

**TOPIC:** Stakeholder Consultations  
**LOCATION:** Online via Go To Meeting  
**DATE & TIME:** 7 June 2023, 10:00 – 10:45  
**MINUTES:** 9 June 2023

# **Minutes of the Stakeholder Consultations**

## **Research Program Croatia**

### **Program component 2: Eurostars**

#### **Activity 2: Support activities within the second Swiss-Croatian cooperation program**

#### **7 June 2023**

#### **Agenda:**

1. Introduction
2. General presentation of the Eurostars program
3. Overview of Support Activities
4. Discussion of the proposed Support Activities
5. Conclusions

#### **1. Introduction**

For the purposes of preparing the application of the Eurostars program for the second Swiss contribution, it was necessary to organize stakeholder consultations at which support activities were discussed.

During the preparation of the proposal for the consultation, research was conducted among innovation agencies, members of the Taftie network, about the support activities they provide to entrepreneurs when looking for an international partner to apply for the program.

A query about activities that would be complementary to the services provided within the Enterprise Europe Network was addressed to 34 innovation agencies and 5 responses were received. From the responses received, it was concluded that the support activities provided by the agencies refer to variations of:

- Travel grants
- Preparatory grants
- Partner search platforms

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In addition, the consultations themselves were preceded by conversations with the current users of the EUREKA and Eurostars programs, and feedback was obtained. They informed us that they had used the support activities and were very satisfied with them. They also liked the new proposed activities.

There were 45 registrations for the stakeholder consultations and the total number of participants were 21.

After the consultations were held, another inquiry was sent to all applicants to comment on the proposed support activities, and not a single response was received.

The consultations were opened by Ms. Marija Galeković, Representative of the Executing Agency (HAMAG-BICRO) and the National Project Officer (NPO) for EUREKA and Eurostars programs.

## **2. General presentation of the Eurostars program**

Ms. Galeković gave a short overview of the Eurostars program and the results of this program in Croatia since 2018. She presented the first Swiss-Croatian Cooperation Program and the two activities included in the program component 2: Eurostars, which are Co-financing of the subprojects and Support activities.

## **3. Overview of Support Activities**

The two types of Support Activities were furthermore presented: vouchers for consulting services to successfully apply to the Eurostars program and organized trips for SMEs to selected B2B events. Since the beginning of the first Swiss-Croatian Cooperation Program in 2018, vouchers were given on 8 occasions and their amounts varied from HRK 10,000 to 30,000. There were 56 applications and 30 vouchers were awarded, out of which 5 were positively evaluated in the Eurostars program and got co-financing of their projects. SMEs were taken to B2B events on 8 occasions within the period from 2018 to 2023. There were trips organized to B2B events in Switzerland, Germany, Great Britain, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain and Austria. There were 55 SMEs in total and they held more than 180 meetings on these events.

## **4. Discussion of the Proposed Support Activities**

Ms. Galeković presented the continuation of the Swiss-Croatian Cooperation Program with the total value of the program component of CHF 2.3 million. In addition to the co-financing of approved projects of SMEs under the Eurostars program, within the framework of the mentioned program, it is also planned to

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carry out support activities for entrepreneurs to find an international partner and to strengthen the capacity for applying and implementing projects. Ms. Galeković also numbered the challenges that were observed in the previous period: program promotion, finding partners for application and the quality of the proposed applications. Furthermore, she presented the proposed support activities: 1. Program promotion through organization of Info Days and targeted workshops, whereby these events would also take place outside Zagreb region, 2. Travel vouchers for B2B events that would cover travel and accommodation costs up to a specific amount, 3. Consultation services vouchers for the application preparation. After this the discussion was opened with the following proposed questions: *Do you think that the proposed activities could be improved and in what way? Do you think that the proposed activities should contribute to an increased number of Eurostars applications that would be positively evaluated? Do you have an idea for additional support activities not mentioned?*

The first to share his opinion is Josip Balen, a consultant and an Associate Professor at the Faculty of Electrical Engineering, Computer Science and Information Technology in Osijek. He says that promotion should be increased, and that Info Days and workshops are needed in Osijek and the Slavonian region. He also asks why scientific research institutions cannot be co-financed in the Eurostars program Croatia, as according to Croatian rules, only SMEs can be partners on an Eurostars project. Ms. Galeković points out that finding a partner is the most demanding part and that Enterprise Europe Network (EEN) offers its assistance in partner search, these travel vouchers should be an addition to already existing partner search opportunities. Ines Bajto from the company C-pharm Ltd. says that sometimes there are administrative problems with the application. Mr. Balen also states that Croatian co-financing rate in Eurostars is very low and asks if it is possible to increase it. Ms. Galeković replies that this is not the topic of these consultations and that we cannot influence it for the moment. She asks the participants what could be done to improve the quality of Croatian Eurostars applications. Josip Buljan, a consultant and an independent Eurostars evaluator, agrees that the low co-financing rate puts Croatian companies in a subordinate position, and they can hardly be the leading partners on Eurostars projects. If the co-financing rate could be increased from EUR 200,000 to 300,000 would help a lot to make them more desirable project partners. In addition, he pointed out that he is not sure how B2B meetings can help in the search of Eurostars partners. He also adds that these travel vouchers should be conditioned somehow, e.g., by Eurostars application. Ms. Galeković replies that we are aware that the co-financing rate of EUR 200,000 is limited and that it will be taken into consideration and passed to higher decision-making levels. She repeats that this is not the topic of these consultations, and she invited other participants to share their opinions and proposals. Josip Buljan adds that the participation of a scientific research institution increases the value of application. He asks how to enable applicants to find such partners.

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Ms. Kristina Tatarović from the Ministry of Regional Development and EU Funds invites the attending participants to share their opinion. She notes that she found out when visiting the beneficiaries of the First Cro-Swiss Cooperation Program all these support activities help them.

In addition, Ms. Galeković points out that we also contacted other innovation agencies from the Taftie association to find out what support activities they provide to their beneficiaries. Several agencies replied and we analysed their replies. She points out that we asked all these questions to our current Eurostars and EUREKA beneficiaries (Robotic Process Automation Ltd., Agrivi Ltd. and Lloyds Digital Ltd.) and they replied that they had used the support activities and were very satisfied with them.

As no other comments or questions were asked, Ms. Galeković thanks everyone for attending the consultations, so the consultations were successfully closed at 10:45.

## **5. Conclusions**

During all the consultations held, three main conclusions were drawn:

1. Promotion of Eurostars program should be enhanced, especially by organizing Info Days outside the capital (Zagreb) as well.
2. Voucher scheme proved to be a good activity and it would be kept in an unmodified form
3. Regarding the travel scheme, since the most criticism was directed towards predetermined events, a modified version is proposed that would include the specific travel voucher amount and that the entrepreneurs themselves propose the events they would attend.

## **Annexes:**

1. Agenda
2. Presentation

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