



*Follow-up Meeting of the Ministerial Conference “Developing Regional Strategy for Research and Development for the Western Balkans”, Sarajevo, 7 September 2009*

**Opening address of Deputy Secretary General/Head of the Expert Pool,  
Jelica Minic**

Dear colleagues,

It is a great pleasure to welcome you in Sarajevo, roughly four months after the Ministerial Conference “Developing Regional Strategy for Research and Development for the Western Balkans”. During this period, the RCC continued to support concrete projects and initiatives related to the most urgent development needs of South East Europe. Projects which accelerate reforms in the region encourage cooperation and support the delivery of commitments with regard to European and Euro-Atlantic integrations.

Along this road, we managed to focus our activities on building human capital in the region, as the precondition for efficient adoption and implementation of European values and standards in various areas. Guided by the Lisbon agenda, we aim to develop three main pillars of the knowledge complex: education, research and innovation, as well as to improve interconnection among them. Our Building Human Capital Unit is actively involved in supporting development and quality of higher education systems through balanced cooperation among higher education institutions in the region and those of the EU Member States. We aim to stimulate research cooperation across the SEE and with the EU partners in order to create integrated research policy, as well as to foster dialogue between education and research sectors so as to create positive environment and facilitate innovation.

The reason for our gathering here today is one of our most prominent, most praised, most discussed projects - the “Regional Strategy for Research and Development for the Western Balkans”. After reiterated support of the science and research ministers of the RCC members from the Western Balkans, expressed through the Joint Statement of the April Ministerial Conference, the RCC has been coordinating further development and promotion of the project idea.

The main aspirations of this important, though challenging endeavour is, firstly, to increase knowledge transfer through improving networks of researchers and scientists from the Western Balkans, and within the entire South East Europe. Secondly, to create an environment for building young scientists’ research capacity. Thirdly, to enhance cooperation of the science, research and education communities with the business sector. Fourthly, and certainly not less important, to create cross-border regional clusters in competitive sectors and to pave the way for establishment of competitive regional Centres of excellence, just to name some of the ideas in this ambitious project.

Dear friends,

I would like to take this opportunity to thank respective institutions and experts from the RCC members as well as European Commission, World Bank, Steering Platform on Research for the Western Balkans, Council of Europe, European Training Foundation, OSCE, RCC Task Force Fostering and Building Human Capital, UNESCO, UNDP and other international partners for their support and interest in development of the project “Regional Strategy for Research and Development”. Our particular gratitude goes to Professor Djuro Kutlaca, to whom we owe a great appreciation for his involvement in drafting the project proposal.

The aim of today’s expert meeting is to assess the current status of the realization of the project and raise discussion on the future steps and best modalities for development and financing of the Regional Strategy. I am confident that we are going to have a fruitful discussion, conducive for strengthening relations within the scientific community of Western Balkans and South East Europe, which is necessary also for the facilitation of preparations for the integration of Western Balkans into the European Research Area. By building capacities to join the European Research Area, we build institutional capacities for the EU accession processes.

I sincerely hope that our joint efforts will not only open opportunities for establishment of contacts and cooperation in the research area, but will also increase our capacity of the genuine knowledge-based societies. Given the current global economic crisis, and its adverse effects in our region, the role of science and research is paramount to increasing competitiveness and, therefore, crucial for the continuation of sustainable development of South East Europe as a whole.

There are many challenges ahead, but I am confident that by joining our strengths we can achieve concrete, tangible and sustainable results. In that direction, the RCC will be, in its own capacity, a firm and reliable partner to all interested parties.

Thank you!

Sarajevo, 7 September 2009