



Innovation and Entrepreneurship Conference in Croatia, Dubrovnik, 23-24 May 2013

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On the 1st of July 2013, Croatia will enter the European Union as its 28th member. From this date, the country will participate fully in all EU policies, including the Europe 2020 Growth Strategy which spells out the EU's goal of becoming a smart, sustainable and inclusive economy. One of the five flagship initiatives of this strategy is the Innovation Union. The Innovation Union aims to improve conditions and access to finance for research and innovation, to ensure that entrepreneurs can turn innovative ideas into products and services that create growth and jobs.

The Croatian economy is the most developed in Southeast Europe, with GDP per capita reaching €10,427 in 2011 (€45.897 billion GDP) or around 60% of the EU-27 average. It is characterised as an upper-middle-income country. Its research and innovation system has evolved over the last decade into a complex system of various institutions and measures directed to build innovation-driven growth. Croatia's innovation policy priorities are on grants for junior researchers and technology-related research and development, and on tax subsidies for the development of knowledge-based enterprises. Over 80 percent of the national research and innovation budget is spent on human resources (Inno Policy Trend Chart December 2012).

Despite these efforts, Croatia was affected by the severe economic crisis, causing significant job losses, damaging companies' finances and mounting budget deficits. That gives an impression that research and innovation systems, in spite of the fact that they provide various incentives for innovation, exist for their own sake, unrelated to the sphere of business development, entrepreneurship or industrial technology progress. However, there is a common opinion that the upcoming Croatian membership to the EU provides remarkable opportunities for Croatia to address a number of economic and innovation-related challenges and become a competitive and successful economy.

Many of these challenges are shared by other EU member countries and beyond. In fact, innovation is a key driver of sustainable prosperity everywhere, and innovation policy is a key priority also for the transition economies. Entrepreneurship is the powerful engine that drives innovation.

The Innovation Union initiative, which pools the resources of the EU's member countries and coordinates their policies in the innovation sphere, holds potentially valuable lessons also for transition economies, because innovation is a key driver of sustainable prosperity everywhere, and no country can hope to be successful on its own, without importing innovations from abroad, and without cooperating with foreign partners at the level of research, development and commercialization. According to the Innovation Union Scoreboard, Croatia is a moderate innovator with performance below the EU average. However, its growth in innovation performance in the last five years has been well above EU average, and expenditures on innovation in 2010 increased more in Croatia than in any other EU country.

The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, through its programme on Economic Cooperation and Integration, supports its member States in developing and implementing their national innovation policies by identifying international good practices and providing capacity building and policy advice. There is tremendous scope for countries, both within the European Union and beyond, to compare their innovation policy approaches and to learn from each other to exchange views and share experiences on specific measures needed to integrate science, technology and innovation in national and international development strategies. There is also tremendous

scope for cooperation, in terms of coordinating policies, carrying out joint research, and commercializing innovations within international value chains.

Croatia is happy to announce the international conference on “Entrepreneurship and Innovation: Making Things Work Better”, which will be held under the high auspices of the Government of the Republic of Croatia, in Dubrovnik, Croatia, from 23 to 24 May 2013. The conference is jointly organized by the UN Economic Commission for Europe and the Croatian Ministry of Entrepreneurship and Crafts.

The objective of the conference is to create opportunities for networking among a wide range of stakeholders. It will gather decision makers, innovation experts and practitioners to generate discussion and exchange of information on the potential of entrepreneurship promotion and innovation to improve national and regional competitiveness.

The core topic of the Conference is the promotion of innovative entrepreneurship. The Conference will start with a high-level segment where political and business leaders will introduce strategic policy issues and make keynote statements on the role of entrepreneurship in innovation promotion.

The remaining part of the programme will be structured into three thematic sessions:

- Innovative entrepreneurship: the links between innovation and entrepreneurship policies
- Collaboration and innovative entrepreneurship
- Social entrepreneurship: making a difference

The Conference will bring together aspects of policy and practice that influence the development of innovative entrepreneurship. The intention is to address not only current developments, but also to identify policy-making issues and future directions that should be addressed to tap into the innovative potential of entrepreneurship.

The conference location, Dubrovnik, is one of the most iconic cities in the world and guarantees an unforgettable experience to conference participants. Because of its monumental walls and well preserved cultural monuments, it has been included in UNESCO's Register of World Architectural Heritage. A mild climate, green nature and crystal clear sea coupled with rich history and culture define an exciting combination that makes Dubrovnik a perfect place to network with other participants in this Conference.

We look forward to welcoming you in Dubrovnik!

For more information on the international conference “Innovation and Entrepreneurship – Making Things Work Better”, please visit the conference website at <http://www.unece.org/index.php?id=32036> or contact the organizers at snjezana.ivic-pavlovski@minpo.hr or ralph.heinrich@unece.org.