

PHAETHON Project Kick-Off Ceremony Marks the Launch towards the PHAETHON Centre of Excellence

The Teaming for Excellence Project, coordinated by the University of Cyprus, in partnership with Cyprus Seeds, the Technical University of Denmark, and the University of Groningen, is expected to revolutionize the energy landscape in Cyprus and beyond through the upgrade of FOSS Research Centre for Sustainable Energy into a world-class, autonomous Centre of Excellence.



The High-Level Kick-Off Ceremony for the Teaming for Excellence Project PHAETHON took place on 11 October 2023 at the University of Cyprus (UCY). Importantly, the Horizon Europe project will lead to the establishment of the PHAETHON Centre of Excellence (CoE) for Research and Innovation in the field

of Intelligent, Efficient and Sustainable Energy Solutions, signalling in parallel the evolution and upgrade of the FOSS Research Centre for Sustainable Energy of the University of Cyprus.

It is worth noting that Project PHAETHON secured funding of €15 million from the EU, as well as an equal amount from the Deputy Ministry of Research, Innovation and Digital Policy, Republic of Cyprus, with significant funding also coming in from the private and public sectors. The coordinators of the project are Professors Constantinos Christofides and George E. Georghiou of the University of Cyprus, while the other partners in the consortium are the Centre for Entrepreneurship and Innovation Cyprus Seeds, the Technical University of Denmark, and the University of Groningen in the Netherlands.

The first part of the Kick-Off Ceremony featured high-level representatives from the Government of the Republic of Cyprus, European Commission, European Research Executive Agency, Embassies to Cyprus, funding bodies, and the academic community. The Ceremony kicked off with a welcome by Professor Constantinos Christofides, former Rector of the University of Cyprus and one of the coordinators of the Project. Professor Christofides spoke of breaking the boundaries between industry and academia, underscoring the importance of the establishment of this dedicated Centre of Excellence in the island.

Speaking on behalf of the President of the Republic of Cyprus, the Chief Scientist for Research, Innovation and Technology, Mr. Demetris Skourides, congratulated and thanked the partners in the effort underway, which he noted is exemplary of investing in scientific progress. The Chief Scientist expressed that “PHAETHON is not just building a project, but building a legacy” that he maintained will ultimately revolutionize the energy landscape in Cyprus. Mr. Theodoros Loukaidis, Director General of Cyprus Research and Innovation Foundation, who was attending on behalf of the Deputy Ministry of Research, Innovation and Digital Policy, similarly touched upon the contribution of PHAETHON CoE to the National Research Innovation System, underlining the potential of the Centre to innovate and be international.

This international dimension was on full display in the welcoming addresses of both the Ambassador of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to Cyprus, Ms. Elke Merks-Schaapveld, and the Honorary Consul of Denmark to Cyprus, Mr. Efthymou Paraskevaides. The former highlighted the Project’s important role in fostering EU cooperation on the timely subject of Green Transition between three Member States, stating: “This project is serving as a bridge between the academic and professional world of our countries”. The latter emphasised that, under the PHAETHON Project umbrella, the partners will markedly expand their research spectrum and access to human resources, infrastructure, and complementary funding.

In his welcoming remarks, Mr. Patricio Ortiz de la Torre, Head of Sector of the Widening Participation Unit, European Research Executive Agency, outlined the key elements for a successful Centre for Excellence, which he noted is fuelled by scientific excellence, competitive funding, and a focus on policy making and policy development activities. On her part, Dr. Karina Firkaviciute, representing the Directorate General Research and Innovation, European Commission, joined the high-level proceedings online from Brussels to deliver a brief presentation on policy aspects of Teaming Action. Dr. Firkaviciute stood especially on the solid partnership and dedicated engagement of the partners, accentuating the key success factors of PHAETHON CoE.

Professor Tasos Christofides, Rector of the University of Cyprus, rounded out the high-level representatives, thanking the Project Coordinators and partners in the process. The Rector touched upon the main objectives and milestones of Project PHAETHON, standing especially on its anticipated groundbreaking legacy, which includes transforming the UCY Campus into an energy efficient Smart Energy Campus.

The Kick-Off Ceremony formally ushered in the essential work of Project PHAETHON, the major outcome of which is the establishment of PHAETHON CoE. As such, the second part of the Ceremony consisted of keynote speeches by central Project PHAETHON members, representing the dynamic Consortium partnership, working in concert towards this significant objective.

Professor George E. Georghiou kicked off the keynote speeches, speaking on behalf of the UCY Project PHAETHON Coordinators. He emphasised the importance of the new Centre to expand and diversify the research, innovation, infrastructure, and educational pillars of the FOSS Research Centre for Sustainable Energy, effectively upgrading it to a world-class Centre of Excellence. Prof Georghiou went through the ambitious PHAETHON timeline, touching upon the major milestones along the way, which include a range of capabilities and services, dedicated research units, and educational and training centres, paving the way towards an autonomous and sustainable CoE. More generally, he stressed the anticipated far-reaching scientific, societal, technological/economic, and environmental impacts of PHAETHON CoE.

Ms. Maria Markidou Georgiadou, Managing Director of Cyprus Seeds (CS), the innovation partner of PHAETHON in Cyprus, expounded upon the NGOs vision for mentoring the next generation of energy field researchers, as well as leveraging the innovative, high-level academic output of the Project, among others, actively supporting its commercialization for the benefit of society, the environment, and the economy. "CS will nurture a strong innovation culture within the CoE, where a significant portion of researchers will actively participate in the commercialization of research", she added.

Each of the proven academic institutions partnering in Project PHAETHON provides complementary competences in addressing crucial research problems of societal benefit. In this vein, Professors Klaus Hubacek and Aravind Purushoththaman Vellayani, representing the University of Groningen in the Netherlands, one of the two advanced partners in the Consortium, presented their university's programmes, research facilities and centres, and upcoming work in related areas: including large-scale wind power production, underground-hydrogen storage, and net-zero initiative with biomass.

Prof. Jacob Ostergaard, Head of Division of DTU Wind, Department of Wind and Energy Systems, and Mr. Mikkel Sorensen, Director of DTU Skylab, represented the Technical University of Denmark (DTU), the other advanced partner in the PHAETHON Consortium. In his online address, Prof. Ostergaard stressed the challenges and opportunities for the division of Power and Energy Systems. He then highlighted the key benefits of DTU's participation in PHAETHON CoE, while Mr. Mikkel Sorensen, speaking on site at the event, outlined the specialised DTU contribution to the PHAETHON project.

At the heart of Project PHAETHON is the dynamic partnership between committed organisations in each EU Member State, notably demonstrating that institutions from countries of relatively small size can “grow” to be regarded amongst the top in scientific excellence in Europe, with world class institutional and innovation/entrepreneurial ecosystems. Ultimately, PHAETHON seeks to decisively contribute towards the commonly held objective for a climate-neutral Europe by 2050.

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