

POINT OF VIEW OF THE UNIVERSITY OF BUCHAREST ON THE PACKAGE OF PROPOSALS FOR THE TRANSFORMATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION

The point of view of the University of Bucharest on the package of proposals for the transformation of higher education considers the following three key aspects:

- The concept of joint European Degrees/Diplomas,
- Feasibility of introducing a legal status for European university alliances,
- Establishment of an *Observatory for Higher Education*, responsible for monitoring the implementation of the strategy.

Comments and general proposals on the package of proposals for the transformation of higher education and the stated issues:

- New steps to modernize the European Higher Education Area and strengthen transnational cooperation in the field of education invite higher education institutions to a comprehensive exercise in reconsidering existing practices in learning and teaching processes, focusing on societal challenges, ensuring a sustainable and transformative impact on the future European approaches. Through these approaches, the academic context transcends the regional level and proposes a European educational brand in the global education market, promoting new forms of transnational collaboration, based on mutual trust, shared values, and principles, through mechanism adapted to new academic paradigms.
- The future European academic area can be reconfigured and strengthened through cooperation, innovation, modernization, interconnectivity, commitment, ensuring an optimal climate for the most important projects for the transformation of European higher

education, as shown by the European Strategy for Universities and the proposal for a Recommendation on building bridges for effective European cooperation in higher education.

- In this context, universities play a crucial role in supporting the consolidation of an educational milieu open to all students, in which transnational cooperation ensures not only inclusion, excellence, diversity, attractiveness and competitiveness, but also contributes to providing concrete solutions to real problems that society and members of the community are facing, whether we are talking about the need for equal opportunities for access to education, whether we are considering climate change, the challenges posed by democratic values, the digital transformation or the increased dynamics of labor market demands. In relation to these perspectives, the transnational academic communities (especially the Alliances of European Universities) are becoming the most important promoters of change, both by proposing new solutions to the problems they identify, but especially by testing the main European reform projects: flexible learning pathways leading to micro-credentials, making academic curricula and learning processes more flexible, opening up the educational offer to non-traditional students, increasing mobility and cultural exchanges, and even developing common curricula and European Diplomas.
- The participation of universities in this large-scale project at regional level cannot be achieved without relevant support from the European Commission (in terms of sustainable sources of funding, operationalized European tools, intensive dialogue with decision-makers, consultations with stakeholders) and from Member States (legislative and methodological harmonization in line with the needs identified in the various innovation initiatives proposed at European level, ensuring clear financial and structural tools at

national level to stimulate excellence and innovation, providing additional sources of competitive funding for universities involved in these transformational processes).

Comments and proposals applied to the experience of the University of Bucharest within the European CIVIS Alliance, with a direct role in European curriculum innovation, the construction of European Diplomas and the legal statutes of the Alliances:

- The University of Bucharest, through the CIVIS Alliance, is on the list of European universities that provides an optimal framework for implementing the most important academic innovation projects in Europe, both in terms of proposed and supported strategic directions, and especially through the design and implementation of tools to ensure the alignment of the CIVIS Alliance and the University of Bucharest to the development directions proposed by the package of proposals for the transformation of higher education.
- The University of Bucharest, through the CIVIS Alliance, proposed a new vision on the European academic curriculum, starting from the design of small learning units and the flexibility of the learning path (with emphasis on multiple delivery formats and the recognition of learning provided by ECTS credits and volume up to modular educational components (based on the pattern of “micro-credentials”), such as study programs, ensuring an optimal framework for the construction of European Diplomas within the alliance, on all three levels of studies. This new curriculum construction is based on concepts such as “building blocks” and “stickability”, ensuring a process of recognition and integration of small learning components in the largest one, but also the individual recognition of all learning activities through the ECTS credits system.
- The University of Bucharest considers that the efforts to reconfigure the European higher education area and strengthen the various forms of transnational cooperation in the field of

education need a new vision on academic curriculum construction, based on modularization, learning flexibility, and ensuring the optimal framework for building European Degrees/Diplomas, as labels of excellence of new joint study programs at European level, where mobility, societal challenges, innovative pedagogies and inter-/trans disciplinary to be basic components. A multi-faceted curriculum, based on modularization, automatic recognition and transferability of learning and the transformative dimension of the educational process, is the only one that can ensure a sustainable impact of European academic innovation and its inclusion in a global educational market, more competitive and dynamic than before.

- The University of Bucharest welcomes the efforts of European institutions, especially those of the European Commission, to propose the construction of academic innovation through an approach that develops both on the existing framework of the Bologna Process and on the results of current and future analyzes, on which basis the “European innovation toolbox” will be designed, constructed on pilot projects and enhanced mutual learning. The same approach is seen in the European directions on the construction of the European Diplomas, as a label of excellence on common transnational curricula, but which does not diminish the value of national diplomas and certifications. On the contrary, the new approaches aim to strengthen existing instruments, such as the ECTS credit system, the European Quality Assurance Standards (ESG) or the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), rather than reconfiguring them into a broader landscape and empowering them for future approaches.
- The University of Bucharest, through the CIVIS Alliance, joins European universities in the extensive pilot project of European Diplomas, already having the consolidated experience of designing and implementing an innovative European academic curriculum

that provides a concrete framework for the addition of European Diplomas in certification processes of joint study programs, based on transparent quality assurance standards and procedures, by cooperating with the partner universities in the alliance, but also with the universities in the other European alliances. Through this, the University of Bucharest expresses its opinion that the alliances of European universities represent the most suitable framework for piloting the main European higher education innovation projects, building on the experience gained in the last three years, but also on the strategic directions assumed at the alliance level.

- The University of Bucharest considers that the main challenges that Member States and higher education institutions must overcome are linked to legislative harmonization, which allows the development of joint curricula and the recognition (even automatic) of learning in these educational activities, to the configuration of a coherent and inclusive framework for quality assurance of educational processes related to joint curricula (by linking quality assurance processes at national level to European standards and by adopting at national level the principles of the European approach to quality assurance of joint curricula), but also to uniform compliance with existing and adopted systems and instruments (such as the various instruments of the Bologna Process).
- The University of Bucharest, through the CIVIS Alliance, considers the legal statutes of European university alliances to be valuable tools for ensuring a strong transnational academic identity for alliances, in order to ensure an active cooperative climate, guaranteed by a clear set of mutual principles and values, enabling them to share common resources and services, inter-operational platforms for joint and mixed learning activities, strengthening transnational cooperation and building common European Diplomas.

- The University of Bucharest considers that the identification of the most appropriate forms of legal representation of European university alliances must ensure the continuity of the individual identities of all higher education institutions included in alliances, respecting the cultural particularities and academic specifications of each, but responding to the needs of more accentuated cooperation. In this sense, within the CIVIS Alliance, the University of Bucharest has been actively involved in the identification and design of the legal status at the level of the alliance, meant to ensure an empowered European identity, representing the interests of all partner universities. However, it is important to underline the fact that the legal status of alliances is not a universal panacea for the challenges facing alliances, as some of them are specific regional or national issues, which can only be addressed through systemic, structural, step by step approaches.
- The University of Bucharest expresses its readiness to join the efforts of the European Commission and other regional and national bodies that aim to build scenarios to identify possible forms that the legal statutes of European university alliances may take soon, to explore their applicability in alliances and the relationship between them and the prospects for the development and innovation of the European educational area. Thus, we consider that the steps proposed in the process of identifying possible forms that legal statutes can take, by investigating existing tools (such as the European Groups of Territorial Cooperation), designing scenarios and proposing optimal models, can ensure a clear and effective process, to ensure a harmonized European framework for alliances seeking legal status. Thus, we welcome the Commission's initiative to leave this decision in the hands of the alliances, without imposing adherence to a form of legal identity and to constrain this decision.

- The University of Bucharest considers that the establishment of a European team of specialists/experts in the field following the European strategy and the innovation directions of the European academic milieu (such as the innovation of the academic curriculum, the management of study programs, the reconfiguration of learning and teaching processes, etc.) can ensure the role of “Observer” for higher education responsible for monitoring the implementation of the targeted strategic initiatives. Thus, a team of excellence, with the role of working group/supervision/implementation at European level/FOR EU level/alliance level, represents a vital need for the success of these development directions, having the possibility to consider it even a genuine professionalization of the selected experts and ensuring a sustainable structure in this regard.
- In view of the intense experience already gained in the transnational cooperation processes within the CIVIS Alliance and the direct role in providing precise directions for innovation of the educational components at European level, in the direction of creating European Diplomas and adopting micro-credentials in the formal academic curriculum, the University of Bucharest actively joins these approaches and expresses its support for all future actions in the path of the development of the European academic milieu.