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Co-ordination of Research Policies
with the Western Balkan Countries

ALBANIA

PROGRESS REPORT[1]

on recent developments regarding science and technology cooperation in/with the WBC

(May 2011 till December 2011)

1   Policy actions

- The Government of Albania endorsed the new Higher education reform – a new financial reform and financial scheme for public, which is driven by the principle that funding is attributed to students (Action Plan, September 2011).

- The Ministry of Education and Science (MoES) of Albania has undertaken a policy review on the role of private higher education (see Action Plan 2011).

- The Ministry of Education and Science has taken an initiative to promote regional prosperity by building regional development centers, affiliated within regional universities across Albania.

2   Legislative initiatives - development of the legal and strategic framework

Ministry of Education and Science (MoES)

- Development of national standards for the internal and external evaluation (accreditation of higher education institutions) (by ministerial order, Nr. 126, March 2011, etc.);
- Amendments to the government decree on the Quality Assurance and Regulation for the Public Agency for the Accreditation of Higher Education. Changes in the composition of the Council of Higher Education, which now includes two international, recognized experts (GOV Nr. nr.368, April 2011);
- Amendments on the regulation for issuing licenses to private higher education institutions ;
- New amendments to the Law on Regulated Professions in the Republic of Albania (Law Nr. 10 171, dated 22/10/2009);
- New legal initiative taken on establishing fees on the State Exam/s and preparing by laws that regulate the organization of the states exams for regulated professions (laying out questionnaires;

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[1] The progress reports are collected in preparation of the meetings of the Steering Platform on Research for the Western Balkan Countries and will be provided for download from the WBC-INCO.Net homepage (www.wbc-inco.net) about one week before the meeting takes place. Therefore please submit your report to office@zwbc-inco.net until November 22, 2011.

- Standard legal acts on approving procedures on annual quotas per cycle of study, admission to universities (full time vs. part-time, long distance education) during the 2011-2012 academic year;
- Ministerial orders on approving new study programs per cycle, across universities;
- New national standards drafted on the quality of long-term study programs in the field of medicine; to be approved soon

Ministry of Economy, Trade and Energy

- Decision of Council of Ministers Nr. 667, date 28.09.2011 "On establishment of Innovation Fund".
  - This fund will provide assistance in the form of direct subsidies, micro, small and medium-sized, up to 2850 Euro for the period 2011-2014. Depending on the assessment for the project submitted by the applicant the scheme covers from 30% to 50% of eligible costs and approved, within the aforementioned limits

- Decision of the Council of Ministers Nr. 303, date 03.31.2011"On establishment of the Information Technology and Communication Units" (CIO)
  - (CIO), as a technical and organizational structure for the design, implementation and administration of e-government. Hereafter, projects, programs, budgeting and especially technical standards in all state offices, with IT systems established, will be harmonized and well-coordinated. DCM also provides for the establishment and operation near Ministry for Information, Communications Technology and Innovation (MITIK) of the Technical Council for Electronic Governance (e-Gov), headed by Deputy Minister of MITIK. The council will perform this coordination, that whole state apparatus to adopt rapidly information technologies and electronic systems.
  - 31 June 2011 - the signing of the agreement between Albtelecom in Albania and Telecom Italia Sparkle for the project of increasing capacity of optical fiber cable trans Adriatic Bari-Durres. This project aims to increase the capacity of the main network, creating tie points with neighboring states and increasing the quality of service and provides for increasing the capacity of optical fibers up to 20 Gbps transmission, which means 8 times higher than existing capacity. While this allows for increased network capacity up to 80 Gbps. Increased capacity as above will provide quality Internet services in Albania, Global Internet connection through a "First Tier Suplier", providing better quality services for ISP (Internet service provider) in the country to provide opportunities for ISPs in neighboring countries, etc.
- September 2011 - a second license for providing 3G service was given to AMC, which has made the highest bid in the tender, an offer worth 15.1 million euros significantly higher than the minimum value.
- Through the Project Public Access Points (PAP) Albanian Post Office in Student City is one of 510 offices in the country that offer free internet to anyone who needs. The number of users in a month is more than 376 thousand users, with nearly 1 million 700 thousand clicks

per day. Through PAP, every Albanian, every resident of this country, can have access not only to the services of state agencies, but also can navigate free in the Internet.

3 Important events, meetings, training activities, etc.

Ministry of Education and Science

- The Ministry of Education and Science of Albania organized, in collaboration with DG Research and Innovation and DG Education and Culture of the European Commission a 2-day conference, financed by the TAIEX instrument, on promoting awareness and practical knowledge on how to apply and benefit from eligible community programs, including FP7, Jean Monnet, Marie Curie, Erasmus Mundus, Tempus, etc (November 2011);
- The MoES organized in close cooperation with the World Bank, the conference on the new action plan of the financing reform in higher education in Albania (October 2011); high-level roundtable with international experts on the new financial reform in higher education (October 2011);

- Organization of workshops on the European quality assurance approach – Public Agency for the Accreditation of Higher Education and public and private HEIs;

- The Public Agency for the Accreditation of Higher Education Institutions (PAAHE) in Albania has organized workshops with international experts on exchanging best practices and models on self-evaluation reports (in line with ENQA standards)

- The PAAHE organized theme-based workshops ((Engineering, Health Care, Economics, and Human Science) focused on peer review training, relevant to the pre-accreditation and accreditation process of HEI in Albania

- The PAAHE put together a seminar dedicated to setting up internal quality assurance units within public HEIs;

- The Public Agency for the Accreditation of Higher Education Institutions has undergone intensive training in order to fit and adhere to European Network of Quality Assurance standards;

Agency for Research, Technology and Education

- May 2011 - The Agency of Research, Technology and Innovation (ARTI) with the support of the Delegation of the European Union to Albania, organized an Information Session on Research, in the Academy of Science aiming at supporting the Albanian potential applicants with the preparation of project proposals under Framework Programme 7 (FP7);
- July 2011 - The Agency for Research, Technology and Innovation in cooperation with the Italian Agency for Promotion of European Research (APRE) organized a two-days training course aiming at supporting and encouraging Albanian researchers to apply at the FP7- Health Programe

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- ARTI has continued its efforts in awareness raising, organizing information and training events, sending up-to date information on FP7 and other EU R&D programs. The micro-training centre, established in September 2010, providing training for FP7 project application and implementation, has been active in offering personalized assistance to individuals and research institutions, organizing round tables, debates etc;
- An Inter-institutional agreement amongst the ARTI, Alb-Shkenca Institute and Brain Gain Programme to update the database of Albanian Researchers in Diaspora;
- In regard to building human capital, Albania has officially expressed the interest to become member of EURAXESS Network and ARTI, as the national coordinator (Bridgehead organization) is now creating and updating the EURAXESS Albania website;
- With regard to infrastructure, ARTI has undertaken a process of mapping of national research institutes and has established regular communication / share of information with them. Further analysis of the status of research infrastructure / laboratories at national level is currently taking place;
- Concerning the integration in the European Research Area, Albania holds its interest in joining Life-Watch – European Research Infrastructure Consortia. Moreover, programs like COST and EUREKA have been highly promoted amongst researchers, opening up new research opportunities for the Albanian research community;
- Regarding the contribution to the forthcoming Innovation Union, ARTI is now part of the Albanian Consortium, which has applied for EEN membership, whereby, the role of ARTI will be to support SME participation to R&D programs, through a calendar of activities to inform and train.

Ministry of Economy, Trade and Energy

- September 2011 - The 14th International Conference on Network-Based Information Systems (NBiS) has taken place at Polytechnic University of Tirana. The main objective of NBiS is to bring together researchers from both network systems and information systems with the aim of encouraging the exchange of ideas and experience between these two communities;
- 26 and 27 September 2011, First Monitoring Project for electronic communications and information society for the candidate and potential candidate to the European Union. The project is a three-year initiative funded by the European Union and implemented by the company Cullen International. The overall objective of the project is to assist the European Commission and authorities of the candidate countries and potential candidate for the EU to monitor the progress made by each of them towards compliance with EU rules on electronic communications and information society services and convergence with EU internal market;
- September 2011- Business Relay and Innovation Centre, BRIC organized training workshop for 16 consultants on SME Innovation and Technology Auditors;
- Tirana, October 24, 2011 - An alliance among the Albanian-American Development Foundation (AADF), the Government of Albania, USAID, Microsoft Albania, Hewlett-Packard, Cisco, and Albtelecom, was formally announced in a ceremony held at the Ministry of Innovation and Information and Communication Technology (ICT). This public-private partnership will establish Albania's first ICT training and resource center, PROTIK, to support the development and use of ICT innovations for small businesses and promote ICT sector growth in Albania;

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- November 2011 – A high level meeting on information society development has taken place in Tirana, with a goal to reap the full potential of the Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) to spur innovation, economic growth, and regional competitiveness and improved quality of life in South East Europe. The three-day event, was in the framework of the Electronic South Eastern Europe (eSEE) Initiative, has been organized by the Albanian Ministry of Innovation, and Information and Communications Technologies, the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) Secretariat and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)

4   Development of international cooperation and actions on integration into ERA

The Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Albania has issued a positive standing to joining the Lifelong Learning Programme of the European Commission through a Memorandum of Understanding, which is subject to be finalized in 2012. The LLL program will open up new frontiers and opportunities to build innovative and creative skills in the field of education and science.

Upon submitting the official expression of Interest in joining the EURAXESS Network, the Agency for Research, Technology and Innovation, as the National Bridgehead Organization participated for the first time in the meeting of the EURAXESS Network in Brussels.   ARTI is now working to establish the EURAXESS Network.

Concerning the integration in the European Research Area, Albania confirms its interest in joining ERIC Life-Watch – European Research Infrastructure Consortia. Moreover, cooperation with COST and EUREKA has also started and it has opened up new research opportunities for the Albanian research community. Regarding the contribution to the forthcoming Innovation Union, ARTI is now part of the Albanian Consortium applying for EEN (Enterprise Europe Network) membership, whereby, the role of ARTI will be to support SME participation to R&D programs.

- Tirana, 13 May 2011 - The Albanian Minister for Information, Communications Technology and Innovation and United Nations Development Programme, (UNDP Albania) signed a new project which supports Albania's advancement towards the National Digital Agenda. The project will support improving the legal and technical foundations for IT infrastructure, and also provide direct support to the institution of the Minister for Innovation and Information and Communications Technologies to better manage the national information society agenda. This includes technical assistance to create a complete legal framework, strengthening the public and private partnerships in this regard as well as the application of the most advanced standards in the area of Information and Communication Technology.
- 13 June 2011 - The Albanian government and USAID launch cyber security program in Albania. The program will help build the capacity of the Albanian government to prevent and respond to cyber incidents. This progam is supported by USAID and managed by the National Agency of Information Society (NAIS).

- The Albanian Investment Development Agency (AIDA) and BICRO establish a framework of collaboration. Both Institutions signed a Memorandum of Understanding on July 14th 2011 for

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exchanging information and collaboration, and in particular support for the future application of Albania in the European Enterprise Network (EEN) and the provision of relevant services.

5   Statistics - major changes / updates of relevant statistical data

In terms of human capacity building in Albania and taking stock of human resources in the field of academia and research, we have a more accurate picture as of 2011, noted below:

- Researchers with the title (Prof.)– **682 (152 women)**
- Researchers with the title (Prof. Ass) – **544 (180 women)**
- Researchers with the title (Dr.) – **1326 (719 women)**
- Doctor of Scientific Research – **269 (181 women)**
- Master of Scientific Research – **61 (43 women)**
- Assistant of Scientific Research – **12 (women 7)**

In terms of Albania's activity in science and technology projects, under the framework of FP7 programs, the performance has shown steady progress, showing a higher mobilization of local resources and know-how in community programs.

- SP Cooperation: 15 projects out of all applications submitted, were retained mainly in the Social Sciences, ICT and Environment themes.

- Participation in SP People: 7 Marie Curie fellowships awarded to Albanian fellow scholars who do their research in different EU countries.

- Participation in SP Capacities: this is the programme in which Albania was most successful. Out of 60 proposals submitted, 11 had been retained for funding. Albania is part of 3 international cooperation projects of which the WBC.INCO.NET is the most important one.

Statistics in other areas, subject to the domain of the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Energy

Mobile telephony:

- The electronic communication market is liberalized and a large number of undertakings are authorized to provide different services through a light regime of general authorization
- The mobile phone penetration is very high, ca. 141.9%, for 2010
- The fourth mobile operator in the market (Plus mobile, in addition to AMC, Vodafone and Eagle Mobile),
- The introduction of the number portability, now widely used, and a reviewed plan of wholesale termination tariffs, competition has significantly increased, services have diversified and retail prices have gone down.

Fix line telephony:

- Fixed telephony penetration remains low despite the numerous providers 10.3 % in 2010 International Telecommunication Union (ITU)
- The newly launched, GSM based, fixed telephony service will make possible a significant increase in penetration and the full coverage of the country.

Internet:

- Internet penetration dynamically increased during the last years reaching beyond 50% from 43,5 % in 2010 (MITIK)
- Broadband access is available to 15% of households, to more than 50% of the small businesses and to almost all medium and big businesses (MITIK)
- Percentage of households with computer 15.6 (ITU)
- Percentage of households with internet 11.7 (ITU)

6   Assessment of the developments and outlook on the next 6 months

 The Albanian governmental bodies (ARTI and the line Ministries) will engage in identifying success stories linked to FP7 projects and other community programs that are of a regional character. In addition, better links are expected to be instated between scientists in the Diaspora or who work abroad (the case of the Marie Curie Fellows) and scientists in the country, so as to exchange experiences and to spur close collaboration and successful and innovative ideas.

Albania is set to strengthen cooperation with other organizations such as Central European Initiative, COST, and EUREKA.

Other developments:

The Albanian legislation and institutional framework on e-signature, e-document and e-databases is in place. This is transferring a lot of activity and transactions from the conventional ways into the cyberspace.

We are focusing in the same time on improving security and increasing confidence among all groups of online users. We are working to:

-   Raise awareness of different stakeholders like, families, internet companies, other business; also, helping schools to avoid risks.

-   Updating the existing electronic communications law in line with the 2009 EU Directive; to be approved by parliament beginning next year.

-   The drafting a policy paper on broadband development; to be approved within this year.
-   The adoption of rules for the right of way for physical networks; the draft law awaits parliamentary approval.

-   The adoption of effective regulation for access to existing infrastructure has been undertaken by AKEP with the relevant conditions for the Significant Market Power operators.
-   Promote investments of private sector, through a public private partnership aiming to build a National Broadband Network; offers will be submitted next week.

-   Develop an ICT park through, again a PPP next year.