Horizons of Innovation

EU RESEARCH COLLABORATION FORUM

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ABOUT THE FORUM

The Horizons of Innovation Forum is a regional platform for dialogue, partnership-building and strategic exchange between research institutions, innovation ecosystems, industry and policy-makers from the Western Balkans and the European Union. It is a working environment with a single, deliberate purpose: to connect the actors of the innovation ecosystem, turn those connections into durable, operating partnerships, and through them drive the development of the ecosystem itself.

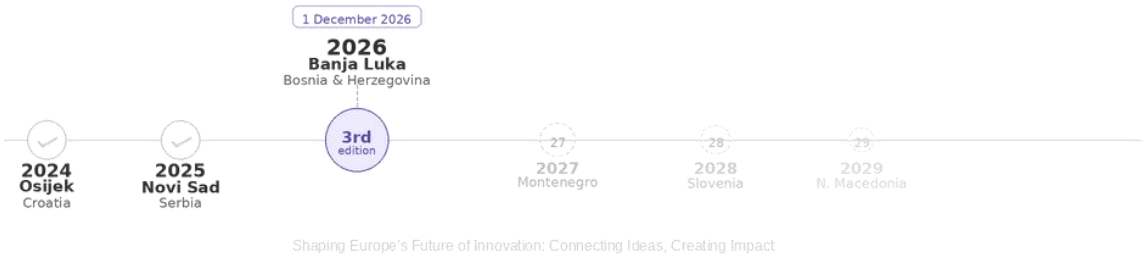
The Forum addresses a real and well-documented gap. The region has the researchers, companies and institutions capable of competing at the European level; what has too often been missing is the structure that brings them together with the right partners, at the right moment, and on equal terms.

The Forum supplies that structure deliberately and consistently. Every session and every format is built to produce concrete agreements rather than impressions — and, through them, to strengthen and develop the innovation ecosystem in which the region takes its place as a credible, permanent contributor.

A TRAVELLING REGIONAL INITIATIVE

The Forum is designed as an annual travelling event, hosted each year in a different country of the region. Through this approach, the initiative stays rooted in different regional contexts — each year bringing a new local ecosystem, a new circle of institutions and new challenges, while maintaining an unchanged vision of strengthening regional cohesion in research and innovation.

Each edition builds on the results of the previous one. Partners, contacts and ideas generated in one year become resources for the next — transforming the Forum from a series of one-off events into a continuous cooperation platform.



WHY THE FORUM EXISTS

Participation in European research programmes is not only a question of application quality — it is a question of position within a network. Who knows whom, who is a trusted partner, who understands how a consortium works. Researchers and institutions from the Western Balkans often possess solid expertise but remain peripheral within these networks — not because they are not

good enough, but because they have not had enough opportunities to connect and demonstrate what they can do.

The Forum exists precisely to change this dynamic. Each year, in one place, people meet who would otherwise have no reason or opportunity to talk: a researcher from Banja Luka and a project coordinator from Vienna, an innovator from Novi Sad and an industry manager from Zagreb, a young doctoral student looking for a consortium and an experienced evaluator who knows what the committee looks for in an application.

> ***The Forum does not build reputations — it builds connections that last longer than a single day.***

THE 2026 EDITION — BANJA LUKA

The **third edition** of the Forum arrives at a moment when the region has an increasingly clear picture of where it stands in relation to the European Research Area and what is needed to become firmly anchored within it.

The theme of 2026 - **Shaping Europe's Future of Innovation: Connecting Ideas, Creating Impact** - reflects precisely this moment of maturity. The question is no longer how to keep pace with European innovation, but how to help shape where it is heading. Europe's innovation landscape is being redrawn now - by artificial intelligence, by shifting priorities, by a new balance between strong centres and strong ecosystems - and the ambition is for the region to be among those defining that future, not merely adapting to it: anticipating what is coming, contributing ideas that carry weight, and turning them into real impact.

Banja Luka hosts this edition. The Forum is organised by MOZAIK Hub, Digital Innovation Hub (DIH) ONEX, the Faculty of Mechanical Engineering of the University of Banja Luka, the Enterprise Europe Network/FINNO, and Smart Manufacturing Innovation Center UNIDO - a team with deep knowledge of the local research and innovation ecosystem and the capacity to facilitate quality exchanges that go beyond protocol.

WHO THE FORUM IS DESIGNED FOR

The Forum is **designed for everyone active in research, innovation or development who wants to build or deepen connections with actors across the region and beyond**. It is not a space for passive listening — it is a space for people who come with a concrete intention: to find a partner, understand a call, receive feedback, or simply start a conversation that would otherwise take weeks of back-and-forth by email.

Regular Forum participants include **researchers and academic staff working on projects or planning EU funding applications; representatives of science and technology parks and digital innovation hubs; companies - especially SMEs** - looking for research partners or wanting to understand how research can address their technological challenges; policy-makers and institutional representatives shaping development frameworks in the region; and organisations supporting international cooperation.

HOW THE FORUM WORKS

The Forum’s format is deliberately designed to avoid the trap of one-way conference monologue. There are plenary sessions and panels, of course - but these are only the backbone, not the core. The core is the zones: relatively informal spaces in which the conversations take place that are the real reason people came.

The **Innovation Mindset Zone** provides the common starting point for all participants, bringing together keynotes, panels, and discussions on the future of innovation, research, and collaboration.

The **Research in Action Zone** focuses on project ideas, research applications, and the path from knowledge to implementation. The **Insights & Impact Zone** creates space for reflection, peer learning, and honest conversations about lessons, challenges, and experiences from innovation and project practice.

The **Real-World Solutions Zone** highlights concrete innovations, technologies, and solutions already being applied in practice, while the **Collaboration Zone** is dedicated to networking, matchmaking, partnership-building, and the exchange of organisational capacities and project opportunities.

Complementing all activities is the **Flow & Recharge Zone** - an informal networking space designed for spontaneous conversations, idea-sharing, and relationship-building throughout the day.

> ***It is not about how many sessions you attend — it is about who you meet.***

STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

The Forum is anchored in four strategic objectives that give it coherence across years and editions. Strengthening regional research cooperation - because without strong regional partnerships it is hard to present confidently to the outside world. Increasing participation in European programmes remain underutilised by institutions from the region, and the Forum is one of the places where this can change.

Bridging the gap between science and industry - because research that finds no application loses relevance, and industry that does not collaborate with science loses innovation. And fostering project development - because ideas need structure, and consortia need the trust that is built face to face.

These objectives are not declarative — every session and every format in the Forum's programme is designed to contribute to one or more of them.

A LONG-TERM PLATFORM, NOT A ONE-OFF EVENT

The Horizons of Innovation Forum is not conceived as a series of independent annual events. Each edition builds on the previous one — contacts, projects, conversations and ideas generated in Osijek continue in Novi Sad, and then in Banja Luka. Participants who already know each other arrive with different goals: not to meet, but to continue the work.

This logic of continuity gives the Forum a dimension that short-term events simply do not have. It is not only valuable in the days when it takes place — it is valuable because it permanently shifts the position of its participants within regional and European networks.