

## Innovation and Business Support Program

In 2019, the Innovation and Business Support Program focused its activities in the following fields:

- Supporting SMEs to establish international partnerships and enter markets in third countries. The Innovation and Business Support Program as Coordinator of Enterprise Europe Network (EEN) – Bulgaria co-organized key European business events on the Network’s calendar and facilitated more than 40 Bulgarian companies in business negotiations with international partners. This resulted in 13 international business partnerships as well as entries on the US, Canadian and Turkish markets.
- Consulting SMEs. There were three main areas of interest among businesses: Access2Finance, focusing on the SME Instrument within Horizon 2020; access to new markets; and innovation management. EEN experts are among the few in Bulgaria licensed by the IMP<sup>3</sup>rove International Innovation Management Academy. Over 30 SMEs approached EEN and benefited from in-depth IMP<sup>3</sup>rove analysis and consultations, resulting in optimized management of their innovation processes.
- Efficiency of policy and financial instruments for SMEs and innovation. Two main achievements feature IBS program’s policy related activities in 2019: (I) the endorsement of an Action Plan for improving the efficiency of the National Innovation Fund by Bulgaria’s Executive Agency for SME Promotion; and (II) the newly launched CityZen that captures and uncovers the business potential of urban farming as an emerging phenomenon in Bulgaria leading to new business models and resource efficiency.

## Access2Finance

In 2019, approximately 35 SMEs, start-ups and clusters benefited from the in-depth consultation on Access2Finance for developing innovation projects and speeding up their expansion on international markets. Taking advantage of the wide spectrum of the EEN's team expertise in H2020, clients were directed to the most appropriate funding instrument. As a result, two projects have been approved for funding under the EIC Accelerator Pilot – the SME Instrument Phase II and the Fast-Track to Innovations respectively, while another proposal was given the Seal of Excellence. Topics covered the range from micro-satellite to big data and robotized devices.

## New Markets

Business-to-business events proved to be the short-cut to new collaborations and new markets. 43 Bulgarian companies were given the opportunity in 2019 to participate in specialized brokerage events and business missions, such as the Green Industry Innovation in Oslo, EU Cluster Matchmaking in Bucharest, Bulgarian-Argentinian Business Forum in Stara Zagora, Malta brokerage event in Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Future of Building 2019 in Vienna, all of which were co-organized by EEN's team.

These events, together with the active use of the EEN database by Bulgarian companies, triggered more than 60 negotiations on business and technological partnerships in a variety of sectors such as mechatronics, digital and creative technologies, incl. blockchain and AI, construction, environment and

ICT outsourcing. A good example of EEN's advisory role for market entry is Spesima's gateway to the Turkish market.

The EEN team also assisted the Bulgarian company InteriorProtect Ltd. in applying for the **ENRICH** Advanced Manufacturing Tour to the USA and Canada, aiming to introduce European clean-tech companies to North America's regulations and market opportunities, as well as to promote European science, technology and innovation in both countries.

Overall, in 2019 more than 75 companies received extensive advisory and consultation EEN services, which resulted in 13 successful partnerships, 9 project proposals and entries on new markets.

In 2019, EEN's team consolidated its position as the main expertise pool for providing companies' Innovation management assessments and Digital Innovation Quotient under the methodologies of the **ATKerney IMP<sup>3</sup>rove Academy of Innovation Management** by launching new services to 24 companies in various sectors and locations in Bulgaria.

2019 was successful for three more Bulgarian companies that received funding by the H2020 SME Instrument phase I with support by EEN's team:

- TRANSMETRICS AD is the second Bulgarian company with successful project under the Horizon 2020 SME Instrument Phase I. Being the first company in the world to focus on predictive optimization for cargo industry, TRANSMETRICS is already working with the leading logistics companies worldwide.
- Smart Soft Ltd. was supported in analyzing its market and technological needs and in contracting top-level external consultants and coaches for



the CoLumbo project, related to an innovative AI online platform for diagnosing herniated disk and other spinal pathologies, capable of magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) reading, and medical history analysis.

- Bee Smart Technologies is a high-tech company bringing breakthrough

innovation to the global beekeeping industry by increasing the overall honeybee health and by decreasing operating costs through smart integration of sensor technology and bio-based algorithms.

### *First Contest for Innovative Enterprise in North Macedonia with the support of IBS Program*

Inspired by the Innovative Enterprise of the Year national contest, North Macedonia endeavored to introduce this contest as an efficient tool for entrepreneurial discovery and promotion of the innovation potential of its local SMEs. The IBS team transferred know-how and provided methodology support to the YES Incubator, Skopje, to ensure the high quality of the contest that received recognition and support by the local Ministry of Economy. 3 companies out of 31

candidates were awarded “Innovative start-up”, “Innovative small company” and “Innovative medium-sized company”. The **first online course on innovation management in Macedonian**, along with a mobile application for technology transfer, were developed to empower local companies on their way to innovation-driven growth. Furthermore, guidelines on innovation management and innovation funding have been drafted in Macedonian as well.



*Award ceremony of the first edition of the national contest Innovative Enterprise of the Year, North Macedonia, 29<sup>th</sup> May 2019*

### *Consultancy in the field of intellectual property*

Since 2017 the EEN team has been entrusted by the EC to act as the IP Helpdesk Ambassador for Bulgaria. Two capacity building workshops, partaken by about 80

representatives of science and business communities, were organized together with the Joint Innovation Center of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences. The first – on 16 April

## *Part one: Program areas*

2019, introduced intellectual property as a tool of protection of research results, including via copyright, patents and utility models. The second event, on 11 June 2019, focused on the role of patents as internationalization tool, via the European and the International Patent Systems and the databases Espacenet and PATENTSCOPE. Dr. Fanny Koleva, acting as IP Helpdesk Ambassador, was invited to present local specifics related to legislation and practice at an international intellectual property and technology transfer workshop in Plovdiv on 20 May 2019.

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*Dr. Fanny Koleva presents the specifics of European and International Patent Systems to representatives of business and science communities at a workshop in Sofia, 11<sup>th</sup> June 2019*

### *Mentoring young innovators at Innovation Academy 2019*

Dr. Todor Galev, senior expert at ARC Fund, supported students' innovative project at the Innovation Academy 2019. He mentored three teams working on business ideas and IT prototypes to compete for a BGN 10,000

award. Participants from 10 Bulgarian universities took part in the events, organized by the Innovation Starter in partnership with the European Commission, EIB and business organizations.

### *Leveraging policy efficiency*

In 2019, the team of the IBS Program continued working in close collaboration in the field of policy research and consultancy with national authorities such as the Council of Ministers, the Ministry of Economy, the Ministry of Education and Science, the Bulgarian SME Promotion Agency, the Executive Agency "Science and Education for

Smart Growth" Operational Program, and the Fund of Funds.

**Smart Specialization** was a key topic, in which the IBS Program streamlined its policy research efforts in 2019. It was given mandate to assist the Ministry of Economy in its preparatory work for the next program

period 2021–2027 by preparing the following analyses:

- Assessment of the degree of achievement of the objectives of the Innovative Strategy for Smart Specialization of Bulgaria 2014–2020.
- Assessment of the compliance of the Innovative Strategy for Smart Specialization of Bulgaria 2014 - 2020 with the basic principles of the European policy and concept for smart specialization, and SWOT analysis.
- Regional innovation profiles by planning region with analysis of the progress achieved according to the Innovation Strategy for Smart Specialization of Bulgaria 2014–2020.
- Policy Brief.

IBS Program and the Ministry are now jointly developing a concept for a transparent and effective innovation policy for smart specialization in Bulgaria. Furthermore, the Action Plan for improving the procedures of the National Innovation Fund, proposed by the IBS Program and, was **endorsed by the Bulgarian SME Promotion Agency** under the "Effective Financial Instruments in Support of SMEs" (ESSPO) initiative.

The Plan featured three main improvement measures as follows:

- Focused public support to innovative SMEs.
- Facilitation of collaboration between business and science.
- Result-oriented monitoring and evaluation system.



*ESSPO Interregional Meeting, Sofia, 5-6th November 2019*

### *InnoBridge – making research and innovation a market success in European regions*

After three years of active exchange and collaborative design of new policy measures, 2019 marked the beginning of the **InnoBridge** second phase, dedicated to the implementation of the designed measures. IBS Program at ARC Fund was elicited to act as InnoBridge process driver and methodology consultant for the entire partnership of 8 EU regions. In the local context, it fostered

the improvement of the Sofia Innovation Fund, where mid- and long-term measures were introduced to leverage the support on R&D concepts in the creative, digital and cultural industries into commercial success.

The **InnoBridge Experience Book** summarizes the results of the knowledge exchange among the regions.



*InnoBridge Interim Conference 'Towards successful R&D commercialization',  
Tampere, 19 February 2019*

*Stepping into a new field – resource efficiency and business models implications of urban farming*



The **CityZen** initiative launched and coordinated by ARC Fund, aims at enhancing scalable innovations and new business models based on urban farming ecosystem values. CityZen responds to the growing number of cities and regions that recognize the ben-

efits of urban farming for living sustainably and leveraging revenues and aims to promote the concept among policy-makers. Integrating urban farming models and practices into regional policies on green innovation and resource efficiency can significantly improve food security, waste management, community development and adaptation to climate change. CityZen paves the way to a promising collaboration with Bulgaria's Ministry of Economy as the managing authority of the Regional Innovation Centers (RICs) under the Competitiveness and Innovation Operational Program. As R&D infrastructure hubs strengthening the innovation fabric of the regions, RICs could introduce the resource efficient concept of urban farming in a number of regions and cities of Bulgaria. ARC Fund's team involved in the CityZen supports the Ministry in assessing the environmental and socio-economic impacts of the RICs specialized in industries for healthy life and biotechnologies.



*The CityZen Kick-off meeting set the scene for the CityZen work plan, Sofia, 12-13 September 2019*