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**Concept Note**

for contribution to the

**Action Plan to increase innovation capacities in the whole region of the western Balkan countries (WBC)**

**Deadline May 13, 2012**

**Title of the suggested Action**:Innovative Backbone of Interdisciplinary Business Incubators (I2B)

**Subtitle** (or short description in one sentence):Innovative Backbone of Interdisciplinary Business Incubators is a project focused on the development of business and innovation support structure through establishment of network of interdisciplinary business incubatorsthat provide support to start-up companies and carrier development.

**Description of the Action** (approx. 1 page):

*Overall objective* of the project Innovative Backbone of Interdisciplinary Business Incubators (I2B) is improvement of the business and innovation support structure through establishment of network of interdisciplinary business incubators. The network will serve as a backbone (support) for new companies, providingexpert and infrastructural support and carrier development, simultaneously building capacity of local/regional small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) andentrepreneurship in general.

*Specific objective* is to increase the capacity, efficiency and competitiveness of entrepreneurial and business sector in the region by forming a network of business incubators. This project aims to link technological and entrepreneurial experts who are equipped with up-to-date knowledge, skills and attitudes based on R&D, with people who want become entrepreneurs and/or start their own business. The network of business incubators will provide the infrastructural support along with expert consultations for its users. The project will create better links between experts and business sector and enhance innovative approach to business in the region, regarding products, technology development, processes (organization, quality standards, and procedures) and market approach.

We aim to raiseefficiency and effectiveness in doing business as a precondition for business sustainability and attaining competitive advantage on the market. Our project will first of all provide support to new companies focused on technology, but also to companies in other sectors.Business efficiency will be increased through adoption of new idea or concepts, processes, development of new innovative products and services, implementation and development of new technologies, expert consultations and advices, as well as new market approach that will open new markets or market niche, abroad or within the region. Building the capacity and competences of business sector in general, will improve productivity within the region and quality standards. New capacities that will be created within frames of this project will form a basis for adoption of innovative approach to business, not only in technical aspects, but also regarding marketing issues and techniques, financing, business plan development, management of human resources etc.

Main activities of the project are divided in five work packages: 1. Project Management, 2. Preparation activities – feasibility study, 4. Establishment of the network of Interdisciplinary Business Incubators, 5. Dissemination.Duration of the project is 22 months.Approximate budget for this project is 240.000,00 EUR.

If we split these objectives, these goals are to be attained by the project’s activities:

1. Improving business and innovation support through **establishment of network of Interdisciplinarybusiness incubators.** The existing business incubator will be renovated at the University College of Economics, Entrepreneurship and Management Nikola Subic Zrinski (UCEEM-NSZ), and business incubators will be formed in the facilities of Mechanical Engineering Faculty in Slavonski Brod (MEF-SB) and Faculty of Technology, University of Novi Sad (FT-UNS). Those three business incubators will be connected in a network providing stable expert and infrastructural support for new companies and carrier development.

2. Stimulating**collaboration between industry/technology/business and academia/expertise** through promotion of initiatives and creation of mechanisms for transfer of technologies and knowledge.

3. Variety of **specialized innovative companies** will be supported and developed. As a result of new established cooperation the network will facilitate the development of clusters and networks of competitive specialized enterprises producing new products and services which are in demand in global markets.

4. Improvement of**access to business information, knowledge andtechnology and promote exchange of experience and good practices.** Promotion of transfer and implementation of technologies, encourage search for new technologies from abroad or through local innovative activities.

**References to running activities, lessons learnt from other regions**, etc. (one paragraph):

There are several business incubators in theterritory of Croatia and Serbia that operate on a smaller scale considering their financial and operational capacities. Existing incubators lack the capacity in expert, financial and infrastructural sense, and are able to provide support to a smaller number of companies. Therefore there is a need to increase the support to new companies. The targeted region shows a general lack in entrepreneurship initiatives, insufficient information on importance of start-ups that are initiated out of an identified opportunity (not a need), better cooperation and linkage of research and development and businesses, lack of concept and strategy for the development of technological and entrepreneurial knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary for an SME to sustain on the market, lack of trainings and advising in entrepreneurship and strong need for technological know-how.

**Actors to be involved in the implementation and their roles** (max. half a page):

University College of Economics, Entrepreneurship and Management "Nikola Subic Zrinski" from Zagreb, Croatia, will be the leader of this project, ensuring that all project activities are implemented within the planned timeframe and quality outputs.Existing business incubator will be renovated and connected in a network of business incubators with other project partners. UCEEM-NSZ will provide expert support for the activities of the network and also throughout the project.

Partners Mechanical Engineering Faculty in Slavonski Brod of Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek, Croatia, and theFaculty of Technology, University of Novi Sad, Serbia will cooperate in all activities project activities and provide all necessary information to project coordinator/leader. Business incubators will be formed in their facilitiesand be connected in a network of business incubators. They will provide expert support for the activities of the network and participate on project meetings.

**Expected impact** (one paragraph):

Expected impact of the project Innovative Backbone of Interdisciplinary Business Incubators (I2B) is based on its main objective – forming of a network of Interdisciplinary Business Incubators. The network will serve as a backbone for start-up companies, and provide expert and infrastructural support. It will build capacity of local/regional small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) andsteer entrepreneurial activity in the region. It will also create links with adequate networks, agencies and business in this region, having as consequence improvement of businesses, technologies and procedures used, increase of quality and exports of products, diversification of products/services, increase of employment, new business transactions, exchange and common use of knowledge and innovation etc.

**Relevance to the WBC region** (one paragraph):

Employment, quality and productivity at work, are main preconditions of the regions competitiveness. Investment in human resources and the existence of a highly qualified workforce, with high levels of education and ability to adapt to new technologies and ever changing market – are key factors for increasing productivity, innovation and in the long run, the competitiveness of the economy of the region. Developed EU countries have recognised the importance of supporting SMEs (*A “Small Business Act” for Europe*) and are active informing a frame that supports development of human capital in the national and international context to step towardknowledge-based economy, so there is a need to strategically foster SMEs, especially start-up companies, in this region as well. This project is a step towards the answer of these issues in the Western Balkans Region.

**Author** (name, affiliation, contact details):

Contact person: MSc. Martina Ferk, Vicedean for Internation Cooperation and Development

Affiliation: University College of Economics, Entrepreneurship and Management "Nikola Subic Zrinski"

Postal address: Selska cesta 119, 10110 Zagreb, Croatia

Telephone number: + 385 1 4002 301

Email address: martina.ferk@zrinski.org