



PRESS RELEASE

November 2011

The Middle East enriches its Research And Education Infrastructure Lebanon blazes a trail for a National Research and Education Network

“In a globalised context, challenges of internationalization, employability of graduates, relevance of systems and programmes, competitiveness and quality should be faced in a more intelligent and efficient way”.

With these words, HE Hassan Diab, the Lebanese Minister of Education and Higher Education, embraced the European model for research and education networks as a model for the future of its educational services in the short-term. The move marks an important step towards expanding eInfrastructure adoption in the Middle East as part of a collaborative effort between the region and Europe.

“As research is getting more and more costly and painfully expensive and its funding goes beyond the capabilities of a single country –said HE Hassan Diab - and as Lebanon is a small country with limited resources, there is an increasing need to federate all efforts in order to minimize this costly process, thus the need for coordinated action and collective approach. Here, eInfrastructures and e-services can play an important role”.

Building on an on-going dialogue among the Lebanese Ministry of Education and Higher Education, ASREN and the EUMEDGRID-Support project, HE Hassan Diab delivered this speech at the Workshop on Developing Lebanese National Research and Education Network, which took place on the 21st of October 2011 in Beirut at the Ministry premises. Organized together by the Arab States Research and Education Network (ASREN) and the Lebanese National Council for Scientific Research (NCRS), and hosted by the Ministry, the workshop built on an on-going dialogue with key decision makers at government level and ASREN as well as on the results of the “Grids and Modeling: Application” workshop held at the St-Joseph University on the 28th and 29th of June 2011, in cooperation with EUMEDGRID-Support.

“Together with the Ministry of Education and Higher Education, Lebanese Universities, the NCSR, and our European partners, we are here today to witness the launch of the Lebanese National Research and Education Network. Our ultimate goal is establish an electronic infrastructure to connect all Lebanese Universities through a dedicated network at the national level, then to the Arab and European research and education network. This will support advancing research, improving education, accelerating progress, providing hope, and enabling better opportunities for our young scientists’ Said Dr. Talal Abu-Ghazaleh, Chairman of ASREN.

The European Model

The workshop focused on building consensus among officials of the Ministry of Education and Higher Education, CNRS and universities around the development of a Lebanese Research & Education Network based on the European best practice NREN model and on the examples of the National Research and Education Networks already implemented in many Euro-Mediterranean countries.

The speech by Minister HE Hassan Diab brought into sharp relief the importance for society at large to invest in ICT infrastructures with particular reference to the value of eInfrastructures for Education and Research, expressing his support to the initiative of building a NREN in Lebanon.

“We are trying to catch-up with the latest development taking place in our region and in the world at large –he said - but this world is changing so rapidly that educational systems including higher education must follow suit”.



As HE Hassan Diab pointed out, , the workshop came at a time when the Lebanese government is placing emphasis on modernizing its education system in general and its strategy for higher education in particular. A new law on the reorganization of the private sector within the higher education system awaits ratification by the Lebanese parliament. Another law for the establishment of a national Agency for Quality Assurance was written by the Government. Moreover, the national consultation for the establishment of a National Qualifications Framework is going to be launched soon.

Orchestrating efforts across the Mediterranean

The presentations at the workshop by Dr. Roberto Barbera, University of Catania, Dr. Federico Ruggieri, Italian Institute for Nuclear Physics (INFN), Italy, and Dr. Salem Al-Agtash, ASREN offered perspectives on Arab and European NRENs and National Grid Initiatives, specifying NREN model and services, and critical aspects such as the need for National Certification Authorities and a Federation of Identity Providers.

The success of Lebanese efforts to improve its educational services can be leveraged by the transnational cooperation that starts from the Middle-East countries – ASREN, offered its support to foster the process of creation of the Lebanese NREN and its inclusion in the largest picture of NRENs worldwide - passing through Europe - the European Projects EUMEDCONNECT3, EUMEDGRID-Support, CHAIN and EPIKH were cited as key initiatives in the area of Arab Countries .

Why NRENs

NRENs play a key role in the support of research and education communities, including world class experts and scientists, thanks to network operation, services and applications that help drive innovation and cutting edge research. But it doesn't stop here. NRENs provide a variety of general services and activities, including unified connectivity to research and education institutions, consolidated internet services, access to contents and common repositories such as library resources, video conferencing and streaming services, federated identity management, etc..

Drivers behind the creation of NRENs span technological, social and economic factors. From a scientific point of view, NREN technologies are capable of satisfying the high computational and storage demands of educational and research communities. Power tools for Multimedia Collaboration and Distributed High Performance and High Throughput Computing (HPC, GRIDs) support disciplines as diverse as Earth Sciences and High Energy Physics, such as the Large Hadron Collider programme, Bioinformatics, Computational Chemistry, Radio-astronomy, computations and simulations in Engineering and archiving, collaborative digital access to & preservation of Cultural Heritage. NRENs also play a key role in addressing the digital divide thanks to investments in high bandwidth links to the global research and education community. Furthermore, NRENs can provide guidance on public expenditures with the aim of making smart investments to boost competitiveness across borders and disciplines.

Towards an enriched Lebanese Research and Education Network

Deliberations between decision makers and the research and education community in Lebanon reflect a keen interest in building eInfrastructures along the European model to advance research and cross-border collaboration as cost effectively as possible. A panel debate focused on a roadmap for a Lebanese NREN helped define a series of follow-up activities that will be coordinated by the Lebanese National Research Council (CNRS).

For more information
EUMEDGRID-Support
www.eumedgrid.eu
po@eumedgrid.eu