



Conclusions of the 3rd Western Balkans Research and Innovation meeting held in Sarajevo on March 26-27, 2019

The third Western Balkans Research and Innovation meeting was organised in Sarajevo on March 26-27, 2019 within the framework of the European Commission's Support for the Steering Platform (SP) on Research and Innovation for the Western Balkan countries (WBC). The meeting was introduced by the Romanian Presidency of the Council of the European Union, chaired by the European Commission and hosted by the Ministry of Civil Affairs of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Representatives of the Science Ministries from the Western Balkans (WB6), the Regional Cooperation Council, as well as the European Commission's Joint Research Centre, COST (European Cooperation in Science and Technology), several EU Member States, and international organisations dealing with research and innovation contributed to the discussions.

In the opening session, the Assistant Minister for Science and Culture from Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), Mr. Suvad Dzafic, welcomed all participants to Sarajevo, thanked the European Commission (EC) for its support and wished all participants a successful Research and Innovation meeting. The Ambassador of Romania to Bosnia and Herzegovina, Ms. Dana Costantinescu, highlighted the priorities of the EU Council Presidency, thanked the EC for its engagement and wished all participants a fruitful meeting. Mr. Gianluca Vannini from the Delegation of the European Union to BiH also welcomed the participants informing about cornerstones regarding the R&I system in Bosnia and Herzegovina. On behalf of the EC, Mr. Kostas Glinos, DG Research and Innovation, wished the participants a productive meeting and discussions, acknowledging progress that has been made by the Western Balkans since the last meetings. Ms. Mimika Dobroshi further welcomed the participants on behalf of the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC), and emphasised how regional cooperation has become fundamental to overcome common political and economic challenges. As a representative of the EC's DG Joint Research Centre, Mr. Miroslav Veskovic greeted the participants and reconfirmed JRC's will to continue the support of the Western Balkans by providing scientific and technological support for the enlargement and integration process.

Smart specialisation in the context of R&I capacity building

The smart specialisation roadmap is on track in the Western Balkans. Albania is still in the early stages of the smart specialisation process while Bosnia and Herzegovina has not yet

started, and Kosovo* is preparing first steps. In the upcoming activities, they will benefit from experiences made by regional frontrunners and more advanced Western Balkan economies, supported by full political commitment in order to carry out the process in accordance with the JRC framework. North Macedonia's smart specialisation roadmap is closely followed and the country is achieving progress with clear political support from relevant authorities. Montenegro and Serbia are frontrunners in developing their Smart Specialisation Strategy in the Western Balkans. The first draft of Smart Specialization Strategy Serbia will be developed until mid-2019. Montenegro completed the Entrepreneurial Discovery Process phase and has undertaken the active work on the finalisation of the Strategy. Montenegro plans to adopt this Strategy at the national level by end of June 2019 and to submit it to the European Commission for an opinion.

Widening

Regional cooperation and mobility of researchers plays a vital role in the WB6 in view of ERA integration. Increasing and attracting human resources and capacity building in the R&I system are still a top priority for the Western Balkans. The better use of Widening instruments in Horizon 2020 and future Framework Programmes should be aimed at. In such a context, a regional mobility instrument in order to support capacity building and increase human resources would add value. The proposal for Horizon Europe foresees a substantially strengthened Widening budget including the COST programme, supporting the creation of research and innovation networks.

Open Science

It is now widely recognised that making research results more accessible to all societal actors contributes to better and more efficient science, and to innovation in the public and private sectors. With its support to Open Access, the 'European Open Science Cloud' aims at creating a trusted environment for hosting and processing research data to support EU science in its global leading role to advance research excellence and cooperation. At the same time the importance of collaboration with government and policy makers is recognised to include Open Science in policies, for capacity building, and for generating incentives for scientists. The Western Balkans are on their way to integrate this topic in their political agendas, and a meeting with experts on this topic should be planned before summer.

Conclusions and summary of the preparatory tasks for the Steering Platform meeting / Ministerial Meeting, Brussels, September 24, 2019

Participants agreed on the following issues to be forwarded for discussion at the upcoming Western Balkans Steering Platform meeting and Ministerial Meeting:

- The regional dimension of Smart Specialisation in the Western Balkans represents different stages of development in each of the economies. Further progress will be achieved with support of the Joint Research Center. Synergies among the Western Balkan economies should be sought and promoted. Centers of Excellence, flagship

* This designation is without prejudice to positions on status and is in line with UNSCR 1244 and the ICJ opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

initiatives such as SEEIIST, and research infrastructures have to be integrated into these strategies.

- Discussions on the most effective way to use the widening approach and instruments in the upcoming Framework Programme – Horizon Europe - will continue and a Joint Statement from the WB6 on this subject will be prepared reflecting on the role and engagement of the WB6 in Horizon Europe.
- Open Science Policies will be further discussed and the Western Balkans look forward to a Workshop organised on this topic before summer. The integration of the Western Balkans into the European Open Science Cloud has to be assured in order to grant them access to publications and research data.

Upcoming meetings:

On 4 and 5 July 2019, the 6th sixth annual Western Balkans Summit will take place in Poznań, Poland. The event is organised within the Berlin Process initiative for European integration of the WB6, and discussion will include aspects of the upcoming EU Framework Programme Horizon Europe. Heads of governments, foreign ministers, and the ministers of economy from WB6, as well as from Croatia, Slovenia, other EU Member States and representatives of the European Union and the International Financial Institutions will attend.

The European Commission looks forward to organising the Western Balkans Steering Platform on Research and Innovation and Ministerial Meeting in Brussels on September 24, 2019. This meeting will be held in the margins of the Research and Innovation Days (September 24 to 26, 2019). The next Western Balkans Research and Innovation meeting is envisaged to take place in autumn 2019. The venue will be communicated in due time.