

Conclusions of meeting of Steering Platform on Research for
Western Balkan Countries
Tirana, 12-13 June 2012

The Steering Platform on Research for the Western Balkan Countries met in Tirana on 12-13 June 2012. The meeting was co-chaired by the Danish Presidency of the Council of the European Union, Albania - who hosted the event on behalf of the Western Balkan Countries - and the European Commission.

Albania welcomed the Steering Platform members and confirmed its commitment towards EU membership. In this context it underlined the useful role of the Steering Platform and how honored it was to be hosting it. The Danish Presidency presented its Presidency programme 'Europe at Work', highlighting the actions taken to move forward the EU Agenda on Research and Innovation. The European Commission welcomed the opportunity to meet and share information on recent developments on research and innovation and encouraged all the Platform members to take advantage of these meetings to become more familiar with the EU *acquis* on Research and Innovation in general. The Platform welcomed the presentation by the Danish Presidency which helped towards understanding the overall functioning of the EU and learning about the most important recent developments. The Platform welcomed the information by the Danish Presidency on the General Partial Agreement (GPA) on Horizon 2020 adopted at the Competitiveness Council on 31 May 2012.

The Steering Platform welcomed the variety of measures and different actions taken over the last 6 months by all participants. This is seen as a direct result of the good cooperation in the Steering Platform and commitment towards the

Balkan region. All Balkan countries reported progress in line with the EU *acquis* on EU Research and Innovation. The increased number of actions to stimulate innovation was also noted. A good illustration of this was made by the Albanian Business Relay and Innovation Centre (BRIC) who presented its action SITA (Strategic Innovation Technology Audit) providing support to stimulate SMEs to implement their R&I ideas. The Platform welcomed the continued commitment from CEI, EUREKA and UNESCO towards the Balkan region and took note of EUREKA's invitation to start considering possible EUREKA chairmanship. The Steering Platform also welcomed the package of actions taken by the Joint Research Centre for the enlargement countries.

The Platform welcomed the most recent information on the upcoming FP7 work programmes, especially on the next generation biofuels and support for the Danube Strategy. In this context the Steering Platform asked to ensure that all Western Balkan countries will continue to be fully covered and that the role of the Steering Platform will be duly considered, building upon the useful and constructive work undertaken by the FP7 WBC- INCO.NET project. The importance of continuing the coordination efforts with and for all the Western Balkans was stressed.

All members were encouraged to actively consider research cooperation opportunities in the last FP7 calls, which should serve as a good transition to Horizon 2020. In this context cooperation between the more experienced members of the Platform and the less successful participants was seen as a way to facilitate and strengthen the participation of the Balkan countries in key research areas necessary to address the societal challenges.

The Platform welcomed the presentation of the Smart Specialization Strategy which helped in understanding how to prepare for actions on capacity building

and ensure effective synergies between Horizon 2020 and other EU instruments. The need for good and timely planning of projects was well illustrated by the examples presented by Hungary.

The Platform regretted the absence of an explicit reference in the proposed text of IPA II on the possibility to deploy IPA support for research and innovation capacity and ensure effective synergy between Horizon 2020 and IPA II. The Platform fully endorsed the work undertaken by TUBITAK/TURBO in the frame of the WBC-INCO.NET, seeking an amendment to IPA II for that purpose.

The Platform asked to continue the discussion on Smart Specialization and to be kept informed about the actions aiming at widening the participation in Horizon 2020, amongst others on the basis of the EU12 position paper initiated by Poland. In this context, the Platform recalled the WBC-INCO.NET analysis on mapping innovation capacities and infrastructures in the Balkan region, as well as the study on good practices of innovation policy and instruments. **The Platform encouraged the members to draw inspiration from the good practices when taking action.**

The Platform also took note of the use of the Smart Specialization Strategy to develop a regional strategy for Research, Development and Innovation for the WBCs, led by the World Bank. It also welcomed the organization of a workshop before the end of 2012 on the Innovation Union, with a focus on the self-assessment tool.

The European Commission reiterated that – where it can – it will continue to assist and support the WBCs in their efforts to strengthen the Research and

Innovation capacity at national and regional level, while at the same time underlining the importance of ownership of the beneficiary countries.

Serbia expressed an interest in holding the next meeting, to be co-chaired by Serbia, in the second half of 2012, together with the upcoming EU Cyprus Presidency and European Commission. Information will be announced in due time.