



# **FACT-FINDING MISSION REPORT TO IDENTIFY RECENT DEVELOPMENTS OF THE MOLDOVAN RESEARCH AND INNOVATION SYSTEM**

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## List of Abbreviations

ASM	Academy of Sciences of Moldova
EaP	Eastern Partnership
EBRD	European Bank for Reconstruction and Development
EIB	European Investment Bank Group
EU	European Union
FP	Framework Programme
GDP	Gross domestic product
GERD	Gross domestic expenditure on R&D
H2020	Horizon 2020
ISTC	The International Science and Technology Centre
MECR	Ministry of Education, Culture and Research of Moldova
MOST	Moldovan Office for Science and Technology
NARD	Nation Agency for Research and Development
NCP	National Contact Point
NPRI	National Programme for Research and Innovation
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
R&I	Research and Innovation
RM	Republic Moldova
STI	Science, Technology and Innovation



## 1. Preface

The EaP PLUS project, funded by the European Commission, aims to provide support and to develop concrete actions in the fields of science, technology and innovation (STI), while working closely with the policy stakeholders and the respective policy dialogue fora. In order to support the policy dialogue and strategic priority setting several objectives are foreseen:

- a. Contribution to policy dialogue activities in various fora and with a wide variety of stakeholders;
- b. Specific attention will be given to the recent association of several EaP countries to H2020 that constitutes a major development. In that respect, activities will be dedicated to sharing of experiences among those countries but also with previously associated countries (e.g. Norway, Israel or Turkey) in order to maximize the impact of the association;
- c. Finally, based on the conclusions of all the project's activities as well as on any other development, recommendations for the future of the cooperation will be drafted ("EU-EaP beyond 2020").

In order to achieve these objectives, a series of **fact-finding missions** have been implemented in the countries of the target region with interviews with research authorities and other stakeholders from the EaP countries. Thus, the objectives of the fact-finding missions have been identifying recent developments and dynamics in the STI system of each country, as well as gaining input for recommendations for future EU-EaP STI cooperation.

Special attention has been given to the fact-finding missions to Azerbaijan and Belarus, since the STI systems of these two countries have not been subject to an external Policy Mix Peer Review exercise until today, as is the case with Georgia, Armenia, Moldova and Ukraine. Furthermore, Azerbaijan and Belarus have not yet been associated to Horizon 2020.

The fact-finding mission to Chisinau, Moldova has taken place in the period 01-03 October 2018. In Chisinau, Béla Kardon (RCISD) has made eight interviews with various partners from the Moldovan STI community (see Annex). The outcome of these interviews is reflected in the present report, which includes a summary of the main findings as well as recommendations in its last chapter.



## 2. The national STI landscape and international STI cooperation

### 2.1. Economic situation

The Republic of Moldova is a small lower-middle-income economy in Eastern Europe with a population of approximately 3,5 1 million inhabitants. Although it is the one of the poorest countries in Europe, Moldova has made significant progress in reducing poverty and promoting inclusive growth since the early 2000s. The economy has expanded by an average of 5% annually, driven by consumption and fuelled by remittances. The latter account for a quarter of GDP, among the highest share in the world<sup>1</sup>. Moldova's European orientation has anchored the Government's policy reform agenda. Association already to the 7th Framework Programme for Research; the EU's research funding programme between 2007 and 2013 (FP7) and then Horizon 2020, the EU Research & Innovation Program (2014-2020), made science policy a pioneer in the EU accession process.

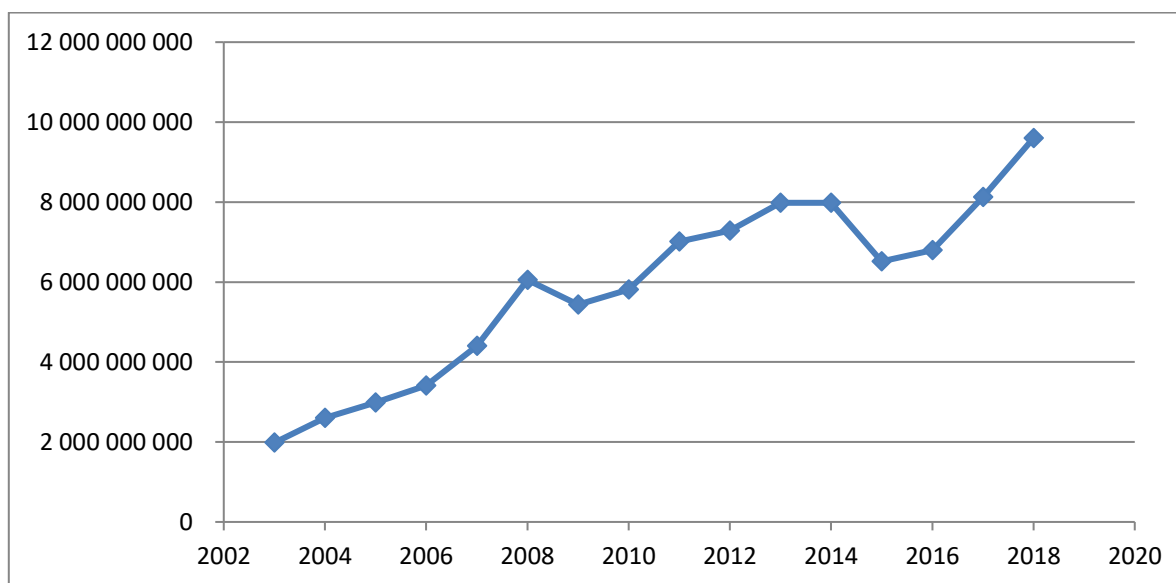
**Table 1: Development of Gross domestic product**

GDP (2009)	5439M USD
GDP (2013)	7985Mn USD
GDP (2016)	6796M USD
GDP (2018)	9600M USD
GDP/capita (2009)	1525 USD
GDP/capita (2013)	2244 USD
GDP/capita (2016)	1913 USD
GDP/capita (2018)	2692 USD

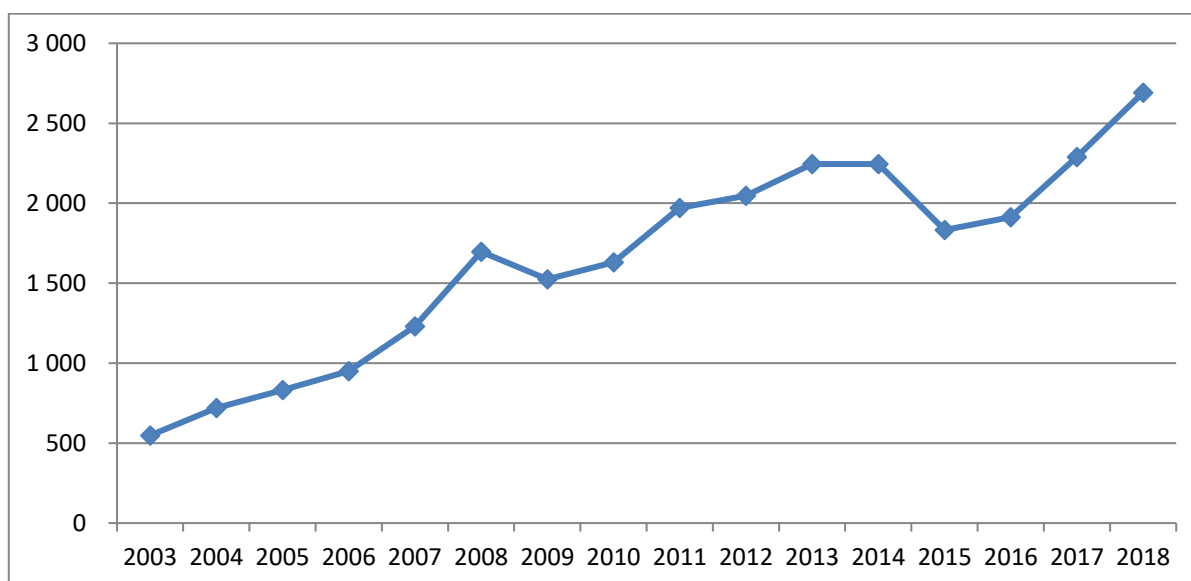
Source: UNESCO & World Bank estimation for 2018

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<sup>1</sup> Source: World Bank



GDP in USD (Source: UNESCO)



GDP/capita in USD (Source: UNESCO)

## 2.2 Development of key STI indicators

At the same time – due to attractiveness of STI area – a growing interest in research investment is recognised from economic operators; a stronger link between private and public sector, that contributes to higher financing of STI from private and external sources. As in other former socialist countries and especial in the Eastern Partnership region, the years after independence and the transition of the country to a market economy were very hard times; the GDP of Moldova decreased in the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century by one third. The scientific community witnessed severe cuts in the sphere of academia and research in the first years of the young republic. While in some areas

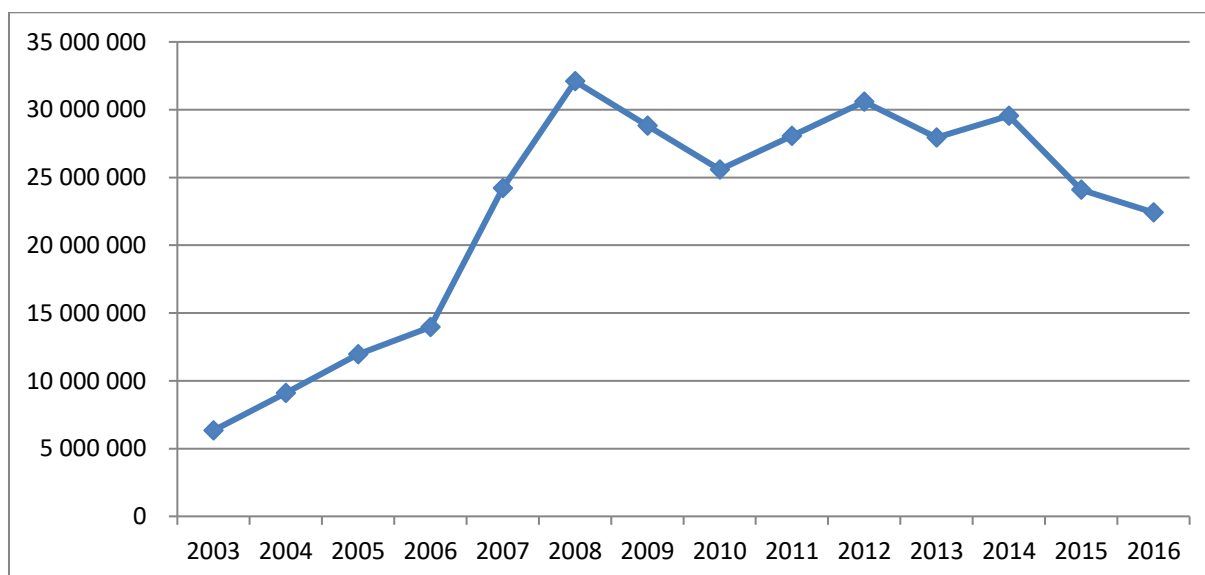


there are still remnants of the excellent “Soviet” science system, in comparison to the Soviet period public spending for science and innovation is comparatively low. This shortcoming was mentioned in several of the interviews, and the need to invest more in the science-research-development-innovation sector was stressed.

The development of STI is in process of harmonization with international standards according to the EU experts’ recommendations (2017) in the Peer review report of the Moldovan Research and Innovation System.<sup>2</sup>

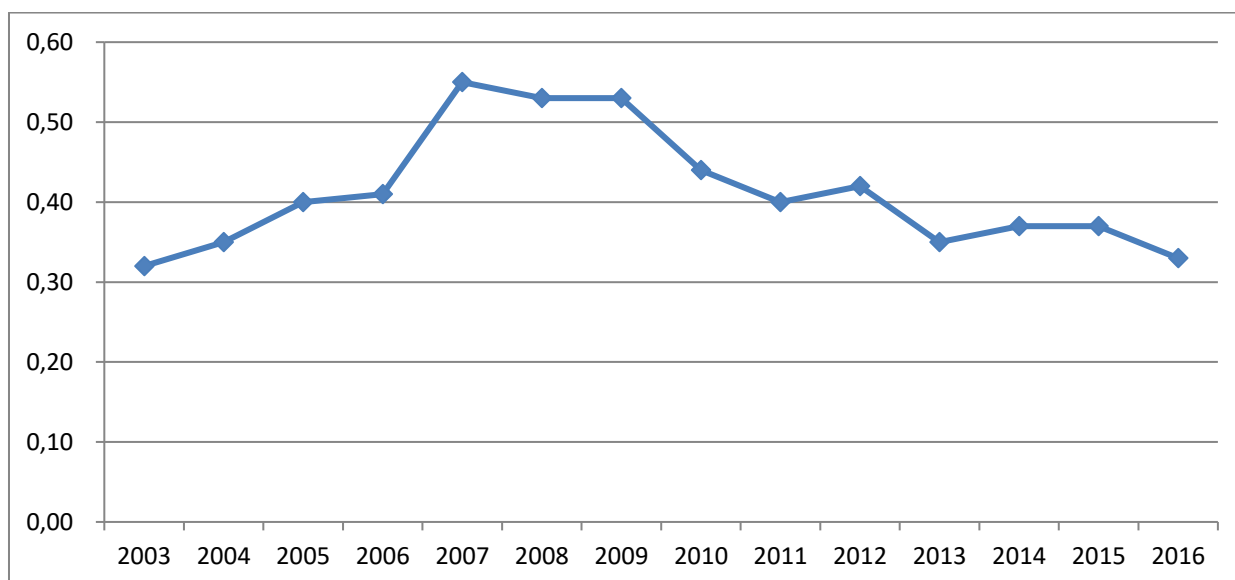
**Table 2: Gross domestic expenditure on R&D (GERD) & GERD / GDP (Source: UNESCO)**

GERD (2009)	29M USD
GERD (2013)	28M USD
GERD (2016)	22M USD
GERD in per cent of GDP (2009)	0,53%
GERD in per cent of GDP (2013)	0,35%
GERD in per cent of GDP (2016)	0,33%



GERD in USD (Source: UNESCO)

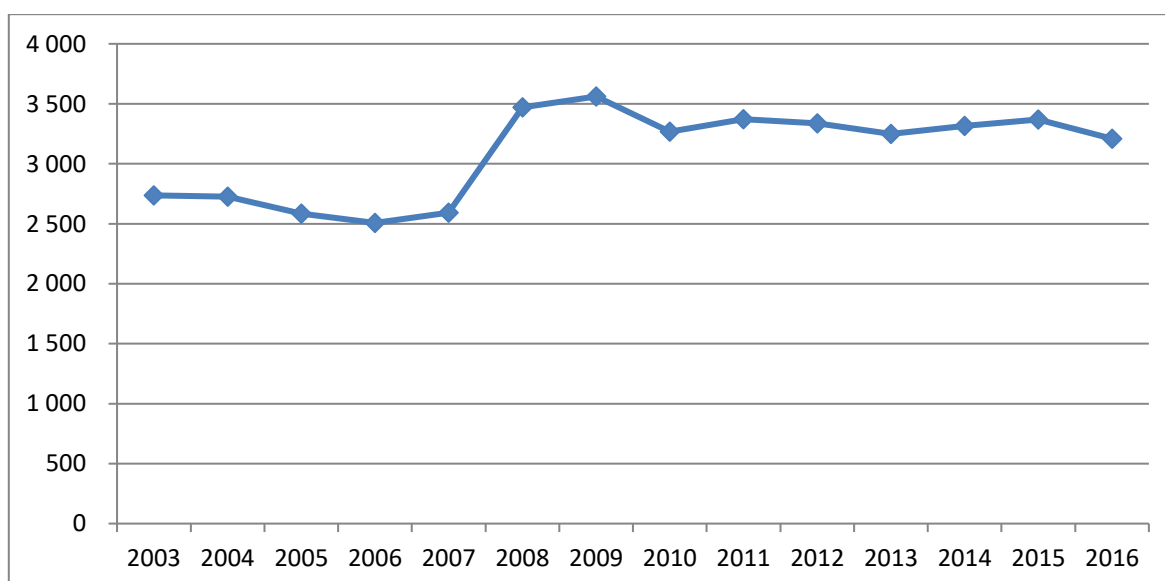
<sup>2</sup> <https://rio.jrc.ec.europa.eu/en/policy-support-facility/peer-review-moldovan-research-and-innovation-system>



GERD/GDP (Source: UNESCO)

Understanding that the developed STI is the most important factor for Moldova, not only to strengthen global competitiveness, but also to achieve sustainable growth, one of the government priorities for sectorial policies on medium-term is to connect research and innovation with the necessities of socio-economic development of the country and to encourage (support) the participation of young researchers in the thematic programmes of the EU.

### 2.3 Human resources



Total researchers - head count (source: UNESCO)





Large part of R&D activities take place in the public sphere. The division between various sectors the Moldovan R&I personnel is employed in shows that almost 2/3 is working in government sector i.e. institutes of the Academy of Sciences and R&D institutes administratively subordinated to different ministries. Less than 1/3 of the research personnel are employed by universities and the remaining 5-10% by the business sector.

**Table 3: R&D personnel**

Researchers (headcounts) per million inhabitants 2009	869
Researchers (headcounts) per million inhabitants 2013	798
Researchers (headcounts) per million inhabitants 2016	791
Researchers employed in Business enterprise sector (% of all researchers) in 2009	8,68
Researchers employed in Business enterprise sector (% of all researchers) in 2013	7,88
Researchers employed in Business enterprise sector (% of all researchers) in 2016	5,52
Researchers employed in Government sector (% of all researchers) in 2009	60,71
Researchers employed in Government sector (% of all researchers) in 2013	62,52
Researchers employed in Government sector (% of all researchers) in 2016	64,70
Researchers employed in Higher education sector (% of all researchers) in 2009	30,61
Researchers employed in Higher education sector (% of all researchers) in 2013	29,60
Researchers employed in Higher education sector (% of all researchers) in 2016	29,78

Source: UNESCO

Although a number of corrective actions were already introduced by the Academy of Sciences, the human resources situation of the Moldovan R&I sector is alarming (decreasing population and decreasing share of researchers from population at the same time till 2016). Career prospects and working conditions for researchers in Moldova are not very advantageous, especially for young researchers, because of small salary for career beginners, but improvements of career prospects and working conditions for researchers in Moldova are foreseen in the new policy documents. New facilities highlighting young researchers are envisaged by the National Program for Research and Innovation.

## **2.4 Structure of STI landscape, STI policy and priorities, institutions**

Until 2017, R&I in Moldova was administered in a way that was still very much influenced by the Soviet past. Amongst others, this is exemplified by the important role attributed to the Academy of Sciences of Moldova (ASM), earlier the main player in the Moldovan science system. The financing



coming from the Academy of Sciences was mainly basic funding (i.e. ca 90% institutional financing). The project based R&I funding was only ca. 10%.

In September 2017, due to the adopted legislative acts, started the process of reforming the fields of research and innovation. ASM remained the supreme scientific forum, but the funding system was generally changed. The Academy of Sciences evaluates the STI policy and its implementation for consulting the Government, evaluates the results of research projects and advises research institutions in research development. The Ministry of Education, Culture and Research of Moldova (MECR) – one of the nine ministries of the Government of Moldova after the reform – became the main player of the national R&I policy, responsible for the elaboration of the National Programme in the field of research and innovation for a period of 4 years and the implementation of its Action Plan.

After the Academy of Sciences, the Ministry of Education, Culture and Research is the new founder of 19 research institutes. MECR is funding the institutes and 13 public universities under its subordination. The Ministry of Agriculture, Regional Development and Environment is funding another 7 research institutes in its subordination and the Ministry of Health, Labour and Social Protection allocate funds to its 8 research institutes. For project based funding a new agency for STI policy implementation was established, the National Agency for Research and Development (NARD). NARD is a central public authority under the Government of Moldova responsible for the implementation of research and innovation policy. It was established by Government Decision nr.196 from 28 February, 2018 as result of reorganization through fusion (absorption) of three public institutions: Agency for Research and Development, Agency for Innovation and Technology Transfer and Centre for International Projects of Academy of Sciences of Moldova. NARD has the mission to ensure excellence and performance in achieving national priorities in the area of research, innovation and development and performs the following general duties:

- allocates financial sources in order to support research and innovation.
- implements state policy according to the action plans approved by the Government in order to implement the National Program in the fields of research, innovation and development.
- manages the approved national funds for project financing and funds from bilateral and multilateral programs launched under cooperation agreements with international organizations
- carries out the activities related to the participation of the Republic of Moldova in the EU programs and projects for research, innovation and development, including information, training and promotion activities.

Specific objectives of the Moldovan STI policy:

- Ensuring the management of the project competition in the fields of research and innovation
- Identification of Moldovan Smart niches for the promotion of excellence-based research in strategic areas with relevance and impact on the economy and society
- Improving the funding mechanism performance-based funding
- Increasing the number of projects implemented jointly by research groups and universities
- Increasing the share of young people in the total number of researchers



- Stimulating researcher mobility between the public and private environments
- Developing collaboration with the representatives of the scientific diaspora
- Developing of a short and medium term vision for the development of the national research infrastructure
- Creating clusters in the areas of research, innovation and technology transfer
- Connecting RM Research Infrastructure to Pan-European Infrastructures
- Developing tools to transfer knowledge and scientific outcomes to potential users
- Strengthening support infrastructure for technology transfer and innovation
- Stimulation of R&I activities within the private sector
- Plenary capitalization of opportunities stemming from country status associated with H2020
- Enhancing complementarity between national programs and EU framework programs
- Preparing the Association Process for the Horizon Europe Community Program
- Developing technological-scientific and multilateral cooperation in areas of mutual interest

***Legislation& STI policy documents:***

Main country policy documents embedding R&I policy are the legal base of the changes:

- Law no. 259 of 15 July 2004, (Code of science and innovation no 259/2004; republished 2018) as subsequently amended and supplemented by Law no. 190 of 21 September 2017 (Official Monitor of the Republic of Moldova no. 58-66 / 131 /2018), which specifically stipulates in art. 27 the elaboration of the National Programme in the field of Research and Innovation.
- Government Decision no. 691 of 30 September 2017 on the organization and functioning of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Research
- Code of Education no.152/2014
- Government Program 2016-2018 (Chapter IX – Research and Science)
- Government Action Plan 2016-2018 (Chapter IV – Economic development, enhancing competitiveness and jobs creation, Part B – Innovations and technological development)
- National Action Plan for the Implementation of the Association Agreement between the Republic of Moldova and the European Union during 2017-2019 (Chapter 24)
- Future National Development Strategy “Moldova 2030” shall also include R&I policy
- Parliament Decision no. 150 of 14 June 2013 on the approval of strategic directions of the activities from the science and innovation area for 2013 - 2020
- GD no. 50/2018: Ministry of Education, Culture and Research is the founder of the 19 Research and also of 13 public universities
- GD no. 196 on organization and functioning of the National Agency for Research and Development (28 February 2018)
- GD no. 350/2018 on government priorities for sectorial policies on medium-term (2019-2021)
- Law on science technology parks and innovative incubators nr.138 from 21.07.2007 / nr.226 from 01.11.2018



### ***Strategies related to R&I:***

- National strategy for R&D 2020 – GD 920/2014 (abrogated)
- Innovation strategy of RM for competitiveness 2013-2020 GD 952/2013
- National Roadmap for the ERA integration (submitted for approval)
- NPRI (public consultations)

The main purpose of state policy in the field of research and innovation lies on the development of the knowledge society in the Republic of Moldova through stimulation and valorisation of a maximum of scientific and technological potential oriented towards the creation and marketing of products, services, modern ecological, competitive processes as well to the values of a democratic and open society.

Through the new national investment management framework public R&I investment was improved and become more predictable and transparent. In view of the introduced changes the expectations of the government are high; the new Moldovan system shall enhance and promote

- the creation of economically utilizable intellectual products,
- international competitiveness of domestic R&I based on the development of the knowledge based economic growth,
- co-operation ability in the European Research Area, furthermore between the domestic and international R&I communities of the most developed countries,
- modernization and innovative practices, increase market competitiveness, reduce vulnerability and improve equity,
- more targeted approach to stimulating investments in innovation and high value sectors,
- efficiency and improve access to finance to have a meaningful impact
- competitiveness of the economy by building of knowledge triangles through the co-operations of research, education and enterprises,
- attractive environment for talented young researcher by securing
  - high quality education,
  - essential technological infrastructure,
  - inspiring business environment.

### ***Research funding and topics***

“Basic funding” is provided to all state-run research institutions and universities. It covers costs for buildings maintenance, development of research infrastructures and equipment, staff costs etc. According to the recent legislative changes the following funding organisations can be recognised:

- Basic / institutional funding:
  - Ministry of Education, Culture and Research: 19 research institutes and 13 universities.
  - Ministry of Agriculture, Regional Development and Environment: 7 research institutes
  - Ministry of Health, Labour and Social Protection: 8 research institutes



- “Programme-based funding”: NARD; Specific scientific programmes and targeted financing of projects to stimulate and increase the competitiveness

European Investment Bank Group (EIB):

EIB intend to increase the support for research and innovation; an extensive range of support is available to innovative and growing businesses in Moldova. Under the Innovation Finance (InnovFin) range EIB has specially designed products for:

- banks and financial intermediaries;
- mid-sized and large innovative business;
- large research and innovation projects emanating from universities and public research organisations, among others;
- specialist financing for first-of-a-kind commercial-scale demonstration projects in the fields of renewable energy and hydrogen and fuel cells;
- specialist financing for project developers of vaccines, drugs, medical and diagnostic devices or novel research infrastructures for infectious diseases that have successfully completed the pre-clinical stage working;
- advisory services to companies and other promoters investing in innovation, so that they can be better prepared to access EIB financing and/or other sources.<sup>3</sup>

### ***Research topics***

The thematic priorities are defined by the Parliament Decision no 150/2013 (up to 2020) and identified through the smart specialisation strategy (S3) of the country. These topics are:

- Identification of others through S3.
- Innovative materials, technologies and products
- Energy efficiency and use of renewable energy resources
- Health and biomedicine
- Biotechnology
- National patrimony and social development

### ***Research performing institutions***

The Ministry of Education, Culture and Research is the founder of 19 research institutes of ASM.

The Ministry of Agriculture, Regional Development and Environment is funding another 7 research institutes in its subordination and the Ministry of Health, Labour and Social Protection allocate funds to its 8 research institutes.

Furthermore several research institutions, private entities, and science and technology parks, innovative incubators state and private exist.

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.eib.org/en/events/supporting-innovation-in-moldova.htm>



The National Higher Education System includes 31 institutions, of which 19 state and 12 private universities. Only 20 universities were accredited as R&D performing institutions.

The mission of universities is primarily focusing on education and teaching, while research activities and links to business are weakly developed. It is a policy priority of Moldova to strengthen research within universities. Theoretically, all university teachers must carry out R&D, but usually the personal is driven mainly by teaching duties and only a few conduct substantial research. The reason for this was until now on the one hand the high workload in teaching activities and on the other hand the insufficient resources for research activities.

### ***Innovation***

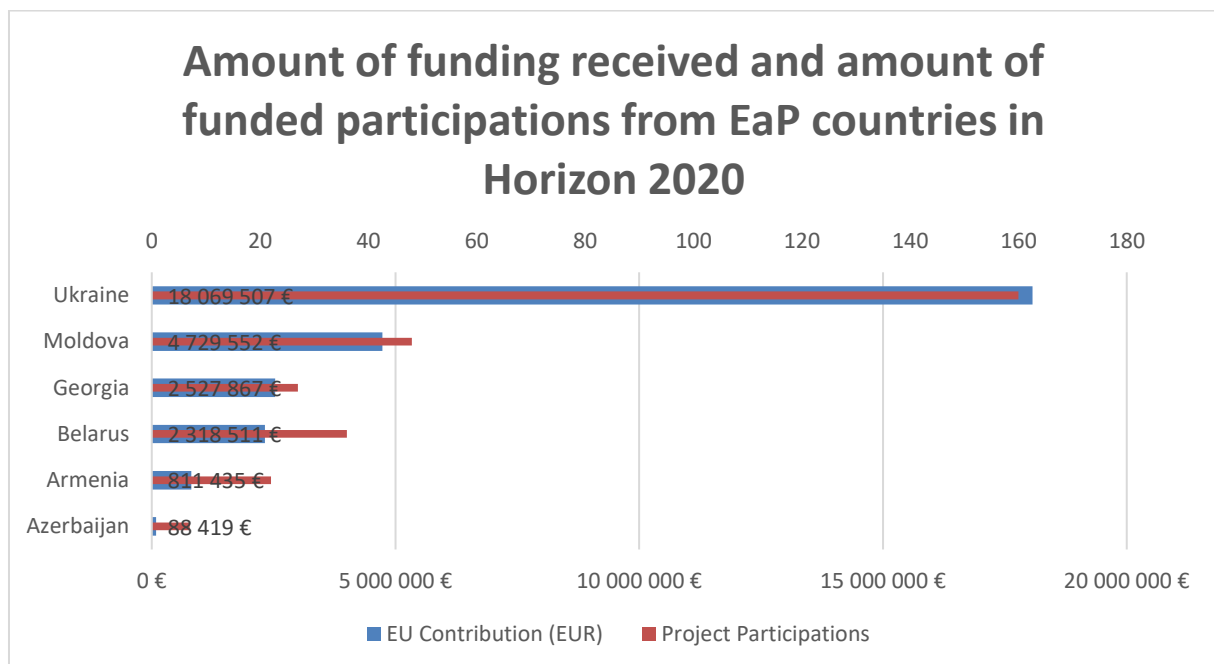
The reform of the national R&I system has been successfully conducted. Public and private entities participate in the annual competition on innovative and technology transfer projects. Priority is given to projects that protect intellectual property rights, confirming the novelty of the project. Entrepreneurship and administrative burdens are foreseen to be reduced, for example use of the electronic submission system is mandatory for the competition. The Law on science-technology parks and innovative incubators (2007) has foreseen fiscal and custom tax exemptions for companies dealing with innovation, but in practice is not applied by Fiscal Authority. According to the Law, science-technology parks and innovation incubators are established with the role of support infrastructure for stimulation of innovation. There are 1 science technology parks and 5 innovative incubators active at the moment.

SMEs and private sector are the main beneficiaries of funds for innovation. Some of them are conducting innovative activities by them self. Many of them seek for budget funding, which is limited. SMEs and private sector are supported by NARD for STI activities, but also by ODIMM (Ministry of Economy and Infrastructure), and other donor programmes in Moldova.

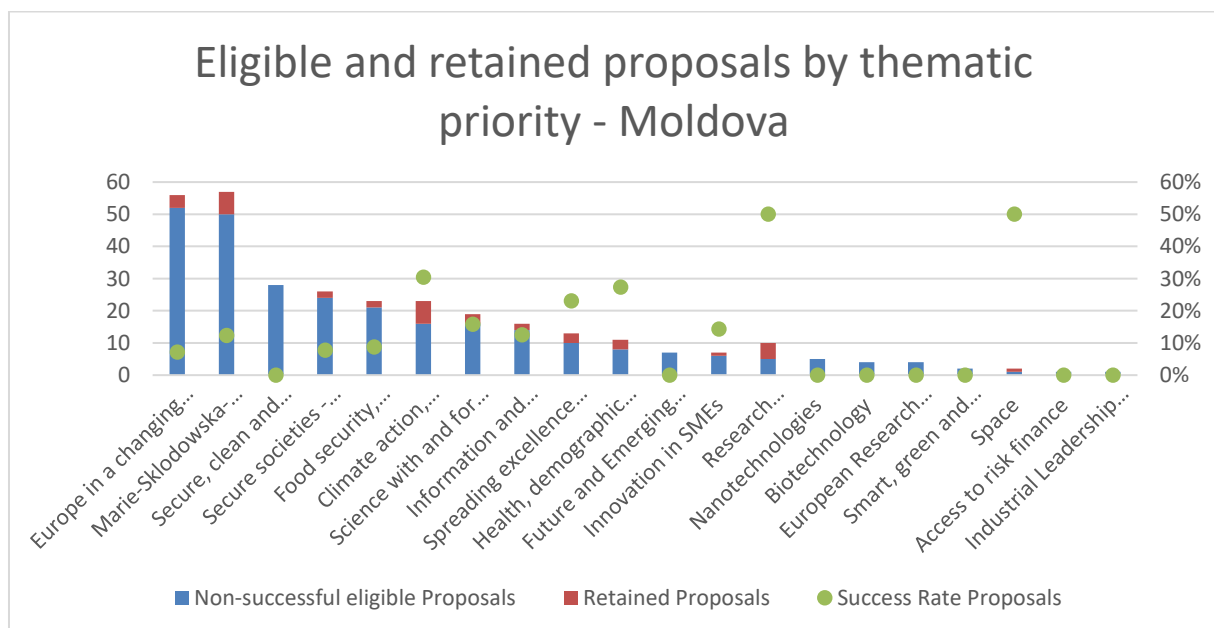
## **2.5 International cooperation**

The main instruments for supporting international STI cooperation in Moldova are bilateral research agreements, (several bilateral funding schemes have been established with e.g. Romania and Russia) multilateral research agreements, international research agreements; tax facilities for projects, application of bonuses for researchers' involvement in H2020 Program; consulting and support of researchers in H2020 Program participation.

The most important partners are EU, Romania and Russia. Further important international cooperating partner countries in R&I are Belarus, Turkey, Georgia, Japan, China and the USA. The main objective of international R&I cooperation is to foster better integration into the European Research Area. Moldova became Associated to the EU's Horizon 2020 (H2020) programme. Moldova was already 2012 associated to the Seventh Framework Programme for Research and Technological Development of the European Union (FP7).



Although the Moldovan participation in H2020<sup>4</sup> is the second best among the Eastern Partnership countries<sup>5</sup>, in the interviews the low participation rate in the framework programme was mentioned again and again. The demand on international networking experience is extreme high; the most partners expressed the hope of being able to raise the level of their international cooperation through involvement in the EU Framework Programme.



<sup>4</sup> Source: Horizon 2020 Dashboard

<sup>5</sup> [http://cpi.asm.md/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/M.Penny\\_EC.pdf](http://cpi.asm.md/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/M.Penny_EC.pdf)





The Moldovan Office for Science and Technology (MOST):

MOST – responsible to contribute to the advancement EU-Moldovan R&I cooperation – started its operation Brussels as a liaison office in 2012 following the association of the country to FP7. Earlier MOST's activity was coordinated by the Academy of Sciences of Moldova, until 20th February 2018, central public authority responsible for national R&D activities via its Centre for International Projects (H2020, NCPs host institution). The successor of rights and obligations of the centre became NARD.<sup>6</sup>

Key activity areas of MOST are the followings<sup>7</sup>:

- Promoting the participation of Moldovan R&D organizations, as well as SMEs and relevant NGOs within European R&D programs
- Promoting research potential and scientific results of Moldovan scientists and innovator within the European Research Area;
- Representing Moldovan scientific community within different institutional configurations, in accordance with an associated country to H2020 statute;
- Disseminating relevant information, also through the national NCPs network, about open calls of proposals, rules of participation and submission guidelines;
- Promoting the participation of Moldovan R&D organizations and individual researchers within other initiatives launched under ERA, among others.

MOST is actively involved in informing national relevant authorities about the features of the new Horizon 2020 program, also in fostering the necessary research and administrative capacities for participation of Moldovan entities within H2020 calls of proposals. The services offered by MOST are opened to a wide range of interested stakeholders, such as R&D institutes, universities, business sector, NGOs, central and regional public authorities

### **3. Key messages for enhancing the EU-Moldovan STI cooperation**

#### **Main findings:**

- Moldova was undergoing deep changes in the last two years (2017-2018). The main actor in the implementation of the national R&I policy became the new Ministry of Education, Culture and Research and took over the funding role of the Academy of Sciences. The ASM remained the supreme scientific forum. Following the recommendations of the Peer Review of the Moldovan Research and Innovation System,<sup>8</sup> NARD, an independent Agency for R&I policy implementation subordinated directly to the government started operating in 2018, responsible for project based R&I funding allocation, European and international cooperation.

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<sup>6</sup> The Moldovan Government examined to whom to deliver MOST; NARD or MECR. The decision was taken in December after the fact finding mission. NARD became responsible for MOST.

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.h2020.md/en/most>

<sup>8</sup> <https://rio.jrc.ec.europa.eu/en/policy-support-facility/peer-review-moldovan-research-and-innovation-system>





- The competition in STI funding was strengthened
- Capacity building and networking instruments were developed
- R&I expenditure is low (0,33% in 2016)
- In order to merge the “research triangle” the role of private sector needs to be strengthened
- The situation of human resources is critical, especial in international cooperation activities
- The demand on increasing international STI cooperation is high
- Expectations regarding the participation in the FP is high but hasn’t been fulfilled yet.
- Low participation in Horizon 2020 because of:
  1. insufficient national R&D investments as the main barrier to competitiveness
  2. lack of synergies between national research systems and the EU research landscape
  3. weak access to international networks
  4. problems with information, communication and training

Mastering challenges no. 2 & 4 are possible through the recent changes to the national R&I system, overcoming challenge no. 1 & 3 is only possible in a long term.

#### **Recommendations for Moldova:**

- Continuation of the reforms and set clear the attributions of the players: MECR, NARD, ASM
- Networking is extreme important to increase visibility. To support networking, strengthen support mechanisms (financial tools but information services too) that help Moldovan researchers and innovators participate on information days of the framework programme, on matchmaking events but publication on international conferences too.
- Encourage higher involvement of the private sector in R&I
- International experiences demonstrate that in countries where GERD/GDP is below 1% the state expenditure is at least 2/3 of GERD. Between 1% and 2% the private sphere (industry, enterprises, etc.) spending is ca. equal with the state funding and above 2% GERD/GDP is business spending more than the state. This means that the higher involvement of the private sector shall be encouraged through higher public R&I investments.

#### **Recommendations for the EU:**

- Launching thematic coordinating and support actions (CSAs) in the next framework programme (Horizon Europe) with a focus on EaP countries would strengthen the participation of Moldova and the other EaP countries in the FP. This is essential if the EU really intends to integrate these countries into the European Research Area, because most of the Moldovan researchers and innovators are not enough embedded in those networks that could lead to successful proposals.
- Contacts between the best Moldovan researchers and research groups with EU partners should be supported through mobility programmes and other measures.
- Support to intermediaries that help to foster cooperation with the EU (above all the network of the 21 Moldovan NCPs<sup>9</sup>) should be provided.

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<sup>9</sup> <http://www.h2020.md/en/npc>



## **Annex**

### **List of interview partners:**

#### 01 October 2010

1. Ms Viorica Boaghi, General Director, National Agency for Research and Development
2. Mr Belostecinic Grigore, Rector, Doctor of Philosophy, Professor, Academician, Academy of Economic Studies of Moldova

#### 02 October 2010

3. Ms Tatiana Moraru Head of Department and Ms Duhlicher Olga, Consultant in the Research and Innovation Policy Division, Ministry of Education, Culture and Research
4. Mr Alexander Spinu, Manager of the Science Technology Park „Academica” and Innovative Incubator „Inovatorul
5. Mr Alexandru Stratan, Director, doctor. habilitat, professor, member correspondent of the Academy of Sciences of Moldova, National Institute of Economic Research
6. Mr Mircea Bernic, Dr hab. Vice-Rector, Technical University of Moldova

#### 03. October 2010

7. Ms Cristina Grajdieru and Ms Irina Mitina, superior researchers Institute of Genetics and Protection of Plants, Ministry of Education, Culture and research
8. Mr Vadim Iatchevici, Head of Innovative Projects Directorate, National Agency for Research and Development



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