



## Regional Platform for Benchmarking and Cooperation in Higher Education and Research

### **ARTICLES OF ASSOCIATION of the Regional Platform for Benchmarking and Cooperation in Higher Education and Research**

#### Document history

Regional Platform for Benchmarking and Cooperation in Higher Education and Research, hereafter ‘the Platform’, was launched on 26 September 2012 in Dubrovnik on the occasion of Regional Strategic Forum, in association with EC funded STREW Tempus project: 511355-TEMPUS-1-2010-1-RS-TEMPUS-SMHES, as a mature phase of ‘Novi Sad Initiative’. The representatives of eleven universities, seven higher education authorities and one parliamentary committee for education, research and technological development, from the Region (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo\*, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Slovenia) hereafter ‘the founders of the Platform’, acknowledged the common challenges that the region faces in higher education and the value of collective approaches in responding to these challenges. On 26 September 2013, on the occasion of International Conference of Higher Education in Dubrovnik, they agreed to pursue further development of the Platform as an association of universities, higher education authorities and parliamentary committees for education, research and technological development, with the organisational, financial and logistical apparatus to support it, including establishment of a permanent Office in Dubrovnik at the Centre for Advanced Academic Studies of the University of Zagreb. At the first meeting of the Platform Council which took place in Ljubljana at the Slovenian Ministry of Education, Science and Sport on 30 June 2014 and the follow-up electronic communication, this statutory document (Articles of Association) has been adopted (the original text is in English). At the same meeting the Platform founders have authorised Platform Leadership, to register Platform in Croatia. On 3 September, 2014, the Platform has been registered as a legal entity in Croatia, with permanent Office in Dubrovnik, Don Frana Bulića 4. On 17 June on the occasion of Andrevlje meeting of the Platform Council and the follow-up Zagreb meeting of the Platform Council on 27 October 2015, this statutory document (Articles of Association) has been amended.

#### Preamble

Regional Platform for Benchmarking and Cooperation in Higher Education and Research responds to the increasing demands for advancement in reform and development of higher education and research in the Region (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo\*, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Slovenia). The Platform offers a range of possibilities for cooperation and benchmarking through various initiatives, development opportunities, strategic debates and project activities in higher education and research and can be seen as a driving Regional force in the further development of the European Higher Education Area and European Research Area. Regional benchmarking and cooperation shall retain its character as an open invitation to implement the underlying principles set out in EU policies in higher education and research since 2000 including the agenda for the Modernisation of Higher Education in Europe, launched by the European Commission in 2014 and shall contribute to the achievement of the objectives of the Europe 2020 Strategy for growth for the coming decade, the South East Europe (SEE) 2020 strategy launched by Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) and the objectives of the Education and Training 2020” (ET 2020) strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training. The Platform will also contribute to the on-going debate about the future evolution of higher education and research through European, regional, national and local policy and action and will promote cooperation and partnerships that have an impact on the capacity building, modernisation and internationalisation of higher education institutions and systems in the Region. The Open Method of Coordination that has been developed within the European educational and social arena provides a modus operandi that is supportive of the strategic objectives of the Regional Platform. This method fully respects the autonomy of participating institutions, authorities and organisations within a transparent and collective endeavour to advance common goals.

## **1. NAME**

The name of association is “Regional Platform for Benchmarking and Cooperation in Higher Education and Research”, thereafter „ Platform “. The term “Region” refers to the geographic area which includes Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo\*, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Slovenia.

## **2. AIMS**

The aims of the Platform are to:

- *foster* a Regional 'collective voice' in higher education and research that resonates regionally, nationally and internationally
- *enable* strategic level debate in the Region on higher education and research issues which will impact on its development.
- *promote* regional policy and collaborative solutions in higher education and research.
- *initiate* regional discussions for exploitation of the strategic opportunities facing the higher education and research sector.
- *develop* benchmark solutions for higher education quality issues and mutual trust in the recognition of qualifications.
- *provide* bespoke professional development opportunities for managers, administrators and policy-makers from higher education institutions and authorities in the Region.
- *encourage* further cooperation in doctoral studies, research and innovation and exchange of doctoral students and early career researchers within the Region.
- *enhance* public understanding of the underlying principles set out in EU policies in higher education and research since 2000
- *contribute* to the implementation of the Europe 2020 Strategy, South East Europe 2020 Strategy and new strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET 2020).
- *give* active support and guidance to members of the Platform in their development in higher education and research.

## **3. MEMBERSHIP**

Members of the Platform are universities, higher education authorities and parliamentary committees for education, research and technological development.

### **3.1 Founders**

The following universities, higher education authorities and parliamentary committees for education, research and technological development, hereafter called ‘the founders of the Platform’, agreed to work together in promoting regional policy in higher education, research and innovations, encouraging strategic debate on the regional development, enhancing higher education institutions’ responsiveness to European, regional, and national needs and fostering a collective voice in higher education and research through coordinated initiatives. The founders of the Platform expressed their intention to participate in the Regional Platform by signing joint letter of intent issued in Dubrovnik on 26 September 2012 on the occasion of Regional Strategic Forum or/and by signed individual letters of intent.

#### *3.1.1 Universities*

Aleksander Moisiu University, Durrës, Albania

University of Banja Luka, Bosnia and Herzegovina

University of Belgrade, Serbia

University Goce Delcev, University Goce Delcev, Stip, Macedonia

University St Kliment Ohridski, Bitola, Macedonia  
University of Ljubljana, Slovenia  
University of Montenegro, Podgorica, Montenegro  
University of Novi Sad, Serbia  
University of Pristine, Kosovo\*  
University of Tirana, Albania  
University of Zagreb, Croatia

### *3.1.2 Higher Education Authorities*

Ministry of Education and Sport, Albania  
Agency for Development of Higher Education and Quality Assurance, Bosnia and Herzegovina  
Agency for Science and Higher Education, Croatia  
Ministry of Education and Science, Macedonia  
Ministry of Education, Montenegro  
Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development, Serbia  
Ministry of Education, Science, and Sport, Slovenia

### *3.1.3 Parliamentary Committees for Education*

Parliamentary Committee for Education, Science, Technology and Information Society, Serbia

## **3.2 Members**

Full membership of a founder is formally confirmed after providing signed *letter of membership confirmation*. The Council of the Platform could make decision to invite a new member, thereafter “the candidate”, on the recommendation of the Executive Board of the Platform or on the initiative of minimum five members of the Platform. The full membership of a candidate is formally confirmed after provision of signed *letter of accession confirmation*.

## **3.3 Affiliates**

Executive Board of the Platform may at its discretion grant the status of affiliate, without voting rights, to an organisation, authority or institution. The status of an affiliate is formally confirmed after provision of signed individual *letter of affiliation confirmation*.

## **3.4 Representation**

Individual members and affiliates shall be represented by duly authorised senior representative.

## **3.5 Resignation, exclusion and suspension from membership**

Members or affiliates of the association can resign from the association by sending a written notification to the Council. Members or affiliates of the association who are no longer deemed to be supporting the aims of the Platform, as set out in Article 2, may be excluded or suspended from the association. The resigned or excluded member or affiliate, shall assert no claim on the association’s assets.

## **4. GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE**

The Platform operates through the following bodies: the Council, the Executive Board, and the Advisory Board.

## **4.1 The Council**

The Council of the Platform, thereafter ‘Council’, shall be responsible for pursuing of the strategic course of the Platform.

### *4.1.1 Composition*

The Council shall comprise nominated representatives of members and affiliates, with member’s representatives only being entitled to vote. Each member of the Council may hold only one proxy (from another member).

### *4.1.2 Operation*

The Council shall meet or have electronic session/voting at least once a year. The quorum shall comprise at least fifty one percent of the total number of the members of the Council. An extraordinary electronic session of the Council may be convened by the President of the Council or Coordinator of the Platform or on formal request in writing of at least five members. Any proposal signed by at least three members, must be included in the agenda except for decisions upon the amending the Article of Association and the initiative to dissolve or merge the Platform, in which case it has to be signed by at least seven members. The Council may decide upon its mode of voting, including electronic voting, either on a case by case basis or as specified in the Rules of Procedure of the Council. Council meetings shall normally be preceded by meetings of the Executive Board.

### *4.1.3 Decisions*

Decisions shall be made by a simple majority of quorum of at least fifty percent of members present at the meeting or/and involved in electronic voting, except for decisions upon amending the Articles of Association or decision to dissolve or merge the Platform, in which case two third majority is required, with the quorum as described in Articles 9 and 10. Abstentions shall not be counted as votes. In case of even number of members present at the meeting or involved in electronic voting, the Chair has the casting vote. The decisions shall be kept at the Platform Office where they can be perused by all members. These decisions may be notified to interested third parties by letter.

### *4.1.4 Functions*

The Council has power to:

- elect or remove from office the President and the Vice-President of the Council, the Chairperson of the Executive Board, and the Coordinator of the Platform
- decide on appeals relating to admission or exclusion of a member
- adopt the Articles of Association under conditions described in the Article 9
- adopt the Action Plan of the Platform on the recommendation of the Executive Board
- amend the Articles of Association under conditions described in the Article 9
- amend Action Plan of the Platform on the recommendation of the Executive Board,
- dissolve the Platform or decide on merging under conditions described in the Article 10
- approve the annual report of the Executive Board,
- approve the annual budget on the recommendation of the Executive Board,
- appoint the auditor on the recommendation of the Executive Board,
- adopt and amend the Rules of Procedure of the Platform on the recommendation of the Executive Board
- establish Standing Committees to deal with specified subjects

#### *4.1.4 The Presidency*

The Presidency of the Council shall be responsible for pursuing the aims of the Platform and effective operation of the Council, within the policies agreed by the Council. The Presidency shall comprise President and Vice-President of the Council and Past President of the Council. President and Vice-President of the Council cannot be both from the same country. President and Vice-President of the Council shall be elected by the Council on a proposal of at least five members.

In particular President and Vice President shall

- prepare and chair meetings of the Council
- participate in the Executive Board
- promote collaborative solutions in higher education and research among the Platform members
- foster a Regional 'collective voice' in higher education and research,
- encourage strategic level debate in the Region on higher education and research issues
- initiate regional discussion on the exploitation of strategic opportunities facing the higher education sector

President shall be a person who is holding or has held a senior university position (rector/vice rector). President holds office for four years with the possibility to be re-elected for one further term. Vice-President of the Council deputises for the President in his or her absence. Vice-President of the Council shall be a person who is currently holding senior position at higher education or research authority (deputy/assistant minister, state secretary, head of organisational unit within the ministry or agency). Vice-President holds office for two years, with the possibility to be re-elected for one further term.

### **4.2 The Executive Board**

The Executive Board shall be responsible for managing the Platform and acting as its public voice, within the policies agreed by the Council, according to the Rules of Procedures set up by the Council.

#### *4.2.1 Composition*

The Executive Board shall consist of five members: Chairperson of the Board, President of the Council, Vice-President and Past President of the Council and Coordinator of the Platform. Members of the Executive Board shall serve in a personal capacity, not as representatives of respective Platform members. Platform Office Administrator could be invited to join specific sessions of the Executive Board, without voting rights.

#### *4.2.2 Operation*

The Executive Board meets at least twice a year. President of the Council or Vice-President of the Council or Coordinator of the Platform can deputise Chairperson of the Board in case of her/his absence.

#### *4.2.3 Decisions*

Decisions shall be made by a simple majority of the present members of the Executive Board. The quorum constitutes minimum three members of the Executive Board. In case of equal number of pro and contra votes President of Platform Council or his/her deputy has the casting vote. The decisions shall be kept at the Platform Office where they can be perused by all members. These decisions may be notified to interested third parties by letter.

#### *4.2.4 Functions*

The Executive Board has power to:

- propose Activity Plan of the Platform
- propose Annual Budget of the Platform
- implement the policy of the Platform agreed by the Council
- recommend the auditor to the Platform
- propose amendments to the Articles of Association

- propose amendments to the Activity Plan of the Platform
- propose amendments to the Rules of Procedures of the Council and the Executive Board
- set up Working Groups and Task Forces.
- appoint or remove Platform Office Administrator
- grant the status of affiliate to an organisation, authority or institution,
- invite higher education expert or representative of an organisation, authority or institution to the Advisory Board, on the proposal of the Coordinator of the Platform.

#### *4.2.5 Chairperson of the Executive Board*

Chairperson of the Executive Board shall be responsible for effective operation of the Executive Board, within the policies agreed by the Executive Board. In particular the Chairperson of the Executive Board shall

- prepare and chair meetings of the Executive Board
- represent Executive Board in communication with the Council
- prepare annual report of the Platform in cooperation with President of the Council and Coordinator of the Platform
- shall manage the operations of the Regional Office under the Croatian law.

Chairperson of the Executive Board shall be appointed by the Council, to hold the office for four years with the possibility to be re-elected for one further term. Chairperson of the Executive Board shall be a person who is holding or has held a senior university position.

### **4.3 The Advisory Board**

The Advisory Board provides assistance in the matters related to the policy issues.

#### *4.3.1 Composition*

The Advisory Board comprises up to 15 representatives of international organisations, students' international organizations, affiliated institutions and organisations and prominent international experts. Members of the Advisory Board are nominated by the Council on the proposal of the Chairperson of the Advisory Board.

#### *4.3.2 Operation*

The Advisory Board is chaired by the Coordinator of the Platform. Unlike the Executive Board, the Advisory Board does not have authority to vote nor a legal fiduciary responsibility.

#### *4.3.3 Functions*

The Advisory Board shall

- advice the Council and the Executive Board in the matters related to the policy issues
- assist in developing priorities and guidelines on policy issues.
- disseminate the information about the Platform activities
- provide information when required, in the form of project reports and policy documents on key topics
- provide necessary expertise to the Working Groups and Task Forces concerning the Policy issues.

#### *4.3.4 Coordinator of the Platform*

Coordinator of the Platform shall be responsible for pursuing Platform policy and activities within the policies agreed by the Executive Board and the Council.

In particular Coordinator of the Platform shall

- promote regional policy in higher education and research,
- coordinate activities of Platform Working Groups and Platform Task Forces
- prepare and chair meetings of the Advisory Board
- participate in the Executive Board of the Platform
- represent Advisory Board in communication with the Council

- represent Platform in working groups that are not founded under the Platform scheme
- give active support and guidance to members of the platform in their policy development in higher education and research.

Coordinator of the Platform shall be appointed by the Council to hold the office for four years with the possibility to be re-elected for one further term. Coordinator of the Platform shall be a person who has experience and international reputation in higher education policy issues.

## **5. PLATFORM OFFICE**

The Platform Office shall provide administrative and financial assistance to the Platform according to Croatian law and the terms set out in 'the Agreement on the operational modalities of the Office of the Regional Platform'. The office will also provide assistance to the various Working and Task Force Groups established within the Platform.

### **5.1 Premises:**

The Platform Office is based at the Centre for Advanced Academic Studies of the University of Zagreb (acronym CAAS). The premises shall be made available by the University of Zagreb under the terms to be set out in 'the Agreement on the operational modalities of the Office of the Regional Platform', adopted by the Council of the Platform and the Senate of the University of Zagreb.

### **5.2 Platform Office Administrator:**

Administrator of the Platform Office shall be a member of the University of Zagreb administrative staff, appointed by the Executive Board, on the proposal of the Coordinator of the Platform, to hold the office for four years with the possibility to be re-elected for one further term.

## **6. PLATFORM LEADERSHIP**

Coordinator of the Platform, President of the Council, Vice-President of the Council and Chairperson of the Executive Board shall be responsible for effective Platform operation, according to respective terms of reference defined in articles 4.1.4, 4.2.5 and 4.3.4 *within* the policies agreed by the Executive Board and the Council.

## **7. FINANCIAL RESOURCES**

The Platform shall have its own financial resources to able it to carry out its work. The Platform may receive grants, gifts, endowments, bequests or other forms of donations from public or private sources, whether or not allocated to specific purposes covered by its aims. The Platform may apply for projects to external funds. It may also charge for the operational costs of those services provided by the Platform to private or public persons or organisations, whether members or non-members, any overhead being reinvested exclusively in the work of the Platform. Each year the Platform shall draw up certified financial statements. The financial year of the Platform shall run from 1 January to 31 December.

## **8. AUDITORS**

The auditors shall submit to the Executive Board their report on the annual accounts within three months of the end of the financial year. The Chairperson of the Executive Board shall forward the report to the Council.

## **9. AMENDMENT TO THE ARTICLES OF ASSOCIATION**

A proposal to amend the Articles of Association may be made by the Council on its own initiative, supported by at least seven members or on the initiative of Executive Board. An amendment shall be adopted only with two third majority providing that at least fifty percent of members are present or involved in electronic voting. Abstentions shall not be counted as votes.

## **10. DISSOLUTION OF THE PLATFORM OR MERGING WITH OTHER INITIATIVES**

A proposal to dissolve the Association or merge it with other initiatives or platforms could be made by the Council either on its own initiative or on the initiative of the Executive Board. Such a proposal is valid only if it is supported by a written request of at least seven members.

The Platform may be dissolved or merged to other initiative or platform by a decision of at least two third majority. The quorum for such decision is constituted by at least two third of the total number of members, present at the meeting and/or involved in electronic voting. Abstentions shall not be counted as votes. Any decision relative to dissolution or merging taken by the Council at the meeting attended by less than two thirds of all members of the Platform shall be submitted to the civil court for approval. In the event of dissolution of the Platform, the assets of the Platform shall be transferred to the University of Zagreb.

## **11. REGISTRATION**

The Platform shall be incorporated (have Croatian legal entity) and have registered offices in Dubrovnik.

\*This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.