



***The Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs***

***Solidarity Funds for Innovative Projects, civil societies, Francophonie and human development.***

**Higher education in the Western Balkans  
ES-Balk**

**CALL FOR PROJECTS 2021**

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## 1. General presentation

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The “*Higher education in the Western Balkans*” project proposes support in launching academic cooperation initiatives for our institutions and research centres and to enable those already launched to be supported in the Western Balkans (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia), by assisting them in their exploratory research, enabling better identification of needs in local training, and by promoting French educational engineering to meet those needs, while maintaining a European dimension with the aim of better attracting European funds.

This project is part of **France's strategy for the Western Balkans**, endorsed by the Presidency of the French Republic in March 2019, in which **higher education and research must form one aspect of our soft diplomacy, with a view to France’s renewed bilateral commitment in this region.**

This **selective call for proposals** aims to **help supply meet demand by financing 10 bilateral projects** (one or two per country for a maximum amount of €38k) and **two regional projects** (maximum €60k per project with at least two partners from two Western Balkan countries and at least one French partner), **all of which must be jointly developed by two partners or a dedicated France-Balkans consortium.** The technical and operational implementation of the project activities will be handled by France Education International, which will report back on its activities to the Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs (MEAE).

## 2. Geographical reach

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The **countries admissible for the call for projects** are the six countries in the Western Balkans (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia) and France. In order to be eligible, the projects submitted cannot include other partners from other countries.

## 3. Objectives

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### 3.1. Main objective

**Provide support to launch academic cooperation initiatives for our institutions and research centres and enable those already launched to be supported in the Western Balkans, by assisting them in their exploratory research, enabling better identification of needs in local training, and by promoting French educational engineering to meet those needs, while maintaining a European dimension with the aim of better attracting European funds.**

### 3.2. Secondary objectives

The project developers may **propose one or more activities that fall within the field of eligible expenses listed below, within one or both components of ES-Balk:**

- **Component 1: “EXPLORATION”** - Assist private and public higher education institutions and research centres in their ambitions to grow in the Western Balkans by facilitating the financing of exploratory research in both directions and the expansion of partnerships.
- **Activities 1 – Building relationships:** Financing exploratory research by French educational teams; quality assessment of partners; promotion of France's university offering, which helps spark an interest in France in countries where foreign competition is strong; and hosting Balkan teams.

- **Activity 2 – Documentation of strengths and weaknesses of practices to initiate useful partnerships between French institutions and research centres in the six Western Balkan countries:** needs analysis studies, methodological studies; feasibility studies of academic projects; feasibility studies of joint research projects, educational innovation; cartography and analysis of existing university partnerships in a given country.
- **Activity 3 – Support to social and human sciences courses in universities and research centres that require better networking at the regional level:** Financing workshops, conferences and meetings to set up joint research projects.
- **Component 2: “EUROPEANIZATION”** – Help to strengthen existing cooperation programmes and start new ones by supporting training and exchange activities between the departments and international relations offices of higher education institutions so they may use financing levers such as the AUF, Erasmus+ and Horizon Europe (non-exhaustive list).
- **Activity 1 – Technical support and capacity-building for Balkan institutions so they are able to attract international financing, such as Erasmus+ and AUF funds:** Methodological support to carry out a watch on calls for projects, submit tenders and be Erasmus+ project coordinator.

**Activities 2 – Organization and financing of work sessions on-site in France or in the Western Balkans** so that the international relations teams of partner higher education institutions can spend time preparing their tenders in accordance with the timeline of the pre-selected calls for projects.

ES-Balk is not based on courses or disciplines, but rather on **competencies; all courses and disciplines are eligible**, once they meet the needs and priorities of higher education and research of the partner countries.

The financial expenses covered will include **travel costs, communication costs, access to documentation** and the **use of technical expertise** consistent with the targeted objectives of the project. The time spent working on the project by French and Balkan institution coordinators may also be partially covered, limited to 10% of the total project amount.

The cost of **small equipment or materials**, according to needs that are clearly identified and detailed by the institutions in the tender file may, if necessary, be partially covered, limited to 10% of the total contribution requested from the MEAE.

The following is a non-exhaustive list of **non-eligible** expenses:

- Study and placement grants
- Registration fees
- Cost of one full salary
- Management and operating costs of institutions

#### **4. Eligibility requirements and project selection**

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#### 4.1. Eligibility requirements

The projects submitted:

- May be presented by **any public or private higher education establishment or any public or private research centre**. Several projects may be submitted by the same institution or research centre;
- **May be in French or English;**
- Must be **jointly drafted and submitted by a partnership of two** (institution/research centre + institution/research centre from one of the six Western Balkans countries) or a dedicated **French-Balkan consortium** (French institutions and/or research centres + institutions from one or several Balkan countries);
- For each institution member of a partnership/consortium, a contact project manager and a **lead institution or research centre must be designated, and this lead will be the recipient of all funds in the name of the consortium. This lead institution should designate, in addition to a project manager, one person responsible for the project's administrative and financial follow-up;**
- Will fulfil the **ES-Balk objectives** as defined in paragraph 3.2;
- Will propose activities that fall under the category of **eligible expenses** listed in paragraph 3.2;
- Will not request a **sum exceeding €38,000** (bilateral projects) or **€60,000** (regional projects) for their implementation;
- May be **ready for commencement in autumn 2021 and must be terminated by November 2022 at the latest;**
- Will be submitted in compliance with the **presentation framework** proposed in paragraph 6;
- Will propose a **calibrated budget** according to the topic and the methodology used, and based on the costs of the country concerned. The budget will be drawn up based on the template proposed in the appendix (Excel file "Budget template")
- Must describe precisely the **expected outcomes and deliverables** (responses and results achieved in European and international calls for projects, establishment of cooperation/mobility agreements, setting up of joint research programmes, publications, etc.).

#### 4.2. Project selection

A **steering committee**<sup>1</sup> will meet in June, **chaired by the MEAE**, to check the eligibility of the projects submitted and **assess the proposals** deemed admissible. A **limited number of high quality projects will be selected** depending on the financing available. Depending on the actions proposed, the evaluators will pay close attention to the following **evaluation criteria** which will determine the admissibility of the projects submitted:

- **Alignment of the topic and objectives** with those selected for the call for projects;
- Even geographical distribution of projects in the six countries of the Western Balkans and varieties of French project developers;
- **Joint creation of projects** in a partnership dynamic between Balkan and French institutions, that illustrates the involvement of all parties in the project;
- **Project implementation capacity** of the French teams and their partner Balkan institutions, organization of activities and balanced and realistic division of roles;
- Realistic and operational nature of actions likely to **find a useful niche and blend into the landscape of higher education and research in the host country/countries;**
- Project's capacity to:

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<sup>1</sup> Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs, Ministry for Higher Education, Research and Innovation, agency responsible for the project (FEI), CPU

- Develop the visibility, **attractiveness and outreach of French institutions and research centres in the Western Balkans**
- **Support the scaling-up of the existing local offering**
- **Identification by the project developers of non-academic partners** (businesses, consortiums, professional fields, donors, research organizations, etc.)
- **Economic model** and lever effects on the **mobilization of external financing**;
- **Methodology of the response proposal**;
- **“Gender” aspect**, to encourage gender equality, equity and to attract young generations, especially young women, to areas (educational fields, trades, etc.) traditionally marked by a gender imbalance;
- **Timetable of actions** to be rolled out in relation to the expected outcomes;
- **Inclusion of the current health context when drafting projects and evenly dividing the actions between 2021 and 2022, while acknowledging that they cannot commence before autumn 2021 (see below)**;

**Special attention will be given to projects that include local governments and/or businesses already present in the six countries of the Western Balkans and on cross-cutting topics such as reconciliation, climate change and promoting women in science.**

These criteria will be adapted to suit the nature of the project submitted (exploratory/structural – called “Europeanization” below)

**In addition to the technical criteria listed in the attached analysis table, the selection committee will take into consideration criteria of a political, strategic and geographical nature.**

## **5. Budget**

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The delegating of credits to the project developers selected will be carried out as follows:

- **30% in year *n* (2021)**: financing agreements will be drawn up between the France Education International agency and the French institutions and research centres behind the projects selected in this call for projects
- **70% in year *n+1* (2022)**: the payment for year *n+1* will be determined by an annual review of results achieved and of the partners’ activity programmes for the finalization of project activities within the given timeframe and will be paid in two instalments. The availability of funds included in the budget in *year n+1* is subject to its adoption by the MEAE budget authorities.

**The projects must be implemented and the expected results achieved by the end of November 2022.**

## **6. Project presentation framework**

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The summary presentation of the project must **not be more than eight pages long** (excluding appendix documents)

- **General presentation:** project title, duration, project developers, project managers and their job titles, contact details (address; email; land line and mobile phone numbers), person responsible for administrative follow-up for lead institution;
- **Type of action(s) proposed** (see para.3.2): exploratory research, methodological studies, setting up of degree or certificate training courses, capacity-building, joint publications, applications for project/financing tenders;
- **Partners:** presentation and contact details of the academic and non-academic partners identified;
- **Project description:** summary; current situation and general problem; justification for the project with regard to the partner institutions, the country and the region; the value of the project with regard to the public policies in higher education and research in the partner countries; identification and anticipation of possible difficulties;
- Overall and specific **objective, group targeted and end beneficiaries;**
- **Implementation method** enabling objectives to be achieved and main advantages that the leader believes to have to successfully carry out the project, in particularly as regards previous experience in the area;
- **Expected results** with calculated results indicators and situation at project end;
- **Conditions to secure the project's future** once the FSPI project financing is terminated;
- **Detailed budget** (table attached to this call for projects completed): detail of all project costs by specifying the partners' contributions (financial, human resources, material contributions, etc.);
- **Timetable of activities: the activities can start once the agreement is signed with the FEI agency and must be completed by the end of November 2022.**
- **Documents attached:**
  - **Letter of intent by the French and Balkan partners;**
  - Demonstrating their collaboration and their commitment to jointly creating the project;
  - Letter of undertaking from the **non-academic partners;**
  - Letter of undertaking concerning the **covering of co-financing** signed by the representatives of the institutions/structures involved;
  - **curriculum vitae** of the project developers;
  - **any other document** that the applicants may deem useful to provide to the MEAE.

## **7. Implementation schedule**

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- **31 March 2021: Call for projects issued** in France and the countries eligible for the programme by FEI
- **30 May 2021: Project submission deadline**

- **June 2021: Submissions reviewed** (eligibility, compliance, admissibility), project assessment and selection by the steering committee
- **First week of July 2021: notification sent to the coordinators of selected projects**
- **July 2021 and August 2021:**
  - **Projects finalized** (deliverables completed, timetable and budget)
  - **Financing agreements signed**
- **September–October 2021:**
  - Payment of the first financing instalment to the lead institution for projects for which the agreement has been signed
  - **Commencement of activities**
- **30 November 2022:** termination of projects financed by ES-Balk, to allow for final external evaluation

## 8. Contacts

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The selected teams can **obtain support from the academic services (embassies, Instituts Français) in the Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs’ network**. Its officials (Cooperation and Cultural Action Counsellors, academic and scientific cooperation attachés, international technical experts, etc.) will be available to French institutions to support their initiatives and guide them in their exploratory phase. Note that the completed analysis table can be sent to the project developers who will submit the request to FEI. The projects with completed budget template should be **sent to the following e-mail address before 30 May 2021 (reference “Call for projects ES-Balk - name of French project developer”)**: [esbalk@france-education-international.fr](mailto:esbalk@france-education-international.fr)

## Appendix: Table for internal analysis

CRITERIA FOR ANALYSIS	
Project name	
Higher education institution/research centre partners	
Amount requested	
<b>Category 1: Admissibility criteria (prerequisites for application review) Answering “no” to any of these questions will result in project’s exclusion</b>	
1. <b>Application submission deadline</b> (30 May 2021) respected	yes/no
2. Project presented by <b>public or private higher education institutions/ public or private research centres.</b>	yes/no
3. Project prepared and developed <b>jointly by a dedicated partnership</b> (French institution + Balkan research centre) or a <b>French-Balkan consortium</b> (French institutions + institutions of one or several Balkan countries)	yes/no
4 the Balkan partner(s) is/are <b>from one of the six countries eligible for the call for projects</b>	yes/no
<b>5. Presentation framework respected</b> ( <i>general presentation, type of action proposed, partners, project description, objectives and beneficiaries, implementation methodology, expected results, conditions to secure the project’s future, detailed budget, timetable of activities</i> ) in <b>eight pages maximum (tolerance up to 10 pages)</b> , excluding appendix documents	yes/no
6. The project proposes one or more activities that fall within the field of <b>eligible expenses</b> , within both components of ES-Balk	yes/no
7. The total amount of the financing requested does not <b>exceed €38k for bilateral projects and €50k for regional projects</b>	yes/no
8. The total project duration will not <b>go beyond the year 2022</b>	yes/no
<i>For categories 2 and 3, the table evaluates the project according to compliance with the criteria specified. The criteria are evaluated on a scale of 0 to 5, 0 being the lowest, 5 the highest. Depending on the number of applications, a minimum score will be required to qualify for the Selection Committee.</i>	
<b>Category 2: Call for projects compliance criteria</b>	
9. <b>Alignment of the topic and objectives with those specified in the call for projects</b>	/5
10. <b>Joint creation of projects in a partnership dynamic</b> among Balkan and French institutions	
11. <b>Capacity</b> of the French teams and their partner Balkan institutions to <b>develop the projects within institutions, and division of roles;</b>	
12. Actions likely to strengthen the capacities and the quality of the educational offering in the <b>higher education landscape of the host country</b>	
13. Project's capacity to <b>develop the visibility, attractiveness and outreach of French institutions and research centres in the region and support the francophonie.</b>	
14. Project's capacity to <b>draw on the high-quality educational courses provided in the Western Balkans and on the well-established inter-university and scientific cooperation between France and a given country</b>	
16. Project's capacity to <b>fulfil the needs expressed by the Balkan partners</b> with the support ( <i>academic, scientific, technical and institutional</i> ) of French partners	
17. Project's capacity to <b>strengthen ties between universities and businesses, by prioritizing the structuring of a high-quality professional training offering</b> , guided by economic demand and enabling insertion in local employment areas	
18. <b>Identification of non-academic partners</b> ( <i>businesses, consortiums, professional fields, donors, research organizations, etc.</i> )	



19. <b>“Gender” aspect</b> , to encourage equality, equity and to attract young generations, especially young women, to areas (educational fields, trades, etc.) traditionally marked by a gender imbalance;	
<b>Category 3: Technical evaluation criteria</b>	
20. <b>Innovative nature of the action</b> proposed	
21. <b>Methodology of the response proposal</b> : clear objectives, relevant, realistic and operational activities	
22. <b>Human resources dedicated</b> to implementation of the project	
23. Mobilization of <b>co-financing</b>	
24. <b>Precision, consistency and calibration of the provisional budget with regard to the planned activities</b> ( <i>accurate estimate of expenditure, ratio of cost of the action to the expected benefit, fund management strategy</i> ) and adaptation of the budget to the costs in the country concerned	
25. Presence of a <b>realistic implementation schedule/timetable</b> that presents a structured list of the actions to carry out	
26. <b>Description of deliverables and the situation at project end</b> in the key topics of the programme with <b>calculated results indicators</b>	
27. <b>Anticipated impact of the project on the partners</b> : benefit of the expected outcomes in relation to the <b>development strategies in the French and Western Balkan research centres and institutions beneficiaries of the project</b> and with regard to the <b>higher education and research public policies</b> in the partner countries	
28. <b>Project ambition in terms of positive outputs and viability of the actions</b> ( <i>economic model, business plan, development strategy, mobilization of external financing, etc.</i> )	
<b>TOTAL SCORE</b>	<b>/100</b>
<b>Category 4: Opinion and comments</b>	