



International Conference on Mediterranean Countries and EU opportunities

Amman, 22-23 October 2012

Report

The issues debated during the International Conference on Mediterranean Countries and EU opportunities focused on the evolution of Euro-med cooperation:

- Meaning and possible results of the new strategy of co-ownership and co-responsibility of EU initiatives;
- Finding together concrete solution to existing barriers for cooperation;
- Promoting networking and synergies among the projects co-financed by European Commission in order to create further opportunities of cooperation;
- Spurring MPC coordination to projects co-financed by EU;
- Bringing research and innovation closer together in cooperation projects;
- Exploring fields where the common interest, including innovation outcomes and co-ownership, could result in short and medium term benefits.

Day I – Plenary session

Session 1: The objective of the introductory session was to set the scene by presenting the results achieved and lessons learnt over the last years of Euro-Mediterranean S&T cooperation, and exposing opportunities for the coming ones, especially in the frame of the new FP Horizon 2020 and the forthcoming INCO-NET Med SPRING that will accompany the Euro-Mediterranean cooperation in research and Innovation during the transition from FP7 to Horizon 2020.

At the regional level, the experience built by the INCO-NET MIRA (Mediterranean Innovation and Research Coordination Action) to shape a 'Euro-Mediterranean Innovation Space' (EMIS) highlighted its privileged position to work as the armed hand of the Euro-Mediterranean S&T Monitoring Committee (MoCo) created 17 years ago (in 1995) to promote the Euro-Mediterranean cooperation in RDI. MIRA was based on a dense network of partnerships - not to say friendships - already existing but which needed a good and agile framework to be able to efficiently collaborate. In this respect, all MIRA activities aimed at providing a strong institutional basis for EU-MPC S&T cooperation. The biggest efforts were focused on supporting the Research and Innovation Systems in all the countries so as to favourite this framework. MIRA contributed, among others, through training and structuring of National Contact Points around the Mediterranean, training on RTD project management and audits, set up of indicators, priority settings and design of reports and recommendations, and organization of brokerage events, in alliance with BILAT and ERA-WIDE projects. The community of practices that has been created is able to communicate efficiently with the policy makers via the MoCo. MIRA will edit a book to compile these experiences before handing over in January 2013. Its last contribution will be to contribute to the Common Research and Innovation Agenda (CRIA) that should reflect a medium to long term strategy for the renewed Euro-Mediterranean partnership based on the principles of co-ownership, mutual interest and shared benefit.

The forthcoming INCO-NET Med SPRING will start in February 2013 for a four-year period, meaning the three first years of the new framework programme, and will focus on three main societal challenges: scarcity of resources; renewable energies and high quality affordable food. In the meantime, Med SPRING will have to support the building process of the renewed Euro-Mediterranean partnership based on the



principles mentioned above. Med SPRING will involve the civil society as an important stakeholder of the S&T cooperation through the 'Agora'.

Horizon 2020 will focus on three priorities: i) the excellent science; ii) Industrial leadership and iii) Societal challenges.

In its *"New strategy for international cooperation in research and innovation"*, the European Commission highlights the need to *engage more actively and strategically in international cooperation to achieve three main objectives:*

- i) Strengthen the Union's excellence and attractiveness in research and innovation as well as its industrial and economic competitiveness;
- ii) Tackle global societal challenges;
- iii) Support the Union's external policies.

In this perspective, Horizon 2020 will combine openness with better-targeted actions, strengthen partnership with Member States and stronger focus on topics contributing to external policies of the Union.

At the bilateral level (EU-MPC), the experience of the EU-Jordan S&T cooperation was presented in the frame of the final conference of EU-JordanNet. The main achievements were:

- (i) The support to the bilateral S&T policy dialogue provided through the contribution to the joint EU-Jordan S&T Committee meetings foreseen under the bilateral S&T Agreement;
- (ii) The building of capacities of RTD Administrators on the administrative, legal and financial issues of FP7 which are quite complex and difficult to understand, in particular for organisations who have never actively participated in FP projects;
- (iii) The raising of S&T Awareness and Cooperation through the organisation of Thematic partner days, guidelines for SMES in FP7 and coordination of ERA-WIDE projects.;
- (iv) The support to mobility and partner search, with an important focus on PEOPLE program;
- (v) The contribution to the development of an Observatory for S&T cooperation at the national level.

The main indicator of success is the training of more than 600 researchers, RTD managers and administrators, implemented in close collaboration with SRTD program.

The new projects (EU-JordanNet II and SRTD II) will build on and consolidate these results, with a special emphasize on the involvement of SMEs.

Session 2 focused on the main programs and instruments to foster the cooperation in the next years. It was introduced by the presentation of the opportunities currently opened in the last FP7 call, in particular the ERA-NET, BILAT and R2I schemes focusing on the Mediterranean and enabling the transition to Horizon 2020. The experience of ESCWA Technology Centre illustrated the huge gaps existing in terms of RDI performance between the countries members of this regional organization in (Qatar vs. Sudan) as well as with respect to other regions in terms of creation of products with values. As an example, it was exposed that the in terms of Digital Arabic contents, less than 2% focus on creating new applications. ESCWA exposed the 'regional commercialization tour' as an interesting initiative to attract investors from big companies in regional events, together with young researchers and entrepreneurs. The Virtual Technology Exchange Market was also highlighted as a powerful instrument for cooperation. The role of the International Financial Institutions (IFI) was also discussed by the European Investment Bank as an important potential to support RDI in the Euro-Mediterranean region, especially the infrastructures. The experience of the FEMIP in supporting the knowledge economy over the last years focused on education,



risk capital loan (JEDCO), ICT, capital funds in Lebanon and Palestine (Capital Growth Capital), Global loan scheme to government (ex: Turkey). It could go further with RSFF or non-RSFF. The EIB together with the Centre de Marseille pour l'Intégration de la Méditerranée (CMI) implemented IT1 project so as to identify ways of fostering innovation in the region. Up to day, there are opened to new financial scheme such as support to spin offs, incubator accelerators, IPR backed instruments, MENA living labs, strengthen the triple x so as to develop new products and train human capital to support R&I.

Session 3 focused on two main issues faced by the Euro-Mediterranean cooperation: i) the existing barriers to the cooperation and concrete solutions identified; and ii) the recent development of co-ownership and co-funding as main drivers for the renewed partnership. The same views and principles have been confirmed since 1995 but the absorption of these values takes time, which could explain why they have not been processed yet at the policy level. The following points were highlighted:

- Unbalanced cooperation and challenges: the incoherence of full RI systems and the lack of norms to favour a trusty environment enabling knowledge creation were highlighted as a main barrier; the revolutions have generated a lot of pressure to advance on reforms;
- Lack of structuring policy dialogue at the South-South level between the Med countries; Although bilateral agreements exist between them, there is a urgent need to create such a committee between the South Mediterranean countries so as to be able to dialogue region to region;
- Specific designed programmes for the Euromed region are needed to strengthen partnership with EU;
- The main drivers to start cooperation as well as to get in touch with the industry are the personal contacts which are based on mutual trust. In that sense, human capital is certainly one of the most important aspects to invest in;
- Coordination of the policy dialogues are needed as well as more coherence between the policy and the instruments.
- To ensure co-ownership the following pre-requisites are necessary: political will from both European and Mediterranean sides; a trusty eco-system (lost after revolutions and financial crisis) rather than a more and more bureaucratic one; the involvement of civil society, due to the fact that the empowerment of the actors without empowering democracy is a bit 'tricky'; necessity to cope with the limited capacities of absorption of the knowledge economy at all the levels: individuals, research and innovation organization and governments; improve the ways the funding are managed.

Session 4 addressed the ways to bring research and innovation closer together and more particularly the ways how raising the economic, environmental and social impact of research. Governments should invest in initiatives favouring the communication channels between these two worlds, while the involvement of the banks and private sector was highlighted as a prerequisite for the sustainability of the projects funded by the EC and their economic impact. Generally speaking, the researchers do not realize the commercial impact of their research. In this respect, the mobility schemes between academia and industry were highlighted as a powerful instrument to raise cultural awareness between both culture, by developing management skills able to play an interface and communication role favouring trust and mutual understanding. The IPR management was also mentioned as one of the pivotal aspect of the contractual relations between academia and SMEs to create trust and values for both sides and hence the importance of the RTD managers to support this process. An interesting trend that was raised related to the fact that more and more often, the individuals involved in the knowledge economy have to create their own jobs and opportunities instead of looking for a permanent position. In this respect, adequate administrative frames should be developed.



Session 5 raised the experience of the cluster initiatives. The concept of a research-driven cluster applied to water and developed in the frame of EMIS was exposed, as well as the Water Cluster Alliance proposed by Tunisia. Based on these experiences, some advantages of the clustering were highlighted: they are good communication channels between bottom-up and top-down approaches, both at regional and national levels. They support the visibility of R&DI strategy with holistic approach and identification of R&D gaps. In particular, they bring competencies and concentrate effort/resource; offer a framework for multi-actors and multi-disciplinary calls; provide a real partnership and co-funding with similar rules. Clustering can also be considered as condition for participation to call with high multidisciplinary aspect. Clustering of project should be initiated by the call themselves (as one component) in order to plan specific budget and well identified management/communication mechanisms.

CONCLUSIONS of Day 1

Some needs were highlighted to spur cooperation at both regional and bilateral level, with a stronger impact on socio-economic development of the region concerned. The most relevant are:

- Need to further use the Euro-Mediterranean S&T cooperation and policy dialogue to support the reforms of the national R&I systems by building on the success stories;
- Need to further develop the South-South cooperation and dialogue between the MPC so as to be able to dialogue region to region (example of ESCWA);
- Need to design specific programmes more adapted to the Euro-Mediterranean region and the fields reality;
- In terms of job creation, need to adopt appropriate legal, financial and administrative frameworks corresponding to SMEs (including SMEs under creation) and to design instruments more useful to young entrepreneurs and ideas (seed funds and training/coaching);
- Need to recognize and support the potential role of the civil society in the Euro-Mediterranean dialogue in RDI;
- Further support capacity building and mobility through regional and co-financed schemes inspired from the ERA-WIDE, REG POT, IAPP and IRSES including South-South and North-North;
- Need to invest in human capital and people empowerment answering the need for people who do catalyst (micro level)
- Need to invest in structures and institutions can make the links (meso level)
- More investment in the industry with the support of the banks (macro level)
- Time to take action and to make the co-ownership become a reality; strong message was launched, not only to the European Commission but also to the National authorities in charge of the formulation of the public policies in ST&I.

Day II - ERA-WIDE parallel sessions

Four parallel thematic sessions were organized on health, environment, renewable energies and food and agriculture, in which coordinators of ERA-WIDE projects were invited to present their experiences as a basis for exchange on the lessons learnt so far with respect to the impacts expected mentioned in the call and to share thoughts on the opportunities, needs and risks envisaged for the coming years.

Among the relevant **common conclusions** the following deserve here to be highlighted:

1) Main achievements and impact of ERA-WIDE projects



- Since the ERA-WIDE projects are coordinated by the South Mediterranean organisations, they represent a very efficient way of empowering the human capital and developing the institutional capacities.
- One of the most important impact of these project is the capacity building provided for young researcher and PhD students as well as the fact to have to think 'strategically' and long term.

2) Problems faced and suggestions to solve them

- ERA wide coordinators are pioneers and many difficulties were faced in terms of financial and legal management due to different legal requirements between EU and each country participating in the consortium. There is a need to support the incorporation of RTD managers in the organizations so as to accompany the researchers and make the structures more efficient. RTD managers and interface could bring job opportunities.
- Establishment of a specialized EU Funding unit in the relevant national Ministries in charge of finance and planning so as to clarify the rules of the game (as, for example, ANPR in Tunisia).

2) Valorisation of ERA-WIDE experience

According to participants' main conclusions, valorisation of ERA-WIDE experience should pass through:

- Dissemination activities, which include researchers, industry, public and policy makers. Recipients of EU funding must cluster to show impact, ROI (Return on Investment) as well as success stories to raise awareness about importance of lifting barriers to success.
- Maintaining a regional platform able to valorise the field's experiences and results: the agora that will be developed in Med SPRING was presented as an interesting platform where ERA-WIDE projects are invited to participate and that will also involve the civil society.
- Continuing working after the projects are over: in the parallel session on health, for example, the capacity building through the project should be extended to other joint actions, through twinning activities between research labs and clinical institutions (hospitals) where skilled labour from the project can offer services and expertise in the clinical setting to impact patient care; new funding schemes should focus on post-genomic era of personalized care as it spans research, medicine, technology as well as public health.

3) The clustering approach

- The idea to start clustering ERA-WIDE is a very good one to provide a sample able to build messages that can be conveyed to the policy makers through the supportive schemes to the policy dialogue (BILAT and INCO-NET).
- The clustering of ERA-WIDE should allow better addressing the research capacities needs, especially in terms of RTD management, through joint actions fostering RTD managers as a profession recognized at the national level. The messages should be conveyed not only to the EC but also and especially to the national authorities.
- Clustering of project should be initiated starting of the call (as one component) in order to plan specific budget and well identified management/ communication mechanisms.

4) Recommendations to better use or improve schemes of RTI cooperation:

- The new R2I scheme was welcome as a promising tool to build on the experience of the ERA-WIDEs. Nevertheless, the national authorities should also be able to up take and further support the business plans that will be produced by the ERA-WIDE. This aspect could be interesting to apply



in practice the principle of co-ownership understood as the new driver of the Euro-Mediterranean cooperation in research and innovation

- To build on interesting schemes already existing like IRSES and IAPP but to allow more flexibility to develop south-south and north-north collaborations, visits and funding;
- To invest in infrastructure should be more emphasized in the next actions to be designed;
- To provide further support, guidance, coaching and expertise on how to turn the strategies into business plans complying with banks criteria;
- To support strategies implementation through a specific EU-MED programme.