

Conclusions of meeting of Steering Platform on Research for
Western Balkan Countries
Becici, 11 November 2010

The Steering Platform on Research for the Western Balkan Countries met in Becici on 11 November 2010. The meeting was co-chaired by the Belgian Presidency of the Council of the European Union, Montenegro on behalf of the Western Balkan Countries – who hosted the event – and the European Commission.

The Steering Platform heard the introductory statements from Montenegro, the Belgian Presidency and the European Commission, highlighting the recent policy actions taken at EU and regional level and notably on the proposed Innovation Union and the impact this will have on future activities in research cooperation already now in the upcoming FP7 calls and certainly in FP8. Platform members asked how actions in support to facilitating integration in the European Research Area and in particular on research capacity building, such as the research potential programme, will be addressed in the future. In this context it was recalled how important it is for the scientific community and innovation actors from the Balkan region to have specific actions in the research potential programme within FP7. The Platform took note of this request. As to FP8, the WBCs announced a contribution to the FP8 consultation process which is to be welcomed. The Steering Platform welcomed the progress noted on the research chapter in the “enlargement package” adopted by the Commission. The package also showed the overall progress made towards future integration into the EU.

The presentations of the Progress reports showed that both the Balkan countries and the other Platform members were actively promoting research cooperation under FP7, which is very much to be welcomed, and indeed necessary in order to increase participation and strengthen research capacity. Several actions had also been taken to facilitate future integration in the European Research Area. This was also demonstrated by the activities of COST and Eureka. With respect to regional cooperation, the Platform took note of the further progress announced by the RCC on the support under IPA for the development of a regional R&D strategy for innovation. The Steering Platform also took note of the progress made on research cooperation in the SEE.ERA.NET Plus project.

The Platform discussed, on the basis of several presentations, how to engage more and better the SMEs and industry in research. It was recognized that this is a core priority for the EU and thus also

for the candidate and potential candidate countries. All the presentations were very informative and should stimulate the WBCs to pro-actively consider the participation of SMEs in EU research projects and programmes. The Platform was very much stimulated by the presentation made by UEAPME (The Genesis Initiative) which outlined that it is of key importance to create more awareness on the research possibilities for SMEs through all forms of communication and that FP7 offers such opportunities but that this should be made known to a wider audience, in the first place, at national level. The presentation on European Technology Platforms showed that this instrument also offered possibilities for the WBCs and they will analyze the opportunities in given markets, where industry and academia could contribute to the objectives of ERA through ETPs.

The presentation of the CIP project 'Numix' demonstrated that CIP has good potential for WBCs but that further efforts are required to stimulate the industry and service sector into participating in research and to take more CIP projects.

The Steering Platform welcomed a first introduction to the Innovation Union (IU) and will analyze the policy Communication further so as to contribute to the objectives set and integrate into the IU, as is expected from the candidate and potential candidate countries. In this context, the work of the WBC-INCO.NET, which has recently been enhanced with a strong focus on innovation issues, will be instrumental. The results of the first Innovation Dialogue Forum will feed into the process of strengthening innovation capacities, learning from good practices, and offering training and networking possibilities.

The Steering Platform welcomed the concrete cooperation possibilities offered by the Central European Initiative (CEI) on facilitating the networking of all stakeholders of the region committed to facilitate technological development. To ensure effective cooperation it was agreed that CEI, as well as the OECD, will be invited as an observer delegate to the Platform meetings on a regular basis.

The Steering Platform recognised that the reviewed guidelines allowed for a smoother and more focused agenda and discussion.

Information on the next meeting will be announced in due time.