

Government Council approves measures to address urgent challenges in research

Given the circumstances and measures adopted by the Office of the Government of the Czech Republic in connection with the situation around the coronavirus, the presidium of the Research, Development and Innovation Council (the Council) cancelled the regular session of the Council at Straka Academy planned for 27 March 2020 and on selected items of the originally planned programme declared remote voting with a deadline of 31 March. The main items of voting included the National Research, Development and Innovation Policy of the Czech Republic 2021+ and the Procedure for Reporting Cooperation with Major Research Infrastructures. The conclusions of the talks reflect the current situation with the threat of the coronavirus pandemic.

"The crisis caused by the current COVID-19 epidemic is a global threat at many layers of the civilisational structure. All efforts focused on overcoming this crisis also provide an opportunity to re-evaluate or redefine what have been the standard paradigms of institutional and individual activities," stated the Council's Vice-Chairman Pavel Baran on the results of the meeting.



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In a vote the Council approved the draft **National Research, Development and Innovation Policy of the Czech Republic 2021+**, which will be now be submitted for interministerial consultation proceedings. The national policy is an overarching strategic document for developing all components of research, development and innovation (R&D&I) in the Czech Republic and its existence is also a precondition for being able to draw funding from EU funds in the given programming period of 2021–2027. In the structure of the Innovation Strategy of the Czech Republic to 2030, the National Policy represents one of the instruments for meeting the goals for financing and evaluating research and development.

Part of this strategic document is the added Measure 27, which allows for a redefinition of the National Priorities of Oriented Research, Experimental Development and Innovation through **assistance for specific research programmes relevant to areas of defined threats with a society-wide impact**. The current situation around the coronavirus, along with a number of other threats of recent decades, accelerate the urgency of redefining this conceptual document. Right now it is necessary to push for part of our research capacity to focus and orient more narrowly on monitoring, analysing and proposing solutions for risks with society-wide impact.

"The Council approved remote voting of an important addendum to the strategic material that should help set out the science policy after 2021. Called Measure 27, it should allow for highly flexible financial support for research focused on dealing with urgent challenges such as defence against infections like COVID-19. There has not been such a possibility to date, or rather it was highly limited and minimally flexible. It's an ambitious plan, but I believe that it is essential," said Council First Vice-Chairman Petr Dvořák. The process of redefining oriented priorities must of course be set up so as not to undermine the knowledge base of blue sky research, as only a high-quality and long-built research knowledge base constitutes a source and starting point for potential further orientation and focus.

The Council also remotely discussed the manner in which the impact of the built up network of large and expensive instrumental and expert units on Czech research and the economy should be monitored. Council members approved the material **Procedure for Reporting Cooperation with Major Research Infrastructures (MRI)** submitted by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport.

"In the given context it should be emphasised that the impact of certain major research infrastructures can now clearly be seen in the fight against coronavirus. In record time we managed to multiply the Czech Republic's capacity for virus testing, in part via these infrastructures. This is clear evidence that the idea of building a network of major research infrastructures was correct and that scientists can directly help out where traditional capacities are insufficient," Petr Dvořák pointed out.

The goal of the approved material is to provide submitters of results with a unified terminology and clear rules for reporting on cooperation with major research infrastructures in Results Information Register in the R&D&I Information System. Adherence to these principles and rules ensures the accessibility of comparable, factually correct and current data for statistical and analytical purposes.

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