

Romanian-Swiss Research Programme 2011-2016

Programme Document

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Status: The present version of the Programme Document is the result of a discussion between the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF), the Executive Agency for Higher Education, Research, Development and Innovation Funding in Romania (UEFISCDI) and the Swiss Agency for Development Cooperation (SDC) and the National Coordination Unit in Romania (NCU). Since all partners agree on the terms presented in the document, it is ready for SDC's credit approval.

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1 Introduction

Switzerland is participating in the EU enlargement by supporting the efforts to reduce economic and social disparities. The supported countries include Romania and Bulgaria, the most recent EU members. One of the selected fields of cooperation with these two countries is scientific research.

The cooperation in the field of scientific research between Switzerland and Romania builds on the previous experience in scientific cooperation with transition countries via the SCOPES programme, in which Bulgaria and Romania have been involved since 1996. The programme has been implemented together with SNSF.

The bilateral cooperation defined here is part of the Swiss enlargement contribution to Romania and is based on the following legal framework:

- The Memorandum of Understanding signed between the President of the Council of the European Union and the Swiss Federal Council (signed on 27 February 2006) and its Addendum of 25 June 2008 for the extension of the Swiss Contribution to Romania and Bulgaria;
- The Bill of the Swiss Federal Council to Parliament on the Swiss Contribution in favour of Bulgaria and Romania for the reduction of the economic and social disparities in the Enlarged European Union, approved by Swiss Parliament in December, 2009;
- The Framework Agreement between the Swiss Federal Council and the Government of Romania concerning the Implementation of the Swiss-Romanian Cooperation Programme (SRCP) to Reduce Economic and Social Disparities within the Enlarged European Union, signed on 7 September 2010.

Arrangements and modalities relevant to the implementation of the Romanian-Swiss Research Programme (RSRP) are further detailed in a set of agreements (Thematic Fund Agreement, Mandate Agreement, Cooperation Agreements, Grant Agreements), which are based on the main principles and stipulations of the Framework Agreement and reflect parameters agreed by involved parties and described in the present Programme Document and its annexes. Principles and procedures applied in similar programmes – SCOPES, Research programme with Poland, Scholarship programme with the 8 new EU member states Sciex – were also incorporated.

The overall objectives of the Swiss cooperation with Romania read as follows: "The Parties shall promote the reduction of economic and social disparities within the enlarged EU through Supporting Measures mutually agreed upon between the Parties.". The cooperation programme in the field of scientific research fits into this overall orientation. It contributes to the promotion of joint Romanian-Swiss research.

Furthermore the Swiss Contribution is regarded as an important element of the bilateral relations between Switzerland and Romania thus the RSRP shall endeavour to enhance the bilateral relations in many aspects, such as providing opportunities to assert Swiss solidarity, to establish Swiss-Romanian institutional partnerships, to promote Swiss presence and visibility as well as to make good use of Swiss knowledge and experience.

The following principles of the SRCP are of particular relevance for the RSRP:

Transparency: Transparency and openness are key to all cooperation activities and are binding at all levels. Special emphasis on transparency shall be given in project and activity selection, contract awarding and financial management.

Environmental sustainability: Cooperation activities shall respect the need to incorporate requirements of environmental sustainability.

Commitment by all actors involved: All decision-makers and entities involved with the RSRP shall be committed to the efficient and effective implementation of the agreed Supporting Measures.

Partnerships: Partnerships between Swiss and Romanian partners are an enriching element and are strongly encouraged, especially in fields where Switzerland contributes with particular experience, know-how and technologies.

Visibility: Visibility is an important aspect that shall be taken into account when selecting and implementing activities.

The Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF) was chosen by the Swiss Agency for Development Cooperation (SDC) as the Swiss Intermediate Body (SIB) for the RSRP. SNSF is responsible for the overall management and administration of the Research fund. It is therefore responsible for ensuring that the programme is duly implemented in line with the defined principles and procedures.

SNSF shall cooperate with and be supported by a Romanian partner – the Executive Agency for Higher Education, Research, Development and Innovation Funding (UEFISCDI/MECTS) of the Ministry of Education, Research, Youth and Sports (MECTS).

Responsibility for the implementation and management of individual projects will lie with the participating research teams. They are the programme's direct beneficiaries.

The RSRP Programme Document elaborates on the main parameters of the programme and details its implementation modalities in the period 2011 – 2016. It shall serve as a reference document for all further contractual and steering arrangements between Swiss and Romanian authorities and implementation agencies. It will also provide a basis for SDC to prepare and defend the "Credit Proposal"/decision note for TF "Research" in Romania.

2 Rationale of the Programme

The RSRP responds to the Romanian scientific community's demand for more international integration and cooperation with colleagues from Western Europe in particular. It does so by mobilising research capacities in Switzerland and Romania, and by supporting scientific cooperation in the form of Joint Research Projects (JRPs) between Switzerland and Romania through the provision of grant assistance. JRPs shall enable scientists from Romania, jointly with scientists from Switzerland, to undertake, in the form of consortiums, research activities addressing specific problems in different four thematic areas. Research is carried out at the research facilities involved; reciprocal visits and short stays in Switzerland of a few weeks for researchers from Romania and vice-versa are also possible within a JRP.

3 Objectives

Projects implemented under the RSRP aim at strengthening the research cooperation between Romania and Switzerland. In pursuance of this, the RSRP's specific objectives are twofold:

- to further enable the integration of Romanian researchers within international networks;
- to facilitate the exchange of knowledge and know-how among researchers.

Activities are primarily the organisation of one call for JRPs applications and the implementation of 20 to 25 selected JRPs amounting to max 450'000 Swiss francs each.

Outputs relate to strengthening individual capacities, strengthening research institutions, transfer and sharing of knowledge, as well as strengthening the research cooperation.

Outcomes to be delivered by the RSRP consist of benefits for end-users at policy level and/or at societal level captured by the number of submitted patent applications as well as number of

innovations/inventions in terms of product, process, methodology etc. implemented and used following the implementation of JRPs.

In the long term, additional investment for research should lead to sustainable economic growth.

The Logical Framework is provided in Annex 4 of this Programme Document. The set of indicators are standardised for all research programmes implemented in the frame of the Swiss Contribution; they allow for an aggregation of results over the whole Swiss Contribution.

4 Thematic Focus

In order to make targeted use of the financial resources available, the RSRP defines thematic choices that were agreed upon between SDC/SNSF and UEFISCDI/MECTS.

The following thematic areas were chosen to be included in the RSRP:

- Research on major diseases: cancer, cardiovascular diseases, diabetes and obesity;
- Impact of waste and pollutants on environment and climate;
- Sustainable energy;
- Economic Growth and Social Disparities.

The evaluation panel (see section 7.3.2 below) will assess whether the proposed JRPs fall under one of the thematic areas. The grant repartition per thematic area will be done according to the number of qualitative proposed JRPs.

5 Beneficiaries

The RSRP supports the implementation of JRPs realised by a group of researchers from Romania, jointly with a group of researchers from Switzerland, each group being headed by a Principal Investigator (PI). The grant beneficiaries are the PI working within the following types of public institutions:

PI from Switzerland working at:

- Cantonal universities of higher education;
- Swiss Federal Institutes of Technology and associated institutions;
- Swiss universities of applied sciences;
- Federal and cantonal research institutions.

PI from Romania working at:

- Romanian public universities;
- National research and development institutes;
- Research institutes, centres and research and development units of Romanian Academy or Branch Academies;
- Other public research and development organizations.

Application modalities

Each application for JRP must have two PIs; they are the lead scientists on the Swiss and Romanian side respectively. For the Swiss PI, the general SNSF eligibility criteria apply and for the Romanian PI, the general UEFISCDI/MECTS eligibility criteria apply. The Swiss PI is responsible for the submission of the application. Upon selection/approval of JRP and setting up of grant arrangement, both PIs are responsible for the implementation and completion of the funded JRP. Each PI can submit only one application per call.

6 Programme Budget and Grants

61 Programme Budget

SDC will support the RSRP with 9.75 Mio CHF of which 8.8 Mio CHF are foreseen for the JRP grants. This amount (8.8 Mio) being calculated as 85%, the Romanian Government's total contribution amounts to an additional 15% (CHF 1'553'000). As a matter of principle the Romanian contribution will be solely allocated to JRP activities.

SNSF will receive 5% of the total budget (CHF 565'000) for the programme management costs in Switzerland. UEFISCDI/MECTS will receive up to 2.5% of the total budget (CHF 283'000.-) for the programme management in Romania.

A total of CHF 102'000.- is allocated as a reserve. Commitment of the reserve fund will be subject to consultation and the final decision shall lie with the RSRP's Steering Committee (see section 815 below).

The table below presents the main financial parameters of the RSRP and the repartition of the co-financing.

Romanian-Swiss Research Programme	Swiss Contribution CHF	Romanian contribution CHF	Total CHF
Grants for JRPs	8'800'000	1'553'000	10'353'000
Management costs at programme level, Swiss side	565'000		565'000
Management costs at programme level, Romanian side	283'000		283'000
Reserve	102'000		102'000
Total	9'750'000	1'553'000	11'303'000

Financial procedures are described in section 83 below. The management tasks of SNSF, respectively UEFISCDI/MECTS, are defined in section 811, respectively in section 812 below.

62 Grants

The only type of projects eligible are Joint Research Projects (JRPs) realised by a group of researchers from Romania (Romanian partner), jointly with a group of researchers from Switzerland (Swiss partner), each group being headed by a Principal Investigator (PI). The maximum amount to be granted for a single JRP (Swiss and Romanian contributions) is 450,000 CHF. For each project, a maximum of 50% of the grant may go to the Swiss partner. The maximum duration of a JRP is three years.

Eligible costs include

- **Personnel / staff costs** of researchers, technicians and other supporting staff directly involved in the project.
The salary of the Swiss PI cannot be paid from the project funds. The salaries of the other Swiss staff (e.g. Ph.D. students, postdoctoral fellows) must follow the usual SNSF guidelines. Romanian scientific staff, including the PI, will be paid according to the provisions of the Governmental Decision no. 475 / 2007 (upper ceilings), and in full compliance with the working contract of Romanian staff with its organisation.
- **Travel & subsistence allowances** for staff taking part in the JRP in order to visit each other and to participate in international conferences thematically linked to the JRP.
- **Equipment costs** of Romanian and Swiss partners in JRPs to the extent that these are used for the research activities. The maximum percentage for equipment within a JRP is 20% of the total project cost.
- **Consumables** can be charged by both the Swiss and the Romanian side. They include materials, supplies and consumables used in the framework of the JRP and for research activities.
- **Other research costs:** e.g. costs for publication of joint scientific articles, for organising seminars and conferences, dissemination of results, subcontractors, etc., provide they are directly linked to the JRP implementation.
- **Overhead:** On the Romanian side, the maximum overhead costs shall not exceed 5% of the Romanian costs. Swiss partners are not entitled to charge overhead costs.

Not eligible costs are:

The following costs are not eligible within JRPs:

- Expenditure incurred before and after the dates of the project
- Interest of debt, purchase of land and buildings
- Fines, financial penalties and expenses of litigation
- Activities supported from other sources
- VAT, if it could be recoverable by the beneficiary under national regulation.

7 Call, Application and Evaluation Procedure

71 Call

There will be only one call for applications; the call is planned to be launched in June 2011. If an insufficient number of JRPs is proposed/granted, SNSF together with UEFISCDI /MECTS will initiate a process of consultations with SDC and the NCU for deciding on adjustments of the frame conditions if deemed necessary.

Information about the call will be published jointly by SNSF and UEFISCDI/MECTS. Both these organisations will use their regular (electronic and other) channels to inform interested scientists in their respective country about the call. An information event will be held in Romania as an additional measure to raise awareness of the programme before the call is launched.

Language: All documents relating to the programme (application, reporting, operational communication and exchange, minutes from meetings etc.) will be published in English. However legally binding documents (e.g. letters of decision, contracts) will need to be written in a national language of the respective Swiss and Romanian PI.

Deadline for submission of applications: The submission deadline for applications will be at least three months after the official launching of the call.

Call document: The call document for applications will be elaborated by SNSF in close cooperation with UEFISCDI/MECTS. The call document will contain the following information required for appropriate submission:

- Funding instrument: Joint Research Projects as only eligible type of project (limited to one Swiss PI and one Romanian PI, conditions of the partnership)
- Formal criteria (deadline, eligibility of applicants and institutions, thematic focus)
- Guidelines for applicants (research plan and administrative data according to SNSF standards) set in accordance with SNSF standards and procedures
- Evaluation criteria in accordance with SNSF standards (and mentioned under 732)
- Reporting requirements
- Financial volume and rule for funding
- Eligible costs
- Contact persons for information
- Example of a grant agreement
- Template for the research plan

72 Application

Proposals will be jointly prepared by Swiss and Romanian applicants. For technical reasons, they will be submitted by the Swiss PIs to SNSF via its electronic submission system (mySNF). Romanian partners will have access to the electronic submission system through their Swiss partner. The proposals will be made available to UEFISCDI/MECTS by SNSF. Proposals as well as all correspondence and reports will be exclusively in English.

The overall supervision of the evaluation and selection procedure is performed by the Steering / Selection Committee.

73 Evaluation Procedure

731 Formal Eligibility Check

The formal check of submitted applications is performed by SNSF. The check will consist of an appraisal of the completeness of the data as requested by the call. Furthermore, the proposed JRP's link with the thematic fields of the programmes will be assessed.

The eligibility of the PIs and their institutions will be checked by SNSF for Swiss partners and by UEFISCDI/MECTS for Romanian partners.

After the deadline for submission, neither new applications nor changes to the research plans will be accepted. If minor information is missing in a submitted proposal (e.g. CV, publication lists), only SNSF may invite the PIs to provide the respective information after the submission deadline within a reasonable time-frame. No PI's requests to submit additional information will be accepted.

The Swiss PI will receive an acknowledgement of receipt. Applications that fail to meet the formal criteria will be returned to the Swiss PI with a **decision letter** explaining the reasons for the formal rejection of the application. If the Swiss PI does not agree, he/she has the right to request a reconsideration (SNSF internal procedure) or an appeal procedure (regulated in the Funding Regulations of SNSF, in the Federal Law on the Promotion of Research and in the federal Law on Administrative Procedure).

732 Scientific Evaluation

Peer review:

JRPs that meet formal criteria are subject to scientific assessment within maximum of 7 months after the submission deadline. Proposals for JRPs will be reviewed according to international **peer review** standard procedures, organised by SNSF. The peer review experts are designated by the members of the evaluation panel based on national and international databases. These external experts make a peer review of the applications in a score system, verifying the scientific quality of JRPs.

Evaluation panel:

An **evaluation panel** will be set up; it will be composed of international experts proposed by SNSF and UEFISCDI/MECTS and include mainly representatives of the Swiss and Romanian academic community. Candidates (excellent scientists with international experience) are proposed based on their CV and publication lists. Panel members are approved by the Specialised Committee International Co-operation (FA IZ) of SNSF. For their work in the panel, Swiss, Romanian and international experts are remunerated by SNSF according to internal SNSF rules (travel expenses, daily allowance for meeting and homework). In case of any conflicts of interest by the evaluation, SNSF rules apply (recusal).

Based on assessments conducted in form of the peer reviews, a list of JRPs with scores and justifications is prepared. The evaluation panel will discuss the applications and the evaluation done by the peer reviewers. Based on the results of these discussion, it will recommend some projects for funding in the framework of the RSRP. Recommendations will include appropriate justifications.

Decision:

Members of the Steering / Selection Committee will participate as observers in the evaluation panel's meeting. The final grant decision on JRPs is made by the Steering / Selection Committee based on the list of ranked JRPs applications and accompanying documentation proposed for funding by the evaluation panel.

Finally, in line with SNSF and UEFISCDI/MECTS regulations, this list also needs to be approved by SNSF's Specialised Committee International Co-operation and SNSF's Presidial Board and UEFISCDI/MECTS's Scientific Board.

Based on the final decision, SNSF will prepare **decision letters** for the Swiss PIs and UEFISCDI/MECTS will do so for the Romanian PIs. SNSF and UEFISCDI/MECTS will collaborate to make sure the content of both letters are consistent. For the applications to be funded, the letters include disbursement plans as well as an example of a **Grant Agreements** to be signed by the beneficiaries. The decision letters for applications which are not funded contain a relative ranking of the application as well as the main arguments for the rejection. A list of approved JRPs will be sent by SNSF to SDC and to NCU and will be published on the websites of SNSF and UEFISCDI/MECTS.

The evaluation criteria used to determine the scientific quality of the proposals include:

- Scientific relevance and interest
- Originality of the aims and objectives
- Appropriateness of the methodology
- Experience and past performance of applicants
- Competence of research partners with respect to the project
- Complementary qualities of research partners.
- Feasibility of the project

These criteria will be described more precisely in the call document.

74 Appeal Procedure

With the decision letter, the Swiss main applicant will be informed, that he/she has the right to appeal to the competent authority in Switzerland in conformity with the national legislation.

He/she has also the right to request a reconsideration of its proposal in accordance with SNSF internal regulations.

In Romania, the PIs can appeal against the decision of the evaluation only regarding administrative procedures. The standard UEFISCDI appeal procedures apply. Any appeal regarding scientific aspects is not taken into consideration and it is rejected by definition.

8 Implementation

81 Institutional Structure

Annex 2 provides a graphic presentation of the programme's institutional structure and the cooperation between actors. The tasks of the main institutions involved in the management are presented in the section below.

811 SNSF

SNSF, as Swiss Intermediate Body for the Research Fund, is responsible for the set-up, management and implementation of the RSRP, for the build-up, contracting and supervision of the JRPs, and for reporting on the RSRP. The main tasks of SNSF include:

- participate in the Steering/Selection Committee and assume secretarial tasks;
- prepare and implement the call together with UEFISCDI/MECTS;
- arrange legal aspects required for the implementation of the RSRP;
- inform the Swiss scientific community about the call
- operate as the submission point for applications;
- propose members for the evaluation panel and approve its final composition;
- organise the evaluation and selection process;
- inform the Swiss PI about the decision regarding the submitted application;
- ensure that the grant beneficiaries signed the grant agreements;
- transfer funds to the Swiss PI of the JRP. These funds include the budget for the Swiss PI and the budget for the Romanian PI allocated by Swiss partner. The Swiss PI will have to transfer the corresponding part to the Romanian PI;
- transfer administrative funds to UEFISCDI/MECTS;
- establish and apply an adequate financial and operational controlling systems for JRP implementation; intervene if required and inform SDC about irregularities immediately;
- collect, control and approve the scientific reports;
- collect, control and approve the financial reports of the Swiss Contribution;
- monitor the JRPs and report to SDC on the programme's finances and the JRPs' implementation; reporting includes at least one annual progress report and financial report;
- submit audit reports, if any, to SDC and NCU and ensure the follow-up of audit recommendations.

SNSF will allocate the necessary human resources for management of the programme.

812 UEFISCDI/MECTS

SNSF shall cooperate with and be supported by UEFISCDI/MECTS. The main tasks of UEFISCDI/MECTS include:

- assist SNSF on preparing and implementing the call;
- secure the Romanian co-financing;
- participate in the Steering/Selection committee;
- inform the Romanian scientific community about the call and organise an information day (with SNSF's assistance);
- assist SNSF with the evaluation process;
- inform the Romanian PI about the decision regarding the submitted proposal;
- manage the finances coming from the Romanian government;
- transfer funds to the Romanian PI of the JRP;
- propose members for the evaluation panel;
- control and approve part of the financial reports based on the overall JRPs financial documents (the part concerning the money coming from Romania);
- monitor the JRP and report to local co-funding authority about the programmes' finances and the JRPs' implementation;
- assist SNSF writing the annual reports to SDC;
- maintain contact with and inform relevant institutions in Romania about the RSRP.

Detailed terms of reference will be established as a separate document defining the tasks of UEFISCDI/MECTS. These terms of reference will be part of the cooperation agreement between SNSF and UEFISCDI/MECTS.

813 SDC

SDC is the main funding agency for the RSRP and has the overall responsibility for the implementation of the programme. Its tasks include:

- lead, based on the bilateral Framework Agreement, the development of a comprehensive Programme Document;
- decide on the financing of the RSRP;
- prepare and conclude the Research Fund Thematic Agreement with the NCU;
- mandate SNSF as Swiss Intermediate Body for the Research Fund;
- approve the call document;
- supervise the operational monitoring and the financial controlling of SNSF;
- Set up and co-chair the Steering / Selection Committee;
- analyse the regular reporting of SNSF, assess the implementation progress and discuss the reporting with the NCU and ensure the follow-up;
- request immediate reporting in case of irregularities and ensure follow-up;
- carry out reviews and evaluations on the RSRP in general;
- organise publicity in Switzerland regarding the RSRP in general;
- to transfer funds to SNSF.

In Romania, the Swiss Embassy will support the programmes' implementation.

814 NCU

The NCU is responsible for the inclusion of the Research Fund in the Swiss-Romanian Cooperation Programme and – on a general level – for the monitoring of the RSRP implementation. The main tasks of the NCU include:

- conclude the Research Fund Thematic Agreement;
- co-chair the Steering / Selection Committee;
- monitor RSRP's implementation on a general level and provide feedback to SDC on observations;
- comment on RSRP reports prepared by SNSF;
- comment on the audit reports (if any);
- acknowledge the payments made by SDC on the basis of financial statements submitted by SDC;
- in the event of irregularities, participate in the assessment of causes and solutions;
- include main elements of RSRP reporting in an overall annual report on the Swiss Contribution;
- discuss implementation progress with SDC in the annual meeting;
- ensure inclusion of the RSRP in the publicity on the Contribution.

The NCU may delegate a number of these tasks to UEFISCDI/MECTS.

815 Steering/ Selection Committee

The Steering / Selection Committee is made up of representatives of SDC (co-chair), one member of the NCU (co-chair), SNSF (one member from the FA IZ and one member of the programme management), UEFISCDI/MECTS (one member from UEFISCDI and one member from the MECTS). The organisations propose their own representative(s). In its steering function, the Committee will meet at least once a year and provide guidance on strategic matters with a view to meeting the objectives of the RSRP and with regard to ethics, compliance with applicable laws and regulatory policies, financial practices, disclosure and reporting. It is responsible for overseeing management and ensuring that systems are in place to manage the risks involved in the programme. It will be consulted with regards to the conditions of the call and the organisation of reviews and evaluation. In its selection function, the Steering / Selection Committee shall approve the list of JRP's proposed for funding by the evaluation panel.

SNSF will assume secretarial duties for the Committee. The terms of reference for the Steering / Selection Committee are part of the Thematic Fund Agreement.