
2018 Highlights

Innovation.bg has been ARC Fund's flagship initiative since 2004. It encompasses the *Innovation.bg* report, the *National Innovation Forum* and the *Innovative Enterprise of the Year contest*.

- The report *Innovation.bg 2018* presents the progress in the implementation of the national *Innovation Strategy for Smart Specialization* for the period 2014–2020, reviews the main challenges faced by national and regional authorities, and provides recommendations for better understanding of the process of entrepreneurial discovery and for improvement of the science–business relationships lying at its basis.
- *The National Innovation Forum (NIF)* is a platform for exchange of ideas and cooperation among the government, business community and research organizations. This year's National Innovation Forum gathered more than 250 policy-makers, researchers and business people to discuss Bulgaria's position in the smart policies for innovation-driven growth.
- *The Innovative Enterprise of the Year contest* is open to participants from all sectors of industry nationwide. The contest is recognized by the European Commission as a best national practice for promoting innovation-based development. Twenty-five out of over 100 companies from various sectors of the economy were shortlisted and a 17-member jury in which public authorities, funding organizations, the business and academia were represented selected the winners in eight areas of innovation impact. *Spesima Ltd.* was awarded for Market Leadership for reengineering universal robots from the automobile industry. *Comrade Cooperative* received the Social Innovation award for developing innovative software products on the basis of blockchain and artificial intelligence. Contest finalists also received ARC Fund's newly introduced „*Excellence in Innovation*” label for their cutting-edge innovations.

Innovation and business support

2018 was marked by Bulgaria's Presidency of the Council of the EU. ARC Consulting, as Coordinator of Enterprise Europe Network (EEN) – Bulgaria, co-organized key European business events and facilitated nearly 70 international negotiations of more than 40 Bulgarian companies. As a result of the integrated support, eight international agreements with Bulgarian companies were reached. During the year, more than 70 Bulgarian companies benefited from the consulting services and expertise of EEN.

ARC Fund also took part in a series of capacity building and interregional learning events with business and public institutions on improving the efficiency of national and European financial instruments for SMEs and innovations, bringing therein the National Innovation Fund and the Innovation Fund of Sofia Municipality.

Science, technology and innovation policy

In this area ARC Fund focused on: responsible research and innovation (RRI), transforming household energy consumption culture, developing research infrastructures, and building national capacities for research and innovation project management. ARC Fund completed a study of RRI in Bulgaria, which found that familiarity with the RRI concept is mostly limited to policy-makers and researchers familiar with EU funding programs. ARC Fund

examined and classified 1067 sustainable energy consumption initiatives and created an open-access online database for energy practitioners, researchers, community groups, and anyone seeking good practice examples. Bulgaria and the Danube region lack the capacity to evaluate, monitor and assess the socio-economic impact of research infrastructures. To tackle this deficiency, ARC Fund engaged in pilot mutual learning between research infrastructure managers from several countries in the Danube macro-region.

Safer Internet

In 2018, the Safer Internet Program further expanded its activities for protecting children online. The Internet Hotline for fighting illegal and harmful content and conduct online received and processed over 6200 reports on sexual exploitation online and was granted a Quality Certificate by the International Association of Internet Hotlines INHOPE. Over 2000 teenagers were trained under Safer Internet's most successful program Cyberscout and more than 3000 children, 1500 teachers, 1200 parents, 300 social workers and 250 university students were involved in various training and awareness raising events. The Ministry of Education joined the working group of ARC Fund experts, high school teachers and university professors set up to develop a methodology for teaching digital and media skills in primary schools. ARC Fund became Trusted Partner of Facebook and Trusted flagger of Google.