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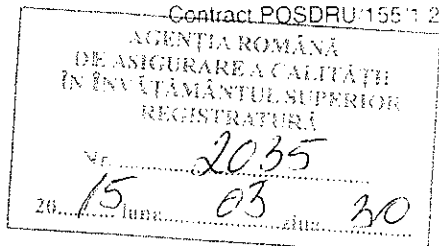
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REPORT

of the foreign evaluator for the
„1 Decembrie 1918” University of Alba Iulia

Date: March 23, 2015

ETS – FOREIGN EVALUATOR EXPERT

Name.....Prof. Milan Polj,

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PARTENER





Introduction

This report contains my findings and impressions that I collected as Foreign Expert during the site visit at the „1 Decembrie 1918“University of Alba Iulia” conducted on March 12-14, 2015. My site visit was a part of a larger review focused on institutional as well as programme evaluation at the above mentioned university that carried out Romanian Experts within the project QUALITAS (Development and consolidation of quality culture at the level of Romanian higher education system).

For my reporting I used my previous experience from institutional as well as programme evaluations carried out at different HE institutions in several countries in last 15 years. For 11 years I served as the Permanent Working Group member of Accreditation Commission of the Czech Republic, since 2010 I am the foreign member of the Slovak Accreditation Commission. I conducted in the role of panel chair four reviews in Russia (under the arrangement of National Centre for Public Accreditation), four reviews in HE of Kosovo (under the Kosovo Accreditation Agency arrangement), and as an ENQA expert I was also the panel member at the review of Slovenian Quality Assurance Agency NAKVIS (SQAA).

During the review process related to „1 Decembrie 1918“University of Alba Iulia” I studied closely all submitted documents of the respected HE institution (mainly self-evaluation report and other available documents). This was done prior to my arrival to Alba Iulia. At the time of the very site visit I had the opportunity to discuss more systematically different aspect of the university functioning with a number of „1 Decembrie 1918“ University of Alba Iulia representatives across the university. I had a good opportunity to visit university premises, too. And I was provided with supplementary documents on different aspects of university operation. This helped me a lot to get clearer picture about the university and its operation in its complexity.

I would like to thank to the mission director Prof. Luca Iamandi, the co-ordinator of the expert evaluators team Prof. Adrian Lungu and all their colleagues from the team for a great support and also for a very friendly and collegial approach and good co-operation. I would also like to thank to colleagues from ARACIS for precise organisation of the visit. And also, I would like to express my thanks to people at the „1 Decembrie 1918“University of Alba Iulia” for their open and friendly attitude. Last but not least I would like to express my thanks to Ms Diana Petrescu who helped me a lot as the interpreter during my discussions with colleagues from the „1 Decembrie 1918“ University of Alba Iulia”.

Organisational Details of the „1 Decembrie 1918“University of Alba Iulia”

The „1 Decembrie 1918“University of Alba Iulia is a state institution of higher education and public research. It was founded in 1991 and it started to function in the academic year 1991/92 with the Faculty of Humanities and with the Technical and Economical College. It was developing gradually in several major phases. At the moment, the university consists of five faculties: (1) History and Philology, (2) Economic Studies, (3) Exact Sciences and Engineering, (4) Law and Social Studies, (5) Orthodox Theology.

A total number of students is currently about 4.200 students, their number has been rapidly decreasing recent years, though, due to a number of reasons, incl. demography, competition, economic situation in the country, and more.

Apart from the focus on education and its quality, one can see the attention is paid to the development of research profile of the university, and to the international dimension of university operation. As I could also see, this development is accompanied with the efforts to develop material basis of the university accordingly.

The financial resources of the university concerned come mainly for the Romanian government, school fees and projects. The level of financing seems to reflect overall level of financing higher education and research in Romanian higher education sector.





According to the law, the university is led by the Administrative Board chaired by the rector, and the Senate of 19 members.

Evaluation Process – an Outline

In general, the evaluation process was very well prepared and realised. The whole process can be divided into several phases: self-evaluation process, site visit, and after-visit phase.

Self-evaluation process

The self-evaluation report is a comprehensive document written in a sufficient level of detail. It also has a number of annexes that complete the picture. In general, the report gives a lot of useful information about all main areas of the university operation. It describes current state of arts but also shows the developmental process. In a certain extent this report has self-evaluative (self-reflective) quality/features, too. I have no doubt that the preparation of the report was a collective effort that needed a lot of work to be done. In general, the report serves as a solid basis for the institutional evaluation of the „1 Decembrie 1918“ University of Alba Iulia.

Site visit

The site visit practically started in the afternoon March 11 soon after my arrival to Cluj. I was introduced to Prof. Eva Marza (former staff member of the university who very recently retired). Prof. Marza is Slovak by origin but she lives in Romania since 1973. She was very kind to answer all kind of my questions specifying the information I had from the self-evaluation report, documents on higher education in Romania and more.

The first official day of the visit started with a short meeting of the evaluation team and then with the meeting between ARACIS experts team and the management of the university. It served as an introduction to the university visit. After this, during the time of the site visit, I had numerous opportunities to meet number of people across the university and discuss with them the themes related to their institutional operation. Throughout the visit I participated at the meetings of the main ARACIS expert team, but I also had a number of individual meetings and consultations. This way, I discussed with the rector Prof. Valer Daniel Breaz and several of his vice-rectors. Also, I had the opportunity to discuss with Prof. Nicolae Todea, president of the University Senate. Further, I had discussions with Assoc. Prof. Letitia Simon Trif, Director of the Centre for Quality Management and Institutional Strategy; Assoc. Prof. Manuella Kadar, Director of the Centre for Technology Transfer, Research, Development, Innovation and Project Management. I also consulted with Assoc. Prof. Teodora Iordanescu, Director of the Centre for International Relations, with Assoc. Prof. Larisa Dragolea, Director of the Centre for Career Orientation, Counselling and Development, and with Assoc. Prof. Diana Campan, University's Spokeswoman. Much relevant information was provided to me also by several deans of the faculties and department heads. And I benefited from participation at the meeting with teachers, students and alumni.

The program of the site visit was also containing the possibility to get acquainted with different facilities of the university and its faculties, including the library and some other parts of the university. Briefly, I had also a chance to visit some classes and discuss with teachers and students. This all gave me a lot of information that I had a chance to discuss further with the colleagues from ARACIS experts' team.

On March 14 the final meeting between ARACIS experts' team and the university representatives took place. The findings were summarized with a number of statements from individual ARACIS experts' team who expressed positively their impressions from the site visit and also offered some recommendations.

Then the site visit was concluded.

In the next parts of my report I will pay attention to my observations related to main areas of university functioning: Governance and Institution, Quality Culture, Teaching and Learning, Research, Service to Society, Internationalisation, and Material Basis.

Governance and Institution

In my view, the leadership of the university is identified with the institution and proves to be highly committed. It seems, there is a rather intensive relationship between governing bodies at the university, mainly between the rector and his team and the University Senate. The Senate seems to be having a very important role not only in “controlling” and/or “approving” of what is going on or what is planned to be done, as concerns main strategic steps and measures. On the top of it, it also deals with many issues of a rather operational nature, seemingly often having quite detailed and extensive agenda. Such a profile of Senate’s work may lead to at least three questions: (1) possibilities of the rector and his team to act flexibly on an operational level and profile the university in a number of respects; (2) the power of Senate (maybe rather strong?); and (3) the workload of the Senate (maybe too high?).

The university has developed the set of strategic documents and other plans related to main areas of university operation on different levels. These plans are monitored and evaluated annually, and consequently they are updated. These aspects seem to be potentially strong and promising for the university development.

On the other hand, some of these documents may not be really clear to everybody concerned. For instance, the university mission, according to the SWOT analysis provided, is not clear and understandable to everybody at the university which may lead into the danger of low cohesion. Clear indicators and benchmarks for the defined goals and mission of the university would be helpful to have, too. This would enable to conduct more fair and evident evaluation processes.

Recommendations:

- Reconsider the workload and profile of the agenda of the Senate and this way to reconsider a balance between the university management team (rector and his team) and the University Senate.
- Make sure vision, mission and plans are clearly communicated at different levels of the university.
- Develop and implement more precisely monitoring instruments related to the progress of strategy plan, with indicators, and benchmarks.

Quality Culture

The university pays attention to issues of quality assurance. The Quality Assurance department has already been established in 2006. As already indicated above, there are strategies of monitoring and evaluation in different areas of university functioning taking place at the university and this system reaches the teaching staff level. The quality assurance processes are linked with the Quality Assurance Board that consists of people across the university and includes representatives of different university groups and stakeholders.

The university follows the recommendations of ARACIS and further develops its own measures. There seem to be several main forms of evaluation regularly conducted: alumni, peer evaluation (teacher-teacher), student evaluation, then evaluation done by heads of departments, and other forms of evaluation by faculty/university leadership. Some of them probably only have a complementary function due to low reliability (for instance low involvement of students in evaluation).

Financial constrains seem to limit personal development possibilities at the university, possibilities of innovations in personnel. Some academics are not only involved in their academic duties but they also have their roles in managing some support departments/activities at the university (for instance, QA department, International department) – this has some

advantages (mainly a possibility to contribute with an “academic’s eye” to it), on the other hand this can lead to overload of some people.

This should be noticed that the university had successfully undergone several external evaluations (last ones in 2009 by ARACIS and in 2013 by EUA (European University Association)).

Recommendations:

- Continue in the development of existing variety of evaluations, and work on using their synergic potential.
- Pay attention to work with the evaluation information (incl. communication of some data with those who evaluated) – obviously, this is a highly sensitive area, though.
- Pay more attention to the relation between evaluation and change.

Teaching and Learning

The teaching process is realised in a solid material basis. Teachers’ pedagogical qualification is in focus at the university not only via evaluation. Since some time ago, the teaching staff gets possibilities to develop their teaching skills by participation at summer courses at the university that are focused on this area.

A number of teaching hours a full-time student has to spend in the classrooms a week is very high. Also, a teaching load requirement of the teaching staff is very high – this relates to all categories, incl. professors and associate professors).

It seems, the information system of the university does not provide a full support to teaching and learning. Virtual resources (Moodle) are directly available only to part-time students; full time students can access these resources only in the library.

During the meeting with the students some were appreciating a quality of teaching and work of the teachers, few critical remarks were voiced out, too, as for the study programs. Among them not always appropriate content of study-work during practical placements in summer seemed to be most frequent.

Also, students were advocating for more often meetings with the teachers/university staff to enable open discussions about university-related issues.

Recommendations:

- Decrease number of contact hours for full-time students.
- Decrease a teaching load requirement for the staff and differentiate more clearly among different categories of the staff.
- Pay more attention to development of virtual systems to support learning of all students.

Research

Although in overall the research results of the university are growing, there seems to be very diverse situation as for the research across the university. On the one hand there are several departments (for instance archaeology, history, and more) with very good research profile. Some other departments are not having that sounding results, though. There seems to be a low interest of some staff to get involved in research activities – this may have several reasons. In my view the research plan is a good basis with a potential to be developed more explicitly, as for the benchmarks and indicators. Financing of the research seems to be a problem, the state gives 0.2 % of GDP to the research. There are not many opportunities from national granting funds, only very few grants are related to international granting schemes. In fact, internal research granting schemes are mostly missing at the university. As indicated above, teaching staff, including



professors and associate professors, is having a high teaching load which may prevent them from research. The issue of methodological preparedness of the staff may require more attention, too. There are elements of reward mechanism for research results at the university (coverage of conference participation costs) and it has a potential to be developed further. Also, a visibility of research results could be better, it seems (for instance at the university web platform, and elsewhere). There are publications of the university staff, mainly in Romanian language. Only a very limited number of publications are published in other foreign languages elsewhere.

Recommendations:

- Define and implement clearly policy of realistic support to the research at the university (from concrete strategy and plans, working conditions for the staff to get involved in research, support schemes, ways of making research visible within and outside the university).
- Pay more attention to methodological preparedness of the staff.
- Support more visibly with doctoral but also master students' involvement in research at the university.
- Emphasis publications in sounding journals/publishing houses and in other languages (mainly English) than Romanian language.
- Promote research – business links wherever possible (with the involvement of recently established Centre for Transfer of Technologies).
- Consider setting up the Ethical Commission for the research at the university.

Service to Society

The image of the university seems to be very good in Alba Iulia and in the region. Career Centre serves to students and is mainly focused on their employability, it seems. There is a potential of development of lifelong learning programme offers to wider public at the university, and this potential has not been used so far.

The university involves international students and organizes events for a wider public of Alba Iulia (for instance Festival of International Youth - Alba Culinaria).

Recommendations:

- Develop more effective ways of co-operating with secondary and other schools in the region.
- Promote development of lifelong learning possibilities to wider public (different non-degree courses, University of the 3rd age etc).
- Make research activities and results of the university more visible and accessible to wider public.
- Develop more effective ways of working with alumni.

Internationalisation

The university pays attention to its internationalisation. This can be seen in several ways. The international department seems to be a vivid unit to deal with these issues. As for the student exchange, main scheme is clearly the Erasmus programme. There are 19 agreements with foreign Erasmus partners at the university. I wonder how to look at this number. On the one hand, it provides a good chance for those who qualify within the selection procedure. On the other hand, considering a total number of students at the university, this is not much, in my view. Apart from students exchange places, the university has 50 exchange places for the staff and it divides them

between academics and non-academics equally. There are currently 26 foreign exchange students at the university. The university provides study opportunity to students from Moldova (under special regime). There are about 10 students from other countries at the university, and practically no foreign teaching staff (except of one Chinese woman).

International dimension of the research is underdeveloped, as indicated above.

One of the problems in the area of internationalisation seems to be a foreign language competences (English) among a number of university staff (language courses for the staff are offered, though).

Also, maybe more visibility at the international scene is a challenge (English version of the web page has been under reconstruction at the time of the site visit).

Recommendations:

- Promote internationalisation by further enlargement of student and staff exchange possibilities.
- Develop a scholarship scheme for students involved in study exchange (to soften the fact that the scholarship often does not cover all the costs of the stay abroad).
- Emphasis foreign language competence development (mainly English) of the staff and the students.
- Emphasis internationalisation of research at the university by supporting those who aim at the involvement in international research collaboration teams/consortia.

Material basis

The university premises seem to provide a solid basis for teaching, partly for research, and also for other aspects of university life. Clearly, one can see there has been a gradual and positive development.

Concluding remark

Sincerely, I was really pleased to have the opportunity to get acquainted with „1 Decembrie 1918“ University of Alba Iulia. I met very pleasant, hardworking and enthusiastic people. I could see there is a sounding development history at the university and much has been achieved since its establishment. I can also see there is a potential to develop further in a number of respects. And I wish to „1 Decembrie 1918“ University of Alba Iulia every success in these efforts.