

SEEFIRE WORKSHOP: FIRST STEP FOR NRENS WISHING TO ACQUIRE DARK FIBRE IN SOUTH EAST EUROPE

The first SEEFIRE (South East Europe Fibre Infrastructure for Research and Education) workshop took place in Sofia, Bulgaria on 14 and 15 July - opening dialogue between NRENs and industry about dark fibre acquisition in the region. The workshop attracted 52 people, half from industry and half from NRENs, Research and Education institutes and the European Commission.

The new GÉANT2 pan-European network will connect a total of 33 countries, many of which will have access to up to 10Gbit/s based on dark fibre international links. This network will connect many locations throughout Europe, but not all of the countries in the SEE region. Among non-EU member states, only the NRENs of Croatia, Bulgaria, Romania and Turkey are members of the GÉANT2 consortium.

The NRENs in South East Europe will have a crucial strategic role to play regarding the extension of GÉANT2 in the region and narrowing the digital divide. Some NRENs in the region are not in operation yet and the countries concerned are lacking the minimal network infrastructure for research and education, whereas others have already taken steps towards the improvement of their infrastructure through the acquisition of dark fibre.

Dark fibre is optical fibre dedicated to use by a single organisation – in this case research network organisation – where the organisation is responsible for attaching the transmission equipment to 'light' the fibre. NRENs are keen to access dark fibre to improve their networks, rather than lease complete services from telecom operators or commercial Internet Service Providers (ISPs).

The primary aims of the workshop included:

- To provide a way for industry and NRENs to meet face-to-face and establish contacts;
- To increase industry's understanding of the research and academic environment and why NRENs are interested in acquiring dark fibre;
- To highlight that NRENs are not competitors of telecom operators and Internet Service Providers;
- To demonstrate that NRENs have a deep knowledge about optical transmission technologies and are ready to manage it;
- To raise awareness of the SEEFIRE project.

An interactive session on "Fibre Opportunities in the SEE Region" was stimulated by presentations given by Valeriu Vraciu (RoEduNet), Orlin Kouzov (ICT Development Agency Bulgaria) and Fred Premti (INIMA) on the preliminary results of the SEEFIRE project concerning fibre availability in Romania, Bulgaria and Albania. This session also provided a forum to explain that NRENs in the region are interested in acquiring dark fibre as it is the only cost effective means of developing their networks; that it would allow NRENs in the SEE region to bring their networks to the same level as other European research and education networks; and that NRENs are not in direct competition with the telecom operators and ISPs.

Welcomed on Thursday afternoon by Rossitza Petrova, ISTF, the workshop was opened by Orlin Kouzov, Director of the ICT Development Agency Bulgaria. A session on the “International Landscape” gave the workshop attendees an overview about the use of fibre in the SEE region, other European countries and the United States. Jorge Sanchez (GRNET), Victor Reijs (HEAnet) and Dimitar Vasilev (Cisco Systems) presented in this session.

Greece (GRNET), Serbia and Montenegro (AMREJ) and FYROM (MARNET) are currently well advanced in the deployment of dark fibre, although the modality of the acquisition, the type of ownership, and many other details vary significantly. A session on “National Landscapes in the SEE Region” with presentations by Jorge Sanchez (GRNET), Pavle Vuletic (AMREJ) and Borislav Popovski (MARNET) gave attendees the opportunity to hear about the different models of acquiring dark fibre in these countries.

Wim Jansen, European Commission, concluded the first day of the workshop highlighting that the SEEFIRE project is inline with the European Union strategies in supporting research and development in South East Europe. He advised that associated and future member states should create strategic co-ordination of research and education at a national level.

Two sessions on the second day of the workshop allowed the SEEFIRE partners with experience in setting-up and running optical networks to share their experiences, give advice and make recommendations in particular with regard to the technical elements of deploying dark fibre and optical transmission technologies. Stanislav Šíma, Lada Altmannova and Josef Vojtech (CESNET), Chrysostomos Tziouvaras (GRNET) and Djordje Vulovic and Pavle Vuletic (AMREJ) all contributed to these technical sessions.

The next SEEFIRE Workshop is planned for January 2006 and will focus on the strategic and economic aspects of dark fibre networks in the SEE region. The workshop will particularly appeal to all NREN stakeholders, politicians, users, managers of research and education institutions and fibre owners.

The Sofia workshop was one of the deliverables of the SEEFIRE project, which began in March 2005 and will last one year. Co-funded by the European Commission, the project will ultimately provide NRENs in the SEE region with a set of useful reports and guidelines about the deployment of optical transmission technologies and as well as regulatory, legal, economic and strategic issues. The workshop was organised by the IST Foundation (Bulgaria) and TERENA with significant contribution from SEEFIRE consortium participants. The workshop was sponsored by Cisco Systems and the ICT Development Agency of Bulgaria.

The SEEFIRE project is made up of a consortium of 11 partners, including:

- AMREJ (Academic & Research Network of Serbia & Montenegro);
- BIHARNET (Bosnian & Herzegovinian Research & Education Network);
- CESNET (Czech NREN operator);
- DANTE (Delivery of Advanced Network Technology to Europe);
- GRNET (Greek Research & Technology Network);
- INIMA (Academy of Sciences of Albania, Institute of Informatics & Applied Mathematics);
- ISTF (Information Society Technologies Foundation Bulgaria);
- MARnet (Macedonian Academic & Research Network);
- NIIF/HUNGARNET (Hungarian Research & Education Network);
- RoEduNet (Romanian Research & Education Network);
- TERENA (Trans-European Research and Education Networking Association).

To view the first SEEFIRE workshop presentations, visit: <http://www.seefire.org/schedule.php?ctn=1&language=en>

For more information about the SEEFIRE project, visit: <http://www.seefire.org>.

For more information about the GEANT2 project, visit: <http://www.geant2.net/>.

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