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The European Research Executive Agency

First class support for excellence in security research

Science and research are among the top priorities of the 18 month programme agreed by the Spanish, Belgian and Hungarian EU Presidencies. It is good to see that research ministers from the EU Member States have understood the importance of science and research and underlined it by committing themselves to increasing investments in research and development (R&D) and to creating a culture of trust in scientists. Under the Seventh Research Framework Programme (FP7) 2007-2013, the European Commission has made EUR 1.4 billion specifically available for security research. Making Europe more secure for its citizens while increasing its industrial competitiveness, is the goal of European security research.

Europe has never been so peacefully consolidated, so prosperous and secure, yet at the same time so vulnerable to threats like terrorism, organised crime and natural disasters. In a constantly changing world and with the evolving nature of security issues, cooperating and coordinating security efforts across countries – and not just nationally – is crucial to respond quicker and more effectively to risks, including taking joint measures for prevention, crises and after crisis management.

Security research activities are multidisciplinary, mission-oriented and also user-oriented. They range from technology and methodology development to systems integration. Most of the consortia carrying out the projects are in close contact with end users or even have one or several users as full participants.

Moreover, societal aspects are also addressed. Developing new or enhanced security solutions remains a major challenge for our societies. Ethics and human values are central to security research and the on-going projects have an obligation to identify and follow up any ethical issue arising. In addition, parts of the security research efforts are dedicated to understanding, analysing and reviewing the human rights consequences of countering terrorism.

It is very promising to see that European security research efforts have increased substantially in the last years, establishing a real European spirit of cooperation in a field which was traditionally "national" and that they are starting to deliver their first operational results.

To name but one recent example of a security project which the Research Executive Agency (REA) is managing: 'SGL for UsaR' is a project helping rescue teams to rapidly locate trapped or buried victims in cities after earthquakes. The project combines chemical and physical sensors to develop early location devices for trapped people. The project will support relevant urban search and rescue services, like the ones operating in Haiti following the recent earthquake, by integrating early location and monitoring systems with communication and information management applications.

This is only one of 46 projects currently being managed by the REA with another 24 projects expected to start during 2010. By establishing the Research Executive Agency, project management is now concentrated in one location and dealt with by highly specialized staff. In the REA Security Research unit, all Project Officers are high level scientists covering a wide range of expertise. Although autonomous in managing the projects under its responsibility, the REA collaborates closely with its parent DGs in the European Commission. For the security research portfolio, it works in close cooperation with the Directorate-General for Enterprise and Industry where security-sensitive grant agreements, contracts and policy-related actions are implemented.