

The main activities of the Research Council of Lithuania

The task of the Research Council of Lithuania ('the Council') is to actively participate in the formation of research and experimental development policy; to strive for the Lithuanian research and experimental development ('R&D') system to be efficient, to meet the needs of the Lithuanian society and to be consistent with the scientific policy of the European Union ('the EU'). The Council seeks to ensure that its activities and R&D funding are based on international best practices and expertise, and that high-quality research is a clear asset.

The functions and tasks of the Council shall be laid down by the Law on Research and Studies ('LRS') of the Republic of Lithuania ('the Republic of Lithuania') and the regulations of the Council. The Council shall consist of the President and Vice-Presidents of the Council, the Scientific Secretary, members of the Board, members of two expert committees, the Natural Sciences and Technology (NST) and the Humanities and Social Sciences (HSS), and the Council's Science Foundation. The 2020 Council was chaired by professor Romas Baronas.

2020 was characterised by exceptional challenges and changes, as the Council has been working remotely since March. The Council has been able to maintain its normal work rhythm and adapt to the ever-escalating pace of work. The COVID-19 pandemic necessitated changes in plans, simplification of project administration and simplification of Council procedures. The Council has begun the transition towards the use of electronic signatures – most of the Council documents were signed digitally in 2020.

In March, following the reactions of the world and the academic community, we launched a call for projects in a few weeks for the decision-making on the consequences of COVID-19, which have generated strong interest of the researchers, the media and the Government.

In order to fulfil its mission and perform expert functions in discussing the country's scientific policy issues, in 2020 the Council submitted over 30 proposals and conclusions on various strategy documents, laws and other legal acts regulating the field of R&D. The Council noted the flawed distinction between R&D and innovation in the legal acts and its possible negative consequences in the future, and called for the inclusion of not only businesses but also basic research entities in the Law on the Innovation Promotion Fund. The Council noted that the academic community (researchers) should be involved in the management of the Innovation Promotion Fund of the Republic of Lithuania, to ensure a greater emphasis on the country's culture and science, which are vital for successful state and social development, and stressed the importance of basic research and the unique role of different fields of science, such as the humanities and social sciences, in the Lithuanian R&D and innovation system. The Council presented a project to complement the Plan for the DNA of the Future Economy, which would contribute to the implementation of the European Green Deal, strengthen the R&D infrastructure of agroforestry, boost R&D work and create preconditions for more efficient implementation of innovations in this sector in the market. The Council made proposals on the draft goals and objectives of the 2021-2030 National Progress Plan.

The importance of science in the rapidly changing world is constantly growing, but the share of state budget funds in the gross domestic product ('the GDP') allocated to fund the activities of the Council and the competitive research activities administered by it showed a continuous decrease in 2016-2020. In 2020, about 18.1 million EUR were allocated from the state budget for these activities (excluding 1.45 million EUR of R&D COVID call funds allocated by the resolution of the Government of the Republic of Lithuania in June 2020), therefore the mentioned rate decreased from 0.047 to 0.037 percent of the country's GDP in five years. The Council proposed to the Parliament of the Republic of Lithuania to reconsider the issue of the need for state budget funds to increase the competitive R&D research funding and to allocate additional funds to the Council for the period 2021–2023 or at least maintain the same level of state budget appropriations allocated to the Council in 2020. Attention was also drawn to the fact that in the future the appropriations allocated to the Council should increase sustainably in accordance with the objectives of Lithuanian science and the additional functions assigned to the Council.

In the framework of their respective competences in implementing the R&D policies, the Council prepared a new description of the minimum conditions of qualification for the positions of researchers of State research and studies institutions (the document was approved on 29 January 2021); analysed the procedure for competitive funding of research carried out by the Council and made amendments to the legal acts regulating it, which reduce the administrative burden for project promoters.

In order to achieve the quality and efficiency of competitive funding of science and in consultation with the Board of Directors of Lithuanian Science Institutes, the Council prepared a draft description of the procedure for initiating, approving, implementing and evaluating long-term institutional R&D programmes, and updated guidelines for carrying out the evaluation of R&D of Lithuanian research and studies institutions and artistic activities; submitted proposals for updating the descriptions of financing conditions for projects implemented with the help of the EU Structural Funds administered by the Council.

During the annual evaluation of research (artistic) activities of Lithuanian Research institutions and universities ('RIU') in 2019, over 11.46 thousand projects, contracts and research (art) works submitted by 35 Research institutions and universities, 3 university hospitals and 2 Lithuanian national libraries. In order to ensure the quality of the annual evaluation, in 2020 the Council renewed the Appeal Panel for the examination of appeals of RIU regarding the results of the annual evaluation.

The Council assessed the reports on the results of the implementation of long-term institutional R&D programmes (51 in total) carried out by state research institutes in 2019 and recommended to the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport of the Republic of Lithuania ('the Ministry') to continue the programme.

The Council, while supervising the quality of doctoral studies, submitted to the Ministry a revised version of Point 31 of the Regulation on Doctoral Studies regulating the submission of the doctoral thesis on the basis of articles, continued evaluations of changes in the composition of doctoral committees, and performed the procedures of academic recognition of doctoral degrees of foreign research (art).

In the framework of the financing of R&D works, the Council continued to fund state-commissioned projects from the state budget (Lithuanian Studies and Dissemination Programme (2016–2024), National Scientific Programme, Competitive Priority Research Programme) research on topics proposed by public bodies (research on demand), and research for decision-making on the consequences of COVID-19. The EU Structural Funds ('the EU SF') financed high-level R&D of smart specialisation priorities, Parallel laboratories, brain gain and reintegration (professors of the State), and scientist-driven research projects. In 2020, researchers implemented over 450 projects administered by the Council, which promote the qualitative growth of Lithuanian R&D, international cooperation of researchers and contribute to the solution of problems relevant to the country. Under the instrument of Research projects on demand, the Council funded applied research for short-term delivery based on the needs of Lithuanian State, and in response to the COVID-19 global pandemic, launched a call for proposals to fund short-term research projects, after which Lithuanian scientists would submit science-based conclusions and recommendations related to the pandemic, which are important to human health, State's policy, the economy, public security, education, culture and other areas of public and social life. The Council launched a call for proposals and selected projects under the action in the Plan for the DNA of the Future Economy 'Short-term research (research on demand) (in health, social and other fields), analysis and diagnostic implementation (in agreement with the Ministry of Health) related to COVID-19' – projects to fund the research for short-term delivery to address the health and education and training challenges resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic.

International bilateral and trilateral cooperation programmes administered by the Council with Belarus, Japan, Latvia, Poland, Ukraine, France, China (Taiwan) provide opportunities for joint research projects between two or three countries, further close cooperation and joint proposals of other international programmes.

In 2020, the Council launched the II call for proposals of the Baltic Research Programme, funded by the financial mechanisms of the European Economic Area ('the EEA') countries (Iceland and Liechtenstein) and Norwegian Financial Mechanism for the period 2014–2021. 11 proposals received more than 10 million EUR. Continuing the cooperation with the Polish National Science Centre (in Polish: *Narodowe Centrum Nauki*), in 2020 the Council announced the call for proposals 'Daina 2' for joint Lithuanian and Polish research projects.

In accordance with the Article 3 of the Law of LRS, **the Council constantly keeps a consistent focus on the implementation of the priority of Lithuanian studies**. In 2020, 24 new studies and dissemination projects of the Lithuanian Studies and Dissemination Programme (2016–2024) were launched, for which almost 2 million EUR were allocated for the period 2020–2023. The research implementing the priority of Lithuanian studies according to the approved directions by the Resolution No. 1372 of the Government of the Republic of Lithuania of 14 November 2012 '[On the Approval of Directions for the Lithuanian Studies Research Development 2012–2020](#)' of Lithuanian Studies Research Development 2012–2020 is also carried out in accordance with other activities supported by the Council – the priority research programme 'Welfare Society' and the national research programme 'Modernity in Lithuania', research groups and research on demand projects.

In 2020, more than 150 Lithuanian studies projects were implemented under various measures financed by the Council, for which more than 4.5 million EUR of state budget funds were allocated.

In 2020, the implementation of the project 'The Development of the database Lituaništika' ('LDB') has continued. The content indexing and search system of the LDB portal <https://www.lituanistika.lt> has been developed, based on the *Apache Solr* open-source software, the open-source statistical system AWSTATS has been installed, which allows to analyse the usability of the LDB.

The Council provides support to PhD students for study results, supports their academic field trips, promotes the activities of academic associations, finances international and national scientific events, and the dissemination of research results. Although activities related to the organisation of events and field trips to collect research material or present the results were negatively affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, in 2020 the Council allocated almost 1 million EUR in support and funded 462 projects from the state budget. Students' research activities were also promoted – 221 project funding agreements were signed, during the performance of which students have the opportunity to gain experience in conducting research, learn to prepare scientific publications and scientific reports.

In 2020, the Council continued the project "Development of Doctoral Studies" financed by the EU SF. After completing the two-stage call for proposals, 48 PhD students were admitted to doctoral studies. Since the beginning of the project (beginning of 2016 until the end of 2020), 252 PhD students have completed their doctoral studies.

In 2020, the Council signed 49 new contracts for projects funded by the EU SF to finance research projects and 157 contracts for post-doctoral internships. 6 project agreements have been signed to attract the foreign researchers of the highest quality. These projects aim to strengthen the scientific potential of Lithuanian Research institutions and universities and to help develop advanced research directions and strengthen cross-border cooperation.

The Council, promoting the integration of Lithuanian scientists and Research institutions and universities into the international research area, coordinates the activities of COST (The European Cooperation in Science and Technology) and represents Lithuania in high-level committees of the officials and scientific committees of the COST Association.

The Council administers and ensures the representation of Lithuania in various areas of the EU research and innovation programme, Horizon 2020 ('H2020'). In 2020, the Council continued to participate in 12 international coordination initiatives under the H2020 ERA-NET Cofund, the European Joint Programmes ('EJPs') COFUND and the Joint Programming Initiatives ('JPIs').

In 2020, the Council played the role in new H2020 international coordination initiatives: the JPIAMR-ACTION programme for the prevention and control of antimicrobial resistance, the CHANSE programme – Transformations: Social and cultural dynamics in the digital age, and the new JPI ENUTC – Urban Transformation Capacities.

The Council participates in the network of H2020 National Contact Points (NCPs) established and supported by the European Commission ('EC'): in 2020, the Council performed the functions of the NCPs in 11 H2020 thematic areas. In October 2020, in order to improve the quality of services provided by the NCP and the rates of Lithuania's participation in the new Horizon Europe programme (2021–2027), the Council strengthened the NCP network of represented thematic areas by employing 5 new employees (from LINO LT project – EU SF funds) who will be committed to the NCP activities on a full-time basis.

In 2020, the Council continued the project 'The increase of internationalization of Lithuanian science – development of R&D relations (LINO LT)' aimed at encouraging Lithuanian researchers and scientists to improve or acquire scientific and professional competence by participating in EU research and innovation programmes and initiatives. The global COVID-19 pandemic affected the project activities – only 19 researcher visits and field trips took place, during which new contacts were established and the interaction with foreign Research institutions and universities were reinforced. Most of the events organised by the LINO office in Brussels have been moved to a virtual space, but the change in the format of the events also had its advantages: more participants than usual took part in the events. A total of 9 events were organised during 2020, there was a first participation in the EuroScience Open Forum, where the LINO office presented the achievements of Lithuanian science, cooperation opportunities and its activities at the exhibition.