

**Main Developments in Research and Innovation: Montenegro update**  
**Western Balkans Platform on Research and Innovation**  
**12 February 2025**

In terms of **strategic framework**, the first strategic cycle of the Smart Specialization Strategy in Montenegro has officially concluded at the end of 2024, and preparations for the new Smart Specialization Strategy, for the period 2026-2031, are well underway.

The Quantitative Analysis Report, implemented with the support of the JRC, that we have received in December 2024, has identified 5 potentially priority areas, namely: tourism, food, energy, ICT, and construction. In accordance with the Roadmap for the development of the new Strategy, which was adopted by the Government of Montenegro in April 2024, Montenegro is currently in the final phase of Qualitative Analysis Process.

With the aim of further exploring the potentials identified through Quantitative Analysis, using Qualitative approaches, Ministry of Education, Science and Innovation has formed Qualitative Analysis Teams (QA teams).

Within the framework of the Qualitative mapping of innovation, scientific, and economic potential, focus groups with key stakeholders, local experts, and a foreign expert who provides support in the process of developing the Qualitative Analysis are scheduled for next week (17-20 February 2025).

Meanwhile, the Council for Innovation and Smart Specialization, the Inter-institutional S3 Group, and the National S3 Team are fully operational.

In order to bridge the one-year gap between the two strategies, a one-year Plan for the implementation of S3 for 2025 is currently being developed, and it will maintain the continuity of the S3 support measures.

As previously announced, the new Smart Specialization Strategy is expected to be adopted in the first quarter of 2026.

Furthermore, the preparation of the final Report for 2024 and preparations for the first external evaluation are underway.

To conclude, this year is of particular importance for the Smart Specialisation Strategy, as it will provide a quality review of the implementation of the previous strategy and prepare the new Strategy for the next six-year period.

Further on, the *Research and Development Strategy 2024-2028* was adopted at the beginning of July 2024, followed by the *Roadmap for Research Infrastructure 2024-2028*. The Strategy embedded nine research priorities adopted by the Council for Scientific Research Activity, including those recognized by the previous S3 Strategy, namely: Sustainable Agriculture and Food Value Chain; Energy and Sustainable Environment; Sustainable and Health Tourism; Science, Education, and Culture; Medicine and Health; Socio-political and Socio-economic Challenges of Montenegrin Society; New Materials, Technologies, Products, and Services; Risk Management of Natural Disasters; and ICT.

In terms of **legal framework**, the Government of Montenegro approved 3 legal documents that are now through the parliamentary procedure:

- *The Law on Scientific Research Activities* strengthens the recognition and monitoring of research actors, supports their development, enables system evaluation and digitization per EU standards, and introduces new professional recognition to enhance career growth and visibility,
- *Proposal of the Law on Incentive Measures for the Development of Research and Innovation* streamlines the process for granting innovation incentives, establishes a monitoring system with sanctions, and improves project tracking efficiency,
- *Proposal of Amendments to the Law on Innovation Activities* refers to technical harmonization.

Speaking of **funding of research and innovation** in 2024, total state funding in 2024 amounted around 15 million €.

Regarding the funding of research activities, in addition to the standard *Public Call for co-financing scientific research activities in 2024*, worth 420.000 €, two new programmes are introduced in 2024: *Scholarship Programme for Excellence in Doctoral Research in Montenegro* that supported 30 doctoral scholarship holders with somewhat over 1 mil. € and *Research Grants Programme for Promoting Excellence*, worth 2.1 mil €, where 20 received applications are under review.

In the area of funding innovation activities, the Ministry implemented two programmes to support the participation of Montenegrin beneficiaries in the international innovation programmes, EUREKA and Innovative Europe (Pillar III of Horizon Europe), where 3 new Eureka projects were approved.

Through the Incentive Measures Mechanism for the Development of Research and Innovation, 2,4 mil € was invested in startups, innovation infrastructures and licensed research institutions.

The Ministry also promoted science and innovation in the society and also praised and rewarded the achievements of scientists and innovators via three public calls: two calls supporting scientific and innovation programmes within the Festival Science and Innovation Days 2024, with over 100 events, and the Call for annual awards for scientific achievements that will be finalized very soon this year. In 2024 the Ministry also conducted the first Call of science promotion aimed specifically at the NGO sector, worth 0,1 mil €.

In 2024, the **Innovation Fund** has focused on implementing already established support programmes from the previous period, and implemented seven programme lines, thus funding over 70 projects with around 2.4 mil €. The *Programme for fostering innovation for industrial energy efficiency* as interinstitutional S3 flagship was continued in 2024. The Work Plan of the Innovation Fund of Montenegro for 2025 is adopted by the Innovation and S3 Council and expects the Government adoption.

The **Science and Technology Park of Montenegro** was officially opened in June 2024, marking a significant boost to the development of innovation infrastructure in Montenegro. It has already admitted 18 tenants based on the 1st call cycle, and right now the 2nd Call for tenants is underway. It is continuously providing the services and programmes to the community, and additional significant

novelty is the establishment of the Technology Transfer Office (TTO) within the Science and Technology Park with primary goal to facilitate the commercialization of research, foster innovation and bridge the gap between academia and industry.

**The Innovation and Entrepreneurship Center Tehnopolis Nikšić** continued to support innovation and entrepreneurship in Montenegro by improving conditions for startups and companies, hosting events, and enhancing its business incubator. Ongoing projects include the development of the Digital Revolution Hub that is in its final stage and participation in EU-funded programs. Tehnopolis is implementing the 4th edition of pre-acceleration programme BoostMeUp that in 2024 received a record-breaking 54 high-quality applications.

Under the **IPA III EU Reform Facility**, the Ministry Innovation Fund are collaborating with the World Bank through the BEST program to enhance the innovation ecosystem, strengthen infrastructure, and support R&D reforms, while also partnering with the UN to advance smart specialization.

Regarding **Montenegro's participation in Horizon Europe**, the promotion of this programme was strengthened through the organisation of a series of training sessions, accompanied with the implementation of the Horizon Europe Widera.Net project, where the Ministry enhanced support for Montenegro's scientific and innovation community by funding study visits to top research institutions in Spain, Germany, and Italy, and provided travel grants for international networking and project proposals to Montenegrin researchers. Additionally, the Ministry launched a preliminary review call for Horizon Europe project proposals, offering expert evaluations to improve proposal quality before submission.

In 2024, Montenegro actively promoted the COST programme through dedicated info days, including a major event with the COST Association in April and another in September 2024.

The research project for Montenegro's participation in the 12th round of the European Social Survey was submitted.

Montenegro also saw the kick-off of the first European Digital innovation Hub. Namely, the European Commission approved the MontEDIH project, led by the University of Montenegro, to establish a digital innovation center supporting SME and public sector digital transformation, co-financed by national ministries and backed by a €1 million EU grant.

The European Institute of Innovation and Technology launched the EIT Community RIS Hub in Montenegro end May 2024 to facilitate Montenegro's participation in activities and programmes within the EIT KICs.

In terms of bilateral cooperation, it is worth emphasizing 20 new projects between Montenegro and Slovenia, 15 new projects with China, and 9 new projects between Montenegrin and Austrian beneficiaries.

Finally, the update regarding the Growth Plan for the WB and related Reform agendas: Montenegro's Reform Agenda was adopted by the European Commission on 23 October 2024, with funding contingent on successful reforms. The Reform 1.2.2 related to R&I aims to strengthen Montenegro's R&I ecosystem by enhancing funding access, international collaboration, and innovation infrastructure. Montenegro prepared the Implementation plans and is now through the process of tailoring a comprehensive inter-institutional response to implement reforms and adequately report to the European Commission.