

Conclusions of the 8th meeting of the Steering Platform on Research
for the Western Balkan Countries
Belgrade, 24 June 2010

The Steering Platform on Research for the Western Balkan Countries met in Belgrade on 24 June 2010. The meeting was co-chaired by the Spanish Presidency of the Council of the European Union, the Republic of Serbia on behalf of the Western Balkan Countries – who hosted the event – and the European Commission.

The presentations of the progress reports again showed that both the Balkan countries and the other platform members and stakeholders had taken many actions over the last six months to strengthen their research capacity. Actions varied from research funding activities and promotion of research cooperation at national level, to that with other countries in the region as well as under FP7. All Balkan countries announced further measures and actions aimed at reinforcing their national research strategy. An increasing number of bilateral S&T agreements have been concluded over the last six months, which is another indication of the interest and potential in developing further international research cooperation. From the progress reports it was established that strengthening the research capacity requires measures at various levels – national, regional, European - and in different areas - including higher education, infrastructure, science technology and innovation. The importance for the Steering Platform of focusing more on innovation in the future was mentioned in this context.

The Platform discussed, on the basis of concrete examples of projects supported by the EU Pre-Accession Instrument (IPA), the possibility to strengthen the research capacity in the Balkans through IPA. This issue could be brought to the attention of the Hungarian Presidency, for possible further consideration at the WIRE II Conference. The Competitiveness and Innovation Programme (CIP) is another instrument that offers good opportunities for the Balkan countries, as well as the Enterprise Europe Network which offers support to SMEs throughout the EU and partner countries, including all the Balkan Countries.

From the presentation of the data it emerged that since their association to FP7, the participation of the WBCs in the Framework Programme has increased. Further improvements are needed, particularly in the area of researchers' mobility. It is important that, as highlighted in the study on patterns of cooperation, the research entities from the Balkan countries participate more actively in collaborative research projects, including taking on the role of coordinators. In addition, particular

attention should be devoted to the involvement of SMEs and industry in general in research cooperation.

The outcome of the evaluation of the call for joint European research projects organized under the SEE.ERA.NET Plus FP7 project is a good demonstration of the high potential for effective research collaboration in the region. The presentation of the outcome of the FP7 Research Potential programme showed that this action meets the real needs of the research institutions in the Balkan countries and hence the importance to continue with such actions in the future.

The Steering Platform took stock of the present level of participation of Western Balkan Countries in COST activities and welcomed their increased and further involvement.

The Steering Platform also welcomed progress in the project “Regional Strategy for Research and Development for Innovation for WB”, supported by the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) and to be funded by the EU IPA fund, and expects that the project will contribute to an effective implementation of the Ministerial declaration on the regional dimension of research adopted in Sarajevo on 24 April 2009. The Platform acknowledged the successful organization by the Turkish authorities and the RCC of a regional workshop on public research institutes, held in Istanbul on 8-9 March 2010, which was part of an effort to enhance the role of public research institutions in technological development of WBCs and their integration into the ERA.

The presentation of the Central European Initiative (CEI) offered a good overview of the cooperation opportunities offered by this regional forum, in particular on human resource development. The Platform welcomed the prospect of possible cooperation in the future.

The Platform welcomed the progress made within ESFRI’s Regional issues working group with respect to research infrastructures at regional level and encouraged active WBC involvement in the ongoing discussions on how to foster development of regional partner facilities at South-Eastern-European level.

The Steering Platform started reviewing, based on its conclusions of the previous meeting, its working methods and practices with a view to improving the effectiveness and impact of deliberations. This should be done, inter alia, through more focused meeting agendas, allowing for sufficient time for debate, through involvement of the members in the preparation of the agendas, and through follow-up on conclusions.