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For immediate release

## Bulgaria Joins European Biobanking Research Infrastructure as Full Member

Bulgaria has joined the *Biobanking and BioMolecular resources Research Infrastructure – European Research Infrastructure Consortium* (BBMRI-ERIC) at its Assembly of Members, which took place in Bologna on the 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2018.

Bulgaria will be represented by the Medical University – Sofia and becomes the 21<sup>st</sup> Member. The Medical University – Sofia (MUS) is the biggest university in the field of medical science and biomedical research in Bulgaria. MUS is the coordinating institution of the National University Complex for Biomedical and Applied Research infrastructure, which has been part of the National Roadmap for RIs since 2014. The Ministry of Education and Science is the financial coordinator of all RIs included in the Roadmap. In the coming months, both the Bulgarian Ministry of Education and Science and MUS will work with BBMRI-ERIC to set up the BBMRI National Node – the national network of Bulgarian biobanks that will interact with BBMRI-ERIC and use and disseminate BBMRI-ERIC services across the country.

Bulgarian Minister of Education and Science Mr Krasimir Valchev said, “I would like first to thank BBMRI-ERIC for the warm welcome of the Bulgarian biobanking and biomedical community to their European family. I am proud that we have excellent research teams who collaborate world-wide and I am convinced we should further strengthen our policies and instruments in support of our bright minds and the research and innovation development in the country. Among our European priorities are acceleration of knowledge transfer and increased access to research results, including via fostering European open science initiatives and ensuring long-term sustainability and openness of pan-European research infrastructures. Bulgaria is committed to continuing its efforts to contribute to the European research area main pillars and common goals.”

BBMRI-ERIC’s Director General Erik Steinfeldt said, “It is with great pleasure I welcome Bulgaria to BBMRI-ERIC. Bulgarian biobanks are now connected to the world like never before. At the same time, Bulgarian researchers and biobankers will have access to knowledge, IT tools, and tailor-made guidance by BBMRI-ERIC that will support the further development of biobanking and biomedical research in Bulgaria”.

“This is also a milestone for European research in general”, Steinfeldt commented. “While other countries are decreasing investment in research, Bulgaria is showing the way, boosting the development of its biomedical sector. For our part, we will do our best to make sure that Bulgaria’s trust in BBMRI-ERIC will yield fruitful results beyond the face value of joining a European research infrastructure”.

Steinfeldt concluded saying: “BBMRI-ERIC believes in providing services to make new treatments possible, however, biomedical research does not take place in a vacuum: it requires a multidisciplinary approach. That’s why we are increasing our collaboration with other ERICs to ensure that, in the future, research infrastructures in biomedical research will integrate their services, increasing the benefit for Bulgarian and other European biobanks of being connected to BBMRI-ERIC. That is also why we welcome the Council conclusions on accelerating knowledge circulation within the EU: we are going in the same direction”.

To perform high-level, impactful biomedical research and deliver on the promises of personalised medicine, researchers need high-quality human samples that are collected maintaining the highest patient and citizen privacy rights standards and stored in state-of-the-art biobanks according to

international quality standards. BBMRI-ERIC brings together more than 500 biobanks from 20 European countries and one international organisation. The BBMRI-ERIC Directory, the largest sample catalogue in the world, allows users to search more than 100 million samples online. BBMRI-ERIC's mission is to facilitate access to biological resources and biomedical facilities. This makes BBMRI-ERIC and its biobanks a central player when it comes to making new treatments possible.

BBMRI-ERIC is an international, non-for-profit organisation established under EU legislation. Its headquarters are in Graz, Austria, and it has a liaison office in Brussels.

BBMRI-ERIC provides support and services to local biobanks via its National Nodes (one per country). The National Nodes are fully involved in the day-to-day management of BBMRI-ERIC and provide feedback from the national level. BBMRI-ERIC services cover three main areas: ethical, legal and societal issues (ELSI), quality management, and IT solutions that allow users to search collections online and request access:

- [Quality management services](#) include consultancy programmes on guidelines and standards, monitoring and audit programmes, training and education, as well as support with quality management documentation and assessment;
- IT services include the Directory, the Sample/Data Locator and Negotiator as well as data harmonisation tools and reference tools for biobanks. The Directory is the largest biobanking catalogue on the globe, with more than 100 million samples. Find out more about the Directory [here](#).
- [ELSI services](#): BBMRI-ERIC supports the biobanking community by facilitating compliance with regulatory requirements and best practice standards. Given that the proper consideration of ethical, legal and social issues (ELSI) is key to any biobanking activity, BBMRI-ERIC provides services and tools for researchers who would like to be informed of ELSI matters or have specific ELSI questions.

BBMRI-ERIC funding comes from membership fees paid by the Member States and from EU-funded projects.

#### **For BBMRI-ERIC, contact:**

Luc Deltombe, Communications Manager

Email: [luc.deltombe@bbmri-eric.eu](mailto:luc.deltombe@bbmri-eric.eu)

Phone: +43 316 349 917 21

[www.bbmri-eric.eu](http://www.bbmri-eric.eu)

#### **Editor's Note:**

BBMRI-ERIC Members: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Malta, Latvia, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Sweden, United Kingdom

BBMRI-ERIC Observers: Cyprus, Switzerland, Turkey, IARC/WHO