

EXPERT REPORT

EVENT TITLE: TAIEX EXPERT MISSION ON NATIONAL PROGRAMME FOR RESEARCH AND INNOVATION FOR 2019-2022

ID: 66921

DATE: 9-15 SEPTEMBER 2018

PLACE: CHISINAU, MOLDOVA

Please fill in this report in detail and return it electronically to cristina.baraganescu@ec.europa.eu within two weeks of the completion of your mission. For reasons of coherence, teams of experts are invited to draft joint reports.

REPORT

1) Please describe the overall aim of your mission:

The aim of the TAIEX expert mission was to discuss, improve and finalise the the National Program for Research and Innovation for 2019-2022 of Moldova.

Based on the review of the Moldovan R&I system, performed under the Horizon 2020 Policy Support Facility (PSF) in 2015-16, a new law, Code of Science, entered into the force, that mirrors the experts' recommendations.

Subsequently to the law, the secondary legislation for implementing the PSF's recommendations is under development, including the National Program for Research and Innovation for 2019-2022, NPRI, of Moldova.

At the end of the mission we have the draft of the NPRI and its action plan for the year 2019 and up to 2022.

The expected impact of the NPRI is to have a unique policy document that shall include all priorities and strategic objectives of the sector, which shall allow a better concentration of their implementation.

2) State of play – analysis (indicative length: 1 page)

Please list key issues and developments in the area covered by your mission, e.g. legislation, policies, statistics, resources and infrastructure available, best practices and shortcomings which explain the current and the future need for assistance. This section is particularly important for defining our future activities as well as for the European Commission and the EU Delegation.

The information and views set out in this report are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the official opinion of the European Union. Neither the European Union institutions and bodies nor any person acting on their behalf may be held responsible for the use which may be made of the information contained therein.

- Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (MECC) has prepared a detailed strategy, and related action plan for the research and innovation sector for the years 2019-2022. Many elements of the report of the EU H2020 PSF review panel of 2016 have been included in the drafts, which is a very positive feature.
- Current research and innovation funding is very limited and allows for only low salaries, and for the maintenance of outdated infrastructure. An overall increase of research funding will be required to sustain the available research capacities, and to implement reform measures.
- Attracting and keeping young researchers in the system is an important task. For PhD students and young researchers grants and salaries need to be urgently increased to ensure their continuation.
We recommend exploring the possibility of a financial support for targeting this challenge.
- The National Agency for R&D (ANCD) is in the process of being established, and the agency has launched first competitions for Technology Transfer projects and for bilateral Moldova-Belarus research projects.
International evaluation needs to be a standard. It needs for attracting diaspora, developing attractive on-line evaluation tools, a permanent dialogue for collaboration with other RDI funding agency.
- There are different visions on the reform path between the MECC and the Centre of Reform under the Prime Minister.
- The Centre for Reform is considering to install administrative directors (a new managerial position) of research institutes, who are not researchers. Given the limited size of research institutes, we do not consider this measure necessary. Moreover, it would add supplementary administrative cost to the institutes.
- It is important to keep the available research capacities that exist in the country.
Funding programmes that were in place in previous years under the Academy of Sciences are planned to be continued through to 2019. Modifications of these programmes should be considered starting with 2019, by merging certain programmes (conference and publication support can be integrated in other actions), by including elements for stimulating collaborative research (cooperation among research and business organisations ensure), by including elements to stimulate joint projects between universities-research institutes.
Special attention is needed to ensure a transparent and objective selection procedure.
- There is a need for better and regular coordination among MECC and ANCD, e.g via regular coordination meetings (e.g. every two weeks).
- In the innovation field, an action for identifying priorities through smart specialisation is underway in Moldova with support of the EC's Joint Research Centre. It is expected that priorities will have been defined by 2020.
For implementation of priorities, few options have been discussed during the mission: orienting calls for collaborative research projects towards the priorities, and/or establishing competence centres in the priority fields. Support from EU side is expected.
- There is a danger that the research sector is exposed to quick technocratic changes, which may endanger the existing remaining capacities. For example, we have strong doubts that universities should deal alone with fundamental research in the near future and that research institutes should only do applied research (as formulated by the Centre of Reform). The research capacity in these institutions has been long built up, it has declined strongly over the last 20 years, but still there are areas of competence, research infrastructure and capacity to apply for and attract international research funds; so what is in place should be kept. That does not mean not to

reform. For example, stimulation instruments and incentives for research institute and university cooperation should be put in place.

- Competitive funding should be increased, but there needs to be solid enough institutional funding to ensure personnel cost for key research staff.
We see as critical the transition period from the actual model of institutional funding to the new one. It is an area of a major risk that could jeopardize the whole *pro-performance reform*. A clear methodology - well documented and fit for purpose, well discussed with all the key stakeholders, well communicated to the researchers and research staff; clear road map of implementation; clear monitoring and evaluation (M&E) and correction mechanisms. Technical assistance from the EC is needed, both for developing and for piloting the institutional funding, including performance based institutional funding.
We consider the performance based institutional funding as one of the *pillars* of a Twinning project. However, due to the existing time pressure some other types of technical assistance, with a shorter life-cycle have to be considered (e.g. Taiex).
- Institutional evaluation of research institutes and of research in universities have to be well prepared, well communicated and implemented in a transparent way. The Agency for Quality Assurance, in charge with this evaluation, needs also technical assistance.
It should be also one *pillar* of a Twinning project. Due to the calendar some other types of technical assistance with a shorter life-cycle worth to be consider (e.g. Taiex) as well.
- Funding is critical! Competitive Funding for research should be increased not on the detriment of the institutional funding. This increase, would be an incentive for implementing the reforms and to have on board those researchers performing well, showing also the government commitment for supporting performance. Reform show a clear political will in transforming RDI in Moldova; it asks also for an explicit political will in increasing R&D budget in parallel with the request for efficiency and efficacy and institutional restructuring.
Technical assistance from the EC is needed!
- Research infrastructure is important;
 - maintenance and up-grades;
 - networking;
 - access of the multiple users (public, private for/not for profit, start-ups, etc.) to the research facilities have to be defined and operationalisedEC assistance is needed.
- A better coordination among MECC and Ministry of Economy, as well as among ANCD and ODIMM actions will be required. It is also because the NPRI 2019-2022 will replace not only the R&D Strategy in place but also, partially, the Innovation Strategy.
Clarifications are important, clarity is needed.

3) Recommendations (indicative length: 1 page)

Please list i) your main conclusions; ii) your recommendations (legal/institutional/operational dimensions) and iii) if applicable possible areas for further TAIEX assistance.

- Institutional funding will be required also in the future; we recommend that it can be used for maintenance and personnel cost for key research staff – in spite of other voices in the government
- Convene the PSF panel of 2016 again for a review mission to Moldova, for evaluation of actions taken on the recommendations provided in the PSF report, and for ensuring their continued follow-up and implementation.
- Re-establishing the Moldovan S&T office in Brussels (MOST) with one person, under the responsibility of MECC.
- We recommend that the organisation and administration of the Official Representative and National Contact Points should be assured by the MECC. It is required by the whole coordinated actions needed for an integration in ERA as well as for becoming full member of the COST programme and other programmes in the future.
- Implement the umbrella programmes for support of R&I activities along the lines discussed and agreed in the TAIEX mission among researchers, MECC, ANCD, and the experts.

Assistance by the EU is required e.g. in the form of:

- a PSF follow-up action (specific support) and/or Twinning actions, as well as short term TaieX missions providing focused, short term technical assistance.
- a long-term technical assistance asked for the coherence of a complex process of transformation of R&I in Moldova:
 - Accompanying the reform efforts in R&I by the government, and for ensuring that available research capacities are kept and improved;
 - Peer review by an international review panel of research capacity in research institutes and research in universities, and of research and innovation infrastructure;
 - Establishing Institutional financing;
 - Institutional Capacity building:
 - Support for Ministry of Education, Culture and Science for implementing the planned reforms outlined in the R&I Programme and the related Action Plan, and for monitoring of actions;
 - Support for ANCD for establishing the agency and its procedures, ensuring objective and transparent selection of staff and R&I projects;
 - Support for Agency for Quality Assurance for institutional evaluation; methodology and implementation.

Financial support from the EU is required for:

- Topping up grants for PhD students and salaries of young researchers, so as to keep and increase the share of young researchers on the example of a similar action of topping-up salaries of teachers in the education system which has already been successful implemented.
- Support for smart specialisation implementation, e.g. for collaborative research or competence centres in the priority fields identified.
- Research infrastructure.

4) Gender equality

In line with the EU Gender Action Plan 2016-2020, the European Commission aims to strengthen girls' and women's rights, to give them a stronger voice and to improve their participation as well as empower them in all the areas in which we provide assistance. In this regard, how do you assess the progress of policy or the institutional set-up in the country and/or in the area covered by your mission?

In the management of the R&I field in Moldova we see a strong role of women. The State Secretary for R&I is female, as well as most collaborators in the department managing research within the Ministry for Education, Culture and Research. The head of the new National Agency for R&I (ANCD) is also female.

DETAILS OF THE EXPERT¹

Name, position and institution	Manfred Spiesberger, Senior Scientist, Centre for Social Innovation Prof. Adrian Curaj, Director, UEFISCDI; head of the UNESCO Chair on Science and Innovation Policies, SNSPA
Country	Austria Romania
Telephone and e-mail	+43-650-6812122, spiesberger@zsi.at +40-723-588698, adrian.curaj@gmail.com

Date: 28 September 2018

Signature(s):

¹Personal data contained in this document will be processed in accordance with the privacy statement of the TAIEX instrument (see http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/taix/pdf/privacy_statement_online.pdf) and in compliance with the Regulation (EC) N° 45/2001