

INTERNATIONAL TRENDS OF THE UNIVERSITY AUTONOMY IN ROMANIAN HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM - CASE STUDY UNIVERSITY OF AGRONOMIC SCIENCES AND VETERINARY MEDICINE OF BUCHAREST, ROMANIA

Sorin Iulian MERLUȘĂ, Adrian TUREK-RAHOVEANU

University of Agricultural Sciences and Veterinary Medicine Bucharest, 59 Marasti, District 1, 11464, Bucharest, Romania; Email: sorin.merlusca@usamv.ro, turek.adrian@managusamv.ro

Corresponding author: turek.adrian@managusamv.ro

Abstract

The paper analyzes the university autonomy as a fundamental principle of action in Romanian higher education system with examples from the University of Agronomic Sciences and Veterinary Medicine of Bucharest (UASVMB). The research is based on four major dimensions proposed by European University Association: staffing autonomy, organizational autonomy, academic autonomy and financial autonomy. The paper employed qualitative analyses of the measurement indicators for each dimension involving a comparative approach at an international level, based on the information collected from 47 countries, in order to underline the current tendencies in relation with the international implementation of university autonomy principle.

Key words: university autonomy, agronomic higher education, international

INTRODUCTION

The university autonomy represents an actual topic in numerous scientific papers at international level as the definitions, measurements and impact on quality of higher education system are subjects of major interest nowadays. The development of the concept has started in 1960s, when the International Association of Universities (IAU) formulated the most widespread definition of university autonomy as the authority to make decisions related to who and what will be taught, who will graduate and what will be researched with limited reference to financial matters [9]. Later on, in the late 70s, Organization of the Economic Cooperation and Development - Center for Educational Research and Innovation launched the first survey based on 20 elements referred as indices of autonomy [8]. The ongoing monitoring of the concept implementation in higher education is realized by European Association of Universities [2, 3, 5, 6], using as a starting point the Lisbon Declaration: Europe's Universities beyond 2010: Diversity with a Common Purpose (2007) [7].

Other relevant sources are represented by OECD that published starting with 2008 reports analyzing main trends of institutional autonomy, governance, accountability and the role of the state [12]. In 2010, the Center for Higher Education Policy Studies released an in-depth analyses of autonomy reforms over 30 countries from Europe [1].

A more recent research, conducted by UNESCO, International Institute for Educational Planning [18], focuses on Asia and analyzes recent developments of institutional autonomy in six countries.

All the international comparative studies published underline the historical development of the university autonomy concept. Each country has its own progress and common features can be identified.

Romania, as a European country since 2007, guarantees university autonomy through the Constitution, representing a principle of action regulated by the Education Law No.1/2011 [11]. According to the legal definition, "the autonomy entitles the university community to define their own mission, institutional strategy, structure, activities, organization and functioning, as well as to manage their human and material resources, in strict compliance

with the legislation in power". (Education Law No.1/2011, art. 123(1)). The university senate, as the highest decisional structure, guarantees the academic freedom and university autonomy. The University Carta - a document elaborated and approved by the University Senate, in compliance with the legislation in power - expresses the elements related to the implementation of the autonomy principle.

In this context, the purpose of the paper was to analyze the university autonomy as a fundamental principle of action in Romanian higher education system with examples from the University of Agronomic Sciences and Veterinary Medicine of Bucharest (UASVMB), based on four major dimensions proposed by European University Association.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

To measure the extent to which the principle of university autonomy is implemented, it has been used the dimensions proposed by the European University Association [5] and illustrated in the following diagram:



Fig. 1. University autonomy dimensions
Source: Own contribution based on the information from the official website of European University Association (<https://www.university-autonomy.eu>) [5].

Each element is analyzed based on the framework of Romanian higher education

system, with correspondence at international level. Specific examples are identified from University of Agronomic Sciences and Veterinary Medicine of Bucharest (USAVMB), as a study case.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The organizational autonomy indicates the university capacity to decide on its internal organization. For this dimension, the European University Association proposes seven indicators:

- (i) selection procedure for the rector
- (ii) selection criteria for the rector
- (iii) dismissal of the rector
- (iv) term of office of the rector
- (v) inclusion of external members in the university's governing bodies
- (vi) capacity to decide on the academic structure
- (vii) capacity to create legal entities.

Starting from these indicators the analysis of the Romanian higher education system is based on the legislation in power, e.g. Education Law No.1/2011. The selection procedure for the rector is provided by art. 209, while the application norms are provided in Order 4062/2011 [10], as follows: the rector is elected following a public contest or by the professors, researchers, students in the university senate and the councils of the faculties. For example, at UASVM Bucharest, the selection procedure, as stipulated in art. 30 from the University Carta [15], is set up based on referendum – the professors, researchers, students in the university senate and the councils of the faculties decide through secret vote the way the rector will be elected. Noteworthy, the designated rector needs to be validated by an order of the minister of education. Thus, Romania lines up to the countries where a validation procedure from an external authority is required (Austria, Croatia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Belgium, Ireland, Lithuania, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Serbia, Slovenia, Great Britain).

As for the second indicator, the Romanian legal framework stipulates that the university's senate elaborates and approves

the methodology for the publicity, selection and recruitment of the rector.

In terms of specific selection criteria, art. 210, par. 4 of the Law No.1/2011 stipulates that: “national and foreign scientific or academic personalities can participate in the contest for the election of the rector based on prior approval of the university’s senate, following a hearing in the general assembly of the senate”.

Taking into consideration the selection methodology at UASVM Bucharest [16], it can be noted that includes the law criteria (art. 34) and details the main criteria of eligibility for the rector (art. 7):

-advanced knowledge of legislation related to higher education system and finance mechanism from Romania, EU and other countries; high experience in project development;

-very good managerial capacity in relation with partnership activities with other universities, public institutions and business stakeholders;

-passion and professional interest for development of research and production at university level;

-respectful behavior as member of academic community.

Therefore, Romania belongs to the group of countries where the selection methodology is provided by the law and where the future rector is requested to hold an academic position (Croatia, Denmark, Estonia, France, Hungary, Italy, Luxemburg, Poland, Portugal, Serbia, Spain, Sweden).

The dismissal of the rector is also stipulated in the Education Law No.1/2011: the university’s senate can dismiss the rector based on the terms of the management contract and the university Carta.

Besides the senate, the Ministry of Education can decide on the rector’s dismissal based on the proposal of the Council for ethics and university management, in consultation with the university’s senate, if the rector has failed to fulfill the following public responsibilities, as stipulated in art. 123 (Fig. 2).

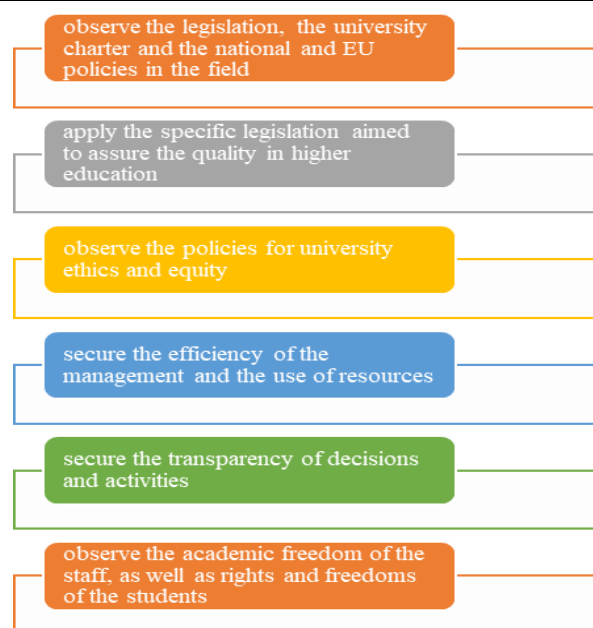


Fig. 2. Rector’s public responsibilities
Source: Own processing following art.123 of the Education Law No.1/2011 [11].

Analyzing the UASVM Bucharest Carta, the dismissal conditions are described in art. 32 in the same line with legislation. Beside the general conditions, the University Carta includes the absence from more than half of the meeting during one academic year as a condition for rector dismissal.

In conclusion, in Romania the procedure for the dismissal of the rector is stipulated by law (like in Iceland, Luxembourg, Slovakia, Spain) and can be carried out both by an external authority (like in France) or by the university’s senate.

In the Romanian higher education system, the rector has a 4-year mandate, as provided by the Law No.1/2011, art.123. A person cannot have more than two successive mandates in the same institution, in compliance with the amendments provided by the Emergency Ordinance No. 49/2014 [14]. The University Carta of UASVM Bucharest mentions the same criteria in the art. 23, par. 3.

Such regulations align Romania to practices in countries like Austria, Croatia, Estonia, France, Iceland, Italy, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Serbia, Slovakia, Switzerland.

The inclusion of external members in the university governing bodies is optional. Art. 214, par. 7 stipulates that, according to the

University Carta, the university can develop structures that involve the economic environment or external personalities. It is the university that decides on this matter, there is no legal obligation in this respect, like in Great Britain, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Italy, Lithuania and Portugal.

The capacity to decide on the academic structure is provided by Law No.1/2011 only as a general reference (art 131, par.1), as Romania is one of the countries where universities can decide on their internal structure without any constraints.

The right to establish legal entities as stipulated in art 129, par.1 of the Education Law is the last of the evaluation criteria. Any higher education institution can set up associations, foundations, companies with the approval of the senate. For example, UASVM Bucharest has 3 research and production facilities: Istrita – specialized in fruits production (apples, plums, cherries), Moara Domneasca – as a training center and good practices for sustainable agriculture and Pietroasa – as a research and production of vine from 737 types of grapes. The Emergency Ordinance No. 49/2014 also provides the obligation to contribute to the performance of the institution without hampering the education, research or consultancy activities. Such regulations place Romania among the countries that allow universities to create legal entities.

To conclude, the analysis of the seven indicators proposed by the European University Association reveals a clear picture of the organizational autonomy in the Romanian higher education system and enables correlations with other countries, based on similar elements.

The staffing autonomy - that is the freedom to decide on personnel issues – is the second element analyzed. The ability of a university to attract, manage and retain quality human resources, both academic and administrative, ensures its success in the global higher education environment. Eight evaluation indicators are presented:



Fig. 3. European evaluation indicators of staffing autonomy dimension

Source: Own processing after the official website of European University Association (<https://www.university-autonomy.eu/dimensions/staffing/>)[5].

Art. 293 of the Education Law No.1/2011 stipulates that universities decide on recruitment, hiring, evaluation, motivation, continuous training, and dismissal of the teaching and research staff in higher education, as provided in the methodological framework established by the Ministry of Education and the university Carta.

Based on the methodological framework each university decides on its own methodology which needs the senate's approval as provided by art. 123. par. 2. UASVM Bucharest has a specific methodology for organizing the hiring process of didactic and research vacant jobs, approved by the Senate in 2018 [17]. The document is structured per chapters, including:

- procedures for contest organization for vacant didactic jobs
- procedure for contest committee nomination
- minim conditions for eligibility as candidate
- procedures for enrolling to the job contest
- responsibilities of the contest committee
- procedures for appeal.

In addition, art. 312, par. 11 from Education law stipulates that the head of the department, the leader of the doctoral school or the dean are responsible for the staff's selection, periodic evaluation, training, motivation and

termination of the labour contract, according to the University Carta.

In case of wrongdoings, the university's senate can impose sanctions, as provided by the methodology, including the dismissal of the rector or of the deans. The salaries of the teaching staff comply with the legislation and the decisions of the university's senate. UASVM of Bucharest elaborates an annual procedure for payment of didactic and research staff, respecting the legislative framework [17]. The document includes the description of the didactic and research functions, the didactic norm and sets up the calendar for elaboration and approval of the organizational chart and payment.

The academic autonomy defines the capacity of the university to manage independently internal academic elements related to the students' admission, academic content, quality, etc.

Twelve items are proposed for the measurement and evaluation of this aspect:

- (1) procedure for establishing the number of available places
- (2) admission procedure for the bachelor's programme
- (3) admission procedure for the master's degree programme
- (4) introducing bachelor's programmes
- (5) introducing master's degree programmes
- (6) introducing PhD programmes
- (7) termination of degree programmes
- (8) language of instruction for the bachelor's programmes
- (9) language of instruction for the master's degree programmes
- (10) selection of quality assurance mechanisms
- (11) selection of the quality assurance providers
- (12) capacity to decide on the content of the degree programmes.

In Romania, according to art. 138, par. 5 of the Education Law, every year a government decision, published by the Ministry of Education before March 31, decides on: classification of the degree programmes, the areas and programmes of the degree studies, the type of education, number of credits that can be transferred, the language of instruction and the maximum number of students that can

enroll, as proposed by the agencies for quality assurance that have evaluated each programme.

The Ministry of Education prepares annually a methodological framework for the admission procedures. Each university develops its own admission regulations for the degree programmes, in compliance with the general framework of the Ministry of Education. For 2021-2022, UASVM Bucharest issued the Methodology for organization of the admission contest approved by the Senate on 12th of February 2021. The document includes all the details related to the programs, number of available places, required documents for the admission for each program, language of instruction, the calendar of the admission process and it can be downloaded from the university website. A specificity of the methodology for 2021-2022 is the online feature, due to the pandemic situation.

The admission procedures for bachelor's and master's degree programmes have similar elaboration mechanisms.

The Education Law No.1/2011, in art. 150, par. 1, art. 155, par. 1 and art. 158, par. 4 regulates the introduction of new bachelor's, master's degree and doctoral programmes, respectively.

Any bachelor's or master's degree programme has to be accredited by a government decision, following an external evaluation conducted by ARACIS – Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education [13] or by another quality assurance agency from Romania or abroad, registered in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education [4].

Following the accreditation of the master's degree area of study, the university's senate decides on the degree programmes and informs the Ministry of Education. As for the doctoral school, ARACIS - or another similar agency - conducts an individual evaluation for each area of study. An order of the Ministry of Education establishes the evaluation criteria and methodological framework.

As provided by art. 10 in the Education Law, the university programmes are taught in Romanian, minority languages or languages of international circulation. In over 80% of the

29 countries surveyed, universities can choose the language of instruction for all degree programmes.

ARACIS or another national or foreign agency – provided to be registered in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education - can assure the quality.

The freedom to choose the quality assurance agency includes Romania in a group of eight countries (Austria, Estonia, Finland, Switzerland among them) out of 29 countries surveyed.

The Education Law, in art. 137, stipulates that universities decide on the content of the degree programmes. In compliance with par. 2, the curriculum is approved by the university's senate and has to be correlated with the qualification as reflected in the national register of qualifications. This correlation is a mandatory criterion for the evaluation of the quality assurance. UASVM Bucharest has stipulated the didactic autonomy through the following elements (art 3.3 University Carta):

- the possibility to set up, cancel, reorganization of the faculties, departments, institutes, research centers, university study programs;
- approval of the number of available places for university programs according to the legislation, ARACIS, UASVM financial possibilities and own institutional development strategy;
- approval al all university and post university training plans;
- setting up the standards, criteria, procedures related ot the evaluation of the didactic process.

Thus, Romania lines up to 26 countries (out of the 29 countries surveyed by the European University Association) where universities have the freedom to establish the content of their degree programmes.

The financial management – the fourth dimension of autonomy – analyses the extent to which the university is free to allocate resources to budgetary lines. Eleven evaluation items are proposed to evaluate this dimension (Table 1).

Table 1. Evaluation items of financial autonomy dimension

No.	Financial autonomy – evaluation items
1.	length of public funding cycle
2.	type of public funding
3.	right to borrow money
4.	ability to keep profit
5.	right to own property
6.	ability to charge fees for bachelor's programmes for national and EU students
7.	ability to charge fees for master's degree programmes for national and EU students
8.	ability to charge fees for doctoral programmes for national and EU students
9.	ability to charge fees for bachelor's programmes for non-EU students
10.	ability to charge fees for master's degree programmes for non-EU students
11.	ability to charge fees for doctoral programmes for non-EU students

Source: Own processing after the official website of European University Association (<https://www.university-autonomy.eu/dimensions/financial/>) [5].

In Romania, according to the legal provisions, - art. 223 of the Education Law – there is a multiannual financial cycle, covering a whole cycle of studies.

The revenues of the higher education institutions come from the state budget, on a contractual basis with the Ministry of Education, for the basic funding, complementary funding and supplementary funding.

Basic funding is based on the equivalent average cost per student, per study area, per study cycles, and per tuition language. Complementary funding covers subsidies for accommodation and boarding, funds for endowments, investments and refurbishment, funds allocated on competitive basis for academic scientific research.

Supplementary funding encourages excellence of degree programmes, both for public and private universities.

As for the right to borrow money, art. 122, par.5 of the Education Law stipulates that the funding of higher education can be secured from other sources, loans included, without any other special mention.

Universities in Romania are non-profit and are organized as non-profit entities. However,

they own their patrimony as stipulated by the university Carta. If a state university disbands, its property becomes state property, as provided by art. 226, par. 10 in the Education Law.

In Romania, universities have the right to set the amount of the tuition fees for various degree programmes.

According to the law, the Council of Administration sets the amount of the fees and informs those concerned. The fees are calculated based on similar procedure irrespective of the level of the degree programme or the student's profile (EU or non-EU). According to 2021-2022 methodology for admission of UASVM Bucharest, the Romanian students from all over the world and the EU citizens have the same admission conditions, including the same fees for studies (between 3,000-3,500 RON per year). The EU citizens have to equvalate their studies following the procedure of Ministry of Education – National center for Diploma Recognition and Equivalation. The non-EU citizens can apply for the study programs, according to a special procedure realized by UASVM and Ministry and Education. The study fee has to be paid in advance for the first year and there are some supplementary admission fees.

CONCLUSIONS

The analysis of the higher education system in Romania, based on the four dimensions of the university autonomy, stresses the legal framework and the responsibilities of the Government, the Ministry of Education, and the leading bodies in the academic environment.

The current analysis reveals a medium-level autonomy compared to the other European countries surveyed by the European University Association report, in compliance with the EU regulations and recommendations.

The importance of the university autonomy is underlined by all documents of educational policy resulted from the cooperation of significant European institutions and bodies: Global Forum for Academic Freedom,

Institutional Autonomy and Democracy, Council of Europe, International Consortium for Higher Education, Civic Responsibility and Democracy, Organization of the American States, Magna Carta Observer, International Association of Universities.

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