

ACTION PLAN

The Action plan specifies the **objectives and thematic priorities** for the main goals set in the 'Shared vision' document, identifies the potential **instruments** for the implementation of the policy and provides for the preparation of annual Workprogrammes of the actions to be undertaken.

In addition to the main goals, actions should be undertaken aiming at:

- Creation of atmosphere of understanding of EU RTD policies and strategies.
- Creation of general conditions for integration into EU RTD activities.
- Creation of potentials and capabilities for full participation in ERA, FP6 and other European programmes.

A. Objectives and thematic priorities

As it concerns the objectives and thematic priorities, only aspects that have been emphasised in the conclusions of several previous events are selected in this Action Plan as the basis for action.

A1. In terms of Infrastructure

To improve the infrastructure, sound and realistic projects are necessary. As a first priority, projects of regional importance and impact should be elaborated and submitted for funding to existing assistance schemes.

Financial support for projects of national importance could be obtained, to a lesser extent, from assistance schemes, through bilateral agreements with some MS or through investment banks. This would require the commitment of the interested country.

The following objectives are considered to be of particular importance:

- Establishment and/or upgrade of electronic networks for science, research and education and their link to the European gigabit network GEANT. In this respect, the following objectives need to be addressed:
 - Reinforcement or improvement of the capacity of the electronic telecommunications for Research and Education purposes.
 - Training of staff.
 - Interconnection of research entities at regional level and with the EU. The ongoing project 'SEEREN/SINSEE' could be used as pilot example.

A Task Force was established at the end of May 2003 in order to:

- Investigate the state-of-the art of the present situation and the needs.

- Prioritize the needs.
- Identify and explore potential sources for the financial support of the implementation.

The Conclusions of its first meeting are attached as an Annex to this Action Plan.

- Integration of the above networks into European *e*-infrastructures (Grids, *e*Science, virtual environments for teaching and research).
- Renewal of scientific equipment based on identified needs and priorities.
- Renewal of scientific libraries, *e*-access to scientific journals, data bases and virtual libraries. The possibility to establish a central scientific library and documentation centre for the region that could be accessed via electronic communication means should be analysed.

A2. In terms of Human potential

Policy makers, information multipliers and research administrators should be trained in modern concepts for the organisation of research systems, as well as in the evaluation procedures of research activities.

In parallel, actions for the improvement of the capacity of the research personnel would need to include their familiarisation with the ways of funding research activities, especially through competitive projects. It is also important to implement schemes for the networking and exchange of researchers within the region and between the region and the MS/candidate countries.

A Task Force will be set up to facilitate exchange of information and coordinate initiatives, including support for generation of consortia to prepare joint proposals.

The following objectives are considered to be of particular importance:

- Training and exchange of experience of policy makers, information multipliers (NCPs, regional and institutional contact points) and of research administrators
This initiative could be implemented through Specific Support Actions in FP6, subject to the normal rules and procedures.
- Stimulating the mobility of scientists and researchers as a means for sustainable research cooperation within the region and with other aspects of the European Research Area including the activities of the Joint Research Centre. While implementing such measures, appropriate pre-cautions will have to be taken to avoid brain drain. The Human Resources and Mobility part of FP6 offers opportunities to support such initiatives on a competitive basis.
- Support for the participation of Conferences and support for organising Conferences (FP6).
- In addition the gradual opening of the Joint Research Centre's Enlargement Action offer for workshops and training courses will be used in specific areas of regional character and a mutual added value¹. This offer will be combined with Marie Curie mobility instruments allowing scientists and experts to gather specific experience.

¹ For the list of workshops/training courses see
<http://www.jrc.cec.eu.int/enlargement/action2003>

- Enhancing the attractiveness of careers in science, research and technological development in the region.

The Commission will submit later this year a proposal for a Directive and an Action Plan for the visa and other entry requirements for researchers from non-EU countries.

A3. In terms of Institution building

Where necessary, the re-organisation of the research system should be promoted, to achieve a simple and efficient structure with clearly defined goals.

Issues related to Intellectual Property Rights should be addressed, and the adequate structures should be established.

The need of the research community for up-to-date information on EU RTD activities and assistance for the participation in these activities should be considered as a main priority.

The following objectives are considered to be of particular importance:

- Creation of National Contact Point systems (NCPs) in the Western Balkan countries, Networking and Twinning of NCPs with NCPs of EU member states and candidate countries. This initiative could be implemented through Specific Support Actions in FP6, subject to the normal rules and procedures.
- Creation of Innovation Relay Centers: Setting-up (including training) of Innovation Relay Centers (IRCs) targeting on the use and valorization of research results. Creation of long-lasting relationship between producers of knowledge and technology (e.g. Universities, Research Centers, Hospitals, etc.) and end-users of RTD (SMEs, industry, policy makers, institutional authorities, civil society, etc.). This initiative could be implemented through Specific Support Actions in FP6.
- Foster RTD cooperation in the Thematic Priorities of FP6 with special focus on the thematic areas listed in this Action Plan.
- Evaluation and benchmarking of national research systems.
- Preparation of inventories of research infrastructures, capacities and potentials (research landscapes).
- Utilizing synergies between bilateral initiatives and programmes. The possible synergies between the existing bilateral cooperation initiatives and programmes need to be investigated.
- Investigation and exploitation of synergies with EU Educational Programs (e.g. TEMPUS).
- Extend the Community framework of Intellectual Property Rights (IPRs) to the Balkan countries and assist these countries to comply with EU rules.

- Investigation of the possibility to apply to the Western Balkan countries, a scheme for Centers of Excellence comparable to that for the Accession countries included in FP5.
- Establishment of a (virtual) R&D institute of clear European dimension (a secretariat managing different existing institutes) in South East Europe based on membership fees from participating countries. A topic at the cutting edge of science should be addressed (example: system biology).

A4. In terms of Joint RTD activities

In order to maximise the impact of the common effort undertaken by the EU Member States, candidate countries and the W. Balkan countries, it is important to focus on a limited number of thematic priorities – scientific fields of intervention. It will also be necessary to maintain a bottom-up approach and to promote projects of mutual benefit and regional impact.

- According to the conclusions of several specific events that have been organised during the last two years, the following scientific fields are considered as high priorities:
 - Information and communication technologies and services,
 - Integrating the national RTD information systems (inventories of research infrastructures, capacities and potentials).
 - Creating a common RRCC² Internet portal: This initiative could be implemented through a Specific Support Action in FP6.
 - Energy (energy saving, renewable energies),
 - Environment (monitoring, improvement, water management, seismology),
 - Development of clear regional concept on decentralized water management based on innovative technologies. Extend existing initiative to the whole region.
 - Agriculture – Biotechnology – public health,
 - Cultural Heritage (preservation, valorisation – tourism).
- Activities to stimulate RTD cooperation in particular in the above priority areas:
 - Meetings (brokerage events) of researchers from the region and from member states and candidate countries to stimulate joint RTD actions (STREPs, IPs, etc.)
 - Creation and/or strengthening of extended networks for S&T cooperation, notably in the identified thematic priorities of the Action Plan, of mutual benefit and regional impact for the SEE countries, to be submitted in the respective part of the international cooperation programme line under FP6 or other potential funding sources subject to the normal rules and procedures.
 - Fostering RTD cooperation in the Thematic Priorities of FP6 with special focus on the thematic areas listed by the Action Plan, subject to the normal rules and procedures.

² RRCC: Regional Research Coordination Committee for SEE.

- European initiatives such as COST & EUREKA could be used extensively to improve networking and collaboration.
- Review of the cooperation launched in the context of the FP6 between EU Member States, candidate countries and Western Balkan countries to propose, if necessary, adaptation and/or reinforcement of Specific International S&T cooperation activities for the Western Balkan countries.
- Review experiences of first calls for proposals of FP6.

In implementing the above activities, synergies with other relevant EU Programmes (e.g. Education - TEMPUS) could be maximized.

In implementing joint RTD activities, the socio-economic impact and ethical issues should be taken into account where appropriate, as well as their contribution to sustainable development. Special emphasis will be put on fostering cooperation between universities, research centres and industry with the support of governments for creating a favourable environment.

B. Implementation

Interested Member States and candidate countries will seek to enhance the impact of their bilateral co-operation programs by contributing to the goals set in the Action Plan.

The countries of the region will also devote a particular effort to the achievement of the goals set in the Action Plan, that is

- to raise their national R&D investments following the Lisbon strategy;
- to strengthen regional co-operation;
- and to immediately start their integration into the European Research Area.

European and International financing organisations should be encouraged to mobilise more resources for investing in promising research and technological projects.

Member States, candidate countries, the concerned countries and the European Commission form a High Level Group of Representatives under the responsibility of the Council presidency. This Group will have the responsibility of monitoring the overall implementation of the Action Plan and of reporting to the Ministers or their representatives on the progress achieved.

B1. Instruments

For the implementation of the Action Plan, several Instruments intervening at different level exist. It is important to define ways for the coherent use of all the existing instruments.

At Multilateral level, opportunities provided by European and international initiatives³ and by the European Community⁴ should be exploited to a greater extent. In order to allow the countries of the region to recover and to integrate earlier and more quickly to ERA, the Western Balkan countries are encouraged to use the CARDS Programme, and the Candidate countries the structural instruments, for the development of RTD infrastructures, research and education information networks, research information services, research equipment and innovation centres.

At Regional level, assistance programmes as well as programmes for the promotion of regional collaboration exist such as Interreg, SEED. In particular it should be recommended that the Stability Pact be opened up to RTD capacity building and valorisation. Since their main scope does not focus on research issues, it is important to present sound projects with a clear demonstration of their impact on the stabilisation, social cohesion and economic growth of the region.

At Bilateral level, several agreements, collaboration programs in RTD, and assistance programmes exist between countries of the region, the EU Member States and the candidate countries. It is important to produce an inventory of all these programmes and to maximise their impact, possibly through their coordinated use on a voluntary basis. However, the importance of bilateral collaborations between individual organisations (including those set up without direct Government involvement) should also be recognised. These may be set up through arrangements such as Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) between research organisations. By being based on mutual benefit they will create a “win-win” situation.

B2. Implementing modalities

Rolling annual Workprogrammes will define projects, including their management, deliverables, time-schedule and budget.

The Workprogrammes to develop should include projects and activities to be undertaken at short and medium term, each project been identified by at least its objective and deliverables, time schedule, budget and project leader. Nevertheless, it must be noted that every action specified in the Action Plan is considered as priority and is open for initiatives arising from interested countries and/or institutions on a bottom-up and voluntary basis.

An *ad-hoc* Group composed of high level officials⁵, is set up. The *ad-hoc* group will:

- Develop the Workprogramme and monitor its implementation;
- stimulate new initiatives;
- assure the continuous updating of the WorkProgramme,

³ such as COST, EUREKA, UNESCO, World Bank, etc. For example a Donors Conference is envisaged within the framework of the Stability Pact with the logistic support of UNESCO-ROSTE, as proposed by the Ministers of Science who met in Paris (October 2001).

⁴ such as through the Sixth Framework Programme, CARDS, and European Investment Bank

⁵ As of June 2003 the following are participating: AL, AT, BG, BiH, DE, FR, FYROM, GR, IT, HR, Montenegro, RO, Serbia, SI, TR and the European Commission.

⁶ It has already been decided to set up two Task Forces in the fields of ‘electronic networks’ and ‘human resources and mobility’ (see sections A.1 and A.2)

- report regularly to the High Level Group of representatives, and
- set up, wherever appropriate, Task Forces⁶ of experts from the interested countries and/or institutions to promote the implementation of such initiatives. For each individual Task Force, a chair should be identified that will be exerted by one co-ordinating high-level representative.

The first meeting of the *ad-hoc* Group will be convened under the responsibility of the Italian presidency and the European Commission well before the end 2003, in order to establish its working modalities, designate a Chair among its members and prepare the Workprogramme 2004. The European Commission will provide organizational and secretarial support to the *ad-hoc* Group.

C. Duration and Follow-up

The duration of the Action Plan will be three years.

The *High-level* group of representatives will review the implementation of the Action Plan after one year.

Annexes

Annex A includes **Policy documents** of the European Commission.

Annex B includes **Conclusions** from previous events.

Annex C includes a brief overview of Organizations, Initiatives and Schemes for the **financial support** of actions in the Balkan region.

Annex D includes information on **bilateral cooperation** initiatives and programmes between EU Member States and countries of the region.

Annex E contains **information from the target countries**: identification of their main needs and problems and the actions that they envisage to address these problems. This information can be the basis for bilateral collaboration with EU member states and candidate countries to address particular problems. It can also be used to initiate multilateral initiatives with the same objective.

Annex F contains the **Conclusions of the Task Force on electronic networks** (First meeting, June 11, 2003).