Activity Report

of the

Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education

2016

THE ROMANIAN AGENCY FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION
*Member of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education - **ENQA***
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ROMANIAN AGENCY FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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Registered office: 12 Spiru Haret Street, district 1, Bucharest, Romania
Address for correspondence: 59 Mărăşti Blvd., district 1, Bucharest, Phone No 021.206.76.00, Fax No 021.312.71.35

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS (in alphabetical order)

ACAD-INOV	Virtual community for quality assurance and improvement in strategic and innovative management in the technical and mixed universities, in order to increase the relevance of higher education to the labor market
ANOSR	National Alliance of Student Organizations in Romania
AQUA-TS	Automatic Control Quality. Tool System
ARACIS	Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
ARACIP	Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Pre-University Education
BusinessEurope	*BusinessEurope* Organization comprising 39 members from 34 European countries, representing employers' unions
CEENQA	Central and Eastern European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education
CNATDCU	National Council for Attesting Titles, Diplomas and Certificates
CPE	Standing Commission of Ethics
DRIPC	International Relations, Projects and Cooperation Directorate
EHEA	European Higher Education Area
EI	Education International
ENAEE	European Network for Accreditation of Engineering Education
ENQA	European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
EQAR	European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education
ESU	European Students Union
EQAVET	European Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training
ESG	European Standard and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
EUA	European University Association
EURASHE	European Association of Institutions in Higher Education
FEN	Non-repayable external funds
GEO	Government Emergency Ordinance
GD	Government Decision
IMPALA	Impact Analysis of External Quality Assurance Processes of Higher Education Institutions. Pluralistic Methodology and Application of a Formative Trans-disciplinary Impact Evaluation
INQAAHE	International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education
LEN	Law of National Education
MEN	Ministry of National Education
MECȘ	Ministry of Education and Scientific Research
QUALITAS	Development and consolidation of the quality culture of the Romanian higher education system - QUALITAS

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QAFIN	Improving public policies in higher education and enhancing the quality of regulations by updating the quality standards
RNE	National Register of Evaluators
ROF	Organization and Functioning Regulations
UEFISCDI	Executive Unit for Financing Higher Education, Research, Development and Innovation
USR	Union of Students in Romania
UNSR	National Union of Students in Romania

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FOREWORD BY THE PRESIDENT

In 2016, the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education continued the pursuit of the mission it committed to, respectively the fulfillment of the duties incumbent upon it in regard to the enforcement of the applicable regulations for quality assurance in the Romanian higher education.

This Report's 'Table of Contents' provides for a synthetic identification of the main activities that the Agency carries-out for the settlement of current problems related to the organization of its activities, under the external evaluation processes, for the completion of the national and international projects in which the Agency was involved as Contractor or partner organization. Details on those activities are presented in the body of the Report.

Of course, the main efforts of the Agency were steered towards the external evaluation activities. Of the 15 institutional evaluations that were completed in 2016, in respect of nine higher education institutions in the public sector and six in the private sector, six were awarded with the 'high confidence' rating and five with the 'confidence' rating, which confirms the fact that this second regular evaluation recorded either an enhanced quality, or a quality level that was at least maintained at a similar level. At the same time, one cannot overlook the fact that the rating awarded to a number of four education institutions was 'lack of confidence' and this confirms that the provision of material and human resources is a decisive condition for the quality of education and is indicative of the difficulties faced by the private education sector, whereas the number of candidates is decreasing.

The analysis of the reports corresponding to the external evaluations conducted by the Agency at institutional and study programmes level, revealed encouraging elements in the sense of a culture of quality being developed within the higher education institutions, which is comparable to the state of facts recorded in other countries of the European Higher Education Area. This statement is also confirmed by the final results of the IMPALA project, as a project financed under the Life Long Learning Programme of the European Commission, which was completed in 2015; under this project, the Technical University of Civil Engineering of Bucharest was an important Romanian partner, besides ARACIS. The comparison with the results of this project of an intense research nature, leads to the conclusion that, beyond the differences in the educational systems of the four countries that participated in the project, namely Germany, Spain, Finland and Romania, the issue of internal quality assurance in universities continues to be very contemporary and it will have to be deemed as a permanent objective in terms of university management.

In terms of resources and internal organization, the efforts for the provision of a proper environment for the adequate implementation of the Agency's activities were completed, and, as such, further to the application of the legal procedures for public procurement, ARACIS operates, since December 2016, at 59, Mărăşti Blvd., district 1, Bucharest, in a building made available under a lease contract, by the University of de Agronomic Sciences and Veterinary Medicine of Bucharest. The relocation of the Agency was a must, first of all given that the premises located in 1, Schitu Măgureanu Blvd., district 5, Bucharest, was in a building with a high risk at earthquake, and,

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secondly, given the wish to provide for improved working conditions for the Agency's in-house staff and for the implementation of the working reunions of the evaluators and of the Council.

As well, the year 2016 represented for ARACIS a period in which an important segment of activities focused on furthering the efforts for enforcing the provisions set out in the *Revised Version of the Standards and Guidelines (ESG), as approved at the Yerevan Ministerial Conference held between 14 and 15 May 2015,* by the Ministers responsible for higher education in the 48 countries that are part of the European Higher Education Area. In this context, the main directions followed by the Agency's efforts were as follows:

❖ Adjustment of the Agency's provisions to the new ESG, under the circumstances of previous – but still effective – amendments brought to the Romanian legislation, mainly in regard to the external evaluation of Master's Degree university studies;

❖ Preparation of a new *External evaluation methodologies, standards, reference standard and the list of performance indicators of ARACIS* for the new ESG, starting from the current version which contains, in different forms of wording, many of the provisions thereof; this activity implied the involvement of the members of the Council and the Agency staff, as well as the evaluators, the students and other interested persons. In 2017, the Ministry of National Education will submit the new Methodology to the Romanian Government, for approval;

❖ Preparation of the project *'Improving public policies in higher education and enhancing the quality of regulations by updating the quality standards - QAFIN''*, as partner of the Ministry of Education and Scientific Research; the project is financed under the Operational Programme 'Administrative Capacity';

❖ Revision and completion of the *Specific Standards for the external evaluation of the academic quality of university study programmes for Bachelor's and Master's Degree,* which are used by the Standing Specialty Commissions of Experts, in consultation with a large number of evaluators and of representatives of the academic community, as an activity scheduled to be completed in 2017;

❖ Supplementing the National Register of ARACIS Evaluators with new specialists and planning of sessions for the training thereof, in 2017;

❖ Closer collaboration with the students, through the involvement thereof in: the activity of the Standing Specialty Commissions of Experts, the external evaluation visits, the development and enhancement of the new methodologies.

The Report hereunder gives me a new opportunity to thank all of those who contributed to the adequate implementation of the Agency's activities!

President of ARACIS,

Prof. Eng. Iordan Petrescu, Ph.D.

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INTRODUCTION

This Report covers the period between 03 January 2016 and 31 December 2016 and corresponds to the second mandate year of the Council of the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS), as a Council that started its activity in May 2015, subsequent to the completion of the *Procedure for selection of members by public competition,* whereby the composition of the Council was renewed.

The Report was prepared by a group, under the coordination of the International Relations, Projects and Cooperation Directorate (DRIPC), which comprised representatives of all decision-making, coordination, execution and control structures operating within ARACIS, who also contributed with supporting documents revealing the carried-out activities and proposals for future measures intended to enhance the internal quality assurance in respect of the Agency's activities. The Report was submitted to, and analyzed by, the Executive Bureau of ARACIS and approved by the ARACIS Council.

The group comprised:

On behalf of the Executive Bureau of the ARACIS Council: Prof. Eng. Iordan Petrescu, Ph.D. and President; Prof. Eng. Cristina Ghițulică, Ph.D. and Vice-President; Prof. Eng. Simona Lache, Ph.D., Director of Quality Assurance Department; Associate Professor Mădălin Bunoiu, Ph.D., Director, External Quality Evaluation, Professor Ioan Ianoș, Ph.D., Secretary General.

Coordination and drafting of the final version: Prof. Eng. Radu-Mircea Damian, Ph.D., Director, International Relations, Projects and Cooperation Directorate - DRIPC; Adina Ghidura, Specialty Inspector, DRIPC; Adriana Popoiu, Expert, DRIPC.

Primary reporting and data processing: Ion Tănase, Director, Economic Division; Oana Sârbu, Head of Department, Inspectors; Carmen Mirian, IA Inspector; Cristian Eni, Ph.D., Computerisation Department; Emilia Mircea, Legal Adviser; Marinela Lolea, Human Resources; Mihaela Ivan, Secretary; Daniela Păcuraru, Referent.
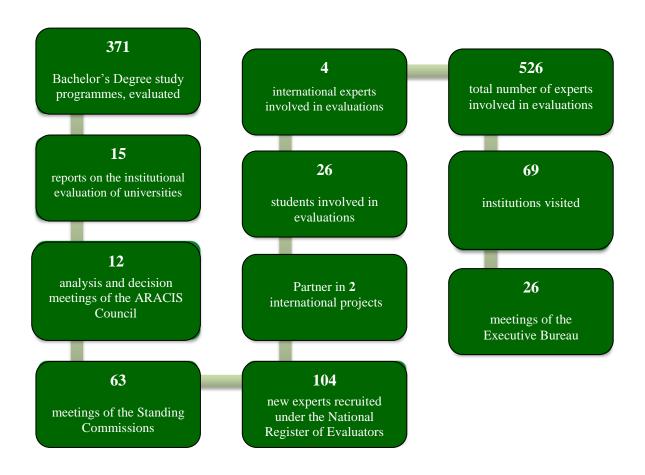
The drafting group thanks all the members of the ARACIS Councils and all the other persons who have contributed to the final drafting of this Report.

The Report, in its final version, was published on the Agency's webpage in Romanian and in English.

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ACTIVITY REPORT OF ARACIS FOR 2016

Summary of the main activities performed by ARACIS in 2016

371
Bachelor's Degree study programmes, evaluated

15
reports on the institutional evaluation of universities

12
analysis and decision meetings of the ARACIS Council

63
meetings of the Standing Commissions

4
international experts involved in evaluations

26
students involved in evaluations

Partner in **2** international projects

104
new experts recruited under the National Register of Evaluators

526
total number of experts involved in evaluations

69
institutions visited

26
meetings of the Executive Bureau

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1. GENERAL ASPECTS

1.1 Context, legal framework for operation, organizational structure and resources of ARACIS

1.1.1. Presentation of the context

Romania, as a signatory party of the Bologna Declaration (1999), became part of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), an ample process for the reorganization of the higher education in the signatory countries. Quality assurance in the education sector is a main objective pursued by EHEA and, in this context, the Ministers responsible for higher education adopted in 2005 the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (ESG) in the European Higher Education Area*. The Standards and Guidelines were drafted based on a proposal prepared by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), in cooperation with the European Students Union (ESU), the European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE) and the European University Association (EUA).

Remarkable progress was recorded after 2005 in regard to quality assurance, but also in regard to other lines of actions included in the Bologna process, such as the framework of qualifications, the recognition and promotion of the use of learning outcomes, all those contributing to a change of paradigm towards student-based learning and teaching.

In Romania, the **Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS)** was established for the purpose of evaluating the quality assurance in the education sector; the Agency operates pursuant to the provisions of the national legislation in force, as well as pursuant to the external evaluation methodologies, standards, reference standard and the list of performance indicators of ARACIS, as approved by Government Decision (GD) No 1418/2006. The Agency's management is provided by the *ARACIS Council* (in brief, *the Council*).

ARACIS is a full member of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education - **ENQA** and it is regularly subject to the international external evaluation procedures set out for the maintenance of this status.

ARACIS is registered in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education - **EQAR** and it is regularly subject to the international external evaluation procedures set out for the maintenance of this status.

ARACIS is also a member in other international organisations or networks of the Agencies for quality assurance in higher education.

1.1.2. Legal framework for operation

The institutional establishment statute and the activity of ARACIS are regulated at national level by the following legal acts:

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- **Government Emergency Ordinance of the Romanian Government (GEO) No 75/2005 on quality assurance in education**, with subsequent amendments and additions;

- **Romanian Government Decision (GD) No 1418/2006 approving the** *External evaluation methodologies, standards, reference standard and the list of performance indicators of ARACIS,* hereinafter referred to, in brief, as the 'Methodology';

- **GD No 1731/2006 approving the authorization and accreditation fees charged by ARACIS for study programmes of the higher education institutions and for the external evaluation of the quality in education;**

- **GD No 1512/2008 amending the** *External evaluation methodologies, standards, reference standard and the list of performance indicators of ARACIS;*

- **Law of National Education (LEN) No 1/2011**, with subsequent amendments and additions;

- **GD No 369/2013 approving the Methodology for the accreditation of Master's Degree study domains, based on accredited Master's Degree study programmes;**

- **Orders of the Minister of the National Education**, which are issued on a regular basis to regulate specific evaluation activities**.**

In the performance of its activities, ARACIS prepares and uses, according to the law, its own regulations that are approved by the Council:

- *The Guide on the evaluation activities in regard to the quality of university study programmes and of higher education institutions*;

- *The Code of Ethics and the rules of conduct to be observed in the activities carried-out by ARACIS for quality assurance, evaluation and accreditation in the Romanian higher education,* hereinafter referred to, in brief, as the Code of Ethics;

- *The Specific Standards for the external evaluation of the academic quality of university study programmes for Bachelor's and Master's Degree*, used by the Standing Specialty Commissions of Experts;

- *Decisions of the ARACIS Council and Decisions of the Executive Bureau of the Council (BEX,) for the settlement of current problems*.

Further to the actual application of the 'Methodology', but also further to the legal changes, a series of elements were identified for the improvement of the methodology; those elements derived from the observations made by the evaluators, by the evaluated institutions and by ARACIS staff, respectively by the members of the Council, of the Standing Specialty Commissions of Experts, as well as by students, employers and specialty inspectors. The ARACIS Council approved the measures and the composition of the group in charge for amending the 'Methodology' and the subsequent documents, for the purpose of a full adjustment to the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (ESG) in the European Higher Education Area – 2015.*

The Council approved the *Standards and Guidelines for the EUR-ACE® certification* for the study programmes in the field of Engineering Sciences but also the *External evaluation methodology for study programmes in the field of engineering sciences, for the purpose of the*

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regular evaluation and for awarding the EUR-AC certification, the *Guide* and the *Evaluation Sheet on compliance with the standards of the European Network for Accreditation of Engineering Education (ENAEE)*.

Furthermore, as a result of two public consultation phases, a revision was conducted of the *Specific Standards for the external evaluation of the academic quality of university study programmes for Bachelor's and Master's Degree* used by the Standing Specialty Commissions of Experts, valid as of the academic year 2017/2018. During the two public consultation phases, proposals were received from the universities in Romania, but also from the Ministry of Culture and from the Romanian Landscape Architects Association (AsoP). As well, the consultation approach also included the organization of a meeting that was attended by the members of the National Council of Rectors in Romania, the President and secretaries of ARACIS's Standing Specialty Commissions of Experts, but also by the members of the ARACIS Council. The purpose of this meeting was to clarify the important aspects related to the Specific Standards and to harmonize the standards with the observations received from academic world.

As well, a series of legal provisions that also concern the activity conducted by ARACIS were issued in 2016 at national level, for example:

- Order of the Minister of National Education and Scientific Research No 6.154/2016 on the adoption of the *Methodology for the regulation of activities carried-out on the Romanian territory by the foreign quality assurance agencies registered in EQAR*;

- Order of the Minister of the National Education and Scientific Research No 6.085/2016 on the establishment of the Ethics and University Management Council and on the approval of the Organization and Functioning Regulations – the Ethics and University Management Council also includes one representative nominated by ARACIS, Professor Ioan Ianoş, Ph.D. (member of the ARACIS Council);

- Order of the Minister of the National Education and Scientific Research No 6.153/2016 for the adoption of the *Methodology on the authorization, accreditation and regular evaluation of doctoral schools, by fields of study*.

1.1.3. ARACIS Mission and Purpose

ARACIS **Mission** is to conduct the external evaluation of the quality of education provided by higher education institutions, as an external evaluation that applies to all education providers operating on the Romanian territory, as well as to the Romanian education providers that operate lawfully on the territory of other countries, according to the legal regulations in force in Romania and, as applicable, on the territory of the country in which they operate, so as:

a) To certify the capacity of the education providers of fulfilling the quality standards and, consequently, of meeting the expectations of the beneficiaries;

b) To contribute to the development of an institutional quality culture in the higher education system;

c) To ensure the protection of the direct and indirect beneficiaries of study programmes, through the production and dissemination of systematic, coherent and reliable, public and

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accessible information on the quality of the education services provided by the higher education institutions;

d) To make proposals to the line Ministry (the Ministry of Education and Scientific Research) in respect of strategies and policies aimed at permanent quality improvement in higher education, in close correlation with the pre-university education, with the employers' requests and with the European and international practices;

e) To contribute to the promotion of the quality higher education in Romania, at international level;

f) To ensure a better correlation between the skills required on the labor market and the education offer based on learning outcomes, so as to increase the employment rate for the recent graduates, both on national level, but also on European level.

The main objective pursued by the activities of ARACIS is to provide a qualitative education and vocational training in higher education, so as to enable the development of a competitive human capital.

1.1.4.   The organizational structure

ARACIS is public autonomous and independent institution, of national interest, with legal personality and with its own revenues and expenditure budget. ARACIS is fully funded from its own revenues. For the purpose of organizing and streamlining its activities, ARACIS has developed its own Organization and Functioning Regulations (ROF) that are approved by the Council.

The organizational structure (*Annex 1 - Organization chart*) of ARACIS comprises:

- The Council;
- The Executive Bureau of the Council;
- The Department for External Evaluation of Quality;
- The Department for Accreditation of University Studies;
- The Department for Accreditation of Postgraduate Studies (not yet operational, therefore this Department has not yet started to operate);
- The Standing Specialty Commissions of Experts;
- The Advisory Commission;
- The Commission of Ethics;
- The Technical Department, that is divided along four specialised Divisions:
  - The Quality Assurance Division;
  - The Economic Division;
  - The Organization, Human Resources, Computerisation and Public Procurement Division;
  - The International Relations, Projects and Cooperation Division.
- Two Departments under the coordination of the President of ARACIS :
  - The Internal Public Audit Department;
  - The Legal Department.

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The ARACIS Council (or, in brief, *the Council*) is made of 21 members who are selected by public competition, according to the internal procedure of ARACIS, as a procedure that comprises criteria on the professional and scientific competence, on the professional prestige etc., of which: **17** Professors and/or tenured Associate Professors or who continue their teaching activity with the approval of the University Senate; **two** students from the student federations that are representative at national level; **one** representative of the education union and **one** representative of employers.

The Council is the collective management structure of ARACIS that provides the programmatic orientation of the Agency. The Council meets on a monthly basis in ordinary meetings, but also in extraordinary meeting whenever required, when convened by the President or, where the President is absent, by the Vice-President.

The Council fulfills the duties set out in the Organization and Functioning Regulations (ROF).

The Executive Bureau of the ARACIS Council is the operational management structure of ARACIS and is made of the President, the Vice-President and the Secretary General of the ARACIS Council, the Director of the Department for External Evaluation of Quality and the Director of the Accreditation Department. The Bureau convenes in weekly ordinary meetings, as well as in extraordinary meeting whenever required, when convened by the President or by the Vice-President. The regular meetings of the Executive Bureau are also attended by one representative of the students who are included in the ARACIS Council and by one representative of the education union, as guests.

The Department for External Evaluation of Quality, *the Department for Accreditation of University Studies* and *the Department for Accreditation of Postgraduate Studies* are made of quality assurance experts, members of the Council, and are coordinated, each, by one Director. These three Departments meet on a regular basis for analysis and debates on the evaluation of the study programmes and on the institutional evaluation. Following the debates, the Departments prepare their own reports and present the ARACIS Council with substantiated proposals on the fulfillment rate in respect of the standards and the quality indicators applied in the case of study programmes and in the case of higher education institutions that are subject to evaluation.

*The **Technical Department*** of ARACIS is an executive structure comprising 69 positions; of those positions, in the beginning of 2016, 32 positions were occupied and 37 positions were vacant. 5 vacant positions were the subject of public competition in 2016. In 2016, three employees had their labor contracts terminated and one new person was employed by public competition.

*The **ARACIS Advisory and Auditing Commission*** is made of outstanding figures of the academic world and its mission is to check the evaluation procedures and to provide support for the Agency's decisions (*Annex 3 - the Advisory Commission*).

The Standing Commission of Ethics (CPE) of ARACIS is made of three persons, namely *one President* and *two members*. The record-keeping of documents and correspondence is provided by a Secretariat to the Commission, which is also responsible for drawing-up the meeting minutes. The CPE operates based on a four-year mandate. The Standing Commission of Ethics ensures the compliance with the *Code of Ethics.*

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The Standing Specialty Commissions of Experts. Pursuant to Government Decision No 1418/2006, the ARACIS Council decided to operate with a number of *14 standing commissions of experts*. The commissions are subordinate to the ARACIS Council. The Standing Commissions of Experts carry-out their activities based on the *Regulation approved by the ARACIS Council* and they are assisted, in their activity, by a body of ARACIS evaluators, who are included in the ***National Register of ARACIS Evaluators*** (RNE). The Register comprises Professors and Associate Professors from Romania and from abroad, with recognized professional activity and moral integrity, who are competent and experienced in education quality assurance at national and international level. To be able to become evaluators registered in the Register of ARACIS Evaluators, the candidates go through a transparent selection process that is regulated by a public procedure approved by the ARACIS Council.
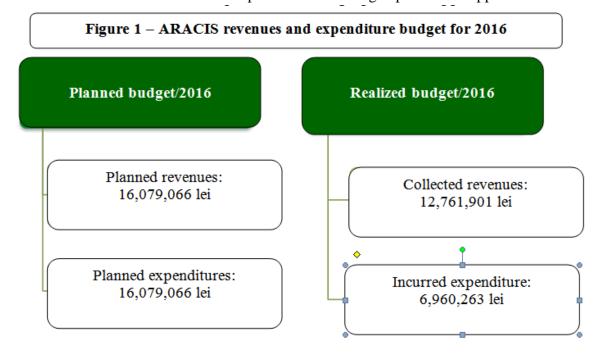
1.1.5. *The financial activity of ARACIS*

For year 2016, the ARACIS Council approved a revenues and expenditure budget totaling 16,079,066 lei for revenues and expenditure together (*Figure 1*); of this, the value corresponding to projects financed from non-repayable external funds (FEN) was 6,542,718 lei in terms of revenues and 9,076,566 lei in terms of expenditure.

The revenues of ARACIS originate from own sources, as required by the legislation in force, such as fees charged for external evaluation activities concerned with the authorization for the provisional operation/accreditation and/or regular evaluation at the level of the study programmes and/or institutional level, financial income – interest, and non-repayable external funds.

As of 31 December 2016, ARACIS had collected revenues amounting to 12,761,901 lei, of which 2,827,017 lei from FEN, while the expenditure incurred totaled 6,960,263 lei, of which 16,380 lei under FEN-financed projects.

The data below was established pursuant to the legal provisions applicable in Romania.

Figure 1 – ARACIS revenues and expenditure budget for 2016

Planned budget/2016

Realized budget/2016

Planned revenues: 16,079,066 lei

Collected revenues: 12,761,901 lei

Planned expenditures: 16,079,066 lei

Incurred expenditure: 6,960,263 lei

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As it follows from the data presented above, the non-realization of the revenues and expenditure planned for 2016 is fully deriving as an effect of the incomplete use of non-repayable external funds corresponding to the projects implemented in 2016, specifically in regard to the projects *'Virtual community for quality assurance and improvement in strategic and innovative management in the technical and mixed universities, in order to increase the relevance of higher education to the labor market -* ACAD-INOV*"* (POSDRU /155/1.2/S/141884 contract) and *'Development and consolidation of the quality culture of the Romanian higher education system – QUALITAS'* (POSDRU /155/1.2/S/141894 contract).

Thus, the failure to realize the revenues and expenditure corresponding to the implementation of projects financed from non-repayable external funds, under the staff expenditure budget line thereof, is due to the enforcement of the provisions set out in the Framework Law No 284/2010 on the uniform remuneration of staff paid from public funds, which did not allow for the remuneration of those who were nominated in the implementation teams according to the budgeted level foreseen in the Financing Guidelines.

1.1.6. The legal activities conducted by ARACIS

In 2016, subsequent to the carried-out evaluation missions and also further to the enforcement of all legal procedures on decision-making and on awarding of ratings, including on the appeal procedure, in certain situations, given the discontent of those being evaluated, ARACIS found itself in the situation of appearing before the court to defend the decisions it had made.

Thus, ARACIS acted in the capacity of defendant in a number of four cases brought before the court. For all matters on trial, ARACIS prepared its de facto and de jure position and submitted statements of defence to which supporting documents were attached. Until now, all cases on the docket of the courts were settled in favor of ARACIS.

The evaluation activities carried-out in 2016 required a large number of experts, and this was materialized in the conclusion of 1,625 Civil Collaboration Contracts with the evaluators.

In 2016, 35 Decisions of the ARACIS Council's Executive Bureau and 64 Decisions of the ARACIS Council were drawn-up, for different situations and cases. All Decisions of the ARACIS Council's Executive Bureau and all Council Decisions were subject to the internal procedures on transparency, communication, numbering and archiving.

Also, all templates for Service Contracts that ARACIS uses for the evaluation activity and concludes with the higher education institutions, were prepared and updated; the same applies for the Civil Contracts used for quality evaluation, which are concluded between ARACIS and the national and international evaluation experts.

1.1.7. Internal quality assurance

As a full member of ENQA, the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education understands the rights and obligations it undertook according to its statutes. For this

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purpose, ARACIS is permanently concerned with internal quality assurance and with the observance of the European Standards on quality assurance in respect of its activities.

As such, ARACIS is subject to regular external evaluations, conducted by the teams of international experts operating under the coordination of ENQA. The next external evaluation onto ARACIS is planned to be completed in 2018.

As presented in the first chapter of this Report, ARACIS is an independent and autonomous organization that operates based on clearly defined mission, purpose and objectives, which are stated in the public documents of the Agency. Among its current activities, in 2016, ARACIS fulfilled the objectives scheduled for the purpose of fulfilling its mission. In its activities (authorization of study programmes, accreditation, institutional evaluation etc.), ARACIS acted pursuant to the Methodology and pursuant to its own procedures, which are public and known to all parties involved in the quality assurance of higher education. The activity performed by ARACIS and the results obtained are recognized by the interested parties (MENCȘ, higher education institutions, employers, the public etc.).

For the purpose of conducting its quality evaluation activities, ARACIS collaborates with experts originating from the national universities, who form the National Register of ARACIS Evaluators (RNE) and who, for being registered in the RNE, were subject to a transparent selection procedure that comprised criteria on personal expertise, integrity and professional ethics. The participation in the selection for registration in the RNE is a personal endeavor of each of the expert, while ARACIS, for this purpose, uses an electronic platform enabling that two of the evaluation steps be conducted *online*. As such, the quality of the experts represents a permanent and constant concern of ARACIS.

In 2016, for the continuous training of the experts, ARACIS organized the online training course '*European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, Module I*' that was attended by 205 users (external evaluators from the ARACIS RNE and internal evaluators). This training course was implemented under the sustainability phase of the project 'e-Education System for quality evaluation in the Romanian higher education (SeECIS)'; the project was co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund, under the Operational Programme 'Increase of Economic Competitiveness' and was implemented by ARACIS between October 2011 and May 2013.

In terms of institutional quality evaluation, the Agency collaborates with international experts. In 2016, **4 international experts** participated in the institutional evaluations conducted by ARACIS. Also, ARACIS carries-out the quality evaluation activities with the involvement of students who are selected by the students' organisations and by the representatives thereof. In 2016, **26 students**, who attended training programmes and were evaluated, participated in the institutional evaluation commissions.

The quality evaluation activities carried-out by the ARACIS experts materialize in detailed reports and in summary reports, which are public documents that can be read and/or downloaded on/from the web page of the Agency. For the evaluation of study programmes, the site-visits commissions prepare the 'Site-visit Sheet', together with a series of annexes that represent the documents used by the expert evaluators to write down their findings during the site visit. The

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Reports (to be prepared, in addition to the Site-visit Sheets, on the occasion of institutional evaluations) provide information on what the commissions of evaluators found within the evaluated institutions, depending on the type of evaluation, on the consistency between what the institutions claim to fulfill in terms of quality standards and indicators and what is found to be relevant, and confirm the internal quality assurance pursuant to the ARACIS Methodology. The said Reports are subject to analyses and decisions on the authorization/accreditation and on the rating to be awarded. The Reports are also used as documentary proof for the settlement of potential appeals or litigations.

1.1.8. *Activities conducted by the Internal Audit Department within ARACIS*

In 2016, ARACIS was the subject of the monitoring visit carried-out by the Central Unit for the Harmonization of the Internal Public Audit (UCAAPI) that was completed with a Site Visit Report.

In 2016, as a result of the termination of the employment contract of the internal public auditor, no audit missions were organized, while ARACIS took the necessary measures to employ a new internal public auditor; the employment process is planned to be completed in 2017.

1.2 Summary of performed activities

The Executive Bureau of the ARACIS Council gathered 26 times in ordinary meetings. On the occasion of those meetings, it has examined the received applications and requests and prepared resolutions that were sent directly to the applicants or were submitted to the ARACIS Council, for analysis and approval.

In all cases referred to above, irrespective of the form in which the requests were received (letters, emails, phone inquiries etc.), the answer was provided within the legal deadline and within the remit of ARACIS competence.

During the reference period, appeals were filed by some of the higher education institutions that were evaluated (public and private universities), in regard to the evaluation results. The analysis and the settlement of appeals, as applicable, were conducted pursuant to the specific procedure of ARACIS.

Also during 2016, the Executive Bureau of the ARACIS Council granted audiences to Rectors of higher education institutions, to Presidents of associations or foundations, to university teaching staff, to journalists, to students etc. and provided written answers to the inquiries received from the higher education institutions in Romania.

In fact, the entire activity that ARACIS carried-out in 2016 consisted in the collaboration between all structures that are interested in quality assurance of the higher education system in Romania. ARACIS was an active partner for the Romanian universities and provided ongoing support, through the implemented activities and projects, to the efforts on quality assurance and enhancement that are made by the mentioned universities.

ARACIS has continued its cooperation with the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Pre-University Education (ARACIP), which materialized in the submission of joint project

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proposals and in the participation in several reunions with impact onto the education system in Romania.

As to the students' activity, to be mentioned that the students were permanently involved and supported by the ARACIS Council and participated in the external quality evaluation visits. Upon the request of the students, the Agency provided technical and material support for the training of the student evaluators, including through the assistance it provided to the students' federations for the organization a three training sessions intended to student evaluators, as follows:

- Students training session organized by the National Union of Students in Romania (UNSR) and by the Union of Students in Romania (USR) at Bucharest, between 06 and 09 April 2016;

- Students training session organized by the National Alliance of Student Organizations in Romania (ANOSR) at Bucharest, between 17 and 21 October 2016;

- Students training session organized by the National Union of Students in Romania (UNSR) at Bacău, between 18 and 22 November 2016.

The training sessions referred to above resulted in 108 students trained for participation in the institutional evaluations carried-out by ARACIS.

The National Register of Evaluators_Students (RNE_S) was updated as a result of these actions and based on the information on the student evaluator status received from the student federations; the composition of this Register, which is uploaded on the ARACIS web page (http://www.aracis.ro/organizare/registrul-national-de-evaluators/), is regularly updated and supplemented.

The students are full members in the ARACIS Council and attend the meetings of the Executive Bureau of the ARACIS Council and all the institutional evaluations carried-out by the Agency.

In 2016, the students participated in a number of 15 institutional evaluations.

In terms of students' involvement in the quality evaluation and assurance processes, after the revision of the ESG in May 2015, ARACIS continued its endeavors to involve the students in all external evaluation processes.

As such, in 2016, the ARACIS Council prepared and approved the Procedure for the *selection and appointment of students as members of the Standing Specialty Commissions*, while the selection of students for all Standing Commissions is scheduled to be completed in the beginning of 2017.

As to the involvement of students in the external evaluations of university study programmes, ARACIS will adopt all additional measures required, so that the students would play an active part not only in the institutional evaluations, but also in the evaluation of study programmes.

The involvement of students in the activities carried-out by ARACIS presents a significant potential for development, as the students acting as evaluators demonstrated the capacity to also

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manage other types of evaluations and to be part of the quality assurance processes in the Romanian higher education, at all levels.

2. EVALUATION ACTIVITIES AND ARACIS EVALUATORS

The approval by the ministers responsible for higher education in the Ministerial Conference of Yerevan, Armenia, held between 14 and 15 May 2015, of the new *'Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education'* – ESG 2015, required the necessity of preparing a new External Evaluation Methodology for ARACIS.

The Methodology is still under preparation, based on the recommendations made in the studies concerning the impact of relevant current practices at national level, but also based on the current status, trends and good practices at European level.

According to the Yerevan Press Release (2015, p. 2-3), the national policies in the field of higher education will have to integrate at least four objectives (adequate to the specificity of the current period): a) strengthening the quality and relevance of learning and teaching; b) strengthening the employability of graduates across their work life; c) increasing the inclusion level of the national higher education systems; d) implementation of the structural reforms that were agreed upon.

Further to the consultation of all the relevant institutions and subsequent to the correlation of standards with the European guidelines, and given the experience acquired following the application of the current methodology and the data obtained from the external evaluation processes which took place, a Methodology adjusted to the current national and European current requirements will be elaborated.

The instrument to be developed will consider the shift of focus of evaluation processes, from the input indicators, to an evaluation based on the outcomes of the process, with a greater accountability attached to the structures responsible for internal quality assurance in higher education.

Considering the extent of planned activities, ARACIS, in the capacity of partner to the Ministry of Education and Scientific Research, submitted for approval an application for financing for a project to be funded from the Operational Programme 'Administrative Capacity'. The project title is *'Improving public policies in higher education and enhancing the quality of regulations by updating the quality standards – QAFIN'*; the project was submitted for approval to the competent bodies at government level and those bodies will decide on whether the funding will be granted.

2.1 Evaluations carried-out by ARACIS in 2016

In 2016, ARACIS received from the Universities a number of 552 applications for external quality evaluation services for Bachelor's and Master's Degree university study programmes.

In 2016, the Accreditation Department of ARACIS carried-out its activity pursuant to its prerogatives, as set out in the Organization and Functioning Regulations of the Agency:

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- preparation, with the support of staff from the Technical Department of ARACIS, of the internal reports of ARACIS for validating the outcomes of evaluation missions for study programmes, for the purpose of provisional authorization, accreditation or maintenance of accreditation.

- organization and management of the database for the evaluation of study programmes;

- management and updating of the National Register of ARACIS Evaluators.

As for the situation of higher education institutions, in 2016, according to Government Decision 376 of 18 May 2016 (academic year 2016 - 2017), the situation was as follows:

- State Universities: **55** – *all subject to at least one external evaluation*;
- Private accredited Universities: **37** of which **7** operate under liquidation with all the programmes in their structure (according to the endorsement notices submitted to the Ministry of National Education, after the ARACIS evaluations). *All these universities were subject to at least one evaluation carried-out by ARACIS.*
- Private Universities authorized to operate on a provisional basis: **10** of which **2** operate under liquidation with all the programmes in their structure (of which one organizes only Master's Degree university studies programmes). Out of those, ARACIS evaluated three (the institution that organizes only Master's Degree programmes, an institution for which the accreditation was proposed to be awarded and one institution for which ARACIS proposed that the accreditation be denied).

2.1.1   Evaluation of study programmes

In 2016, the Accreditation Department of ARACIS carried-out its activity pursuant to its prerogatives, as set out in the Organization and Functioning Regulations of the Agency.

Tables 1.1 - 1.3 present the situation of study programmes in the Romanian universities that were evaluated by ARACIS in 2016. To be noticed that most evaluation activities concerned the accredited study programmes, that are regularly evaluated for accreditation maintenance purposes. Only 14% of the total programmes consisted of new study programmes that were proposed to be provisionally authorized. Out of those, 13.2% did no obtain the rating and were denied the endorsement for operation.

In regard to the programmes that are subject to regular evaluation, most of them (99%) obtained the maintenance of accreditation, while 97% of the ones subject to accreditation were accredited.

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Table 1.1 Situation of BACHELOR'S DEGREE university study programmes (SP) evaluated in 2016, depending on the evaluation type (PA/ A/ EP)

Total number of evaluated SP	Number of SP evaluated for provisional authorization purposes (PA)	Number of SP evaluated for accreditation purposes (A)	Number of SP evaluated regularly for the purpose of maintaining the accreditation (EP)
1	2	3	4
TOTAL = 371	53	59	259

*SP=study programmes; PA = provisional authorization; A=accreditation; EP=maintenance of accreditation

Table 1.2 Situation of BACHELOR'S DEGREE university study programmes (SP) evaluated in 2016, depending on the rating awarded

Total number of evaluated SP	Number of evaluated SP for which the 'Confidence' rating was awarded	Number de evaluated SP for which the 'Limited confidence' rating was awarded	Number of evaluated SP for which the 'Lack of confidence' rating was awarded
1	2	3	4
TOTAL = 371	321	38	12

*SP=study programmes

Table 1.3 Results of the BACHELOR'S DEGREE university study programmes evaluations in 2016

Number of SP evaluated for provisional authorization purposes 53	Evaluated SP for which the 'Confidence' rating was awarded	34
	Evaluated SP for which the 'Limited confidence' rating was awarded	12
	Evaluated SP for which the 'Lack of confidence' rating was awarded	7
Number of SP evaluated for accreditation purposes 59	Evaluated SP for which the 'Confidence' rating was awarded	46
	Evaluated SP for which the 'Limited confidence' rating was awarded	11
	Evaluated SP for which the 'Lack of confidence' rating was awarded	2
Number of SP evaluated regularly for the purpose of maintaining the accreditation 259	Evaluated SP for which the 'Confidence' rating was awarded	241
	Evaluated SP for which the 'Limited confidence' rating was awarded was awarded	15
	Evaluated SP for which the 'Lack of confidence' rating was awarded	3

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2.1.2 Institutional evaluations

In 2016, 15 higher education institutions in Romania were subject to external evaluation at institutional level.

Also in 2016, the President of ARACIS personally handed over the Certificate attesting the 'high confidence' rating awarded further to the institutional evaluations carried-out by the Agency in 2015 or 2016, to a number of six higher education institutions.

2.1.3 Evaluation of the Master's Degree Study Domains

The preparation of regulations for the evaluation of the Master's Degree Study Domains started in 2014. The 'Specific Procedure for the Regular External Evaluation of Accredited Master's Degree Study Domains' was approved by Order of the Minister of Education and Research and published in the Official Gazette, Part I, No 236/2014.

Details on these procedures are presented on the Agency's web page, at: http://www.aracis.ro/fileadmin/ARACIS/Legislatie_-_Proceduri/2014/Proceduri_privind_acreditarea_sau_evaluarea_periodica_a_domeniilor_de_studii_universitare_de_master.pdf.

Tables 1.4 - 1.5 present the situation of Master's Degree university study programmes that were evaluated by ARACIS in 2016:

Table 1.4 Situation of MASTER'S DEGREE university study programmes that were evaluated in 2016, depending on the evaluation type (A/ EP/compliance with the study domain)

Total number of evaluated SP	Number of SP evaluated for accreditation purposes (A)	Number of SP evaluated regularly for the purpose of maintaining the accreditation (EP)	Number of SP evaluated for compliance with an accredited study domain
1	2	3	4
TOTAL = 113	16	2	95

*SP=study programmes; A=accreditation; EP=maintenance of accreditation

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Table 1.5 Results for the MASTER'S DEGREE study programmes evaluated in 2016

Number of SP evaluated for accreditation purposes	Evaluated SP for which the 'Confidence' rating was awarded	15
	Evaluated SP for which the 'Limited confidence' rating was awarded	-
	Evaluated SP for which the 'Lack of confidence' rating was awarded	1
Number of SP evaluated regularly for the purpose of maintaining the accreditation	Evaluated SP for which the 'Confidence' rating was awarded	2
	Evaluated SP for which the 'Limited confidence' rating was awarded	-
	Evaluated SP for which the 'Lack of confidence' rating was awarded	-
Number of SP evaluated for compliance with an accredited study domain	Evaluated SP for which the 'Compliant' rating was awarded	81
	Evaluated SP for which the 'Lack of confidence' rating was awarded	14

2.2 Updating the Register of ARACIS Evaluators

The National Register of Evaluators (RNE) was updated in 2016 and 104 new evaluators were admitted after having been subject to the specific procedure. The detailed situation, by specialty commissions, is given in *Table 2*.

Table 2. Number of evaluators admitted in the RNE, by specialty commissions

Commission	Number of evaluators admitted in 2016
C1 - Exact sciences and natural sciences	8
C2 – Humanities and theology	7
C3 – Legal sciences	0
C4 - Social, political and communication sciences	1
C5 - Administrative sciences, education and psychology	0
C6 - Economic sciences I	2
C7 - Economic sciences II	7
C8 – Arts, Architecture, Urban planning, Physical education and Sport	6
C9 – Agricultural sciences, forestry and veterinary medicine	3
C10 - Engineering Sciences I	4
C11 - Engineering Sciences II	6

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Commission	Number of evaluators admitted in 2016
C12 – Medical sciences	0
C13 – Distance education and part-time learning	3
Register of employers	57
Total evaluators admitted in 2016	**104**

In 2016, ARACIS organized a training session dedicated to the evaluators included in the National Register of Evaluators; the session was held on 11 November 2016 in Braşov and its topic was the EUR-ACE Certification®, the system for the evaluation of study programmes in the field of Engineering sciences, for the cross-border recognition of qualifications. The training session was dedicated to the new evaluators who were coopted in the Register of Employers, as well as to the experts who are part of the specialty commissions in the fields of Engineering sciences and Agricultural sciences and forestry.

As well, the ARACIS Council decided that at least two training sessions of the expert evaluators included in the Register between 2014 and 2017, will be organized in 2017.

2.3 Updating the Register of Student Evaluators of ARACIS

The situation of student evaluators registered in the National Register of Student Evaluators of ARACIS is presented in the Table below:

Table 3. Number of student evaluators in RNE, by organisations recognized at national level

Student organization	Number of student evaluators in 2016
National Alliance of Student Organizations in Romania (ANOSR)	76
National Union of Students in Romania	101
Union of Students in Romania (USR)	24
Total student evaluators in the National Register of Student Evaluators in 2016	**201**

In 2016, ARACIS provided technical and material support for the training of student evaluators, including assistance to student federations for the organization of three training sessions dedicated to student evaluators, further to which 108 student evaluators were included in the Register.

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3. COOPERATION

3.1 National cooperation

At national level, ARACIS cooperates with the **universities**, for the purpose of fulfilling its duties on the external quality evaluation of higher education providers and of study programmes, pursuant to the standards and the methodology approved by Government Decisions and makes proposals for the authorization or accreditation thereof, as applicable.

In 2016, ARACIS organized two phases of public consultation with the universities and all stakeholders, for the revision of the *Specific Standards for the external evaluation of the academic quality of university study programmes for Bachelor's and Master's Degree* used by the Standing Specialty Commissions of Experts, valid as of the academic year 2017/2018.

Also, ARACIS attended the **meetings organized in 2016 by the National Council of Rectors**, as well as **other national events**, where it presented the development status of the new methodologies for external evaluation.

ARACIS engaged in permanent consultations with the Ministry of Education and Scientific Research, with the National Council for Attesting Titles, Diplomas and Certificates (CNATDCU), with the Executive Unit for Financing Higher Education, Research, Development and Innovation (UEFISCDI) and with other institutions in the field of education.

3.2 International cooperation

3.2.1 *Activities in ENQA - European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education*

In the European Higher Education Area, ARACIS is full member of the *European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education -* **ENQA** and it is regularly subject to the international external evaluation procedures set out for maintaining this status.

According to the legal provisions, the requirement enabling ARACIS to continue its activity consists in the maintenance of the Agency in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR). For this purpose, the maintenance of ARACIS as a full-member Agency in ENQA is an important element in the decisions of EQAR, as it is this capacity that demonstrates the compliance with the provisions set out in the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG).

Consequently, the Agency must prove that its procedures and the other activities observe these Standards and Guidelines. According to the ESG, the Agency must be subject to regular evaluations, conducted by an international panel coordinated by ENQA ('ENQA coordinated review') and must draw-up a Progress Report between two regular evaluations.

In 2013, ARACIS was evaluated by ENQA and received the confirmation of the full-member Agency status for a period of five years, starting with 28 October 2013; this decision was confirmed by the General Assembly of ENQA held in Dublin, Ireland, as per the letter received from ENQA on 28 November 2013. The same letter requested that a Progress Report be prepared,

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that should present the follow-up in respect of the recommendations included in the Report of the panel coordinated by ENQA, as the panel that conducted the external evaluation of ARACIS in 2013. The Progress Report was scheduled for October 2015.

Consequently, in September 2015, ARACIS prepared a **Progress Report (Follow-up Report)** on the actions taken by the Agency in the 2-year period for the purpose of implementing the recommendations of ENQA and delivered the said Report to the ENQA Board. The document was well-received by ENQA, which, according to the letter received from the President of ENQA on 20 November 2015, welcomed the progress achieved by ARACIS.

In the letter referred to above, ENQA requested ARACIS to submit clarifications on the manner in which the students are involved in the evaluation teams of ARACIS; ARACIS submitted the answer to the requested clarifications in January 2016.

In 2016, for the purpose of fulfilling the ENQA standard regarding the active involvement in the activities of the association, ARACIS attended the following events organized by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education:

- 11 January 2016 – Brussels (Belgium) – 'Excellence in higher education' Working Group, organized by ENQA (participants: Radu-Mircea Damian, Director, International Relations, Projects and Cooperation Directorate);

- 27 – 29 April 2016 – Budapest (Hungary) - Forum of agencies that are ENQA members (participants: Iordan Petrescu – President of ARACIS, Cristina Ghițulică – Vice-President of ARACIS);

- 19 – 21 October 2016 – Gloucester (Great Britain) – General Assembly of ENQA (participants: Iordan Petrescu – President of ARACIS , Cristina Ghițulică – Vice-President of ARACIS);

- 03 – 04 November 2016 – Brussels (Belgium) – ENQA seminar on 'Quality assurance in the European context' (participants: Adina Ghidura – Specialty Inspector, International Relations, Projects and Cooperation Directorate of ARACIS and Mihai Marcu – Expert, Accreditation and Quality Assurance Experts and Specialty Inspectors, ARACIS);

- 06 – 07 October 2016 – Astana (Kazahstan) – Participation of Prof. Eng. Radu-Mircea Damian, Ph.D., as the representative of ENQA, in the international Conference on 'Global challenges and the future of independent accreditation in Kazakhstan' organized by the Independent Agency for Accreditation and Rating (IAAR);

- 17 – 19 November 2016 – Ljubljana (Slovenia) – The 11th European Quality Assurance Forum (EQAF) (participants: Iordan Petrescu – President of ARACIS, Cristina Ghițulică – Vice-President of ARACIS).

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3.2.2   *Activities in EQAR - European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education*

ARACIS is registered in the *European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education - EQAR* and it is regularly subjected to the international external evaluation procedures set out for maintaining this status.

The external evaluation report of ARACIS, prepared in 2013 under the coordination of ENQA, was submitted to EQAR on 29 November 2013, as the basis for renewing the listing of the Agency in the Register.

By the letter dated 26 May 2014, the registration of ARACIS was confirmed for a 5-year period, by the decision of the 'Register Committee' of 22 May 2014, until **30 September 2018 (*5 years from the date of submission of the External Evaluation Report, by ARACIS), under the coordination of ENQA*.** The EQAR letter mentions that ARACIS has to present a Report on the substantive changes ('Substantive Changes Report) of its Methodology regarding the external evaluation of Master's Degree study domains, where such change becomes operational and begins to be implemented. The EQAR letter also requested, in explicit terms, that ARACIS should include the students in the evaluation teams for all study programmes, considering that this request is included in the 'Flagged' category, which means that special attention shall be paid in this respect and that the request shall be observed for the next external evaluation and for the renewal application for the status of Agency registered in EQAR. This request shall be based on an external evaluation conducted by a panel coordinated by ENQA. In the documents received from EQAR, it is recommended that ARACIS should apply for the external evaluation conducted by ENQA, at least 10 months before 30 September 2018.

Consequently, ARACIS prepared and submitted such a *Substantive Changes Report* in March 2016 regarding the approval and enforcement of a new Procedure for the evaluation and accreditation of Master's Degree study domains.

EQAR requested ARACIS to provide clarifications on this Report and ARACIS submitted the answer to these clarifications in June 2016, while in September 2016, EQAR informed ARACIS that the Report was approved.

3.2.3   *Activities in ENAEE - European Network for Accreditation of Engineering Education*

ARACIS is a member of the European Network for Engineering Accreditation and it is authorized by ENAEE to award the EUR-ACE® Label to Bachelor's or Master's Degree study programmes in the field of engineering, which were accredited further to the evaluations carried-out by ARACIS.

In 2016, ARACIS prepared the Standards and Guidelines for EUR-ACE certification®, as well as: the *External evaluation methodology for study programmes in the field of engineering sciences for the purpose of the regular evaluation and for the awarding of the EUR-AC certification*, *the Guide and the Evaluation Sheet on compliance with the standards of the European Network for Accreditation of Engineering Education (ENAEE).*

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In November 2016, ARACIS organized a training session intended to the evaluators included in the Register; the session took place on 11 November 2016 in Braşov and the topic was the EUR-ACE Certification®, as a system for the evaluation of study programmes in the field of Engineering sciences, for the cross-border recognition of qualifications. The training session was dedicated to the new evaluators who were coopted in the Register of Employers, as well as to the experts who are part of the specialty commissions in the fields of Engineering sciences and Agricultural sciences and forestry.

Also, in December 2016, information letters were sent regarding the possibility of applying for evaluation and for the awarding of the EUR-AC certification Label, to 34 higher education institutions that operate programmes in the 'Engineering' field.

In 2016, ARACIS attended the following event organized by ENAEE:

- 21 - 22 November 2016 - Roma (Italy) - *General Assembly of ENAEE*, where the Activity Report and the Financial Report were approved, a new Agency was admitted in ENAEE, elections were held for the President of ENAEE and for two members of the Board and discussions were held with the President and the Vice-President of ENAEE on the activity of ARACIS in terms of EUR-ACE certifications (participants: Simona Lache, Director of Department, ARACIS Council).

3.2.4   *Activities in CEENQA - Central and Eastern European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education*

- 12 - 14 May 2016 – Krakow (Poland) - *General Assembly* of the Central and Eastern European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (CEENQA) (participants: Iordan Petrescu – President of ARACIS). In 2016, Mrs. Cristina Ghiţulică was selected for a second mandate as member of the Executive Office of CEENQA.

3.2.5   *Other international activities*

In May 2016, upon the initiative of the PRO DIDACTICA Education Center in Chişinău, ARACIS organized in Bucharest the first study visit and exchange of best practices among the representatives of the National Agency for Quality Assurance in Professional Education in the Republic of Moldova (ANACIP).

The event was attended by twelve representatives of ANACIP (members of the Board and experts of the Technical Department), while the topics debated during the meeting were: internal management of ARACIS and of the ARACIS Council; the economic and administrative organization of ARACIS; methods for selection, training and monitoring of evaluators' evaluation activities; best practices and experience gained in external quality evaluation; procedures for external quality evaluation; monitoring experience in regard to education programmes/ education institutions in the post-evaluation phase; external evaluation experiences of the Agency for registration in EQAR; best practices for international collaboration etc.

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Between October and November 2016, under the same collaboration between ARACIS and ANACIP, ANACIP representatives participated in three evaluation visits performed by ARACIS in Romania, namely: the institutional evaluation of the 'Artifex' University of Bucharest; the evaluation of the study programme for 'Veterinary Medicine' of the 'Regele Mihai I al României' University of Agricultural Sciences and Veterinary Medicine of Banat in Timişoara; and the institutional evaluation of the National University of Music of Bucharest.

Also, between 21 and 24 September 2016, the President of ARACIS, Prof. Eng. Iordan Petrescu, Ph.D., attended the *International Scientific Conference named '25 years of economic reform in the Republic of Moldova: economic progress by innovation and competitiveness'* dedicated to the 15th celebration from the establishment of ASEM, organized by the Academy of Economic Studies of Moldova, Chişinău.

4. INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION

The main means of presenting the information on the activities conducted by ARACIS is represented by the web page of the Agency: www.aracis.ro, that was permanently updated in 2016 with information of public interest regarding the outcomes of the evaluations carried-out by ARACIS, the schedule of the external evaluation visits, information on the recent developments of activities, the events organized by ARACIS or any other actions, for example the launching of public consultations.

Also in 2016, the International Relations, Projects and Cooperation Directorate a ARACIS (DRIPC) monitored the references to ARACIS that were published in the national media and prepared a summary of articles published in the central media on higher education topics, which took the form of a 'Press Review' submitted to the members of the ARACIS Council and to the Department for Accreditation and Quality Assurance Experts and Specialty Inspectors. As well, during 2016, press releases were prepared and issued on the activities carried-out by ARACIS, for the purpose of disseminating the information to the Romanian public.

The information activities carried-out by DRIPC also included an international component, as draft articles were submitted to ENQA and to INQAAHE for the purpose of inclusion thereof in the electronic newsletters that the two associations publish on a regular basis. As such, the ENQA Newsletter of March 2016 comprised information on the results of the project 'Development and consolidation of the quality culture of the Romanian higher education system – QUALITAS' (POSDRU/155/1.2/S/141894 contract), a project implemented by ARACIS in partnership with the Central and Eastern European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (CEENQA). Also, the December 2016 edition of the INQAAHE Newsletter, under the section 'News from Members', comprised information on the recent stages of collaboration and on the exchange of best practices between ARACIS and the National Agency for Quality Assurance in Professional Education in the Republic of Moldova (ANACIP).

For the purpose of providing information on the current status and on the trends in the field of quality assurance in higher education at European level and beyond, but also for the purpose of disseminating its own experiences on the quality of the higher education in Romania, ARACIS uses

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electronic and printed means of information. Thus, in 2016, ARACIS continued to subscribe to two journals:

- *Journal of the European Higher Education Area*, RAABE
- *Quality in Higher Education*, Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group

In 2016, in terms of international events in the field of quality assurance, ARACIS contributed to the publication of the paper *On the Role of Impact Evaluation of Quality Assurance from the Strategic Perspective of Quality Assurance Agencies in the European Higher Education Area, Quality in Higher Education*, *Routledge, Taylor & Francis Online: http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13538322.2015.1111005,* under the IMPALA project, authors R.M. Damian, J. Grifoll-Sauri, Anke Rigbers.

5. PROJECTS

5.1 National projects

5.1.1. QUALITAS Project

ARACIS implemented the project *'Development and consolidation of the quality culture of the Romanian higher education system - QUALITAS''* (POSDRU/155/1.2/S/141894 contract), in partnership with the Central and Eastern European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (CEENQA). The project implementation period was between April 2014 and December 2015.

The **general objective** of the QUALITAS project consisted of quality assurance in the higher education system in Romania, through the development of an organizational culture centered on the continuous enhancement of quality in the higher education institutions and through management skills training at institutional and system level, as fundamental premises for enhancing the quality of study programmes, but also the relevance thereof for the integration on the labor market and for the knowledge-based society.

The project was structured in five work packages, under which all proposed objectives were achieved and a series of publications were prepared, printed and available on the ARACIS page dedicated to the QUALITAS project: http://www.aracis.ro/projecte/qualitas/.

The following actions were carried-out under the project in 2016:

- The documents for the final applications for reimbursement were completed;

- The on-site on going verification mission on the project implementation manner took place in February 2016; the verification team comprised officers of the Intermediate Body of the Sectoral Operational Programme 'Human Resources Development' – MECȘ, while the visit result consisted in the acknowledgement of fulfillment, by ARACIS, of the obligations undertaken under the financing contract referred to above;

- Follow-up and consolidation of the project results, according to the financing application and ensuring the sustainability of the project – some of the measures taken in this respect were:

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o Approval for launching the procedure for printing, in the English language, of the 'Quality Barometer 2015', which was prepared, printed in the Romanian language and translated into the English language, with the funds of the QUALITAS project;

o Approval for the organization, in 2017, of minimum two sessions for the expert evaluators who were included in the National Register of ARACIS Evaluators between 2014 and 2016;

o Support for the organization of three training sessions dedicated to student evaluators, for the purpose of the registration thereof in the National Register of ARACIS Evaluators – Students;

o Continued collaboration, under the institutional evaluations carried-out by ARACIS, with the international expert evaluators selected under the QUALITAS project etc.

5.1.2. ACAD-INOV Project

ARACIS implemented the project *'Virtual community for quality assurance and improvement in strategic and innovative management in the technical and mixed universities, in order to increase the relevance of higher education to the labor market'* (POSDRU/155/1.2/S/141884 contract), in partnership with four universities in Romania – 'Politechnica' University of Bucharest, 'Dunărea de Jos' University of Galaţi, 'Gheorghe Asachi' Technical University of Iaşi, 'Transilvania' University of Braşov and the company S.C. ARWEN PROFESSIONAL SERVICES S.A. (S.C. RED POINT S.A.) of Iaşi. The ACAD-INOV Project was implemented between April 2014 and November 2015.

The *general objective* envisaged the improvement of university management by developing management, strategic planning and communication skills for education quality assurance, so as to increase the relevance of higher education for the labor market and for the knowledge-based society.

The following actions were taken under the project in 2016:

• The documents for the final applications for reimbursement were completed;

• The on-site on going verification mission on the project implementation manner took place in February 2016; the verification team comprised officers of the Intermediate Body of the Sectoral Operational Programme 'Human Resources Development' – MECŞ, while the visit result consisted in the acknowledgement of fulfillment, by ARACIS, of the obligations undertaken under the financing contract referred to above;

• Follow-up and consolidation of the project results, according to the financing application and ensuring the sustainability of the project results:

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5.2 International projects

5.2.1 *IMPALA project*

The project *'Impact Analysis of External Quality Assurance Processes of Higher Education Institutions. Pluralistic Methodology and Application of a Formative Trans-disciplinary Impact Evaluation (IMPALA)'* was financed by the Education, Culture and Audiovisual Executive Agency (EACEA) (Framework programme: Lifelong Learning Erasmus Project) and was implemented along a 3-year period, between 2013 and 2016.

ARACIS was a partner organization in the **IMPALA project**, as a project coordinated by EVALAG (Evaluation Agency Baden-Württemberg, Germany). The partner institutions in this project were: AQU Catalunya (Barcelona, Spain), FINEEC (Helsinki, Finland), ARACIS (Bucharest, Romania), University of Stuttgart (Stuttgart, Germany), Autonomous University of Barcelona (Barcelona, Spain), University of Applied Sciences Jyväskylä (Jyväskylä, Finland), Technical University of Civil Engineering Bucharest (Bucharest, Romania), Prof. Bjørn Stensaker, Ph.D. (Faculty of Education Sciences, University of Oslo, Norway), ENQA (European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, Brussels, Belgium) and ESU (European Students' Union, Brussels, Belgium).

The **project objective** consisted in the development and implementation of a methodology for analyzing the impact of external quality assurance procedures (External Quality Assurance - EQA) on the higher education institutions. At the same time, the main objective of the project was to provide additional information on the outcomes, expectations, effects and impact of external quality assurance procedures in higher education, in the four partner universities.

The following activities were carried-out under the IMPALA project in 2016:

- Participation of ARACIS in the fourth project meeting organized between 25 and 26 January 2016, at AQU Catalunya (Barcelona, Spain) (participants: Radu-Mircea Damian, Director, International Relations, Projects and Cooperation Directorate);

- Organization, by ARACIS, of the fifth project meeting, in Bucharest, between 26 and 27 April 2016;

- Participation of ARACIS in the international final conference organized in cooperation with ENQA, with the topic '*Impact Evaluation of Quality Management in Higher Education. A Contribution to Sustainable Quality Development of the Knowledge Society*', between 16 and 17 June 2016, at Barcelona, Spain (participants: Radu-Mircea Damian, Director, International Relations, Projects and Cooperation Directorate);

- Organization and implementation by ARACIS, in partnership with the Technical University of Civil Engineering of Bucharest, of the 'IMPALA Training Workshop Eastern Europe', with the topic 'Analysis of the quality assurance impact in the higher education institutions: Theory, practice and political perspectives'; the workshop was held on 19 September 2016, at Bucharest.

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5.2.2 AQUA-TS Project

The *'Automated quality control system (AQUA-TS)'* is a Leonardo da Vinci project with a duration of three years, implemented between 2013 and 2016, of which purpose was to design, develop and implement operational tools for the measurement and control of indicators of the type External Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET), in collaboration with the target groups and with the interested parties. ARACIS acted as a partner organization in the AQUA-TS project.

The project approached aspects related to the implementation of the European Reference Framework for Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET) in the tourism sector, by testing the tools in compliance with the collaboration methodologies and by the use of *job shadowing*. The project approached all stakeholders in the sector, which facilitated opportunities for sharing and for comparison of initiatives. This led to the development and implementation of a *bench-learning* instrument for the parties interested in education and vocational training in tourism at European level, with the possibility of extrapolation to other sectors as well, therefore providing for a common training framework. For ARACIS, the participation in the project offered the opportunity of identifying the common points between the external quality evaluation of university study programmes and of the VET-type ones, as well as the discrepancies in approach. In the perspective that the higher education institutions will undertake training by non-university tertiary education programmes, which will be subject to external evaluation by ARACIS, the Agency will find itself in a privileged position in terms of the experience it acquired further to the participation in this project.
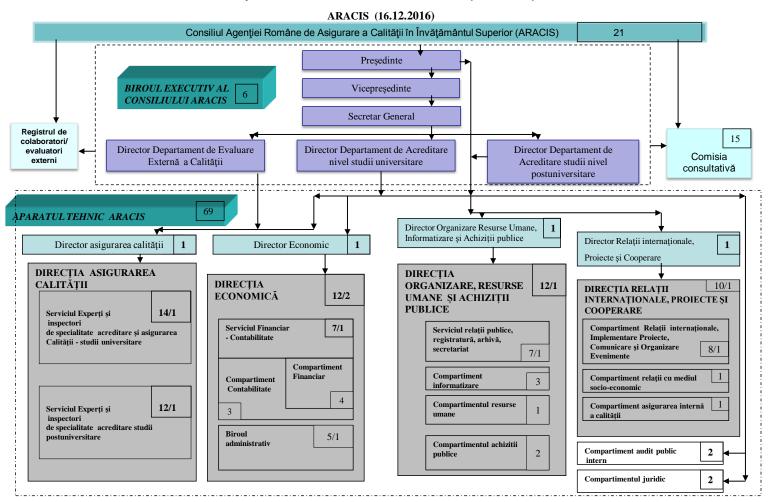
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ANNEXES

Annex 1 – ARACIS Organization chart

ORGANIGRAMA AGENŢIEI ROMÂNE DE ASIGURARE A CALITĂŢII ÎN ÎNVĂŢĂMÂNTUL SUPERIOR

ARACIS (16.12.2016)

Consiliul Agenţiei Române de Asigurare a Calităţii în Învăţământul Superior (ARACIS)	21

BIROUL EXECUTIV AL CONSILIULUI ARACIS — 6

Preşedinte
Vicepreşedinte
Secretar General

Registrul de colaboratori/ evaluatori externi

Director Departament de Evaluare Externă a Calităţii

Director Departament de Acreditare nivel studii universitare

Director Departament de Acreditare studii nivel postuniversitare

Comisia consultativă — 15

APARATUL TEHNIC ARACIS — 69

Director asigurarea calităţii	1

Director Economic	1

Director Organizare Resurse Umane, Informatizare şi Achiziţii publice	1

Director Relaţii internaţionale, Proiecte şi Cooperare	1

DIRECŢIA ASIGURAREA CALITĂŢII

Serviciul Experţi şi inspectori de specialitate acreditare şi asigurarea Calităţii - studii universitare — **14/1**

Serviciul Experţi şi inspectori de specialitate acreditare studii postuniversitare — **12/1**

DIRECŢIA ECONOMICĂ — **12/2**

Serviciul Financiar - Contabilitate — **7/1**

Compartiment Contabilitate — 3

Compartiment Financiar — 4

Biroul administrativ — 5/1

DIRECŢIA ORGANIZARE, RESURSE UMANE ŞI ACHIZIŢII PUBLICE — **12/1**

Serviciul relaţii publice, registratură, arhivă, secretariat — 7/1

Compartiment informatizare — 3

Compartimentul resurse umane — 1

Compartimentul achizitii publice — 2

DIRECŢIA RELAŢII INTERNAŢIONALE, PROIECTE ŞI COOPERARE — 10/1

Compartiment Relaţii internaţionale, Implementare Proiecte, Comunicare şi Organizare Evenimente — 8/1

Compartiment relaţii cu mediul socio-economic — 1

Compartiment asigurarea internă a calităţii — 1

Compartiment audit public intern — 2

Compartimentul juridic — 2

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Annex 2 – Members of the ARACIS Council

President:

1. Prof. Eng. Petrescu Iordan, Ph.D.

Vice-President:

2. Prof. Eng. Ghițulică Cristina, Ph.D.

Secretary General:

3. Professor Stan Vasilica, Ph.D.

Director of the Department for External Evaluation of Quality:

4. Professor Popa Ion, Ph.D.

Director of the Accreditation Department:

5. Prof. Eng. Lache Simona, Ph.D.

Members:

6. Associate Professor Bunoiu Octavian Mădălin, Ph.D.
7. Prof. Eng. Cojocaru Dorian, Ph.D.
8. Professor Corbu Nicoleta, Ph.D.
9. Prof. Eng. Georgescu Puiu Lucian, Ph.D.
10. Professor Grigoraş Gheorghe, Ph.D.
11. Prof. Eng. Hadăr Anton, Ph.D.
12. Professor Iamandi Luca, Ph.D.
13. Professor Ianoș Ioan, Ph.D.
14. Professor Lascăr Ioan, Ph.D.
15. Professor Nagy Ladislau, Ph.D.
16. Professor Opre Adrian, Ph.D.
17. Cherecheş Vlad – student
18. Tunsoiu Nicolae – student

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Annex 3 – The Advisory Commission of ARACIS

Academician Ionel Haiduc - President of the Romanian Academy

Prof. Dinu Airinei - 'Alexandru Ioan Cuza' University of Iaşi

Prof. Cezar Birzea – National School of Political Studies and Public Administration of Bucharest

Prof. Oprea Călin – 'Nicolae Titulescu' University of Bucharest

Prof. Dumitru Gaşpar – West University of Timişoara

Prof. Viorel Lefter – Academy of Economic Studies of Bucharest

Prof. Mircea Miclea – 'Babeş-Bolyai' University of Cluj-Napoca

Prof. Mircea Cristel Muthu – 'Babeş-Bolyai' University of Cluj-Napoca

Prof. Delia Marina Podea – 'Vasile Goldiş' West University of Arad – Suspended from the

Advisory Commission

Prof. Gheorghe Popa – 'Alexandru Ioan Cuza' University of Iaşi

Prof. Alexandru Popovici – 'Petrol-Gaze/Oil&Gas' University of Ploieşti

Prof. Zoltan Rostas – the University of Bucharest

Prof. Gheorghe Solomon – 'Politehnica' University of Bucharest

Prof. Emilian Stancu – University of Bucharest

Prof. Paul Şerban Agachi – 'Babes-Bolyai' University of Cluj-Napoca

Prof. Mircea Ivănescu – University of Craiova

Prof. Adrian Miroiu – National School for Political Studies and Public Administration (S.N.S.P.A)

Prof. Mihai Octavian Popescu – 'Politehnica' University of Bucharest