

EUMEDCONNECT

EUMEDCONNECT

Abstract

The EUMEDCONNECT project was formulated in early 2001 through a series of advisory expert meetings hosted by the EC to address the challenges of increasing infrastructure for internet-based research and education in the Mediterranean region. Developing this infrastructure forms a key element of the European Commission's EUMEDIS programme which supports the development of the EUro-MEDiterranean Information Society. In turn, the EUMEDIS programme is part of the EC's MEDA programme which is implementing the conclusions of the 1995 Barcelona Euro-Mediterranean Conference to support the technological and societal development of the Mediterranean Partner countries. The MED Partner countries are Algeria, Cyprus, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Malta, Morocco, the Palestinian Authority, Syria, Tunisia and Turkey.

Today there remains a significant and growing digital divide between the communities in the MED Partner countries and Europe. Internet connectivity is still a relatively scarce resource in almost all these countries: only Cyprus, Israel, Malta and Turkey are connected to GÉANT, and there are virtually no direct connections between MED Partner countries.

EUMEDCONNECT is a two-phase project developing an international Internet infrastructure to link the research networks in MED Partner countries with GÉANT. Phase 1, completed on 2002, consisted on a range of technical, commercial, financial and organisational studies to test the practicality and identify the best approaches to achieve the phase 2 objectives. Phase 2 intends to tender, implement and operate the network.

Objectives

EUMEDCONNECT is aiming to achieve the following objectives:

- To provide international connectivity that links the national research networks of MED Partners to the GEANT pan-European research network, and to other Research Networking accessible through GEANT;
- To increase international research networking connectivity within the Mediterranean region;
- To provide international network services that assist other EUMEDIS Pilots projects and promote increasing research and education collaboration with MED Partners;
- To promote good practice in providing effective network services within each beneficiary country; and
- To ensure that the network services and international structures set up as part of the EUMEDCONNECT are sustainable beyond the end of the project in June 2006.

Technical Approach

During the early stages of Phase 2 the project has focussed on the programme of activities to provide the connectivity, network equipment, network management and operations needed to develop the EUMEDCONNECT network. Connectivity has been tendered using negotiated procedures to give maximum scope for negotiation with supplier and flexibility in determining the scale and topology of the infrastructure. The project has continued to involve the European and MED Partners in Phase 2 to ensure that the results align with best national research network practise and meet the needs of the potential beneficiaries. As the project has progressed plans have been prepared for operating the network and transferring technical know-how to the beneficiaries.

Applications

End-users in the MED Partners countries and European research communities will benefit from this new data communications infrastructure and their work will profit from the possibilities of rapid information exchange. Through the collaboration with user groups the project will be able to demonstrate the wider usefulness for society in general.

Phase 1 Results

Phase 1 concluded that it was justified to proceed with implementing the project and defined how the project should be developed to maximise the chances of achieving its objectives. Key results were as follows:

- The project was confirmed to be technically feasible and the network should be designed to allow capacities and the performance of the network to increase during and beyond the lifetime of the project
- Despite limited fiber in the Mediterranean there was determined to be sufficient capacity to achieve and provide some options for network topology.
- Apart from Israel, all MED Partners were found to currently have monopoly national operators and needed to ensure their operators supported EUMEDCONNECT as a non-commercial project delivering significant national benefits.
- The project developed a model for allocating MED Partners' shares costs based each Partner's access capacity to, and hence benefit from, the network
- The project was recommended to maintain the organisational approach that had worked successfully during Phase 1.
- All European and MED Partners supported the Phase 1 activities
- First results were disseminated via brochures and presentations to national governments

Phase 2 Expected Results

- The EUMEDCONNECT network procurement programme has remained on track despite the challenges of conducting it in the Mediterranean region.
- First contracts with service providers are expected to be awarded during late 2003, allowing the national research networks of the MED Partners to connect to GÉANT from early 2004.
- The use by not only the national research networks but by EUMEDIS Pilots will be encouraged. EUMEDCONNECT has the potential to accelerate the development of connectivity for international research within the Mediterranean region, with benefits for the wider economies and societies of the region. Its benefits could be extended into the wider communities with longer-term benefits for development and prosperity in the Mediterranean area.

Success Story

Regardless of the economic and political situation of some of the countries, all of the MED partners supported the initial phase of the project. With regard to the procurement phase and despite the fact that all MED Partners, except Israel, were found to have monopoly national operators, the strong lobbying exercise helped to ensure their operators supported EUMEDCONNECT as a non-commercial project, offering significant price reductions during negotiations. As of today, the project has been signed by 11 countries and has assured connectivity to GEANT of 6 of them by the end of 2003.

Project name:
EUMEDCONNECT Phase 1

Contract no.:
EUMEDIS Contract handled by the EuropeAid Co-ordination Office

Project type:
Phase 1: Grant
Phase 2: Grant & Special Fund

Start date:
Phase 1: 14/12/2001
Phase 2: 15/11/2002

Duration:
Phase 1: 9 months
Phase 2: 43 months

Total budget:
Phase 1: €144,000
Phase 2: up to €12,256,000

Funding from the EC:
Phase 1: €115,000
Phase 2: up to €9805,000

Total effort in person-months:
Phase 1: 10
Phase 2: 139

Contact person:
Mr. David West
David.West@dante.org.uk
tel.: +44 7713 117 542
fax.: +44 1223 303 005

Project participants:

CERIST	DZ
CNRS	RL
CYNET	CY
DANTE	UK
EUN	ET
GARR	IT
GRNET	GR
HIAS	SYR
IUCC	IL
MARWAN	MA
MTIT	PL
NIC	JOR
REDiris	ES
RENATER	FR
RNRST	TN
ULAKBIM	TR
Univ. of Malta	MT

Keywords:

EUMEDCONNECT

EUMEDIS

MEDA

National Research and Education Networks

Collaboration with other EC funded projects:

ALICE

COMREN

EUMEDIS Pilot Projects

GEANT

SERENATE

IST- Research Networking - Networks for Research – International Co-operation