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REGIONAL COOPERATION COUNCIL SECRETARIAT GATHERED IN SARAJEVO EXPERTS ON DRAFTING THE STRATEGY FOR RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT FOR THE WESTERN BALKANS

Joining Knowledge towards the EU



Podgorica – Experts from ministries of science of the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) members from South East Europe (SEE), including Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro, Serbia, Macedonia and Kosovo, representatives of the European Commission and members of scientific institutions from the region started the preparations on networking science community and business sector.

At the meeting held at the beginning of this week in Sarajevo and supported by World Bank representatives, they agreed in the assessment that regional activities are the most efficient, cost-effective and practical model of operation on the path of associating Western Balkans countries into the European Union.

The Regional Strategy for Research and Development for the Western Balkans aims to increase knowledge transfer through boosting networks and capacities of researchers and scientists from SEE and to enhance cooperation of the science, research and education communities with the business sector. The aim is also to create cross-border regional clusters in competitive sectors.

“The meeting was a follow-up to the Ministerial Conference, organized in Sarajevo on 24 April 2009 by the RCC Secretariat and the Czech Republic, with the aim of assessing the current status of the project and future steps in developing the Regional Strategy. In compliance with the Joint Statement adopted at the Ministerial Conference, a Project Coordination Body was formed which will be in charge of Strategy production, while names of members of this Body, representatives of individual RCC members, will be known by the end of next week,” said **Mladen Dragasevic**, Head of Building Human Capital Unit with the Regional Cooperation Council Secretariat for *Evropski Reporter*.

Regional Strategy for Research and Development for the Western Balkans project, guided by the European Union Lisbon Agenda, was established with the aim of further enhancement of research, innovation and education, and their more efficient interconnection.

Road to Science and Business Community Network

The plan is to increase the intensity of knowledge transfer through improving networks of researchers and scientists from the Western Balkans. The Strategy covers the activities which will create conditions for strengthening research capacities of young scientist and enhance communication of science, research and education communities with business sector.



Dragasevic says that a concrete idea the RCC aspires to is to join efforts to conduct researches in various fields, from environmental protection to improvement of different industry branches.

Science and research ministers of the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) members from the Western Balkans adopted the Joint Statement at the end of April this year expressing their strong and unanimous support to further project development. Based on this and with the support of EU Council Presidency, the RCC has been coordinating activities on Regional Strategy project development. The Coordination Body is currently being formed.

“This Body will work on further project improvement and organise preparatory activities for its efficient implementation. Draft project will be submitted to the European Commission by mid of this month. It is expected that the procedures for providing financial support to the project in the relevant European Commission bodies would be finalised by April next year”, said Dragasevic.

He added that modalities of financing the EUR 1.5 million worth project were also discussed at the meeting in Sarajevo.

“The European Commission will consider the possibility of financing the Regional Strategy for Research and Development for the Western Balkans from the EU’s Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) funds which is intended for multilateral development projects of future EU members.”

Individual RCC members will in future apply for assistance and support projects in the area of education, science and research, while one of the main prerequisites for RCC’s support to a project is significant involvement of experts from the region in its preparation and implementation, in cooperation with specialised agencies and services of the EU.

“It is our belief that through active approach and participation in drafting and implementation of concrete regional projects, experts and officials from countries of the region strengthen their own capacities and thus the capacities of their institutions and countries. This is in fact one of the main tasks of the RCC Secretariat’s Building Human Capital Unit. The Regional Strategy for Research and Development for the Western Balkans project is an excellent example of putting this policy into practice especially bearing in mind that people from relevant institutions and

institutes of countries from the region actively contributed to drafting it and, I may well say, did most of the job,” stressed Dragasevic.

Through Fragments to a Whole

Capacities of Western Balkans countries are small and fragmented and their cooperation is of crucial importance. Individual presentations at the European Union market, as estimated by the RCC, would not generate positive results.

“We are small, poor countries and we need to catch up. We believe that through investments and joint work on research and development we can significantly improve economic and social development in the region. This is the underlying aim of initiating this project”, said RCC Deputy Secretary General, **Jelica Minic**.

She mentions that regional cooperation has manifold significance and that the main purpose is to keep in this way in their respective countries the young, perspective workforce that will open the door of European Research Area.

Article by Vanja Lazarevski