



Integration of Universities of the Republic of Moldova into the European Higher Education Area /EHEA

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Abstract: Higher education has accompanied the evolution of European society over time. At the moment, by virtue of social economic circumstances, universities are considered by society the prime factor, which ensures economic evolution and social cohesion in a knowledge society. The complexity of the socio-economic relations, the effects of the globalization phenomenon generated the need to valorize the possibilities of the university environment by creating the EHEA. The higher education system of the Republic of Moldova joined the Bologna Process in 2005 and has implemented the new conception of higher education. The effects of this change are being first and foremost felt by the direct beneficiaries, the students, who appreciate the success of the implementation of various aspects of the new educational paradigm. The results of a study realized in ten universities in the country allow us to confirm that the universities in the Republic of Moldova are currently part of the EHEA, but it is natural that any process that takes place in a living organism, such as the universities, needs to be permanently improved and updated.

Keywords: *EHEA, Higher education, Integration of universities, New educational conception*

Introduction

The special significance of university education, and of the establishment and development of collaborative relationships in the field of higher education is increasingly influenced by the real capacity and power it has for substantiating and strengthening socio-economic stability, democracy, freedom and peace. The current situation, and especially the perspective of social evolution, in which these fundamental values can become increasingly present in the life of the society, shows us that this possibility becomes reality through the force of the university education, which not only must maintain its strength but, through a qualitative change, be able to multiply its influence in the construction of the new human, social, national, European and universal edifice.

The approach of the problem of the higher education evolution is current in the context of the period we are going through, taking into account the complexity of socio-economic relations and the role of education in

ensuring the quality of life and the process of socio-professional integration. Today, more than ever, the opportunities for quality education must provide the man with opportunities for self-realization. In a world of multiple and rapid changes, only education is the process by which the person can integrate into his/her life environment, through daily behavior and professional activity. Uncertainty and unpredictability of the future, the diversity of the problems to be solved force the 21st century man to continually resort to education and training studies, appreciating this fact as the main means of solving the dilemmas.

We live in an era of rapid evolution of modern technologies, of information development in arithmetic progression and rapid wear of information; the society and economic environment are dissatisfied with the quality of education and vocational training - in these conditions higher education has been recognized by the European community as a means of overcoming the crisis and a creative environment for the forces that will propel the civilization in future. In

order to transform the European economy into a prosperous one, with more and better jobs, with a social environment favorable to personality development, the European universities have undergone a profound reform. These circumstances oblige us to know the process of evolution of the university education, the study and evaluation of the paradigms of this level of education, which reflected the essence of the emergence and development of the university, its development context, the relations between universities and the socio-cultural environment.

Methods

The study carried out by us has an analytical character, the analysis being based on the study of documents and data obtained through the study performed in the field/in practice. The theoretical part, which refers to the conceptual landmarks, is based on the study and analysis of documents related to EHEA, accompanied by the analysis of the factological data, critical appraisals and comparative approaches.

The practical part of the article is based on the questioning method. This method is a quantitative one, but knowing the conceptual basis in combination with the statistical data, allows us to appreciate the existing situation. As a research tool we chose the questionnaire in the form prescribed by E. Babbie in "The Practice of Social Research" (Rubin & Babbie, 2009). Our questionnaire is an ascertaining one, with a descriptive-analytical function, containing systemic questions, and a number of about 100-160 students and 20-50 teachers represents the statistical representative sample for each institution under study, the research comprising ten institutions from the Republic of Moldova: eight state institutions and two private.

We chose namely these institutions, because they are the most representative for the Moldovan university space, by the number of students and teachers involved in the study process, by the fields of vocational training, by the geographical location, as well as by the receptivity and susceptibility to the reforms proposed by the relevant ministry.

Conceptual Landmarks

In previous studies (Dandara & Parhomenco, 2019), we have stated a correlation between education and the socio-economic environment. Higher education, in the acceptance of this term and by expressing the respective level of education, appeared and developed in response to the demands of society. In the second half of the 20th century, there was noted the consolidation of national socio-economic systems, strengthening of national education systems, elaboration of educational concepts and educational policies in correlation with the needs of developing economic systems.

At the same time, there already appears a contradiction between education in general, higher education, in particular, and the socio-economic environment. This contradiction (noted by Coombs in the 1970s) is known as the education crisis. The essence of the contradiction lies in the dissatisfaction expressed by the world community (a fact ascertained by the UNESCO Commission) regarding the level of professional training of vocational education graduates, including higher education, and the ability of graduates to integrate into the labor market and contribute to the evolution of the economy and to influence the quality of life.

Meanwhile, at the socio-cultural and economic level, the phenomenon of globalization starts. The transfer of knowledge, the efficient use of resources (first of all human resources), is perceived by the European community as a chance of consolidation and revitalization of the European economy within the parameters corresponding to the 21st century society. In this sense, universities and higher education is appreciated as a primary means of achieving development desires.

The stage of establishing the European system of Higher Education starts in the 1990s of the 20th century. For this process there were premises such as: the technical-scientific revolution that generated the phenomenon of globalization facilitates indirect communication; the predominance of the economic interest at regional/global scale in relation to the national ideological provisions; the intensification of social mobility; the demographic crisis in Europe; the appreciation of education as the main source of overcoming economic crises; the internationalization of the economy; the strengthening of the position of international languages.

The concept of higher education, called to revitalize the European economy, is called the Bologna Process. This name is accepted on the basis of a historical event (the anniversary of the University of Bologna), but, in our opinion, it was also wished to emphasize the fact that the unique European Higher Education Area has traditions.

During the years of establishing the European Higher Education Area, the European community has developed a mechanism focused, on the one hand, on the key ideas of the conception, deduced from the

pressing needs of the existence of the European community, and on the other, there have also been formulated the modalities of intervention at three-dimensional level: regional European, national and institutional. This approach gave the concept an applicable character and made it functional right from the moment of the constitution intentions.

At the basis of the current conception of higher education, the following principles are placed:

- The principle of using/valorizing the existing international/regional structures, the normative framework and the practical experience;
- The principle of receptivity of education to socio-economic issues;
- The principle of establishing unity on the basis of diversity;
- The principle of openness and flexibility;
- The principle of the prospective character of education in the context of permanent changes in society.

The process of establishing the Bologna Process is launched through the Lisbon Convention (1997), based on an economic objective: the rational use of human capital and labor. This convention is imposed in the process with the title: *Regarding the recognition of attestations obtained in higher education in the states of the European region*. The argument in favor of this decision becomes the key idea of the meeting: “Being aware that the right to education is a human right and that higher education which, instrumentally, is for the purpose and progress of knowledge, represents an exceptional goods of cultural and scientific importance for both individuals and society, considering that higher education must play a vital role in promoting peace, mutual understanding and

tolerance, as well as in strengthening mutual trust between peoples and nationalities” (Lisbon Convention, 1997).

From what was stipulated, we deduce that at the beginning of the 1990s, there appeared the need to correlate some activities in order to set up a transnational educational system, which could have ensured the opening and valorization of the academic and scientific potential at regional level.

The actions taken up to 1999 can be considered as a preparatory stage, prior to the actual conception, which aimed to adjust higher education under several aspects: at the level of legislation (normative aspect); structural and procedural aspects, in order to create the European Higher Education Area. The moment of transition from the preparation period to the actual confirmation of the Bologna conception can be considered the meeting of the four ministers of education, which took place in Sorbonne, on the occasion of the university's anniversary and the announcement of the declaration. “We are the ones who need to strengthen and consolidate the intellectual, cultural, social and technical dimensions of our continent. An open European Higher Education Area offers a large number of beneficial perspectives. While respecting our diversity, it also calls for continuous efforts to remove barriers and develop a framework for teaching and studying/research, which would increase mobility and closer cooperation” (Sorbonne Declaration, 1998). The declaration also establishes the benchmarks of structure and procedure of unification, such as recognition of titles, progressive harmonization of structures and carrying out studies in cycles.

The core of the Bologna Concept is stipulated in the *Magna Charta Universitatum*, signed by the four ministers of education, which configures the following ideas: the future of humanity depends on education, and the universities are meant to carry out this process; universities must ensure for the younger generations a cultural, social, economic future through university studies and preparation for further training; universities, through education, must ensure a balance between the natural and the social environment (*Magna Charta Universitatum*).

The Bologna concept strengthens its positions through the Bologna Declaration '99, “*The European Higher Education Area*”, by the Joint Declaration of Ministers of Education from Europe, agreed in Bologna, June 19, 1999 (The Bologna Declaration was signed by the Ministers of Education from 29 European countries on the occasion of the CRE/Conference of Confederation of Rectors of the European Union, held in Bologna, June 18-19, 1999). The statement contained the following message: “A Europe of Knowledge is now unanimously recognized as an irreplaceable factor for social and human development and as an indispensable component for strengthening and enriching the quality of being a citizen of Europe, capable of providing its citizens with the skills necessary to face the challenges of the new millennium, together with awareness of common values and belonging to a common social and cultural space. The vitality and efficiency of any civilization can be measured by the way its culture attracts other countries. We must make sure that the European higher education system accumulates a degree of attraction on a global level equal to our extraordinary cultural and scientific traditions” (Bologna Declaration, 1999). At the procedural level, measures

are taken to adjust the normative and systemic framework. We appreciate a better comparability and compatibility of education systems through the following:

- Adoption of a system of diplomas easy to compare and recognize by implementing the idea of the diploma supplement, in order to promote the employability of the citizens of Europe and the international competitiveness of the higher education system.
- Adoption of a system essentially based on two cycles, “undergraduate” and “graduate”. Access to the second cycle will require the successful completion of the first cycle studies, which may take at least three years. The diploma received after graduation of the first cycle will also be relevant for the European labor market as a certain level of qualification. The second cycle should lead to the master and/or doctoral diploma, as is the case in many European countries.
- Establishment of a credit system equivalent to the ECTS system as an opportunity to promote the idea of students mobility all over the world. The credits could also be obtained in contexts that do not involve higher education, which involve lifelong learning, as long as they are recognized by the university.
- Promotion of mobility by overcoming obstacles to the effective exercise of free movement, focusing in particular on the following accents for students: access to studies and training opportunities and related services; for teachers, researchers and administrative staff: the recognition and valorization of the periods spent in the European context through research, teaching and training, without prejudice to their statutory rights.

- Promotion of European cooperation in ensuring the quality of a vision related to the idea of developing comparable criteria and methodologies. Promotion of the necessary European dimensions related to higher education, especially regarding curricular development, inter-institutional cooperation, mobility schemes and integrated programs of study, training and research.

At the base of the functioning mechanism of the European conception is placed the respect of the cultural and linguistic diversity and the university autonomy. At this stage, the mechanism of Bologna Process consolidation, the development bodies of the conception, is also established. The supreme body of the process becomes the annual/biannual conference, the executive body is the permanent secretariat, which monitors the fulfilment of the conceptual provisions of the conference, identifies the priorities and functional aspects of the process.

The following biennial conferences diversify the conceptual aspects and mechanisms for the creation of the European Higher Education Area/EHEA.

- Promoting mobility;
- Promoting European cooperation for quality assurance; the consolidation of the European Quality Assurance Network in Higher Education (ENQA);
- Promoting the European dimension in higher education in order to improve the development of modules, courses and programs with European content, orientation and organization;
- Lifelong learning (permanent education);
- Higher education institutions and students;
- Promoting the attractiveness of the European Higher Education Area.

The issue of strengthening European cooperation in the field of professional training is systematically addressed in the “*Copenhagen Declaration*” (2002), where the defining emphases of the relationship between the labor market, social partners and vocational training through technical and higher vocational education are set on certain strategic dimensions. The conceptual aspects of the Bologna Process are focused at this meeting on the following key idea: “In Europe, the economic and social development of the last decade has demonstrated the growing need for a European dimension of education and training. Moreover, the transition to a knowledge-based economy, capable of sustainable economic growth, with more and better jobs, with a higher degree of social cohesion, brings new challenges in the field of human resources development” (Copenhagen Declaration, 2002).

The Copenhagen Declaration refers, in large part, to the importance and role of education as an integral part of social and economic policies, as a tool for strengthening European competitiveness in the world and as a guarantee of ensuring the cohesion of our societies and the full development of their citizens. Based on these ideas, the Bologna Concept emphasizes:

- European dimension of higher education;
- Transparency, information and guidance. Implementation and rationalization of networks and media, including the integration of existing instruments, such as European CVs, completions of certificates or diplomas (diploma supplement);
- Access to education and training and transferability and recognition of competences and qualifications, to support the geographical and occupational mobility of the citizens of Europe;

- Recognition of competences and qualifications.

Through the Berlin Communiqué, the ministers reaffirmed the importance of the social dimension of the Bologna process. The following findings are based on conceptual ideas: the need to consolidate a knowledge-based Europe. The purpose of this action is to preserve the cultural richness and linguistic diversity of Europe, based on the legacy of different traditions, as well as to educate the potential for innovation, economic and social development through an all-inclusive cooperation between the European institutions of higher education (Berlin Communiqué, 2003).

Through the Berlin conference, the Bologna Process reinforces the conceptual landmarks. The ones with reference to the essence of education and the specificity of the relation of this phenomenon with the socio-cultural and economic context are emphasized. In this sense it is emphasized and it is insisted on strengthening the continuous character of education. The influence of the phenomenon of globalization becomes obvious, by opening the unique educational space for students from other regions of the world. The Bergen Communiqué (2005), emphasizes the following:

- The social dimension that includes measures taken by governments to help students, especially those from disadvantaged social groups, as well as to provide guidance and counseling services to widen access to higher education;
- Recognition of diplomas and periods of study.

One of the basic priorities set up at this conference is the consolidation of the two pillars of higher

education: education and research, which constitute the essence of the activity of a university and make it distinct from other educational institutions.

The London conference (2007) expresses a current reaction of the European space to the cardinal phenomena, which are emphasized on the world map. The title of this meeting reflects the essence of the message: “*Making of the European Higher Education Area - a Response to Globalization Challenges*”, in which it is said: “We are aware of the importance of the influence that higher education institutions exert on the development of society. For these reasons, our purpose is to provide the necessary resources to the higher education institutions in order to continue meeting the proposed objectives. These objectives are aimed at: preparing students for life as active citizens in a democratic society; preparing students for their future career and personal development; creating and maintaining a broad, advanced knowledge base; stimulating research and innovation” (London Communiqué, 2007).

These key ideas reformulate the conceptual benchmarks of the Bologna Process. In addition to the quality of education, the social dimension and mobility, the need for continuous education is reaccentuated, there appear new ideas such as:

- Doctorate as a cycle of higher education;
- The European Higher Education Area in a global context;
- Employment in the labor field and the matching of studies with the demands of the labor market.

The following idea is emphasized at this meeting: “Since 2010 will represent the transition from the

Bologna process to the European Higher Education Area, this crossroads will be an opportunity to reaffirm our decision to consider higher education as an essential element in strengthening society through its own forces at national and European level. 2010 will also mean the possibility of directing the evolution of the education system in higher education on a path that goes beyond current problems, transforming them into possibilities of confronting the demands of the future” (London Communiqué, 2007).

The meeting in Bucharest (2012) takes place in the context of the European Higher Education Area. The following actions are reiterated as conceptual conceptual provisions:

- Increasing of access to higher education;
- Social dimension of higher education;
- Student-centering;
- Financing and governance;
- Increasing of employment opportunities to serve Europe's needs;
- Focusing on the aims of education (diploma supplement, CNC);
- Mobility for better learning.

Academic and professional recognition, including recognition of non-formal and informal learning, is situated in the center of EHEA (Bucharest Communiqué, 2012).

The following conferences, from Yerevan and Paris, focus on the following:

- Improvement of the quality and relevance of learning and teaching;
- Stimulation of the professional insertion capacity of the graduates throughout the active life, which derives from the rapid change of the labor markets, influenced by the evolution of technology,

the emergence of new jobs, as well as the increase of employment and self-employment opportunities.

Taking into account the European and global realities, the European Higher Education System tends to make the system more inclusive, because the population is diverse, the migration is rather pronounced, and the demographic changes are profound.

Generalizing the current evolution of the concept of higher education, we delimit the following stages:

1. Preparation stage for the launch of the Bologna Process 1997-1999;
2. Stage of constitution of the Bologna Process conception 1999-2003;
3. Stage of consolidation of the Bologna Process conception 2003-2010;
4. Stage of the unique European Space of Higher Education 2010 - present.

Each of these stages has certain characteristics and its role in shaping the new university paradigm. It is certain that these stages were prompt and adequate responses of higher education to the demands of the socio-cultural environment. European higher education accepts the role of promoter of European civilization and economy; in this period it becomes a driving force for the evolution of the European region. The term paradigm is used by us, in this context, as a “model” of higher education, ideological and functional construction, conception. The syntagm Bologna Process is perceived by us as synonymous with the syntagm Bologna Paradigm. The applicability of this paradigm lies in the ability to promote general, functional principles at European level, on the one hand, and the possibility of adapting to the traditions of national education systems, on the other.

The direct correlation of the evolution of the higher education system with the socio-economic environment, the regional and global problems, have strengthened the prospective character of the higher education.

Through this conception, the European society has recognized the priority and the primordality of the education in relation to the socio-economic environment.

The Republic of Moldova is part of the Bologna Process and therefore has accepted the implementation of the respective concept since 2005 (Bergen Communiqué, 2005). With the accession to the Bologna Process, the universities in our country start the process of replacing the old paradigm with the new paradigm.

Results

The Republic of Moldova has undergone a multitude of radical changes at all levels of society, and higher education, in particular, has been the most metamorphosed since the 1990s. By joining the Bologna Process in 2005, the Republic of Moldova is committed to implementing the conceptual provisions of the new paradigm of higher education, which creates changes in education legislation, system structure and the education process.

In order to identify the results of our country's accession to the EHEA, we conducted a practical study, involving students, teachers and universities. During the study, over 1300 students from different universities in the country (ten institutions) were questioned, but we were able to validate, about 1240 questionnaires and about 270 teachers. Further, we

will present the results of the integration of the higher education system from the Republic of Moldova into the EHEA, from the perspective of the students' vision. The method of study was the questionnaire, using a questionnaire developed by us, the items to which were formulated, starting from the conceptual landmarks of the Bologna Process conception (access to studies and massification of higher education; motivation for higher studies; attitude towards education based by cycles; academic mobility; academic credit system). Some of the results of this study, focused on a certain conceptual idea, will be presented below.

Regarding the access to studies and the massification of higher education, the students had different opinions. Some of them felt that not all young people who want to be students in universities deserve this, because they do not always have a reason for the quality of their studies and may not be worth it, because they do not have the necessary skills and training. About 19% of the respondents consider that the higher education must have an elitist character, emphasizing the intellectual elite: university students become the best graduates of the general education. But more than half of those surveyed believe that higher education should be accessible to all, should be given a chance to all.

The next variable in the research is *motivation*, which is the reason that makes young people to attend a faculty at a higher education institution. According to the data obtained, the chance to make a career is the most often chosen reason why young people go to university, and namely 69% checked this point, followed, with a major gap, by the statement that it is good to have a diploma of higher education, chosen by

17% of the respondents. 6% of the respondents consider that university studies are a period when young people decide how to live their lives, 6% also consider it prestigious to be a student, and 2% say that young people come to universities because they need to communicate.

Equally interesting is the opinion of the students regarding *the perspective offered by the higher studies*. 55% of the respondents have a favorable view of the benefits of higher education, 46% of the respondents stated that young people with higher education have a potential for the country, and 9% mentioned that university studies influence the culture level of the young people. At the other pole, 43% of the respondents, in total, come with the following answers: 30% say that university studies are not enough to be a good specialist, anyway they will learn in the workplace; 10% say that higher education does not ensure social integration, it matters how you manage in life; and 2% of students consider that higher education is outdated by social progress. The 30% of respondents who consider higher education insufficient to train a good specialist, highlight a gap in the relationship between the competences offered by the institutions and the skills needed in the workplace. However, this number represents 30 percent of our sample, respectively, around one third of the number of students in the country, and the decrease of this percentage would require the quickest involvement of the institutional and relevant management in order to correlate more efficiently and effectively the higher education and labor market.

The research also addresses the problem of *the division of higher education into cycles*.

Thus, of the entire sample surveyed, 82% of students consider that education in cycles is an advantage for students and only 18% see something negative in it.

Thus, based on the data obtained, 65% perceive the education in cycles as a chance to correct the route of professional training according to personal interests and problems, or one to choose between different fields of vocational training at the bachelor and master, these distributed respectively - 29% and 36%. Therefore, we can conclude that the maturity from the point of view of the awareness of the field of each student's professional training, as well as the selection of the correct route in each person's career is realized only at the end of the bachelor's (lycenate) cycle.

Another important principle of the Bologna Process is *the involvement of students* in the academic process, a phenomenon confirmed in our study by the manifestation of 28% of the respondents who believe that the students have real possibilities to get involved in the life of the university, as well as the 24% of the respondents who say that students' participation in the institution's senates and faculty councils allows them to really promote the interests of their colleagues. Here join the 14% of students who believe that students are actively involved in the life of the university. At the other pole are 28% of the respondents who have concluded that students' rights to self-government are only declarations, in reality everything is decided by the rectorates and deans, as well as the 4% of students who said that only the best students are involved in self-government.

Starting from the representativeness of the sample, we consider that the results reflect a real situation. The answers given by the students emphasize the possibility of participating in the life of the university.

The real rights offered by the existing normative framework are highlighted, which does not elucidate the de facto situation regarding student activism and their level of involvement.

Obtaining of *the academic credits*, being the business card of the Bologna Process, initially established as a tool for measuring mobility within international programs, were subsequently taken over by the Bologna mechanisms to measure the various training stages. Thus, according to the results, 28% of the students considered the academic credits as formal, not having a real role for the vocational training and the evolution in the career. However, some students consider the credits to be of real benefit - 19%; based on credits they can keep a clear record of success - 10%, as well as credits are an effective mechanism for recognizing studies abroad - 19%. 11% of the respondents said that based on the credits they can return to studies after a certain pause, and 10% - that on the basis of the credits they can choose disciplines according to the interests and prospects of employment. These results prove that the selective principle of the academic path is expanding, as well as that taking breaks within an internship, or abandoning studies at a certain stage, does not prevent students from resuming their study activity.

The transformation of the student into the subject of vocational training and the promotion of the idea of focusing the higher education on the student is found in the conceptual dimension of the Bologna Process regarding the change of the correlation between the hours of direct contact and *the individual working hours*. This conceptual provision also expresses the need to individualize the academic routes from the perspective of integration into the labor market. We

consider that the respective principle of the Bologna Process corresponds to the socio-economic realities such as: the massification of higher education, the instability and fluctuation in the labor market, the diversity of the preparation in the general education, etc. It is important how it is applied and realized in the higher education system of the Republic of Moldova. In addition to the quantitative results obtained through questionnaires and the attempts to interpret them, there are multiple subtleties that make it difficult to assess the quality of university studies in various institutions. Through the answers given the students express a certain appreciation of the change produced at the system level. Thus, 36% believe that the division of hours increases the quality of vocational training, 23% say that individual work allows individualization and motivates students, only 11% believe that dividing the hours in direct contact and individual working hours reduces the time required for teaching, while 15% of respondents value individual work as a waste of time and additional involvement. However, 12% of the students consider that the indication of the individual working hours in the curricula is a formality, which neither the students nor the teachers usually do. We find this finding alarming, because it directly reflects an existing problem at the system level: one of the basic conceptual ideas of higher education is not fully realized. We know very well that European universities are gaining in quality and attracting students, as a priority, by dynamically organizing individual working hours, using them to emphasize the practical nature of higher education and preparing students for integration into the professional environment.

The approximation of higher education to the labor market has become a desire on which it is constantly

insisting and it also becomes the Bologna logo after 2000, when the university goals are reoriented and the universities multiply their functions, the ergonomics of higher education is expanding, and the technocratic society demands the restructuring of the university contents. Following the analysis of the data on the relation of the university with the labor market, we can mention that 39% of the students consider that the internships are a real exercise of accumulation of professional competences, which is encouraging, and 18% of the students think that the universities permanently modernize study programs according to the changes in the economic environment. At the same time, we find doubt of some students concerning the relevance of the professional training according to the requirements of the labor market. Only 13% of the respondents said that higher education corresponds to the demands of the labor market, while 23% of students believe that in universities is taught an outdated content, and some teachers do not know the real changes in the professional environment. This figure is not at all encouraging, and everyone's efforts should focus on minimizing this problem through different actions to bring the labor market closer to the university space and vice versa. Of course, the universities of the Republic of Moldova are going to persevere in this regard, emphasizing the quality of the academic environment, as a means of vocational training and personal development, but at the same time, we are aware that such problems are also socio-economic in nature, are generated by social realities, by lack of levers between economic agents, or other social entities and the academic space.

The data presented referred to some aspects of the implementation of the new conception of higher education, which allow us to outline a general picture

of the specificity of the integration of higher education from the Republic of Moldova in the EHEA. We can say that all the universities in the country have implemented the conceptual provisions, which has led to the change of the functioning of the universities in the conditions of opening and democratizing the society. The benefits are felt by the students, but at the same time there are some moments that need to be improved.

Conclusions

The implementation of the provisions of the Bologna Process conception is based on the general principles, which are the same for the whole European area of higher education, but their application is adapted to the particularities of the university system in the Republic of Moldova. This approach, we believe, is generally valid for all education systems in the states, which have joined the new paradigm.

Conceptual provisions are transposed into practice through strategies and actions of higher education institutions. From the findings, we deduce that the results of the implementation depend on the particularities of the university environment and its organizational culture. The realization of concrete conceptual aspects, the students' attitude towards various aspects of higher education, is influenced by the size of the university, the profile of the institution of higher education, the traditions regarding the demands on studies, the particularities of the integration of the graduates in the professional environment, the location of the university (in the capital, or in region).

In general, the higher education system in the Republic of Moldova has accepted the principles of the Bologna

Process conception and has implemented them in universities. Students have a positive attitude towards the new paradigm. We conclude that the essential conceptual provisions, such as: organization of higher education in cycles, use of transferable credits of studies, academic mobility, are implemented, and the benefits are realized and appreciated by students. At the same time, students, as direct beneficiaries of the new conception, identify gaps and difficulties faced by universities. We consider that, as a result of stereotypes and traditional strategies for carrying out the study process, it is more difficult to implement the provision regarding the active and authentic involvement of the student in the life of the university and in his/her own vocational training. Often the individual work is neglected, or has a formal character. Starting from the results of the research, we conclude that the results of the implementation of the new paradigm of higher education, found by us, are also influenced by the appreciation of higher education by the society (students and their families being its exponents), appreciation of the role and usefulness of higher studies for socio-professional integration. The attitude of the society definitely influences the attitude of the students towards various aspects of higher education and how they are implemented.

Although the sample involved in the research was representative according to the number of institutions involved, their geographical location, the number of students, and as the variables of the research served us the conceptual provisions of the Bologna Process paradigm, however the results obtained should not generate judgments of definitive value. The information we obtain is based primarily on quantitative research methods and outlines an overview of the functioning of higher education in the

country. Each of the variables studied is the basis of complex processes, which would justify the formulation of narrower research problems, focused

on the application of both quantitative and qualitative methods.

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