



S&T International Cooperation  
Network for Central Asian and  
South Caucasus Countries



# Stakeholders Conference

"Evaluation approaches in S&T policy making:  
sharing good practices"

A satellite-style map of Central Asia, showing the Aral Sea and surrounding mountainous terrain. The map is overlaid with a large, semi-transparent magnifying glass graphic that is the central focus of the slide's design.

Astana, Kazakhstan  
26 - 27 May 2011

## Conclusions

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## INTRODUCTION

Building on the success of the previous years' Policy Stakeholders' Conferences organized in the framework of the IncoNet EECA FP7 project (Athens 2009, Moscow 2010), the IncoNet CA/SC project convened a third in a row Policy Stakeholders' Conference, in Astana, on 26 and 27 May 2011. The focus was on "Evaluation approaches in S&T policy making: sharing good practices".

National and regional STI strategies such as the latest *Europe 2020 Strategy* and the *Innovation Union Flagship Initiative* on the EU side constituted the background for the conference.

The conference reiterated the necessity for a sustained open dialogue between the EU and the EECA region in the sphere of S&T policy making and it brought into focus the role of international exchanges and joint policy learning, particularly in the context of the ongoing and planned reforms in both EU MS and EECA countries.

Against this background, special emphasis was laid on the analytical methods for supporting policy making in S&T and the benefits for the countries that could arise from the implementation of pilot international policy mix review and/or of a benchmarking exercise of RTD institutions.

## EU-EECA PERSPECTIVES AND EXPECTATIONS

EU-EECA policy dialogue in the sphere of STI remains a driving factor for addressing in partnership the goals of knowledge based sustainable and inclusive growth in both regions.

Acknowledging the current global as well as societal challenges both regions are facing, as well as the respective policy objectives, new perspectives for the strategic partnership among the EU, Associated Countries and the EECA region should be developed building on each others' strengths. This partnership should encourage the close alignment of public and private sector initiatives in order to increase the dissemination and exploitation of research results.

Significant concern is given to the consolidation of national STI policies, as well as to the creation of trans-national synergies between national research programmes. Building on each others' priorities, core fields of mutual interest should be identified (e.g. jointly addressing global challenges such as

climate change and infectious diseases, and/or building on promising research areas of cooperation such as health, biotechnologies, energy and environment).

The need for analytical evidence to support decision making is affirmed, with a growing number of good practice examples in the region such as the ongoing international foresight exercise in Moldova, the completed OECD country review of innovation policies and the national foresight exercise in the Russian Federation, the UNECE review of the innovation performance in Belarus and the just launched similar one in Kazakhstan.

## THE CURRENT LANDSCAPE

Currently the S&T cooperation of the EU with the countries in EECA is supported by several policy initiatives and respective agreements at various levels, such as Partnership and Cooperation Agreements (PCAs) of the EU with several EECA countries, the EU-Russia Four Common Spaces (4CS) and the related Partnership for Modernization, the Eastern Partnership of the EU and the European Neighborhood Policy, the Agreements on Cooperation in Science and Technology EU-Russia and EU-Ukraine, as well as the EU-Central Asia Strategy being implemented through regional and bilateral programmes of the Development and Cooperation Instrument (DCI).

At the same time, many bilateral cooperation programmes exist between the EU MS and countries in EECA at governmental level but also between scientific institutions. The bilateral cooperation programmes are considered as a valuable tool by the stakeholders in the region, since the policy makers can negotiate priorities

and concrete projects, while the researchers have access to funds through relatively simple procedures and, in some cases, can even acquire equipment. However, multilateral cooperation schemes prove to be of particular value for joining resources and achieving critical mass for STI activities.

At present, the strengthening of the S&T cooperation between the EU and EECA is actively supported by the Seventh Framework Programme and in particular through the coordination and support actions such as the IncoNet EECA, IncoNet CA/SC, BILAT-RUS, BILAT-UKR, ERA. Net RUS, BS-ERA.Net and ACCESSRU. Under these actions several studies have already been implemented on S&T cooperation patterns, on S&T Indicators, on the driving forces for successful participations in FP7, on the possible links with ENPI and CIP, etc. In addition, ERA-WIDE projects are already under implementation since 2010 and new ones will be launched by the end of 2011

led by research centers in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. In parallel and including the present one, three Policy Stakeholders' Conferences have been organized (Athens/2009, Moscow/2010, Astana/2011) and three others are foreseen, involving policy makers and representatives of the research community, aiming at the identification of needs and priorities for action. All these conferences are building on the collective knowledge and experience of a wide range of actively participating stakeholders.

The key messages from all the aforementioned activities, enriched with specific information provided by every country in EECA, are currently compiled in a “*White Paper on Opportunities and Challenges in View of Enhancing the EU Cooperation with Eastern Europe, Central Asia and South Caucasus*” to be presented to stakeholders from both regions in fall 2011.



## ADDRESSING THE CHALLENGES

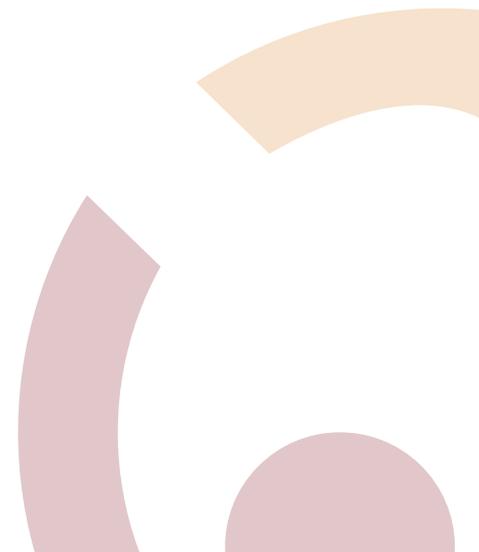
The broader political priorities of an EECA country determine to a large extent the interest in the activities of the FP: In countries where the cooperation with the EU is not a priority the interest is rather weak; the interest is average when the FP is seen just as a source of funding; the interest is high when the participation in the FP is also seen as way to boost national reforms and performance in S&T.

In that respect, there is a strong need to better promote among the stakeholders in the region the intangible benefits from an increased participation in the FP (acquisition of know-how on project based funding on a competitive basis, familiarization to team work at international level, science-industry collaboration, research on World class thematic priorities, contribution to global and regional problem solving, etc.). On the other hand, the necessity to

further increase the knowledge on access opportunities, to simplify the rules and to provide flexibility for a better adaptation to the legal framework of countries outside the EU is also evident. To achieve these goal administrative barriers need to be removed (e.g. on IPR, Visa, transfer of funds, materials or equipment, etc.) and appropriate frames need to be consolidated (e.g. access to STI- infrastructures, ethical standards, fighting corruption etc.).

In parallel, the research organizations in EECA should increase their capability to join S&T transnational partnerships. It is true that despite the excellent research activity that has been pursued or has emerged in the region, there is a lack of recognition from the world scientific community. Therefore, new support actions should be directed to the increase of competencies of the research centers and researchers in order

to make their scientific activity more visible, to develop suitable contacts with foreign counterparts and to efficiently participate in transnational collaborative research.



## JOINT POLICY LEARNING

Joint policy learning became a regular activity of modern S&T governance and RTDI policy delivery systems. The evaluation and policy intelligence framework encompasses several tools for policy advice such as information repositories, STI statistics, foresight studies, peer reviews, evaluation and monitoring etc.

In recent years, joint policy learning based on international exchange of good practices and benchmarking, which was to a certain extent promoted by European initiatives and exercises, gained wide attention among different local, national and international stakeholders, including those from EECA countries. To sustain the momentum *IncoNet CA/SC* and *IncoNet EECA* comply with dedicated presentations and initiatives to meet this demand.

Evaluation approaches such as the ones implemented in UK and PL have been presented:

The Research Assessment Exercise (REA) targeting university research in the UK, is a good example of positive effects on the system and the institutional performance of a higher education sector. REA is conducted in reference to the quality of research outputs, to the wider impact of research and the vitality of the research environment. As an outcome of the latest evaluation cycle in 2008, “quality profiles” of all the universities across the disciplinary spectrum have been published and can be referred to as examples for a benchmarking of research organisations. A similar example is the set of specific performance criteria established for the research institutions in Poland. The institutional funding of the research activities is closely linked to this set of criteria.

The performance based evaluations of research institutions can create “winners” and “losers” and are not very popular in the academia as they represent a potential threat to the usually well

established hierarchy. Furthermore, evaluations of research may lead to widening the gap between the top performing and weaker institutions. However, R&D assessments conducted regularly could have a direct impact on the future research performance, increase public accountability and attract more public funds to the best performing units once they are an integral part of the strategic research agendas of the institutions.



## INTERNATIONAL POLICY MIX REVIEW IN THE EECA

Most of the countries of the EECA region are undergoing a period of transition/ reform of their research systems. New strategies for RTD are launched and new laws implemented but, in most of the cases, with limited scientific evidence to support them.

In that respect, a S&T policy assessment tool from which the EECA countries could benefit in view of increasing the legitimacy and basis for the planned or ongoing reforms is the International S&T Policy Mix Review.

Described as a systematic examination and assessment of the performance of a national STI system by international experts, a country's policy mix review aims at improving the design and the implementation of national S&T policy. Such reviews rely heavily on mutual trust among the partners involved and on their shared confidence in the process. Positive effects have been observed

after the implementation of policy mix reviews in many of the EU MS.

In that respect, reviews conducted in Estonia have been presented as an example and several challenges have been highlighted that could be of interest for future policy mix reviews in the EECA countries:

- The first review exercise is likely to be the most important as it will serve implicitly as the basis for future evaluations;
- The subject-country should also be prepared for contextualizing the results of the external review to the local policy realities;
- Last, but not least, too many assessments may trigger an evaluation fatigue due to the fact that same issues and questions arise with the same stakeholders, but from the point of view of different reviewers.

The *IncoNet EECA* and *IncoNet CA/SC* projects could provide the knowledge for the planning and implementation of a policy mix review (internal and external expertise) through a network of local partners with good knowledge of the national landscape that are also in close contact with the local authorities and through experienced partners from EU and Associated Countries. In addition, the projects could provide the means for such a review in terms of funds and logistics.



## BENCHMARKING OF RESEARCH ORGANISATIONS IN THE EECA

Research institutions (RTOs) are also affected by the various changes in the STI landscape in EECA, with most of them facing serious funding problems, brain-drain, difficulty to attract young in the research carriers as well as new challenges for the cooperation with the private sector under market economy conditions.

In this context, a Benchmarking exercise of research organisations from different countries on a voluntary basis and on a pre-defined thematic research field could be a valuable tool for mutual learning, performance improvement and accountability increase. It should be noted that benchmarking exercises produce signs of good practices rather than evidence of poor performance.

Designed to be implemented by a team of international experts (a team of “critical friends”), such an exercise is organised as a comparative learning tool with the aim to improve the participating RTOs at different levels (management, organisation,

scientific standards, market responsiveness), to learn from others, to successfully implement standards and procedures, to establish relations and networks for future collaborative research and to highlight the specific strengths of the participating RTOs for a more active cooperation with institutions in the European Research Area.

The *IncoNet EECA* and *IncoNet CA/SC* projects could support such an exercise providing the knowledge necessary for its implementation (through internal and external expertise), ensuring also the involvement of local stakeholders (through the network of local partners).

## KEY MESSAGES AND THE WAY FORWARD

The state-of-the art presentations (see <http://www.increast.eu/en/1159.php>) and the intense discussions among policy makers and representatives of the research community from both the EU MS and the EECA countries resulted in a series of key messages, facts and perspectives for action that will further strengthen the EU-EECA S&T cooperation:

- The interest to cooperate in STI is strong between the EU and the EECA region at both bilateral and multilateral levels while at the same time it is acknowledged that there is room for strategic and operational enhancement within the given agreements and instruments.
- The EU MS and the EECA countries are mutually interested in widening the jointly owned activities in STI such as the coordinated calls, twinnings, etc.
- There is a strong interest in the participation in the 7th EU RTD Framework Programme, especially when considering the intangible benefits of such participation (e.g. FP7 as a mechanism to support national reforms and to increase institutional performance of the STI sector in EECA).
- The IncoNet scheme funded within the 7th EU RTD Framework Programme strongly supports the bi-regional policy dialogue dedicated to identification of needs and priorities for action, eventually compiled in the “*White Paper on Opportunities and Challenges in View of Enhancing the EU Cooperation with Eastern Europe, Central Asia and South Caucasus*”, which is currently under preparation.
- The promotion of the potential and achievements in EECA needs to be

strengthened using new approaches towards regional cooperation such as the joint KZ-UZ programme or the CIS-Intergovernmental Innovation Programme.

- The efforts to attract the young generation in research and to build a carrier in EECA but also to actively participate in international S&T cooperation, should be intensified.
- In line with the current discussions about the Innovation Union in the EU, the STI activities of the private sector and the links between academia and industry have to be intensified in the EECA countries.
- Significant interest, room for co-operation and for exchange of know-how also exists for the implementation of International Policy Mix Reviews and of Benchmarking exercises for research institutes, in which the IncoNet projects could be instrumental.

The next Policy Stakeholders' Conference will take place in Warsaw, on 15-16 November 2011, in the framework of the Polish Presidency of the Council of the European Union. The Conference will be dedicated to the presentation and in-depth discussions of the White Paper and to the recommendations that will arise from it on the way to boost the EU-EECA cooperation in Science and Technology.



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