



**SEE IFA Network ([www.see-ifa.eu](http://www.see-ifa.eu))**

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*Special edition: Midterm Evaluation*



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### **01 | Project Summary**

The SEE-IFA network is a network of 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 organizations 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 | Evaluation Outline**

#### **Selection of Evaluation Company**

Having reached half-time of the SEE IFA Network project, a midterm project evaluation was assigned by the Lead Partner awis in December 2010. The aim of the evaluation was to provide the project partners with an independent external opinion on project activities and outcomes. Out of a couple of competitive offers, “winnovation” – a Vienna-based consulting company – was selected as the most competitive and competent expert for the realization of the evaluation. winnovation is specialized in innovation management and innovation policy in the EU as well as on national level. The company has experience in assessing innovation projects and works in close collaboration with universities like Copenhagen Business School, Harvard University and MIT. ([www.winnovation.at](http://www.winnovation.at))

#### **Objectives of the Evaluation**

The midterm-evaluation served several purposes:

- Assessment of strengths and weaknesses in terms of project implementation compared with

- the initial planning, organisation and communication between project partners
- Assessment of quality, relevance and progress of activities and identification of deviations from project goals and time schedule
- Already achieved added value for project participants
- Recommendations and need for action in the remaining project period

Financial and budget issues as well as the reporting towards national and international bodies were not part of the midterm evaluation.

### **Evaluation Procedure (Empirical set-up)**

The evaluation was carried out between December 2010 and February 2011. On the one hand, it consisted of an assessment of interim project outputs through the evaluators. These outputs included the Country Study Synthesis Report, a draft of the Prefeasibility Study for the implementation of new instruments in Vojvodina, the Feasibility Study on the Cross border Patent Fund, the Needs Assessment for new institutions as well as the evaluation questionnaires of the trainings carried out so far. On the other hand, semi-structured telephone interviews were conducted with all project partners as well as some stakeholders. On overall, 14 stakeholder interviews could be realized, which resulted in the comparatively high coverage rate of 32%.

## **03 | Key Findings**

### **Added Value for Catching-up Countries**

All project partners stressed that the project provides already some added value for them: It has resulted in more awareness for local needs, new information and know how about innovation issues and an extension of the professional network. Although the benefits were especially clear for catching-up countries in the SEE area, all 11 project partners assured that they would join the project again.

### **Efficient Overall Project Implementation, but Heavy Delays in Some Work Packages**

Overall project implementation was considered efficient and proper. However, some work packages are delayed up to 6-8 months. This can partly be explained by the high diversity of the project partner institutions, procedures, cultures and countries and the consequently high coordination needs. Moreover, difficulties were encountered during the start-up phase in establishing the needed contracts, reporting and control structures in all partner countries. But even with a planned project prolongation by two or three months, this would mean that implementation has to be speeded up considerably. This applies especially to work packages 2 (Communication) and 6 (New Agency), where dissatisfaction with the so far achieved outcome was expressed by some interviewees. Work package leaders and all involved PPs will therefore need to put more efforts into proper implementation.

### **Need for Improved Knowhow-Transfer between Project Partners**

For many of the interviewees, it is not yet clear how to implement new information, instruments and/or structures properly. Not all partners are experienced funding agencies and links with management authorities and funding organisations still need to be established. Some partners expect difficulties in funding and convincing political stakeholders to support implementation and face a lot of uncertainty. The evaluators recommended enhancing chances of a real implementation of project outputs during the remaining project period by intensifying knowledge transfer and communication through the web platform, newsletters and events.

### **Enhanced Stakeholder Inclusion Necessary**

Additionally, the evaluators suggested all project partners creating much stronger stakeholder support through local events and enhanced communication. First, this is highlighted by the fact that out of 66 planned stakeholder meetings (“Local Support Group Meetings”) only 12 were conducted at the time of the midterm evaluation. Second, interviews with local stakeholders showed that stakeholders are often not informed about project goals and potential benefits. If communication and stakeholder commitment can be improved, at the end of the project, SEE countries can finally harness the full potential of the project improving the environment for innovative MSMEs.

## 04 | The Way Ahead – Need for Action

### **Improved External and Internal Communication (WP2)**

*Newsletter with local contributions:* For the future, newsletters shall be used more intensively as a tool to promote dissemination and knowledge sharing between SEE countries. The inclusion of relevant local or regional information provided by project partners and their stakeholders can enhance mutual learning among SEE countries.

*Broaden the use of the website:* The work package-leader and all partners are encouraged to upload more up-to-date information to the general user section or log-in-section of the website. Users (partners, stakeholders) are suggested to share relevant local content and to comment on uploaded documents or events in the log-in-section of the website. This involves materials such as minutes or outputs of stakeholder meetings, networking events, press releases, photos and the like.

*Improve stakeholder inclusion through Local Support Group Meetings:* All partners are advised to intensify stakeholder inclusion on a local and regional level. An intensive stakeholder dialogue is crucial for the overall project outcome: It raises awareness on the local political level, which will finally support the implementation of the outcomes of the SEE IFA network. Also those project partners, who do not plan to implement a new instrument or institution, should hold at least two additional meetings. It is also strongly recommended including more business stakeholders (SME associations, chambers) into the project, as they should represent the final beneficiaries of the project (= innovative MSMEs).

*Dissemination in local languages:* As not all relevant players in the local communities are fluent in English, project partners should translate relevant results of the project into local languages. This will facilitate dissemination and raise the interest of stakeholders. Also some contributions to the Newsletters and the website could be provided in some of the local languages.

### **Boost Chances of Real Implementation of Instruments (WP4)**

Concerning effective implementation and long term use of new instruments, efforts should be made in order to achieve sustainable results. Local meetings should be intensified where instruments are discussed in detail and where experts give guidance for implementation. In order to create a supportive local environment which allows PPs to successfully implement new instruments even after the SEE IFA project is finished, here again stakeholder inclusion should be improved. A “memorandum of understanding” between project partners and responsible stakeholders will increase chances for successful instruments.

### **Simplified Information Material on Crossborder Patent Fund (WP5)**

It was recommended to develop simplified information material about the Patent Fund model. According to the experience of the interviewed partners, some areas are too difficult to explain to stakeholders because it is a new and rather complex tool.

### **Intensified Efforts for the Setup of New Institutions (WP6)**

The massive delays and the small number of interviewed stakeholders and partners, who were able to discuss this work package, should be seen as an indicator that the work package leader and its subcontractor definitely need to put more effort into WP6 in order to ensure progress and required outputs. This involves also intensified communication between the work package leader and project partners during the remaining period. Moreover, a more intensive stakeholder dialogue in the respective IPA countries is necessary in order to create more commitment and support on the local level.

### **Increase Practical Relevance of Trainings (WP7)**

The practical relevance of trainings during the remaining period shall be further increased. The evaluators suggested pointing out more clearly how instruments and the work of organizations on a local level can be improved.

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## 05 | Contact

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