



Ambitious plans for e-IRG, EOSC and EuroHPC under Croatian EU Presidency - Interview with Ivan Maric, SRCE, Croatia

13 Jan 2020 Helsinki - At the e-IRG Open Workshop in Helsinki, Finland, Primeur Magazine had the chance to talk to e-IRG Delegate Ivan Maric from the University of Zagreb Computing Centre (SRCE) in Croatia. Ivan Maric wears many hats. He is engaged in the European Open Science Cloud Governance Board, he is the Croatian delegate in the Programme Committee for Horizon 2020 and Croatian representative in the Programme Committee for Research Infrastructures. Ivan Maric is also involved in the EuroHPC activity. For 15 to 20 years, he was member in the board of GÉANT and other e-Infrastructures in the Pan-European ecosystem. Indeed, Ivan Maric has many responsibilities as a Delegate of the Croatian Member State.



Ivan Maric

Primeur Magazine: Let us first talk about the e-IRG Workshop. Next year, Croatia will have the Presidency for the European Union which means that the e-IRG Workshop will be held in Croatia.

Ivan Maric: Yes, Croatia is taking up the rotating Presidency after Finland in January 2020. As usual, we will host the e-IRG events during our Presidency. I would say both of them are very important at this stage of the e-IRG lifetime. The first one will be the Delegates Meeting but what is more important, it will be in conjunction with the Conference on the Future of Research Infrastructures in Europe which will be held in March 17-20 in Zagreb. It will be a good opportunity for the Delegates to discuss the future of e-IRG but also to visit the open part of the conference and learn about the white paper on new ESFRI research infrastructures. I would like to see a good preparation of the e-IRG Meeting in March and plenty of e-IRG Delegates visiting the ESFRI open conference.

This first meeting and the period until the May event which is a combination of the e-IRG Delegates Meeting but also the e-IRG Workshop, we, as a community of Member States and Associated Countries' Delegates, should use for a better preparation of the final Workshop and of course the meeting after the Workshop to decide what will be our future. Since its establishment in 2006, e-IRG has been fulfilling its mission and has been doing this over the last twelve years, being the forum where Member States Delegates can exchange ideas and seek for exchange of knowledge and be a platform where I personally like to come to represent what is happening in Croatia but also to listen to what is happening in other Member States, and finally move Croatia up to the level of the better ones and sometimes to lead other nations.

We are now facing a new era. We are approaching the discussion on the European Open Science Cloud. The European Open Science Cloud is here and we have to prepare for the post-2020 period, living in the Horizon Europe era. However, we also need to discuss a new model of European Research Area. I would also like to emphasize the interest of Croatia in education and a new European higher education area. These are the new elements on the

horizon which the e-IRG community Delegates should address and prepare for the e-IRG Workshop in May. I am happy that Croatia is leading this part in this timeframe. It is a duty and an honour but also a responsibility for me as the Croatian Delegate but also for the other colleagues from the e-IRG Secretariat, Programme Committee and troika, to do a best job to prepare these next events.

Currently, I just discussed and agreed with the new e-IRG Chair Paolo Budroni and some others that we will have the first video conference meeting of the Programma Committee and troika very soon. I think it is very important that we announce the programme of the e-IRG Workshop very early to prepare not just the Croatian stakeholders which I hope will be filling the places in the Workshop but also the European friends from the infrastructure area and relating areas to come to Zagreb in May and to make this event very rich.

Primeur Magazine: Yes, because May, just like each month, will be very crowded with lots of events.

Ivan Maric: For a small country like Croatia, it is of course a challenge to host all these events. I cannot recall the last time when two e-IRG events were put on the press list of the Presidency country. I am happy to say that the two e-IRG events that will happen in Croatia are on the B-level list which is very high. My country recognized the e-IRG, the importance of e-Infrastructures, the importance of **Open Science** and all these things. The Ministry of Science, among 16 or 18 events that are on the list from the area of science, has put the two e-IRG events for which I am honoured. It is a privilege to have these events. On the other hand, I have to pass this honour to the e-IRG Secretariat and the colleagues. We should make something big out of this during the Croatian Presidency.

Primeur Magazine: If we look at the e-Infrastructures in Croatia, what is their status?

Ivan Maric: I would say that we have all the pieces but we are not very much different in this from the problems or issues the other countries in Europe are facing. These are related to coordination and integration of the horizontal and vertical research infrastructures. Apart from these coordination and integration issues, we also have a problem of undercapacity because the e-Infrastructure reflects the size of the economy. Croatia is not that rich a country. Once I was told that the e-Infrastructure or any infrastructure reflects the GDP of a country. What we have in Croatia, is that we have the opportunity to use the structural funds to build the capacity of the basic infrastructure. This is the HR-ZOO project, the Scientific and Educational Cloud which is run by SRCE. We also have some other projects funded through the structural funds. This is the period of time in which Croatia is trying to rebuild their research capabilities, including e-Infrastructure. This is a good time and we are hoping that we will use the structural funds to build a national component as we think that the national components are the building blocks of the Pan-European components. This is the way we are presenting the position of Croatia inside the European **Open Science** Cloud (EOSC), EuroHPC, GÉANT, and many other Pan-European blocks. Institutional, national building blocks, solid blocks are the prior request for a big and successful European move.

Primeur Magazine: Croatia is also working in the European Open Science Cloud and in EuroHPC.

Ivan Maric: Over the last few decades, we have built national components of e-Infrastructure. A national research and education network was established in 1991-1992, connecting to the TEN-34 Pan-European network at that time. We have always been connected to Pan-European counterparts of infrastructure. We aimed to connect the Croatian research and higher education area to the European research and higher education area. In early 2000 we built a distributed computing infrastructure and joined the EGI projects. We are now part of EOSC and EuroHPC. We have all these connections. Our research infrastructure is a part of ERIC. Inside our country, we built a Center of Research Excellence, we built a virtual organisation supporting this thematic research infrastructure, and at the same time built the horizontal e-Commons national infrastructure and connected this national infrastructure as a building block of the Pan-European infrastructure.

In that sense, we are part of EOSC, and also part of a number of infrastructure EOSC projects, but also very active in the EOSC Governance Board as a Member State, trying to act on the policies, recommendations, and standards that are concerning data infrastructure and e-Infrastructure services. At the same time, we are also a member of EuroHPC. We have signed the EuroHPC Declaration. Our interest is to be very active in research and innovation activities. Currently, we are one of the partners in EuroCC. This is a project proposal for establishing the national Competence Centre in HPC. This is also mandated by the Ministry of Science. At the level of e-Infrastructure connection with the Pan-European infrastructure, Croatia has been from the beginning very and fully connected.

Obviously, there is an ambitious plan in Europe to consolidate a data layer to use the data produced in Europe which is the main producer of data in the world, and to build something on this so-called data lake. At the national level, we have lots of things to do to sort out Open Access to publications, incentives, and reward mechanisms. All these issues are currently very hot. Speaking with my colleagues here, I have to be honest that I do not see a role model in European countries. We are all seeking for solutions and this is okay. I like the idea that we are seeking together and not in a fragmented way, without trying to reinvent the wheel. This is the way we are working in e-IRG and we are doing in EOSC currently.

There are working groups that involve the smartest people from the community. I am sure the final results will be a set of recommendations but at the end of the day, it will be up to the institutions, up to the funders of research activities, up to the ministries, agencies and governments to find the best possible policies which will be FAIR enough for everyone and for the shakers and makers of this science research sector. At the end of the day, the attractiveness of EOSC will

either fail or succeed. You need to have attractive content and content is basically data and services. This attractiveness will turn EOSC into the new Google or will make us drop back. In my opinion, I think we should not follow these commodity Clouds. EOSC should primarily be a scientific Cloud. As long as we are run by the scientists, by science, then we will find our purpose and our place in the sky, I would say. As long as we will listen to scientists and be driven by scientists and by the end-users, EOSC will have a bright future. Of course, it is up to us all to not make it complicated, to make it easy, to make it hands-on. In doing this, the basic values of EOSC properly stand tall: open by default, closed when needed, and all-inclusive.

It is a fair question to ask: 'Is it just another hype?' I think it is another hype but what I basically like is that we will sort out some things about data. We should take the good things from the EOSC hype or EOSC initiative which is concerning FAIR data, open research, data management, and so on. There are so many good things that will make the European Research Area and the Research Area in Croatia, in the Netherlands, or in any other country more interoperable. One of the Croatian priorities will be that what we are doing in EOSC or in all other areas of e-Infrastructure, we are enabling this FAIR mobility of the researcher. For Croatia, one of the priorities is brain circulation that we see as a tool to transform the current brain drain which has a very negative impact on countries like Croatia, a very bad impact not just on the research sector but also on the whole economy of the country.

Primeur Magazine: Thank you very much for this interview.

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Ad Emmen

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