
European Regional Economic Forum (EREF-2006)

Building Knowledge Society through Regional Innovation Support

Nova Gorica, 14-15 June 2006

- DRAFT CONCLUSIONS -

This text is accessible at: www.eref.si; www.sbra.be; www.ribn.eu; comments and suggestions of Forum participants are welcome till 5th September 2006.

The Forum acknowledges that:

- 1) Creating conditions to generate and support “innovation culture” aiming at enhancing knowledge-based competitiveness is an urgent, complex and demanding task, national, regional and local authorities should be jointly committed in. The very societal fabric being focused on innovation represents the key factor, this is why the results needed cannot be achieved unless regional authorities and stakeholders are fully involved.
- 2) Knowledge centres and other stakeholders not seldom remain aside in designing and implementing innovation policies, instead of being fully integrated into the process. This is susceptible to negatively affect the quality of regulation and implementation policies. Optimal results can be achieved only through a truly inclusive and fully integrated approach.
- 3) Innovation support has to be seen as necessary investment into growing capacity of society in improving its performance and upgrading its competitive potential. It should never be understood only as a budgetary expenditure.
- 4) Politicians and public servants, as well as top managers in business and in R&D, and representatives of Academia should benefit from specialized information/training activities on innovation management with particular emphasis on innovation marketing and protection of IPR.
- 5) The forum fully endorsed the recommendations of the report of the Independent Expert Group on R&D and Innovation appointed following the

Hampton Court Summit and Chaired by Mr. Esko Aho and would highly appreciate European regions disseminating its contents among regional stakeholders and policy makers

The Forum recommends:

- Local, regional and national innovation support schemes (ISS) to be opened to the maximum possible degree in order to stimulate innovation capacity and contribute to effective development of the European Innovation System;
- Upgrading and in-itinere check by Regions of their Lisbon agenda implementation governance is highly desirable;
- Networking and partnership building support for joint or combined activities between ISS and relevant EU programmes should be given support;
- Inter-regional clusters of innovation and innovation capacity to be stimulated;
- Multi stakeholder participatory process to explain the necessity of building a knowledge society through regional innovation support to be initiated;
- Partnerships between research and business in such a way to maximize the impact of scientific findings towards innovations to be pursued;
- Benchmarking and awards to most innovative companies to be encouraged;
- Support schemes for innovative jobs to be put in place;
- Further opportunities for growth and jobs to be discovered by addressing the cultural, historical and environmental values of the region and represent them in innovative ways;
- Innovative training programs to be implemented using e-learning technologies to build foundations of knowledge society at the regional level
- Entrepreneurial culture amongst the youth to be stimulated by providing mentorship and support for innovative business models and services;
- Partnerships for inter regional technology transfer strategies to be fostered;
- Joint implementation of a data base of good practice in regional innovation initiatives and support in order to share know how, inspire and stimulate regional development, moving from the consideration that collaborative research and knowledge transfer are key sources of innovation. Good practice cases being supplied by the Regions for SBRA based handbook and its online database could serve this aim.
- Active continued collaboration among regional innovation programme owners to be developed, inter alia, in the framework of EREF – an active Network of the European Regional Economic Forum;
- Patent exploitation agencies to be expanded aiming at enforcing strategy to improve protection of patent rights;

- Structural funds are key instrument of supporting research and innovation capacity in EU regions. The present expenditure on research and innovations being voluntary increased substantially is therefore recommended.
- Support to regional innovation and research, particular by SMEs, can be given by Regional authorities, via establishing and supporting different associations, non-for-profit organisations, science parks, incubators. These institutions provide important support for young high-tech SMEs and even for more traditional ones that are transforming to innovation-based strategies.
- Innovations and research are taking place in every day life on regional and local level. A task for regional authorities is therefore to collect feedback information from different regional stakeholders and furthermore promote innovation spirit in the regions.
- Closer cooperation on European, national and regional level is highly desirable. A major role in creating and implementing national and European development strategies and reform programmes can be played by regional authorities.

Brussels, 7 July 2006