COMMUNIQUÉ
of the International Conference
IMPLEMENTATION OF THE EUROPEAN HIGHER EDUCATION AREA
IN THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA

Achievements, Challenges, Future Actions: Agenda 2020
ULIM, Chișinău, 1-2 December 2011

On December 1-2, 2011 the International Conference "Implementation of the European Principles of Higher Education in Moldova. Achievement. Challenges. Future actions. Agenda – 2020" was held. It was organised at the initiative of the Free International University of Moldova (ULIM) and in co-operation with the Council of Europe, the Bologna Secretariat, the Ministry of Education and the Council of Rectors of the Republic of Moldova. International organisations, which provided their expertise at the seminar included: Academic Co-operation Association (ACA), European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR), European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE), League of European Research Universities (LERU). The participants – representatives of the institutions of higher education from the Republic Moldova and other countries, of public authorities and international institutions discussed the implementation of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) in the republic of Moldova and participated in the generation of the recommendations included in the Declaration for better alignment of the higher education system with the EHEA principles and action lines.

The ULIM Conference is the first forum convened after the accession of the Republic of Moldova to the European Higher Education Area. The participants welcome this initiative, considering it as an expression of the will and the capacity of universities of Moldova to be equal partners in their efforts to create a European Higher Education Area. The participants also agreed that the Bologna reform is a dynamic process, which provides an opportunity for reform through promotion of common action in 47 European member states in the field of higher education, while respecting diversity of each national system.

The participants committed to implementing the main objectives and policies of the European Higher Education Area in the Republic of Moldova in a manner that ensures the modernization...
and the competitiveness of the National System of Higher Education. It was also stressed that under the conditions of fragile economic growth and the risk of the second wave of a global economic crisis, the growth of unemployment, the pressure on social budgets, the augmentation of demands for social relevance and research, a new context for higher education reform is being created. Today more than ever it is absolutely necessary to maintain and ensure efficient investment in education and research, as such investments provide sustainable economic growth.

The next steps in higher education reforms should be made with the final aim of ensuring that higher education institutions continue to fulfill their multi-faceted mission: ‘preparing students for life as active citizens in a democratic society; preparing students for their future careers and enabling their personal development; creating and maintaining a broad, advanced knowledge base and stimulating research and innovation. The necessary ongoing reform of higher education systems and policies will continue to be firmly embedded in the European values of institutional autonomy, academic freedom and social equity and will require full participation of students and staff.’

The research participants at the conference identified a number of external and internal challenges of regional, international and global dimension having an impact on achieving these goals and implementing coherently the Bologna Reform in the Higher Education system of the Republic of Moldova and in the region:

- **Social dialogue** concerning scientific and practical reasons for the higher education reform needs to be intensified. There is a distance between the opinion of experts, the information and the instinctive perception of society and the policies. Therefore it is extremely important to provide qualitative and comprehensive information to the public and develop the commitment to reform in higher education and in research;
- **Representation of the main stakeholders** in the process of formulating and approving the decisions on reforming higher education and the research should be ensured. The participation of students, employers and civil society in policy-making reform is of particular importance;
- **Moldovan representatives** should be more actively involved in joint projects and in working groups at European level which have been established to steer and implement the European Higher Education Area and the European Research Area (EHEA and ERA);
- **A coherent action plan for reforming higher education and research** in order to ensure the convergence of EHEA principles and national competitiveness should be developed. Special attention should be paid to the following key areas of higher education reforms: quality assurance in higher education at institutional and national level according to the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area, promoting academic mobility at all levels and for members of the academic communities: students, teaching stuff, managerial staff, developing and implementing the National Qualifications Framework aligned with the EQF and QF-EHEA;
- The objectives of creating the European Higher Education Area by 2020 outlined at the Conference of Ministers responsible for higher education, Leuven (2009) need to be transposed within a national action plan;
- Specialized structures to implement the reform and to encourage dialogue at national and international levels need to be set up;

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1 Leuven/Louvain la Neuve Ministerial Communiqué (2009)
- Alignment of the higher education system of the Republic of Moldova into the European Higher Education Area should be promoted and the imbalance between the numbers of students going/coming from abroad to study needs to be addressed;
- **The rate of unemployment of graduates** should be reduced;
- **The quality of education** and the professional skills acquired by students need to be improved;
- Interest for teaching and research careers should be nurtured and administrative procedures for teaching career advancement need to be reviewed.
- Challenges posed by demographic decline and structural diversification of the student contingent should be addressed.
- **Closer connection** between the national higher education system and the research and innovation system needs to be developed to ensure the continuity of new knowledge and skill sets for addressing national and global issues.
- Transparency within and responsibility for the higher education and research system should be ensured;
- The social dimension of higher education and the lifelong learning should receive more attention;

To face these challenges, the International Conference at ULIM, Chisinau, considers it imperative to take actions focused on strengthening cooperation at national, regional and international levels.

In this regard, the participants at the international conference at ULIM propose the following action lines:

1. The biennial organization, at the beginning of December, of the **Forum for Higher Education Modernisation** in order to review achievements, to identify domestic and global challenges and to agree upon the reform actions and policies needed to overcome these challenges. **The International Conference at ULIM on 1-2 December 2011 is considered as the launch of the initiative for dialogue and cooperation in promoting reforms in the higher education system.** From the conceptual point of view, this conference represents an important scientific event for higher education reform. In this context, we consider it opportune to establish the **Scientific Committee for Reforms and Modernisation Policies of the Higher Education System of the Republic of Moldova,** which will coordinate, in a proactive manner, activities during the period between conferences. The Committee will appoint its representatives within the working groups and networks of the Bologna Follow-Up Group, ensuring collaboration and dialogue between national, European and international partners to promote reforms of higher education modernization.

2. A public debate regarding the **National Qualifications Framework Project** will be organised, with involvement of international expertise. The final aim is to self-certify the national qualifications framework against the framework of qualifications of the European Higher Education Area (QF-EHEA) and reference it against the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning (EQF) during the academic year 2012-2013 and start the process of its implementation.

3. The creation of **the National Agency for Higher Education Quality Assurance**, improving the national regulatory framework in accordance with the European Standards and Guideline for Quality Assurance (ESG), the inclusion of the national agency in the European Quality Assurance Register **until 2014.** The responsibility of each institution
will be to develop internal quality assurance systems in line with part one of the ESG and to promote the quality culture.

4. Training teaching staff in line with all the recommendations for reform at the level of higher education institutions and disseminating good practices.

5. Development of joint and dual programs with national and international universities. Designing higher education programs to ensure multicultural, linguistic and global skills.

6. Promoting the social dimension by ensuring fair access to higher education of various social groups. One way to achieve this goal is to encourage the use of different non-standard educational paths (non-formal and informal education). Fair access is expressed in terms of equal opportunities, but will continue to be based on academic selection. The national target should be set at 20% of students coming from socially vulnerable groups.

7. Improving the regulatory framework in the field of mobility and recognition of studies and the development of a National Action plan for the period 2012-2020. Promotion and financial support of vertical and horizontal mobility, so that at least 20% of students from all higher education levels would have a mobility experience abroad. Enhancing the capacity to make use of the opportunities offered by regional cooperation programmes such as TEMPUS, Erasmus, CEPUS, the Seventh Framework Programme and others.

8. Promoting the strategy to combat the exodus of talents "from exodus to the movement of talents". Finding ways to stop the exodus of qualified staff and researchers by developing, supporting and strengthening partnerships between institutions from the country and from abroad, by promoting talents from early stages, by developing attractive paths for teaching and scientific careers, upgrading doctoral studies and creating opportunities for career paths beginning with the first cycle, by developing and promoting the circulation of talents. Target - by 2020, 20% of the total number of students have come from abroad.

9. Promoting the principle of equivalence in the process of recognising studies based on the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System and not the similarity of studies. ECTS implementation should be done according to the ECTS Users Guide. As for the recognition of qualifications, the participants gave support to the principle of credibility within national and institutional quality systems. Minor differences in curriculum will not represent barriers in the process of academic or professional recognition.

10. Strengthening efforts to achieve by 2020 the following levels of higher education funding: at least 2% of GDP and 1% of GDP for research – to introduce new models and principles of financing, to introduce competitive funding based on performances, promoting at the same time a genuine autonomy, transparency and social responsibility of universities.

11. The Bologna Process, representing a European process of higher education systems transformation, is developed in a global context and becomes a referential system of creation and dissemination of knowledge. This fact determines the importance of internationalisation of higher education policies.

12. Development of benchmarks for monitoring the implementation of policies for mobility, social dimension, multidimensional tools for transparency (making national surveys on priority areas and participation in regional / international surveys).

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Achieving the above-mentioned desiderata requires a strong and professional leadership, an institutional management oriented on strengthening the dimensions of morality and spirituality, on reforming the university governance and implementation of the public responsibility principle “for” and “of” higher education. It is essential therefore to promote partnerships and dialogue with different actors involved at various administrative levels to ensure the social impact and establish trust.

Being aware of the uncertain conditions in both the national and global context, we invite the academic community from our country and the decision-makers to support this ambitious agenda for the target 2020. We express our firm conviction that the **coherent, holistic and dynamic achievement of European Higher Education Area objectives**, taking into account the peculiarities and traditions of the national university system through thematic dialogue involving interested actors, will ensure the fulfillment of the multi-faceted mission of higher education and will help create the Knowledge and Innovation Society.

Universities must demonstrate that they are able to overcome economic, demographic and intellectual crises and to be part of the answer to these challenges. Only through full and effective involvement of both governments and stakeholders can we succeed in implementing the European Higher Education Area by 2020.

“**Educate the next generation so as to cope intellectually, morally and politically with the messiness and complexity of the world**” (Yehuda Elkana)

“**If the country should have a place in the concert of Europe then it will not arrive there by industry, by commerce, but only through education**”. (Mihail Kogalniceanu)