

The state of implementation of the National Research Programme of the Republic of Kosovo

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Introduction

In May 2013, the Center for Political Courage (CPC) published a policy brief entitled "[Policymaker Impact on Research Work in Kosovo](#)". The findings of that policy brief were drawn from a roundtable discussion with stakeholders involved with Kosovan higher education policy, such as the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MEST) and the Committee on Education, Culture, Youth, Sports, Public Administration, Local Governance and Media of the Assembly of Kosovo. One of the key findings was that the National Research Programme of the Republic of Kosovo (henceforth the Research Programme) has been only partially implemented.

This briefing paper aims to examine the current state of implementation of the Research Programme. In order to investigate this issue, several interviews and informal discussions were conducted with the MEST's Head of Department for Science and Technology, research project coordinators of individual or institutional grant holders and individual researchers engaged in think tanks.

The findings of this briefing paper will be used as a tool for advocating¹ a more comprehensive implementation of the Research Programme.

The Research Programme

The European 2020 strategy aims to support economic growth, contribute to poverty reduction and establishment of conditions for a more competitive labor market and employment. In order for these objectives to be reached until 2020, the strategy pursues three priorities, which should be at the heart of Europe 2020: smart growth; sustainable growth; and inclusive growth.² Even though there is sufficient evidence that science, research and innovation contribute to and accelerate sustainable development and evidence-based policy making, the improvement of research capacities in Kosovo has so far not been set as a real objective and

¹ On April 2013, CPC established a working group composed of MEST representatives, the UP Rector's Office, professors from the Department of Political Science, the Department of Sociology, the Faculty of Law and civil society representatives, with the aim to contribute to and advocate for the advancement of research capacities.

² "Three priorities should be at the heart of Europe 2020: Smart growth – developing an economy based on knowledge and innovation; Sustainable growth – promoting a more resource efficient, greener and more competitive economy; Inclusive growth – fostering a high-employment economy delivering economic, social and territorial cohesion". See "Europe 2020: A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth", European Commission, Brussels, 3 March 2010, p. 10. Available at: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2010:2020:FIN:EN:PDF> (accessed on 29 October 2014).

the country is far away from reaching the Europe 2020 strategy priorities. Indeed, in the last 25 years no serious investment has been done in science, research and technology in Kosovo.

Pursuant to Law No 2004/42 on Scientific Research Activities, the National Research Council approved the Research Programme in March 2010. This policy document aims to identify research priorities, strengthen Kosovo’s participation in international research programs and invest in relevant infrastructure.³ Moreover, the National Research Programme outlines the obstacles inhibiting research and science in Kosovo during the 1990s, such as lack of economic development and exclusion of the academic community from the international research arena. Hence, the main long-term goal of the National Research Programme is to “counterbalance these deficits by providing a conceptual orientation frame for upgrading scientific capacities in Kosovo”.⁴ The main systemic deficiency in this regard is, however, the lack of financial means to back up research and capacity building activities, which are planned within the Research Programme. Approximately only 0.1% of Kosovo’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is allocated to research and development, far below the average of the region, Europe and beyond⁵, as the following two tables illustrate.

States	Albania	Bosnia and Hercegovina	Croatia	Kosovo	Macedonia	Montenegro	Serbia	Slovenia
Expenditures in % of GDP for Research and Development (R&D)	0.15	0.02	0.75	0.1 ⁶	0.23	0.41	0.73	2.51

States	Austria	Belgium	Czech Republic	Denmark	Finland	Israel	Japan	Republic of Korea
Expenditures in % of GDP for R&D	2.75	2.04	1.84	3.09	3.78	4.39	3.26	3.73

Source: Data extracted from the World Development Indicators: Science and technology.⁷

³ See “Policymaker Impact on Research Work in Kosovo”, May 2013. Available at: [http://www.cpc-ks.org/repository/docs/Briefing_paper_Policymaker_Impact_on_Research_Work_in_Kosovo_\(English\)_482260.pdf](http://www.cpc-ks.org/repository/docs/Briefing_paper_Policymaker_Impact_on_Research_Work_in_Kosovo_(English)_482260.pdf) (accessed on 2 November 2014).

⁴ The National Research Programme of the Republic of Kosovo, January 2010, p.15.

⁵ Contrary to the 2013 Law on Scientific-Research Activities 04-L/135, Art. 5 stipulates that “[f]or providing the conditions and necessary means for scientific-research activity, the Government of the Republic of Kosovo allocates zero point seven percent (0.7 %) of the local annual budget.” Available at: <http://www.kuvendikosoves.org/common/docs/ligjet/Law%20on%20Scientific%20Research%20Activities.pdf> (accessed on 19 November 2014). These funds, however, have either never been allocated or only in symbolic amounts as the tables in this briefing paper illustrate.

⁶ Although Kosovo is mentioned in the World Bank report any data on expenditures on research and development has been omitted. See “The World Bank 2014 States and Markets: 5.13 World Development Indicators: Science and technology”. Available at: <http://wdi.worldbank.org/table/5.13> (accessed on 31 October 2014).

⁷ See “The World Bank 2014 States and Markets: 5.13 World Development Indicators: Science and technology”. Available at: <http://wdi.worldbank.org/table/5.13> (accessed on 31 October 2014).

Even though the share of GDP that Kosovo has dedicated to research and development is one of the lowest compared to other countries, the full envisaged funding has not been allocated up to date either. Instead of the € 5,393,953 planned for financing 22 activities related to research, science, infrastructure, mobility, internationalization of research, establishing quality assurance mechanisms, only € 580,000 have been allocated to implement the Research Programme. Although until 2015 at least 10 laboratories are planned to be established, each of them has been estimated to cost more than € 250,000, the overall budget of € 580,000 would have only been sufficient to purchase 2 laboratories, putting aside all other Research Programme activities. The Research Programme foresees annual expenditure of € 4.5 up to € 6.5 million in implementing planned activities, be that in mobility programs, brain gain, publications, access to electronic libraries, quality assurance mechanisms within research institutes, participation in international projects etc. This budget, however, has not been allocated to either the academic community or to the research institutes.

In order to establish a “Society of Knowledge in Kosovo”, as stated in the MEST slogan, the Research Programme sets the following five objectives and measures to be reached until 2020:

1. Development of human capacity for research activities;
2. Development of research infrastructure;
3. Internationalization of scientific research activity;
4. Strengthening the links between science and society and economy for enhancing economic and social development;
5. Excellence in research and scientific activity.⁸

To date none of the activities planned within the Research Programme has been fully implemented. The table below displays the objectives and activities from the Research Programme and analyzes the state of implementation of these activities.

⁸ The National Research Programme of the Republic of Kosovo, January 2010, p. 5.

Objectives:	Activities ⁹	The state of implementation ¹⁰
1. Development of human capacity for research activities	- By 2015 at least 50 candidates will have received support to pursue post-doctoral studies through joint programs with full or partial financing from the Kosovo Budget.	- By 2014 no candidate has received full or partial support from Kosovo Budget to pursue post-doctoral studies. Those candidates who have pursued their post-doctoral studies so far have been supported by the HigherKos Project.
	- By 2015 at least 100 candidates from Kosovo who pursue PhD studies in top 500 universities worldwide will have received full or partial financing from the Kosovo Budget.	- By 2014, out of 138 candidates from Kosovo who pursue their PhD studies in top 500 universities worldwide, only 58 of them have been supported by the Kosovo Budget.
	- 100 short term mobility grants assigned for active researchers.	- In 2012, 30; in 2013, 38; and in 2014 42 mobility grants were offered to researchers.
2. Development of research infrastructure	- By 2015 the establishment of at least 10 laboratories (at the value of € 250,000 each) plus introduction of scientific equipment at a total cost of € 1 million will have been accomplished.	- By 2014 no laboratory has been established with partial or full support from the Kosovo Budget. 20 laboratories have been established and equipped under TEMPUS programs.
	- Research and Technological Development (RTD) Information System was supposed to be built by 2012.	- By 2014 the RTD Information System has not yet been established.
	- Access to relevant electronic libraries was to be granted by 2011.	- By 2012 Kosovo public universities were provided with access to ISI Web of Knowledge. MEST prepaid access to EBSCO collection, however, most researchers have had no information about this service.
3. Internationalization of scientific research activities	- Support for the publication of a considerable number of scientific publications in international journals.	- By 2014 MEST has supported 8 researchers to publish in international journals.
	- Total annual value of joint research projects with foreign institutions was to be at least € 2 million beginning in 2012.	- By 2014 MEST has provided support for 51 small projects (at a value ranging from € 10,000 to € 40,000). The grant holders have been obliged to cooperate with foreign researchers.

⁹ The objectives and activities above stem from the National Research Programme of the Republic of Kosovo, January 2010, pp.16-19

¹⁰ Interview with Murteza Osdautaj, Head of the Department for Science and Technology (MEST), 22 September 2014.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Enhanced participation in international research networks. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - By 2014 MEST has published 75 scientific monographs. - By 2014 MEST has supported three scientific journals in Kosovo. - By 2014 no information has been given on annual value of joint research projects with foreign institutions. - By 2014 Kosovo has partnered with four international projects and several regional initiatives such as the Strategy of Southeast Europe 2020.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Improved cooperation with researchers of Kosovan origin working abroad. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - By 2014 no significant cooperation with Kosovar researchers working abroad has been in place.
4. Strengthening the links between science, society and economy for enhancing economic and social development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Establishment of an applied RTD programme for supporting science-industry relations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - By 2014 MEST has not established an applied RTD programme for supporting science-industry relations.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Establishment of an innovation programme to meet the economic and social innovation needs of private sector (business, NGO) until 2015. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - MEST has drafted the National Strategy of Innovation, but by 2014 it has not yet been approved by the Government of Kosovo.
5. Excellence in research and scientific activity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Centers of scientific excellence established. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - By 2014 the centers of scientific excellence have not yet been established.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Awards for extraordinary achievements applied. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - MEST has established the Scientist of the Year Award and the Young Scientist of the Year Award.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Research institutions build in quality assurance mechanisms in the field of research such as manuals for indexing of publications. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - By 2014 the quality assurance mechanisms in the field of research have not been established within research institutions.

Evaluation criteria, limitations and results of MEST financed research projects

The Research Programme sets 5 criteria for evaluating research project proposals, which are aimed to contribute to implement the overall objectives. These general criteria are:

1. Importance to Kosovo's development;
2. Scientific value and international measures of the project;
3. Scientific achievement of the project proposer;
4. Competence of the applying organization;
5. Ecological adequacy of the project.¹¹

In 2013 – 2014, 22 so-called small research projects have been supported by MEST. Out of these, 4 are related to medicine, 2 are interdisciplinary, 2 focus on agriculture, 5 on environment, 2 on history, and 7 of them are economic and social science research projects. In 2014 – 2015, MEST has supported 9 research projects, among which 2 are interdisciplinary, 1 focuses on language, culture and history, 2 on agriculture, 2 on medicine, 1 on environment, and 1 on economy.

There are three stages of evaluation of research projects submitted to the MEST. In the first stage, the Department for Science and Technology evaluates the technical aspects of research project proposals. Having been accepted by the Department, the research proposals are submitted to the Science Council of MEST, which gives the final recommendations to the Minister of MEST, assessing whether the projects have matched the strategic objectives of the Research Programme. The main issue about the evaluation process, however, is that the projects' evaluation is not based upon scientific criteria, but upon political affiliation of the project applicant. For instance, several Kosovan researchers point to the fact that most of the small grant beneficiaries are affiliated with the Minister's political party.¹²

The number of research projects and the budget provided by MEST remain limited, as do the research capacities and the number of applications for research grants. In general, however, the so-called small grants application procedures are not complicated. Nonetheless, only a few researchers succeed in publishing in international peer-reviewed journals, while others have shown no interest to absorb the funds and implement research projects. One of the obstacles to conduct research in Kosovo is the lack of accurate data such as access to online libraries, which makes it difficult for researchers to access up-to-date sources.

"The impact of transitional justice measures on democratic statehood building in Kosovo" is the title of one of the MEST financed research projects. The lack of mobility and limited possibilities to use international libraries have been mentioned as two key obstacles while conducting this research. The project received only € 4,600 of the requested budget of € 12,000 and this is why proposed activities such as visiting libraries abroad and financing the publication of four scientific papers had to be left aside.¹³ Another research project financed in 2013 by the MEST

¹¹ The National Research Programme of the Republic of Kosovo, January 2010, p. 8.

¹² Interviews and informal discussions with Kosovan researchers, Prishtina, October 2014.

¹³ Interview with MEST grant holder Remzije Istrefi, professor at Law Faculty, University of Prishtina, Prishtina, 2 October 2014.

is entitled “Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) War in Shala Operational Zone”.¹⁴ The research project entitled “The professional identity formation of teachers” has emphasized that the motivation of the prospective teachers and their commitment to teaching profession does provide the potential for the development of professional identity. An inductive study method was used to analyze the changing views of teaching and motivation for the teaching profession. The study was conducted at the Faculty of Education with 761 prospective teachers and 10 focus groups. The research results suggest that through the teacher education program MEST should broaden perspectives of future teachers. The research results are submitted for publication in a scientific journal, and will be also presented in an international conference.¹⁵

Nonetheless, a significant number of the research projects coordinators examined were not able to explain how the MEST financial support was spent and which their concrete research outcome is. This brings to the conclusion that, in addition to the evident need for more financial and systematic support of the research activities, quality insurance mechanisms and a higher degree of transparency and professionalism appears to be crucial for further enhancement of research capacities and activities in Kosovo.

Recommendations:

To the Government of Kosovo

- Make innovation, research and development one of the key political priorities;
- Significantly increase the percentage of the Kosovo GDP to be invested in scientific research and development.

To the MEST

- Implement the whole Research Programme and provide the necessary financial means to the planned activities;
- Re-appoint the National Research Council as the main body in charge of the National Research Strategy of the Republic of Kosovo;
- Undertake regular information campaigns on funding opportunities for scientific research;
- Provide information on application procedures and templates for research projects in three languages: Albanian, Serbian and English;
- Award research funds based on professional and scientific criteria while strengthening professional evaluation committees and exclude political interference;
- Improve the reporting and monitoring procedures of MEST research grant holders;
- Ensure access to digital academic libraries in order to enhance the research quality in Kosovo and enable access to up-to-date academic resources;

¹⁴ Interview with MEST grant holder Sabit Sylja, Director of the Institute of History “Ali Hadri”, Prishtina 9 October 2014.

¹⁵ Interview with MEST grant holder Eda Vula, Faculty of Education, University of Prishtina, Prishtina 13 October 2014.

- Make sure that outcomes of the research projects supported by the MEST are uploaded on the web and disseminated to the academic community and policy-makers.

To grant holders:

- Enhance fund absorbing capacities and project development skills;
- Establish quality assurance mechanisms within their research institutions;
- Cooperate with international research institutes and provide “peer review” feedback on their research products;
- Publish results in international peer-reviewed academic journals, and present their study outcomes to the Kosovar policymakers;
- Engage in more interdisciplinary research projects among different fields taken into account within the National Research Programme.

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The views expressed in this briefing paper are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent opinions of the SDC and the University of Fribourg.