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RO-i2010, Promoting ICT in Education in Romania

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Key words: *Real world experiences*

Abstract:

This paper will present the RO-i2010 project based the partnership of three Romanian (RO) universities: University of Bucharest, University of Craiova and University Transilvania of Brasov. The project is aiming to increase the visibility of the RO scientific community and research programs in the field of ICT for education, in order to better correlate and integrate into European and international educational and research programs. The resulting activities of the RO-i2010 project are aiming at fighting the digital divide at the institutional level, together with promoting the digital inclusion at the individual level. These aims will contribute to a durable socio-economic development of our country and will support the integration in the European and world value and skills circuits.

1 Presentation of national and international context within the mentioned thematic field

Recent statistical data, regarding years 2004 and 2005, shows that Romania is less prepared for digital technologies when compared to Bulgaria and other EU 15 countries. An even darker situation appears in contrast with other world regions: North America (8.38 index in 2005) and Western Europe (7.87 index in 2005)

Economist Intelligence Unit e-readiness rankings, 2005

Central and eastern Europe

2005 rank in region	2004 rank in region	Country	Overall ranking (of 65)	e-readiness score (of 10)
1	1	Estonia	26	6.32
2	4	Slovenia	27	6.22
3	2	Czech Republic	29	6.09
4	3	Hungary	30	6.07
5	6	Poland	32	5.53
6	8	Slovakia	34	5.51
7	5	Latvia	37	5.11
8	7	Lithuania	40	5.04
9	9	Bulgaria	42	4.68
10	10	Romania	47	4.19
11	12	Russia	52	3.98
12	11	Ukraine	57	3.51
13	13	Kazakhstan	62	2.97
14	14	Azerbaijan	65	2.72

Source: Economist Intelligence Unit, 2005

In order to achieve a durable socio-economical development together with European integration, Romania needs training and education systems that are able to take full advantage of the digital technologies. The 'digital divide' concept comprises of two issues: (i) the poor quality of the infrastructure, or even lack thereof (computer access, internet access, etc), and

(ii) even where equipment exists, it remains unused or under-utilized due to socio-economical or psycho-pedagogical reasons; human resources exist but do not possess skills and abilities required by a competitive and dynamical market economy.

The project aims to use the existent orientation, directions, priorities and objectives: (i) share partners' human and material resources at a national level; (ii) improve partners' research infrastructure, as well as the training and education ones; (iii) create modern training products and services that will contribute to the elimination of the digital divide at the institutional level and will promote digital inclusion at the individual level; (iv) contribute to the durable socio-economical development of our country and to help the inclusion in the world skills and values circuits.

2 Project's objectives

2.1 Promoting EU i2010 in Romania

This objective is focused on the recently launched EU initiative (June 2005) which aims to increase the degree of ICT use in socio-economic activities, in order to close the gap between the EU and US and Japan. In this respect, the project includes specific activities related to the establishment of the RO-i2010 consortium and to the definition of project management and implementation procedures: establishing the consortium, planning the project management, a website and forum, public presentations, seminars, conferences, printed materials (flyers, leaflets etc.).

2.2 Strengthening the long-term cooperation with EU partners in order to integrate in European and international research programs

The traditional partners are Carinthia Tech Institute, Villach, Austria and International Centre for Theoretical Physics in Trieste, Italy. We are happy to implement (2006-2009) a SOCRATES ERASMUS CD project named BIT2010-Joint Bachelor Degree in Information Technology 2010. Also, we will contribute as co-organisers to the training seminar "Workshop on Rich-Media Webcasting Technologies for Science Dissemination" which will be organized by ICTP Science Dissemination Unit.

We are open to new partnerships.

2.3 Increasing international visibility of the Romanian ICT community

The project will contribute to the fight against the digital divide at institutional level, and will promote the digital inclusion at individual level. Both these results will contribute to create better working and living conditions, learning opportunities, will contribute to the durable socio-economic development of our country and will sustain European integration. The project generates competitive capacity for future EU programs. The RO consortium will concentrate a critical mass of high quality ICT human and material resources, will allow national sharing of human and digital resources, and will encourage creativity and personal development. The implementation of the project will demonstrate the research-development-innovation abilities of the partner institutions and will help convince potential EU partners to accept us for future EU projects and programs.

The project will generate sustainable operational results. The RO-i2010 consortium will allow the harmonization of partners on the subject of educational policies and ICT promotion. Digital training technologies will be implemented in the partner institutions ensuring the modernization of the operational systems. Each partner will try to bring other clients – private companies – from their respective areas, which will ensure the sustainability of the consortium beyond the timeframe of the financing.

3 Real results, UniBuc-VIR

The RO-i2010 Consortium took the opportunity to build a pilot project having as objective to set-up a virtual university platform: (i) to design, implement and develop a virtual university platform at the University of Bucharest, in pilot phase; (ii) to implement two Master programmes on this platform; (iii) to create a core for further development of a “virtual university”-like consortium with national coverage.

The UniBuc-VIR platform will include:

- the UniBuc Virtual Campus –hardware (computer networks, internet access points in faculties) and software (software applications) infrastructure which will provide the communications systems used by the “users” of this institution (students, teachers, researchers, administrative personnel);
- computer based administration systems (information, planning, databases, student records, accounting and financial services, etc.)
- communications services (email, discussion boards, chat, video-conferencing, wireless internet access);
- educational “blended learning” services, flexibly combining face to face and virtual learning (e-Library, e-Books), eLearning resources, virtual and remote laboratories, subscriptions to electronic specialized newsletters, etc.
- research services in virtual (designed in this project) or actual (like BCUM – previously financed by the World Bank and the Romanian Government) laboratories for interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary study programs.

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