

CONVERGENCE OF ACADEMIC ACTIVITY BETWEEN ROMANIA AND THE EUROPEAN UNION

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Abstract. *One of the numerous problems that need to pass through convergence processes in order to continuously increase the dynamics of European integration is also academic activity, respectively the science field, the research and development one and the didactic activity of university education. The aim of the paper is to analyze elements of convergence between the academic activity from Romania and the one from the European Union. As general objective, through comparisons and statistics, we propose to monitor common elements and existing disharmonies and by the found solutions to contribute to streamline the Romanian academic activity. As a punctual objective, the study wishes that, by a manner of „auditing” type, to propose an indicative model, a reconceptualization of the Romanian university field, necessary to certain corrections to be made. Also another punctual objective proposes to highlight certain necessary aspects (networks) to compatibilize in a greater extent the approached themes, in relation to the similar one from the European Union, in order to achieve a real and beneficial convergence between the union states and, first of all, of our country and EU..*

Keywords: academic activity, convergence, efficiency, research, university education

1. Introduction

No matter the moment syncope, the process of European integration, of „continentalization” will continue, being an objective process of the progression of the present world, so technologized and with forms of internationalization and globalization in all fields. From this perspective, in order to understand things, education becomes priority, field in which the lack of compatibility and homogeneity is of the hour. It is, of course, a difficult process, many of times controversial, but more and more useful to academic collaborations all over the world. In this context, we consider useful an analyses linked to European academic compatibility, in general, and to the convergence of academic activity Romania – the European Union in special.

As a first objective, we propose to start from a *diagnoses* of principle of the Romanian academic complexity, with the identification of the main elements of dysfunctionality and a systemic reconceptualization.

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Another objective is to highlight certain directions and a series of concrete solutions that may effectively lead to the convergence of the academic activity from Romania with the one in EU. The aim of the proposed objectives is to streamline this crucial field for our country.

Academic activity, defined by numerous bibliographic papers [10,11,12], represents the ensemble of physical, intellectual and moral acts made in order to get a certain result concerning the development of one country's science and culture, respectively of institutions and superior schools. Physical, intellectual and moral acts are to be found at academic level, in the basic mission of academic structures, namely: the research mission, the didactic one, as well as the one to disseminate scientific and cultural knowledge.

An institutional innovation specific to the **knowledge emergent society**, that gives a new relevance to superior education and scientific research, is to constitute a new type of organization: *the cooperation heterogeneous network*. They are based on the idea of **harmonization** by institutionalized cooperation between types of activities, institutions, different social actors that until now used to activate separately, not in competition.

Networks are NOT characterized as a formal type of organization, but as a „*moral relation based on trust, on social capital*” [3,6]. A convergence element of these types of networks is *to share resources* so that participants may have access to others' resources.

Among the numerous structures of this type we may mention *The research and technical innovation networks* (initiated even since the year 1998), and more recently there is initiated to link excellence in research centers from Europe to the network and to join scientific communities, firms and scientists from western Europe and from eastern Europe (after CEC / 2000) [9].

For **Romania**, the evolutions that take place at international level represent a chance, the one of the integration into the transition process from the industrial society to the knowledge society, through convergence and without covering precursory stages. Practically, the main resources of the knowledge society are NOT any more material resources and money, but **knowledge**, preponderantly illustrated by human and social capital. Power is not any more given by money (that assure resource control and distribution), but it is given by knowledge, that assures resource balanced distribution and the mobility of the job factor [8].

2. Material and methods

In the study there are used methods such as: diagnoses, prognoses, monitoring, and comparison. Also there are used a series of specific properties of the management of academic activity (conceptual analyses on principles of European

integration; managerial analyses of supervision and guidance of the Romanian academic activity; utilization of comparisons and statistics regarding academic activity).

3. Results and discussions

Starting from the idea that, as a consequence of the development tendency, „KNOWLEDGE” becomes the main „pawn” of this evolution, and to pursue the process of **continental convergence** of the education by knowledge is more than opportune, we consider that this one may lead to **complementary unification of principles** of education approach, of formation and information in the EU space.

In the carried out analyses we will approach the idea of convergence of the Romanian academic life with the one in EU, pursuing four directions we consider to be relevant:

- (1) Definition and principles of academic activity;
- (2) Academic situation in Romania;
- (3) Convergence dynamics and vehicle;
- (4) Solutions of principle to achieve the convergence of Romania's academic activity with EU.

3.1. Definition and principles of academic activity

Taking account of the complex semantics of the „convergence” notion we may structure a definition of the approached themes in the paper:

THE CONVERGENCE OF ACADEMIC ACTIVITY represents a confluence, meeting, contact, intersection, intermission, cross, reunion, connection, concentration, respectively the evolution towards a common system of educational development.

The general context shows us that we must have in view the general present specificity of academic activity, respectively that, in the present context, we can't ignore the **globalization concept** that refers to „*the diminishing of the worlds and the increase of the awareness degree of the world as a whole*” [7]. From the beginning we will have in mind a thing, namely that the „whole” presupposes the idea of *CONVERGENCE*, i.e. towards a unity of the whole argued by levelling tendencies and ones that impose a unique model. That is why we militate for the idea that the convergence process must be **ETHICALLY** regarded, taking into account national identities that regularly are complementary, based on unanimously accepted principles and rules of „unity in diversity”, in conformity with the *Living planet* model and the **bioharmonism paradigm** [4]. In other

words, at continental level should result an **efficient and multipolar academic system, in dynamic balance (permanently adaptable)**.

The **pragmatic aspect** determines that thus **academic convergence** may implicitly lead to the reduction of costs in education through compatibility, to acceleration of changes and communication, to efficiency increase of academic activity at European level, to avoidance of deepening educational differences, to the break-up of certain bankrupt branches, with potential to destabilize economic life and others. The result will be that human resource will have necessary competences to build a real knowledge society at European level (and not only).

3.2. The academic situation in Romania

A short diagnosis shows us that, unfortunately, Romanian school does not look good, in conformity with certain EU data (2017): Romania is the EU country with the less money allocated to education; - The system is adrift by school abandon for the segment 18-24 years old, which is above 18 % (especially in rural space and among Roma and pupils' obliteration from university education); - Unfortunately Romania is on the 3rd place in Europe as for the number of youngsters that do NOT study at a faculty; - Half of the school pupils do not have the minimum level of competences, i.e. potential students are poorly prepared; - Superior study graduates (those of 30-34 years) are averaging 25 % in Romania, face to approximately 40% in EU ; - Adult participation at the continuous educational process is under 2% in Romania, face to approx.11% the average in EU. Another eloquent aspect of *educational disharmony* is the comparison between urban and rural environment, it being extremely concerning in the rural environment (Table 1) [1].

Table 1. Diagnosis regarding the educational level in Romania in function of the geographic zone

Zone	UM	Primary + Gymnasium	High school	Professional	Post-high school + Foremen	Superior	Total
URBAN	no.	491,998	674,662	198,988	101,420	457,664	1,924,732
	%	25.56	35.05	10.34	5.27	23.78	100
RURAL	no.	381,797	44,911	38,021	2,555	330	467,614
	%	81.65	9.60	8.13	0.55	0.07	100

There is observed a really alarming situation (reference the year 2018), i.e. only approx. 19.14 % of the total children and youngsters that study in Romania have graduated superior education.

Therefore during the last decades it is registered a strong *individual de-professionalization, concomitantly with an institutional deprofessionalization*

(!). A reconceptualization of the university didactic and research field becomes imperiously necessary, concomitantly with the convergence at the EU system.

The reduced weight of superior study graduates and their precarious quality risks to create a lack of competences in sectors that need a high degree of knowledge and, finally, to limit Romania's economic progress.

It becomes compulsory TO AVOID individual and institutional de-professionalization taking account of the following aspects of great importance. We can speak about the fact that today to destroy a nation doesn't need atomic bombs nor continental ballistic rockets, but it is enough to reduce education quality and allow fraud at students' exams, situation in which (elements found at different universities from less developed countries): Patients die in the hands of such doctors; Buildings cave in being built by such engineers; Money is lost in the hands of such economists; Justice evaporates in the hands of such jurists and judges.

In such a dramatic situation the conclusion is obvious: **The education crash is the nation crash!** Therefore it becomes more than opportune the **convergence** of academic life from Romania with the one in EU and the finding of **solutions** to achieve this process.

3.3. Convergence dynamics and vehicle

Concretely, academic convergence from Romania with the one from the European Union is expressed by having the same aim, by finding common elements, respectively structural and functional similarities of the educational system with its components in an as good as possible harmonization.

Thus „convergence” offers the finding of solutions to effectively achieve the social mission of transforming university in a center of educational resources and of services offered to the community.

Pragmatically, academic activity found at the level of education is the *process* of systematically influencing (in organized manner too) the formation and development of intellectual, moral, physic etc. characteristics of children, youngsters or men or human collectivities by education.

The importance of school gets above (of different educational institutions) in getting fundamental humanist knowledge and meta-knowledge (Fig.1).

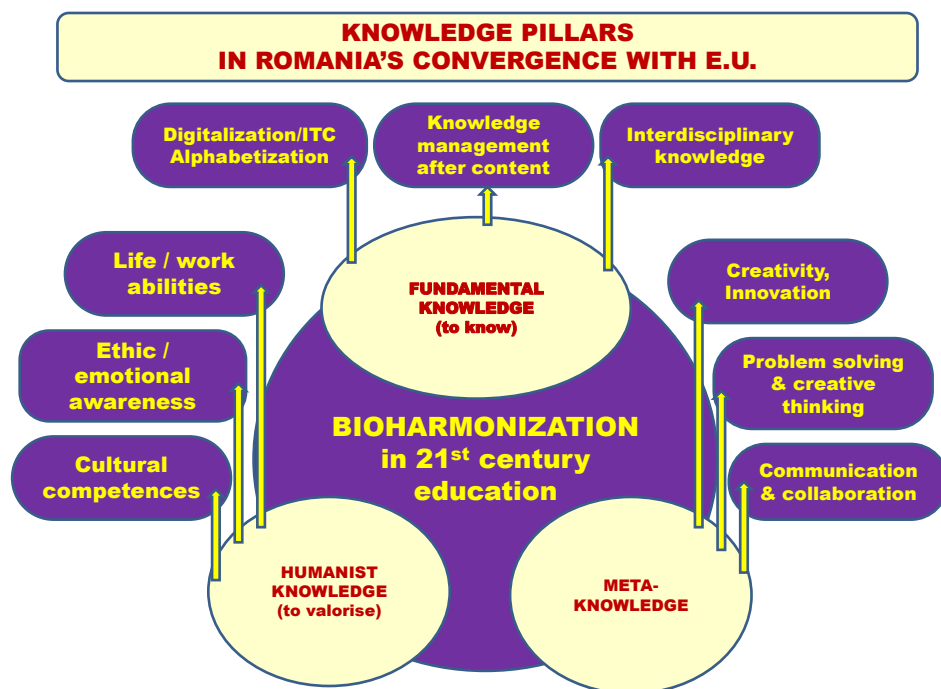


Fig.1. The education process on direction of getting „knowledge” necessary for the formation level geographically compatible in the 21st century

3.4. Solutions of principle for the convergence of the academic activity from Romania with the one in the European Union

More important solutions for the process of academic convergence with EU have potential of **efficiency growth of** academic activity, through a good relation between the obtained results and efforts made for the system financing; development of university study programs centered on the creation of competences (especially practical ones), adapting European similar models; initial formation of professors by teaching master degree; creation of „attractors”, of course in order to attract motivated university teaching staff and to implement research and teaching projects with **linking performance pay at individual level** (on meritocracy principles: welfare and social position are got through performance validated by correct competition, by talent and demonstrated competences).

The principle of teaching staff meritocracy: obligatory scores by the *Teaching file* and *Research file* that will stay at the basis of academic activities (of promotion, of continuing activity after retirement age etc.) and the two pay fractions in

conformity with the legal mission in university academic activity: the teaching one and the research one.

One can reach meritocracy only by education in general, and qualitative teaching in special. Therefore, in modifying attitude and behavior, essential is the **reform of the educational system**. Education along one's whole life (LLL) must be achieved by an ever larger part of the society at superior level and that is why university institutions must pass to a new **teaching paradigm**. In this regard, a convergent direction and of concrete action might have the following characteristics [2,5], in synthesis adapted in Table 2.

Table 2. Elements of reform and harmonization with the 21st century realities for the educational system at University level

Old paradigm		New paradigm
• « Ivory tower » university		• « Social partner » university
• Student = 18-25 year old young person		• Student from birth to death
• Multicultural approach		• Global approach
• “Brick and mortar” type formation: learn in order to know and to do		• “Bits and bytes” formation type: learn in order to be and to live in community
• Assisted, static university		• Entrepreneurial university
• Unilateral approach: - Centered on institution - Financed by government - Technology, an expense		• Multilateral approach: - Centered on market - Financed by market - Technology, an investment
• Teaching job for life		• Continuous performance with market value (periodical reaccreditations)
• “Trouble” student		• « Client » student
• Teaching in amphitheater and classrooms		• Teaching in any adequate place
• Books, main teaching material		• Diversified information when requested
• Everything that may be got by individual assimilation		• Courses at request, multi-disciplinary, team work
• Calendar of the university year		• University as an idea, adaptability, real autonomy in official university year
• Graduation diploma		• Learning along one's own life, with diplomas „ <i>in crescendo</i> ”, linked to financial remuneration.

An important step to adopt the new paradigm from Table 2 is certainly represented by the convergence process with the present European model, but which, at its turn, is in transition towards the Knowledge Society.

Indicative MODEL proposal for growth efficiency of the academic process by convergence and compatibility with European universities

There may be kept progressive elements from the present university organization, but to improve the quality of the academic activity there is necessary harmonization of teaching and research elements of the university act and de-bureaucratization of the present system. As a first stage, the **ELIMINATION of *present dysfunctionalities from the Romanian university management*** becomes useful, which will allow to implement solutions that induce RO-EU convergence (Table 3).

Table 3. Decalogue of the convergence of the Romanian academic system with the EU one

No.	Element of convergence	Specification
1	Entrepreneurial superior education	- The state or financing foundation consider the allocated sums as an investment in education, in regime of project, respectively on structures of expenses and on activities or on actions, the allocation being made in instalments with justification in order to get the next instalment. For example the circulating fund (wages + utilities) through the basic educational fund, at which, by competitive project, go on: the fund for development; the fund for research; the fund for academic activities, the reserve fund etc.
2	Controlled utilization of financial funds	- Investment in laboratories and equipment for research and educational activity (objective: compatibilization with the European level);
3	Harmonization of the financing flow	- Separate financing on education and research direction concerning the wage level of the university educational staff (objective to encourage the access of projects in university research, similar to the situation in EU);
4	University restructuring	- Reorganization may be done by fusion (in order to become efficient), with forming Schools on fields, but also avoiding superposition in organization (ex. a faculty should obligatorily have at least two departments, because at one department in a faculty there appear superposition between the department council and the faculty one and between the department director and the dean);
5	Optimization of the numeric model	- Students may be assigned in universities with medium capacity, of approx. 30,000 de students. In perspective, everything depends on the country's demographic policy. Hoping to have an ascendant demographic flow, then to widen the bases from 19% with superior education at compatible level with the EU average (which is approx. 35 %), at which there may be added foreign students etc., the situation may forecast large universities in Romania (60-80 thousands of students). In this scenario in Romania there should be organized 15-20 large universities even from now (not irrationally abolished, but fusion and reorganization of the existing ones, with locations in different localities);

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6	Department framework	- On department specialty (without supplementary functions and without wage supplements), but important for the organization of academic activity and for communication between full professor (coordinator of the specialty department) and the other education staff from the same specialty (especially with University assistants), as well as with associated staff (technicians, laboratory assistants etc.)
7	Multiple integration in education	- Applying the known idea of integrating education with research and production by rapid technological transfer (to make an exchange of experience between specialists in multinationals, for example, as a rule formed at „mother firms” and university educational staff that know the problem, being in fact trainers from superior education. As a result: the laboratory and course program may rapidly be adapted in conformity with last generation technologies and production demands).
8	Managing positions in universities	- Functions of rector, dean, director of department should be for a period of maximum two mandates of four years; the possibility to candidate for the third mandate only if, from proved objective motives, the second mandate has been interrupted for a period at least as long as 50 % from a mandate (NB – there must urgently be removed from the education law the phrase „complete” mandates).
9	Flexibility and personalization of the analytical program	- In the program 60 % obligatory disciplines (the fundamental ones and the basic ones; these ones are to be found in basic norms of the educational staff) and 40 % from the list of specialty disciplines, the student to be able to choose and make his own route. As a first example (existing in other countries too) a discipline may be presented if there subscribe at least 5 students.
10	Increase of interest by students' presence at day form study	- Obligatory presence at course at least 50 %, and 100% at laboratory / seminar, but concomitantly with making a students' credit system during their studies and finance return after graduation; at reduced frequency, or without frequency, the presence at course may remain facultative, but not at laboratory/seminars.

Conclusions

(1). The academic convergence has as FINALITY to achieve a harmonious unity, so that at continental level may result an efficient and multipolar academic system (networks), in dynamic balance (permanently adaptable), at which Romania may become as convergent as possible, namely to be part of as many structures as possible and with integrated activity.

(2). Convergence leads to the interconnection of the Romanian academic activity with the EU one by COMPATIBILIZATION and ADAPTATION at today's reality of the educational plan, respectively the laboratory program and course information, but also the research projects, in conformity with last generation

technologies and production demands, investment in laboratories and equipment for research and didactic activity and, last but not least, university reorganization, in relation to success models and European recommendations.

(3). The convergence of Romania with EU and, especially, of education, would allow to AVOID individual and institutional de-professionalization and, at the same time, to avoid the crash (because *educational crash means nation's crash!*) taking account of the reduced weight of superior study graduates in Romania and their precarious professional quality in a too large proportion, risking to create a lack of competences in sectors that need a high degree of knowledge and, finally, to limit the economic development of the country.

(4). Convergence in the research field and the participation at international academic life is *de facto* the most stringent, taking account of the disharmonies in the present Romanian research activity (lack of corresponding financing, valuable human resource hemorrhage, reduced attractiveness from financial and professional point of view by lack of last generation endowments, with *de rigueur* exceptions, but that you „count on fingers”) etc.

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