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# EXTERNAL EVALUATION REPORT:

# ERAMUS+ project MARDS ”Reforming doctoral studies in Montenegro and Albania – good practice paradigm” Project Nr: Grant: 598465-EPP-1-2018-1-ME-EPPKA2-CBHE-SP

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1. **INTRODUCTION TO THE PROJECT ACTIVITIES**

Erasmus+ project ”Reforming doctoral studies in Montenegro and Albania – good practice paradigm (MARDS)”, 598465-EPP-1-2018-1-ME-EPPKA2-CBHE-SP ( [www.mards.ucg.ac.me](http://www.mards.ucg.ac.me) ), is a three-year regional structural project, with a main objective to reconstruct doctoral studies in Montenegrin and Albanian higher education systems in line with Salzburg Principles and establish sustainable and modern Pilot Joint Doctoral Schools between Montenegro and Albania. The idea is to use further those established Joint Doctoral Schools as examples of ”good practices” for the Western Balkan Region. The specific objectives of the MARDS projects are:

Project activities are organised in eight working packages (WP) with relating activities:

* **WP1 / PRE Monitoring and analysing of national systems and policies of doctoral education in Montenegro and Albania and comparing with EU practices**
	+ A1.1 Evaluation of the existing doctoral education policy and standards in MNE and Albania and comparing with EU practices
	+ A1.2 Organization of a Conference on doctoral education in Montenegro and Albania
	+ A1.3 Recommendations and purpose of basic legal documents on university and national levels
* **WP2 / DEV Training of Montenegrin and Albanian academic staff and professionals/administration in doctoral education**
	+ A2.1 Training of academic and professional staff on EU practices on doctoral education
	+ A2.2 Creating a Guidelines and recommendations for WB academics and professionals in doctoral studies
* **WP3 / DEV Establishing a new model of funding doctoral studies on national levels**
	+ A3.1 Evaluation of models for funding doctoral studies in Montenegro and Albania
	+ A3.2 Adoption of bylaws on funding doctoral studies in Montenegro
	+ A3.3 Adoption of bylaws on funding doctoral studies in Albania
* **WP4 / DEV Establishment and start-up of Joint Pilot Doctoral Schools**
	+ A4.1 Development of the Curricula for joint Doctoral Schools
	+ A4.2 Equipping the laboratories and other infrastructure at partner universities
	+ A4.3 Accreditation of the Doctoral Schools
	+ A4.4 Enrolling the first generation
	+ A4.5 Programme implementation
* **WP5 / QPLN Quality plan**
	+ A5.1 Internal Quality Control
	+ A5.2 External Quality Control
* **WP6 / DISS / EXP Dissemination of the project**
	+ A6.1 Creation and updating project web site
	+ A6.2 Creating and distribution of dissemination documents
	+ A6.3 Organizing dissemination conference with stakeholders
	+ A6.4 Organizing MARDS Doctoral Colloquium ”Science, Technology and Services for Sustainable development”
* **WP7 / DISS / EXP Exploitation and Sustainability of the project results**
	+ A7.1 Regular meetings about MARDS flow with stakeholders
	+ A7.2 Universities - stakeholders networking in Montenegro and Albania
	+ A7.3 Establishment of sustainable scholarships in Albania and Montenegro
	+ A7.4 Promotion of Doctoral School in Region
* **WP8 / MNGT Management of the project**
	+ A8.1 Daily management of the project
	+ A8.2 Precise guidelines for management of the project
	+ A8.3 Regular meetings of project bodies
	+ A8.4 Reporting (progress, quality, financial)
	+ A8.5 External financial pre-audit.

There are 16 partners in the project, as follows:

* P1, University of Montenegro (Coordinator, Management), Montenegro (UoM)
* P2, University of Vienna, Austria (UNIVIE)
* P3, University of Maribor, Slovenia (UM)
* P4, Faculty of Education and Rehabilitation, University of Zagreb, Croatia (ERF-UNIZG)
* P5, Matej Bel University, Slovakia (UMB)
* P6, University of Donja Gorica, Montenegro (UDG)
* P7, University of Shkodra ”Luigj Gurakuqi”, Albania (UNISHK)
* P8, Polytechnic University of Tirana, Albania (PUT)
* P9, University of Vlora, Albania (UV)
* P10, Metropolitan University of Tirana, Albania (UMT)
* P11, Ministry of Education, Montenegro (MoE)
* P12, Ministry of Science, Montenegro (MoSM)
* P13, Ministry of Education, Sports and Youth, Albania (MESY)
* P14, Chamber of Economy, Montenegro (CEM)
* P15, Association for Professionals in Doctoral Education, Austria (PRIDE)
* P16, Union of Chambers of Commerce and Industry, Albania (UCCIAL).
1. **EVALUTION OF THE PROJECT EVENTS**

Various types of events and mobility of teaching and other staff and students are well supported by the Erasmus+ programme, which focuses on achievement of additional knowledge, skills and further competences. For the MARDS project, as a project that is focused to joint doctoral schools, mobility represents an important factor during both, development of doctoral schools and their implementation in near future. However, the issues influenced by Covid-19 virus has influenced limitation of mobility and orientation to on-line virtual mobility and meetings.

As presented, there are events organised within the MARDS project

(<https://www.mards.ucg.ac.me/workflow.html#EventsWorkflow>):

* WP6 / DISS / EXP Dissemination, MARDS promotion at Shkoder, 02/11/2018
* WP6 / DISS / EXP Dissemination, MARDS promotion at Erasmus+ Info Day at University of Montenegro, 13/11/2018
* WP6 / DISS / EXP Dissemination, MARDS promotion at TAM Seminar about Reform of Doctoral Studies at University of Montenegro, 19/11/2018
* WP6 / DISS / EXP Dissemination, MARDS presented on Erasmus+ Info Day, guest Gullia Moro from EACEA, 29/11/2018
* WP9 / MNGT Management, Grant holders coordination Meeting, Brussels, EACEA, 28-30/01/2019
* WP6 / DISS / EXP Dissemination, Presentation of MARDS at Metropolitan University of Tirana, 14/02/2019
* WP8 / MNGT Management, MARDS Kick-off meeting in Podgorica, 20-23/02/2019
* WP5 / QPLN Quality Plan, Quality report / questionnaires on Kick-off meeting, after the meeting
* WP6 / DISS / EXP Dissemination, MARDS is promoted at similar project coordinated by University of Zagreb, HarISA, 25/02/2019
* WP6 / DISS / EXP Dissemination at University of Maribor, 09/04/2019
* WP6 / DISS / EXP Dissemination at University of Vlore, 03/05/2019
* WP8 / QPLN NEO Monitoring visit at University of Vlore, 31/05/2019
* WP11 / PRE Workshop / Conference in Kotor, 03-05/06/2019
* WP5 / QPLN Quality report/analysis of questionnaire, after the Workshop / Conference
* WP6 / DISS / EXP Dissemination of MARDS project at MECO’2019 conference, 10-14/06/2019
* WP2 / DEV Training #1: University of Vienna: ”Professional Management of Doctoral Studies”, 24-28/06/2019
* WP5 / QPLN NEO Monitoring Visit to the Universities of Montenegro and Partners, 08/07/2019
* WP6 / DISS / EXP Dissemination at Website of University of Montenegro, Interview of Project Coordinator Prof. Dr. Radovan Stojanović, 220/07/2019
* WP2 / DEV Training #2: University of Zagreb, Dubrovnik (CAAS): ”Professionalization of PhD Supervision”, 04-06/09/2019
* WP8 / MNGT MARDS Bilateral Meeting between the Coordinator (University of Montenegro) and partners from Albania, 23/09/2019
* WP6 / DISS / EXP Round Table: ”Doctoral Studies, Industry, Services and Society”, Montenegrin Chamber of Commerce, 26/09/2019
* WP2 / DEV Training #3: Matej Bel University, Banska Bystrica: ”Collaborative Doctoral Programmes”, 02-05/10/2019
* WP8 / MNGT Regional Cluster Meting on the CBHE project’s impact in the Western Balkans, Durres, Albania, 22-23/10/2019
* WP6 / DISS / EXP Dissemination in Matej Bel University newsletter (page 23), 10/2019
* WP2 / DEV Training #4: University of Maribor: ”Quality Assurance of Doctoral Studies”, 06-08/10/2019
* WP6 / DISS / EXP Dissemination about the MARDS Training at the University of Maribor, 12/11/2019
* WP8 / MNGT MARDS Meeting between the Coordinator (University of Montenegro) and local partners, 18/11/2019
* WP6 / DISS / EXP Dissemination at the University of Shkodra, 18/11/2019
* WP6 / DISS / EXP Dissemination at the University of Vlora with young researchers, 25/11/2019
* WP6 / DISS / EXP Dissemination on Facebook page of the University of Donja Gorica, 09/12/2019
* WP4 / DEV Equipping the room at the University of Montenegro, 09/12/2019
* WP8 / MNGT MARDS Consortium Meeting Vienna, 10-13/12/2019
* WP5 / QPLN MARDS Open Call for External Evaluators, 20/12/2019
* WP6 / DISS / EXP Presentation of MARD project during Erasmus+ Info day at Polytechnic University of Tirana, 21/01-2020
* WP6 / DISS / EXP Article from University of Maribor Magazine UMniverzum, nr 11, 02/2020
* WP8 / MNGT 2nd MARDS Bilateral Meeting Albania – Montenegro, 04-05/02/2020
* WP6 / DISS / EXP MARDS Seminar at Metropolitan University of Tirana: Digitalization in Tourism for Sustainable Development, 20/02/2020
* WP5 / QPLN 2nd National Erasmus+ Office Monitoring Visit to the University of Montenegro and Montenegrin partners, 02/06/2020
* WP6 / DISS / EXP Dissemination about MARDS project, The problems of Doctoral Education in Montenegro in Light of MARDS Project, Reforms Inside, Publication of Higher Education Experts in Montenegro, Issue 1, 02/06/2020
* WP6 / DISS / EXP MARDS project disseminated at MECO’2020, 08-11/06/2020
* WP6 / DISS / EXP Interview with Prof. Dr. Radovan Stojanović and Prof. Dr. Predrag Miranović about new doctoral studies in Montenegro and Albania, 15/10/2020
* WP8 / MNGT MARDS 3rd Consortium Meeting, 30/10/2020
* WP4 / DEV The first candidate within MARDS Programme in Montenegro, announcing his interest in enrolling the new PhD studies, 07/11/2020
* WP5 / QPLN External Experts Selected, Prof. Dr. Mile Dzelalija and Prof. Dr. Yannis Manolopoulos, 15/11/2020
* WP4 / DEV Document Management System for Doctoral Studies, purchased with MARDS, in TEST operation at University of Montenegro, 26/11/2020
* WP2 / DEV, WP5 / QPLN, WP6 / DISS / EXP MARDS Workshop Proceedings, 26/11/2020
* WP2 / DEV Government of Montenegro, Council for Qualifications, approved proposal for development of PhD qualification, 02/12/2020
* WP2 / DEV Doctoral Education – 15 years of reform after Salzburg, 09/12/2020
* WP6 / DISS / EXP Montenegrin Chamber of Commerce Webinar, 09/12/2020
* WP6 / DISS / EXP Dissemination in Article about MARDS in ”Prosvjetni rad”, 01/2021
* WP8 / MNGT MARDS – Senate of the University of Montenegro approved MARDS programme related to the establishment of new doctoral studies, 21/01/2021
* WP4 / DEV Governing Board of the University of Montenegro approved MARDS Elaborate on the establishment of doctoral study, 27/01/2021
* WP5 / QPLN Intermediate Report on Internal Quality Control by Quality Monitoring Committee, 30/01/2021
* WP5 / QPLN NEO #3 Monitoring Visit to MARDS project, 04/03/2021
* WP6 / DISS / EXP Dissemination of NEO #3 Monitoring Visit to MARDS project, 05/03/2021
* WP4 / WP8 The Elaborate about ”Doctoral Programme in sustainable development” is submitted to Agency for Control and Quality Assurance of Higher Education (AKOKVO), 12/03/2021
* WP4 / WP8 ”Doctoral Programme in sustainable development” is accredited by the AKOKVO, 21/06/2021.

All events have been organised according to the workplan with relevant agendas, topics and participation of relevant stakeholders.

According to the evidence, the consortium has organised and conducted the project activities very much in line to the work plan of the project, structured into eight working packages (WP). There have not been significant deviations, besides rescheduling of events influenced by well-known covid-19 issues.

Promotion and dissemination events of project results and outcomes, as well as project objectives clearly support project mission and vision and the related Erasmus+ programme. Besides organisation of dissemination events, the MARDS project presented project results and activities in newsletters.

Very important events of the project are a set of 4 training sections at various universities in EU member states.

There are still missing activities and events in the Project that are related to the enrolment of the first generation of doctoral students to the Joint Doctoral Schools and implementation of the Doctoral Schools. In addition, one of proposed Joint Doctoral Schools also needs its formal accreditation.

1. **EVALUATION OF THE ACHIEVED DELIVERABLES**

The project ”Reforming doctoral studies in Montenegro and Albania – good practice paradigm (MARDS)” has objectives that are relevant to EU standards.

Achievement of the project deliverables is very clear. There is an analysis of the existing national polices and standards regarding doctoral studies in both countries, Montenegro and Albania, elaboration of a new model of doctoral studies for those countries, model of funding, and preparation of the base for the implementation of two pilot Joint Doctoral School. One of two pilots is realistic to be piloted (Montenegro), and another one (in Albania) needs further maturity actions. The Joint doctoral School in Montenegro (Podgorica) ”Natural sciences and Technology for Sustainable Development” has been prepared for the implementation, while the joint doctoral school ”Economy and Tourism for Sustainable Development” in Albania (Shkoder) needs further preparatory actions in order to become operational.

Deliverables of the project are organised withing working packages:

1. **(PRE) Monitoring and analysing of national systems and policies of doctoral education in Montenegro and Albania and comparing with EU practices**
	1. Report on the “state of the art” in doctoral education in Montenegro and Albania and comparison with EU practices
	2. Proceedings from conference about doctoral education in Montenegro and Albania
	3. Legal documents to be send to responsible bodies for adopting
2. **(DEV) Training of Montenegrin and Albanian academic staff and professionals/administration in doctoral education**
3. Report on academic and professional training of WB staff profs and admi' at EU
4. Guidelines and recommendations for WB academics and professionals in doctoral studies
5. **(DEV) Establishing a new model of funding doctoral studies on national levels**
6. Report on appropriate funding doctoral studies in Montenegro and Albania
7. Obligatory decision on adopting MARDS's methodology on funding for Montenegro
8. Obligatory decision on adopting MARDS's methodology in Albania
9. **(DEV) Establishment and start-up of Joint Pilot Doctoral Schools**
10. Curricula book for Joint school suited in Albania (Shkoder)
11. Curricula book for Joint pilot school in Montenegro
12. The report on MARDS’s equipment resources
13. Final version of accreditation application
14. Decisions on accreditation
15. The list of enrolled students
16. The records on implementation flow
17. **(QPLN) Quality plan**
18. Quality plan adopted
19. Internal quality assurance reports delivered
20. Tender for subtracting external QC experts completed
21. External quality control and monitoring delivered
22. **(DISS/EXP) Dissemination of the project**
23. Setting up and maintaining the project web site
24. Dissemination material created and distributed
25. Dissemination events with relevant stakeholders organized
26. MARDS doctorial Colloquium organised
27. **(DISS/EXP) Exploitation and Sustainability of the project results**
28. Sustainability strategy adopted
29. University – stakeholders network created
30. Doctoral scholarships provided
31. **(MNGT) Management of the project**
32. Overall project management
33. Project coordination meetings
34. Periodical and Final reports.

WP-1:

There are 3 deliverables within the WP-1 (D1.1, D1.2, D1.3), which are partly ready. The main outputs are: Report on the ”state of the art” in doctoral education in Montenegro and Albania and comparison with EU practices, and Report on funding of doctoral studies in Montenegro and Albania. Those reports are ready and are of good quality, providing relevant overview of doctoral education and research in both countries. The reports give recommendations for a more relevant model of doctoral schools. The MARDS workshop Proceedings has been published and presented at the web site, open to the wide community. The outcome related to legal documents for adoption (deliverable D1.3) has been partly achieved. The study programme of Doctoral School at the University of Montenegro has been approved and ready to be implemented, while the doctoral programme ”Economy and Tourism for Sustainable Development” in Albania (Sckoder) needs further preparatory actions in order to be approved and ready for implementation. According to available data and experiences in similar cases, an additional year of actions would be needed.

WP-2:

Both deliverable of the WP-2 are ready. Thematic trainings have been conducted by universities in EU partners. The outputs “Report on academic and professional training of WB staff” (D2.1) and ”Guidelines and recommendations for WB academics and professionals in doctoral studies” (D2.2) have been prepared by the University Matej Bel from Slovakia.

WP-3:

According to the available data and communication with project coordinator, the outputs of the working package WP-3 have not been prepared yet. The outputs are related to the establishment of a new model of funding for doctoral studies on national levels, and the activities are planned as a continuation of the WP-1. According to experiences the activities and achievement of three deliverables (Report on appropriate funding doctoral studies in Montenegro and Albania, Obligatory decision on adopting MARDS's methodology on funding for Montenegro, Obligatory decision on adopting MARDS's methodology in Albania) could be achieved within one additional year of activities.

WP-4:

This work package is dedicated to the establishment and implementation of two Joint Doctoral Schools, one in Montenegro (”Natural sciences and Technology for Sustainable Development”) and one in Albania (”Economy and Tourism for Sustainable Development”). According to the available material, two curricula books for doctoral schools have been prepared (D4.1 and D4.2), and the reports on MARDS’s equipment resources (D4.3) are well published. Regarding the accreditation application (D4.4.) both accreditation applications are ready. Regarding the decisions on the accreditation of joint doctoral schools some delays have been witnessed. Decision of the joint doctoral school ”Natural sciences and Technology for Sustainable Development” has already been achieved by the Accreditation Agency in Montenegro, whereas the decision on the joint doctoral school ”Economy and Tourism for Sustainable Development” in Albania is still in process (D4.5). For the joint doctoral school ”Natural sciences and Technology for Sustainable Development” there is a list of potential enrolled students (D4.6). It is clear that the two remaining outputs (D4.6 and D4.7), i.e. the list of enrolled students and records on implementation flow needs an additional year of well-prepared activities.

WP-5, WP-6, WP-7, and WP-8:

All deliverables within the working packages related to Quality Plan, Dissemination, Exploitations and Sustainability, and Management of the MARDS project are ready or very well ongoing, except D6.4 (doctorial colloquium, which was foreseen to be prepared and held during the implementation of the new study programme, where the students would present their work/achievements), as well as the system of awarding the scholarships (D7.3), which is still to be defined, while the first generation of students will not pay their studies, at least the first year. Quality Assurance Plan (D5.1), Internal Quality Control Activities and Reports (D5.2), and External Experts Selection (D5.3) are ready. The External quality control and monitoring (D5.4) is ongoing.

1. **SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The project started according to the time schedule and was progressing successfully by organising all the planned activities and delivering the proper reports and other outputs. Since the beginning of 2020, due to the covid pandemic, it was not viable to continue as it was planned. Despite the obstacles and problems, the MARDS project continued to progress, however, delays were faced.

It is mentioned that it is crucial to complete the process of accreditation the doctoral program that is going to operate on the Albanian side. Further, it crucial to continue the disseminating actions. To this end, the project management team could examine the possibility to host an international conference as a further dissemination action, and an opportunity to organise a round table with key project players as well as other international authorities and personalities.

An additional year would be recommended for achievement of all outcomes and outputs of the MARDS project. Specifically, the formal accreditation of the Joint Doctoral School ”Economy and Tourism for Sustainable Development” in Albania is needed. Further actions are needed also for the selection and enrolment of doctoral students to both Joint Doctoral Schools, including their full implementation.