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Mr Holger SCHROEDER
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Western Balkans Regional Programmes,
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Directorate-General for Neighbourhood
and Enlargement Negotiations
European Commission

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Subject: COBISS.Net Project: Phase 3

Dear Mr Holger Schroeder,

For more than 30 years, many educational, research and cultural institutions in the Western Balkan countries have been working to develop national library and research information systems linked to the regional COBISS.Net network (www.cobiss.net). This was also the focus of the Ministerial Conference on the Information Infrastructure for Science, Education and Culture [COBISS 2009](#), where participants unanimously endorsed the COBISS.Net project. The conference included panels on information support for research evaluation (with the participation of the ministers of science and technology and higher education of the countries in the region) and on library information systems as the most comprehensive overview of creativity (with the participation of the ministers of culture of the countries in the region). The conference was organized by the Institute of Information Sciences ([IZUM](#)) in Maribor and co-organised by the Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Technology, the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Government of the Republic of Slovenia.

Representatives of the ministries responsible for libraries from all the Western Balkan countries have also shown their support for the COBISS.Net project at previous and subsequent COBISS conferences, which has significantly contributed to the inclusion of over 500 libraries from the Western Balkan countries in the COBISS.Net network, but this still covers only 40% of the national, general, higher education and specialized libraries in those countries. The development of national library information systems on the COBISS platform in the Western Balkan countries is, namely, almost exclusively dependent on international development aid, as this is the only way to overcome local staffing and financial constraints as well as the interests of providers of partial solutions, and to promote regional cooperation in line with the recommendations of the European Commission.

Since the COBISS.Net project is beyond the constraints and organizational approaches of the various EC calls for proposals and requires a specific approach, DG EAC and DG NEAR proposed in 2015 to solve the problem by political agreement at the 4th Ministerial Meeting of the

Western Balkans Platform on Education and Training (Vlorë, Albania, 2-3 July 2015) or at the Western Balkans Summit (Vienna, 27 August 2015) and again at the 5th Ministerial Meeting of the Western Balkans Platform on Education and Training (Sarajevo, 27-28 June 2016). However, communication challenges among the potential proponents of the project "*COBISS.Net – Support for the development of national library information systems of the Western Balkan countries and their integration into the common EU education, research and cultural space (2016–2018)*" prevented an agreement on the financing of the project from European funds from being reached. Eight years have passed since then, but the project's objectives remain unachievable without financial and coordination support from the EU.

The Slovenian Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (NAKVIS) informed us about the definition of Phase III of the COBISS.Net project and the proposal for a programme of EU development assistance to libraries in the Western Balkan countries over the next five years. The project includes the transfer of good Slovenian practices in the integration of libraries into a single information system and in the support of libraries to national research and higher education information systems (Annex).

In this regard, we kindly recommend extending an invitation to the Ministerial Meeting of the Western Balkans Steering Platforms on Culture, Research and Innovation, Education, and Training in Skopje to Dr Aleš Bošnjak, Director of IZUM, and Dr Franci Demšar, Director of NAKVIS. Additionally, we propose including in the meeting agenda a presentation of the COBISS.Net project as an example of good practice. We believe this initiative, with the endorsement of the Western Balkan countries, merits EU support, and NAKVIS and IZUM are prepared to coordinate its implementation.

Sincerely,



Dr Igor Papič
Minister of Higher Education, Science
and Innovation of the Republic of Slovenia

Copy to:

Dr Franci Demšar, Director, Slovenian Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (NAKVIS)
Dr Aleš Bošnjak, Director, Institute of Information Sciences (IZUM)
Ms Maja Dimkovski Engelman, Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Republic of Slovenia