ENQA/UNESCO-GIQAC Project
Capacity building activities for quality assurance networks in
the field of higher education
Kick-off meeting, Astana, Republic of Kazahstan,
December 6-7, 2011

ESTABLISHING A NEW AGENCY AND ADOPTING THE ESG – THE ROMANIAN EXPERIENCE

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What the ministers decided (Bergen 2005):

- *"We adopt the **standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area** as proposed by ENQA. We commit ourselves to introducing the proposed model for peer review of quality assurance agencies on a national basis, while respecting the commonly accepted guidelines and criteria"*

- *"We welcome the principle of a **European register of quality assurance agencies** based on national review. We ask that the practicalities of implementation be further developed by **ENQA in cooperation with EUA, EURASHE and ESIB** with a report back to us through the Follow-up Group"*

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What the ministers decided (London 2007):

- *"We welcome the **establishment of a register** (i.e. EQAR) by the E4 group (...) The register will be **voluntary**, **self-financing**, **independent** and **transparent**"*

- *"Applications for inclusion on the register should be evaluated on the basis of **substantial compliance with the ESG**, evidenced through an independent review process endorsed by national authorities, where this endorsement is required by those authorities"*

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What happened in Romania

- First effects of Bergen: Government Emergency Ordinance no. 75/2005 on Quality in Education approved later by Law no. 87/2006 and modified afterwards:
  - ▫ **Covers pre-university AND higher education national system;**
  - ▫ **Establishes two new agencies: ARACIP (for pre-university, ministerial, state funded) and ARACIS (recognition of ESG's for higher education: independent, self funding).**

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- ARACIS had to take over from the former CNEAA (established by law in 1993 under the authority of the Parliament):
    - **Premises;**
    - **Permanent Staff – by selection procedure;**
    - **Archives;**
    - **Experienced peer reviewers;**

but also:
    - **A different paradigm of QA in higher education – centered on accreditation;**
    - **Image – good and … bad;**
    - **Actions in court … as defendant!**
    - **Unfinished evaluation work.**

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The first year – 2005

- 1 st Provisional Council with hybrid structure: nominations by Senate (5) + Ministry of Education (5) + National Rectors Council (5);
- Missions:
  - **organize selection procedure for permanent staff;**
  - **organize selection procedure for the next composition of the Council (3 yrs. mandate);**
  - **finalize formalities to take over facilities and archive;**
  - **prepare the Government decision for the methodology.**

- Result – almost nil, no activity, no evaluations performed.

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The second year 3/4 (Painful!) – 2006

New law, approving the GEO no. 75/2005 with some amendments;

- 2 nd Provisional Council with hybrid structure: nominations by Senate (5) + Ministry of Education (5) + National Rectors Council (5):
    - Process of taking over from CNEAA;
    - Election procedure of 5 members to continue as Council members;
    - Organize selection procedure for 10 new Council members.

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The second year 3/4 (Difficult!) – 2006

- Both GEO no. 75/2005 and Law no. 87/2006 specify the obligation of ARACIS to become listed in the EQAR in one-year time (fortunately it was not mentioned when was the "zero moment"!);

- "What register" in 2005 and 2006?

Law: OK
Media and other "friendly" comments: why ARACIS was not listed in the EQAR? "we know better" etc.

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The second year ¼ (Better times!) – 2006

- The Methodology of evaluation approved - Government Decision no. 1418/September 2006;
- The evaluation guides:
  - **Study programs (Bachelor and Master degrees) accreditation external evaluation;**
  - **Institutional authorization/accreditation external evaluation;**
  - **Academic quality external evaluation of accredited higher education institution;**
  - **External evaluation of Teaching staff training departments (TSTD);**
  - **External evaluation of distance learning study programs (DL);**
  - **External evaluation of part time study programs;**
- The pilot project (10 + 1 universities).

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The steady state: 2007 – November 2011

- Study program evaluations:
  - **2765 master program evaluations (accreditation);**
  - **1917 bachelor program evaluations (provisional authorization, accreditation, periodical evaluation)**
  - **190 master program evaluations (accreditation – long distance and part time learning);**
  - **310 bachelor program evaluations (provisional authorization, accreditation – long distance and part time learning);**
- **80** universities were evaluated (out of which 46 in the ACADEMIS project, supported from EU Structural funds, managed by ARACIS);
- **7** universities are being currently evaluated (out of which **1** try to have the final judgment improved).

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External Evaluations of ARACIS:

- National level - performed by a Monitoring Committee in 2007;

- EUA and ESU evaluations in 2008;

- ENQA evaluation in 2008 – 2009: ENQA full membership granted in June 2009;

- Listed in EQAR in September 2009 (one year after the register was opened!).

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Independence

- Modifications of the law 87/2006:
    - **funding (2007): no state subsidy, only contracts with beneficiaries and projects**
    - **number of permanent staff, premises, inclusion of two students as full Council members (2011)**
    - **additional modifications of the law in progress – to guarantee even more independence**

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How stands ARACIS now:

- Sustainable funding – includes also EU funded projects

- Progress report submitted to ENQA before June 2, 2011 - accepted by the Board

- Internal QA procedures amended and improved; evaluators trained and "quizzed electronically"; new committee of employers; no proposal of ARACIS overturned yet by the MoERYS etc.

- ENQA GA, October 2011 organized in Bucharest

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- Two students included as Council members

- System analyses of QA in HE for 2008,2009,2010, 2011,, at country level, followed by reports

- International activities: ENQA, CEEN, INQAAHE , other projects (i.e. QAHEQA etc.)

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- Problems raised and Lessons learned:
  - **Political support needed - to continue as an independent agency under any Government (5 ministers of education from 2005 – present, from 4 political parties);**
  - **Need for evidence-based decisions - society dominated by lack of confidence, rumors (sorry, not only!) of corruption, interest of local authorities to support some universities, coexistence of state and private universities (not always in a fair and healthy competition).**

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- Quality culture difficult to build;
- Evaluation regarded as bureaucracy;
- Negative decisions always challenged;
- Judgments to be on a larger scale to provide room for differentiation;
- Note : ARACIS has won in all court all cases in which decisions were taken! (Optimist's view: don't worry: other trials will come).

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- For the future:
- **New law of education** (February 2011) – does not modify law 87/2006 but opens all evaluations to any agency listed in the EQAR;
- **New proposal for Methodology** presented for public debate – differentiation of universities, shift to benchmarking procedures and to more output/outcome criteria, ESGs as firm support;
- **New challenges, more pressure**: more complex mission, more co-operation needed to evaluate research and doctoral programs; classification of universities and ranking of study programs in the law: ARACIS will be involved in the future!;
- **Internationalization of QA in the EHEA** – competition BUT do not forget co-operation (EHEA is a space for co-operation, students and staff mobility !).

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Most important achievements

National: building confidence in ARACIS !
"Quality Barometers" as part of system evaluation – 2009,2011 indicate it clearly!
and EQAR listing : condition of survival (by law!)

European: ENQA full membership

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Conclusion:

- The local context extremely important!
- Work with universities to build quality culture and CONFIDENCE in the agency
- Do not forget the importance of political support but … beware of local interests

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THANK YOU VERY MUCH!