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"You should be very, very glad that such a comprehensive program has come our way! Our libraries are now their own advocates ... The whole image of libraries is changing. This is the development of libraries that we have been awaiting for so long."

*~Florica Pop,
Salaj County Library
Director*

Biblionet Launches National Program at Major Event in Bucharest

On April 23, 2009, as part of the celebration of Romania's National Library Day, Romania's new [Biblionet](http://www.biblionet.ro) program was officially launched.

The event was held at the Central University Library in Bucharest, Romania, and included remarks from national stakeholders and program partners, a round table with participants from the year-long pilot program, and a workshop

session for Romanian librarians to learn about participation in the first year of the program. Librarians from across Romania attended the event.

Biblionet, a five year, \$27 million program, is being implemented by IREX and will equip up to 1,500 public libraries with public access computers for internet access, train up to 2,500 of the nation's public librarians, provide assistance to the National Association of Librarians and Public Libraries in Romania, and foster government support for the library system.

The launch conference, entitled "Biblionet—The World in My Library," featured national figures and key program partners. Underscoring the enthusiasm among national leaders to support the program, Secretary of State Octavian Stireanu announced that, "The Ministry of Culture, Religious Affairs, and National Heritage has made this program's importance well-known and is now establishing a working group whose mission will be to support Biblionet programmatic activities."

Despite the local budgetary challenges libraries face during difficult economic conditions, Ministry representatives at the launch

also noted the opportunity that this economic context has created for libraries; libraries can be a place for citizens to learn about and apply for jobs and learn new skills.

Through the Biblionet program, Romanians will soon have public space in their communities where they can become part of the world's information society.

As part of the celebration of National Library Day, Doina Popa, president of the National Association of Librarians and Public Libraries in Romania (ANBPR), presented the association's annual awards. Many of the awards were given to librarians who participated in the pilot phase of the program.

Speaking during the roundtable, Salaj County Library Director and ANBPR award winner Florica Pop encouraged her colleagues to see the full potential of Biblionet. "You should be very, very glad that such a comprehensive program has come our way!" said Pop. "Our libraries are now their own advocates ... The whole image of libraries is changing. This is *the* development of libraries that we have been awaiting for so long."



At the Central University Library in Bucharest, librarians and national stakeholders celebrate the launch of Biblionet.

County Libraries Begin Online Application to Biblionet

As part of its national launch conference on April 23, Biblionet officially released its online library application for the first round of training and new library computers. County libraries from across Romania are now working to complete the online application to be considered for the program's first group. County library applicants have also been gathering for regional workshops that IREX has hosted to answer Biblionet application questions and provide additional information.

Over the next five years, Romania's Biblionet program will offer computers and training to more than 1,500 public libraries in Romania. Biblionet will roll out the program through a series of competitive applications; libraries demonstrating an active commitment to public access to information will be given preference in the first round. Romania's 41 county libraries can apply to participate in the program on behalf of the public libraries in that county. An independent



During a Q&A session at the launch conference, Sanda Constantinescu, director of the Valcea County Library asks about how the Biblionet application process will work.

committee will select up to 12 counties and up to 20 local libraries in each of those counties that will best benefit from Biblionet resources.

The application is the result of a collaborative process that included input from the ANBPR's board and a test group of five county library representatives who

piloted the online application form. The application is now available on Biblionet's website at: <http://www.biblionet.ro>.

Biblionet's online application process reflects the national program's commitment to county and local-level cooperation. The application package includes one section for the county library and another section for the 25 local public libraries recommended to work in conjunction with the county. The form for county libraries solicits information about their key staff, plans for using PACs, and ability to open a training center. These centers will offer local librarians trainings on using technology, technology management, and new library services.

After the June 4 application deadline, IREX will convene an independent committee to review applications and select up to 12 county participants for Biblionet's first round. The announcement of the first cohort of participants is expected to take place on July 20.

ANBPR Takes Steps Forward with an Eye on the Sustainability of Romania's Public Libraries

After demonstrating its commitment to the Biblionet program during the pilot phase, the National Association of Librarians and Public Libraries in Romania (ANBPR) is now moving forward with plans to improve its organizational and professional capacity to better meet changing member needs. The ANBPR looks to become the country's leading advocate for the long-term sustainability of Romania's public libraries.

Responding to the organizational assessment it performed last year, the ANBPR has identified steps to improve its administrative structures and diversify member services. The Executive Board is committed to strengthening the association's capacity to represent public libraries and librarians over the next four years. Some of the association's top objectives are to create more professional development opportunities for librarians, to redefine the role of librarians as valuable information resources, and to promote a modern system of public libraries.

"The partnership with IREX, and our active involvement in the Biblionet program, makes us confident in stating that over the next five years our association

will be able to present a lot of successful examples of public libraries at the national level, and to gain legitimate recognition of librarians as information specialists in their new position as a community resource for the library's users," declared ANBPR President Mrs. Doina Popa at a meeting with IREX in March.

Since establishing their partnership with IREX, ANBPR's Executive Board has developed organizational policies related to financial management, communication and decision-making structures, as well as determining milestones to be achieved during the first year of the program. Over the course of three working meetings in April, the ANBPR developed an organizational policy manual, which was finalized on May 11.

"There was a lot of hard work involved in developing the policy manual," said Mr. Constantin Bostan, one of the vice-presidents of ANBPR. "Once we started to work on the manual, the process helped us to better understand the structure and the organizational processes and also gave us the necessary guidance on how we should formulate decision making to help us be more efficient and reduce our response time."

"The partnership with IREX, and our active involvement in the Biblionet program, makes us confident in stating that over the next five years our association will be able to present a lot of successful examples of public libraries at the national level."

Doina Popa, ANBPR President

Looking forward, the ANBPR is committed to becoming an organization that will effectively represent the interests of librarians and their professional development and that will fully participate in the decision making process on policies related to the development and sustainability of the Romanian library system.

IREX Biblionet Office:

15 Dr. Staicovici Nicolae
St., 050556, District 5
Bucharest, Romania

Phone: +40 21 231-5537
Email: gl@irex.ro

IREX Headquarters:

2121 K Street NW #700
Washington DC 20037

Phone:
202-628-8188
Fax: 202-628-8189
E-mail: gl@irex.org



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WWW.IREX.ORG

IREX is an international nonprofit organization providing leadership and innovative programs to improve the quality of education, strengthen independent media, and foster pluralistic civil society development. Founded in 1968, IREX works in more than 50 countries.

Romanian Ministry of Culture and IREX Initiate Strategic Partnership

Romania's Ministry of Culture issued a Ministerial Order on April 28 that establishes a working group to focus on developing innovative policies for modern library development. The six-member working group includes representatives of the Minister's office, Written Cultural Heritage Promotion and Public Policy Units, the National Library, and IREX.

At the group's first meeting on May 5, government representatives signaled their interest in supporting the Biblionet program and seeking out new ways to promote the value of libraries in Romania. The working group plans to issue a joint press release with IREX promoting the Biblionet application process to demonstrate the national government's support for counties joining the program. The Ministry is disseminating a letter of support to county and local authorities, encouraging cooperation in Biblionet participation at the community level.

The Ministry and IREX also agreed to promote books and reading alongside electronic access to information within the Biblionet program. IREX has also discussed with the Ministry how best to engage the county training centers that will be opened under Biblionet, with a view towards ensuring that they continue to function with direction from the Ministry of Culture into the future.



Members of the Ministry of Culture participating in the working group at the Biblionet launch conference.

The new working group will meet again in early June at which time IREX and the Ministry will brainstorm how the working group can engage additional national stakeholders, including other government representatives, and plan a press conference to announce the first round of Biblionet winners. On July 20, IREX and the Ministry of Culture will jointly announce the first round of Biblionet county library winners.

Biblionet Launch Conference

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The event concluded with a working session for librarians outlining the application and selection process for participation in the first year of the program; an online application will allow each of Romania's 41 counties to apply to the program over the internet. In order to provide additional support during the application process, IREX staff are now travelling to each of Romania's seven Euroregions to better explain the application process and answer individual questions.

Given the current worldwide economic situation and the challenges this poses to libraries, Romania's Biblionet program could not come at a better time. Soon, Romanian citizens will be able to access electronic information in renewed library public spaces.



Secretary of State at the Ministry of Culture, Octavian Stireanu provides the keynote address at the Biblionet launch conference.