e-IRG Communiqué on the e-IRG Workshop under Slovenian EU Presidency

The e-IRG Workshop, organised in the framework of the Slovenian EU Presidency, took place on 1.-2. December 2021. The Workshop was implemented as three virtual sessions addressing main topics of the Slovenian Presidency of the Council of the Union concerning the resilience of Europe, its future and way of life, and the stability in the European neighbourhood.

The three main topics addressed were i) **Need for resilient and reconfigurable e-Infrastructures**, ii) **Gender balance in e-Infrastructures, Careers in e-Infrastructures** and iii) **Western Balkans and EU collaboration.** *The workshop* had a specific focus on e-Infrastructures as they play an even more important role addressing the grand challenges of today's society*.*

Need for resilient and reconfigurable e-Infrastructures

Research has become strongly dependent on electronic Infrastructures (e-Infrastructures) and data-intensive Research Infrastructures (RIs). These have to provide their services in a reliable and sustained way to support all research communities to address global challenges. Thus, RIs and e-Infrastructures are recognised as critical infrastructures, not only for researchers, but also for the society and the general public.

In this context the experiences made at the Roque de los Muchachos Observatory on the La Palma island and at GRNET has shown that crises and natural disasters, such as volcano eruptions and wildfires can significantly affect the operation of large scientific facilities. Therefore, a lesson learnt is that

> *"to mitigate the impact of environmental crises and natural disasters, service delivery must be designed and implemented in an uninterruptible way, even under complex environmental situations".*

Gender balance in e-Infrastructures, Careers in e-Infrastructures

This session topic was in-line with the Slovenian EU Presidency priorities and the European Research Area (ERA) Policy Agenda action on "Deepening the ERA through environmental inclusive gender equality",

The two main topics - gender balance and career development in Research Infrastructures and e-Infrastructures - were interconnected at many levels. The main focus laid in providing researchers with tools and knowledge on gender equality, equal opportunities, inclusiveness and attractive and sustainable working conditions and careers. The brief overview on definition/basics on gender and gender equality (strategies) in Europe (Horizon 2020 and Horizon Europe) including the GEAR tool, was followed by main questions like who is it for and what services are provided. Some good practices from research and academia rounded off the whole session. Attention was given to Research Infrastructures/ e-Infrastructures, which also have an operational dimension and face difficulties in keeping talented employees under the public sector.

Collective action is needed to develop skills, training, reward and recognition frameworks and career paths necessary to support further development and mainstreaming of FAIR and open science.

In particular, the role of IT service management in e-Infrastructures careers was considered:

An important added value is provided by a pragmatic approach to help distributed organisations capture and sustain knowledge through recognised career profiles and related processes.

Western Balkans and EU collaboration

The third session addressed the need for a stable European neighbourhood considering *EU collaboration in the Western Balkan region* - Research Infrastructures and electronic infrastructures (e-Infrastructures) are key enablers for research collaboration across the globe, and are even more important in regions with long-standing divisions. Research networking and establishment of National Research and Education Networks (NRENs) are fundamental to interconnect researchers and thus bridge the divisions and the digital divide between parts of the SEE region and the rest of Europe.

Strategic foresight offers governments (as well as NGOs, private companies, or other stake-holders) a range of tools to prepare for possible future developments. The collection of trends and newly emerging issues can help to develop a joint vision on how to respond to these developments in the area of research Infrastructures and electronic infrastructures. One finding was that *e-Infrastructures are key enablers for cross border and cross discipline Open Science and research*. Their development, but also the ability to maximise their utilisation through awareness, education and training needs to be promoted. These are two major processes that need to be continuously supported in parallel for the Western Balkan region, including valuable examples from Kosovo, North Macedonia and Serbia, providing the environment for scientific excellence to pair the EU levels.

e-IRG therefore states that

- *Regional and cross-border cooperation is required to build state of the art e-Infrastructure and services in the Western Balkans, used by the cross-border communities*
- *Furthermore, close cooperation between national e-Infrastructure providers and their local government is needed to secure national support for Infrastructures and buy-in for EC initiatives*
- *All parties should appreciate synergy and complementarity between national, regional and EU actions and funds*
- *Regional dimensions are important to keep them on par with EU efforts, to support countries on the path to EU accession and to prevent brain drain from the region*
- *Continued EC funding for the region (matching the national funding) is crucial to keep the momentum and to prevent 2-speed Europe*

Quote from Commissioner Mariya Gabriel:

> *"EU cooperation with the Western Balkans offers unparalleled opportunities. The Agenda for the Western Balkans will open these opportunities to students, researchers, innovators and cultural operators so that they access new markets, become more competitive and build sustainable prosperity"*

e-IRG publishes this communiqué after the successful completion of the workshop and would like to thank the speakers and moderators of the sessions who contributed significantly to the writing of the communiqué, in particular:

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e-IRG Workshop under Slovenian EU Presidency (https://events.geant.org/event/1081/)