



# Smart Specialisation and Technology Transfer as Innovation Drivers for Regional Growth

**Western Balkans Steering Platform on  
Research and Innovation**

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## **Conference on Smart Specialisation and Technology Transfer as Innovation Drivers for Regional Growth**

- 3-4 May 2018 - Sofia, Bulgaria
- Under the auspices of the Bulgarian Presidency
- Focus:
  - Smart Specialisation
  - Technology Transfer
  - Digital Economy
- Approx. 320 participants from South-East Europe and Western Balkans
- Policymakers, scientists, businesses, regional authorities and universities

# Regional Innovation Systems

## Objective

**Smart Growth** (sustainable: economically, environmentally, socially)

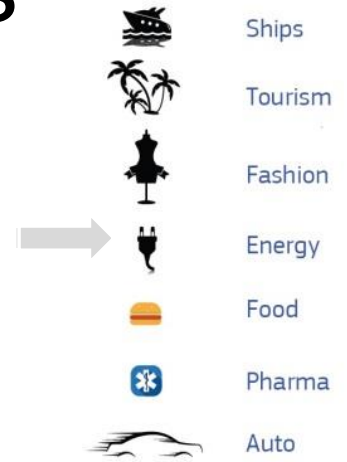
## Strategy

**Smart Specialisation** (focus on competitive sectors, build consensus among stakeholders)

## Policies

- R&D (funding, mobility, talents, infrastructure,..)
- Education (university, Academies, Erasmus, ..)
- Business (environment, SME, internationalisation,..)
- Markets (regulatory, fiscal incentives,..)
- Skills (curricula, training, quality, mutual recognition, ...)

## Implementation



# Innovation in the Western Balkans

- Strategic leveraging of public investment and spending for impact of R&I, find synergies and mobilise private funds
- fragmented internally and not connected internationally (value chains)
- Smart Specialisation in the Western Balkans should be linked to Foreign Direct Investment, "big thinking" and structural reforms in order to be relevant

# Smart Specialisation

- Good commitment and progress across the region in creating or leveraging institutional capacity for smart specialisation
- efforts are being made even to align investments with Smart Specialisation (e.g. Serbian Innovation Fund)
- good quality data and dedicated governance of the S3 process are crucial for success
- Capability of middle management to translate Smart - Specialisation messages
- Greater engagement of business
- General need for a cultural shift led by education system that should be closer to industry (e.g. industry internships) and for support in translating concerns from one to the other side.

## Smart Specialisation Cont.d

- Exchange of insights from other regions (Poland and Slovenia)
- Consultation and buy-in extensively before setting priorities
- Selection criteria for partnerships to be carefully designed
- Monitoring and assessment: what and who should be monitored. Less is more. Few key but high-quality measurable indicators
- Objectivity and stakeholder involvement. Political ambitions should not be automatic objectives.

# Technology Transfer (TT)

- Technology transfer: alchemy requires skills and knowledge, Finance and ecosystems to work
- Good research is at the basis of technology transfer
- Pockets of research excellence in the WB but skills and culture need to improve
- Skills: IP generation and management, Spin-off creation, valuation, negotiation, Industry relations, etc.
- Culture:
  - emphasis on exploitation and commercialisation of research
  - Entrepreneurship: Capacity building
- International collaboration/support are essential to both
- Shift in skills and culture = BETTER PROJECTS

## TT: Finance

- Important. Not the end all and be all → bankable projects
- Europe is good in deep tech – requires deep pockets and deep commitment
- Need to support PoC investment
- Need for demand side (supply of projects) and supply side (investment) support



## TT: Ecosystems

- STPs becoming more and more important as centres of gravity for innovation ecosystems
- STP design and management is important but complex (e.g. Sofia Tech Park)
- Many models exist and no one-size-fits-all solution
- Concentration of researchers and businesses can trigger virtuous circle
- Importance of involving other stakeholders national and international
- Both Ljubljana and Belgrade STP are good examples of successful public intervention in support of STP development

# Digital economy

- Digital transformation turning point for our societies (e.g. AI)
- Strong commitment to support/manage transformation
- To reap full benefits we need:
  - Improved education
  - Adequate digital infrastructure
  - Good quality + accessible data
- EU should address fragmentation and coordination given the lack of consolidated regional/national strategies
- Remain strategic in interventions playing to Europe's strengths.