



Brussels, 23 March 2017

## **STATEMENT TO THE PUBLIC CONSULTATION ON SMART SPECIALISATION: A FRESH APPROACH TO EUROPEAN GROWTH AND JOBS THROUGH REGIONAL INNOVATION STRATEGIES**

Herewith UAS4EUROPE, the networking platform for universities of applied sciences (UAS) in Europe, would like to contribute to the public consultation<sup>1</sup> on smart specialisation.

UAS4EUROPE believes that smart specialisation as a concept is of great value, since a focus on smart specialisation allows for better aligning of regional research and innovation activities and bringing regional actors closer together on specific themes, in which the region can build up competitive advantages. Universities of Applied Sciences (UAS) are deeply rooted in the regions and therefore either directly or indirectly affected by or dealing with the smart specialisation mechanisms. We believe that **smart specialisation strategies (S3) should continue to be supported**. We see that smart specialisation strategies, if managed well and broadly supported at grassroots levels, i.e. by companies, UAS, universities, communities and the like, can improve the research and innovation processes. They can also lead to both economic and social impact.

We would like to bring the following general remarks to attention:

1. We support S3 as it is in our 'DNA', the UAS have a natural cooperation on regional themes of importance with regional players. UAS are the linking hub within the region: they aim at addressing questions brought forward by their regional stakeholders. UAS4EUROPE supports the enhanced involvement of its partners in the entrepreneurial discovery process (EDP<sup>2</sup>) in order to support their S3-representatives with a **bottom-up driven input**. Otherwise the process is in danger to become too much steered by governments from above, hence allowing too little flexibility. Regional priorities can change over time and therefore the regional actors need to be in contact regularly to adapt and improve their strategies in order to remain competitive. The **bottom-up support and flexibility** are key ingredients in achieving this.
2. S3 should in essence be **voluntary for the UAS** in order for them to be adopted successfully and to create the expected impact. We support that until now the development of a smart specialisation strategy has not been voluntary for the regions in order to receive funding from the European Structural and Innovation Funds (ESIF). Therefore we also support that the regions should further develop the S3, also during the future funding periods, however the adoption and participation in the agenda of a smart specialisation strategy should remain voluntary for all institutions, e.g. UAS.
3. We believe that there should be a better alignment between the different funds available for regional players. A recurring topic in for example many position papers on the midterm evaluation Horizon

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<sup>1</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/en/newsroom/consultations/smart-specialisation/](http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/newsroom/consultations/smart-specialisation/)

<sup>2</sup> <http://s3platform.jrc.ec.europa.eu/entrepreneurial-discovery-edp>

2020 has been creating **better synergies between the different funds**. The wish for better synergies applies also to the **European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF)**. But the topic is not new in the discussions. On the contrary, also the FP7 evaluation mentioned that “the FP7 was not effective in building synergies with the related European funding programmes”<sup>3</sup>. This was due to the differences in the participation rules, which was just one of the factors. It would therefore be good to also look into how different funding mechanisms can in the future really be used successfully. In case there are ESIF funds, which are thematically linked to specific Horizon 2020 calls, it should be possible to apply for Horizon 2020 in order to fund the excellent science and simultaneously this proposal would apply for structural funding. In this case the synergies between the programs would be part of the project from the beginning. In addition, we would like to see that if a Horizon 2020 project above the evaluation threshold has not been able to obtain funding due to limited budget, it should in one way or another be supported and backed by regional funds like ESIF. This would mean that the **Seal of Excellence**<sup>4</sup> as proposed by the European Commission in 2015, would be continued and extended. However, for this, a redefinition of the European Regional Development Goals (ERDF) as well as well-defined criteria would be needed for better alignment.

4. Finally, we would like to underline that UAS4EUROPE is also working on **Smart Partnerships for Regional Impact (SPFRI)**<sup>5</sup>, which we see as a possible concept in e.g. FP9 to support and facilitate easier participation of applied research actors like the UAS participating in collaboration with universities, companies, non-for-profit organisations, RTOs, and regions on multidisciplinary themes on the basis of **excellence and impact**. In our opinion it is of utmost importance to ensure as well a regional embedding of future FP9 funded projects, and therefore synergies between smart specialization strategies as a policy concept and SPFRI as a practical tool and instrument would be wishful<sup>6</sup>. Therefore, UAS4EUROPE encourages its UAS networks to get involved with their regional smart specialisation strategy representatives.



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**UAS4EUROPE** is a joint initiative from **EURASHE**, **UASnet**, **swissuniversities**, **Hochschule Bayern e.V.** (supported by Bavarian Research Alliance) and the **Austrian FHK** to promote the voice of the UAS in Europe.

<sup>3</sup> [http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release\\_MEMO-16-146\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_MEMO-16-146_en.htm)

<sup>4</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/research/soe/index.cfm>

<sup>5</sup> <http://uas4europe.eu/files/UAS4EUROPE%20Smart%20Partnerships%20for%20Regional%20Impact%20FINAL.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> UAS4EUROPE is currently working on further defining its concept Smart Partnerships for Regional Impact (SPFRI).