

# József Pálincás: Berlin stands for the international consortium to exploit the Szeged laser facility

The Federal Government of Germany supports the forming of an international consortium to be organised for the utilisation of the ELI laser facility in Szeged, József Pálincás, President of the National Research, Development and Innovation Office of Hungary stated in Berlin.

Further to his talks with Georg Schütte, State Secretary at the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF), in an interview given to the Hungarian public media, József Pálincás explained: the backing Germany confirmed at federal level is of key importance while the so-called European Research Infrastructure Consortium (ERIC) is being organised.

Once the consortium with a European institution status is achieved, the new laser centre may prove far more attractive than being just a Hungarian facility, the President of the NRDI Office said, pointing out that Germany's share is an outstanding 20% in the European laser-related research.

Pálincás added: if beside Germany we manage to secure also France and the UK to support the initiative, it will be easier to make arrangements with other countries on what conditions they would participate in the work and get involved in the utilisation of the capacities of the research centre.

He also told about his recent talks with French and British high-level government officials, while this Friday he would negotiate with the Czech and the Romanian ministers of research being in charge for the laser research facilities under construction in the Czech Republic and Romania respectively, as to the management structure of the integrated research infrastructure located in these three countries. As soon as the parties agreed on this, the next step would be the legal establishment of the consortium.

According to József Pálincás, the German government will help involve more German scientific institutions in the work of the Szeged laser research centre and the consortium, but it is also important to build an institution which may be felt by German partners as comfortable as their own, because science “does not work on commands, not even in Germany”.

German partners “will choose to check out Szeged if they can find preferable equipment, and the management of the institution provides smooth access to the facilities” he said. For this reason the President of the NRDI Office held further talks in Berlin with Otmar Wiestler, President of the Helmholtz Association covering around ten thousand German researchers, a network that receives the largest government funding in Germany, and Marc Vrakking, Director of the Max Born Institute deeply engaged in optical research. They both confirmed that German researchers show significant interest but “there is still a lot to do in Hungary” to ensure that the facilities and the management in Szeged meet their expectations and requirements, József Pálincás reported.

He highlighted the Hungarian-German scientific cooperation having a history of centuries and being similarly strong today, to which Hungary's accession to the EU in 2004 added great new dimensions. This fact is marked also by the very successful Hungarian participation in an EU funded programme, in the frame of which ten so-called scientific excellence centres were selected across the 28 Member States, and two institutions among them were Hungarian. Both projects have German partners: the Institute for Computer Science and Control (SZTAKI) of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (HAS) collaborates with the Fraunhofer Institute, while a consortium formed by the HAS Biological Research Centre in Szeged (SZBK), the University of Szeged, the University of Debrecen and the Semmelweis University of Budapest works with the European Molecular Biology Laboratory seated in Heidelberg. This also demonstrates that, within the scientific relations Hungary maintains with other nations, “the links with Germany may be the strongest” Pálincás said.

As to the future of the higher education, the academician stressed that roughly ten years ago the higher education system in the Netherlands had been almost entirely switched to English as its tuition language, and today the Dutch higher education proves by far the most successful. That is why they won 104 euros per capita of the available EU funding, while Hungary reached 14 euros only. It means Hungarian higher education institutions should also move towards English as tuition language in a significant share of their education schemes, that is how they could become more attractive for the students, said József Pálincás.

The ELI laser research centre in Szeged is the fifth largest EU funded investment in Hungary within the 2014-2020 programming period. It is scheduled to run with full capacity in 2019, and the first institutions can also start their operations then in the science and industrial park to be created in its surroundings. According to the plans communicated by the NRDI Office earlier, after the establishment of the ELI-ERIC consortium members will pay membership fees to cover the operating costs of the facility. Once the consortium is established, the Hungarian state budget is estimated to contribute annually HUF 2.4 billion (nearly EUR 9 million) to the operating costs.

Source: Berlin, 20 June 2017, Tuesday (MTI)



József Pálincás, President, NRDIO and Prof. Dr. Otmar Wiestler, President, Helmholtz Association



Panel discussion



József Pálincás, President, NRDIO and Matthias Koehler, Director, Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Energy



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Matthias Koehler, Director, Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Energy



Péter Györkös, Hungarian Ambassador to Berlin



Kornél Kisgergely, CEO/General Manager, Hiventures