



JOINT STATEMENT

TURN IDEAS INTO ACTION: INVEST IN JUNIOR SCIENTISTS AND JOBS FOR GROWTH

3RD JOINT SCIENCE CONFERENCE
WESTERN BALKANS PROCESS / BERLIN PROCESS
Paris · France · 14 – 16 June 2017

The 3rd Joint Science Conference of the Western Balkans Process / Berlin Process (JSC-WBP) convened at the French Académie des sciences – Institut de France in Paris to take further the process started in Germany in July 2015 and continued in Austria in May 2016. The outcomes of both the 1st and the 2nd JSC-WBP were summarised in Joint Statements, which were endorsed by the Heads of State and Government at the Western Balkans Summits in Vienna (2015) and Paris (2016)¹.

The 3rd JSC-WBP focused on two major topics:

1. **Investing in Junior Scientists and**
2. **Education and Innovation for Jobs and Growth.**

The parties welcome the announcement made by Italy's Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei to hold the next Joint Science Conference of the Western Balkans Process in 2018.

Key Recommendations

1. Establish the **Western Balkans Research Foundation** as a self-governing international organisation, which awards *ad personam* grants to junior scientists to build up excellent research labs and teams in the Balkans, and which supports mobility and interlinking with European counterparts.
2. Develop a **Western Balkans Action Plan for Smart Growth** containing recommendations to optimise the link between education, research and innovation, and the labour market and economic development.

Western Balkans Research Foundation

At the Paris Western Balkans Summit of 4 July 2016, the Heads of State and Government formulated the following request to the JSC-WBP: “[...] to propose [by summer 2017] funding mechanisms for excellent young researchers from the Balkans, allowing them to gain experience abroad and to create their own laboratories of excellence.”

Subsequently, an international Expert Group has been appointed, which through an intensive process has developed a comprehensive blueprint for a new **Western Balkans Research Foundation** (hereafter called Foundation).

The blueprint was consensually adopted at the 3rd JSC-WBP.

Mission and Instruments

The Foundation is designed to enable **outstanding junior scientists from the Balkans and from Europe² to build up excellent research labs and teams in the Balkan countries³ within a period of five years through *ad personam* grants**, enjoying grant portability. The grants will allow an preceding one to two-year training period in top research organisations in Europe, thus enhancing scientific links between the WB and the EU.

¹ See www.leopoldina.org/en/jsc.

² If meaningful, applicants from other countries with ties to the Balkans may be accepted.

³ Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, FYRo Macedonia, Kosovo*, Montenegro, Serbia, Slovenia. (*This designation is without prejudice to positions on status and is in line with UNSC 1244 resolution and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo Declaration of Independence.)

Grant agreements between the Foundation, the grantee and the host institutions (in the WB and the EU) will safeguard autonomy of operations. These grants are a central measure of **brain gain** aimed at the Balkans.

As further instruments for **brain circulation** and transfer of excellence, three optional add-on actions will support:

- a. the establishment of research networks within the Balkans,
- b. the outreach of scientific findings in society and
- c. innovation and technology transfer into economy and society.

Agents of Change

Through the Foundation's grants, a critical mass of excellent researcher teams in the Balkans will be shaped progressively. **These teams will form a driving force of change:** by participating in these "hives" of excellence, the national education and science systems will profit from sustainable improvement, hence aiding their efforts to keep on the European track or setting the course for it. Science today knows no national divisions and requires cross-border networking.

In the global competition for the greatest minds, the Foundation should **attract the best of the best**, paying particular attention to junior scientists from the Balkans. Participation is open to all scientific fields. Criteria are clearly defined: junior scientists (max. 45 years of age), PhD certificate in hand and publicised PhD thesis. The quality of applicants and research projects are evaluated in a two-stage process with a final interview.

Governance

The Foundation will be set-up as a self-governing international institution. Italy is willing to host the Foundation in Trieste. The Foundation should be carried by the countries involved in the Western Balkans Process; at a later stage, other interested countries such as Switzerland or Norway and others could join. A financial contribution from the European Commission and a cooperation agreement with the European Research Council as well as further collaboration with public and private donors are highly desirable and expected.

The management of the Foundation and its operational routines will **strictly follow international standards** in order to safeguard credibility and reputation. The administration will be as lean and efficient as possible. The recruitment of the Scientific Council and the administrative staff needs to take place exclusively according to quality criteria and must be publicised internationally. The grantees and the research performance will be at the core of the Foundation's work.

ANNOTATIONS

SEE = South-East Europe

HE = Higher education

SME = Small and medium-sized enterprises

STEM = Science, technology, engineering and mathematics

The term "science" (and related expressions) refers to the entire spectrum of scientific branches: natural sciences, social sciences and humanities, formal sciences, life sciences, applied sciences etc.

Education and Innovation for Jobs and Growth

The previous Joint Statements of the JSC-WBP and the Final Declarations of the Western Balkans Summits in Paris (2016) and Vienna (2015) highlighted the **pivotal role of education, research and knowledge transfer for the creation of jobs as well socioeconomic and territorial cohesion.**

Several problems affect the WB, such as poverty, (youth) unemployment, low labour productivity, underused innovation potential, and brain drain and emigration. These demand an integrated approach on different levels: European Union, macro-regional, national and local. Thus, the JSC-WBP will establish an:

Expert Group for the elaboration of a "Western Balkans Action Plan for Smart Growth"

The Action Plan is intended to provide **recommendations to interlink education, research and innovation with the labour market and economic development.** Relevant actors from academia, business and civil society as well as international financial institutions and development organisations are encouraged to engage in this undertaking. It will comprise three stages:

1. assessment of existing strategies and initiatives,
2. identification of problematic areas, and
3. elaboration of recommendations to be implemented until 2020 – 2030.

The Expert Group will deal with the following thematic modules, expanding on the concepts presented hereafter and analysing their feasibility for the Balkans:

1. University-Business Cooperation

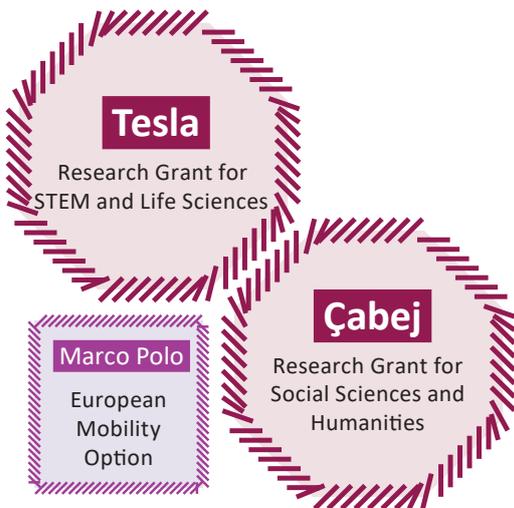
University-business platforms bring together HE institutions and the economic system, with participation of local and national authorities. Considering the size of WB economies and the need to achieve scale effects, the concentration on singular national platforms and a regional one is advisable. Such platforms should convene once a year, having strong public outreach.

The relevance of study programmes should be improved through greater cooperation between HE institutions and employers in the design and modernisation of curricula (including blended learning), in the improvement of teaching methods, and by negotiating work experience opportunities and internships in state and private companies (including SMEs). In this process the **universities' autonomy should be safeguarded.**

2. Innovation Ecosystems

Support programmes, possibly pivoting around Science, Business and Technology Parks, can lead to thriving innovation ecosystems, thus enhancing innovation performance. Alongside with **supporting the connectivity of best practitioners / best**

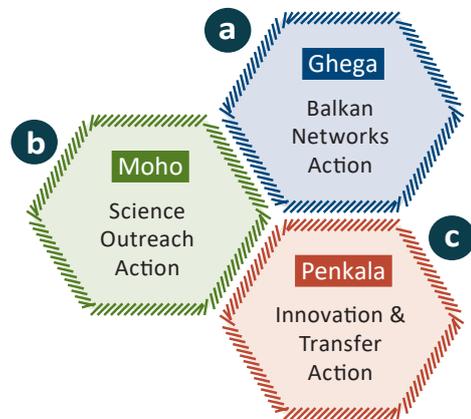
WESTERN BALKANS RESEARCH FOUNDATION



1 Grants

- ↳ Establishment of own excellence team or lab, as a principal investigator (ad personam grant)
- ↳ **5 years** investigation-driven research
- ↳ **1-2 years** optional preceding training in the EU
- ↳ Grant amount = 750,000 EUR

FUNDING INSTRUMENTS



2 Add-ons

- ↳ 3 optional actions as add-ons to the Tesla and Çabej Grants
- ↳ Amount per grant ≥ 12,500 EUR

ORGANISATION

- ↳ Status of a self-governing international organisation
- ↳ Carried by the 13 countries of the Western Balkans Process with the support of the European Union
- ↳ Located potentially in Trieste, Italy

Steering Council

Scientific Council + State envoys (1/state & EC) + Other donors or trustees (optional) + College of Auditors
 Scientific council has >50% seats Convenes at least once a year

Co-Chair: Foundation President + 1 state envoy

Board: Foundation President, Vice-President, Director-General, 1 state envoy convenes regularly

Scientific Council

Evaluators / Panel (≥19) 3-4 Subpanels according to major disciplines
 Evaluates the applications (2 stage-process with final interview), convenes as often as necessary
Chair: Foundation President and Vice-President (at least one woman)

Executive Agency

Grantees

Grant Agreement between foundation, grantee and host institution (tailored approach)
Grant Assistance Scheme (individual, flexible) Grant evaluation & monitoring (ongoing)

performers, this can be a motor of convergence. Already existing instruments can be emulated to fit the WB conditions, e.g.:

- ♦ A Regional Community of Innovators in the WB;
- ♦ Smart Specialisation strategy with support of the EC⁴;
- ♦ National Innovation and Start-Up Competitions⁵;
- ♦ Strategic use of Science and Technology Parks and of R&D public-private-partnerships.

3. Strategic Partnerships

For the managing “big” structural reforms – such as new models of performance-based funding or the restructuring of universities – **modernisation partnerships between ministries from WB and EU countries** could be pursued. These would focus on the joint design of reforms and strategies as well as on their implementation.

Mirroring the ministerial partnerships, universities and rectors’ conferences could collaborate with their EU peers in the process of institutional transition, quality assurance, full introduction of the Bologna system etc. **Using pilot projects** in this area of action would be a suitable approach.

4. Joint Degrees and Mobility

In order to maximise the opportunities of the Bologna Process, universities could engage in **joint degree programmes with partner universities⁶ and industry / business**, and thus make academic mobility instrumental for performance enhancement. Additionally, alumni-associations and professional organisations are useful for strategic networking. Following formats should be developed:

- ♦ Both classical and innovative joint degrees between universities in the WB, in SEE and the EU;
- ♦ Joint degrees between university and industry, with additional training for interactive skills and entrepreneurial learning;
- ♦ Erasmus+ type of mobility schemes within the WB, guaranteeing the full transferability of credit points;
- ♦ Formation of “elite” cohorts of graduates in selected strategic fields – e.g. civil servants, engineers, science managers, journalists etc. – through joint degrees with renowned EU universities.

5. Accreditation and Quality Assurance

Where not already established, the accreditation of universities and study programmes should be carried out, and **rigorous quality assurance measures** should be applied to raise the quality of HE services. External evaluation of HE institutions needs to be carried out in compliance with the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance.

⁴ See s3platform.jrc.ec.europa.eu.

⁵ Similar to the French program “Investissements d’avenir” or the German program “Deutschland – Land der Ideen”.

⁶ The inter-university Regional Platform for Benchmarking and Cooperation in Higher Education and Research in the WB, established by the major regional universities and ministries is a suitable framework.

6. Better Employability of Graduates

Universities and public employment services should provide **improved support and advisory services to job-seeking graduates** to ensure that more graduates find well-matched jobs. This is required to reduce informal networks and nepotism in the labour market. Local / national occupational orientation programmes, which would encompass dual professional education, vocational training, continuous education and re-qualification, can also be considered.

Universities should provide more information to potential applicants in secondary schools about labour market demand. Governments should also use scholarships and budget quotas (if relevant) to **raise attractiveness of priority subjects such as STEM and fast growing sectors (e.g. ICT)**.

PARTICIPATING PARTIES

NATIONAL ACADEMIES

Academy of Sciences of Albania (Muzafer Korkuti) | Austrian Academy of Sciences (Anton Zeilinger) | Academy of Sciences and Arts of Bosnia and Herzegovina (Miloš Trifković) | French Académie des sciences (Sébastien Candel) | German National Academy of Sciences Leopoldina (Jörg Hacker) | Italian Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei (Mario Stefanini) | Academy of Sciences and Arts of Kosovo (Nexhat Daci) | Macedonian Academy of Sciences and Arts (Taki Fiti) | Montenegrin Academy of Sciences and Arts (Dragan K. Vukčević) | Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts (Ljubomir Maksimović) | Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts (Tadej Bajd) | The Royal Society (James Jackson)

NATIONAL RECTORS’ CONFERENCES AND UNIVERSITIES

Rectors’ Conference of the Republic of Albania (Valentina Duka) | Austrian University Conference uniko (Elisabeth Freismuth) | University of Sarajevo (Rifat Škrijelj) | University of Banja Luka (Milan Mataruga) | Rectors’ Conference of the Republic of Croatia (Marin Milković) | Conference of Deans of French Schools of Engineering (Pierre Koch) | Conference of University Presidents of France (Jacques Comby) | German Rectors’ Conference (Horst Hippler) | Hasan-Prishtina-University of Pristina (Marjan Dema) | Saints-Cyril-and-Methodius-University of Skopje (Nikola Jankulovski) | South East European University of Tetovo (Zamir Dika) | University of Montenegro (Radmila Vojvodić) | Conference of Serbia’s Universities (Vladimir Bumbaširević) | University of Novi Sad (Dušan Nikolić) | Rectors’ Conference of the Republic of Slovenia (Boris Kavur)

DISTINGUISHED SCIENTISTS AND EXPERTS *AD PERSONAM*

Boban Arsenijević (University of Niš) | Blerjana Bino (European University of Tirana and Uppsala University) | Donald Bruce Dingwell (Ludwig-Maximilians-University Munich) | Dhimitër Doka (University of Tirana) | Arjan Gjonça (London School of Economics and Political Science) | Zoran Hadzi-Velkov (Saints-Cyril-and-Methodius-University of Skopje) | Armanda K. Hysa (Centre of Albanological Studies Tirana) | Marija Janković (CentraleSupélec, University of Paris-Saclay) | Stipan Jonjić (University of Rijeka) | Erna Karalija (University of Sarajevo) | Almir Maljević (University of Sarajevo) | Fetah Podvorica (Hasan-Prishtina-University of Pristina) | Miroslav Radman (Mediterranean Institute for Life Sciences Split and Paris Descartes University) | Oliver Jens Schmitt (University of Vienna) | Sofija Stefanović (University of Belgrade and BioSense Institute, University of Novi Sad)

INVITED SPEAKERS

William Bartlett (London School of Economics and Political Science) | Jean-Paul Chabard (Électricité de France EDF) | Martin Dietz (Helvetas Swiss Intercooperation, PERFORM) | Adnan Ibrahimbegović (Compiègne University of Technology) | Didier Roux (Saint-Gobain S.A. and Académie des sciences) | Ivan Svetlik (University of Ljubljana)

5 JULY 2017

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