

## External Evaluation Report

**External Project Evaluation Report of TEMPUS Project (544188-TEMPUS-1-2013-1-XK-TEMPUS-JPCR): ‘Modernizing the 3<sup>rd</sup> cycle at the University of Prishtina and Developing a PhD Program at the Faculty of Economics’**

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## **1. Introduction**

The joint TEMPUS Project ‘Modernizing the 3<sup>rd</sup> cycle at the University of Prishtina and Developing a PhD Program at the Faculty of Economics’ has the main aim of supporting curricular reform, modernization and capacity building at the University of Prishtina “Hasan Prishtina” with the active involvement of four international higher education institutions (Johannes Kepler University Linz, Università degli studi “G. D’Annunzio” di Chieti-Pescaara, University Nice Sophia Antipolis, World University Service – Kosova), the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, the Kosovo Accreditation Agency, and the Kosova Center for International Cooperation in Higher Education. It focuses on reforming PhD curricula in accordance with the Bologna process and up-to-date European standards, thus supporting the integration of Kosovo into the European Higher Education area.

This is an external report of an exclusively scientific nature, leaving the issues associated with the budget execution of the project for the consideration of other institutions or experts. The report is based not only on the set of information provided by the main beneficiary and grant holder of the Project – the Faculty of Economics of the University of Prishtina –, but also on the in loco observation of the functioning of the institution, namely of the activities that took place during our visit to Kosovo between 15 and 18 November 2017. This visit allowed us, among other things, to participate in a meeting of about two hours with all the PhD students, and to attend the great majority of the sessions of the international conference where these students presented their work.

In addition to this first section, this independent external report is further structured in four other sections. Section 2 presents the Faculty of Economics of the University of Prishtina. Section 3 is devoted to the analysis of the main conclusions of the self-evaluation and accreditation reports. Section 4 evaluates the various institutions and organizations that participated in the project, as well as a critical analysis of the main objectives of the project, seeking to discuss their feasibility within the timeframes set for their implementation. This section also evaluates the results of the main activities resulting from the project, assesses its sustainability, and identifies in detail the added values of the project. Finally, section 5 concludes this external report, leaving some recommendations for the future.



## **2. The Faculty of Economics**

The Faculty of Economics of the University of Prishtina “Hasan Prishtina” started working in the academic year of 1961-62 with the original designation of “Faculty of Law-Economics”. In the first nine years of activity it worked under the auspices of the Faculty of Economics in Belgrade, with the lectures taught in Serbo-croatian. On February 13, 1970, the Assembly of the University of Prishtina was founded. From October 1, 1971 to June, 1991, the Faculty of Economics functioned as an independent organization of higher education, while in 1970-71 the teaching process started to use simultaneously both languages (Albanian and Serbo-croatian). From its foundation until now, the Faculty of Economics was the place where over 35,000 of students graduated with instruction in Albanian.

The Faculty of Economics presents itself currently as a public institution of higher education dedicated to the preparation of professionals in the field of economics through teaching and research at different levels (Bachelor, Master and PhD degree). The graduates are expected to be able to contribute to the economic and social development of the community, and to the advance of global knowledge in Kosovo.

According to the Statute of the University of Prishtina, the Faculty of Economics is an academic unit of the University. The highest official is the Dean, who is accountable to the Rector of the University. An important organisation within the Faculty is the Faculty Council, which is composed by the Dean, Pro-Deans, the Secretary of the Faculty, twenty Professors of the Faculty, five Assistants from the academic staff, one member from the non-academic staff, and two students elected by the council of students.

As mentioned before, teaching and research activities are organized at three different levels: Bachelor, Master and PhD levels. The first cycle programs are taught at three different campus: in Pristina (Faculty of Economics), in Gjilan (University of Gjilan Street “Zija Shemsiu”), and in Mitrovica (Faculty of Economics). For the second and third cycles, the Faculty of Economics offers the corresponding Master and Doctoral programs exclusively at the campus of Prishtina.

Recently, the Faculty of Economics has been entirely transformed, due to the new economic realities in Kosovo and, especially, by the challenges arising from the Bologna Process. Although the country is not a member of the Bologna Process, the

organization of studies is in line with the curriculum and teaching reforms produced by this process.

Under these circumstances, and in an attempt to become a regional leading center for the development of Knowledge, the Faculty of Economics of the University of Prishtina has recently tried to strengthen its cooperation with other European institutions, namely by its integration into scientific international networks and through the implementation and modernization of PhD programs and research projects, of which the current TEMPUS Project (544188-TEMPUS-1-2013-1-XK-TEMPUS-JPCR) is a good example.

Notwithstanding the progress made in the process of accreditation of their studies programs, the main results of the self-evaluation report still continue to present some weaknesses that need to be overcome, namely in the context of this TEMPUS Project, through the development of a new PhD Program and through the modernization of the 3<sup>rd</sup> cycle at the Faculty of Economics of the University of Prishtina.

### **3. Self-Evaluation and Accreditation Report**

The main aim of the PhD program in Economics, in a first moment, is to prepare students to conduct theoretical and empirical research in economics and publish their outputs in scientific international refereed journals. In a second moment, the PhD program naturally seeks to enhance the career prospects of its future graduates, whether in the academic field as future teachers and/or researchers, or in the labor market as highly qualified staff serving the country in general and the region of Prishtina in particular.

However, it is important to mention some of the weaknesses and constraints identified in the self-evaluation report (2014) promoted by the Faculty of Economics that in some way may obstruct the successful achievement of these objectives, and that it is therefore important to overcome.

Among the main weaknesses and constraints the following stand out:

- i) Due to budgetary constraints, there is no opportunity to increase staff in the library or in the financial service;
- ii) The curriculums needs to be developed in order to comply with the Bologna Declaration. It is also fundamental that the titles of the course

- components be revised so that they reflect better the PhD level, contents and learning outcomes of the course components;
- iii) Relatively weak awareness in the academic community of the great importance that the organization of seminars where students can present their papers and watch other presentations could have on student learning outcomes;
  - iv) Absence of study programs taught in English, namely at the level of the 3<sup>rd</sup> cycle. Teaching in the Albanian language is an obstacle for exchange students to come to the University of Prishtina from Universities abroad;
  - v) At least until the 2014-15 academic year, it did not exist in the Faculty of Economics any research center that could help the dissemination and publication of academic papers;
  - vi) The necessity to expand the academic staff is still a reality. The strengthening of international cooperation relations and the development of PhD programs are therefore fundamental to overcome this fragility.

Despite this set of weaknesses and constraints, the Faculty of Economics of the University of Prishtina was successfully subjected to an accreditation process of its study programs, namely of the PhD program, based on the national legal requirements for the 3<sup>rd</sup> cycle of the European Qualifications Framework for Higher Education. According to the Accreditation Report, the proposed PhD program in economics – the first taught in English at the University of Prishtina –, demonstrates a very strong alignment with the institution's and the University of Prishtina's mission (see section 2 of this External Report) to the extent that it is developed as part of the TEMPUS project entitled 'Modernizing the 3<sup>rd</sup> cycle at the University of Prishtina and Developing a PhD Program at the Faculty of Economics', and is financed by the European Commission. Since the PhD program in economics is offered in English, it does not only support the expected internationalization of the PhD program, but also contributes to advances in educational activities at the highest academic study level, allows reforms regarding curricula and teaching methodology, foresees improvements in research capacities, and is helping the Faculty of Economics of the University of Prishtina to become a leading regional center for PhD studies.

From the analysis we have made of the set of documents made available, as well as from the local observation of both the Faculty and University reality on the occasion

of the visit we made to the University of Prishtina between 15 and 18 November 2017, we strongly believe that the prospect of the development of the TEMPUS project previously mentioned was fundamental for this accreditation. In that sense, it is now important to analyze more specifically the main objectives and outcomes of that project.

#### **4. About the Project**

The TEMPUS project ‘Modernizing the 3<sup>rd</sup> cycle at the University of Prishtina and Developing a PhD Program at the Faculty of Economics’ is funded by the European Commission through TEMPUS program.

The main aim of the project is to support the development of 3<sup>rd</sup> cycle of Bologna Process, revising the PhD regulation and development of other related documents as well as human capacity building for setting up the modern PhD studies in addition to piloting the PhD program at the Faculty of Economic of the University of Prishtina “Hasan Prishtina”.

The project was divided into five development work packages (WP1-WP5). A further four work packages (WP6-WP9) assured optimal management and quality of the project development, implementation, results as well as dissemination and sustainability.

##### **4.1. Evaluation of the Partners and Project Objectives**

The project ‘Modernizing the 3<sup>rd</sup> cycle at the University of Prishtina and Developing a PhD Program at the Faculty of Economics’, with the acronym ‘MODPhD’, has as Applicant the University of Prishtina “Hasan Prishtina” and as Partners the Johannes Kepler University Linz, the Università degli studi “G. D’Annunzio” di Chieti-Pescaara, the University Nice Sophia Antipolis, the World University Service – Kosova, the Kosovo Accreditation Agency, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (Kosovo), and the Kosova Center for International Cooperation in Higher Education.

The participation in the same project of international higher education institutions combined with Kosovo’s higher education institutions as well as with

Kosovo's public institutions outside the University seems to us to be a distinctive element of great added value for the pursuit of the project given the synergies that may result from this collaboration, e.g., in what concerns the active communication with stakeholders. Recall that this is a project which is expected to yield important results for the region of Pristina and for the country as a whole. Therefore, the integration of partners such as the Kosovo Accreditation Agency, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (Kosovo), and the Kosova Center for International Cooperation in Higher Education is in our point of view a strong and decisive element for the success of the project.

Regarding, in particular, the higher education institutions that are partners in this project, we can also say that by their geographic location, by the highly qualified academic staff, and by their long history in the development of postgraduate study programs and scientific research activities, they are also perfectly suited to the pursuit of the objectives established in the project, although one or two other institutions could also have been included in order to allow a greater availability of resources, in particular to ensure the supervision of research activities, as well as of the final doctoral dissertations.

Among the main objectives established in the project, we highlight the following:

- i) Development in the Balkan region of the first PhD program taught in English and undertaken in accordance with the Bologna Process;
- ii) Implementation, revision and modernization of procedures, regulation and documents related with PhD studies;
- iii) Improvement of curriculum, trainings, mobility and accreditation processes with a view to improving the dissemination of the information produced;
- iv) Creation of a scientific journal ('Balkan Economic Review') seeded at the Faculty of Economics of the University of Prishtina and supported by an editorial board of reputed international scientific quality;
- v) Public dissemination of the first results of the research activity of PhD students through the organization of the first International Scientific Conference at the Faculty of Economics of the University of Prishtina;
- vi) Promotion of the internationalization and quality assurance procedures of the institution;

- vii) Ensure the sustainability and dissemination of the PhD program.

For the accomplishment of this set of objectives, nine Work Packages have been established to be implemented during the term of the project (36 months, beginning in January, 2014) by all local stakeholders and partners from Austria, Italy and France, under the following titles:

Work package N°	Type of work package	Title of work package	Start	End
WP 1	Development	Gap Analysis Report	1	4
WP 2	Development	Modernization of PhD regulation at the University of Prishtina	5	18
WP 3	Development	Development and Accreditation of PhD program	10	22
WP 4	Development	Implementation of the PhD program	18	36
WP 5	Development	Purchasing the Scientific Literature	19	24
WP 6	Management	Project Management	1	36
WP 7	Quality plan	Quality Control	1	36
WP 8	Dissemination	Dissemination	1	36
WP 9	Exploitation	Sustainability	2	36

Taking into account the previous objectives, as well as the respective distribution and organization of tasks by the various institutions participating in the Project, we consider to be in the presence of a set of purposes that are very relevant and adequate to the ultimate aim of the Project: the modernization of the 3<sup>rd</sup> cycle and the development of a PhD program at the Faculty of Economics of the University of Prishtina.

The implementation and appropriateness of the work packages, resulting, as we will see in the next section, in the practical implementation of three major activities: i) development of the PhD program, ii) establishment of a scientific journal, and iii) organization of a scientific international conference, seems also to us to be very balanced and feasible. However, it should be noted that we do not have, to the best of our knowledge, additional information on the actual performance of all activities, particularly in the context of work package n° 5, so our assessment must be made from a general perspective and therefore viewed with some caution.

## **4.2. Evaluation of the Main Project Activities**

As we mentioned earlier, we can summarize the main project activities in three main outcomes: i) development of the PhD program, ii) establishment of a scientific journal, and iii) organization of a scientific international conference.

With regard to the first main outcome, the development of the first PhD program taught in English and in accordance with the Bologna Process, it is immediately clear that this was an unprecedented achievement at the Faculty of Economics of the University of Prishtina, demonstrating that the project was fundamental for the revision and amendment of legal documents, the establishment of new courses, modules, training and workshop activities, and the modernization of curriculum in respect of the good practices of teaching and research.

The implementation of the PhD study program also allowed the dissemination of knowledge, a greater internationalization of the institution (e.g. through the mobility of students) that can thus benefit from the knowledge and experience offered by the partner institutions in the context of co-teaching and co-mentorship activities, which we believe are fundamental for quality assurance and the creation of synergies without which the accreditation process could hardly have been guaranteed.

It was also an excellent opportunity for PhD students to be confronted with new realities, with innovative teaching and learning methods, although some weaknesses are still evident, namely in what concerns the internalization of the need for international publications, as well as on the development of studies with a more applied nature. Notwithstanding the offer of courses with a third cycle designation, a more careful analysis of their respective contents, objectives and expected outcomes allows us to conclude that there are still some weaknesses, namely in terms of available literature or access to e-journals. This was made clear by our meeting with the nine PhD students when we asked them to speak a little about the difficulties they encountered. However, it is worth noting the efforts made to bring contents closer to those offered in the best schools in the region or at European level. The study programs offered by the Faculty of Economics of the University of Prishtina are similar to those supplied by the Ljubljana and Zagreb universities. The newly developed PhD program in Economics is also similar to the study program of the Faculty of Economics of the Johannes Kepler University Linz in Austria, an university which for many years has already been

offering an extensive range of academic programs in the areas of Social Sciences, Economics and Business Administration in accordance to national and international guidelines and quality standards.

Regarding the objective of the establishment of a scientific journal, it was possible to observe on the occasion of our visit to the University of Prishtina, but also by the disclosure of the address *balkaneconomicreview.net* that the journal, with the designation of ‘Balkan Economic Review’, is already a reality. This is, in our view, one of the most important achievements of the TEMPUS Project, which is essential to ensure the dissemination of the work produced namely by PhD students and other researchers, but also to foster future work safeguarding the respect of the highest standards of international scientific research.

It is a biannual scientific journal in the field of economics and social sciences, which at this stage seems to be adequate. Naturally the journal will probably want to assert itself as a wider publication in the near future, for which it will be fundamental to ensure that in its first numbers only works with unquestionable quality and preferably of a more applied nature should be accepted. The combination in its editorial board of the most prestigious professors and researchers of the region, but also of several European universities are in our opinion an important guarantee that this will be safeguarded.

Also on the subject of the creation of the ‘Balkan Economic Review’, it should also be noted that the various stages of its implementation have been fully respected, despite some difficulties in obtaining the necessary ISSN.

Finally, in what concerns the organization of the first scientific international conference with the appealing and appropriate title of ‘Knowledge Based Society as a Strategy for Faster Economic Growth’, it can be said that it was very participated and of some scientific quality. The conference was structured in Plenary and Parallel sessions, in a very suitable number for a two-day conference (16-17 November, 2017).

All submitted papers were subject to a referee process, and at the end of the conference a prize was awarded to the best works, which in our opinion was a motivating element for the continuation of the research work of PhD students with a view to a future publication.

It should also be noted that as a result of this initiative it was also published a conference proceedings book, so that in this aspect the TEMPUS Project’s main purposes were also entirely fulfilled, namely with regard to the dissemination of

knowledge, enrolment of students, promotion of quality, internationalization, and development of networking, essential for the organization of future scientific events.

### **4.3. Sustainability of the Project**

The PhD program was developed based on the recent European Higher Education trends for PhD studies. The program is accredited, students are enrolled and lectures were held on the courses by European Union (EU) and local professors. Additionally, the program supported students' mobility at the universities of the three European Union partner countries. Supervision of the PhD thesis will be by international and local professors for each enrolled student.

The network created among the universities will be further continued, as the students are co-supervised by EU project partner universities. Additionally, the developed PhD program in the field of Economics, was accredited for three years by the Accreditation Agency of Kosovo, composed by International experts. Therefore, the second generation will be enrolled, which ensures the sustainability of the developed programs. Furthermore, due to positive comments given by international experts of Accreditation Agency, the program taught in Albanian language in the field of Economics, does not continue any longer. Instead, only the program taught in English language will continue with student's enrollment.

Another activity that contribute to the sustainability of the project is the Memorandum of Understanding signed among the University Nice Sophia Antipolis, France and the University of Prishtina "Hasan Prishtina", that will continue the cooperation in the field of students and staff exchange.

The TEMPUS project also contributed on fostering the linkage among the University-Government/Policy makers and the Industry, while during the implementation of the program, there were guest lecturers: Deputy Prime Minister, as well as Director of Kosovo Pension Savings Funds.

In addition to all that has been said, it is also worth mentioning the capacities build within the University from the trainings, study visits and workshops will continue sharing experiences among the staff and students.

For all of this, we believe that the 'MODPhD' Project has important added values.

#### 4.4. Added Values

Within the project frame, there were significant changes at the faculty and university level. The improvements made, were concentrated in the following core fields for future development, as well as for the improvement in the quality:

- i) Development of Bachelor program in Applied Economics and Management in cooperation with the international project partners, entirely taught in English. Curricula have been based on the Johannes Kepler University Linz, Austria. This Program enrolls the third year students. In the Report of External reviewers this study program has been acknowledged as a model study program. Thus, it has advised the Faculty that in the second round of accreditation all of the study programs to be prepared by taking into account the academic standards applied at Bachelor in Applied Economics and Management;
- ii) The Master in Applied Economics and Management has been developed this year, again in very close cooperation with all international partners and by taking as a basis curricula of Johannes Kepler University Linz, Austria. The study program is in the process of passing the phases at the Faculty/University level and soon will be send for accreditation;
- iii) The Faculty Council has decided to close the study PhD Program in Albanian Language, and continue with the curricula of PhD Program in English Language due to its appropriateness. Very soon the announcement for admitting the 2<sup>nd</sup> generation will be stated;
- iv) Continuance of mobility cooperation with the University of Nice via ERASMUS+ International Credit Mobility for students and staff;
- v) Development of the students guide for the PhD program and all other programs offered at the Faculty of Economics of the University of Prishtina;
- vi) The PhD students are engaged in the teaching process. As in the European Union Universities, all enrolled students in the PhD program are engaged in teaching. This is the first time experience at the University of Prishtina “Hasan Prishtina”.

- vii) Mobility for students at the European University partners. European Union project partners hosted enrolled students for two months. During the mobility they developed PhD thesis, worked on research for jointly scientific publications with European Union professors as well as attended courses;
- viii) Establishment of the Scientific Journal and Organization of the Scientific Conference. It is the first international scientific journal at the Faculty of Economics of the University of Prishtina, which was established within the project. As we mention before, the journal is peer-reviewed journal titled: 'Balkan Economic Review', which is composed of the editorial board of international university professors and experts of the economic fields and local professors from the Faculty of Economics of the University of Prishtina. Moreover, the scientific conference was organized with the participation of scientist from Kosovo, regional countries and European countries. This enables the functioning of the Institute of the Faculty of Economics;
- ix) Possibility of joint publication in international journals and participation in the conferences among international professors and students;
- x) Several study visits have been conducted to European Union partners, as well as trainings, workshops were organized for administration, academic staff and students at University "Hasan Prishtian" by local and European Union experts.

We believe that the main success factor for all these developments is sustainability and institutionalization, which is foreseen during the development phase and project duration. In this context, the Faculty of Economics and the University of Prishtina "Hasan Prishtina" confirmed their commitment to supporting and enabling the results to be institutionalized after the project ends.

## **5. Conclusions and Recommendations**

The TEMPUS Project 'Modernizing the 3<sup>rd</sup> cycle at the University of Prishtina and Developing a PhD Program at the Faculty of Economics' has proved to be a

decisive instrument for the modernization of the 3<sup>rd</sup> cycle at the University of Prishtina, with application of the principles and good practices arising from the Bologna process. It was also a decisive opportunity for the revision and amending of legal documents, as well as for the consolidation of the accreditation process of doctoral courses. It also allowed the diffusion of knowledge and a greater internationalization of the Faculty of Economics, supporting the publication of scientific works, the accomplishment of training and workshop activities, but mainly through the establishment of a scientific journal and the organization of the first international Scientific conference at the Faculty of Economics of the University of Prishtina, with the presence of several professors and researchers of reputed international quality.

For all this, we view the Project as a success, having achieved in essence the main goals set in the work packages defined for its accomplishment. The Faculty of Economics of the University of Prishtina can thus present itself as an important agent promoting knowledge, research and post-graduate education in the Balkan region. Additionally, it is hoped that the future graduates of this first PhD program offered in English can very soon contribute to the strengthening of teaching and research activities within the institution, but also can assert themselves as superior staff of exceptional quality within the labour market of the region.

Nevertheless, it is recommended that a greater emphasis be placed on the internationalization and publication of papers in international refereed journals, which may involve a reduction in the number of hours of teaching that PhD students are required to do, as well as the development of research activities in co-authorship with international supervisors or other external researchers. In this particular aspect, it is also essential that in the short term the Faculty of Economics can create an autonomous research center capable of allowing PhD students to develop their research activity in a more integrated perspective and possibly inserted in international research networks. It is also recommended as essential the acquisition of databases and econometric software capable of allowing the development of more applied work. The major challenge facing current students is, in our view, precisely their ability to move from a descriptive and more qualitative analysis to a more applied and quantitative analysis.

Concerning the ability and capacity of PhD students to present and write a text in English according to the international standards, based on what we were able to observe during the international scientific conference, we believe that they are already

relatively well prepared, so in this aspect the work developed in the ambit of the 'MODPhD' Project seems to have been very fruitful.

In short, on many levels there is clear evidence that the TEMPUS Project 'Modernizing the 3<sup>rd</sup> cycle at the University of Prishtina and Developing a PhD Program at the Faculty of Economics' has been largely successful despite the presence of some natural qualitative weaknesses arising from the fact that many of the teaching and research activities developed were first implemented at the University.