

## Stakeholders Conference “EU-EECA S&T cooperation: The way forward”

Athens, 16-17 June, 2009

### Conclusions

The close cooperation between the European Union, its Member States, the countries associated to the EU RTD Framework Programme and the countries of Eastern Europe and Central Asia (EECA) is considered of utmost political and economic importance for both sides. Apart from traditional and further deepening relations between individual countries and their institutions this is reflected by the policy umbrellas of the European Neighbourhood Policy and the recently launched Eastern Partnership, the Four Common Spaces with Russia and the Central Asian Strategy of the EU.

Science and technological development (S&T) are considered a backbone of any knowledge based economy and an asset for responding to the recent global challenges. Therefore strong links between the S&T communities of both regions are a key pillar of the bi-regional relations and of major concern of the respective policy stakeholders.

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 Cooperation Network for Eastern European and Central Asian Countries” (*IncoNet EECA*). This initiative is funded within the 7<sup>th</sup> European R&D Framework Programme. One of the core activities is to provide a platform for bi-regional dialogue process among relevant stakeholders representing the science communities, S&T policies, innovative industries and civil society in order to increase the mutual understanding and to develop joint scenarios for enhanced cooperation between EU-Member States, Associated Countries and the EECA countries.

Against this background a conference was convened in Athens 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 recommendations and open questions, which need in-depth reflections for enhancing the cooperation.

The main conclusions of the conference are:

#### Current situation

1. It was highlighted that over the passed years and as a principle the cooperation between EU and EECA turned into a real partnership on equal footing, which is driven by the guiding principle of mutual benefit. It is recommended to further specify common priorities addressing among others global challenges (like climate change, global health, management of natural resources and energy security) to be jointly tackled on the basis of flexible policy dialogue formats (see point 5).

2. For shaping the partnership, common major challenges for the EECA countries as well as specificities of individual countries need to be acknowledged and responded to.

As challenges were addressed among others:

- The ongoing transition process into market economies;
- The need for further enhancement of comprehensive national (or regional) STI policies building wherever appropriate on international cooperation;
- The need for (further) reconstructing the scientific landscape and for improving the performance of the science and innovation sectors;
- The under-financing of STI activities;
- The imbalances in the science community resulting from the scientific diaspora of the past and a shortage of young scientists, in particular female ones.

Those issues require first of all national action of the EECA countries. In this respect, recent efforts such as new ways to support S&T that are under development in some of the EECA countries, e.g. Funding Agencies or Science Foundations, are acknowledged. In addition, the EU-EECA partnership could contribute to tackle some of the challenges.

### **Science Technological Development and Innovation Policy**

3. As one of the crucial points for the development of any knowledge based economy, the existence of a consolidated national STI policy was highlighted.

In the EU Member States an appropriate but light tool for contributing to developing STI policies are international peer reviews, which are under implementation among them on a voluntary basis under the umbrella of the Open Method of Coordination. It is recommended to apply similar procedures by interested EECA countries building on their bilateral cooperation with individual EU Member States/Associated Countries.

Country reviews undertaken by the OECD are another option to explore. Here the issue of financing needs to be resolved. Options for funding through the European Neighbourhood Policy Instruments and the Development Cooperation Instruments need to be explored.

In addition mutual learning among interested EU and EECA countries is recommended to be part of future policy dialogue processes (see point 5).

4. Regional cooperation among EECA countries was felt to be of importance to increase the STI performance and to become even more attractive as partner for the EU. However, at present there are limited policy initiatives to develop regional policy strategies and to identify regional research priorities and therefore further efforts building on existing regional frameworks is highly recommended. In this respect, coordination projects like the INCONETs are adding value to the dialogue and coordination among EECA countries. It was also highlighted that there is room for regional initiatives within the ENP and DCI. Furthermore, in order to provide

conditions for the promotion of cutting-edge scientific research, especially in multidisciplinary fields, the creation of regional networks of virtual centers of excellence and regional technology platforms should be explored.

### **EU-EECA Policy Dialogue**

5. Building on the experiences of this stakeholders conference and of existing dialogue formats of the EU with other regions of the world and - as a principle - complementing existing policy dialogue processes between individual EU-Member States and EECA countries and of individual EECA countries with the European Community, it is recommended to foresee flexible policy dialogue formats. They should allow mutual policy learning between EU and EECA, the identification of joint (policy) objectives and respective common priorities, as well as the discussion of scenarios for addressing those objectives jointly. Here, 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.

Other stakeholders representing the science community, industry or the civil society should be invited wherever appropriate.

It was underlined, that both the partners from EU and EECA should contribute to develop appropriate formats, tools and agendas for any up-coming dialogue process.

The options offered by the 7th EU RTD Framework Programme for supporting dialogue processes should be jointly exploited. Of utmost importance are coordination and support activities in particular the IncoNet EECA, the up-coming IncoNet CA/SC, BILAT RUS and BILAT UKR. It was recommended by the participants to proceed with a series of stakeholders conferences as a most flexible format. It was also recommended to have a wide geographical coverage of both regions and a balanced participation from different groups of stakeholders taking into consideration the specificities of the subjects to be discussed.

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.

In addition, the setting up of small Working Groups on concrete problems could be a promising approach for an enhanced EU-EECA S&T cooperation.

### **Barriers**

6. The limited knowledge of the existing capabilities in EECA is among the major obstacles for cooperation. In that field the studies, the mapping and the networking activities (e.g. brokerage events) supported by the European Commission could be

extremely helpful. In addition, the setting up of schemes supporting participation to Conferences and/or short visits to western labs should be investigated by the interested EECA countries, possibly in partnership with EU MS.

7. 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 the level of EU. The best use of the existing Visa facilitation Directive in the EU should be targeted.
8. The language constitutes on one hand a barrier for the cooperation with EU and for publication in international journals and, on the other side, a common denominator in all EECA region. To a lesser extent this is also true for the 'working culture'.
9. Obstacles arising from national financial regulations are highlighted. It was recommended to improve these procedures wherever possible in order to ensure coherence with the EU procedures.

### **Instruments**

10. Building on existing good practices it was highlighted that a variety of different instruments should be offered to the science communities using existing instruments at National, Bilateral, multilateral and EU level. In particular:
  - a. Smaller scale mobility schemes including re-integration schemes;
  - b. Funding of collaborative research projects;
  - c. Support of joint research structures and international laboratories;
  - d. Opening up of existing research infrastructure in EU and EECA countries.
  - e. Seminars.
11. The optimum use of the possibilities offered by the 7<sup>th</sup> EU RTD FP should be aimed at by both regions. In particular for under-represented areas such as Nanotechnology, Space and Social Sciences and Humanities, as well as for the better preparation of the scientific community in EECA for an active involvement into the ERA.
12. The opening up of national EECA research programmes is an issue that needs further efforts.
13. There is a need for improvement in Science Management activities in EECA countries. The TEMPUS Programme has been used successfully for the improvement of Scientific Management capabilities in certain EECA countries. The use of similar instruments, including the IRSES within the People Programme of FP7, should be further encouraged.
14. Co-funding of the activities with funds from EU and from the EECA countries could be further enhanced as a means for an increased co-ownership of every action. The International ERANETs, in particular the ongoing ERANET-Rus and BS-ERANET, could be considered as tools for developing co-funding schemes among interested Programme owners from both regions.

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

15. It was proposed to use the scientific diaspora of EECA countries for setting up partnerships and creating consortia for grant applications to FP7.

#### **FP7 project management**

16. The role of NCPs is crucial for an enhanced participation of researchers from EECA countries in the FP. Among others it is important to consolidate the NCP network at the regional level (e.g. through activities such as the INCONTACT project).
17. Particular advise should be given to the scientific communities by the NCPs on:
  - a. FP7 financial and reporting requirements;
  - b. Treatment of Intellectual Property in international cooperation projects;
  - c. FP7 evaluation procedures.

#### **Forward looking activities**

18. The conclusions of the Conference should be disseminated to relevant stakeholders in EECA and EU (e.g. national policy makers, major scientific organizations, Strategic Forum for International cooperation of the EU, etc.).
19. The ongoing IncoNet EECA is encouraged to implement Stakeholders Conferences on subjects to be jointly agreed among EU and EECA stakeholders. Among the proposed themes, conferences on evaluation and benchmarking of research institutions and programmes could be envisaged.
20. 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 (see point3).
21. 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 proposal for improving the S&T statistic systems has been drafted under IncoNet EECA. Its realisation (or part of it) should be considered (e.g. with support from ENPI or DCI).

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