



EIT RawMaterials partners with Government of Albania to launch landmark Regional Innovation Centre

- Regional Innovation Centre to support Albania's 'Smart Specialization' strategy
- Centre positions Albania as a pioneer in raw materials sector for Western Balkans
- The official launch of the Regional Innovation Centre took place on 23 April in Elbasan, Albania

BERLIN, 23 April 2024 -- EIT RawMaterials, the largest raw materials partnership in Europe, and the Ministry of Infrastructure and Energy of Albania signed a historic agreement marking the establishment of Regional Innovation Centre in Albania.

The raw material sector has been identified as part of the priority sectors under the Government of Albania's Smart Specialization Strategy. The Regional Innovation Centre, based in Elbasan, will act as a hub to catalyse innovation, education and business creation in the raw materials for Albania and the wider region. The centre will play a critical role in modernising the extractive and processing industries related to raw materials, including introducing green technologies and expanding Albania's primary resource offerings to the European market.

This partnership marks the first of its kind between EIT RawMaterials and a Western Balkan government, laying the groundwork for future collaborative initiatives in the region.

Speaking at the launch, Bernd Schäfer, CEO and Managing Director, EIT RawMaterials, said: *"This landmark partnership between EIT RawMaterials and the Government of Albania opens an exciting new path for collaboration and innovation in the raw materials sector for the region. The Regional Innovation Center will play a strong role in implementing the Government's Smart Specialisation Strategy, and support Albania realising the rich potential of its raw materials sector by leveraging the power of the EIT RawMaterials network, and the wider European industrial ecosystem."*

Belinda Balluku, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Infrastructure and Energy, Government of Albania said: *"The Regional Innovation Centre in Albania, being a hub for innovation, collaboration, and sustainable practices, marks a major step forward in transforming our raw materials sector, and reinforces our commitment to aligning with the EU Critical Raw Materials Act. Given that the Raw Material sector is part of the Growth plan priorities for the Western Balkans, this initiative contributes substantially to the regional development and positions Albania strategically within the EU value chain. Our steadfast dedication to the raw materials sector, as outlined in the Smart Specialization Strategy, signifies our ambitious role in the EU integration journey and our aim to be a key player in the industrial landscape and integrate into global supply chains."*



The raw material sector has been identified by quadruple helix stakeholders* in Albania as part of one of the three main priority sectors of the Smart Specialization Strategy that the Government of Albania is going to adopt by June 2024.

The Regional Innovation Centre will facilitate information exchange and collaboration across the EIT RawMaterials network and beyond, building synergies with Albanian national programmes, including those in the wider Western Balkans region. The centre will also focus on building skills and entrepreneurship, particularly among women students and researchers, while promoting STEM education tailored to the industry's future needs.

The new partnership complements the European Commission's recent Growth Plan for the Western Balkans**, which aims to provide the region with some preliminary advantages of EU integration, boost economic growth and accelerate essential socio-economic advancements. By working together, EIT RawMaterials and the Government of Albania are determined to advance the goals of the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans and the Western Balkans Innovation Agenda and to charter a course for regional development and sustainable innovation.

The new Regional Innovation Centre is located on the premises of the University of Elbasan, located 30 minutes from the Albanian capital, Tirana and an official Mission City of the European NetZeroCities^ Programme. It will be open daily to support stakeholders from universities, industry, investors, and innovators of the raw materials value chain in Albania.

Notes to the editor:

- The official launch of the Innovation Centre took place on 23 April in Elbasan, Albania.
- The ceremony was attended by the Deputy Prime Minister of Albania, Belinda Balluku; the EU Ambassador to Albania, Silvio Gonzato; CEO & Managing Director of EIT RawMaterials, Bernd Schäfer; and the EU Delegation in Tirana.
- An audience of more than 100 people attended the inauguration ceremony, including concession owners, representatives of the Albanian Geological Survey, the National Agency of Natural Resources, institutes of higher education and the research community.
- * quadruple helix stakeholders: public authorities, industry, academia and citizens
- ** New Growth Plan for the Western Balkans: https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/enlargement-policy/new-growth-plan-western-balkans_en
- ^ NetZeroCities: <https://netzerocities.eu/mission-cities/>

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About EIT RawMaterials

EIT RawMaterials is the leading European raw materials partnership, which was established in 2015 to advance Europe's transition into a sustainable economy. EIT RawMaterials' mission is to secure a sustainable raw materials supply for Europe, close materials loops and design product solutions to ultimately develop raw materials into a major strength for Europe by driving innovation, education and entrepreneurship. EIT RawMaterials is also the largest network worldwide in the raw materials sector, with over 300 members across the entire raw materials value chain. EIT RawMaterials is one of the nine innovation communities supported by the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT), a body of the European Union.