

OPENING SPEECH

European CO-operation in Science and Technology – COST

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Welcome to the *European Network for Research Evaluation in the Social Sciences and the Humanities* Action meeting. As a COST National Coordinator for Bulgaria I am honored to deliver the opening speech and I am happy to welcome all of the scientists, researchers and scholars here today. I believe that this COST Action will be able to prove how important the Social Sciences and Humanities actually are. Improving the understanding of how these fields generate knowledge and what kind of scientific and societal interactions characterize different disciplines is crucial and will benefit not only European, but also International scholars in research evaluation and in the sociology of sciences, research managers and policy makers at all levels, data managers and researchers themselves.

I am quite curious myself! We, the policy makers, have been trying to be more flexible and more effective. We are witnessing sharp changes in the recent years: the research in the Social Sciences and Humanities is becoming more and more interdisciplinary, new types of objects need to be taken into account, new methodologies are being proposed, a combination of different policy interests are emerging from a large variety of social actors in order to improve the system nationwide and in the European Union.

Most of these challenges relate to profound changes in the way science, technology and innovation relate to society. We must take into account the needs and strategies of as many different actors involved as possible. The range of relations between science and society has been expanding rapidly in the last decades. We promote open science and open innovation, the growing digitalization, the new developments such as the sharing economy, crowdfunding, responsible science and innovation. But we cannot underestimate the fact that they drive to new governance issues. And this is precisely why your project is so important! I

believe the outcomes of this Action will be greatly useful for all the policy makers in the European Union for developing better legal and policy frameworks.

As you already know, the European COoperation in Science and Technology is the longest running European intergovernmental network for cooperation among researchers, engineers and scholars across Europe. Since its creation in 1971 COST is working towards closing the gap between science, policy makers and society throughout Europe and beyond.

After receiving observer status in 1998, Bulgaria became a COST country in 1999. The program consists of 36 Member Countries, 17 Near Neighbor Countries and 29 International Partner Countries. All these countries create an enormous network. It is worth mentioning that Bulgaria is among the 20 Inclusiveness Target Countries. This policy contributes to the Spreading Excellence and Widening Participation Horizon 2020 goal. It builds on the Committee of Senior Officials' previous efforts to boost inclusiveness in COST activities, while fostering scientific excellence in Europe.

COST provides unique opportunities for joint development of original ideas and initiatives across all scientific disciplines, including social and humanitarian sciences.

We should not underestimate COST's role in building the European Research Area.

We are glad that the Actions are notably flexible, effective and efficient and open and inclusive to all researchers, irrespective of country, career stage or gender.

COST stimulates the participation of Early Career Investigators in a very effective way by providing possibilities in participating in all of its networking activities. We must not forget that one of the main goals is building capacity by connecting high-quality scientific communities throughout Europe and worldwide. In the last few years we see a gradual increase in the share of Early Career Investigators from Bulgaria. In 2015 r. 34% of all Bulgarian participants are in this category. Unfortunately there is a slight decrease in 2016.

Bulgaria is especially proud of the participants' gender balance. Our women scientists are very active and they make up around 50% of all participants. In 2015 this number goes up to 52%, which I think is a substantial achievement.

Since 2012 Bulgaria has participated in a constantly growing number of running COST Actions. In 2015 and 2016 Bulgaria has participants in 56% of the Actions.

Bulgaria actively participates in every COST Domain with a particular involvement in the *Food and Agriculture; Individuals, Societies, Cultures and Health; Earth System Science and Environmental Management and Materials, Physics and Nanosciences* Domains.

The Bulgarian Research Strategy 2025 identifies the following priority research areas:

- Mechatronics, clean technology and new energy and energy efficient technologies;
- Health and quality of life, green and eco-technologies, biotechnologies, eco-foods, purification and waste technologies;
- Environmental protection. Utilisation of raw materials and bio-resources; environmental monitoring.
- Materials and Nanotechnology;
- Information and communication technologies;
- And last, but not the least - National identity and anthropology. Socio-economic development and governance.

Over 23 thousand publications were generated between 2011 and 2016 by over 15 thousand authors in Bulgaria. A total of 103 thousand citations are estimated, which is equivalent to 4.4 citations per publication. Unfortunately, Bulgarian scientists in the Social Sciences and Humanities do not publish as much as scientists in other fields – only 1618 publications in these areas were published in the last 5 years. But I have to say that even though the publications are fewer, their quality is among the best publications from Bulgaria. Their citation impact is well above the average.

The best performing Bulgarian institutions in the Humanities are the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, Sofia University and New Bulgarian University. It is also worth mentioning the South-West University Neofit Rilski and the American University in Bulgaria. The best performing ones in the Social Sciences are again Sofia University and the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences. The 3rd place is taken by the Technical University of Sofia, and New Bulgarian University and South-West University are again in the top 5.

Bulgarian scientists and researchers benefit more and more from COST Actions' budget. Every year in the last 4 years more than 400 000 € has been transferred to Bulgaria, which amounts to the average of 1.3% of the total budget of the Actions. In 2015 this sum goes up to 468 000 €. Of course there is a slight decrease to around 433 000 € in 2016.

In the 2012 – 2016 period the number of participation in Short Term Scientific Missions and Training Schools equals to 402. In 2016 we have 31 Short Term Scientific Missions

participants and 38 Trainers in Training Schools. Unfortunately we have no Trainers in Training Schools in 2016.

In the last 5 years the number of COST Action activities held in Bulgaria equals to 120. In 2016 18 Meetings, 11 Short Term Scientific Missions and 1 Training School have been held in Bulgaria. These activities will inevitably increase the visibility of Bulgarian hosting institutions.

I wish you all the best during your stay in Bulgaria. This COST Action is extremely relevant and important. I will personally track the results of your intense work. Your COST Action is almost one year old and I really hope this meeting will be remarkable and beneficial for your work in the following years.