

1. ENLARGEMENT AND EUROPEAN NEIGHBOURHOOD POLICY COUNTRIES

1.1. Enlargement Countries

1.1.1. *The Enlargement Countries as partners of the EU*

Cooperation with the EU enlargement countries (currently six candidates and potential candidates from the Western Balkans¹ and Turkey) has focused on facilitating their integration into the European Research Area (ERA), inter alia through association to the EU Research and Innovation Framework Programme Horizon 2020.

The enlargement countries have, given their pre-accession status, a special place and importance for the EU with respect to research and innovation. All enlargement countries, except Kosovo², have signed association agreements to the Horizon 2020 programme and therefore contribute financially to it. Entities from Kosovo are, given their level of development, also eligible for funding.

Association to Horizon 2020 is the strongest form of cooperation offering entities established in the associated countries the same research and innovation opportunities as enjoyed by entities from the Member States. Through their association, the enlargement countries are also invited to nominate observers in the different Horizon 2020 programme committees allowing them to become familiar with EU decision-making. Representatives of the associated enlargement countries may also be invited to nominate observer delegates in ERA policy bodies such as ERAC. Given the pre-accession context, this aims at preparing these countries to take up effectively the EU acquis by the time they become a Member State.

Accession negotiations with Montenegro on the acquis on science, research and innovation (accession negotiations Chapter 25) were opened and provisionally closed in December 2012; accession negotiations with Serbia were opened in January 2014 and preparations on Chapter 25 are ongoing. With Turkey the accession Chapter 25 was opened and provisionally closed back in June 2006. Progress is being monitored on a regular basis in the annual report for all seven enlargement countries. This also allows the creation of synergies with funding under the Pre-Accession Instrument (IPA II). On the regional level, a Western Balkans Regional R&D Strategy for Innovation (with support from IPA), was adopted in Zagreb in October 2013 to encourage regional integration in a number of key areas. Under the EU Macro-Regional Strategies with respectively the Danube countries and the countries of the Adriatic and Ionian region, cooperation on research and innovation in a number of specific areas has also been included as a way to foster closer socio-economic relations and create growth and jobs. Finally, meetings with all West Balkan countries and regional stakeholders take place on a regular basis in the Steering Platform on Research to take stock and create synergies between the different actions and stakeholders aiming at strengthening regional integration and the R&I capacity in the Balkan region.

1.1.2. *Priorities for S&T cooperation*

The performance of enlargement countries in Horizon 2020 is quite heterogeneous and on average comparatively low. The best performing entities are those of Turkey (especially in the fields of energy, food and nanotechnology as well as participation in

¹ Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Kosovo, Montenegro and Serbia.

² This designation is without prejudice to position on status, and is in line with UN Security Council Resolution 1244/1999 in the International Court of Justice opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

the SME instrument) and Serbia (mainly in ICT, energy and health). This relatively weak performance can be explained by several factors; in particular medium or low R&I capacity at national level, lack of comprehensive national research and innovation strategies and weak networks with EU researchers. Concentrating efforts on a number of selected research priorities is likely to help improving the research landscape in general and the participation in Horizon 2020 in particular. For example, the Western Balkans could benefit from focusing on research areas of common interest with partners from the Danube and Adriatic-Ionian EU macro-regions and engaging into a preparation of the Smart Specialisation Strategies. On the latter, expertise of the EC and in particular of the JRC in designing and implementing Smart Specialisation Strategies shall contribute to a better governance and coordination of the R&I activities and in turn to a better participation in the EU research programmes.

1.1.3. Framework conditions

As mentioned above, a substantial part of the cooperation with the Enlargement countries consists in preparing for compliance with the EU *acquis* on science, research and innovation. Having a good research and innovation capacity at national level and good framework conditions are likely, in turn, to increase their participation in Horizon 2020.

As of today none of the enlargement countries fully benefit from the ERA. To begin with, the level of investment in R&D is still very low to medium, ranging from 0.10% of GDP in Kosovo to 0.77% in Serbia and almost 0.96% in Turkey. In addition, the allocation of funding is not sufficiently competitive (ERA priority 1) and does not sufficiently set priorities in line with EU priorities aiming at concentrating efforts in addressing the societal challenges (ERA priority 2). Only Montenegro has a national roadmap for infrastructures in line with the ESFRI (European Strategic Forum on Research Infrastructures) Roadmap. Human capital availability is also weak³ and effective compliance with the Charter and Code of Conduct for recruitment principles is low (ERA priority 3). On gender equality, all countries are close to gender parity although women are still underrepresented in management functions. On open science and access to data, most Western Balkans are not fully aware of the principles of Open Access and/or lack the capacity to implement them. Some Turkish universities have started to implement open access to data but further efforts are necessary on Open Science skills such as on data management and re-use. With Turkey, the importance of acting in compliance with the ERA actions was discussed in October 2015 in a conference organised by the Commission together with six leading Turkish universities. Following this event, the six universities created an Alliance and made action plans on reform in the universities in line with the ERA actions. With the Western Balkans a Workshop on ERA actions was organised in March 2016.

Many of the countries are in the process of designing or updating a national strategy on science, research and innovation but several face the challenge to identify a clear vision and the knowledge and means to implement them. To streamline their efforts, the Commission's Policy Support Facility could help. At the same time, in the context of the Economic Reform Programme (ERP) process which was launched to prepare for the European Semester exercise, all enlargement countries have recognised that research and innovation are drivers of economic reform and competitiveness and plan for this purpose to deploy IPA II funding to strengthen their research and innovation capacity at national level.

³ In the West Balkan countries the number of R&D personnel in percentage of total employment (FTE) ranges between 0.13% and 0.60%. In Turkey the number is 0.45% (Unesco Institute of Statistics, 2013). The EU28 average for the same year is 1.26% (Eurostat).