



SEE IFA Network

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01 | **Project summary**

The SEE-IFA network is a network of South East European national and regional innovation & finance agencies (IFAs), authorities and universities, which collaborate within an EU-funded project. Lead-managed by Austria-based awis, it unites eleven partner organisations from ten SEE countries, joining forces to strengthen the capacity of IFA project partners to effectively provide innovation and technology support to micro, small and medium sized enterprises (MSMEs). The project has a budget of EUR 2.7 million and will be implemented between March 2009 and December 2011.

02 | **Project Progress in the second Reporting Period**

Contracting

After considerable delays due to administrative reasons, the IPA Grant Contract between the partner organization and the EC delegation of FYROM (Macedonia) was finally concluded in December 2009. However, budget cuts by approx. 25% had to be accepted.

Reporting

On the basis of the Application for Reimbursement submitted in December 2009 along with the Progress Report, the transfer of ERDF funds related to the first period was remitted in May 2010. However, due to complications concerning the setup of national control structures, reimbursement of expenditures of most project partners had to be postponed to the second reporting period.

Website

The website www.see-ifa.eu has gone online in March 2010. It has also got an intranet section where project partners can upload / download project related materials or documents.

Needs and Gaps Analysis: Country Studies and Synthesis completed

Country Studies on national innovation support systems as well as good practice models were carried out for 14 SEE countries – all partner countries as well as Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Montenegro and Slovakia. A synthesis has been drafted, revealing important aspects related to innovation and finance in this region. In brief, a coordinated cooperation and complementarities between institutions involved in research, development and innovation and companies could be observed. In the participating countries, the education system (in particular at university level) and cooperation between the academic sector or other knowledge providers and companies were one of the investigated topics. However, a lack of business culture based on innovation, limited numbers of available mechanisms for supporting SMEs during difficult times and absence of risk-capital were identified as the major weaknesses. Whereas green economy (eco-innovation) and the availability of highly skilled scientists at low cost can be considered opportunities, a decrease of public support for innovation, copyrights and IPR were regarded as major threats.

Development of instruments to support innovation & technology in SMEs: Analysis completed

Some preliminary results were already obtained based on an assessment grid, which has been filled in by each partner and assessed by Finlombarda. It is aimed at evaluating existing good practice instruments and matching them with the needs of the partner countries. It was concluded that there is a general need for support instruments for developed SMEs providing access to finance for innovative technology, product and services. The fostering of networks between SMEs and research institutions was also deemed important. Typically, support addressed to SMEs is provided as grants, guarantees and loans whereas equity support is not a commonly utilized form, because it involves more risk and is more complex to handle.

SEE Cross border Patent and License Fund: Demand Analysis completed

A Demand analysis for the Fund is already available for all participating countries. Based on desktop research and expert interviews performed in each country, it contains a comprehensive analysis on Intellectual Property-related needs in South East Europe.

Setting up new IFAs- External Expert selected: One or more feasibility studies will be prepared to assist at least one IPA country to establish a new Innovation and Finance Agency (IFA). This work will be done by Veneto Innovazione, an expert selected by Regione Veneto, with the mission to promote innovation and research in the region. One of the starting points for the feasibility studies is the outcome of the Synthesis of Country Studies.

Capacity building: All training activities focus on enhancing personnel capacity in new or young IFAs, based on a detailed training concept. The Intensive Training Course on Patent and Licence Management, which was held in Vienna from 5th to 7th May 2010, was aimed at providing the theoretical background for the implementation of a crossborder patent and license fund. Moreover, the first Train-the-Trainer-Training (TTT) was carried out in Skopje from 7th to 11th June 2010. From 21st to 25th June 2010, a study visit on financial support institutions and instruments for innovative SMES will be carried out in Vienna. It targets mainly IFA managers and their stakeholders from IPA countries and will include a tour to regional support organisations and other stakeholder institutions in Austria. The first internship will start in July 2010 and will involve the Croatian partner institution AZRA, who will send an employee for an 8 months-internship to AWS in Vienna.

03 | Events

Partner Meetings

Steering Group Meeting, Bucharest

On 24th November 2009, the Steering Group, consisting of all Work Package Leaders and IPA country observers, gathered in Bucharest and assessed the project implementation status which was considered satisfactory.

Thematic Seminar, Bucharest

On 25th November 2009, all partners met in Bucharest for the First Thematic Seminar. During this Seminar, each Work Package was assessed, but the focus was on Country Studies performed by each organization, based on the template developed by AMCSIT (RO).

Technical meeting, Budapest

The aim of the meeting on 16th February 2010 was to present project participants the outcome of the Needs and Gaps Analysis and to get ready for the subsequent work packages.

Technical meeting, Venice

The aim of this technical meeting on 16th April 2010 was to wrap up information obtained by the Work Package Leader for the development of support instruments (Finlombarda, IT), based on a previously developed grid. Also, the ground was prepared for the first steps towards the setup of a new IFA.

Local Support Group (LSG) Meetings

LSG meetings were held by the project partners in Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Romania and Serbia before the Thematic Seminar in Bucharest. The LSG meeting held in Bucharest on 9th September 2009 involved representatives of the Romanian Electro technical Committee, Romanian Patent Office, ROMET S.A. (Buzau), ICPE Actel S.A. and IPA CIFAT S.A.

04 | Next steps

The next steps include the realisation of Feasibility Studies for the development of new instruments, new IFAs, and the implementation of a cross border patent fund. In the area of capacity building, the internship programme will start and the study visits to Austria and Italy will be carried out or prepared.

Next meetings and Events:

Study visit Austria

21st -25th June, Vienna

Steering Group Meeting

29th June 2010, Milan

Thematic Seminar 2

30th June 2010, Milan

05 | Contact information

Andrea Waclik

austria wirtschaftsservice
Ungargasse 37 | 1030 Vienna
Phone +43 1 50175 – 530
Fax +43 1 50175 – 900
a.waclik@awsg.at

