



SUMMARY REPORT FINAL EVENT

RIS3 in Eastern Macedonia and Thrace



18 November, 2015

REMTh Final Event,
Museum of Natural History, Brussels Belgium

OVERVIEW

The final event of the European Parliament Preparatory Action carried out by JRC-IPTS, in collaboration with DG REGIO, to support the refinement and implementation of the RIS3 of the Greek region of Eastern Macedonia and Thrace (REMTh), successfully took place at the Museum of Natural History in Brussels on Wednesday 18 November 2015.

High-level participants included the Governor of the Region, the Deputy Minister of Economy and Development of Greece, two MEPs, European Commission Directors and Heads of Unit, and various regional and national stakeholders from Greece. The event looked back at the achievements and impacts of this preparatory action and at the implications for future work in REMTh and other lagging regions across Europe.

INTRODUCTION

The introductory panel was composed of Charlina Vitcheva, Director, DG REGIO.G - Smart and Sustainable Growth and Southern Europe, Markus Pieper, Member of European Parliament, Alessandro Rainoldi, Head of Unit, Joint Research Centre of the European Commission, Knowledge for Growth Unit, and George Pavlides, Regional Governor of Eastern Macedonia and Thrace. The opening remarks all set a positive tone, emphasising the achievements of the preparatory action in the region, as well as the strong potential for further work.

There had been some uncertainty at the inception of the preparatory action, but the subsequent sustained engagement and motivation of the stakeholders in the region, particularly the Managing Authority, were key elements of its eventual success. The preparatory action had built trust, fostered collaboration and strengthened both technical and administrative capacities in the region. It had enhanced understanding among all participants of the realities of RIS3, shifting from conceptual perspectives to hands-on implementation.

Mark Boden, Project Leader of this Preparatory Action, gave an overview of the project and presented its main objectives, outcomes, impacts, barriers and challenges encountered.

Its primary aims were to support refinement & implementation of RIS3 of REMTh and to generate lessons/a model for other regions. Its main impacts and outcomes were:

- building trust;
- co-developing and sustaining stakeholder commitment;
- spanning boundaries between stakeholder communities;
- fostering participatory capacity building and learning;
- and also a number of concrete projects, ideas and partnerships.

Following this introductory session and overview of the project, three consecutive expert panel sessions reviewed the issues arising.

IMPLEMENTING THE RIS3 UNDER UNCERTAINTY

The **first Panel Discussion**, "implementing the RIS3 under uncertainty," was moderated by Elisabetta Marinelli. The panel members were: Panagiotis Koudoumakis (REMTh Special Managing Authority for the Regional Operational Programme), Evita Agalianou (DG REGIO – Greece and Cyprus), Antonio Viader (Senior Innovation and Growth Advisor and Board of Critical Friends), Theodora Kouloura (Hellenic Fertilizers – ELFE), Ioannis Firbas (Director General - National Coordination Authority for ESIF) and Ioannis Kourkoutas, Democritus University of Thrace

Participants were asked to answer both general and specific individual questions (*What do you take home, in your professional capacity, from the activities of the Preparatory Action? What did it achieve and what should it have achieved?*). A number of important issues arose:

- the significance of having a strong and appropriate governance mechanism in the region.
- the development of a toolbox for the implementation of RIS3 in REMTh, which helps translate theory into practice, particularly in a region with less innovation experience.
- trust-building among participants, which was further emphasised as one of the key success factors of this preparatory action, particularly in enhancing collaboration opportunities.
- state aid which was identified as a key issue by several panellists, especially the need for clarity in the use of funding instruments.

RIS3 IN LAGGING REGIONS – LESSONS FOR THE FUTURE

The **second Panel Discussion** was chaired by Karel Haegeman. The panel comprised Vassilis Pitsinikos (REMTh Special Managing Authority for the Regional Operational Programme), Magdalene Haberle (Ministry of Finance and Economics Baden-Württemberg and member of the Board of Critical Friends), Roberta Dall'Olio (ERVET Emilia Romagna), Marek Przeor (DG REGIO, Competence Centre), and Stelios Kakoulidis(Thrace Group Ltd.).

As in the first session, participants were each asked both general and specific questions (*Considering that the preparatory action also aimed to develop a model for RIS3 implementation for other lagging regions, what do you see as the most important lesson that is relevant to other lagging regions?*). The main lessons cited by the panellists reaffirmed those of the previous panel and included:

- the importance of a RIS3 toolbox available for other regions, not only less developed ones (for instance, governance and adaptation mechanisms).
- trust building, addressing social aspects. The bottom-up approach to drive the design and implementation of a RIS3 can be seen as a booster of mutual trust between stakeholders.

- the crucial role of entrepreneurs, particularly since the ultimate objective is to create sustainable jobs, based on local knowledge and skills (RIS3 to deliver for the welfare of the community). Research Centres and Universities should be partially driven by business needs.
- emphasis by panellists on the active role of the critical friends, especially for mutual learning, with regional stakeholders and representatives and experts external to the region.
- simplification of legal aspects of different organisations that manage funds, which was identified as a common issue that still remains to be tackled.

CONCLUSIONS

The **concluding panel** was chaired by Alessandro Rainoldi, and included Alexis Charitsis, Deputy Minister of Economy and Development of Greece, George Pavlides, Regional Governor of Eastern Macedonia and Thrace, Sabine Bourdy (DG REGIO Greece and Cyprus) and Colin Wolfe, Head of Unit of DG REGIO Competence Centre.

The concluding panel reiterated the strong consensus that the Preparatory action had a highly positive outcome.

However, it is clear that the changes engendered by the preparatory action need to be sustained over the longer term, through an ongoing Entrepreneurial Process of Discovery (EDP) and the launch and follow up of fruitful concrete projects.

To support this, further administrative and legal clarification and review are still required. Inter alia, the complexities of state aid and structural funds need to be fully addressed. The role and engagement of entrepreneurs also need to be further strengthened and maintained.

It was highlighted that S3 is also a tool for peripheral and lagging regions, facing economic uncertainty. RIS3 is not merely an ex-ante conditionality but also a smart strategy to address societal issues and business growth.

Alessandro Rainoldi officially closed the event thanking all participants for a very fruitful exchange of ideas.