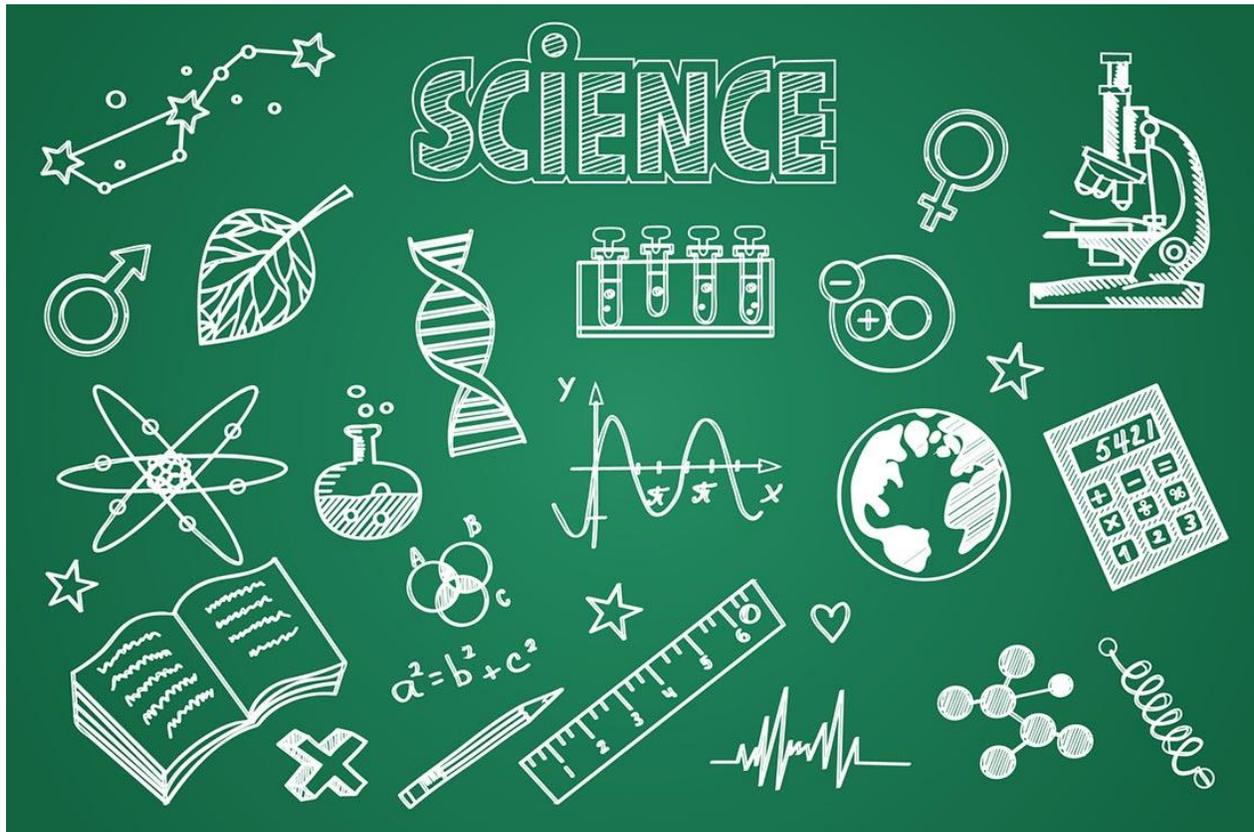


New Way of Funding Science

- Vladimir Popovic, State Secretary

Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development



Establishing a Fund for Science is an extremely important systemic change, a big reform step. The plan is to fund competitive project calls through this fund. In the initial stage, the Fund will be financed through the state budget. However, the intention is to create conditions that will ultimately lead to the Fund being supported by the private sector as well. We believe that it was thanks to the fact that we did not implement any rash reforms that we managed to preserve the capacity of our research community, which is of high quality. This is not just our opinion, but also of numerous experts from around the world. The working group in charge for drafting the Law on Fund for Science has completed its work. During September there will be a public debate regarding this law after which parliament procedure is expected.

How Will the Fund for Science Work?

The Fund will have a Science Council as its highest expert and advisory body. The programmes of the Fund have to be diverse enough to respond to various societal challenges – technological development, support to progressive ideas, capacity building, development of innovative ecosystem, development of scientific infrastructure, cooperation between science and industry, creation of public policies, etc. The programmes of the Fund will be determined according to the following structure: development, strategy, ideas, people, infrastructure, cooperation, innovation, publication, promotion, etc. Within each programme, projects will be implemented based on public calls for projects aiming at addressing particular challenges from that field. Projects can be long-term (4 years), mid-term (2-3 years) and short-term (up to 1 year). Within each programme, project evaluation will consider criteria such as excellence, impact and implementation.

What is the Model of Motivating the Business Sector to Invest in the Fund?

One of the main programmes of the Fund will be the Development. This is a programme of directed research and technological development, which will try to respond to concrete needs of the society and the economy. The Programme will be realised through clearly defined thematic projects within the respective public call. Topics are defined through a consultative process by various actors including private sector, society, government, public administration, etc. Business entities will be able to nominate a topic that is of interest to them, and then participate in co-funding of these research studies together with the Fund. That way, the Fund would support businesses in financing research that is relevant to them.

How Interesting are Social Sciences and Humanities to the Private Sector?

The Fund is structured in a way that all science and social capacities can participate in projects, without any limitations regarding scientific fields. With the increasing multidisciplinary of projects, the issue of scientific fields is becoming redundant. The focus here is on the impact of science on society and not just the business sector. The Ministry has invested a lot of effort into overcoming the divisions in our scientific community and we believe now is the right time for reform changes.

The Fund will perform everything related to the competitive projects, from publishing public calls to organising evaluations and monitoring the implementation of the projects. We want to nurture excellence, but we also want to provide security for our researchers through institutional financing. Certain programmes are specifically tailored toward nurturing excellence. Also, we will make sure that the projects that came close to being financed by Horizon2020 get priority in national funding.

Why Was There No Public Call for Projects According to the Existing Rules?

We want a reform of the entire science system, change the financing model, move to combined institutional and project funding. We want higher relevance of project calls, a higher impact of research results on the economy and the society. We need to increase the contribution of public research to social and economic development and enable researchers to conduct research outside the academic realm. Certainly not all innovation is the result of scientific work, but it is not possible to separate innovation from science, especially not in a small country and system with limited capacities such as ours. According to the existing rules, this is not possible or is possible to a small extent. There is deep-rooted opinion among the scientific community that business people have no understanding of their work, while the business community feels the scientists are doing work that is in no way relevant to them. This has to change. We need new laws, not temporary, short-term solutions. The proposed model is completely in line with the Strategy for Scientific and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia, as well as the Government's Action Plan. We have clear support of the Government for all activities related to the establishment of the Fund for Science.

Will the New Financing Model Start with the New Budget Year?

The current law was adopted in 2005, but the circumstances in the society have significantly changed since then. The most important changes are introducing the combined institutional and project financing, and the establishment of the Fund for Science. The Law on the Fund for Science and the new Law on Scientific Research should be adopted this autumn. Then we have to establish the Fund, adopt by-laws, so we can expect the new model to start July 1st 2019. This means starting institutional financing and publishing the first project call through the Fund for Science.