



**Experience of International Doctoral Education –
Lessons and Conclusions in the Context of Georgian Doctoral Education**

[Policy Paper]

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This document will describe the experience of participating in an international doctoral program, what are the advantages of such projects, what benefits/opportunities do they offer to doctoral students and based on this experience, what would be desirable to take into account in the context of Georgian doctoral programs.

The above-mentioned experience was gained in 2015-2018, when the author was an Early-Stage Researcher and a PhD candidate at the Research Center for East European Studies at the University of Bremen (Germany). The doctoral research was funded by the European Commission, in the framework of the following project - Marie Skłodowska-Curie Innovative Training Network. During the same period, the doctoral student was an affiliated fellow at the Bremen International Graduate School of Social Sciences – BIGSSS.

Participation in this international doctoral program has played a very important role in the development of research skills of doctoral students and the successful completion of their doctoral dissertations. One of the most important factors was that under this program, doctoral students were provided with a monthly salary. This was important because in parallel with the research, doctoral students did not have a need to work and had the opportunity to focus on their own research. This is a big challenge for doctoral students in the Georgian context, as they do not have a stable income, moreover, in some cases, they have to pay for their doctoral education themselves. Therefore, they are forced to work in parallel to writing the doctoral dissertation, which makes it impossible to complete the research within the period specified by local regulations.

The Marie Skłodowska-Curie doctoral program also allocated a research budget to each doctoral student, which plays a major role in the timely and successful completion of doctoral research. First of all, through it the student has the opportunity to participate in international conferences, which are important both to get acquainted with the latest findings in his/her field, as well as to bring his/her research to

the international arena and receive valuable comments from other scientists. It is noteworthy that such scientific conferences also play a very important role in establishing contacts with researchers from various universities and research centers with similar research interests. In addition to funding participation in local or international conferences, the research budget also provides for reimbursement of various methodological training participation fees. Naturally, the doctoral students of the Marie Skłodowska-Curie doctoral program are members of different graduate schools and have access to a variety of methodological courses. However, it should also be noted that if a doctoral student feels that the courses offered at the university level do not fully meet the specific research needs, he/she has the opportunity to obtain funding for specific methodological training within the research budget.

Most importantly, the research budget covers the most important component of any doctoral research – fieldwork. In this case, the doctoral student no longer has to limit his/her research interests due to financial reasons (e.g. travel, housing costs, etc.). Another factor that has a positive impact on the timely implementation of doctoral students' research tasks is the ability to hire a research assistant within the research budget. The assistant plays a very important role in collecting research materials, systematizing them, preparing transcripts of interviews, etc., which allows the doctoral student to devote more time to analyzing the data.

The factors mentioned so far have been mainly related to the financial side of the doctoral program, which makes it much easier for the doctoral student to achieve the research objectives. In addition to financial support, an important advantage of this doctoral program is the research network that has been established within its framework. The network includes seven European universities (academic partners) and reputable research centers and institutes (non-academic partners). Within the project, doctoral students had the opportunity to do secondments in academic or non-academic institutions related to their research interests. This is important in terms of presenting research findings and receiving feedback from the members of the host institution and in general, in terms of gaining access to on-site resources (both electronic databases and books) and making contact with people working in a similar field.

The positive role of this international research network is also reflected in the fact that the contacts acquired through it between the professors and students participating in the project, continue after the end of the project as well and it plays a positive role in preparing joint academic publications or participating in joint research projects.

As for the component of thesis writing itself, two main factors need to be emphasized here: First, regular supervision by academic supervisors. For professors employed at European universities who

supervise doctoral students, thesis supervision is counted as part of their workload and their supervision is reimbursed accordingly. In this case, the professor has more time and motivation to be actively involved at all stages of doctoral research writing. The active involvement of the supervisor and regular feedback from him/her side plays an important positive role in overcoming the challenges facing the student and moving the research forward relatively quickly.

Second, the regular feedback that a student receives not only from the thesis supervisor, but also from other professors and students at the same Graduate School. It should be noted that during the week, at least two doctoral colloquia were held at the University of Bremen, with the participation of individuals with similar research interests. Not only doctoral students, but also professors were presenting at the above-mentioned colloquia. On the one hand, these doctoral colloquia were of great practical value, as the doctoral student learned a lot by listening to the comments, as well as to the reactions to those comments. This experience and knowledge plays a major role in reflecting upon and refining one's own research project. On the other hand, the above-mentioned colloquia are a very good example of collaboration between different universities and research centers, because they are attended by students and professors with similar interests across the country.

In view of the above-mentioned factors, in order to improve the quality of Georgian doctoral education, it would be advisable to share the following recommendations:

- Doctoral students must have certain financial guarantees in the form of salary or scholarship, so that they do not need any additional work in parallel with working on their doctoral dissertation and are able to complete research projects on time;
- In order to complete doctoral theses in a timely and successful manner, it is important for students to have an access to the research budget that covers the cost of attending international conferences, methodological trainings and fieldworks;
- It is desirable, on the one hand, to introduce the practice of doctoral colloquia in Georgian higher education institutions and, on the other hand, to promote active cooperation between professors and doctoral students of different universities, in order to actively exchange views and knowledge in the format of doctoral colloquia;
- Since the involvement of the academic supervisor has a direct impact on the quality of the research conducted by doctoral students, in order to motivate professors to be more actively involved in the process of doctoral supervision, it is desirable to balance their workload and determine appropriate remuneration for their work.