

“EU – Balkan Countries Action Plan in S&T”

Workprogramme 2005

Draft to be discussed at the Second meeting of the *ad-hoc* group of High Level Officials
(Brussels, 2 February 2005)

Introduction

The second meeting of the *ad-hoc* group of High Level Officials has been convened in Brussels in February 2005, i.e. approx. one and a half year after the adoption of the Action Plan and one year after the first *ad-hoc* group meeting (Florence, November 2003). This meeting is giving the opportunity to overview the achievements of the activities undertaken so far and to adopt a new Workprogramme, at a very appropriate moment since:

- Several activities could still be supported by the 6th Framework Programme;
- The content of the 7th FP is under negotiation; and
- Early discussions for the future of the Action Plan can be initiated.

Provision for the adoption of ‘rolling’ Workprogrammes is included in the Action Plan as part of the mechanism to maintain the momentum and to monitor its implementation.

The Workprogramme 2005 should draw some conclusions from the activities undertaken so far and should denote the ongoing and foreseen projects and initiatives (at short, mid and long term).

The aim of the Workprogramme is to concentrate the efforts of all interested parties (countries of the region, EU Member States, European Commission, Funding Organizations, etc.) on the specified activities, in order to maximize their breath and impact. This does not exclude the possibility for any other activity towards the objectives of the Action Plan that are all considered as priorities.

Wherever possible, the ‘network’ of High Level Officials should undertake a proactive role for the stimulation of policy makers, other stakeholders, institutions and scientists of the region and in the EU Member States in order to obtain their support for the goals of the Workprogramme.

Information received from members of the *ad-hoc* group on ongoing and planned activities is annexed to this document and references to the annexe are included in the text.

Conclusions from the activities so far

One of the main achievements of the Action Plan has been the creation of a momentum at the highest political level for concrete activities towards the Balkan region and more specifically towards the Western Balkan countries (WBC).

The ‘network’ of High Level officials that promoted the adoption of the Action Plan has been valuable also during the implementation phase, especially for the exchange of information, for the promotion of participation to joint projects, etc. There are further possibilities to exploit for this network.

The 6th FP includes Specific Activities for WBC. In addition, the European Commission took several initiatives towards the region. The response to these initiatives was satisfactory and many projects are under implementation.

In the opposite, there was very limited participation in the Thematic Priorities of the 6th FP. The main reasons for this fact include: on the one side the limited adequateness of the new instruments for participation of researchers from the WBC, and on the other side the difficulties in the diffusion of the information on opportunities and procedures, the weak networking with scientists and institutes from the EU Member States, the lack of adequate infrastructure, etc.

Most of the activities undertaken so far have been supported financially through the 6th FP or bilateral programmes. The exploitation of other regional programmes or sources was very limited or inexistent.

1. Ongoing activities

1.1 Infrastructures

The improvement of electronic networks for science, research and education and their link to the European gigabit network GEANT remains a main priority. Many initiatives have been undertaken so far (e.g. FP5/SEEREN, SINSEE, NATO/MANI, etc) and a considerable dynamic at national and regional level has been created (e.g. FP6/SEEFIRE, FP6/6DISS, etc). Integration of electronic networks into European electronic infrastructures (Grids-empowered infrastructures for eScience) targeting distributed research communities and interconnection to the pan-European and worldwide Grid initiatives, is also work in progress (e.g. FP6/SEE-GRID, etc).

1.2 Human potential

- Training and exchange of experience of policy makers, information multipliers (NCPs, regional and institutional contact points) and of research administrators.
- Initiatives to stimulate the mobility of scientists and researchers.

1.3 Institution building

- Further activities to support the development of efficient and effective National Contact Point systems (NCPs) in the Western Balkan countries, networking of NCPs with NCPs of EU member states and candidate countries is well under way and will be further enhanced.
- Initiatives towards reorganization of research administrations.
- Projects under the TEMPUS Programme have also been initiated.

1.4 Joint RTD activities

- Information and communication technologies and services.
- Environment and water management.
- Activities to stimulate RTD cooperation in the priority areas
 - Organising meetings (brokerage events) of researchers for the region and from member states and candidate countries to stimulate joint RTD actions (STREPs, IPs, etc.).
 - European initiatives such as COST & EUREKA could be extensively used to achieve networking.

A particular mention need to be made to activities that have already been supported by CARDS.

Most of the above initiatives have been initiated in 2003 and 2004, and are expected to continue in 2005.

2. Activities for 2005

The *ad-hoc* group will continue to monitor the implementation of the Action Plan. As an input to the preparation of the Specific Programmes of 7th FP, a document with proposals for measures supporting the integration of the Western Balkan countries in FP7 could be prepared by the end of April. If necessary, a new meeting could be envisaged during the second semester 2005.

At the same time, the political dialogue for the ‘future’ of the Action Plan should be initiated since its duration has been set for 3 years and, therefore, expires during 2006. The European Commission (DG RTD) should support the work of the *ad-hoc* group and participate actively in the political dialogue.

In view of the progress of the implementation of the Action Plan and of the ongoing discussions for the structure and content of the 7th FP, the launching of Specific Activities promoting the S&T

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cooperation between the EU and the Western Balkan countries should be put forward at the appropriate political level responsible for the preparation of the 7th FP (e.g. Research Group). The ad-hoc group could prepare a document towards this goal by the end of April. Continuous discussion at a High Officials Level should take place in order to ensure timely preparation of objectives, priorities and tools for implementation of such Specific Activities.

Since the next programming period for CARDS is approaching, appropriate contacts should be established and concrete input should be provided in order to include Science and Technology in its objectives. The necessity to create a Task Force that will specifically undertake this work should be discussed. Moreover, one of the important tasks at the High Officials Level should be to provide concrete input for the next CARDS programming period that is foreseen for 2006. To this end, it is strongly advised to follow the discussions and the implementation of the CARDS programme.

The Web site dedicated to the Action Plan set-up in Greece should be used to facilitate the diffusion of information and the linkage among the research administrators in the region. In addition to the information on projects, brief description of political initiatives could also be included in the web site to increase their visibility and impact.

The following activities are foreseen in the four domains of intervention stated in the Action Plan:

2.1 Infrastructures

- Upgrade of electronic infrastructures (or eInfrastructures, i.e. Research and Education Networks, Grid-enabled infrastructures). The creation of such an eInfrastructure will provide fully integrated communication and information processing services.
- Development of regional virtual collaborative environments and applications for eScience.

There is no single instrument/framework that can address all issues of eInfrastructure expansion and deployment. Complementing EC Framework Programmes with regional/national initiatives, EU structural funds, support/funding programmes from global organizations like NATO, donations from industry, etc., can contribute to the sustainability of the effort. FP7 should be shaped towards integrating tools and funding sources.

2.2 Human potential

- Training and exchange of experience of policy makers, information multipliers and research administrators.
- Initiatives to stimulate the mobility of scientists and researchers in order to establish long-term collaborative links between the WBC, the European Union and the Candidate Countries.

2.3 Institution building

- Evaluation and benchmarking of national research systems.
- Utilizing synergies and coordination between bilateral initiatives and programmes (ERA-NET).
- Further development and strengthening of National Contact Point systems.
- Creation of Innovation Relay Centers. Setting-up (including training) of Innovation Relay Centers (IRCs) promoting and supporting the use and valorization of Research results.
- Exploitation of possibilities offered by TEMPUS.
- Extend the Community framework of Intellectual Property Rights (IPRs) to the Western Balkan countries and assist these countries to comply with EU rules.

2.4 Joint RTD activities

- Review the cooperation launched in the context of the 6th FP between EU member states, candidate countries and Western Balkan countries to propose, if necessary, adaptation and/or

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reinforcement of Specific International S&T cooperation activities for the Western Balkan countries. Learn from experience and propose measures to increase participation in the remaining calls of the 6th FP.

- Identifying and strengthening centres of excellence in the region.
- Improving the visibility of the research capacities of the region with the help of specific support actions.
- Use of COST and EUREKA for enhanced joint RTD activities.

In addition, an effort will be devoted to the strengthening of the bilateral cooperation, which could be used as a tool for the implementation of the Action Plan. The ERA-NET scheme is a very good instrument to support such initiatives.

3. Long term activities

The necessity and possibility to adopt a new Action Plan should be discussed, including the future of the ad-hoc group as a forum for monitoring the RTD cooperation between the WBC, the Member States and the Candidate Countries.

Exploitation of other sources of funding, in addition to the possibilities provided by the FP. These include, e.g.:

- The Development Aid programmes of the EU (CARDS, etc.).
- The possibilities to exploit the programmes and initiatives of the European Investment Bank (e.g. the Innovation Programme launched in 2003 for the SEE countries, etc.).