

THE ROMANIAN REFORM OF EDUCATION – MOMENTS OF THE POST-COMMUNIST TRANSITION

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“The Community shall contribute to the development of quality education by encouraging co-operation between Member States and, if necessary, by supporting and supplementing their action”. (Treaty, Art. 149.1, Chapter 3: Education, vocational training and Youth)

The reform of education, from Romania, began from the first moments of the post-communist transition. It was marked by three limits: the reactive character, the changes in education being the consequence and not one of the driving forces of the political, economical or social reform; the dependence of external financing, especially in investment that led to the precipitated import of institutions, at doubts and discontinuities, at incoherence at the level of educational politics; limitation at formal education, at school and university, ignoring the important fields of permanent education as the adults education, the education of the persons with special needs, early education, education of Gipsy population, etc neglecting the early evolution of the professional field.

In the conditions of these limits, aggravated by the general context of the Romanian society, can be considered the fact that the education reform from '90 was rather a partial reform, a reform limited to certain components and to the priorities that took advantage of external financing.

What was missing was the global perspective; a coherent politic in the field of education, centred on realistic reference points and well defined stages; the agreement of the political class and considering the national education as a domain protected from the political disputes, from unilateral manipulations and steps; a program of the international cooperation, especially as part of the European Union.

The contemporary superior education deals with unprecedented transformations. They are generated by three factors: the first is represented by the technology of information and communications. The second factor is represented by the increase of individual request of superior studies. More and more persons aspire to obtain a superior education degree.

Finally, the third factor takes the form of the superior education market. The institutional diversity on the public – private axis and the increase of the individual request for superior studies generated the competition between universities and the extinction of the tax payers for educational services led to apparition of commerce with such services.

In the Statement from Bologna, adopted in 1999 by ministers of education from member states and associated countries of the European Union, mentioned the necessity of increasing competition of superior education on global plan. This way appeared the so-

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called “Bologna Process” that was expecting to generate, until 2010, the European space of superior education, that is a space more unite and competitive on global plan.

- The superior education is a national value; it contributed along time at the formation of nation, at the preparation of the scientific, engineering and cultural elites.

- Confidence in universities. We have to invest plenty of faith in our universities; either they are old or new, public or private, in the last decade, them insured an important growth (of over three times) of the young persons with university degree.

- European integration. Once was signed, in 1999, the Declaration from Bologna, are universities are expected to show their European vocation.

- Transforming as development. In the past ten years, the Romanian universities passed through a profound changing process. We have to admit that the reform is not concluded yet. The passage to the theory of acknowledgement, the pressure of more and more persons to accede in the superior education faces the new universities with new requests. So, we need to promote changes that generate a new development of the universities.

The options that we should make must be based on the existing reality, and from its messages, the following can not be ignored: there are important differences between the required qualifications on the work market and those offered to the university; the students are selected especially from the urban environment and from the most advantaged social categories, fact that leads to significant talent loss and to the depth of the social inequality.

Comparing to other European states, especially with the states that are candidate to integration in the European Union, Romania invest less in superior education.

Public financing, on each student, began to decrease with about 20% in the period 1990-2000. Universities do not have financial incentives proper to recruit and maintain young people in the universities.

The average age of the university members reaches in some institutions 55 years or even more. The deficit of university personnel on the ensemble of superior education system is of 40%. The quality of teaching, of documents basis from the libraries or the laboratory equipments is precarious in most of the universities, fact that is associated with a chronically status of professional lack of satisfaction of the students and didactic personnel.

Education is much more theoretically oriented, without a focalization in a sufficient measure on the formation of practical professional abilities. Our number of students is yet very small, comparing with that from other European countries, including those in transition.

The participation percent that corresponds to those of 18-30 years is at us less than 30%, while in France reaches 50%, and in Poland arrived at about 35% or more. Top research is less stimulated in our strong universities, and in the others, research is a secondary activity. Sub financing the university research became chronically.

We have plenty of universities, public or private, too small and less competitive, with a traditional management and insufficient development sources. The first 10 great and classical universities are comparable as products and resources with all the other universities, while the administrative and managerial expenses of the last ones are substantial.

The public universities that were recently founded contribute less at the economical and cultural development of the communities where they are situated, and some private universities extended their logistic infrastructure and the students number without realizing didactic and research personnel, based on that of the already existing universities. Several of the actual legal provisions blocks the development, does not offer plenty of space for those with initiative. The subventions and scholarships are still headed after criteria that are insufficiently fundamental to support those who really need help.

The government should propose to gradually eliminate the mentioned status by promoting a coherent set of measures.

The strategy regarding education development in Romania, the sector strategies and any reform program regarding education on the entire complex must respect a series of principles. The general principles that will be taken as a reference in what was called “strategy of transforming as development” that is the development processes of superior education from Romania are the following:

- ✓ The priority granted to major objectives and less to detailed programming of superior education;
- ✓ Realizing an education system that is equilibrated through decentralizing;
- ✓ Promoting the variety of application options of some central ideas in solving some punctual solutions;
- ✓ The development of the relations between superior education institutions and the economical, cultural agents and those of the civil society;
- ✓ Planning changes and granting a response time that should be sufficiently enough, for the superior education system to be able to take reaction at the interventions determined by the implementation of new politics;
- ✓ Finding amplification points from the superior education system.

It is necessary a clear conception about the role of education in society, about the role of students in each stage of the system of work market. Among others, will be imposed: the renouncing at the actual system that is practiced in the state superior education of registration of two student’s category: subvention and tax payers, the introduction of a new system of study taxes and subventions that should encourage those with performances and to ensure real social protection of poor students and those with difficulties. Granting scholarships and social aids must be correlated with a minimum of performances obtained by beneficiary students. The renunciation at state monopoly in education must be encouraged, by encouraging the non-public education (particular and alternative education), the implication of local communities, decentralization and extra – budget financing.

Quality of education is a indispensable condition to ameliorate professional occupation, the social cohesion and economical competitiveness. For this we will follow objectives as:

- ✓ The instruction of an internal and external evaluation system of the universities;
- ✓ Amelioration of the advising and orientation system for students;
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- ✓ Accentuating the long term results and not strictly academic performances;

✓ Re elaboration of criteria and standards of institutional performances, the evaluation of university specialization and study programs and their stages, the introduction of a differential financing system in comparison with the quality of performances at the level of programs and institutions;

✓ Elimination from the system of the non- performing education institutions;

✓ The differentiation of superior education units in comparison with the levels of the study cycles that can be organised (national universities – that organises licence, master and doctorate; regional universities – that organises licence and master decided as part of the consortium; area universities – that organizes licence

✓ The essential role of the institutions in ensuring quality;

✓ Adopting a special law regarding ensuring quality in education.

The programs of educational reform, realized after 1990 has a pronounced repairing character, of remediation of some grave dysfunctions. Considered separately, the sector programs of educational reform in their ensemble emphasises a series of disarticulations between components. That is why it is imposed the passage as systemic transformations through which: reanalyse of state education structure to obtain its optimisation; evident formulation of the educational politic option for mass superior education; the definition of the mass superior education concept with its different forms; reviewing the admitting system; changes in teaching methodology and in contexts of facilitating education; introduction of a new system of selection during the study years, adopting a new Law for social service that should oblige the graduates of some study programs to realise a practical stage, with a period of up to one year, in the rural areas or in the de favourite areas, before graduation. Doctoral schools will be realised and 10 centres of scientific excellence, whose financing will be adequate will be selected.

In conformity with the commitments realized by signing the Declaration from Bologna and the Declaration from Berlin, Romania will take action on this side. Among others, will be imposed: the internationalization of the superior education system from Romania by opening for recruiting talented teenagers from other countries, selected on value criteria that can be proved with documents; offering facilities for young teenagers that wish to study in our country, by simplifying the visa formalities, especially for the post university level, the introduction of some study visa that does not give the right to work; offering some consultancy programs for superior education in other countries; informing Romanian students about the chances of a career abroad, in the field of technical assistance and consultancy.

It will be requested the realization of a new investment plan for a new academic quality. It will be realized from public and private resources, an Investment Program in Superior Education, as part of the superior education budget, by stimulating the innovation initiatives in university transforming.

The diversification of the financing sources in superior education refers to the growth of the financial contributions brought by private economical agents and by students, besides those allocated from the public budget. Ensuring, in the following 4 years, the study subventions, for an annual flux of 75.000 students in university and post university studies. The students that did not obtain study subvention are tax payers.

The Investment Plan for Superior Education should have three resources:

1. at least 50% from the total of taxes for university studies paid by tax payers students;
2. donations or any other contributions realized by private agents or other donors;
3. loans granted by government accorded to universities for research – development projects that contributes at the regional economical, communitarian or national development. 50% from the increase of the budget allocation for superior education in 2005 will realize, as part of the Investments Program in education and will administrate the complementary financing of investments.

Starting with 2004, the budget funds that are allocated to research must increase in a substantial way. For an efficient use of these funds, will be realized in the following directions:

- a. The distribution of public funds allocated to research depending on the sector potential of research (superior education, Academy, institutional research and enterprise);
- b. Encouraging the realization of powerful and wide research units and granting with priority funds for them;
- c. Allocation of research funds especially to centers that tests and grants the obtaining of competitive results on national and European plan.
- d. Realization in 2004 of 10 excellence centers with priority financing, through national concourse, in the sciences field (mathematics, physics, chemistry, biology) with engineer sciences and socio- human sciences;
- e. The allocation of post doctoral grants to young researchers that should constitute research teams in domains with big changes of applicability;
- f. Radical changing of the formulation method and the priority number of university research;
- g. The introduction of an efficient evaluation system of the research results, with accent on effective results.

The formation of didactic personnel will be done starting from the compulsoriness principles of such activities, of the specific forms that should be taken in the preparation of the university personnel and the integration of didactic research (active research) as a step towards the realization of initiators in teaching process. It will be imposed: the development of the conciliation and orientation system for students; the elaboration of some programs to prevent school abandon and failure; differentiation of universities in rapport with the performance level requested at entrance and during the university studies, the increase of exigency in promoting the didactic personnel.

Even if there were elaborated several projects of preparing the university managers, not even in the present exists an institutionalization system of initial and continuous formations of them. The university manager is still an autodidact that distillates its own empiric experience and sometimes learns by trying and error.

The dominants of the academic managerial evolution will reside in perfecting the mechanisms from inside the managerial structures, in realizing professional the managerial practice and in the construction of formation and development system of own competences for this professional domain. It will be imposed the realization of a climate of responsibility and emulation by mentioning some quadruple statutory obligations of the university didactic team of teaching, research, participation at the administration of the cathedra and research system and diffusion of the culture and science in the society.

The managerial system in universities will be organized in such way to ensure the

growth of the consistency and efficiency of the decision processes. As part of a system that is managerial at the level of the institution and collegial as part of the cathedra and university, will be realized managerial islands under the form of some study programs, initiation centers for some spin-off enterprises.

It will be realized the maintenance and accentuation of differentiation in superior education between the academic management and administrative management, the distinct formation of two managers categories and the growth of their professional performances; varied and gradual usage of a set of material – financial stimulus that should recognize and pay the upper managerial performances.

The participants at the National Conference of Superior education (2005) have analyzed the actual status and the perspectives of the superior education from Romania and observed the acute need of elaboration of some programmatic document that should begin, on a period of 10 years, a series of priorities and action directions. Their application will ensure the minimal guaranties so that the education should respond in a proper manner to the provocation of the present. The participants at the Conference sustain the necessity of taking the obligations assumed by the Romanian Government by signing the Declaration of the Conference from Berlin from 19 September 2003 by all the universities. By this document, the ministers of education from the European countries have reaffirmed the decision of their governments o realize the objectives of the program European Space of the Superior Education.

The Declaration from Berlin establishes the principal action directions for the period 2003-2010. Between them, three objectives have been considered with priority, having as realization horizon year 2005:

1. Ensuring quality by developing new institutional, national and European mechanisms. In the year 2005, the national systems of ensuring quality will include: establishing responsibilities of the organisms and institutions implied: the evaluation of the programs or institutions, an accreditation, certification and comparable procedures system; international participation, cooperation and nets.

2. The adopting of a structure of the study programs, based on cycles: license diploma, master and doctorate. In this sense it is necessary the elaboration of a system comparable and compatible with the university disqualification, in which each qualification should be described in terms of study direction, knowledge, competence and profile. There will be elaborated a nomenclature of the university qualification that is operational in the European Space of Superior Education.

3. Promoting the mobility of students and the academic and administrative personal.

The representatives of all the universities from Romania, the National Council of Rectors, the consultative national councils and the Ministry of Education, Research and Youth expresses its support for the realization of the following principal objectives of the strategy of superior education in Romania, considering education as a real national priority, will be imposed the followings:

- ✓ The state budget will foreseen in 2007, a budget allowance that is equivalent to over 6% from PIB for education,

- ✓ Encouraging educational investments so that is can exceed 10-15% from the education budget,

✓ Including the education and formation as a priority in international and European development programs for Romania,

✓ The elaboration of a new legislative basis of education, of superior education especially.

The organization of study programs on three cycles, in accordance with the scheme promoted by the Process from Bologna, the university studies will be restructured as follows:

✓ The license university studies, with a duration of 34 years (minimum 180 and maximum 240 credits).

The medicine and architecture studies are excluded from this rule. To obtain the license diploma are necessary, for most of the specializations, 180 credits. The license domains with 240 credits will be established by MEC and the Council of Rectors, at the proposal of university senates. The license studies can offer large qualifications, on study domains. The graduates of this cycle can enter on the work market or can continue with master studies. Such a system will permit the rapid solving of the acute qualified work force in the rural area and from the underprivileged area;

✓ The master university studies with a duration of 60-120 credits. The minimal cumulated duration of the cycle I (License) and cycle II (master) will be of 300 transferable credits (ECTS). The thoroughgoing university qualification (specializations) will be situated at the level of master cycle, moving the fragments that exists, in the present, at the license level, in several early, more and short specialization;

✓ The doctoral studies with duration of 3 years. The gradual passage from the actual system that is based on the individual leading of the doctors and the development of European doctoral schools.

The principal scheme of the cycle's duration will be of 3-5-8. Taking into account the fact that specialty will be realized at the level of master, we consider that for universities, for graduate and future users of the graduates, it will be necessary a master period that is equivalent with 120 transferable credits.

The proposals that I have mentioned above, I hope to be assumed by the Government, especially by MEC and promoted so that it can reach a durable development of our superior education. Concomitant, the consolidation of university autonomy in the didactic field, of research, of leading and administration, including financial, will have to be harmonised with the accentuation of public responsibility of public and private university.

Having regard to all these aspects, we must put into practice the best solutions otherwise, we will console ourselves with – the Romanian academic system being source of an ample exodus of the valuable young people across the border, many of these considering emigration as the only chance for professional fulfillment.

The program "Return to Romania" initiated by the American Administration encourages the graduates of the several academic programs to come back to Romania and it represents an important signal of the preoccupation that this phenomenon generates at the international level.

Like a final view on the reform of education up today put in the light a complex process in which the reform programmes coexist with old elements and practices, like in a

puzzle, as well as the persistence, in different forms, of a group of determinant strategic purposes and objectives.

Thus, the central aims, highlighted by the reform of education in Romania, are of a functional nature and consist in the reorganization of the educational system according to the new requirements of the economic, social and politic environment and the creation of personalities with autonomous thinking and behavior, able to integrate in their individual projects and participation in social life, the fundamental values of the democratic society and market economy.

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