

Joint Action Plan 2009 for Co-operation beyond SEE-ERA.NET

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RE	Restricted to a group specified by the consortium (including the Commission Services)	
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1. Introduction

In August 2007, the “White Paper on overlaps, gaps and opportunities in view of the extension of bilateral RTD programmes and initiatives towards multilateral approaches” and its accompanying Joint Action Plan were finalised as a deliverable of SEE-ERA.NET. Since then, the White Paper has been widely distributed; it was published, inter alia, in "Transition Studies Review" (Springer Verlag Wien New York) in autumn 2007, it was presented to and discussed with the European Commission at an intra-service consultation meeting in Brussels on 28 February 2008, and it was put forward to and debated at meetings of the Steering Platform on Research for the Western Balkan countries in Thessaloniki on 29 October 2007 and in Ljubljana on 13 June 2008. Some of the proposed actions of the Joint Action Plan have already been implemented, some have been started, and some remain outstanding. Feedback and many recommendations have been collected and now, after two years and close to the end of the SEE-ERA.NET project, it seems to be a good time to revise the Joint Action Plan once more.

While the White Paper is designed as a policy paper, the Joint Action Plan has to be understood as a working paper that reflects the current situation, proposes appropriate measures, and gains momentum through the combination, coordination and adaptation of the individual measures. This makes the Joint Action Plan the ideal document to be updated from time to time, summarising and outlining all measures aimed at strengthening strategic reform processes with regard to S&T in the Western Balkan countries, securing a high level of participation of the Western Balkan countries in the 7th EU Framework Programme for research and technological development (FP7), and promoting the intensive use of existing cooperation instruments, or, where necessary, introducing new, coherent and complementary or joint cooperation instruments.

The Joint Action Plan 2007 described the general concept underlying these activities, with particular emphasis on those measures that were planned to be further developed and implemented by the partners of the SEE-ERA.NET consortium through the expansion of previous and ongoing coordination activities in its “Regional Programme for Cooperation with Southeast Europe” (ReP-SEE). In addition, interested European and international institutions were addressed by a multitude of proposals and invited to contribute to the planning and implementation of all activities covered by the Joint Action Plan. In order to describe the current state of implementation of the measures outlined in the Joint Action Plan 2007, chapter two of this document is dedicated to taking stock of initiatives and the first results. On the basis of these findings, an updated Joint Action Plan (2009) is provided in chapter three, including amendments and an outlook.

2. Joint Action Plan 2007: Stocktaking of Implementation

2.1 Regional Programme for Cooperation with Southeast Europe (ReP-SEE)

The Regional Programme aims to provide new momentum for enhanced S&T cooperation with the Western Balkan countries. ReP-SEE was designed as an umbrella for all further measures that had to be prepared and initiated by the partners of the SEE-ERA.NET consortium. ReP-SEE consists of four pillars, namely (1) a Joint Call for European research projects, (2) Accompanying Measures to facilitate

joint research, (3) a Young Scientists Programme to foster the individual mobility of young scientists and (4) an Innovation Programme with the aim of linking SMEs, technology/innovation centres and other innovation structures in the Western Balkan countries to existing thematic innovation networks/clusters in the EU partner countries.

2.1.1 Joint Call for European Research Projects

The core aim of the Joint Call as mentioned in the Joint Action Plan 2007 was to fund “Collaborative Research Projects”. This aim is about to be addressed in the FP7 project “Further integrating key research institutions from Southeast Europe into the European Research Area” (SEE-ERA.NET PLUS), which started on 1 April 2009 and is outlined in chapter 3.1, “Initiatives for ‘Collaborative Research Projects’”.

2.1.2 Accompanying Measures

The Accompanying Measures aim at preparing the ground for Joint RTD, especially through small-scale activities that facilitate or support capacity and institution building, policy development and regional development. Since August 2007, the following four Accompanying Measures – which have been initiated and funded under the umbrella of SEE-ERA.NET’s Pilot Joint Call – have already been implemented. Since the SEE-ERA.NET project is about to be terminated in August 2009, no further Accompanying Measures are foreseen.

The event “**Management training for science administrators from the Western Balkan countries**” was successfully held in Bonn, Germany, on 3-7 December 2007. The Federal Ministry of Education and Research of Germany (BMBF) and its International Bureau at PT-DLR organised this measure. The aim was to support the further development and differentiation of the national S&T system and S&T policy in the Western Balkan countries (WBC) by providing training, building on German experiences and knowledge. Science administrators from the respective ministries of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia participated in the management training session in Bonn, Germany. The participants of the management training:

- were introduced to the national S&T system and policy of the Federal Republic of Germany, including relevant aspects of European and international cooperation,
- got an overview on the responsibilities of the institutions,
- deepened their knowledge of the instruments and the administrative procedures for the implementation of the relevant national and bilateral S&T funding programmes and the promotion of participation in the EU Framework Programmes for research and technological development,
- took advantage of the opportunity to get an insight into practical work in important areas of science administration,
- engaged in an exchange of experiences

The “**South East European Conference on Innovation**” was organised on 29 and 30 November 2007 by the Southeast European Era-Net (SEE-ERA.NET), under the auspices of the Hellenic Ministry of Development, General Secretariat for Research &

Technology. The objective of the conference was to prepare the ground for the participation of SMEs and other innovation-related structures in the future planned SEE-ERA.NET innovation activities.

The main contribution to the conference was the presentation of a study that identified and analysed existing research, technological development and innovation (RTDI) cooperation needs in the Southeast Europe region, focusing in particular on possible innovation support infrastructures and services in the Western Balkan countries, their absorption capacity for RTD and innovation, and transnational cooperation and regional cooperation opportunities for innovation. This study was realised in the course of the SEE-ERA.NET project.

Innovation stakeholders from the SEE-ERA.NET countries, representatives of RTD and innovation-related structures from countries outside SEE-ERA.NET and other European networks as well as other European and international funding bodies participated and discussed their innovation policies and activities, their problems and needs, and their expectations and proposals for future innovation related collaboration actions within SEE-ERA.NET. Nearly 100 attendees participated in the conference, which was held at the Centre for Research and Technology Hellas (CERTH) in Thessaloniki.

At the conference, it was agreed that the future SEE-ERA.NET innovation activities should aim at

- Raising awareness of the potential of joint innovation activities
- Defining the scope of joint innovation activities and building on common interests of the innovation stakeholders by addressing their specific needs
- Developing specific innovation-related actions and tools
- Attracting the interest of potential national, regional and international funding bodies in participating in the joint innovation activities.

The Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Technology of Slovenia and the SEE-ERA.NET project partners have joined forces to organise the **Herman Potočnik-Noordung Award** for donations of scientific equipment in the area of Research Technology and Development (RTD) collaboration in the WBC. In this way, they are bringing the problem of infrastructural needs to the attention of the public and relevant stakeholders, such as science policy-makers and potential investors. At the end of 2007, the SEE-ERA.NET project partners from the Western Balkan countries gathered information to put together a list¹ of the most urgent infrastructure needs in the WBC. Donations are expected to take the form of either second-hand scientific equipment or the financial means to purchase or develop the required infrastructure in the Western Balkan countries, with a value of €20,000 or above. During the first Herman Potočnik-Noordung Award Ceremony, which was held in Ljubljana City Museum on 13 June 2008, Slovenian Minister for Higher Education, Science and Technology Ms Mojca Kuclar Dolinar thanked the representatives of the Joint Research Centre of the European Commission and the Slovenian company Sava for their donation of research equipment for Western Balkan research institutions. At the

¹ <http://www.investsciencesee.info/infrastructureneeds.html>

SEE-ERA.NET Steering Board meeting in Paris on 17 December 2008, members of the Potočnik-Noordung Award Selection Commission decided to distribute the offered technical equipment to research institutions in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. It was decided that the website should be kept open to new donors.

Information on evaluation measures and systematic approaches to the different types of R&D evaluation are of interest for the Western Balkan countries (WBC). For this reason, the Federal Ministry of Education and Research of Germany and the Ministry of Education and Science of the FYR of Macedonia jointly organised SEE-ERA.NET's **International Conference on Evaluation and Benchmarking** in Ohrid, FYR of Macedonia on 8 and 9 October 2008. This conference contributed to the discussion of approaches and criteria for the evaluation and benchmarking of R&D institutions by offering expertise and European standards for a dialogue between the policy-makers and the science community in WBC.

The overall aims were to raise awareness of the subject of R&D evaluation and benchmarking, to introduce European "good practice" and to propose possible approaches to evaluation and benchmarking in the R&D system to be applied in the WBC. An underlying objective is to promote the integration of the WBC into the European Research Area and to contribute to the enlargement process.

More than 40 policy-makers and experts from 8 different countries (including 4 WBC) as well as a representative of the European Commission participated in the conference. The conclusions² of the meeting have been documented.

2.1.3 Young Scientists Programme

The core objective of the Young Scientists Programme is to foster the individual mobility of excellent young scientists from home institutions in the Western Balkan countries (outward) or to host institutions in the Western Balkan countries (inward).

The preparation of a first concept for a multilateral programme for SEE mobility was initiated at the "SEE-ERA.NET workshop on the ReP-SEE Young Scientists Programme", which was organised by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research of Germany and its International Bureau at PT-DLR in Bad Neuenahr (Bonn), Germany on 29 and 30 May, 2008. On the basis of the discussed need for action in the field of mobility with the Western Balkan countries and a stocktaking of existing mobility programmes, a first concept for the Rep-SEE Young Scientists Programme was outlined. Building on the findings of this workshop, the Romanian partner, the National Authority for Scientific Research (ANCS), which was responsible for the further development of the Rep-SEE Young Scientists Programme, prepared a complementary "Study on mobility needs and career development opportunities in Southeast Europe". In addition, "SEE-ERA.NET's mobility workshop" was held in Timisoara, Romania on 2 April 2009. This workshop brought together interested stakeholders from EU Member States, Associated countries and Western Balkan countries, including those that run or plan to run funding programmes at unilateral, bilateral and multilateral level, and provided a setting for the presentation of existing or possible joint actions in the field of SEE

² http://www.see-era.net/attach/Conclusions_Evaluation_and_Benchmarking_final.pdf

mobility. After two SEE-ERA.NET workshops on mobility, the observation is that setting up a specific mobility programme for the WBC is not, for the time being, of the highest priority for the WBC. For the near future, the implementation of “stand-alone measures” currently seems more appropriate. It was agreed to prepare “Recommendations for stand-alone measures in the field of mobility with the Western Balkan countries”.

2.1.4 Innovation Programme

An Innovation Programme was proposed as the fourth pillar of the ReP-SEE. Coordinated by the General Secretariat for Research & Technology of the Hellenic Ministry of Development – and taking into account the results of the “South East European Conference on Innovation” (referred to under 2.1.2) – the proposal “South East European ERA-NET on Innovation” (SEE-ERA.NET INNO) was submitted under the Call FP7-INCO-2007-3, which was closed on 12 February 2008. The aim of this project – which comprised 20 ministries and funding bodies from 15 different countries, including all Western Balkan countries – would have been not only to develop an appropriate instrumental setting for joint actions supporting RTDI in the SEE region, but also to implement a pilot joint call on research and innovation. The proposal was evaluated positively and placed on the reserve list. Unfortunately, due to a lack of funds, the project was dropped.

2.2 Initiatives towards Infrastructure Development

The S&T infrastructure in the Western Balkan countries is in urgent need of updating and improvement. Smaller-scale infrastructure such as electronic databases or equipment for research laboratories needs to be renewed, and access to large S&T infrastructures needs to be provided. The following short- and medium-term measures have already been implemented:

- It was decided that the “European strategic forum on research infrastructures” (**ESFRI**) should be opened to newly associated countries. An official invitation was sent in December 2008 to all Ministers of Science of the Western Balkan countries, inviting them to nominate a representative as a delegate to ESFRI.
- In order to initiate a systematic, demand-driven **transfer of used laboratory equipment from the EU Member States** to Western Balkan institutions, the Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Technology of Slovenia and the SEE-ERA.NET project partners have joined forces to organise the **Herman Potočnik-Noordung Award** for donations of scientific equipment as outlined under 2.1.2 .
- Thematic **reports on the Innovation Infrastructures** in the Western Balkan countries were produced by the “Information Office of the Steering Platform on Research for Western Balkan countries” in order to enhance understanding of the national innovation systems in the Western Balkan countries. The reports were updated³ in April 2008.
- The WBC-INCO.NET project included the task “**Analysis of Opportunities to Access Infrastructure**” to investigate, on the one hand, the possibilities

³ <http://www.wbc-inco.net/object/document/2331.html>

for researchers from the Western Balkan countries to access the large-scale research infrastructures of EU Member States, and, on the other hand, to map the existing infrastructure in the Western Balkan countries and provide information on their openness to researchers from EU Member States and researchers from the region.

2.3. Initiatives towards Institution Building

Although institution building in the Western Balkan countries is mainly a national issue, assistance should be offered by the EU Member States and through European and international programmes and other initiatives in such a way as to build on existing experiences, to assure the compatibility of new institutions with already existing structures in the European Research Area and, last but not least, to make full use of available funding opportunities. The following short- and medium-term measures have been implemented so far:

- SEE-ERA.NET's **International Conference on Evaluation and Benchmarking** was held in Ohrid, FYR of Macedonia on 8 and 9 October 2008 and is outlined under 2.1.2.
- In order to support the reform of the overall statistical system, including S&T statistics in the Western Balkan countries, a **two-day workshop on S&T indicators** was held in Belgrade on 2 and 3 October 2008 in the context of the WBC-INCO.NET. Furthermore, peer visits to the statistical institutes in the region are planned with the aim of developing recommendations.
- Bosnia and Herzegovina became a full member of COST, which is an intergovernmental framework for European Cooperation in Science and Technology, allowing the coordination of nationally-funded research on a European level.
- A Ministerial Conference on the development of a Regional Research Strategy for the Western Balkans was organised by the Regional Cooperation Council. At the conference, which took place in Sarajevo on 24 April 2009, a Joint Statement was adopted.

2.4 Initiatives towards Human Potential Development

Since human potential is a key asset of the Western Balkan countries, it is most important to offer a set of measures to assure a high level of academic graduate and post-graduate training along with attractive careers in the S&T system of the Western Balkan countries. Within the last two years, the following activities have taken place:

- The preparation of "**Recommendations for stand-alone measures in the field of mobility with the Western Balkan countries**" as an outcome of the Regional Programme for Cooperation with Southeast Europe has been initiated. The current status is outlined under 2.1.3
- The successful "**Management training for science administrators from the Western Balkan countries**" in Germany in December 2007 is described in more detail under 2.2

- As part of the WBC-INCO.NET project, the Slovenian Business and Research Association (SBRA), with the help of project partners from Serbia and from Bosnia and Herzegovina, organised **two training workshops for FP7 Research Managers** in Belgrade and Sarajevo on 8 and 9 May 2008. The training workshops explained the benefits and pitfalls of participation in FP7 and gave advice on project preparation, building up consortia etc. More than 200 representatives from the RTD community, business, NGOs, universities and research establishments participated in the lectures.
- In autumn 2008, the Bulgarian Ministry of Education and Science organised several one-day **training events for financial managers** in the form of a roadshow on financial management within the EU Framework Programmes covering all Western Balkan countries. The target groups for the training events were financial managers from the all types of research organisations (universities, companies etc.), NCPs on legal and financial issues and representatives from the Ministries.
- As the mobility of researchers may be hindered by **visa issues**, the Council issued Directive 2005/71/EC “Admission for purposes of scientific research,” which has been transposed into national law in 17 Member States. By 26 February 2008, 13 Member States had fully complied with the Directive (Austria, Belgium, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal and Romania) and another four had reported partial implementation (Bulgaria, France, Lithuania and Slovakia). As the next step, on 15 July 2009, the European Commission adopted a proposal for granting visa-free travel to the citizens of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia. The Commission remains committed to visa liberalisation for the citizens of Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina, too. However, these countries have not yet fulfilled the conditions necessary to be included in this proposal. If the pace of reforms is maintained and if all the conditions are met, the Commission could envisage making a new proposal including these countries by mid-2010.
- The new **Task Force** of the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) on **Fostering and Building Human Capital** was established in June 2008 to promote coherency and coordination between education, higher education and research by creating a platform for dialogue and cooperation between different stakeholders involved in these sectors. The first international conference organised by the TF FBHC was held in Bucharest on 6 and 7 March 2009. The conference aimed to respond to the changing landscape by creating a forum for debate on the role of human capital for the development of sustainable knowledge economies and societies in the region as well as for the region’s inclusion in an enlarged Europe.
- The Task Force also implements a “**Capacity Building Programme for Regional Cooperation**”, which was designed as a support measure to avoid potential shortages of middle-level civil servants who are acquainted with and capable of managing regional activities and programmes in education, science and research and of acting as contact points for the existing networks of cooperation.
- A **benchmarking of the NCP system in the Western Balkan countries** based on a web-based, extensive questionnaire addressing the clients of each NCP system in order to collect feedback on the quality, efficiency and

effectiveness of the services provided by the respective WBC-NCPs has been initiated by the General Secretariat for Research and Technology of the Hellenic Ministry of Development in the context of the WBC-INCO.NET project. The whole procedure will have the aim of assessing and further developing the capacities of the NCP system in the WBCs in line with European standards.

- The **identification and analysis of existing barriers to specific project-based RTD cooperation** was at the centre of a study performed by the Institute of Social Sciences IVO PILAR in Zagreb, Croatia in the context of the WBC-INCO.NET. This was the first study focusing on the identification of the factors that hamper the participation of Western Balkan countries & Turkey in the two types of collaborative projects: (1) European Union Framework Programmes (FPs) and (2) bilateral projects. The study also identified the differences in the perception of barriers between the Western Balkan countries & Turkey and EU MS within these two types of projects. The main findings were that the principle barriers are “project management barriers”, which can be overcome through the national science policy, and “EC bureaucratic barriers”. As a result, it was concluded that a proper mix of policy measures both at national and at European level should be aimed at.

2.5 Dissemination of Information

The widest possible dissemination of information is a top priority, not only in order to promote the strengths and dynamics of the S&T community in the Western Balkan countries, but also to raise awareness in the Western Balkan countries of the existing options for participation in the activities of the EU Member States.

- In the recent past, **several meetings** between representatives of the WBC-INCO.NET and representatives of **thematic Directorates of the European Commission (EC) – DG Research, DG Information Society and DG Enterprise** – took place in order to discuss successful collaborative activities and further cooperation possibilities, also under FP7.
- The **WBC-INCO.NET** started in January 2008 and took over and continued the work of the **Information Office** of the Steering Platform on Research for the Western Balkan countries, with its website, newsletter, and further links to information channels, platforms and conferences (throughout Europe)
- A final **book publication**⁴ “**Science and Technology in the Western Balkans**” (April 2008) by the Information Office of the Steering Platform on Research summarised several country reports describing the S&T systems of the Western Balkan countries. The full publication also includes a thematic report on S&T in Kosovo under UNSC Resolution 1294.
- A booklet on the **scientific results of the SEE-ERA-NET Pilot Joint Call** is under publication, containing a foreword by Commissioner Potočnik and a note by Prof. Philippos Tsalidis, Secretary General of the General

⁴ <http://www.wbc-inco.net/object/document/5500.html>

Secretariat for Research & Technology (GSRT) at the Hellenic Ministry of Development. This booklet is intended as a documentation of the scientific results and allows the reader to get an impression of what was achieved in the funded projects. Furthermore, the booklet presents the project SEE-ERA.NET in all its components and provides a good overview of the activities during its lifespan. Apart from this, the booklet is enriched by a chapter on the implementation of the Pilot Joint Call, providing further information on the call implementation and important data on the call as a whole. In addition, the booklet offers an insight into the accompanying measures to the call, such as management seminars, a conference on innovation as well as one on evaluation and benchmarking.

- WBC-INCO.NET plans dissemination activities in Europe through **participation in major conferences**. It successfully realised promotional activities at the Research Connection 2009 in Prague on 7 and 8 May 2009 and plans further participation, e.g. at the European Science Open Forum 2010 in Turin.
- Several **projects** are funded in specific areas to **support dissemination activities**, such as the “Western Balkan countries INCO-NET Support in the field of ICT” (WINS-ICT) and “Promoting ICT Cooperation Opportunities and Policy Dialogue with the Western Balkan countries” (ICT-WEB-PROMS). Some of the Western Balkan countries have also become or are on their way to becoming members of the EURAXESS network, which disseminates information on researcher mobility.

3. Joint Action Plan 2009: Update and Amendments

3.1 Initiatives for “Collaborative Research Projects”

- Initiated under the umbrella of the Regional Programme for Cooperation with Southeast Europe and building on the experiences and the success of the Pilot Joint Call⁵ of the FP6 project SEE-ERA.NET, the single call for Joint European Research Projects (JERPs) of **SEE-ERA.NET PLUS** represents – with a planned call budget of around €3.5 million – the biggest call ever to be specifically tailored to the needs of the Western Balkan countries. This activity will include scientists and key stakeholders in R&D policy-making in the countries participating in the broad SEE-ERA.NET PLUS consortium, including EU Member States, associated states and all Western Balkan countries. The Project Management Agency at the German Aerospace Center (DLR) will administer the Joint Call.

The publication of the call for Expressions of Interest for Joint European Research Projects is planned for 1 September 2009; the start of the first projects is scheduled for October 2010.

The further strengthening of regional collaboration will be achieved through the participation of at least two eligible institutions from different Western

⁵ <http://www.see-era.net/pjc/results.html>

Balkan countries and of at least one eligible institution from a non-WBC country in each project. JERPs will have a duration of one to two years and need to include a substantial scientific contribution from each partner institution. The maximum funding for each project will be €150,000 for the project duration. The concrete deliverables will have to include an utilisation plan to ensure the sustainability of the results.

Specific scientific priorities have been chosen for the call, based on the regional collaboration needs of the participating countries and bearing in mind the priorities of the 7th EU Framework Programme on Research and Technological Development (FP7). The following four fields have been selected as thematic areas for the Single Joint Call of SEE-ERA.NET PLUS: In the area of AgroFood 1) Preservation of indigenous species and traditional food products (in SEE/WBC) 2) Interdisciplinary field: Land use impact in agriculture on biodiversity. In the area of ICT 3) Software systems for learning process management and support and 4) ICT for energy efficiency. The careful selection of thematic areas based on the scientific priorities will help to combine the goals of enhancing cooperation with the WBC on the one hand and fostering scientific excellence on the other. After SEE-ERA.NET and WBC-INCO.NET, SEE-ERA.NET PLUS is the next initiative supporting the integration of the WBC and their research communities into the European Research Area (ERA).

An impact assessment report of the SEE-ERA.NET PLUS call for JERPs will be prepared. A second report with policy recommendations on future cooperation, especially joint R&D funding options, and on the sustainability of the SEE-ERA.NET PLUS consortium is also planned.

Additional proposed measures that aim at supporting S&T cooperation with and in the Western Balkan countries include:

- The creation of **Regional Technology Platforms** (equivalent to European Technology Platforms (ETP)), e.g. in the agriculture and food area in order to define a common regional research agenda based on national priorities
Who: Western Balkan countries with support from institutions from EU Member States

3.2 Initiatives for Innovation

In Western Balkan countries, small enterprises make a major contribution to job creation and economic development. Clusters of small enterprises operating in high value added operations are emerging, spreading innovation throughout many parts of the Western Balkan countries. Improving the management of human resources, the capacity to innovate and the skills of the workforce and increasing business expenditure in RTD and early-stage venture capital for innovative SMEs are the main challenges of European innovation policy. On the basis of the milestones already reached – most notably the proposal for SEE-ERA.NET INNO (under 2.1.4) – appropriate SME innovation support actions and tools should be developed:

- Initiatives towards Innovation are currently under discussion in the context of an **extension and enlargement of the WBC-INCO.NET**. At the meeting of the WBC-INCO.NET Executive Steering Board in Liblice, Czech Republic on

27 May 2009, a proposed activity for the upcoming work programme in “International Cooperation: Extension and enlargement of the INCO-NETs” was presented

Who: Extended WBC-INCO.NET

- Designing and implementing a trans-national programme on innovation in SEE

Who: Future ERA.NET

3.3. Initiatives towards Infrastructure Development

Despite the successful Accompanying Measure Herman Potočnik-Noordung Award of the Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Technology of Slovenia, presented under 2.1.2, the S&T infrastructure in the Western Balkan countries is still in urgent need of updating and improvement. Further measures should be taken into account:

- Providing an **inventory of medium- and large-scale infrastructure in EU Member States and the WBC region**, including access to this equipment for Western Balkan scientists within WBC-INCO.Net. The draft version of this inventory has already been prepared by MHEST and MPIN and was presented at the Executive Steering Board meeting in Liblice in the Czech Republic on 27 May 2009
Who: WBC-INCO.NET
- In late 2008, the “Regional Issues Working Group” of the “European strategic forum on research infrastructures” (**ESFRI**) prepared a report on “Research infrastructures in the new Member States in the context of the European Research Area”. The update of this report needs to include a chapter providing an **inventory of specific infrastructures of pan-European interest in the Western Balkan countries**
Who: Western Balkan countries
- Developing a **regional research infrastructure roadmap** for the Western Balkan region in order to identify medium- and large-scale research infrastructures of regional and European interest and to develop an Action Plan for their upgrading, modernisation and validation
Who: Western Balkan countries supported by the Steering Platform
- Developing “**e-strategies**” by setting targets for the development of e-services in order to overcome the digital divide
Who: Western Balkan countries supported by the Steering Platform, RCC; WINS-ICT also has some activities at political level, as does GRNET, Seegrid, seeren2, etc
- Supporting the development or expansion of the current capacities of **electronic networks** among research institutes and universities in the Western Balkan countries as part of an e-strategy. Appropriate links to the main scientific and academic networks in the EU should be established and easy access to the GEANT computer network provided
Who: All Western Balkan countries and Delivery of Advanced Network Technology to Europe (DANTE)

3.4 Initiatives towards Institution Building

Institution building in the Western Balkan countries is mainly a national affair. However it is also a core objective of the WBC-INCO.NET to provide assistance in such a way as to build on existing experiences and to assure the compatibility of new or renewed institutions with already existing structures in the European Research Area.

- Expansion and improvement of the Western Balkan network of **National Contact Points** (NCP) for the EU Framework Programme on Research and Technological Development through specific support, twinning and networking measures, building on the ERA WESTBALKAN and ERA WESTBAL-KAN+ projects.
Who: Western Balkan countries supported by the Steering Platform, WBC-INCO.NET
- Transfer of experience and direct assistance for the implementation of systematic **evaluation and benchmarking** of Western Balkan R&D institutions and programmes, building on the outcome of “SEE-ERA.NET’s International Conference on Evaluation and Benchmarking” in Ohrid, FYR of Macedonia on 8 and 9 October 2008. Measures should also include training for evaluators; an evaluators’ database; a full curriculum and systematic training programme, mentoring for evaluators, etc.
Who: Western Balkan countries with support from the EU Member States
- Creation of a lasting **relationship between the producers of knowledge and technology** (e.g. universities, research institutes, research centres, clinical centres, etc.) **and end users of RTD from the private sector** (SMEs, industry), facilitated by the establishment of **Innovation Relay Centers** (IRCs) or similar innovation structures in the Western Balkan countries; these to be linked to the established IRC network.
Who: Western Balkan countries with support from the EU Member States, possibly funded under the Competitiveness and Innovation Framework Programme (CIP) and 7th EU Framework Programme on Research and Technological Development
- **Integration of WBC representatives** in decision-making bodies, working groups, etc. of European initiatives, programmes, etc.
Who: Western Balkan countries
- Establishing a roadmap for the development of a **Regional Strategy on R&D** as agreed on at the Ministerial Conference on the development of a Regional Research Strategy for the Western Balkans, which was organised by the Regional Cooperation Council on 24 April 2009 in Sarajevo.
Who: Western Balkan countries with support from EU Member States and RCC

3.5 Initiatives towards Human Potential Development

Human resources are a major asset, not only in the Western Balkan countries. In addition, encouraging brain circulation is a prerequisite for successful RTD and innovation in the ERA and the Member States of the European Union.

- Fostering the individual mobility of excellent young scientists from home institutions in the Western Balkan countries (outward) or to host institutions in the Western Balkan countries (inward) is the core objective of the **Young**

Scientists Programme (please see 2.1.3). Although for the time being it seems to be more appropriate to implement stand-alone measures in the field of mobility with the Western Balkan countries, in the long run the setting-up of a specific mobility program for the WBC should be reconsidered, building on the coordination of efforts of the national organisations offering European mobility grants and the coherence and complementarities with the “People” Programme of the EU’s FP7.

Who: Western Balkan countries with support by institutions from EU Member States

- Offering Training Workshops for RTD Managers and **Science Management Training** through internships for science administrators from the Western Balkan countries who work in national administration or in the management of S&T institutions (building on the experiences of the German Accompanying Measure outlined under 2.1.2)
Who: EU Member States; WBC-INCO.NET
- Setting up a “**Diaspora**” **Task Force** as a mostly virtual working group to develop ideas on how to attract expatriate Western Balkan scientists back to their home countries. A specific Web portal could be envisaged as an information and communication platform for this particular group of scientists
Who: Western Balkan countries with support by institutions from EU Member States
- Supporting the development of **national mobility centres** networks in the Western Balkan countries and their integration in EURAXESS - Researchers in Motion, the European network of mobility centres offering career opportunities and providing relevant information and assistance for incoming, outgoing and returning researchers.
Who: Western Balkan countries
- Constant **updating of the SEE-ERA.NET/WBC-INCO.NET Scholarship database and establishing links to the EURAXESS web portal**. This user-friendly database allows young scientists to search specifically according to their needs. Among other things, they can search for grants offered for residents of a specific country or specific disciplines. The information text on the scholarships on offer concentrates on the most important information (eligibility, deadlines, country, field of research). This means that young scientists are able to find all the information they need on a single page (<http://www.wbc-inco.net/sdb/list>)
Who: King Boudoin Foundation
- **Contact trips for young researchers** consisting of a) grants to attend conferences (precondition: contribution such as a presentation or paper), summer schools for PhD candidates, workshops, etc. ;b) (in connection with attendance of the conference:) visit to the partner institute where the conference is taking place in order to establish scientific contacts. The application should contain a schedule of the planned talks with scientists/staff from the guest institution. Since some of the partner countries already use this type of funding mechanism under different programs/initiatives, this recommendation could be considered by the rest of the countries that have no such national funding scheme
Who: Western Balkan countries with EU Member States

- Information events and training sessions to tackle the **low awareness** of mobility programmes in the region, the lack of **institutional structures** dealing with mobility and the **obstacles in national legal systems** when it comes to employing researchers from abroad. They should be addressed, accordingly, to academic and research communities, to members of future/existing mobility units at different research institutions and to stakeholders at the decision making level in the targeted countries. However, since some of these measures overlap with other national and trans-national initiatives and projects, a synergy and/or complementarities with other such actions should be taken into consideration when initiating such a measure
Who: Western Balkan countries with EU Member States

3.6 Dissemination of Information

The widest possible dissemination of information is a top priority

- In the EU particularly with regard to the strengths and dynamics of the S&T community in the Western Balkan countries, the potential of their further integration in the European Research Area and the existing support schemes for cooperation. This is primarily a responsibility for the scientific communities in the EU Member States. In addition the EC Cooperation Directorates and multinational organisations such as UNESCO, OECD etc should be at the focus.
- In the Western Balkan countries particularly with regard to the existing options for their participation in activities of the EU Member States within or outside Community Programmes and in specific support schemes aimed at capacity building in the Western Balkan region and at the integration of the Western Balkan S&T community into European S&T activities and networks. The primary target group are the ministries and the S&T communities in the Western Balkan countries.

The following measures are proposed:

- Supporting **information activities** through the wbc-inco.net website, information newsletters (journal, e-mail newsletter), brochure etc.
Who: Member States and Western Balkan countries, WBC-INCO.NET
- Fostering **Information exchange** with a) **Directorates General** of the EC other than DG Research (DG ELARG, DG INFSO, DG TREN, DG Education, etc.) with a current focus on DG Enterprise (CIP) and DG Enlargement (IPA) b) with other **multilateral initiatives**, e.g. international stakeholders such as RCC, OECD, etc.
Who: WBC-INCO.NET, Western Balkan countries
- Raising awareness of the opportunities for S&T in the Western Balkan countries by becoming part of the **ERAWATCH** Network. ERAWATCH⁶ provides information on national and regional research policies, stakeholders, organisations and programmes in the worldwide web.
Who: Western Balkan countries

⁶ <http://cordis.europa.eu/erawatch/index.cfm>

3.7 Expansion of the Collaboration towards Initiatives in Other Regions

In many other regions, such as the Danube, the Mediterranean or the Black Sea region, initiatives and projects are underway with a similar approach as SEE-ERA.NET. Therefore, it is recommended that these measures and activities be analysed in order to take advantage of synergies and gain more momentum in the implementation of the initiatives recommended in the Joint Action Plan 2009.

ANNEX



ERA-CT-2004-515805

SEE-ERA.NET

Southeast European ERA-NET

ERA-NET
Coordination Action

D4.2 JOINT ACTION PLAN AS BASIS FOR WP5 (IMPLEMENTATION OF JOINT ACTIVITIES) AND WP6 (PILOT MULTILATERAL RTD PROGRAMME)

Due date of deliverable: 15.09.2007
Actual submission date: 15.09.2007

Start date of project: 1 September 2004 Duration: 60 months

Organisation name of lead contractor for this deliverable:
Centre for Social Innovation
Linke Wienzeile 246
A – 1150 Wien

Project co-funded by the European Commission within the Sixth Framework Programme (2002-2006)

Dissemination Level

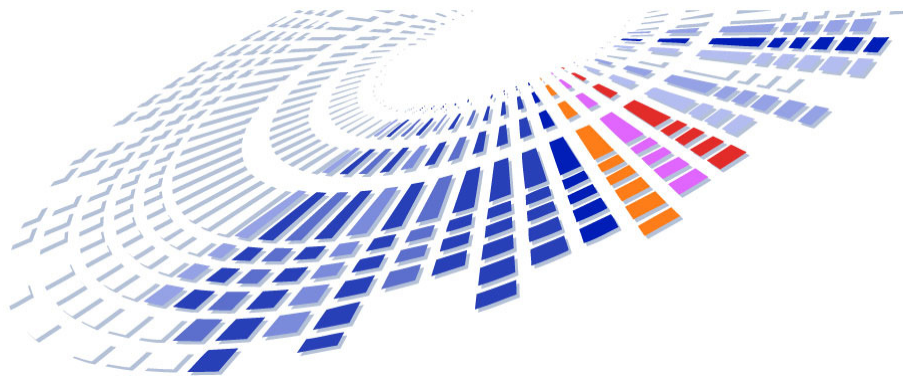
PU	Public	PU
PP	Restricted to other programme participants (including the Commission Services)	
RE	Restricted to a group specified by the consortium (including the Commission Services)	
CO	Confidential, only for members of the consortium (including the Commission Services)	

WP

04

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4.2



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INTEGRATING AND STRENGTHENING
THE EUROPEAN RESEARCH AREA

Erika Rost / Jörn Sonnenburg / Ralf Haratschek / Karsten Hübner / Philipp Borek / Radovan Fuchs / Adriana Gjonaj / Florian Gruber / Slobodanka Koprivica / Slavi Krusic / Peter Mayr / Iulia Mihail / Husein Panjeta / Nikos Sidiropoulos / Viktor Stefov / Anneliese Stoklaska / Sándor Szigeti / Jean-Luc Teffo / Ivan Videnovic / Albena Vutsova / Dagmar Simon / Hildegard Matthies

JOINT ACTION PLAN

AS BASIS FOR WP5 (IMPLEMENTATION OF JOINT ACTIVITIES) AND WP6 (PILOT MULTILATERAL RTD PROGRAMME)

The See-ERA.NET-Consortium

Bonn, August 2007

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1. Introduction

Summarising the recommendations of the SEE-ERA.NET deliverable D4.1, the White Paper on overlaps, gaps and opportunities in view of the extension of bilateral RTD programmes and initiatives towards multilateral approaches, priority should be giving to the following activities:

1. strengthening strategic reform processes with regard to the national research and innovation systems in the Western Balkan countries and contributing to their sustainability through institution and capacity building.
2. assuring a high level of participation of the Western Balkan countries in the 7th EU Framework Programme on Research and Technological Development and Demonstration activities.
3. promoting the intensive use of existing cooperation instruments, or, where necessary, introducing new, coherent and complementary or joint cooperation instruments for those national and multinational institutions which exceed the scope of the 7th Framework Programme, allowing the full European integration of the Western Balkan science community.

Addressing these needs and building on the experiences of the “Pilot Joint Call” for proposals for S&T networks and projects, as launched by the SEE-ERA.NET consortium in November 2006, a “Regional Programme for Cooperation with South-East Europe” is proposed (targeting mainly priority areas 2 and 3).

Consideration should also be given to complementary activities which aim at the coordination of measures fostering S&T infrastructure development, institution and capacity building human potential development (targeting mainly priority 1).

The Joint Action Plan describes the general concept underlying these activities, with particular emphasis on those measures that will be further developed and implemented by the partners of the SEE-ERA.NET consortium through the expansion of previous and ongoing coordination activities.

Interested European and international institutions are invited to contribute to the planning and implementation of all activities covered by this Joint Action Plan.

2. Regional Programme for Cooperation with South-East Europe (ReP-SEE)

Objectives

The Regional Programme intends to provide a unique instrument and new momentum for enhanced **S&T cooperation with the Western Balkan countries**. This includes networking activities facilitating **active participation of Western Balkan institutions** in project consortia participating in **European programmes** and other major multilateral initiatives like **EUREKA and COST** - taking into account the strengths of the Western Balkan countries. The **joint utilisation of large-scale infrastructure** in the growing European Research Area will also be supported.

Additional measures are envisaged with regard to the two other elements of the “Innovation triangle”, education and innovation, both considered to be major assets for economic growth and prosperity. **The aim is to create a favourable environment for young scientists at Western Balkan S&T institutions and to integrate recently developed innovation structures located in the Western Balkan countries into innovation networks and clusters in the EU Member States.**

Target Groups

The various measures proposed here are addressed to public and private S&T institutions, innovation structures and individual young scientists situated in the participating countries from all over Europe. Innovative SMEs are especially encouraged to participate in this programme.

The four Pillars

ReP-SEE will consist of four key elements:

First pillar: **Joint Call for European research projects**

Second pillar: **Accompanying Measures** in order to facilitate joint research

Third pillar: **Young scientist Programme** to foster the individual mobility of young scientists – men and women – between their home institutions and host institutions in the Western Balkan countries

Fourth pillar: **Innovation Programme** with the aim of linking SMEs, technology/innovation centres and other innovation structures in the Western Balkan countries to existing thematic innovation networks/clusters in the EU partner countries.

Within the **Joint Call for European research projects** it is intended to

- fund “Collaborative Research Projects”
 - offer “Preparatory Grants” for collaborative research projects
 - offer “Docking Grants” for collaborative research projects.
1. Funding criteria for “**Collaborative Research Projects**” will correspond with the thematic areas of the 7th EU Framework Programme on Research and Technological Development and Demonstration activities in such a way as to foster scientific excellence and enhance cooperation with the Western Balkan countries. The further strengthening of the regional research area in South-East Europe should be achieved by a minimum participation of two institutions from Western Balkan countries in each project. The “Collaborative Research Projects” are expected to have a duration of at least two years and to include a substantial scientific contribution from each partner institution. The concrete deliverables include an utilisation plan for the results.

Eligible costs include travel, additional personnel including guest scientists,

consumables and small equipment (including leasing). Sub-contracts for R&D services are permitted.

2. Aimed at the preparation phase of a project concept/proposal, the **“Preparatory Grants”** for collaborative research projects are subject to criteria similar to those of the “Collaborative Research Projects”. Here, the duration is much shorter (maximum one year). Specific activities to enable more intense networking will be funded. Eligible costs include travel, workshops/conferences, additional personnel and consumables for feasibility studies.
3. **“Docking Grants”** for collaborative research projects aim at the integration of institutions from Western Balkan countries into already running projects (supported by the EU Framework Programme, EUREKA, COST, etc.). The duration is limited to a maximum of one year. Eligible costs include travel, additional personnel and consumables for preparatory studies.

The **Accompanying Measures**, an integral part of the ReP-SEE, aim at preparing the ground for Joint RTD, especially through small scale activities facilitating or supporting capacity and institution building, policy development and regional development. Examples of Accompanying Measures are

- the development of a standard methodology and of implementation scenarios for introducing a systematic evaluation and benchmarking at project, programme and institutional level in the Western Balkan countries
- trainee programmes for science managers from the Western Balkan countries in experienced European research institutions, science organisations and public S&T administrations.

One objective of the **Young Scientist Programme** is to foster individual mobility of excellent young scientists – women and men – from home institutions in the Western Balkan countries (outward) or to host institutions in the Western Balkan countries (inward).

With reference to outward mobility, it is essential that the young scientists remain in contact with their home institutions, while building bridges to S&T institutions in EU Member States. There are two options:

- Young scientists may be employed by institutions in the Western Balkan countries to implement S&T projects at the cutting edge of science for a three-year period in close cooperation with a host institution in an EU Member State. Short and medium term working periods in the host institution will be funded through the fellowship scheme.
- Young scientists from the Western Balkan countries may proceed with their scientific career in a host institution in an EU Member State for a two-year period, including an additional two-year return period in a home institution in a Western Balkan Country. For the entire four-year period, a (return) fellowship will be offered.

With reference to inward mobility, special emphasis will be given to attracting young scientists from EU Member States to work in leading S&T institutions in the Western

Balkan countries. Complementing the European Marie Curie funding scheme, exploratory grants for short and medium term studies of up to 6 months will be offered.

As a fourth pillar of the ReP-SEE, an **Innovation Programme** is proposed. It aims at linking recently or newly established innovation structures in the Western Balkan countries, including innovative SMEs, technology and innovation centres and incubators, to existing thematic innovation networks/clusters in the EU partner countries. Funding should be offered for exploratory and partnering activities between interested institutions in the Western Balkan countries and their potential partner networks/clusters in the EU and for the building of mutual communication and cooperation structures.

To attract the interest of funding institutions or other donors to such a programme, a preparatory phase should be devoted to promoting the innovative potential of the Western Balkan countries, based on a mapping of existing innovation structures. Stakeholders from regional administrations and municipalities from the Western Balkan countries and EU Member States should be invited to contribute to the establishment of the Innovation Programme.

Administration of the Regional Programme:

In order to perform administration in the context of the Joint Calls for S&T project proposals, a **(new) Central Administrative Body** is to be contracted. The Body will have responsibility for the following main tasks:

- Management of the call for proposals, including a hotline for applicants
- Organisation of the peer-review process and preparation of the funding decision
- Contractual matters, e.g. coordination of decentralised project contracting (of a virtual common pot); implementation and monitoring of the real common pot contracts
- Financial administration and control of the programme budget, based on a centralised common pot (the juste retour principle will be respected for project funding except in the case of the accompanying measures)
- Monitoring of S&T projects including documentation and statistics
- Review of the financial statements and reports
- Reporting to the financing and donating institutions
- Organisation and chairing of donor meetings

In addition, the Central Administrative Body will implement the Young Scientist Programme and the Innovation Programme and could also act as a Central Information Facility for cooperation between the EU and the Western Balkan countries. It could offer administrative services to other interested institutions as dictated by the demands of efficiency and effectiveness.

Implementation Scenario and Time Table:

The conception of the core programme, consisting of collaborative research grants and accompanying measures, will be finalised in 2007 by the SEE-ERA.NET consortium in close cooperation with the additional funding organisations and taking into account the monitoring report on the Pilot Joint Call (PJC).

Based on the commitments of all interested institutions, an ERA-NET Plus proposal will be prepared for submission to the EU Commission by February 2008.

If the proposal is successful, the implementation of the core programme will begin in autumn 2008.

The establishment of the Central Administrative Body will be an important milestone. Here, various scenarios are possible.

- a) Contracting an experienced institution through a public Call for Tender
The contracted institutions will in this case be required to have particular science management skills. Since the host country stands to benefit from expected synergies with national activities, a 50% share of running costs are to be covered by the host country. The other 50% should be covered by the funding and donor institutions for the respective funding activity.
- b) Contracting a new institution (private entity), to be established specifically for the purpose of administering the Regional Programme
In this case the full administration costs will be covered by the programme budget. Usually, central programme administration will constitute about 10-15% of the programme budget.
- c) Establishing a new joint programme management institution of interested partner countries (EU and Western Balkan countries) through Art. 171.
This option requires clear financial commitments from a significant number of Member States and a related proposal from the EU Commission as a basis for European Parliament and Council decisions. Such an institution will require co-funding from the EU Commission.

Option c) will lead to the most suitable structure. However, it is a challenging scenario. A two-step procedure is the most promising way to proceed, starting with option a) or b) as an interim solution until a joint institution through art. 171 can be established.

The first Call for Project Proposals is planned for spring 2009.

3. Initiatives towards Infrastructure Development

The S&T infrastructure in the Western Balkan countries is in urgent need of updating and improvement. Smaller scale infrastructure such as electronic databases or equipment for research laboratories needs to be renewed, and access to large S&T infrastructures needs to be provided. These measures have to be implemented mainly by the Western Balkan countries but support from the EU Member States, the EU and other European or international institutions is desirable. The following short and medium term measures are proposed:

- building an **inventory of existing S&T infrastructure in the Western Balkan countries**, including a strategic needs analysis for the reconstruction or updating of these installations
Who: Western Balkan countries supported by an international assessment group

- setting up a **regional „ESFRI“-like mechanism in the Western Balkan countries** with a view to defining strategic medium scale S&T infrastructure needs in the region
Who: Western Balkan countries supported by the Steering Platform on Research
- providing an **inventory of medium and large-scale infrastructure in EU Member States**, including access to these installations for Western Balkan scientists
Who: i.e. INCO NET for Western Balkan countries
- arranging a systematic, demand-driven **transfer of used laboratory equipment from the EU Member States** to Western Balkan institutions by establishing a Web portal as a market place
Who: European Science Foundation to be set up through a SEE-ERA.NET Accompanying Measure
- developing “E-strategies”, by setting targets for the development of E-services in order to overcome the digital divide
Who: Western Balkan countries supported by the Steering Platform
- focussing on the development or expansion of the current capacities of electronic networks among research institutes and universities in the Western Balkan countries, as part of an E-strategy. Appropriate connections to the main scientific and academic networks in the EU should be established and easy access to the GEANT computer network provided
Who: All Western Balkan countries and Delivery of Advanced Network Technology to Europe (DANTE)

4. Initiatives towards Institution Building

Institution building in the Western Balkan countries is mainly a national affair. However, assistance should be offered by the EU Member States and through European and international programmes and other initiatives in such a way as to build on existing experiences, to assure the compatibility of new institutions with already existing structures in the European Research Area and, last but not least, to make full use of available funding opportunities.

The following short and medium term measures are proposed:

- transfer of experience and direct assistance for the implementation of systematic **evaluation and benchmarking** of Western Balkan R&D institutions and programmes, starting with an international conference for scenario development and methodological approaches. Training should be offered for national statistical offices and managers from the ministries responsible for science and research, with a view to effective monitoring of R&D indicators. Additional training should be provided for evaluators/scientists who evaluate scientific projects. Support should be given to the development of an evaluation system compatible with EU trends.
Who: Western Balkan countries supported through a SEE-ERA.NET accompanying measure and a specific Coordination and Support Activity (CSA) within the Specific 7th EU Framework Programme on Research,

Technological Development and Demonstration Activities “Capacities” Programme, also taking into account the expertise of the OECD

- expansion and intensification of the Western Balkan **network of National Contact Points (NCP)** for the EU Framework Programme on Research and Technological Development through specific support, twinning and networking measures, building on the ERA-WEST BALKAN and ERA WESTBALKAN+ projects
Who: Western Balkan countries with support from the Member States, possibly funded within the EU Framework Programme on Research and Technological Development through the forthcoming INCO-NET and thematic Coordination and Support Activities, aiming at the networking of NCPs throughout Europe
- Creation of a durable **relationship between the producers of knowledge and technology** (e.g. universities, research institutes, research centres, clinical centres, etc.) **and end users of RTD from the private sector** (SMEs, industry), facilitated by the establishment of **Innovation Relay Centers** (IRCs) or corresponding innovation structures in the Western Balkan countries; these to be linked to the established IRC network..
Who: Western Balkan countries with support from the EU Member States, possibly funded within the Competitiveness and Innovation Framework Programme (CIP) and 7th EU Framework Programme on Research, Technological Development and Demonstration Activities.

5. Initiatives towards Human Potential Development

Human potential is a key asset of the Western Balkan countries. For this reason, it is most important to offer a set of measures to assure a high level of academic graduate and post-graduate training along with attractive careers in the S&T system of the Western Balkan countries. The various existing programmes for fostering academic exchange or training at national, bilateral and European level, as well as the Young Scientist Programme, should become part of the Regional Programme ReP-SEE. These programmes should be complemented by the following short and medium term measures:

- offering **Science Management Training** through internships for science administrators from the Western Balkan countries who work in national administration or in the management of S&T institutions
Who: EU Member States; a first small programme is foreseen by SEE-ERA.NET through an accompanying measure
- setting up a **“Diaspora” Task Force** as a mostly virtual working group to develop scenarios on how to re-attract expatriate Western Balkan scientists. A specific Web portal could be envisaged as an information and communication platform for this particular group of scientists
Who: Western Balkan countries with support by institutions from EU Member States; kick-off through an accompanying measure of SEE-ERA.NET

- solving the **visa issue** (smart visa). Implementation of the EU directive that researchers from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, and Serbia will not have mobility problems when travelling.
Who: All EU Member states

6. Dissemination of Information

The widest possible dissemination of information is a top priority

- in the EU particularly with regard to the strengths and dynamics of the S&T community in the Western Balkan countries, the potential of their further integration in the European Research Area and the existing support schemes for cooperation
- in the Western Balkan countries particularly with regard to the existing options for their participation in activities of the EU Member States within or outside Community Programmes and in specific support schemes aiming at capacity building in the Western Balkan region and at the integration of the Western Balkan S&T community into European S&T activities and networks.

It is proposed:

- to support and widen the activities of the **Information Office** of the Steering Platform on Research for the Western Balkan countries (Centre for Social Innovation, Vienna) and to further link the Office to information channels, platforms and conferences throughout Europe
Who: Member States and Western Balkan countries supported within the EU Framework Programme on Research and Technological Development through the Information Office, the forthcoming INCO-NET and complementary thematic Coordination and Support Activities, SEE-ERA.NET
- to directly and regularly **address the thematic Directorates in DG Research and DG Information Society as well as the thematic ERA-NETs** with first hand information on a) the strengths and dynamics of the respective scientific fields in the Western Balkan countries and b) successful collaborative activities
Who: joint effort of Western Balkan countries and SEE-ERA.NET, forthcoming INCO-NET
- to strengthen the respective **press activities** (newspapers and scientific journals) coordinated by the Information Office of the Steering Platform on Research for the Western Balkan countries and SEE-ERA.NET
Who: Member States and Western Balkan countries supported within the EU Framework Programme on Research and Technological Development through the Information Office and the upcoming INCO-NET and SEE-ERA-NET

