the WBC-INCO.NET. Mapping of innovation infrastructures was considered a useful exercise to build upon innovation capacity.

Information on the next meeting will be announced in due time. An invitation has been expressed by Bosnia and Herzegovina to hold it in Sarajevo.

11th Steering Platform meeting, Sarajevo – December 1, 2011

Agenda

Meeting of Steering Platform on Research for Western Balkan Countries

Meeting in Sarajevo on 1 December 2011

- 9.00 - 9.30 **Opening Statements by:**
- Polish Presidency (including presentation of Presidency activities);
 - European Commission;
 - Representative from Bosnia and Herzegovina
- 9.30 - 9.45 Approval of the Agenda.
- Approval of the Minutes of the last Steering Platform Meeting (Ohrid, 26 May 2011).
- 9.45 - 11.15 **What has been done since May 2011:**
Stocktaking on implementation Conclusions Steering Platform meeting in Ohrid (WBC-INCO.NET).
- Presentation of **recent developments regarding S&T cooperation in/with the WBCs** (see Information Sheets for more details) by:
- European Commission (DG RTD and JRC);
 - Western Balkan countries;
 - Steering Platform members: EU Member States and countries associated to FP7;
 - Representatives from WBC-INCO.NET, SEE-ERA.NET PLUS, COST, RCC, EUREKA, UNESCO and CEI.
11. 15 – 11.30 *Family photo*
- Coffee break*
11. 30 – 12.30 **Preparations for HORIZON 2020 and synergy with Pre-Accession Instrument (IPA):**
- State of play/preparations/procedures/timing;
 - Comments/questions by Filiz HAYIRLI from Tübitak on behalf of all

	enlargement countries;
	- Q&A
12. 30-13.00	Regional dimension of research cooperation: Implementation of Regional Strategy on R&D for Innovation (IPA project) by Mladen DRAGASEVIC, RCC.
13.00 - 14.15	Lunch
14.15 – 15.30	Innovation Union: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Presentation by COM on commitments relevant for WBCs; - How to prepare/support from EC - Importance of S&T statistics - Presentation of FIRMA (B&H-US programme) fostering innovation.
15.30 – 15.45	Coffee break
15. 45- 16.30	Current results of WBC.INCO.NET by Jadranka SVARC: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Innovation Systems update - Comparative results on innovation capacities; - Mapping of Innovation infrastructure; - Social Innovation: research opportunities for WBCs.
16.30 – 17.30	Concluding Remarks: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Presentation and adoption of conclusions including recommendations on future actions and work. <p>AOB</p> <p>Announcement of the next Steering Platform Meeting</p>
19.00 –	Social event

Conclusions

Conclusions of meeting of Steering Platform on Research for
Western Balkan Countries
Sarajevo, 1 December 2011

The Steering Platform on Research for the Western Balkan Countries met in Sarajevo on 1 December 2011. The meeting was co-chaired by the Polish Presidency of the Council of the European Union, Bosnia and Herzegovina - on behalf of the Western Balkan Countries - who hosted the event – and the European Commission.

The Steering Platform heard the introductory statements from Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Polish Presidency and the European Commission, from which it became clear that efforts for the next Research and Innovation Framework Programme 'Horizon 2020' are high on the political agenda of the EU, as well as efforts undertaken at bi-regional level to strengthen the research and innovation capacity building. The Platform welcomed, in particular, Poland's commitment towards Eastern Europe, including the Balkan Region.

From the presentations of the Progress Reports, the Platform took note that all Members are further contributing to strengthening the research and innovation capacity in the region. The Platform was also encouraged by the different actions and measures taken by the Balkan countries to improve their participation in the Seventh EU Research Framework Programme (FP7) in preparation for Horizon 2020. In this regard, the presentation by the CEI on the Next Generation Bio Fuels was considered as an area of interest and one to be pursued based on the CEI Trieste Declaration. The Platform welcomed EUREKA's further work with the region, as well as the progress made on the "Regional Competitiveness Initiative" presented by OECD.

The Platform underlined the importance to address the research and innovation aspects of the Danube Strategy in general and expressed the wish that the FP7 Work Programmes 2013 will foresee actions to support and facilitate the implementation of the funding of the research priorities for it. In this context, the importance to build upon the SEE-ERA.NET PLUS and the WBC-INCO.NET was mentioned. The need to continue support for all enlargement countries with the Steering Platform was also called upon.

The Platform also welcomed the actions of other stakeholders and donors, such as the USAID / SIDA supported project "FIRMA" which contributes to the implementation of national strategies in line with the EU Innovation Union objectives. National governments are encouraged to interact closer with these stakeholders and include activities in the national progress reporting.

The Platform welcomed the WBC-INCO.NET study analyzing the innovation capacity and national innovation systems, which contained useful recommendations for further strengthening and promoting research cooperation with and in the Balkan Region. The Platform noted that several recommendations are similar to the commitments identified as relevant for the enlargement countries under the Innovation Union.

The Platform took note of the commitments of the Innovation Union on which the enlargement countries should start preparations. In this context, the need to develop better S&T statistics is of utmost importance. The support offered by UNESCO was welcomed. Given the importance of statistics in the overall accession context, the Platform also underlined the important role of Eurostat.

The Platform welcomed the launch of the project "Regional R&D for Innovation Strategy for the Western Balkans" which took place in Belgrade on 23-25 November and underlined the importance of establishing, as soon as possible in this process, some key actions and measures to strengthen the regional cooperation on research and innovation and in turn regional competitiveness. The study on innovation capacity was seen as a useful tool for the regional dimension of R&I cooperation.

The Platform welcomed the presentation on 'Horizon 2020' the day after its adoption by the European Commission and took note of the very ambitious goals of the new instrument. It was agreed to revert to the proposal at a later stage, in particular in view of the association of the enlargement countries to the programme. The synergy with the next IPA II was welcomed; several questions were raised on the effectiveness of the synergy, which should be well prepared.

An expression of interest was made by Albania to hold the next meeting in the first half of 2012 in Albania, together with the upcoming EU Danish Presidency. Information will be announced in due time.

12th Steering Platform meeting, Tirana – June 12-13, 2012

Agenda

Meeting of Steering Platform on Research for Western Balkan Countries

Meeting in Tirana on Tuesday, 12 June 2012

The morning session will be dedicated to the discussion about a possible Action Plan to increase innovation capacities in the Western Balkan countries organised by the WBC-INCO.NET project – see separate agenda. All Steering Platform members are warmly invited.

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|---------------|--|
| 14.00 – 14.30 | <p>Opening Statements by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Danish Presidency (including presentation of Presidency activities);- European Commission;- Representative from Albania |
| 14.30 – 14.45 | <p>Approval of the Agenda.</p> <p>Approval of the Minutes of the last Steering Platform Meeting (Sarajevo, 1 December 2011).</p> |
| 14.45 - 16.15 | <p>What has been done since December 2011:</p> <p>Stocktaking on implementation of Steering Platform conclusions adopted at Sarajevo meeting (WBC-INCO.NET).</p> <p>Presentation of recent developments regarding S&T cooperation in/with the WBCs (see Information Sheets / Progress Reports for more details) by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- European Commission (DG RTD and JRC);- Western Balkan countries;- Steering Platform members: EU Member States and countries associated to FP7;- Representatives from WBC-INCO.NET, SEE-ERA.NET PLUS, COST, RCC, EUREKA, UNESCO and CEI. |
| 16.15 – 16.45 | <p><i>Family photo</i></p> <p><i>Coffee break</i></p> |
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16.45 – 17.45

Information and preparation on R&I activities:

'HORIZON2020':

State of play following discussions in Council/EP: preparations/procedure/timing (Danish Presidency)

FP7 WPs 2013:

- Procedure and timing
- Research on bio-fuels; International Cooperation (WBC/Danube)

Preparation on EU *acquis* on Research and Innovation

- Information on organisation of TAIEX Workshop in Brussels on Innovation Union
- Preparation of Accession negotiations with Montenegro
- Preparation of Progress Reports 'Enlargement package'
- Presentation of Strategic Innovation Technology Audit (SITA) by Idlir Proseku, Albanian Business Research Innovation Centre

Regional dimension of research cooperation: Implementation of Regional Strategy on R&D for Innovation (IPA project) by Mladen DRAGASEVIC, RCC.

Working dinner

19.00

Wednesday, 13 June 2012

9.15 – 11.15

Synergy Research cooperation and IPA

- Presentation IPA II and R&I capacity (DG ELARG, tbc)
- Presentation of Smart Specialisation strategy (Ciaran Dearle Dir. C5)
- Presentation of good examples under Structural Funds (by Bela Kardon/Hungary)

Questions and Answers

Coffee break

11.15 – 11.30

11.30- 12.00

Good practice measures to increase innovation capacities in WBC

- Study on good practice innovation policy measures (WBC-INCO.NET)

12.00- 12.45

Concluding Remarks:

- Presentation and adoption of conclusions including recommendations on future actions and work.

AOB

Announcement of the next Steering Platform Meeting

In the afternoon on Wednesday, 13 June 2012 a workshop of the Knowledge Transfer Study 2010-2012 (<http://www.knowledge-transfer-study.eu>) in cooperation with WBC-INCO.NET is being organised. The presentations and discussions will deal with the current situation and challenges of research and knowledge transfer – see separate agenda. All Steering Platform members are warmly invited.

Conclusions

Conclusions of meeting of Steering Platform on Research for
Western Balkan Countries
Tirana, 12-13 June 2012

The Steering Platform on Research for the Western Balkan Countries met in Tirana on 12-13 June 2012. The meeting was co-chaired by the Danish Presidency of the Council of the European Union, Albania - who hosted the event on behalf of the Western Balkan Countries - and the European Commission.

Albania welcomed the Steering Platform members and confirmed its commitment towards EU membership. In this context it underlined the useful role of the Steering Platform and how honored it was to be hosting it. The Danish Presidency presented its Presidency programme 'Europe at Work', highlighting the actions taken to move forward the EU Agenda on Research and Innovation. The European Commission welcomed the opportunity to meet and share information on recent developments on research and innovation and encouraged all the Platform members to take advantage of these meetings to become more familiar with the EU *acquis* on Research and Innovation in general. The Platform welcomed the presentation by the Danish Presidency which helped towards understanding the overall functioning of the EU and learning about the most important recent developments. The Platform welcomed the information by the Danish Presidency on the General Partial Agreement (GPA) on Horizon 2020 adopted at the Competitiveness Council on 31 May 2012.

The Steering Platform welcomed the variety of measures and different actions taken over the last 6 months by all participants. This is seen as a direct result of the good cooperation in the Steering Platform and commitment towards the Balkan region. All Balkan countries reported progress in line with the EU *acquis* on EU Research and Innovation. The increased number of actions to stimulate innovation was also noted. A good illustration of this was made by the Albanian Business Relay and Innovation Centre (BRIC) who presented its action SITA (Strategic Innovation Technology Audit) providing support to stimulate SMEs to implement their R&I ideas. The Platform welcomed the continued commitment from CEI, EUREKA and UNESCO towards the Balkan region and took note of EUREKA's invitation to start considering possible EUREKA chairmanship. The Steering Platform also welcomed the package of actions taken by the Joint Research Centre for the enlargement countries.

The Platform welcomed the most recent information on the upcoming FP7 work programmes, especially on the next generation biofuels and support for the Danube Strategy. In this context the Steering Platform asked to ensure that all Western **Balkan countries will continue to be fully covered and that the role of the Steering** Platform will be duly considered, building upon the useful and constructive work undertaken by the FP7 WBC- INCO.NET project. The importance of continuing the coordination efforts with and for all the Western Balkans was stressed.

All members were encouraged to actively consider research cooperation opportunities in the last FP7 calls, which should serve as a good transition to Horizon 2020. In this context cooperation between the more experienced members of the Platform and the less successful participants was seen as a way to facilitate and strengthen the participation of the Balkan countries in key research areas necessary to address the societal challenges.

The Platform welcomed the presentation of the Smart Specialization Strategy which helped in understanding how to prepare for actions on capacity building and ensure effective synergies between Horizon 2020 and other EU instruments. The need for good and timely planning of projects was well illustrated by the examples presented by Hungary.

The Platform regretted the absence of an explicit reference in the proposed text of IPA II on the possibility to deploy IPA support for research and innovation capacity and ensure effective synergy between Horizon 2020 and IPA II. The Platform fully endorsed the work undertaken by TUBITAK/TURBO in the frame of the WBC-INCO.NET, seeking an amendment to IPA II for that purpose.

The Platform asked to continue the discussion on Smart Specialization and to be kept informed about the actions aiming at widening the participation in Horizon 2020, amongst others on the basis of the EU12 position paper initiated by Poland. In this context, the Platform recalled the WBC-INCO.NET analysis on mapping innovation capacities and infrastructures in the Balkan region, as well as the study on good practices of innovation policy and instruments. The Platform encouraged the members to draw inspiration from the good practices when taking action.

The Platform also took note of the use of the Smart Specialization Strategy to develop a regional strategy for Research, Development and Innovation for the WBCs, led by the World Bank. It also welcomed the organization of a workshop before the end of 2012 on the Innovation Union, with a focus on the self-assessment tool.

The European Commission reiterated that – where it can – it will continue to assist and support the WBCs in their efforts to strengthen the Research and Innovation capacity at national and regional level, while at the same time underlining the importance of ownership of the beneficiary countries.

Serbia expressed an interest in holding the next meeting, to be co-chaired by Serbia, in the second half of 2012, together with the upcoming EU Cyprus Presidency and European Commission. Information will be announced in due time.

13th Steering Platform meeting, Belgrade – December 6, 2012

Agenda

Meeting of Steering Platform on Research for Western Balkan Countries

6 December 2012

Meeting in Belgrade, Republic of Serbia

09.00 – 09.30

Opening Statements by:

- Cyprus Presidency;
- European Commission;
- Representative from Serbia

09.30 – 09.45

Approval of the Agenda

Approval of the Minutes of the last Steering Platform Meeting (Tirana 12-13 June 2012)

09.45 – 11.15

What has been done since June 2012:

Presentation of **recent developments regarding S&T cooperation in/with the WBCs** (see Information sheets for more details), by:

- European Commission (DG RTD and JRC)
- Western Balkan countries;
- Steering Platform members: EU Member States and countries associated to FP7;
- Representatives from WBC-INCO.NET, SEE-ERA.NET PLUS, COST, Eureka, RCC, Unesco and CEI.

11.15 – 11.30

Family Photo and Coffee break

11.30 – 12. 45

Preparing for Horizon 2020:

- latest developments on H2020 (Cyprus Presidency)
- Widening participation (Polish Ministry of Science and Higher Education)

12.45 – 14.00	Lunch
14.00 – 14.45	<p>Preparation for Horizon 2020 (cont):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - NCPs under Horizon 2020 (EC) - Stocktaking on participation in FP7 (EC/WBC-Inco.Net) - Procedure for association (EC)
14.45 – 15.30	<p>Preparation for bio-economy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Presentation of EU Communication: A Bio-economy for Europe (tbd) - Debriefing on CEI Ministerial meeting in Trieste in September and follow-up (CEI) - COST: debriefing on specific actions on Green engineering Camp (Cost Senior official)
15.30 – 15.45	<hr/> <p><i>Coffee break</i></p>
15.45 – 16.45	<p>Regional Cooperation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Strategy for Regional cooperation on R&I: Debriefing on implementation of April 2009 Ministerial declaration Sarajevo (RCC and World bank) - Debriefing of S.E.E Ministerial Round Table on Science and Technology in Sarajevo on 22-23 November 2012 (Unesco) and follow-up by WBC-INCO.NET - Joint funding and joint evaluation: SEE-ERA.NET PLUS and EVAL-INNO (ZSI)
16.45 – 17.30	<p>Concluding Remarks</p> <p>Presentation and adoption of conclusions including recommendations on future actions and work</p> <p>AOB</p> <p>Announcement of the next Steering Platform Meeting</p>
19.00 – ...	Social event

Conclusions

Operational Conclusions

WBC Steering Platform – Belgrade, 6 December 2012

The Steering Platform on Research for the Western Balkan Countries met in Belgrade on 6 December 2012. The meeting was co-chaired by the Cyprus Presidency of the Council of the European Union, Serbia - who hosted the event on behalf of the Western Balkan Countries and the European Commission.

Serbia welcomed all participants and expressed its gratitude at hosting the Platform meeting for the second time. It also took advantage of the occasion to inform the members of the Platform about its national research policy which focused on actions to strengthen the links between science and industry as a way to boost the economy. Serbia was also grateful for the supporting role of the Platform in achieving its objectives. The Cyprus Presidency welcomed the opportunity to learn more about work in the Balkan Region and underlined the importance of research and innovation, in particular in times of economic crises. The European Commission thanked the co-chairs for the organization of the meeting which is always a good opportunity to inform and learn about latest developments on research and innovation, both at EU level and in the Region. At EU level, the priority was the discussions on the next research programme Horizon 2020 while work on the realization of the European Research Area and the Innovation Union also actively continued. On international cooperation a new strategy was adopted aiming at more strategic cooperation with the international partners. The EC recommended all enlargement countries to take this strategy into consideration in the development and implementation of their international cooperation strategies.

The Steering Platform welcomed the variety of actions taken by all Platform members since the last meeting in Tirana in June 2012. It took note that several countries (Member States and Balkans) had organized bilateral and/or regional research cooperation opportunities (including under the SEE.ERA.NET plus project) and concluded bilateral S&T agreements. The Platform took note that most policy actions taken by the Balkan countries related to stimulating innovation. The Platform welcomed the continued commitment from the Joint Research Centre for the enlargement countries and the visits organized to the Region, as well as the continued commitment from Central European Initiative (CEI), Cost, Eureka and the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC). The Platform welcomed, in particular, the

presentation by the RCC of the South East Europe 2020 Strategy which will certainly offer more opportunities for strengthening cooperation at Regional level. The Platform also welcomed the latest information on the implementation of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region by the Coordinator for the priority area on “Knowledge Society”. In this context, the Platform welcomed the fact that the FP7 Work programme 2013 included a call for a Danube INCO.NET.

The Platform appreciated very much the presentation by the Cyprus Presidency on the latest developments on Horizon 2020. The WBC members of the Platform expressed interest in obtaining more information on the outcome of the General Partial Agreement (GPA) adopted at the Competitiveness Council on 10 October 2012. The presentation by Poland on the outcome of the discussions on widening participation in Horizon 2020 was also much appreciated and informative for the enlargement countries. From the exchange of views it became clear that besides specific measures to encourage participation in Horizon 2020, there is also a strong correlation between successful uptake of EU research projects and measures taken at national level to strengthen the research and innovation capacity, and in particular efforts with respect to increasing the level of investment in research. In this context, the importance of good synergy between Horizon 2020 and the Structural Funds and the Pre-Accession Instrument (IPA) was mentioned as well as becoming familiar with the Smart Specialization Strategy (S3). The Platform welcomed the organization by the WBC-INCO.NET of a training session on S3 in Belgrade in Spring 2013. The Platform was also informed that the WBC-INCO.NET, represented in this case by TURBO (Turkish liaison office) had been successful in convincing the European Parliament to introduce an amendment to the draft IPA II regulation, explicitly adding the funding possibilities for S&T capacity building. It was now important that all Platform members call upon the support of their authorities in the ongoing discussions both in the EP and the Council to secure the adoption of the amendment.

The Platform very much welcomed the data presented on the successful participation of all WBCs and Turkey in FP7 so far (based on E-Corda statistics until 30 November 2012) and the more qualitative assessment provided by the WBC-Inco.Net. The current levels of participation in FP7 underlined the importance to start preparations for Horizon 2020 as soon as possible, in particular on participation in effective collaboration projects, on research on societal challenges and on Marie Skłodowska Curie actions. In this context, the Platform took note of the importance of preparing for the (re) structuring of the National Contact Points in line with Horizon 2020 and the EU standards on support services. The EC reminded participants how important it was also to attend the preparatory meetings organized for all NCPs from the Member States and the Associated Countries.

The Platform took note of the outline presented on the procedure and timing for association to Horizon 2020. All Balkan countries asked for an Ad Hoc meeting at regional level to be more informed about the terms and conditions of association, in particular on the financial contribution given the current absorption capacity and budget increase for Horizon 2020.

The Platform took note of the importance to take actions to boost the Bio-Economy at EU level and welcomed the support from the CEI which informed the Platform on its actions on advanced bio-fuels. The CEI also offered support to participate in the proposed bio-based public-private partnership which will offer additional cooperation opportunities for the Region in this important field. The Platform welcomed the presentation of the COST action on Green Engineering Camp which illustrated very well the need for international and interdisciplinary networking to secure sustainable development of natural resources.

The Platform welcomed the comprehensive debriefing on the state of implementation of the IPA project (implemented by the RCC and the World Bank) aiming at developing a regional strategy on research and innovation in the Western Balkans. The draft nature of the strategy and proposed actions was underlined. Some questions related to the estimated funding for the proposed regional actions. The Platform asked to be kept informed on a regular basis in particular on the possible future actions that will be proposed to avoid duplication and ensure coherent governance.

The Platform took note of the Joint Declaration adopted at the South East European Ministerial Round Table in Sarajevo on 23 November 2012, co-organized by the Ministry of Civil Affairs of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Unesco Regional Bureau in Venice. The Platform asked for good coordination on the implementation of the recommendations to avoid overlap and duplication of work. With respect to work to be undertaken on Infrastructures, the importance of attending the meetings of the European Strategic Forum on Research Institutes (ESFRI) was stressed as well as the need to improve the quality of the statistics on S&T. The Platform expressed interest in work aiming at improving science communications.

The Platform welcomed the presentation of the EVAL-INNO project which emphasised the importance of ensuring open, transparent and fair evaluation of research programmes and projects as a way to increase scientific excellence. The EC encouraged the Balkan countries to take full advantage of the training offered under this project which was fully in line with the ERA objectives.

In conclusion, all members very much appreciated the work of the Steering Platform, which had really become a reference for boosting and enhancing cooperation on R&I in the Balkan

Region and preparing for accession to the EU. The Platform called upon the EC to carry on and build upon the work achieved by the WBC-INCO.NET even after the end of the project (in principle end of 2013). This was particularly relevant for the Newsletter and the WBC-INCO.NET website which contained very useful up-to-date information. The EC fully agreed on the useful role the Platform meetings played, but considered that it should also be used to further steer future work, since information can also be obtained directly in the relevant ERA governance bodies (hence the importance of attending those meetings). In response to several interventions during the meeting to continue the work of the Steering Platform beyond the duration of the WBC-INCO.NET project, the EC promised to look at the possibilities.

Montenegro expressed an interest in co-chairing the next meeting in the first half of 2013, together with the upcoming EU Irish Presidency and the European Commission. Information on this will be announced in due time.

14th Steering Platform meeting, Budva – June 5-6, 2013

Agenda

Annex I



EUROPEAN COMMISSION RESEARCH
DIRECTORATE-GENERAL



MINISTRY OF SCIENCE
OF MONTENEGRO



IRISH PRESIDENCY

DRAFT AGENDA

Meeting of Steering Platform on Research for Western Balkan Countries in Budva (Montenegro) on 5-6 June 2013.

5 June 2013:

- | | |
|---------------|--|
| 14.00 – 14.45 | Opening Statements by: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Montenegro for Balkan Presidency- Irish Presidency;- European Commission. |
| 14.45 – 15.00 | Approval of the Agenda
Approval of the Minutes of the last Steering Platform Meeting (Belgrade, 6 December 2012). |
| 15.00 – 16.15 | Preparing for 'Horizon 2020': <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Latest developments on Horizon 2020 (Irish Presidency)- Novelties under Horizon 2020 (Commission)- Timeline for Association (Commission)- Support in preparation of Horizon 2020 (Commission) <p>Questions and answers</p> |
| 16.15 – 16.30 | Family photo followed by Coffee break |
| 16.30 – 17:30 | Regional Cooperation (Part 1): debriefing on: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- State of play on IPA project designing strategy for regional cooperation (WB/RCC)- Implementation of South East Europe 2020 strategy (RCC)- EVAL INNO : project outcomes and patterns of cooperation (ZSI) |
| 19.30 | Social Event |

6 June 2013:

9. 15 – 10.00

European Research Area: update and highlights (Commission)

Questions and answers

10.00 – 11.15

What has been done since December 2012:

Presentation of **recent developments regarding S&T cooperation in/with the WBCs** (see Information sheets for more details), by:

- European Commission (DG RTD and JRC)
- Western Balkan countries;
- Steering Platform members: EU Member States and countries associated to FP7;
- Representatives from WBC-INCO.NET, SEE-ERA.NET PLUS, COST, Eureka, World Bank, OECD, RCC, Unesco and CEL.

11.15 - 11.30

Coffee break

11.30- 12.15

Regional Cooperation (Part II): debriefing on:

- WBC INCO.NET: deliverables and outcome of discussions general assembly (ZSI)
- New opportunities of cooperation: Danube INCO.NET
- Debriefing on Workshop in Belgrade on 11-12 April 2013 on Smart Specialisation Strategy (Serbia)
- Establishment of the South East European Center for Advanced Studies (CAS) in Rijeka (Croatia): inaugural conference in September.

12.15 – 13.00

Concluding Remarks

Presentation and adoption of conclusions including recommendations on future actions and work

AOB

Announcement of the next Steering Platform Meeting

Conclusions

Conclusions of meeting of Steering Platform on Research for

Western Balkan Countries

Budva (Montenegro) on 5-6 June 2013

The Steering Platform on Research for the Western Balkan Countries met in Budva on 5-6 June 2013. The meeting was co-chaired by the Irish Presidency of the Council of the European Union, Montenegro - who hosted the event and co-chaired on behalf of the Western Balkan Countries and the European Commission.

Montenegro opened the meeting by welcoming all the members of the Platform to their country and expressed the hope that as co-chair they can be of use in moving forward the research and innovation agenda between the EU and the enlargement countries. Montenegro took advantage of the occasion to share with the Platform their experience in the accession negotiations on chapter 25 on science and research and the continued efforts they have taken at national level since the provisional closure of the chapter in December 2012. In its opening statement, the Irish Presidency outlined its experience as Member State since 1973 and encouraged all WBCs to make the necessary efforts to join the Union. The European Commission welcomed the opportunity to inform on latest developments in EU Research and Innovation policy and also to learn about progress made by the WBCs on national R&I capacity. Referring to the conclusions on international cooperation, adopted at the Competitiveness Council on 30 May, the EC invited all members of the Platform to consider how cooperation on R&I could be deepened with the enlargement.

The Platform welcomed the presentation from the Irish Presidency on the latest developments and the state of play on the next EU Research and Innovation programme 'Horizon 2020'. It also took note of the conditions and procedure for association to 'Horizon 2020'. It was underlined that a request or an expression of interest to associate was necessary in writing in order to launch the association procedure. All agreed that association is a good pre-accession tool but it was recognized that the decision should also be taken in full consideration of absorption capacity. DG ELARG underlined the importance of including R&I as a priority sector in the Country Strategy Paper under preparation for the implementation of the next Pre-Accession Instrument (IPA II). The proposed support measures by the Commission were welcomed, in particular the support for project preparation and promotion of participation in Horizon 2020. The Platform asked to be kept closely informed on developments in the organisation of the National Contact Points for

Horizon 2020. A follow-up meeting on association to 'Horizon 2020', together with DG ELARG, was seen as useful.

In view of their possible association to 'Horizon 2020', WBCs were also encouraged to step up efforts on R&I capacity at national level. Based on the presentation of the Progress Reports, it was encouraging to learn that the WBCs are in the process of revising their Law(s) on Research, Science and Technology and/or adopting national strategies on innovation and are working on S&T statistics. The variety of actions taken by the Member States and the countries associated to FP7 (Switzerland) in support of the Western Balkans, both on capacity building and offering cooperation opportunities on research and innovation and mobility of researchers, are all contributing to the objective of strengthening the R&I capacity. The support from other stakeholders, and notably the JRC, OECD, WBC.INCO.NET, SEE-ERANET Plus, RCC and CEI are also very precious for the Balkan Region.

Sharing information on progress and actions in the Steering Platform was seen as a very useful exercise in creating synergies and considering further actions addressing the global value chain in line with EU policies and objectives. It was noted that the Platform played a key role, for example, in allowing WBCs to become familiar with the Smart specialisation strategy, which had been fully demonstrated by the Workshop on Smart specialization organized by the WBC- INCO.NET in Belgrade in April 2013.

The Platform welcomed the presentation which gave an update on the latest developments on the European Research Area. The WBCs were invited to carefully follow developments and contribute to the first Progress Report.

The Steering Platform was pleased with the selection of the FP7 project Danube INCO.NET and expressed the hope that it will lead to more research opportunities for all WBCs.

The Platform further welcomed the additional progress made in the EVAL-INNO project and underlined the importance of this project in preparing for Horizon 2020. Serbia recommended considering best practice, in particular.

The Steering Platform was also satisfied with the announced prolongation of the duration of the WBC.INCO.NET as a means to support the WBCs in making the bridge from FP7 to Horizon 2020 and took note of the future activities, in particular the final Conference and Brokerage event to take place in Vienna on 27-28 March 2014.

In view of the termination of the WBC.INCO.NET (April 2014), all members of the Steering Platform underlined the importance of continuing the policy dialogue with the WBCs beyond

the duration of this FP7 project. In this context, the Platform welcomed the possibility outlined by the RCC in its presentation of the SEE Europe 2020 strategy, which would include a Regional Platform on Research and Innovation to monitor progress on the SEE 2020 strategy related to R&I (smart growth pillar). This Regional Platform would also be responsible for the implementation of the proposed Regional strategy for research and innovation under preparation, with the support of the World Bank. It was noted that bringing the current Steering Platform under the auspices of the RCC would increase synergy and unite all actions under one forum. Given the importance of the Steering Platform from a pre-accession point of view, Members also asked to consider the possibility of ad-hoc support under IPA and/or 'Horizon 2020' to ensure the uninterrupted continuation of the present Steering Platform and the dissemination of information that the WBC.INCO.NET has so far provided through the WBC Newsletter and website. Whatever solution was found, a real plea was made to continue the policy dialogue until the accession of all the WBCs to the EU.

The Steering Platform took note of the other actions taken at regional level, notably the presentation by the RCC of the Regional Strategy for Research and Innovation for the Western Balkans. The Platform, however, was not in a position to express its views on the proposed regional strategy, due to lack of detailed information on the joint initiatives. In view of the Ministerial Meeting in Skopje next July seeking endorsement of the Regional Strategy, the EC urged the WBCs to liaise with their representatives in the Steering body of the Regional Strategy.

The Platform also took note of the pilot project outlined by the CEI on supporting the integration and strengthening of centres of excellence in the Balkans. Interested representatives were invited to join the meeting of the CEI focal points in Trieste on 9-10 July to discuss the proposal in more detail.

The Platform took note of the establishment of the South East European Center for Advanced Studies (CAS) in Rijeka and noted that the important topic of "New Challenges for Democracy: Exploring the Crisis of Trust and Legitimacy in Europe" will be addressed at the inaugural conference to be held in Rijeka on 16-18 October 2013.

The Platform was grateful for the presence of the Lithuanian Presidency at this meeting and is looking forward to preparing together the next Platform meeting. The brief outline of their Presidency Programme was also much welcomed as guidance for our future work.

Croatia expressed an interest in hosting and co-chairing the next meeting in the second half of 2013, together with the upcoming EU Lithuanian Presidency and the European Commission. Information on this will be announced in due time.

15th Steering Platform meeting, Zagreb – December 11-12, 2013

Agenda



EUROPEAN COMMISSION
RESEARCH DIRECTORATE-
GENERAL



MINISTRY OF SCIENCE,
EDUCATION AND SPORTS -
CROATIA



Lithuanian Presidency
of the Council of the
European Union 2013

LITHUANIAN PRESIDENCY

DRAFT AGENDA

Meeting of the Steering Platform on Research for Western Balkan Countries in Zagreb, Croatia

11 December 2013

- | | |
|---------------|--|
| 14.00 – 14.05 | Welcome address by <ul style="list-style-type: none">– Representative from Croatia (host) |
| 14.05 – 14.30 | Opening Statements by: <ul style="list-style-type: none">– Lithuanian Presidency;– European Commission;– Representative from FYROM (co-chair);– Representative from Croatia (host and co-chair). |
| 14.30 – 14.45 | Approval of the Agenda
Approval of the Minutes of the last Steering Platform Meeting (Budva, Montenegro June 5/6, 2013) |
| 14.45 – 16.00 | Preparing for 'Horizon 2020': <ul style="list-style-type: none">– Latest developments on Horizon 2020 (Lithuanian Presidency)– State of play on association to Horizon 2020 (European Commission)– Actions in Support of participation in Horizon 2020: launch events and workshops/technical assistance (European Commission)– COST (COST representative Croatia)– Preparations for IPA II and Horizon 2020 (information by WBCs). |
| 16.00 – 16.30 | <i>Family photo followed by Coffee break</i> |

16.30 – 18.00

What has been done since June 2013:

Presentation of **recent developments regarding S&T cooperation in/with the WBCs** (see Information sheets for more details), by:

- European Commission (DG R&I and DG JRC)
- Western Balkan countries;
- Steering Platform members: EU Member States and countries associated to FP7;
- Representatives from WBC-INCO.NET, SEE-ERA.NET PLUS, COST, Eureka, UNESCO, CEI, EVAL-INNO, M-ERA.NET.

19.30

Dinner / Social Event

12 December 2013

09.00 – 10.30

Regional cooperation: Strategic approaches

- Debriefing and follow-up on “Regional R&D Strategy for Innovation” (World Bank team)
- Debriefing on “South East European 2020 Strategy” – Pillar “Smart Growth” (RCC)
- Debriefing and follow-up Annual CEI meeting in Trieste
- Future of the Steering Platform
- Preparations for the WBC-INCO.NET Final conference

10.30 – 10.45

Coffee break

10.45 – 12.30

Challenges and opportunities for the WBCs:

Knowledge and technology transfer:

- Debriefing on “Modernization of WBC universities through strengthening of structures and services for knowledge transfer, research and innovation” (WBCInno TEMPUS project)

Smart Regions:

- Debriefing on Danube.INCO.NET
- Debriefing on Danube Regional Research Fund
- Eastern European Partnership (Lithuanian Presidency)

- Debriefing on 2nd Training Workshop on Smart Specialisation for South East European countries.

Horizons for Social Sciences and Humanities

- **Vilnius Declaration** (Debriefing on Conference *Horizons for Social Sciences and Humanities*; Lithuanian Presidency).
- **Democracy challenges in SEE** (Debriefing on inaugural conference of the regional Centre for advanced studies SEE in SSH established at the University of Rijeka; CAS director).
- **Evaluation culture in SEE** (Public procurement in SEE innovation evaluations: A comparative and needs assessment study; EVAL-INNO expert).

12.30 – 13.15

Round Table & Discussion

- Regional cooperation: strategic approaches
- Challenges and opportunities for the WBCs
- Future of the Steering Platform
- AOB

13.15 – 14. 00

Concluding Remarks

Presentation and adoption of conclusions including recommendations on future actions and work
AOB

Conclusions

Conclusions

Meeting of Steering Platform on Research for

Western Balkan Countries

Zagreb, 11-12 December 2013

The Steering Platform on Research for the Western Balkan Countries met in Zagreb on 11-12 December 2013. The meeting was co-chaired by the Lithuanian Presidency of the Council of the European Union, Croatia - who hosted the event and co-chaired on behalf of the Western Balkan Countries and the European Commission.

Croatia opened the meeting welcoming all participants to their country and underlining the importance of the Steering Platform also for the implementation of the Regional Strategy on Research and Innovation adopted in Zagreb on 25 October 2013. Croatia stressed that as Member State it remained committed to continuing the cooperation with the Balkan countries and supporting them in their path to the European Union. The Lithuanian Presidency welcomed very much the opportunity to participate in the Steering Platform which they considered as a very good tool to prepare for EU membership, one which was unfortunately not available when Lithuania was a candidate country. They welcomed the opportunity to contribute to the work by informing the members of the Platform on the latest developments in research and innovation, in particular, the adoption of the Horizon 2020 package and the outcomes of the Conferences held during their Presidency. The EC welcomed the opportunity to meet with all the Balkan countries together with other stakeholders which was a valuable occasion to take stock of actions taken or to be taken. With the adoption of Horizon 2020 and the launch of the first calls in the 2014/2015 work programmes, it is clear that efforts should be concentrated on the preparation for participation in the new Union programme for research and innovation. In view of the end of the WBC- INCO.NET project, this meeting was an occasion to reflect openly and jointly on the future needs of the Steering Platform.

The Platform members thanked the EC for the preparatory work on the procedure for association to Horizon 2020 and were pleased to learn that by now all enlargement countries had expressed interest in becoming associated to Horizon 2020. Several enlargement countries, however, expressed concern about the level of the estimated financial contributions, given the limited possibilities under the Pre-Accession Instrument (IPA II) for reimbursement of part of the contribution. All enlargement countries confirmed they were in close contact with their National IPA coordinator to ensure that research and innovation was retained as a priority sector in the Country Strategy Papers. With the

support of the WBC.INCO.NET, preparations on the design and use of a Smart Specialization Strategy were also progressing. The Balkan countries were encouraged to use the strategy as guidance for participation in Horizon 2020 and use of IPA II.

The Steering Platform took note of the many and diverse actions taken by the Member States towards the Balkans and notably through cooperation in research projects, exchange programmes and concluding bilateral agreements. Several Balkan countries informed on actions and strategies focusing on innovation. The actions taken by the JRC confirmed its commitment towards the implementation of the EU Danube Strategy. UNESCO informed on the work it had conducted on S&T statistics in the Region and its willingness to support, with other stakeholders, the need to improve the statistics. The Platform took note of the outcomes of the SEE.ERA.NET Plus project and was invited to suggest a final action with the remaining funding. The Platform also welcomed the cooperation opportunities offered under the M-ERA.NET project on material sciences. The Platform was informed about the latest developments on COST and expressed the hope that membership for all the Balkans would soon become a reality. The Platform was informed about the final activities within WBC-INCO.NET project, in particular the announcement of the WBC-INCO.NET final publication “Western Balkan Region – R&D and Innovation Systems in Focus” and preparations for the Final conference (March 27/28, 2014) and brokerage event (March 28, 2014) in Vienna.

The Platform took note of the Western Balkan Strategy on R&D for Innovation and welcomed the useful analysis and vision to improve the R&I capacity both at national and regional level. The Platform inquired on the funding necessary for the implementation and, in particular, for the governance structure, including the technical assistance facility called WISE (Western Balkan Innovation Structure Exercise). In this context the Platform underlined the overarching importance and role of the Regional Cooperation Council. The Platform welcomed the suggestion from the RCC to propose further synergy between the role of the RCC on R&I and the newly established WISE facility and the future status and role of the Steering Platform. The Steering Platform took note of the commitment of the Central Europe Initiative (CEI) to support the strengthening of the research infrastructure in the Balkan region with Horizon 2020 actions.

The Platform welcomed a number of new studies presented during the meeting and particularly the WBC INNO project on strengthening transfer of technology capacities at universities. This was a good demonstration of how other programmes (i.e. Tempus) contribute to the key ERA priorities. The Platform noted that preparations for the kick-off meeting of the Danube.Inco.Net were on track and that preparations on the Danube Regional Research and Innovation Fund (DRRIF) were progressing in the right direction. The Steering Platform appreciated the presentation on the newly adopted Eastern European Partnership and its endeavor to strengthen cooperation also through research and innovation. It also welcomed the information given by the Lithuanian Presidency on the Vilnius Declaration, which was another useful source and tool in preparing Horizon 2020 projects. The Platform welcomed the presentation of the activities undertaken by the Centre for advanced studies in South East Europe (CAS-SEE), a new organisation established at the University in Rijeka (Croatia) which conducts research on democracy challenges in the region. The organisation was encouraged

to consider, in cooperation with entities from the Balkan Region, research opportunities under Horizon 2020, as social sciences and humanities (SSH) is an important cross-cutting challenge. The Steering Platform welcomed the presentation of the study on evaluation culture on government procurement in S.E.E conducted within EVAL-INNO project and advised that the recommendations be carefully studied and applied at national level.

In conclusion, this Steering Platform, in principle the last one, once more demonstrated its usefulness in sharing information and best practices and offering networking opportunities on research and innovation. In the light of this, all members of the Steering Platform were asked to consider options for continuing the Platform's work, in the same constructive spirit and with the same commitment, in time for the final WBC.INCO.NET conference in Vienna on 27- 28 March 2014.

16th Steering Platform meeting, Trieste – September 24, 2014

Agenda



EUROPEAN COMMISSION
COOPERATION
RESEARCH
DIRECTORATE-GENERAL



SERBIA



ITALIAN PRESIDENCY



REGIONAL COUNCIL

DRAFT AGENDA

Meeting of the Steering Platform on Research for Western Balkan Countries in Trieste, Italy (Hotel Savoia Excelsior - 24 September 2014)

- | | |
|---------------|--|
| 09:15 – 09:30 | Welcome address: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Italian Minister for Education, University Research, EU Presidency- CEI Secretary General- RCC |
| 09:30 – 10:15 | Opening Statements: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Italian Presidency: presentation of Presidency Programme with focus on Research and Innovation;- European Commission: representatives from EC/DG RTD and JRC- Serbia on behalf of Western Balkan Region |
| 10:15 – 11:30 | EU policy on Research and Innovation: latest developments <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Horizon 2020: Widening and Spreading Excellence programme (EC/DG RTD/tbc)- Presentation of EU Strategy on International Cooperation including on association (EC/DG RTD)- Innovation Union including European Research Area: state of implementation (EC/DG RTD)- IPA II on Research and Innovation (EC/DG ELARG – H. Visser, tbc) |
| 11:30 – 12:00 | Q&A, contributions by participants
<i>Family photo followed by Coffee break</i> |

12:00 – 13:15

State of play on Research Infrastructures in Western Balkan Region:

- Mapping and preparing of national roadmap and participation in ESFRI by prof. G. Rossi, Vice-President of ESFRI
- Actions for Infrastructures in Horizon 2020; EC/DG RTD (Ph. Froissard, tbc)
- JRC: outlining actions and cooperation for Enlargement countries and scientific support to regional strategies (Danube and Adriatic – Ionian regions)

Q&A, contributions by participants

13:30 – 14:30

Buffet Lunch together with Delegations to CEI Ministerial Meeting for Science and Technology

14:30 – 16:00

Regional Activities:

- State of play on 'South East European 2020 Strategy' – Pillar 'Smart Growth' (RCC)
- State of play on Implementation of Regional R&D Strategy for Innovation: launch of WISE (Croatia)
- Activities in the framework of Danube.Inco.Net
- Activities by UNESCO
- Activities by CEI: outline of CEI–PRAISE Programme aiming at strengthening the scientific communities of member countries, including integration of Research Infrastructures in Western Balkans through CEI S&T Network

Q&A, contributions by participants

16:00 – 16.30

Conclusions and next steps (Italian Presidency; CEI; Serbia; European Commission).

Q&A, contributions by participants

19:30

Social Event (tbc)

25 September 2014: possibility to visit scientific infrastructures and centres of excellence in Trieste

Minutes

16th Meeting of the WBC Steering Platform

in Trieste on 24 September 2014,

under the Italian Presidency, co-chaired also by the EC and Serbia

and hosted by the Central European Initiative

I. Welcome Statement

The EC (Tania Friederichs), welcomed, on behalf of the Co-Chairs all participants and in particular the Italian Minister for Education and University Research, Mrs Giovanni. Her presence was much appreciated and meant a lot for the Western Balkan countries both with respect to the importance of research and innovation and on their path to the EU. During the work of the WBC Steering Platform we had always experienced support from Italy towards the Western Balkans. The presence of the Minister and the hosting of the meeting during the Italian Presidency was another demonstration that concentrating efforts on strengthening the research and innovation capacity in the Western Balkans was also politically important. It was thus to be regretted that for the time being there is not a better institutional framework to steer the work on research and innovation but thanks to the hospitality of the Italian Presidency and the commitment of many member states towards the WBCs, this meeting could take place. The EC invited all participants to take advantage of this unique opportunity and proceed with the agenda after the opening speech by the Minister.

II. Opening Statements

The Minister outlined the Italian programme on research and innovation in which strengthening the human capital building took an important part and this should be reflected in the mid-term review of the Europe 2020 strategy. She also reiterated Italy's commitment towards the Western Balkan countries and strongly believed that through cooperation on research further progress on the overall process could be achieved. She hoped that participants will fully take advantage of the opportunities offered in this beautiful city of sciences. The Minister also mentioned the importance of cooperation with the Mediterranean countries and hoped that this will soon be consolidated by an Article 185 initiative called PRIMA.

The President of the Central European Initiative (CEI) outlined cooperation opportunities which the organization is offering to the Western Balkan Countries and expressed hope that meetings in Trieste will lead to more concrete actions and will allow benefiting from the scientific excellence and experience that Trieste's research institutes had with participation in the EU's research programmes. This was particularly relevant for actions on infrastructure such as the ERIC initiative in Central Europe (CERIC) as well as on energy issues in the Balkan Region and for the H2020 widening programme.

The Regional Cooperation Council mentioned the importance of the overarching South East Europe 2020 Strategy in which cooperation on research and innovation was a cornerstone of the smart growth pillar. It was thus important that the Platform operates within and contributes to the SEE 2020 Strategy.

Serbia, Co-Chairing on behalf of the WBCs, took advantage in its opening statement to underline the importance of the work of Steering Platform that had served as a good tool to prepare for the accession negotiations on Chapter 25 on Science and Research. Hence the importance that work within the Platform could continue and be used for information sharing. For Serbia, work in the Platform has also been instrumental in preparing for association to Horizon 2020. Implementation of that is of course to be done at national level.

DG Research and Innovation informed about the latest activities on international cooperation and notably the adoption of the first progress report on the Strategy on International cooperation identifying areas of cooperation with the key EU partners. The synergy between Horizon 2020 and other external instruments, notably the Pre-accession Instrument (IPA II) was also important when considering how to strengthen the R&I capacity in the WBCs both at national and regional level. Unfortunately the colleague from DG ELARG responsible for IPA II and research could not attend but asked DG RTD to remind of the importance to ensure that research is covered in the programming of the sector on competitiveness and growth and that planning of projects starts well in advance so that IPA II can be maximum deployed to improve the research and innovation capacities.

The representative of the Joint Research Centre (JRC) welcomed the opportunity to participate in the meeting which it considered as a useful Platform to share information and ensure synergies between actions taken by different stakeholders and the scientific and technical support that the JRC provides through their enlargement and integration activities – in particular in the context of macro-regional activities. Activities for the Danube Region are of key importance for the WBCs.

Finally, DG RTD took advantage to thank the Centre for Social Innovation, the Regional Cooperation Council and the CEI for their administrative, logistical and financial support, which was also instrumental for organizing this meeting.

III. Discussion on agenda points

[H2020 programme on Spreading Excellence and Widening Participation](#)

DG RTD (Stefan Weiers, Policy Officer in DG RTD/Dir. B5) presented the new Horizon 2020 programme "Spreading Excellence and Widening Participation" (see presentation). This programme is of great interest to the WBCs since their research entities qualify for participation as associated countries being from a low performing country/region. Following the presentation of the programme useful discussions took place on eligibility conditions, notably on the need to create synergies with Structural Funds as well as a Smart Specialisation Strategy which is another tool in place in the Member States that can guide the MS or regions in which areas to strengthen their capacities as a matter of priority. The ownership of the projects by the target countries, through the principle of co-funding, was also discussed and seen as another criteria making participation of WBCs more difficult

or demanding than for the Member States. The EC promised to reflect on that and provide further explanations or guidance in time for the next calls (on twinning in May 2015 and then in 2018). This programme also demonstrated the importance to deploy IPA II funding for R&I in synergy with H2020 (for S3, for example).

Based on a pilot initiative in FP7, ERA Chairs will be organized in 2017 and 2019. In particular for this action, the EC underlined the importance to plan and prepare well ahead of the call deadlines given the importance to find and match with sustainable entities and the administrative capacity which is required in the host country.

[Research Infrastructure Programme under H2020](#)

DG RTD (Philippe Froissard from DG RTD/Dir. B4), mentioned that under Horizon 2020 the budget for Infrastructure had increased (2.4 bn €) and will be mainly used for actions facilitating the integration of infrastructure activities, for networks of infrastructures, the development of new RIs and policy actions such as:

- RIs of pan-European interest, supporting ESFRI projects;
- fostering the innovation potential and their human resources; and
- reinforcing European RI policy and international cooperation.

The programme addresses the development of infrastructures at different stages (concept, preparation, implementation, operation). Further sources for implementation are coming from national budget or Structural Funds. The call of 2014 involved several topics in which partners from third countries can participate based on the principle of mainstreaming i.e including partners of third countries in the main research actions together with entities from MS and associated countries. Smaller countries and less represented/performing Member States/associated countries should also be in a position to better benefit from the funding to access research infrastructures as the purpose is also to widen access and increase research capacity.

In the next WP for 2016-2017, currently under preparation, it is envisaged to further “*enhance openness and the global character of RI to enable Europe to play a leading role in science and innovation*” (as reported by the advisory group). The EC invited the Steering Platform participants to submit their views and expectations on the upcoming actions. Based on the updated ESFRI roadmaps, further budget will also be available, but the capital costs for large RIs are not funded by the programme which focusses on joint activities and some equipment and actions to improve services.

During discussions, questions concerned mainly budgetary aspects in particular in relation to the synergy with the Structural Funds for Member States and possible analogy with IPA II for the WBCs and Turkey.

The EC recalled the importance of a roadmap similar to ESFRI for the Western Balkan Region, which in turn required national strategies/roadmaps to facilitate harmonization at European level. In 2016, the ESFRI roadmap will be updated which will certainly require a regional roadmap and so respective strategies will be necessary. To launch new infrastructures, a lot of political will is needed as well as a sound business plan and good governance. Western Balkan countries shall have a regional roadmap

looking at the perspectives of the European Roadmaps and in particular in light of the new projects, i.e. “emerging projects”, which are not yet ready enough to be on the top list, but are major steps for the future. A collection of information of what has been done and the identification of the best way forward, involving policy makers, is of high importance. The process is taking rather long and for funding it can easily take 10 years. Openness of infrastructures is also being discussed (not free, but open).

The EC also recalled the importance to nominate delegates in ESFRI and to attend meetings and participate actively, through eIRG, to the development of white papers and strategies.

[Joint Research Center](#)

The JRC (Luciana Zanier) outlined its actions in support of enlargement countries and facilitation of their integration into the EU. The fora instrumental for this support, e.g. JRC Board of Governors involve also representatives from the associated countries. Intensive networking activities go on with the National Contact Points in the enlargement countries who are also involved in the current activities. On the basis of priorities main activities are being launched. One of the instruments is the scientific support to the macro-regional strategies, e.g. the Danube Strategy addressing the scientific needs related to its implementation and to strengthen the scientific cooperation in the region. The JRC initiative is implemented via seven flagship clusters (water, land, soil, bio-energy, air, data exchange and harmonization, smart specialization, innovation and technology transfer). JRC coordinates the clusters and gather additional partners of the region working together on concrete projects. A new initiative is the “stairway to excellence”. Currently the support to the Adriatic Ionian strategy, which is expected to concentrate on four specific pillars, is being discussed and potential contributions are being defined in view of launching the actions in November 2015.

Enlargement and Integration Actions exist since 1999, the tool supports the enlargement countries from a scientific and technical point of view to transpose the *aquis communautaire* (through workshops, study visits, and posts). In 2013, 50 workshops and advanced trainings / summer schools / events have been organized; specific study visits have also been organized hosting 40 researchers at the institutes for a maximum period of 3 years. Memoranda of Understanding to improve cooperation and to host PhDs and Post-Docs are signed with Turkey/Tübitak; the fYR of Macedonia and Serbia. With Serbia, 35 researchers have been co-selected.

Scientific support to the Danube Strategy was launched in 2011 and operates in close collaboration with the key scientific partners. Letters of Interest have been signed with 11 academies of sciences and Danube Rectors Conference representing 70 universities in the region.

As an example, the Danube Reference Data and Service infrastructure was highlighted. Comparable information is key to sound policy making in macro-regions. Access to homogenous data sets is very important and so a platform has been created with a catalogue of existing data which now leads to harmonization. A network of National Contact Points of data exchange is being set up. Another key issue is the Smart Specialization platform for the Danube Region, which the JRC’s Institute in Sevilla/IPTS operates. It includes the support to policy makers through the publication of various guidelines and mutual learning tools, such as informal peer reviews for which regions submit their strategies. Furthermore, cross-border cooperation is to be increased by supporting the alignment to address common challenges. The use of EU funds for more effective cross-border and transnational

platforms is being discussed as well as the synergies between Horizon 2020 and ESIF, addressing in particular the countries that accessed the EU after 2004.

The Danube Innovation Partnership has been launched last year, to improve Technology Transfer Offices and foster TT activities, establishing also thematic or cross-border TTOs. In this context, an invention award, an IP e-learning module, best practices workshops and a summer school are being implemented.

Every year, through a call for proposal, JRC is asked to offer specific activities dedicated to the enlargement countries. The events are hosted in the respective countries. The institutes' activities and the participation from the enlargement countries in the international events are being supported. JRC also fills posts with applicants from enlargement countries. Furthermore, the Travel Accommodation and Conference Facility (IPA TAC) organizes study visits to the institutes and priority events. Specifically, a JRC thematic meeting on macro-regional strategies and the smart specialization approach is being organized in Novi Sad.

The new call for proposal for E&IA for 2015 is currently being prepared, the priorities from the enlargement countries have been collected and institutes are now invited to present projects.

[Regional Cooperation Council / State of implementation of the SEE 2020 strategy](#)

The RCC (Madlen Dragasevic) recalled the major elements of the SEE 2020 strategy, being the key strategic document prepared under coordination of the RCC and providing guidelines on how to move closer to the EU 2020 Strategy and its targets and to support the enlargement countries to become familiar with and comply with these targets in view of becoming a EU Member state. In this context, the RCC referred to the R&D Strategy for Innovation (prepared with support from the World Bank), being adopted by all Science Ministers from the Western Balkans in Zagreb in October 2012 as the new reference for R&I actions at regional level. The RCC is mandated by the EC and the regional governments to start implementation of this Regional Strategy and received additional financing for this. The governing board is now implementing the strategy, to begin with establishing a regional facility (WISE) overseeing the implementation of the Strategy. The seat of the international secretariat is established in Split, the current chair is Serbia. A strong team of experts supports the implementation. The signatures of the ministers and the host country agreement are being prepared (next step is meeting in Ohrid on September 30, 2014). The priority programmes selected for implementation are the programme for TT and one to be further developed during 2015 on the establishment of Networks of Excellence. The process is ongoing with consultative regional workshops to discuss the guidelines.

For the RCC it stays to see how the platform can be sustained, for which it is open for discussion with all interested parties following the interest of the WBC. In the discussion, the European Commission insists on the differentiation of WISE and the Steering Platform. The Steering Platform meetings with the Balkans, the Member States and the stakeholders have been called to be further supported. The capacity of WISE, which focuses on four activity pillars, might be used, but the scope and purpose of the Steering Platform is broader in topics and stakeholders and purpose (clearing house). Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina insisted on the importance of the Steering Platform as well as the necessity for logistical and administrative support and the support for the independence of the platform.

[Central European Initiative – PRAISE programme](#)

CEI presented a programme aiming at strengthening the research capacity, and in particular the infrastructure and human capital building necessary for excellent research centers through cooperation modules with the RI in Trieste exploiting their experience with FP7/Horizon 2020. PRAISE is based on the CEI Science and Technology Network and represents an interdisciplinary hub. It also involves the CERIC ERIC Consortium based at the Elettra Sincrotrone which already has nine signatories of the CEI Member countries. The resources from various funding instruments are to be efficiently combined with a variable geometry and modular flexibility. The full potential of PRAISE could be estimated at 45 million €. Fundraising is currently ongoing; among others the MSCA and twinning instruments are being explored. This programme is fully in line with the Regional Strategy to be implemented by WISE, once established, and both CEI and Praise are willing to cooperate and coordinate the actions with WISE.

[ESFRI – Strategy Forum](#)

As the SP meeting took place back to back to the ESFRI Ministerial meeting, the SP could benefit from a presentation on latest developments "Mapping and preparing of national roadmap and participation in SFRI" by Prof. G. Rossi, Vice-President of ESFRI. He highlighted the importance of RIs, access, investments and coordination at European level. The first roadmap in 2006 was updated in 2008 and 2010, reaching a size of 50 RIs.

Prioritization took place then and implementation moved on. The inclusion of new criteria means that any project will stay on the list a maximum of 10 years. Thus, the New Roadmap will be shorter (25 projects) and contains projects at the decision stage. The G8+5 supported also a group to discuss global research infrastructures. National roadmaps are also necessary to be taken into account, listing priorities and possibilities, strengths, etc. Horizon 2020 has some instruments to support ESFRI RIs.

[Danube-INCO.NET](#)

The Coordinator of the FP7 project Danube-INCO.NET (Centre for Social Innovation (ZSI) represented by Elke Dall) presented the state of work of this initiative that was progressing well and demonstrated that also this project will lead to concrete actions on R&I among the Danube partners. This project presentation offered also insight into the policy coordination activities for the less performing Danube countries and notably the WBCs.

Following the presentation, the representative from the FYR of Macedonia highlighted that, since they are not member from this project and the geographical area of the Danube Region, they cannot benefit from the actions unlike under the WBC-INCO.NET.

III. [Conclusions](#)

The meeting demonstrated once more the usefulness of the WBC SP on research as it allowed to have a mix of topics and a variety of stakeholders both at ministerial as well as on working level. It allowed for exchange of views and experience on topics that are relevant for all the WBCs since they all have the same challenge: strengthening the R&I capacity and EU perspective.

At this SP meeting, the open and joint discussion on Research Infrastructure and the calls under Spreading Excellence and Widening Participation (“Widespread”) were considered of great importance and most valuable.

Several Member States indicated willingness to support the Steering Platform and would consider concrete follow-up while at the same time underlining that a SP convened/hosted by a Member State or other institutional stakeholder would never have the same effect and structuring agenda as when organized by the EC. For Serbia, the amount of information and updating on latest developments in R&I policy be it at EU, regional or national level was the most added value of the SP and should be preserved in view of accession negotiations on Chapter 25 by other WBCs in the near future.

EC (Tania Friederichs, DG RTD/C1) took note of the concluding remarks and promised to raise it with the authorities. She agreed that SP was an important source of information while at the same time encouraged WBCs to participate as much as possible to the meetings in which they are invited as observer or delegate, most notably in the European Research Area Committee (ERAC) and ESFRI. A meeting at which all WBCs, interested Member States and stakeholders participated had of course its merits if only because it often led to new cooperation opportunities and support measures on R&I.

Presentations held at the meeting are available from the following webpage: <http://wbc-rti.info/object/news/14416>

17th Steering Platform meeting, Budapest – June 8-9,2015

Agenda



European Commission
Directorate General
Research & Innovation



Ministry of Science
Montenegro



Latvian Presidency
of the Council of the
European Union

Latvian Presidency
of the Council of the
European Union

DRAFT AGENDA

Meeting of the Steering Platform on Research for Western Balkan Countries in Budapest (Hungary) on 8-9 June 2015.

Monday, 8 June 2015

- | | |
|---------------|---|
| 13:30 – 14:30 | Networking Lunch (together with participants of the Danube-INCO.NET workshop “Enhancing synergies in research and innovation programmes in the Danube Region”). |
| 14:30 – 14:45 | Welcome address by Host |
| 14:45 – 15:00 | Opening Statements: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Presidency: presentation of Presidency Programme with focus on Research and Innovation ;- European Commission: DG RTD and JRC- Montenegro on behalf of the Western Balkan Region |
| 15:00 – 15:15 | Approval of the Agenda.
Approval of the Minutes of the last Steering Platform Meeting (Trieste, 25 September 2014) |
| 15:15 – 16:00 | What has been done since September 2014:

Presentation of recent developments regarding S&T cooperation in/with the WBCs (see Information Sheets / Progress Reports for more details) by: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- European Commission (DG RTD and JRC)- Western Balkan countries |
| 16:00 – 16:30 | <i>Family photo followed by Coffee break</i> |
| 16:30 – 17:15 | What has been done since September 2014 (continued): <ul style="list-style-type: none">- SP Members: Member States and Associated countries to H2020. |

17:15 – 18:00 **First results and assessment participation in Horizon 2020**

Contributions by participants, Q&A

19:30 - Working dinner

Tuesday, 9 June 2015

09:00 – 09:45 **COST**: presentation of programme 2015-2017 (COST CSO)

Discussion

09:45 – 10:45 **Regional Activities:**

- Update on R&I dimension of the SEE2020 strategy (RCC)
- State of play on Implementation of Regional R&D Strategy for Innovation: launch of WISE (Croatia)
- Activities in the framework of Danube-INCO.NET
- Activities by CEI

Contributions by participants, Q&A

10:45 – 11: 00 Coffee break

11:00 – 11: 45 Presentation of **European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT)** and actions for WBCs

Discussion

11: 45 – 12:30 **Conclusions and next steps**

Contributions by participants, Q&A

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Regional Cooperation Council

Minutes

MINUTES

17th Meeting of the Steering Platform on Research for the Western Balkan Countries in Budapest on 8-9 June 2015,

under the Latvian Presidency, co-chaired by the European Commission (EC)
and Montenegro
and hosted by Institute for Foreign Affairs and Trade; Hungary

8 June 2015

I. Welcome Statements

The Director-General of the Institute for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Márton Schőberl) welcomed the participants. After a short presentation of the Institute's work, he emphasized the need to further strengthen the cooperation with the WBCs and relevance for WBC of participating in EU Framework Programmes. Mr. Schőberl underlined the support of the National, Research, Development and Innovation Fund in Hungary for hosting the Steering Platform by Institute for Foreign Affairs and Trade in Hungary.

On behalf of the Co-chairs, the representative of the European Commission, Directorate General Research and Innovation, Directorate for International Cooperation, (Tania Friederichs) welcomed all participants and expressed appreciations to the host, the Regional Centre for Information and Scientific Development (RCISD) and the Centre for Social Innovation (ZSI) for their efforts in preparation of the SP. She mentioned importance that now bridges between EU and WBC are build; we "walk" over them. The participants were informed that the representative of the Latvian Presidency will join the meeting the next day. The EC also welcomed the fact that many stakeholders had been invited and many of them participated in this Platform meeting which confirms interest and necessity of regular meetings and thus importance of having a sustainable support for a Regional Platform on Research and Innovation, in particular to share information on latest developments and learn from each other.

Montenegro (Darko Petrusic), co-chairing on behalf of the WBCs welcomed the participants and expressed his pleasure about the continuation of Steering Platform meetings emphasizing once again its relevance for all countries in the region.

Special thanks were expressed by EC towards Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) for financial support allowing the WBC members of the Platform to attend the meeting.

II. Approval of the Agenda and the last Minutes

After some adjustment of the agenda to take time constraints of speakers into account (Latvian Presidency Inga Jekabsons) arriving later and representative of Croatia debriefing on latest developments on creation of WISE), the agenda was adopted without further changes.

The Minutes of the previous meeting in Trieste in September 2014 were approved subject to changes requested by Serbia.

III. WISE: Western Balkan Research and Innovation Centre (Kristina Ferar Blaskovic)

The representative of WISE presented the facility which shall be established as an international, independent, non-profit, sustainable organization. The mission of WISE is to strengthen regional research, innovation and technology systems by providing support, advice, information and recommendations to the states, public and private institutions, non-governmental organizations and all other relevant stakeholders. It aims at improving cooperation on regional, EU and international level, as well as the Western Balkans research and innovation climate.

The WISE shall have a Secretariat, with the Director as head, and two departments with their respected heads assigned, as well as the Supervisory Board. The Supervisory Board shall be the sole strategic decision-making body of WISE and shall consist of high-level government officials, preferably Deputy or Assistant Ministers from each member. As the host country of the WISE, Croatia started the procedure of setting up the institutional background in 2013.

The economies (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia) shall provide annual financial contributions to the annual budget of WISE. Besides that, WISE shall finance its activities from contributions from other sources, namely donations, Associate Member contributions, subsidies or other funds from public or private sources such as the European Commission, bilateral donor countries, international financial institutions and other international organizations with special interest in research and development.

There was a discussion about the difference between the facility (WISE previously named: The Western Balkans Innovation Strategy Exercise Facility) and the Centre (Western Balkan Research and Innovation Centre) which will be established in the end 2015. The representative of WISE (Ms Blaskovic) pointed out that nothing has changed; the Centre represents the institutionalization of WISE.

Montenegro, as the co-chair of the meeting, questioned the provisions of the Agreement where it is noted that the Agreement will enter into force when four Members (out of seven) sign the Agreement.

At the next WISE meeting on 3rd of July 2015 in Croatia, two documents will be presented (Final Draft of the Agreement on the Western Balkan Research and Innovation Centre – WISE and Draft of Host Country Agreement). After the Zagreb meeting, the Agreement will be officially sent to the 7 economies to start the approval procedure within their governments.

There will be two departments, two programme managers and one general-director. WISE will have own secretariat and a governing board consisted of one research minister per country.

The JRC (Miroslav Veskovic) added that JRC supports the Danube strategy and was looking for possibilities to support the Adriatic-Ionian region.

The representative of WISE confirmed that the economies are aware of different macro-regional strategies that are in place but those strategies complement each other and do not overlap.

The national contribution to WISE is quite limited but the main aim of establishing the Centre is that this is the first regional initiative which foresees the strong interaction of scientific organizations, universities and industry. The WISE added that selection of a good director, who will be able to represent the region and fulfil the goals of the strategy, is an issue.

R&D is an overarching topic of stability in the region. It was important to see what can be done at regional level. The other important factor is the sustainability – it shall be ensured by setting up a permanent structure for the implementation. Success at regional level requires, however national efforts. At the national level the strategies shall be in line with EU priorities and the Centre will be a platform to exchange ideas of national and European level.

All countries have the opportunity to join H2020; the Steering platform is a good opportunity to launch common projects.

RCC budget

Following some questions on funding possibility for a sustainable Platform structure, the representative of the RCC (Mimika Loshi) explained that the RCC budget is comprised of 1/3 from the European Commission, 1/3 from the 1/3 part from the SEE participants and the rest from other RCC participants all of which are members to the RCC Board. RCC is currently developing its strategy and Work programme 2017-2019 in close cooperation with EC/DG NEAR. The support from IPA will consist of RCC functioning budget and some Ad Hoc funding for specific actions. RCC has undergone a 4-pillar assessment by the EC and following this the EC gave sub-granted authority to the RCC. In concrete terms this means that in future the RCC will be able to take up IPA funding easier. Accordingly RCC is now implementing parts of the Strategy through sub-granting.

Therefore in its pilot phase RCC launched a Call for proposal for non-profit organizations to implement the SEE2020 strategy. Indicative types of activities which may be financed under this call for proposals are the following: Promote and disseminate results achieved under SEE 2020 Strategy, support direct implementation of SEE 2020 objectives, and support engagement of civil society organizations in monitoring and implementation of SEE 2020 Strategy. However, since WISE is not yet legally established, it cannot receive funding and ministries/governments are not legible to apply under this call.

IV. Presentation of recent developments regarding S&T cooperation in/with the WBCs²

Detailed information about recent developments is available in Country progress reports and an overview is provided in a PowerPoint presentation ("What has been done"), available via <http://wbc-rti.info/object/document/14418>. Power Point presentations held at the meeting are available via <http://wbc-rti.info/object/news/14417>.

European Commission – DG Research and Innovation (Tania Friederichs)

The EC presented the recent activities of the European Commission of which the major activities consisted of (1) organizing technical support for H2020 (Workshop in each WBC) and (2) monitoring on regular basis progress made by all WBCs on Research and Innovation, in particular with Serbia in context of accession negotiations.

The EC also mentioned the importance of other regional initiatives and notably the Adriatic-Ionian Region in which four Balkan countries (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Serbia) are members, since research opportunities in the focus areas of the Region (connectivity, tourism, cultural heritage) could offer good opportunities for joint research projects with the Member States also belonging to that Region (Italy, Slovenia, Greece). DG RTD agreed with DG REGIO to promote joint actions and it would be good that WBCs actively participate in this, notably on cultural heritage.

European Commission – Joint Research Centre (JRC) (Miroslav Veskovic)

Miroslav Veskovic presented the recent activities of JRC such as organization of several workshops and trainings around defined priorities with special regard to the Danube region (e.g.: energy and infrastructure). A workshop will be held on S3 for Danube and WB Countries on 7th July in Vienna; the Danube strategy point opening will be held on 8th July. JRC also underlined importance of Regional cooperation with other EU regional initiatives and notably (Baltic Sea Strategy 6th Annual Forum to be held soon) since it has important experience in the field which could be interesting for WBC countries as well. JRC also underlined the importance of Smart Specialization Strategy (S3) and support offered by JRC – IPTS in Seville in this respect.

² More details are available in the ppt compiled

Albania (Geron Kamberi)

In Albania, most actions concentrated on involving business in the research projects: a fund with 300,000 Euros will be available for SMEs in 2016-2017 (85% from government and 15% from businesses) and a "triple helix" competition is being launched. ARTI has organized many Info Days on Horizon 2020 and applied to the Europe Enterprise Network as well.

Bosnia and Hercegovina (Alma Hasanovic)

Following general elections in 2014, there is a new Minister for Civil Affairs since April 2015 who envisages some reforms but not yet specified. The Stabilization and Association Agreement (SAA) with the EC came (finally) into force on 1 June, 2015 which reinforces the relations with the EU. No policy actions have been taken but BiH continues to participate in several international projects notably on exploitation of hydropower in cooperation with Germany.

Kosovo^{*3}

Representatives from Kosovo were invited but due to other obligations could not participate in the SP meeting.

The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) (Draganko Apostolovski)

The representative of FYROM reported that most actions related to Innovation with the first innovation awards from the Innovation Fund allocating in total 30,000 Euros to 16 SMEs. In addition, the country has organized several H2020 info-days.

Montenegro (Darko Petrusic)

Montenegro gained full COST membership in May 2015 and intensified the cooperation with CERN (2 summer schools for students and one for teachers are held). The national scholarship for excellence amounts to around 1.2 million euros. Moreover there is a dedicated amount of money for participation in EUREKA Danube projects.

Serbia (Viktor Nedovic)

Serbia informed about the new law on innovation activities. On Horizon 2020 it organized several Workshops and Info Days which has resulted in good results (first ERC grant by University of Belgrade; University of Novi Sad received grant under the first Teaming call). At national level, Serbia is supporting technology transfer (grant of 4.5 million euros). Most important activity related to opening of accession negotiations on Chapter 25 for which Serbia thanked EC.

³ Kosovo*: This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

Austria (Christian Gollubits)

The representative of Austria highlighted that there is a demand to relaunch WBC information platform on research, technology and innovation which will be done through WBC-RTI.info. The Online-Platform is funded by Austrian Federal Ministry of Science, Research and Economy and implemented by Centre for Social Innovation (ZSI). It builds upon the very successful WBC-INCO.NET platform (project funded under the 7th Framework Programme for Research and Technological Development). ZSI (Ines Marinkovic) presented the objectives of the platform and its new logo. The website will include well known databases of the WBC-INCO.NET platform; however it will have a more thematic approach based on RTDI issues of relevance for the region. Information disseminated will also include interviews, different analytical papers etc. The Platform will approximately start by June/July. Furthermore, monthly thematic newsletter will be prepared and disseminated. The platform will be maintained in close cooperation with the Danube-INCO.NET website.

Croatia (Damir Jelacic)

Croatia reported on their international R&I activities and activities related EUREKA and EUROSTAR programmes.

Czech Republic (Pavĺina Janova)

A new government was formed in the Czech Republic. Cooperation in knowledge exchange and research infrastructure takes place also with WBCs.

Germany(Ulrike Kunze)

Germany reported on 3 open calls addressing the Danube region.

Hungary (Bela Kardon)

Bela Kardon informed that the structural funds were used to support cooperation with WBCs in the previous programming period. The National Research Development and Innovation Office (NKFIH) was launched on 1 January 2015 in which almost all R&I funds are integrated representing a huge amount of resources.

Slovenia (Slavi Krusic)

Slovenia referred to several ongoing bilateral cooperation and joint board meetings and more are to take place before the end of the year 2015.

CEI: Central European Initiative (Sergiu Porcescu)

The representative of CEI referred to ongoing activities at both at CEI level and the Scientific Institutes in Trieste to promote and support cooperation with institutes and scientists from the WBCs. in particular, CEI organized very successful Workshop on Widening Programme and on Marie-Sklodowska Curie grants. all this confirms relevance of establishing a specific support programme on Network of Excellence for and with the WBCs (PRAISE programme).

DTP: Danube Transnational Programme (Marius-Valentin Niculae)

The representative of DTP presented the programme, which is one of the successors of the Southeast Europe Programme. The kick-off meeting will be held on 21st September and the first call will be launched in October 2015.

The programme will invest **EUR 202.3 million** from **ERDF** and **EUR 19.8 million** from **IPA II** for transnational projects in the Danube basin territory. Eligible partners will, therefore, come from 9 EU countries - **Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Germany** (only Baden-Württemberg and Bayern), **Hungary, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia**; and 5 non-EU countries - **Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Republic of Moldova, Montenegro, Serbia, and some parts of Ukraine**. The programme will focus on certain aspects of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region, such as energy, governance and innovation. Participants agreed that the programme should be presented in more details at the next meeting.

EUSDR PA7 (Viktor Nedovic)

Mr Nedovic expressed his gratitude to Miroslav Veskovic for his excellent work in PA coordination which he will now take over following Dr Veskovic's assignment of special advisor to DG of JRC. At the Steering Group meeting of Priority Area 7 in Bratislava early June 2015, the DRRIF feasibility study was presented in almost final form. The aim is to have it adopted by voting on 19th June although DRRIF is to some extent feasible it does not offer an ideal solution. Reference was also made to synergy with other programmes:

- DTP which was presented and its evaluation criteria will be connected $\frac{3}{4}$ to EUSDR PA7 priorities
- possibilities to have special regional call under COST programme running under H2020: Danube countries should belong to special targeted countries of COST except for Austria, BW and Bavaria, with a dedicated budget
- involvement of PA7 in the preparations of the Ulm Annual Forum where innovation will be one of the main topics

At the Annual Forum in Ulm end of October a meeting of ministers responsible for EU funds will be held.

UNESCO (Marie Prchalová)

UNESCO informed about actions focusing on appropriate green technologies and methods in some countries and they facilitate to integrate scientific trainings and research at universities. They used sustainable managements of traditional resources and consider important the mobilization of resources.

Statistical surveys will be available online and dissemination list should be updated. Moreover strengthening science media is an important initiative.

Djuro Kutlaca (Institute Mihajlo Pupin, Serbia) highlighted the importance of UNESCO's work in improving S&T statistics of non-EU MSs though it is not harmonized with the EUROSTAT methodology.

9th June 2015

I. Latvian Presidency (Inga Jekabsone)

The representative of the Latvian Presidency presented the Presidency's overall priorities during its term: competitive Europe, digital Europe and engaged Europe. With respect to research and innovation, the Latvian Presidency reported on the fruitful debates within the Competitiveness Council and notably:

- The policy debate on 3rd March was about fostering innovation, which unlocks Europe's potential for growth in the European Research Area and Europe's digital potential.
- On 29th May the Council adopted conclusions on the European Research Area Roadmap 2015-2020 and the review of the European Research Area advisory structure and issued a conclusion on an open, data-intensive and network research as a driver for faster and wider innovation

The EC (Tania Friederichs) thanked for the comprehensive summary of the presidency's priorities and achievements: she highlighted the important message that ERA remained high on the political agenda and important that also WBCs would take actions in line with ERA and contribute to the ERA Roadmap.

Serbia (Viktor Nedovic) added that the associated countries are also invited to take part in ERA roadmap exercise and Montenegro informed will prepare a regional roadmap.

II. Participation of WBCs in H2020 (Tania Friederichs)

The EC shared the preliminary statistics on the participation of WBCs in H2020 compared to FP7 but stressed that more statistical data is necessary and further analysis before a thorough assessment on participation in first period of H2020 can be made. Preliminary results do, however, suggest that:

- overall participation rate is very low;
- in particular participation of Industry/SMEs; and
- success in Scientific Excellence Pillar (ERC and Marie Curie Grants), except for Serbia.

EC encouraged to networking opportunities in which stronger partners could take entities from Western Balkan in their projects. This was particularly relevant in macro-regional context and more particularly Adriatic-Ionian Region as mentioned before. The EC underlined that centers of excellence should be put on the map with defined priorities, because one of the weaknesses identified is that all countries cannot be good in many fields. In this context, EC underlined importance to implement the Regional Strategy on Research, for Innovation (WISE) and as a matter of priority prepare an IPA action for pillar aiming at reinforcing Centers of Excellence

through Networking with well-established institutes and centers, as presented by the CEI (PRAISE), for example.

The representative of Serbia (Viktor Nedovic) asked to include Croatia and Slovenia in such presentations for comparative analyses and reference points.

As regards the participation of WBCs and their success, Albania asked whether a database of WBCs coordinators and participants do exist. Representative of FYROM confirmed that the ERA-NET + Balkan project set up such database which should be probably updated; however it should be used and promoted.

The issue of national support instruments was also discussed. Serbia suggested that WISE should fund ERC grantees that are evaluated as excellent but do not receive H2020 funding due to lack of funding. Or, as in case of Croatia and Serbia in the past and still available in Montenegro and Slovenia, topping up funding should be granted as an incentive and reward to H2020 applicants.

On the possibility of dedicated calls, as suggested by several WBCs, COST mentioned that it has a tool to facilitate the participation of the low-performing countries to encouraging those countries with financial opportunities: perhaps similar rule could be implemented in H2020. Representative of COST (Orsolya Tóth) confirmed that 50% of funding shall be received by low performing countries. It was explained that such calls do not exist in H2020 anymore, however, according to FYR of Macedonia the participation of WBCs could be reinforced through those calls in which the participation of third countries represents added value. However, the EC underlined that dedicated calls are not appropriate given association status. Moreover, for certain calls under energy efficiency, reference was made to relevance for candidate and potential candidate countries and this did not result in specific proposals. For EC it was equally important to take actions at national level aiming at strengthening capacity on R&I, in line with ERA actions and Innovation Union.

III. COST (Orsolya Tóth)

Representative of COST delivered a concise presentation on COST including its priorities, application procedure and open opportunities. COST strategies contain excellence and inclusiveness policy besides openness. Excellence and inclusiveness policy encourages excellence researchers to join to COST actions from less intensive research countries. It was also mentioned that Croatia, Serbia, and Slovenia are the most active SP members. It is a positive sign too that participation of WBC researchers increase continuously.

Albania asked why it was the only WBC still not to be a COST member. It was agreed that EC would verify this and come back to Albania bilaterally.

Serbia (Viktor Nedovic) noted that last year the second call was not published and raised a question on the possibility of increasing the number of approved projects or a third call this year; COST representative was not aware of this.

Miroslav Veskovíc from JRC added that COST actions could be interesting for the Danube Region including WBCs with regard to capacity building for smart specialization strategy and a targeted network could be set up.

The representative of the DANUBE-INCO.NET (Elke Dall) noted that a targeted network already exist for research administrators and within this framework the organization of a training school for inclusiveness countries as defined by the COST association is planned (WBC are included). The representatives should channel in ideas on the needs of administrations with this respect.

IV. EIT: European Institute of Innovation and Technology (Martin Kern)

Martin KERN, Director A.i. presented EIT as an independent EU institute with a special focus on Knowledge and Innovation Communities (KICs). He explained rationale of the Institute aiming at competitiveness and sustainable economic growth in Europe by promoting and strengthening synergies and cooperation between businesses, education institutions and research organizations and stimulating entrepreneurship by bringing researchers and academia together. Given that WBCs are associated to Horizon 2020 they also contribute to the EITs budget. It is thus high time that entities from WBCs start applying and benefiting from KICs. Although KICS are autonomous, he strongly encouraged WBCs to study the calls which include many hands on options by bringing practical skills and entrepreneurship, education and training together provided there is excellence. He mentioned EIT Regional Innovation Scheme (RIS) which could be of special interest for WBCs. This programme will start in 2016 and there is a financial scheme for that.

Another opportunity of cooperation exists at the level of EIT since currently there is no staff from WBCs therefore cooperation with relevant innovation organizations is not sufficient either.

In addition, structural change is needed too so that also the universities and academia acquire and offer entrepreneurial knowledge.

In conclusion, the Director really made a strong plea towards WBCs and gave EIT's full support.

Béla Kardon added that KICs could be a good opportunity for the increased involvement of WBC SMEs in H2020. The EIT confirmed that this was a good way to raise awareness.

Albania inquired about the opportunities for the non-Member States. EIT confirmed that there are opportunities for them as well and even some good practices could be transferred to WBCs. It was added that scholarships are also available and KIC added value activities can be funded up to 100% but there is also a complementary funding.

In reply to the inquiry raised by UNESCO which focuses on transboundary cooperation i.e. in biosphere areas, the representative of EIT affirmed that various programmes and activities of KICs can be joined solely if there is an added value. Thus the UNESCO offices could also join.

V. DANUBE-INCO.NET (Elke Dall)

The presentation of the project had a special focus on WBC related activities. The project coordinator informed that the project aims at being even more inclusive through increased communication means notably website and updated databases and mapping and other analytical works.

VI. CEI PRAISE (Sergiu Porcescu)

The representative of the CEI referred to intervention the first day and confirmed that CEI is available for further help and support for institutes and researchers from the WBCs. From what he had heard, in particular first H2020 assessment, he was convinced that the PRAISE project would really be of great support to the WBCs and these pilot projects could serve as a starting point for H2020 consortium membership.

VII. BSEC: Black Sea Economic Cooperation (Bratislav Dordevic)

The representative of BSEC welcomed very much participation in SP as this was informative and useful for cooperation in his organization grouping Black Sea Countries which included also Danube countries as well as SP WBC members (Albania, Serbia, Ukraine, Moldova and Turkey). He welcomed in particular open spirit of SP and asked for similar support from the EC for his organization.

VIII. RCC: Regional Cooperation Council (Mimika Loshi)

The representative of the RCC informed Members that the organization will launch very soon call for proposals for non-profit organizations to raise awareness on SEE2020 Strategy and monitoring SEE2020 for non-profit organizations, RCC dimension coordinators and similar.

RCC's main focus is the coordination of SEE2020 and monitoring its implementation; in this endeavor RCC is working closely with OECD to collect quantitative and qualitative indicators. The representative of the RCC informed the members of the Steering Platform that SEEDS or SEE2020 development scoreboards are available on the RCC's website. South East Europe Development Scoreboard or SEEDS is the RCC's web-based platform showing how the region of South East Europe, and its individual economies, is faring in achieving the SEE 2020 Strategy targets and objectives. It consists of: SEE 2020 Progress Tracker, Balkan Opinion Barometer, and Balkan Business Barometer. The indicators from all 7 economies can be found on the web platform and if there is missing information it can be also considered as an indicator. The representative of RCC noted that the information will be tracked down each year from now on

EC regretted that Barometer, in particular on Business Opinion, did not include any indicator on investment in research or importance for business to get support for R&I.

The RCC was also very pleased with work achieved in SP Platform and committed to further support in one way or another, i.e. through WISE if it is formally established (awaiting meeting of 3rd July in Zagreb); on ad hoc basis or any other form/institutional way to bring WBCs together aiming at strengthening R&I and in turn competitiveness and economic growth.

IX. Closing remarks and next steps

The EC (Tania Friederichs) welcomed the many new cooperation opportunities that had been presented and notably the strong commitment from the EIT and the different Macro-Regional groups and the mapping on Danube initiatives and actions all offering interesting perspectives for the WBCs even for those who are not a Danube country. For the later she thanked in particular the Danube-INCO.NET coordinator and partners who with a bit of creativity helped to get all WBCs around same table and putting the interesting agenda together. The first, although preliminary, assessment on H2020 participation, was also useful and should motivate all of us continue and strengthen or rather focus more the efforts.

All this confirmed once more usefulness of SP Platform and thus important to keep this option of back-to-back meetings with the Danube-INCO.NET, at least pending other more sustainable solutions and on this it was strongly hoped that if WISE was formally and legally established, there would be room and financing for regular WBC SP meetings. Alternatively, the proposed Policy Support Facility in the Horizon 2020 WP 2016-2017 under Challenge 6, subject to adoption and publication (and good proposals), will certainly also offer opportunities to meet at WBC/Regional level on Research and Innovation. The EC took note that members consider the Steering Platform also as good opportunity for both the Member States as the WBCs to find partners and form project consortia.

Montenegro (Darko Petrusic) closed the session with the remarks that it was a successful Steering Platform meeting focusing on common issues and joint actions.

Next meeting and activities

As to date for the next meeting, no concrete proposal could be made as there has not been an opportunity to discuss with upcoming Presidencies (Luxemburg and Slovak Republic) but for sure another meeting should and will take place in less than a year from year.

EC mentioned that a Workshop to be organized in Brussels with support from DG NEAR on a still to be identified acquis topic will also be another opportunity to meet. EC invited WBCs to inform EC, through Danube-INCO.NET communication tools, which topic they would like to see discussed. Input is awaited by beginning of August so that preparations, to hold meeting in November 2015 (date to be specified), can start.