

Summary of the Workshop on Research and Innovation in the EUSAIR - The Role of Innovation Ecosystems and Smart Specialisation

3rd FORUM OF THE EU STRATEGY FOR THE ADRIATIC IONIAN REGION

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The Workshop on "Research and Innovation in the EUSAIR - The Role of Innovation Ecosystems and Smart Specialisation" has discussed how to promote Research and Innovation (R&I), a crosscutting issue in the EUSAIR Action plan, in the Adriatic-Ionian region.

The session started providing an overall overview of the process of definition of Smart Specialisation Strategies (S3) in Europe and the variety of Innovation Eco-systems at EU level, with a specific focus on S3 in the EUSAIR macro-region.

The first panel has discussed how to reinforce innovation Capacities and Ecosystems through funding synergies within the framework of S3, stressing the complementarity of EUSAIR with other macro-regional diplomatic, economic and scientific initiatives and processes, especially the scientific research multilateral cooperation activities in the area. A specific focus was centred on the case of Trieste system and the role of science parks as creators of value and developers of innovation ecosystems. The panel has presented some financing opportunities for intensifying the cooperation between researchers from the EU and Western Balkans in order to slow down brain drain and facilitate the technological transfer in the region (WBRF) and to develop innovative solutions in food productions and water provision in the Mediterranean Area (ITA4PRIMA Programme). In front of significant disparities in R&I performance in the Adriatic-Ionian region, the panel has highlighted the possible contribution of the Widening actions under the Spreading Excellence and Widening the Participation part of Horizon 2020 as a financing source to fund EUSAIR-related activities and to support R&I investments in the area. A specific focus has been given to the Vanguard Initiative, an interregional bottom-up network focusing on market uptake of innovative technologies promoting the cooperation between innovation ecosystems: regional authorities, clusters, business, knowledge institutes.

The panel has recommended to increase the support of well performing R&I ecosystems considering all forms of innovation and to design and implement R&I policies based on a multiannual approach and on S3s. In order to create the right framework conditions for business R&I investments along macro-regional value chains the panel calls for: (i) multilevel funding synergies (allocating adequate and predictable public investments); (ii) building innovation capacities, widening policies; (iii) innovative procurement (demand-side innovation policies), (iv) the promotion of public-private partnerships to leverage research results.

The second panel of the event has presented the experience of and good practices from regional Clusters and Research Systems. A specific focus was centred on regional Maritime Blue Growth clusters -in particular the Blue Italian Growth Cluster. In front of several initiatives and clusters in the region, the session has discussed the opportunity to establish a Waterborne Adriatic Ionian Technology Platform in order to increase the competitiveness of the Adriatic-Ionian maritime sectors by enhancing its innovativeness and networking attitude and to set up a cluster-of-clusters to be the framework to share visions and implement common programmes. The session has also presented the Interreg-ADRION OIS-AIR project which is working to establish an Open Innovation System of the Adriatic-Ionian Region to unlock the innovation potential and competitiveness of

the region assisting the creation of innovation networks beyond borders, stimulating SMEs access to research infrastructures, valorising research results and establish durable links and synergies between enterprises. The session stressed that the elaboration of a Pilot Macro-regional S3 along with the development of trans-regional value chains could provide useful insights on the untapped opportunities of the EUSAIR R&I system and contribute to the definition of the next macro-regional strategies. The session has also discussed how to promote universities research and education contribution to the Strategy taking into account the declaration of Trieste on interuniversity cooperation within the Berlin process) the interuniversity cooperation within the Berlin process.

The panel has stressed the importance of strong clusters, networks of universities, science and technology parks and RTOs. In this view, Open Innovation is a tool for collaboration and integration of Macro regional R&I actors and an analysis of Trans regional value chains could lead to a Pilot Macro regional S3.

The third panel discussed how to boost public-private Investments maximising the impact of existing European opportunities. The role of EU funding for the promotion of R&I has been stressed, highlighting also the opportunities European Investment Bank (EIB) and European Fund for Strategic Investments (EFSI). Non-traditional sources of funding have also been discussed with a specific reference to the Role of Business Angels and Clusters for supporting Start-ups in the EUSAIR Macro region. Angel Investors in Europe grow continuously but are still scarce in the Mediterranean and Adriatic-Ionian countries. The session presented some initiatives, as the Adriana project, and possible incentives, as national/EU funding programmes or Tax-relieves, to create and strengthen Business Angels Networks (BANs). A specific focus was given to Blue Culture Technologies Cluster, a bottom-up initiative that aims to support the development of Start-ups and SMEs in the field of Underwater Technologies, a specific, non-mainstream, R&I area. The session has presented the EFSI-European Fund for Strategic Investments, an initiative launched by the EIB and the Commission to mobilize private investment and overcome an investment gap. The panel has also discussed EIB Decentralised Financial Instruments (DFIs), an innovative way of employing EU and other public funds in a revolving manner, experience that has demonstrated positive impacts in terms of efficiency, bankability, Leverage and financial sustainability of projects.

The workshop summary and conclusions are published at the event website above.