

Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to Slovenia!

It is my great pleasure to greet you on behalf of the Slovenian Presidency and on behalf of the Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Technology.

As you know, Slovenia made the Western Balkans one of her priorities during her presidency to the Council of the European Union, which is also due to numerous historical ties. We are well aware of the importance of the stable South-Eastern Europe for the stability of the broader region and Europe in general.

It just so happens that tonight Ljubljana will host another event focused on the Western Balkans. I believe this is a pure coincidence and that the two events have nothing to do with the fact that it is Friday the thirteenth. Namely, today is the day of the meeting of the Steering Platform on Research for the Western Balkan countries and the Herman Potočnik Noordung award ceremony. Our Ministry, together with the steering committee of the SEE-ERA.NET, launched the initiative for the donations of little-used research equipment or funds for the Western Balkan countries. The fact is that the countries from the SE Europe are limited due to the lack of modern equipment and thus unable to equally participate in the European research projects and programmes. The initiative met with a good response and on request of some countries the collection of donations was extended until autumn.

As a European Union Member State, Slovenia has an opportunity to use all the advantages brought by the membership in the Union, which is certainly a wish of many people in the countries of South-Eastern Europe. Sometimes the obstacles on the way seem big, even too big; yet - as a proverb goes - a 1000-mile journey begins with a single, therefore the first step.

And even as we count we measure, say metrologists.

We encounter measurements in the fields of science and technology, in industry, in environment protection, in health care, in transport and telecommunications, in agriculture, civil engineering, trade and services as well as in the fields of justice, defence, police and others.

At the national level, several hundred million measurements are implemented annually in different fields, influencing the quality of life of the population in different ways. About 40% of all measurements are required by the (European) legislation and concern the quality of life. The users of services of the national metrology system are therefore individuals, organisations from different fields of economy as well as public administration.

The field of development, research and technical cooperation is an ideal platform for the exchange of opinions between researchers and experts thus discovering common research challenges and arranging common solutions. In the process they keep in mind national priorities and appropriate distribution in the region in a way observing the criteria regarding quality of the development, research and scientific work, which improves the quality of life in a broad sense. We all know that the added value in research derives from networking and international cooperation.

I hope that your work in the last two days was successful and that your work method and obtained results set the 'reference', as metrologists would say, for further work, both in the field of metrology and in other fields of technical infrastructure (accreditation, standardisation) as well as in research and development.

Persons responsible for the establishment of national systems in the field of metrology and other activities of technical infrastructure face a difficult task of modernisation of the existing system, for this inevitably demands certain changes necessary for the formation of a permanent infrastructure in line with European requirements.

Metrology infrastructure is a considerably expensive system, so it is very important that the national metrology institution establish a "distributed metrology system" in which it performs some tasks itself while some are performed under its auspices by the competent external institutions which may be included in the national metrology system upon meeting criteria set in advance.

The central task of the national metrology institute is thus to oversee, by including institutions of appropriate capacities, a smooth operation of the metrology system enabling quality implementation and reliability of measurements in the priority fields for the country, and avoid the duplication of the existing metrology capacities in the region. The latter is of key importance for the mid- and long-term development and existence of national metrology institutions in the European environment, for it is the only way for these institutions to be equal partners to other national metrology institutions with tradition.

Our experience shows that such task is anything but easy. Insofar as you believe that Slovenian experience may help you, we are glad to assist you.

Ladies and gentlemen, I invite you to keep maintaining and developing the cooperation in your field of work, and wish you a very creative day!

Thank you.