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THESIS

The introduction of the three-level system of higher education in Bulgaria presents a major conceptual shift away from the existing structure and academic organization of the institutions of higher education. The policy for the introduction of the three-level system is part of the effort to reform the field of higher education; its general objective is to effectively adapt the system of higher education to the changing demands of Bulgarian society in the post-communist period. The policy introducing the bachelor-master-doctor levels has been directed by the government. In the following paper I will attempt to show that the prescriptive and regulatory normative acts of the government have proved counter-productive to the implementation of higher education policies. As I will suggest, a mode of thinking and organization inherited from the past has been framed in a new hierarchical structure of higher education that has led to little qualitative change. The way in which bachelor programs have been created has not affected the qualitative nature of the process and the contents of study but merely the quantitative aspects of the degrees such as the number of years, the course hours, and the institutions which could offer them. In practice, old study plans and programs have been reshuffled and then re-ordered within the three new tiers. The implications are felt primarily at the bachelor's level where narrow specialization has been preserved, thus limiting the student's options from the very start. Combined with the nascent market economy in the country and the high rate of unemployment, the future bachelors will be given few chances for development apart from continuing in the master degrees. As a result, the Bulgarian institutions' potential to achieve its goal of effective adaptation to the changing environment, the demands of the fluctuating market, and the need for higher quality mass education has been limited.

INTRODUCTION

In this project, I describe and analyze the introduction of the new degree system, that of the bachelor-master-doctor, into the traditional system of higher education in Bulgaria. Until very recently, Bulgarian higher education followed the Soviet "mono-phased" educational model according to which full-time university students usually studied for five years. During their studies, students progressed in unchangeable cohorts through fixed curricula. At graduation, they received a professional degree diploma for completed higher education, the so-called "*Diploma za zavarsheno vissho obrazovanie*."

On December 27th, 1995, a new Law on Higher Education was passed. This Law initiated the reform of the higher education system. One basic component of this reform was reflected in a new educational policy which stipulated the introduction of the three-tier system of education, that of the bachelor-master-doctor. This policy was to be implemented by the end of 1996 or in a year after the 1995 Law was enforced. If effectively implemented, this policy was expected to provide a mechanism for institutional adaptation to the changing environment as well as promote the integration of Bulgarian higher education into European structures.

Since the new degree system embodied a fundamental shift from the traditional conception of Bulgarian higher education, the implementation of this policy posed a rather serious challenge both to the central decision-makers and the individual institutions. As one highly-placed official of the Ministry of Education observed, "[d]ue to the strong German influence [before World War II], and the post-war imposition of the Soviet educational system, higher education at the level of **bachelor** fights its way with difficulties in Bulgarian higher education" (Pranchov 1998, p. 36). Indeed the **greatest challenge** was experienced in the effective institutionalization of the undergraduate or bachelor's degree - this level was the new element for Bulgarian higher education. Since the 1995 Law simply stipulated the introduction of the three-tier system without providing any conception or idea concerning its structure, means or goals, the strongest confusion appeared around the development of bachelor programs: no bachelor study plans were prepared before the deadline (end of 1996 according to the Additional Regulation N12 of the 1995 Law on Higher Education) but instead were ready for the academic year 1998/1999.

During the development of the new bachelor programs, different issues of concern were voiced. Some of them regarded the course load at the different degree levels, the number of students that would be allowed to, and could afford to, continue at the master's degree level, the final image and level of preparation a bachelor should have, the

lack of opportunities for students to transfer between specialties as well as to enroll into master degrees different from their field of specialty, and the lack of opportunities for students to structure their programs. As the Vice-Minister of Higher Education exclaimed: "[T]he introduction of the three-tier structure of higher education still confronts serious difficulties... The level of the "bachelor" is considered not that prestigious; it is taken to be something like a half-educated master. As a result the students together with their professors prefer to work directly towards the "master" degree" (Totomanova 1998, p. 31).

Purpose of the Study

The study aims at examining the implementation of the three-tier system of higher education at the institutions of higher education in Bulgaria. In the formulation and implementation of this policy, one important factor, both traditionally strong in Bulgarian higher education and further strengthened during the transitional post-communist period of almost a decade, emerged as decisive and omnipresent in most aspects concerning the introduction of the tier system. This factor was the prescriptive and detailed legislative framework. Education policy making in Bulgaria remains the prerogative of the State – the 1995 Higher Education Law is the main document guiding higher education; from this Law several subsequent documents have sprung, which concentrate on the details in the structure and functioning of higher education. With respect to the policy introducing the three-tier system, the definitive documents are: the Uniform State Requirements for minimum study content and the State Register of Specialties. The Law on Scientific Degrees and Scientific Qualifications and the Law on the State Budget also have some influences on it.

It is my conviction that the detailed and prescriptive character of the normative base in a system where the State had preserved its central power and authority has stifled the potential of this new policy to address many of the problems of the post-communist higher education system and assist university re-structuring. Combined with the dire economic conditions of the country during the post-communist period and the high level of unemployment, the prescriptive normative base has had an enormous effect on policy implementation and the implications for the future graduates. In my research, I seek to examine the way this prescriptive normative base has shaped the policy for the bachelor-master-doctor system and influenced its introduction at the institutions of higher education.

Rationale for Studying Bulgarian Higher Education

One important reason behind the movements for reform of higher education in Central and Eastern Europe after the political changes in 1989 could be found in the strong drive towards educational synchronization with more efficient international models. This goal reflected the general politics of the post-communist societies to seek integration in the structures of the European Union - a process accompanied by radical social, political, and economic transformation. The difficult transition period of these countries had presented serious challenges to educational reform: one case in point could be the discrepancy between the demand for resources necessary for the restructuring of higher education and the drastic reduction of the financial abilities of these societies (Dimitrov 1998, p. 55). Additional challenges came from the need to face world-wide tendencies for higher education in the region which was no longer isolated from global developments such as mass education, the differentiation of higher education in response to the changing social and labor markets, and the increasing expectations for accountability. Finally, post-communist institutions of higher education were also still grappling with the legacies from almost half a century of political and ideological interference into their structure and functioning.

In Bulgaria, changes in higher education were certainly not atypical for the region after 1989. The system quickly expanded both in student enrollment and in the number of institutions and specialties; private education saw its first examples while some Bulgarians began to pay for their studies at the public institutions as well; state financial support for education and research fell drastically; university "self-regulation" found itself strictly defined within governmental directives as did also the institutions' attempts at quality assessment. After 1989, the first changes were expressed in the elimination of ideological courses. The system then experienced a number of legislative acts which followed changing political trends and quite often provided conflicting directives.

The goal of the Bulgarian higher education reform aimed at facilitating the integration of Bulgarian higher education into European structures. One of its major tasks was to introduce into the present system of higher education an academic degree system with the levels of bachelor, master, and doctor. This task reflected the attempt to synchronize Bulgarian higher education with other more open and efficient international educational models; it also

aimed to promote future co-operation between Bulgarian and foreign universities. The establishment of the new degree system represented a fundamental change in the traditional conception of Bulgarian higher education; it was expected to affect not only the internal institutional structures but also the educational content and the roles of all constituent members of the university community.

Research Design

"Policy analysis is not a discrete, self-contained activity. It is a process involving continuous review and evaluation of new information against existing information. It is a process that is sensitive to organizational culture and politics, and that continuously scans the environment looking for important interactions among people, resources, and organizations. It also requires a focused examination of factors effecting policy implementation" (Jill & Saunders 1992, pp. 15-16). In the process of analysis, I employed two kinds of data collection methods: document analysis and open-ended interviews. The principal data-gathering sources used in the research included: normative documents, university policies and regulations, institutional materials and histories, and interviews. The data-collecting process fell into three stages. The first stage aimed at identifying the main factors that had the largest influence on the introduction of the new degree structure. To that end, I conducted fifteen interviews with ten people who were actively involved in higher education. I also reviewed current literature on the reform efforts of higher education as well as on the introduction of the three-level system. Recent publications on the development of higher education are scarce. The educational publications that are available cover predominantly the history of education in the country and the development of the pedagogical thought. There are also sociological publications and surveys that refer to higher education and its role in the country's development and, above all, in the national attempts to establish democracy. "St. Kliment Ohridski" Sofia University is the institution that has been mostly studied from a historical perspective due to its important place in the history of higher education in Bulgaria. This first stage of analysis had a formative effect on the overall study. It provided the main perspective in the analysis by focusing the attention on the normative base. In addition, my interviewees recommended a list of interview participants for the coming institutional interview stage.

The second stage of the study focused solely on the analysis of the normative documentation and institutional materials including: the Laws on higher education after 1989 and including the new 1999 one, the Uniform State Requirements for the specialties I focused on, the State Register of Specialties, old and new bachelor programs from the institutions of study, the institutional Regulations and operational documents. Interviews with government officials and higher education researchers were also conducted.

The last stage provided the institutional perspective through the eyes of its teaching and administrative institutional community (there is no professional administration in Bulgarian institutions of higher education – it is faculty who for a given mandate are elected to administer). For this, and following the recommendations of my interviewees from the first round, I interviewed twenty-eight faculty and administrators from different institutions. The main criteria for the selection of this pool of interviewees were based on the faculty's involvement with higher education reform and their participation in the administration of the university. I used the open-ended interview type but the questions in the interview guide were directed predominantly at the influence of the legislative framework on the implementation of the policy for the introduction of the three-tier system of higher education. It was important for me to hear the perspective from the insiders, those who were actually involved in the designing of the bachelor and master programs as well as in the attempts to institute changes related to the three-tier system.

Some Definitions

Before proceeding, it is important to define several key terms that I use throughout the study.

Normative Base: The term is generally used in the Bulgarian cultural and social context – the so-called "*normativna baza*," – to encompass all the obligatory, prescriptive legislative documents which guide higher education policy in the country. The communist legacy of over-reliance and "blind" following of legislative directives is still rather strong in the country. With respect to higher education and the policy for the introduction of the three-tier system of education, the obligatory and directive normative base is comprised of: the 1995 Law on Higher Education, the Uniform State Requirements for minimum study content, the State Register of Specialties; of some importance are also the Law on Scientific Degrees and Scientific Qualifications and the Law on the State Budget.

The bachelor-master-doctor (BMD) structure: the European Union has repeatedly pointed out that using the term BMD is less neutral than using the undergraduate-graduate structure term since the former might imply that the reference is with the English Anglo-Saxon model of higher education. However, the Bulgarian case focuses explicitly on the BMD structure thus implicitly signaling that elements from that model might be considered. In my study, I use the terms bachelor-master-doctor, the three-tier system, and the three-level degree system interchangeably simply to refer to the policy that has been intended. I do this for matters of convenience – the intention of my study is not to determine which model the Bulgarian reform effort should be following. In this respect, the goal of my research remains predominantly descriptive and explanatory.

As a point of qualification, the Bulgarian higher education system now has four tiers. The professional level of a "specialist" was legally incorporated into the existing system of higher education by the Law for the Change and Amendment of the 1995 Law on Higher Education from July 2, 1999. With respect to the three "new" degree levels, the last one of the "doctor" has undergone certain modifications but has actually existed in the system; the problems that the system faces are mostly with the split of the long "diploma" phase into a bachelor and a master degree.

Faculty: institutions of higher education in Bulgaria follow the Continental type of organization, based on the Chair-Faculty structure, or the "*katedra-facultet*" structure. In my study, I start the word Faculty with the capital letter "F" to distinguish the university unit from the members of the teaching staff.

Mono-phased model of education: In using this term, I have kept the literal translation of the Bulgarian term, the so-called "*ednofazen (monofazen) model na obrazovanie.*" This term is used to refer to the type of higher education which is comprised of one phase of higher education studies, or one degree which is comprised of one phase in length. Such was the previous model of Bulgarian higher education built following the example of the Soviet system.

Specialty: the term is used to denote the field of current studies; for example, economics is a specialty as is business administration, philosophy, microbiology, and so on. In Bulgaria, higher education is always in something and this something is the specialty: bachelor in biology, master in economics, etc.

Study plans and study programs: whereas study plans present the actual curricula, or all courses (disciplines) and their contact hours as they are distributed throughout the whole period of study, study programs are the syllabi, or the distribution of the material of every individual course.

SOME THEORETICAL ORIENTATION

Although separate, the topics covered in this section, I believe, will foster understanding of the context for the study.

Higher Education Policy

The discipline of policy studies is relatively new. It developed soon after World War II predominantly in the West and became more prevalent in the 1960s. The focus of the discipline was more concerned with public policy issues than educational ones. In "The Science of Muddling Through," Lindblom was the first one to describe the policy process the way he saw it (1959).

1. The Concept of Public Policy

The term "policy" has been used to signify different phenomena both from everyday and professional lives. Hogwood and Gunn illustrate some of its different meanings: "a label for a field of activity", "a general expression of general purpose or desired state of affairs", "program", "formal authorization", "output", "outcome", "theory or model", and "process" (1984, pp. 13-19). Scholars from different disciplines such as political science, administrative studies, and public administration focus on a more narrow understanding of this concept. Here, they usually consider it to define a purposive course of action or a goal that has been followed by government, organization, or a person in an attempt to address a certain problem or matter of concern (Anderson 1994, Hough 1984). In addition, policy studies are interested in the type of public policy which has been developed by governments and which is

authoritative, based on law, distinct from the activities of private enterprise and its strong motivation by self-interests. As Hough states, "It is the authoritative and potentially coercive quality for a society as a whole that distinguishes public policy from other policy" (1984, p. 14).

Public policies vary greatly in purpose, orientation, appearance. According to different criteria and with regards to different uses, policies can be: *positive* or *negative*; *substantive* or *procedural*, the former of which relate to the government's intended actions while the latter pertain to how or by whom something is going to be done; *distributive*, which allocate services to parts of the population and *re-distributive* - deliberately shifting allocations among population groups; *regulatory* - imposing restrictions on the behavior of individuals and groups, and *self-regulatory* - also restrictive but usually sought by the regulated group as a means of protection; *material* and *symbolic* policies depending upon the kind of benefits they allocate; policies involving *collective* (indivisible) goods and *private* (divisible) goods; *liberal* and *conservative*; *governmental* and *institutional* (Anderson 1994, Hough 1984, Fincher 1973).

2. Public Policy in Higher Education

Public policies in higher education are all of those policies which are generated by government, which direct the conduct of individuals, such as students or teachers, and organizations, such as universities, and which are developed and implemented through state bureaucracies. Public policy activity in education is usually related to the activity of various institutions which act on behalf or with the authorization of the state. Because of its relation to the government, the public sector, in contrast to the private sector, is more exposed to political influence and open to demands for public accountability and equality; it is directed towards the public interest and involves no profit or ownership of enterprise. Thus, in the Western context, educational policy has become a bureaucratic instrument with which to administer those expectations that the public has of education (Taylor, Rizvi, Lingard, and Henry 1997, pp. 1-6).

With content as the criteria, Hough (1984, p. 15) divides educational policies into four groups. The first group is comprised of policies that are concerned with the essential functions of schools and institutions of higher education. The second group are policies which focus on the establishment, structure and governance of institutions or educational systems. The third regulate all matters concerning those employed by the academic institutions. And the final group includes financial and facility policies. According to this classification, some of the policies might be more important at the different levels of policy formulation than others.

Educational policy is closely linked of course to organized education – universities and their status of academic organizations.

Public policies in education are not developed in vacuum; they are defined by particular values and constraints, and within particular structural arrangements; they also address particular problems and needs (Hough, p. 17). The policy process has been generally divided into three stages. The first stage, which is most familiar to the researchers, is the one of policy formulation and authorization. Different policy actors become involved: the official ones such as the initiators (Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Teachers' Union, parents' groups) or the informal actors (interest groups, political parties and media). Important are also the trigger influences such as demographic changes, the ethnic composition of the population, the influence of the social and economic policy, the social attitudes and political climate with regard to education, employment prospects, and many others. At the formulation stage, the result, as Lindblom has noted, is a strong tendency towards an incremental style of policy-development, rather than sudden shifts in policy direction. "But it is often harder still to translate such policies successfully into government action. The experience of the last two decades in many countries demonstrates that high sounding education policies do not always work well when converted into particular programs, and that outcomes may be very different from those intended. Often implementation produces the classic symptoms of under performance, delay, and escalating costs" (Hough 1984, p. 24).

Second, there follows the implementation stage. Different factors determine the success of this stage:

1. Clear and unambiguous policy design

2. Implementation strategy – simple and straightforward programs that anticipate accurately likely problems and that require minimal management effort
3. The commitment and capacity of the bureaucratic system; capacity includes the political resources available and means available to secure compliance
4. The environment factors: the degree of support or opposition encountered in the community, the building of effective coalitions of on-going support and political pressure (Harman 1984, pp. 25-26).

The final stage is the evaluation stage. "Evaluations serve different purposes and call for different strategies, at various stages in the life of programs... In all cases, the aim is to provide the most valid and reliable findings possible within political and ethical constraints and the limitations imposed by time, money, and human resources" (Rossi and Freeman 1993, p. 3). Evaluation takes different forms – from insider or outside personnel, often, especially at state level, evaluation comes more often in the nature of incidental "feedback" to officials or the Minister (Rossi and Freeman 1993).

Change is a constant companion to the policy process. Changes take a variety of forms, including alterations in the number and variety of participants or in their roles and relationships, in the manner in which some issues are handled, and in the procedures or techniques used to deal with problems. When change is deliberately designed and sought, when it takes the form of a deliberate effort to improve the operation of the policy process from some perspective, it is often called *reform* (Anderson 285).

Policy is an instrument through which change is mapped onto existing policies, programs or organizations, and onto the demands made by particular interest group. "To put forward a policy is to acknowledge that a new policy was needed or that the old policy needed to be revised in response to the changes occurring in society" (Taylor, Rizvi, Lingard, and Henry 1997, p.5).

Policy Systems

The interrelated combinations of rules, procedures, and measures are called a policy system by Veld, Fuessel, and Neave (1996, p. 34). "In the concept of the *Rechtsstaat*, a policy system is given shape by law." In their definition, a policy system is characterized by three dimensions:

1. The Level of Decision-making

This dimension has to do with the degree of (de)centralization. Burton Clark distinguishes six levels of authority in higher education systems: from bottom to top, the first level is the lowest major operating unit (the Chair department in the European model), the second level is the Faculty - these two levels can be referred to as the under-structure of a national system; they are closely interlocked too, for authority in the one determines the authority in the other. The third level is the institution itself - that is the middle structure as a mediating position between the two lower levels and the higher levels of national systems. The fourth level refers to an eventual multi-campus administration; the fifth level is the state or municipal governance itself. And the last, sixth, level is the national government (1983, pp. 109-110).

2. The Points of Reference for Steering

This dimension refers to the subjects for steering, either inputs, throughputs, or outputs of the system. Veld, Fuessel, and Neave believe that "Respect for professional discretion can lead to the idea that outside governing bodies should concentrate on the steering of university inputs such as resources and perhaps student numbers, leaving the professional practice to the professionals who can take care of steering outputs" (1996, p. 45). Different regulatory systems have also concentrated on steering the throughputs such as curricula, exams and degrees, and the internal organization of the university. The strongest trend for the decade in many countries has been the push for stricter management for universities usually focusing the decision-makers' attention on the steering of outputs by introducing quality control, performance indicators and output oriented budgeting.

3. The Policy Instruments

Veld, Fuessel, and Neave distinguish between three main categories of policy instruments through which influence is exercised: enforcement, money, and persuasion. The legal form of persuasion is easy to imagine, but generally the steering instrument of persuasion is only indirectly given shape in educational laws, for instance by the legal obligation for the decision maker to deliberate with the parties concerned, to discuss a draft, or similar activities. In Western Europe one finds a common tendency to shift from regulations as the most important instrument, to money and persuasion (1996, pp. 45-46). McDonnell and Elmore have proposed an alternative set of policy instruments (1987). The four categories they have formulated include: mandates, inducements, capacity-building, and system-changing.

The Bulgarian Higher Education Policy Environment

1. Steering of Higher Education Policy in Bulgaria

Contemporary social policy employs several distinct ways of characterizing a policy issue (Kirp 1983, pp. 138-140, Clark 1983). A given policy issue may be resolved best by professional expertise, through political judgment, through the following of legal norms, depending on bureaucratic norms and standards of internal accountability, or, finally, through the market and the degrees of regulation it is subject to. It is quite usual that particular policy domains are linked with certain frameworks.

Using these terms of reference, one can point to political judgment as the major factor shaping the evolution of higher education policy in Bulgaria. Bureaucratic norms and standards form the second factor of influence. As a young Bulgarian researcher stated, "Tracing the development of Bulgarian university education, one can say that the Bulgarian model of relations between the State and the University is from the State-centralized type" (Slavova 1999, p. 102). Historically, the first Bulgarian university, founded in 1888, was initiated by prominent politicians and materialized through a Ministry decision; a consequent series of normative acts within a period of a year and a half defined the school's status, organization, and functioning.

Throughout the development of higher education, normative laws had a formative role for the university organization and activities. Quite often these laws, approved by the Bulgarian Parliament, were abolished or amended with the change of political governments. Serious political interference in the functioning of Sofia University was recorded in 1907 as a reaction to students' mockery of the Bulgarian Monarch, Knjaz Ferdinand, and in 1922, as a reaction to disputes between the university and the Ministry of Education. Political influence on the field of higher education increased tremendously with the advent of the communist regime after the W.W.II - by the end of 1940s, the new Bulgarian proletariat government passed a series of legislative acts which established the control of both the party and the state in higher education (Tchitchovska 1995). As a field on which the new government relied on the formation of the "new" man, the socialist man, higher education was completely transformed to allow for full control of the State and the Party. The first Laws of Higher Education that initiated this transformation were passed in 1947 and 1948.

The example that the new government followed was the mono-phased Soviet model: students studied for five years (most usually) to receive a Diploma for Completed Higher Education; this document was sufficient to enter a specific profession. Obtaining a job was predetermined - centralized governmental planning defined the number of graduates that would be needed each year. Academia, on its part, reproduced itself by directing a few selected students beyond the diploma stage to the doctoral studies, the so-called "*aspirantura*," which ended with the defense of a dissertation and the "*kandidat na naukite*" (Candidate of Science) degree. To achieve this degree, the student combined work with studies (assistant positions teaching practical or exercising seminars). Narrow specialization started from the first years of study. This type of education responded well to the needs of the society it was designed for.

Together with many Central and Eastern European countries, in 1989 Bulgaria had its "velvet" revolution. This revolution overthrew the totalitarian regime and initiated the democratic changes. In the field of higher education, this political change brought the *1990 Law on Academic Autonomy of Higher Education Institutions*. The Law was considered the logical counter-reaction to the preceding years of tight communist control and attempted to "liberate" many of the university activities. Five years later, these "liberating" changes had yet another counter-reaction expressed in the *1995 Law on Higher Education*, a law promoted by the Socialist Party then in power. The most

recent governmental activity (the Party of Democratic Union is again in power) proposed another round of amendments, documented in the *Law for the Change and Amendment of the 1995 Law on Higher Education* from June of 1999.

The practice of defining higher education policy issues almost exclusively in terms of political discretion or through bureaucratic norms has had a tremendous effect on the system's development. The different, quite often drastic, changes in the normative base of higher education with every change of the political governance reflect **the general inconsistency in steering higher education policy in Bulgaria** (Todorov, in Boyadjieva 1999, p. 70).

2. The Pendulum of the Post-Communist Reform Movement of Higher Education

As mentioned above, the Bulgarian "velvet" revolution initiated the movement for higher education reform. Although attempts to have some change in socialist higher education pre-date 1989, active transformation took place after the political changes. The post-1989 period could be divided into three stages:

Stage I: Between 1989 and 1990

(between the 1989 political changes and the *1990 Law on Academic Autonomy of Higher Education Institutions*)

At this stage, one basic feature prevailed: as in most post-communist countries, immediate action was taken to abolish ideological disciplines at all institutions of higher education in the country. The process was initiated by the institutions themselves as a reaction to political shifts and wide-spread disillusionment with the communist ideology. It was also strongly supported by the "opposition" democratic cabinet during its short rule. "In this new government the Ministry of Science and Higher Education has instructed a new policy of "de-ideologization" in higher education. This occurs within the framework of an economic crisis of catastrophic dimensions, and teaching staff which, in its majority, were members of the former communist party" (Penkov 1992, p. 96).

Stage II: Between 1990 and 1995

(between the *1990 Law on Academic Autonomy of Higher Education Institutions* and the *1995 Law on Higher Education*)

Developments during this period were rather dynamic for the *1990 Law on Academic Autonomy* served as a catalyst for significant changes in higher education. The new legislative framework provided institutions with the long-denied freedoms to define their organizational structure (including the freedom to establish new Faculties), the specialties they offered, and the student programs (1990 Law on Academic Autonomy, articles: 3 and 4). The institutions were also given the opportunity to look for additional subsidies outside the state budget including the admission of an additional number of students (on top of the state-subsidized admissions quota) on a student-paid basis.

As a result, the system of higher education quickly expanded. The fast growth of the sector was expressed in the large student increase as well as in program and institutional diversity. According to Buchkov, "from 130-140 thousand at the beginning of 1991-1992 academic year, the number of students rose to 250-260 thousand towards 1995-1996 academic year" (1998, p. 17). Moreover, the number of specialties multiplied, reaching more than 500 (Stamov 1996, p. 6), as did the number of higher education institutions, reaching 42 (Ministry of Education and Science 1996). The expansion of higher education stimulated some competitiveness in the sector. At the same time, spending on higher education drastically fell - the spending per student as a percentage of the Bulgarian internal revenue product per population head fell from 42% in 1991 to 22% in 1998 (Dikova 1999, p. 1). The process of expansion was not accompanied by increase in state subsidies. There was also no development of internal mechanisms for the regulation of educational standards. As a result, the quotas of students paying for their education reached a peak indirectly affecting admission standards and creating conditions for the "selling" of diplomas (Georgieva, in Boyadjieva 1999, pp. 175-176).

Stage III: Between 1995 and 1999

(between the *1995 Law on Higher Education* and its *Amendments* from June of 1999 - the Law for the Change and Amendment of the 1995 Law on Higher Education was ratified on June 30, 1999 (effective from academic 1999-2000) by the democratic government once again in power)

The *1995 Law on Higher Education* outlined the government's intentions for a systematic reform and appeared as a counter-reaction to the developments of the previous period. It introduced Unified State Requirements for course content and State Register for university specialties as well as obligatory accreditation for all institutions. With this Law, the Bulgarian Government and the Ministry of Education increased their responsibility for directing higher education. The State would control: the preparation and approval of the legislative framework (by the State organs and the Parliament), the defining of course content, study programs, and specialties by the Unifying State Requirements and the State Specialty Register (both to be approved by the Council of Ministers), the assessment of institutional quality by the National Agency for Evaluation and Accreditation (mainly verifying compliance with the State Requirements), and defining budget allocations including the number of students to be enrolled both on state support and student-paid basis.

The Bachelor-Master-Doctor Degree Structure

Academic work, according to Burton Clark, is based on "the principle of sequence," meaning that "activities will be arranged above and below one another according to defined difficulty" (1983, p. 49). In the undergraduate-graduate model, tiers are specifically differentiated and follow each other sequentially. In addition, most of the bachelor's degree involves general education; limited specialization comes as students choose a major concentration in the last two years of study. Specialization is located at the graduate level which has two forms: the graduate school and the professional school (Clark 1983, pp. 49-53).

1. Some Historical References

The origins of higher education qualifications can be traced back to medieval European universities such as Bologna, Paris or Oxford. In their formative first centuries, one of their achievements was the "professionalization of learning through the craft guild system" – a development on which these institutions' survival depended (Driver 1972, p. 112). The first universities emerged exactly as guilds of masters (Paris) and guilds of scholiasts (Bologna); they also created their status completely controlling the behavior of their members – to follow the numerous regulations of academic life, masters had to give vows at the entrance of the university. Whereas high professionalism penetrated all sides of the emerging institutions, the structure of their very community – students, bachelors, masters – reflected the level of achieved competency. One special feature of the other definition of the first universities – the *studium generale* – was the right of the masters who have received their degree at one university, to teach at any other university without the need for additional exams (Bojadzhieva 1998, pp. 80-89). In this sense, the titles conferred by these universities were used as means of marking and preserving the possession of guild rights. Special "privileges" earned by these institutions from the authorities gave them the freedom to do so. The first universities had a specific relationship with the medieval authorities – without getting under the control of neither the Church or the State, they used the services of both (Bojadzhieva 1998, p. 80-95). The authorities' recognition was usually enforced through Bulls and Charters. The academic titles that came into being in the medieval European universities were thus shaped by the academic community itself, although ultimately sanctioned by the spiritual and temporal powers.

In the early modern period, many of the medieval European universities were abolished or transformed into radically different structures. The rise of absolutism and the nation state led to new universities and specialist schools that had to stimulate national consciousness, meet the need for state administrators, and teach. Political change was the cause of two of the new models for the European university that were to emerge in the early nineteenth century: the Humboldtian and the Napoleonic.

The spread of industrialization and the rise of science introduced new subjects into the university curricula and increased the demands that the training of at least the "oldest" professions be located within universities. More rigorous procedures for degree awarding were developed. There also appeared new qualifications or the old ones were reinterpreted. Both Oxford and Cambridge, for example, started distinguishing between the honors degree

(recognizing a high level of specialist knowledge for those who would continue their studies) and the pass degree (a lower level of general education). In the USA, the M.A. *in cursu* (as a matter of course: i.e., following the payment of a fee but no further study beyond a B.A.) was abandoned in the late nineteenth century (although it survives to the present in Oxford and Cambridge). The Ph.D., first developed in Germany as a mark of the completion of a serious piece of research, was introduced into the United States during the 1860s and in Britain and other European countries in the early twentieth century. The introduction of the Ph.D. into the United States came to a peak in 1876 by the establishment of Johns Hopkins University as a research institution based on the German model (Spurr 1970, p. 118).

The 1960s marked a gradual move away from the prevailing elite model. Until then, it was academy itself that determined its degrees according to its own needs. These degrees were used in the wider society as credentials (Collins 1979). In many countries, considerable expansion of the higher education systems has taken place. Since the 1980s, the challenges higher education has been facing have included not only its expansion but also the development of information technologies and the reduction of resources: a development which has its strong influence on the nature of qualifications.

Contemporary Trends

One of the current challenges higher education is facing is that of internationalization which has taken many forms almost all of which have a significant impact on degrees. Amongst the most significant is the introduction of foreign (often U.S. or U.K.) degrees (e.g., MBAs or other master degrees) into countries with nationally-defined degree systems where these introduced qualifications have no official status. The development of trade relations has stimulated agreements on the mutual recognition of degrees. In addition, the spread of the transnational organizations and associations has led to measures to facilitate and promote higher education exchanges and mutual recognition of degrees.

The European Union presents one notable example in this respect. The history of higher education policy of the European Union can be regarded as a history of international institutions looking for an European identity. Until the seventies, the national governments were the dominant actors within the European Community (EC) and inter-governmental co-operation was the rule. In the eighties, the EC played a key-role in the process of policy implementation of European higher education. Due to the role of the European Court of Justice, a supra-national organ became more important. Policies were implemented that were for the interest of European higher education. Several action programs and a Declaration signed in Maastricht in 1992 stated that the primary responsibility for higher education should remain for the national governments (Beverwijk and Maat 1999).

However the European legislation and action programs have had strong influence on national governments and European higher education institutions. ERASMUS and ECTS have stimulated student mobility. The higher education institutions have been compelled to introduce new structures that comply with ERASMUS programs. Three more declarations, The Lisbon of 1997, the Sorbonne of 1998, and the Bologna of 1999, have in common the desire to focus on recognition and transparency of European higher education institutions and support the "Harmonization of the Architecture of the European Higher Education System". The Sorbonne and the Bologna Declarations give more concrete meaning to these terms through referring to the undergraduate-graduate structure. The Bologna declaration was signed by 29 countries amongst which was Bulgaria.

Western Examples of Degree Restructuring

With respect to the growing awareness of the need for more transparency of European higher education systems, one can point to a number of countries currently facing the challenges of degree restructuring. Behind national decisions to restructure there lie different reasons. Although higher education systems differ, and the political and economic context of the countries of the West and the East is extremely different (not to mention the transition period of the latter countries), some conclusions can be drawn. Beverwijk and Maat studied four Western countries and their attempts to introduce the new bachelor-master degree system (1999). "Up till now there are no European criteria to indicate the output level of the Bachelor and Master degrees" (p. 3). Beverwijk and Maat's analysis takes into consideration the peculiarities of the national systems and the way the introduction policy was formulated and introduced. Their conclusions follow.

The Netherlands: The initiative for the introduction of the bachelor-master structure has come from the higher education institutions. The main goals have been: to enhance student mobility, to cooperate with other European higher education institutions, and to formulate a structure to find a solution for the huge number of master degrees that have been offered at the institutions but have not been legally acknowledged by the government. The new system has been added to the existing system; if in the future this system is legally accepted, then it will be probably a matter of renaming the higher education programs.

Germany and Denmark: In both countries, the new structure has been introduced by the governments as a means of support the intended reform. The bachelor-master structure has been added to the existing systems. Introducing a shorter program of study has been a part of the aims of the reform and with the new structure this has been realized. Foreign students will also be attracted and dropouts will be reduced.

Finland: Both the government and the universities have realized they would benefit from a reform that would help break the isolation of the Finnish universities; they have been actively involved in the reform process.

THE BACHELOR-MASTER SYSTEM IN THE BULGARIAN CONTEXT

The following historical summary is an attempt provide grounds for comparison between expected and achieved differences with respect to the new policy on the three-tier structure.

Before the Political Changes of 1989

Until very recently, Bulgarian higher education followed the model of the former Soviet Union – a model which communist Bulgaria "embraced" after World War II. In the words of a Bulgarian educational researcher from that time, "Many aspects of Bulgarian education ... closely resemble the patterns in the Soviet Union, from whom the Bulgarians receive inspiration for much of their pedagogical thought as well as for their political ideology. Indeed, the two elements cannot be separated, since educational practices are an extension of the political factor and are intended to give support and continuity to Communist ideology" (Georgeoff 1968, p. 39).

The communist party, which came into power in 1944, controlled all levels of higher education; it also used institutions as re-education instruments for the creation of the "new communist man" (Koucky 1990, in Mauch & Sabloff 1995). Political control of professors and central planning "often stifled cultural and academic freedom, limited individual choice and diversity, encouraged dogmatic teaching, and limited the flow of information, particularly in the humanities and social sciences" (Laporte & Schweitzer, in Barr 1994, p. 261). As Mitter pointed out, "goals, structures and contents of higher education were dominated by the political monopoly and ideological monism of the State " (in Burgen 1996, p. 170).

Alongside several positive assets of socialist educational governance, such as quantitative growth of students as well as universities and institutes, and increased opportunities for access to higher education, the central bureaucracy was very successful in imposing uniformity at all levels and in all respects of the higher education system. Uniform institutional structures as well as party control of institutional management were guided by the typical five-year state plan. Conforming to the planned system was the paramount means for evaluating the effectiveness of each institution (Barr 1994; Burgen 1996; Mauch & Sabloff 1995). Central planning led to excessive specialization and limited choice for the individual. The Ministry of Education shaped higher education policy through budgetary control, by decrees, by approving all curricula, and personnel assignments. Highly specialized universities reported to different Ministries with little exchange among academic disciplines or flexibility to introduce new subjects.

Technically, the length of the first and unique degree was four-and-a-half to six years. The minimum applied for some institutions in economics and high school teacher-training colleges, and the maximum for medicine. For the universities and the engineering institutes the course was ten semesters long. There was no division between bachelor and master degrees; the diploma was uniform. For most of the courses longer than ten semesters, there was a final state examination, awarded by a committee of the institution without special representations by the government.

With few exceptions, the major subjects were chosen at the moment of enrollment, the curriculum was rigid and students had almost no choice. "Even when options do exist, they are hampered by "tunnelization" (Penkov 1992, p.96). Graduate studies were called "*aspirantura*" and the Ph.D. students "*aspirants*." The length of a graduate course was three years and led to the degree of "candidate of sciences" where the specialization could be in a given discipline. The number of "aspirants," just like the number of all students, was determined by the government each year. Teaching load was defined. There were two main groups of teaching: formal lecturing (*ex cathedra*) and exercises (problem solving, seminar discussions, laboratory and field work, etc.). The average teaching load for a lecturer was four to six hours per week, and in the case of exercises - 10-12 hours per week.

This higher educational model satisfied the communist conception for the planned development of economy, society, and culture. The political order developed this idea to its full extent by creating a large number of professional and semi-professional institutions. The construction of the curricula was based on the principle that there existed a certain body of knowledge that should be learned by the student in order for him/her to perform the everyday activities in a specific, predetermined occupation till the rest of their lives.

The Shift of the Existing Degree-System

The intended degree change in Bulgaria was expressed mainly in the introduction of the undergraduate, the bachelor's, degree level. In this sense, the implementation of the policy for the introduction of the different degrees presented a specific Bulgarian peculiarity. One way to illustrate it was provided by Burton Clark and his conception of *vertical differentiation* within institutions of higher education. Clark distinguished between "the horizontally aligned units as *sections* and the vertical arrangement as *tiers*. Among institutions, the lateral separations are called *sectors*; the vertical, *hierarchies*." (1983, p. 36). Based on his conceptual distinctions, the Bulgarian system change was to be a form of **descending vertical degree differentiation of higher education** through which the long phase of higher education was to be split into two consequent tiers (see Table 2).

Table 2

Before 1995	1995 and Later
Doctor of Science (<i>Doktor na Naukite</i>)	No Corresponding Degree
Candidate of Science (<i>Kandidat na Naukite</i>)	Doctor of Science (<i>Doktor</i>)
Diploma of Completed Higher Education (<i>Diploma za Zavarsheno Visshе Obrazovanie</i>)	Master (<i>Magistar</i>)
No Corresponding Degree	Bachelor (<i>Bakalavar</i>)
Diploma of Completed Semi-Higher Education (<i>Diploma za Zavarsheno Poluvisshe Obrazovanie</i>)	Specialist (<i>Spetsialist</i>)

Based on Dobrow-King, M. (1998). "New Structure of Bulgarian Higher Education". *WENR*, November/December 1998, Volume 11, issue 6, pp. 10-11.

Another more recent feature of this descending degree differentiation was the inclusion of the so-called semi-higher (*polu-visshe*) education (a type of vocational education) in the new higher education structure. This degree level was incorporated into the system of higher education with the Law on the Change and Amendment of the 1995 Law on Higher Education from July 2, 1999 (Article 42 (5), State Newsletter N66, July 23, 1999). This degree, called "specialist," would precede the bachelor's degree. Thus as of academic 1999-2000, the Bulgarian higher education system will consist of four potential degree levels of higher education instead of three.

It is important to note that the levels of certification were the first step in the conceptualization of the policy for the introduction of the vertical tiers; the levels, and content, of training that would correspond to them were to follow. In this sense, the degree differentiation was to play a definitive role in the forthcoming program re-structuring. Finally, the new degree system was introduced by the government which intended to initiate reform.

Reasons For The Degree Shift

Although discussions about restructuring the socialist type of education dated much earlier in the country, the introduction of the three-level system of education into the existing traditional higher education was a reform component of the *1995 Law on Higher Education*. As such it was also formulated and implemented by the government, or, from the top. The new degree structure was a mechanism that, many believed, would stimulate university transformation and provide the means for institutional adaptation to the changing environment. Several reasons for the formulation of this policy could be mentioned. Some of them had been explicitly stated; others, implicitly suggested.

The main reason was the desire to facilitate the integration of Bulgarian higher education into the European educational structures through the new degree structure. The present government direction of priority and strong urge towards compliance with the requirements of the European Union in order to qualify for entering the Union as full members underlie the desire for synchronization. Such synchronization would stimulate future co-operation and academic exchange with foreign universities. In this respect, the decision reflected international movements in that direction (the Sorbonne and Bologna Declarations on the Harmonization of the Architecture of the European System of Higher Education of 1998 and 1999 respectively) and considerations of similar degree restructuring in Western countries (Denmark, Germany, Finland, the Netherlands to name a few).

With respect to this explicitly stated reason, many believed, especially from the academic circles, that the synchronization impulses of the government were only the formal reason for the formulation of this policy. The real reasons were economic. As one of my interviewees stated, "The reason for the tiered form of education are only on the surface to harmonize higher education with the international standards – this is only pro forma. The subtle idea is different: to reduce the expenses for education; in this way, students will be reduced as well – the strategy is that only 10% of the students will continue for the master's degree and only 1% for the doctoral... and thus, faculty will be reduced as well" (Dimitrov April 29, 1998, interview).

As another reason, the policy was seen as a means to stimulate the inward reform of the institutions of higher education in order to facilitate their adaptation to the fluctuating labor market conditions and the changing economy and society. As the Sofia University Rector stated in our interview, "The question about the introduction of the three-tier system in Bulgaria is in connection with the re-assessment of our higher education system with respect to the dominating world tendencies – in England and France... not Germany where such a transformation is also being considered. For us this is an opportunity to re-evaluate to what extent the higher education we provide responds to the needs of society" (Lalov May 27, 1998, interview). The government, which was the one to initiate, formulate and enforce the policy for the new degrees, intended reform. One strong signal for the government's intention to direct change was also the major implementation instrument of compliance which it applied.

In addition, the central authorities saw in this shift a possibility to amend the consequences of the preceding period of university autonomy (Round Table 1998). The undergraduate level would give opportunities for the combination of the myriad of newly-created specialties; it could also provide the basis for future school mergers and the reduction of the increased number of institutions.

To some extent, the further vertical differentiation of the system was a reaction to the increased demand for higher education in Bulgaria. In the decade after the political changes, the number of students enrolled in the Bulgarian institutions doubled as also did the number of applicants. As Clark stated, "[t]he problems of access in modern higher education are most severe in the systems whose primary enterprises have only one tier. Broadened entry, then, means the right of much larger numbers of students who complete the secondary level to enter into the one meaningful level, specialize in it, and graduate with a certified job-related competence" (Clark 1983, p. 51).

Finally, the policy came as a natural continuation to previous institutional experiments with program cycles and degree differentiated programs.

ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

PART I: Review of the Normative Basis for the New Degree Structure

The higher education normative base is that set of documents which provide direction or mandate the developments in the field. These documents pre-determine to a large extent the final result of the implementation of the policy for the introduction of the new system. As it has been already discussed, higher education policy formulation and implementation in Bulgaria is regulated by the central authorities. This control is expressed above all in the **1995 Law on Higher Education** – a legislative act which is passed by the Bulgarian Parliament. The 1995 Law was enforced on December 27, 1995 in State Newsletter N112; some changes to it were made later on in April of 1996; it was also amended three times in July of 1997. All of the quotes that follow incorporate the changes and are taken from State Newsletter N58 from July 22, 1997. This Law plays a decisive role for the vertical degree differentiation of higher education. In this connection, I provide a description of these aspects of the Law that touch upon it.

The Law defines the "structure, the functions, the governance, and the financing of higher education in Bulgaria" (Article 1). It also creates several sub-Law acts which go into further detail concerning different aspects of higher education.

✍ The Role of the State

The first aspect of regulation that is directly related to the policy of my interest is the role of the State in setting higher education policy. In the Law, the State is given special functions in the management of higher education. The Parliament, the Council of Ministers, the Ministry of Education and Science, and the National Agency for Evaluation and Accreditation execute state control. These State authorities are empowered to establish, transform, and close higher schools, to approve the budget of each state institution with an annual Law on the State Budget, to define the State Register of Specialties, to approve the Uniform State Requirements for obtaining degrees, to define the number of students to be admitted at every institution, to define student tuition fees, to determine scholarships and different aspects of the students' living conditions, and to define the requirements for the recognition of diplomas from abroad (Chapter 2, articles 8-10).

As it is evident, higher education policy which directs university governance and functioning has remained strongly centralized. Moreover the highest organs of the State such as the Parliament and the Council of Ministers define the way higher education functions. Universities have been given the responsibility to govern themselves within the framework of these educational policies. Their involvement has been relegated to the actual implementation of the policies. One result of this situation is that ambiguity in creating policies will unavoidably obstruct their implementation at the institutional level.

✍ The Lack of Clear Conception Behind the New Policy

The 1995 Law on Higher Education was the normative document which introduced reform in the field. The new educational policy for the introduction of the three-tier system of a bachelor, master, and doctor was formulated in this Law. However the Law does not offer a general conception behind this policy; it simply deals with two mechanical aspects. The first aspect reflects the length of study:

Article 42 (1) The system of higher education shall organize a process of learning after the completion of secondary school, consisting of the following degrees:

1. First degree - with a curriculum for at least four years ending with awarding a Bachelor's degree;
2. Second degree - with duration of studies at least five years or one year after the Bachelor's degree, ending with a Master's degree;
3. Third degree - with duration of the studies after the Master's degree at least three years ending with a Doctor's degree.

(2) The duration of studies at colleges shall be at least three years ending with an Expert's degree.

Article 46 Doctors could work on their degrees individually following state requirements.

The second aspect of the Law's conception refers to the types of the institutions of higher education and the different degrees they can offer. Thus according to Article 17, *Universities* are those higher education institutions which provide training in a wide range of specialties at least in three out of the four major fields of science (the humanities, natural, social and technical sciences). The universities have their own research potential and facilities; they are entitled to train their students for all degrees

Specialized higher education institutions are engaged in training and scientific research in (a) major field(s) of science, arts, sports and defense. Their names reflect the specificities of the training process. These higher education institutions are also entitled to organize training for all degrees.

Colleges offer a relatively shorter-term vocationally oriented training. Their students receive the degree "specialist in..."

✍ The Objectives of Higher Education

A direct bearing on the implementation of the new policy have the objectives of higher education which the Law sets as: "the preparation of highly qualified specialists above the secondary school level" (Article 2). The definition places the importance on highly-specialized knowledge which, on its part, is based on factual knowledge. This tendency has been traditionally strong in Bulgaria. The assumption that education needed to be specialized, and that specialized study was necessary for a professional career, underlined the transformation of higher education in the nineteenth century. After W.W.II, the Soviet model of education, based on the communist conception for the planned development of economy, society, and culture, developed this idea to its full extent by creating a large number of professional and semi-professional institutions. With the separation of research and university education, higher education in Bulgaria started providing mostly professional training. Specialized curricula have been based on the principle that there exists a certain body of knowledge that should be learned by the students in order for them to perform the everyday activities in a specific range of occupations. In this sense, and with respect to the new degree system, to divide this body of knowledge into two sub-portions would certainly produce the incomplete version of the expected specialist.

✍ The Sub-Law Documents

The 1995 Law created two documents which immediately lead one to believe that the path to learning is one and it is well-known in advance: the Uniform State Requirements and the State Register of Specialties. These documents have an enormous impact on the new degree system.

Article 9

(3) The Council of Ministers shall:

4. Approve the state register of educational and qualification degrees by individual specialties;
5. Approve the uniform state requirements for obtaining educational degrees by professions or specialties;

Article 10

(2) The Ministry of Education, Science and Technologies shall:

1. Make proposals before the Council of Ministers as per Art. 9, paragraph 3, sub-paragraphs 1-9;
3. Prepare and maintain the state register of specialties at higher schools.

☞ The Uniform State Requirements of Courses

The Uniform State Requirements are created and approved for every individual specialty. They are published in the State Newsletter in the form of an Order which is passed with a Decree of the Council of Ministers. For example, the Order for the approved Uniform State Requirements for the obtaining of higher education in the "Public Administration" specialty was approved with a Decree N172 from April 24, 1997 and promulgated in the State Newspaper N35 from May 2, 1997.

The Uniform State Requirements set the minimum course load of the different degree levels and specialties. This minimum usually encompasses from three quarters to a half of the study content. In essence, they present a list of required courses which must be taken by everyone in this degree. Apart from the minimum of required courses, the Requirements allow the universities to have other courses added to the list, both required and elective. The courses of the optional type cannot be more than 10% from the total course load as recorded in the study plan.

The Requirements also define: the type of school which can offer higher education in this specialty, the forms of education in which the specialized degrees would be offered (such as full-time, part-time, and evening courses), the student admission procedures, the length of the study including the minimum study hours, the type of exams and the composition of the exam committees, and the types of courses offered in the specialty (obligatory, electives, and optional) together with the course load for each of them, the type of faculty who can lecture, and the length of the practical hours.

The Requirements for the four-year bachelor level in most of the specialties at the Faculty of Philosophy define the minimum course load for this level at 3,000 contact hours; it is 3,200 contact hours for the bachelor level in the specialties at the Faculty of Biology; and it is 2,800 contact hours at the Faculty of Economics and Business Administration; the master degrees in most of the above specialties at the three Faculties are usually defined at a minimum course load of 700 contact hours for one year of study.

☞ The State Register of Specialties

The different specialties that are recognized by the State, and from which institutions of higher education can choose, are listed in the State Register of Specialties. It was promulgated in State Newsletter N24 from March 21, 1997; various changes within the Register have been made after that. The register is organized in the following principle: it lists the field of a given discipline, then lists the specialties or professions that might exist under this field and then it gives the qualification degree a student can achieve in this specialty. For example:

N	Name	Qualification Degree, Professional Qualification		
		Bachelor	Master	Specialist
1	2	3	4	5
1.	EDUCATION			
1.1.	Pedagogy	Pedagogue	Master-pedagogue	-
1.1.2.	Pre-school and Elementary School Pedagogy	Pedagogue	Master-pedagogue	-
1.1.3.	Special Pedagogy	Pedagogue	Master-pedagogue	-
1.1.4.	Social Pedagogy	Pedagogue	Master-pedagogue	-
1.1.5.	Pre-School Pedagogy	-	-	Pedagogue in Kindergarten
1.1.6.	Pre-School Pedagogy and Foreign Language	Pedagogue	-	Pedagogue in Kindergarten
1.1.7.	Elementary School Pedagogy	-	-	Pedagogue in Elementary School

The State Register of the Specialties is approved by the Council of Ministers; changes in it can be made through the Minister of Education who requests them before the Council of Ministers.

☞ University Autonomy and Self-Governance

The role of the individual institutions in the policy implementation process is of a large importance to the study. Chapter Four of the 1995 Law focuses on the academic autonomy which has been granted to the institutions of higher education. According to it, the institutions are given a "choice" in most aspects of their activities from a given number or alternatives of options that are provided by the Law.

Article 19

(2) The academic autonomy shall include academic freedoms, academic self-government and inviolability of the territory of higher schools.

(3) Higher schools shall perform their overall activities on the basis of the academic autonomy principle, while observing the laws in this country.

Article 20

The academic freedom is expressed in the freedom of teaching, the freedom of research, the freedom of acts of creativity, and the freedom of training.

Article 21

The academic self-government is expressed in:

1. The electivity of all bodies with a fixed term of office;
2. The right of higher schools to decide their structure and activities in their own regulations in conformity with the provisions of this Act;
3. The independent choice of faculty, admission requirements and forms of training students and postgraduates;
4. The independent development and implementation of curricula and research projects;
5. The choice of specialties to be taught;

☞ The Primacy of the Faculty Structure

With respect to the institutional structures, the Law defines the Faculty structure as the primary one. Thus:

Article 26

(1) Faculties are the main units of higher schools, bringing together individual Chairs to train students in one or more related specialties.

☞ The Structure and Organization of the Study Process and the Evaluation Methods

The structure and organization of the study process at the schools of higher education have also been defined:

Article 39

Studies shall be conducted at higher schools on the basis of training documentation for each specialty, including a qualification description, a study plan, a study program of the disciplines and an annual time table.

Article 40

- (1) The contents of learning shall be organized for each discipline in distinct modules.
- (2) Each module shall include at least 15 academic hours of training. The academic hour is 45 minutes long.

Article 41

- (1) Education at the higher schools shall be organized in required, elective, and optional courses.
- (2) Each student shall have the right to choose subjects within the framework of the approved curriculum.

The basic form of exam, the written form, as well as the types of the final exams for graduation are defined in articles 44-45. The Law also recognizes only four forms of learning: "full-time, part-time, evening courses and correspondence education" (Article 42 (6)).

✍ The Accreditation Requirement

One other reform element which the 1995 Law introduces was the requirement for accreditation which is to be accomplished by the newly-created National Accreditation Agency. The way it has been defined in the Law, this process of accreditation bears directly on the introduction of the three-level system of education: accreditation in Bulgaria means compliance with the normative base - since education is subsidized by the government and since all functions of the university are centrally-governed, non-compliance with the Law and the other documents will result in no accreditation and consequently no funds:

Article 75

Accreditation is the recognition of the consistency of the activities of a school of higher education, any of its basic units or a given specialty with the state requirements.

Article 87

- (1) The accreditation shall be valid for five years. Higher schools which have not participated in an accreditation or an evaluation procedure for five years shall not be entitled to state subsidies or any other funding by the state.

15. Higher schools and their basic units which have not participated or expressed their willingness to participate in an accreditation or assessment procedure for three years after the entry into force of this Act shall not receive state subsidy or any other financing by the state (from the Transitional and Concluding Provisions section).

✍ Deadlines for the Introduction of the Three Tiers

The Law on Higher Education gives deadlines for the introduction of the new tiers. However, the development of the new bachelor programs depended on the preparation of the Uniform State Requirements. The latter were not ready before the deadline of the Law; a new deadline was set up with an amendment to the Law. Both were as follows:

12. Higher schools shall introduce the degrees within one year after the entry into force of this Act.

(Transitional and Concluding Provisions, State Newsletter, N112, 27 December 1995)

Two years later, this requirement was changed to read:

12 Higher schools shall introduce the degrees within two year after the entry into force of this Act.

(Transitional and Concluding Provisions, State Newsletter, N56, 1997)

✍ Faculty Salaries

Finally, the Law authorizes the Ministry Council to pass regulations related to the faculty remuneration for their work at state institutions:

Article 92

The Council of Ministers shall adopt the rules to determine the payment of staff working at public higher schools.

As a result, Decree N29 of the Council of Ministers, last modified in July 2, 1999 in the State Newsletter N67, states that the number of people employed by every institution as well as the average monthly salary of the employees should be defined by the schools themselves after following: their budget allocations in the State Budget, their own resources, and follow the attached salary scale as a guiding principle (Article 5; Attachment N6 for the salary scale).

PART II: Analysis of the Interview Transcripts and the Institutional Materials

Four main themes emerged as general topics under which the collected data from the interview process could be presented:

1. Program Area
2. Student-related Issues
3. Faculty-related Issues
4. University Organization

1. Program Area

The first area of university activities which has been most strongly influenced by the new policy is the area of study plans and programs: all study plans have been reworked to reflect the Uniform State Requirements. In this respect, it is important to point out that every Dean of Faculty whom I approached for an interview immediately re-directed me to the Vice-Dean of Academic Affairs who would be the one to address issues around the three-tier system of education. Then, the next person I was immediately directed to by the Vice-Dean was the Faculty Inspector – the person who kept the statistics for student’s progress. There emerged three major sub-fields of interest in this area::

- 1.1) Structure of the new degrees,
- 1.2) Content of the new degrees, and
- 1.3) Methods of teaching and evaluation.

1.1) Structure of the New Degrees

The lack of clear conception behind the new degree system was a major theme which most of the interview participants commented on. Otherwise restrictive with respect to different aspect related to higher education functioning, the central government did not formulate any objectives for the new policy to aim at. As a highly-placed administrator noted:

"We all know now, of course, that learning should be incessant. But how do we define it within the framework of the educational program, of the study process, how do we work with this concept? Now the Law provides the following scheme: a bachelor is the one who studies for 8 semesters; a master – the one who studies for 10. And this is it. I have very high respect for the principle of chronology, it provides the base for all historical knowledge, but in this case it does not help me at all to understand what it is all about."

A faculty (Microbiology) also expressed his concern with the unclear goals of the State with respect to the degree shift:

"The first difficulty we encounter comes from the State level: there is an absolute obscurity what we are going to prepare the bachelors for... and from there comes the enormous difference between the volume of knowledge and future realization. In other words, if this degree is to respond to the economic situation and the market, then preparing the bachelor should be less rigorous... because the market requires broad-based specialty teaching which leads to preparing students without a specialty."

Because of the contradiction between vague goals and prescriptive regulations, it was common that various problems which were detected by the people were immediately explained with the lack of clear State policy on the given issue. As a faculty member (Sociology) noted:

"The State has not solved the problem with the master and the doctor degrees as well. It says that the doctorate will be an educational level with eight years of study; the state does not want to subsidize the master level, but only the bachelor's and the doctoral, or only those who can pay can continue – but these are not the best students. This will devalue the doctoral degree."

The lack of a conception behind the new structure at the central level brought a number of discussions focusing on what the new structure might or should be. Thus people would consider their knowledge of other foreign degree structures and comment on the use of these in Bulgaria. A faculty (Economics) said:

"The bachelor-master-doctor structure is oriented towards the real needs of the different people, it is oriented towards the market economy, it is turned towards the student as opposed to the Prussian system and this of the former Eastern Economic Block... there the educational system was tuned to the state – the state paid and controlled educational policy; students had to adjust and become what the state wanted them to be. The philosophy of the previous [our] structure was simple: Study and you will find out what you study for afterwards. The three-tier structure says: Find out what you want and education will help you realize your ideas."

There were also opinions that this educational structure belonged to different cultural and educational values and would not find its place in the Bulgarian context. A faculty (Philosophy) noted:

"The idea behind the three-tier structure has been perverse from the very beginning: this is an ideal system for new private institutions where things are just starting... but when it comes to the re-structuring of these huge state institutions... the new bachelor programs there prepare have the master's load but for four years. What will the masters be studying then?"

The new bachelor study plans in all three Faculties were prepared for the academic year 1998-1999. The programs were made to fit the four years as it was prescribed in the normative base. Most of my interview participants shared with me that there were no difficulties in preparing the new study plans for there were not that many changes. The most significant one was expressed in the provision of electives as well as optional courses in the new programs. A strong reason behind the inclusion of such courses was the need to make the study plans consistent with the Uniform State Requirements. As several faculty members commented:

"The new study plans are somewhat different – the previous fifth year is all gone now. And we have tried to connect the levels...." (Business Administration)

"It was not difficult for this Faculty to switch to the new system – in the past education here was divided: there were specialty-base studies for three-and-a-half years and profile studies for one year; then, the last, tenth, semester was usually filled up with courses around which different modifications occurred. What is a little better now is the possibility to move from one specialty to another in the Faculty and to select from some electives even from another specialty." (Biology)

"Well, we still have not started graduating the first bachelors... we are still preparing the old type of engineers... or the so-called masters nowadays. Maybe in a couple of years we will have the first bachelors. Their education is a year or two shorter... and practically what has been removed from their studies have been superstructure or the disciplines which form already the real specialist... otherwise, the theoretical preparation is the same." (Engineering)

Another recurring theme from the interviews was related to the preservation of the so-called "narrow tunnel" of studies. In the opinion of many of the interview participants, this "narrow tunnel" was expressed in the persisting "fixed" structure of the curricula. As a highly-placed administrator said:

"The problem with the new courses and specialties became really serious when they decided to develop a state standard for needed course minimum... sometimes this minimum reached 90% of the total course load; these standards define each discipline, when to be taken, in what contact hours... Prospective students apply directly to the respective Chair-department, or, the bachelor's degree belongs to a given Chair-department."

And another faculty (Industrial Management) shared:

"In creating our study plans, we always followed the State Requirements. And... I think they reflect the reality... So we first follow them, and then... the worst part is though when there is a change in them. For example, first, of all, the State Register did not have Industrial Management as a specialty in it so we followed the requirements for the Economist... and now, the specialty we wanted it out and we ... we are changing."

The prescriptive nature of the State Register of Specialties was another theme which kept reappearing. As a Faculty Vice-Dean expressed his opinion:

"This Register is an absolute stupidity – I understand that thanks to it many unneeded specialties were eliminated after their boom in the past years, but it also eliminated needed ones: for example, European Studies, where can we put it, it is something completely different, it is not simply History, Philology ..."

Many of my interviewees commented on the unclear relationship between the different levels. The connection between the bachelor and the master levels was most discussed. The other two educational levels, the specialist and the doctor, were apparently not on the agenda for concern yet. As a highly-placed administrator commented:

"The biggest thoughtlessness is that in order to continue in the master degree one has to have finished the respective bachelor degree in the same specialty. Even more, in many cases one has to have finished the respective bachelor degree in the same specialty and at "our" university."

And another faculty member (Biology) agreed:

"It is again the nomenclature regulations that leave it unclear whether one can be a bachelor in one thing, master in another – so, every school is placing requirements at the entrance of the master programs which can be fulfilled only by the students of this school..."

1.2). Content of the New Degrees

The most recurrent theme here concerned the course load in the bachelor degrees, or the number of disciplines per year and the contact hours they were to be taught in. In the words of a faculty member (Philosophy):

"The following problems occurred while developing the new study plans: practically the previous 5 years of study now had to be squeezed in 4 years in order to preserve the level and rigor of student preparation. It is at the level of the master programs where there is some initiative where faculty teaching teams work together... at the level of the bachelor programs changes are minimal."

In support of the words uttered above, a comparison between the old study plans reveals the great similarity between them: almost all courses from the past plans are present in the new plans. However, whereas the course load for five years in the old study plan in Philosophy, for example, included 3,210 contact hours, the new study plan in the same specialty but for four years now envisions 3,150 contact hours. With respect to this, a faculty member exclaimed:

"In the existing bachelor programs, all specializing courses are being squeezed down into the four years and everything "unnecessary" from the obligatory program has been thrown out; however, both the students and the faculty have their course load normatively defined – this means that against the law to increase the contact hours."

Another faculty member (Chemistry) agreed:

"There is a general struggle to bring the disciplines from the former fifth and fourth year down into the beginning years. This is where the increase of different disciplines comes from... but the increase of disciplines, or the course load for the students, is also State policy, which ties the faculty teaching course load to the salary – every faculty needs to make minimum 360 contact hours per year in order to receive the optimal salary."

As a highly-placed administrator and faculty member said:

"Yes, the programs are highly loaded with courses... indeed, the bachelor's level in Economics requires 3,060 contact hours. Compared to the programs in the past, this is considerably higher."

And a faculty member (Biology) agreed:

"On the one hand, with such heavily loaded programs we provide more knowledge to the students... but on the other hand, they have less free time. So, students are overloaded with learning of factual material while the faculty have absolutely no time for research."

The high course load in the new bachelor programs at the institutions of higher education was a theme which also occurred in my interview with an official at the Ministry of Education who exclaimed:

"The development of programs turned into sheer arithmetic and calculation."

Several faculty members commented on the type of courses that usually got dropped off the study plans in an attempt to preserve the status quo:

"The perverse character of the new policy is in the following: the status and organization of the master degrees is still vague - above all, no one knows who will be financing this level... the Ministry spreads rumors that only 10% of the bachelors will be allowed to continue in the master degrees, these students will be paying for their degrees themselves. As a result, many faculty members fear of losing their jobs - especially these whose courses were usually offered in the last two years in the past... these faculty are habilitated and have the most specialized knowledge and hold the seats of power at the institutions. Thus they manage to offer their highly specialized courses in the lower years of study so that they become part of the bachelor's degree; quite often this is done at the expense of other courses, and the colleagues teaching them, mostly the ones of the general learning type." (Organic Chemistry)

"Everyone creates study plan in which we squeeze in all kinds of technical disciplines and very little... language and computer preparation. We have overloaded the student with technical sciences, with math, with physics, with many many others..."(Technical Sciences)

"If we have a look at the weekly load of our students... we made new study plans but we couldn't make their initiation, their first couple of semesters different for them... when it is so difficult for them, when they are still adapting... we put 32-34 contact hours weekly.. it is impossible for them... they have 3-4 heavy exams at the end of the first semester, second semester, third semester... and at the end we wonder why our students know nothing... in almost any discipline..." (Ship Building)

One side of this development touched upon the other recurring theme: the persistence of the narrowly-specializing character of the bachelor programs. As two faculty members commented:

"The problem has a different dimension as well - as long as the master degrees will be student-paid, institutions of higher education attempt to make the bachelor degrees even more narrowly specialized since few students will be able to continue further... these students will want to leave the institutions prepared for the eventual professions... The paradox is that although we see the bachelor level as the one where different specialties can be grouped together to provide foundations for future studies, the base of one specialty only is still rather strongly represented here." (Philosophy)

"In the natural sciences, the study plans include courses which are there simply for one reason – to preserve the teaching course load of given faculty members, not that there is really a need for such narrow specializing courses. In addition, our study plans are extremely theoretical... and the serious contact-hour load turns the students into school pupils and not into creative individuals who have the time for self-education... our students have totally limited world view..." (Mathematics)

The development of the master programs also followed the central regulations. However, the restrictions with respect to this level, as well as the negative consequences, seemed to be less. In the words of a faculty member (Sociology):

"On the content side, there are certain regulations that are followed in the development of the master degrees: the length of study should be 1 or 2 years, the minimum course load - 700 contact hours, there is a given number of base disciplines, and the degree should finish with a diploma. Usually the content of a master program is discussed amongst the faculty of the specialty in which the specialty is... there are faculty teams for interdisciplinary master programs such as Intercultural Dialog and European Studies program - here even, faculty from other Faculties take part."

There also seemed to be a strong tendency for the growing development of many master degrees since their character remained extremely narrowly-specialized. As a member of the teaching staff said:

"There are many master programs because of the many narrow specialties – there are narrow, very narrow specializing courses in the master degrees; thus the continuation from the bachelor degree level to the master and the doctor ones here is only along the narrow vertical line, only in the same specialty." (Education)

1.3). Methods of Teaching and Evaluation

The lecture method of teaching was the main method for conducting classes in the previous educational system. The lack of change in this respect was voiced by many of the interview participants. However, there were seemingly opposing opinions amongst my interviewees from the different Faculties. In the words of two faculty members:

"The lecture form here will be preserved until the technical equipment increases as well as the available literature." (Physics)

"It is absurd to follow this outdated mode of teaching – it allows no development neither on the part of the student, nor on the part of the professor" (Philosophy)

The exam methods used were also discussed. There seemed to be general disagreement with the types of exams prescribed by the central government as well as dissatisfaction with the methods which were still employed. As two faculty members exclaimed:

"According to the Law, exams should be written and not oral - no one here does that." (Cultural Studies)

"Although many people participated in the preparation of the Uniform State Requirements, the Ministry had the last word; and there were lots of mistakes made especially with respect to the final degree examination; for example, in the natural sciences, one receives a degree only after passing a State Exam – this is a hindrance to all of us."

2. Student-related Issues

The main themes which I arranged under this topic concern the different opportunities that the new study plans and Faculty arrangements provide for the student growth and development. The first theme discusses the existing possibilities for students to change specialties at the bachelor level. Most of the interview participants agreed that within the framework of the same Faculty there are more chances for this now as compared to the past. Transfer of students at the bachelors level was interpreted as change of specialty within the Faculty: a process that had existed in the past in almost all Faculties but was becoming more prominent now. In the words of the faculty members:

"The transfer of students in a different specialty inside the Faculty can be done after the first year - it has always been this way. The more prestigious specialties (such as European Studies both bachelor and master, Public Administration) require excellent grades. The Dean's Council makes the final decision." (Philosophy)

"There is communication between the two specialties we offer. We have developed requirements for such a transfer or for acquiring a certificate for second specialty, and even a second diploma... all that is needed on the student's part is an early plan, a written request, and attendance of additional lectures and exams." (Economics)

"Students apply directly to one specialty and are accepted in it. They can file a request for transferring from one specialty within the Faculty into another. But for my five years of work here I am not aware of such a case." (Inspector at a Biological Faculty)

"We have some electives and some options for choice... well, students can go from one specialty to another but is this flexibility... and I don't know about adaptability, computer skills, and all there... transferable skills – we certainly do not provide them to them" (Engineering)

Opportunities for students to change specialties at the bachelor level between different Faculties seemed somewhat different at the different Faculties. The process depended on the distance of the specialty students expressed desire to come from. Although good grades were an asset in such transfer attempts, the course content was more important. In addition, most specialties at the Faculties I studied had their requirements for previous studies. Most often, students from related disciplines would have more chances at the early couple of years of study. The situation seemed unclear and one reason for this was the lack of precedents since up till now students were neither allowed nor expected to want to change their initial specialty.

In addition, the opportunities to continue in the master degree of a different specialty than the one of the bachelor degree varied at the different Faculties. The situation again seemed unclear since the future master degree programs were dependent on the State's decision to subsidize them or not. The interview participants shared with me that the opportunities for such continuation would be strongly dependent on the status of the master degrees. In general, it seemed hard to continue in the master degree which was different from the bachelor degree one had completed. As a Vice-Dean commented:

"The possibilities to continue further in the master degrees are again vague because of a number of paradoxes on the part of the normative base: according to it, one can enroll in any master program, but one cannot finish it without the bachelor course load in the same specialty. We totally disagree with this. The Faculty is trying to swerve the Law and has invented a little trick: here we say that we accept not only bachelors in philosophy but also bachelors in all social sciences... the latter term is an extremely vague one in Bulgaria."

Student participation in structuring their programs and even in administering the institution was yet another theme that I discussed with my interviewees. In comparison to the system before, there are now two types of courses from which students can choose: the elective type of courses which on their part fall into different groups, and the optional courses which have no obligation attached to them whatsoever and play no role in the final grades. For example, according to the study plan of the bachelor degree in Philosophy students can choose 4 out of 9 offered electives. In addition, students can take a course at another Faculty of their choice which can be considered towards the elective requirement provided that the contact hours are the same and the final course exam is passed. Students are also required to listen to 6 special courses out of several offered each year.

There seemed to be also opportunities for students to choose courses offered at other Faculties. However, the heavy course load of the students' required programs allowed them little time for external things. Some of the students could choose courses in the later semesters from the Faculties in fields closer in nature. Several faculty members commented:

"Concerning the choice of really different courses... from the course load perspective, students here do not have the time to choose something like philosophy or computers; from the perspective of the students' wishes, they again cannot – for what are they going to do with this course..." (Biology)

"In the bachelor programs there are electives - every other semester students choose one course from several; the masters choose one every semester. The electives change and get more and more narrowly profiled with the years. There are no optional courses... Of course students can attend whatever courses they want where-ever they want – it is not calculated in the final grades but it can be reflected in the diploma." (Economics)

Apart from having the opportunity to choose courses from several offered electives, students have little participation in any other university area. In this connection, student evaluation of faculty and programs, as another theme which was discussed in the interviews, has not been systematically implemented at any of the school. As one example:

"There is no student evaluation mechanism - if students are asked for feedback at all, it is being done at the initiative of the individual faculty member... such evaluations are followed by no administrative consequences... they can only serve for faculty's orientation." (Sociology)

A theme that occupied my interviewees concerned the lack of any practically-oriented courses or internships for students during their studies – a tendency which was found to be contrary to the situation in the past.

"The natural sciences are more experimentally oriented and the existing theoretical orientation of the bachelor degrees is limiting the faculty members. Thus on the one hand, there is a reduction of the years of study; on the other hand - reduction of the time for experiments for the students. Finally, the lack of resources makes our teaching outdated, for we have no money for technology... our bachelors will not be competitive on the market... There are absolutely no opportunities for the students to apply out there what they learn at the university." (Physics)

"The practically-oriented courses here are in a very bad state of affairs. Theoretically, students must have 45 days of practice in Business Administration and 160 hours in the Economics. The latter has been completely dropped. The first one is covered somehow through some projects which are basically done in order to fulfill the requirements. Here we depend on the economic sector and they don't need students out there. Yes, we know that faculty administration can also arrange it but it needs a lot of running around to organize it." (Economics)

"The situation is basically tragic – we used to have contracts with factories around the town where our students could get some experience. Nothing is done now – practical training is the biggest problem..." (Technical Studies)

Finally, the normative base requires that all institutions of higher education should provide opportunities for students to pursue a second specialty as an addition as well as even a full second degree. The different Faculties have arranged that within their own framework – the requirements placed before students were different and depended on

the subject matter. However, completing such an optional venue was quite difficult because of the course load of students, especially in the natural sciences. One final similarity amongst all Faculties was the tendency for the students to wish to continue for the respective master degree. As one summary:

"All our students want to continue for the master degrees – they don't consider the bachelor degree to be a real degree." (Economics)

3. Faculty-related Issues

The main theme that emerged with respect to the faculty and the new degree system concerned finances. Due to ambiguity on the State's part with respect to financing the different levels of the three-tier system, different speculations the future status of the master degrees created apparent inclinations on the part of the faculty to try to preserve their courses within the bachelor programs regardless of the course specificities. In addition, the direct link between the number of every faculty's contact hours per month and the optimal monthly salary further exacerbated the situation: the less the contact hours, the less the money. As a highly-placed administrator exclaimed:

"The change is difficult - if a certain specialized course is reduced, some faculty will remain without classes to teach. Many of the university people, because of the fact that their payment is formed on the basis of the auditory load, strove to preserve their courses - there still exists this archaic system of teaching load."

4. University Organization

Almost all of my interviewees referred to the horizontal structure of the universities, or the Chair-Faculty structure, as creating problems for the full development of the new tier system. The institutions were often called "a federation of Faculties" and references were made concerning the "feudalism amongst the Faculties." As a highly-placed administrator said:

"Problems with the development of the study plans were created by the feudal division amongst the Faculties - instead of integrating and working together, every Faculty has completely isolated itself; it is not only that the students cannot move between the Faculties but broad-integrative courses such as European Studies or Information Technologies have no chances."

One direct consequence of this strict division between the University units is related to the idea that the bachelor degrees should consist of broad-based courses – such, in the opinion of a faculty (Philosophy) will be hard to achieve:

"It is not possible to organized inter-disciplinary teams of faculty because the faculty are entrenched in a given Chair-department... it is the unit that accounts both for the teaching load and the activity."

Summary

The findings of this study have described a direct connection between the prescriptive normative base for higher education and the consequences of the implementation of the State-formulated and implemented higher education policy for the introduction of the bachelor-master-doctor structure. The 1995 Law on Higher Education has had the largest influence on the new tier structure. Through this Law the State has established restrictive control over the university functioning and governance. The Parliament, the Council of Ministers, the Ministry of Education and Science, and the National Agency for Evaluation and Accreditation have been the institutions to execute the State control.

Despite the lack of a clear conception behind the new degree structure, the Law has prescribed in detail different aspects of the university functioning which have directly affected the introduction of new structure. In this connection, the Law has predetermined: the types of institutions of higher education and the degrees they can offer, the length of these degrees, the structure and the organization of the university study process and the evaluation methods, and the objectives of higher education. Educational content has been controlled in large extent through the Uniform State Requirements and the State Register of Specialties.

Institutions of higher education have been given academic autonomy and self-governance within the framework of the normative base – failure to comply with it will result in no-accreditation which will entail loss of state subsidies for the failed institution. The Law has also preserved the primacy of the Chair-Faculty structure within the university.

Concerning the normative base, the findings have revealed two main contradictions which have predetermined the serious difficulties for the institutional implementation of the policy for the new degree structure. The first contradiction was expressed in the generally vague conception behind the policy on the part of its creators and implementers and the overly prescriptive and detailed manner in defining university functioning in the aspects that directly related to this policy. The second contradiction was reflected in the activities of the central governance: according to the Law, the main precondition to introducing the new structure was the preparation of the Uniform State Requirements; the latter were not ready in time which led to two amendments of deadlines in the Law on Higher Education.

At the institutional level, the analysis of the data collected through interviews and review of university materials has identified four main areas where the impact of the policy after its implementation has been felt in one way or another: Program Area, Student-related Issues, Faculty-related Issues, and University Organization.

The Program Area has been the one mostly influenced by this policy. In order to switch to the new degrees, the normative base has demanded the change of all study plans. Little difficulties have been noted by my interviewees in the process of change since the main goal there has been to adjust to two State requirements: minimum amount of required courses and four years of study instead of five for the bachelor's degree. In the change of plans, my findings have identified several tendencies. With respect to the structure of the new degrees, the connection between the different degrees, and above all between the bachelor and the master degrees, has been quite uncertain. In addition, different opinions of what the new degrees should be expected to look like and aim at have been voiced.

With respect to the program content, the findings have revealed a tendency to copy the previous "higher education" programs into shorter periods of time to comprise the bachelor's programs, to emphasize highly-specialized courses at the bachelor's level, and to keep the maximum possible course load in the bachelor study plans in order to preserve faculty salaries. The old methods of teaching and evaluation have also not changed.

There has been a slight increase in student choice in the new study plans – electives and optional courses have been offered. In addition, provided they could find the time, students have been allowed to take optional courses from outside their Faculty. Although rarely attempted, student transfers between the bachelor specialties of one Faculty were doable; harder seemed transfers between the different Faculties and their specialties. Finally, the lack of cooperation between the University Faculties at this level has remained.

In sum, the findings in this case study have revealed little initiative and creativity in preparing the new bachelor study plans and providing different arrangements to students and faculty at this level; more initiative and opportunities have been noted at the master's level despite the general obscurity and contradictions concerning this level in the normative base.

CONCLUSIONS AND ARGUMENT: REFORMING OR RENAMING

It became evident after completing the interviews and analyzing the data on one particular policy implementation, that governmental determination of higher education reform from top down has proved to be quite ineffective. Prescriptive and regulatory normative acts have been counter-productive to the implementation of higher education policies.

The restrictive normative base has attempted to regulate in detail the process and organization of study. This regulation has amounted to distortions at the institutional level. According to a survey Dimitrov conducted amongst experts in the field of higher education, all interviewed agreed on three main points concerning both the State Requirements and the Register: there was a lack of publicity and transparency in defining them in the respective Ministry Committees, there was an excessive emphasis on the administrative and mechanical side (number of

courses in a discipline, number of classes for the different degrees), and these documents were to be approved by the Council of Ministers which was not competent for the task (1998, p. 58).

The functions of the new degree system were expected to provide a mechanism to the institutions to adapt to the social, political, and economic changes. Specifically in the local context, this policy was expected to reduce the number of students by preparing graduates for the market earlier. This development would have automatically posed the question for the reduction of the unrealistically large numbers of teaching staff which have been inherited from communism. Another consequence from this development would have been the change of educational focus to concentrate on transferable skills increasingly demanded by the new market conditions, thus allowing students more mobility in their studies not only in Bulgaria but also abroad.

In reality, the new degree system has developed in a different way. As the findings reveal, apart from following the State requirements in implementing the new policy, the response of the university community to the prescriptive normative base has otherwise remained passive. As a result, the introduction of the three-tier system of education has shown little change in a number of important aspects of the university functioning. A mode of thinking and organization inherited from the past has been framed in a new hierarchically ordered structure that has led to little qualitative change of higher education. The way in which bachelor programs were created has not affected the qualitative nature of the process and the contents of study but merely the quantitative aspects of the degrees such as the number of years, the course hours, and the institutions which could offer them. In practice, old study plans and programs have been reshuffled and then re-ordered within the new tiers.

The implications are mostly felt at the bachelor's level where narrow specialization has been preserved thus limiting the student's options already from the start. One result of this development has been detected in the status of the bachelor degrees seen only as a preparatory stage for the master degrees – a consequence of the new study plans which have included only a little less of the specialized knowledge which created the "real" higher education specialist in the past. It is not surprising then that at the present moment, popular belief identifies future bachelors with half-educated masters whose prestige is doubtful (Totomanova 1998, p. 31). This development, combined with the nascent market economy in the country and high unemployment rate, has turned the bachelor's level into preparation for unemployment. As a second result, the institutions' potential for creating mechanisms for the effective adaptation to the changing environment, the fluctuating market, and mass education has been also limited.

MOST RECENT DEVELOPMENTS AND IMPLICATIONS

By the Summer of 1999, the new degrees of higher education in Bulgaria have been followed by new, corresponding curricula developed by Ministry Committees. The problems encountered with the introduction of the bachelor degrees have found some reflection in the newly adopted *Law for the Change and Amendment of the 1995 Law on Higher Education* (first promulgated on July 2, 1999; last amended: State Newsletter N66, July 23, 1999). Two main changes have been made. The first is twofold – it attempts to expound on some conception about the different degrees and also incorporates the specialist's level into the higher education system:

Article 42

- (2) The study at the 'bachelor's level' assures the base broad-profiled preparation of the professional directions and specialties
- (3) The study at the 'master's level' assures the in-depth fundamental preparation combined with profiling in a defined specialty
- 4) The study at the 'doctoral level' follows scientific directions. This scientific direction must be from a scientific branch reflecting the professional branch in which the person has a bachelor's degree qualification
- (5) The educational-qualification degree "specialist in..." is a degree of professional education. It is given after completing a course of study at a college with a minimum length of study three years. Those who complete their education can continue their studies into the bachelor's degree depending on the conditions defined by the State Requirements or the Regulations of the given institution of higher education.

The second change is related to the new State policy that from the academic 1999-2000 all students will start paying tuition fees for their studies. These fees will be determined annually by the Council of Ministers (Article 95).

Both changes in the normative base work towards the preservation of the current state of confusion. On the one hand, the "conception" behind the new bachelor programs appeared after the programs were developed. On the other hand, the inarticulated differences between the two initial professional degrees of the bachelor and the specialist will contribute to the problems. Finally, with the fact that everyone will be able to pay a semester fee in all degrees (which is rather symbolic), all students will simply continue for the master degrees just as it was in the past.

In other words, the bachelor's degree once again does not have the integrity of a terminal degree but remains solely a preparatory stage for the coming master's degree or further professional studies. The normative approach to academia's transformation through the decision of external, governmental bodies has stifled the full development of the undergraduate degree's potential. It is my belief that this degree has a strong potential which could be, for example, to provide the background for further (different) professional studies, or, to offer general education oriented to the development of transferable skills (such as writing, communications, computers, languages), or, to empower individuals by teaching them to be flexible, adaptable, and knowledgeable, or, to address the different needs of different student populations, or, **all of these at once**.

These developments have a direct implication for the future bachelors: many graduates holding the same professional qualification will not have a job since they have not been given the means to adapt (they possess only highly specialized knowledge of questionable quality) to the fluctuating labor market; moreover, it puts under question the future competitiveness of the specialists, the bachelors, and the masters for all of them have been trained for the same thing – to be able to complete the same job in questioningly varying degrees. I also believe that there are direct implications for the universities as well – any institution can train a future professional according to the way the State wants this person to be.

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