

Foreign Expert Evaluation Report of the “Alexandru Ioan Cuza” Police Academy of Bucharest

AGENȚIA ROMÂNĂ DE ASIGURARE A CALITĂȚII ÎN ÎNVĂȚĂMÂNTUL SUPERIOR FSE-POSDRU/2/1.2/S/1 Nr. 5183 Data: 29.05.2009
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Introduction

I was appointed by the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS) as a foreign expert for the external evaluation of the “Alexandru Ioan Cuza” Police Academy of Bucharest which took place from 13 to 15 May 2009. The evaluation team was headed by Professor Dr. Florentin Moraru of the Military Technical Academy of Bucharest (mission Director) and by Prof. Dumitru Onose of the Civil Engineering University of Bucharest, (coordinator). The members of the team, selected so as to cover all the domains and the objectives of the mission, included senior academics from several Romanian universities, all having previous experience in conducting similar evaluations. Two student representatives, who were part of the mission, took an active part in the evaluation, asking incisive questions and making pertinent remarks. The scientific secretary appointed by ARACIS was very helpful in making all the necessary arrangements so as to facilitate the work of the evaluation team.

Conducted in a collegial manner, the evaluation occasioned an open discussion and a constructive dialogue with regard to the overall institutional structure and the management, the teaching staff, the students and the programmes of the Academy. It began with meeting the Rector of the Academy and members of his senior managerial staff. Attended also by Prof. Lazar Vlasceanu and Prof. Mihai Floroiu of the ARACIS Council, the meeting focused on the overall responsibilities of the Academy in changing the rather unfavourable perception by the Romanian general public of the police force and of law and order enforcement mechanisms and structures in general. This was a constant concern, followed by the mission team throughout the evaluation.

An extended visit of the campus allowed the evaluators to get to know the excellent facilities of the Academy: spaces for the academic activities, laboratories, libraries, board and lodging facilities for students, sports facilities, etc. Located in a splendid green area North of Bucharest, the Academy has one of the best campuses of a Romanian higher education institution.

The tour of the campus was followed by a large meeting with the representatives of the academic staff, to present the members of the mission and its objectives and to clarify various matters regarding its work. The mission team was then divided into three groups, dealing with (i) the institutional structure, (ii) selected programmes of study, and (iii) other specific aspects, respectively. I was attached to the group handling the institutional structure and participated in the visits to various services and departments, in the discussions arranged with members of the academic and administrative staff as well as in the deliberations among the members of the group that were sanctioned in its report.

A meeting with students and graduates of the Academy and another meeting with employers were particularly helpful to the evaluation team in order to round up its findings and conclusions.

Background and main findings of the evaluation

The remarks, conclusions and recommendations contained in my report are based on the observations and findings made during the three-day stay at the Academy, on the thorough reading of its self evaluation Report, as well as on the other informative documents I could find on the site of the Academy. Some observations made and views expressed, particularly with regard to the institutional aspects, are reflected in the Report of the mission group that covered that domain and are not repeated here.

My 25 year-long experience with UNESCO's action in the field of higher education allowed me to place the findings and conclusions in a broader international context, in keeping with the requirements of an external evaluation by a foreign expert. This concern was heightened by the fact that the evaluation took place just before the European Forum of Higher Education (Bucharest 22-23 May 2009) and the World Conference on Higher Education convened by UNESCO in Paris, on 6-8 July 2009.

While striving to cover all the domains that formed the objectives of the mission team (managerial structure, teaching staff, programmes, students, quality assurance, etc.), the report focuses on a number of issues that are particularly relevant for an analysis of how the Institution discharges its mission and functions.

The evaluation report takes into account the **unique, distinctive** nature of the Police Academy as the only institution in Romania which trains high level personnel for a broad range of public order and security services: police officers, border police officers, officer rank personnel for the gendarmerie and the firemen services, the national archives, etc. This has important implications for the way it discharges its functions and organizes its activities. In a certain sense, it functions as a "command" institution, its programmes being geared so as to respond to demands placed by the Ministry of Administration and Internal Affairs (MAI). As a military institution, the Academy is therefore subordinated to that Ministry. When the Academy was founded in 2001, by governmental decision and in keeping with the provisions of the laws governing higher education, it was decided to grant it **university status**. As a higher education institution the Academy is equally subordinated to the Ministry of Education, Research and Innovation.

Granting university status to the Police Academy follows the practice adopted for other military institutions in the country, such as the Military Academy and the Technical Military Academy. This is in keeping with established traditions in other countries (e.g. France, where the famous "Ecoles militaires" are among the most prestigious higher learning institutions). However, institutions that provide training for the police forces do not have that status in most countries. Nevertheless, given their growing role and complexity in modern societies, law and order services require advanced training, especially for the higher echelons. The current trend is to award university status to that training. A trend seems to be emerging, particularly among European police training institutions to acquire university status. Granting university status to the Police Academy of Bucharest is therefore fully justified, but the institution should be aware of the responsibilities evolving upon it by being in the forefront of that trend.

While **double subordination** appeared to the mission team to function smoothly, posing no problems, it became evident throughout the evaluation that granting

university status to the Academy has raised certain problems that are still in the process of finding optimum solutions. They will be discussed later in the Report, particularly when dealing with the academic programmes.

1. Managerial Structure

It is not felt necessary to go into the details of the managerial structure of the Academy, which is organised in accordance with the legal provisions in force and those foreseen in its Charter. The Academy operates a democratic managerial structure with direct elections for key managerial posts. Its management system and structures appear to work well, and the academic staff, the students and the administrative staff have a sense of being part of the Institution through direct participation to its management.

What needs to be stressed in the first place is the ability and competence of the management systems and structures of the Academy to respond efficiently and promptly to emerging needs of a fast evolving public order and security system. This required setting up new programmes, sometimes over a very short period (including programmes that emerged from the need to adapt training to needs for increased regional cooperation in the field of public order and security, the Schengen space, etc.). It became equally evident that the Academy management has coped well with the complex tasks related to the fast changes and adjustments required by the Bologna process.

2. Teaching Staff

One of the most remarkable achievements of the Academy is to have been able to recruit – within a short period of time – a competent academic staff to meet its fast growing teaching and research needs. The staff reflects the status of the institution both as a military academy and a higher education institution proper. Much effort is invested in maintaining the balance between these two missions, which is not always an easy task. The core of the Academy professoriate is composed of full-time teaching staff. Part-time staff is also employed, mainly from among high level practitioners in the police forces. This enables the Academy to keep abreast of developments in the public order and security services and to make use of up-to-date skills and experience on its teaching programmes. All senior academic staff hold doctoral degrees, as do the majority of mid-level staff. All remaining teaching staff pursue doctoral studies.

Teaching loads are not heavy. This and the practical nature of much of the teaching keep the staff-student ratio fairly low, with good effects on the quality of education delivered to the students.

There is however a problem that I would like to raise with regard to the teaching staff. When a higher education institution grows fast – and has the necessary resources for it – recruitment of staff tends to be equally fast. The need to fill in posts under the pressure of immediate needs, necessarily involves a certain relaxation of selection standards. Under normal conditions, the academic staff usually grows smoothly, allowing for a very selective recruitment. Moreover, recruitment over a longer span, allows drawing on renewal of staff with young blood.

Apparently, the Academy has reached a stable level with regard to student numbers and diversity of programmes. This will allow for a smoother growth of academic staff as well, based on increased selection standards. This is particularly important in relation to postgraduate studies, as discussed later in this Report.

3. The Students

The quality of the student body is probably one of the most important assets of the Police Academy. It results in the first place from the highly competitive basis on which recruitment and admission are based, particularly of the students admitted to the full-attendance courses. The very special study conditions offered to them (no fees, a stipend - as students of a military academy, free board and lodging, free uniforms and other equipment, etc.) and, above all, assured employment upon graduation - with good prospects for promotion - turns the Academy into a privileged institution, attracting many candidates who seek admission to it.

On the good side, a select student body entitles the Academy to strive to become an "elite" institution, like many other military schools in the world. It is indeed a goal that the Academy should pursue. On the other hand, the very high pressure for admission requires appropriate measures to assure full correctness of admission. This is not easy, given the complexity of the process, with pre selection phases, and numerous tests, including physical and psychological ones which tend to be contested by unsuccessful candidates. The evaluation team was impressed by the way the Academy assures full transparency of the entrance examinations.

The students are highly motivated, appreciate the learning environment of the Academy and show keen interest in the police services they will join upon graduation. They appreciate in particular the practically oriented nature of the larger part of their study programmes and the excellent relations established between teachers and students.

4. Programmes

What was mentioned above with regard to teaching staff and students, namely the ability and competence to cope promptly and efficiently with complex demands, applies also to the way the academic programmes of the Police Academy have been initiated, elaborated and are being implemented. There is a good mix of theoretical courses and of practical ones, aimed at developing the skills and competencies they would need for their future jobs. All programmes have been accredited..

I will not dwell on their contents, but I find it necessary to raise an issue that became obvious during the evaluation, notably the tension that seems to have emerged between some of the programmes of the Academy (notably Law and Archives studies) and the corresponding programmes of the other institutions of higher education (Faculties of Law and History Departments). Having been conferred university status, the Academy has decided to develop full fledged Law studies, leading to qualifications that entitle its graduates to exercise all law professions. The corresponding faculties of public (and private universities) contest this, claiming that law studies at the Academy are not entirely comparable. Moreover, they are beginning to develop another line of argumentation: if "your" graduates are equally equipped to exercise the law professions, why shouldn't "our" law graduates be allowed to compete for jobs in the

police force that are awarded to the graduates of the Academy? The reply of the Academy is (quite rightly), that law graduates of regular universities lack the military training provided to its students. The discussion moves then to the status of the police personnel, which according to current laws and regulations are defined as “civil servants”.

The situation has become even more complex as a result of the initiative taken by some private universities to set up special programmes for training public order and national security personnel. Since they meet the academic requirements, some of them have been duly accredited. A solution will certainly be found to these disputed issues. As far as the Academy is concerned, the way to look for a solution is to pay due attention to raising the quality of its programmes.

The Academy has responsibilities for the **in-service training** aimed at upgrading skills and competencies of other categories of police force personnel, as requested by the Ministry of Administration and Internal Affairs. Apparently, these responsibilities will increase in the future, with considerable implications for the Academy. International experience shows that, for a variety of reasons, quality assurance standards are more difficult to maintain for in service training. But the diplomas and degrees obtained through them have full validity. It seems to me that, given the numbers involved in such training, maintaining, if not raising, standards is a major priority for the Academy at present.

As a professor of English, I would like to make a personal remark about the **foreign language programme** of the Academy. Students are expected to master a foreign language at an advanced level by the time they graduate. To meet this requirement, the entrance examination includes a fairly strict foreign language test. This basic knowledge is further developed through 2 hours of practical language classes per week. (I consider this insufficient, but was told that the very heavy programme of the Academy does not allow allotting more time). However, activities that help students learn a foreign language are organized during their spare time through language labs and modern teaching materials. The Academy has developed excellent relations with the foreign language institutes and embassies that organize language classes in Bucharest (the British Council, l’Institut francais, Goethe and Cervantes Institutes, etc.). Students are encouraged to pass the internationally recognized foreign language tests which are organized with their help. For special programmes that train personnel for missions to be sent abroad, intensive courses are organized, sometimes with the help of native speakers.

4. Postgraduate studies

Postgraduate studies (MA and PhD level) at the Academy are organized by a separate Department, with the status of a Faculty, which functions very much like a Graduate School of a regular university. They have known a very rapid development that deserves more attention. As a rule, enhanced vertical diversification of studies through Master and Doctoral programmes is a feature of those higher education institutions which are recognized –or aspire to become - “research universities”.

However, upon request by the various departments and services of the Ministry of Administration and Internal Affairs, the Academy organizes a large number of Master

programmes in various fields. Thus, in 2008, 14 Master programmes were organized in Law (for the Police Faculty); 2 Master programmes in Engineering (for the Firemen Faculty) and 1 Master Programme in History (for the Archives School). Admission figures totalled 719 students. The Ministry sets admission figures in keeping with identified needs. More recently, the Academy has started to supplement them with additional places for fee paying students. Adjustments to the Bologna process have also helped push the development of Master programmes.

This is a positive development and, judged by the outcomes I could see by looking at graduation figures and grades, the results are good. Special mention should be made of the Master programmes that cover training for police services involving close European cooperation. However, transition from undergraduate to graduate training should mark a distinct qualitative step. As things stand at present, it tends to be a mere matter of continuing studies, with the prospect of salary increase as the main incentive. Maintaining standards becomes particularly important therefore, particularly for fee paying students. This seems to be a problem faced by many higher education institutions in Romania at present.

Doctoral studies have known a similarly fast development. In the same academic year (2008-2009) a total of 148 students were admitted for PhD studies under the supervision of 15 professors). While pointing out that Master and doctoral studies are the main resource for developing the research capacities of a higher education institution, I am still inclined to believe that graduate studies at the Police Academy are slightly overambitious and, at any rate, have grown too fast, for an institution which is not designed to function as a research university. This is not an invitation to reduce their role. It is simply intended to stress the need to keep up standards.

5. Research

The self evaluation Report of the Academy and the other documents presented to the evaluation team define scientific research as a “basic component” of its mission and refer to it as the foundation on which the entire training programme is based. A medium and short term strategy for research has been elaborated, which covers all types of research: basic, applied and innovation. Some of the research laboratories are well equipped thus allowing for advanced research to be carried out. Scientific sessions are organized periodically and a well attended international conference is convened every year.

Much of the research is geared towards teaching needs (publication of textbooks, more specialized courses and other teaching materials). The scientific review of the Academy “Pro Patria Lex” is gaining recognition as one of the leading journals in the field of public order and law enforcement.

It is not within my competence to judge the scientific value of the research output of the Academy. There is clear evidence however of its quality, as proved by the continued presence of some of its teachers and researchers in the major scientific journals in the field. Researchers of the Academy are linked to prestigious European research networks, with increased chances for access to EU funds. There can be no doubt however that research is the area in which the Academy has still a long way to go in order to gain international recognition. Unlike the case of postgraduate studies in

relation to which I warned about setting ambitious quantitative goals, there is no limit to the ambitions that the Academy could set for itself with regard to research.

6. Facilities

As mentioned at the beginning of this report, the campus of the Academy is outstanding. Facilities are well used and it is clear that both staff and students feel a sense of ownership of the facilities. The library are very well provided with and functions as a modern learning resources centre, including a close circuit television system.

It is however important to continue to invest in its physical infrastructure of the Academy and its location in very beautiful surroundings presents excellent possibilities.

Conclusions and Recommendations

I would like to single out in what follows the main conclusions I could draw and a few recommendations that I would like to make for the future development of the Police Academy. In formulating them, I have paid particular attention to existing international practices and standards.

- By international standards, the Police Academy is a small-to-medium size institution of higher education, with a fairly circumscribed range of programmes, to which corresponding structures have been adopted. Its programmes have been carefully designed so as to correspond to its mission and functions. They are well provided for in terms of staff and learning facilities. It has an excellent student body recruited on a highly selective body. In the eyes of this evaluator, a visit to the Police academy campus and an encounter, however brief, with its staff and students calls to mind the image of the ivy league colleges on the East Coast of the United States, or of the prestigious military colleges in the same country or in Europe. Evidently, the Academy has a long way to go in order to reach that status. But it is a goal it should pursue perseveringly.
- As stressed at the very beginning of this report, any evaluation of the Police Academy at the present moment cannot ignore its major **role and responsibility for improving the public perception of the police services in Romania**. The Rector of the Academy informed that some 80 percent of currently employed officer rank police personnel are graduates of the Academy or have attended one of its in-service training courses. It will still take time to make significant progress in changing public perception of the police, but encouraging signs are already noticeable. Just as the evaluation team was finishing its job, a Romanian film describing the dilemmas of a young policeman faced with a difficult case won a reputed prize at the Cannes Film Festival. This is convincing proof that the general public understands the complexities of the profession. The Academy can change some of the stereotypes that accompany the image of the police at present by training its graduates so as to become efficient agents of that change.

● **Quality assurance** is a priority need with regard to many aspects raised in this Report. Raising overall quality and standards should be a constant concern because it is the only way for the institution to gain recognition nationally and internationally.

● The other line of action that I would like to recommend to the Academy is to **increase vigorously its international links**. Present achievements are only a modest beginning on which much broader links should be built.

● When I asked a specific question with regard to **access and employment figures** for the Academy, the reply was that their validity is for about 30 years. International experience shows that long term planning and forecasts for access and graduate employment very seldom can cover such a long period..I would recommend therefore more caution with regard to preliminary forecasts, particularly with regard to employment figures. In fact, soon after the mission completed its evaluation, a news item in the press and on television referred to difficulties about finding jobs for this year's graduates of the Academy.

● With due apologies for taking this liberty, I would like to venture a piece of advice to the executive management of the Academy. I was indeed very much impressed by their ambitious plans and optimism with regard to its future. However, I got the impression that some of that optimism could be attributed to the fact that until now they have not been faced with serious problems. There have been no serious difficulties in finding the necessary resources for the steady development of the Academy. That situation may well change. It is never advisable to count on the availability of continued resources. The current world crisis is bound to change all that. While admitting that it is not in the nature of a Police Academy to seek financial autonomy, I would strongly recommend therefore continuing the efforts for the diversification of resources.

● May I add a final remark concerning the very careful planning and preparation of the evaluation by ARACIS. Romania has known one of the fastest and largest expansions of higher education in South Eastern and Central Europe, accompanied by a strong process of diversification. It is normal therefore to witness highly diverse and diverging views expressed with regard to the mission, functions, institutional structure and programmes of higher education. Serious problems arise when the views expressed have invested interests of various stakeholders behind them. The presence of an institution that defends the perennial values of higher education and surveys the preservation of its quality becomes a vital in this context. ARACIS performs this function. Through its remarkable managerial staff and its strong international links it enjoys a solid prestige and is recognized by the institutions and the authorities in charge of higher education as well as by the general public as a serious, competent, objective and credible agency.



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