



European Research & Innovation days 2020

“Towards an innovation agenda for the Western Balkans” Open session

Event Concept note

Date: 24 September 2020, 10:00

Venue: digital conference

Duration: 45 minutes

Panel members: video statements from Commissioner Gabriel and Western Balkan Ministers of Education and Science and high-level panel discussions.

Moderator: Dr *Sanja Damjanovic*, Minister of Science, Montenegro [tbc]

Background:

The European Research and Innovation Days is the European Commission’s annual flagship event, bringing together policymakers, researchers, entrepreneurs and citizens to debate and shape the future of research and innovation in Europe and beyond. The 2020 edition will gather broad input from participants on how research and innovation policy and funding can deliver on the Green Deal, digitalisation and other European Commission priorities such as dealing with the COVID-19 crisis.

In this crucial year, just ahead of the launch of Horizon Europe and the enhanced European Research Area, this event is a unique chance to discuss how research and innovation will benefit the future of Europe and the international community at large.

For more information on the event, please consult the official homepage of the conference in this [link](#).

Description and objectives of the session

The Western Balkans are a strategic priority for the European Commission. The EU has increased its efforts to boost the economic growth and support reforms required for the region to move forward on the path towards joining the EU.

This session will focus on the prospective priorities of the Western Balkans Agenda on Innovation, Research, Culture, Education, Youth and Sport and its accompanying actions; how this Agenda is setting out a new narrative for the region providing a positive and forward-looking vision for all citizens, and youth in particular.

As fully Associated Countries to Horizon Europe, the Western Balkans are treated on par with the EU Member States. Association to Horizon Europe is the deepest form of international cooperation where the active engagement of the Western Balkans entities is expected to significantly expand in order to enable mutual access to excellence and research resources, pursue solutions to global challenges together and help companies integrate in international value chains.

A particular element of the discussions will be the global challenges and President von der Leyen’s Commission priorities (Green Deal, Digital transformation and an economy that works for people) and its ambition for Europe to be a strong global actor, to lead the transition to a sustainable planet and to a new digital world. It should also address efforts undertaken in the region to foster economic growth, job creation and stability and further explore ways of cooperation.

The Ministerial political statements and the high-level discussion will cover issues relating to Association as an instrument of systemic change in the countries and region as a whole.

The panellists will delve further on how association to Horizon Europe triggers changes in the R&I ecosystem bringing about wider reforms in the countries, such as governance, digitalization, alignment with norms and creation of effective economic ties and ultimately in the longer term the contribution to the preparation of the countries for EU membership.

The panellists may refer to the [European Commission priorities](#) and how they reflect national priorities. They are expected to reflect upon and provide their perspective as regards the following elements, in particular looking ahead towards a new Agenda for the Western Balkans:

- How association contributes to a coordinated engagement allowing for selective specialisation in scientific excellence as well as industrially oriented research and innovation.
- How the national R&I priorities correspond with the EU ones, and in what way synergies can be promoted to realise these priorities. Does association to the programme make alignment easier to achieve?
- How the EU's single market for research (the European Research Area) and digital single market leverage innovation in the Associated Countries.
- The effect of association in support of innovation as key to growth, jobs and instrument of systemic change (i.e. paving the way to EU accession etc.).

Speakers

Video statements: Commissioner Mariya Gabriel, DG Research and Innovation and Ministers from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo*, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia [tbc]

High-Level policy discussion moderated by Sanja Damjanovic, Minister of Science, Montenegro [tbc]

- *Ms Florensa Haxhi*, Director for Development Programs & Program Manager for Regional Economic Area, Prime Minister's Office, Albania
- *Mr Jovan Despotovski*, Director, Fund for Innovation and Technology Development, North Macedonia
- *Prof. Dr. Viktor Nedovic*, Assistant Minister, Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development, Serbia
- *Mr Martin Kern*, Director, European Institute of Innovation and Technology
- *Prof. Dr. Atanas Kochov*, Dean of the Faculty of Mechanical Engineering in North Macedonia, JRC Board Member