

considerably, and there is no system in place that provides financial support for students. A culture of saving for higher education is lacking, nor is there a system of scholarships for talented students who face financial constraints.

Much confusion still exists in society concerning the recognition of doctoral programs and international study programs. The labor market has not yet responded to the value added by doctoral training; thus, those obtaining such degrees have not received the compensation warranted by such specialization.

The rapid changes of the 1990s have affected higher educa-

tion regulations, its system of operation, and the network of institutions. But the actors involved in this transformation have paid less attention to the issue of educational quality. In the years to come, within the established institutional and organizational framework, the content of programs and the quality of training will require more attention. ■

Author's Note: The following article is excerpted from the Civic Education Project's Discussion Series. For more information on the Discussion Series and other CEP activities, please write to cep@osi.hu or visit our website at www.cep.org.hu.

Euro-Shape and Local Content: The Bottom Line on Romanian Higher Education Reform

Alexandra Horobet and Bogdan Chiritoiu

Alexandra Horobet is assistant professor in the Department of International Business and Economics, Academy of Economic Studies, Bucharest, Romania. Bogdan Chiritoiu is assistant professor in the Department of Political and Administrative Studies, University of Bucharest, Romania.

The European Commission, which is generally fairly unimpressed with Romanian progress toward European Union (EU) harmonization, notes in its Agenda 2000 that the education sector will not create problems for Romania's accession. The Romanian Ministry of Education also reflects optimism when presenting 1999 as a year of reform in education: "1999 will be the year of concrete actions toward visible and comprehensive changes in education, the year when all changes initiated previous to or in 1998 will be completed."

This article reviews the mixed outcome of higher education reform to date. Higher education is one sector that registered strong growth during the transition in Romania, yet such growth was not matched by increased resources, leaving the sector as starved as it was before 1989. Moreover, efforts to improve the content of higher education have encountered little success, and today Romanian universities retain many of the failings of the communist past.

Failures of the System

A number of recurrent characteristics of Romanian higher education are blamed for its lack of competitiveness. These have been targeted for change by successive governments: (1) The university system concentrates on information transfer; it aims more at the memorization and reproduction of information rather than the acquisition and application of knowledge. (2) The system does not permit sufficient choices for individualized training, does not

recognize or encourage individual achievement, and promotes an obsolete concept of personal achievement as simple quantitative expansion (increased volume of information, more classes, more examinations, etc.). (3) The system uses local—i.e., national—standards of achievement, even though educational standards are increasingly being internationalized. (4) The system emphasizes the acquisition of general qualifications, even though educational priorities worldwide have moved on to target graduate studies. (5) The system is a centralist one in which detailed decisions are taken only by high-ranking managers. (6) It is a system that is too susceptible to the pressures of corruption involving grading, competitions, job offers, and examinations.

Reform Priorities

Education reform is linked with the overall reform process; it should not "follow other reforms" but rather is a condition of their success. Moreover, it can be achieved more rapidly if other reforms are initiated simultaneously. Over the medium run, investments in education can be extremely beneficial to the success of transition as a whole.

The reform strategy of the current education minister is structured around 12 areas, several of which are relevant here.

Higher education is one sector that registered strong growth during the transition in Romania, yet such growth was not matched by increased resources, leaving the sector as starved as it was before 1989.

First, the administration intends to improve the infrastructure of education and to promote the development of information technology use. Large investments from the central budget are granted on a competitive basis to universities pursuing such goals.

Second, a change in the “character of education” will take place, resulting in a shift from the transfer of information to the ability to generate knowledge. Measures to achieve this include the introduction of new curricula based on interdisciplinarity, compliance with European standards, and harmonization at the national level. A related priority is the development of graduate studies supported by “centers of excellence” at high-performance universities. Moreover, a reform of examinations to produce reliable nationwide, comparable evaluation is envisaged.

Third, the role of scientific research is being reassessed. The goal is to connect research with teaching by reintegrating it into universities and making it the backbone of graduate studies. This will also improve the status of the teaching profession, another goal of the reforms, by introducing compensation based on academic achievement.

Higher Education Expansion

Romania experienced a great increase in student numbers after 1989, partly due to the development of the private sector. While the total number of students doubled over the last eight years, the average rate of growth for private education was 4.4 percent (1992–1997), enrolling 26.4 percent of Romanian university students by the 1996–1997 academic year. The rate of higher education enrollment increased overall from 8 percent in 1989 to 22.2 percent in 1996, and the number of students per thousand inhabitants from 7.1 in 1989 to 15.7 in 1997. National capacities in the social sciences, arts, and humanities quadrupled; medicine increased 150 percent, and the number of students in technical disciplines dropped in both relative and absolute terms.

Related to the increase in student enrollment in Romania is the growth in the number of universities and faculties. Over the last decade, the greatest increase in the number of higher education establishments has been observed in the private sector, accounting for 44 universities and 161 faculties in 1996–1997, compared to zero before 1990. The reaction of the state to the “attack” of the private sector was public institutional expansion: in 1989–1990, 44 state higher education institutions and 101 faculties existed; in 1993–1994, 63 establishments and 261 faculties.

The proportion of public spending on education increased from 6.1 percent in 1989 to 9.6 percent in 1996. Even so, it falls below the 4 percent of gross domestic product (GDP) mandated by the Law of Education, Article 169, and is one of the lowest in Europe. Moreover, the relative increase does not necessarily represent a higher absolute amount, due to the fall in Romania’s GDP during the transition period. The relative increase in resources has been directed mainly toward expanding academic staff. Of public expenditure on education, 76.1 percent supported salaries in 1994, as compared to 69.2 percent in OECD (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development) countries. However, the average wage in the educa-

tion sector is still the second lowest in the economy, surpassed only by the health sector.

Higher Education Restructuring

Post-1989 and current reforms aim to bring the Romanian university system closer to the European model. As mentioned previously, master’s programs were introduced, and license examinations and doctoral programs have been modified. A credit system also has been approved for implementation.

Scientific research previously was connected institutionally to government bodies or the Romanian Academy. It is now recoupled with university teaching through research grants offered by the National Council for University Scientific Research to teams organized within top university departments. These teams will also supervise master’s and doctoral programs.

The private sector is developing quickly and is responsible for a great deal of the increase in student enrollments, but quality is debatable.

The private sector is developing quickly and is responsible for a great deal of the increase in student enrollments, but quality is debatable. Public higher education is more rigorous in student selection, while private universities as a rule have copied state universities and thus fail to offer a true alternative. In private universities scientific research is insubstantial or nonexistent. They also do not employ their own academic staff beyond about 5 to 10 percent (1996) of their instructors, relying mainly on the academic staff of public universities or persons who are not qualified to teach. Wide discrepancies exist even among the private universities themselves: some are comparable to the most competent public universities, while others barely observe the national standards.

An interesting feature of private universities in Romania is that, contrary to the situation in other countries, they are considered of lower status than the largely tuition-free public universities and attract students from lower income groups. This counterintuitive fact is explained by “informal” privatization—the continuous increase in private tuition (averaging U.S.\$600 to U.S.\$700 per year) among students in public universities, a major (tax-free) source for supplementing the income of teachers. The current decline in the quality of public secondary education and the extension of this informal privatization are curtailing the ability of students from lower income groups to pass the competitive entrance examinations of public universities.

Conclusion

In spite of the apparent convergence with Western education systems, Romanian universities remain focused on the needs of the provider rather than the demands of student “customers.” Disciplines and the number and geographic distribution of places and funding are based on the structure of the existing labor force, and the reforms that have been implemented tend to reflect the desire to raise the status of the teaching profession rather than to address the needs of the economy.

The higher education sector is experiencing great change, responding to the strong pressure of demand—as reflected in the improving Romanian statistics in comparison with other countries. Where the reform process has been less successful is in qualitative change. Most of the shortcomings inherited from the communist regime are still present. The Ministry of Education has attempted to make the education system responsive to societal and economic needs: to replace the mechanical reproduction of information with the generation of knowledge through new study programs and new teaching and testing methods, to reunite teaching and research, and to improve the

training of professors. However, little of this vision has reached the classroom so far.

We identify three factors responsible for this situation. First, financial resources are clearly insufficient. Second, the ministry no longer possesses the administrative leverage to impose changes upon universities. The main legal innovation of the reforms—university autonomy—did not result in the expected improvement. It may be that autonomy requires more time to “deliver the goods.” However, without hierarchical subordination or effective competition for public resources, there is little pressure on universities to change, innovate, and improve. As mentioned earlier, the new private sector has thus far failed to provide an adequate alternate to the public sector. Finally, the array of task forces and committees created will soon have to move beyond institution building to qualitative reform in order to realize their proposals for change. ■

Author’s Note: The following article is excerpted from the Civic Education Project’s Discussion Series. For more information on the Discussion Series and other CEP activities, please write to cep@osi.hu or visit our website at <www.cep.org.hu>.

Kazakstan’s Higher Education in Transition

Hoa Tran

Hoa Tran is a consultant to Unicef. Address: 11 rue du Belvedere, 56400 Auray, France.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, an independent Kazakstan embarked on the search for a new identity. Adopting a market-oriented economy, it looked both to the West and the Asian “tigers” for models. From 1993 Kazakstan’s higher education started veering away, at least in form, from Soviet tenets. Today, seven years since the restructuring began, questions may be asked about how much the fundamentals of Kazakstan’s higher education have in reality shifted.

New Wine in Old Bottles

A key issue for Kazakstan’s higher education during the transition period concerns the relaxation of Soviet-style centralized control, which had been deeply embedded in higher education legislation and a multitude of regulations. These regulations had been the backbone of the system, determining its human and material inputs and outputs, and controlling everything from policy to delivery. The relationship between the state and the universities was characterized by one-way traffic in the form of top-down directives. If that structure made some sense under the Soviet

system, the dynamics of the nascent market economy have quickly rendered it out of date and in need of change.

Universities have urged the government to grant them greater autonomy, especially in policymaking, management, and program development. Even the Soviet-trained technocrats who sit at the head of these institutions have recognized that excessive state control, coupled with significantly reduced state financing, would stifle the universities. Their calls for change have contributed to the adoption of several measures promoting the democratization of institutional arrangements and academic planning. Elected university rectors and their deputies have acquired more say in institutional governance. They have been adding new subjects to existing programs, while trying to engage in income-generating activities to keep pace with the new economic realities. Content in social science subjects has been adjusted, glossing over Marxism-Leninism and introducing Western philosophy.

A key issue for Kazakstan’s higher education during the transition period concerns the relaxation of Soviet-style centralized control.

Notwithstanding these new features, the restructur-