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Antoanela Naaji

Western University, anaaji.uvg@inext.ro

Janis Grundspenkis

Riga Technical University, jgrun@egle.cs.rtu.lv

Andras Gabor

Budapest University of Economic Sciences, gabor@informatika.bke.hu

Cristina Bala

Western University, cris_bala@yahoo.com

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DEVELOPMENT OF DISTANCE EDUCATION IN THE EASTERN EUROPEAN COUNTRIES

Chair:

Antoanela Náaji

Chair of the Computer Department, "Vasile Goldiș" Western University, Romania
anaaji.uvg@inext.ro

Panelists:

Janis Grundspenkis

Dean and Professor, Riga Technical University, Director of the Institute of
Applied Computer Systems, Latvia
jgrun@egle.cs.rtu.lv

András Gábor

Chair of the Department of Information Systems, Budapest University of Economic
Sciences and Public Administration, Hungary
gabor@informatika.bke.hu

Cristina Băla

Researcher at the Institute of Educational Sciences and
"Vasile Goldiș" Western University, Romania
cris_bala@yahoo.com

1. OVERVIEW

The evolution of the European structure brought about the promotion of the distance education as a new strategy for the 3rd Millennium. Its development was due to the even more diversified work market and the expansion of communication techniques. In the modern society ruled by new forms and levels of competition, education became a top priority. As a consequence, the policy of education, especially the academic one, needs to be perceived from a totally new perspective. In a world where there are no longer boundaries for information and communication techniques the part played by universities changed accordingly.

In this context, distance education represents an important step in the evolution of teaching. The progress of modern society demands new types of teaching which should increase the professional preparation, allowing general access to higher education forms.

2. GOALS

The panel for distance education focuses on the presentation of the development of distance education in different countries from Eastern Europe. The panel will address the challenges and difficulties that universities are facing in organizing this form of education. The panel will allow the exchange of teaching experience and will try to identify solutions to these problems.

This panel has a special significance for those who take an active part in organizing this form of education in universities. It also helps those who are structuring the educational legislation and are responsible for implementing such systems.

We hope that those attending this panel will have the opportunity to enrich their knowledge in what concerns the distance education field and most of all, to find workable solution for the existing difficulties.

3. ISSUES

The panel deliberations will consist of the following:

- ◆ The development stage of distance education in the Eastern European countries:
 - the number of years the distance education has been functioning,
 - the target population,
 - its importance compared to other forms of education,
 - the level this form of education is implemented (high school, graduate, postgraduate etc.),
 - adequate areas of study for distance education.
- ◆ How the distance education form is functioning:
 - means of information dissemination (print materials, audio and video tapes, CD-ROM, radio and TV broadcasting, Internet) and the importance of Internet compared to other means,
 - the role and the necessity of face-to-face meetings,
 - the nature and scope of practical classes (laboratories),
 - the type of exams.
- ◆ The proficiency of the teaching staff in the distance education system and the possibility of improving their skills by research activities.
- ◆ Debates on the role and relationship between distance education and full time attendance curricula.
- ◆ Distance education enabling legislation.
- ◆ The difficulties relating to distance education system.

4. STRUCTURE

We suggest the following steps in this panel: at the beginning the participants would be invited to come up with their own topics and ideas for completing the issues above, then the chair of the panel will present the issues one by one and let the panelists develop some of the issues (Mr. András Gábor, the issue about how the distance education form is functioning, Mr. Janis Grundspenkis, the issue about the role and relationship between distance education and full time attendance curricula and Ms. Cristina Băla, the issue about the difficulties relating to distance education system). The chair of the panel will discuss the remaining issues. Then each participant will express his/her opinion about the matter under discussion. The time limit for each participant will be about 15 minutes.

After discussing the challenges and the difficulties of each Eastern European country regarding distance education, the last item on our agenda will be to identify lucrative and workable solutions for them.

We hope that, due to the contribution of all participants, we will have a detailed view about the development of distance education in the Eastern European countries.