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## Networking with Southeast Europe

### SEE-ERA.NET Pilot Joint Call for Research Proposals



Nikos Sidiropoulos, Work Package Leader responsible for the Pilot Joint Call, interviewed by Florian Gruber

Gruber: The Pilot Joint Call "Networking with Southeast Europe" that is about to be launched is one of the major outputs of the SEE-ERA.NET project. What is this project all about?

Sidiropoulos: The major aim of our activities is to foster a multilateral programme approach by supporting R&D projects through the exchange of

knowledge. We aim to build up a stronger knowledge based society, to stop the brain drain, and to contribute to economic and social development, regional cooperation, and the stability of the region.

Gruber: What are the specific benefits for researchers participating in the Pilot Joint Call?

Sidiropoulos: Researchers can apply for research mobility projects, network projects, and summer schools. Our call will help to enhance mobility, to increase networking, to share results and experiences with colleagues, and to establish new partnerships. Additionally, participating researchers from Southeast Europe can take advantage of their knowledge gained from the Pilot Call for easier access to EU programmes.

The assessment of proposals will be transparent and fair. It will be carried out as an international peer review process. The final approval of a project application will be made by a committee representing the ministries and/or agencies from all participating SEE-ERA.NET member countries.

Gruber: This call is a pilot call with limited budget. There is an upper limit for project costs, and the three thematic areas "Food, Agriculture and Biotechnology", "Information and Communication Technologies" and "Environment", narrowed by sub-areas (see factsheet), have been selected as a focus. Why did SEE-ERA.NET choose these three areas?

Sidiropoulos: Our thematic areas were selected in relation to the national and regional research priorities of the Western Balkan countries, keeping in mind the strengths of these countries. These thematic areas are oriented especially towards relevant problems and the future economic development of the region; they are in line with

the Stabilisation and Association Process for Southeast Europe and will strengthen the participation of the Western Balkan countries in FP7.

Gruber: What will be financed by this call for proposals?

Sidiropoulos: Mainly expenses resulting from mobility costs of researchers. In addition, staff expenses for the implementation of projects and feasibility studies are eligible for grants, and also costs of events and meetings, for example the rental of venues, alongside with logistics and physical resources, e.g. consumables, printing costs, small equipment, and so forth.

Gruber: How many countries are participating in the Pilot Joint Call?

Sidiropoulos: All countries represented in the SEE-ERA.NET project participate in the Pilot Joint Call. They are: Albania, Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, France, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia, and Slovenia.

These countries contribute national funding to this Pilot Joint Call. It was a very pleasant surprise that the whole consortium joined forces in order to create this call for proposals.

Gruber: Many researchers in South Eastern Europe cooperate with scientists from Italy and also Turkey. Why are those scientists not eligible for participation?

Sidiropoulos: Simply because Italy and Turkey and other Southeast European countries such as Cyprus are - up to now - not participating in the SEE-ERA.NET project. Therefore researchers from these countries cannot apply for funding.

Gruber: What is the benefit of SEE-ERA.NET for the EC in regard to funding RTD collaboration with the Western Balkan countries?

Sidiropoulos: SEE-ERA.NET is a useful tool, not only to provide funding. It aims at structuring and expanding the European Research Area to the Western Balkan countries by coordinating and supporting RTD activities. The important issue is that the funding of these joint activities such as the Pilot Joint Call is covered through the national contributions of all the partners. This facilitates the sustainability of our collaboration in South Eastern Europe.

Gruber: Apart from the call itself, several accompanying measures are planned.

Sidiropoulos: Yes, a number of accompanying activities are foreseen parallel to the Pilot Joint Call, concerning awareness raising in the Western Balkan countries, the participating EU-Member States and Associated Countries. We are planning qualification and training measures regarding R&D management skills in order to pave the way for a successful participation of the Western Balkan countries in European and multilateral projects. We will also organise brokerage and networking activities to foster the integration of researchers





from the Western Balkan countries in European consortia as a basis for joint R&D projects.

Gruber: When will these brokerage and networking events take place?

Sidiropoulos: They will take place in January and February 2007. We will organise one event for each thematic priority: in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, in Montenegro/Croatia, and in Serbia.

Gruber: What are the steps researchers have to take to participate in the Pilot Joint Call?

Sidiropoulos: We are going to launch the call in the end of November 2006. The deadline for the applications is March 31, 2007. Applications for project funding may be submitted by legal RTD entities according to the national laws of the participating countries. This funding scheme targets at institutional collaboration, therefore private persons are not allowed to apply.

As the application procedure is completely based on electronic submission, interested researchers should visit our website [www.see-era.net/pjc](http://www.see-era.net/pjc) for a detailed description of the application process. For definitions and clarifications, the applicants should contact the SEE-ERA.NET National Contact Points of their countries. Contact details are provided on the website. We hope to receive high-quality research proposals, strengthening our aim to integrate Southeast Europe into the growing European Research Area!

Gruber: Which are the reasons for the countries to participate in SEE-ERA.NET and the Pilot Joint Call?

Sidiropoulos: The countries participate in the call because they want to test the implementation of a new multilateral funding programme, and also to monitor the opening of their internal procedures to a multinational level. Here I would like to emphasise that our target is to scale up our activities after this test phase and to launch a multilateral joint call in 2008, combining policy development, capacity building, infrastructure development, brokerage and networking activities: to end up with big joint research projects.

As for my country: Greece strongly supports the initiatives improving cooperation and coordination of national research activities, especially in Southeast Europe. I would like to remind you that the promotion of the exchange of knowledge, personnel and technological innovations in order to foster socio-economic progress throughout the Euro-Mediterranean area was stated as an important ambition and mission of the European Union according to the EU-Balkan Countries Action Plan on Science & Technology adopted at the Ministerial Conference in Thessaloniki under the Greek Presidency in 2003.

Gruber: One last question: which steps does the SEE-ERA.NET project envisage to ensure the sustainability of the the Pilot Joint Call initiative?

Sidiropoulos: As I mentioned before, one of our priorities is the detailed monitoring of this pilot phase, which will be implemented by an external expert. This will lead to a better design of the next joint call, which will be launched by SEE-ERA.NET in 2008. Furthermore, a white paper on RTD overlaps, gaps and opportunities in Southeast Europe will be drafted by our German colleagues. And finally, a turn-key ready RTD programme will be prepared by our Romanian colleagues in cooperation with all other SEE-ERA.NET project partners. From my point of view, SEE-ERA.NET - and the ERA-NETs in general, act as catalysts to initiate and facilitate the coordination and collaboration of national funding bodies.

Authors

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#### Factsheet: SEE-ERA.NET Pilot Joint Call

Launch of the Pilot Joint Call: November 30, 2006

Deadline for submission of project applications: March 31, 2007

This first joint call by SEE-ERA.NET is a pilot case for the cooperation of the project partner countries in the field of research funding. The design of the call is based on research on the priorities and needs of the Western Balkan countries with a view to better integration into the European Research Area.

#### Funding will be provided for

- < Research projects: conducted by a project consortium with at least three participants from three different countries (at least one from a Western Balkan country)
- < Network projects: conducted by at least five partners from three different countries (at least two from a Western Balkan country)
- < Summer Schools: conducted by a project consortium with at least three participants from three different countries (at least one from a Western Balkan country)

#### Thematic priorities are

- < Environment: Environmental Technologies
- < Information and Communication Technologies: Applications Research
- < Food, Agriculture and Biotechnology: Sustainable Production and Management of Biological Resources from Land, Forest and Aquatic Environments

Indicative budget per project will be 20,000 euro for a period of maximum 9 months.

Language for project applications is English.

More information about the call and the online-application tool can be found at: <http://www.see-era.net/pjc>

