



Fellowship Report

Organisation sending: Science and Technology Park of Montenegro (STP MNE)

Name of the fellow: Srna Sudar

Organisation Hosting: German Aerospace Center (DLR)

Location of the fellowship: Germany

Names of the mentors: Birgit Ditgens and Malte Schrage-Veltins

Introduction

The fellowship at DLR Projektträger (DLR-PT) in Germany was conducted within the framework of the POLICY ANSWERS project, which aims to strengthen research and innovation policies and practices across the Western Balkans by fostering structured cooperation with European Union institutions and best-performing innovation ecosystems.

As the Director of the Technology Transfer Office (TTO) at the Science and Technology Park of Montenegro (STP MNE), the participation in this fellowship had a dual aim:

- To acquire first-hand knowledge of German and EU innovation transfer practices, and
- To develop a tailored strategy and practical toolkit for supporting innovation, technology transfer, start-ups, and IP management at STP MNE.

The fellowship directly contributes to the delivery of Deliverable 5.2 (D5.2) of the POLICY ANSWERS project, which emphasises the transfer of best practices in technology transfer and the establishment of sustainable models of innovation support in the Western Balkans.

Fellowship objectives

The overarching objective of the fellowship was to strengthen institutional capacities of the Science and Technology Park of Montenegro through exposure to leading European practices. Specific objectives included:

- Policy and strategy development: Learning how DLR-PT integrates policy design with innovation transfer and translating these insights into practical policies for Montenegro.
- Intellectual Property (IP) management: Understanding IP ownership structures, inventor compensation models, licensing practices, and frameworks for university-industry collaboration.
- Start-up and spin-off support: Exploring structured incubation and acceleration pathways, mentorship and access-to-finance programmes such as EXIST.
- Market readiness and commercialisation: Learning about technology and market readiness assessment methodologies, proof-of-concept funding and commercialisation pathways.
- Partnerships and funding opportunities: Mapping potential collaborations with German and European institutions and identifying relevant EU, national and bilateral programmes that STP MNE can access.

Overview of Fellowship Activities

The fellowship programme combined policy-level discussions, institutional visits and hands-on exchange with German counterparts. The key meetings were with DLR-PT - the major German project management agency under the German Aerospace Center (DLR). It manages national and EU funding programmes, including Germany's participation in EUREKA/Eurostars, and provides





advisory support for international cooperation and innovation funding. Following meetings and visits took place:

Day 1 - 1 September 2025 (Bonn and Cologne)

- DLR-PT Offices (Bonn): Discussions with policy officers and innovation managers on DLR-PT's role in designing, implementing and monitoring national and EU-funded research and innovation programmes. Special focus was given to how DLR-PT manages the interface between policy and practice, ensuring smooth transfer of research results to industry.
- DLR_Startup Factory (Cologne): Presentation of the incubation and acceleration models used by DLR. Topics included early-stage start-up mentoring, venture creation support, access to corporate partnerships and investment readiness. Practical examples demonstrated how scientific ideas are transformed into viable start-ups.

Day 2 - 2 September 2025 (Sankt Augustin and Bonn)

- Hochschule Bonn-Rhein-Sieg - ZWT and CENTIM: Exchange on how applied research is systematically commercialised through collaboration between academic departments, industry and entrepreneurship centres. Best practices in university-industry cooperation were discussed, with emphasis on the entrepreneurial culture within German universities.
- enaCom, University of Bonn: Insights into the university's innovation office, which provides proof-of-concept grants, entrepreneurship education and IP services to researchers. enaCom's experience in balancing academic research priorities with entrepreneurial incentives was particularly valuable for designing similar mechanisms in Montenegro.

Day 3 - 3 September 2025 (Bonn)

- DLR-PT Offices: Meetings on innovation transfer strategies, with case studies from German national innovation programmes.
- DLR Innovation Strategies Unit (Joseph-Beuys-Allee): Focused discussions on innovation strategies at regional and federal levels. The session highlighted how innovation policies are co-created with stakeholders and how DLR-PT supports ministries in shaping evidence-based policies.

Day 5 - 5 September 2025 (Berlin)

- Projektträger Jülich (EXIST Programme): In-depth exploration of the funding programmes it supports, with the focus on EXIST programme, a national funding scheme that provides financial support, training, and mentoring to academic entrepreneurs. This visit was particularly relevant for Montenegro, where structured national support for academic entrepreneurship is still in early stage.
- DLR Projektträger Berlin Office:
 - EUREKA/EUROSTARS, DLR-PT: EUREKA is an intergovernmental network established in 1985 to support market-oriented R&D and innovation projects of its member states across borders. EUROSTARS is one of its main funding programmes, co-funded by the EU, designed to support innovative SMEs in carrying out international R&D projects with partners from other countries.
 - DLR Projektträger Berlin Office: Final wrap-up meetings, focusing on international cooperation opportunities, joint EU projects and mechanisms for long-term collaboration.



Key Insights and Best Practices Learned

- Integrated approach to technology transfer: German practice shows that successful technology transfer requires close alignment of policy, funding mechanisms and institutional support structures.
- Proof-of-Concept and pre-seed funding: Dedicated funds for early validation of research results significantly increase the chances of successful commercialisation.
- Clear IP policies and management: Transparent frameworks on IP ownership and inventor compensation encourage researchers to participate actively in commercialisation. Focus is on licensing. The management of IP for all universities and DLR is handled by external company Provendis.
- Structured start-up pathways: German start-ups benefit from a clear ecosystem: idea validation → incubation → acceleration → investor readiness → scaling.
- Monitoring tools: Use of TRL (Technology Readiness Levels) and MRL (Market Readiness Levels) ensures objective assessment before committing resources to commercialisation.
- Cross-institutional partnerships: Strong collaborations between universities, research organisations, industry and government ensure a systemic approach to innovation.

Tailored roadmap/Action Plan for STP MNE

Based on the fellowship, a preliminary roadmap/action plan for the TTO of the Science and Technology Park of Montenegro is proposed:

1. IP Policy development

- Draft research-business IP ownership and licensing guidelines for STP MNE.
- Introduce inventor compensation mechanisms to motivate researchers.
- Establish a centralised IP readiness registry at the TTO.

2. Market readiness and commercialisation

- Introduce TRL/MRL assessment for all projects/products entering the TTO pipeline.
- Develop structured commercialisation guidelines and pathways including licensing, spin-offs and industry partnerships.

3. Start-up and Spin-off support

- Develop an Incubation & Acceleration Programme modelled after the Hochschule Bonn-Rhein-Sieg - ZWT/ CENTIM and using additionally experience of DLR Startup Factory.
- Provide investor readiness training and mentorship for start-ups.
- Create linkages with business angels and venture capital funds from Montenegro and abroad.

4. Capacity building

- Organise entrepreneurship and IP management workshops for TTO staff and for researchers and students.
- Implement staff exchange programmes with German and EU TTOs.

5. Policy recommendations

- Advocate for the development of a Montenegrin EXIST-like programme to support academic entrepreneurship at national level.





- Advocate for the development of a Montenegrin SMEs tailored made AI advancement programme to support SMEs advancement the use of AI (modelled by KI4KMU-RLP programme).
- Propose incentives for university-industry collaboration within Montenegro.

Potential partnerships and funding opportunities

Strategic partnerships

- DLR-PT (Germany): Cooperation in policy design, innovation transfer strategies and EU project participation.
- DLR_Startup Factory: Knowledge exchange on incubation/acceleration models, involving students in the entrepreneurial activities and education.
- Hochschule Bonn-Rhein-Sieg - ZWT/ CENTIM: Knowledge and expert exchange on commercialisation of research and impact of IP, and incubation/acceleration models.
- University of Bonn (enaCom): University partnerships on entrepreneurship education.
- Projektträger Jülich (EXIST Programme): Benchmarking for creating EXIST-like schemes in Montenegro.

Funding opportunities

- Horizon Europe (EIC Pathfinder, Transition, Accelerator).
 - HORIZON-EIE-2026-02-CONNECT-01: From lab to market: Strengthening the role of Technology Transfer Offices in bringing knowledge to the market (Deadline September 2026)
 - Call is in the prepublication of the EIE WP 2026-2027: Comitology Register
- European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT Digital, EIT Health, EIT InnoEnergy).
- Erasmus+ (Alliances for Innovation, Capacity Building in Higher Education).
- Interreg Danube and Adriatic-Ionian Programmes for regional innovation cooperation.
- IPA III (EU pre-accession funds) for innovation ecosystem strengthening.
- Bilateral programmes with Germany and other EU Member States.

Institutional impact and benefits

This fellowship provided an unprecedented opportunity for Montenegro to connect with one of Europe's most advanced innovation ecosystems. The direct benefits for STP MNE include:

- Access to best practices in IP management and commercialisation.
- Concrete models for start-up incubation, acceleration and proof-of-concept funding.
- Strengthened international cooperation and visibility of Montenegro's TTO.
- Roadmap for establishing a systematic and sustainable support mechanism for start-ups and technology transfer.
- Improved capacity of staff to engage with European programmes and funding schemes.

Conclusions and next steps

The fellowship has demonstrated that Montenegro can accelerate its innovation and technology transfer capacities by adopting structured practices from German institutions, while tailoring them to local needs and capacities.

Next steps:

- Cooperation on drafting IP Policy guidelines for STP MNE.



- Cooperation on developing a Market Readiness & Commercialisation Toolkit.
- Cooperation on developing an incubation and acceleration programme within STP MNE.
- Initiate discussions with German partners on joint project proposals.
- Advocate for a national start-up and SMEs support programmes inspired by EXIST and KI4KMU-RLP programmes.

The fellowship outcomes will directly enhance the Science and Technology Park of Montenegro's role as a central hub for innovation, entrepreneurship, and technology transfer, positioning Montenegro more strongly within the European Research and Innovation Area.

