

RDI Council to submit to the government the final proposal of the 2022 budget for science

The May meeting of the Research, Development and Innovation Council (the Council) was held on 28 May 2021 as a video conference. The main items of the agenda included the proposal of science expenditure from the 2022 state budget, support for research and development from the National Recovery Plan and preparation of the operational programmes OP JAC and OP TAC.



From a videoconference meeting on 28 May 2021 of the RD&I Council. Photo: Office of the Government of the Czech Republic

As the first item of the agenda, the Council members approved the **final proposal of state budget expenditure on research, development and innovation for 2022**, with an outlook for 2023 and 2024, and a long-term perspective until 2028. The proposal will now be submitted to the government. For 2022, the proposed expenditure from public sources is CZK 1.35 billion (3.6%) higher than the current mid-term outlook. The total volumes of expenditure are proposed at CZK **39.4 bil.** for 2022, CZK **40.4 bil.** for 2023 and CZK **41.2 bil.** for 2024.

The Council emphasised in its resolution the importance of research, development and innovation (R&D&I) for the development of the Czech Republic, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic. The presented budget proposal was discussed with all commenting bodies. Disagreements remain only with the Ministry of Finance.

“Any freezing or reduction of the budget for science due to budgetary austerity measures would have very negative consequences, mainly in the gradual outflow of the best researchers and teams to foreign countries,” said Dr. Pavel Baran, first Deputy Chairman of the Council, on the situation in the budget negotiations. *“The budget proposal of the Council reflects the consequences of the epidemic crisis caused by SARS-CoV-2, the proven capacity of relevant science disciplines to respond quickly and find new solutions in the face of global threats, and it stresses the necessary stimulation of economic growth.”*

“In particular, we call for strengthening the knowledge base, support for social science research evaluating the impacts of the pandemic on the life of our society - all that with a special emphasis placed by the present on the importance of innovation and digitisation. Economic prosperity is conditioned by public investment in research both from the macroeconomic point of view and with direct regional effects,” Vice Chairman of the Council, Prof. Vladimír Mařík, adds.

“When the National Economic Council (NEC) of the Czech government met for the first time, it expected pressure on the budget and warned that investment in science is what should certainly not be restricted. Any future outlook of the sustainability of public budgets of our country, including an expert analysis of the National Budget Council, declares that, with a mere one percent of annual productivity increase, the ratio of the public debt (in the 50 year horizon) to GDP will be halved, from three times to one and a half times the GDP. If we regard research funding not as an investment but only as consumption, we do not think in economic terms. Investment in science is essential for the growth of the Czech Republic's productivity,” Prof. Štěpán Jurajda, a member of NEC and the Council, commented on the topic.

The Council also turned to the Ministry of Finance with a request that if any of the budget chapters proposes to reduce its R&D&I expenditure for 2022 to 2024 as part of the preparation of the Budget Act, the released R&D&I funding should be allocated to other budget chapters after consultation with the Council.

Under the standard point of the agenda on **support for science and research from the National Recovery Plan**, the Council recommended to the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, responsible for component 5.1 “Excellent research and development in priority areas of public interest in healthcare”, supplementing the implementation programme of the basic research component with a priority of neurodegenerative diseases.

The background document was drawn up by Prof. Jan Konvalinka, a Council member leading the Working Group for Health Research, in connection with the dramatically growing average age of the population and the worldwide increase in neurological and mainly neurodegenerative diseases, the health and economic impact of which will be enormous in the upcoming decades.

The Council also asks the grant provider to ensure maximum synergies with all other public sources for the R&D&I area of support in implementing the future programmes and calls of the National Recovery Plan.

Subsequently, the Council plans to hold a seminar in September, dealing with the organising and results of research connected with the COVID-19 pandemic, and targeted at strengthening the resilience of the society and at substantial future risks.

The Council approved its opinion on the operational programmes **John Amos Comenius (OP JAC)** under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, and **Technologies and Applications for Competitiveness (OP TAC)**, prepared by the

Ministry of Industry and Trade. The Council asked both grant providers to incorporate the Council's comments into the relevant documents before submitting them to the government.

In the next items of the agenda, the Council members approved their opinion on the “Proposed change to the Eta Programme supporting applied social-science and humanities research, experimental development and innovation” and the “Proposed change to the programme supporting applied research, experimental development and innovation of the National Competence Centre”. Both programmes, submitted by the Technology Agency of the Czech Republic, were proposed for extension.

In the process of implementing the Evaluation Methodology 2017+, the Council also approved the text of the Call for Proposals of Candidates for Members of Expert Panels.

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