REPORT OF THE
OPENING AND FIRST SESSIONS:
KNOWLEDGE TRIANGLE- EDUCATION, RESEARCH AND INNOVATION IN
NATIONAL POLICIES

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OPENING SESSION: Key points and messages

The Forum is an opportunity to:
➤ discuss where the reforms of HE, science and innovation are in SEE countries;
➤ bring forward regional initiatives for cooperation in S&T area,
➤ provide an opportunity for broad based policy-oriented discussion,
➤ exchange of experiences and good practices
➤ look for synergies through regional cooperation.

Issues for debate:
➤ decision making process in S&T
➤ effective legislative process
➤ governance in HE and R&D
➤ establishment of dialogue among various stakeholders
➤ management of the new concepts of HE, S&T and innovation
➤ how to combine the international, regional and national R&D strategies
  and strengthen their implementation through cooperation.

The development of national capabilities in SEE in the area of science depends
crucially on R&D infrastructure, which needs to be modernized. In this regard,
Slovenian Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Technology and the SEE-
ERA.NET project consortium have launched the Herbert Potočnik Noordung Award
(http://www.investsciencesee.info) for donations to improve R&D infrastructure in the Western Balkan countries. This initiative was welcomed and recommended to be extended.

**Human resources**: one of the key resources of the SEE countries which needs to be systematically build-up through reforms and improvements of higher education are human resources. Especially critical in this area is the accreditation and quality control process in higher education.

Importance of **international, regional and bilateral cooperation** to promote development in HE, S&T and innovation and in this regard the important supporting role of European Commission (Framework programmes, ERA Nets), UNESCO and other international organisations was also stressed by several speakers.
SESSION I:

KNOWLEDGE TRIANGLE- EDUCATION, RESEARCH AND INNOVATION IN NATIONAL POLICIES

Presentations were made by representatives of Montenegro, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Moldova, Serbia, Turkey and Bulgaria.

Summary:
All countries are undergoing structural reforms in their higher education and science sector. They have already or are in the process of preparation of long term strategies for the HE and R&D sector with the ambition to improve the capabilities in both areas, raise the quality of the human resources and contribute to the national economic and social development.

In the area of higher education, several countries opted for implementation of the Bologna process and have reformed their curricula and accreditation system in this direction. The increase in enrolment has been noticed in all countries, followed in some also with the growth in number of institutions, including private ones.

One of the key issues in these processes is the accreditation of various programmes and universities with a view to assure the highest possible level of quality and thus secure comparability of the degrees internationally. The exchange of experiences as well as specific help in the accreditation process at the regional level was called for.

Higher education sector is entrusted with an important role of increasing the capacity and quality of human resources, which is essential capital for SEE countries overall, but also for improved R&D sector and innovation.

A need to better integrate the research is also among the challenges of the reforms of higher education system. The tradition of separating higher education from research, which was conducted either in special national research institutes or/and within Academies of science needs to be overcome, since closer integration of higher education and research can results in mutual synergies.

In spite of on-going reforms in research sector, the levels of overall funding are still relatively modest, especially compared to EU average. Also, the role of private sector is in most countries minor. To increase the overall level of funding and to better integrate private sector in R&D sector have been stressed as the two key priorities in R&D strategies of SEE countries. Increased funding calls for political commitment of the governments, where the recognition of the importance of R&D for the development towards knowledge based society is growing. Thus most countries have experienced increase in the nominal amount of resources available for R&D and project further growth.

The least success so far has been noted by several speakers in the area of innovation. Low participation of business sector in R&D activity can be noted in all
SEE countries. Policies to better integrate R&D sector with industry are being developed, but one of the prerequisites is to restore/improve the growth capacity of the industry and this way also increase their need for R&D and innovation.

The importance of human resources for R&D sector has been recognised as well and countries are introducing various programmes and measures to stimulate young people to enter the research field. Several countries have designed measures to attract researchers who have left the country to come back (brain-gain initiatives) and transfer their knowledge to the national R&D system. Programmes to assist researchers in participating at international conferences or in international R&D projects have been introduced. Improving R&D infrastructure is also high on the agenda of many SEE countries.

All the countries in the region find international and regional cooperation very important in the process of reforming their HE and science sectors. Not only the financial resources which come through various international programmes, but the very possibility to learn from each other and from third countries has proved to be of significant value in designing and implementing national policies. The ERA Nets have been frequently mentioned, as well as participation in the Framework Programmes. More, however, still needs to be done to support the regional cooperation, since here not only the opportunities for cooperation exist, but also the topics of interest and the problems faced are similar and could benefit from joint approach. The Forums, organised by UNESCO, are therefore highly valued in the participating countries.

In conclusion, it was noted that while the reforms are on the way, the reform process should be speeded up. Specific focus of further actions should be on enhancing the quality and strive towards excellence in higher education, science and innovation. With this as a target, joint international/regional programmes to improve higher education (like joint degree programmes, cooperation in accreditation, exchange programmes) need to be developed. The implementation of the planned reforms calls for further improvement of governance, policy making and increased funding in the areas of higher education, science and innovation. The exchange of information and good practice can be very helpful in this regard. This calls for further improvement and enhancement of sub-regional and regional cooperation.