

IMPORTANT CHALLENGES OF THE ROMANIAN HIGHER EDUCATION IN EUROPEAN CONTEXT DURING THE POST-COMMUNIST ERA

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Abstract

The objective of our paper is to highlight and analyse certain of the important challenges of the Romanian higher education in European context during the post-communist era, within the market economy, in the context of the transformations higher education has been suffering at European level during the last decade of the 20th Century, the first decade of the 21st Century and the beginning of the second decade of the 21st Century.

Key Words: challenges, higher education, Europe 2020 strategy, higher education quality, higher education internationalisation, higher education graduates, market economy

JEL Classification: I21, I23, I25, I29, J21, J24, J64

1. Introduction

Even in the modern times of market culture, teaching should contain all the components, in different proportions; by its nature, level and speciality, it should not be partial, simplistic or conducting young people to perceptions that could badly make them not human (non-superior) beings (Popovici and Jivan, 2012, pp. 39).

In his book “Democracy and education”, John Dewey proposes a philosophy of education, which places it among the great theories of education, next to Platon and Rousseau. His philosophy differs from the one of his outstanding predecessors from two points of view. On one hand, being a social philosophy, it is a philosophy of a democratic society, in which the individual inserts himself through the free game of his intelligence. Not of an individualist intelligence in the sense of “capricious” or “whimsical”, but in the experimental sense which implies putting to the public test his ideas. On the other hand, being a philosophy of nature, it is the philosophy of a nature reflected by science. “Democracy and education” is grounded on the principle of continuity: continuity of the human being and of nature, of the individual and of the group, of the child and of the adult, of the education and of the society. This continuity involves an interaction in which the terms are not distinguished in fact - except by abstraction – one from another. (Deledalle in Dewey, 2011, pp. 41).

An important motivation of individuals to invest in education is based on the idea according to which accumulated knowledge and competencies tend to lead to a growth in productivity and, implicitly, of the potential earnings. Another important reason for accumulating a high level of education is getting a higher stability on the labour market, which implicitly reduces the risk of unemployment. Educated workers have a higher rate of participation on the labour market, and the length of their active life is generally higher than in the case of the persons with a lower level of education (Popovici, 2011, pp. 194).

The human capital treatment as investment has generally imposed itself; the abilities human capital is composed of could practically be used anytime, in function of the social and economic environment, in which individuals could place themselves at a certain moment. More, this investment is continuous, aiming either the development (for instance, the training courses or continuous education), either the maintenance of the capital stock (for instance, periodical medical consultancies) (Cismaș and Popovici, 2009, pp. 57; Popovici, 2012, pp. 378).

Ștefan and Chivu (2011, pp. 611) show the very important influence of investment in human capital on the economic and social development of the country, as the building in Romania of a knowledge economy and society requires “a real social scale of values that involves education and training throughout life”.

The importance of education and health for the economic growth and development is due to the returns from investments in the two variables. These are two forms of human capital, the improvement of which should enhance worker’s productivity. Several studies show that better health, special early in life, is associated with higher educational attainment. Conti et al. (2010) argue that more educated individuals, in turn, have better health later in life and better market prospects. According to the authors, education has an important causal effect in explaining differences in many adult outcomes and health behaviours (Conti, Heckman and Urzua, 2010; Carlei et al., 2011, pp. 174; Popovici, 2012, pp. 378).

Educational capital presents itself in two different forms: on one hand, there are the abilities acquired as a result of participating at the formal educational systems, knowledge confirmed by diplomas; on the other hand, there are any other knowledge and abilities that have been acquired during the life time, by personal efforts or by contacts with experts in different fields finalized with knowledge gains as a result of assimilating the knowledge received by interaction with them (Popovici and Jivan, 2011, pp. 40).

2. The European Union's contribution to the modernisation of higher education. The “Europe 2020” strategy. The “Europe 2020” strategy and Romania

According to the European Commission's website: “The Europe 2020 strategy is about delivering growth that is: smart, through more effective investments in education, research and innovation; sustainable, thanks to a decisive move towards a low-carbon economy; and inclusive, with a strong emphasis on job creation and poverty reduction” (http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/europe-2020-in-a-nutshell/priorities/index_en.htm).

The European Commission is aware of universities' essential role to play in fulfilling “smart, sustainable and inclusive growth”, as the Europe 2020 Strategy requires, and of their need for a significant increase of the budget allocated for education, research and innovation. “... investment in higher education in the EU is 1.3 per cent of GDP on average, compared with 1.5 per cent in Japan and 2.7 per cent in the US” (The House of Lords, 2012, pp. 17).

The Europe 2020 strategy includes the target that, by 2020, at least 40% of 30-34-year-olds should complete third level education (http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/europe-2020-in-a-nutshell/targets/index_en.htm). In the same 27th Report of Session 2010–12 of The House of Lords (2012, pp. 17), it is mentioned that: “In 2009 the EU average was 32.3 per cent, which was up from 22.4 per cent in 2000. In the same year, the United Kingdom was already just above the target at 41.5 per cent. [The Europe 2020 strategy] estimates that, by 2020, 35 per cent of all jobs in the EU will require high-level qualifications but that only 26 per cent of the current workforce has those qualifications”.

The House of Lords (2012, pp. 18) reiterates its “support for the objectives of the Europe 2020 Strategy to achieve ‘smart, sustainable and inclusive growth’ [and believes] that the EU can add value in this area, and can support the EU's economic recovery”.

It also considers that, due to the increasing demand for higher-level skills, “higher education has a key role to play” and that the European Commission “should investigate the collection of further data linking higher education provision to employability in order to achieve a better match between university programmes and labour market demand, while recognising the more general benefits of studying for a degree for students and employers alike (The House of Lords, 2012, pp. 18)”.

A document elaborated by the European Commission in order to compare Member States' performances in one of the key areas of The Europe 2020 strategy, represented by higher education, highlights the existence of clusters of Member States (http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/pdf/themes/20_tertiary_education.pdf).

According to this document, in comparison to the group of countries composed of: Italy, Malta, Austria, Bulgaria, Germany and Greece, which perform below the EU average, the tertiary education attainment rates of the group of countries composed of: Romania, Hungary, the Czech Republic and Slovakia are “above the EU average, but ... still below the overall EU average”.

According to the same document, of all European Union, the group of countries composed of: “Slovakia, Portugal, Malta and the Czech Republic have the most progress to make to meet their national targets (more than 10 percentage points), although in some cases comparatively good progress has been made in recent years.”

3. Important challenges of the Romanian higher education in European context during the post-communist era

3.1. General features of the Romanian higher education after 1990

After 1990, the former very performing Romanian educational system became a problem, because of the diminishing standards and loosing position in international classifications. Its performance was not keeping with our doubtful economy; therefore market mechanisms won and they strongly entered in the Romanian educational system, diminishing its quality (Popovici and Jivan, 2011, pp. 42).

The House of Lords (2012: 5) shows that: “Since 1999, significant changes to European universities have occurred outside the EU framework as a result of the Bologna Process, which has seen the closer alignment of higher education systems across Europe. 47 European countries participate, including all 27 Member States.”

Romania signed the Bologna Declaration in 1999, which aimed to form until 2010 a unique European space in the higher education and research field (Popovici and Jivan, 2011, pp. 40). The decision factors declared their goal to harmonize education with the European Union educational systems. The alignment of the teaching system, with regard to its content and organisation, to the requirements of a society based on a market economy was also declared. The country's slow modernization being observed, an urgent solution to the problems caused by this reality was required. This could be through the professions provided by the educational system, through scientific research and through educational policies. Certain radical transformations were made; reorganizations were tested, the number of places in

schools and universities has increased, the admission system has been modified etc. Quality problems resulted from it, often replacing quality with quantity (Jivan et al., 2011, pp. 745).

All these reform measures have apparently had noble goals, but improper methods for the Romanian spirit and values, lacking the necessary coherence and the strategic thinking: exactly these goals have been altered, even turned towards market values, by models which are inappropriate for the educational system (Jivan et al., 2011, pp. 748).

But we must believe in our nation's future. Even if 90% of Romanian researchers had to reconvert their work, even if Romanian teaching system was embezzled by becoming more massive, and was reoriented on market goals and partly already devalued, even if Romanian physicists are "hunted" by the western powers etc., in despite of all this virtual "fight" against Romanian intellectuality, we will survive: in a worse way, but we will survive (Jivan et al., 2010, pp. 75).

Florea and Oprean, (2010, pp. 78-79) point out that, in the communist regime, "unemployment in Romania was to be eradicated and every high school or college graduate was to be guaranteed a job, hence the central government allocated slots based on predicted demand for given occupations. As a result of this restricted opportunity for admissions, competition became very intense at an early age...", while the same authors reveal that that all educational policies after 1989 tried to change the communist heritage "in view of preparing graduates for the tough(er), by all means, different emerging labour market of the 1990s" (Florea and Oprean, 2010, pp. 79).

3.2. The incompatibility between the Romanian thinking system and the Bologna education system

As highlighted in a previous study we made (Jivan et al., 2010, pp. 71), the opposition private versus state finds place in Romanian ideology and practice too; unfortunately, in the Romanian teaching system it proved as well sterile, as even destructive for the quality of education.

In the same study, we show that the passing to the Bologna system has represented a big transformation. Unfortunately, certain perverse effects have resulted, showing decisions as being inappropriate.

The roots of those effects are consistent with our soul and profound way of thinking. The Romanian thinking system is Latin and, like the Slavic one, it is rather deductive: from general to particular. On the solid basis of the principles inoculated by the education from an adequate school, individuals could make the particularization to diverse real cases; and Romanians proved a lot of success in the most different situations, on international level; including (and even mostly) in the West (Jivan et al., 2010, pp. 71).

The teaching system proposed in Europe at Bologna is mainly a copy of the Anglo-Saxon thinking system. This is contrary to the Latin one: it is inductive, from individual to general. The spirit of the European norms, values and requirements makes the confusion between its own (European) spirit and the American one: in fact, it has been tried to copy the American model, in the current Anglo-Saxon trend - with long-term effects which are comparable, by their magnitude, with another imposing of inappropriate models (e.g. the imposing of collectivization - of Soviet origin - in the Central European agriculture, although agriculture collectivization was improper to the model of this agriculture). The same happened with the Anglo-Saxon model in the European Latin education and thinking style (Jivan et al., 2010, pp. 71).

Therefore new (foreign) focus replaced our old European thinking, built on long term thinking, on investment, including the investment in intellect: the Anglo-Saxon way of thinking is focussed on goals (targets), mostly on short run goals. Such a (re)orientation on short term can lead, at least in our case, to the loss of causality. Moreover, it could lead to a narrow, purely economic or hedonistic, rationality of Anglo-Saxon type. And we should not generalize the performance of the Anglo-Saxon thinking (and teaching) system: we are not less valuable and, then, we should keep our analytical (causal) style, quite because this one is appropriate to us and we own it. We should not change it with a foreign one, which is inappropriate for us: it is exactly the reverse of our own thinking system (Jivan et al., 2010, pp. 71-72).

3.3. The education budget

Ștefan and Chivu (2011, pp. 606) consider that the share of the GDP spent on education is one of the most important indicators for the analysis of higher education.

According to the authors, if, during the communist era, the Romanian higher budgetary allocation represented the main source of financing public education, since 1999 the financing changes, passing "to a methodology for allocating budgetary allocations based on formula (quantitative component) based on the fundamental principle 'follows students resources' and in 2002 the quality component, permanently updated (Dincă and Damian, 1997 in Ștefan and Chivu, 2011, pp. 606).

They point out "that it is still necessary a substantial increase in funding for our higher education as well as, to integrate fully into the European Higher Education Area and to meet quality requirements and performance."

Because any institution of higher education should serve the society, Ștefan and Chivu (2011, pp. 607) underline the fact that a priority for any university should become "drawing on resources and their proper use through effective and efficient organization", in order to increase their international recognition, as well as their capacity to produce and disseminate knowledge, for contributing to economic growth and social welfare.

3.4. Private teaching institutions: connections with economic principles

As we have showed in a previous paper (Jivan et al., 2010, pp. 73), usually, in the functional market economies, the best people are the best paid. Having bigger financial power than the public institutions (based on the funds collected from the tax payers) and providing good wages, private teaching institutions gain the best teachers and have the most performing teaching tools. Image and fame of teaching institutions is consistent with this same hierarchy, in favour of the private ones).

In Romania, wages differences between private and state teaching institutions were not so big after 1989: they could not counteract the image; and this is plainly in the favour of those having tradition – the state ones. After 1989, private teaching institutes are too seldom big businesses. Most of them are organized at a university level, addressing to clients having already their own incomes, and less to those sustained by their parents. Those clients, businessmen themselves, thinking practically, materialistically, like in business, if they pay, they want to buy something “concrete”, material: such individuals, honest buyers on the market, cannot imagine giving money for watching some theoretical considerations of some “philosophers” university professors. They want to get a diploma, by their money: they do not think philosophically or at elevate intellectual principles level - that is what they are interested in, not knowledge itself.

This is our market: market works with priority to any supposed principles or imposed regulations: everything is sold and everything can be bought.

3.5. Internationalisation of the European and Romanian higher education

The House of Lords (2012, pp. 28) shows that, due to the global dimension of the higher education sector, to the supporting role of the European Commission in higher education policy and to the importance of the internationalisation process to the higher education sector, the establishing of a strategy in this area would be very welcome. It also considers that “any such strategy must identify, with full justification, those areas where the EU can add value to avoid duplicating the work already being carried out by universities and Member States. Areas where the EU could potentially add value include supporting mobility schemes and encouraging cooperation between European universities”.

Pociovălișteanu (2012, pp. 84) points out that “the lack of recognition of foreign certificates might slack the mobility since it can bind the students to start all over their studies or to tighten their perspectives of finding jobs once they return to their home country. UNESCO and OECD have established the guidelines for the Qualitative Dispositions in the Transborder Higher Education, requesting more transparency and international cooperation as mean of easing the international recognition of qualifications”.

Ștefan and Chivu (2011, pp. 610) highlight that the European Union bodies provide the national model of education, research and development and that the integration into international flows of the Romanian higher education “is based on the Lisbon Declaration (2000) and the Barcelona Declaration (2002), by the European Union has proposed to develop within a decade the most competitive knowledge-based economy. These documents include measures that show what are the main lines of action - vectors of the knowledge economy: information society, education and research”.

The House of Lords (2012, pp. 7) underlines the publishing by the European Commission of a communication entitled ‘*Supporting Growth and Jobs—an Agenda for the Modernisation of Europe’s Higher Education Systems*’, on the 20th of September 2011, “against the background of a funding squeeze on higher education across Europe”. In this document, the European Commission highlights its belief “... that the potential of European higher education institutions to contribute to Europe’s prosperity and society remains underexploited”, although “... responsibility for this area mainly rests with the Member States”.

In the 20th of September 2011 communication, the European Commission proposes to “strengthen synergies between EU and intergovernmental processes (mainly the Bologna Process) and support the internationalisation of higher education”.

The House of Lords (2012, pp. 27-28) also points out, on one hand, the EUA’s view on the European Commission’s proposal of an internationalisation strategy was that a “common European strategy would also lead to a better visibility of European higher education, study and funding programmes, thus benefitting all Member States and offering orientation in particular for those countries currently developing or revising their internationalisation strategies”. On the other hand, it underlines the reluctance of the national governments, which wanted to avoid the duplication by any strategy of “what was already happening through the Bologna Process”.

After January 2007, when Romania joined the European Union, connecting the Romanian education system to the European and international education system represents a process that became a necessity (Pițurcă and Popovici, 2011, pp. 310).

3.6. Romanian labour market, Romanian universities graduates’ number dynamics and graduate employment

Florea and Oprean (2010, pp. 81) state that in the last years higher education institutions must subordinate education and research to “the benefit of economy and society”. “However, the criteria for their assessment in this respect are uncertain, particularly because the research on the substance, teaching-learning processes and their impact on employment and work have been more successful in demystifying traditional concepts than in establishing a generally accepted knowledge of ‘good practices’, ‘quality’, etc.”

According to the European Commission's website: "The Europe 2020 strategy is about delivering growth that is: smart, through more effective investments in education, research and innovation; sustainable, thanks to a decisive move towards a low-carbon economy; and inclusive, with a strong emphasis on job creation and poverty reduction." (http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/europe-2020-in-a-nutshell/priorities/index_en.htm).

Herman (2010, pp. 163) considers that the decline in employment in Romania is mainly due to "the restructuring of the Romanian economy, the dissembling of economic and social reform elements, the errors of employment policies which were mainly passive and concerned more with recovering the effects than with removing the causes; all these, and many others, raised the risk of firing a large number of employees and created the conditions for increasing unemployment."

Employment rate among young people (15-24 years old) is much lower than that of the total population, because many young people are still included in the educational system and don't have a work place. On the other hand, the decrease in young people employment can also be determined by their migration abroad, the decrease in the birth rate and the black economy (Popovici, 2011, pp. 210-211).

Ștefan and Chivu (2011, pp. 607) show that: "Increased interest in higher education is determined by the existence of a higher degree of labour market absorption of highly skilled labor and a lower risk of unemployment for university graduates".

Herman and Dalalau (2011, pp. 343) point out the gravity of young people unemployment and underline the categories of young people who are the most affected by unemployment: "Within this group of unemployed people we usually find people who are not involved in training activities, graduates from high school, occupational schools, as well as graduates from university immediately after graduation."

Florea and Oprean (2010, pp. 80) also reveal that "graduate employment is being presently challenged to the core and two of the most frequently invoked underlying reasons are unadjusted curricula to job market demands, and graduate skills' failure to meet employers' requirements."

A previous study we made with regard to the dynamics of the Romanian universities graduates number in the 2005-2010 period, reveals (Popovici, 2011: 195-196) the doubling of the faculty graduates number, from 108,000 in the university year 2004/2005, to 214,000 in 2008/2009 (Fig. 1).

We can also notice that the number of women faculties' graduates has registered an increasing trend in 2004-2009. This phenomenon may be explained by the increase in the educational supply from the private and state universities and of increasing qualification requirements for obtaining a work place (Fig. 1).

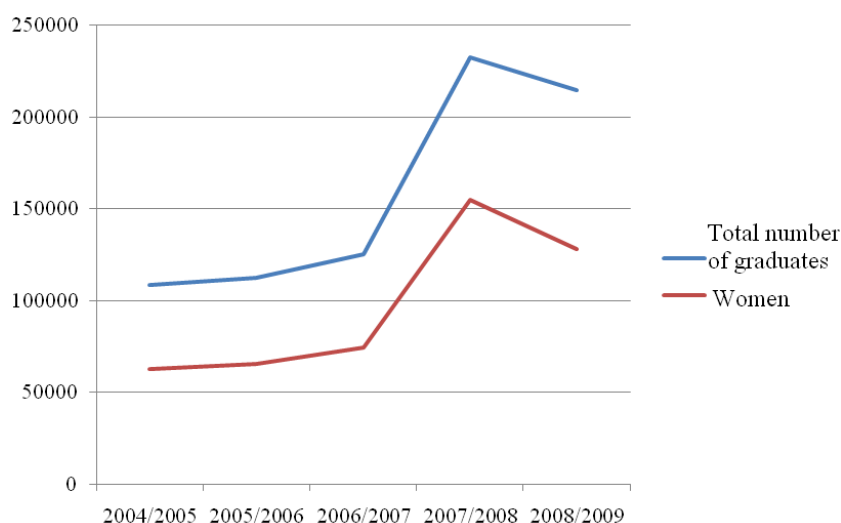


Figure 1. The Evolution of Graduates Number

Source: Made by the author based on *The Statistical Annuary of Romania*, 2010, pp. 247

According to the data supplied by the National Institute of Statistics, there is a decreasing trend with regard to the evolution of young population until 2025. This evolution may be explained by the decrease in the birth rate, the increase of the period and level of education, the social mobility, women's emancipation. Regarding young people's unemployment rate in Romania, it was of 22.1% in 2010, a little higher than the average unemployment rate in the European Union. This situation can be explained, on one hand, by the inexistence of a correspondence between the educational (too much theoretical) level and the requirements of the labour market, and, on the other hand, by the companies' desire to employ qualified labour force. The lower unemployment rate among young people with higher education, in comparison with other categories, as well as the fact that the smaller the necessary period for finding a work place, the higher the educational level is, brings an increasing importance to the diploma at the beginning of the career (Popovici, 2011: 194-195).

Ștefan and Chivu (2011, pp. 605) interpret that the increase in the number of graduates is a sign of our intellectual capital appreciation, which helps the transition of our country to the knowledge-based economy.

3.7. The quality of the Romanian higher education

As we underlined in a previous article: Pițurcă and Popovici (2011, pp. 309), the assurance of quality in the Romanian higher education is mandatory for producing very-well prepared graduates in the future and “a condition for the integration on the labour market of the national, European and international community.”

The quality of Romanian higher education, of Romanian education in general, must be related to the changes that have been occurring in the post-communist era in Romania, during the antagonistic passing from autocracy and a centralized economy to democracy and the market economy.

These changes have generated the need to assure the quality of Romanian higher education. This required the creation of an institution, authority to conduct the quality assessment process, which was to be independent from the ministry or another institution and to have European recognition. “Qualitative assessment of higher education needs to be multidimensional, to be achieved in stages, to be based on criteria, standards, minimum indicators for performance and reference. In this context, the accreditation of programs of university studies as the final step was to take an important place in quality assurance” (Pițurcă and Popovici, 2011, pp. 310).

The Law no. 88/1993 laid the foundation of the quality assurance process in the Romanian higher education and established the National Council for Academic Evaluation and Accreditation (N.C.A.E.A.). The Government Emergency Ordinance no. 75/2005 established the current institution: the Romanian Agency for Ensuring Quality in Higher Education (R.A.E.Q.H.A) (Pițurcă and Popovici, 2011, pp. 310-311).

According to its website, The Romanian Agency for Ensuring Quality in Higher Education (R.A.E.Q.H.A) is a full member of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education – ENQA and is listed in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education – EQAR (<http://www.aracis.ro>).

The quality of university education is one of the very important issues which have made the subject of debates in academic circles. The society, students, parents, government, who are benefiting from it, are interested in the quality of the educational act, but the academic staff, the provider of the quality of education, is interested in the quality of the educational act, as well (Pițurcă and Popovici, 2011, pp. 311).

The law set up the methodology of ensuring quality, the criteria, standards and reference standards, performance indicators, qualifications (Pițurcă and Popovici, 2011, pp. 312).

Accreditation is a multifunctional process that has been imposed in education, generated by the creation of private universities. This process characterizes only the post-communist era, not having existed ever before in our country, due to the inexistence of the private higher education in Romania prior to 1990. Accreditation in higher education is a final process, which aims at measuring the quality of the education of the higher education institution, based on criteria, standards and indicators. It leads to the modification of the status of specialization, faculty or institution, in this case the university (Pițurcă and Popovici, 2011, pp. 313).

Some of the main features of the quality of the Romanian higher education quality are (Pițurcă and Popovici, 2011, pp. 315):

- assuring and improving it should be a permanent objective of both the Ministry of Education and the higher education institutions, which provide higher education;
- It requires the existence of an institution, authority to conduct the quality assessment process, which was to be independent from the ministry or another institution and to have European recognition. This institution is R.A.E.Q.H.A., created by The Government Emergency Ordinance no. 75/2005;
- Accreditation in higher education is a final process, which aims at measuring the quality of the education of the higher education institution, based on criteria, standards and indicators;
- for contributing to the progress of the Romanian society, there should be no discrimination in the higher education quality assurance process;
- the assurance of quality in the Romanian higher education is mandatory for producing very-well prepared graduates in the future and a condition for the integration on the labour market of the national, European and international community;
- the indicator represented by the integration on the labour market of higher education graduates within a period of eighteen months should receive a special attention, as it indicates the quality of education, the correlation between the quality of education and the labour market.

4. Conclusions

In this paper, we have highlighted and analysed certain of the important challenges of the Romanian higher education in European context during the post-communist era, within the market economy, in the context of the transformations higher education has been suffering at European level during the last decade of the 20th Century, the first decade of the 21st Century and the beginning of the second decade of the 21st Century.

All the challenges of the Romanian higher education in the post-communist era have been generated by the changes that have been occurring in the post-communist era in our country, during the antagonistic shift from autocracy and a centralized economy to democracy and the market economy and by the transformations the European Union's higher education has been suffering across time. At their turn, these transformations have been triggered by the trends and transformations which have been occurring in higher education at international level, within the competition between the European Union, Japan and the United States.

Romania signed the *Bologna Declaration* in 1999, which aimed to align higher education systems across Europe until 2010.

We show that the shift to the *Bologna system* has represented a big transformation. Unfortunately, certain perverse effects have resulted, showing decisions as being inappropriate.

Radical transformations were made, the number of places in universities has increased, etc., but quality problems resulted from it, often replacing quality with quantity.

All the reform measures have had *noble goals, but improper methods for the Romanian spirit and values*, lacking the necessary coherence and the strategic thinking. The consequence was that exactly *these goals have been altered, even turned towards market values, by models which are inappropriate for the educational system*.

The roots of the perverse effects resulting from the shift to the *Bologna system* are consistent with our soul and profound way of thinking. So, the *Romanian thinking system is Latin* and, like the Slavic one, it is rather *deductive: from general to particular*, while the *teaching system proposed by the Bologna process is basically a copy of the Anglo-Saxon thinking system, which is inductive, starting from individual and going to general, contrary to the Latin one*.

The *Europe 2020 strategy* aims at achieving a growth which is *smart, but also smart, sustainable and inclusive, through more effective investments in education, research and innovation*.

The *European Commission* published on the 20th of September 2011 a communication entitled: “Supporting Growth and Jobs - an Agenda for the Modernisation of Europe's Higher Education Systems”, which proposes to support the *Bologna Process and the internationalisation of higher education*.

Since January 2007, when Romania joined the *European Union, connecting the Romanian education system and especially the Romanian higher education system to the European and international education system, in general, and higher education system, in particular, has represented a process that has become a necessity*.

The *European Commission* is aware of universities' essential role to play in fulfilling a *smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, as the Europe 2020 Strategy requires, and of their need for a significant increase of the budget allocated for education, research and innovation*, because investment in higher education in the *European Union* as percentage of the *Gross Domestic Product (GDP)*, on average, is lower than in *Japan and the United States*.

The share of the *GDP* allocated to higher education is extremely important. Therefore, a *priority for the Romanian higher education institutions should be to benefit from increased investment as percentage of GDP in order to increase their international recognition, as well as their capacity to produce and disseminate knowledge, for contributing to economic growth and social welfare*.

The *university graduates number* has significantly increased in the first decade of the 21st century, due to the lower unemployment rate for higher education graduates and the appreciation of the intellectual capital in our country.

The quality assurance in the Romanian higher education is mandatory for producing very-well prepared graduates in the future. Assuring and improving it should be a permanent objective of both the Ministry of Education and the higher education institutions, which provide higher education. It requires the existence of an institution, authority to conduct the quality assessment process, which was to be independent from the ministry or another institution and to have European recognition. This institution is the *Romanian Agency for Ensuring Quality in Higher Education*, created by The Government Emergency Ordinance no. 75/2005.

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