

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 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.