

## **Faculty of Islamic Studies in Prishtina**

### **I: Institutional Accreditation**

### **II: Re-accreditation Bachelor of Arts “Islamic Theology**

### **III: Accreditation Master of Arts “Islamic Theology in the European Context”**

#### ***Final version of report (18 August 2014)***

Experts on behalf of the Kosova Accreditation Agency (KAA): Prof. Dr. *Zekirija Sejdini*, University of Innsbruck, Austria, and Prof. Dr. *Maurus Reinkowski*, University of Basel, Switzerland (Chair)

#### **1 Documents and details of the on-site visit**

This report is based on the following documents respectively evidence:

1. Experts’ Final Report from May 2012, written by Prof. Dr. Ednan Aslan, University of Vienna (Austria), and Prof. Dr. Aziz Hasanovic, Meshihat Zagreb (Croatia)
2. Experts’ Final Report from 25 June 2013, written by Prof. Dr. Abdullah Sahin, Markfield Institute of Higher Education (UK), associated with the University of Gloucestershire (UK), and Prof. Dr. Erdal Toprakyan, University of Tübingen (Germany)
3. Experts’ Final Report from June 2014, written by Prof. Dr. Abdullah Sahin, Markfield Institute of Higher Education (UK), associated with the University of Gloucestershire (UK), and Prof. Dr. Maurus Reinkowski, University of Basel (Switzerland)
4. Self-Evaluation Report 2014 of the Faculty of Islamic Studies in Prishtina, submitted to KAA in September 2014
5. Set of electronic data: 30 curricula vitae (full-time, part-time and visiting teaching staff); 45 syllabuses for BA *Islamic Theology* and 8 syllabuses for MA *Islamic Theology in the European Context*.
6. On-site visit of the experts Zekirija Sejdina and Maurus Reinkowski (Chair) at the *Faculty of Islamic Studies* at 4 August 2015
7. Self-Evaluation Report 2012 of the Faculty of Islamic Studies in Prishtina, submitted to KAA in 2012 (handed over by KAA to the expert team as additional information after the on-site visit) Comments by the management of the Faculty of Islamic Studies on the experts’ draft report from 10 August 2015. The comments of the Faculty of Islamic Studies from 14 August 2015 are titled “The review and the comment on the draft evaluation report compiled by a team of experts for evaluation”
8. Annex submitted by the management of the Faculty of Islamic Studies on 14 August 2015 following the experts’ draft report (10 August 2015), titled “Annex:

Scientific activities and international cooperation after the delivery of the SAR (30.09.2014)”

9. An updated version of the Self-Evaluation Report from 2014, following the recommendations in the experts’ draft report from 10 August 2015. The electronic document that was submitted to the experts is titled “SER with the changes made after recommendations of experts”.

The expert team met during the on-site visit with the management of the institution from 9.00 to 11.30 and discussed the following issues: Mission statement, organization and management, staff, finance, development plan, quality management, internationalization, recommendations (from earlier experts’ reports). The management was represented by: Fahrush Rexhepi, Associate Professor and Dean; Qemajl Morina, Senior Lecturer and responsible for internal quality assurance; Zija Abdullahu, Assistant Professor; Vedat Shabani, administration. Also present was Zanita Halimi, University of Prishtina, as translator.

From 14.00 to 16.00 the expert team met with responsible persons for the study programs and discussed the issues of curriculum, teaching, researches, and recommendations. Present were from the side of the Faculty of Islamic Studies: Fahrush Rexhepi (as head of the BA study program and the projected MA study program), Professors Zija Abdullahu, Sulejman Osmani and Lulzim Esati (all members full-time staff).

From 16.00-17.00 followed a meeting with the teaching staff: On behalf of the teaching staff the following nine persons were present: Mehvide Bunjaku, Safet Hoxha, Ilmije Kuqi, Besim Mehmeti, Sadik Mehmeti, Ajsen Metoshi, Ajni Sinani, Musa Vila, Agim Zogaj.

During the concluding meeting with the students (17.00-18.00) 16 students (from the classes 1, 2, 3 and 4) were present.

The Faculty of Islamic Studies in Prishtina (in the following abbreviated as ‘FIS’), established in 1992 by the Council of the Muslim Community, has been offering an undergraduate level program in Islamic Theology for the past two decades. In 2012, the Kosovo Accreditation Agency accredited the BA program of FIS for the period 2012-15, thus enabling the recognition of its BA degree by the University of Prishtina and other universities. With submitting the Self-Evaluation Report (in the following abbreviated as ‘SER’) in fall 2014 (which has been – besides the on-site visit – the main basis for the recommendations of the expert team) FIS has applied for (I) Institutional re-accreditation, (II) Re-accreditation of the BA ‘Islamic Theology’ and (III) Accreditation of the newly developed MA ‘Islamic Theology in the European Context’. These three applications will be dealt with in the order I-III in the following.

### ***General Remark Concerning the Final Version of the Draft Report***

The management of FIS has reacted to the recommendations of the expert team from 10 August 2015 in a remarkable speedy and comprehensive manner. FIS has submitted on 14 August the documents (itemized in the list of documents above as nos 8-10) implementing the experts' recommendations.

The specific and binding recommendations that were given for the BA "Islamic Theology" and the MA "Islamic Theology in the European Context" were completely implemented by FIS in the updated version of the SER from 14 August 2015. These specific and binding recommendations have thus been deleted from this final version of the report (they can of course be found in the draft report version from 10 August 2015).

FIS has also consented in its comments and response from 14 August 2015 to implement *(a)* the general and not binding recommendations at the end of part II (BA) and *(b)* the recommendations given after each chapter (chapters 1-9 in part I and chapters 1-5 in the parts II-III). Given the extremely short period between 10 August 2015 (submission of draft report) and 14 August 2015 (response by the management of FIS) not all of the recommendations can easily be implemented. In order to give a general idea which issues the expert team raised during the discussions with the management on 4 August and which points it deemed to be important, these recommendations are not deleted from the final report. The expert team does not want to imply by this that FIS has been unwilling to implement these recommendations, rather it wants to express once more its appreciation regarding the willingness of FIS to respond to the experts' recommendations.

## **Part I**

### **Faculty of Islamic Studies**

**Institutional Re-Accreditation is recommended.**

#### ***Introductory Remarks***

According to information transmitted verbally during the on-site visit at 4 August 2015 FIS still aims to be integrated into the institutional framework of the University of Prishtina. The prospects of FIS to become part of the University of Prishtina (in the following: 'UP') seem to be good, but, obviously, since the last meeting with an expert team in March 2014 there has been no visible progress. As far as the expert team was able to learn, the Council of the Islamic Community in Kosovo is supporting the integration of FIS into UP and there have been also signals from the side of UP to support such an integration. The management and the staff of FIS support this idea expecting an equalization with other study programs and faculties of UP, an increase of the number of students and an heightened visibility of FIS. In the same time FIS wants to preserve its present title and be organized as a separate faculty in UP. The expert team encourages the idea of FIS becoming part of the University of Prishtina: Problems of legal status of FIS will thus be solved and the construction will follow a general tendency at European universities to establish faculties of Islamic theology within universities.

The present SER is well-structured and is – concerning also the quality of the English translation – of good quality (and thus a clear improvement from the earlier one from fall 2013). It is advised though to pay in latter English versions of the SER more attention to a persistent terminology. Whereas the Faculty itself is labelled 'Faculty of Islamic Studies', the Bachelor Arts is registered under the label 'Islamic Theology'. The planned Master is announced as Master in 'Islamic Theology in the European Context'. To use the confusing term 'Islamic Studies' for the BA program itself (see for examples the pp. 7f, 22, 23, 108) or 'Islamic Theology' for the projected MA (p. 3) should be duly avoided. SER also uses often the term 'Islamic studies' in a general sense which is legitimate, but to a certain extent confusing. It is therefore suggested to give in the introduction of a later version of the English SER a clear definition of 'Islamic Studies' (in international use a term for designating studies *about* the religion of Islam) in contradistinction to 'Islamic Theology' (clearly a term designating studies from *within* the religion of Islam *about* the religion of Islam).

#### ***1 Mission Statement***

The mission statement in the SER announces that the mission of FIS is "to educate, train and prepare professional and scientific cadres for the needs of the Islamic Community, its educational institutions, public institutions and the Kosovar society as a whole, in the spirit of scientific principles and contemporary values of the Islamic studies" (p. 8). FIS very much stresses that it teaches Islamic studies *and* social sciences on an equal standing.

FIS also “aims to hire teaching staff with international scientific and academic qualifications in the country, and international staff during the academic year of 2014/2015” (p. 8). The discussion with the management during the on-site visit showed that FIS has great difficulties in hiring academic personnel being educated at West-European universities.

During the on-site visit the experts discussed with the management the question whether members of the academic staff may openly defy the aims laid down in the mission statement such as “tolerance, peace and multi-nationality and multi-confessionality” (p. 9).

→ *Recommendations:* Given the difficulties of attracting scholars from outside, in particular Western Europe, to institutions of higher education in Kosova the expert team does not wish to lay down here any binding obligations, but sees it of utmost importance that FIS will vigorously make the most of its effort to be successful in the aim to attract scholars from West-European universities to FIS, in the beginning at least as visiting scholars. The experts also stress that FIS has to be aware of the fact that the criteria of academic correctness may be in some cases more strict than the more general juridical criteria of being legally convicted.

The expert team is glad to learn that FIS has expressed in its comments from 14 August 2015 very clearly its intention to implement all of the recommendations given in the draft version.

## **2 Academic Freedom**

FIS is directly financed by the Council of the Muslim Community of Kosova. The management of FIS explained during the discussion with the expert team that this direct reliance on the Council of the Muslim Community does not affect academic freedom within the institution. The interviews with the teaching staff and the students did not give any hints whatsoever to a limitation of academic freedom (although neither teaching staff nor students tend to be very frank in the context of such interviews).

→ *Recommendations:* The expert team nevertheless recommends to establish an external advisory board. Such a step had already been recommended by earlier expert reports. In the tabular overview in the SER (pp. 131ff) how FIS reacted to the recommendations given by the experts in the reports of the years 2012-4, it is said that FIS has established a “board consisting of seven members, eminent professors and academics” (p. 137), but the graphical overview over the structure of FIS (p. 13) does not give any evidence that such a board has been indeed established.<sup>1</sup>

The experts are glad to learn that in the comments from 14 August 2015 on the experts’ draft report it is announced that “the management will implement this recommendation with the latest precision until the beginning of the academic year 2015/2016” (p. 1 of “Comments by the management of the Faculty of Islamic Studies on the experts’ draft report from 10 August 2015”).

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<sup>1</sup> In case that the SER might refer here to the Educational Scientific Council the experts would like to stress that the tasks of the council and an advisory board are functionally different.

### **3 Academic Programmes and Student Management**

FIS has since 2012 an accredited BA program in “Islamic Theology” with a considerable, though not too large number of students. Students therefore have the privilege of enjoying a positive environment with close and productive contacts to the teaching staff. Discussion with the students during the on-site visit left with the experts a very positive impression about a collegial and trustful atmosphere within FIS. Student management seems to be, given the rather small number of overall roughly 200 students, appropriate and efficient. In the SER it is mentioned on p. 111 that FIS “has allocated scholarships to 50 students” during the last three years. Obviously, these ‘scholarships’ are more a kind of donations for needy and in the same time successful students. During the meeting with the experts, the students were enthusiastic about the possibility to be sent for one term to universities in Turkey (Bursa; obviously to be now extended to other universities). As far as the experts were able to learn the management strives to integrate FIS into the Erasmus structures, but is still at the early stages of this venture.

→ *Recommendations:* The rather limited funds notwithstanding the expert team recommends a more regularized system of scholarships (clear and publicly announced criteria, defined amount of money etc.). The expert team also recommends to strive for finding possibilities (Erasmus and others) to send students (even in very small numbers) also to West-European universities. In a long-term perspective, FIS will have to find possibilities to send students for education at the MA and in particular doctoral level to West-European universities thus diversifying and strengthening its academic staff.<sup>2</sup>

The expert team is glad to learn that FIS has expressed in its comments from 14 August 2015 very clearly its intention to implement all of the recommendations given in the draft version.

### **4 Research**

Research seems to be one of the weaker point in the overall academic record of FIS. Teaching and research seem not tie in with each other productively. Of the research areas defined on the original version of the SER (pp. 125ff) four areas of research were given, (a) The role of religion in building peace in Kosovo, (b) Adolescent problems – delinquency, (c) Challenges of violence in the education system, (d) Domestic violence. Very obviously, only the first one overlapped to a certain extent with the expertise of the teaching staff at FIS. As the discussion during the on-site visit showed, the management of FIS obviously mixes up attempts to engage itself as an actor of civil society in Kosova (and as such contributing as an institution to improving societal conditions within Kosova) and down-to-earth research which must be related to the capabilities and also the overall mission statement of the institution. →

*Recommendations:* The expert team appreciates the replacement of the research areas (b) – (d) in the SER report from 2014 with the more appropriate research agendas in the updated SER report from 14 August 2015: (b) The right of freedom and belief, conscience and religion

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<sup>2</sup> Which is by the way stressed, at least as a declaration of intent, also in the SER: “Sending our young professionals for further professional enhancement.” (p. 11).

in the Republic of Kosovo, (c) Dialogue and religious tolerance in Kosovo multiethnic society, and (c) The role of Religious Communities in Kosovo in European integration. The expert team encourages FIS to develop research areas that are visionary, but in the same time compatible with the capabilities and interests of the academic staff.

### **5 International Cooperation**

FIS gives importance to international cooperation. Contacts to colleagues at universities in Western Europe and in the Islamic world exist, but – as enquiries of the expert team during the on-site visit showed – are still of a vague and often non-committal character. Besides the more stable relations to Turkish institutions (possibly owed to rather lavish funding from the Turkish side) cooperation with other institutions seem to be rather of an *ad hoc* character.<sup>3</sup>

Whereas the SER confesses FIS' commitment to extend knowledge of the major international academic languages, the discussion with the management and the staff on research issues showed that there should still be more awareness of the fact that without a good knowledge and use of English as the major academic language it is barely possible to relate to the international research community.

→ *Recommendations*: FIS should develop a clear agenda in what ways for what specific aims one would like to cooperate with which individual institutions and universities. In order to develop such a coherent strategy of internationalization the expert team may one again refer to the usefulness of an external advisory board that would increase the expertise of FIS in the field of international cooperation. It is also suggested to establish within FIS an "International Office" (even if in the beginning this would simply mean to attribute this function to one person among the full-time staff). FIS should also strive to create greater awareness among the staff and the students that a very good knowledge of major foreign languages, in particular English, is a condition sine qua non for visibility and acceptance in the international academic 'market'.

The expert team is glad to learn that FIS has expressed in its comments from 14 August 2015 very clearly its intention to implement all of the recommendations given in the draft version.

### **6 Staff**

The academic staff of FIS consists of 9 full-time staff (7 of these professors and two senior lecturers), 19 part-time and 2 visiting teachers. Teacher-student ratio is thus excellent and certainly surpasses other institutions of higher education in Kosova. The quantity of staff is

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<sup>3</sup> The information given on the cooperation partners are not persistent in the SER: p. 9f: Cooperation with the respective institutions in Sarajevo, Skopje, Bursa, Konya, Novi Pazar, Innsbruck for reasons of "comparison" in order to apply "positive trends in teaching methodology"; p. 22: In connection with the attempt for international harmonization were contacted amongst others Prof Yasar Aydin (Bursa) and Jorgen Nielsen (Copenhagen); p. 134f: FIS "has created cooperation relations with professors and various international institutions", such as Tübingen, Vienna, Innsbruck, universities in Turkey, Malaysia, Brunei "and with other Islamic countries of the world"; p. 135: FIS "has engaged professors and visitors from various universities", amongst others Prof. Dr. Adem Apak (Bursa) and Prof. Dr. Hajredin Hoxha (Qatar).

without doubt sufficient for teaching the already established four-year BA “Islamic Theology” and the projected one-year MA “Islamic Theology in the European Context”.

Of the 9 full-time staff members 2 have as Senior Lecturers no doctoral degree (Ismaili and Morina).<sup>4</sup> 3 staff members hold a doctoral degree from the University of Prishtina (Rexhepi, Vila, Qazimi), one has received his doctorate at the University of Sarajevo (Hamiti) and one each from universities in Malaysia, Lebanon and Tunisia respectively (Esati, Osmani, Abdullahu). Such a diversity of places of education at the doctoral level is productive and welcome. Yet given in particular the planned MA ‘Islamic Theology in the European Context’ and the necessity to connect closer with European universities a certain percentage of academics being educated at Western / West-European institutions would be highly welcome. On p. 8 of the SER the management of FIS expresses its intention to do so: “The Faculty of Islamic Studies aims to hire teaching staff with international scientific and academic qualifications in the country, and international staff during the academic year of 2014/2015.” The experts well understand that FIS however has great difficulties in hiring academic personnel being educated at West-European universities, given the difficulty of attracting scholars to institutions of higher education in Kosova.

→ *Recommendations:* It is recommended, as has already been done in earlier expert reports, to increase the number of female teachers, particularly among the full-time staff. Besa Ismaili is at the moment the only woman in this group and also an exception in the way that she is teaching only one obligatory course (English Language, Elementary), all other courses taught by her (also in the projected MA curriculum) being elective courses. It is also recommended to separate the functions of dean (or vice dean) from the functions of the responsible persons in the study programs (now Professor Fahrush Rexhepi combining the three functions of dean, head of the BA program and the projected MA program in one person). It is furthermore recommended that the management will strive to increase the salary of the staff members so that they will receive in the near future a salary commensurable to those being paid at the University of Prishtina (according to the information given to the experts is is at the present roughly one third lower). The management is advised to enquire into the distinctly lower level of work satisfaction amongst the administrative staff (see p. 117ff).

The expert team is glad to learn that FIS has expressed in its comments from 14 August 2015 very clearly its intention to implement all of the recommendations given in the draft version.

## ***7 Organization, Management and Planning***

Given the limited number of students and the easily manageable number of staff members, FIS seems to be at ease when it comes to the question of organization and management. The management mentioned during the on-site visit the project of digitalizing the administrative processes (in cooperation with UP). As no development plan was handed over to the expert they are not able to elaborate on this point.

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<sup>4</sup> It is by the way difficult to understand how both of the senior lecturers will be able to advance in their academic career while their daily administrative workload is at 5 respectively 7 hours daily (SER, p. 105)



→ *Recommendations:* In connection with the next SER the experts recommend that a full English version of a development plan will be submitted to the next expert team.

The expert team is glad to learn that FIS has expressed in its comments from 14 August 2015 very clearly its intention to implement all of the recommendations given in the draft version.

### **8 Finances and Infrastructure/Space and Equipment**

FIS disposes of a small budget, yet with a very significant increase from € 186.816 in the year 2013 to € 303.240,90 in the year 2014. Large investments such as the building of FIS seem to be financed by extraordinary donations. FIS disposes of a spacious building in the centre of Prishtina and proudly refers to the very good quality of the building and the equipment (pp. 10, 121). The expert team had during the on-site visit the impression that building and equipment serve very well the needs of FIS, its academic staff and its students. According to international standards the library is rather small,<sup>5</sup> but a good starting point for further extension.

→ *Recommendations:* In consonance with an increased use of academic books in West-European languages, particularly on Master level (see also the recommendations for the MA study program), it is recommended to pay attention to a systematic increase of research literature in English, French and German languages in the library of FIS.

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### **9 Quality Management**

The SER contains information regarding the aims of the proposed program, its curricula, procedures for assessment, quality assurance mechanisms and the details of the academic staff, together with the Faculty's finances and its cooperation with the relevant international higher education institutions. FIS also stresses the importance of questionnaires, submitted regularly to the academic staff, administrative staff and the students (p. 115ff), their results being meant to feed back into the improvement of curricula, working conditions etc.

FIS has established two internal positions for quality management, one responsible for assuring internal quality (held by Qemajl Morina), the other responsible for access and international cooperation (held by Besa Ismaili). Although the person responsible for assuring internal quality assurance was present during the meeting of the experts with the management only very little was to be learned beyond the information given in the SER.

→ *Recommendations:* FIS might still more strive to professionalize its internal structures of quality management. Also in this regard the establishment of an external advisory board would be helpful as it would be able to consult the management of FIS on issues of quality management.

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<sup>5</sup> According to p. 124 of the SER there is a total of 3,705 relevant books for the study programs, but obviously the overall total is over 10,000, see p. 10 of the experts' report from 2012.

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## **Part II**

### **Bachelor of Islamic Theology: Re-Accreditation is recommended**

#### ***Introductory Remarks***

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→ *Recommendations*: The rather limited funds notwithstanding the expert team recommends a more regularized system of scholarships (clear and publicly announced criteria, defined amount of money etc.). The expert team also recommends to strive for finding possibilities (Erasmus and others) to send students (even in very small numbers) also to West-European universities. In a long-term perspective, FIS will have to find possibilities to send students for

education at the MA and in particular doctoral level to West-European universities thus diversifying and strengthening its academic staff.<sup>6</sup>

The expert team is glad to learn that FIS has expressed in its comments from 14 August 2015 very clearly its intention to implement all of the recommendations given in the draft version.

## **2 Staff**

The academic staff of FIS consists of 9 full-time staff (7 of these professors and two senior lecturers), 19 part-time and 2 visiting teachers. Teacher-student ratio is thus excellent and certainly surpasses other institutions of higher education in Kosova. The quantity of staff is without doubt sufficient for teaching the already established four-year BA “Islamic Theology” and the projected one-year MA “Islamic Theology in the European Context”.

Of the 9 full-time staff members 2 have as Senior Lecturers no doctoral degree (Ismaili and Morina).<sup>7</sup> 3 staff members hold a doctoral degree from the University of Prishtina (Rexhepi, Vila, Qazimi), one has received his doctorate at the University of Sarajevo (Hamiti) and one each from universities in Malaysia, Lebanon and Tunisia respectively (Esati, Osmani, Abdullahu). Such a diversity of places of education at the doctoral level is productive and welcome. Yet given in particular the planned MA ‘Islamic Theology in the European Context’ and the necessity to connect closer with European universities a certain percentage of academics being educated at Western / West-European institutions would be highly welcome. On p. 8 of the SER the management of FIS expresses its intention to do so: “The Faculty of Islamic Studies aims to hire teaching staff with international scientific and academic qualifications in the country, and international staff during the academic year of 2014/2015.” The experts well understand that FIS however has great difficulties in hiring academic personnel being educated at West-European universities, given the difficulty of attracting scholars to institutions of higher education in Kosova.

→ *Recommendations*: It is recommended, as has already been done in earlier expert reports, to increase the number of female teachers, particularly among the full-time staff. Besa Ismaili is at the moment the only woman in this group and also an exception in the way that she is teaching only one obligatory course (English Language, Elementary), all other courses taught by her (also in the projected MA curriculum) being elective courses. It is also recommended to separate the functions of dean (or vice dean) from the functions of the responsible persons in the study programs (now Professor Fahrush Rexhepi combining the three functions of dean, head of the BA program and the projected MA program in one person). It is furthermore recommended that the management will strive to increase the salary of the staff members so that they will receive in the near future a salary commensurable to those being paid at the University of Prishtina (according to the information given to the experts is is at the present

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roughly one third lower). The management is advised to enquire into the distinctly lower level of work satisfaction amongst the administrative staff (see p. 117ff).

The expert team is glad to learn that FIS has expressed in its comments from 14 August 2015 very clearly its intention to implement all of the recommendations given in the draft version.

### **3 Research and International Cooperation**

Research is a weak point of FIS. Teaching and research do not seem to tie in with each other productively (see the discussion of this point in more detail in part I).

FIS gives importance to international cooperation. Contacts to colleagues at universities in Western Europe and in the Islamic world exist, but – as enquiries of the expert team during the on-site visit showed – are still of a vague and often non-committal character. Besides the more stable relations to Turkish institutions (possibly owed to rather lavish funding from the Turkish side) cooperation with other institutions seem to be rather of an *ad hoc* character.<sup>8</sup>

Whereas the SER confesses FIS' commitment to extend knowledge of the major international academic languages, the discussion with the management and the staff on research issues showed that there should still be more awareness of the fact that without a good knowledge and use of English as the major academic language it is barely possible to relate to the international research community.

→ *Recommendations:* Concerning the issue of international cooperation FIS should develop a clear agenda in what ways for what specific aims one would like to cooperate with which individual institutions and universities. In order to develop such a coherent strategy of internationalization the expert team may once again refer to the usefulness of an external advisory board that would increase the expertise of FIS in the field of international cooperation. It is also suggested to establish within FIS an "International Office" (even if in the beginning this would simply mean to attribute this function to one person among the full-time staff). FIS should also strive to create greater awareness among the staff and the students that a very good knowledge of major foreign languages, in particular English, is a condition *sine qua non* for visibility and acceptance in the international academic 'market'.

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### **4 Finances and Infrastructure/Space and Equipment**

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### ***5 Quality Management***

The SER contains information regarding the aims of the proposed program, its curricula, procedures for assessment, quality assurance mechanisms and the details of the academic staff, together with the Faculty's finances and its cooperation with the relevant international higher education institutions. FIS also stresses the importance of questionnaires, submitted regularly to the academic staff, administrative staff and the students (p. 115ff), their results being meant to feed back into the improvement of curricula, working conditions etc.

FIS has established two internal positions for quality management, one responsible for assuring internal quality (held by Qemajl Morina), the other responsible for access and international cooperation (held by Besa Ismaili). Although the person responsible for assuring internal quality assurance was present during the meeting of the experts with the management only very little was to be learned beyond the information given in the SER.

→ *Recommendations:* FIS might still more strive to professionalize its internal structures of quality management. Also in this regard the establishment of an external advisory board would be helpful as it would be able to consult the management of FIS on issues of quality management.

The expert team is glad to learn that FIS has expressed in its comments from 14 August 2015 very clearly its intention to implement all of the recommendations given in the draft version.

### ***General and not Binding Recommendations for the BA "Islamic Theology"***

In the following the expert enlist some points that they recommend for correction respectively insertion in later revisions of the current study programs. In order to allow for an unimpeded continuation of the work of FIS the experts have abstained from making these

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<sup>9</sup> According to p. 124 of the SER there is a total of 3,705 relevant books for the study programs, but obviously the overall total is over 10,000, see p. 10 of the experts' report from 2012.

points as binding recommendations and thus conditional for accreditation.

→ The expert team is aware of the fact that FIS is not the only institution that does not differentiate between various formats of teaching such as lecture, language exercises or seminars. Nevertheless they recommend to introduce such a clear differentiation for the future.

→ Curiously enough the obligatory courses Arabic 1-4 are spread over the terms 1, 3, 6 and 7. The management stressed the fact that Arabic is taught also as a living language and not only for reasons of access to written sources. Yet, even in this case (in case that Arabic were taught as kind of Latin) it would be helpful to place the Arabic courses in the first four terms of the BA program.

→ The experts recommend to introduce one course on *Tasavvuf* (Islamic mysticism) und *Ahlaq* (ethics) each in the BA curriculum (as an obligatory or elective course)

→ The course "Women and Society" (elective, 8<sup>th</sup> semester) should be relabeled as "Women in Muslim Society" with a corresponding re-writing of the course objectives and expected learning outcomes.

→ It is quite remarkable to see that FIS has already partially implemented its announcement that "in a near future, the FIS shall harmonize its Islamic Studies<sup>10</sup> program with Western countries", but then relegating all courses with a more 'secular' respectively social sciences contents to the status of elective courses. Thus, at least in the last two years of the BA the number of elective courses should be extended from 1 to 2 (thus 8 credit points from 30 to be obtained each semester) or social sciences courses should be made part of the obligatory curriculum.

The expert team is glad to learn that FIS has expressed in its comments from 14 August 2015 very clearly its intention to implement all of the recommendations given in the draft version.

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<sup>10</sup> Again is is not clear whether FIS refers here to Islamic Theology or more to 'Islamic studies' in the Anglo-American or 'Islamwissenschaft' in the German tradition.

### **Part III**

## **Master of Islamic Theology in the European Context: Accreditation is recommended**

### ***Introductory Remarks***

Since a couple of years FIS aims to offer an accredited Masters level study program in Islamic Theology mainly targeting the graduates from its BA in Islamic Theology. An expert group in 2013 came to conclusion not to recommend accreditation. The experts' report contained detailed recommendations concerning the central points for further improvement of the MA program. A revised version of the projected MA curriculum was submitted in fall 2013 and discussed with an expert team in March 2014. This latter expert team again deemed the revisions made as too superficial and with too many weak points and thus recommended not to accredit this MA program.

The present SER is well-structured and is – concerning also the quality of the English translation – of good quality (and thus a clear improvement from the earlier one from fall 2013). In particular, the section on the projected Master program has been completely reformulated. The projected Master of Arts “Islamic Theology in the European Context” has been modeled along the example of the one-year Master course “Islamische Theologie im europäischen Kontext”.<sup>11</sup> The effort made and the willingness to be open towards the expert teams' recommendations is clearly visible and has to be duly given appreciation.

It is advised though to pay in latter versions of the SER more attention to a persistent terminology. Whereas the Faculty itself is labelled ‘Faculty of Islamic Studies’, the Bachelor Arts is registered under the label ‘Islamic Theology’. The planned Master is announced as Master in ‘Islamic Theology in the European Context’. To use the confusing term ‘Islamic Studies’ for the BA program itself (see for examples the pp. 7f, 22, 23, 108) or ‘Islamic Theology’ for the projected MA (p. 3) should be duly avoided. SER also uses often the term ‘Islamic studies’ in a general sense which is legitimate, but to a certain extent confusing. It is therefore suggested to give in the introduction of a later version of the SER a clear definition of ‘Islamic Studies’ (in international use a term for designating studies *about* the religion of Islam) in contradistinction to ‘Islamic Theology’ (clearly a term designating studies from *within* the religion of Islam *about* the religion of Islam).

### ***1 Academic Programmes and Student Management***

The projected MA “Islamic Theology in the European Context” strives on the one hand to qualify students “for independent research at an advanced level and prepares them for further promotion” (p. 88), but in the same it is argued that the “primary aim of the Masters

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<sup>11</sup> See for more information: <http://www.uni-tuebingen.de/en/faculties/center-for-islamic-theology/studium/study-programmes/islamische-theologie-im-europaeischen-kontext-ma.html>



program 'Islamic Theology in the European Context' is to prepare students for the labor market (p. 89). FIS thus strives to implement a Master program that increases chances of employability (compared to the BA degree), but does also prepare students for academic research. Students are thus required to know another foreign language (English) good enough to use professional literature" (p. 92).

FIS has since 2012 an accredited BA program in "Islamic Theology" with a considerable, though not too large number of students. Students therefore have the privilege of enjoying a positive environment with close and productive contacts to the teaching staff. Discussion with the students during the on-site visit left with the experts a very positive impression about a collegial and trustful atmosphere within FIS. Student management seems to be, given the rather small number of overall roughly 200 students, appropriate and efficient. In the SER it is mentioned on p. 111 that FIS "has allocated scholarships to 50 students" during the last three years. Obviously, these 'scholarships' are more a kind of donations for needy and in the same time successful students. During the meeting with the experts, the students were enthusiastic about the possibility to be sent for one term to universities in Turkey (Bursa; obviously to be now extended to other universities). As far as the experts were able to learn the management strives to integrate FIS into the Erasmus structures, but is still at the early stages of this venture.

→ *Recommendations*: The rather limited funds notwithstanding the expert team recommends a more regularized system of scholarships (clear and publicly announced criteria, defined amount of money etc.). The expert team also recommends to strive for finding possibilities (Erasmus and others) to send students (even in very small numbers) also to West-European universities. In a long-term perspective, FIS will have to find possibilities to send students for education at the MA and in particular doctoral level to West-European universities thus diversifying and strengthening its academic staff.<sup>12</sup>

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## **2 Staff**

The academic staff of FIS consists of 9 full-time staff (7 of these professors and two senior lecturers), 19 part-time and 2 visiting teachers. Teacher-student ratio is thus excellent and certainly surpasses other institutions of higher education in Kosova. The quantity of staff is without doubt sufficient for teaching the already established four-year BA "Islamic Theology" and the projected one-year MA "Islamic Theology in the European Context".

Of the 9 full-time staff members 2 have as Senior Lecturers no doctoral degree (Ismaili and Morina).<sup>13</sup> 3 staff members hold a doctoral degree from the University of Prishtina (Rexhepi,

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<sup>12</sup> Which is by the way stressed, at least as a declaration of intent, also in the SER: "Sending our young professionals for further professional enhancement." (p. 11).

<sup>13</sup> It is by the way difficult to understand how both of the senior lecturers will be able to advance in their academic career while their daily administrative workload is at 5 respectively 7 hours daily (SER, p. 105)

Vila, Qazimi), one has received his doctorate at the University of Sarajevo (Hamiti) and one each from universities in Malaysia, Lebanon and Tunisia respectively (Esati, Osmani, Abdullahu). Such a diversity of places of education at the doctoral level is productive and welcome. Yet given in particular the planned MA 'Islamic Theology in the European Context' and the necessity to connect closer with European universities a certain percentage of academics being educated at Western / West-European institutions would be highly welcome. On p. 8 of the SER the management of FIS expresses its intention to do so: "The Faculty of Islamic Studies aims to hire teaching staff with international scientific and academic qualifications in the country, and international staff during the academic year of 2014/2015." The experts well understand that FIS however has great difficulties in hiring academic personnel being educated at West-European universities, given the difficulty of attracting scholars to institutions of higher education in Kosova.

→ *Recommendations*: It is recommended, as has already been done in earlier expert reports, to increase the number of female teachers, particularly among the full-time staff. Besa Ismaili is at the moment the only woman in this group and also an exception in the way that she is teaching only one obligatory course (English Language, Elementary), all other courses taught by her (also in the projected MA curriculum) being elective courses. It is also recommended to separate the functions of dean (or vice dean) from the functions of the responsible persons in the study programs (now Professor Fahrush Rexhepi combining the three functions of dean, head of the BA program and the projected MA program in one person). It is furthermore recommended that the management will strive to increase the salary of the staff members so that they will receive in the near future a salary commensurable to those being paid at the University of Prishtina (according to the information given to the experts is at the present roughly one third lower). The management is advised to enquire into the distinctly lower level of work satisfaction amongst the administrative staff (see p. 117ff).

The expert team is glad to learn that FIS has expressed in its comments from 14 August 2015 very clearly its intention to implement all of the recommendations given in the draft version.

### ***3 Research and International Cooperation***

Research is a weak point of FIS. Teaching and research do not seem to tie in with each other productively (see the discussion of this point in more detail in part I).

FIS gives importance to international cooperation. Contacts to colleagues at universities in Western Europe and in the Islamic world exist, but – as enquiries of the expert team during the on-site visit showed – are still of a vague and often non-committal character. Besides the more stable relations to Turkish institutions (possibly owed to rather lavish funding from the Turkish side) cooperation with other institutions seem to be rather of an *ad hoc* character.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> The information given on the cooperation partners are not persistent in the SER: p. 9f: Cooperation with the respective institutions in Sarajevo, Skopje, Bursa, Konya, Novi Pazar, Innsbruck for reasons of "comparison" in order to apply "positive trends in teaching methodology"; p. 22: In connection with the attempt for international harmonization were contacted amongst others Prof Yasar Aydin (Bursa) and Jorgen Nielsen (Copenhagen); p.

Whereas the SER confesses FIS' commitment to extend knowledge of the major international academic languages, the discussion with the management and the staff on research issues showed that there should still be more awareness of the fact that without a good knowledge and use of English as the major academic language it is barely possible to relate to the international research community.

→ *Recommendations:* Concerning the issue of international cooperation FIS should develop a clear agenda in what ways for what specific aims one would like to cooperate with which individual institutions and universities. In order to develop such a coherent strategy of internationalization the expert team may one again refer to the usefulness of an external advisory board that would increase the expertise of FIS in the field of international cooperation. It is also suggested to establish within FIS an "International Office" (even if in the beginning this would simply mean to attribute this function to one person among the full-time staff). FIS should also strive to create greater awareness among the staff and the students that a very good knowledge of major foreign languages, in particular English, is a condition sine qua non for visibility and acceptance in the international academic 'market'.

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#### ***4 Finances and Infrastructure/Space and Equipment***

FIS disposes of a small budget, yet with a very significant increase from € 186.816 in the year 2013 to € 303.240,90 in the year 2014. Large investments such as the building of FIS seem to be financed by extraordinary donations. FIS disposes of a spacious building in the centre of Prishtina and proudly refers to the very good quality of the building and the equipment (pp. 10, 121). The expert team had during the on-site visit the impression that building and equipment serve very well the needs of FIS, its academic staff and its students. According to international standards the library is rather small,<sup>15</sup> but a good starting point for further extension.

→ *Recommendations:* In consonance with an increased use of academic books in West-European languages, particularly on Master level (see also the recommendations for the MA study program), it is recommended to pay attention to a systematic increase of research literature in English, French and German languages in the library of FIS.

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#### ***5 Quality Management***

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134f: FIS "has created cooperation relations with professors and various international institutions", such as Tübingen, Vienna, Innsbruck, universities in Turkey, Malaysia, Brunei "and with other Islamic countries of the world"; p. 135: FIS "has engaged professors and visitors from various universities", amongst others Prof. Dr. Adem Apak (Bursa) and Prof. Dr. Hajredin Hoxha (Qatar).

<sup>15</sup> According to p. 124 of the SER there is a total of 3,705 relevant books for the study programs, but obviously the overall total is over 10,000, see p. 10 of the experts' report from 2012.

The SER contains information regarding the aims of the proposed program, its curricula, procedures for assessment, quality assurance mechanisms and the details of the academic staff, together with the Faculty's finances and its cooperation with the relevant international higher education institutions. FIS also stresses the importance of questionnaires, submitted regularly to the academic staff, administrative staff and the students (p. 115ff), their results being meant to feed back into the improvement of curricula, working conditions etc.

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