



## SEE IFA Network

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## Content

- 01 | **Project background**
- 02 | **Project progress**
- 03 | **Events**
- 04 | **Next steps**
- 05 | **Contact**

### 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 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 is being implemented between March 2009 and December 2011. A project prolongation until March 2012 is currently being prepared.

### 02 | Project Progress

#### **Reporting**

Finally, functioning FLC structures could be established in all ERDF partner countries, so that the regular reimbursement of funds is now working smoothly. On the basis of the fourth Application for Reimbursement submitted to the JTS along with the Progress Report, the transfer of ERDF funds was remitted to the ERDF partners in May 2011.

#### **Website**

The webpage [www.see-ifa.eu](http://www.see-ifa.eu) is continuously updated and the intranet section frequently used by the partners to share project relevant information. A rising number of host names, who visit the website each month, demonstrates that the visibility of SEE-IFA NETWORK is increasing.

#### **Development of new instruments to support innovation**

Based on the results of prefeasibility studies elaborated by Finlombarda (IT) and stakeholder meetings in the interested countries, next steps towards the implementation of new innovation support instruments were taken. Taking into account the most relevant selection criteria, it became

apparent that Croatia / Varazdin county, Bulgaria and Romania are the most potential candidates. These countries/regions show strong indications that the necessary political will, budget, as well potential managing authorities exist for the implementation of their selected instruments. The chosen instruments include a guarantee instrument, a seed fund and a cluster program. Action plans are currently elaborated in collaboration with the partners and relevant stakeholders.

#### ***Cross border Patent and License Fund – Feasibility Study finalized***

The feasibility study exploring possibilities and suitable models of implementing a cross border patent and license fund in the SEE region was published in the download area of the website ([http://www.see-ifa.eu/uploaded/editor/file/SEE\\_IP\\_Fund\\_Feasibility\\_Study.pdf](http://www.see-ifa.eu/uploaded/editor/file/SEE_IP_Fund_Feasibility_Study.pdf)). As a next step, an assessment of funding possibilities is currently carried out. Potential pilot technologies for commercialization through the fund are in the selection process. Finally, possibilities of linking up with recent EIF-efforts of setting up a patent fund on the EU-level are currently investigated.

#### ***Capacity building - Trainings realized***

The third **Train-the-Trainer-Training** was carried out in Varazdin (Croatia) from 11<sup>th</sup> – 15<sup>th</sup> April 2011. Hosted by the Varazdin County Development Agency AZRA and organized in close cooperation with aws, the seminar targeted local stakeholders who act as multipliers of a strengthened local innovation system. Representatives of AZRA, the Varazdin County Guarantee Agency GARA, the Business Innovations Center of Croatia BICRO, the Croatian Institute of Technology HIT, the Croatian Bank of Reconstruction and Development HBOR, the Croatian Chamber of Commerce, the Technology Park Varazdin, the Faculty of Organization and Informatics, the Varazdin County Innovators' Society as well as private sector actors such as SMEs from Varazdin County participated in the training.

An **Intensive Training Course on Project Assessment** was organized by aws in Vienna from 6<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> June 2011. 21 participants from the project partners' countries participated in the training. These included managers and experts from IFAs, ministries, universities and other stakeholders, who will provide and promote financing instruments for innovative SMEs and start-ups in the respective countries/regions. The program covered a range of relevant topics for supporting innovation projects of existing entrepreneurs and start-ups effectively. Lectures, workshops and a panel discussion were provided by representatives of Austrian and Italian innovation support organizations as well as private consultants, such as aws, Finlombarda, the Provincial Government of Lower Austria, the Association of Austrian Technology Centers VTÖ, the Center for Social Innovation ZSI, Wirtschaftsagentur Wien, and innovation consulting experts.

**Internships** for two employees of Croatian and Serbian partner and stakeholder organizations have been carried out in aws. During these six and eight months' exchange schemes, the trainees have got 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.

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## **03 | Events**

### **Partner Meetings**

#### ***Technical Meeting on Selection Criteria in Vienna***

On 9th March 2011, a Technical Meeting was organized in Vienna by aws. The purpose of the meeting was to prepare the criteria to identify concrete implementation possibilities in each country with all partners interested in new innovation support instruments.

#### ***Technical Meetings on Instruments in Milan and Vienna***

Between April and May 2011, meetings were held in Vienna (aws) and Milan (Finlombarda) for each of the three selected instruments: the "Innovation Support Program" (guarantee instrument), the "Seed Fund" (soft loan program for seed companies) and "Metadistretti" (cluster program). At these meetings, the technicalities, guidelines, procedures and statistical results of the respective instruments were presented to and discussed with the interested partners and their stakeholders.

#### ***Steering Group and Thematic Seminar in Venice***

From 28<sup>th</sup>-29<sup>th</sup> April 2011, the Steering Group Meeting and Thematic Seminar was organized in Venice by Regione Veneto for all project partners. Apart from general project management issues, the thematic focus of the meeting was on the country needs assessed and next steps with regard to the implementation of new innovation and finance agencies.

## Local Support Group Meetings

Local Round Table discussions were held in Vienna, Budapest, Bucharest, Varazdin and Zrenjanin, in order to obtain local stakeholders' input and feedback on the ongoing project activities and to disseminate preliminary results. For example in Romania, UEFISCDI organized two LSG meetings, where the main subject was Metadistretti - the new cluster instrument for Romania, which is developed in the framework of the SEE IFA Network.

## International Events

### **4<sup>th</sup> International conference for entrepreneurship, innovation and regional development**

From 5<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> May 2011, the 4<sup>th</sup> International conference for entrepreneurship, innovation and regional development, ICEIRD 2011 ([www.iceird.org/2011/](http://www.iceird.org/2011/)), was organized in Ohrid, FYROM, by the National Center for the Development of Innovation and Entrepreneurial Learning NCDIEL (UKIM FME). ICEIRD gathered scientists (universities, R&D centers, technology transfer centers, business start-up centers), policy-makers (governments, ministries and state agencies) and practitioners (SMEs, business incubators and business support organizations) in order to generate discussion on the potential of entrepreneurship promotion and innovation to increase national and regional competitiveness. The theme of this year's conference was "From entrepreneurial learning to innovation and regional development". The SEE-IFA Network Project acted as supporter of the conference.

## 04 | Next steps

The next steps focus on action planning for new instruments and institutions in Croatia, Serbia, FYROM, Romania and Bulgaria as well as a funding assessment and the selection of pilot technologies for the patent fund.

### Next meetings and Events:

Technical Meeting: Planning new instruments and institutions in Bulgaria	July 2011, Sofia
Technical Meeting: Planning next steps for institution in FYROM	July 2011, Skopje
Technical Meeting: Planning next steps for institution in Serbia	tbd, Belgrade
Technical Meeting: Planning of next steps for instruments in Croatia	tbd, Varazdin

## 05 | Contact information

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