

JOINT STATEMENT

SHORT VERSION

1ST JOINT SCIENCE CONFERENCE
INTERGOVERNMENTAL INITIATIVE WESTERN BALKANS



Intergovernmental Initiative Western Balkans

Joint Science Conference

A common European future must be shaped now and the Western Balkans (WB) are an inseparable part of it – maintaining the status quo is not a viable option. We therefore resolutely support efforts for cooperation, reconciliation and integration in the WB. A particular focus should be on young people as the driving force for positive change. Sciences and humanities should be considered as a continuous investment into the future.

To address the identified challenges and implement sustainable solutions, we recommend the following to the WB Summit in Vienna on 27 August 2015:

1. Commit to allocate 3% of national GDP for higher education, science and research and establish unified quality standards for evaluation;
2. Support firmly institutional change, which ⁽ⁱ⁾ modernises the WB science systems in convergence with EU-standards, towards integration into the European Research Area, and ⁽ⁱⁱ⁾ which creates opportunities for young researchers and graduates, thereby reducing brain drain and encouraging brain gain;
3. Create a South Eastern European Research Council or Research Foundation, which funds individual outstanding scientists as agents of change, using a competitive selection mechanism based exclusively on research quality and academic excellence;
4. Establish interconnected Centres of Excellence in the WB as cooperation platforms by: ⁽ⁱ⁾ pooling resources and competencies, ⁽ⁱⁱ⁾ investing jointly in state of the art core facilities and research infrastructures, ⁽ⁱⁱⁱ⁾ supporting the mobility of researchers and students, ^(iv) establishing competitive doctoral and post-doctoral training and ^(v) creating innovation communities;
5. Institutionalise the dialogue between science, politics and society, by ⁽ⁱ⁾ creating mechanisms of consultation and strategic planning, and by ⁽ⁱⁱ⁾ establishing procedures for providing unbiased science-based advice to politics and society.

These recommendations are intended as sustainable solutions for the following key issues, which need urgent attention and reforms.

1. Sustainable Funding and Unified Quality Standards

- ◆ In the WB, there is a chronic shortage of public and private funding for science and research. Therefore, we strongly advocate the goal of allocating 3% of national GDP for higher education and science.
- ◆ Planning reliability and sustainable financing are conditions for strategic development of the science system, which are currently hampered by short term focus and distributive approaches towards financing. Therefore, middle and long term approaches have to be implemented and finances allocated through competitive procedures.
- ◆ To ensure a reliable evaluation of performance, unified quality standards – within the WB and following the EU-standards – must be established.

2. Institutional Change, Brain Drain and Brain Gain

- ◆ Young scientists are a key element of science. Currently, mass emigration (especially brain drain) is one of the greatest risks for future development of the WB.
- ◆ To make it attractive for young scientists to stay in their home country and to get involved in the science systems, they need a reliable perspective starting immediately after graduation. The WB academic diaspora should be encouraged to return through brain gain initiatives, creating a welcome culture for returning scientists.
- ◆ Such measures must be part of a wider institutional change with the principal aim of modernising the WB science systems for integration into the European Research Area.

3. South-Eastern European Research Council/Foundation

- ◆ The WB science systems lack strategic approaches to foster academic excellence and competitiveness, according to internationally acknowledged standards. Excellent individual scientists can act as agents of change. Thus, the support of their research by targeted funding is of highest priority.
- ◆ We strongly recommend the creation of a South-Eastern European Research Council (SEERC) – in a joint consortium with the European Research Council and the research funding institutions from the WB countries – or a South-Eastern European Research Foundation (SEERF), both emphasising merit-based individual funding.
- ◆ Transparent selection criteria guided only by academic excellence and evaluation procedures according to international standards, with the participation of international evaluators, are needed.

* This designation is without prejudice to positions on status and is in line with UNSC 1244 resolution and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo Declaration of Independence.

4. Centres of Excellence; Connectivity and Mobility

- ◆ Existing resources, infrastructures, projects and people in the WB science systems are insufficiently linked. This leads to a high degree of isolation/inward orientation of the national science systems. Therefore, WB science needs to be interconnected, within the region and with the rest of Europe.
- ◆ Networks of regional, supranational Centres of Excellence with an interdisciplinary focus (up to five) should be established. This will enhance the chances for accessing EU-funding. These centres should have three major tasks:
 - ⁽ⁱ⁾ state of the art basic and applied research,
 - ⁽ⁱⁱ⁾ internationally competitive doctoral and postdoctoral training, and ⁽ⁱⁱⁱ⁾ transfer of research results.
- ◆ Additionally, resources and infrastructures (educational, research, core facilities etc.) should be used jointly. Already existing cooperative formats should be strengthened and extended.
- ◆ Mobility schemes, which interconnect scientists within the WB and with the EU, should be developed. This includes facilitating international travel for scientists and students from the WB region, and creating a regional exchange programme following the Erasmus model.

5. Science-Politics-Society: Institutionalised Dialogue

- ◆ Science and its results are rarely included in decision-making and opinion-building. The knowledge gained by researchers is thus lost for the beneficial use of politics and society.
- ◆ This calls for a new approach by implementing institutionalised mechanisms for the science-politics-society dialogue in the WB. The participating parties of the conference are willing to share knowledge and provide technical support for capacity building.
- ◆ A scientific advisory mechanism analogue to the one used at the G7 summits should be realised for the Intergovernmental Initiative Western Balkans.

PARTICIPATING PARTIES

NATIONAL ACADEMIES

Academy of Sciences of Albania (Muzafer Korkuti, Edmond Cane) | Austrian Academy of Sciences (Anton Zeilinger, Oliver Jens Schmitt) | Academy of Sciences and Arts of Bosnia and Herzegovina (Miloš Trifković) | German National Academy of Sciences Leopoldina (Jörg Hacker) | Italian Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei (Maurizio Brunori) | Academy of Sciences and Arts of Kosovo (Nexhat Daci) | Macedonian Academy of Sciences and Arts (Vlado Matevski, Taki Fiti) | Montenegrin Academy of Sciences and Arts (Momir Đurović) | Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts (Ljubomir Maksimović) | Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts (Tadej Bajd)

NATIONAL RECTORS' CONFERENCES, NATIONAL SCIENCE ADVISORY BODIES, SCIENCE FOUNDATIONS

Conference of the Rectors of Universities in Albania (Acting president: Rector of the University of Tirana, Dhori Kule) | Rectors' Conference of Bosnia and Herzegovina (Acting president: Rector of the University of Banja Luka, Stanko Stanić) | Rectors' Conference of the Republic of Croatia (Acting president: Rector of the University of Rijeka, Pero Lučin) | Alexander von Humboldt Foundation, Germany (Thomas Hesse) | Vice-Rector of the University of Pristina, Kosovo (Fetah Podvorica) | Rector of the University of Montenegro (Radmila Vojvodić) | Conference of Serbia's Universities (Acting president: Rector of the University of Belgrade, Vladimir Bumbaširević) | National Council on Scientific and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia (Vera Dondur) | Rectors' Conference of the Republic of Slovenia (Acting president: Rector of the University of Ljubljana, Ivan Svetlik)

DISTINGUISHED SCIENTISTS *AD PERSONAM*

Dhimitër Doka (University of Tirana) | Almir Maljević (University of Sarajevo) | Stipan Jonjić (University of Rijeka / Leopoldina) | Zoran Hadži-Velkov (University "Ss. Cyril and Methodius" of Skopje) | Sanja Bauk (University of Montenegro) | Melita Vidaković (University of Belgrade) | Sofija Stefanović (University of Belgrade)

13 AUGUST 2015

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