



Conclusions of the Western Balkans Research and Innovation meeting held in Vienna on July 9-10, 2019

The 4th Western Balkans Research and Innovation meeting was organised in Vienna on July 9-10, 2019 within the framework of the European Commission's Support for the Steering Platform (SP) on Research and Innovation for the Western Balkan countries (WBC) hosted by the Austrian Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research.

Debriefing

The meeting started with a debriefing session on current activities of Austria in cooperation with the Western Balkans, the Berlin Process, the International Service Facility, CEEPUS and Horizon 2020. In the discussion, SEEIIST, WISE and other cooperation activities were mentioned.

It was concluded that the subject of researchers' mobility is going to stay on the agenda of the Steering Platform and that all stakeholders need to be engaged to improve the participation figures for Horizon 2020. Sound preparation for Horizon Europe is needed and in order to exploit the new elements, participation in the currently open consultation as well as in several upcoming events (such as the R&I Days in Brussels in September or ESOF2020) are important.

Considerations in relation to Horizon Europe

The WB6 aim to influence the strategic planning and to take next steps towards Horizon Europe association with the development of a position paper. Association and international cooperation aspects have not been part of the Partial General Approach on the programme. Thus, information on the payment for the entry ticket, which will be performance based instead of GDP-based, is preliminary. Participants aim to evaluate pros and cons of different options to calculate the contributions and the envisaged support from DG NEAR through IPA-III. Further issues raised included the reflection of the WB6 interests in the work programmes and calls. Support should not come only via Coordination and Support Actions and networking or "hop on" possibilities focused on dissemination activities, but to be facilitating production of science with high impact publications as well as high quality research infrastructures to keep young scientists in the region.

Research infrastructures

The ERIC model was discussed with its advantages to organise international opening of RIs but also the challenges e.g. in relation to the VAT exception. The participation in Research Infrastructures on the ESFRI Roadmap is important for WB6, national research infrastructure mapping is a priority in most countries.

Smart Specialisation

In the tour de table of the WB6, legislative progress and strategy development were highlighted. In particular, Montenegro was the first non-EU Member State that adopted a Smart Specialisation Strategy with three vertical and one horizontal priority. Support through the International Service Facility for the implementation is welcome, all countries should benefit from the study and activities that are implemented.

Preparation of the Ministerial meeting in September 2019

Participants agreed that Monday, 23rd September, will start with a preparatory meeting organised by the RCC. After lunch, in the first session, topics of mobility, Horizon Europe and smart specialisation strategies will be discussed. In the second session, IPA-III (DG NEAR), Widening, Research Infrastructures and Open Science/Open Access will be in focus.

On the second day, 24th September, after the welcome speeches a report from the Steering Platform will be followed by a presentation of the WB6 Position Paper on Horizon Europe. A keynote by Commissioner Moedas is planned, followed by opening statements of the ministers. Participation in Horizon 2020 and expectations for Horizon Europe should be discussed. The Commissioner will stay for the full first session. The second session shall include information from DG JRC on smart specialisation and from DG CONNECT on the Digital Agenda for the Western Balkans with a second round of discussion by the ministers focused on implementation of smart specialisation strategies, impact on the national economy and the role of R&I to support transformation. The event shall be closed by the European Commission and after lunch participants are invited to the opening of R&I Days in Centre Pompidou.

Logistic note for draft conclusions:

The minutes of the R&I meeting (after approval by the EC and all participants) will be made available only to SP members in a restricted website area by July 2019 at <https://wbc-rti.info>. The conclusions of the R&I meeting will be published separately and made available for public at <https://wbc-rti.info>.