

FINAL

**MINUTES OF THE STEERING PLATFORM MEETING ON RESEARCH FOR THE
WESTERN BALKAN COUNTRIES**

Thessaloniki / Greece (October 29, 2007)

The minutes were adopted at the Steering Platform Meeting in Ljubljana / Slovenia
(June 13, 2008) with one amendment

Conference organiser

General Secretariat for Research and Technology,
Greek Ministry of Development

Venue

Thessaloniki, 29 October 2007, Mediterranean Palace Hotel

List of Participants

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Thessaloniki - Monday October 29, 2007

Agenda	
Meeting of Steering Platform on Research for Western Balkan Countries Thessaloniki, 29 October 2007 Venue: Mediterranean Palace Hotel (3, Salaminos & Karatassou st., Thessaloniki)	
9:30 - 10:15	Opening statements by: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Greek official (Secretary General)- Portuguese Presidency (tbc)- European Commission- Representative from WBC
10:15 – 10:30	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Approval of the Agenda- Approval of the Minutes of the last Steering Platform Meeting (Berlin, 29 March 2007)
10:30 – 11:15	What has been done since March 2007 <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Information by European Commission- Information by Information Office of the Steering Platform- Information by the Western Balkan Countries
11:15 - 11:30	Coffee break
11:30 – 12:45	Presentation of IPA and Research: presentation by each WBC what they have programmed; difficulties encountered? Need for improvements?
12:45 – 14:00	Lunch
14:00 – 14:30	Introduction to the Upcoming WBC INCO-NET Consequences for the Steering Platform and its Guidelines
14:30 – 15:30	Approval of the Guidelines for the Functioning of the Steering Platform
15:30 – 16:00	Presentation of the SEE-ERA-NET White Paper and Joint Action Plan
16:00 – 16:15	Developing mobility policy guidelines for the WBC: The Web-MOB project results
	Information Exchange with Observers
16:15 – 16:45	Announcement of the next Steering Platform Meeting/AOB/Closing Remarks
16:45 – 17:15	

09:30 – BEGINNING OF THE MEETING

CHAIR: CHRISTOS VASILAKOS (Permanent Representation of Greece to the EU)
Co-Chair: ALESSANDRO DAMIANI (European Commission)

1. Welcome and introduction – Dr. Nikos Sidiropoulos (GSRT- Conference organiser)

On behalf of **Ioannis Tsoukalas**, Secretary General for Research and Technology, **Nikos Sidiropoulos** (GSRT, Greece) welcomed the participants to the Meeting of the Steering Platform on Research for the Western Balkan Countries and thanked them for their participation.

Christos Vasilakos (Permanent Representation of Greece to the EU) also welcomed the participants to the meeting and started his speech, saying that now it is the right time to raise up all the proposals concerning the role of the Western Balkan Region to the European Research Area.

Mr. Vasilakos went on referring to the efforts made by the European Union on the development of Research and Innovation at the Western Balkan Area and pointed out that Science, Innovation and Technological Development seem to be an essential tool for the economic stabilization and growth in the WBC. Therefore he suggested to all the participants to consider actions to integrate the WBC into the European Research Area and to stimulate R&D in the region. He assures that these priorities are also on the Greek political agenda.

Alessandro Damiani (European Commission) welcomed the participants and thanked the General Secretary for Research and Technology of the Greek Ministry of Development for the organization of the Steering Platform and the Steering Board Meetings in the symbolically and historically so important town of Thessaloniki. He highlighted the association to FP7 which has progressed since the last meeting in Berlin and the Green Paper which was issued in April. Although the international cooperation part is not particularly developed, it sets the scene and shows the emphasis on the need to push for tighter cooperation. The EC will work on an international cooperation strategy policy paper (available early in the 2nd semester of 2008) and invite the participants to contribute. Furthermore, he mentioned the CREST Working Party in Internationalisation of S&T which issued a report and recommendations relevant for the platform.

The first calls of FP7 showed a positive performance in terms of submissions, but strengths, weaknesses, success rates and participation need to be analysed closely. Mr Damiani also mentioned the submission of the WBC-INCO.NET project and announced that the decisions on this very relevant project will be taken within a month. The experience gathered around the table will be of high importance, organisational support and background structures for the Steering Platform will be available and provide a stronger organisational basis.

The Slovenian presidency, starting on 1.1.2008 (same as the WBC-INCO.NET) will also give a further strong push to this issue but the impetus needs to be maintained also throughout the Chairmanship of other presidencies. EU27 and the WBC need to be equally represented.

Christos Vasilakos suggested that the participants should discuss, at a next future meeting, the outcome of the first call of the International Co-operation Actions in order to confirm the participation of the Western Balkan Countries and maybe to propose some further actions.

2. Opening statements

Mr Vasilakos asked, by alphabetical order, the representatives from the Western Balkan countries to briefly present the situation in their countries.

ALBANIA

Gjergji Gjinko (Ministry of Education and Science of Albania) informed the participants about the work and the progress that has been made in this area during this year. He referred to:

- The high importance given to the participation in FP7 (use of IPA/CARDS) and expectations for a Memorandum of Understanding before the end of the year.
- Presentations, training and dissemination activities carried out in the country, awareness raising activities and the visit of Commissioner Potocnik
- New law on higher education and a master plan setting new university standards. Implementation of Bologna (one article being still under discussion)
- The approval from the Albanian Government of a new fund of excellence for the participation of young talented researchers and excellent students for the development of research (studies, publication and achievements in the scientific world)
- A brain drain programme providing additional payments to students with a Master Degree to work in administration in order to enhance the capacity for European integration.
- A programme to improve infrastructure together with Worldbank (focused on laboratories).

Mr. Gjinko also invited the participants for a future meeting to Tirana.

CROATIA

Damir Jelcic (Ministry of Science, Education and Sports of Croatia) said that the Steering Platform is fully supported by Croatia and an effort to increase the number of Croatian scientists, concerning their participation in projects of the FP7 in the future, is also made in Croatia. Positive results from conferences and the Steering Platform Meetings are expected. There is a need, on behalf of Croatia, to increase the level of co-operation and participation in the projects.

FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA

Jovanka Tuteska (Ministry of Education and Science of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) pointed out that:

- ✓ They are satisfied by their country's participation in different programmes (more than 40 projects in FP6 gained 6.2 mio euro for implementation)
- ✓ They give great importance to Steering Platform Meetings
- ✓ They expect to be funded by IPA for their participation to FP7, the Memorandum of Understanding is already signed
- ✓ Furthermore, capacity building activities and ongoing coordination and support actions raise the expectation that participation in FP7 will be higher than in FP6.

MONTENEGRO

Slobodanka Koprivica (Ministry of Education and Science of Montenegro) said that they will do their best to increase the participation from Montenegro in programmes of the European Community as participation has been rather poor till now.

SERBIA

Viktor Nedovic (Ministry of Science of the Republic of Serbia) informed the participants that a new government has been formed in Serbia since May 2007 transforming the former »Ministry of Science and Environmental Protection« to the »Ministry of Science«. Since that time they have been doing a lot of activities to increase communication with other Western Balkan Countries as well as the participation from Serbia in the FP7 programme.

Remarks on the Agenda and Participation

As a next point, several remarks on the agenda, participation and minutes were discussed.

Gjergji Gjinko supported that the National NCP/FP7 Co-ordinators should be permanent participants to the Steering Platform Meetings.

Alessandro Damiani said that FP7 should not be over-valued and the main emphasis given to policy exchange and policy orientations, including the issues such as the institutional capacity building and regional co-operation towards that direction.

Anneliese Stoklaska suggested that the members of the Platform (countries) nominate two key persons as representatives and it therefore depends on the national priority to decide upon the level of participation.

Fatih Sahin (TUBITAK) had a remark to make on the minutes written down by Erika Rost (Federal Ministry of Education and Research of Germany), concerning the previous Steering Platform Meeting held in Berlin. In particular, on page 4 (paragraph 4), the word most should replace the word all in the phrase "Turkey signed cooperation agreements with all Western Balkan Countries".

On page 3, Slovenia has to be exchanged with Serbia in the phrase »No bilateral agreements are existing in S&T, except with Serbia.«.

On page 6 the term »UNMIK« has to be added in the topics for studies: »(Barriers of transnational mobility programmes; Situation of Higher education and S&T in Kosovo/UNMIK, State of innovation infrastructures in the Western Balkan countries). Ms. Adriana Gjonaj has to be added to the list of participants.

Nikos Sidiropoulos suggested that the participants should write down their comments and provide them to **Erika Rost** in order to produce the final minutes of the Meeting in Berlin.

3. What has been done since March 2007

EUROPEAN COMMISSION

Tania Friederichs (European Commission) mentioned the direct and indirect results of the previous Steering Platform Meeting in Berlin. She said that the main objectives have been achieved. There are four countries associated in FP7 (three of them are from the Western Balkan region and the other one is Turkey). According to Commissioner Potocnik, as she said, a strategy was needed because of the existence and ceremony of the Western Balkan Platform. This strategy has been

formed in order to make conditions and offers for association to FP7 so interesting that the Western Balkan countries could not refuse them. There is now also a formal request from Albania to associate to FP7. She assured the participants can count on Montenegro and Albania to be associated countries as of January 2008.

A very important Meeting took place in Bosnia & Herzegovina. It is expected from the European Commission that Bosnia & Herzegovina will also participate in the FP7 programme. They have analyzed the work programmes into different thematic areas and she suggested that next time they should take as a specific issue the participation of the Balkan countries in the FP7 programme and see to what extent as well as in which areas participants have submitted proposals and in what areas they have been successful (if not having been successful, what could be done collectively in order to achieve that). She gave emphasis on the importance of regional integration and team work. DG Research and others shall consider WBC issues and therefore very important to communicate the priorities.

An effort was made to strengthen the dimension of the potential candidate countries in the Green Paper (research as tool for integration), but the fact that there is no reference to potential candidate countries is very disappointing.

Targeted calls are not enough and SICAs cannot be aimed at. But DG Enlargement shall be taken on board, assessing the situation and using the multi-regional dimension of IPA e.g for calls for funding of summer schools and mobility or thelike..

Anneliese Stoklaska emphasised that:

- Lot of progress has been made in the field of research during the last year and the Steering Platform will play an important role in the future
- Stability Pact / Regional Cooperation Council has research and science included in its activities.
- The SEE-ERA.NET White Paper shall play a role also in the Green Paper discussion and feed the platform directly and indirectly.

Furthermore she added that the Slovenian presidency will focus on the EU-Balkan cooperation, will put the Steering Platform on the inherited agenda and shall propose presidency conclusions. WBC as an important part for the European Research Area shall be acknowledged in the Competitiveness Council. Discussions in the Research Working Party are expected.

INFORMATION OFFICE OF THE STEERING PLATFORM

Elke Dall (Centre for Social Innovation – Information Office of the Steering Platform on Research for Western Balkan Countries) prepared a short presentation including information on what had been done during the last six months. She informed the participants that a book on Science & Technology for the Western Balkan Countries will be published in early 2008 and that they are in the process of producing the fall/winter issue of the see-science.eu Journal. On the main page of that book there will be an article about the Steering Platform Meeting in Thessaloniki.

Then, she referred to two thematic reports which concern the following issues:

- The first report, which was distributed to the participants, covered Innovation infrastructures (such as clusters, Technology Innovation Centres, incubators etc) in all the Western Balkan Countries.
- The second report, which was also distributed to the participants, had been prepared by the Austrian Research Promotion Agency which deals with mobility issues between the Western Balkan Countries and the European Research Area. The report contains elements on the last months and has to do with the European Mobility Strategy, summarizing main inhibitory factors concerning mobility among regions, etc..

Both reports/deliverables are available on the internet (<http://see-science.eu> Document Service).

Elke Dall informed the participants that she and her colleagues were in the process of producing another thematic report dealing with the situation of Higher Education, Science & Technology in UNMIK/Kosovo, which is something very important, as she said. It will be available on their web-site see-science.eu.

She continued saying that they have submitted a position concerning the Green Paper consultation. Then a slide was shown with information about the Conference of the Future of Science & Technology in Europe which will take place in Lisboa/Portugal in October 2008. During that Conference, they will raise the point of the Western Balkan Countries in a specific session on International Co-operation.

WBC ACTIVITIES

SERBIA

Viktor Nedovic (Ministry of Science of the Republic of Serbia) informed that the Ministry of Serbia, in the frame of the FP7 programme activities, wishes to give researchers the possibility to join in actions. Serbian researchers are very interested to enforce their activities in the other Western Balkan Countries and the EC countries. The REGPOT-Calls were a great success for Serbia (in REGPOT-3 from the 11 selected proposals there are 7 from Serbian institutions).

Concerning the dissemination of the information about FP7, the Serbian Minister organized information events in June 2007 with Joint Research Centres.

Concerning the preparation of the next activities of Steering Platform, another Meeting took place in the Ministry of Science of Serbia. There, information about activities of the WBC-Inco.net project was exchanged.

About SEE-ERA.NET pilot joint call and the national funding of SEE-ERA.NET activities, he informed the participants that they had finished with the procedure of contracts and funding.

MONTENEGRO

Slobodanka Koprivica (Ministry of Education and Science of Montenegro) referred to the changes in Montenegro since last meeting in Berlin (March 2007). She mentioned that the Stabilization and Association agreement between the EU and Montenegro was signed on 15 October 2007. That agreement will probably come into force after two months. It is the first involvement on behalf of Montenegro to join the EU. Currently drafting of the National Plan for Integration is ongoing in all ministries. Harmonisation with the aquis is currently an important topic.

Fifty teams from Montenegro participated in the SEE-ERA.NET Pilot Joint Call Proposals and six research teams from Montenegro are involved in approved projects of the Pilot Joint Call.

She also referred to the procedure, on behalf of Montenegro, of signing twenty bilateral agreements. Some of them concern the Balkan Countries and SEE-ERA.NET partner countries. There are also bilateral projects with Greece. The funding of national adoption procedure will have ended by the end of 2007.

Regarding the FP7, they have established an NCP network for different thematic areas of FP7 and have appointed a national co-ordinator on FP7. A workshop on Mobility was organized in Podgoriça in September.

Although Montenegro's participation in FP7 was limited, they have announced 22 projects.

Montenegro is also full member in the NATO Science for Peace programme and has one leading project.

Another important issue mentioned was the Strategy for the Development of SMEs in Montenegro which provides additional support to SMEs for their participation in European programmes such as the FP7 and CIP (Competitiveness and Innovation programme).

FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA

Jovanka Tuteska (Ministry of Education and Science of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) referred in her short presentation to:

- 3 important laws are currently in the process of finalization:
 - The law of Higher Education, the law for Science and Research as well as the law on Technological Development.
- The plan for establishing the new Council of Science. As a country, they have new national co-ordinators for each science area.
- A bilateral agreement with Austria was signed in July

She also informed the participants that they had to make decisions on the financial support of some projects of SEE-ERA.NET and FP7.

Katerina Sumanovska (Ministry of Education and Science of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) referred to the Meeting which took place in Ohrid and said that their participation in the programmes on medicine will be active, mentioning their success in the SEE-ERA.NET regional call as well as the importance of the SEE-ERA.NET Project. The Ministry has established a unit of European integration and an IPA unit and they are in the process of making an Agency for EU Programmes.

Mr Vasilakos pointed out that the Workshop in Ohrid was successfully organized and asked if the Council for Science had the most significant role to Research & Development or if there was another unit for making decisions.

Jovanka Tuteska answered saying that the responsible body for making decisions is the Council for Science because it deals with research projects, NCPs, groups of research.

CROATIA

Damir Jelacic said that Croatia associated last year and has been involved in more than sixty FP6 projects. They also wish to increase the number of participation in FP7 – but may not be a success in the first year. They have covered all the areas with the NCPs and the Programme Committee Members. He said that scientists who have been positively evaluated for their proposals, can be financially supported by the Croatian Ministry. He referred to the workshop events that have taken place in Croatia, thanking the European Commission for having supported the Info days workshops. They are prepared to participate in WBC-INCO.NET next year. Croatia is involved in about seventy actions concerning COST as well as in EUREKA (where they are participating in approximately thirty actions), aiming at the promotion and increase of the international co-operation.

ALBANIA

Edmond Agolli (Ministry of Education and Science of Albania) mentioned that the Albanian Ministry concerning the Network established for Albania's ERA integration, had signed two agreements with Turkey and Poland and is expecting the implementation of a signed agreement with Austria. He also referred to the co-operation between Albania and UNESCO and said that they have applied for their proposal on modernization of statistics and development of the research sector which is being prepared, to be funded by UNESCO.

4. Presentation of IPA and Research

Tania Friederichs pointed out that it is important that the participants keep each other informed. The DG Enlargement, absent from that meeting, should be pressed to retain some of the projects proposed by the participants. Concerning DG Enlargement, research has not been taken as an important item yet, there should be pressure to fund research capacity building (also in the light to comply with acquis). Tania wanted to be informed about official projects and the existing obstacles, if any. Research Capacity building, very important to research, can be financed. Participants could pay part of their financial contribution for FP7.

Mr Vasilakos asked the representatives of the Platform Members:

- Which are the difficulties
- Their proposals for improvements

He also asked the participants if they were satisfied from the actions from both of the European Commission and the European Council.

ALBANIA

Gjergji Gjinko referred to:

- The importance of asking and giving the deadlines for more activities in the Western Balkan Countries
- The assistance offered to Albania by different donors
- UNESCO and its experience in Research and Education as well as the link with Albania
- The discussion of making some activity with UNESCO in regards to statistics
- Albania's effort to involve the new centres in the universities and orientate the universities to do more research
- Education programmes to universities and some money they have succeeded in getting for research courses in universities

Mr Vasilakos informed that the Competitives Council is going to adopt communication for the synchronization of the universities.

CROATIA

Damir Jelcic gave a presentation on IPA and research experience of Croatia, as the person in charge could unfortunately not attend the meeting.

The main objectives are

1) to build technology transfer capacities of higher education institutions and public research organisations – contribute to a sustainable development and industry competitiveness with start-up support services.

Mr. Jelcic mentioned that the technology transfer and support services for knowledge-based start-ups includes two operations: a. building entrepreneurial and intellectual property management skills in public institutions and b. creation and growth of technology and knowledge-based spin-offs in biosciences/biotechnology.

Beneficiary is MSES, who will give grants for higher education institutions and research organisations. A CARDS project on intellectual property rights already supports nine bio-centers which are candidates for the grant scheme by the Science and Innovation Investment Fund

2) Bio-Center

Procurement contracts are planned in Zagreb and ten regions lagging behind (which shall be linked to the national center). Beneficiary for this activity is BICRO.

The operations might encounter some difficulties such as

- approval of a grant scheme by EC (question of absorption capacity, question of experience, etc.)

FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA

Katerina Sumanovska/Jovanka Tuteska referred to:

- A budget of about 350.000 euros concerning FP7 for 2008, a budget of about 550.000 Euros for 2009 and further increase till 2013
- The priorities for Human Resources Development Programme about Education & Science and employment
- An IPA unit established in the Ministry of Education and Science of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

MONTENEGRO

Slobodanka Koprivica and Tatjana Knezevic mentioned that Montenegro can't count on IPA funds at the time being and referred to the more important issues than Science for Montenegro such as Public administration, Agriculture, Environmental protection, etc.

Montenegro can count on IPA 2009/2010 for possible funds for research.

Some activities by the University of Montenegro were not approved, the multi-annual planning document mentions integration into ERA only in general terms.

SERBIA

Viktor Nedovic referred to Serbia's participation in IPA activities and good experiences with CARDS programming. In 2007 several infrastructure projects were launched without success. More transparent feedback on why the proposals were not supported would be requested.

Susana Vojinovic gave a presentation on IPA activities and plans for the next steps.

Strategic priorities and Objectives:

Component 1. Transition assistance and Institutional Building

Objective

- The main objective of the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) is to help Serbia face the challenges of European integration.

a. Socio economic Requirements (Priorities)

- Further development local-regional business support structures
- Improving Infrastructure Information and Communication technologies

b. European Standards (Priority)

- Supporting the development and implementation of other strategies and policies

Research - Planned project activities

- Financial contribution for the participation in the 7th EU Framework Programme for Research and Development, NCP support, infrastructure and equipment

Component 2. Cross Border Cooperation

Objective

- Supporting initiatives in the area of education, research and employment generation

Anneliese Stoklaska mentioned that it might be very helpful to involve ESRI, Commission of Regions, etc. and raise awareness. FP5 initiatives on Centres of Excellence was regarded as successful, mapping and making the access easier, showing possibilities to cooperation is important. She also referred to the award on infrastructure sponsoring organised by the Slovenian Ministry.

Mr Vasilakos pointed out the works about ESRI and that, in his opinion, it is a good idea to enhance the participation of the Western Balkan Countries in the large scale of European research infrastructures and the development of the Roadmap for the next 15 years.

Fatih Sahin referred to some previous Programme Committee Meetings for Regions of Knowledge and Research Potential as well as the countries participated in those Meetings (Croatia, Bulgaria, Germany, U.K.). A position paper to mention IPA after Structural Funds in the Workprogramme was also prepared, the issue of co-financing of actions for those that don't receive Structural Funds was raised.

Slavi Krusic referred to the main issues concerning Slovenian Presidency and infrastructure such as:

- Discussion of the Green Paper under the Presidency
- Different proposals to activities for the European Research infrastructure
- The integration of the Western Balkan Countries into the ERA
- The role of SMEs to Research infrastructure

They are trying to continue the German Presidency efforts for the use of the structural funds, in order to create a funding base for the future co-operation in FP7.

Mr Vasilakos pointed out that Slovenia has the chair for the regional issues.

Lora Pavlova mentioned that Bulgaria had recently finalized the negotiation with the European Commission, all operational programmes are finalized and already several measures have been implemented at national level under several evaluation programmes. What should be done at national level from each Ministry and other organizations is to push on the highest possible level the research related activity and be put as a priority. They will spend a large amount of money for Research Infrastructure. The absorption capacity is very low in Bulgaria as well as in the new Member States.

The amount they intend to spend will concern not only research infrastructure but also innovation infrastructure. Also, the money will be allocated mainly at national level in their national development.

Edmond Agolli referred to what they have done during the last two years as IPA is concerned:

➤ In 2006 they did not do anything about IPA. In 2007 they have had a very good answer from the IPA, the Albanian Minister has been given the authorities to fund the fee they have to pay concerning FP7. For 2008 they plan to:

1. Increase the capacity building, 2. Make improvements in their universities

Alessandro Damiani, as a conclusion, added that the discussion was very rich on that point of the agenda and it would help in improving things within the Commission. He mentioned cases, such as:

- cases of Science & Technology not being put forward as a priority under IPA instruments,
- cases where Science & Technology has not been positively received,
- cases that it has not been translated into (adequate) projects,
- cases of proposed good projects and successful outcomes

In his opinion, it would be useful to have a more scientifically sound, overall picture. Maybe the Information Office could help in it.

Infrastructure was at the centre of the discussion but Institutional capacity is also important. Emphasis should also be given, within the terms of capacity building, to infrastructure, facilities and equipment that makes the capacity of Research, Science & Technology production possible on a national scale. Active membership in ESFRI is relevant, the focus should not be on the world class level but steady enhancement.

Tania Friederichs said that the difficulty is in the project and the submission of the projects and all countries have done all their best to plan it. The good projects have to comply with the objectives of IPA. Each country has an obligation, as far as their integration to the Union, to design a research policy. She suggested that two things should be done by the participants:

- to establish a contact point that links between IPA and Research
- to have a working meeting of the synergy between FP7 and IPA
- to look at the Progress Reports being published on November 6 which refer to the development of an integrated research policy

(**Christos Vasilakos** thanked the participants for their participation and contribution to that successful and fruitful Meeting. For certain important reasons beyond his will he had to leave the meeting earlier and was replaced in the chair by Nikos Sidiropoulos)

5. Introduction to the Upcoming WBC INCO-NET

Elke Dall mentioned that:

- ZSI has submitted everything in time and received all the necessary signatures to see how the negotiations will proceed

Next steps to work on:

- The consortium agreement
- Kick-off meeting: already discussed with the Slovenian colleagues: Ljubljana-Slovenia (February 1st 2008)

Elke Dall also gave a presentation on the WBC INCO-NET partners and its workpackages as well.

WBC-INCO.NET Workpackages:

- WP1 - European and Regional Dialogue (BMWf)
- WP2 - Priority Setting (PT-DLR)
- WP3 - Monitoring and Analysis of S&T Cooperation (MHEST)
- WP4 - Building Capacities (GSRT)
- WP5 - Facilitating Networking and Increase Participation in FP7 (MSEP)
- WP6 - Project Management (ZSI)
- WP7 - Dissemination (ZSI)

Christian Gollubits (BMW – Austrian Federal Ministry of Science and Research), as the WP1 Leader, gave a presentation on the objectives, tasks and deliverables of WP1.

6. Approval of the Guidelines for the Functioning of the Steering Platform

During the presentation on the Guidelines for the functioning of the Steering Platform on Research for the Western Balkan Countries, corrections were made by the participants before the approval of the Guidelines for the Functioning of the Steering Platform.

Mr Sidiropoulos expressed his willingness to offer the Western Balkan Countries the opportunity to decide, after that Meeting, the Co-Chair for the next meeting of the Steering Platform. In his opinion, the participants will find the way to the selection of the Co-Chair.

The paragraph in the Guidelines concerning Information and Reporting was not changed at all.

Concerning the paragraph about the Agenda, **Mr Damiani**, referring to an earlier point of the discussion, said it should be up to the members to propose items and not necessarily up to the participants.

The final version of the guidelines is provided as an annex to these Minutes of the Meeting.

7. Presentation of the SEE-ERA-NET White Paper and Joint Action Plan

Ralf Hanatschek (International Bureau of the Federal Ministry of Education and Research BMBF - Germany) gave a presentation of the SEE-ERA-NET White Paper and the Joint Action Plan.

Overall Objective

- Contributing to the further enhancement of S&T cooperation with the WBC to achieve full integration into the ERA

Through proposing actions to major stakeholders aiming at

- Raising S&T capacities of the WBC
- Proving a stimulating environment for collaborative research on individual scientists and institutional level
- Widening the activities of SEE-ERA.NET based on the promising outcome through new partnerships with interested stakeholders throughout Europe by launching a “Regional Programme for Cooperation with South-East Europe (ReP-SEE)”.

Note: 1. Coherent and complementary actions are needed.

2. Joint actions of various stakeholders are most welcome.

It is recommended to the Western Balkan Countries to:

- Strengthen S&T as a national priority
- Increase international competitiveness
- Establish appropriate service structures promoting and supporting European and international cooperation of the national science communities

It is recommended to the EU-MS and AS to:

- Fully explore the potential of future cooperation with the WBCs
- Deepen the bi- and multilateral policy dialogue and policy coordination with the WBCs facilitating mutual learning and joint priority and agenda settings
- Facilitate institution and capacity building through twinning models between institutions of EU-MS/AS and WBC
- Provide preferential access to S&T infrastructure, electronic infrastructure and computer networks for the Western Balkan countries

It is recommended to the EC to:

a. Stimulate the participation of WBC in FP 7 through:

- Supporting integration of the NCP system in the WBC in the EU-NCP networks.
- Setting-up targeted actions for integrating WBC-institutions in collaborative research
- Raising full potential of coordination activities under the ERA-NET scheme (docking of WBC to ongoing ERA-NETs, new thematic and horizontal ERA-NETs) and the INCO-NET scheme.

b. Make full use of the potential of other Community Programmes in favour of S&T capacity building, human potential development and institution building in the WBC, namely:

- Instruments of Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA)
- Life Long Learning (LLL)
- Competitiveness and Innovation Framework Programme (CIP)

Note: Building on the various EU programmes a full and consistent package should be offered to the WBC and a coordination of the various Community actions across various DGs (Research, Joint Research Centre, Enlargement, Education and Culture, Enterprises and Industry, ...) needs to be ensured

It is recommended to the Steering Platform on Research to:

- Provide a forum for exchanging information and views and elaborating recommendations on R&D policy in and towards the Western Balkan countries
- Monitor of R&D and innovation policies
- Initiate dialogue on innovation infrastructure in the Western Balkan countries (e.g. technology parks, incubators etc.)

In order to implement the recommendations in the White paper the SEE-ERA.NET consortium will :

- Raise further awareness for opportunities of enhanced S&T cooperation and possible implementation scenarios
- Offer strategic input to the EU Commission for the development of future work programmes (FP7, CIP etc) and future annual indicative programmes (IPA)
- Serve as a platform for coordination of activities supporting S&T cooperation of EU MS and Western Balkan countries
- Develop a concept for a Regional Programme for S&T cooperation with South-East Europe with a wider scope of programmatic activities inviting other funding institutions to join

Finally, Ralf Hanatschek concluded his presentation by giving some information about the Promotion Strategy of the White Paper which they had developed with the part of the Centre for Social Innovation (Mr Florian Gruber). He referred to: The publication of the White Paper in "Transition Studies Review". This aims at presenting the White Paper call to the scientific community as well as inside the European Commission, by doing that in the context of some kind of intraservice consultancy Meetings.

Anneliese Stoklaska suggested that all the participants should look deeply into the White Paper because there are such a lot of recommendations and ideas based on experience. They should really try during the next months and years to implement at least some of them. Also, the role of the European Commission to the White Paper is very important.

Elke Dall referred to the support of the Information Office and the Steering Platform that was mentioned in the White Paper. Together with the colleagues from SEE-ERA.NET, they have decided to publish an extra issue concerning the main points of the White Paper and the Action Plan.

Lora Pavlova said that the Joint Action Plan will be as guidelines for the Western Balkan Countries, in some way, in order to adopt their national legislation systems, instruments etc. The most important thing is how that Joint Action Plan could be filled with concrete instruments.

Ralf Hanatschek referring to the White Paper, said that copies of the White Paper excerpt in its full version will be sent to all the participants.

Alessandro Damiani referring to the recommendations concerning the White Paper, suggested that they could have a discussion within the European Commission in the future about the implementation. The important thing is that at the present time the Western Balkan Countries are transitioned as far as their relations with the framework programme is concerned. Most of them participate but not all. There is a need:

- To see what can be done for the transition of the Western Balkan Countries
- To be more careful not to duplicate too much work and efforts concerning the SEE-ERA.NET and WBC-INCO.NET

Mr Sidiropoulos said that one of the topics in the next Steering Platform Meeting in Slovenia could be the adoption of the White Paper.

8. Developing mobility policy guidelines for the WBC: The Web-MOB project results

Mr Dimitrios Sanopoulos (Centre for Research and Technology Hellas – CERTH), Coordinator of the Greek Mobility Centres Network and WEB-MOB project, Representative Member of the Steering Group for the Human Resources ERA Mobilizing in Brussels, NCP for the project PEOPLE in Northern Greece, gave a presentation on the outcome of the Web-MOB project (it was funded under the FP6, ended in October 2007) and the mobility policy guidelines for the Western Balkan Countries.

Objectives for the project:

- Identify the existing obstacles concerning the incoming mobility of researchers in Western Balkan Countries.
- Create synergies acting in close cooperation and complementary to the ERA-MORE Network to attract researchers in the region or to direct them within Europe

Main activities:

1. Review of the existing mobility policies in EU and in the WBC
2. Mapping exercise to identify research and academic organizations capable of attracting researchers, focal points within ministries, governmental organizations, local authorities, professional associations and chambers capable of offering information or assistance in matters of overcoming mobility obstacles, web addresses providing information for job opportunities, salaries, taxation schemes, national legislation in relation to mobility, visa requirements, work permits, social security, pension rights, etc.
3. Preparation of Mobility guides addressed to incoming researchers containing useful information relative to all aforementioned topics
4. Awareness activities focused on specific target groups that are the main stakeholders, like academics, governmental bodies, public services and local or regional authorities.
5. Preparation of mobility guidelines addressed to decision makers
6. Development of the WEB-MOB portal <http://www.web-mob.eu>

Mr Sanopoulos referred to the five booklets (called 'Mobility Guides') that were produced for the five Western Balkan Countries included in that project. Those booklets contain useful information for the researchers who decide to have a mobility experience in the Western Balkan Countries.

He mentioned that in all those Countries the level of attraction of researchers from other foreign countries is less than 20% according to their statistics.

9. Information Exchange with Observers

Toby Linden (THE WORLD BANK) presented ideas for Regional Co-operation in Higher Education in South-Eastern Europe.

Challenges and Opportunities

- A lot of things to be done in the Western Balkan Countries
- There is a gap that should be filled to gain access to resources available
- Legal Framework: Integration of Faculties (Structure of Universities)
- Revised funding
- Quality & Quality Assurance (Higher Education concerning Research activities)
- Balanced Higher Education Systems (System having a variety of Institutions)

Concerted Action needed at four Levels is envisaged

- European Level
- National Level
- Regional Level
- Institutional Level

Why Regional Cooperation?

SEE countries face the same challenges and have similar opportunities as other countries for the future.

Their initial group of targeted countries for the project is from the Western Balkan Countries. It seems that the project will be complicated. A flexible approach is needed in order to make things easier. The approach depends on the amount that the WBCs are available to borrow, a leverage to larger resources is intended.

Tania Friederichs said that Steering Platform Meeting has to do with both national and regional projects and also that financing is a problem. The World Bank has its mechanisms.

10. Announcement of the next Steering Platform Meeting/AOB/Closing Remarks

Nikos Sidiropoulos announced that the next Steering Platform Meeting will take place in Slovenia on July 13th 2008.

Issues to be discussed:

- Participation of the Western Balkan Countries in the WP7 programme
- Conclusions from the kick-off Meeting of WBC-INCO.NET
- Results of infrastructure conference
- The White Paper adoption
- Infrastructure donation award

News from Steering Platform Members:

Eveline Glättli (Switzerland)

- They are involved into a Scientific Co-operation programme SCOPES (2005-2008 115 projects in 15 countries)
- Negotiations are made for future co-operation between Eastern European teams and Swiss teams

Bulgaria received funding from the UNESCO for young researchers contest and invites WBC to participate

Czech Republic announces that scientific visa directive has been transposed also in CZ

Alessandro Damiani and Nikos Sidiropoulos thanked the participants for their participation in the meeting.

18:00 – END OF DAY

**Guidelines for the functioning of the
Steering Platform on Research for the Western Balkan Countries (WBC)**

October 2007

Preamble

In the context of the *Communication “The EU and the Western Balkans: strengthening stability and prosperity” (Com (2006) 27 final of 27.1.2006)* of the European Commission, and as a follow-up of the *EU-Balkan Countries Action Plan on S&T* adopted at the Ministerial Conference in Thessaloniki in 2003 and endorsed by Ministers at the General Affairs Council in March 2006, the Steering Platform (“the Platform”) plays a central role in stimulating, monitoring, and supporting the cooperation in research and technological development between the countries of the European Union (EU 27), associated countries to the Seventh European Framework Programme for RTD (FP7) and countries of the Western Balkans (WBCs).

The Western Balkan Countries’ Ministries responsible for Science and Technology fully endorse this initiative of the European Commission, considering it a Forum of utmost importance for the accession and integration of the WBCs to the European Research Area.

Mission Statement

The Platform facilitates the interaction between the Western Balkan Countries, the EU member states, the candidate and potential candidate countries and other states associated to the Framework Programmes for RTD and the European Commission. Its main objective is to support the enhanced integration of the WBCs in the European Research Area. It is a strategic body to deal with European, multilateral and regional issues of Science and Technology policies in and with the WBCs. It acts as an information exchange centre, clearing house for joint ideas and activities, and coordination forum for needs, suggestions and proposals of the WBCs to the European Commission, the EU27, candidate and potential candidate countries and the countries associated to FP7 (AC) and vice versa. In this spirit, the Platform continues and intensifies the progress achieved under the EU-Balkan Countries Action Plan on Science and Technology.

(Information Office of the Steering Platform on Research for the Western Balkan Countries (<http://see-science.eu/news/111.html>).

Duration

The Platform shall continue until the accession of the Western Balkan Countries to the EU.

Scope of the Platform

With a view to promoting the implementation and development of European research cooperation and thereby also supporting the technological and economic development in the Western Balkan Countries, the Platform will:

- Act as a forum for exchanging information and views, elaborating recommendations on the RTD policy, and coordinating needs, suggestions and proposals in and towards the WBCs, especially regarding the Framework Programmes;
- Monitor RTD policies and developments including interactions with innovation and higher education, and intervene with specific recommendations, if deemed necessary;
- Propose concrete actions to be taken in the context of furthering the EU-WBC cooperation on RTD and the bi- and multilateral cooperation activities;
- Identify issues of mutual importance to be addressed in the context of the Platform; and,
- Seek synergies with other instruments, organisations and stakeholders to strengthen the research capacity in the Western Balkan countries.

For its internal operations, the Platform adopts the following Procedural Guidelines.

Procedural guidelines:

General

The Platform operates on the basis of consensus.

The Platform itself decides when and where it will meet and what it will discuss.

The Platform will be supported by the project WBC-INCO.NET with respect to logistics, administration and content.

Platform meetings will be held on a regular basis, typically twice a year.

The language of the Platform is English.

Membership

Platform members are the EU Member States, the Candidate and Potential Candidate Countries, the Countries associated to FP7 and the European Commission.

Nomination of delegates is made by the governments of the member states of the Steering Platform. The level of participation should be up to the governments, who should nominate two persons committed to WBC issues (participation should depend on the agenda). The European Commission will delegate a senior official from the Service responsible for international scientific cooperation between EU and WB countries. Other involved Services of the European Commission will be associated where appropriate to the Commission's delegation.

Participants

In addition to the delegates, the Steering Platform is open, ex officio, to the participation of

- a representative of the Information Office of the Platform / WBC-INCO.NET; and,
- the Coordinator of the South-East European ERA-NET (SEE-ERA.NET).

The Steering Platform is also open, upon invitation of the co-chairs, to the participation of:

- Representatives from other organisations and stakeholders;
- Experts on a case-by-case basis.

Each member's delegation may be accompanied by experts.

Chairs

The Platform should have in principle three Co-Chairs: one each representing the European Commission, the EU Presidency, and a Western Balkan country. In general, meeting invitations will be issued by the co-chair representing the host country in cooperation with the other co-chairs. The WBC Co-Chair will be nominated from the Western Balkan countries. Once designated, a co-chair should act in the general interest of the Platform and no longer as a country representative.

The task of the Co-Chairs is to jointly prepare and conduct meetings and act as moderators for the discussions.

The Co-Chairs will call the meetings at least one month in advance.

Information and Reporting

The WBC-INCO.NET will act as a service platform and an operational arm of the Steering Platform.

Meetings

The Platform shall meet twice a year, preferably every 6 months. The dates and venue of each meeting shall be set by the Platform at its preceding meeting (taking into account the WBC-INCO.NET logistics). The Platform may decide to convene additional meetings whenever needed.

Meetings shall be typically hosted by the EU Presidency or a Western Balkan country, back-to-back with WBC-INCO.NET Steering Board meetings until this project expires in 2011.

Agenda

The Agenda shall be proposed by the Co-Chairs. Any delegate or participant of the Platform may propose items for the agenda.

The draft Agenda and any document related to a meeting of the Platform shall be sent to the delegates and participants at least 2 weeks in advance.

The Agenda shall be approved by the Platform at the beginning of each meeting.

Minutes

The minutes of each meeting will be drafted in the framework of the WBC-INCO.NET project and presented to the Platform by the Co-Chairs at the following meeting, where the minutes will be amended as necessary and approved. The minutes shall summarise the discussions held and the conclusions, list all proposals made, and briefly report on previous activities and the implementation of proposals which are still relevant.

All delegates of the Platform will have the right to give feedback on the draft minutes within 2 weeks of receipt.

Cost of meeting

The Platform has no budget.

The member countries and the Commission are responsible for meeting the travel and subsistence expenses of their delegates and experts participating in a meeting of the Platform. Other organisations are responsible meeting the travel and subsistence expenses of their representatives.

Local organisational costs shall generally be covered by the host country.

Amendment to the Minutes of the Steering Platform meeting in Thessaloniki

Fatih SAHIN has mentioned the absence of Candidate Countries in the Co-Chairmanship rule in the Guidelines proposed. Then, he underlined the importance and requested to include the Candidate Countries in it, notably Turkey as Balkan country not determined under WBC.

With this amendment, the minutes of the Steering Platform meeting in Thessaloniki were adopted in the meeting in Ljubljana on June 13, 2008.