

HIGH LEVEL ROUND TABLE

SCIENCE AND INNOVATION POLICY IN SOUTH EASTERN EUROPE AND IN SLOVENIA

29 September 2006, Ljubljana, Slovenia

FINAL COMMUNIQUE

Ministers and representatives responsible for science and for finance from South Eastern European countries and Slovenia met in Ljubljana, Slovenia, on 29 September 2006, at the invitation of UNESCO (Venice Office), the Slovenian Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Technology, and of the Austrian Science and Research Office in Ljubljana.

The High-Level Round Table was preceded by an International Conference 'Why Invest in Science in South Eastern Europe' in which theoretical issues and practical approaches regarding science and innovation management at international, regional and national levels were presented and discussed by distinguished experts, representatives of European and international institutions, as well as the private sector.

The participating Ministers and representatives acknowledged that:

1. Knowledge creation and diffusion are increasingly important for the enhancement of innovation, sustainable economic development, and social well-being; and increased investment in science, research and quality education is essential for achieving the Millennium Development Goals adopted by the UN Millennium Summit in 2000.
2. Based on their well educated workforce, rich traditions in the promotion of science and technology, South Eastern European (SEE) countries possess the fundamental assets needed for building the process towards knowledge societies and for reaching regional sustainable development by placing science and technology (S&T) at the forefront of national and regional development policies.
3. Countries within the SEE region are at very different stages of development concerning the state of their economy, technology, and research and development (R&D), in particular with a view to reaching EU standards.
4. Although considerable improvement of R&D systems has been made in the last decade by some of the SEE countries, modernisation of science and innovation systems is still needed in others.
5. By its very nature, science transcends political borders and geography, acting as a catalyst for sharing intellectual endeavours among national communities; enhanced regional cooperation (in particular in scientific fields of common interest and the sharing of major research infrastructure) is therefore an important means for the reinforcement of both S&T capacities and cooperation among SEE countries.

The participants recognized that, in order to create sustainable development and social welfare within South Eastern Europe, specific measures are necessary at national level with a view to:

- continuing or initiating overdue development and enhancement of S&T policy and innovation systems by: a) improving the overall status of S&T in governmental policy priorities; b) creating the legislative and institutional framework to foster R&D with a particular emphasis on industrial demand for and business expenditures on R&D; c) fostering the modernization of R&D infrastructure;
- further supporting quality education, in particular higher education, and the development of universities as important nodes of emerging knowledge-based economies;
- continuing to foster research collaboration, scientific cooperation and technology development within and outside the SEE region;
- supporting further development of human resources also by attracting more women and youth and taking appropriate measures to reduce brain drain from science and research;
- raising awareness and public understanding of science;
- making extensive use of existing and new platforms for dialogue among decision-makers and society at large.

The participating Ministers and representatives called upon international organisations, in particular UNESCO and sister Organisations, funding agencies, as well as European institutions to:

6. support SEE countries in the development and the implementation of quality science, technology and innovation policies;
7. contribute to the training of decision-makers in STI policies, including foresight techniques to set priorities for funding and crafting of policies and to disseminate best practices in STI policy and management;
8. support actions to put STI at the top of the national/regional development agenda;
9. support SEE governments in improving the performance of administrative, legislative and financial infrastructure of STI systems, including the improvement of the access to information technology and networks, and to the pan-European Research Infrastructures.
10. support SEE governments in increasing intellectual property assets development and management, technology transfer, public-private partnerships to promote science-based innovation, and in the creation of science/technology parks;
11. create incentive programmes, supportive of fundamental, long-term research to ensure that universities and public laboratories can continue to explore knowledge frontiers on a broader front and remain reliable sources of objective scientific expertise;
12. promote greater regional and international cooperation in S&T as essential means to meet global challenges such as economic growth, social cohesion, improved health, sustainable development, enhanced safety and security, and to promote peace and dialogue in the region;
13. help to strengthen the potential and capabilities for full participation in ERA, FP7, CIP and the other European programmes (e.g. Eureka), seeking in particular increased participation of the business sector, mainly SMEs.
14. support the exchange of researchers, academics and students, overcoming visa problems, and encouraging mobility schemes between Western Balkan countries and the European Union Member States;
15. consider the idea of a permanent global Forum of Ministers of, or those responsible for, Science and Technology to be held on a regular basis under the auspices of UNESCO.

