

# TIME TO REFORM THE HIGHER EDUCATION

**Mihai Ionac**

Year 2000, Lisbon: the European leaders have envisioned for Europe to become the most competitive knowledge-based economy by 2010. The cornerstone of this ambitious strategy is innovation and the key actors are the universities.

Where is Romania, as a new EU member, in 2007? Considering the ranking of the countries by original scientific article output, Romania is somewhere around 65<sup>th</sup> place, just before Botswana and behind Turkey, Serbia, Ukraine, Bielarus, Uruguay, Jordan, or Lebanon. Compared to our neighbor Hungary, Romania has registered 8 times less patents in 2005, respectively 4 times less in 2006. The percentage of Romanian high technology exports is 4 times less than the EU mean.

What is actually happening in the Universities? Soros Foundation Romania (<http://www.soros.ro>) has published an extensive study of the Romanian graduate system. This analysis is based on the opinions of 1000 faculty members and 1100 students regarding the evaluation of both the personal status and the organization and functioning of the university system, autonomy, corruption and educational process.

Seventy percent of the teaching staff consider that the Romanian graduate system has the same quality as the Western Europe, while 59% of the students have the same perception.

The poll reveals that four out of ten faculty members have at least one other job outside the university, either teaching at other universities or being

active commercially as employees or employers. On the other hand, 25% of the students have a job and 43% would like to leave the country after graduating.

Twenty two of the students declare that members of the university staff have asked at least in one occasion for presents, money or other services and 13% of them admit that they have complied to this request. Almost the same percentage of the faculty members declare that they have been offered presents, money or other services by the students and 7% declare that they have accepted it.

The alarming results of the Soros study reveal that the universities, that should represent by far the most opened, critic, innovative and ethic institutions, have become closed systems and paradigms of conservatism. The teaching staff has reached the threshold of self-sufficiency and their creative role is undermined by conflicts of interests.

The time for reforms has arrived. I feel that this moment is essential, first, because the world is changing very rapidly around us. And it is vital for us to adapt to this global changing. Second, it is a propitious time for reforms, because of the growing funds oriented to education and research that give us the "breathing space" to design and put in place far-reaching policy changes. However, we are pressed to adopt the reforms now. Otherwise we will be pressed by a real crisis, when there is no other option than implementing the reforms.

---

Co-Editor in Chief, Timisoara Medical Journal

Correspondence to:  
Prof. Mihai Ionac, 2 Eftimie Murgu Pl., 300041 Timisoara, Tel: +40-256-216510  
Email: [mihai\\_ionac@rdstm.ro](mailto:mihai_ionac@rdstm.ro)

---

Received for publication: Mar. 27, 2007.