

Briefing Paper on the Strategy on Scientific/Artistic Research and Development Activities 2013-2016 and its Impact on the Work of the Research Institutes at the University of Prishtina

CPC, June 2014

RRPP Policy Dialogue - Briefing Paper 1/2014

Introduction

The aim of this analysis is to assess the implementation of the “Strategy on Research/Artistic and Development Activities 2013-2016” (Strategy on Research) and its impact on the work of the University of Prishtina (UP). As a local coordinator of the set dialogue between the policymakers and researchers in Kosovo within the Policy Dialogue of the Regional Research Promotion Programme in Western Balkans (RRPP), CPC has established an advocacy group composed of professors of the UP, officials from the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MEST) and representatives from education oriented think-tanks. The findings of this analysis will be used as a tool for advocating a more comprehensive implementation of the respective components of the Strategy on Research. The main finding of this analysis is that the UP is only partially implementing its Strategy on Research. The specific recommendations for the UP are divided into three subgroups: (1) ethics and quality of research, (2) internal reforms, and (3) external cooperation. These recommendations were reached at the round table “The Strategy and its Impact on the Work of Research Institutes of the UP”, that took place on the 27th June 2014, at the premises of the UP Rectorate.

Background

The research capacities and the willingness to support research activities at the UP continue to be low. Considering that the UP is primarily a teaching institution, research activities are rare and uncoordinated. The situation has further deteriorated under UP’s former management, as it emerged that in 2013 even the former Rector had abused his position by publishing dubious research papers in a fraudulent journal abroad, with the aim to be promoted to a higher academic position. Once revealed¹, the case led to massive protests and as a result of the pressure from the students, the professors, the public and the media, the Rector was forced to resign in February 2014.

This case illustrates the level and quality of many alleged research activities in the UP and Kosovo in general. To be specific, these are not isolated cases, since a great number of academic staff, including important officials in Kosovo’s public institutions, have accomplished career promotions based on suspicious academic credentials.

¹ In order to illustrate the low quality and standards of the journal where the former Rector was published, an anonymous person using an imaginary name (Filan Fisteku, the English equivalent of John Doe), after paying the requisite fee, managed to publish in the same fraudulent journal *ad litteram* whole portions of the “The Communist Manifesto” by Karl Marx. Even though a widely known document, the “proposed” research paper was accepted and published by the same journal.

The problems related to research activities in Kosovo are systematic. Investing in science and scientific research has never been a strategic priority and, accordingly, has never drawn sufficient attention from the policymakers in Kosovo. Moreover, the relationship between research, on one hand, and economy and society on the other, remain totally uncoordinated. In order for Kosovo to become a “State of Knowledge”, as the slogan of the MEST proclaims, scientific research in general and the training of young students to conduct research based on contemporary methods must become an authentic national priority. The above mentioned requires not only investments, but also, academic ethics and full transparency.

Since this analysis is being written at a time when the UP is administered by a management body with a temporary mandate, carrying out a consistent and multidimensional evaluation of scientific research at the UP for the first half of 2014 would be problematic. The temporary management has undertaken several steps in its efforts to increase transparency, restore trust in academic ethics and improve the image of the UP in general. However, measures such as publishing the CVs of its academic staff on the UP’s official website are not sufficient. The UP has also adopted a regulation on promotion in faculty positions, but it is uncertain whether this regulation can tackle the existing problems since it excludes the basic academic responsibility for providing professional evaluations on scientific and professional contributions. Nevertheless, an important issue such as academic corruption, which has a direct negative impact on the research system, remains unaddressed.

CPC in the briefing paper [“The State of Research in Social Sciences at the University of Prishtina”](#) conducted in April 2013, provided a description on the state of research at the UP.² In order to measure the progress and the steps undertaken to advance research at the UP, the present paper analyses the steps that were undertaken for implementation of the Strategy on Research; a document aiming to provide a roadmap to advance research at the UP.

The Strategy on Research

The Strategy on Research focuses on four areas, which also correspond with the National Research Programme. These areas include: human resources, research infrastructure, international cooperation and the relationship links between economy and society.

1. **The Human resources area** lists 6 priorities including, among others: the development of doctoral programmes, the provision of funds for short-term visits abroad for the UP staff, incentives for staff research work, incorporation of diaspora’s capacities in research activities and regulation of research activities of UP staff through employment contracts.

² In April 2013, CPC established a working group composed of MEST representatives, UP Rector’s Office, professors of the Department of Political Science, the Department of Sociology, the Faculty of Law and representatives from the civil society, aiming to contribute to and advocate for the advancement of research capacities. See e.g. The State of Research in Social Science at the University of Prishtina, Prishtinë, April 2013. [http://cpc-ks.org/repository/docs/Briefing_paper_The_State_of_Research_in_Social_Sciences_at_the_University_of_Prishtina_\(English\)_213048.pdf](http://cpc-ks.org/repository/docs/Briefing_paper_The_State_of_Research_in_Social_Sciences_at_the_University_of_Prishtina_(English)_213048.pdf) (accessed on 8 July 2014).

2. **The Infrastructure area** lists 5 priorities, including, amongst others: establishing a database on infrastructural capacities of UP, establishing laboratories, establishing institutes and providing access to electronic libraries.
3. **The Internationalization area** lists 4 priorities including, amongst others: strategic partnerships between the UP and international institutions, technical assistance to write project proposals, the provision of vocational programmes in compliance with labour market demands, and UP co-financing in international projects.
4. **The Science and economy area** lists 4 priorities including, amongst others: establishing a database on UP co-operation projects with the public and private sectors, provision of vocational programmes, incorporation of the business community in the process of drafting the academic programmes of UP and mutual engagement by UP and the private sector in joint scientific research.³

The following table illustrates the allocated budget for each of the areas covered by the Strategy on Research. As stipulated in the Strategy on Research, the planned budget is 1.5% to 3% of the total annual budget of the UP. As of 2013, the actors involved within the RRPP's Policy Dialogue and coordinated by CPC have raised the issue that the difference from 1.5% to 3% is huge and undefined. Consequently, this has direct financial implications when translated into the total budget allocated for the implementation of the Strategy.⁴

Table: Planned budget for the implementation of the “Strategy on Scientific/Artistic Research and Development Activities 2013-2016”⁵.

Area	Budget				
	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	Total
Human resources	€140,000	€140,000	€140,000	€140,000	€560,000
Infrastructure	€10,000	€113,000	€250,000	€250,000	€623,000
International cooperation	€55,000	€185,000	€185,000	€185,000	€560,000
Links between economy and society	€0	€ 5,000	€0	€0	€ 5,000
Management	€17,150	€21,200	€21,200	€21,200	€80,750
Total	€222,150	€464,200	€596,200	€596,200	€ 1,828,750

³ Strategy on Research/Artistic and Development Activities 2013-2016, p. 8. See: <http://www.uni-pr.edu/getattachment/4fc95f03-b53f-4e7c-a2a0-c0056b9c43e4/Strategjia-per-veprintari-kerkimore-shkencore-arti.aspx> (accessed on 2 July 2014). This document is in compliance with the areas of the National Research Programme of the Republic of Kosovo; see the National Research Programme of the Republic of Kosovo 2010-2015, <http://www.uni-pr.edu/getattachment/21dfd45e-cd3e-47da-ad78-a2fe060ec1e9/Programi-Kombetar-i-Shkences-i-Republikes-se-Kosov.aspx> (accessed on 2 July 2014).

⁴ See The State of Research in Social Sciences at the University of Prishtina, CPC, Prishtinë, April 2013. http://cpc-ks.org/repository/docs/Briefing_paper_The_State_of_Research_in_Social_Sciences_at_the_University_of_Prishtina_%28English%29_213048.pdf (accessed on 8 July 2014).

⁵ Even though requested, no data could be obtained regarding spending of the budget for 2013 with the justification that “no records were kept on this”.

However, the budget of 1.5% to 3% was never actually allocated for the implementation of the Strategy on Research. Furthermore, even though the Strategy on Research proposes actions and measures that may be undertaken with no financial implications, there is no evaluation report regarding undertaken measures and how the document will be further implemented. In addition, the Strategy on Research anticipates adoption of a regulation on research incentives for staff; nevertheless, such a regulation seems nowhere on the horizon. To make matters worse, the Core Group⁶, which is a mechanism established according to the Strategy on Research in order to provide technical assistance for planning at least 5 research projects a year at the UP, is almost completely non-functional.

In the following section, we discuss the issues that the UP is facing in relation to scientific research, institutional support and the functioning of scientific research institutes at the UP.

Issues raised at the Round Table “The Strategy and its Impact on the Work of Research Institutes of the UP”, June 2014

The round table “Strategy on Scientific/Artistic Research and Development Activities 2013-2016 and its Impact on the Work of Research Institutes at the UP”, held on 27 June 2014, brought together a total of fourteen representatives from the current UP management, university professors and representatives of think-tanks, in order to discuss the state of research in social sciences at the UP. The reference documents for organizing the round table were the recommendations from the four previous briefing papers published within the RRPP’s Policy Dialogue coordinated by CPC. The Strategy on Research provides actions and specific measures that must be undertaken for advancement of scientific research at the UP.

Professor Arben Hajrullahu, from the Political Science Department, opened the discussion by putting emphasis on the importance of supporting scientific research in general and new researchers in particular. He referred to the role that the scientific research institutes should play within the UP and the challenges that they currently face.⁷ Most of these institutes do not enjoy financial support from the UP and remain relatively non-functional.

Ms. Hasnije Ilazi, the Vice-Rector for International Cooperation, a professor at the Department of Philosophy and Executive Director of the Institute for Social and Humanistic Studies, focused on a specific aspect of the Strategy on Research, namely on the area of international cooperation. According to her “International cooperation is a precondition to compare the UP with the world and to avoid complacency”. In this context, she cited the evaluation report from the international experts, who evaluated the UP and provided its accreditation for the next five years. A number of problems were identified, which are the core of the problem. Ms. Ilazi highlighted that the institute she manages within the Faculty of Philosophy had never received an invitation to give its contribution to the creation of the document in question. Since she was

⁶ See <http://www.uni-pr.edu/Kerkime-Shkencore/Grupi-Berthame.aspx> (accessed on 5 July 2014).

⁷ Currently there are five institutes and one excellence centre in teaching. These are: the Institute for Social and Humanistic Studies; the Institute for Examination of Materials; the Media Institute; the Institute for Legal Research, and the Mining, Metallurgy, Geology and Technology Institute and the Centre for Excellence in Teaching.

referring directly to the evaluation report of the international experts for accreditation of the UP, we present below the experts' evaluation on the Strategy on Research:

“The University has developed The Strategy on Scientific/Artistic Research and Development Activities 2013-2016, which is a good start. However, one has to be careful with over-ambitious and unrealistic financial planning which could hinder or cause ceasing of a number of planned activities. This appears to be a problem with the Research Strategy that was developed. Another issue is how the Strategy was developed ... [Experts] received an impression that the Strategy was developed within a limited circle of people and has not been disseminated widely throughout the community”.⁸

In the section titled “Research”, the evaluation report notes that research is still not a high priority at the UP. The report points out the lack of inclusion of doctoral candidates in research and recommends that the UP should establish a communication platform and include the industry in research carried out at the university. In addition, the report recommends that the “academic staff needs to be supported and motivated, and that the level of research activity needs to be clearly recognized in academic staff promotion procedures”.⁹

In addition, Ms. Ilazi stressed two additional issues apart from the recommendations proposed by the evaluation report for accreditation of the UP. The first one was the **internationalization of research**, whereby research in Kosovo should reflect research trends and topics in the region and the world. The second issue was the immediate need to provide the research institutes with more resources and to offer a higher autonomy to manage their own budget. The bureaucratic procedures make it extremely hard for the research institutes to be efficient and functional.

In his speech, the acting Rector, Anton K. Berishaj, a professor at the Department of Sociology, stressed that the problem does not lie only in the lack of funds for scientific research, but also in the access of the academic staff to the funds allocated for scientific research. Mr. Berishaj emphasized that in the past, even though there were few available funds for scientific research, they were unused. This, according to Mr. Berishaj, was not due to lack of interest, but rather because of the complicated procedures that discouraged the researchers to apply for these funds.

Mr. Muhamet Mala, Vice-Rector for Scientific Research and a professor at the Department of History, mentioned a positive practice within the UP. The practice in question is the establishment of an industrial board within the Faculty of Electrical Engineering, that has established cooperation with publicly-owned enterprises such as the Kosovo Energy Company. One of the remarks made by the publicly owned enterprises and other industries was that the UP had no module on managerial and communication training, skills that were quite deficient

⁸ Evaluation Review Report of University of Prishtina, Hasan Prishtina”. Kosovo Accreditation Agency: Prishtina, May 2014, p. 15. Members of the team hired to draft the report are: Dr. Norman Ryan, University College Cork, Ireland (chairperson); Prof. Dr. Melita Kovacevic, University of Zagreb, Croatia; Ms. Emilia Todorova, University of Glasgow, U.K.

⁹ Ibid, p. 16.

within the technical sciences. Mr. Mala suggested providing courses for students, which in addition to their professional training, would also train them in managerial and communication skills. In this way, Mr. Mala highlighted the increasing possibility of linking UP's study programmes with the labour market.

Ms. Merita Berisha, Vice-Rector for Development and Quality and a professor at the Faculty of Medicine, stated that the advocacy capacity of the UP on allocation of research funds must be strengthened. Another important issue for Ms. Berisha was the strengthening of staff mobility, not only externally with the UP partners, but also internally across academic units through the usage of equipment and laboratories. Ms. Berisha underlined that, within the doctoral studies, it would be good to enhance a "distance learning" mode and to develop modules in English. Training on continuous professional and scientific development for the academic staff and the doctoral candidates would have a direct impact on increasing the quality of research.

Mr. Hysen Bytyqi, member of the Core Group responsible for providing technical assistance and drafting research projects at UP and a professor at the Faculty of Agriculture, discussed the role of the Core Group and the process of how the Strategy on Research was drafted. The role of the Core Group, also foreseen by the Strategy on Research, is to provide technical and research assistance for university projects. In relation to the measures provided by the Strategy on Research, Mr. Bytyqi mentioned that some of the measures had already been implemented. Five planned doctoral programmes and one interdisciplinary programme have been accomplished. According to Mr. Bytyqi, the UP has currently two interdisciplinary programmes in the field of medicine and natural sciences. What remains to be achieved, in Mr. Bytyqi's view, is the creation of scholarships for mobility and short-term research visits abroad. Mr. Bytyqi reiterated that the UP must regulate the legal basis to motivate the academic staff involved in research projects. The main idea behind the drafting of a regulation is to incentivize the research staff as currently even those few researchers who managed to become involved in international projects, or who were awarded projects, instead of being supported, were actually viewed with suspicion as possible "opportunists" and "abusers of foreign funds".

Recommendations for the University of Prishtina:

General

- To initiate a full review of the Strategy on Research and to involve the community of scientists, researchers and other interested partners in the process, based on bottom-up approach;
- To plan a feasible, specific and implementable budget parameters and their allocation for the implementation of the Strategy on Research;
- To begin the drafting of the Strategy on Scientific/Artistic Research and Development Activities 2017-2020 based on the experiences and lessons learned from the current Strategy on Research;
- To draw on practices and lessons learned from other countries, possibly also from the region.

Specific

Increasing ethics and quality of research

- To pursue a determined anti-plagiarism policy;
- To put into function and fully support the Committee on Ethics, which should work independently, free from political interference, and which should be the filter for all academic promotions including the attainment and withdrawal of fraudulently acquired academic titles;
- To establish a group of external, transparently selected experts with adequate references, who would produce biannual reports on the implementation of the measures proposed by the Strategy on Research;
- To establish contractual relations with the staff, thereby obligating the academic staff to devote 30% of the total norm of lessons/hours to research.

Internal reforms of policies and practices

- To simplify and professionalise all procedures and timelines for the use of existing funds for research and scientific publications;
- To make functional and reorganize existing research institutes by planning the annual budget for activities of these institutes, and to establish other necessary institutes;
- To adopt a regulation for financial incentives for the academic staff involved in research activities;
- To establish a “prize for the best annual research paper” in different disciplines or multi-disciplinary, published either by the staff or students in prestigious journals with an international peer review;
- To re-organise, allocate a specific budget for and build the capacities of the Core Group, a mechanism established pursuant to the Strategy on Research for planning and providing technical assistance for research projects at the UP;
- To adopt a Code of Ethics for field research that will specify how information is acquired and will ensure the information is processed in compliance with research ethics, which is a fundamental criteria for scientific research in conformity with human values.

Establishing external cooperation

- To implement the agreements signed with other partner universities and establish new international, functional and strategic partnerships;
- To establish an administrative office for contracting international and local experts to write projects proposals, to find international partners and to apply for EU funds such as “Horizon 2020”;
- To require from all academic units to establish advisory boards that would include members from the publicly-owned companies, the business community, media, civil society and think-tanks. Involving all interested parties in the drafting process of the curricula and of the academic courses in the respective academic units, will lead to increased awareness for meeting the labour market demands for deficit workforce;

- To cooperate with publicly-owned enterprises, business community, MEST and international partners and to establish a special staff-mobility fund for research visits abroad as well as to invite guest professors and researchers;
- To cooperate with public institutions, the business community, think-tank organizations and to oblige students to conduct internships and research work. During their internships, students would further develop their skills for carrying out research.

The Regional Research Promotion Programme Western Balkans (RRPP) is run by the University of Fribourg upon a mandate of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), Federal Department of Foreign Affairs.

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.