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Survey of Future Market Research and Innovation Needs in the Western Balkan Countries

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Purpose

This brief presents the results of a survey conducted as part of the WBC-INCO.NET project initiative to support innovation capacities in the Western Balkans region. The WBC-INCO.NET project seeks to promote the bi-regional dialogue on science and technology between the EC, the member states and the Western Balkan countries. The survey aimed to pinpoint both present and likely future research and market needs as well as identify possibilities for collaboration in the region.

Future Research and Market Needs for the Western Balkans Region

This brief presents the results of a survey conducted as part of the WBC-INCO.NET project initiative to support innovation capacities in the Western Balkans region. WBC-INCO.NET partners from the Western Balkans include research and policy stakeholders from the following countries: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, FYRo Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Kosovo (under UNSCR 1244). The survey aimed to pinpoint both present and likely future research and market needs as well as identify possibilities for collaboration in the region.

The findings of the survey will support other activities that together will provide a clear overview of the region's current situation and future needs in regard to innovation. These activities should help to prepare an action plan for further cooperation in innovation between the Western Balkan countries (WBC) and serve to establish closer cooperation between research and innovation stakeholders in the region (i.e. publicly funded researchers and innovative companies). This should include expertise from the industrial sectors and the fields of innovation management and market entry. It should also involve exploring EU programmes, other than FP7, and supporting programmes of other institutions that are directed toward increasing innovation in the WBC.

Survey among Stakeholders

Two questionnaires were jointly designed by the European Commission JRC-IPTS (Seville) and the Ivo Pilar Institute of Social Sciences (Croatia). The questionnaires addressed market and research stakeholders, including selected firms and entrepreneurial research-

ers, and aimed to identify **current** and **future** research and innovation needs in order to support the design of a joint action plan towards 2030.

The methodology employed consisted of five phases:

1. Initially, a literature review on innovation was conducted to identify important aspects that would have to be taken into account when designing the ques-



tionnaires. The selected aspects were:

- i) Importance of different stakeholders in the innovation process.
 - ii) Specific actions that can improve regional cooperation as well as innovation.
 - iii) Factors necessary to stimulate regional cooperation divided in human resources, entrepreneurship infrastructure, expert assistance and cooperation between industry and research, fiscal and financial obstacles, and national and local regulations.
 - iv) Likely outcomes of enhanced regional cooperation.
2. The first questionnaire was submitted to selected firms in the WB region.
 3. Building on the results of the first questionnaire with the aim to compare them, a second questionnaire was sent to research stakeholders in the region.
 4. A statistical analysis was conducted for both questionnaires and the results were crosschecked.
 5. The results were circulated within the consortia for final refinements.

It must be emphasised that the findings indicate only potential needs in the region, which need to be refined by further analysis and discussed with industry, research and regional stakeholders, for instance in a workshop for this purpose.

The response rate of the industry questionnaire was low: only 20 firms replied, which nevertheless allowed the team to perform some analyses. The response rate of the researcher questionnaire was higher.

Interesting Results of the Industry Survey

The respondents were asked to assess the importance of 14 stakeholders for firms' innovation capacities.

Top Three Stakeholders

As the top three stakeholders, the respondents identified:

1. Employees in the respondents' enterprise or enterprise group
2. Professional and industrial associations
3. Universities and colleges

Bottom Three Stakeholders

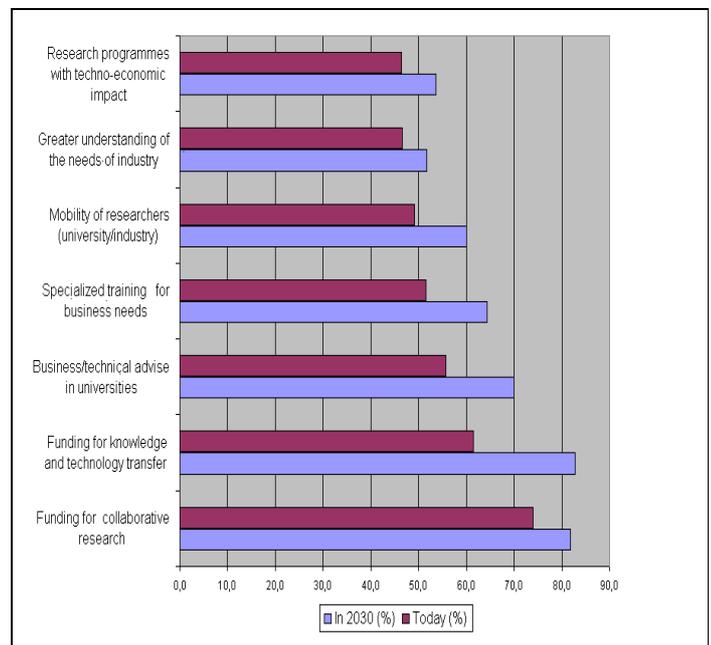
The bottom three stakeholders were:

12. Cluster networks
13. Suppliers and customers from the WBC region
14. Venture capital firms/angel investors

Interesting Results of the Researcher Survey

Figure 1 (below) compares the proportion of researchers that ranked various factors influencing university-industry collaborations as *highly important*. A majority of the researchers assessed all the factors as more important in the future than today, which suggests that the researchers feel that other barriers need to be overcome in the short-term.

Figure 1. Important factors for university-industry cooperation today and 2030



Industry and Research: Diverging Views on the Needs for Research and Innovation

Based on the results of the surveys in the field of research, the following points can be highlighted:

- **The most important actions to improve cooperation between business and research in the region**, both in the present and in the future are (1) more funding for knowledge/technology transfer activities and expert consultations and (2) more funding for collaborative research between universities and businesses.

- Whilst **state and local regulations as well as expert assistance** seem critical for innovative performance **today**, **investment in human resources and infrastructure** emerge as crucial to enhance cooperation **in the future**.
 - The analysis of the questionnaire administered to both research and business stakeholders reflects disagreement as to which potential outcomes of enhanced regional innovation collaboration are to be considered more relevant. The only outcome that both equally perceive as important is access to new markets. This suggests the **need to build both more awareness of new opportunities and (new) capabilities** in the region. To this end, improved communication, including the respective infrastructure (e.g. ICT), and mobility seem to be critical.
 - The answers industry and researchers give when asked about the most important actions to improve regional innovation activities differ substantially. The three actions least important to industry are among those actions that the participating researchers considered most important:
 - common programmes for mobility of personnel in the region between universities and business to establish cooperation between science and industry,
 - a consistent legal framework aimed at facilitating foreign direct investments in the WB region, and
 - the progressive liberalisation and mutual opening of the service market within the WB region.
- The only action that business and researchers both perceive as important (ranking third for both of them) is developing regional initiatives for large infrastructural projects. Such an outcome highlights the need for enhanced communication and understanding between these two groups of stakeholders in order to achieve a joint agenda.
- Finally, of the research topics identified by industry as important to trigger regional innovation through collaboration, the ones that the researchers also appear to be interested in are
 - the environment,
 - information management systems: monitoring through ICTs and the automation of information management systems, artificial intelligence and agent-based software and
 - new approaches and frameworks to enhance foreign direct investment and cross-regional investments in the region.

Diverging Views between Industry and Research

Hot Policy Topics: Need for More Technology Transfer

A strong divergence between the views of industry and research in terms of present and future actions as well as areas for collaboration has emerged. This call for policy measures aims at improving communication between the two groups of stakeholders to facilitate the move towards a common agenda.

Presently, a strong need is also felt for policies that provide more funding for knowledge/technology transfer activities and expert consultations as well as collaborative research between universities and businesses.

Action Needed: Improving Innovation Capacities

This exercise is part of a wider project that aims at defining a long-term strategy for scientific collaboration within the Western Balkan countries and between them and Europe.

The critical issues that emerged in the survey call for further analysis and discussion. In particular, it is suggested that industry and the research community gather to discuss the following aspects:

- Investments in knowledge and technology sharing, expert consultations and collaborative research
- Decrease in regulation
- Strengthening of human resources
- Improvements in infrastructure (including ICT)
- Building of awareness of innovation benefits
- Fostering of mobility
- Enhancement of communication between different stakeholders

Shaping the Future: Critical Factors

This project was part of the larger WBC-INCO.NET project, which ultimately will develop a joint action plan for the WBC. The results will feed directly into the process at three levels:

1. **The development of a common vision for the WBC.** This vision should set the longer-term objective(s), which are to be defined by authoritative experts in the field and endorsed politically.

2. **The translation of the vision into a strategic research agenda (SRA)**, which entails specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-based (SMART) objectives. The strategic research agenda should make the vision operational and link the implementation of the vision's objectives with existing competences in Europe (or in the region) and new ones to be developed.
3. **The implementation of the SRA**: All participating public authorities should gear their programs and funding towards the implementation of the SRA in a coherent manner. The full toolbox of public research instruments should be explored and used to implement the individual joint programming initiatives. Regular monitoring and evaluation of progress against the SMART objectives should be ensured and the results reported to the political level.

Sources and References

For sources and references see the WBC-INCO.NET website:

<http://wbc-inco.net/>

The brief is based on the report by IPTS in collaboration with IVO-PILAR:

<http://wbc-inco.net/object/document/7423>

About the EFP: Policy professionals dealing with RTD, innovation and economic development increasingly recognize a need to base decisions on broadly based participative processes of deliberation and consultation with stakeholders. Among the most important tools they apply are foresight and forward looking studies. The EFP supports policy professionals by monitoring and analysing foresight activities and forward looking studies in the European Union, its neighbours and the world. The EFP helps those involved in policy development to stay up to date on current practice in foresight and forward looking studies. It helps them to tap into a network of know-how and experience on issues related to the day-to-day design, management and execution of foresight and foresight related processes.