

Higher Education in Romania Compared to Other Signatories of the Bologna Reform

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Abstract

The essential motivational purpose, primary to the writing of this study, is to deliver the conceptual framework of higher education in Romania and elsewhere. The approach of this educational stage should not marginalize the early stages, otherwise very important for education. Regarding the description of other higher education systems, the selection of signatories to the Bologna Reform was made randomly, based on available specialist material. The paper largely describes the acceptable conditions for accession to higher education in Romania and the states used as examples. In its penultimate point, the current research brings as a contribution the implementation and effects of the Bologna reforms in the initial training of teachers in the education systems of the signatories previously mentioned, as a comparative approach. The conclusions put an end to this paper with the expectation that it has managed to describe the approachable higher education.

Keywords: *system, higher education, Bologna Reform, allowable conditions.*

1. Introduction

The educational system is the main constituent of the institutional system of education, including specific institutions, which accomplishes educational goals through management focused on the coordination of formal and non-formal influences. In the narrow sense, the education system comprises the paradigme of schooling institutions, on which runs the specific educational process, with a priority to pupils that are between 3 and 18 years, but with openings to permanent education. The education system has a national and historical character, in other words, it evolves and develops in relation to the development of physical and cultural specificities of each country. The education system ensures to solve one of the most difficult and important social and human issues: education and training of the young generation, the labor force and the professionals (Eși, 2011,). Therefore, naturally, the German philosopher Immanuel Kant argued that: "the greatest and most difficult problem to which man can devote himself is the problem of education".

The functions of education system are:

- a) Cultural – training for assimilation and development of cultural values;
- b) Social – training for free incorporation into the social activities and social life, leading to the development of contemporary social characteristics;

- c) Economical – training, developing the personality of the educated one, trained in an equitable way, concordant, according to his distinct particularities, at his own and social expectations point.

The education system include:

- a) An input stream which is composed of human and material resources, namely: the teaching staff, pupils, students, school buildings and facilities, material and technical facilities and money funds;
- b) The educational process which employs the full set of resources, in order to achieve the educational objectives, in this way combining three educational functions that are essential: teaching, learning and evaluation;
- c) An output stream representing the system`s product, persons which are: educated, trained, equipped with the skills and attitudes provided by the collective demand for education.

The national education system includes the following levels:

- a) *Pre-school education (kindergarten)*: junior, middle group, large group and preparatory school;
- b) *Primary education*: classes from I to IV.

Secondary education, which contains:

- a) *Lower secondary education*, divided in two succeeding cycles: gymnasium, grades from V to VIII, and the lower high school or arts and crafts classes: classes from IX to X;
- b) *Upper secondary education*: the secondary education cycle of high school, classes of high school XI-XII / XIII. Preceded, where appropriate, with the year of completion;
- c) *Post-secondary education (post-high school)*;
- d) *Higher education (superior)*: university and postgraduate education.

The specifics of various levels of structure:

- a) *Primary education* - focused on acquiring general knowledge of instrumental account (acquiring the skills of writing, reading, calculus, introduction to specific languages);
- b) Lower secondary education – acquiring basic general knowledge (fundamental knowledge of the main fields of knowledge);
- c) *Upper secondary education/high school* - general knowledge orientation to specific areas of knowledge (science, social sciences, technology, economics), with an opening towards the optional courses in a specialist field of study;
- d) *Vocational education* - coordination to acquire qualified knowledge necessary to practice a particular profession;
- e) *Higher education /university* - focused on deepening of specialized theoretical and practical knowledge in a particular field.

In any country higher education is the moment of truth for its entire society. Therefore, I must mention that this paper will only deal with a part of the education system, namely higher education, without trying a minimization to the importance of others.

2. The frame of higher education system in Romania

Education is what supports us and it enables us the opportunity to go beyond what life teaches us, and also enables us to know things and places that may, at first glance, seem inaccessible. The establishment of the European Higher Education Area in which education systems and diplomas are synchronized is the main aim of the Bologna reform, which was signed in June 1999 by the European ministers who dealt with education. Creating a common European area for higher education is very important when we consider the opportunity to study, to work or to live in another country, other than the native, thereby ensuring ourselves a common space for a continuous development and cultivation.

We can never work in a foreign country where the education system is totally different from our country or if diplomas are not recognized in the country where we want to go. There are, of course, previously to the implementation of the Bologna Reform, a possibility of recognizing the diplomas, but this depended very much on the country and the university, of agreements made by those countries with Romania. It is now much easier, because through the Bologna reform a new European university system was formed, allowing all students to have access to mobility because diplomas are common and the education system becomes a uniform one. European Higher Education Area has developed quite a lot lately, which can only make us pleased, considering the number of students who took advantage of this new cultural dimension. In recent years, our country has greatly increased the number of people who enroll in an institution of higher education, in order to subsequently get its benefits in terms of the labor market. Increased demand from students automatically led to an increase in universities, thus leading to a presence of private education in the Romanian education market. All this led to a large competition among universities, which triggered an economic development for some institutions.

But the Bologna Reform was referring not only to the internal competitiveness, but more on a global scale, so as to reach a uniform and unique education system which would lead to a further competitive development, for both students and educational institutions. Education symbolizes a portion of what we are today, beginning with our culture. It is therefore important to know how to organize it, to make sure it will not turn into failure. The Bologna Reform pointed very important outlines, but now it depends on each of us to know how to apply them. Each student has the opportunity to choose their field of study and a university in which he wishes to study in. There is no longer an obstacle to study abroad, but regardless of your choice a set of principles established by the reform must be followed. This option of choice involves a development of our society in which we live in, because mobility means change, it means improvement, it means new. This "new" or a rather desire to learn additional things and discover new cultures, to be in contact with them, always in search for things, proves that we are a nation that wants go beyond the country's borders for a continues both material and spiritual development.

The fact that a Romanian student has the opportunity to learn a portion of his studies or to continue them in another country is a plus for the entire Romanian society. It is a recognition of his personal merits and national merits, because we must not forget that behind all these statements signed between states stands the interest for national development. The fact that a following the education reform it was decided that university studies must be structured differently from the old system, as follows:

- a) *Undergraduate studies/Bachelor studies*, lasting 3 or 4 years: minimum 180 and maximum 240 credits (medicine or architecture studies are exempted from this rule). To obtain a bachelor degree 180 credits are required for most majors. Bachelor studies will provide broad qualifications, on fields of study. The graduates of this cycle can enter the labor market or can continue their studies through the master's degree studies. This system will enable quick resolution in the shortage of skilled labor in rural and disadvantaged areas.
- b) *Master's Degree studies*, lasting 1-2 years, and a minimum of 60 credits and a maximum of 120 credits. The minimum cumulated period of the cycle - I (undergraduate/bachelor) and second cycle II (master) will be 300 transferable credits (ECTS). Academic detailed qualifications (specialties/majors) will be placed at the master's level, eliminating the current fragmentation existing at undergraduate studies level with numerous specialties, contracted and too early.
- c) Doctoral studies with a length of 3 years. Gradual transition from the current system based on individual coaching of PhD students to the doctoral schools system and their development. Romania is among the first countries that signed the Bologna Process. Thus, Romania is participating in the Bologna Process right from the initial starting of this process, the signing of the Bologna Declaration in 1999. From then until now, Romania has voluntarily assumed aligning its higher education policies with objectives and policies promoted by the Bologna Process. As a result, the higher education system in Romania has undergone a series of fundamental changes, through making a compatible legislation, promoting national public policies, the founding of new institutional structures, regulations and policies at universities.

Overall, in the ministerial announcements can be found a number of essential principles intended to define the nature of the Bologna Process, and that by accepting / signature by the Romanian representatives of those releases have gained a worth of national commitments.

These principles can be identified by reading press releases and refer to the following:

- a) Inter-governmental cooperation;
- b) Cooperation with non-governmental structures at European level;
- c) Full assumption of the reforms generated by the Bologna Process at both national and institutional level;
- d) Aligning national practices with the objectives and policies of EHEA;
- e) Insertion of teachers and students in applying the Bologna Process and the development/strengthening of EHEA.

The social awareness of education: access, participation and completion of studies.

The concrete objectives that Romania has taken in the Bologna Process over time regarding the participation and access are:

- a) Establishing quantifiable targets to enlarge the access to higher education and take appropriate measures for achieving those objectives;
- b) Increase graduation rates and time cover of studies in higher education;
- c) Increasing the participation of underrepresented groups in higher education;

- d) Providing the Bologna Follow-Up Group (BFUG) national strategies, action plans and measures to evaluate the effectiveness.

3. The higher education system in the European Union

ECTS – The European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System - was created in the late 80`s in order to facilitate the movement of students from one university to another. The EU encourages the study periods at partner universities. It is the opportunity for students to learn for a semester or an academic year in another European university and will then return to his university, where they can finish their studies and where, upon graduation, receive a diploma. In this way, the student benefits from continuity of studies, while he has access to educational vision, a new academic, cultural, social and linguistic environment. This is the type of student mobility within the Socrates-Erasmus program. But there are also obstacles in their path. In recent centuries, an important power of progress was the independence of universities. On an academic level, it also meant different evolution from one university to another or from one schooling system to an alternative of specialization, of plans and curricula, of rating systems and rating traditions, academic calendars, etc. Each of these differences create barriers in the communicational approach between universities through student mobility. The return to his home university often means difficulties in synchronization (different periods of start/end of the semester) and difficulties on the recognition of performance made by the student in the associated university - the latter being the most difficult to overcome. It was the framework in which ECTS design was initiated.

Implementation of the ECTS system.

Synchronization of education in Europe is a necessary clause in order to improve exchanges between higher education institutions. Thus to ensure implementation of this new system, at a European level, the Bologna Declaration was a necessity in order to find a common ground between different institutions of higher education. This way the ECTS system has implemented, with the purpose to promote recognition of studies done abroad, new tools such as marks/grades and credits. Although it had been used in programs such as Erasmus, Bologna has made it to become a European identity. In fact, each European institution belonging to the countries that joined in, this process will need to reform the system by incorporating the use of ECTS credits for foreign students and for any non-mobile students.

System`s methodology is based on three concepts: (a) Informing students about the study courses of universities; (b) Mutual agreement between the student, the institution he is visiting and the main institution; (c) The use of credit as a common point for this project.

In fact, the methodology has three key elements: the educational program, the learning agreement, otherwise known as your application, and the report card. Countries that have adopted the Bologna reform were numerous, and together wish to improve the European education system. Each of the participating countries have attempted to reform the education system and fold it to the principles established in Bologna. In some countries the system was easier to implement because the two systems, both the new and the "old" found some common points. On the other hand, we must remember that when they accepted this challenge, each had pursued the goal of reform: a European education, unique and which functions under the same criteria. We all know that it's hard to change something with which we are accustomed, but on the other hand it's worthy to do what we can when the ultimate goal is an advantageous one. The general principles of reform have been

implemented in almost all countries. But in order to highlight the differences, I propose to analyze a group of countries inside the European Union as an example.

France

The admission to higher education in France is very similar to the Romanian one. High school ends in the twelfth year of study with a Baccalaureate diploma (different from the Romanian one, but equivalent).

The university system is organized uniformly according to the Bologna process:

- a) 3 years of undergraduate education - Bachelor Degree;
- b) 2 years master`s education - master's degree;
- c) 3 years doctoral education - PhD.

French higher education diplomas are structured according to the Common European organization - LMD shown above - which take into account, in order to award a diploma the validated years or semesters of study, beginning from the admission in higher education and the correspondence between them and ECTS credits:

- a) Bachelor = 6 semesters = 180 ECTS (Baccalaureate + 3 years);
- b) Master = 10 semesters = 300 ECTS (Baccalaureate + 5 years);
- c) PhD = 16 semesters (Baccalaureate + 8 years).

The French higher education system is characterized by the coexistence of two sectors, the selection and non-selective.

The first cycle of higher education, 2 years long, is founded on the principle of non-selection, in the idea that any young man who passed the general baccalaureate is entitled to enter the desired university.

The second cycle, which corresponds to the Bac + 3 years (License/Bachelor) and Bac + 4 years (Maitrise) is especially for university pathways. It is possible that the second cycle can be followed after the succeeding of the first cycle, through obtaining a general university degree (Bachelor of General Studies - BGS), after obtaining a UDT (university diploma of technology), and fewer cases of a BTS (technician brevet).

The third cycle is symbolized by the Bac + 5 years, two types of diploma: the first is DESS (specialized higher education diploma) and the second one is DEA (Postgraduate Diploma).

Unlike other European education systems, the advantage of the French system is that national diplomas are delivered at the end of each school year (Bac + 2, Bac + 3, Bac + 4, Bac + 5).

Germany

In education, Germany has recently made numerous changes in order to adapt to international requirements. In Germany the structure of the education system is different from that of the other EU countries because here Länder are responsible with structuring, accreditation and recognition of educational institutions. Because of increased competitiveness in the education system throughout

the European area, Germany took measures onto the education system, and particularly on its quality.

They have also formed specialized organizations aimed mainly in education quality monitoring, a continuous evaluation of both teachers and students, to ensure that education remains a center of interest for students. This continuous concern for quality has led, in the year 1998, to a national project on quality management, which stipulated the creation of a network of experts and experienced teachers and the unification of organizations specialized in the quality of higher education which operate at a regional level.

Those who want to study in Germany have the possibility to choose between several forms of higher education. such as universities on the one hand and technical universities and colleges on the other hand, which are based on the assimilation of materials from a practical and less theoretical point of view, the so-called Fachhochschulen. If the first two types of faculties are found everywhere in Europe, as for the Fachhochschulen, they are more a particularity of the German university system. Study in a Fachhoschule is divided into two parts.

- a) Grundstudium - basic theoretical training;
- b) Hauptstudium - specialization and practice.

The first step before applying for admission to one of the faculties in Germany, is to ask for the Diploma Supplement, which Romania has introduced it since 2005, which is centered on the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS), with the 60 credits corresponding to one year of study. This diploma supplement is recognized throughout the European Union and may be written in English, German and French. But those who have graduated several years ago and want to continue masters or doctoral studies in Germany, can apply for a Diploma Supplement to the university who have finalized in, but also with another graduation diploma, where notes can be equated with transferable credits. The German grading system is different from the Romanian one. Such differences were prominent across Europe, which is why for a greater transparency in terms of grading, the European grading system was developed. German grading system comprises grades from 1 (high) to 5 (insufficient). Regarding the Bologna reform, we can say that in Germany the number of students attending a master immediately after qualifying as bachelors has increased. However, it is very important that there is a correlation between the new education system and the labor market, as this could be a real problem in the complete implementation of the new education system. Germany, similar to other countries that have signed the declaration, enjoys the advantages it offers: student mobility and the opportunity to study at universities abroad.

Italy

University level studies in Italy is recognized throughout Europe and the rest of the world for its high specialization and competitiveness. We are talking about the country with the oldest university in Western Europe, namely the University of Bologna. It is the place of birth for the new university system that applies in Europe, which bears his name - the Bologna system. With no fewer than 58 state universities, 17 private universities, 3 technical universities and 12 specialized institutes, Italy is a top option, especially for those who want to benefit from quality education and a quite generous funding. Furthermore, the internationalization of their education systems has paid off, currently with two institutions that are dedicated to foreign students. Similar to Romania, education in Italy is based on the Bologna system. Thus, higher education is structured on three levels - bachelor, master

and doctorate. A limited number of masters ("Laurea Specialistica / Magistrale") have as an access condition the high school diploma and an entrance test, therefore making the bachelor's degree not necessary. Such masters are in fields of study such as medicine, veterinary medicine, dentistry, pharmacy or architecture. The length of these studies is more than an ordinary master, taking 5 to 6 years, depending on the field of study. Italian university system held, in 2001-2002, a reform that treat one of the major problems of the Italian system: late age for completing university studies was 26-27 years, and was more advanced than that of other European students. Were thus redefined types of diplomas, different classes (final diploma attesting the accomplishment of complete or a portion of the university education), and general regulation of credit. In addition to this problem, Italy is considering, like all other countries, quality assurance in the national education system. Thereby, in 1999 CNVSU was established, being responsible for quality assurance in higher education. The committee has published documents and proposals for the national university quality assessment. The national quality assurance system includes a system of accreditation and certification or similar procedures. Italian legislation allows universities to provide academic qualifications. Both ministerial decrees (509/99 and 270/04), referring to the reform of academic studies, establish that universities in Italy may grant diplomas together with foreign universities. The rules governing the procedure for granting final qualification are internal regulations of each university, and are clarified through inter-university agreements.

Belgium

As we all know, Belgium is made up of two communities: the Flemish and the French. Although the two communities have their own management system, application system of higher education is common to both. In Belgium, compulsory education lasts until the age of 18. The education system is divided into four levels: nursery: from 2.5 to 6 years (not compulsory); primary education: from 6 to 12 years (compulsory), secondary education from 12 to 18 years (compulsory); higher education: 18 years + (not compulsory). Higher education is open to young people who have successfully completed the general or technical cycle of secondary education. Belgian colleges and universities offer students a wide range of options. The Bologna Declaration has led to a radical overhaul of the higher education system in Belgium. Signed by the European Ministers of Education in 1999, the statement was intended to harmonize higher education in the European Union. This resulted in Belgium to a differentiation between bachelor's degree (general education lasting three years) and master's degree (a specialized course which lasts between 1-2 years). The results are measured in ECTS credits, bachelor estimated at 180 ECTS credits, while a master's degree is rated in between 60 and 120 ECTS. Within this system, 1 ECTS credit means 24 hours of study. French and Flemish communities have taken all necessary measures for the integration of Belgian education into the European higher education.

Another problem is the deepening of competitiveness in higher education institutions by adopting the funding. Higher education institutions in the French Community of Belgium belong to one of the three systems, depending on the type of competent authority:

- a) The French Community system (French Community is the competent authority);
- b) The subsidized official system (The competent authority are the municipality, associations, provinces or any legal entity operating under public law);
- c) Independent subsidized system (competent authority is a legal or an individual entity which is functioning under private law).

Analysis on implementation of quality management in the educational institutions showed that there are however many different points between the two communities in Belgium, although the general principles are the same. Quality is one of them, because according to this analysis, each of the two communities have different institutions of evaluation. Therefore, the first challenge for the education system in Belgium is also a national one. Because in order to align with the international system, they must first move on from the national level. Although the principles are common to the two communities and diplomas are similar, there are still disagreements between them. Nevertheless this will only increase competitiveness both nationally and internationally, which is very important in developing the new European university area.

Spain

The Spanish education system is based on the Constitution from 27th of December 1978, which laid the foundation of a centralized higher education system, on the one hand proclaiming the autonomy of universities and establishing a distribution of powers between the state and the autonomous communities.

In Spain there are several types of educational institutions: public universities (50), which are organized under the law of 21th of December 2001, private universities, religious universities, also foreign educational centers from Spain and private centers.

The institutions in charge of evaluation and quality assurance in education are:

- a) “National Government through the Ministry of Education and Science, responsible for the coordination of problems in higher education;
- b) The governments of the 17 regions, responsible with public universities;
- c) Universities based on the principles of autonomy.”

The higher education system in Spain has been modified in order to comply with the decisions provided in the Bologna Declaration in order to create the European Higher Education Area. The organizational system based on university cycles has also been implemented here, similar to other countries. The structure is different from the previous one because the new university courses are not equivalent to the previous ones. The main difference between the two systems is that each cycle automatically lead to an official diploma. At the end of each cycle a diploma is issued, according to the study period. The access to a faculty can be done if the interested person is in possession of a Graduate upper secondary education title (graduated 12 classes) or its equivalent and if he holds and passes an exam. The curricula must have at least 240 credits (generally over 4 years). At the end of the faculty he will prepare and submit a final project.

The access to master studies is enjoyed by the people who hold a university degree (Spanish or issued by another state of the European Higher Education Area). The study programs have 60 or 120 credits in general (throughout 1-2 years). At the end of this cycle he will prepare and submit a final project which will ensure between 6 and 30 credits. To participate into a doctoral program in the training period, he must meet the same requirements as for master studies. To participate in a doctoral program during the research period, it is necessary for that person to be in possession of a formal academic master. Also, there are people who can participate if:

- a) Have approved 60 credits included in one or more academic masters;

- b) They are graduates of faculties in which they received more than 300 credits.

Doctoral thesis will consist of an authentic research prepared by the candidate. In preparing this thesis, the candidate will have the support of one or more doctors with experienced accredited research.

4. The implementation of the Bologna process and the effects occurred in initial teacher training from Romania and other signatories members. Comparison presentation.

If within the previous chapters we referred to the influences of the Bologna Process on higher education, specifically on students, in this chapter we will focus on the training of teachers by the Bologna Process. Legal regulations in the initial teaching training varies from one state to another, depending on the pedagogical traditions of that country and the implementation stage of the Bologna Process regulations. As far as the teachers training curriculum in all countries goes, it includes compulsory and optional courses, specialized and pedagogical courses. They sum up in a total of at least 30 credits; the number of hours in practicing varies from state to state and from a training program to another. Status of teachers varies from country to country, in some countries teachers are civil servants (Greece, Germany, Luxembourg and Malta), in others they are not.

As far as the status of implementation regulations of the Bologna Process goes, it is stated that we have managed to identify very few relevant informations, but synthesizing the data obtained, we make the following clarifications:

1. In Bulgaria, the main problems concern the low mobility of students and teachers, the main successes were identified in implementing SECT and in modernizing curricula;
2. In England, there are still various flexible routes for initial teaching training in which schools have an important role; depending on the provider and the forming program, duration of studies fluctuates. English education is connecting itself to the Bologna Process regulations;
3. In Slovenia, implementation of the Bologna Process regulations has led to flexibly the initial teaching training and a replacement of early specialization in a large number of disciplines with fundamental skills which facilitate continuing professional development;
4. After the implementation of the Bologna Process regulations in the higher education from French, IUFM had become university structures and didactic studies have begun to function according to SECT; starting with the 2010-2011 academic year, the three-cycle structure will operate entirely in France also for initial training of teachers.

As it is known, today in Romania, the initial teacher training is structured on two levels. It is being offered by faculties (for specialized disciplines) and by TTD (for pedagogical and methodological disciplines). After graduating Levels I and II, those who followed them receive a certificate of competency for each level of teaching, funding for Level I is being assured from state funds (for budgetary students) and students; the costs for Level II are borne solely by the students and there is no budgeted for this purpose.

5. Conclusions

Throughout the paper, it can be easily seen that there is a desire for a standardization of the European education system. This uniformity is based on a union between the European countries for a better understanding and development at all levels. It is an important step in order for Europe to be an integer and it can presently be discussed about a development and an increase in both economic and social terms. By aligning the education system and through the Bologna Reform, the first step towards a united Europe was largely achieved. As early as the development period of man in school, he is free to move throughout Europe to study without the fear that when returning to his native country his studies will not be recognized. Due to reform in education system, the diplomas are now similar in most European universities. This is a very important step when we talk about interculturalism. There is now an opportunity for each student from the countries who have signed the Bologna reform, to study in a university outside their country of origin. By using this we can talk about a direct interaction with people who belong to a different culture and which are based on different values. It is an opening to interculturality and a step towards novelty. The mere fact that we are suddenly in a foreign country makes us first think of a way to survive, afterwards we realize that it is a different culture from our homeland, but which could be as interesting and as beautiful as ours. Of course that people we interact with put a mark on the view of things that we discover. That is why, it is very important, when it comes to interaction with people that belong to different cultures to have a dialogue. Dialogue is at the base of interculturality and the one that supports to form the European area. Bologna reform is a primary step towards an intercultural methodology, because it has set out to uniform principles in the education system and gave any student, regardless of the country of origin an opportunity to learn and exploit the potential of EU members. All these principles that were established at the university level could be a basis and a starting point for all other areas, ensuring success for a united European Union. The final qualifications of the Bologna reform and their recognition abroad remains the core purpose of each state participating in the creation of the European Higher Education Area. For it to be truly successful in every way, every state, every university participating in this program must take into account all the principles set out in Bologna and respect them throughout the process. Otherwise, in the event that one of the countries does not comply with the principles, the whole process is compromised, because it requires a general cooperation, both at European and national level.

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