

From knowledge to impact: Nurturing research and innovation in Southeast Europe

Podgorica, Montenegro - 21 October 2025

As evidenced by the priorities of the current trio of Council presidencies (Poland, Denmark and Cyprus), the EU's strategic agenda reflects the challenge of keeping dual perspectives in balance – from managing the shorter-term causes and effects of multiple crises to implementing agreed longer-term goals such as enlargement of the Union in both Southeastern and Eastern Europe.

Against a backdrop of conflict, economic constraint and geopolitical turbulence, there are plenty of obstacles in the way of the EU and candidate countries achieving their enlargement goals. Nonetheless, and to paraphrase JFK's time-honoured comment, the way forward may not be to ask what Brussels can do for the region, but rather what the region can do for – and, more importantly, with – Brussels in the years to come.

This question has particular importance for research and innovation (R&I), given its unique and transversal relevance to every part of today's economies and societies. Put simply, creating European added value through R&I – whether for resilience, preparedness, competitiveness or sustainability – has necessarily become a two-way street. In parallel, it now becomes imperative to understand not only where and how the EU's collaborative R&I instruments are already generating impact in Southeastern Europe, but also the region's own assets and success stories in fostering science-based ecosystems that can strengthen the European Research, Innovation and Education Areas.

On October 21, Science|Business will organise its first-ever event in Montenegro – in line with the ministerial meeting of the EU Western Balkans Steering Platform on Research and Innovation – to debate the way forward, informed by “living” case studies of R&I in action. Our public conference will bring together leaders and decision makers from the region and beyond, and from the worlds of science, policy, industry and finance, to air bold policy ideas, share good practices and develop recommendations to optimise the regional impact of EU instruments in the years ahead.

AGENDA

14.00 Registration and welcome coffee

14.45 Welcome

- Representative from the Montenegro University
- Edit Herczog, Chair, Widening Initiative, Science Business

14.55 Keynotes

15.15 Pitch sessions

- Rana Sanyal, Professor, TÜBİTAK; European Prize for Women Innovators 2024 winner

15.30 Panel Session I – Branching and ripening of deep-rooted SEE collaboration

While EU policies and programmes already generated several benefits for the local academic and research ecosystems, ambitions and expectations tend to run higher, and as a result may overlook how far we came. The panel will centre on the symbiosis of existing accomplishment and future growth prospects.

- Andrijana Tasevska, Lead Project Manager, Fund for Innovation and Technology
- Çağrı Yıldırım, Head of EU Framework Programmes Department, TÜBİTAK
- Branka Zizic, EIT Community Officer Montenegro

Moderator: Florin Zubaşcu, Executive Editor, Science|Business

16.15 Pitch sessions

To showcase the talent in the region, we invited representatives of EU supported projects and initiatives, with the aim to highlight the tangible, on-the-ground impact; celebrate the success; and inspire students, young researchers and other stakeholders.

- Mirela Alhasani, Member, Management Committee Multi-task, Multilingual, Multi-modal Language Generation (Multi3Generation) COST Action
- Vladimir Mrkajic, Science Communication Coordinator & Management Committee Member, FruitCREWS; Head of Research and Development, InoSens, COST Action

16.30 Coffee break and photo

17.00 Presentation of the data aggregated for SEE region

- Elsevier
- EIT Health Innostars

17.30 Panel Session II – Nurturing research and innovation in the ERA

With the European Research Area Policy Agenda 2025-2027 in place, and the Horizon Europe 2028-2034 proposal planning to complement national efforts with EU level funding, the panel will deliberate the opportunities and risks of integration efforts for the region.

- Robert Blatnik, Head of Office for Substantive Project Support, Technology Transfer and Innovation, Jožef Stefan Institute

Moderator: Ágota David: PO, International cooperation - Europe and Americas, DG RTD, European Commission

18.15 Pitch sessions

- Uroš Đorđević, Chief Executive Officer, Agrounik
- Besmir Buba, Owner, Pharmabest Group

18.30 Closing session followed by the reception

- Edit Herczog, Chair, Widening Initiative, Science Business