INSAIT – A perfect example of borderless research cooperation in Europe

14.04.2022

At a glance

With INSAIT, a leading scientific institute for computer science and artificial intelligence and a research centre in these fast-growing areas of technology is being created in Bulgaria. It is the result of a partnership between Sofia University and the two Swiss Federal Institutes of Technology of Zurich (ETH) and Lausanne (EPFL). The support of tech companies such as Google and Amazon contribute to the excellence of the institute. This example shows once again: research knows no borders. Only if European countries work together - e.g., in the context of Horizon Europe - will our research institutions continue to be among the world leaders in the future.

A successful project starts with personalities, their history and their connections to other personalities. In the case of INSAIT, it is Professor Martin Vechev. Born and raised in Sofia, he graduated from the Sofia High School of Mathematics (SMG). His education and research took him to the UK, the USA and Canada. Today he is a full professor of computer science at ETH Zurich, where he heads the Secure, Reliable, and Intelligent Systems Lab. Without his collaboration with world-leading institutes in the field of artificial intelligence, neither the know-how nor the funds needed to establish the institute in Sofia would have come together.

A result of international research cooperation

In addition to professors from Switzerland's two top technical universities, INSAIT also receives scientific support and advice from researchers at other leading research institutions such as the Institute of Science and Technology Austria (ISTA), the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), UC Berkeley, Yale, Princeton and the Technion - Israel Institute of Technology.

The start-up capital for the institute is around 100 million dollars for the next ten years. This will be provided primarily by the Bulgarian government through an endowment fund. But the real economy is also participating in the project: Google is investing $3 million over the next three years to provide INSAIT with cloud computing resources and access to its Tensor Processing Unit Research Cloud, a dedicated infrastructure for running high-performance machine learning models. Technology companies such as SiteGround, DeepMind and Amazon Web Services are participating in the project as well. A number of Bulgarian entrepreneurs are supporting the institute with more than seven million dollars.

Cutting-edge research knows no borders

"INSAIT is actually the first institute of its kind in Eastern Europe and therefore has the potential to be a very groundbreaking initiative," says Prof. Martin Vechev.

The new institute is a perfect example of the fact that cutting-edge research is only possible with international cooperation between all stakeholders, the public sector and the private sector, and without political blinkers. The establishment of INSAIT in Sofia also stands for successful Swiss-Bulgarian cooperation. This in turn underlines the importance of transnational research

cooperation in Europe, to which Switzerland can make an important contribution even as a non-EU member. At present, Switzerland continues to be treated as a third country in the European research programme. It is in the interest of both the EU and Switzerland to end this inadequate status as soon as possible and allow Switzerland to participate in Horizon Europe as a full member.

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