

RIS3 PEER REVIEW SUMMARY REPORT

Eastern Macedonia and
Thrace



12-13th February,
2015

Peer Review Workshop, Alexandroupolis,
Greece

OVERVIEW

The Peer Review of the region of Eastern Macedonia and Thrace was held in the city of Alexandroupolis on the 12th and 13th of February 2015. This was the first smart specialisation peer review event to focus exclusively on one region.

With peers and experts coming from regions across Europe, as well as representatives from the Greek General Secretariat for Research & Technology and the National Coordination Authority for the NSRF, an in-depth examination of issues central to the successful implementation of the RIS3 of Eastern Macedonia and Thrace took place.

The event centred on a moderated parallel discussion approach, designed to ensure detailed examination of five core themes selected by the region:

- the RIS3 governance mechanism in the region;
- the development of action plans for the implementation of RIS3;
- human resources mobility and training needs;
- monitoring and evaluation; and state aid rules and
- legislation opportunities and restrictions.

Rapporteurs were appointed for each parallel session and provided summaries in the subsequent plenary sessions.

The second day of the event was opened by Markus Pieper, the MEP behind the launch of the Preparatory Action together with George Pavlides, Governor of the Region.

PARALLEL SESSIONS

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- Tables A1 & A2
 - RIS3 governance mechanism in the region;
 - Monitoring and evaluation;
- Tables B1 & B2
 - Development of action plans for the implementation of RIS3;
 - State aid rules and legislation opportunities and restrictions.
- Table C (two sessions)
 - Mobility of researchers and high-skilled and training needs;

In each of these five sessions, a representative of the region managing authority presented in detail the key issues that needed to be explored. International experts were invited to participate to the parallel discussion most suited to their profile, maximising the benefits of the debate. A representative from IPTS chaired each table discussion and rapporteurs were appointed to provide summaries in the subsequent plenary sessions. Below we report the key points emerged from the parallel session.

Tables A1 & A2

Parallel session A1 focused on the governance of RIS3 implementation. Following a presentation of the proposed governance system by the regional authority, the various peers and experts from regions across Europe offered useful perspectives on the three-tiered approach to governance based on coordination, management and implementation. Particularly relevant, in this respect, were the linkages between national and regional governance.

The discussion explored the proposal to establish “knowledge and innovation communities” to facilitate bottom-up engagement, and the consequent requirements for awareness raising, training and enhancements to the cooperative culture. The parallel session also commented on the working group on governance, which will be set up under the preparatory action.

Parallel session A2 focused on Monitoring and Evaluation. The region set out their proposals and the ensuing discussion examined both the choice and design of the type of indicators to be used and the setting of appropriate (and significantly ambitious) target values. The participants to the table acknowledged that this is one of the most difficult topics for everyone to address.

Tables B1 & B2

The second stream of two parallel sessions (sessions B1 and B2) were related to RIS3 implementation and State aid rules. In session B1, the peers and experts gave a lot of practical input in reply to eight questions prepared by the Managing Authority. Questions related to methodological issues for implementation (What does exactly an action plan include? How to proceed into concrete action plans?), to the right level of granularity in identifying priority areas (and selection criteria for selecting areas) as well as reducing related risks (such as risks related to possible future declining growth rates in selected areas, risk of overspecialisation, etc...), and design issues of calls for proposals (such as project selection criteria and the 'right' level of granularity of call topics). During the discussions, various practical examples from the thematic EDP focus groups were used to clarify the questions. Participants highlighted that “business interest” should be one of the criteria for selecting both projects and priorities, in order to guarantee proper take up and participation in the RIS3 implementation. As for the sustained development of EDP, it was suggested that once an area of interest to a large number of stakeholders is identified, one should ensure that the private sector is able to lead organically the entrepreneurial discovery process, allowing space to experiment flexibly with ideas as well as with different stakeholders. For the same flexibility reason, topics for calls for proposals should not be formulated too specifically. Participants also discussed the need for external partners for S3 priorities success. From within the region it is preferable that a temporary institution outside of the regional authority is tasked with promoting funding opportunities related to smart specialisation. From outside, EMT should try to ‘win allies’ within Greece but also in the rest of the European Union, to do business with and align priorities, because the relatively small region may not be able to acquire the necessary critical mass to compete globally.

In session B2, seven questions were prepared by the Managing Authority and discussed with peers, especially with members of the state aid unit at GSRT and DG COMP, but also some Greek regions. Technical questions were related to the implementation of the new framework (Commission Regulation (EU) No.651/2014 of 17 June 2014 declaring certain categories of the aid with the internal market in application of Article 107 and 108 f the Treaty) in the region, especially on eligible costs, schemes applicable to research and innovation projects of SMEs, state aid regulations regarding collaborative innovation formations (clusters) and aid for process and organizational innovation. During the discussions, DG COMP and national experts on state aid clarified the applicable legislation.

Table C

The working table on human resources mobility (C) included representatives from the local higher education sector (researchers and managers from the Universities and Technical institute) as well as international representatives from the Marie Curie Fellows Association, the Cambridge University International Office, Tecnalía (a research centre in the and the University of Porto).

An ad-hoc working group on international and intersectoral mobility of human resources and their training needs will be set up within the preparatory action and this table served to kick-off this discussion. The table agreed that the region should adopt a pragmatic approach to the issue of mobility. This implies, for instance, to start from options/ideas that are relatively easy to tackle, such as short-terms and informal exchanges across scientific institutions which would have a very low costs (for instance, engaging with international scholars for PhD supervisions of local students, embedding international visits in research projects). The table pointed out that networking and short-term mobility are a key pre-condition to achieve a sustained inflow of international scholars willing to come up for a longer time frame.

The issue of intersectoral mobility was also deemed critical for the region. The table discussed of different mechanisms that could be useful in allowing the research and business sector to engage with each other. These include traditional instruments (such as student placements) or more innovative ones (such as "student contests" to solve a problem raised by a given firm). It was stressed by different participants that efforts should focus on identifying measures that could offer real and concrete support to firms.

For both inter-sectoral and inter-national mobility, it was highlighted that different training and research needs should be taken into account in order to support different segments of the population (i.e. undergraduate students, PhDs, Post-docs, as well as firms employees who may benefit from ad-hoc training offered by universities.).

Whilst much of the conversation focussed on the higher education sector, Mr Markus Pieper, raised the issue of mobility and needs in relation to vocational training which is an aspect that would also benefit significantly from a good cooperation between the public and private sector.

FOLLOW-UP

A detailed feedback report on the outcomes of the peer review is being prepared in collaboration with the rapporteurs.