Stairway to Excellence
Cohesion Policy and the Synergies with the Research and Innovation Funds

Example of Synergies

Institute of Information and Communication Technologies (IICT) at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences (BAS)

Bulgaria
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Executive Summary

The Institute of Information and Communication Technologies (IICT) at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences participates successfully in national, Structural Funds (SF) and EU level research initiatives (mainly FP and Horizon 2020). This case study is particularly informative because it demonstrates the positive developments in the Institute stemming from three different projects, chosen as running largely in parallel and allowing for synergies between the different funding sources. IICT could be considered a good case study to illustrate the benefits of combining funding from different sources, and synergistically implement a wide set of research activities, which transform the Institute into a recognized institution providing excellent research and training possibilities.

Type of synergies

- Parallel funding

S&T field targeted by the synergies

- ICT
- Interdisciplinary research opportunities

The views expressed are purely those of the author and may not in any circumstances be regarded as stating an official position of the European Commission.
1. INTRODUCTION

The case presented in the following sections is one of the examples of synergies provided by the ‘Stairway to Excellence’ project in which different sources of funding have been combined to amplify the R&I investments and their impact on the economy and wider society.

As described in the guide ‘Enabling synergies between European Structural and Investment Funds, Horizon 2020 and other research, innovation and competitiveness-related Union programmes1’, synergies can be achieved through:

- Sequential (or successive) funding that use funds in separate projects built on each other;
- Parallel funding that use funds in separate projects complementing each other;
- Simultaneous/cumulative funding that brings together Horizon2020 and ESIF funds in the same project aimed at achieving greater impact;
- Alternative funding that reorients FP7/Horizon 2020 projects that were positively evaluated, shortlisted, but not funded given the limited budget, towards Structural Funds impact.

The combination of sources of funding is used to address two types of activities:

- Upstream activities build the appropriate capacities to perform research. They can be capacity building in physical capital (construction or improvement of research infrastructures, purchasing equipment, (including IT equipment and connections, data storage capacities), innovation infrastructures (LivingLabs, FabLabs, Design factories, etc.) and social capital (assistance for building networks, clusters and consortia).
- Downstream activities are focussed towards the market and the creation of economic value. They can be applied to research, development and demonstration activities, technology transfer and adoption; technology and innovation audits to identify potential demand for RDI results; proof-of-concept funding; pilot lines for first production; and pre-commercial procurement projects. There can also be activities to support the improvement of the innovation eco-system in a territory.

2. CONTEXT

The Bulgarian Academy of Sciences (BAS) is expected to play a key role in the country’s innovation system. The Institute of Information and Communication Technologies (IICT)2 at BAS is the successor of three former structures with related activities: the Institute for Parallel Processing (IPP), the Institute of Information Technologies (IIT) and the Institute of Computer and Communication Systems (ICCS), starting from 1 July 2010. Since then the reform of the management of IICT has focused its attention on capacity building and competitive project development and management at national and EU level.

This transformative process has been initiated by the creation of Information and Communication Technologies for Energy Efficiency (ICTEE), Technology Transfer Office (TTO)3 (integrated at present in the network of 28 such centres, called Bulgarian Technology Transfer Network). With SF support the TTO was established and become recognized at national and EU level. In the chosen field of application (energy efficiency), prototypes of innovative products have been developed. The funding came from Operational Programme 2007-2013 “Development of the Competitiveness of the Bulgarian Economy”, whereby the Institute received

2 http://www.iict.bas.bg/EN/
3 BgTTN: http://www.gis-tc.org/centers
support for research facilities, as well as for substantive research activities, networking, marketing and dissemination of research results.

Thanks to the FP7 project called **Advanced Computing for Innovation (AComIn)** the Institute as Coordinator receives additional funding for: Smart Periphery Lab; - Human Potential; - Knowledge dissemination; - Training of User Community; and - IPR management skills. The AComIn project is expected to transform IICT into a leading RTD Centre in Eastern Europe, providing facilities and working conditions comparable to the average standards of the EU Centres of Excellence in ICT.

Understanding the importance of building also human capabilities, the Institute extends its activities in this respect with assistance, achieved under another FP7 project (as Partner): **Empowering Young Explorers (EYE)**. Thus, the scope of the IICT activities is widened with support for young European researchers in a range of scientific disciplines to realise their scientific potential in future and emerging technologies (FET) and to contribute to breakthrough research. EYE project also supports the development of young scientists’ leadership potential via networking and training.

Only the timely combination of the elements included in the three mentioned projects (one from SF and two from FP7) makes possible the simultaneous implementation of mutually-reinforcing and complementary activities and corresponds to the strategy of IICT in Bulgaria to provide excellence in research, combining research facilities with human potential and effective partnerships.

**3. Implementation**

Figure 1 maps the project chronologically, the research activities of the organisation and the type of funding. It aims to give a picture of relations between projects revealing planned or unplanned dependencies (synergies) between projects and their source of funding.

**Figure 1: Diagram of chronology of the main projects involved in synergies**
**Added value / complementarities created by the synergies**

The IICIT is the Coordinator of an FP7 project *Advanced Computing for Innovation (AComIn)*4. The EU level support ensures the necessary financial resources for Smart Periphery Lab; Human Potential; Knowledge dissemination; Training of User Community; IPR management skills, included as work packages in the project. The idea of AComIn is to additionally strengthen the IICIT research and innovation capacity by increasing the knowledge and skills of IICIT researchers in emerging areas, as well as by purchasing modern research infrastructure. AComIn should help the Institute to successfully accomplish its strategic mission: by 2016, i.e. 5 years after its creation, IICIT has to become a leading RTD Centre in Eastern Europe, providing facilities and working conditions comparable to the average standards of the EU Centres of Excellence in ICT.

Given the importance of the human potential and the next generation of researchers, the Institute cooperates at EU level to explore the opportunities for supporting young people with career prospects in R&D. IICIT participates as Partner in another FP7 project – *Empowering Young Explorers (EYE)*5. Thus, the scope of the IICIT activities is widened with support for young European researchers in a range of scientific disciplines to realise their scientific potential in future and emerging technologies (FET) and to contribute to breakthrough research. EYE project also supports the development of young scientists’ leadership potential via networking and training. The concept behind the EYE project is to stimulate both individual potential and collaborative efforts of young researchers from different parts of Europe. In particular, EYE seeks areas where Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) can bring new interdisciplinary research opportunities, which is the core function of IICIT in Bulgaria.

**Mechanisms facilitating the synergies**

During 2007-2013 specific national mechanisms facilitating synergies between SF and FP funding sources hardly existed. Nonetheless, individual research organizations managed to reorganize their work in such a way as to facilitate parallel project participation, whereby activities complement each other, while the usual difficulties in combing external support are avoided (lack of capacity or own financial resources). IICIT is an example of such organization that possesses internal mechanisms to realize multiple project synergies.

**Main problems encountered in implementing the synergies**

The most difficult aspect concerning SF in Bulgaria, especially in the sphere of R&I, has been the planning process. OP Competitiveness 2007-2013 creates high expectations at the start of the programming period and then until 2011 innovation calls were limited in number and predominantly targeting start-ups. When the relevant call is finally open (accompanied by numerous others), the project proposal evaluation period extend for unduly long period of time. By the moment of contract signature applicants may have lost interest in participating. If other activities need to be coordinated or are dependent upon the SF project, the whole enterprise becomes risky.

The other two elements are also crucial. One, staff resources are rarely specifically dedicated to project generation and implementation. Thus, running projects, even projects in parallel, becomes impossible, due to the complexity of the research work combined with the administrative overload related to project management, including financial management, reporting and audit. Two, the typically inflexible PRO financing system exclude the cash flow options needed for pre-financing (and co-financing if relevant). IICIT manages to be successful in overcoming these difficulties by ensuring sufficient internal resources and capacity in the area of project preparation and realization, as well as adequate forward-looking and project-oriented planning of adequate financial means.

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4 [http://www.iict.bas.bg/acomin/](http://www.iict.bas.bg/acomin/)
5 [https://www.fet-eye.eu/](https://www.fet-eye.eu/)
Suggestions to improve the synergies
From the perspective of the project implementers the most straightforward way to improve synergies are the following:

- Firstly, reducing the administrative burden by aligning to the highest possible degree the rules and implementation requirements of the national funding (from the budget) and of the national SF funding (from the dedicated Operational Programmes) with the funding model of FP/Horizon 2020. Following similar procedures would substantially reduce the effort on the side of beneficiaries and would allow them to focus on the actual research work.

- Secondly, early planning and intensive information distribution concerning forthcoming as well as part calls and initiatives. Knowing about the funding opportunities in advance would allow beneficiaries to devise the most suitable scheme for financing complementary activities and combing sources.

- Thirdly, allowing for financial stimuli for participation and/or priority support for preparatory/follow-up activities. This model of ‘bonusing’ synergies would provide the proper incentives for project developers to gradually build their own internal innovation and project management system, meaning staff, resources, dedicated time and capacity-building efforts.

- Finally, systematic approach to dissemination of project results. For example, a well-functioning database of R&I investments and their impact could be used extensively by partners and collaborators to build upon existing grounds and additionally improve synergies.

Main motivations in implementing the synergies
As mentioned by interviewees, the key motivating factors for them to implement three different projects (one with SF support and two under FP7) within approximately the same period in time are as follows:

- At least in the programming period 2007–2013 it was impossible to apply with the so-called integrated project (combining ERDF and ESF types of funding6) under one national OP. All operational programmes were mono-fund, which has changed in the new 2014–2020 programming period. Either the different types of costs were not eligible in one programme or procedure, for example improving infrastructure and simultaneously strengthening human capital potential, or alternatively the different types of beneficiaries such as PROs or even consortia with PROs were not included as potential beneficiaries. This motivated IICT to implement parallel mutually-supporting activities as three separate projects from two separate funding mechanisms (SF and FP7).

- The budget ceilings and the project duration periods in SF rarely encourage participants to think strategically and implement a large-scale project investment with long-term impact and all-encompassing rationale. However, instead of discouraging IICT from having a vision for itself in the long run, this served as motivation for it to review its own functioning and adapt to the possibility of parallel project implementation. The obvious conclusion was that achieving an ambitious budget target is only possible through multiple project participation.

- Framework programmes, as compared to the predominant type of SF funding, allow and even encourage partnerships producing results which cannot be achieved in one country only or within one type of beneficiary (PRO, company, etc.). Also, information flows are often organized more efficiently within one cooperation project, compared to simply one beneficiary seeking information on its own or outside the framework of a project. That is why IICT was stimulated to search for financing under both SF and FP7, given the additional value of information flows and good practice exchange with foreign peers and other types of partners.

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6 except for the 10% flexibility option
IICT was aware of the fact that participation in joint research project in itself is conducive to further partner initiatives and new projects. People-to-people contacts are established with additional knowledge concerning potential new research areas and activities. The motivating factor is clear and can be viewed as a ‘virtuous development spiral’.

**Facilitating mechanisms for the take up of the scientific results**

The overall environment for take-up of scientific results needs to be further improved in Bulgaria. Limited opportunities exist for scientific results to be spread more widely and to be integrated further to reach market and allow for positive social and economic developments. In addition, the level of IPR regulations and their implementation in practice cannot sufficiently facilitate the collaboration between public-private organisations and knowledge transfer.

What happened in this particular case is that IICT managed to transform these two wider challenges into concrete project work. On the one hand, the role of a Technology Transfer Office is exactly to manage effectively the intellectual property resulting from research and to establish mutually beneficial contacts with industrial partners. Here comes the role of the SF project for IICT TTO. On the other hand, the AComIn project specifically includes activities that strengthen IPR:

- Setting up IP policies and KT processes at IICT-BAS and harmonizing them with the European standards for transferring research results to industry;
- Creating sufficient awareness with the IICT-BAS staff of the value of protecting their IP and of measures for early identification of IP potential;
- Submitting patent applications to BPO and EPO.

**Impact on the regional / national economy**

AComIn is expected to help IICT to successfully accomplish its strategic mission: by 2016, i.e. 5 years after its creation, to become a leading RTD Centre in Eastern Europe, providing facilities and working conditions comparable to the average standards of the EU Centres of Excellence in ICT. IICT will be in a position to contribute to the sustainable regional and national growth and employment by providing RTD results to advanced industrial organisations. This may happen on the basis of ensuring critical mass of excellent research work, of increased collaboration with business and of submitted patent applications to BPO and EPO. IICT also plans to become a focal point of high-quality research training in South-East Europe.

EYE project on the other hand intends to engage EYE partners to help teams of young researchers with best ideas generated at various EYE events to transform their ideas into concrete project proposals suitable for the submission to various EU-funded programmes. The process would hopefully lead to assignments for the young researchers and/or employability. Started in November 2013, the EYE project is aimed at supporting a series of complementary regional and European brainstorming and training events for young scientists involved in FET – quality research, such as seminars, conferences and summer schools.

Six regional Lab Surfing workshops organised in Brussels, Bratislava, Belgrade, Thessaloniki, Milan and Gothenburg provided young researchers with a unique opportunity to learn about the most advanced FET research, brainstorm about future research areas and jointly elaborate new high risk scientific ideas, partner with their peers, and also develop scientific administration and leadership skills. Regional teams formed at the six Lab Surfing workshops were invited to submit applications for the participation in the Blue Sky Conference 2014.

The Blue Sky 2014 showcased the best ideas coming out of the regional Lab Surfing workshops and allowed the participating young researchers to further consolidate their collaborative research ideas and to network more widely at a European level. At the last stage, the European teams with strongest ideas are invited to take part in the Science Incubator summer school – intensive training event to help selected teams of young researchers to bring their ideas to a level from which
substantive FET project proposals can be presented for participation in Horizon 2020 and/or other relevant national funding schemes. The EYE activities are supported with an online platform called NOVA - Networking for Outstanding Visionaries and Academics.

Figure 2 aims to position projects according to the activities they cover; from upstream (infrastructures, equipment, research activities) to downstream related activities (innovation, knowledge transfer, access to market).

**Figure 2: Diagram of the complementarities of the funds in the knowledge triangle/flow**

The IICT case study shows the manner in which three projects from different funding sources have been combined. Thus, all the necessary pillars (research, innovation and training) together build the ‘solid construction’ of this institution, its successful R&I development and its orientation towards future partnerships and collaborations. IICT has already planned three new projects (marked as *forthcoming* on the diagram): under H2020 IICT has submitted a proposal within the Teaming action, while it is in process of elaborating two ESIF projects (under OP Science and Education for Smart Growth 2014-2020), related to both infrastructure and human resources in one of the four RIS3 priority themes for Bulgaria – “Informatics and ICT”.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research</th>
<th>Innovation</th>
<th>Training</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Research Infrastructures, facilities, Research activity, etc.)</td>
<td>Knowledge dissemination, knowledge transfer events, funding of the KTOs, etc.</td>
<td>(Continuous professional training, PhD fellowships)</td>
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4. Related Projects

Name of the SF Project: IICT Technology Transfer Office (IICT TTO)
- SF funding scheme: BG161PO003-1.2.02 "Support for new and strengthening the existing technology transfer offices"
- Budget: 182 622 euro
- Time frame of the SF funded project: 24 months
- Main objectives and type of costs covered: creating and developing sustainably TTO in the IICT at BAS though: improved research facilities, research activity, events, networking, marketing and advertising of results.

Name of the FP Project (as Coordinator): Advanced Computing for Innovation (AComIn)
- FP funding scheme: FP7-REGPOT-2012-2013-1
- Budget: 3 594 288 euro
- Time frame of the FP funded project: 42 months (36 months + 6 months external evaluation)
- Main objectives and type of costs covered: strengthening the IICT research and innovation capacity by: increasing the knowledge and skills of researchers in emerging areas as well as by purchasing modern research infrastructure.

Name of the FP Project (as Partner): Empowering Young Explorers (EYE)
- FP funding scheme: FP7-ICT-2013-C
- Budget: 1 337 150 euro
- Time frame of the FP funded project: 24 months
- Main objectives and type of costs covered: building a lasting European community of high potential young researchers (YRs) that are able to generate radical new ideas and build research collaborations in interdisciplinary area through: integrated programme of complementary regional and European events, online platform and project preparation support.
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Abbreviations</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BAS</td>
<td>Bulgarian Academy of Sciences</td>
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<tr>
<td>COST</td>
<td>European Cooperation in Science and Technology programme</td>
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<td>EC</td>
<td>European Commission</td>
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<td>ERA</td>
<td>European Research Area</td>
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<td>ERDF</td>
<td>European Regional Development Fund</td>
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<td>ESF</td>
<td>European Social Fund</td>
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<tr>
<td>ESIF</td>
<td>European Structural and Investment Funds 2014-2020</td>
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<td>EU</td>
<td>European Union</td>
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<td>FP</td>
<td>Framework Programme</td>
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<td>GDP</td>
<td>Gross Domestic Product</td>
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<td>HEI</td>
<td>Higher Education Institution</td>
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<td>H2020</td>
<td>Horizon 2020</td>
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<td>ICT</td>
<td>Information and Communication Technologies</td>
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<td>ICTEE</td>
<td>Information and Communication Technologies for Energy Efficiency</td>
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<td>IP</td>
<td>Intellectual property</td>
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<td>IPTS</td>
<td>Institute for Prospective Technological Studies</td>
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<td>JRC</td>
<td>Joint Research Centre</td>
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<td>MS</td>
<td>Member State</td>
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<td>NCP</td>
<td>National Contact Point</td>
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<td>OP</td>
<td>Operational Programme</td>
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<td>OPC</td>
<td>Operational Programme &quot;Development of the Competitiveness of the Bulgarian Economy&quot; 2007-2013</td>
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<td>OPIC</td>
<td>Operational Programme &quot;Innovation and Competitiveness&quot; 2014-2020</td>
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<td>OPSEIG</td>
<td>Operational Programme &quot;Science and Education for Intelligent Growth&quot; 2014-2020</td>
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<tr>
<td>R&amp;D</td>
<td>Research and Development</td>
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<td>R&amp;D&amp;I</td>
<td>Research, Development and Innovation</td>
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<td>R&amp;I</td>
<td>Research and Innovation</td>
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<tr>
<td>RIS3</td>
<td>Regional Innovation Strategy for Smart Specialization</td>
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<td>SF</td>
<td>Structural Funds 2007-2013</td>
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<td>SMEs</td>
<td>Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises</td>
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<td>S2E</td>
<td>Stairway to Excellence Project</td>
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ANNEX I. DETAILED PROJECT INFORMATION

PROJECT TITLE: Establishment and sustainable development of the Technology Transfer Office “Information and Communication Technologies for Energy Efficiency (ICTEE)

Weblink: http://www.gis-tc.org/centers
Beneficiary: IICT
Type of institution: PRO
Budget:
  Total Investment: 182 622 euro
  EU contribution: 123 770 euro
Other contributors: NA
SF/ESIF funding instrument: OP Competitiveness, Priority Axis 1, BG161PO003-1.2.02 "Support for new and strengthening the existing technology transfer offices"

Time frame of the project: 24 months

Main project objectives:
Creating and developing sustainably TTO in the IICT at BAS

Specific goals (expected output)
- number of organizations using the services of the TTO
- number of seminars, conferences and other events
- ensured infrastructure and facilities for the functioning of the TTO
- analysis, marketing strategy, forecasts
- number of supported projects
- research activities
- stimulated investment and employment

Collaborative work within the project
The result of the project is the improved collaboration between enterprises and PRO (including take up of public sector research results).

Type of costs covered:
- research infrastructure and facilities;
- consumables;
- networking, events, seminars and working meetings;
- analyses and forecasts;
- dissemination, marketing activities, including marketing strategy;
- research activities (prototyping).

Main Results
Established and functioning TTO which is well-known and part of TTO network. The TTO already performs tasks, assigned by enterprises, supports collaborative projects (business - PRO) and is able to assist with patents and IPR.

Difficulties encountered at the stage of drafting the proposal
Two main types of difficulties were encountered:
- Flexible criteria and rules that frequently changed (sometimes even during the opening of the call). The changes in the legal basis and administrative structures and staff were
frequent. The MA attempted to reduce the impact on beneficiaries, but it was not always possible.

- The time from the start of the programming period to the first relevant call. Waiting for a call to be launched until midst of the programming period seemed inappropriate.

Concerns regarding the evaluation
Even though the evaluation criteria were seen as unproblematic overall, the delays in issuing the results led to doubts concerning transparency. The feedback for both accepted and rejected projects was very scarce.

Difficulties during the implementation of the project
The administrative workload is estimated as serious enough to even justify internal reorganization of resources. There were frequent changes in the regulations and the overall legislative framework, as well as in the specific acts and procedures guiding project implementation. The complexity of the national framework and its modifications made it hard for the beneficiary to manage the project according to plans.

Facilitating mechanisms during the draft proposal/ implementation
The strengths of the draft proposal which facilitated its approval related to the clear correspondence with the call, as well as the provision of a full package of activities that mutually support each other. What could have assisted at the stage of implementation was a level of flexibility to allow the project management to adapt to the changing environment and the project funding to fit more adequately to the arising needs.

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NAME OF THE FP PROJECT 1: Advanced Computing for Innovation (AComIn)

Weblink: http://www.iict.bas.bg/acomin/
Beneficiary: IICT
Type of institution: PRO
Budget: 3 594 288 euro (EU contribution: 3 219 478 euro)

FP funding instrument
- Funding scheme: CSA-SA - Support actions
- Subprogram: REGPOT-2012-2013-1 - Any research topic covered by the EU FP7
- Call for proposal: FP7-REGPOT-2012-2013-1

Time frame of the project: 42 months (36 months and 6 months external evaluation)

Main project objectives
- Gaining scientific reputation
- Brain gain
- Smart Lab and training of users
- Knowledge transfer
- International collaboration

Specific goals (expected output)
- Strengthening the IICT Human Potential
- Purchase of modern equipment for setting up a Smart Periphery Lab
- Organization and Training of User Communities
- Networking
- Building an IICT Innovation Strategy and development of innovation potential and IPR management skills
- Organization of various dissemination activities
- Evaluation of IICT by international EC-selected reviewers

Collaborative work within the project
The IICT is involved in international evaluation.

Type of costs covered:
- research infrastructure and facilities;
- consumables;
- short-term training;
- networking and dissemination activities;
- 7 three-year positions for post-docs (3 – for Bulgarians and 4 – for foreigners).

Main Results
The main results to be achieved relate to international exchange of know-how, organized international conferences, workshops and lectures, possible reintegration of experienced scientists, post-doctoral researchers from abroad, ISI publications and patent applications submitted to BPO and EPO.

Difficulties encountered at the stage of proposal drafting
The main difficulties related to the amount of paper work, which was viewed as complex, but certainly worthwhile the dedicated efforts. The application rules and eligibility criteria were seen as
clear and logical without inappropriate opening of the calls (e.g. during holiday period). The time to prepare suited the participant. The process was evaluated as effective overall.

**Concerns regarding the evaluation**
In practice, there were no serious concerns regarding evaluation, including with respect to evaluation criteria, transparency of the procedure and the quality of evaluators work. The difficulty that could be mentioned came from the inherited disadvantages compared to EU15 performers. EU13 often suffer from fragmentation, chronic R&D underfunding and disconnection from the rest of international research. Yet, the call (FP7 REGPOT) was specifically designed to assist potential applicants in overcoming the inherited systematic obstacles. Disconnection could have been a fact, if such measures had not been taken.

**Difficulties during the implementation of the work**
Two kinds of difficulties existed concerning implementation. Firstly, there is no external support (even at the level of simple advice) for dealing with administrative issues, which generated high workload on IICT staff, including the research staff. Secondly, certain barriers still could not be removed (unrelated to research) to attract foreign PhD/post-doc researchers. The salaries, payments and fee rates are very low in Bulgaria, which is additionally aggravated by the difficulties in scientific career development.

**Facilitating mechanisms during the draft proposal/ project implementation**
Drafting of the proposal was performed by IICT itself, without any external help (given no ministry/office offers assistance and no financial support is provided). The project implementation is considered as ‘normal’, without further need to modify procedures, the only issues remaining motivation (esp. financial) for attracting foreign talent and expertise.

**Other push – pull factors that may affect the R&I performers in applying/ being successful in FP calls**
In the case of IICT the FP opportunity could not compete with SF funding. Rather, there were ways to complement activities as it was eventually decided. Given the experience of the institute with other partnerships, awareness was not an issue as well as project management itself. However, the overall environment could have been more conducing to R&I work, including level of NCP support and the research base.

**Which were the strengths of the proposal to become successful?**
The strengths that out-ranked the proposal were appropriateness to the procedure and all-encompassing character. The key to success of course were the potential excellent results and the strong international reputation of the institution. Within the project itself, willingness to use international review was emphasized.

**Suggestions to policy makers to facilitate the participation of national R&I performers in H2020**
- Support for proposal drafting
- Financial stimuli for participation
- Financing of reserve lists
- Priority support for follow-up activities of FP successful projects
- Dissemination of results

**Advise to R&I performers willing to apply**
Have long-term goals and overall vision!
Partners

- Prof. Asen Asenov - Gold Standard Simulations Ltd. & University of Glasgow, Device Modelling Group
- Prof. Oleg Iliev - Department of Flow and Material Simulation at the Fraunhofer Institute for Industrial Mathematics (ITWM)- Kaiserslautern
- Prof. Johannes Kraus - Department of Mathematics, University of Duisburg-Essen
- Prof. John Domingue - STI International
- Prof. Virginio Cantoni - Computer Vision & Multimedia Lab CVML, University of Pavia
- Prof. Ivan Kalaykov - Centre for Applied Autonomous Sensor Systems, School of Science and Technology, Örebro University
- Prof. Markos Papageorgiou - Dynamic Systems and Simulation Laboratory, Department of Production Engineering and Management, TU Crete
- Joint Innovation Centre, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences.

Contact

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NAME OF THE FP PROJECT 2: Empowering Young Explorers

Weblink: https://www.fet-eye.eu/
Beneficiary: TECHNISCHE UNIVERSITEIT DELFT, Netherlands as Coordinator and 10 other partners
Type of institution: HEI (HEI, SME and PRO partners)
Budget: 1 337 150 euro (EU contribution: 1 152 960 euro)

FP funding instrument
- Funding scheme: CSA - Coordination and support actions
- Subprogram: ICT-2013.9.1 - Challenging current Thinking
- Call for proposal: FP7-ICT-2013-C

Time frame: 24 months

Main project objectives
- Training and networking
- High risk FET-quality multi/interdisciplinary research
- International collaboration
- Future projects

Specific goals (expected output)
EYE develops (a) S&T ideas of higher risk nature that can be generated through ideation and brainstorming; (b) collaboration between YRs across various disciplines and from different parts of Europe; and (c) young researchers themselves, by supporting their leadership potential through networking and training in the specific methods used in European collaborative projects.

EYE activities are supported with an online platform (NOVA-Networking for Outstanding Visionaries & Academics) which serves as an operational tool to prepare the events and as a professional platform for ideation, networking, collaboration and discussion.

Collaborative work within the project
EYE will achieve its goal by implementing an integrated programme of complementary regional and European events:
- "Lab Surfing" workshops in 6 regions of Europe;
- Europe-wide "Blue Sky" Conferences for YRs in 38 countries in Europe;
- "Science Incubator" International Summer Schools (2 rounds over 2 years).

Type of costs covered:
- international workshops and conferences;
- online platform;
- short-term training and project preparation support;
- summer schools.

Main Results
- Six regional Lab Surfing workshops - Brussels, Bratislava, Belgrade, Thessaloniki, Milan and Gothenburg
- Blue Sky Conference 2014
- Science Incubator summer school
- new project proposals to be presented for participation in Horizon 2020 and/or other relevant national funding schemes
- NOVA (Networking for Outstanding Visionaries & Academics) online platform
Difficulties encountered at the stage of proposal drafting
The complexity only stems from coordinating 11 project participants. The efficiency of the Coordinator is decisive in such cases.

Concerns regarding the evaluation
Evaluation has not raised issues. The project architecture combines the experience of EU12 representing countries and Serbia and EU15 countries, so that performance disadvantages could be compensated. Of course, additional evaluation feedback is always useful and serving as motivational factor for self-improvement and future projects.

Difficulties during the implementation of the work
It is especially inspiring for all project managers to work with young people in the field of science and technology. When activities are straightforward, the implementation runs without major complains.

Facilitating mechanisms during the draft proposal/ project implementation
Although in Bulgaria there were no mechanisms to support drafting of project proposals, there were such in the Netherlands (i.e. support in the preparatory stage and with specialized units in the HEI), which were effectively used.

Other push – pull factors that may affect the R&I performers in applying/ being successful in FP calls
The issue of deficit of qualified professionals/research project managers in EU12 is to some extent compensated within the project, given it included YRs project training and direct support for future projects.

Which were the strengths of the proposal to become successful?
The success factor is its truly international character and the ‘eye’ for high-risk and break-through potential.

Suggestions to policy makers to facilitate the participation of national R&I performers in H2020
Financial support for participation should not be underestimated.

Advise to R&I performers willing to apply
The most difficult but most rewarding element is finding and relying upon excellent partners.

Contact
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