



Bologna Process and the Reform of Higher Education in Romania.

The Case of Romanian Private Universities, Constantin Brâncoveanu

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1. Introduction

Within the broad process of economic, social and human development an irreplaceable factor is a Europe of knowledge, an indispensable component needed in order to “consolidate and enrich the European citizenship, capable of giving its citizens the necessary competencies to face the challenges of the new millennium, together with an awareness of shared values and belonging to a common social and cultural space” (Bologna Declaration, June 19 1999).

The activity carried out by universities, education and education cooperation play a vital role in creating a stable, democratic society. As higher education is situated „at the crossroads of research, education and innovation, it is also the key to Europe’s competitiveness” (Bergen Conference, May 19-20 2005).

Bologna Process is a dimension of the undertaking of building the united Europe. It was initiated with the Sorbonne Declaration whose authors envisaged a continent where the “intellectual, cultural and social” dimension and “the Euro, the banks and the economy” dimension go side by side. The “intellectual, cultural and social dimensions have to a large extent been shaped by the universities, which continue to play a pivotal role for their development.”

European co-operation for ensuring education quality, curricular development, inter-

institutional co-operation, mobility schemes and integrated programmes of study, professional training and research, students' access to study and training opportunities, recognition of research, teaching and training activities carried out by teachers and researchers in the European context, without prejudicing their statutory rights, make up only some of the proposed objectives that require concentrated actions and efforts undertaken by every university in this geographical area.

In the future Europe created with the help of knowledge-based society and economy, continuous training, life-long learning are necessary in order to be able to face the challenges entailed by competitiveness and the use of new technologies and in order to improve social cohesion, equality of opportunity and generally the quality of life.

Therefore it is necessary to ensure the complementarity between the general framework of qualification in the EHEA-European Higher Education Area, which will be created by 2010 and the broad framework of qualifications proposed with respect to life-long learning, both regarding general education as well as vocational education, as developed within the European Union, but also by the countries engaged in the Bologna Process.

2. Romanian legislative and institutional framework related to the Bologna Process and aspects regarding the implementation of European provisions in the higher education field

Romania took important steps towards building the EHEA by means of reorganisation of the entire education system. The Declaration of the Higher Education National Conference enshrines the determination to underpin the objectives laid down in the conferences held in Bologna and Prague – 2001 and Berlin – 2003.

In June 2004, the Bologna Promoters Group – GBP was created with the help of the European Commission, through a Socrates grant. The group is composed of members of the teaching staff with extensive experience in higher education, rectors, deans, international relations officers selected by the Ministry of Education and Research based on the criteria of an equitable geographical representation of university centres. The Group includes three thematic workgroups that act in accordance with the priorities of the Bologna Process: quality assurance, education cycle system and recognition issues (ECTS and Diploma Supplement). The activities undertaken by the GPB consists of consultancy services provided to higher education institutions in order to modify the curriculum according to the requirements of the new three-cycle structure, of the dissemination of Bologna Process objectives emphasizing quality assurance and forms of mutual recognition, of the drafting of a detailed structure of the Diploma Supplement.

International cooperation in the research field was encouraged by the Line Ministry by means of dissemination of information regarding European research programmes. Romanian higher education institutions have been engaged in the SOCRATES and LEONARDO da VINCI programmes since 1997. During 2004-2006, the members of the teaching staff benefited from support within the mobility process given through a PHARE project of the Socrates Agency.

The reorganisation of the higher education national system considering the social dimension promoted by the Bologna Process was carried out on the basis of scholarships and grants and of subsidizing accommodation and meal costs, travelling and health services expenses.

The revised and supplemented Education Law no. 84/1995 sets forth the legal

background for adult education. It includes a special chapter dedicated to life-long learning. Government Resolution 129/2000 allows ministries, trading companies and other legal persons to carry out adult training. The very same law stipulated that adult education benefits from the possibility provided by organising institutions to make distance education and open education available by using modern communication technologies. These legal provisions are applied to all universities. Many universities in Romania have laid down study programmes that result in achieving either a Romanian or a foreign diploma on the basis of accreditation, in compliance with national procedures.

On the basis of Government Emergency Ordinance no.75/2005 on quality assurance, as amended and supplemented by provisions of Law no. 87/2006, the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education – ARACIS was set up following the consultation of all constituent elements of Romanian university community, it elaborated the External Assessment Methodology, standards, reference standards and the list of performance indicators for higher education.

The President of ARACIS, expressed a series of observations at the end of 2007 based on the assessment carried out and by referring to the Romanian higher education issues, he focused on education quality assurance; these observations had a negative impact as they pointed out:

- failure to pay the necessary attention to education standards and to concrete results within the education process;
- absence of a unitary examination procedure applied at the level of the

university, which leads to an increasing discontentment of the students; moreover, the student evaluation system is faulty;

- following the application of the Bologna Process the number of classes corresponding to certain subjects was reduced, while the volume of information required is still the same;
- maintenance in the university curriculum of subjects that are no longer of interest to the students who deem them as useless;
- the students want a change that they perceive as a must have;
- student expectations are not rendered by education and services offered by the universities; the conditions provided in Romania are considerably below the conditions provided in the European Union;
- low involvement of students in the institutional quality assurance processes;
- absence of a national framework and register of qualifications for higher education, consequently universities are compelled to offer several specialisations that in the end do not result in a qualification relevant to the labour market;
- fragile structure of the economic and business environment relations centre;
- absence of a monitoring strategy regarding the graduates' labour market integration;
- much of the contents of subjects studies while attending Master courses are similar to those studies while attending Bachelor courses;
- poor student training is the result of poor training in the undergraduate education, of the lack of motivation in learning, of poverty, of the high percentage of students that have jobs;
- little interest shown by universities with respect to the development of a dialogue with employers, in order to monitor the professional path of their graduates,

and with respect to the provision of career counselling in co-operation with state or private agencies.

3. Features of Romanian private education

The development strategy of Romanian higher education is based on strategic objectives elaborated at European level for the 2001-2010 period and on objectives and priorities elaborated by a host of bodies such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, the World Bank, UNESCO, UNICEF.

4. Currently in Romania there are:

- 56 accredited state higher education institutions (49 state civil higher education institution and 7 military universities);
- 32 accredited private higher education institutions;
- 24 accredited private higher education institutions authorised to function on a temporary basis;
- 6 postgraduate academic study establishments;
- 33 higher education institutions that function under liquidation conditions.

Romanian private higher education operates on the basis of Law 88/1994 on higher education institutions accreditation and the recognition of diplomas. Tuition fees corresponding to private education are set by each education establishment under the law. The material base must correspond to the standards required by a high quality instruction and education process: rooms adequate to the education process which are owned or leased, own laboratories, library with its own stock of books, according to the contents of the subjects listed in the curriculum.

In order to be granted the accreditation, the education establishment must produce the proof that during the temporary functioning it used at least 25% of income for investments in its own material base. Subsequent to the granting of accreditation, it must produce the proof that it owns 50% of the building.

According to a report drafted by the Ministry of Education and Research regarding Romanian education system, a spectacular increase of the number of students registered for the private higher education system was noticed during the 2005-2006 academic year; the number thereof increased by almost 31% compared with the numbers registered during the previous year. This boost was anticipated in the autumn of 2003, when, following a three-year continuous drop, the number of students admitted in private faculties began increasing again. On the whole, the total number of Romanian students has increased on a continuous and constant basis, by approximately 20% - 30% per year in the last seven years, currently exceeding 716 thousand. In fact, the increase of the total number of students experienced in the last year is due to the private faculties.

Constantin Brâncoveanu University is an institutionally accredited higher education institution, a private law legal entity of public service, organised on the basis of non-profit principles; it is an integral part of the national education system, residing in Pitești municipality, Argeș County, having faculties in Pitești, Brăila and Râmnicu Vâlcea municipalities. It is coordinated by and subordinated to the Ministry of Education and Research. It is self-financed and following its accreditation it became entitled to receive funds granted by the state.

Constantin Brâncoveanu University of Pitești was accredited by law in 2002, as it was a member of the first group of six private higher education institutions that benefited from acknowledgment, consequently becoming an integral part of the higher education national system.

The specialisations created within the university are the following: management, marketing, business administration, international affairs, accounting and business data processing, finance and banking, law, social communication, public relations and journalism, international relations and European studies, social assistance.

The number of students enrolled in the academic year 2007 – 2008 amounts to 7049 students, of which 5387 students attend day courses and 1662 pursue low attendance courses. Taking into account the number of students, Constantin Brâncoveanu University ranks among the largest universities in Romania.

Institutional management, structure, teaching and scientific research, administration and financing are ensured on the basis of university autonomy, guaranteed by the Constitution of Romania and by Law 84/1995.

Social dimension of the Bologna Process is also encountered in the Constantin Brâncoveanu University and it takes the form of scholarships, performance scholarships, social scholarships, support given while providing free training to its own employees.

Starting from the academic year 2005-2006, the university experienced an increasingly better dynamics **in terms of international relations** especially in terms

of relations established with universities abroad. Consequently, for the academic year 2006/2007, through the Department of International Relations, as part of the SOCRATES-ERASMUS European Programme, the university concluded a series of bilateral agreements with seven universities in the European Union State Members for the purpose of student and teaching staff mobility; these universities are the following: Jules Verne de Picardie University of Amiens, France, Instituto Politecnico Do Porto, Portugal, Tietgen Business College, Odense, Denmark, Institute of Applied Management, NOEA; Aalborg, Denmark, Plantijn Hogeschool Antwerp, Belgium, Letterkenny Institute of Technology, Ireland, Nowy Sacz School of Business-National-Louis University, Poland.

Another constant concern that is currently materialising through the positioning of the university within the local competition sphere is the *quality of teaching*. First of all, the quality of teaching was acknowledged by means of accreditation of the university as part of the first stage in which six universities were included. Pursuant to the Order of the Ministry of Education and Research 3928/2005, the mechanism of internal quality assurance was implemented in consequence of the recommendations outlined by the European Union.

For every faculty there is an organisational structure in charge of quality management, the *Quality Assurance and Assessment Commission*. Professors are assessed by the students and also by heads of departments. Each year institutional reports are drawn up concerning the internal assessment of quality assurance and they are submitted to the Line Ministry. The Quality Assurance and Assessment Commission also includes students.

With a view to guaranteeing student-focused education, in 2001 the university created a „*Career information and counselling Centre*” in charge of student guidance for the purpose of choosing the optimum education path according to the study fields or according to the cycle of university study and of adequate professional integration in the labour market. They benefit from counselling with a view to choosing the field of study.

Research activity is seen as an important lever used for the purpose of professional improvement, aiming at studying, knowing and pursuing economic processes in the Romanian society so that life and labour quality be improved, as well as the performances of trading companies and of public or private institutions in order to be able to face the increasingly stiffer competition taking into account the mondialisation and globalisation.

Constantin Brâncoveanu University was permanently concerned about the involvement of the teaching faculty and of the students in various activities developed in connection with the business, social, cultural and institutional environment.

It is worth mentioning the fact that both the students, as well as the teaching staff, actively participated in the events that the University has been hosting for the companies in the business environment, for public institutions, civil society organisations etc.

The results yielded by the scientific research activity may be analysed on the basis of information rendered in table no. 2

Indicators of scientific research performed by Constantin Brâncoveanu

University of Pitești

Table no. 2

No	Indicator	2005	2006	2007
1.	No. of grants/teaching staff member	-	0,049	0,15
2.	Research value/ teaching staff member	-	476,60 euro	1083,44 euro
3.	No. of scientific papers published in magazines, prestigious annals/ teaching staff member	0,39	0,43	0,6
4.	No. of scientific papers presented in international scientific meetings/teaching staff member	0,41	1,07	0,74
5.	No. of teaching staff members participating in international scientific meetings	56	80	62
6.	No. of completed doctoral theses	4	7	6

A brief analysis of the scientific research undertaken by Constantin Brâncoveanu

University of Pitești led to the following conclusions:

5. Strong points

- there are teaching staff members that are part of the Romanian Academy, faculty to whom various distinctions have been awarded, who have extensive expertise in the field of scientific research and who come from scientific research institutes;
- the teaching staff members are young, comprising professors and lecturers who began their activity in scientific research institutes, such as for example the Institute of World Economy;
- the scientific research carried out by the teaching staff focused mainly on ensuring the university book stocks necessary to the teaching process. Thus, Independența economică (Economic Independence) publishing house has printed over 200 university books for which 8 degrees were awarded by international fairs and exhibitions;
- under the guidance of the teaching staff, each year the students' scientific circles carry out their activity that ends with the annual faculty and university session;
- the teaching staff members are concerned about the scientific research activity and publish articles in specialised magazines;
- each year, the faculty of Constantin Brâncoveanu University participates in international scientific meetings organised inside and outside the country.

6. Weak points

- the number of articles published in CNCSIS and ISI quoted magazines is quite low, but currently an increase of concern shown by the teaching faculty in this respect is noticed ;
- the scientific research activity is organised only at the level of the university, while partnerships with other universities are few and far between ;

- the participations in international conferences organised abroad are limited from the point of view of their number and geographical area ;
- the number of CNCSIS contracts and grants is smaller than the number of contracts executed in connection with the business environment;
- at present the level of grant/research contracts awarded is satisfactory; contracts concluded in connection with the business environment, the local public administration have been executed.

Through quality programmes adopted and monitoring of the degree of implementation thereof by means of periodic assessments, Constantin Brâncoveanu University has in view the ability to face the competition posed by other universities, both at national level, as well as at European level. Pursuant to the provision of the Bologna Declaration, efforts are made with a view to drawing up criteria and methodologies within the context of quality assurance comparable with the ones in force in prestigious universities of Europe. This is the only way in which the value of issued diplomas may be recognized throughout the entire Europe, thus leading to the ability to face the competition posed by universities on the continent within the context of European unification.

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