

1.8. Strategy for higher education development in the Republic of Bulgaria – problems and trends

The active global processes that took place in the end of the 20th and in the early 21st century, which embraced the world economy, were greatly affected by the higher education itself. It is a measure of the quality of society and a condition for active innovative development of the individual states economy. Therefore, the study of the educational activities state in Bulgaria as well as many internal and external factors that affect the educational process quality are one of the main priorities in the work of the Ministry of Education and Science, universities and higher schools.

Current analyses and assessments of higher education in Bulgaria, information from the public register of the National Agency for Evaluation and Accreditation, as well as internal self-assessments in universities, show that the education system needs total changes in accordance with the Lisbon concept and the European Higher Education Strategy for the period 2014-2020 biennium¹⁰⁰. This requires an assessment of the role and importance of knowledge as the main element of education and organization to provide knowledge according to the maxim of "learning for life" and in accordance with the European requirements for the integration of universities within a community, as well as to ensure the mobility of trainees.

To create a new strategy for higher education development, it is first of all necessary to point out and analyze the current shortcomings in the education system and to establish the availability of resources that limit the possibility of change. Another significant element in the definition of a strategy is the comprehension and acceptance of the main trends of the European Strategy for the Development of Higher Education. The combination of the above elements, referring to the level of educational activity achieved in countries, is a prerequisite for drawing general conclusions and to define a realistic strategy, provided with the necessary resources - human, material, financial and informational.

1. The starting position. Prosperity of society and the economy depends on the education of people, since the total changes caused by globalization are based on knowledge. The main characteristics of the present society, which make it competitive, are primarily connected with "infinity" and the availability of knowledge and with the increased mobility of educated people¹⁰¹. It is supported by the intensive development of information systems that facilitate communication and increase the speed of information exchange.

¹⁰⁰Богданова М. Стратегически аспекти на икономиката на знанието в България // Маргарита Богданова // Сборник докладов. – Свищов: СА «Д.А.Ценов», 2014. – С. 55.

¹⁰¹Дракър П. Мениджмънт в следващото общество / Питър Дракър. –София: Изд. «Класика и Стил» ООД, 2006. – С. 194–195.

The system of higher education management and the success of the modernization process are determined by many factors, an important place among which is the availability of information on innovative managerial experience, possession of modern management technologies, and the availability of a team of trained and interested education managers¹⁰². The strategy for higher education development should be based on new values and priorities that correspond to the real needs of Bulgarian society and the economic development of the country. At the same time, the mentioned European educational values and the needs of international business should not be ignored.

The main and most important task of the Strategy for higher education development is to identify the relationship and dependence between knowledge and business and create conditions for their mutual enrichment. Its solution is connected with the definition of the concept of "strategy" for higher education development, outlining its development priorities in the face of strong competition from powerful prestigious European universities and their active marketing to attract Bulgarian youth to study there.

In accordance with the directives of the European Council and the needs of business in the national economy, many reforms have been implemented in Bulgaria's higher education. The most ambitious reforms were related to changes in the Higher Education Act and the Academic Staff Development Act in Bulgaria. On the basis of the implemented changes in these two acts, the conditions for facilitation of public access to higher education and equal access to it for people of all age groups have been created. The new normative documents emphasize the quality of the educational process and the quality of acquired knowledge, competences and skills. To monitor and evaluate them, an independent institution, the National Agency for Evaluation and Accreditation, has been established.

The Agency acts according to the following principles:

- the unified criteria for evaluation of Bulgarian universities and higher schools;
- harmonization of national systems for quality assessment with relevant ones in European universities;
- creating common base to compare and report on the quality of educational activities development in different universities;
- independence and autonomy of the National Agency for the Assessment and its experts accreditation.

2. The state of higher education of the Republic of Bulgaria. The analysis of control result carried out at universities and higher education institutions makes it

¹⁰²Азизова Р. Направления по совершенствованию системы кадров подготовки в высших учебных заведениях / Рейхан Азизова // Сборник докладов. – Свищов: СА «Д.А.Ценов», 2015. – С. 274

possible to extract the following important generalizing conclusions about the present state of higher education:

- after the educational reform in Bulgaria, 16 private universities were registered, and together with the state universities, their total number reached 52 universities;

- during the first 8-10 years there was a serious shortage of habilitated teachers in private universities, which in some cases prevented their accreditation;

- still there are significant problems with changes the way of teaching - it is difficult to overcome the classical form of lectures and seminars, especially by older teachers;

- some universities don't have audio and video teaching facilities, which makes their work more difficult;

- extracurricular learning, as an independent work and as a process of self-study, is not at the required level, as in universities and higher schools there is no policy for out-of-class work and there are no traditions motivating students to independent work¹⁰³;

- in some universities, students are oriented to participate in project studies, which can be assessed as a good start;

- expansion in higher education, after its liberalization, was expressed in an increase in the number of students, and although there were financial constraints (limits) for both state and private universities and higher schools, they were constantly violated (especially with paid professions), but the state could not be found tool for their regulation;

- there has been a serious violation of "the number of students being trained - the number of teachers who are habilitated" ratio (For example, according to the Information Support Center of the Ministry of Education and Science, in 2014 only 143,065 students studied in public and private universities and higher schools, and the number of habilitated teachers was 7,617);

- it has been stated the backlog in training in new professions related to high-technology and innovative activities;

- effective mechanisms of interaction between universities and business have not been created, as a consumer of personnel, as between teaching students and research activities of teachers;

- the rapid increase in the number of students in conditions of financial difficulties, insufficient material resources, the lack of habilitated teachers, especially

¹⁰³Станчева Н. и др. За ролята на висшите училища и качеството на подготовката на студентите / Недка Станчева и др. // Управление и устойчиво развитие. – София, 2008. – № 3–4. – С. 443.

in the field of engineering and technical specialties, etc., questioned the quality of the proposed training¹⁰⁴;

- underestimated control by the state has been ascertained in the transformation of specialized higher schools into universities and in the case of improper training in attractive and not characteristic specialties and professions;

- a holistic strategy for the development of higher education have not been developed in the context of Bulgaria's membership in the EU and increased competition in the international education market.

The above mentioned negative characteristics in the higher education system reveal the problems which demand the work both from the Ministry of Education and Science and the National Agency for Evaluation and Accreditation as well as from universities and higher schools. The goal is to improve the quality of the educational and research process, as well as the knowledge and competencies that students receive.

Higher education in Bulgaria has a number of positive characteristics that should be further developed through an appropriate strategy.

From the very beginning of the reorganization and restructuring of the economy, including education, there have been created the following conditions for:

- development of private universities and higher schools (about 30% of the total number and about 23% of students);

- integration of Bulgarian universities and higher education institutions with EU education institutions and introduction of training in joint programs with leading European universities;

- ensuring the academic mobility of teachers and students in the European programs;

- the introduction of a system for the accumulation and transfer of academic credits in accordance with the model of the European ECTS;

- increasing the autonomy of universities and higher schools for the habilitation of their own teaching staff and for training doctoral students, as regulated by changes in the Law on the Development of Academic Staff in Bulgaria;

- improving the financial condition of public universities and higher schools by providing them with the opportunity to organize paid tuition, subject to certain conditions;

- development of a system for evaluation in accordance with European standards and criteria.

3. Definition and content of Strategy for Higher Education Development.

This Strategy can be defined as an action plan, a style and a model of behavior, a

¹⁰⁴Лалева Ц. Приоритетни проблеми и изисквания към висшето образование – важен фактор за устойчиво развитие / Цонка Лалева // Управление и устойчиво развитие. – София, 2008. – № 3–4. – С. 462.

means of achieving the goal and maintaining a competitive advantage¹⁰⁵. With respect to higher education, it can be defined as an image of the directions, methods and approaches of organizing and conducting effective educational activities in accordance with official European and national normative documents and the needs of specialists with higher education for practice.

Definition of positive and negative characteristics of higher education, knowledge of the Strategy for Intellectual, Sustainable and Accomplishing Growth "Europe 2020", National Strategy for the Development of Scientific Research to 2020 as well as business needs provide an opportunity to develop an approximate model of Strategy for Higher Education Development.

The main integrated goal of the Strategy is creating a modern and effective system of higher education, which should guarantee high quality of the educational process, in accordance with the provocations of the cognitive economy, successful professionalization of graduates and the results of scientific research together with growing competitiveness in European and global aspects.

The Strategy development makes it possible to solve some specific tasks:

- stimulating interest in higher education through increased quality control of graduates;
- improving the quality of education in accordance with European and world standards and criteria;
- establishing effective and efficient communication between universities and higher schools and institutions in the labor market;
- creating an effective network for research and development and supporting innovations in universities and higher schools;
- modernization and decentralization of management and finance system of higher education, in accordance with international trends of increasing autonomy and expansion of resources for teaching and research;
- restructuring of the National Fund for the Development of Science and Higher Education.

The implementation of Strategy for Higher Education Development and performing the above-mentioned tasks are realized in two stages:

- The first stage is connected with the implementation of the full package of structural changes in the system of higher education, including the introduction of a new financing model and the holistic updating of the law and the sub-law framework in accordance with the new model;

¹⁰⁵Стоянова Ц. Стратегическо управление / Стоянова Цветана. – София: Изд. «АвангардПрима», 2012. – С. 10–11.

- The second stage relates to the accelerated completion and synchronization of reforms in the system of higher education, with special attention to the European and global dimensions of educational activities.

Realization of these two stages is a guarantee that Bulgaria will become a regional center of modern higher education with a European profile that is more attractive for students from third countries and from countries of South-Eastern Europe. The criteria for the effectiveness of Higher Education Strategy in Bulgaria are the expected results, namely:

- improving access to higher education and increasing the number and relative proportions of graduates;
- creating working and effective mechanism for assessing the professional self-realization of graduates;
- activating forms of teaching quality estimation by students and academic staff;
- creating an integrated network of research activities and the development of innovative activities;
- developing a system for assessing the innovative potential of university teachers;
- creating flexible research units between Bulgarian universities, European ones and international research centers.

When developing the Higher Education Strategy, it should be kept in mind that today it faces a double challenge:

- on the one hand - to accelerate and complete the ongoing process of structural reforms, overcoming the gap from the leading European countries;
- on the other hand, to successfully implement the process of strategic transformation of higher education: from the complementary service sphere to the winning factor, the advantages in the European and global race for knowledge, skills, economic and material progress and spiritual progress.

The strategy outlines the trajectory and priority areas for the development of higher education in Bulgaria in its two dimensions:

- as a public and individual benefit, which has its contribution to the overall development of the individual and society and prepares students both for their professional implementation, and for their social and civic role;
- as the engine of economy dynamic development and creating a society based on the knowledge and progress of technology.

As a result of the current state analysis, problems and needs of higher education, the Strategy outlines key priorities for particular policies and management strategies in higher education area for the period of 2014-2020, and formulates medium- and long-term goals to achieve effective long-term results.

An objective evaluation of current situation in the system of higher education in Bulgaria shows that it possible to succeed by applying the propose model to upgrade and manage the system. The most important thing is to introduce restructuring as soon as possible in accordance with trends in European and global education.

1.9. Approaches to new authorization standards as a part of strategic planning at Georgian universities

Modern age is characterized with an abundance and diversity of changes everywhere, including Georgia. This is especially true for education, which undergoes almost permanent changes even in Europe, which serves as a model for the world education system. In accordance with the fact that Georgia joined the Bologna process already in 2005 it could be said that we are participants and co-authors of the formation of future common European education system outline, its development principles, common values, trends, etc. and we are completely involved in this very hard, responsible and challenging process.

The intensity of reforms, main priorities or the ways of implementation are such large scale and diverse that it is impossible to cover all of them in one article. That's why we have focused on and paid attention to the issues, which, on the one hand, were not characteristic for the post-Soviet space¹⁰⁶ and their activation causes drastic changes in our thinking, attitude and conduct, and on the other hand, has drawn significant attention in new Georgian standards of authorization. Among them, we consider it to be of primary importance to introduce the elements of strategic management and long-term planning in the management of university or its main educational and different structural units and rethinking the relevant process in a new¹⁰⁷ way.

A modern university is a very complicated and dynamically developing body and its functions are not limited to providing education only. Other issues also of no less importance are on the agenda, which increase the importance of universities in the process of developing a society as well as building a state.

The above mentioned situation conditions significant integration of strategic management in Education institutions as well as organizations, and general

¹⁰⁶Hunter, F. (2013). The importance of strategic planning in high education, European Association for International Education (EAIE), 12/08/2013. Retrieved from: <https://www.eaie.org/blog/the-importance-of-strategic-planning-in-higher-education>

¹⁰⁷Gavtadze, G. (2013). Theoretical bases of reforms in higher education system. Scientific-practical conference devoted to the 80th anniversary of ATSU, 1–2. June, 2013, Kutaisi, Georgia, Collected works (pp. 418-424) [in Georgian].