

## Conclusions of meeting of Steering Platform on Research for

Western Balkan Countries

Sarajevo, 1 December 2011

The Steering Platform on Research for the Western Balkan Countries met in Sarajevo on 1 December 2011. The meeting was co-chaired by the Polish Presidency of the Council of the European Union, Bosnia and Herzegovina - on behalf of the Western Balkan Countries - who hosted the event – and the European Commission.

The Steering Platform heard the introductory statements from Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Polish Presidency and the European Commission, from which it became clear that efforts for the next Research and Innovation Framework Programme 'Horizon 2020' are high on the political agenda of the EU, as well as efforts undertaken at bi-regional level to strengthen the research and innovation capacity building. The Platform welcomed, in particular, Poland's commitment towards Eastern Europe, including the Balkan Region.

From the presentations of the Progress Reports, the Platform took note that all Members are further contributing to strengthening the research and innovation capacity in the region. The Platform was also encouraged by the different actions and measures taken by the Balkan countries to improve their participation in the Seventh EU Research Framework Programme (FP7) in preparation for Horizon 2020. In this regard, the presentation by the CEI on the Next Generation Bio Fuels was considered as an area of interest and one to be pursued based on the CEI Trieste Declaration. The Platform welcomed EUREKA's further work with the region, as well as the progress made on the “Regional Competitiveness Initiative” presented by OECD.

The Platform underlined the importance to address the research and innovation aspects of the Danube Strategy in general and expressed the wish that the FP7 Work Programmes 2013 will foresee actions to support and facilitate the implementation of the funding of the research priorities for it. In this context, the importance to build upon the SEE-ERA.NET PLUS and the WBC-INCO.NET was mentioned. The need to continue support for all enlargement countries with the Steering Platform was also called upon.

The Platform also welcomed the actions of other stakeholders and donors, such as the USAID / SIDA supported project “FIRMA” which contributes to the implementation of national strategies in line with the EU Innovation Union objectives. National governments are encouraged to interact closer with these stakeholders and include activities in the national progress reporting.

The Platform welcomed the WBC-INCO.NET study analyzing the innovation capacity and national innovation systems, which contained useful recommendations for further strengthening and promoting research cooperation with and in the Balkan Region. The Platform noted that several recommendations are similar to the commitments identified as relevant for the enlargement countries under the Innovation Union.

The Platform took note of the commitments of the Innovation Union on which the enlargement countries should start preparations. In this context, the need to develop better S&T statistics is of utmost importance. The support offered by UNESCO was welcomed. Given the importance of statistics in the overall accession context, the Platform also underlined the important role of Eurostat.

The Platform welcomed the launch of the project “Regional R&D for Innovation Strategy for the Western Balkans” which took place in Belgrade on 23-25 November and underlined the importance of establishing, as soon as possible in

this process, some key actions and measures to strengthen the regional cooperation on research and innovation and in turn regional competitiveness. The study on innovation capacity was seen as a useful tool for the regional dimension of R&I cooperation.

The Platform welcomed the presentation on 'Horizon 2020' the day after its adoption by the European Commission and took note of the very ambitious goals of the new instrument. It was agreed to revert to the proposal at a later stage, in particular in view of the association of the enlargement countries to the programme. The synergy with the next IPA II was welcomed; several questions were raised on the effectiveness of the synergy, which should be well prepared.

An expression of interest was made by Albania to hold the next meeting in the first half of 2012 in Albania, together with the upcoming EU Danish Presidency. Information will be announced in due time.