

**Žaklina Gjalevska**

**Results and benefits from the participation of  
Macedonian libraries in the COBISS.Net network**

It can be said that in the Republic of Macedonia COBISS had been used since its very beginnings. This dates back to the time when the National and University Library "St. Kliment Ohridski", Skopje, was a part of the library information system (LIS) and the system of scientific and technological information of Yugoslavia. After Yugoslavia's disintegration and the disruption of LIS, the National and University Library continued to use the then COBISS software locally. After different library software had been surveyed and evaluated both in terms of implementing the adopted library standards for processing library material as well in terms of maintaining, developing and providing services and assistance, the professional team of the National Library decided in 1996 to renew cooperation with IZUM and to continue to use the then latest version of COBISS software. To date, COBISS has been accepted and applied in more than 40 libraries linked into the national library and information system COBISS.MK. Supported by the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Macedonia, COBISS.MK was officially established in December 2004.

Through COBISS, a tool for library automation and shared cataloguing, libraries have improved the quality of their work, standardized and unified cataloguing process, saving time and cost. With the possibility for free online access and search through electronic library catalogues via the COBISS/OPAC software, libraries have been re-discovered as places where anyone can find information needed for educational, research or entertainment purposes. Libraries with automated circulation that use the COBISS/Loan module enable users not only to check whether a publication is held by their library or another library nearby, or whether it is available or already used by someone else, but also to reserve a publication via the Internet from their homes. All this, along with other services provided by COBISS, has caused that the number of users has gradually increased, and libraries have become once again information points where different needs of citizens can be met.

Signing the agreement on integrating national library information systems of Slovenia, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Macedonia, built on the COBISS platform, into a common COBISS.Net network in 2003 was recognised as an opportunity for further improvement of the quality of library functions as well as an opportunity to enhance cooperation among libraries in the region. Setting up the COBISS.Net network has been of benefit to libraries, librarians and the country as a whole. In the period when all libraries have been facing downsizing and shortages of skilled staff, cooperative cataloguing provides significant time and cost savings. Since 2003, more than 38,000 bibliographical records have been downloaded from other COBISS systems into COBISS.MK, which accounts for nearly ten percent of the total number of records in the COBISS.MK union catalogue. Moreover, by exchanging bibliographic records, cataloguers can also exchange their experience and are able to recognise similarities and differences in cataloguing practices; in this way, they have been gradually bringing in line the implementation of the adopted international standards for bibliographic description of library material.

Based on the adoption of the [Phase 2 of the COBISS.Net project](#) in 2006, 15 academic and special libraries joined the COBISS.MK system the following year. Also established was E-

CRIS.MK, a national current research information system in Macedonia, and a uniform management of researchers' bibliographies. Before implementing the E-CRIS.MK current research information system, the National Library had maintained a local research database and the information of vital importance for the development of science and economics was not publicly available to and searchable by all users. IZUM has financially supported the procurement of necessary computer equipment for libraries that joined the system, co-financed the entry of bibliographic records for researchers' bibliographies created in COBISS.MK and provided lecturers for the courses on the preparation of researchers' bibliographies; the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Macedonia has financed the installation costs. Another thing that is so significant for our country, one of the few without a study programme of librarianship at any level, is the fact that IZUM has financially supported, and is still supporting, the postgraduate study programme of librarianship for more than 15 Macedonian librarians at the University of Zadar in the 2007/2008 academic year, and at the University of Ljubljana in the 2009/2010 academic year; ten of them have already gained Master's degree.

Within the framework of international cooperation, even more important is the support that Macedonia receives from the Republic of Slovenia through IZUM (direct financial assistance, procurement of computer and communication equipment, staff education, etc.). The latter has significantly contributed to the development of the COBISS.MK library information system and the E-CRIS.MK current research information system.

How much libraries benefit as members of the COBISS.Net network can best be seen from the agreements that IZUM has recently concluded on behalf of all libraries in the network with OCLC, the ISSN International Register and Thompson Reuters. These agreements would place a great financial burden on any of the participating countries if they had to undertake it by themselves individually. IZUM has helped us in this regard by financially supporting the initial costs of implementing these new features.

We do hope that COBISS will be widely accepted in the Republic of Albania. Membership in COBISS.Net will be another of many common things that bind together people and countries in the region. The Republic of Macedonia sees the participation of the Republic of Albania in the COBISS.Net network as an opportunity to intensify bilateral cooperation and exchange of experience, especially taking into account the needs in the fields of culture, education and science of the Macedonian community in the Republic of Albania and the Albanian community in the Republic of Macedonia.