

**MINUTES**  
OF THE  
**STEERING PLATFORM ON RESEARCH FOR THE WESTERN BALKAN COUNTRIES MEETING**  
**HELD ON MARCH, 29, 2007**  
**IN BERLIN, GERMANY**

Participants: Annex 1

Agenda: Annex 2

Draft Guidelines for the Steering Platform: Annex 3

**Introduction:**

Following the launch of the Steering Platform on Research for the Western Balkan Countries on June 26, 2006 in Vienna, jointly by the Austrian Council Presidency and the European Commission, the German Council Presidency and the European Commission jointly held the first regular meeting of the Steering Platform. The meeting was held back to back with the meeting of the Steering Board of the SEE-ERA.Net.

On behalf of the Federal Ministry of Education and Research, Dr. Erika Rost welcomed all participants in Berlin.

**I. Opening statements made by:**

- a) German Presidency: Dr. Walter Mönig, Commissioner for EU Affairs and the German Presidency, Federal Ministry of Education and Research
- b) European Commission: Alessandro Damiani, Head of Unit, DG Research, International Policy Unit
- c) Western Balkan Countries: Dr. Iwan Videnovic, Assistant Minister, Ministry of Science and Environment Protection, Serbia

Mr. Walter Mönig stressed the importance of the Steering Platform as an instrument to strengthen the cooperation between the Western Balkan Countries and the member states of the European Union within the framework of the European Research Area. He underlined that the Programme of the German Presidency for Research covers important ingredients for a renewal of the European Research Area. He made reference to the Green Paper on new perspectives of the European Research Area in preparation by the European Commission which reviews the developments so far and reflects on the future tasks on this central element of the Lisbon Strategy. The Steering Platform could play an important role in building the European Research Area. In doing so, it could build upon the successful work of the SEE-ERA.Net.

Mr. Alessandro Damiani emphasized the high priority that was attached to the Western Balkan Countries by the European Commission. The Commission and Commissioner Potočnik are actively involved in ensuring the success of the processes towards economic and social progress. Research cooperation is a tool to

facilitate the accession and to circulate ideas, and the Steering Platform is at the heart of this process. It could give input to policies and activities.

Mr. Damiani pointed out that there has been progress in all the countries. Taking note of the ongoing cooperation and a broader policy picture, it should be considered to enlarge the number of countries present at the table. This could concern policy and non-policy stakeholder. With regard to the Inco-Nets, he hoped for success in the upcoming month.

Mr. Damiani congratulated the Information Office of the Steering Platform on its work. He stressed the need to ensure continuity with regard to the Platform being operational and highlighted the importance of testing the effectiveness in the context of the association to the 7<sup>th</sup> Framework Programme.

Dr. Videnovic recalled the launch of the Platform nine month ago. Being asked to give a statement for the Western Balkan countries, and to speak for the whole region, he had looked back at the time of the transition from FP6 to FP7 and took note of what it had put on the region's landscape. With appreciation he highlighted the importance of the commitment of Commissioner Potočnik with regard to the association to FP7 and his participation in conferences in the region. Dr. Videnovic strongly underlined the success of the activities of the SEE-ERA.Net mentioning for instance the success lying in the high participation in the Pilot Joint Call. The INCO-Net scheme would be supportive of the Steering Platform, Mr. Videnovic concluded.

## **II. What has been done since June 2006:**

- a) Information by the European Commission (Tania Friederichs)
- b) Information on Office of the Steering Platform (Elke Dall)
- c) Information on SEE-ERA.Net (Peter Mayr)

a) Ms. Tania Friederichs made clear that what has been achieved in the last month is the result of collective effort brought together in this Platform. The concept is clear - research is a good tool to facilitate the integration. The Steering Platform makes the approach concrete. The fact that almost all Western Balkan countries will be associated to the FP7 or actively considering it, is also to be attributed to the Steering Platform.

The exercise on its way to create more synergy between FP 7 funding and the granting of pre-accession financial instruments is another demonstration of the usefulness of this Platform. She pointed out that the Commission had recently informed the responsible ministries in the Western Balkan countries that using IPA funding for R&D was a high priority. She invited the countries to use the Platform to share information.

Ms. Milena Raykovska from the Joint Research Center (JRC), European Commission, informed how JRC supports candidate and potential candidate countries in their effort towards harmonisation with EU legislation. The activities contribute as well to the development of common scientific and technical references for policymaking (restricted to countries associated to FP 7). The number of meetings increased considerable; invitations are sent to all experts from the Western Balkan countries. She informed that JRC prepares a specific call with regard to FP 7 to be published in some month and invited the participants to participate in the call. Informative events would take place in Skopje and in Belgrade. Calls for proposals of countries together with the JRC would be possible as well (dual task of the JRC).

b) Ms. Elke Dall presented mission and organisation of the Information Office of the Steering Platform. She made reference to the country reports, the eJournal and other services offered by the Office.

With regard to new studies the Information Office would be in the position to undertake, she proposed three topics (Barriers of transnational mobility programmes; Situation of Higher education S&T in Kosovo; State of innovation structures in Western Balkan countries).

She invited the participants to comment upon the three proposals.

Finally, Ms. Dall highlighted the importance of the INCO-NET scheme of the Commission in the context of the work of the Steering Platform and informed on respective activities of the Centre for Social Innovation.

c) Mr. Peter Mayr gave an overview on the mission and objectives of the SEE-ERA.Net, the work done so far by the network and its partners, and the most recent activities, especially the Pilot Joint Call and related measures.

### **III. Round Table on priorities and actions:**

Participants, in particular from the Western Balkan countries (WBC), were invited to present their priorities and the actions taken or to be taken to strengthen the research cooperation in the WBC and with the WBC.

Mr. Viktor Stefov, Ministry of Education and Science, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, highlighted that the international cooperation of the country was becoming more intense, the number of agreements with other countries had increased considerable and there were more than 100 cooperation projects. During the last years, a database of publications in scientific journals was built as well as a database on patent activities. Since the government signed an agreement, State universities and institutes in the countries have access to the scientific SCOPUS database. The participation of institutions from the country in FP6 was high. Mr. Stefov underlined that the definition of national priorities had been accomplished as well as the coordination between the ministries. Concluding, he said that he was pleased to take part in the SEE-ERA.Net and the Steering Platform.

Mr. Ammar Mirascija from the National Contact Point for the Framework Programme recalled the still fragmented situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Ministry of Civil affairs, responsible for education and research, had managed to integrate the S&T sector as a distinctive chapter into the medium-term development strategy of the country. No bilateral agreements are existing in S&T, except with Slovenia. As regards European cooperation, he stressed the importance of an association to FP7. There is a strong interest in the Steering Platform and other European activities like the SEE-ERA.Net and the forthcoming INCO-NET in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Dr. Ivan Videnovic, Ministry of Science and Environment Protection, Serbia, reviewed the situation of S&T in Serbia. With regard to research promotion and the quality of the projects funded, he stressed the Peer Review system according to international standards being in use in Serbia to evaluate the projects. Bottom up and Top down approaches are applied in research promotion. With regard to research fields, he said, Serbian priorities were frontal scientific areas altogether. International

cooperation has become increasingly important as a national policy. Bilateral cooperation takes place with EU countries, with the region, with strongest as well as emerging countries worldwide. The Steering Platform would support the process of setting joint priorities and, Mr. Videnovic concluded, a lot could be done in the frame of the IPA Programme.

Dr. Sreten Skuletic, Vice-director, University of Montenegro, expressed his contentment with the Steering Platform being operational, a body to cover all R&D activities in the Western Balkan countries. With regard to the situation in Montenegro, he referred to the new Law on Scientific Research Activities and the national Council for Scientific Research Activities that had been established. As an important step, a national Strategy for S&T in Montenegro is currently in preparation which will lead to priority setting. At the moment, environment, ICT and biotechnology, food, tourism and energy efficiency, are among the most important research areas in Montenegro.

Ms. Anneliese Stoklaska, Federal Ministry for Science and Research, Austria, thanked the Presidency and especially Ms. Tania Friederichs, for the preparatory work with regard to the Steering Platform being operational. She highlighted the strong interest of her country in the cooperation with the Western Balkan countries, mentioning the support measures and activities. In this respect she brought to mind the Austrian Science and Research Liaison offices in Ljubljana and Sofia, the VII. Bled Forum on Europe – Foresight Conference on Global, European and Regional Governance, held in Bled in March 2006, and the International Conference “Why to invest in science in South Eastern Europe?” held in Ljubljana in September 2006.

Mr. Fatih Sahin, The Scientific & Technological Council of Turkey (TÜBİTAK), expressed strong interest in the cooperation with Western Balkan countries and specific strategies in the countries. Turkey signed cooperation agreements with most of the Western Balkan countries. Mentioning the cooperation with Austria, he stressed the support that was attributed to the INCO-NET scheme and the forthcoming project proposal.

Mr. Peter Volasko, Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Technology, Slovenia, informed on the Young Researchers Programme. The programme, which is published on the web site of the Slovenian Research Agency, aims to invite the best researcher to Slovenian research institutions. Pointing at the forthcoming Slovenian Council Presidency, he informed the participants on priority areas and activities planned for 2008, for instance a conference on the use of Structural funds. A Western Balkan focus of the Presidency would address the Steering Platform, special activities planned would involve the SEE-ERA.Net. Addressing the Green Paper, Mr. Volasko made clear that Research Commissioner Janez Potočnik would make use of the Green Paper to forward new ideas for the development of the European Research Area.

Ms. Lora Pavlova, Ministry of Education and Science, Bulgaria, made reference to the current state of the bilateral agreements with the Western Balkan countries. A bilateral agreement with the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia has already been signed. Agreements with Serbia and Montenegro are under negotiation. According to her information, all national programmes are open to cooperation with Western Balkan countries. With regard to joint cooperation in the European

Framework Programme FP7, preparatory grants are offered by the Bulgarian government (costs could be covered). Researchers from WBC are welcome to participate in information days arranged in Bulgaria. Ms. Pavlova also expressed her interest in the state of the transposition of the Council Directive on Scientific Visa into national law. Member states have to bring into force the law by October 2007.

Dr. Nikos Sidiropoulos, General Secretariat for Research and Technology, Greece, expressed contentment with the Steering Platform being operational, in his view a precondition for stability and European integration. He referred to the EU Western Balkan countries Action Plan initiated by the Greek Presidency and the Commission in Thessaloniki in 2003, which had generated significant momentum and led to the SEE-ERA.Net. All activities, he pointed out, were needed to reinforce the S&T capacities, strengthen the human potential and the creation of institutes to boost innovation and growth in the region. Dr. Sidiropoulos finally commented upon the Greek responsibilities in the SEE-ERA.Net project and emphasized the actual Greek support for a proposal in preparation with regard to the INCO-NET scheme.

Mr. Asley Ibbett, Office of Science and Innovation, Department of Trade and Industry, United Kingdom, appreciated the approach to cooperation being taken by the Steering Platform. In the context of the development of a high-level strategy for the cooperation with other countries, he referred to the Open Method of Coordination and the CREST working group contributing to the debate on S&T cooperation of the European Union.

Dr. Jan Hrusak, Academy of Science, Czech Republic, referred to the agreements on S&T cooperation with the Western Balkan countries which had been signed by the Academy of Science and several universities in the Czech Republic. With regard to the transposition of the Council Directive on Scientific Visa, mentioned earlier in the discussion, he conveyed the information that the Czech law had been submitted to Parliament for approval.

Mr. Karsten Heinz, Federal Ministry of Education and Research, Germany, recalled the work of the Stability Pact in the Western Balkan countries. Mentioning the European Higher Education Area and the European Research Area, he recommended closer links between the "twins". In support of cooperation on a bi- and multilateral level, he made reference to the instrument of the Regional Call of the Federal Ministry of Education and Research, "International Co-operation in Education and Research - Central, Eastern and South Eastern European Region", and to the bilateral S&T agreements. Mr. Heinz encouraged institutions and researcher from Western Balkan countries to cooperate with German partners to make use of this instrument.

Mr. Alessandro Damiani, coming back to the European research promotion, made reference to the Framework Programme FP7 launched recently by the Presidency. One should take lessons from earlier calls and try to enhance the participation, e.g. undertake activities of awareness raising, attract attention, on hubs, expertise, for instance via NPC, by circulating lists. The three studies proposed today by the Information Office of the Steering Platform could support building partnerships and facilitating evaluators.

As regards the policy debate, he considered the British idea (the open method of coordination) an interesting one. He pointed to the CREST working group and argued

that the debate on the European Research Area could be enriched by the Steering Platform.

Regarding the further work of the Information Office in support of the Steering Platform, Dr. Erika Rost draw the attention on the necessity to identify the topics for the forthcoming analytical studies and reports, to be provided by the Office.

Ms. Elke Dall, Information Office of the Steering Platform, recalled the earlier proposal of three topics for studies (Barriers of transnational mobility programmes; Situation of Higher education S&T in Kosovo/UNMIK; State of innovation structures in Western Balkan countries) and added as a forth topic the “Scientific-Visa Issue” to be published in the electronic Journal of the Information Office. The work on the studies would require 6 to 8 month.

Participants were asked to send comments and additional proposals as soon as possible.

Dr. Jörn Sonnenburg, International Bureau of the Federal Ministry of Education and Research of Germany, announced the upcoming SEE-ERA.NET deliverable “Strategic approaches to foster the integration of the Western Balkan into the European Research Area - White Paper and Joint Action Plan” for further discussion by the Steering Platform. He welcomed the invitation of the Steering Platform by the European Commission to comment on the Green Paper. The White Paper could be a first element. Concluding, he stressed the importance of the monitoring of FP7 with regard to new promotion instruments.

#### **IV. Status, Operation and Follow-up of the Steering Platform**

To enter into a first exchange on the functioning and the guidelines of the Steering Platform, Dr. Erika Rost informed the participants on the discussion process on the status and guidelines for the operation of the Platform that had followed the launch of the Steering Platform on June 26, 2006. A mission statement was proposed in October 2006; in addition, procedural guidelines of the Steering Platform were discussed.

*The Platform facilitates the interaction between the Western Balkan Countries, the EU member states, the candidate countries and other states associated to the EU Framework Programme for RTD and the European Commission. Its main objective is to support the enhanced integration of the WBCs in the European RTD cooperation activities. It is a strategic body to deal with European, multilateral and regional issues of Science and Technology policies in and with the WBCs. It acts as an information exchange centre, clearing house for joint ideas and activities, and coordination forum for needs, suggestions and proposals of the WBCs to the European Commission and vice versa. In this spirit, the Platform continues and intensifies the progress achieved under the EU-Balkan Countries Action Plan on Science and Technology.*

(Information Office of the Steering Platform on Research for the Western Balkan Countries (<http://see-science.eu/news/111.html>)).

It was proposed to prepare the decisions necessary in this regard in order to provide for operation of the Platform. The mission statement could serve as a starting point. With regard to the procedural guidelines of the Platform, the Chair proposed to discuss the most important elements, e.g. Members, Participation, Meetings, Invitation, Agenda, Language, Chair, Secretariat, etc.).

After an introductory discussion on general issues with regard to the Platform and its functioning, the Steering Platform members agreed on the following:

#### Membership

Members are the EU Member States, the Candidate and Potential Candidate Countries, associated or not to the 7th European Framework Programme (FP7); the other associated countries to FP7 (Israel, Switzerland, Norway, Iceland and Lichtenstein) and the European Commission. Additional stakeholders should be invited on a case to case basis (depending on the discussion of specific issues).

#### Participants

Nomination of participants is made by the governments of the member states of the Steering Platform.

The level of participation should be up to the governments. Government should nominate two persons committed to WBC issues (participation could depend on the agenda).

#### Secretariat

The secretariat function will be provided by the WBC INCO-Net.

#### Meetings

The meetings should take place one or two times a year. If possible meetings should be held back to back with the meetings of the Steering Board of the SEE-ERA.Net.

#### Invitations; Chair

In general, invitations will be issued by the Council Presidency and the European Commission, co-Chairing the meeting.

There was consensus that the representation of the Western Balkan Countries in the Chair was necessary. There was no final decision on the procedural steps with regard to the nomination of the co-Chair from WBC.

Final proposal was that – during the Portuguese Presidency - the next meeting of the Steering Platform should take place – back to back with the Steering Board of the SEE-ERA.Net - in Tessaloniki in October 2007.

### **V. AOB/Closing Remarks:**

Dr. Erika Rost informed the participants that the draft minutes (including the agreement reached so far with regard to the procedural guidelines of the Steering Board) together with the list of participants would be sent to all participants of the meeting.

## List of Participants

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EUROPEAN COMMISSION  
RESEARCH DIRECTORATE-GENERAL



Bundesministerium  
für Bildung  
und Forschung



Agenda  
Meeting of Steering Platform on Research for Western Balkan  
Countries  
Berlin, 29 March 2007

- 9.30-10.00            Opening statements by:
- German Presidency;
  - European Commission;
  - Representative from WBC.
- 10.00-10.45            What has been done since June 2006:
- Information by European Commission (Tania Friederichs);
  - Information on Office of the Steering Platform (Elke Dall);
  - Information on SEE.ERA.NET (Peter Mayr).
- 10.45-11.00            Coffee break
- 11.00-12.45            Round Table on priorities and actions:
- Under this item we expect participants, in particular from the WBCs, to present their priorities and the actions taken or to be taken to strengthen the research cooperation in the WBCs and with the WBCs. Please identify also the thematic priorities to further steer the work of the Information Office and in general, indicate what role you expect the Platform could play in this process.
- Questions & Answers
- 12.45-14.00            Lunch
- 14.00-15.30            Status, Operation and Follow-up of the Steering Platform
- 15.30-16.00            AOB/Closing remarks

**MISSION STATEMENT AND PROCEDURAL GUIDELINES  
OF THE  
STEERING PLATFORM ON RESEARCH FOR THE WESTERN BALKAN COUNTRIES  
AS OF 29.03.2007 (DRAFT)**

**MISSION STATEMENT**

The Platform facilitates the interaction between the Western Balkan Countries, the EU member states, the candidate and potential candidate countries and other states associated to the EU Framework Programme for RTD and the European Commission. Its main objective is to support the enhanced integration of the WBCs in the European Research Area. . It is a strategic body to deal with European, multilateral and regional issues of Science and Technology policies in and with the WBCs. It acts as an information exchange centre, clearing house for joint ideas and activities, and coordination forum for needs, suggestions and proposals of the WBCs to the European Commission and vice versa. In this spirit, the Platform continues and intensifies the progress achieved under the EU-Balkan Countries Action Plan on Science and Technology.

(Information Office of the Steering Platform on Research for the Western Balkan Countries (<http://see-science.eu/news/111.html>)).

**PROCEDURAL GUIDELINES**

Membership

Members are the EU Member States, the Candidates and Potential Candidate Countries, the Countries associated to the 7th European Framework Programme (FP7) and the European Commission. Additional stakeholders should be invited on a case to case basis (depending on the discussion of specific issues).

Participants

Nomination of participants is made by the governments of the member states of the Steering Platform.

The level of participation should be up to the governments. Government should nominate two persons committed to WBC issues (participation could depend on the agenda).

Secretariat

The secretariat function will be provided by the WBC INCO-Net.

Meetings

The meetings should take place one or two times a year. If possible meetings should be held back to back with the meetings of the Steering Board of the SEE-ERA.Net.

Invitations: Chair

In general, invitations will be issued by the Council Presidency and the European Commission, co-Chairing the meeting.

There was consensus that the representation of the Western Balkan Countries in the Chair was necessary. There was no final decision on the procedural steps with regard to the nomination of the co-Chair from WBC.

To be discussed:

Agenda

Language

Decision rules

Minutes

Cost of meeting