

Launching Event

Steering Platform on Research for Western Balkan Countries

26 June 2006

Conclusions

At the launching event of the Steering Platform on Research in the Western Balkan Countries, Commissioner Potočnik set the tone and outlined the role of the Steering Platform to strengthen research cooperation between the Western Balkan Countries (WBC) and the European Union.

More than just exchanging information, the Steering Platform (SP) aims to be a *clearing house* for ideas and joint activities, intensifying the work which already started under the 2003 EU-Balkans Action Plan on Science and Technology.

The Steering Platform aims to go beyond the Seventh Framework Programme for RTD (FP7) by creating synergies with other stakeholders and also the pre-accession funds (IPA). Therefore Commissioner Potočnik called on the representatives of the Western Balkan Countries as well as the Member States to become actively involved in this process.

In the working sessions, the majority of participants concluded that it is due time to reflect on the working modalities of the SP and agreed that a mission statement and a concrete work plan for the Steering Platform is needed that includes procedural and organisational considerations.

As regards contextual topics of mutual interest, a lot of good ideas came up. While some of them are to be treated in more detail by projects such as SEE-ERA.NET or era-westbalkan, others are fairly well positioned to be discussed by the SP, especially those of more political and strategic nature.

The support of the "Information Office of the Steering Platform on Research in the Western Balkan Countries" which is implemented as a Specific Support Action for the next 24 months was welcomed.

Under discussion was the implementation of a lean management structure, not generating a new layer of institutional arrangement. On the other hand, the necessity of regular meetings was pointed out by the members of the Steering Platform as minimal condition for keeping the momentum. In this respect the upcoming presidencies, the European Commission and other initiatives have been called upon to provide means for (back-to-back) meetings.

Mission Statement

The „Steering Platform on Research for the Western Balkan Countries“ interacts between the Western Balkan Countries, the EU member states and states associated to the European Framework Programme for RTD and the European Commission as a discussion forum, a clearing house for joint ideas and activities and a mutually utilised know-how and information transfer centre. It is the main think tank to deal with European, multilateral and regional issues of S&T policies in the WBCs. In this spirit, it continues and intensifies the progress achieved under the EU-Balkans Action Plan on Science and Technology.

The bi-regional dialogue under the Steering Platform on Research for the Western Balkan Countries will:

- develop, promote, organise and structure the participation of the Western Balkan Countries in FP7;
- facilitate the identification and the prioritisation of common research areas of mutual interest and benefit;
- facilitate the uptake and use of research and innovation activities and monitoring of performance and effects of international S&T cooperation across the Specific Programmes of FP7.

Scope of the Steering Platform

During the meeting the Steering Platform discussed to tackle the following issues:

General Information Exchange within the Platform:

- giving visibility to and raising awareness for the integration of the WBCs into the European Research Area;
- identifying concrete needs, priorities and the means to support the process;
- supporting the coordination of relevant actions/efforts in this field;
- creating synergies between the stakeholders.

Consultation for the EC:

- promoting international S&T cooperation as horizontal concern in the different DGs (e.g. IPA etc.);
- providing input for the preparation of the international cooperation within the 'Cooperations' Work Programmes in FP7; acting as interlocutor for the thematic directorates and justifying the specific focus on the region;
- developing support instruments to stimulate S&T cooperation at bi-regional level in the 'Capacities' programme of FP7;
- considering specific actions under the international part of the FP7 'People' Programme such as the neighbourhood scheme; incoming fellowship for experienced researchers or open posts in the frame of the Marie Curie networks.

Discussion of activities on political/strategic level in the WBC:

- raising general awareness to position research as a priority for economic and social development; clarifying socio-economic benefits of collaborative research and the corresponding role of research policy and priority setting;
- raising awareness on conditions of association to FP7;
- developing regional strategies for an enhanced coverage of S&T in international financial schemes and development programmes;
- exchanging information on national/regional S&T initiatives and discussing regional approaches for joint RTD endeavours;
- mapping and setting sectoral/ thematic priorities according to the particular needs of each country;



- channelling information on topics of the work-programmes to thematic workshops in the region and identifying relevant topics;
- discussing the experience of the new member states/ candidate countries in the alignment to European S&T policy;
- supporting the preparation for a regional foresight approach;
- encouraging international evaluation of national research programmes;
- initiating benchmarking exercises for RTD organisations in the WBC;
- exchanging information on how to design an integrated research, e.g. by organising trainings and exchanges of experience of policy makers and research administrators.

Supporting research collaboration with the region (mobility and scientific infrastructure):

- understanding and re-mediating obstacles to mobility and elaborating mechanisms to increase the participation of researchers from the WBC in FP7;
- facilitating mobility of researchers; lobbying for possibilities to reduce administrative and legal requirements (visa and social security issues);
- encouraging the creation of National Contact Points and training of experts and information multipliers to promote FP7 opportunities in the region;
- explaining procedures and possibilities under FP7 and other research actions (Vademecum for WBC researchers on finding the way to participating in EU research actions);
- disseminating information on comparative advantages of existing WBC capacities to other countries participating under FP7;
- disseminating information on awareness actions, information sessions, brokerage events, Researcher's Mobility Portals (ERA-More network) and the involvement of the scientific Diaspora (ERA-LINK).
- facilitating policy processes towards mutual access to research infrastructures;
- considering and approaching different means to support research infrastructure (ESFRI and/or FP7 research infrastructure actions);
- identifying sectoral priorities for infrastructure in the region leading to the development of key research infrastructure of relevance for the region.

Raising Awareness on synergies with other instruments and organisations among all stakeholders:

- identifying/using links with other EU policies following the Lisbon strategy;
- creating synergies with Pre-accession funds (IPA) (in each WBC and multi-planning of the Action Programmes);
- partnering with other European financial institutions such as EIF, EIB and EBRD;
- examining Risk Sharing Finance Facilities;
- considering synergies with COST, Eureka, ESFRI, JRC, NATO Science Programme, etc.;
- coordinating activities and exchange of information with the Stability Pact for South East Europe;
- disseminating important results and concerns from strategic projects and initiatives of regional importance, such as SEE-ERA.NET, era.westbalkan or ERI-SEE etc.;
- considering submission of an INCO-NET proposal following the regional approach.

