

Conclusions of meeting of Steering Platform on Research for
Western Balkan Countries
Budva (Montenegro) on 5-6 June 2013

The Steering Platform on Research for the Western Balkan Countries met in Budva on 5-6 June 2013. The meeting was co-chaired by the Irish Presidency of the Council of the European Union, Montenegro - who hosted the event and co-chaired on behalf of the Western Balkan Countries and the European Commission.

Montenegro opened the meeting by welcoming all the members of the Platform to their country and expressed the hope that as co-chair they can be of use in moving forward the research and innovation agenda between the EU and the enlargement countries. Montenegro took advantage of the occasion to share with the Platform their experience in the accession negotiations on chapter 25 on science and research and the continued efforts they have taken at national level since the provisional closure of the chapter in December 2012. In its opening statement, the Irish Presidency outlined its experience as Member State since 1973 and encouraged all WBCs to make the necessary efforts to join the Union. The European Commission welcomed the opportunity to inform on latest developments in EU Research and Innovation policy and also to learn about progress made by the WBCs on national R&I capacity. Referring to the conclusions on international cooperation, adopted at the Competitiveness Council on 30 May, the EC invited all members of the Platform to consider how cooperation on R&I could be deepened with the enlargement.

The Platform welcomed the presentation from the Irish Presidency on the latest developments and the state of play on the next EU Research and Innovation programme 'Horizon 2020'. It also took note of the conditions and procedure for association to 'Horizon 2020'. It was underlined that a request or an expression

of interest to associate was necessary in writing in order to launch the association procedure. All agreed that association is a good pre-accession tool but it was recognized that the decision should also be taken in full consideration of absorption capacity. DG ELARG underlined the importance of including R&I as a priority sector in the Country Strategy Paper under preparation for the implementation of the next Pre-Accession Instrument (IPA II). The proposed support measures by the Commission were welcomed, in particular the support for project preparation and promotion of participation in Horizon 2020. The Platform asked to be kept closely informed on developments in the organisation of the National Contact Points for Horizon 2020. A follow-up meeting on association to 'Horizon 2020', together with DG ELARG, was seen as useful.

In view of their possible association to 'Horizon 2020', WBCs were also encouraged to step up efforts on R&I capacity at national level. Based on the presentation of the Progress Reports, it was encouraging to learn that the WBCs are in the process of revising their Law(s) on Research, Science and Technology and/or adopting national strategies on innovation and are working on S&T statistics. The variety of actions taken by the Member States and the countries associated to FP7 (Switzerland) in support of the Western Balkans, both on capacity building and offering cooperation opportunities on research and innovation and mobility of researchers, are all contributing to the objective of strengthening the R&I capacity. The support from other stakeholders, and notably the JRC, OECD, WBC.INCO.NET, SEE-ERANET Plus, RCC and CEI are also very precious for the Balkan Region.

Sharing information on progress and actions in the Steering Platform was seen as a very useful exercise in creating synergies and considering further actions addressing the global value chain in line with EU policies and objectives. It was noted that the Platform played a key role, for example, in allowing WBCs to become familiar with the Smart specialisation strategy, which had been fully

demonstrated by the Workshop on Smart specialization organized by the WBC-INCO.NET in Belgrade in April 2013.

The Platform welcomed the presentation which gave an update on the latest developments on the European Research Area. The WBCs were invited to carefully follow developments and contribute to the first Progress Report.

The Steering Platform was pleased with the selection of the FP7 project Danube INCO.NET and expressed the hope that it will lead to more research opportunities for all WBCs.

The Platform further welcomed the additional progress made in the EVAL-INNO project and underlined the importance of this project in preparing for Horizon 2020. Serbia recommended considering best practice, in particular.

The Steering Platform was also satisfied with the announced prolongation of the duration of the WBC.INCO.NET as a means to support the WBCs in making the bridge from FP7 to Horizon 2020 and took note of the future activities, in particular the final Conference and Brokerage event to take place in Vienna on 27-28 March 2014.

In view of the termination of the WBC.INCO.NET (April 2014), all members of the Steering Platform underlined the importance of continuing the policy dialogue with the WBCs beyond the duration of this FP7 project. In this context, the Platform welcomed the possibility outlined by the RCC in its presentation of the SEE Europe 2020 strategy, which would include a Regional Platform on Research and Innovation to monitor progress on the SEE 2020 strategy related to R&I (smart growth pillar). This Regional Platform would also be responsible for the implementation of the proposed Regional strategy for research and innovation under preparation, with the support of the World Bank. It was noted

that bringing the current Steering Platform under the auspices of the RCC would increase synergy and unite all actions under one forum. Given the importance of the Steering Platform from a pre-accession point of view, Members also asked to consider the possibility of ad-hoc support under IPA and/or 'Horizon 2020' to ensure the uninterrupted continuation of the present Steering Platform and the dissemination of information that the WBC.INCO.NET has so far provided through the WBC Newsletter and website. Whatever solution was found, a real plea was made to continue the policy dialogue until the accession of all the WBCs to the EU.

The Steering Platform took note of the other actions taken at regional level, notably the presentation by the RCC of the Regional Strategy for Research and Innovation for the Western Balkans. The Platform, however, was not in a position to express its views on the proposed regional strategy, due to lack of detailed information on the joint initiatives. In view of the Ministerial Meeting in Skopje next July seeking endorsement of the Regional Strategy, the EC urged the WBCs to liaise with their representatives in the Steering body of the Regional Strategy.

The Platform also took note of the pilot project outlined by the CEI on supporting the integration and strengthening of centres of excellence in the Balkans. Interested representatives were invited to join the meeting of the CEI focal points in Trieste on 9-10 July to discuss the proposal in more detail.

The Platform took note of the establishment of the South East European Center for Advanced Studies (CAS) in Rijeka and noted that the important topic of “New Challenges for Democracy: Exploring the Crisis of Trust and Legitimacy in Europe” will be addressed at the inaugural conference to be held in Rijeka on 16-18 October 2013.

The Platform was grateful for the presence of the Lithuanian Presidency at this meeting and is looking forward to preparing together the next Platform meeting. The brief outline of their Presidency Programme was also much welcomed as guidance for our future work.

Croatia expressed an interest in hosting and co-chairing the next meeting in the second half of 2013, together with the upcoming EU Lithuanian Presidency and the European Commission. Information on this will be announced in due time.