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SEE-ERA.NET PLUS is a project co-funded by the European Community's Capacities Programme on International Cooperation under the 7th Framework Programme for Research and Technological Development (2007-2013). The project represents the next step in further **integrating the West Balkan Countries (WBC) and its key research communities into the European Research Area**. The project is based on the forerunner project SEE-ERA.NET. It enhanced the coordination of bilateral R&D cooperation with the WBCs, upgrading it to a European level. By joining forces and by pooling financial resources the project consortium brought critical mass to bear. The consortium consisted of seventeen partners from fourteen countries including all the South Eastern European (SEE) countries and its relevant R&D program owners - ministries or agencies responsible for science, technology and/or research. The project's lifetime was from April 2009 until July 2013.

The SEE-ERA.NET PLUS contributed to address the following objectives:

- Executing R&D with the WBCs against strategic priorities at European level;
- Assuring continued integration of bilateral RTD initiatives into multilateral, jointly agreed, activities with high synergetic impact;
- Reducing duplication of efforts across Europe,
- Strengthening research communities in new member states and WBCs and preparing them for participation in FP7;
- Satisfying the need for R&D cooperation in the SEE region, as proven by the huge interest in the Pilot Joint Call of SEE-ERA.NET.

The overall strategy of the project was the launch of a single call for Joint European Research Projects (JERPs) with a planned call budget of around 3.5 Mio EUR. The impressive final figure of 2.675.000,00 EUR allocated funds testifies the national commitment to the project. Compared to other national funding sources for research collaboration, the SEE-ERA.NET PLUS call budget was the largest amount of money dedicated to one call for project proposals in SEE including all the WBCs. The Funding List requested additional funding of 208.600,00 EUR to be committed by the partners from Croatia, France and Serbia. Eventually 23 projects were funded following the Ranking List provided by the Scientific Council.

The Call supported the development of 2 main themes/thematic areas: ICT and AgroFood. The **ICT component** dealt with the i) Software systems for learning process management and support and ii) ICT for energy efficiency; whereas the **AgroFood component** focused on i) the Preservation of indigenous species and traditional food products (in SEE/WBC) and ii) Interdisciplinary field: Land use impact in agriculture on biodiversity.

After the final reports and additional efforts to monitor the project progress during implementation through dedicated surveys as well as the collection of outputs produced in the framework of the funded projects, the work was concluded in time. The spending of JERPs partners reached 2.877,716.92 €

The results from JERPs are very tangible: around 60 publications published in international peer reviewed journals can be clearly attributed to the JERPs as net outputs (on average about two articles in peer reviewed journals in the JERP lifetime). One project already applied for two patent applications, which would not have been possible without the JERP and two further joint patent applications are planned by two other projects. Eight JERPs stated that they applied to other funding schemes during JERP lifetime and overall 16 project proposals were submitted. Eleven databases were created by ten JERPs, only two of them could have been

potentially (partly) established without funding from SEE-ERA.NET Plus. Finally, one contribution to standardization (ISO) with international outreach (ISO 17601 Estimation of abundance of selected microbial gene sequences by quantitative realtime PCR from DNA directly extracted from soil) would not have been possible without funding of SEE-ERA.NET Plus. All the above-listed results testify the success of the SEE-ERA.NET Plus project.