Stakeholders Conference

„EU-EECA S&T cooperation:
The way forward"

Conclusions

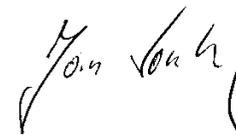## Athens
16 -17 June 2009

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The partnership between the countries of the **European Union and Eastern Europe & Central Asia (EECA)** is of utmost importance for the political, economic and social development of both regions. The EECA countries have significant potential both in terms of their strong academic community and of well known S&T institutes in a variety of scientific disciplines. In order to make optimum use of each others academic strengths, to share respective resources and to prepare the ground for a joint transfer of academic results of national, regional and worldwide markets there is a strong bi-regional interest in enhancing S&T cooperation. Against this background the *IncoNet EECA* consortium convened a conference in Athens **("EU-EECA S&T cooperation: The way forward", 16-17 June 2009)** allowing scientists and policy makers from both regions to exchange experiences and views on the current state of the S&T cooperation, on present challenges and expectations and on concrete re-commendations and open questions, which need in-depth reflections for enhancing the cooperation.

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Current Situation

In the past years the cooperation between EU and some of the EECA countries turned into a real **partnership on equal footing**, driven by the guiding principle of mutual benefit. However, it is obvious that **new global challenges** (like climate change, global health, management of natural resources and energy security) demand collaborative actions among governments, international organizations, corporations, universities and NGOs. Transnational mechanisms to tackle these global issues are still missing, but it is clear that **new flexible policy dialogue formats** are necessary to deal with the dynamic processes.

Among the **challenges** are:

- The **ongoing transition process** into market economies;
- The need to **enhance** comprehensive national (or regional) **STI policies**;
- The need to reconstruct scientific landscape and **improve the performance of science and innovation sectors**;
- The **under-financing** of STI activities;
- The imbalances resulting from the scientific diaspora of the past and a **shortage of young scientists**, in particular female ones.

Science, Technology and Innovation Policy (STI)

As one of the crucial points for the development of any knowledge-based-economy, a consolidated national STI policy is essential. To ensure a further development of STI policies international peer reviews, e.g. country reviews undertaken by the OECD, have been proven useful. Still the issue of financing needs to be resolved.

Options for funding through the **European Neighbourhood Policy Instruments (ENPI)** and the **Development Cooperation Instruments (DCI)** need to be explored. Future policy dialogue processes should support mutual learning between EU and EECA countries.

Regional cooperation among EECA countries was considered important to increase the STI performance and to enhance their attractiveness as potential partners for the EU.

At present policy initiatives to develop regional policy strategies and to identify regional research priorities are limited. Therefore further efforts to build on existing regional frameworks are highly recommended.

- Coordination projects like the INCO-NETs are adding value to the dialogue and coordination among EECA countries;

- Regional initiatives within the ENPI and DCI could provide funding;

- The creation of regional networks with help of virtual centers of excellence and regional technology platforms can be used to promote cutting-edge scientific research, especially in multidisciplinary fields.

EU-EECA Policy Dialogue

Complementing existing policy dialogue processes individual EU-Member States and EECA countries **flexible policy dialogue formats** should allow mutual policy learning. The underlying principle should be the variable geometry for any joint activity allowing interested policy stakeholders from EU and EECA to participate on a voluntary basis. **Policy Stakeholder Conferences** provide such a format.

The options offered by the 7th EU RTD Framework Programme for supporting dialogue pro-cesses should be jointly exploited. Of utmost importance are coordination and support activities in particular

- The **IncoNet EECA**: S&T International Co-operation Network for Eastern European and Central Asian Countries (www.inco-eeca.net);
- The up-coming **IncoNet CA/SC**: S&T International Cooperation Network for Central Asian and South Caucasus Countries (www.inco-casc.net);
- The **BILAT-RUS**: Enhancing the bilateral S&T Partnership with the Russian Federation (www.bilat-rus.eu) and
- The **BILAT-UKR**: Enhancing the bilateral S&T Partnership with Ukraine (www.bilat-ukr.eu).

Barriers and Obstacles

The **limited knowledge of the existing capabilities in EECA** is one of the major obstacles for cooperation. Studies, mapping and networking activities (e.g. brokerage events) supported by the European Commission could be extremely helpful in this field. In addition, interested EECA countries should investigate their possibilities to set up schemes for the participation in conferences and/or short visits to western labs, possibly in partnership with EU MS.

There are considerable obstacles in the **mobility of researchers** (Visa issues), joint utilization and **protection of Intellectual Property** and in the **transfer of funds** (taxation issues), equipment, material and samples (customs issues). Such issues should be addressed in the context of Bilateral Agreements, preferably at EU-level.

The best use of the existing Visa facilitation Directive in the EU should be targeted.

Language constitutes a barrier **for cooperation** with the EU and for the **publication** in international journals. On the other side it is a common denominator in all EECA regions.

Obstacles arising from **national financial regulations** were highlighted, too. These procedures should be improved wherever possible in order to ensure coherence with the EU procedures.
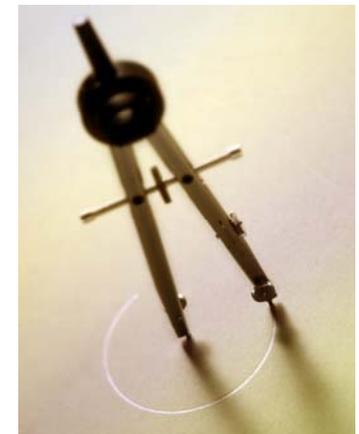
Instruments

Established **good practices** and existing instruments at national, bilateral, multilateral and EU level should be used to offer the science communities a variety of funding and collaboration options, in particular:

- **Smaller scale mobility schemes** including re-integration schemes;
- Funding of collaborative **research projects**;
- Support of **joint research structures** and international laboratories;
- **Opening** up of **existing research infrastructure** in EU and EECA countries.

Both regions should aim at an optimum use of the **possibilities offered by the 7th EU RTD Framework Programme**, in particular for under-represented areas such as Nanotechnology, Space, Social Sciences and Humanities. Scientific communities in EECA need to be prepared for an active involvement in the European Research Area (ERA).

National research programmes in EECA should be further opened to international participation.

Instruments

Science management activities in EECA countries need to be improved. Based on the successful TEMPUS Programme similar instruments, including IRSES within the People Programme of FP7, should be further encouraged.

Co-funding of activities could further increase co-ownership. The international ERA-NETs (i.e. the ongoing ERA.Net RUS and BS-ERA.NET) set a good example as tools for developing co-funding schemes among interested programme owners.

The **access to international bibliography and databases** is essential to strengthen the research capability and production in EECA countries. Several countries are making significant efforts in this field. The possibility for EU support should be explored.

Forward Looking Activities

The ongoing *IncoNet EECA* will implement a **series of Stakeholders Conferences** on subjects to be jointly agreed among EU and EECA stakeholders. Particular priority for up-coming events should be given to:

- **Evaluation and benchmarking practices** of S&T institutions and programmes including the development of Terms of Reference for standard procedures building on international good practice;
- **Financial** schemes for **joint EU-EECA activities**;
- Instruments for **collaboration at regional level** (South Caucasus, Central Asia);
- **Mutual learning** on national S&T international cooperation strategies.

Peer reviewing of national S&T policies and systems could be implemented by interested EECA countries in the context of bilateral agreements with EU MS. In order to support evidence-based policy dialogue and decision making, reliable, valid and internationally comparable S&T statistics are needed. The process towards **applying international statistical standards** (e.g. OECD, UNESCO) should further progress. A generic proposal for improving S&T statistic system has been developed by IncoNet EECA project. Its realisation (or part of it) should be considered (e.g. with support from ENPI or DCI).

The IncoNet EECA Consortium and Portal

In order to foster bi-regional S&T partnership, in 2008 a consortium representing organisations from 21 European and Central Asian countries was formed to launch the **"S&T International Co-operation Network for Eastern European and Central Asian Countries"** (*IncoNet EECA*). This initiative is funded within the 7th EU RTD Framework Programme. One of the core activities is to provide a platform for the bi-regional dialogue process among relevant stakeholders representing the science communities, S&T policies, innovative industries and civil society. Its aim is to increase mutual understanding and to develop joint scenarios for enhanced cooperation between EU-Member States, Associated Countries and the EECA countries.

The consortium hosts the web portal www.incrEAST.eu, a one-stop knowledge base for information on the S&T collaboration between EU and EECA.

It offers up-to-date background material about R&D structures and policies of both regions, relevant news, information on past and current events, open calls and funding schemes as well as contact information on experts and projects. Additional services **include a database of key research institutions** in EECA countries and a regular newsletter.

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