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**Podgorica, October 2017**

**Regional HERE seminar (TAM) "Magical Triangle of Higher Education: Model of Financing, Research Capacities, Quality of PhD Studies", 25-26 September 2017, Budva**

The seminar was supported by the European Commission within the programme - Erasmus + Instrument for Technical Assistance Mission.

Lecturers:

- Prof. Melita Kovačević (Croatia),
- Prof. Vedran Mornar (Croatia)
- Prof. Srbijanka Turajlić (Serbia)

Participants: representatives of national higher education reform expert teams of experts in from Montenegro (representatives of higher education institutions, representatives of ministries of education, students ...) from Republic of Serbia, Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Topics:

- model of financing
- research capacities
- quality of PhD studies

In their introductory presentations, the lecturers emphasized that significant changes have taken place in the field of PhD education in the past 10 years. In spite of it, the region still fails to keep pace with these changes.

### **Quality of PhD studies**

In all the countries of the Region, a small number of PhD students has been noticed (less than 10%). At the same time, there is quite a lot of PhD studies for existing capacities, both infrastructural and human. It may be concluded that the quality standards at the regional level should be accelerated due to the present differences and inconsistencies existing at the level of individual countries of the region.

The procedures for enrollment in PhD studies have to be elaborated; the status of doctoral students needs to be regulated, and their work supervised thoroughly, through constant work with the mentor, who represents one of the key elements ensuring quality.

Regardless of the progress made in the region (work on drafting of the document), everything is still at the level of correction, and there is no supervision of quality as such through the entire



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cycle of PhD studies. These mechanisms have not been elaborated, therefore further information dissemination and exchange of experience are required.

Holding regional meetings and regional cooperation in general represent a suitable platform for the exchange of ideas, identification of weaknesses of the system, and exchange of good practices. Things have begun to change for the better, and each of the countries in the region has made a step forward in some part. Therefore, further exchange and collaboration may just encourage further improvement.

### **Research capacities**

There is no balance between existing infrastructure at the disposal of researchers and human resources, thus reflecting on the quality and competitiveness at the international level. Lack of human resources and poor infrastructure represent the main cause of non-competitiveness in terms of obtaining great research projects through international funds. Investing in research and development at the universities in the region is significantly below the EU average, while at the same time, there are big differences between countries in the Region. In that sense, regional cooperation and gathering resources can be a significant factor in strengthening research capacities.

### **Models of financing**

Funding is a necessary precondition for quality of PhD studies and good research work. At the same time, a good strategic framework as well as clear responsibility in terms of spending money is required. Countries have to increase investment in research, which implies investment in PhD education, currently being below the EU average.

On the other hand, the diversification of financing is also required, because we cannot only count on the state money. There is incompatibility in terms of existing funds and generation of finances in the various units of the university. Therefore, it is necessary to give incentive to higher education institutions, universities' units having the capacity to get funds through international projects, in order to share the part of these funds with those not being able to provide funds in this way. By doing so, certain balance between different research areas would be secured.

It is necessary to create conditions for greater mobility of young researchers and PhD students. Resources available for researcher mobility through Maria Curie programme are insufficiently used, which is partly a consequence of inadequate procedures at HEIs with respect to sabbatical leave of research associates. However, professors have to be actively engaged in assisting PhD students, connecting PhD students with potential mentors from renowned EU institutions.



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## **Main recommendations**

Although there are differences regarding the level of organization and functioning of PhD studies, there are common challenges as well as issues of interest of all Western Balkan countries. Therefore, with the aim of reaching the trends of developed countries, regional cooperation is a must. Taking into account all the above mentioned, we provide the following list of recommendations for further work on this topic:

- development of joint programs of PhD studies, joint mentoring,
- creation of regional strategy of PhD studies, which would define the status of doctoral candidate, especially from a financial point of view,
- identification of areas of PhD studies of common interest, while respecting the specificities and the attained level of some countries in certain areas,
- creation of the regional center of excellence that would provide conditions for improvement of research capacities and the possibility of applying for joint European projects,
- establishment of the joint research fund for financing projects of the same or similar interest, as an encouragement for a better quality of PhD education and strengthening of research capacities at the regional level.

Finally, it was also concluded that such and similar events could in a long run serve as a good platform for establishing regional cooperation in this area, with the expressed readiness of all participants to contribute to this through the recognition of long-term benefits.

And as individuals we can do a lot, and through already existing contacts and the proactive role of professors and greater networking, we can at least try to reach the aforementioned goals as soon as possible.