



SEE IFA Network

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01 | Project background

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 aws, 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 is being implemented between March 2009 and December 2011.

02 | Project Progress

Reporting

On the basis of the second Application for Reimbursement submitted in June 2010 along with the Progress Report, the second transfer of ERDF funds was remitted in September 2010. However, as control systems are still working slowly in some countries, several partners can expect their first reimbursement of ERDF funds only in the first quarter of 2011.

Website

The website www.see-ifa.eu has gone online in March 2010. The webpage is continuously updated and the intranet section is used frequently by the partners to share project relevant information. An increasing number of host names who visited our website each month, demonstrated that the visibility of SEE-IFA NETWORK is increasing.

Development of instruments to support innovation – Prefeasibility studies in progress

Based on the matching of country needs with good practice instruments, each partner country (except AT and IT) was proposed a choice of suitable instruments for innovation finance and

support for SMEs. After discussing the options and possibilities with their respective stakeholders, all partners selected the instrument that was considered most suitable for their region. In close collaboration with the partners, Finlombarda is currently carrying out prefeasibility studies for each country in order to assess in more detail the conditions and requirements of implementing the selected tools. The main selected instruments were a Seed Fund to provide loans for companies in their early stages and an Innovation Support programme combining grants and credit guarantees for existing SMEs. In some cases, preliminary results of the prefeasibility study showed some adjustments in order to create an optimal fit with the local needs and realities.

Cross border Patent and License Fund – Feasibility Study finalized

A feasibility study investigating the possibilities of implementing a cross border patent and license fund in the SEE region was finalized in October 2010. It offers a detailed analysis of existing patent fund models and incorporates the results of the cross-country demand analysis on intellectual property-related needs in SEE. On that basis, a suitable model for a cross border patent fund for the SEE region was developed. A number of international IP and patent fund experts were involved in the elaboration of the study. The patent and license fund was also the main topic at the Thematic Seminar held in Vienna in November 2010. The next steps will involve the search for potential investors and the assessment of funding possibilities. After official approval by the involved institutions, the study will be published on the SEE IFA website.

Setting up new “IFAs” – Needs Assessment completed

A needs assessment for setting up a new innovation and finance agency (“IFA”) was carried out in all three IPA partner countries (Croatia, FYROM, Serbia). For this purpose, stakeholder meetings and interviews were conducted in Varazdin (HR), Skopje (FYROM) and Belgrade (RS), in order to discuss the needs and possibilities and get an understanding of the local economic, legal and institutional conditions and relevant actors. Taking into account the results of the needs assessment, the concrete options will be screened and a detailed action plan for the implementation of the new IFA will be elaborated.

Capacity building - Trainings realized

From 4th - 8th October 2010, a study visit to Italy for IFA managers and their stakeholders from IPA countries and New Member states was organized. It offered concrete insights into financial support institutions and instruments for innovative SMEs in the Lombardy and Veneto Regions.

The second Train-the-Trainer-Training (TTT) was carried out in Zrenjanin (Serbia) from 18th - 22nd October 2010. It was targeted at local stakeholders who act as multipliers of a strengthened local innovation system. The third and final TTT will be realized in Varazdin (Croatia) in spring 2011.

Internships for two employees from Croatian and Serbian partner and stakeholder organizations have started in aws. During these 6-8 months’ exchange schemes, both trainees will get to know aws instruments and programs of innovation support for SMEs, thereby facilitating the transfer of knowhow to their home institutions. A third internship for a trainee from FYROM in aws is planned from summer 2011.

03 | Events

Partner Meetings

Steering Group Meeting and Thematic Seminar in Milan

From 29th-30th June 2010, the biannual Steering Group Meeting and Second Thematic Seminar were held in Milan, organized by Finlombarda for all project partners. Apart from general project management issues, the thematic focus of the meeting was on the country needs assessed with regard to the implementation of new innovation and finance instruments. It could be observed that all partners participated actively in the project activities, despite some remaining difficulties with national first level control systems in some countries.

Technical Meeting in Skopje

From 14th-15th September 2010, a Technical Meeting was organized by UKIM FME in Skopje. At the meeting, the needs and possibilities of implementing a new Innovation Finance Agency (“IFA”) in FYROM were discussed. Several local stakeholders were invited; apart from the involved project partners, the meeting hosted representatives of the Ministry of Education and Science, the Ministry of Economy, the Agency for Promotion of Entrepreneurship (APPRM) as well as innovation experts and consultants.

Technical Meeting in Vienna

On 28th October 2010, a Technical Meeting was held in Vienna, in order to discuss potential funding sources for new innovation finance instruments in the partner countries. Moreover, a presentation on availability and procedures of funding from EU Structural Funds was organized. Finally, funding possibilities for patent funds were looked at.

Steering Group Meeting and Thematic Seminar in Vienna

From 11th - 12th November 2010, the Steering Group Meeting and Third Thematic Seminar took place in Vienna. The main objective was to present and debate the outcome of the feasibility study for the SEE Patent Fund,. All partners were represented at the meeting and concluded that – despite partly differing interests – the study is a good step forward towards establishing the funds.

Technical Meeting in Belgrade

On 2nd December 2010, a Technical Meeting was organized by RDA Banat in Belgrade. It was designed to discuss with the stakeholders the needs and possibilities for setting up a new institution for innovation support in Serbia. Apart from the project partners, representatives of the Ministry of Economy and Regional Development, the Chamber of Commerce, the Intellectual Property Office, the Vojvodina Guarantee Fund and the Vojvodina Development Fund participated in the meeting.

Local Support Group Meetings

Local Round Table discussions were held in Austria, Bulgaria, Greece, Hungary and Slovenia, in order to obtain local stakeholders' input and feedback on the ongoing project activities and to disseminate preliminary results.

04 | Next steps

The next steps include the completion of the prefeasibility studies for instruments, a funding assessment for the patent fund, an action plan for the setup of a new IFA as well as the TTT seminar in Croatia.

Next meetings and Events:

Technical Meeting for Instruments I (Seed Fund)	March 2011, Milan
Technical Meeting for Instruments II (Innovation support Programme)	April 2011, Vienna
Train the Trainer-Seminar in Croatia	April 2011, Varazdin
Steering Group Meeting & 4 th Thematic Seminar 4	April 2011, Venice
Technical Meeting for Instruments III (Metadistretti)	May 2011, Bucharest
Technical Meeting for Planning of Institution	May 2011, Skopje

05 | Contact information

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