PROJECT PROPOSAL

Establishing the Centre for Education, Research, Technology and Innovation (CERTI)
A. RATIONALE

Marin Barleti University (UMB) is a private institution of higher education in Albania which bears the name of the historian/humanist of the 15th century, Marin Barleti author of the historic account on the Skanderbeg epics. Marin Barleti University was established in 2005 by Marin Barleti Joint Stock Company, which is part of DUDAJ Group. Marin Barleti is a fully accredited higher education institution and is governed by a board of the most respected names in Albania, including the Former President of the Country, four MPs, and several other prominent figures.

The University has four Faculties. The Faculty of Economics and Finances, the Faculty of Social Sciences, the Faculty of Law, and the Faculty Applied Sciences form the core of programs and aim at being a guiding force for the Albanian society by nurturing young minds to achieve their full potential by helping them get prepared for great careers. Most of the degrees allow students to combine study in more than one of these subjects with one major subject and one or more minors such as: Information technologies, business law, marketing, international business, international relations, management, public administration, social psychology, etc. The University also offers Master's degree studies as part of the graduate program. The University has been a success story in the ever challenging attempt at raising the standards of a higher level of education within Albania, as well as in organizing national, regional and international activities.

As part of the wider agenda of modernization of higher education in Albania, and to assist the University fulfill all the requirements of the Standards & Criteria of the European Quality Improvement System (EQUIS), Barleti Institute for Research and Development (BIRD) has been established as a ‘not-for-profit’, independent research organization. Its activities are usually undertaken within a multidisciplinary setting mainly, but not solely, within the environmental and social sciences. BIRD aims to foster and carry out qualitative scientific research, providing students and academic staff at UMB with the necessary infrastructure consisting of high technology and contemporary premises. It also under-
takes qualitative research, within its areas of competence, for external purposes in collaboration with the departments and centres of the university and additionally in partnership with other scientific research institutions.

For more than 5 years, the names University “Marin Barleti” and “Barleti Institute of Research and Development” have been synonymous with high-quality teaching and research and analysis on issues at the top of the national policy agenda in Albania. UMB and BIRD are proud of that reputation, of the many studies that have contributed to it and of the researchers and specialists who built and sustain it.

**B. SCOPE**

As the policy issues become more complex and dynamic, the scope of the research and development agenda will expand. Research plays a crucial role in economies and social systems that value knowledge creation and innovation. As Balkan countries seek to develop their research and development (R&D) capabilities and embark on research initiatives and partnerships at the international level, cooperation amongst them will become all the more important to sustain momentum and calibrate impact.

By establishing CERTI, the university is moving to gear up its structures for emerging opportunities to engage, influence and impact the spectrum of issues and agendas that cluster around the modernization of education in transitional states and developing economies. It will use CERTI not only to advance its within-country operational base but also as a platform for building a proactive internationalization strategy particularly in relation to the South East European Region. It will seek to cultivate joint efforts in cross-border research and development, sharing of expertise and resource and common approaches to problem solving so as to reduce within-region variation and achieve cost-effective opportunities for adding value.

CERTI will strive to develop new applications for knowledge and technologies by using strategic partnerships to mediate the transfer and exchange of knowledge assets to stakeholders, service users, clients and social partners in both the private and public sectors.
B.1. Mission and Priority areas

CERTI will coordinate aspects of basic, applied, developmental and strategic research on a broad spectrum of cognate fields of interest and relevant topics. Its lead projects will be directed by the University in response to regional policy priorities in the areas of education and training, science and research, information society, social welfare and rights, business enterprise and trans-European cooperation.

The Mission of CERTI is to provide the necessary infrastructure:

- to foster and support multi- and interdisciplinary research and development and other scholarly activities with Balkan Universities and other research organizations operating in the region.
- to enable the development of standards and the acquisition of knowledge, competences and evidence-informed decision-making capacities on the part of senior administrators and managers in order to open up opportunities for distributed innovation across the region.
• to broker effective partnerships with the business community and promote entrepreneurial capacities and the creation of a competitive and innovative model for sustainable enterprise;
• to exploit the full the potential of young people, and of the wider community, by involving them directly in contributing to diverse projects for the social and economic benefit of the community.

CERTI will have three high-priority goals:

1. Strengthening cooperation between Balkan regional researchers, the higher education sector and synthesizing organizations and agencies with an applicatory agenda.
2. Gaining access to international best practice learning solutions innovation potential.
3. Strengthening sustainable cooperation with Balkan countries in the fields of education, research, technology and innovation.

C. ORGANIZATION AND STRUCTURE

CERTI will be a Coordinating Centre – not a Centre where some particular activity is concentrated. It will serve to coordinate the work of a cluster of cells covering the whole processes of Education - in the wider sense of unlocking multiple opportunities for learning, enhancing social capital and moral maturity, and stimulating knowledge development and mobilization. It will also serve to synchronize the work of its activity cells, integrate them into the wider ‘mosaic of talent’ constituted by the research and scholarly endeavor of the University, its Research Institutes and its Professional Academy and provide links to other organizations.

CERTI will act as platform for the dissemination of research and development practice and output and have a central focus on engaging with wider society in utilizing scholarly expertise to promote social and economic development aligned with the European Union’s enlargement strategy and linked to regional priorities.

CERTI will endeavor to formulate its own matrix of relationships between education, research and technology to realize potential synergies, create a fertile culture for innovation, and deliver practical applications. It will facilitate strategic partnerships, primarily with regional institutions, to help create a mature network of collaboration, build local capacity and create a pipeline of projects to support regional development.
D. COMPOSITION AND INTERACTION

Structurally, CERTI will have four overlapping units, closely interacting with each other and linked to the wider intellectual capital and activities of the University, its Research Institutes and its Professional Academy.

1. Barleti Training and Testing Center (BTTC)

This will have as its central focus the dynamics of the labour market, particularly demand-led qualifications that enhance employability and promotion prospects in the context of Europeanization. It will feature a suite of training and testing options designed to upgrade soft skills, improve knowledge and result in certification in areas such as: Information Technology, Project Management and English Language.

**BTTC** aims to anticipate issues and problems that organizations will face in the future. In integrating these analyses into its training programs, it will enable invaluable changes in relevant sectors and help its service users to gain competitive advantages.

**BTTC** has in put in place a flexible delivery format, from one day training sessions to courses lasting several months. The processes involved can take place either in the **BTTC** premises or at client or other premises that are suitable for the training purposes.

- **IT Training**

IT training programs consist of tracks and individual certification course options designed to give service users skills and knowledge in order to gain a competitive advantage in
the workplace. There is a growing demand for this kind of professional certified training in information and communications technology. New Horizons has a large network of authorized training outlets; with 300 centers distributed in 60 countries, New Horizons is the largest independent company of IT-related education in the world. By applying basic and productive desktop tools that complement and integrate business systems, New Horizons provides a complete technology solution. Its realization is possible through an integrated learning approach that ensures the application of new knowledge in real life situations.

**English Language Training**

During the academic year 2012, BTTC will start offering new study programs to increase the level and scope of English acquisition and proficiency in Albania. The aim of the English Language Training and Testing program is to:

- Help Albanian students prepare for internationally recognized English language exams, which are recognized and accredited by the Albanian Ministry of Education and Science, such as TOEFL, TOEIC and IELTS. BTTC has already been licensed as an Authorized Prometric Testing Center
and is actively seeking further recognition as an Approved Testing Site.

- Help Albanian students raise their level of English language proficiency and enable them to take the relevant English exam.
- Run English ‘crash courses’ to help Albanian high school students take the English state exam
- Help various specialists familiarize themselves with the relevant terminology and literature in English.

**o Management Skills Training**

Through a wide selection of training offers, *New Horizons* Business Skills courses provide companies and individuals, the training skills and different solutions to professional issues of career development such as management, leadership, sales and customer services, finance and human resources.

The Business Skills Training meets the training of students in technology and, complemented by the parallel offer of English language training, together provides an integrated learning solution.

In a competitive environment, the ability of an organization to achieve efficient allocation of resources and activities in line with strategic objectives is the difference between success and survival. The *BTTC* suite of training and testing options can help both individuals and organizations achieve a strong position in this respect.

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**2. Center of Excellence in Teaching and Learning**

*University Marin Barleti* aspires to strengthen its teaching and learning to become a center of academic excellence in the region. It is committed to provide a learning-centered environment to prepare graduates and postgraduates who will demonstrate knowledge, skills and attributes in accordance with internationally recognized standards of achievement.

The Centre of Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL) will:

- act as a catalyst for pedagogic innovation;
- support scholarly teaching, programme development and learning activity;
- provide a knowledge base for excellent teaching that stimulates corporate responsibility for learning whereby scholars, practitioners and students come together to share, extend and apply their understanding of the world.

The CETL will espouse a concept of *excellent teaching* which, first of all, gains the attention of students and convinces them of the importance and significance of what is being taught and learned – the outcomes will be demonstrated by *student engagement*.

The CETL will identify *excellent learning* as occurring when students become aware of having high expectations of their own efforts and of their teachers' efforts to deepen knowledge, extend skills and effect greater under-
standing – the outcomes will be demonstrated by student attainment.

**CETL services**

- Course evaluation.
- On request video-recording of class sessions.
- Preparation and administering of materials devoted to effective teaching (video-demonstration of the best techniques, printed brochures, posters, flyers, etc.)
- Course effective design.
- Orientation sessions for the beginning instructors.
- Pedagogical assistance for the beginning instructors.
- Support and maintenance of teaching-related technological equipment.
- Pre-paid tutoring for UMB students (in math, English, etc.)
- Master credit courses for the professional development of school and pre-school teachers
- Periodical publication of “The CETL Bulletin”.
- Other technical services provided by Media and Technology Sector (MTS) of CETL.
- Leading on/facilitating applications to European education programs such as Tempus, Erasmus Mundus, etc. in order to participate in their exchange of students, faculty and teaching and learning experiences programs.
- Organization of the annual Teaching and Learning Conference

In terms of organizational structure, CELT is conceived as basic unit under the auspices of a designated University Faculty/Division and during the first phase it will be constituted in three sectors, each headed by a “Sector Chair”. These sectors are:

- the sector of leadership and management in education
- the sector of teaching and training
- the sector of media and learning technology

### 3. Center of Information Technology

The Center of Information and Technology presents a new model of computing school—one where students not only learn technology mechanism, but also what it is able to bring about. Our interdisciplinary attitude to research and education, as well as our contemporary curriculum, is planned to bring in a generation of IT professionals with the knowledge, way of thinking, and agility to solve complex situation from the computing word

CIT aspires to be a pre-eminent producer of vibrant professionals that celebrate diversity and foster innovation in academic excellence, research and community participation to be compatible with the new technology era.

The mission of the CIT is to outshine and guide in education, research, and community outreach. It aims to incorporate to the grea-
test extent computing and information technology, including the scientific and technical issues, and wide assortment of applications with different aspects of the human society necessities. In fulfilling this mission, the CIT undertakes:

- To work at excellent teaching which involves being innovative and up-to-date at all times;
- Increase awareness and sensitivity of informatics and achievements and challenges it affords, by stimulating interest, and making information accessible;
- To organize outside courses for individuals in private, public and non-profit organizations in order to offer them with applicable, up-to-date skills and knowledge that will help them to handle competently with an ever-changing computing environment;
- To reflect the CIT's strategy and practice in relation to public feedback, and the requirements, benefits and concerns of society.
- To contribute its expertise to the community and to diffuse its research in national and international journals, books and conferences.

CIT will be in organized in two sections: (i) Computer Sciences (ii) Applied Informatics.

i. The section of Computer Sciences is focused on teaching and researches relatives to:

- Algorithms
- Data Structures
- Programming
- Artificial Intelligence
- Machine Learning
- Computational Logic
- Security
- Information and Knowledge Management
- Language and Communication Technologies

ii. The section of Applied Informatics is focused especially on the problematic related to:

- Databases
- Computer systems and networks
- Innovations and web technology
- Multimedia and graphics design
- Mobile computing
The center provides a prosperous learning and developing environment combining creative, technical and conceptual skills relevant to all aspects of new technologies, digital media and computing and aims to help students, employees, developers and community.

4. Enterprise Development and Innovation Center (EDIC)

EDIC aims to help enterprises find the answers they need to start, sustain and grow their businesses. Supported by the academic staff and experts, EDIC helps businesses grow and enhance their operations through diagnostics and consultancy services. Specifically, it provides assistance in:

- Business road-mapping
- Branding
- Creating enterprises
- Technology innovation
- Productivity and innovation management
- Project management
- Market studies
- Enterprise Resource Planning
- Overall business improvement
- Offering a full range of operational services for businesses and organizations.

EDIC envisages becoming the leader for the delivery of technical support, advisory and information services to the enterprises for the facilitation of an enabling environment which will encourage the growth and development of the successful organizations in Albania and Balkan area. An centre of services and researches with the professional competence and commitment to deliver relevant and reliable services, information and advice to enterprises on all aspects of business resulting in increased competitiveness, higher levels of success and sustainability.

Objectives

- Helping enterprises to improve socio-economic performances
- Increase the number of viable small and medium enterprises in Albania
- Strengthen the institutional support base for private sector development.

E. INTERACTING AND SUPPORTING ORGANIZATIONAL MATRIX

1. The Barleti Professional Academy

The Barleti Professional Academy is part of UMB’s strategy to address growing demand for integrated learning that combines advanced expertise with the development of broader practical skills and a professional mindset that are required for success in the modern marketplace. The Academy’s distinctive educational philosophy will promote a dual-aspect combination of academic study with applied learning in the professional world. In so doing, it will provide a route to sought-
after academic qualifications while enabling students to gain extensive practical experience. This foundation will equip students and graduates to take on challenging tasks early in their professional careers thereby helping to launch them on successful career paths.

It is envisaged that the Academy will be organized in four schools provisionally identified as:

2. Engineering, Computing and IT.
5. School of Public Affairs.

It will offer professional education and training in a variety of fields ranging from management and business operations, applied computer sciences and information technology, architecture, electrical and mechanical engineering, to public administration, media & journalism, education & language, art & design, applied legal studies, health care, etc.

Based on international best practice and partnerships with leading European institutions that share a similar philosophy, the Academy will develop key features of dual aspect, practice-oriented degree programs in modular configuration allowing alternating phases, with students learning theory at the Academy and receiving practical training from an enterprise or social institution. Scientific-academic basics will be covered within the courses and elective modules along with flexible delivery modes and placements of varying length will enable students to choose the duration of their course and the level of qualification ranging from a 3-month Certificate to one or two year Diplomas, to a fully accredited Bachelor Degree.

Through collaboration with strategic partners, the Academy will not only support internationalization of the curriculum, but also cultivate cooperation and knowledge exchange with universities, companies and social institutions that will enable its students to access and engage with a diverse variety of professional fields worldwide and facilitate their experiencing a period of study, internship or placement abroad. It will have an emphasis on high-level interaction between students, their peers and those with experience and expertise and promote IT, analytical and research skills which can give graduates the ability to search out and exploit information and enhance their creative and leadership capacities.
2. Barleti Institute for Research and Development (BIRD)

Barleti Institute for Research and Development (BIRD) has its origin in the Center for Regional Studies, CRS, established within UMB in 2008. The Institute has been undergoing substantial transformations from the functioning point of view, in order to give a much broader vision to the scientific research in all its components, in compliance with the European policies and standards in this regard, as well as to become a strong promoter and supporter of research with Marin Barleti University, as very close collaborators, with a special focus on sustainable development.

The Institute operates as a non-profit organization of neither economic nor political and religious purposes, based on the Albanian legislation on the non-profit organizations in force.

The Institute's aims at fostering and carrying out qualitative scientific research within UMB, providing to the students and the academic staff the necessary infrastructure consisting of high technology and contemporary premises, as well as carry out, by its internal and affiliated staff, qualitative research within its areas of competence, not only in collaboration with the departments and centres of the university, but with other scientific research institutions inside and outside the country.

The institute aims also at supplying the students and academic staff, as well as all interested parties, with the most recent information regarding the latest developments in the areas that fall under the competence of the Institute's research centres and other units, as well as bring closer to the academia the business community, offer consultancy services to the business community, especially services related to SMEs development, information technology, research and innovation, knowledge-based economy.

The Institute relies on its infrastructure and the scientific research of the departments, centers and other institutes, which it has a continuous coordination and cooperation with.

3. Albanian Institute of Public Affairs (AIPA)

The Albanian Institute of Public Affairs (AIPA) is a newly established organization whose mission is to improve the policy making process in Albania by extending and refining the participatory mechanisms and by providing independent qualified expertise on the economic and legal development of the country. Established under the umbrella of Marin Barleti University, AIPA has a unique opportunity to serve as a bridge between the policy making community and the academic world. Therefore, AIPA is dedicated to encouraging and strengthening the present democratic experiences in Albania, by promoting democratic values at all stages and levels of the policy making process, analysis and implementation of public policies in the country. It attempts to help the policy-making process to become more transparent and open,
and responsive to the public interest, offering alternative suggestions based on professional research and evidence-based best practice as represented by leading international jurisdictions.

AIPA has been established as ‘not-for-profit’, independent policy studies organization drawing on an interdisciplinary framework informed by the social sciences, legal and environmental studies. Considering the needs and challenges of Albanian society as it undertakes the process of transformation, as well as the wider goals of AIPA, its work will be focused primarily on: Policy research, analysis and advice; Capacity building and training; Public debates and Policy Forums; Developing monitoring indicators on certain issues of significant importance for the public. So far, the AIPA has been engaged in some joint activities with the University such as the organization of open lectures and seminars on issues of common interest for students, the academia and other interested parties in Albanian society. Representatives from the main embassies and other notable foreign and national personalities have been invited and will continue to be invited as Keynote speakers in such events.

F. COST

There are numerous costs associated with acquiring, operating, maintaining, and running CERTI. In estimating the cost for CERTI we have considered mainly the initial costs (capital investment costs for land acquisition, construction, or renovation and for the equipment needed to operate a facility) and Operational expenses (energy, water, and other utilities).

Based on these estimations:

— Total Cost of the project: 235 000 Euro
— UMB Contribution (in kind) 95 000 Euro
— Donator Contribution 140 000 Euro

All costs are entered as base-year amounts in today’s Euros.