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Priority axis 1 "Education and training for the support of the economic increase and society development based on knowledge"

Major intervention field 1.2 „Quality in the higher education“

Project title „Development and consolidation of quality culture at the level of the Romanian higher education system - QUALITAS“

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**NATIONAL SCHOOL OF POLITICAL STUDIES AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION
EXTERNAL INSTITUTIONAL EVALUATION REPORT**

2014

SOLICITAT RAMBURSARE
FSE-POSDRU
POSDRU/155/1.2/S/141894
ID 141894



Introduction

I was invited to join to the evaluation team of the institutional evaluation process of the National School of Political Studies and Public Administration (NSPSPA) as an external evaluator for the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS) in the framework of the project of CEENQA „Development and consolidation of quality culture at the level of the Romanian higher education system - QUALITAS“. The evaluation took place between Thursday 4 December and Saturday 6 December 2014 in Bucharest. In this process as a foreign expert evaluator I was responsible for establishing an overview of National School of Political Studies and Public Administration focusing on the main points of continuous improvement of quality and future development aspects with outlining the main dimensions of present and future challenges of the university. Before the three day long visit I received the self-evaluation report of NSPSPA and the guidelines of external institutional evaluation from ARACIS. During my stay in Bucharest with the help of the colleagues of the university I had the possibility to insight all the documentations and annexes of the evaluation process and to collect information about the operation of the NSPSPA. My report is roughly following the structure of the self-evaluation report of the institution.

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Background

The National School of Political Studies and Public Administration is a public institution of higher education, advanced scientific research, academic and professional training at national and international level and offering bachelor, master and PhD programs on the field of public administration, political sciences, international relations, European studies, sociology, psychology, communication, public relations and management. The 23 year history of the university is a permanent evolution of educational programs that continuously meet the needs of the students and the market economy requirements. As a leader university in Romanian higher education the institution always has been attractive for those who wanted to get knowledge, skills, competencies and high standard educational services.

There are other institutions, faculties which are offering educational programs on the field of public administration, political sciences, international relations, European studies, sociology, psychology, communication and public relations and management in the country but the experience, the prestige and the competences of NSPSPA show the importance of the institution in the internal and international environment as well. On the whole the institution meets the cultural, social and economic needs of the community.

According to the self-evaluation report of the NSPSPA, the strategic objectives of the institution are focusing on the maintenance of the present favorable position and provide future development with high quality assurance in education, institutional quality and management, strong national and international cooperation and competitive knowledge on the above mentioned fields. The present state of the university shows that the institution has a good chance to keep its position as a leader Romanian higher education and scientific research institution in the future.

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Missions and objectives

According to the self-evaluation report, due to the public nature and nonprofit character of the institution the university offers equal learning opportunities to all students, focusing on their personal motivation and skills with promoting values of quality, confidence, tolerance, social responsibility and democracy.

NSPSPA was established to satisfy the needs of the society in the transition economy of the 1990s to train specialists in political and administration sciences, who would work in key sectors of economy, politics and social sector at national and local level. The concept was based on different models of leading French, Dutch and United States higher education institutions on this field. The university has the mission of carrying on specific higher education activities at different levels, training highly-skilled specialists, developing and improving professional competences in political, administration sciences and other related fields, improving constantly the education process and scientific research, parallel with the permanent cooperation with similar institutions, as well as with institutions from the national, European and international environment.

According to the related documents, beside the three basic dimensions of the mission of NSPSPA for the period of 2014-2020 (research activity; teaching activity; integrating the outcomes of the research in the education process) there is a strong focus on strengthening academic quality culture and institutional identity of the NSPSPA; communication and collaboration between the five structures of NSPSPA; permanent improvement of the development of the material and human resources of the university and strengthening an integrated management system at university level through professionalization of the functional, administrative structures of the university.

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NSPSPA has a Strategic Plan for the period 2014-2016 and operational plans for the given year. The Strategic Plan establishes the mission, values, principles, the strategy for quality evaluation and assurance, the educational and lifelong learning strategy, the strategy for broadening the base of beneficiaries of the educational offer, the research strategy, the strategy for promotion and internationalization, institutional development and the strategy for management and support services.

To reach these strategic aims could be realistic in the next few years and there are already strong efforts to operate the institution along these orientations that certainly correspond with the available material and human resources of the university.

Leadership, managerial structures

According to the information and written documents the academic and the administrative leadership of NSPSPA have the appropriate competencies to do their work correctly. The managerial structures of the faculties of the university, the departments, centers and other organizational units of the institution have a transparent, logical structure and they are suited for the correct management of the organization. The operation of the institution rely on a system of regulations, procedures and tools covering the whole set of university life parallel with the permanent evaluation of the different types of programs, the teaching staff and the other personnel of the university. The present system is suitable for a good level of operation and management of the institution.

The University Senate had 35 members, of whom 25 tenured teaching and research staff of NSPSPA (representatives of the four faculties, Department of International Relations and European Integration, and the director of the Doctoral School) and 10 student representatives. The distribution of the number of members of the university senate for each academic structure is made according to the methodology and rules for elections of NSPSPA.

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Educational programs, teaching staff

The university has four faculties and the Department of International Relations and European Integration and offering educational programs at BA, MA and doctoral level as well. The Bachelor study programs accredited or provisionally authorized are organized by the following faculties:

- Faculty of Public Administration: *Public Administration; European Administration;*
- Faculty of Political Studies: *Political Sciences, International Relations; European Studies; Sociology; Psychology;*
- Faculty of Communication and Public Relations: *Communication and Public Relations; Publicity;*
- Faculty of Management: *Management.*

NSPSPA has Master programs in the following fields: *Sociology, Administration Sciences, Communication Sciences and Political Sciences*, (full time and part time programs).

NSPSPA has doctoral study programs in the following fields: *Political Sciences, Administration Sciences, Sociology and Communication Sciences*. From 1999 the university offered distance learning programs in different locations of the country.

It is important to remark that the number of the enrolled students of the university from the 2009/2010 academic year to the 2013/2014 academic year changed from 12,119 to 5,946, which is a 50% drop. These changes could have several reasons like certain effects of demographic changes, decreasing interest (especially in connection with distance learning programs), worsening financial background of potential students, changing role of higher education, market competition, or the

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increasing supply of other state universities or private institutions on the same fields. Lower number of students certainly could result better level of teaching with improving the quality of the educational processes and scientific research as long as the financial background is stable and the longer term financial sustainability of the institution is not in danger. This challenge could be an important sign for the leaders of the university to deal with in the near future beside the permanently changing and sometimes not so stable financial situation.

The teaching staff of the NSPSPA has proper competencies, qualifications, and academic degrees which results a good level of performance in education and training processes. According to the self-evaluation report of the institution and personal field experiences the scientific potential and quality of human resources of NSPSPA seems to be on a good level. University has now a highly qualified staff. Beyond the professional competences it is important to point out that the language skills of the staff is good. The relatively young age of the staff is also a very good advantage as the challenges of the academic generation shift is ensured in the next years.

The present number of employees is certainly able to satisfy the needs of the education programs in an appropriate level, although it is important to point out that in spite of the drop the total number of students the number of teaching staff has not changed dramatically (2009/2010 academic year: 146, 2013/2014 academic year 138).

Material assets

The equipment and installations in connection with the educational process seems to be an important priority and satisfy the demands of students quite well. Funding is provided from own revenues, from the state budget and from other sources. The

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capacity of the educational facilities (classrooms, auditoriums, seminar rooms, laboratories) is in accordance with the existing regulations.

Besides its existing premises, in 2014, the university completed its office on Expoziției Blvd. no. 30 A, District 1, which is built on a land with a surface area of 3,500 m², and has a gross floor area of 16,155 m². The new building is located in the northern part of Bucharest, close to Romexpo Arena which is a developing and expanding part of the city. The earlier headquarters of the university, Cernica Campus has to be rebuilt in the next years. The 8-storey new building of NSPSPA has an estimated investment value of 97,348 million RON (2/3 state support, 1/3 own, extra budget incomes).

The university also has a 2,000 m² land, located in Constanta, where a 3,000 m² (gross floor area) building will be built. This new building is going to be used as a regional research and conference center, all year round for both research activities involving the NSPSPA teaching staff and PhD candidates, and other activities (science communication sessions, national and international conferences, summer/winter schools) as well. The university also has a building located in Brasov with a gross floor area of 317 m², which was used as a distance learning center in the last years but due to the fact that in the present there is no significant interest for these kinds of programs, the university has to come up with a plan for its future utilization. For teaching and scientific research activities of the institution earlier rented places from the Politehnica University of Bucharest and from the Ecological University in Bucharest.

NSPSPA has IT, foreign languages, multimedia and other laboratories as well. The new building on Expoziției Blvd. has 3 lecture halls, 17 course classrooms, 25 seminar classrooms and 3 IT laboratories. The transference of the institution has almost completely finished although some administrative activities are still operating in the old headquarters. This process was a great challenge for the staff and for the

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students as well, and the university still needs some time to finish this ongoing 'project' and for the next semester expectedly everything is going to find its place in the new environment. Generally, students like the new building although there were certain complaints in connection with the elevators (4+1 for the staff), some of them said that there are some periods when elevators are „overcrowded”.

NSPSPA owns three dormitories with a total capacity of 547 students, covering about 10% of full time students. Dormitories are equipped with all facilities (bedrooms, bathrooms, kitchens, Internet, reading rooms etc.).

The university has a library with a very large and updated book collection close to 30.000 volumes selected according to the demands of the fields covered by the academic programs. This collection covers a wide area of fields and sub-fields, and its interdisciplinary character meets both theoretical and practical education needs. In the new building, NSPSPA will extend the areas used for information and documentation, and it will gradually take steps towards introducing electronic books and mobile access to such books.

The areas dedicated to physical activities were located in the Cernica Campus. Now students have the possibility to use the capacities of other partner universities (ANEFS), although some of them have no information about this facility.

The former campus of the university also has provided students with proper areas for meals. The new building will also add a kitchen and a self-service line with a surface area of 190 m², as well as a dining hall for students and professors with a surface area of 239 m² with 150 seats.

Since 2007, NSPSPA has been using virtual classroom systems. The concerned faculties use different applications (Platon application, which is an own software

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product of the Faculty of Communication and Public Relations and Moodle platform of the Faculty of Public Administration).

The NSPSPA has its own publishing house from 2000 (Comunicare.ro Publishing House). The titles of Comunicare.ro are organized into six collections: "Communication Culture", "Public Environment", "Image, Strategy, Media", "University Courses", "Communication Research" and "Field of Knowledge". The "Field of Knowledge" collection is the result of a partnership concluded with the Flammarion Publishing House. The publishing house is regularly participating on book fairs in Romania and abroad as well. The presence of the publishing house in the electronic market is also significant (Elefant.ro).

On the whole the university meets the demands of European standards but it is important to continue the work to maintain the present good level and invest permanently to its physical infrastructure.

Financial activity

As a nonprofit institution, the university is establishing funds for activity from the annual state finance, school tuition taxes, from donations and sponsorships and other incomes. According to the details and the consultations with the staff of the university the financial activities, incomes and expenses of NSPSPA in spite of the permanently changing financial conditions, changing number of students and fluctuating state finance are well-balanced.

I think that the sometimes uncertain conditions and changing student numbers could result a new strategic orientation in the next years: instead of less secure level of state support the university has to find the ways to realize more own, extra budget incomes to maintain and finance its activities in a reasonable level and quality. Right now there are lots of signs of this change of way of thinking: there are plans to utilize

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the available resources and find also new directions to make extra money. Another way to keep the present financial situation relatively stable could be to realize more income from study fees with raising the present level of fees or enrolling greater number of students. The present capacity not allows more students to the system (according to the data of the last five years there is a relatively great oversubscribe for the offered programs), although the new infrastructural development may result changes in capacity numbers but in this case the university has to develop the human resources to satisfy the needs of the greater number of students. The other path could be to offer new, desirable programs which could attract more students and potential market groups.

It is important to add that the university permanently tries to attract potential students. The good reputation of NSPSPA attracts lot of potential students and the university also has good connections with the secondary education institutions and other private and state organizations and companies. There is also a strong financial assistance for students as granting of scholarships and other forms of financial supports.

It is important to note that from this year the university is not forced to rent other learning spaces in other locations which certainly reduce expenditures, although the operational costs of the new building would be probably higher than the previous period.

According to the received information, it is important to maintain the present average number of students in the future which is 'enough' to make the system sustainable. According to the data of the last 5 years, in the number of candidates for full time programs and the admitted students there is a permanent fluctuation, although the offered programs in this period are significantly oversubscribed. That is the reason why the selection methods used by the university certainly could result more motivated students and could result higher quality. It is important to point out that in

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the present framework the university basically admit the potential number of students and without changing the present limits the only possibility to increase the number of admitted students is developing new education programs. According to the present successful and high level operation of the institution, it is not necessarily means that the university has an urgent need to get more students, which is certainly not conceivable with the present number of staff, but right now when a great capacity enlargement happened this year, in the future it is worth to think about new diversification paths which would meet the needs of the market and could result the capacity exploitation in a higher level.

Students

In the NSPSA in the 2013/2014 academic year are enrolled 5,946 students. As I have remarked earlier this process can be an important sign of changes and the university certainly has to cope with this challenge in the next few years. According to the opinions of some colleagues from the university there is no need to get more students, because the present number of students is 'enough' to maintain the institution and quality of educational processes, but on the other hand if there is a possibility for growing with keeping an appropriate level of quality of the education programs it would be worth to expand the education services and activities of the university.

The university has a large number of international cooperation with other universities in the country and as well as abroad. The NSPSA is also participating in the ERASMUS program where parallel with the student mobility there is also teacher mobility in the university which usually means a one week long period to different European destinations basically with the same main directions like student mobility. Although these connections are operating quite well, it is recommended to maintain and manage these contracts permanently with European and also with non-

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European universities and increase the number incoming and outgoing students and staff members taking part in mobility activities.

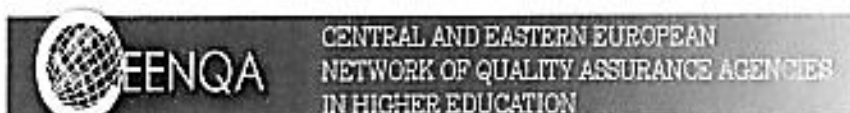
According to the fact that in most of the cases there is a relatively high oversubscribe of the offered programs, the university is organizing and developing admission contest. The themes and bibliography for admission contests are made public six months before the contest on the website of the university, on each faculty website, and in other promotional materials.

The Center for Counselling and Vocational Guidance of the university provides counselling and vocational guidance services with the purpose of increasing employment opportunities for NSPSPA graduates and teaching counselling services to promote the academic offer of NSPSPA. The colleagues of the center also monitor employment data of the graduates, the actual labor market needs and could give important feedbacks to the university/faculty management about the demands on labor market.

According to the data of the self-evaluation report, it is very remarkable that most of the BA students (76.84%) started to work when they have still attended the education programs, and many of them (47%) has been looking for a job before or close to the graduation. Many of the NSPSPA graduates hold important roles in politics, in national security, the diplomatic body, non-governmental organizations and the business environment in Romania.

Dormitory buildings of the university have good conditions of accommodation, and perfectly meet the needs of the students. The present capacities cover 10% of the total number of students but it seems to be enough as large number of students are from Bucharest or from the surrounding areas so they basically don't need this type of assistance of accommodation.

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During my visit I had the possibility to meet with students of NSPSPA and I found them very open minded, energetic and intelligent. They seem to be very loyal to their university and pay a lot of attention to their studies. I have also experienced that the students I met speak very good English.

Public information

To build up a good brand and manage a positive image is a strategic priority of the university from the beginnings. The present favorable position and prestige shows that these efforts have been efficient and the institution successfully and permanently contributes to the training of the political and administrative elite of Romania.

The public information can be found on the NSPSPA site, which is one of the most important parts of the communication with the external environment including correct information about the main aspects of the education process in Romanian language. Besides the common university level promotional policies and activities, each faculty of NSPSPA permanently take actions to promote their Bachelor, Master or PhD study programs.

The English-language programs of the university are also open to the international market, although the present number of foreign students is not very significant. If the internationalization were an important priority in the future, it would be very important to develop a well-operating and up to date English language homepage to inform the potential students and markets about the main aspects of the education process.

Research activities

NSPSPA plays a very important role in scientific research, with promoting the enrichment of knowledge in different fields. The importance of research activities seems to be significant in the university and the results of these activities are

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apparently integrated to the educational process, involving more and more students in research activities (in particular Master and PhD candidates). In NSPSPA, just like everywhere in the European Union member countries of Central-Eastern Europe, the European resources, projects and funds become more and more important in financing the different kinds of research activities.

The NSPSPA has established as strategic option the reconsideration of the research system to increase its international component and develop the research activity based on the use of knowledge in the social and economic environment with generating sustainable partnerships with other organizations from the academia and business network.

For national and international visibility and recognition on scientific, educational and other fields a higher education institution has to develop connections with its academic and social-economic environment. In case of NSPSPA these connections seem to be in a perfect level as national and international collaboration has been in focus from the beginning.

Research activities can be seen at institutional, individual as well as student level. The university promotes the teaching staff participation in research programs, the intense collaboration with industrial and services companies, universities and state institutions.

A significant number of research centers are operating within the university. In the second day of the evaluation I also had the possibility to participate for some time in the actual running program of the Center for Israeli Studies: Professor Raphael Vago from the Tel Aviv University had a series of lectures in these days in the university.

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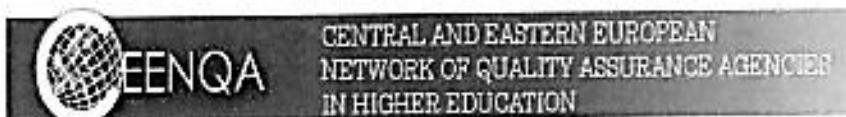
Conclusion

My report is based on what I have experienced; what I have seen, what I have read and have heard before and during my visit. I hope that some of my comments will help the university management in the process of permanent improvement. On the whole NSPSPA meets the individual's educational and professional training specific standards, as well as the community social and economic development standards and European standards of education and scientific research.

I recommend the high level of confidence rate for the university with emphasizing the following:

- Although the present situation, role and reputation of NSPSPA are good, the university should pay enough attention to the permanent changes (number of students, financial resources, needs of the potential students);
- Although the present number of students is 'enough' to maintain the institution and quality of educational processes, it would be worth to expand (again) the education services and activities of the university. The easiest way could be to (re)start and (re)develop distance learning programs as e-learning programs where the existing e-learning platforms and activities could be used in the educational process;
- NSPSPA should continue to invest in the physical and human infrastructure and facilities when own resources, state support or any other funds allow;
- The university has to strengthen and permanently manage the connections, partnerships (local, national and international level as well) between the institution and the actors of market, governmental and non-governmental sectors (internships, field-work, labor market needs).

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Finally I would like to thank to the Rector and all the University staff for the pleasant atmosphere and the support during my stay in Bucharest. At last but not least I would like to thank to ARACIS for giving me the opportunity to participate in this evaluation process in Romania.

Pécs, 12-12-2014



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