

European Fund for the Balkans

Bringing the Western Balkans closer to the European Union

Envisioning Europe Programme Strand

“THINK AND LINK” - Regional Policy Programme

PROGRAMME DESCRIPTION

1. INTRODUCTION

In order to encourage various debates on the challenges, costs and opportunities of building a genuine EU member-state, the European Fund for the Balkans launched a region-wide policy programme: “**THINK AND LINK**” - **Regional Policy Programme**.

It is directed towards emerging think tanks, policy oriented NGO's, independent policy institutes, and policy relevant research groups from the Western Balkans.

The programme seeks to foster inclusive and evidence-based policy making in the Western Balkans by initiating research projects which are relevant from the perspective of the Copenhagen criteria¹, embedded in a regional capacity building and networking programme cycle².

This programme aims to:

- inspire analysis and case studies of important aspects of member-state building in the Western Balkans societies;
- support comparative and evidence-based policy-making;
- foster broad and informed public debates;
- overcome the gap between technical and political debate;
- build up research capacities and support constant learning;
- enhance intellectual regional co-operation, exchange of experience and networking;
- contribute to the transfer of know-how and the exchange of experience with previous EU candidates.

2. PROGRAMME STRUCTURE

Call for Applications

The initial phase of the Programme begins with a call for applications inviting a variety of emerging think tanks, policy oriented NGO's, independent policy institutes, and policy relevant research groups³

¹ In 1993, at the Copenhagen European Council, the Union took a decisive step towards the fifth enlargement, agreeing that “the associated countries in Central and Eastern Europe that so desire shall become members of the European Union.” Thus, enlargement was no longer a question of ‘if’, but ‘when’.

Concerning the timing, the European Council states: “Accession will take place as soon as an associated country is able to assume the obligations of membership by satisfying the economic and political conditions required.” At the same time, it defined the membership criteria, which are often referred to as the ‘Copenhagen criteria’.

² This programme offers more than a research grant by offering a capacity building and networking component. It is especially targeted at emerging organisations or junior researchers/groups who seek such an opportunity.

³ Research groups should consist of at least two researchers and be affiliated with a university, research institution or other type of legal entity based in the region of Western Balkans. Applicants should supply the

to submit applications for participation in the programme cycle (capacity building and networking seminars, mentoring) and for conducting a research project which will analyse the in-country policies against the needs and requirements derived from the EU *acquis*, necessary to ensure effective and complete compliance and, based on their research, to develop concrete policy proposals, policy advice or policy alternatives.

More than a research

The benefit of being selected to participate in this programme goes beyond the funding for a research project: EFB will support the selected applicants through organising a capacity building programme cycle composed of seminars and a mentoring process, providing networking opportunities and by linking them to institutions with relevant expertise in the EU.

In addition, the selected organisations, groups and institutions will be involved in networking experience with the grantees from previous programme cycles, EU counterparts and Western Balkans research institutions. In order to track the professional development of the participating organisations, EFB will nurture the established contacts with its grantees and will develop further relevant opportunities within its Envisioning Europe Programme Strand, such as the newly established “Research Fellowship Programme” for creating links and learning opportunities at EU based organisations and institutions with relevant expertise.

Outreach

To support policy transformation, policy proposals should provide a feasible strategy for change. An effective and efficient dissemination strategy is a crucial element of the programme. Outreach activities are expected to be an integral part of the research proposals. On the other hand, to obtain feedback and dissemination results, EFB will involve policy-makers, non-state stakeholders and develop complementary promotion activities.

Expected Programme Outputs:

- policy papers based on sound research;
- public debate triggered by innovative, effective and efficient outreach activities;
- capacity building and training component;
- new co-operation and communication channels within the regional think-tank scene.

Programme Cycle

The programme is built around a capacity building seminar, 6 month research period, final seminar and dissemination activities:

Seminar I (capacity building seminar)

A seminar at the beginning of the programme cycle offers an opportunity for all accepted applicants to come together, discuss their research plans, get advice for their research project from invited experts and discuss questions with colleagues from across the region.

The capacity building seminar will consist of theoretical and practical tools of assistance for the selected organisations in the areas of: research capacity strengthening, interaction between policy and research, policy research impact and research policy tools, examples of good practice, etc.

Research period

The research period lasts 6 months.

Successful applicants are obliged to submit their final paper in English. The participating organisations / institutions are encouraged to prepare their final papers in their local language as well, for a successful implementation of their outreach strategy and enabling policy influence.

Seminar II (final seminar)

The second seminar will take place after the research projects have been finalised but before publication of the final products.

The seminar will be consisted of two parts:

- Closed seminar: gathering the participating grantees for opening a debate on the research results and for finalising the project outcomes.
- Open seminar: aiming at creating a platform for debate by involving different actors relevant for development of public policy; initiating policy consultations between the analytical community and governments within the region of Western Balkans assessing the research capacities in the region and communicating the grantees' policy recommendations to policy makers and to a wider audience.

Publication and dissemination

The research should from the outset be undertaken in a manner to ensure an impact on the public debate. The applicants are selected not only on the basis of a research plan but also on the basis of a dissemination strategy. This strategy should outline concrete steps planned to ensure that findings reach policy makers and the interested public (presentations, special briefings, cooperation with specific media). For that reason, the participating organisations/institutions are encouraged to ensure their final papers in their local language as well.

Key Dates:

Application deadline: **January 28, 2011**

Final decisions communicated to applicants: **by February 15, 2011.**

Think and Link Programme duration: **February 2011 – December 2011**

- Capacity building seminar (I seminar): **March, 2011.**
- Research period: **March 1, 2009 - September 31, 2011**
- Final papers to be submitted by: **October 30, 2011.**
- Final seminar (II Seminar): **November 2011.**

3. APPLICATION PROCEDURE

The Programme invites applicants *via a call for applications*.

Eligibility criteria

Applications are welcomed from emerging think tanks, policy oriented NGO's, independent policy institutes, and policy relevant research groups from the Western Balkans that have a project portfolio focusing upon political and social issues and interested in the process of EU integration.

The policy programme is designed for *project grants*. It will not offer core funding. Proposals must be submitted by legal entities: organisations, institutions or research groups affiliated with a legal entity.

Organisations that have received a grant under a previous call within this Programme are eligible to apply again.

Call for applications

Applicants are required to complete the *application form* (including: a description of the institutions; a research strategy; a dissemination strategy; motivation for participation in the capacity building and networking programme cycle and an estimated project budget). Applications are requested in **English language** via email to the email address: policy@balkanfund.org. Subject line should include: the word „**APPLICATION11**“. Applications will be accepted via email **only**. Applications which are **not** sent to policy@balkanfund.org will not be considered.

Applications

Both elements of the application (participation in the programme cycle activities and the research project proposal) are integral parts of the application. It is not possible to be accepted only for one part of the programme. Candidates must fulfil the criteria for both elements.

Participation in Capacity Building

This Programme is targeted at organisations/institutions/research groups, which are open for participating in a capacity building and networking programme cycle built around a research project. We especially welcome emerging think tanks, NGOs who are developing their capacities in the field of policy work and junior research staff of well established organisations/institutions.

The **capacity building component** of the programme includes 2 seminars and a mentoring process throughout the research project duration, provided by experts from the region and the EU. **Networking** opportunities will be created between the participating grantees, researchers involved in previous editions of the Programme and relevant organisations/institutions/experts from the Western Balkans and EU.

Research Project Proposal

The research project proposals, dealing with a topic relevant from the perspective of the Copenhagen criteria should be focused on analysis and case studies of the in-country policies against the needs and requirements derived from the EU *acquis*, necessary to ensure effective and complete compliance. The research should be undertaken from the outset with the goal of producing an impact on the public debate by developing concrete policy proposals, policy advice or policy options.

The applicants are selected not only on the basis of a research plan but also on the basis of a dissemination strategy. This strategy should outline concrete steps to ensure that findings reach policy makers and the interested public (presentations, special briefings, cooperation with specific media). For that reason, the participating organisations/institutions/research groups are encouraged to prepare their final papers in English and their local language as well.

The project has to be implemented in the period between **February 2011 and December 2011**. The research period within the project should not exceed 6 months and it should be finalised in the period of **March 2011 and September 2011**.

Optional fields of research:

- **specific institutions** responsible for designing, monitoring or implementing the respective policies;
- **specific decisions**, analysing the role of the administration, civil society, the media in making these decisions;
- public policy making in **specific sectors**;
- **profile** of the countries, providing clear information on the key challenges and actors.

The EU membership criteria require that the candidate country must have achieved:

- stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for and protection of minorities;
- the existence of a functioning market economy as well as the capacity to cope with competitive pressure and market forces within the Union;
- the ability to take on the obligations of membership including adherence to the aims of political, economic & monetary union.

This process of transformation can take place in the areas which are identified as research topics of the Programme and correspond to the *acquis communautaire* (See the Annex 1 of the Call for Applications).

The applicant can choose more than one research topic in the case these topics are thematically related and fall under the same area of research. (i.e. social policy, finance, agriculture)

Selection procedure

A maximum of 12 projects will be selected for support with **a grant up to 15.000 Euros**.

Apart from the project grant, the European Fund covers the participation of the successful applicants in the capacity building and networking programme cycle and eventually supports relevant follow up activities (i.e. publishing of the grantees' policy papers).

The number of grants will depend on the nature, quality and estimated budgets of applications received.

All inquiries will be acknowledged by email **within one week of receipt**.

Applicants will be contacted as to whether or not they are accepted.

Proposal evaluation is based upon:

- relevance of the research to national policy in relation with the EU *acquis* and its potential to inform and improve policy making;
- likelihood that the finding will be useful to policy makers and other stakeholders;
- soundness of the project's conceptual framework (the ideas, concepts, theories and bodies of knowledge informing the proposed approach) and methodology;
- feasibility of the research;
- capability of the applicant organisation/institution/research group to undertake and complete the project on schedule and its' research record;
- soundness of the dissemination strategy;
- readiness and level of motivation of the applicant organisation/institution to actively participate in the whole programme cycle (including seminars, networking and outreach activities);

There will be no national key criterion.

4. PROGRAMME BACKGROUND

In their democratisation and reform efforts the countries of Western Balkans are today oriented towards the goal of eventual EU accession, even if they are at different stages in their respective relations with the EU. They face many similar problems. They can all learn from countries that have recently joined the EU.

This transfer of experiences – both in the region and from previous accession candidates – needs to be organized, however. What member-state building means in practice remains unclear to most of the political elites in the countries of the Western Balkans. It is also often little understood by the wider group – journalists, civil society representatives, academics, interest groups – who shape policy debates.

This lack of a broad and shared understanding of the Europeanisation process adds to the difficulties of building and sustaining reform coalitions. It is often made worse by a large number of competing and conflicting agendas. Countries in the region then generate a plethora of “strategies”, “plans” and “priorities”, often with little real domestic debate, limited ownership, and not leading to sustainable institution building and real transformation.

With the aim of addressing these challenges and needs, the European Fund for the Balkans provides support through programmes focused on research and policy development projects as well as media outreach initiatives, with a view to: supporting inclusive and evidence-based research and policy-making; strengthening the think tank capacity in the Balkans and in the EU regarding Balkan issues; bringing EU integration into public perception; linking emerging policy institutes from the Balkans with EU-based think tanks and stimulating regional exchanges and transfer of know-how within the wider region.