

Government Council supports stability and development of the science system in the fight against pandemic

On Thursday, 30 April 2020 a regular meeting of the Government Council for Research, Development and Innovation (the Council) took place under its chairman, Prime Minister Andrej Babiš, in video conference form - due to ongoing government measures against the coronavirus epidemic. The main points of the meeting included the performance and benefits of research centres (VaVpl), the schedule for the assessment of universities using the current methodology, and technical implementation of the measures of the National Policy for Research, Development and Innovation 2021+ to address urgent research challenges. The Council recommended that its chairman appoint the Indian physicist Ajay Kumar Sood as a new member of the International Council.

The selected conclusions of the meeting again reflected the current threat situation for the coronavirus pandemic.

In response to the pandemic situation, the Council adopted this statement at the beginning of the conference call:

The Council for Research, Development and Innovation is closely monitoring information on the involvement of research organisations in combating the pandemic caused by the novel coronavirus SARS-CoV-2 and stresses the role of research in addressing crises having an impact on society as a whole.

In this context, the Council expresses its appreciation of the extraordinary commitment and efforts of all scientists and researchers involved in combating the pandemic.

In the current context, the Council will therefore continue to give its full support to the stability and development of the science and research system, with a view to strengthening its capacity to respond appropriately to unexpected risks and threats.

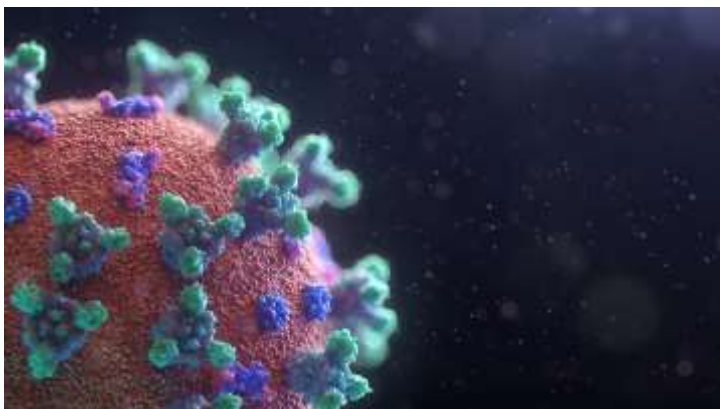


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Under its first item, the members of the Council considered **scientific performance, the potential for socio-economic benefits and the organisational arrangements for research centres** financed by National Sustainability Programme II - on the basis of materials submitted by the Ministry of Industry and Trade, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, the Ministry of Health and the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic. The Council and its presidency, in cooperation with providers, will submit a report on the further functioning of RD&I centres.

In view of the repeated changes in the situation during the ongoing state of emergency and the variable state budget deficit the regular topic of "Proposal for expenditures on research from the state budget of the Czech Republic" was not addressed. *"We welcome the statement from the Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister Havlíček that the area of science and research is one of the government's priorities, as well as their efforts to ensure science is not underfunded."* said Petr Dvořák, first vice-chairman of the Council.

Following the significant change introduced into the National RD&I Policy 2021+ at the March meeting, the Council has now discussed **a draft procedure for technical implementation of Measure No 27**. This measure makes it possible, in a highly operational mode, to provide financial support for research programmes aimed at **addressing defined threats with a global impact** such as defending against diseases of the COVID-19 type. *"We would like to support comprehensive research programmes focused on specific risks and threats, using the knowledge potential of basic research based on the international context, and leading to results applicable in practice."* said Pavel Baran, vice-chairman of the Council.

In cooperation with the Council members concerned, the Council chair will prepare a round table meeting to discuss the current status and outlook for research into the biology of viral diseases, in particular those caused by the SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus.

The Council also approved materials entitled "Assessment of the Results of Research, Development and Innovation Programmes Completed in 2018", which will be presented at a meeting of the government.

In another item within the extensive discussion, the Council members discussed a **Change in the assessment schedule for the university segment according to the 2017+ Methodology** submitted by the Ministry of Education. The first vice-chairman of the Council agreed with a shift in the timetable, providing the basis for a full evaluation, including on-site visits, which are a key element of the process. *"A meeting of experts keeping to the original timetable would not be possible, given the closure of borders and the general restrictions on the movement of people across the European Union, and beyond it. Cancelling on-site visits would mean partially giving up on the quality of the assessment,"* Petr Dvořák pointed out.

The Council recommended that its chairman appoint **Prof. Ajay Kumar Sood as a member of its advisory body, the International Council**; Prof. Sood is a leading Indian physicist and nanotechnology scientist, and has been nominated by the Indian government. Professor Sood works at the Indian Institute of Science (IISc) and the Jawaharlal Nehru Centre for Advanced Scientific Research in Bangalore. This nomination is a response to the offer made by Prime Minister Babiš during his official visit to India last year.

Professor A.K. Sood is a world-renowned Indian physicist, a scientist engaged in graphene and nanotechnology research. He works at the Indian Institute of Science (IISc) and the Jawaharlal Nehru Centre for Advanced Scientific Research in Bangalore. He is, among other things, a member of the advisory Science, Technology and Innovation Advisory Council of

the Indian Prime Minister, chairman of the Nano Science Advisory Group, DST of the Government of the Republic of India.

In 2015, Professor Sood was elected a member of the Royal Society of London (FRS), a member of the World Academy of Sciences (FTWAS, 2002), a member of the National Academy of Sciences of India (FNA, 1996), a member of the National Academy of Sciences of India (FNASc, 1995) and in 1991 a member of the Indian Academy of Sciences (FASc).

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