

THE INTERNATIONALIZATION OF THE HIGHER EDUCATION. TRENDS AND EVOLUTIONS AT INTERNATIONAL LEVEL

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Abstract

The demographic decrease recorded in the wealthy areas of the world, the educational needs that occurred in the emerging countries, the need for qualified personnel and the preoccupation for attracting valuable human resources led to an increasing competition in the respect of educational services on the international market. This paper aims to present the international mobility of students incorporated in the European higher education system, focusing on the European Area and Romania. The conducted researches indicated an increase in the number of students that attend universities abroad, universities that were selected according to some well-established criteria related to the quality of the education, allocated scholarships, career development opportunities or the study fees. Although Romania registered progresses in implementing the international mobility programs, the number of students that attend the Romanian universities is low. The affiliation to the European space or the low fees are not enough for being considered as factors of attraction for the foreign students, the main necessities consisting of reform policies, academic programs in international languages and enhancing the international visibility in the respect of the scientific research performed in our country.

Keywords

higher education, international mobility programs, Europe, Romania

JEL Classification

I23, I28, D47

Introduction

The reorganization of the European education, according to Bologna Process, a large-scale governmental system of cooperation, led to a compatibility of the national educational systems at European level. By signing the Bologna Process, Romania became one of the 48-member states and thus the Romanian educational system became more attractive for the European or non-European students. Besides the education reform process, the statute of NATO (2004) member country, the affiliation to the European Union (EU) in 2007, the economic growth or the geographic position are factors that contributed to an increase in attracting foreign students to study in Romania, increase that was correlated with a relatively high level of the national educational process quality, provided by the professors' high education and teaching experience, with the low level of the high education fees and the

traditional hospitality of the Romanian people. The university studies attended in Romania already represent a tradition and have continuity for the citizens coming from China, African states, Arab countries or South American area. In the last period, the scholarships granted to the Romanian ethnics in the bordering countries around Romania increased the number of foreign students that accessed the Romanian Universities.

1. Literature Review

Adapting the higher education to the European Union criteria, made the European universities focus upon increasing the attractivity in front of the students, lecturers and researchers coming from different regions of the world. The paper wrote by Güenaga and Diez (2017), analyses the origin places of the international students coming from various European countries, by using a cluster analysis and, as ranking variables, the percentage of the foreign students coming from different regions of the world from every European country. The results indicated the fact that it was possible to identify four groups of countries with different features. Within the group formed by France, Portugal and Spain, the share of the African and South-American students was high, while in the group formed by Finland, Germany, Ireland, United Kingdom, Turkey, Ukraine, Greece and the Russian Federation, there existed an increased attractivity for the Asian students. Within the other two groups of European countries, there existed a considerable percentage of international European students. The analysis system Study.EU, developed by a private German company, ranks over 7500 educational programs in Europe, based on education quality criteria, on the costs of the educational programs, career and the quality of life (Study.EU, 2018). In the United States of America USA, the last years brought an important increase in the number of the foreign students, given to the attractivity of the American universities. In 2016 and 2017, the number of the foreign students registered in the American educational system exceeded 1,000,000 attendees (Institute of International Education, 2017). When we speak about origin, within the past 5 years, China was the main supplier of students, with almost 30% from the total, followed by India, Korea and Saudi Arabia. No European country was included in the top 10 origin areas for the foreign students studying in the USA (Collegiate Gateway, 2013).

2. Material and Methods

Statistic information referring to the number of foreign students coming from Europe were collected from the European database Eurostat. For the international flows of students, UNESCO Institute of Statistics offers data referring to the mobility of the students, grouped on origin states and destinations. For the United States of America, the database belonging to the Institute of International Education quantifies the number of foreign students in the American education system, according to their origin. For the scientific articles databases from Web of Knowledge, ResearchGate and Google Academic were used. In some cases, the relevant information coming from the media were verified, by using magazines in the educational field. The information was selected, statistically processed and graphically represented. The results were analyzed and interpreted.

3. The International Context

The statistics of UNESCO offers relevant information about the international mobility of the students at international level, the foreign students flows being quantified by areas of origin and by destination. The flows of foreign students in some states are presented in the table 1. USA, UK and Australia registered positive records as they presented a maximum attractivity for the foreign students in 2017. When we speak about the origin states, China is the main supplier of foreign students on the American continent, while in Europe and Australia being annually recorded over 800,000 students coming from this country. The Russian Federation

presents a positive record when we speak about the flows of foreign students, thus occupying the fourth position at international level, with a plus of +186,837 students. The former Soviet States Kazakhstan, Ukraine, Uzbekistan or Turkmenistan, Russian speaking and in which the natural reserves provide important incomes at national level, also represent the main areas of origin for the foreign students choosing Russia.

Table no 1. The Total Number of Mobile Students

Country	Hosted	Abroad	Difference	The origin of the students, by country
USA	907,251	68,580	+838,671	China (291,063), India (112,714) Korea Rep. (63,952) Saudi Arabia (53,637), Canada (28,454), Other (357,431)
UK	430,687	33,109	+397,578	United State (9,601), Australia (2,019), France (1,995), Germany (1,798), Ireland (1,791), Other (413,483)
Australia	335,512	12,330	+323,182	China (112,329), India (46,316), Malaysia (15,319), Nepal (14,712), Vietnam (14,491) Other (132,345)
Germany	228,756	117,921	+110,835	China (23,616), Russian Federation (9,953), India (9,896) Austria (9,574), France (6,955), Other (168,762)
France	239,409	90,708	+148,701	Morocco (26,654), China (25,297), Algeria (15,937), Tunisia (9,143), Italy (8,035), Other (154,343)
Russian Fed.	243,752	56915	+186,837	Kazakhstan (69,895), Ukraine (22,440), Uzbekistan (19,893), Turkmenistan (16,521), Belarus (15,488), Other (99,515)
Japan	131,980	30,850	+101,130	China (79,175), Korea Rep. (13,480), Vietnam (10,614) Nepal (5,090), Indonesia (2,527), Other 21,094
Canada	189,573	50,506	+139,067	China (60,936), India (19,905), France (15,603), United States (8,355), Nigeria (5,982), Other (78,792)
Romania	33,235	25,824	+7,411	Republic of Moldova (7,695), Israel (2,619), France (2,169), Italy (1,419), Tunisia (1,267), Other (18,066)
China	137,527	847,259	-709,732	-

Source: UNESCO Institute of Statistics, 2018

Romania registers, overall, a positive flow of mobility when we speak about international students, with a plus of 7,411 students. The main state they come from is the Republic of Moldova, with which Romania signed a strategic partnership for an educational offer and an attractive scholarship system, these students covering the recorded surplus at country level almost entirely. Israel, to where a massive exodus of the Israelite population coming from Romania was recorded within 1980-1990, maintains the traditional relations with Romania in the educational field, providing almost a tenth from the foreign students affiliated in Romania.

4. The European Context

In 1999, Romania signed the Bologna Declaration concerning the European Higher Education Area, together with 11 candidate states to EU and the 18-member states. The Bologna Process led to the establishment of European Higher Education Area that includes 48-member states, the main criterion of accepting a candidature being the adherence to the

European Cultural Convention. Until now, 9 ministerial conferences took place: Bologna (1999), Prague (2001), Berlin (2003), Bergen (2005), London (2007), Leuven (2009), Budapest-Vienna (2010), Bucharest (2012) and Yerevan (2015). The Bologna Process meant deep reforms in the field of higher education for all the participating states, marked by legislation changes and the reconsideration of the main principles of the educational process for a society based on knowledge. According to the Bologna Process, the Romanian educational system is currently structured on 3 levels: Ist cycle – undergraduate studies (3 - 4 years), IInd cycle – master studies (2 years) and IIIrd – doctorate studies (3 years). The UE regulated professions may include BA of 5 or 6 years that comprises medical, pharmaceutical, dental, veterinary and architectural studies. According to the signed agreement at Bologna, the mobility and the internationalization of the European education became one of the member states officials' priorities, thus existing the common commitment of the covenanters concerning the access to the education opportunities, professional formation and related services.

5. The European Statistics

The evolution of the number of foreign students (ISCED 5-6) studying in another EU-27, EEA or Candidate country, according to Eurostat database, is presented in the figure 1.

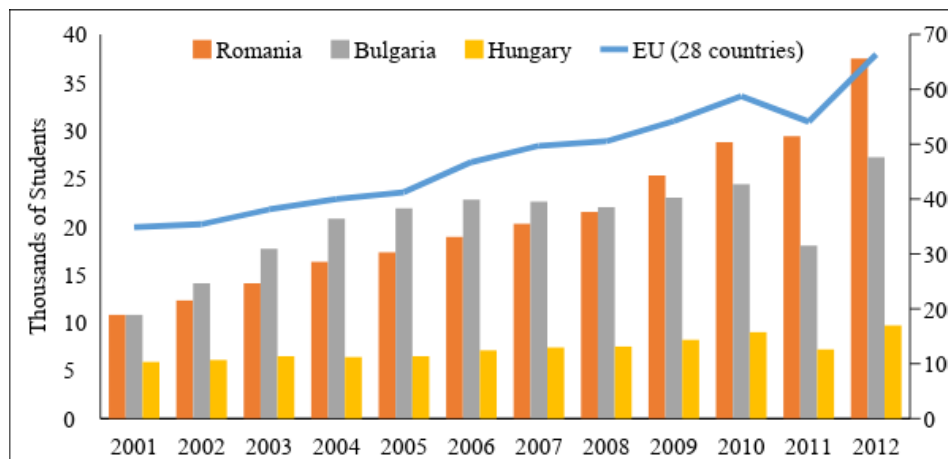


Fig.no 1. The Evolution of the Number of Foreign Students at European Level

Source Authors, Eurostat, 2018 Adaptation

The Eurostat information presents the mobility of the students at the Bologna Process covenanter states level, including the Erasmus-type mobilities for the period 2001-2012. According to the presented data, within the analyzed period, the total number of foreign students affiliated in European mobility programs almost doubled, increasing from 348.7 thousand in 2001 to 663 thousand in 2012. As a trend, the most dramatic increases were recorded for Lithuania and Latvia's cases, with growths of more than 5 times in terms of the number of affiliated students in 2012 compared with 2001, the smallest growth being registered in the case of Greece (65.41%). Romania tripled the number of students within the analyzed period (figure 2). In the context of an increasing competition among the European universities for attracting foreign students, it must not be neglected the fact that the export of higher education services may be an activity that generates economic and non-economic benefits for the universities and for the respective geographical areas. The analysis of the factors that determine the international demand for the higher education was accomplished by Güenaga and Diez (2017), professors at UPV/EHU, Bilbao, Spain. The research evidences that, there are more determinant factors for the international demand of

higher education in any country. The geographical localization of the higher education institution in Europe matters when choosing a university, the countries from the Northern Europe, likewise in other economic and social fields, being more attractive as sources of higher education. The investments that were done at all the educational levels and respectively, the specific investments done for the IIIrd cycle represent key factors for the attractiveness of the higher education system, and the countries that lay more weight on these investments are the most attractive for the international students. There is a positive correlation between the level of investments in the field of research and development and the international demand for higher education in one country.

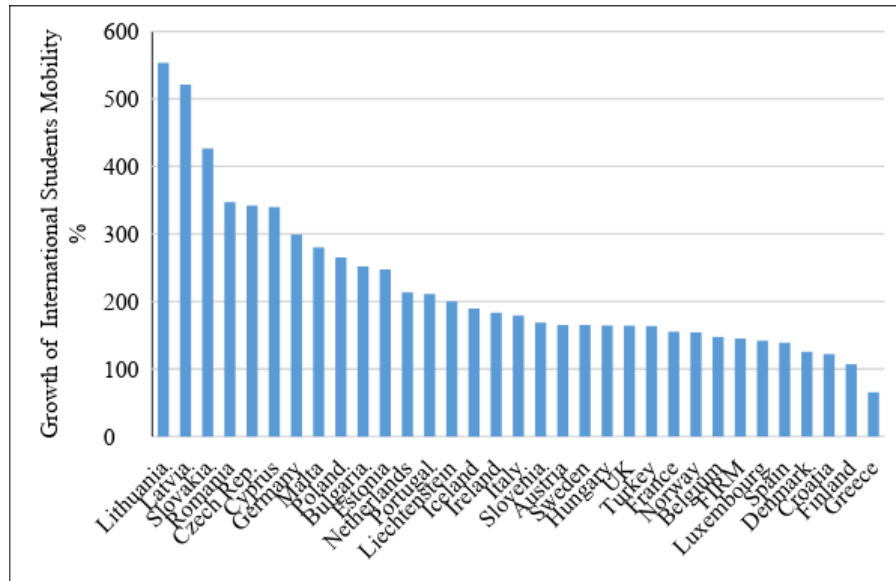


Fig. no. 2. The Increase of the Number of Students within the Bologna Process 2012 - 2001

Source Authors, using Eurostat, 2018

The states that lay stress on the investments in research and development benefit from a higher share of international students (figure 3). This aspect suggests that the international demand is sensitive to the existing relation between the education, development and the IIIrd cycle education. A higher or lower budgetary contribution to research and development generates a parallel behavior in what the higher education concerns. The local competition may increase the attractiveness of the universities, these being encouraged to attract foreign students as a compensation method for the deficit of demand due to the demographic trends and to the pluralism of the local offer. The quality or the impact of the scientific production may not seem to be determinant for the students' mobility within the international higher education system, although the level of the scientific production per professor may influence the international demand.

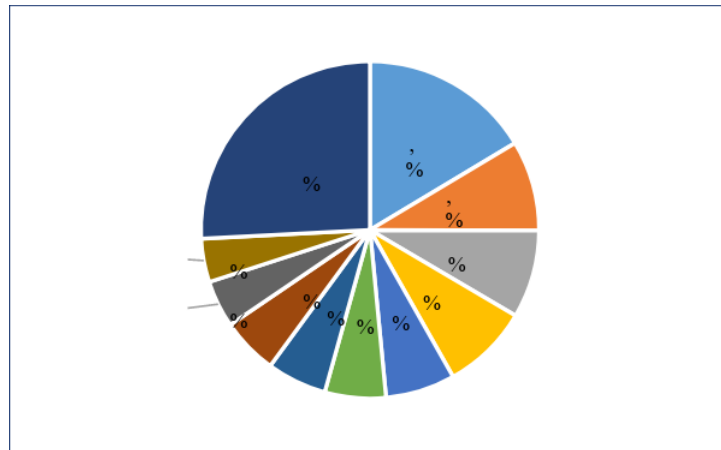


Fig.no. 3. The Top 10 Ranking of the Bologna Process Covenanter Countries (Foreign Students, 2012)

Source Authors, using Eurostat, 2018

A higher volume of scientific publications generates a more increased global visibility, that brings benefits to the university brand. The international visibility of the educational trade mark may increase the capability of the universities to attract international students.

6. Higher Education Mobility Scoreboard

The ranking of the mobility in the field of higher education at European level is accomplished by using the European Commission's Mobility Scoreboard, based of six indicators from five thematic fields: information and orientation, education in a foreign language, grants and ECTS (European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System) transferability, the support granted to the students having a low social and economic level, recognition in terms of the achieved education results and qualifications. The six board indicators are some complex ones, combining various relevant criteria for the educational policies (European Commission, 2018). The purpose of the Mobility Scoreboard is to provide a framework for monitoring the recorded progresses by the European countries in promoting the educational mobility and eliminating the bottlenecks. The information for the year 2015/16 was provided by Eurydice national units and covers the 28 EU member states, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Montenegro, Norway, Serbia and Turkey. The analysis of the European Commission, materialized in the higher education mobility dashboard – comprises six indicators that cover five thematic fields, corresponding to the five main chapters of the report. Thus, if for the indicator information and orientation, the most educational systems converge to the middle area, the recognition of the qualifications is the indicator with the smallest shares at European level. For the indicator concerning the preparation in the field of foreign languages, the European education systems are relatively well rated, more than half of these being positioned in the first two level categories (European Commission, 2017).

7. Romania

The educational offer the Romanian universities have for the foreign students is represented by over 1000 study programs in over 100 universities. Out of these, over 250 study programmes are taught in foreign languages. The attractivity of the Romanian higher education system is particularly due to the low level of educational fees, in comparison with other European states or to the allocated educational funds, within the program dedicated to

the Romanians all over the world. The Ministry of National Education facilitates the matriculation of the students of Romanian ethnic origin and of the Romanian citizens living abroad. The Study in Romania Platform represents the unique access gate to the centralized information regarding the opportunities of studying in Romania. The students' access to the various categories of scholarships offered by the Ministry of National Education is done via the Agency Loans and Scholarships (Agency Loans and Scholarships, 2018). The National Centre for Recognition and Equivalence of Diplomas evaluates and recognizes the documents of study owned by the European Union citizens, by the European Economic Area citizens and by the Swiss Confederation ones, in the perspective of the continuation of their studies in Romania, and also focuses on the study documents owned by the non-UE states citizens, in the perspective of their access on the Romanian labour force market (CNRED, 2018). According to the data provided by the Government of Romania (2018), the number of the foreign students matriculated in the Romanian universities increased during 2009-2013 with more than 25 %, reaching a number of 15,838 students attending the Romanian higher education courses (figure 4).

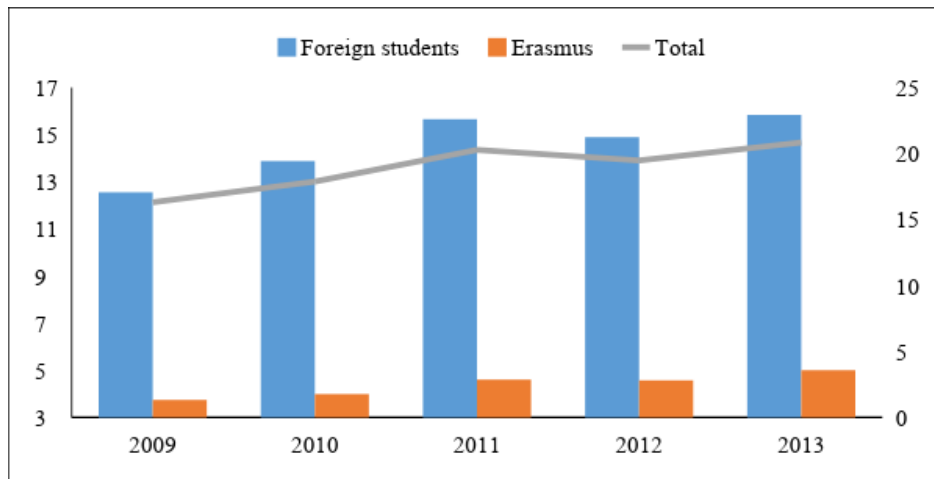


Fig.no. 4. Foreign Students in Romania

Source Authors, by using Romanian Government data, 2017

A positive evolution was also registered by the mobility's programs offered by the Erasmus, where an increase of over 33% of the students studying in Romania was acknowledged for the period subject to analysis. Currently, Romania is a partner in the Erasmus Program (2014-2020), the main tool of the European Union in the field of education, formation, youth and sports. With a budget of 14,7 billion euro, the objective of the program is to allow a number of more than four million of Europeans to study, to form themselves, to achieve working experience and to volunteer abroad (77,5 % of the funds are dedicated to education and professional formation). In Romania, the Erasmus+ Program is implemented by the National Agency for Community Programs in the Field of Education and Professional Formation. (Ministry of National Education, 2018). The analysis of the student's exchanges within the Erasmus+ Program indicates that the hierarchy of the states the students come from is dominated by France, followed by Spain, Turkey, Italy, Portugal, Germany, Poland, Hungary, Belgium and Denmark. The legislation of the higher education in Romania was modified only in 2014, in order to allow the universities to receive more foreign students. The promotion campaigns for the in-house universities developed by the Ministry of National Education had a relatively reduced impact compared to the potential our country disposes of.

Conclusions

The students' mobility has an important impact upon the educational systems and upon the individual study institutions, that are obliged to have an international perspective, to develop the area of curricular coverage and to increase the quality of the educational programs. The students exchange at international level, including Europe, is limited to several bottlenecks, such as the portability of the grants and loans, the recognition of the qualifications and of the transferrable credits (ECTS), the accessibility and the relevance of the information and orientations or of a linguistic nature. Although progresses at international level have been recorded and materialized as an increase in the number of students in international mobility, the potential of the student's exchange is not capitalized enough at European level. Romania, as an EU member state and covenantor of the Bologna Process, did not adapt its educational policies in the field of higher education fast enough, continuing to be attractive only by the reduced level of the educational fees and its affiliation to the European Area.

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