



## Conclusions of the Western Balkans Steering Platform on Research and Innovation and the Ministerial Meeting held in Brussels on June 25, 2018

The Western Balkans (WBs) Steering Platform (SP) on Research and Innovation was organised in Brussels in the morning of June 25<sup>th</sup>, 2018. The meeting was co-chaired by the European Commission (DG Research and Innovation, Directorate for International Cooperation), the Bulgarian presidency of the Council of the European Union and Albania represented by the National Agency of Scientific Research and Innovation (NASRI). In the afternoon of June 25<sup>th</sup>, the Ministerial part of the Western Balkans Steering Platform on Research and Innovation took place.

The Steering Platform on Research and Innovation was held together with the Ministerial Meeting of the Western Balkans Platform on Education and Training. The Ministers met in the afternoon of June 25<sup>th</sup>, 2018 to discuss research and innovation topics and in the morning of June 26<sup>th</sup>, 2018 to discuss the education and training part of the agenda. Commissioner for Research, Science and Innovation Carlos Moedas opened the Ministerial meeting on June 25<sup>th</sup>, 2018 and Commissioner for Education, Culture, Youth and Sports Tibor Navracsics addressed the Ministerial meeting on June 26<sup>th</sup>, 2018.

### **Steering Platform on Research and Innovation**

During the meeting of the Western Balkans Steering Platform on Research and Innovation on June 25<sup>th</sup>, 2018, the European Commission, the outgoing Bulgarian and the incoming Austrian Council Presidencies informed the Steering Platform members about the topics high on the European agenda in the ongoing year. These are the regional and European integration of WBs' scientific communities, investment in research infrastructures, negotiations for the next EU Framework Programme Horizon Europe, and support for sectoral policies such as High Performance Computing, the European Open Science Cloud, the European University Network Initiative, or Digital Europe.

The European Commission further informed the SP members about the Commission's proposal for Horizon Europe which will continue along the lines of Horizon 2020 and build on its achievements. The programme builds on three pillars (Open Science, Global Challenges, Open Innovation) and shall encourage international cooperation. A subject particularly relevant for the WBs is the plan to balance countries' contributions and grants in Horizon Europe.

Western Balkan stakeholders welcomed the opportunity to discuss their advances in reforming WBs' policy framework for research and innovation including notably the ongoing process of designing Research and Innovation Strategies for Smart Specialisation (RIS3). Currently, Serbia and Montenegro are preparing their entrepreneurial discovery processes to agree on RIS3 while the other WBs are in various stages of their smart specialisation processes. The Steering Platform took note of the recent R&I cooperation developments

in/with the Western Balkans notably through cooperation in research projects, exchange programmes and conclusion of bilateral agreements.<sup>1</sup> WB representatives took the opportunity to discuss the needs for building capacities for policymakers and for the scientific community, and to invest in research and innovation, including through Centres of Excellence.

The Steering Platform agreed on the following topics to be presented and discussed at the Ministerial Meeting on June 25<sup>th</sup>, 2018 in the afternoon:

- The Western Balkans are committed to continuing the work of the Steering Platform for aligning policies and exchanging best practices at regional level.
- Policies to strengthen Open Science, Open Innovation and technology transfer, research capacities and to implement Smart Specialisation Strategies are essential for WB research communities but also to increase the competitiveness of the region and therefore Europe as a whole.
- The WBs welcome the Commission's proposal for Horizon Europe and look forward to contributing to the definition of the first Work Programmes.
- The WBs support the proposal to double the Sharing Excellence / Widening budget.
- Regarding Horizon 2020, the WBs are encouraged by an improved - although variable - performance compared to the beginning of Horizon 2020 and FP7 overall.
- There is however need for increasing performance further through trainings for proposal writing, networking events, R&I capacity building measures, thematic workshops, and other support measures.
- Active participation in the ERA Committees is essential to shape European R&I framework conditions; active participation in Programme Committees is also essential to shape future R&I Work Programmes and programme implementation.
- Smart Specialisation efforts have been launched and expectations are high.
- Smart Specialisation Strategies are expected to guide capacity building and prioritisation of national investments and will inform sectoral and cross-sectoral industrial strategies (cross-policy strategies). Budget for the implementation of smart specialisation strategies will need to be sought from all possible sources including IPA II.
- There is a continued need for support to Science, Technology and Innovation capacity building, both national and regional, using national budgets, IPA, and other sources of support. This may include research infrastructures, centres of excellence and social sciences and humanities, in agreement with the Smart Specialisation Strategies.
- There is a need to integrate WBs research communities into the European communities and knowledge networks, but also to increase cooperation among countries in South Eastern Europe. "Brain circulation" is essential both for integration as well as for strengthening excellence in the region.

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<sup>1</sup> Progress reports were prepared by Steering Platform members and are available at <https://wbc-rti.info/object/news/17289>. An event review including the conclusions of the meeting, progress reports, the agenda and all presentations will also be made available for the public at <https://wbc-rti.info/object/news/17289>. The detailed minutes are available to Steering Platform members in the member area.

## **Ministerial Meeting**

During the Ministerial Meeting, Carlos Moedas, European Commissioner for Research, Science and Innovation, expressed the political will to keep WBs including Kosovo\* associated to Horizon Europe. Further, he acknowledged the visible momentum in R&I policy development in the Western Balkans.

All the WB Science Ministers gave updates on their policy efforts to promote research and innovation and expressed their support for regional research initiatives and Centres of Excellence. Ministers welcomed the examples of successful Centers of Excellence such as INNOFEIT (the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia), BIO-ICT (Montenegro), the plans for a South-East European International Institute for Sustainable Technologies (SEEIIST), and ANTARES/BioSense (Serbia) as well as good practice examples such as the Corallia Clusters Initiative (Greece) showing how the Western Balkans can enhance excellence in research and innovation and trigger socio-economic impact.

Jean-Eric Paquet, Director-General for Research and Innovation at the European Commission, expressed his delight to hear from WB representatives about the policy efforts being pursued in their countries. The European Commission can support countries' reform efforts by combining support instruments such as IPA or Horizon 2020 and encourages synergies with national programmes.

## **Upcoming Meetings**

In autumn 2018, a series of events will take place in the Western Balkans aiming at assisting WBs in increasing their participation in Horizon 2020 and in supporting their research communities to access European knowledge networks.

The next Research and Innovation Meeting will take place in spring 2019 in Sarajevo.

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\* This designation is without prejudice to positions on status and is in line with UNSCR 1244 and the ICJ opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.