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2017 Event of the Eastern Partnership Panel on Research and Innovation

**Conference “FROM INNOVATIVE IDEAS TO SUCCESSFUL BUSINESSES: promoting the national systems of early stage financing of innovative companies in Eastern Partnership countries”**

**PRESS RELEASE 18 September 2017**

On September 21, 2017, Minsk hosts the annual event of the ‘Eastern Partnership Panel on Research and Innovation’. The mission of this Panel comprising representatives of the EaP countries, EU Member States and the European Commission (EC) is to boost EU – EaP cooperation in all aspects of Research and Innovation. This year, the Panel’s event is focusing on early stage financing of innovative startups, which is considered one of the weakest components of the national innovation systems in the EaP countries.

Even if the small business sector and its input to GDP in the EaP countries are gradually increasing, the share of innovative companies among SMEs is far below the EU average of 56%. At the same time, the experience of different countries suggests that the innovativeness of SMEs is not necessarily associated with the country’s level of economic development but rather depends on availability of support mechanisms at early stages, including direct financing of start-ups and spin-offs. In this regard, the goals of the conference “From innovative ideas to successful businesses” are:

* to share best practices of EU Member States in supporting innovative SMEs,
* to demonstrate the role the EC instruments play in supporting innovative SMEs and to raise awareness among EaP stakeholders about their availability,
* to discuss possible joint activities of the EaP countries, EU Member States, the European Commission and other international donors to assist EaP countries in addressing the challenges.

The Conference agenda consists of four sessions. Presenting the major challenges and needs of the EaP countries regarding the SME promotion with the aim to give some practical orientation to the next two sessions dedicated to EU instruments for supporting the innovative business and experiences of several EU Member States in financing start-ups and spin-offs. Support for business, youth entrepreneurship and innovation is on the top of the agenda in the EU that is reflected in its latest initiatives, EU4BUSINESS and EU4Innovation. Special attention is given to Horizon 2020, the largest programme for international cooperation in science, technology and innovation in the world. Though the status of EaP countries in this programme is different, all of them are able to participate and get funding, including that for SMEs. Within the first three years of Horizon 2020, Belarus managed to partner in 30 projects with the total budget for local partners approaching 6 mln EUR. Here, similar to the other EaP countries, research centers take the largest share while business just start to explore opportunities available to them.

Later on, representatives of national SME funding agencies from Austria, France, Germany, Lithuania and Poland will present their schemes for supporting early stage companies. The final session is devoted to exchange of views on the possibility to transferring such policies and schemes to the EaP countries, and to explore whether the existing EC mechanisms for supporting the region could be used for that transfer.

The Conference will bring together participants from 14 countries of Eastern, Western and Central Europe, as well as representatives of the European Commission and of several EU-funded projects, of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, of the European Investment Bank and of the UN Economic Commission for Europe. The list of invited guests includes Andrea Wiktorin, Head of EU Delegation to Belarus, Andrea Carignani-Di-Novoli who leads cooperation with the neighborhood countries in the Directorate General for Research and Innovation of the European Commission, Prof. Dominique Foray from Federal Polytechnic School in Lausanne, one of the fathers of smart specialization, and many other distinguished speakers, policymakers, innovation intermediaries and businessmen.

The event is supported by the European Commission with the contributions from the EU project “Science, Technology and Innovation International Cooperation Network for EaP countries – EaP-PLUS” and the Belarusian Institute of System Analysis and Information Support of Science and Technology (BelISA).

More information is available at the following web-sites:

<https://www.eap-plus.eu/>

<http://www.increast.eu/>

<http://www.scienceportal.org.by/>

For questions, please, approach Olga Meerovskaya, BelISA, +375172033139, +375296612576 or [meerovskaya@fp7-nip.org.by](mailto:meerovskaya@fp7-nip.org.by).