



A R A C I S
Romanian Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education

E x t e r n a l I n s t i t u t i o n a l E v a l u a t i o n /
A c c r e d i t a t i o n

Universitatea "Mihail Kogălniceanu" din Iași, Romania

F o r e i g n E x p e r t R e p o r t

26th June 2011

Univ.-Prof. Dr. Winfried Müller
Alpen-Adria Universität Klagenfurt, Austria

Member of the Pool of Experts
Institutional Evaluation Programme
European University Association

1. Introduction

This report summarizes my impressions as Foreign Expert from a visit to the "Mihail Kogălniceanu" University (UMK) in Iași for an institutional evaluation /accreditation by ARACIS in June 2011. This was my fifth participation in an ARACIS external evaluation procedure in Romania. As a member of the pool of experts of the Institutional Evaluation Programme (IEP) of the European University Association (EUA) I have participated already in more than 15 evaluations in 7 European countries and in Colombia. Hence the following observations and comments will partially also reflect my IEP-background and European perspectives.

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My special thank goes to the Rector Prof. PhD. Genoveva Vrabie from the UMK for the hospitality during the visit and to Lect. drd. Andra Marin, Director of the IT-Department, for taking care of me. Furthermore, I also want to express my appreciation to the various representatives of UMK, who have actively participated in the meetings and considerably contributed by their open discussions to a good view of the institution.

Last but not least I want to thank Mrs. Oana Sarbu and Mr. Mihai Marcu from ARACIS for her friendly way of holding contact with me and giving me the opportunity to participate in this evaluation.

The actual ARACIS institutional evaluation /accreditation of visit "Mihail Kogălniceanu" University follows an ARACIS visit of October 2009, after which UMK was classified as an institution with limited confidence.

2. Organizational Details of "Mihail Kogălniceanu" University

When the "Mihail Kogălniceanu" University in Iași was founded in 1990 it was the first private university in Moldavia. UMK was accredited by Law 137/2005, with license and master studies within its only Faculty of Law. In the academic year 2010/2011 UMK offers the three undergraduate degree programs Law (600 students), International Relations and European Studies (15 students) as well as Geography (9 students) and the two master programs Criminal and Forensic Sciences (62 students) and Law of Local Administration (15 students). UMK is a non-profit institution and a juridical entity. The total budget of UMK was 2.355.125 Lei in 2009, 2.080.994 Lei in 2010 and UMK expects a budget of 2.101.390 Lei for 2011. The main financial resources of the University come from school fees, admission and degrees.

UMK is a very small institution having strong public and private competitors in higher

education in the region. Without the closure of unattractive small careers - which has already been started following recommendations by ARACIS after the visit in 2009 - and the opening of new careers related to law such as marketing and management or law and economy by the assistance of a strategic partner the University will probably not reach the critical mass for a higher educational institution on European level.

Besides the small number of students the main problems of UMK are the big number of open positions for professors and associate professors and deficiencies with respect to its infrastructure.

Moreover, the responsible authorities of the city of Iași should be asked to provide access to UMK in a form adequate for a university. (The actual conditions of the approach road are not acceptable for a higher education institution with nearly 700 students.)

3. Outline of the Visit

The 49 pages Institutional Self-Assessment Report (ISAR) plus 51 Annexes provided by UMK gave a partially very good description of the actual situation of the institution. Informative data on the management, teaching and research as well as the facilities was provided. Special focus was taken on quality and evaluation efforts during the recent years as well as changes following recommendations given by ARACIS after the visit in 2009. The ISAR was helpful in preparing the visit and getting an initial good understanding of UMK.

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Between 09:45 am and 10:50 am a tour through the University building was organized. The Team visited the facilities in the new part of the building (completed during 2004) with three large lecture halls (capacity of 217, 179 and 126 seats) on three levels as well as several seminar rooms and laboratories in the new and the old part of the building (total capacity of 382 seats). In the old part of the building we also visited the library (with 80 seats and about 11.000 books and magazines), an IT-class room (12 computers) as well as a lecture room with a criminal and forensic sciences laboratory. The educational spaces especially in the new part of the building are in a good condition and well designed for university purposes. But they are not equipped for the use of new media such as power-

point projections and computer use. The library certainly needs modernization in order to be more attractive - although the visit was during the examen period there was only one student present - and the laboratories need to be brought up to date as well. The computer room with 12 computers is very small even for a law faculty. I have not seen any laboratories especially for the students of geography such as mineralogical collections or equipment for geoinformatics. The University has no modern copying-facilities nor social rooms such as a cafeteria for students.

After lunch I checked documents assisted by UMK members (Management Plan 2008-2012, Operational Plan 2010-2011, Scientific Report 2009-2010, evaluation procedures and quality assurance, staff numbers (scientific and administrative), budgeted 2008 to 2011, mobility of staff and students etc.).

Between 04:40 and 05:40 pm I joined a meeting of the ARACIS team with 8 students (6 males, 2 females). As there were no more any regular classes there were not many students present at the University. But it was an advantage to have a small meeting only. The students were very lively and open. All of them stated that they were very happy with their formation and the manner they were treated by the University. But some of their answers and statements did not correspond with our information and views (e.g. membership to Senate, high satisfaction with the University's infrastructure). All students we met had a good command of English. My questions in English were answered fluently without any translation into Romanian.

Between 05:40 and 06:30 pm the Team discussed the results and impressions of the first day.

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The Mission Director Prof. PhD. Mircea Ivănescu joined the Team at 08:15 am at UMK. He asked all Team members for their impressions so far. Afterwards the Team checked various documents and investigated questions such as the staff and the content of curricula.

I studied the curriculum of the undergraduate law career, student load in classes, introduction of ECTS, student questionnaires for the evaluation of courses, qualification of teaching staff, research activities etc.

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In an internal debriefing meeting from 06:30 to 07:15 pm all team members summarized their impressions so far.

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From 08:30 am onward team members finalized their documents and concluded last checks. Opinions were interchanged.

From 10:00 to 11:30 am the Mission Director Prof. PhD. Mircea Ivănescu, the Mission Scientific Coordinator Prof. univ. dr. Victor Munteanu and all the other team members including the students and me reported to the university leadership on the preliminary results of the evaluation. Strengths and weaknesses were mentioned and some first recommendations given. In her answer Rector Prof. PhD. Genoveva Vrabie referred to different points mentioned and explained once more the situation of UMK.

At 11:45 am I left for the airport.

4. Governance and Institution

"Mihail Kogălniceanu" University has taken the whole evaluation process very seriously. The Rector as well as the scientific and the administrative staff showed high identification with the institution. They all did their best to answer our questions and to provide all documents necessary.

The University is led by the Rector and the Senate consisting of 15 members (11 teachers and 4 students). The Rector chairs the Senate. Despite of some already realized reductions, the organizational structure of UMK is still quite complex. For a university with only one faculty three decision levels, namely the University level, the level of the Faculty of Law and the level of departments and units could be easily reduced to a two level structure, eliminating the faculty level.

Another observation is that the Rector is a very high respected law expert with a strong focus on research. But she is already about 10 years on duty and seems to be more a scientist than an active manager. Hence there is a delay with respect to important management decisions such as the future of the rented spaces in Suceava, the termination of unattractive curricula and the opening of new attractive careers in management and marketing. I new University leadership not linked to historical obligations would probably facilitate necessary reforms.

The University urgently needs to elaborate and agree on a strategic plan with a clear description what it wants to achieve within the next 5 to 10 years. The existing management plan and operating plan only refer to the daily business and do not give a view into the future of the institution.

Nevertheless, I want to commend that thanks to its good financial management and its sparingly use of resources UMK disposes of a nice new building complex for lecture halls and seminar rooms. But there exist evidently problems with the equipment of new media and it-technology. The University also does not have the size and the funds for proper student services such as appropriate it-infrastructure, copying-facilities, cafeteria, sport-facilities etc. There is no Mobility Service Centre (International Office) for students and evidently no Career Consulting and Informing Centre.

The role of student representation and the integration of student representatives into decision boards of UMK is not fully clear.

The data on teaching staff given in the ISAR is not consistent and confusing. In Table 1 there is a total of 47 didactic positions given, Table 2 on the following page states 46 positions. According to Table 1 there are actually only 3 of 10 positions for Professors occupied. But Table 2 with the structure on age of Professors summarizes 12 Professors. Some important facts such as the number of administrative staff are not mentioned in the ISAR. Actually UMK has 20 persons in administration. Opposite to European habits according to the actual legislation and practice in Romania representatives of the technical and administrative employees are not represented in decision making bodies of universities.

The formulated Mission Statement is very general and vague. Other information, e.g. the position and challenges of UMK in the region and in the Higher Romanian Education Area are not mentioned at all.

I also have missed in the ISAR a description of the relations between the Founders and the actual University leadership.

Recommendations:

- Renew the management and the management structure of UMK and reduce the three level decision structure to a two level structure, e.g. rectorate/university and departments/units.
- Start an open discussion on the future of the institution with the goal of a strategic plan giving a clear view of the institution in the next 5 to 10 years. Define actions, clear goals and targets for its implementation. Realizing the strategic plan apply as much transparency as possible for management decisions in order to explain necessities and to avoid critics and misunderstandings. The discussion on the future of the institution should involve the opinion leaders within the institution as well as external stakeholders. I consider a self-assessment process as a very important step for a higher education institution which could start a positive and effective development within the university. I encourage UMK to be more self critical and to mention problems too. This could lead to a fruitful discussion on improvement and quality within the institution.
- Promote the definition of a clear Mission Statement.
- Fill in as soon as possible all open positions with qualified personnel.
- Enforce and follow the way of implementing as much it-applications as possible in student administration and managing the University (Unique Matriculation Register; University Management System; research documentation; information systems on mobility programs, grants, examens and results of examens; communication with students etc.)
- Terminate your activities in Succava and use resources setting your priorities in Iași.

- Create the position of an it-director responsible for the it-infrastructure of the University and the area of new media. (There exists a danger that by the scarcity of financial resources didactic and scientific personnel are "misused" to do more administrative work as usual.)
- The financial resources of UMK should be more diversified. Actually the University depends strongly on student fees. Try to open other sources by contracts and activities beside teaching.
- Strengthen relations and information flow with graduates and employers. These groups have mentioned their appreciation for the institution. The University should make more use of this advantage.
- Improve infrastructure and services for students and staff. Make library more attractive for visits. Create common coffee corners, copying-facilities, public accessible computers linked to internet etc.
Realize things by partnerships with other institutions (e.g. sport facilities, student dormitories, cafeteria etc.)

5. Quality Culture

In 2006 "Mihail Kogălniceanu" University has implemented a Quality Commission in order to install a quality management system. There have been created several quality assurance regulations and procedures but the integration to a quality assurance system of the University seems not yet fully functioning (like in the majority of European universities). Quality assurance should cover all aspects of the institution, namely teaching, research as well as governance and administration. Quality assessment should not be a burden but an instrument for improvement.

With respect to the evaluation of courses by students there are no clear rules for consequences and, if there are consequences, they are not communicated. So students have the impression that there is no effect of their evaluations.

Recommendations:

- Define clear procedures how to improve teaching, research, governance and administration by the extensively collected information and the results of different evaluations.
- Use the collected data in order to provide advice. Develop mechanisms to support academic staff in their teaching, research and administrative tasks.
- Publish results of evaluations and offer a special training for young teachers or teachers with bad evaluations.

6. Teaching

The study programs of UMK are organized according to the Bologna system. ECTS has been introduced. The quality of the formation is generally recognized by employers and graduates. But there were some remarks by employers that practical work should be enforced.

Recommendations:

- Evaluate periodically bachelor- and master-programmes with respect to learning outcomes, employability and internationalization.
- Strengthen practical parts of undergraduate education. Enforce contacts between the University and enterprises/public institutions in order to integrate students into project work.
- Include external stakeholders and experts in the discussion of curricula and the content of different subjects.

7. Research

The description of the research activities in the ISAR is very general. The ISAR does not mention any concrete projects nor institutional research tasks. I want to commend the publication of the scientific Bulletin of the Universitatea "Mihail Kogălniceanu". Nevertheless, the majority of research activities of UMK is linked to the Rector, the Dean and a small number of scientific staff. About half of the didactic personnel has no research activities.

Recommendations:

- Focus research as much as possible in order to make research more visible. Create critical masses by enforcing co-operations with other institutions. Support publications in English language.
- Fill in - as already mentioned - all open staff-positions and recruit future academic staff defining concrete teaching and research profiles.
- Support young research staff by reduction of their teaching load and give financial support for teaching staff to participate to national and international conferences, to research collaborations and advanced training courses.

8. Internationalization

Despite of the list of links and co-operations with other universities given in the ISAR only one exchange program, namely with Madrid, was really functioning in the academic year 2009/2010. There is no student mobility at all.

Recommendations:

- Support mobility of teachers and students (install an office for international affairs - maybe in co-operation with another university).
- Strengthen the foreign languages policy inside the institution.
- Promote an international perspective to curricula.

9. Final Remarks

Please consider my remarks and comments as friendly critics. This report should assist UMK to overcome its actual difficult situation and pursue further its path of improvement and reflection about priorities. My intention is to support UMK for further improvement. Provided fast and efficient reforms, UMK should have the capacity to react adequately to the actual challenges.



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- Promote an international perspective to curricula.

9. Final Remarks

Please consider my remarks and comments as friendly critics. This report should assist UMK to overcome its actual difficult situation and pursue further its path of improvement and reflection about priorities. My intention is to support UMK for further improvement. Provided fast and efficient reforms, UMK should have the capacity to react adequately to the actual challenges.



Univ.-Prof. Dr. Winfried Müller

