

SEE-ERA.NET PLUS CALL FOR JOINT EUROPEAN RESEARCH PROJECTS CALL TEXT

1. BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES

Supported under the ERA-NET PLUS scheme, the SEE-ERA.NET PLUS project started on 1 April 2009. SEE-ERA.NET PLUS aims at structuring and expanding the European Research Area (ERA) to the Western Balkan countries (WBC) by coordinating and supporting RTD activities previously conducted predominantly at bilateral level.

The Call for Joint European Research Projects (JERPs) launched by SEE-ERA.NET PLUS has a call budget of €3.5 million. This activity will engage 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 countries and the Western Balkan countries. SEE-ERA.NET PLUS is based on the SEE-ERA.NET project and its Regional Programme for Cooperation with South-East Europe (ReP-SEE), which was developed to enhance S&T cooperation with the Western Balkan Countries (WBC).

All 14 countries in the SEE-ERA-NET PLUS project have declared that they will give national financial contributions to the SEE-ERA.NET PLUS Call for Joint European Research Projects: ALBANIA, AUSTRIA, BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA, BULGARIA, CROATIA, FRANCE, GERMANY, GREECE, THE FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA, MONTENEGRO, ROMANIA, SLOVENIA, SERBIA, TURKEY.

2. MANAGEMENT OF THE CALL

The overall management and coordination of the call will be carried out by the International Bureau of the Federal Ministry of Education and Research at the German Aerospace Center (DLR), which will also be responsible for the administration of the Coordinated Common Pot with contributions from the SEE-ERA.NET PLUS partner countries.

The call will have a two-stage submission procedure – Expression of Interest (EoI)¹ and Full Proposal – each followed by an independent evaluation by international experts. Only proposals selected under the first stage will be invited to submit a full proposal. The rules and procedures for submission of EoIs and Full Proposals are described in a separate document, “SEE-ERA.NET PLUS Joint Call: Guide for Applicants”.

¹ An expression of interest is a short proposal in which the applicant presents the concept of the project idea and describes the objectives and expected impact of the proposed application.

3. WHAT KIND OF PROJECTS WILL BE FUNDED?

The SEE-ERA.NET PLUS Call for Joint European Research Projects focuses on the thematic areas AgroFood and ICT of the Seventh Framework Programme (FP7). The projects must fall under the following subtopics:

In the field of AgroFood:

- a. Preservation of indigenous species and traditional food products (in SEE/WBC)
- b. Interdisciplinary field: Land use impact in agriculture on biodiversity

In the field of ICT:

- c. Software systems for learning process management and support
- d. ICT for energy efficiency

4. ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

a. Composition of the consortium

A minimum participation of at least two eligible institutions from different Western Balkan countries and at least one eligible institution from a non-WBC country in each project is required (see paragraph 3 in Chapter 1 of the present document).

If a significant added value can be proven, institutions from countries that are not part of the SEE-ERA.NET PLUS consortium may participate in the projects, but they are not eligible for funding. A “letter of commitment” ensuring funding for the applicant in question should be provided together with the EoI.

b. Legal status of applicants

Applications may be submitted by legal RTD entities that are eligible according to the national regulations of the participating countries. The funding scheme targets institutional collaboration: private individuals may not apply independently. Concerning the eligibility of the applicants, each SEE-ERA.NET PLUS country has determined what type of institution is eligible in its national regulations. The national specifications are described in Annex 3.

Wherever possible and eligible, the participation of Non Governmental Institutions (NGOs), commercial and industrial partners – especially small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) – is strongly recommended to ensure the relevance of the research to technological development and to the needs of society. Also, the participation of young scientists in the research teams is encouraged.

c. Eligibility check

All project proposals submitted in the first stage will be checked for eligibility. The national specifications given in Annex 3 will be taken into consideration. In case of ineligibility, the proposal in question will not be considered for evaluation, with one exception: If one partner of the Joint European research project (JERP) consortium is found ineligible, the coordinator of the proposal will be informed by DLR within three weeks after the submission deadline. If the minimum criteria are fulfilled by a JERP consortium even though one or more partners are not eligible, the coordinator of the project proposal has to inform DLR within one week about his/her decision to continue (without this partner or with new partners) and present a revised version of the EoI. If the coordinator is not eligible, the whole proposal will be discarded.

5. FUNDING PROCEDURES

The overall call budget is €3,506,525 of which €2,563,525 are national contributions of the SEE-ERA.NET PLUS countries and €943,000 are the contribution of the European Commission (EC). The national contributions to the SEE-ERA.NET PLUS Call for Joint European Research Projects will be allocated according to a “juste retour”² principle. Each country’s national contributions to the common call budget are listed in Annex 1 to this call text. These national contributions may be increased over the course of the selection procedure in order to increase the number of funded projects.

The outcome of the evaluation process will be a final ranking list with all the proposals – ranked according to the number of points assigned to proposals during the evaluation – that passed the thresholds and are therefore recommended for funding. The proposals that are high on the list and are expected to be funded because enough funding is available will be put on a shortlist. The proposals with a lower rank, which are not expected to be funded – but which have also been recommended for funding! – will be placed on the reserve list. The top two thirds of the proposals on the shortlist will receive the EC contribution to the call budget (€943,000), complementing the requested national budgets. The lower third of the shortlisted proposals will be subject to a “balancing process” between the participating national programmes. This means that projects can be moved up or down within this part of the list or even between this part and the reserve list depending on the availability of national financial contributions. This balancing process at the borderline between the shortlist and the reserve list is caused by the specific nature of the “juste retour” principle. As soon as one partner in the proposal cannot be funded, the whole proposal will be discarded.

On behalf of the SEE-ERA.NET PLUS consortium and according to the national contributions as well as the EC contribution to the call budget, DLR will fund the Joint European Research Projects (JERPs) by providing non-repayable grants. Expenditures have to be actual, only for project purposes, incurred during the course of the project, economic and necessary. JERPs will have a duration of one to two years and need to include a substantial scientific contribution from each partner institution. JERPs can start between 1 August and 1 October 2010. The maximum funding that can be requested for each project is €150,000 for the whole project duration. The concrete deliverables will have to include an exploitation plan to ensure the sustainability of the results.

² Under the “juste retour” principle, national contributions are distributed only to the selected national research teams.

The cost categories and country-specific rules for eligible costs (which also include VAT) are set out in Annex 3.

In general the upper funding limits for eligible costs in JERPs depend on whether the activities to be funded are economic or non-economic activities. In case of non-economic activities, the upper funding limit will be 100% of the eligible costs. In case of economic activities, the respective rates set out in the State Aid regulations of the EC have to be applied. According to the COMMUNITY FRAMEWORK FOR STATE AID FOR RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT AND INNOVATION, chapter 5.1.2. on Basic aid intensities: “the aid intensity, as calculated on the basis of the eligible costs of the project, shall not exceed

- (a) 100% for fundamental research;
- (b) 70% for industrial research for small enterprises; 60% for medium-sized enterprises and 50% for large enterprises;
- (c) 25% for experimental development”.

The projects involving EU Member States have to comply with the Regulation (EC) 800/2008. However, the maximum aid for enterprises is €200,000. As a consequence, the aid received by enterprises in those SEE-ERA-NET PLUS countries that are EU Members States may not exceed €200,000 for the last three tax years. For the purpose of the Regulation, all applicants from EU Member States will provide a declaration on the state aid received by them, including “de minimis” support, following a standardized template in the second step of the application process (together with the full proposal).

6. HOW TO SUBMIT APPLICATIONS

Project proposals are submitted following a two-stage procedure and only via the web-based Call Management System PT-Outline. Applications must be in English. In order to start the application procedure or download the “SEE-ERA.NET PLUS Joint Call: Guide for applicants” please visit <http://www.pt-it.de/ptoutline/seeeraplus/>.

7. EVALUATION OF THE PROPOSALS

The Joint European Research Project proposals will be evaluated through a two-stage process with independent referees. Peer reviewers with a high level of professional experience in the public or private R&D sector will assess the proposals and apply the evaluation criteria which are set out in this call text. A Scientific Council – which will be composed of senior scientists nominated by each participating country – will provide support in the evaluation procedure: it will review the ranking lists of the Expressions of Interest (Eols) and Full Proposals (FPs).

a. Evaluation of Expressions of Interest (Eols)

In the first phase, the Expressions of Interest (Eols) will be collected and undergo external remote evaluation. Two peer reviewers will be assigned to each Eol. The peer reviewers will score the Eols according to the two criteria set out below.

- Scientific and/or technological excellence – (maximum 10 points, no threshold)
 - Sound concept, quality of objectives
 - Innovativeness of the project idea
 - Progress beyond the state-of-the-art
 - Quality and effectiveness of the scientific and technological methodology
 - Sustainability of the project results
 - Qualification and relevant experience of the coordinator and the individual participants

- Potential impact (maximum 10 points, no threshold)
 - Contribution to the development of the research field in question
 - Impact of the project toward solving significant regional research problems

Based on the evaluation results, a ranking list of Eols will be drawn up and reviewed by the Scientific Council. The Scientific Council has two tasks: The first is to review the evaluation reports prepared by the peer reviewers. In case the Scientific Council identifies an unsound evaluation report, it has the right to discard it. The second task is the prioritization of proposals that have attained the same score in order to ensure a coherent ranking list. Only the top-ranking Eols will be invited to submit a Full Proposal. The number of Eols to be invited for Full Proposal will depend on the total available call budget, considering a success rate for full proposals of approximately 35%.

b. Evaluation of Full Proposals (FPs)

Full Proposals will also undergo a remote evaluation. Each Full Proposal will be evaluated by at least three peer reviewers according to the following three criteria.

- Scientific and/or technological excellence – (threshold 6/10)
 - Sound concept, quality of objectives
 - Innovativeness of the project idea
 - Progress beyond the state-of-the-art
 - Quality and effectiveness of the scientific and technological methodology
 - Sustainability of the project results

- Quality and efficiency of the implementation and the management (threshold 6/10)
 - Appropriateness of the management structure and procedures
 - Quality and effectiveness of the work plan and the distribution of tasks
 - Qualification and relevant experience of the coordinator and the individual participants
 - Quality of the consortium as a whole (including complementarity, balance)
 - Appropriate allocation and justification of the resources to be committed (budget, staff, equipment)

- Potential impact (threshold 6/10)
 - Contribution or relevance, at the European and/or international level, to the expected impacts listed in the FP7 under the themes ICT and AgroFood
 - Contribution to the development of the research field in question
 - Impact of the project toward solving significant regional research problems
 - Appropriateness of measures for the dissemination and/or exploitation of trans-national projects results, and management of intellectual property
 - Prospects for establishing efficient and sustainable partnership within the network, including transfer of know-how and experience

Based on the evaluation results, a ranking list of Full Proposals will be drawn up. Once again, the Scientific Council will have the task of reviewing it, as was the case with the Eols. The outcome will be a final ranking list which will be given to the SEE-ERA.NET PLUS Steering Board as a funding recommendation.

8. TIMETABLE

Publication of the call: 1 September 2009

Deadline for submission of Eol: 3 November 2009, 16:00 CET

Invitation for full proposals: 15 January 2010

Deadline for submission of full proposals: 15 March 2010, 16:00 CET

Funding decision: June 2010

Start of the JERPs: between 1 August and 1 October 2010

9. JURISDICTION

The place of jurisdiction is Bonn, Germany. In the event of dispute, German Law shall be applicable.

10. FURTHER INFORMATION AND COUNSELLING

Further information is available from your national SEE-ERA.NET PLUS contact points (Annex 2). Before submitting a proposal, all applicants should contact their national SEE-ERA.NET PLUS contact points to verify the eligibility of their proposal.