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The European Commission's Joint Research Centre and Bulgaria emphasise a proven track record in joint research initiatives and look ahead to future projects

Today, 18 November 2008, a high-level conference on EU-Bulgarian research co-operation with the European Commission's Joint Research reviewed current and future perspectives on topics of particular importance to Bulgaria, such as:

- **Energy, Climate Change and Natural Hazards,**
- **Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs) in Food, Metrology**
- **Nuclear Safety and Security**

The Joint Research Centre comprises seven research Institutes based in five EU member states (Belgium, Germany, Holland, Italy, & Spain) and currently employs 31 Bulgarian staff.

The JRC provides robust scientific and technical support to policy-making in the areas of food, chemical products and health; environment and sustainability; nuclear safety and security; technology foresight; reference materials and measurements; public security and antifraud. A key priority is to help improve know-how and information exchange and to strengthen cooperative activities between EU Member States.

Speaking at the conference were key representatives from Bulgarian academia, research and industry. Keynote addresses were also given by Vania Dobрева, Deputy Minister of Education and Science; Albena Vutsova, Bulgarian Representative on the JRC's Board of Governors; and Roland Schenkel, Director-General, European Commission's Joint Research Centre (JRC).

"What we have seen today demonstrates the potential of Bulgaria's research community to seize the opportunities afforded by European Union membership. Evidence of enhanced cooperation with the Joint Research Centre is there for all to see and we are delighted with the growth in joint initiatives in recent years." said JRC Director General, Roland Schenkel.

Deputy Minister Vania Dobрева added: *"EU research policy can only realise its full potential when it has the appropriate links with scientific and technical organisations at international, national and regional levels. I actively encourage those Bulgarian actors already involved with the Joint Research Centre to continue this important work while pointing the way forward for others"*.

Bulgaria and the JRC: A growing partnership

The level of collaboration between the JRC's research Institutes and Bulgaria's scientific and technical community has progressed significantly in recent years. In 2006 - 2007, over 150 Bulgarian experts participated in specialised JRC-run workshops on the scientific and technical aspects of EU legislation. This level of participation is expected to grow to over 100 in 2008 alone.

Some 38 partnerships across a wide variety of scientific areas have been initiated with 21 currently in operation. Particularly over the past two years, 17 new joint activities have started that further integrate Bulgaria into the mainstream of European research. From detailed studies on investments in information and communication technologies, farm investment behaviour and food safety, to border security, use of chemicals and monitoring Black Sea ecosystems, Bulgarian researchers are becoming increasingly active.

Examples of joint projects

The European Flood Alert System

The JRC develops state-of-the-art technologies that are capable of collecting information, quantifying risks and disseminating warnings to mitigate weather driven disasters. Following the disastrous floods in the Elbe and Danube river basins in August 2002, the European Commission announced the development of a *European Flood Alert System* (EFAS). The system is currently being developed by the JRC in close collaboration with national authorities. In Bulgaria this is the *National Institute for Meteorology and Hydrology*. Once fully operational, EFAS will be capable of providing medium-range flood simulations across Europe with a lead time – the time between the detection and the arrival of the flood – between 3 to 10 days. This increased lead time means better preparedness for upcoming flood events in the Member States and also facilitates the Community's aid management during a crisis. In addition, the JRC is exploring an early warning system on droughts that could provide Bulgarian authorities with seasonal early warnings on future droughts.

Genetically Modified Organisms (GMO) in the food chain

In Bulgaria, the JRC collaborates among others with the *AgroBioInstitute* in Sofia to meet EU requirements for the authorisation, supervision and labelling of genetically modified food and feed. The JRC, a Community reference laboratory for GM food and feed, is assisted by a network of more than 100 national GMO enforcement control laboratories from all EU Member States. Its principal task is the technical evaluation and validation of detection methods for GM Food and Feed as part of the Commission authorisation procedure. Equally important is that operators world-wide are in a position to carry out the tests validated and published by the JRC. Training is an important factor herein and therefore, the JRC organises training courses in Bulgaria, aimed at providing assistance to regional scientists and to assist in capacity building.

Next steps

It is expected that the Round Table will generate concrete proposals further linking the Joint Research Centre with Bulgarian organisations within policy areas of prime concern for European citizens (security, environment, food quality, nuclear safety etc).

Further information

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