European Research Network extended to the Balkans with EU Support

The South Eastern European Research and Education Networking (SEEREN) project has completed the extension of the pan European high-speed research network GÉANT to the Balkan countries. This accomplishment not only interconnects the research communities in the South Eastern European Countries amongst themselves, but also connects them to the existing European backbone network for research and education. The extension makes it much easier for Balkan research communities to participate effectively in joint research and educational activities with the rest of Europe. The European Commission provided 1.3M€ of funding for the SEEREN project under the Information Society Technologies priority of its 5th Framework Programme for R&D. The extension was inaugurated today with a ceremony held at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki.

Erkki Liikanen, European Commissioner for Enterprise and the Information Society hailed the timely completion of the network: "In Thessaloniki, in June last year, the European Union sent a strong message of commitment to the Balkan countries. SEEREN is a concrete example of such support. The new network will improve online access for researchers and this is vital for enabling the full participation and integration of the Balkan research community in the European Research Area".

The South Eastern European segment of the multi-gigabit pan-European Research and Education network was deployed with 1.3M€ of support from the European Commission. The Greek Research & Education Network co-ordinates the project. The new network infrastructure provides broadband Internet links interconnecting the Research and Education Networks of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Greece, former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Romania and Serbia & Montenegro, as an extension of the GÉANT backbone network of Europe.

However the SEEREN project provides more than just technical connectivity: Its ultimate goal is to ease the "digital divide" that still separates the region from the rest of the continent. To this end the project actively encourages the scientific and educational communities of EU Member States to co-operate with South Eastern European countries.

The SEEREN consortium is leveraging other local, European and international funds to maximise the impact of their work in the region. Significantly their National Research and Education Networks are "green-field" infrastructures that use few legacy systems. They have in effect, "leap-frogged" several generations of technology to immediately deploy the latest Internet Protocol IPv6 all the way to computers on the desktop.

Background Information

The 5 Balkan countries added by this extension to the GÉANT network now brings the total number of countries in Europe served to 43. Over 3,500 research and education institutions across Europe are connected.

GÉANT provides a very high capacity Internet backbone which connects together the National and Regional Research and Education Networks in different countries. It offers the greatest geographical coverage of any network of its kind in the world (from Iceland to the Caucasus). GÉANT enables scientists to collaborate on the international stage by providing them with a world-class backbone that offers the bandwidth and the Quality of Service required for the most demanding of research and development activities. GÉANT has a dual role of providing an infrastructure to support the advanced communication needs of the scientific community, as well as providing an infrastructure for research on state-of-the-art communication technologies itself.

GÉANT is co-funded by the European Union within the 5th R&D Framework Programme. Total EU funding of 80 M€ is being provided over the four years of the GÉANT project, which is led by DANTE for Europe's research and education networks.

The GÉANT network is being continually upgraded, and currently has a total trunk capacity of 185 Gbit/s (more than twice as powerful than any other research network in the world). In addition, the network provides 14.5 Gbit/s of international connectivity to North America and Japan. Further links, to the Latin American and Mediterranean regions respectively, are being implemented by the EU-projects ALICE and EUMEDCONNECT and will become operational within the next few months.

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