

Dynamics of Qualifications in Romanian Higher Education, 1968-2010

~ Ph. D. Professor **Bogdan Murgescu** (*Faculty of History, University of Bucharest*)

E-mail: bmurgescu@gmail.com

~ Ph. D. **Andrei Florin Sora** (*Center for Administrative, Cultural and Economic Studies, University of Bucharest*)

E-mail: andreisora@yahoo.com

Abstract: *The study analyzes the evolution of study programs in the Romanian higher education in two very different institutional settings: during the communist regime, when the state controlled centrally the structure and contents of higher education, and during the post-communist liberalization and expansion of the number of institutions, students and study programs. The analysis investigates the legal foundations of establishing new qualifications, as well as the number and share of the various types of study programs. It allows to identify different phases during the two main historical periods. For example, during the last two decades of the communist rule, the number of study programs and qualifications increased significantly during the 1960s and most of the 1970s, and then contracted the late 1970s to 1989. After the demise of communism, there was a massive expansion in the number of qualifications and study programs, especially in the context of establishing new institutions of higher education and liberalizing to a certain extent the procedures for proposing and implementing new study programs. This expansion was reversed after 2001, and the number of study programs fluctuated considerably up to the enforcement of the National Education Law 1/2011.*

Key words: qualification; higher education; Romania; communism; post-communism; Bologna process.

The communist take-over had significant consequences on the Romanian public education. Because of the tight political control on education, higher education followed closely the evolution pattern of the general political system of communist Romania: Soviet-inspired restructuration from the late 1940s to the late 1950s, development and expansion based on a relative opening and partial retrieval of pre-communist national traditions during the 1960s and part of the 1970s, and a relative closing of the system in the late 1970s and in the 1980s, closely connected with the economic constraints and the hardening of national-communist policies (Murgescu, p. 385-386). Due to this multifaceted legacy of communism, after 1989 most people did not consider that the system needed a radical change, and, besides removing the communist political control, focused mostly to restore the patterns of the 1960s and 1970s. Simultaneously, the Romanian higher education capitalized on the expansion opportunities supplied by the gradual liberalization of the market and by the huge social demand for higher education, as well as on the freedom to connect with international academic networks.

During communism, education was regulated by the laws of 1948 (Decree 175 of the Presidium of the Great National Assembly - adopted on 2 August 1948 and published a day later), 1968 (Law 11/1968) and 1978 (Law 28/1978), by decrees issued by the State Council (until 1975) or by the President of the Socialist Republic of Romania (after 1975), by decisions of the Council of Ministers, and by the Ministry of Education. In the 1968 and 1978 laws the normative principles of education were modern and democratic – the right to education for all people without

discrimination based on nationality, sex, race or religion; secular character of the education system; compulsory 10 years education (1968); state-funded scholarships; state-provided jobs for graduates; free education for all levels (after 1961, when the last tuition fees for higher education were removed); permanent (lifelong) education.

The relative opening of the Romanian society in the 1960s and early 1970s included the partial recovery of intellectual traditions and people representing the pre-communist elites or their descendants, who had been excluded and/or repressed during the first phase of the communist rule, as well as the establishment of connections with the West and in general a diversification and a quantitative expansion of international relations. The Romanian higher education participated to these trends, experiencing at the same time a significant institutional expansion – the government planned an increasing number of students (see Perț, p. 337; Anuarul Statistic al României, 1999, p. 261), hired more teaching staff, founded new institutions of higher education and ordered or allowed a diversification of the study programs and specializations.

According to the 1968 law (Bunescu et al., p. 346-368), institutions of higher education could be universities, institutes, academies and conservatories (art.119), which had juridical personality (art.120). Yet, the autonomy of these institutions was limited. The 1968 law also re-established the higher education programs for sub-engineers (sub-ingineri) and 'sub-architects' (conductorii arhitecți), which had been ended in the late 1940s, and integrated them as short-term higher education (art.122). Candidates who had earned their baccalaureate (bacalaureat

– secondary-school-leaving-certificate) were admitted to higher education only on the basis of a competition (admission exam). For the evening courses (*forma la seral*) of higher education it was stipulated that would-be students had to work already in the field of the specialty they wanted to study (art.151); extending this provision, the 1978 law specified that candidates for the part-time courses (*forma la fară frecvență*) also had to be employed in a socialist enterprise (art.70). Normal studies were scheduled for 3-6 years, while the evening and correspondence courses lasted one year more. Post-university education functioned in Romania since 1958/1959 (Decision of the Council of Ministers 325/1958), and according to the 1968 law it could be organized as full-time and part-time study (evening and part-time courses) with a duration of 12 months at most (art. 195).

The notion of qualification emerged in the late 1940s under the term *specialitate* (specialty) and from 1974 *specializare* (specialization). These two terms had been mentioned also previously in the higher education laws of 1932, 1938 and 1942, but without covering all aspects of the concept of qualification and without being used consistently. In the first post-war years, the number of specializations increased significantly, but the trend was reversed starting with the academic year 1953/1954. These fluctuations were caused by the unstable education policies and by the practice of copying Soviet models without adjusting them to the Romanian needs and traditions; additional factors were the demands for the industrialization process, as well as due the relative easiness to create new study lines and to remove them. The ideological and political mission of the higher

education system in communist Romania lead to the creation of the evening courses in 1949/1950 university year and of the part-time courses a year later (Sadlak, 1990, p. 30).

In the 1960s and 1970s the communist government paid an increased attention to the structure of higher education specialization, to curricula and the link between teaching and economic needs, and even commanded comparative analyses and studies regarding higher education in other countries, as for example France, (West) Germany, the United States of America or Italy, besides the Soviet Union and the communist-ruled countries of East-Central Europe. The struggle to modernize Romanian higher education and to better answer to the needs of economic development lead to the establishment of new specializations and new faculties. Inside the Academy of Economic Studies there was founded a Faculty of Economic-Mathematical Calculations and Cybernetics (1967), while in the Polytechnic Institute there were created sections for Electronic Calculators and for Nuclear Plants (1967), as well as a Faculty of Aeronautical Constructions (1971). We mention that in Romania, the term faculty (Romanian *Facultate*) is used not as a collective designation of the teaching staff (as the English faculty), but – similarly to the German *Fakultät* – for an administrative (and academic) subdivision of a university (or another institution of higher education).

In comparison with the previous academic year, the list of higher education specializations for the year 1968/1969, approved by the Decision of the Council of Ministers 1487/1968, which applied the new provisions of the Education Law of 1968, included some noteworthy changes. Short-term specializations reappeared, but from the 20 initial

specializations for sub-engineers and 'sub-architects' 9 existed under the same name also as long-term programs. Besides, there were changes of the names and of the curricula of several specializations, other specializations were unified, one was moved to short-term higher education (Mining Topography) and there were introduced new specializations, such as Administrative Sciences and Animal Science.

The next major change in the list of specializations occurred in 1974 (Decree 147/1974 of the State Council), when the number was slightly reduced. For the first time, specializations were grouped according to domains (Propuneri, f. 178 r). The enforcement of the specialization nomenclature for the year 1977/1978 (Decree 209/1977 of the State Council) marked a pattern which lasted until the demise of the communist rule, i.e. the excessive 'politechnization' of higher education to the disadvantage of social sciences and the humanities, fields which experienced also a severe fall of allocated study places and the closing down of several study programs. Starting with the academic year 1977/1978, the long-term specializations Sociology (which had been reestablished only in 1966), Psychology, Pedagogy, Art and Methodology of Performance, and International Economic Relations received no more study places and were gradually liquidated. Philosophy (which encompassed also Sociology and Pedagogy) was united with History, forming a new combined specialization, which was considered to be better suited for the ideological needs of the regime.

While after 1977 the nomenclature of specializations remained almost the same, illustrating the lack of innovative spirit which dominated late communism, the number

and type of higher education institutions changed. Until the mid-1970s the communist authorities had created several such institutions in various parts of the country, reflecting the more general policies of a balanced regional development of Romania (Sadlak, 1988, p. 193); starting with the late 1970s, some of these institutions were closed down, unified or downgraded, so we can notice a certain concentration in major cities, although it is difficult to speak of a coherent planning for the normal functioning of higher education.

The economic crisis of the 1980s and the flawed policies of the Ceaușescu regime which allocated resources mainly to heavy and chemical industries, generated „the apparition and the escalation of imbalances on the labor market, with some sectors, professions and/or areas benefitting from excess and others experiencing shortages, while the labor force was employed in excess of needs and thus underused” (Perț, p. 333). After spectacular growth till 1975, investments in education also decreased (Perț, p. 331).

The communist regime had developed rules of strict distribution of higher education graduates to be employed “into production” in various enterprises and institutions for stages of 2-3 years, according to specialization (Decree 54/1975 of the State Council, art. 6). This system, which often shaped the whole career and existence of the graduates and their families, became more rigid after 1975 and culminated in the 1980s with the closing of the most important 14 cities for the graduates of most higher education specializations.

After the demise of communism, the new authorities started by removing some of the regulations which had hampered

the development of higher education in the 1980s. Already on January 13, 1990, the Government Decision 41/1990 stipulated that university autonomy was a main principle in the functioning of Romanian higher education (art.1). The compulsory distribution into production was removed, and the obligation of would-be students to perform the compulsory military service was shortened from 9 to 6 months and transferred after the completion of university studies (art.8). For the academic year 1990/1991 there were allocated no study places for short-term higher education studies, but in 1991 this decision was reversed through the creation of higher education colleges (Government Decision 461/1991). The policies of late communism were reversed also through the founding of new state universities, as well as by the growth of the numbers of students and graduates. The first private universities were founded also in 1990 under the umbrella of various foundations and associations which were theoretically non-profit, but which in fact proved to be some of the most effective forms of early post-communist capitalist accumulation.

After some years of deficient central guidance and a multitude of autonomous initiatives of the higher education institutions, the Government Decision 283/1993 attempted to bring some order into the system and included in its appendices also the first post-communist nomenclature of higher education specializations. The same decision (283/1993) allowed to the state-owned higher education institution to register paying students (art.46), and also regulated the graduation procedures (art.43). In December 1993, the law 88/1993 regulated the accreditation of higher education institutions and the recognition of diplomas, trying, without lasting

success, to limit the expansion of private higher education and to enforce some quality standards in the system. A comprehensive education law had been put on the agenda already in January 1990 (Government Decision 41/1990, art. 9; Government Decision 41 bis/1990, art. 11), but had been delayed until it was finally voted and promulgated in July 1995 (Law 84/1995). The 1995 Education Law (84/1995) regulated not only 'normal' higher education, but also private and military higher education, defining the latter as being "state-run education, integral part of the national education system" (art. 97). During the same month, a Government Decision enforced a new specialization nomenclature and the norms of granting provisional authorization for new study programs and/or institutions of higher education.

Already in the academic year 1990/1991 the list and contents of higher education specializations changed significantly. New specializations were established, while others were ended (especially those which had been taught previously at the 'Ștefan Gheorghiu' Academy of the Romanian Communist Party). Most new specializations (or those resumed after being closed during late communism) were in the fields of humanities and social sciences, including economics and administration. Changes were made also in the technical, agricultural and petro-chemical fields, where specializations diversified and tried to better connect with the economic evolutions in Romania and abroad. The deficits accumulated under late communism, as well as the opportunities opened by the transition to democracy and market economy and the social prestige of higher education diplomas enhanced the demand for university studies in post-communist Romania. This

demand was highest for law studies and for a variety of economic specializations, many of them created in the academic year 1990/1991, such as Marketing, International Economic Relations, Tourism and Services, of Finances and Credit. Subsequently, there emerged and diversified a multitude of specializations focusing on various aspects of management, which functioned not only in the field of economic studies, but also in connection with engineering. There appeared also various study programs in international foreign languages, while some of the short-term specializations were restructured as long-term studies.

The dynamic of the 1990s often lacked coherence and/or consistency. Sometimes the official regulations included specializations differing in name (and field of studies), but which were almost identical in their goals, curricula and practical teaching. Such an example is the specialization Journalism. From 1995 to 2001 there co-existed 3 specializations – Journalism (1990-2001 with the name Journalistic), Newspaper Studies (Romanian Ziaristică, name used also under communism; resumed 1995) and Written Press (1995-2001), to which one should add also the double specializations Journalism & Foreign Language and Journalism & Philosophy.

The somehow chaotic multiplication of specializations and study programs determined the reaction of the authorities, which tried again to bring some order into the system. The Government Decision 1336/2001, which was enforced starting with the academic year 2002/2003 allowed to the higher education institutions to propose new specializations (art.4) and to organize various directions of study inside each specialization (art.3), but at the same time reduced to about half the number of specializations included

in the new nomenclature (art. 5). Higher education institutions were allowed also to organize double specializations, but only if in the curricula the quantitative proportion between the groups of disciplines representing the two specializations was in the margin of 1-1,25 (art.5).

Gradually, the short-term higher education (university colleges) became less attractive. This situation was determined by the increase of the numbers of students and graduates of 'normal' higher education, either in state-run or in private institutions, as well as by the decline of labor market demand for graduates of short-term higher education. Legislation also favoured this trend, by facilitating the transfer from short-term higher education to long-term programs. In 1994 it was estimated that short-term higher education would encompass about 30% of the total number of students (Korka, p. 33), but this target was never achieved in post-communist Romania. In the academic year 2000/2001 short-term higher education included only 9.2% of the total number of registered students (Korka, figure 2, p. 32). In 2005, in the context of the transition to the Bologna system of structuring university studies in 3 cycles – B.A., M.A, and doctorate – the short-term programs received no more study places and were gradually ended.

The next phase of major change occurred in 2004-2006. First, the law 288/2004 consecrated the implementation of the Bologna system, i.e. the organization of university studies in 3 cycles starting with the academic year 2005/2006 (law 288/2004, art. 19). The first cycle of B.A. studies was reduced to 3 or 4 years, according to the field of studies, and the double specializations were allowed only in the qualifications based on study programs

of 4 years, as well as (by exception) in the field of philological studies. Starting with the academic year 2005/2006, universities issue for each graduate a Diploma Supplement, both in Romanian and in English, with content in conformity with European norms.

The Government Decision 88/2005 enforced massive changes in the nomenclature of study domains and program studies. Some specializations were removed and/or renamed, but even more were (re-)established (65 in 2005, about 40 in the next years), but most of the new ones were in fact transformations of previously short-term specializations into B.A. qualifications. In absolute numbers, the number of first cycle qualifications was smaller with about one third in comparison with the academic year 2003/2004 (if we consider for the latter year both short-term and long-term higher education).

After 2006 the changes of the nomenclature of study fields and programs were less numerous, being limited also by the effort to connect the system better to the qualifications existing in the European Union. The Government Decision 635/2008 (re)established 10 study programs, among which Ecological Reconstruction (in the field of Environment Engineering), Engineering and Management in the Tourism Industry (field Engineering and Management), Engineering and Forest Management (field Engineering and Management), Security and Defense (field Military Sciences and Informations), Nutrition and Dietetics (field Health Studies). In 2009 there were added 9 new B.A. study programs, such as Public Health Services and Policies (field Administrative Sciences), Air Navigation (field Aerospace Engineering), Industrial Logistics (field Industrial Engineering). The Government

Decision 749/2009 introduced also a national codification system, each fundamental field of sciences, each field of studies and each study program receiving a 3-digit code.

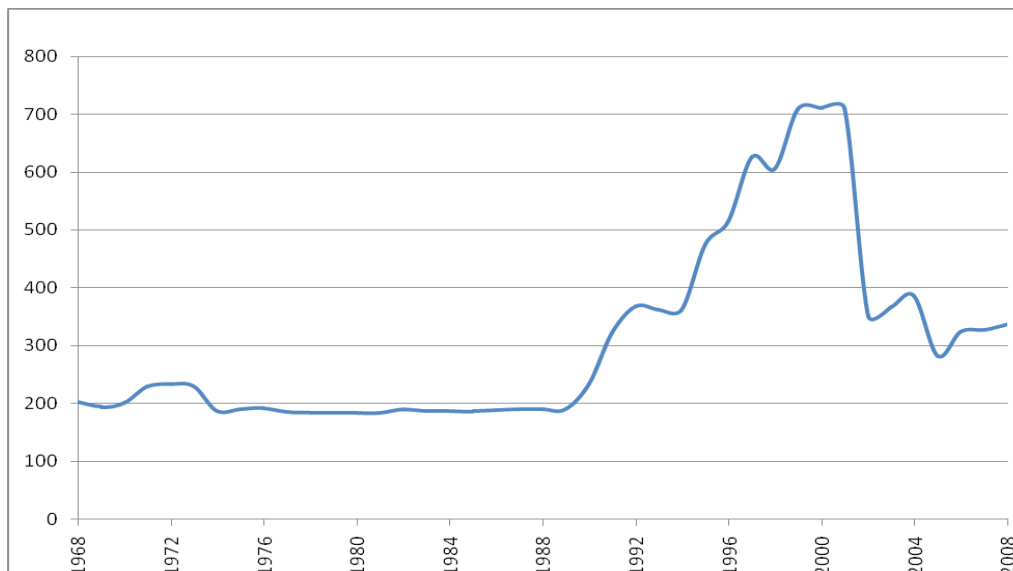
In 2005 it was decided that the National Agency for Qualifications in Higher Education and Partnership with the Economic and Social Environment – ACPART had the task to develop and implement a National Qualifications Framework for Higher Education (NQFHE) in conformity with the European Qualifications Framework (EQF). The Methodology was elaborated in 2007-2008 with international assistance, and in 2009 the Order of the Education Minister 4430/2009 enforced this Methodology. The EU-funded DOCIS project (Development of an Operational System of the Higher Education Qualifications in Romania) allowed to implement the NQFHE by describing a number of 500 qualifications in terms of learning outputs, and by making them public in the National Register for Qualifications in Higher Education (www.rncis.ro). In the framework of this project there was undertaken a correlation of 'historic' qualifications with the current Bologna-system qualifications included in the NQFHE. According to this correlation, most higher education specializations of the period before 2004 match with the first cycle of the Bologna process or with the level 6 of the EQF, while others, because of longer duration of studies, complex curricula and level of knowledge, skills and competences obtained by their graduates, can be equated with a combination of both the first and the second cycle of the Bologna process, or with both levels 6 and 7 of EQF. The correlation is published online on www.rncis.ro.

The National Education Law 1/2011 builds upon a set of principles, which

combine university autonomy an academic freedom with public accountability of higher education institutions. Stipulating that the mission of higher education in Romania includes generation and transfer of knowledge towards society through university initial and continuing training, in order to foster the individual's personal development and employability and to meet the labor market competence needs, it also states explicitly that all study programs provided by higher education institutions must be consistent with a qualification profile defined by the National Qualifications Framework. At the same time, the National Education Law set up the National Authority for Qualifications, which has the task to implement a comprehensive integrated National Qualifications Framework, which should also be consistent with the emphasis on the principle of lifelong learning (art. 1).

The current National Qualification Framework capitalizes on the various changes which occurred in post-communist Romania. Higher education institutions have large rights, both in the definition of qualifications, in proposing new qualifications, and in concretely shaping their study programs. At the same time, the whole system is bound by social accountability and by rules of transparency, which increase the possibilities of stakeholders to have a voice and to participate in the process of defining each qualification. Thus, the qualifications provided by the Romanian higher education can be better connected to the needs of the economy and of the society as a whole, while the conformity towards the European Qualifications Framework allows for a better integration of the graduates into the European labor market and of the Romanian higher education institutions into the European Area of Higher Education.

Quantitative dynamics of qualifications in Romanian higher education, 1968-2008



| Qualifications | 1968/1969 | 1978/1979 | 1988/1989 | 1998/1999 | 2008/2009 |
|--|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|
| | % | % | % | % | % |
| Engineering and Architecture | 58 | 69,6 | 69,8 | 52,8 | 45,6 |
| Medical and Pharmaceutical Sciences | 3,8 | 3,7 | 3,6 | 1,3 | 4,2 |
| Economics | 3,3 | 3,1 | 3,1 | 10,6 | 7,4 |
| Law | 0,5 | 1 | 1 | 0,7 | 0,9 |
| University qualifications and Teacher training | 22,5 | 12,6 | 12,3 | 23,3 | 29,1 |
| Fine Arts | 8,6 | 5,8 | 6,1 | 6,2 | 10,7 |
| Others (qualifications from military service not included in other categories) | 3,3 | 4,2 | 4,1 | 5,1 | 2,1 |
| Total | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 |

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