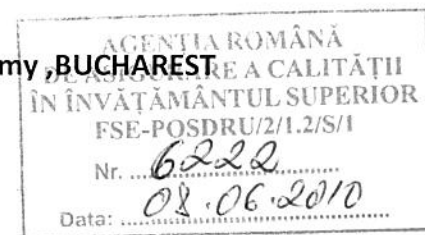


EVALUATION REPORT - Mihai Viteazul National Intelligence Academy, BUCHAREST

Written by the short-term foreign expert: Teréz Kleisz PhD



First, I would like to express my thanks to ARACIS for selecting me to be a member of the evaluation committee. I have appreciated the chance to meet both the expert colleagues of the evaluating commission and the dedicated members of the Intelligence community at the National Academy. The Academy leadership created very favourable working conditions and provided good materials and database for the evaluation. An excellent translator helped me with interviewing students and staff members and kept me informed about the content of plenary meetings and group sessions. I really valued the attentive care and friendly hospitality which I was fortunate enough to enjoy.

- The efficiency of the institutional procedures of programme quality assurance.

Mission, Values and Competitiveness:

Following the government decision to create a separate Higher Education institute for the specialized field of intelligence in 1992, the present form of the Academy was launched in 2000 with the intention of reforming and improving the education of high quality intelligence practitioners for the Romanian Intelligence Service and other services of National Defence. Since then a relatively large-scale transformation has taken place, a range of new and relevant study programmes has been introduced which demonstrate a level of responsiveness to the needs of the rejuvenated Romanian Intelligence Service. The university has been growing at a constant rate. The number of innovative study programmes is on the increase.

The Bologna-type 3 cycle degree system has been developed since 2007 with the aim of supporting the career paths of the students selected offering them not only initial and postgraduate training but the possibility of undertaking PhD studies as well. The newly created MA-s, the doctoral program and the courses providing specialized advanced knowledge are targeting not only students but practitioners as well in the field of internal security services and altogether they make up an elaborate system of continuous professional development, thus creating high advanced-level offerings for the career development of intelligence officers.

The National Intelligence Academy is one of its own kind, a unique blend of a university and a military institution. Having university status it is required to accommodate to the National Higher Education Law and being a military institution its whole functioning has to comply with the strategic vision and objectives of the Romanian Intelligence Service. The leadership and teaching staff hold both military ranks and academic titles. The rector of the university is nominated by the Director of the Intelligence Service, the dean is an elected position. The university is financed from the budget of the Central Intelligence Service.

This unique blend is Janus-faced in the present phase. In my opinion the Romanian Intelligence Community has definitely benefited from the crossbreeding: the curricula reforms have resulted in raising quality in all aspects of training and development, enhanced the attractiveness and an identification with the career and triggered a strong tide of

applied research and related activities (findings are disseminated in newly issued periodicals and books). The Academy operates a publishing house that has published numerous works of the academic staff and other authors.

In the times of late modern society, especially in the future I think security issues will be seen differently than previously, and deepening the security culture in a broader social context is definitely a potential asset arising from a university status that has a goal of "integration into the national and European education and research system with a distinct identity and attributes" .

However, embracing the initiatives of the Bologna Process is not just implementing the three-cycle degree system and reforming curricula. Joining the freshly launched (2010 March Budapest-Vienna Declaration) "European Higher Education Area" would mean creating increased international mobility for staff and students, ensuring credit transfers and flexible learning paths, accrediting prior learning , fostering a policy which widens access reflecting social diversity, building inter-university partnerships and establishing ties between universities and organisations in the public, private and civic spheres.

Having talked to the "employers" of graduates and the academic staff it was obvious to me that the intelligence community does not aspire to building international student exchanges. They had the firm view that the Bologna-type of open learning system is not compatible with the specific nature of the Academy, undergraduates are not to take part in such activities. Achieving visibility within Romania and beyond is out of the question. The lack of an equivalent institutional partner within European Union was mentioned as a barrier as well.

International staff exchanges happen at the Academy and research collaboration with national and foreign partners is a practice but the examples mentioned are not numerous, there is scope for improvement in those areas as well.

I appreciate the fact that the institute's own professional identity is very strong. Inescapable was the marked presence of symbolic demonstrations like the flag, the insignia, the students' uniform, the Day of the Academy and related activities, the Eagle as the symbolic emblem of the Service, etc.) and that the organisation is obvious is well able to convey a sense of belonging to the students very efficiently. All the students I met demonstrated an emotional attachment to the chosen vocation and I heard explicitly expressed a commitment to the defence of their country. "Patrie si onoare" has genuine meaning for them. To my question whether they would like to have more privacy, more scope for individual choice, more democracy in decision-making - everyone expressed the values of learning to be one of the community, to respect others through accommodating to them, to share tasks that lead to building team spirit and the positive effect of a life of discipline with respect to their personal maturity.

The Academy does have an Ethics Commission (with a 3 year tenure), a Code of University Ethics that includes a set of principles and rules of conduct seen as an "ethical contract" between the students and staff members contributing to the sense of cohesion and enhancing the sense of belonging.

The promotion of academic freedom through free thinking, simultaneously assuming personal and institutional responsibilities, free participation in the life of academic communities, professional competence and confidentiality are the values emphasized in the university' charter.

Programme Quality Assurance

The Academy has defined a common qualification framework and operates quality assurance procedures that fulfil the criteria of the internal regulation on initiation, approval, monitoring and periodical evaluation as a guarantee of common standards. Ensuring quality seems to be built into the regular procedures, which I've found very good.

Curricula were developed in close collaboration with experts from the Central Intelligence Service and the content of study programs are constantly attuned to the expressed needs of the Intelligence Service. Their representative is a Senate member who can easily raise items for inclusion on the agenda. Having met the "employers" who represented broader sections of the military services, it turned out that they are regularly asked to give feedback on the skills and competencies demonstrated by the students engaged in field work. Discussions happen several times a year and feedback in written form is in practice. The Academy offers opportunities to these broader sections within the military to teach a module during the 6th semester of BA programs on their specialized areas of work to those students they pre-selected before entering the admissions-process of the Academy BA-training.

Having talked to students of previous and current times (only some years' difference between their graduations) regarding weaknesses in the study programmes it became clear that bodies had been quick in responding and remedying those problematic issues felt and expressed previously. (For instance, now there are more laboratories for practising skill development etc.)

Course evaluation by students and *Peer Evaluation* both influence the improvement of teaching. The students are asked to evaluate the course each year towards the end of the semester over a range of 21 issues, such as *new elements and usefulness of knowledge content, clarity and coherence of the concepts taught, the style of teaching and its ability to hold attention, how the teaching methods promote interactivity in class, stimulate open debate and students' questions, whether the teacher is approachable to the students' informal questions, can he/she provide satisfactory answers, how is the pursuit of research interest motivated, how the responsibilities of students are addressed in correlation to the course, is the teacher capable of giving a thorough and objective assessment of student achievements*. The evaluation sheets were developed and are collected by the members of the Quality Commission. It is their task to undertake analysis of the returns, the results of which are reported to the Senate.

The percentages achieved in the last semester in MA programs varied from 70-78 %. (most satisfactory would be 100%). At the end the whole study programs (covering a couple of courses) was rated on a scale of 1-5. The results showed values of 4,37 - 4,7. Such a satisfaction level is outstanding. Student evaluations and student opinions are taken seriously. I heard from students later that the teacher reaching the lowest grade was asked to leave.

The lowest satisfaction level (70 % of "yes") was achieved by the question : Were you encouraged to think critically ?

Following the Quality Commission Report heads of the departments and study program directors discuss the findings with staff members and certain teachers are advised to consult

with those who excelled in student evaluations in order to improve those aspects where they didn't score well.

Research

The institution created a Scientific Committee and a Research Centre (achieving certification in 2009) where a small group of full time researchers build collaborative partnerships with professors and their PhD- students. Research activities are supported by assuring equipment and software licenses. Since 2009 even European grants are available but the active partner dealing with the European Union is not the Academy itself but a National Coordinating Research Agency. I think promoting this line of activities could enhance the internationalizing aspects that were being outlined before. It was an agreed opinion from staff members that research activities enhance the quality of course programs, outputs are built into the study programs without delay. Each year a scientific conference is organized with the aim of enriching the relationships between staff members, mature students and other actors in the academic community.

Efficiency of institutional procedures in supporting the educational process

Teaching staff:

I found a good mix of very experienced, well-known professors and young academics.

Youth is not prioritised over experience nevertheless 60 % of academic staff is under 37.

Some of former bright students who excelled were selected to join the staff. The academic staff is well qualified : all of them have gained their PhD-, or they are enrolled in such programs.

A very positive finding is that the Academy ensures 38 free days as study holidays and nearly as much more for those in PhD-studies. The institution provides transport to and from the Academy for the staff, and generously supports sport and social-cultural team-building activities among the academics.

Max. 210 teaching hours per year is the norm for a professor, 330 hours a year for other lecturers.

7 staff members are participating in the doctoral programmes of other military-type academies.

Only 12 % of total hours are taught by part-time teachers in associate professor-roles.

New recruits into the academic community have to go through a formal recruitment procedure. Both teaching and research are required elements of the job - they cannot be separated. Those experts without teaching practice have to undertake an open course to demonstrate their teaching skills. Students' evaluation is requested afterwards. In an interview with a new recruit to the staff body, he was very positive about how he had been treated and informed on his duties and rights, what the institution expects.

The Quality Commission (7 members) has developed and operates a system of Teacher Self-Evaluation. Each year the academics are required to conduct a self-evaluation, report on how

they responded to the feedback of their previous learners, record what sort of course materials they have developed and show in an evidence-based way how they had modified the content of the courses they teach, what teaching methods they applied to support student learning. They are supposed to give an account of their publications in peer-reviewed periodicals, academic books they have published, conference participation, patents submitted, scientific awards and research contracts gained. They are also asked to reflect on issues of professional ethics.

Peer evaluation is part of the quality procedure: Disciplinary knowledge, teaching skills, research potential and professional ethics are the areas the committee members chosen in October observe and value through to the end of June in the year.

The staff members are involved in a mentoring system. Smaller students groups (max. 15 members) have a tutor responsible for a support role that covers the professional and personal development of the students.

Being a relatively small –sized university a ratio of 1 teacher: 10 students has produced very good interpersonal relations between lecturers and students.

Representation:

Stemming from the military nature of the organization, meritocratic rather than democratic voting nominations are favoured. Student representatives on the Senate are not democratically elected but those with best results are invited to participate. This fact is accepted by the students who appreciate the value of being represented by the most able.

- **Efficiency of institutional procedures in ensuring graduation standards.**

Access:

In my opinion, the student intake is a very distinctive characteristic of the Academy, the nature of the profession demands specific marked student profiles.

The academy doesn't comply with the Romanian Education Law which prescribe positive social discriminatory practices, -as I learned while doing an evaluation for ARACIS.

No Roma students from families with no tradition in higher education, no Romanians living in Moldova Republic or in the Ukraine, and no students whose parents are members of the teaching profession in public schools are favoured as a means of widening social access.

Admission policy is very selective here, - not in social-ethnic terms but in competence and personality traits which are viewed as essential for the profession.

There is a pre-selection procedure done by the different military wings of National Defence (CV-s, interviews, family background investigation, medical test, demonstration of ICT competence, psychological tests). This is followed by a 5 day assessment period developed and run by the Academy. Knowledge testing , psychological tests, demonstrating foreign language skills , creativity and physical abilities are required for admission. The staff repeatedly stressed that their students are very mature and able. Having talked with different student groups and observing their behaviour that view can be verified as reliable.

The number of places is limited by the Ministry of Defense so the entry is competitive.

Raising interest among young people doesn't seem to be a problem. In recent years at the pre-selection period there were 15 applicants for a single BA place at the Academy. After the rigorous selection procedure there are still 2,5 -3,8 candidates for each place .(2009).

As for publicity the different wings of the military services do have county branches whose personnel historically had developed very good connections with secondary schools and through this channel it is easy to promote the idea of the career to potential students. James Bond movies and the like do the rest for motivation. 15 % of the students do come from military high schools.

The students are socially mixed, mostly from middle social classes.

The official website gives correct information on how to apply and set out the requirements.

Contracts

Contracts are signed at admission between the sponsoring service of the military and students which strictly stipulate the norms and rules of the game. No tuition fees have to be paid, accommodation, meals, travel costs , books and teaching materials, uniforms, even some pocket money is provided, a military-style discipline is required. Girls can't have children while they are undergraduates, repeated failures in studies would be seen as deficits of engagement to the vocation, students are supposed to fulfil duties at the campus and they are required to comply with the prescribed rules. After graduation they have to commit themselves for a certain period to the job offered by the sponsoring service of the military. Failure to do so means reimbursing tuition costs with interest.

Each student has to get up at 6 o'clock in the morning, be at class from 8 till 14.30, and after lunch to participate in an optional activity- that means 100 % attendance level.

Training results

The students expressed satisfaction with the balance between theory and practice. They appreciated the laboratory-work and the fact that most of the courses do offer a variety of opportunities for evaluation. (essays, open discussions, practical assignments). Though the number of courses (17 per semester for a BA) seemed high, still the students were of the opinion that they could cope.

The library functions as a strong learning support system. It collects all the study materials the teachers request and makes them accessible through an intranet system in the Intranet laboratory.

Its reading hall offers 90 seats and 20 PC-s for learning and opening hours are until 21 o'clock.

The Library has a policy to negotiate a very reasonable price with academic publishing organisations and buys and re-sells books to the students and staff. The library director was very proud of the list of foreign books and periodicals offered to the readers. They grant access to EBSCO, Science Direct, CSA , Thompson ISI etc. databases.

Some of the students thought the Library hasn't found the best way to acquaint students with the use of these electronic databases.

Former and present students were very appreciative of their training courses that had developed their skills to perform well. Their evaluations were very favourable. Course evaluations (outlined before) scored 4,58-4,7 on a scale of 1-5 where 5 means the best. There was a group interviewed who failed to identify anything as a weakness. They expressed their gratitude that lecturers always made time for their personal and professional development.

The students' career development path nowadays seems to follow a pattern that nearly 90 % of BA-graduates choose one of the MA programs, at the end of which they automatically find employment.

Each year the Academy organizes a Students' Scientific Week and an accompanying conference.

Employers were stressing that the education institution is capable of training good officers in the broader field of military services, developing knowledgeable and skilled intelligence officers and preparing those engaged in research activities related to the professional field. After initial employment the graduates work in teams and are gradually confronted with more complex experiences and within years they attain that level of maturity and responsibility where they are able to handle individual tasks. The employers don't expect the training institution to turn out fully-fledged officers, only real complex job-context can furnish that requirement. They valued the close cooperation with the Academy in supporting and improving modes of training.

- **Sstudents' use of academic infrastructure**

Learning environment: At present the main campus environment offers well-equipped space for teaching and learning: really good, relatively new facilities, modern furniture and advanced multimedia technology are available in classrooms and lecture halls.

Leisure facilities are satisfactory, the use of tennis courts, football and basketball fields, fitness and body-building room and a sports hall are available, and access to swimming pools and shooting ranges are permitted.

A small orthodox church is at the disposal of the community.

However there is only the dining room that can be used for social events.

The students encountered in the dormitories (separate for men and for women) were satisfied with the living arrangements but in my judgement (2 x3 persons in each room + 1 bathroom for 6) 3 to a room is a bit cramped and limits the chances for individualized living. The students have the right to put refrigerators into the rooms. The accommodation capacity is adequate for the number of students.

For security reasons there is one restriction which the students resented: they don't have access to laptops or PC-s in their dormitory rooms. Only in special Internet and Intranet laboratories can they use PC-s.

Another complaint was formulated: on week-ends the Internet lab is closed from 2 o'clock on Saturday until Monday and for those groups who don't leave the campus it is an

inconvenience. The Academy leadership had declared it is open to offer resources to solve this problem if the need is substantiated.

Use of self-evaluation documents in illustrating institution's capacity to reflect its own scope and limits and how to manage them i to enforce quality and graduation standards.

The Institution's Self-Evaluation Report in English was offered and some other documents (for example The Strategic Plan) were translated for me personally. The Academy was more than happy to offer access to me access to persons with insights in the event things were not understood.

The statements on strategic priorities, goal settings, structures were clear, however appendices were not translated into English, therefore there was no chance to read those and substantiate the written goals .

To my mind the Academy has created an internal quality culture lately. A very favourable regulatory framework and an efficient and transparent internal structure exists within the institution.

The *Commission for Quality Assurance* is not a permanent entity but each year the Senate chooses its members. It holds the task of developing and implementing the 4 evaluation forms: Course evaluations by students, Teacher Self-Evaluation, Peer-Evaluation of Staff and the Head of Department's Evaluation on the staff members. The committee is obliged to submit the annual report to the Senate, this report is the force that shapes quality assurance policies.

My impression was that the academics working in the commission and the key persons in management collaborate very efficiently.

A few member were reported as recently participating in a special training program run by ARACIS to acquire the advanced skills to act as internal evaluators.

- **Credibility of information disseminated by institution with regard to study programmes.**

The information is reliable and credible, but the nature of the institution restricts its breadth.

Good practice aspects

Supporting the career-path of intelligence officers from undergraduate studies to the specialized system of continuous professional development. The newly created MA-s, the doctoral program and the courses providing specialized advanced knowledge altogether they make up an elaborate system of continuous professional development.

The efficient selection process and varied methods of evaluation of the students' performance

Defined evaluation procedure creating and maintaining quality

Evaluation sheet: the range of 21 items, such as *new elements and usefulness of knowledge content, clarity and coherence of the concepts taught, the style of teaching and its ability to hold attention, how the teaching methods promote interactivity in class, stimulate open*

debate and students' questions, whether the teacher is approachable to the students' informal questions, can he/she provide satisfactory answers, how is the pursuit of research interest s motivated, how the responsibilities of students are addressed in correlation to the course, is the teacher capable of giving a thorough and objective assessment of student achievements.

The Students' Scientific Week

The frequent and quality feedback on the skills and competencies demonstrated by the students in field work.

The chance of broader wings of military services to teach a module during the 6th semester of BA programs on their specialized area of work

- **Statement related to the confidence granted to the institution**

I propose a *"high degree of confidence" grade.*

- **Recommendations for the institution's activity**

It is recommended electing the Academy's Quality Assurance Committee for a period longer than a year as is now the case, to invest in their knowledge acquisition in quality assurance, to let them create process and outcome performance indicators and to develop benchmarks for years to come. The Strategy Document terminates in 2010, it is assumed the new one will contain more benchmarks for the future period.

While accepting the professional arguments against international student exchange still my recommendation would be to try carve out some experimental forms of international collaboration maybe among MA-student groups, possibly on transnational security issues of common concern which could develop cross-cultural sensitivity and intercultural competencies, including language skills. Reading through the list of new books in the Library I found a title "The Security Dilemma: Fear, Cooperation, Trust in World Politics" which seems to me to signify a shifting perspective able to be utilized by the Academy.

I am stressing the importance of and recommending the development of a credit transfer policy as well. There are a number of students at the Academy who have signed up for distant learning programs provided by Bucharest university and they offered that the credits gained there were not transferable because of an incompatibility in the credits assigned to courses. Defining the criteria of evaluation and the rules for accepting credits by the Academy will help when initiatives for broadening international cooperation is to be undertaken.

- **Recommendation to ARACIS**

Organizing the meetings with the student groups , leadership and teaching and administrative staff members could not have been done in any other way than happened. But an external evaluation automatically puts them into a defensive position, defending their achievements , not disclosing to outsiders their weak points, thus moves to redress the balance to positive angles were palpable. In my mind proper constructive evaluations are those which trigger self-reflection across the board, which question previously unquestioned received practice. How to induce that sort of reflective atmosphere is a key challenge for ARACIS evaluation committees.