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## Implementation of Quality Assurance in Romanian Technical Higher Education – Objective set by the Bologna Process

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### Abstract

The current research deals with quality assurance in Romanian technical higher education in line with the Bologna Process. A self-assessment grid was devised regarding the implementation of the Bologna Process within 28 Romanian technical universities. On one hand, the results show a high percentage of the universities targeted (99,2%) have made significant progress in quality assurance and, on the other hand, a low percentage (0.8%) will require further research and effort to implement and develop the quality assurance system.

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### 1. Introduction

In line with the recent reform on European higher education, launched in 1999, known as the Bologna Process, that aims at creating an European higher education system by 2010, concerns about the development and quality assurance of higher education have brought about various significant European policies. Thus, the European higher education system must prove and ensure the quality of programs and scholarships and devise and implement corresponding quality assessment methods and tools.

Quality assurance consists in “processes and mechanisms likely to assess, monitor, guarantee, sustain and/or enhance quality of higher education institutions and programs” (Pânzaru, 2005, p.28). Hence, the quality assurance of higher education fosters clients’ and tertiary partners’ confidence their requirements and expectations will be met by the respective higher education provider. Quality assurance presupposes the existence of specific organizational bodies, standards, models and external assessment procedures. Moreover, the higher education provider must prove conformity with the internal quality management system and standards.

The main studies on progress monitoring for each European higher education system of the ten objectives set by the Bologna Process, convey some significant aspects regarding the implementation of the quality assurance system within higher education. Thus, the study *TRENDS V: Universities shaping the European Higher Education Area. An European University Association Report*, (issued in 2007, based on data collected between 2005-2006), indicates that almost 95% of the European institutions conducted an internal assessment of their educational programs. With regard to educational services provided to students, only 43% of the institutional subjects claimed a constant

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evaluation of their services (libraries, academic counseling), whereas 36% claimed only a frequent evaluation and only 20% never conducted evaluation of their educational services provided.

It must be noted an increase from 2003, when only 82% of the institutions targeted conducted an internal evaluation of their study programs and almost 26% would assess the study programs provided to students. Two thirds of the institutions targeted carried out evaluation of the research activity whereas only a quarter did not conduct evaluation at all. Likewise, two thirds of the institutions carried out compulsory assessment of their teaching personnel.

All in all, the research shows that progress has been made in terms of quality assurance within European higher education, aiming at developing an internal quality process. Nevertheless, there are few universities that have implemented a holistic approach of quality assurance due to university autonomy they benefit from. The external quality assurance system still needs upgrading. Major concerns are raised regarding bureaucracy still prevailing within certain institutions. Nonetheless, continuous development of an organizational culture of quality to epitomize creativity and innovation and assumed responsibility becomes a “must”. Likewise, it is necessary that National Agencies for Quality Assurance should collaborate with external ones in order to develop an internal and external quality assurance system (Crosier, Purser & Smidt, 2007, pp. 55-59).

According to the *Bologna Process Stocktaking Report Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve 2009* (commissioned by the Ministers of European Education), in comparison with 2007, the European countries, participants in the Bologna Process, have made progress concerning the external quality assurance as well as self-assessment of the European higher education system, student involvement in the quality assurance process (however, they are still considered mere participants, with little engagement in the elaboration of the self-assessment report and measures to be taken); international participation in the field of quality assurance. Nevertheless, the current study underpins necessary attempts to build upon international cooperation, internal quality assurance of higher education – mainly, focused on learning outcomes and elaboration of corresponding evaluation procedures; assessment of agencies responsible for quality assurance in European higher education and setting up the *European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR)* (Rauhvargers, Deane & Pauwels, 2009, pp. 8-9).

*The Black Book of the Bologna Process*, issued in 2005 by *The National Students' Unions in Europe (ESIB)*, reveals the lack of transparency of the quality assurance system in terms of procedures, publication of assessment results, study conditions, students' participation in the decision-making process in Poland, Romania, Bulgaria. Hence, only one month before the Bergen reunion, the Minister of Education requested that all universities should define their quality management system, skipping the public debate procedure. Although Romanian legislation allows students to be represented up to 25% of the total number of the Senate members or Faculty Board, sometimes, they do not participate and/or they are not even summoned. In France, Denmark, Iceland, Lithuania and Bulgaria, students are not legally granted the right to an opinion regarding the elaboration of legal proposals and norms. The Czech Republic and Sweden are given as examples of good practices, where students are previously asked for an opinion and involved in the decision-making process (ESIB, 2005, pp. 17-20).

The study *Bologna With Student Eyes*, 2007, targeted 36 countries – participants in the Bologna Process and illustrates little progress made by some European countries, during 2005-2007, in terms of quality assurance, student involvement in the decision-making process and reform implementation (ESIB, 2007).

*Bologna With Student Eyes*, 2009 included all 46 countries of the Bologna Process and claims progress during 2007-2009 in quality assurance and student involvement in the quality assurance process (ESU, 2009).

Moreover, the *Black Book of the Bologna Process: Examples of Erroneous Implementation in Romanian Universities* emphasizes the pitfalls of the implementation process within Romanian higher education. Commissioned by the *National Students' Unions in Romania (ANOSR)* in 2006, the study reveals drawbacks and hardships of the quality assurance system. Thus, the implementation process is a mechanical one, universities do not pay much attention to the issue of quality, proactive attitude towards a quality management system, support from the academic community or student engagement (ANOSR, 2006, p.15).

*Romania's Country Report* on the Bologna Process, delivered at *Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve*, 2009, claims significant progress in higher education regarding the implementation of the education reform between 2006-2008: launch of the external assessment of higher education providers and study programs by the Romanian Agency for

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