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Sustainability of EU Funded Projects: Case of EUniAM

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Ensuring sustainability of EU funded projects is a considerable challenge not only for EACEA, but even more for those who benefit from the EU funding. Indeed there might be – and often is – a time lag from the end of a project until project effects start to materialize. A number of factors contribute to this time lag, such as inadequate output development, weak implementation, resistance to change, policy and/or organizational decision making cycle, sabotaging the adoption of the results by respective ministries, and inertia in institutional and organizational capacity building. Other factors emerged during and after the EUniAM project that might hinder sustainability efforts. These became perceptible in 2017 - two years after the end of the EUniAM project.

At the beginning of 2017 the Ministry of Education of Republic of Moldova (MoE) invited two external experts from Romania to develop a funding formula for the Higher Education (HE) sector. Few months later, at the end of April, these external experts presented their findings and respective formula. Technically the formula presented to the MoE by the external experts was fully based on the formula developed and presented to the MoE by the EUniAM project in 2015. These experts acknowledged and highly appreciated the EUniAM proposed funding formula.

In May of 2015, the EUniAM project presented its main output to the Ministry of Education and its other main stakeholders titled “Restructuring Higher Education Sector in the Republic of Moldova: Draft Legislative Proposals”. In addition to the inputs-and-outputs-based teaching and research funding formulae, this deliverable identifies the objectives of the legislative proposals; discusses risks and challenges that HE in Moldova faces today and in the next 10-15 years; identifies expected outcomes; identifies basic principles on which the process will be founded; proposes a new structure for the HE sector; offers an example of a rationalization process, incl., a road map; specifies universities powers and responsibilities; suggests a distinct separation between governance and management; and outlines a new National Qualifications Framework. The team of internal, national experts – authors of the Legislative Proposal and this article – became a formal consultative body to the Council of Rectors to ensure sustainability of the Action in cooperation and consultations with the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Finance and other relevant key stakeholders.

Within this period – 2015-2017 – the Ministry of Education continued looking for a funding formula, disregarding the respective recommendations on funding formula proposed by the national, internal experts. This suggests at least a couple of systemic issues at the institutional level. It appears there is distrust in the work undertaken by national, internal experts. It also emerges there is weak absorptive capacity, i.e., the capacity or ability to recognize the value of new knowledge, assimilate and apply it.

To mitigate these issues, the parties involved shall engage more effectively in two-way communications, in organizing, on a regular basis, workshops, seminars with civil servants at all levels, incl., ministers, vice-minsters, and heads of departments. To ensure sustainability of structural projects such as EUniAM, it is critical for the project teams to become affiliated as consultative bodies to the respective Ministries and institutions. This relationship shall become one of the evaluation criteria of EU funded projects that will demonstrate a commitment of government institutions not only within the project but also beyond.

More information about the EUniAM project may found on the project website:

www.euniam.aau.dk. Legislative proposals may be accessed via:

<http://www.euniam.aau.dk/work-packages/wp4/wp4-deliverables/>.

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