

PODGORICA, 13-15 MAY 2025

Meeting of the Western Balkans Steering Platform on Research and Innovation

Western Balkans Agenda: R&I developments in the Western Balkans

Reporting by the Western Balkans

➔ Smart Specialisation

Albania

- S3 Governance Structure

- An Inter-Ministerial Committee chaired by the Deputy Prime Minister and supported by the Albanian S3 Team, both established by Prime Ministerial Order:
 - a. The Interministerial Committee is the highest decision-making body, responsible for validating outputs from monitoring processes, reviewing and updating the Action Plan, forming thematic working groups, engaging subject matter experts, coordinating with sectoral strategies and related initiatives, and managing medium-term budgeting and donor alignment for implementation.
 - b. The National S3 Team, oversees technical coordination and is responsible also for national and international reporting on S3 progress.
- A dedicated S3 Monitoring Unit will be established at the Ministry of Economy, Culture, and Innovation. It will act as the Technical Secretariat for the Inter-Ministerial Committee and provide implementation reports every 6 months.
- **The total budget for the S3 strategy is €1,187,948,616.** The largest allocations are for "Healthy and Sustainable Food Chain" (€396.87 million), "Research and Innovation" (€354.45 million), and "Sustainable and Diversified Tourism" (€177.53 million). Other priorities include "Renewable Energy" , "Raw Materials" and "Talent Retention", "Diaspora Engagement", "Education", "Digital Infrastructure," and "S3 Communication".

- Most significant ongoing initiatives:
 - **Durana Tech Park** has granted resident status to 34 entities, including startups, academic institutions, and digital nomads;
 - **Transformation of the Elbasan Industrial Area;**
 - **Establishment of Centers of Excellence;** : S3 foresee the establishment of 2 centers of excellence – one for Nanotechnology in Tirana and one for Biomarine Sciences in Vlora.
 - **EIT Raw Materials Center** – Accelerating Innovation and EU Alignment;
 - **Albanian Development Bank** – Strategic Instrument for Economic Transformation;
 - **Skills Development;**

Bosnia and Herzegovina

- In November 2020, the BiH Council of Ministers adopted a Decision on the appointment of members of the working group for the development of the Smart Specialisation Strategy (S3) in BiH.
- The names of the members of the working group were previously submitted by the Governments of both entities, the Government of Brčko District and relevant institutions from the BiH level.
- The Directorate for Economic Planning of BiH coordinates the development of the Smart Specialization Strategy in BiH.

- Several working group meetings have been held so far. In accordance with the methodology prescribed by the European Commission, reports were made based on
 - quantitative analysis (mapping of economic, innovative and scientific potential)
 - and qualitative analysis (interviews based on questionnaires), on the basis of which a proposal of priority areas and sub-areas for smart specialization in BiH emerged.

When agreement is reached in relation to the mentioned areas, the next step called the Entrepreneurial Discovery Process will be started.

At the beginning of March this year, a consultative meeting was held with JRC representatives in Sarajevo, to which members of the working group for S3 were invited.

The meeting discussed the experiences of the economies in the region regarding positive examples from practice in connection with the S3 process, as well as the next steps ahead.

Kosovo*

S3 Priority areas

- ICT
- Wood Processing Industry
- Green Energy
- Agro-Food Processing Industry
- Creative Industry

- 3 Core Pillars: **“Innovate Kosovo” “Empower Digital Creativity” “Drive Sustainable Prosperity”**

- This vision reflects the aim to foster innovation, leverage digital advancements, and achieve sustainability.

Five S3 strategic Objectives

- Strategic objective I: **Human Capacity Building for Sustainable and Inclusive Development;**
- Strategic objective II: **Economic growth fostered by functional Infrastructure and Skills for R&D;**
- Strategic objective III: **Cross-Sectoral Collaboration for Innovation Ecosystems;**
- Strategic objective IV: **Business Environment Enhancement;**
- Strategic objective V: **Regulatory Frameworks Aligned with Innovation Goals;**
- Draft strategy completed;
- Received preliminary JRC comments;

Next steps:

- Strategy inter-institutional and public consultation
- Approval of the strategy

Montenegro

Montenegro's Smart Specialisation Strategy

- **Strategic Cycle Conclusion**
 - First cycle ended in 2024; preparation for 2026-2031 underway.
- **Investment**
 - Over €113 million invested since June 2019, primarily from the national budget.
- **Quantitative Analysis Findings**
 - Completed with JRC support in December 2024
 - Identified five priority areas:
 - Tourism
 - Food
 - Energy
 - ICT
 - Construction

Current Developments and Future Directions

- **Qualitative Analysis Process**
 - Ongoing to explore identified potentials.
 - Focus groups with key stakeholders from February 17-20, 2025
- **EDP process**
 - postponed to autumn 2025 to enhance the quality of strategic document development
 - In preparation phase, efforts will focus on establishing a new local team within state institutions and strengthening the capacity of QA teams for the upcoming EDP process
- **Operational Framework**
 - Council for Innovation and Smart Specialization and National S3 Team active
 - One-year implementation plan for 2025 in development
- **Next Steps**
 - Final report of 2024 and first external evaluation in progress
 - New strategy adoption expected in Q2 2026.

North Macedonia

- **S3 Action Plan 2024-2025**

- 35 measures and 63 activities – 52% actions completed with € 6.1 million budget . Key initiatives:
- Five PhD scholarships for S3-aligned research (four awarded).
- "Digital Agriculture" study program at the Faculty of Agricultural Sciences and Food, in partnership with three other UKIM faculties.
- Digital Agriculture Laboratory established for research and business collaboration.
- Ministry of Economy and Labour launched €0.6M in funding for laboratory accreditation, circular economy projects, and academia-business collaborations.

Serbia

S3– IMPLEMENTATION STATUS

- Serbia adopted its Smart Specialisation Strategy (S3) for the period 2020–2027 in February 2020;
- Developed with support of the European Commission's Joint Research Centre (JRC);
- 4 vertical priorities:
 - Food for Future
 - Information and Communication Technologies (ICT)
 - Machines and Manufacturing Processes of the Future
 - Creative Industries
- 2 horizontal priorities:
 - Key Enabling Technologies
 - Energy-efficient solutions

S3 – MONITORING, PROGRESS & FUTURE STEPS

- Serbia is currently in the 5th year of S3 implementation.
- First Action Plan (2021–2022):
 - Over 70% of planned activities implemented.
- Second Action Plan (2023–2025):
 - Adopted in December 2023
 - Ensures continuity and adjustment to new innovation trends.
- Entrepreneurial Discovery Process (EDP) workshops
 - Planned for 2025 to support the design of the next Action Plan (2026–2027).
- New Action Plan (2026–2027):
 - To be adopted by the end of 2025.
- Impact assessment:
 - Planned after full implementation to evaluate strategic effectiveness and economic impact.