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ARENA's proposal to the Faculty Board

Note prepared for the Faculty of Social Science's Board meeting on Dec 17, 2020

On December 17, 2020, ARENA's "economic situation" will once again take up the agenda of a Faculty of Social Sciences' Board meeting. It is time now—as the Faculty Board also clearly stated at its meeting in June—to find a stable solution for ARENA and move on.

From ARENA's point of view, the best way for the Faculty Board to contribute to a sustainable and successful future for ARENA within the Faculty is to

- support ARENA's efforts to *contribute to the Faculty's educational portfolio*. An international interdisciplinary Master programme in European Studies, which ARENA may host in cooperation with other entities within and outside UiO, would give ARENA some basic income independent of external funding. Teaching opportunities are also attractive to younger researchers who want to pursue an academic career. A Master programme in European Studies would furthermore fill a void in the Norwegian educational system (see e.g. the *NAV-scandal*). The Faculty's total pool of *studieplasser* in 2021/2022 amounts to 1842.¹ ARENA would suggest that 25 are allotted to a new Master programme.

If the Faculty continues to block ARENA from contributing to its educational portfolio—despite its own stated ambitions to encourage precisely such interdisciplinary educational initiatives² and the alignment of such initiatives with the ambitions of UiO within Circle U³—we suggest that it *compensates* ARENA for the lack of basic income generated by teaching that is given to the other units, by

- providing an *annual support of 2 million NOK*, which is the same amount that was given to ARENA as basic support (*basistildeling*) from the Faculty until 2018. Such a compensation would diminish the short-term volatility of ARENA's accounts

Furthermore, in order to stabilize ARENA's economic conditions, we propose that the Faculty

¹ *Studietilbud og opptakstrammer for studieåret 2021/2022*, Fakultetsstyret, 11.9.2020/V-SAK 3, p.5.

² Tiltak: "Oppmuntre fagmiljøer til å etablere undervisningsaktiviteter på tvers av fag og Fakulteter". *Det samfunnsvitenskapelige fakultet Årsplan 2021-2023*, versjon 17.11.2020, p.3.

³ <https://www.uio.no/om/aktuelt/aktuelle-saker/2020/circle-u-er-offisielt-i-gang.html>



- *makes permanent the temporary compensation* that the Faculty has already allowed for 2020 for the unreasonable and unforeseen increase in rents that ARENA experienced (amounting to 0.8 mill. NOK per year)
- *crafts a friendly-minded debt relief program* with regards to the historically accumulated debt that was generated during the years 2010-2014. The prognosis for 2020 indicates that the sum at the end of this year will be 7.1 million NOK.⁴

What is ARENAs value and contribution to the Faculty?

- ARENA is an *exceptionally strong international brand*, which has been built up over almost three decades. In the large interdisciplinary field of European studies, ARENA is widely seen as a leading international player.⁵ The Faculty owns this brand and should nurture it.
- ARENA delivers on its core mission, which is to *produce research excellence*. In the most recent evaluation of Norwegian social sciences ARENA received the highest grade possible (5) and was celebrated as “a centre of excellence in Norway”⁶. ARENA’s publication points per staff and year in the last five years (2015-2019) is 3.93. The second highest score among the other six institutes at the Faculty of Social Sciences during the same time period is 2.48, while the average score is 1.75.⁷
- Part of the success in building ARENAs brand comes from the *coordination of large-scale collaborative projects within the EU Framework Programmes*. The Faculty of Social Sciences has so far coordinated six such projects, *four* of which have been developed and hosted by ARENA.⁸ The evaluation of the most recently finished project (GLOBUS) was outstandingly positive.⁹
- ARENA is the only unit at the Faculty that has *coordinated a Marie Skłodowska-Curie Research Network (Innovative Training Network)*, which is part of the excellence pillar of Horizon.¹⁰ In 2019,

⁴ *Analyse av den økonomiske situasjonen ved ARENA Senter for europaforskning. Rapport fra intern arbeidsgruppe, 12.11.2020, Figure 1, p.6 and Vedlegg 1, p.20.*

⁵ “Since its inception, the ARENA Centre has focused and specialised in the themes of European Integration and on Norway’s role and prospects within it. The focus is relatively narrow and well defined, and the group strives to maintain the high profile and international recognition it has achieved in this area. ARENA is one of the most renowned places for such studies. It is a leading centre in this area.” (“SAMEVAL, Evaluation of the Social Sciences in Norway. Report from Panel 3 – Political Science, *The Research Council of Norway* 2018, p.202.)

⁶ SAMEVAL 2018, p.203.

⁷ Figures retained from *NSDs Database for statistikk om høgre utdanning*.

⁸ The programmes that have been coordinated at ARENA are CIDEL (FP5), RECON (FP6), GLOBUS (H2020), EU3D (H2020). The other two programmes at the Faculty are EUMargins (FP7) and LifeBrain (H2020).

⁹ “The project has delivered exceptional results with significant immediate or potential impact”, European Commission, GENERAL PROJECT REVIEW CONSOLIDATED REPORT, Ref. Ares(2020)5448421 - 13/10/2020, p.2.

¹⁰ PLATO (H2020).

our application for an additional network (AGORA) received top grades and is now being revised and sharpened for the new Horizon call in 2021.

Why is it of value to the Faculty to have a unit that—besides continuously succeeding in the funding bids at the NFR, including the most prestigious calls—also specialises in the coordination of large-scale collaborative EU programmes? *These projects build international cooperation and come with high visibility around Europe.* According to UiO's *Årsplan 2020-2021*, UiO is doing well in some parts of the framework programmes, but underperforms in others. The Rector has recently urged the units to strengthen their participation “within the whole breadth of the programme” and clarified that he expects from the units that they “make use of the possibilities for increased quality that lies in the large European collaborative projects and in the ERC.”¹¹ The Faculty of Social Sciences is increasingly successful with regards to ERC, but without ARENA its track record when it comes to the other parts of the framework programmes (MSCA-ITN, Thematic calls) would be rather underwhelming.

Does ARENA pose a substantive economic risk to the Faculty?

The simple answer is no. ARENA generated a deficit during the years 2010-2014 of 7.8 million NOK.¹² It has not accumulated any additional debt in the last six years.¹³ The prognosis for 2020 (updated in November)¹⁴ indicates that the accumulated debt (*merforbruk*) will be 7.1 million NOK. ARENA's Board approved an ambitious and realistic budget for ARENA in October 2020, including a prognosis for 2021-2025 where the accumulated debt is steadily reduced.¹⁵

At the same time, the accumulation of unused funds (*underforbruk*) at the Faculty of Social Sciences was 199 million NOK after the first four months of 2020.¹⁶ A real challenge for the Faculty is how to stimulate increased levels of activity.

Furthermore, ARENA's continued success within the EU funding schemes contributes substantially to the financing of the Faculty Administration. EU funding comes with national contributions (*RBO-midler*), which is the basis of a Faculty level taxation of ARENA of several million NOK each year.

¹¹ Årsplan 2020-2021, Universitetet i Oslo, p.6.

¹² *Analyse*, Figure 1, p.6.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Analyse*, Vedlegg 1, p.20.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Det samfunnsvitenskapelige fakultet, *Økonomirapport for første tertial 2020*, 11.6.2020/V-SAK 3, p.1.

Conclusion

On 22 March 2019, the Faculty Board decided to refute the proposal to dismantle ARENA by forcing it in under the Political Science Department.¹⁷ Instead, new administrative regulations for ARENA were adopted on 27 September 2019, confirming ARENAs status as an independent permanent centre at the Faculty of Social Sciences¹⁸. Thereafter, a new director was recruited, starting from October 2020.

To reopen the painful process of dismantling ARENA now, on the basis of overblown perceptions of the economic risks that ARENA poses to the Faculty, would result in an extraordinary destruction of value-generating capital that is benefiting the Faculty. The amount of time spent on ARENA's historical *merforbruk* is out of proportion, not least in relation to the Faculty's ongoing and increasing *underforbruk*.

We urge the Faculty Board to come to a closure on this question now. The uncertainty created around ARENA's status not only weighs heavily on its staff, but also makes recruitments more difficult. A first step could be to initiate an investigation into how ARENA may best contribute to the Faculty's educational portfolio.

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¹⁷ 22.3.2019/D-sak 1.

¹⁸ Administrasjonsreglement ved ARENA Senter for europaforskning, vedtatt av fakultetsstyret 27.9.2019.
§ 3 Senterets virkeperiode: "Senteret er opprettet uten sluttdato."