

# Western Balkan Countries

## Western Balkan Countries INCO-NET - WBC-INCO.NET

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### 1. Background and objectives

In the last few years, considerable progress has been made to enhance scientific cooperation of the European Union (EU) (and Associated Countries) with Western Balkan countries (WBCs). WBC-INCO.NET is designed to become a major strategic project in order to support cooperation in the field of S&T between the EU, the countries associated to FP7 and WBCs.

The creation of the Steering Platform on Research between the EU and WBC — launched during the Austrian EU Council Presidency in June 2006 with the participation of the European Commission (EC) — has already had a considerable impact on the progress of S&T relations between the WBCs and the EU. The platform follows up on the S&T Action Plan, adopted in Thessalonica in 2003 during the Greek EU presidency, between the EU and the WBCs. It brings together senior S&T officials and invited experts, but despite having the highest level of coordination politically, its implementation capacity has remained limited.

WBC-INCO.NET was established in connection with the Steering Platform. It will provide analytical and operational support for the policy dialogues conducted under its roof. The EC already supported the Steering Platform by funding a Specific Support Action (SSA) submitted under FP6 (INCO): the 'Information Office of the Steering Platform' (<http://see-science.eu>), whose main services will be continued through WBC-INCO.NET.

The three core objectives of WBC-INCO.NET are:

- to support the bi-regional dialogue on S&T by interacting in an efficient division of labour with the Steering Platform on Research;

- to identify RTD priorities and RTD potential in a transparent and methodologically sound way in WBCs. These will subsequently be prepared for eventual take-up in forthcoming work programmes and calls for proposals due to be launched under the Cooperation, People and Capacity Specific Programmes of FP7;
- to enhance the participation of researchers from WBCs in European projects of mutual interest and benefit by implementing relevant capacity building measures on a structural (horizontal) and individual (i.e. research entity) level, and by accompanying tailor-made networking activities.

The concept of WBC-INCO.NET is to bring existing projects together so as to exploit synergies, fill in gaps with new structural activities, and enhance processes through coordination and networking.

### 2. Dialogue activities

WBC-INCO.NET will support the political dialogue between the EU Member States, the Associated Countries and the EC, with WBCs, by providing logistical and analytical evidence-based input to the Steering Platform. WBC-INCO.NET also supports dialogue within the region through 'Regional S&T Policy Meetings' to find common solutions to cross-border problems and challenges. Furthermore, a structured information exchange with representatives of several Directorates General of the EC will allow for the exploitation of the results and integration of S&T in other sectors (e.g. education, economy, labour market, regional development). Last but not least, round tables with international stakeholders, such as UNESCO, OECD, World Bank and other multilateral initiatives (e.g. relevant ERA-NETs), will be organised in order to disseminate information, detect synergies, avoid duplications and add critical mass to ongoing or planned activities.

### 3. Implementation and dissemination activities

The dialogues are substantiated with a number of analytical inputs. For this purpose, top European and regional research institutes are participating in WBC-INCO.NET to help identify research areas of mutual benefit, in an inclusive and comprehensive manner. WBC-INCO.NET will facilitate the identification of S&T needs and potentials of the WBCs, and their subsequent take-up in the calls for proposals launched under FP7.

WBC-INCO.NET also puts emphasis on capacity building and the facilitation of networking opportunities for researchers in order to improve absorption capacity and enhance the international recognition of existing WBC potential. Several renowned European National Contact Points (NCPs), organisations and research agencies have committed their capacities to joining WBC-INCO.NET and supporting the integration of the Western Balkan region into the ERA. Implementation activities will include seminars, workshops and reviews that will be targeted to, for example, statisticians and civil servants working with S&T statistics, finance managers from RTD organisations and research managers from companies, academies of science, universities, no-profit organisations, and NCPs. Brokerage events will be organised to serve researchers from all WBCs, the EU and coun-

tries associated with FP7. Furthermore, awareness raising sessions will be organised during major European S&T conferences in order to inform audiences about RTD cooperation potential of WBC researchers, and to support partner search.

### 4. Monitoring and review activities

WBC-INCO.NET will also monitor the take-up of identified research areas in forthcoming RTD programmes and the participation of WBC researchers in collaborative FP7 projects. Monitoring activities will deal with realised S&T cooperation and its impact (positive or negative, intended or not), analyses of existing cooperation patterns with social network methodologies and the exploration of barriers to cooperation through the use of empirical investigations. A milestone in this regard would be the development of a toolbox that provides reliable information on the conditions and opportunities of WBC researchers participating in FP7 and other selected European initiatives and programmes. This will allow for an evidence-based assessment of the level of involvement of WBC researchers, its structure and articulation, as well as a better understanding of major barriers that hamper more active cooperation between researchers from WBC and the EU.

#### List of partners

Country	Acronym	Participant organisation name
Austria	ZSI	Centre for Social Innovation - Coordinator
Albania	MOES	Ministry of Education and Science
Croatia	MZOS	Ministry of Science, Education and Sports
FYR of Macedonia	MON-MK	Ministry of Education and Science
Montenegro	MPIN	Ministry of Education and Science
Serbia	MSCI	Ministry of Science
Bosnia and Herzegovina	SUS BIH	Foundation for Higher Education World University Service
Serbia	MPI	Mihailo Pupin Institute
Croatia	IvoPilar	Institute of Social Sciences Ivo Pilar
Kosovo*	KEC	Kosova Education Center
Albania	CIVET	CIVET 2000
Slovenia	SBRA	Slovenian Business & Research Association
Greece	SEERC	South East European Research Centre
Netherlands	UNU-MERIT	UNU - Maastricht Economic and Social Research and Training Centre on Innovation and Technology
Spain	JRC-IPTS	Joint Research Centre, Institute for Prospective Technological Studies
Germany	PT-DLR	International Bureau of the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research
Austria	FFG	Austrian Research Promotion Agency
Turkey	TUBITAK	Scientific and Technological Research Council
Greece	GSRT	General Secretariat for Research and Technology, Ministry of Development
Slovenia	MHEST	Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Technology
Austria	BMWF	Federal Ministry of Science and Research
Germany	BMBF	Federal Ministry of Education and Research
Bulgaria	MES-CRA	Ministry of Education and Science
Belgium/ Turkey	TURBO	Turkish Research and Business Organisations
Italy	APRE	Agency for the Promotion of European Research
Bosnia and Herzegovina	MCA	Ministry of Civil Affairs

\* as defined by the UNSC resolution 1244 of 10.06.1999