

## Conclusions of meeting of Steering Platform on Research for Western Balkan Countries Paris, 19 December 2008

The Steering Platform for Research for the Western Balkan Countries met in Paris on 19 December 2008. The Platform was co-chaired by the French Presidency of the Council of the European Union – which hosted it – the Republic of Serbia on behalf of the Western Balkan Countries, and the European Commission.

The discussion on recent developments on Science and Technology in and for the Western Balkan Countries gave an overview of the different actions taken during the last six months. It also took note of the growing cooperation within the region and with the European Union Member States, the FP7 Associated States, as well as with organisations such as RCC, EUREKA, COST and UNESCO.

The discussion took place on the basis of prior received information sheets. This exercise should be continued to allow for a more focussed discussion on key actions and events which are important for the Region.

While many of the actions evoked aim at reinforcing the participation of the Western Balkan Countries in the 7<sup>th</sup> Framework programme, bilateral and multilateral programmes, other initiatives address the need to reinforce national S&T strategies and governance structures. The Platform took note that further work with regard to this last topic is particularly needed.

The specific discussion on mobility of scientists in the context of setting up the Young Scientist Programme in the frame of the SEE-ERA.NET project showed that scientists from the Western Balkan Countries are still hampered by the obstacles to the free circulation of persons in the entire European Research Area. To be able to react to this issue, the Platform underlines the importance to be specific in the identification of obstacles in order to be able to address them properly.

The Platform recommended that the Scientific Visa package should be implemented, as a matter of priority, in order to facilitate the circulation of researchers coming from the Western Balkan Countries in the European Research Area. The Platform also invites the Western Balkan Countries to report on the specific difficulties encountered.

From the presentation of the work done on statistics and indicators, the Platform recognised that substantial further efforts are necessary in order to obtain good statistics and indicators which are essential for a sound and effective S&T policy. In particular the Platform emphasised the need to train national experts and to improve infrastructure. In that regard, the Platform encourages the EU Member States to organise training of statisticians and the exchange of experts between the Western Balkan Countries and the Member States of the European Union.

The Platform noted the progress made in planning the use of IPA (Instrument for Pre-Accession (IPA)) funding for research capacity building.

On the possibility to implement a regional research strategy, further clarifications are necessary because the European Commission also offered a different option within IPA (on regional competitiveness). Further clarifications

are necessary before a study on the role of research in regional competitiveness may be fully supported. Western Balkan Countries reiterated their interest for establishment of the Regional Research Strategy for the Western Balkans.

The Western Balkan Countries will actively consider how they can programme a better use of IPA funding to support the efforts necessary to design and implement integrated research policies. This synergy was considered as a critical aspect for the further participation of the WBCs in the Research Framework Programme and their integration into the European Research Area.

The Platform took note that the report of the ESFRI regional issues Working Group will be presented during the conference “*research infrastructures and the regional dimension of ERA*” (24-25<sup>th</sup> of March 2009) in Prague, will be held under the Czech Presidency of the Council of the European Union. The importance of the regional partner facilities complementing large pan-European research infrastructures will be stressed during this occasion.

The Platform stated their encouragement for scientific cooperation between the Western Balkan Countries and the European Union to be dealt within the dedicated Forum established by the recent Conclusions of the Council on the European partnership for international scientific and technological cooperation.