

#### **POSITION PAPER**

of the

## SOUTHEAST-EUROPEAN ERA-NET1

as regards the

## PARTICIPATION OF WEST BALKAN COUNTRIES

in the

# 7<sup>th</sup> EUROPEAN FRAMEWORK PROGRAMME FOR RTD

The Southeast-European ERA- NET (SEE-ERA.NET) has been established in order to promote scientific co-operation between the SEE-ERA.NET consortium members with a specific emphasis on Southeast Europe. It is designed to contribute to the 'EU-Balkan Countries Action Plan in Science and Technology' adopted by the Council of Ministers in Thessaloniki and dedicated to enhancement of the European Research Area.

The consortium members of SEE-ERA.NET propose the following measures to strengthen scientific relations between the EU and the countries referred to as the West Balkans under FP7:

- 1. A one-size-fits all approach as partly exercised under FP6 does not satisfy the needs of less advanced countries or scientific communities. Especially the participation of third countries in the priorities of FP7 was dramatically low. This is a strong indication that an open competition without equal structural footing tends to enhance the stronger rather than to help improve the position and integration of the weaker. SEE-ERA.NET supports the principle of open access of third country organisations to the priorities of the next European Framework Programme for RTD, but it pleads for additional specific targeted measures.
- 2. Additional specific targeted measures call for stronger "International Co-operation" under FP7. Specific support activities for the 'Western Balkan Countries' must be included in FP7 to foster the process of socio-economic stabilisation and growth in the region in accordance with the 'EU-Balkan Countries Action Plan in Science and Technology' to meet the current demands of the scientific community, to strengthen human resources and to address the innovative potential in the countries concerned.
- SEE-ERA.NET specifically proposes that FP7 launches relevant thematic calls to foster the knowledge base of the 'West Balkan Countries' in areas which are not yet sufficiently developed but which are important for socio-economic progress. A certain emphasis should be placed on to topics such as

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> SEE-ERA.NET is funded by the European Commission.



- social scientific research (governance, democracy, ethnic issues, migration, gender, labour market policies, civil law, business law, economic research etc.)
- development of regional innovation strategies
- sustainable development decentralized water management systems, small scale energy systems with a focus on renewable energy, industrial pollution and remediation
- ecology (water research, oceanography, seismological research, eco-system research etc.)
- health research (public health inc. good clinical practice, trauma research)
- Other important topics, such as biotechnology, material research, nano-technology, information and communication technologies, should be addressed directly under the new priorities of FP7 (i.e. open access of third countries to the main priorities). Open access for the West Balkan Countries in the field of "basic research" should also be foreseen in FP7.
- 4. In order to improve the structural capabilities of RTD in the West Balkan Countries, scientific Centres of Excellence (CoE) should be supported by the EC. The selection of CoE should be based upon transparent and professional procedures. The methodology developed under the RECORD project funded by the EC under STRATA (FP5) designed to map and benchmark CoE in the New Member States could be exploited to this end. Support of CoE should be focussed on competitive research activities building on the academic skills and ongoing R&D-activities. With this regard EU-funding should cover necessary investments in scientific infrastructure as well as capacity building in RTD management and the intersection between academia and industry, too.
- 5. The decisions of the EU-Ministerial Conference of June 26/27, 2003 highlighted the use of the EU-CARDS - Programme for developing the R&D-system of the Western Balkan countries in particular by investments in R&D-infrastructure for the Western Balkan countries. Following this line, strong emphasis should be put on a complementary use of the various EU-funding programmes in the scope of R&D-policy, regional development policy and the new neighbourhood concept of the Union including the respective assistance programmes (like CARDS). Therefore, as a general future principle the R&D-activities within FP7 should be complemented by specific support mechanisms for the Western Balkans countries allowing investments in R&D-infrastructure according to European standards. Here, the new CARDS -Multi-Annual Indicative Programme (MIP) starting 2007 should set a clear priority.

A particular focus should be directed toward universities, since they are considered as the cornerstones for scientific development in the West Balkan Countries. By now, universities in this region have concentrated on catching-up in the fields of teaching and learning (Bologna-Process), but severely lack the means and capacities for scientific research.

6. Specific support actions (SSA) should continue to be launched for the West Balkan Countries. In order to strive for more impact and regional co-operation, the budgets for SSA should be increased explicitly. SSA should help to improve access for researchers from West Balkan Countries to FP7 and other ERA instruments. Awareness raising and information dissemination measures, partner search (e.g. brokerage events), capacity building in EU RTD matters, bridging institutions, research managers and researchers themselves, should be actively supported.



## The SEE-ERA.NET consortium consists of:

## <u>Austria</u>

Federal Ministry for Education, Science and Culture Centre for Social Innovation

## Bosnia and Herzegovina

Ministry of Foreign Affairs

## **Bulgaria**

Ministry for Education and Science

## Croatia

Ministry of Science, Education and Sports

## **France**

Ministry of Foreign Affairs

National Center for Scientific Research

#### Germany

Federal Ministry of Education and Research

International Bureau of the Federal Ministry of Education and Research at the German Aerospace Center

#### Greece

General Secretariat for Research and Technology

## **Hungary**

National Office of Research and Technology

## Former Yugoslavian Republic of Macedonia

Ministry of Education and Science

## **Montenegro**

Ministry of Education and Science

#### Romania

Ministry of Education and Research

#### Slovenia

Ministry for Education, Science and Sport

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