

The Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education



Activity Report

For the year 2017



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

Full member of

The European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education

ENQA



Listed in

The European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education

EQAR



Member in

The European Network for Accreditation of Engineering Education

ENAE



Member in

The Central and Eastern European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education

CEENQA



Member in

The International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education

INQAAHE



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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS (in alphabetical order)

ACAD-INOV	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”
ANACIP (RO)	National Agency for Quality Assurance in Vocational Education in the Republic of Moldova
ANOSR (RO)	National Alliance of Students’ Organizations in Romania
ARACIP (RO)	Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Pre-University Education
ARACIS (RO)	Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
ARUT (RO)	Romanian Alliance of Technical Universities
AUF (FR)	Agence Universitaire de la Francophonie /Francophone University Association
BE _x (RO)	Executive Board of ARACIS Council
CEENQA (EN)	Central and Eastern European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education
CNATDCU (RO)	National Board for the Certification of University Titles, Degrees and Certificates
CREADING (RO)	Romanian Coalition for Engineering Education
DEQAR (EN)	The Database of External Quality Assurance Reports International ERASMUS+ project, under the aegis of EQAR; ARACIS is a partner in this project
DIRPC (EN)	Division for International Relations, Projects and Cooperation
EHEA (EN)	European Higher Education Area
ENAE (EN)	European Network for Accreditation of Engineering Education
ENQA (EN)	European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
EQAF (EN)	European Quality Assurance Forum
EQAR (EN)	European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education
ESF (EN)	European Social Fund
ESG (EN)	European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education



ESU (EN)	European Students' Union
EUA (EN)	European University Association
EURASHE (EN)	European Association of Institutions in Higher Education
GD (EN)	Government Decision
INQAAHE (EN)	International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education
MoNE (EN)	Ministry of National Education
NRE (EN)	National Register of Evaluators
NRE-S (EN)	National Register of Evaluators - Students
NRFF (EN)	Non-reimbursable foreign funds
QAFIN (EN)	The project “Improving public policy in higher education and improving the quality of regulations by updating quality standards”, under the aegis of MoNE, financed in the Operational Program Administrative Capacity – POCA, co-financed from non-reimbursable funds of the European Union; ARACIS is a partner in the project
QAR (EN)	Quality Assurance Review for Higher Education
QUALITAS	The project “Development and strengthening of a quality culture at the level of the Romanian higher-education system”
UEFISCDI (RO)	Executive Unit for the Financing of Higher Education, Research, Development and Innovation
UNSR (RO)	National Union of Students in Romania
USR (RO)	Union of Students in Romania

FOREWORD BY THE PRESIDENT

The Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education continued to pursue its mission, one that is declared and assumed, of fulfilling the role laid down by the relevant laws in force, as regards quality assurance for higher education in Romania.

This report summarizes the main activities conducted in 2017 by our agency according to its mission. Thus, keeping in mind the main goal of the agency, in particular the good conduct of external evaluation processes, this report details the main measures taken by the agency in settling current issues relating to the organization of our own activity, but also in view of completing the national and international projects in which our agency was or continues to be a contractor or a partner. These activities are further detailed in this report.

The external evaluations of quality of education formed, beyond a doubt, the largest part of the activities undertaken by ARACIS in 2017. Out of the 10 institutional evaluations which were completed in 2017, with five public higher-education institutions and five private higher-education institutions, seven quality judgments of “high level of confidence”, one quality judgment of “confidence” and two quality judgments of “limited level of confidence” were issued. This outcome is a confirmation of the phenomenon, which was also noticed in 2016, that in this second “round” of periodical evaluations into higher-education institutions, the qualitative level increased, or at least remained at an acceptable degree. Nevertheless, in two private education institutions, the quality judgments were “limited level of confidence”, which confirms that the input physical and human resources are a direct condition for the quality of education, but also points out to the difficulties currently faced by the private education system, in the context of a decrease in the number of applicants. The results of assessments into bachelor degree and master degree study programs have largely confirmed an increase of quality.

In 2017, the updating of the External Evaluation Methodology continued to focus on the implementation of the provisions set forth in the *Standards and guidelines revised and approved during the Ministerial Conference of Yerevan of 14 - 15 May 2015 (ESG)* by the ministers in charge of higher education in the 48 countries of the European Higher Education Area. Thus, we completed the preparation of a new *External evaluation methodology, standards, reference standards and list of performance indicators of ARACIS*, updated with the provisions of new ESG, starting from the former version, approved by means of Government Decision no. 1418/2006, which however contained, in various wordings, many of their provisions. This activity involved members of the Council and personnel of our agency, evaluators, students, as well as other stakeholders. The new Methodology underwent public debate and was then approved by the Government of Romania, by means of Romanian Government Decision no. 915/14 December 2017.

In 2017, the implementation of project “*Improving public policy in higher education and improving the quality of regulations by updating quality standards- QAFIN*” started, in which we acted as partner of the Ministry of National Education, a project financed through the Operational Program Administrative Capacity, under code SIPOCA 16.



At the same time, we completed the revision and supplementation of *Specific standards for the external evaluation of academic quality in relation to bachelor degree and master degree study programs* applicable to the Permanent Specialty Commissions of Experts, further to consultations with a large number of evaluators and representatives of academia.

Our cooperation with students continued and intensified, by involving them in the works of the Permanent Specialty Commissions of experts, by taking part in external evaluation visits at the level of study programs, in the development and supplementation of the new methodology.

At the same time, this report contains the measures enforced and preliminary activities undertaken for the implementation of regular external evaluation of our agency, a mandatory condition for maintaining the status as full member of ENQA and to continue to be listed in EQAR. Among them, I want to emphasize in particular the completion of the “Self-Assessment Report” – SAR of our agency and the calendar of the visit with ARACIS conducted by the external evaluation team coordinated by ENQA, scheduled for March 2018.

ARACIS’ publishing activity in the field of higher education and external evaluation of education quality continued in 2017. Thus, we published a study on the topic *Offer of the higher education system in the academic year 2016/2017*, which includes the demand and supply of 1st cycle (bachelor) university studies in statistical data and two issues of the *Quality Assurance Review for Higher Education*. For 2018, we intend to publish new studies on the demand and supply of master, doctoral respectively, university study programs, for the academic year 2017-2018 and two issues of the above-mentioned review.

ARACIS was active at the international level, attending actions organized by ENQA or by our cooperation with other agencies or with other structures and organizations involved in ensuring quality assurance for higher education, such as CEENQA, INQAAHE, AUF.

This annual report provides me, as it does every year, with an opportunity to thank everyone who contributed to the good conduct of the agency’s works!

President of ARACIS,

Prof. Univ. Dr. Eng. Iordan Petrescu



Mission

ARACIS' mission is to carry out the quality external evaluation of education provided by higher education institutions and by other organizations providing higher education study programs, which operate in Romania, with the aim of:

- certifying, according to quality standards, the capacity of education providing organizations to fulfill the beneficiaries' expectations;
- contributing to the development of an institutional culture of higher education quality;
- assuring the protection of direct beneficiaries of study programs at the higher-education level, by producing and disseminating systematic, consistent and trustworthy information, publicly accessible, in respect of education quality;
- proposing to the Ministry of National Education strategies and policies for the continuous improvement of higher-education quality, in close correlation with the pre-university education system.

INTRODUCTION

This report covers the period ranging between 03 January 2017 and 31 December 2017.

This report was drawn up and refined by a team lead by the Division for International Relations, Projects and Cooperation (DIRPC), which comprised representatives of all decision-making, coordination, implementation and control structures operating as part of ARACIS, which contributed information and supporting documents, which presented the activities undertaken, but also by suggestions for future measures to improve the internal quality assurance of the agencies' works.

The following persons contributed to the preparation of this report, broken down into the activities indicated herein below:

Primary reporting and data processing: Ion Tănase, Head of Economic Division; Carmen Mirian, Office of experts and specialty inspectors for accreditation and quality assurance – university studies; Dr. Cristian Eni, IT Department; Emilia Mircea, Head of Legal and Internal Quality Assurance Department; Marinela Lolea, Director, Division for Organization, Human Resources and Public Procurement; Daniela Păcuraru, Assistant.

Report review: Executive Board of ARACIS Council: Prof. Univ. Dr. Eng. Iordan Petrescu, President; Prof. Univ. Dr. Eng. Cristina Ghițulică, Vice-President; Prof. Univ. Dr. Eng. Simona Lache, Head of the Quality Assurance Department; Associate Prof. Dr. Mădălin Bunoiu, Head of the Quality External Evaluation Department, Prof. Univ. Dr. Ioan Ianoș, General Secretary of ARACIS Council; students Vlad Cherecheș (ANOSR) and Nicolae Tunsoiu (UNSR), members of the ARACIS Council; Prof. Univ. Dr. Eng. Anton Hadăr, representing in ARACIS Council the trade union comprising the largest number of members in the higher-education system; Dr. Eng. Cristian Erbașu, employers' representative in ARACIS Council.

Coordination and preparation of the final wording: Prof. Univ. Dr. Eng. Radu-Mircea Damian, Head of the Division for International Relations, Projects and Cooperation - DIRPC; Adina Nică, Expert, DIRPC; Adriana Popoiu, Expert, DIRPC.

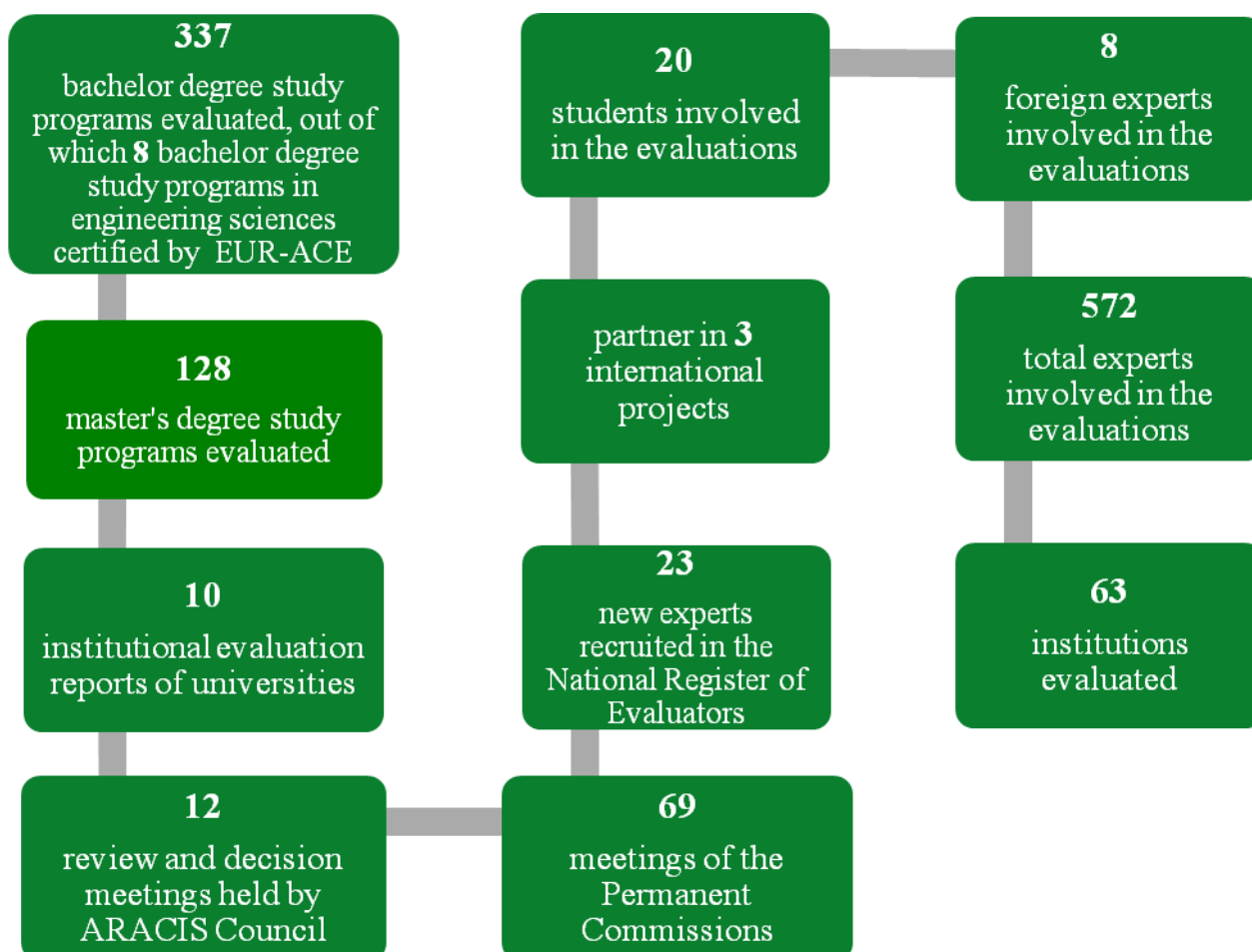
The authors thank all members of the ARACIS Council and everyone else who contributed to the completion of this report.

The report was delivered to and approved by the ARACIS Council.

In its final wording, the Report was published on our website in Romanian and English (www.aracis.ro).

ARACIS ACTIVITY REPORT FOR THE YEAR 2017

Synopsis of main activities undertaken by ARACIS in 2017 in pursuit of its mission



1. GENERALITIES

1.1 Context, Legal Operation Frame, Organizational Structure and Resources of ARACIS

1.1.1. Outlook on the Context

Romania, as signatory of the Bologna Declaration (1999), became part of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), an extensive process for the reorganization of higher education in the signatory states. Assuring education quality is a primary goal of EHEA and, in that respect, the ministries in charge of higher education have adopted, in 2005, the *Standards and guidelines for quality assurance (ESG) in the European Higher Education Area*. These were prepared in reliance upon a proposal submitted by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) in cooperation with the European Students Organization (ESU), the European Association of Higher Education Institutions (EURASHE) and the European University Association (EUA).

After 2005, considerable progress was noticed in terms of quality assurance, but also in other lines of action within the Bologna Process, such as the qualifications framework, recognition and fostering of education results' use, all of which contribute to a shift in the paradigm towards teaching and learning focused on the student.

In Romania, for the purpose of evaluating the assurance of quality in higher education, the **Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS)** was set up, operating in observance of the provisions of the national laws in effect, but also of the *Methodology of external evaluation, standards, reference standards and list of performance indicators of ARACIS*, approved by Government Decision (GD) no. 1418/2006, as amended by Government Decision no. 915/2017. The amendment was rendered necessary as a result of the ministries in charge of higher education having adopted, in 2015, during the Conference of Yerevan, Armenia, the new ESG.

The agency's management is provided by the **ARACIS Council** (in short, *the Council*).

ARACIS is a full member of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education - **ENQA** and undergoes regular international external evaluation procedures, as required for maintaining this status.

ARACIS is listed in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education - **EQAR** and undergoes regular international external evaluation procedures, as provided for preserving this capacity.

ARACIS is also a member of other organizations or international networks of agencies for quality assurance in higher education.

1.1.2. Legal Operation Frame

The institutional status acquired upon its setting up and ARACIS' activity are governed, at the national level, by the following legislative enactments:

- **Emergency Ordinance of the Government of Romania no. 75/2005 on education quality assurance**, as subsequently amended and supplemented;
- **Romanian Government Decision (GD) no. 915/2017 amending the annex to Decision no. 1418/2006 for approving the *Methodology for external evaluation, standards, reference standards and the list of performance indicators of ARACIS***, herein after referred to, in short, as the “Methodology”¹;
- **GD no. 1731/2006 approving the fees for the authorization to operate and accreditation of higher education institutions per study programs and for the external evaluation of education quality, charged by ARACIS**;
- **National Education Law no. 1/2011**, as subsequently amended and supplemented;
- **GD no. 369/2013 approving the Methodology for the accreditation of master’s degree university study fields in reliance upon the accredited master’s degree study programs**;
- For the regulation and/or implementation of specific evaluation activities, **Orders of the Ministry of National Education** are regularly issued.

In conducting its work, ARACIS draws up and enforces, under the law, own regulations, approved by its Council:

- *Guide of evaluation activities for the quality of university study programs and higher education institutions*;
- *Guideline for periodic external evaluation of the fields of study for the Master degrees*;
- *Code of ethics and rules of conduct in the activities carried out by ARACIS regarding the quality assurance and assessment in higher education in Romania*, herein after referred to, in short, Code of ethics;
- *Specific standards on the external evaluation of academic quality in bachelor’s and master’s degree university study programs*, employed by the Permanent Specialty Commissions of Experts;
- *Decisions of ARACIS Council and Decisions of the Executive Board of the Council (BEx) in settling day-to-day matters*.

Following the actual enforcement of the Methodology between 2007 and 2017, the legislative amendments, but also further to approving the new ESG, several elements of improvement have been identified.

For that purpose, in 2016, the Council approved the principles, calendar of activities and members of the working group for the preparation of proposals to amend the “Methodology”. The working group took into account the remarks of the evaluators, of the institutions subject to evaluation and of ARACIS’ personnel, but also of the members of the Council, of the Permanent Specialty Commissions of Experts, students, employers and specialty inspectors.

¹ At the time when this report was drawn up, Government Decision no. 915/2017 is published in Official Gazette of Romania Part I no. 25/11 January 2018.

In 2017, a draft Methodology was drawn up, in line with the *Standards and guidelines for quality assurance (ESG) in the European Higher Education Area 2015*. The amended methodology was approved by *Government Decision no. 915/2017 for amending the annex to Government Decision no. 1418/2006 approving the Methodology of external evaluation, standards, reference standards and list of performance indicators of the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education*.

With a view to providing higher education institutions with the support required to provide internal quality assurance, in the context of ensuring a correlation between the similar skills provided by various universities and in order to amount, of course, to a transparent and efficient instrument of academic evaluation, further to public consultations held in 2017, the ARACIS Council approved the following documents:

- *Specific standards for the preparatory year in the Romanian language, for foreign students;*
- *Guideline for periodic external evaluation of the fields of study for the Master degrees.*

Additionally, further to requests received from higher education institutions or from other stakeholders, the ARACIS Council approved, in 2017, several specific amendments to the *Specific standards for the external evaluation of academic quality in bachelor's and master's degree university study programs* to be used by the Permanent Specialty Commissions of Experts.

The elements specified herein above are useful for the institutions and in the preparation of documents for regular external evaluation – self-evaluation reports and their annexes.

In respect of the evaluation of doctoral studies, in 2017, ARACIS initiated a public consultation process with the stakeholders, in connection with the *Criteria, standards and performance indicators* for this third university study cycle. Given the complexity of this endeavor and the legislative amendments expected and/or already approved, the procedure as a whole continues to undergo preparatory and refining works, as part of a project implemented with technical assistance supplied by the World Bank.

1.1.3. Mission and Purpose of ARACIS

According to its Mission, ARACIS carries out the external quality evaluation of education provided by higher education institutions and by other education providing organizations, which operate in the territory of Romania, but also by Romanian education providing organizations legally operating in the territory of other countries, in observance of the legal regulations currently in effect in Romania and, as the case may be, in the territory of the state where they operate, with the aim of:

- a) certifying the capacity of education providing organizations to achieve the quality standards and, thus, to fulfill the beneficiaries' expectations;
- b) contributing to the development of an institutional culture of higher education quality;
- c) assuring the protection of direct and indirect beneficiaries of study programs, by producing and disseminating systematic, consistent and trustworthy information, publicly accessible, in respect of the quality of education provided by the higher-education institutions;

- d) proposing to the competent ministry (i.e., the Ministry of National Education) strategies and policies for the continuous improvement of higher education quality, in close correlation with the pre-university education system, with the employers' demands and with the European and international practices;
- e) contributing to the promotion of high-quality higher education in Romania at the international level;
- f) providing a better correlation between the skills in high demand on the labor market and the educational offer oriented towards education results, with a view to increasing the degree of employability for new graduates, both in Romania, and in Europe.

The main goal of ARACIS' activity consists of providing high-quality higher education and training, in order to develop a highly-competitive human capital.

1.1.4. Organizational Structure

ARACIS is an autonomous and independent public institution, of national interest, holding legal personality and its own revenues and expenditure budget. ARACIS is fully financed from its own revenues. With a view to organizing and increasing the efficiency of its activity, ARACIS drew up an Organization and Operation Regulation, which was approved by the Council.

The organizational structure (*Annex 1 – Organisation chart*) of ARACIS contains:

- The Council;
- The Executive Board of the Council;
- The Department for Quality External Evaluation;
- The Accreditation Department;
- Permanent Specialty Commissions of Experts;
- Advisory Commission;
- Ethics Commission;
- Technical staff, structured in four specialty divisions:
 - The Quality Assurance Division;
 - The Economic Division;
 - The Division for Organization, Human Resources and Public Procurement;
 - The Division for International Relations, Projects and Cooperation.
- A department and an office subordinated to the President of ARACIS:
 - Internal Public Audit Department;
 - Legal and Internal Quality Assurance Department.

The Council of ARACIS (or the *Council*) is made up of 21 members selected by public contest, in observance of the own procedure of ARACIS, in reliance upon criteria of professional and scientific

skills, professional notoriety, etc., among which: **17** teaching members, who may be tenured professors and/or associate professors or who carry on their teaching activity subject to the approval of the university's senate; **two** students, delegates of representative students federations at national level; **one** representative of the trade union in education and **one** representative of employers.

The *Council* is the collective management structure of ARACIS, which provides programmatic guidance for the Agency. The Council sits once a month in ordinary meeting, but also in extraordinary meeting, whenever necessary, upon the convening notice sent by the president or vice-president, in the absence of the former.

The *Council* fulfills the powers detailed in the Organization and Operation Regulation.

Between February and March 2017, in accordance with the provisions of the *Procedure of selecting, through public competition, of the ARACIS Council members*, 11 vacancies (teaching members) in ARACIS Council were opened. As a result of the contest, 11 teaching members were selected from among the eligible applicants. Given that one of the admitted applicants failed to submit the statement for accepting the job, 10 out of the 11 vacancies were occupied.

Furthermore, also in 2017, in observance of the above-mentioned *Selection procedure*, the position of employers' representative in the ARACIS Council was occupied, from among the applicants proposed by employers' associations.

The Executive Board (BEx) of ARACIS Council is the operative management structure of ARACIS, composed of the president, vice-president and general secretary of ARACIS Council, the Director of the Department for Quality External Evaluation and the Director of the Accreditation Department. The BEx sits in ordinary meeting once a week, but also in extraordinary meeting, whenever necessary, upon the convening notice sent by the president or vice-president. The regular meetings of the Executive Board are also attended, as guests, by a representative of the students' associations in the ARACIS Council and by the representative of the education trade union.

The Department for Quality External Evaluation and the ***Accreditation Department*** are made up of experts in the quality assurance field, members of the Council, and are headed by a Director. These departments met regularly for reviews and debates in connection with the evaluation of study programs and, respectively, for institutional evaluation. Following such debates, the departments issue their own reports, which they submitted to the ARACIS Council, together with substantiated recommendations referring to the extent to which the standards and quality indicators were achieved by the study programs and by the higher education institutions which were subject to evaluations.

The technical staff of ARACIS is an executive structure comprising 72 positions, of which, at the beginning of 2017, 32 positions were occupied and 40 positions were vacant. During 2017, 5 vacancies were opened and contests were organized to occupy them. In 2017, the employment agreements were terminated for four employees and three other new persons were employed by contest.

In 2017, two training sessions were organized for the technical staff of ARACIS, in connection with several topics, among which: internal quality assurance, in view of ESG 2015, Guideline of evaluation activities for master's degree fields, revision of internal quality assurance procedures, and others.

At the same time, one inspector in the Division for Organization, Human Resources and Public Procurement attended a certified training for “Archivist”, the purpose for which the training was attended consisting of developing his knowledge and practical skills to manage and to provide the internal departments and the general public with the documents prepared by the agency.

Advisory and Audit Commission for ARACIS activities is comprised of well-known representatives of academia and its mission is to supervise the evaluation procedures and to uphold the decisions enacted by the Agency (*Annex 3 – Advisory Commission*).

The Ethics Commission of ARACIS is comprised of three individuals, of which *one president and two members*. The records of documents, of correspondence are kept by a secretariat of the Commission, also in charge of preparing the minutes of the meetings. The assignment of the Ethics Commission lasts for four years. The Ethics Commission provides compliance with the *Code of ethics and rules of conduct in the activities carried out by ARACIS regarding the quality assurance and assessment in higher education in Romania (in short, the “Ethics Code”)*.

Permanent Specialty Commissions of Experts. The ARACIS Council decided, in reliance upon Government Decision no. 1418/2006, to set up *14 Permanent Specialty Commissions of Experts*. They are subordinated to the ARACIS Council. The commissions conduct their work in observance of the *Regulation for the performance of activities by Permanent Specialty Commissions of Experts*, approved by the ARACIS Council, and are assisted in their works by ARACIS evaluators, who are listed in the *National Register of ARACIS Evaluators* (NRE). This is made up of university professors and associated professors from Romania and from abroad, whose professional work and moral integrity are well-known, holding high skills and extensive experience in the field of education quality assurance from Romania and from abroad. In order to become an evaluator listed in the Register of ARACIS Evaluators, applicants go through a transparent selection process, governed by public procedure, approved by the ARACIS Council.

During 2017, the ARACIS Council revised several internal documents, such: the *Regulation for the Organization and Operation of the agency*, the *Organisation chart of ARACIS*, *Internal Regulation* and *Code of ethics and rules of conduct in the activities carried out by ARACIS regarding the quality assurance and assessment in higher education in Romania*. The need to revise the above-mentioned documents occurred as a result of legislative amendments, but also with a view to adapt these documents to the current realities, as they appear in the work of the agency.

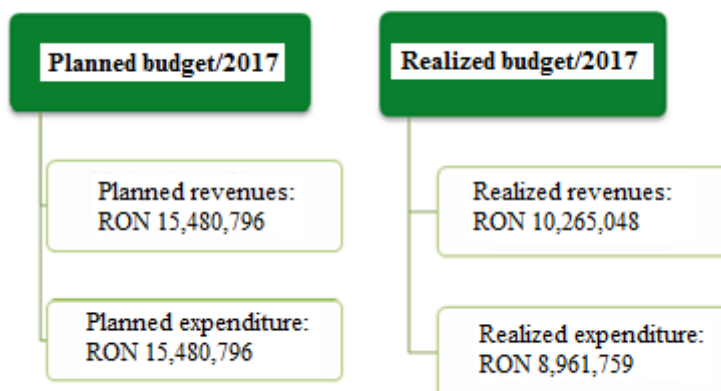
1.1.5. Financial Activity of ARACIS

ARACIS’ revenues originate from own sources, in accordance with the laws in effect, such as taxes charged for external evaluations for provisional authorizing to operate/accreditation and/or periodical evaluation at the level of study programs and/or institutions, from financial revenues-interest, and from non-reimbursable foreign funds.

In respect of 2017, the ARACIS Council approved a revenues and expenditure budget amounting to 15,480,796 RON (Romanian Leu), both for revenues, and for expenditure (*Figure 1*), out of which the amount assigned for projects financed from non-reimbursable foreign funds (NRFF) was of 2,135,000 RON as revenues and 1,965,000 RON as expenditure.

On 31 December 2017, ARACIS had collected revenues of 10,265,048 RON, out of which 280,645 RON from NRFF, while the payments made amounted to 8,961,759 RON, out of which 605,473 RON from projects financed from NRFF.

Figure 1 – Revenues and expenditure budget of ARACIS for the year 2017



The data above was determined in accordance with the relevant legal provisions applicable in Romania.

As deriving from the data indicated herein above, it may be noticed that revenues not realized amounted to 5,215,748 RON, out of which 3,361,393 RON for the baseline activity and 1,854,355 RON for the activity financed from NRFF, and respectively expenditure not realized amounting to 6,518,997 RON, out of which 5,159,470 RON for the baseline activity and 1,359,527 RON for the activity financed from NRFF. The failure to realize revenues and expenditure corresponding to the baseline activity may be explained by the decrease in the number of evaluation agreements concluded with higher education institutions, mainly as a result of the following: regular evaluation of study programs as part of institutional evaluations, which led to individual regular evaluation for a smaller number of study programs; a smaller number of institutional evaluations and respectively the failure to complete the evaluation process in certain cases by the end of 2017. The non-realization of revenues/expenditure for the activities financed from NRFF is the result of the delay in the implementation deadline for the SIPOCA/SMIS2014:16 project, further to the addenda concluded in relation to the financing agreement. The financial statements drawn up as of 31 December 2017 indicate a good management of funds in 2017.

1.1.6. Legal activity of ARACIS

The evaluation activity conducted in 2017 required the involvement of many expert evaluators, and therefore 1,955 civil contracts were concluded for quality evaluation between ARACIS and such evaluators.

For 2017, 45 Decisions were issued by the Executive Board of the ARACIS Council and 92 Decisions of the ARACIS Council in relation to various situations and causes. All Decisions of the

Executive Board of the ARACIS Council and all Council Decisions underwent the internal procedures in terms of transparency, communication, numbering and archiving.

At the same time, all templates have been drawn up and updated in connection with “Services Agreements” used by ARACIS in its evaluation activity, and which ARACIS concludes with higher-education institutions, but also the templates of “Civil Agreements” in connection with quality evaluation, concluded by ARACIS with expert evaluators from Romania and from abroad.

In 2017, following the evaluation missions it performed, ARACIS appeared in court in four cases. Among them, in one case, ARACIS is the complainant, in one case ARACIS is the respondent, and in two cases ARACIS is the defendant: in one case, the complainant waived the proceedings, and in another case – motion for ascertainment – the file was forwarded to the High Court of Cassation and Justice.

1.1.7. Internal Quality Assurance

The component of internal quality assurance within the Legal and Internal Quality Assurance Department of ARACIS manages and provides the logistical support necessary to conduct its day-to-day business, as required for the management and internal quality assurance, for the general purpose of setting up a culture of quality to be adhered to and applied by all members of our agency.

In enforcing the quality management system, the management of ARACIS undertakes to:

- satisfy the requirements of stakeholders;
- provide the infrastructure and a suitable working environment for the appropriate provision of all processes and resources necessary in order to achieve the envisaged goals;
- comply with the applicable laws in force governing its activity;
- continuous improvement of the quality management system.

In 2017, several procedures were drawn up at the level of the agency, concerning the internal activities undertaken by the organizational structures within the agency.

The management of ARACIS continued, in 2017, its efforts to improve internal managerial control, in line with the provisions of Government Ordinance no. 119/1999 on internal/managerial control and preventive financial control, republished as subsequently amended and supplemented and with the provisions laid down in Order of the General Secretariat of the Government (OSGG) no. 400/2015 approving the Code of Internal/Managerial Control of Public Entities, as subsequently amended and supplemented.

With a view to developing the internal/managerial control system, the following activities were conducted:

- preparation of supporting materials for the Internal Managerial Control System implementation at the level of internal structures and of the agency;
- registration, centralization, processing of data delivered by the organizational structures within ARACIS;

- drawing up the Program for the development of internal/managerial control system at ARACIS level;
- updating the decision concerning the Monitoring Commission;
- providing the technical support aimed at developing the internal control system.

In 2017, the implementation of the internal managerial control system continued, this being a permanent, long-term process, involving the continuous development and refining of complex management instruments.

1.1.8. Activity conducted by the Internal Audit Department within ARACIS

In 2017, no audit missions were performed, as a consequence of the fact that the two positions in the Internal Public Audit Department are still vacant. In order to remedy this situation, ARACIS took the necessary measures to recruit two internal public auditors, by three contests organized in 2017 for the two vacancies, however, the recruitment process could not successfully be completed because no applications were submitted. In consideration of this fact, ARACIS will continue its endeavors in 2018.

1.2 Summary of the Activities Performed

Management of daily activities

During 2017, the Executive Board of the ARACIS Council sat in organized sessions, usually once a week, but also in extraordinary meetings, whenever necessary. On such occasions, it reviewed the requests and demands received and issued resolutions which were delivered directly to the claimants or were submitted to the review and approval by the ARACIS Council.

In all these cases, irrespective of the form of requests (letters, e-mails, telephonic inquiries etc.), replies were provided within the legal timeframe and in line with the competence of ARACIS.

During the reference period, several of the higher education institutions subject to evaluation (public and private universities) filed appeals in connection with the results of evaluations. With a view to reviewing and settling appeals, as the case may be, the specific procedure of ARACIS was enforced.

Cooperation with higher-education institutions and with other structures and stakeholders

Also, during 2017, the Executive Board of the ARACIS Council received visits from the rectors of higher-education institutions, chairpersons of associations or foundations, teaching personnel of universities, journalists, students, etc. and delivered written replies to inquiries received from higher-education institutions in Romania.

The entire activity conducted by ARACIS in 2017 consisted, in fact, of the cooperation between all structures playing a role in quality assurance in the higher-education system of Romania. ARACIS acted as an active partner for Romanian universities, by providing permanent support, through its activities and projects, for their effort in the process of assuring and improving the quality of higher education.

At the same time, ARACIS continued to cooperate with the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Pre-University Education (ARACIP), by submitting joint proposals of projects and by taking part in reunions of impact on the Romanian educational system.

Student involvement

As for the students' activity, they were always involved in and supported by the ARACIS Council, and took part in the quality external evaluation visits.

Students are full members in the ARACIS Council, they attend the meetings of the Executive Board of the ARACIS Council and all institutional evaluations conducted by our agency.

The students who are members in the Permanent Specialty Commissions of Experts were invited to and took part in the training sessions dedicated to expert evaluators, organized by ARACIS in 2017.

Following relevant training of students (in 2016, three training sessions were held) and in reliance upon the information received from students' associations concerning the status of student evaluators, in 2017, the National Register of Evaluators - Students (NRE-S) was updated, the members of which, posted on the ARACIS website (<http://www.aracis.ro/organizare/registru-national-de-evaluatori/>) is regularly updated and supplemented.

In 2017, students took part in 10 institutional evaluations.

From the standpoint of student involvement in quality evaluation and assurance processes, after ESG revision, in May of 2015, ARACIS continued its endeavors to involve students in all external evaluation processes. Thus, following the preparation and approval by the ARACIS Council, in 2016, of the *Procedure for the selection and appointment of students members of the Permanent Specialty Commissions*, in 2017, the process for the selection of students was initiated and completed for all Permanent Specialty Commissions of Experts.

As for student involvement in the external evaluations of university study programs, in 2017, ARACIS undertook the necessary endeavors to further involve students in the evaluations of study programs so that, starting from the autumn of 2017, student evaluators take part in the evaluation of university study programs.

Student involvement in ARACIS activities has an outstanding potential for growth, as the activity of student evaluators proves that they are able to manage other types of evaluations and to become involved in quality assurance processes for the Romanian higher-education system at all levels.

Evaluation of the agency's activity by beneficiaries and other stakeholders

Our agency places particular focus on the manner in which our activity is conducted, with a view to continuously improving it. In that regard, in 2017, ARACIS conducted an analysis at the level of higher-education institutions and evaluators in the National Register of ARACIS Evaluators, aimed at assessing the quality of our activity, in the external evaluation process, and its impact in the academia, but also to reinforce quality management at the level of higher-education institutions. The outcome of this investigation was transposed in the paper *Review Report – Evaluation of the quality of the activity of ARACIS* drew up in 2017 and published, in Romanian and in English, on the website of ARACIS.

2. EVALUATION ACTIVITIES AND ARACIS EVALUATORS

As already specified, 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.

According to the Yerevan Communiqué (2015, pp. 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 consultations with all 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, in 2017, a revised version of the Methodology was prepared, adjusted to the current national and European requirements, approved by Government Decision no. 915/2017.

The revision of this Methodology also aimed to shift the center of gravity for evaluation processes from input indicators, to evaluation based on the process outcome, with higher responsibility placed on the internal structures for quality assurance in higher education. From the standpoint of ARACIS, improvement of criteria, standards and performance indicators needs to be a constant concern and a permanent process. Thus, the QAFIN project, implemented with the assistance of the World Bank, in which ARACIS is a partner, the implementation of which began in 2017, will amount to additional support for increasing the qualitative level of internal and external quality assurance.

2.1 Evaluations carried out by ARACIS in 2017

2.1.1 Evaluation of study programs

In 2017, ARACIS received 465 applications for external quality evaluation for bachelor’s degree (1st cycle) and master’s degree (2nd cycle) university study programs.

In order to comply with these applications, the Accreditation Department within ARACIS conducted its activity pursuant to its powers, as laid down in the Organization and Operation Regulation of the Agency, as follows:

- preparation, with the support of ARACIS technical staff, of the internal reports of ARACIS for validating the outcome of evaluation missions for study programs, for the purpose of provisional authorization, accreditation or maintaining of accreditation;
- organization and management of the database for the evaluation of study programs;
- management and updating of the National Register of ARACIS Evaluators.

Tables 2.1.1.1 – 2.1.1.3 illustrate the situation of study programs implemented in the universities of Romania, evaluated by ARACIS in 2017. It may be noticed that most evaluation activities referred to accredited study programs, subject to periodic (cyclical) evaluation necessary to maintain their accreditation. Merely 16% of all programs consisted of new study programs, proposed for provisional authorization. Among them, 7.4% did not achieve the rating and did not receive the license allowing their operation.

In respect of the programs subject to regular evaluation, most of them (99.5%) were successful in maintaining their accreditation, and from those subject to accreditation, 100% received it.

Table 2.1.1.1 Status of BACHELOR’S DEGREE university study programs (SP) evaluated in 2017, depending on the evaluation type

Total number of evaluated SP	Number of SP evaluated for provisional authorization to operate	Number of SP evaluated for accreditation	Number of SP subject to periodic evaluation for the purpose of maintaining the accreditation
<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>
TOTAL = 337	54	58	225

Table 2.1.1.2 Status of BACHELOR’S DEGREE university study programs (SP) evaluated in 2017, depending on the quality judgment awarded

Total number of evaluated SP	Number of evaluated SP which received “Confidence” quality judgment	Number of evaluated SP which received “Limited confidence” quality judgment	Number of evaluated SP which received “Lack of confidence” quality judgment
<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>
TOTAL = 337	321	11	5

Table 2.1.1.3 Results of the BACHELOR’S DEGREE university study programmes evaluations in 2017

Number of SP evaluated for provisional authorization to operate 54	Evaluated SP which received “Confidence” quality judgment	49
	Evaluated SP which received “Limited Confidence” quality judgment	1
	Evaluated SP which received “Lack of Confidence” quality judgment	4
Number of SP evaluated for accreditation	Evaluated SP which received “Confidence” quality judgment	52

58	Evaluated SP which received “Limited Confidence” quality judgment	6
	Evaluated SP which received “Lack of Confidence” quality judgment	0
Number of SP subject to periodic evaluation for the purpose of maintaining their accreditation 225	Evaluated SP which received “Confidence” quality judgment	220
	Evaluated SP which received “Limited Confidence” quality judgment	4
	Evaluated SP which received “Lack of Confidence” quality judgment	1

In 2017, ARACIS settled 10 appeals submitted in relation to 9 bachelor’s degree programs and one master’s degree program.

2.1.2 Institutional evaluations

In respect of the status of higher education institutions, in 2017, in accordance with Government Decision no. 615 of 30 August 2017 (academic year 2017 - 2018), the status was as follows:

- Public universities: **55** – *subject to at least to one external evaluation;*
- Accredited private universities: **36**, of which **6** operate under liquidation, with all programs in their structure (according to the advise submitted to the Ministry of National Education, after the ARACIS evaluations), and three are being monitored, in reliance upon Orders of the Ministry of National Education. *All these universities have been 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 programs in their structure (one of them organizes only Master’s Degree university studies programs). Among these, ARACIS evaluated three institutions (the institution that only organizes Master’s Degree university studies programs, one institution for which accreditation was proposed to be awarded and one institution for which ARACIS proposed that the accreditation be denied).

In 2017, external evaluations at institutional level were carried out in relation to 10 higher-education institutions in Romania.

Furthermore, in 2017, the President of ARACIS awarded, as part of events attended by teaching personnel, students, administrative personnel, employers’ representatives, rectors of higher-education institutions, the “Certificate” attesting that the quality judgment “High Degree of Confidence” was granted, further to the institutional evaluations carried out by our agency in 2016 or 2017.

2.1.3 Evaluation of Master's Degree Study Fields

In 2017, ARACIS completed and approved the Guideline for periodic external evaluation of the fields of study for the Master degrees.

Tables 2.1.3.1 – 2.1.3.2 illustrate the status of Master's Degree university study programs which underwent evaluations by ARACIS in 2017:

Table 2.1.3.1 Status of MASTER'S DEGREE university study programs evaluated in 2017, depending on the evaluation type

Total number of evaluated SP	Number of SP evaluated for accreditation	Number of SP subject to periodic evaluation for maintaining the accreditation	Number of SP evaluated for compliance with an accredited field of study
1	2	3	4
TOTAL = 128	22	0	106

Table 2.1.3.2 Results for MASTER'S DEGREE university study programs evaluated in 2017

Number of SP evaluated for accreditation	Evaluated SP which received "Confidence" quality judgment	21
	Evaluated SP which received "Limited Confidence" quality judgment	-
	Evaluated SP which received "Lack of Confidence" quality judgment	1
Number of SP subject to periodic evaluation for maintaining the accreditation	Evaluated SP which received "Confidence" quality judgment	-
	Evaluated SP which received "Limited Confidence" quality judgment	-
	Evaluated SP which received "Lack of Confidence" quality judgment	-
Number of SP evaluated for compliance with an accredited field of study	Evaluated SP which received "Compliant" quality judgment	94
	Evaluated SP which received "Lack of Confidence" quality judgment	12

2.2 Register of ARACIS Evaluators

2.2.1 Updating the National Register of ARACIS Evaluators

In 2017, the National Register of Evaluators - NRE was updated, with 23 new evaluators being admitted further to the specific knowledge assessment procedure. A detailed presentation of newly-admitted evaluators, distributed to the Permanent Specialty Commissions of Experts, is given in *Table 2.2.1.1*.

Table 2.2.1.1 Number of evaluators admitted to NRE, by Permanent Specialty Commissions of Experts

Commission	Number of evaluators admitted in 2017
C1 - Exact sciences and natural sciences	2
C4 - Social, political and communication sciences	2
C5 - Administrative sciences, education and psychology	1
C6 - Economic sciences I	4
C7 - Economic sciences II	2
C8 - Arts, Architecture, Urban planning, Physical education and Sport	2
C10 - Engineering Sciences I	5
C11 - Engineering Sciences II	2
C12 – Medical sciences	3
Total evaluators admitted in 2017	23

In 2017, the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS) organized three training sessions dedicated to the expert evaluators listed in NRE, one of which was dedicated to the persons in charge of quality assurance in higher-education institutions:

- Braşov, February 2017 – which was attended by 129 expert evaluators;
- Sibiu, March 2017 – which was attended by 118 expert evaluators;
- Bucharest, November 2017 – which was attended by 86 expert evaluators and 94 persons in charge of quality assurance within higher-education institutions.

In 2017, the IT Department created and published on the platforma.aracis.ro website six online courses, which were attended both by expert evaluators within ARACIS, and by internal evaluators within the universities. The IT Department provided technical support for 2,000 evaluators, in relation to the online training platform. The online training attended by expert evaluators is part of their continuing education in view of updating their knowledge in connection with internal and external quality assurance in the education field.

Table 2.2.1.2 Total number of attendants reported for each training course, who accessed and were trained on the SeECIS platform (Log access to training courses) in 2017

Item	Training/Activity	Number of attendants for the course
1	European standards and guidelines for quality assurance in higher education Module II –external quality assurance	569
2	European standards and guidelines for quality assurance in higher education Module III – Quality assurance for agencies	552
3	Relevant standards for the preparatory year in the Romanian language, for foreign students	24
4	Relevant standards on external evaluation in respect of the academic quality of Bachelor’s Degree study programs, corresponding to Permanent Specialty Commission of Experts no. 3 Legal Sciences	3
5	Relevant standards on external evaluation in respect of the academic quality of Master’s Degree study programs (second cycle), corresponding to Permanent Specialty Commission of Experts no. 3 Legal Sciences	1
6	Relevant standards on external evaluation in respect of the academic quality of Bachelor’s Degree study programs corresponding to Permanent Specialty Commission of Experts no. 9 Agricultural sciences, forestry and veterinary medicine	16

2.2.2 Updating the National Register of Student Evaluators of ARACIS

The status of student evaluators listed in the National Register of Student Evaluators of ARACIS is given in the table below:

Table 2.2.2. Number of student evaluators in NRE-S, by organizations recognized at national level

Student organization	Number of student evaluators in 2017
National Alliance of Student Organizations in Romania (ANOSR)	76
National Union of Students in Romania (UNSR)	101
Union of Students in Romania (USR)	24
Total student evaluators in the National Register of Student Evaluators in 2017	201

2.2.3 Updating the list of members of Permanent Specialty Commissions of Experts

During the meeting of the ARACIS Council held in September 2016, the *Procedure for the selection and appointment of students as members of Permanent Specialty Commissions of Experts* was approved. In that respect, in 2017, the student evaluators who are members in such Commissions were recruited (one student member in each Permanent Specialty Commission of Experts, selected from among the students listed in NRE-S).

2.2.4 Updating the ARACIS website

The website of ARACIS was continuously updated during 2017 with information regarding the legislation, ARACIS procedures, events, press releases, publications, contest notices, notices concerning procurements etc.

2.2.5 Procurement of IT equipment and services

In 2017, tender documents and/or technical specifications were drawn up for various tenders of IT products or services. Thus, under the project “Improving public policy in higher education and improving the quality of regulations by updating quality standards QAFIN”, the following IT equipment was purchased:

- monochrome laser multi-purpose device (black and white copying machine) – 1 piece;
- Laptops – 5 pieces;
- Software for Office documents and antivirus software.

Furthermore, the UPS units for the main server of ARACIS were replaced and agreements were concluded for the provision of IT maintenance services.

3. COOPERATION

3.1 Cooperation at national level

At national level, ARACIS cooperates with the **universities**, for the purpose of fulfilling its duties on the external quality evaluation of higher education providers, of study programs and Master’s Degree university study fields, pursuant to the standards and the methodology approved by Government Decisions.

In 2017, ARACIS organized several stages of public consultation, in respect of the following documents:

- *Guidelines for periodic external evaluation of the fields of study for the Master’s degrees* – approved in 2017;
- *Specific standards for the preparatory year in the Romanian language, for foreign students* – approved in 2017;

- *Methodology for external evaluation, standards, reference standards and list of performance indicators of ARACIS*, approved by Government Decision (GD) no. 1418/2006, as revised by Government Decision no. 915/2017;
- *Criteria, standards and performance indicators for the evaluation of doctoral studies* – were subject to public consultation on the ARACIS website.

Furthermore, upon the universities' request, the *Specific standards on the external evaluation of academic quality for Bachelor's and Master's Degree university study programs* were reviewed, which are used by certain Permanent Specialty Commissions of Experts.

As for our cooperation with higher-education institutions in Romania, ARACIS also provided assistance through the organization, in November 2017, of a training session in connection with the *Guidelines for periodic external evaluation of the fields of study for the Master's degrees*, for which invitations were also extended and therefore attended also by persons in charge with quality assurance from the universities.

At the same time, ARACIS representatives have taken part in the meetings of the **National Council of Rectors**, but also in other national events organized in 2017, in which they presented: the progress status of the *Methodology for external evaluation of ARACIS; Guidelines for periodic external evaluation of the fields of study for the Master's degrees; the Criteria, standards and performance indicators for the evaluation of doctoral studies* etc.

Our representatives have attended, in 2017, the regular meetings held by the **Romanian Alliance of Technical Universities - ARUT**, but also the events organized by the **Romanian Coalition for Engineering Education – CREDING** (such as the National Conference on the topic “Engineers’ Education in the 21st Century”).

ARACIS undertook permanent consultations with the **Ministry of National Education**, with the **National Council for the Certification of University Titles, Degrees and Certificates (CNATDCU)**, with the **Executive Unit for Financing Higher Education, Research, Development and Innovation (UEFISCDI)** and with other institutions in the higher education sector, aiming to ensure quality assurance in the higher education sector.

3.2 International Cooperation

3.2.1 Activities in ENQA – the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education

In the European Higher Education Area, 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 maintaining this status.

According to the legal provisions, the legal 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 constantly prove that its procedures and the other activities observe these Standards and Guidelines. According to the ESG, the Agency must be subject to periodic evaluations, carried out by an international panel coordinated by ENQA (“ENQA coordinated review”) and must draw-up a Progress Report between two regular evaluations.

In 2017, all endeavors were undertaken in order for the external evaluation of ARACIS, scheduled to be carried out as an ENQA coordinated review, in 2018, to take place in the optimal circumstances.

Thus, the following steps were taken:

- Setting forth the *Terms of Reference* (including the calendar) for the external evaluation of ARACIS (March 2017), subject to consultations with ENQA;
- ARACIS and ENQA signing the *Contract on the external review* (September 2017) and paying to ENQA the *external review fee* (October 2017);
- Preparation and delivery to ENQA of the *Self-Assessment Report by ARACIS* (November 2017);
- Consultations between ARACIS and ENQA and agreeing on the *final list of members for the team of experts* who will conduct the evaluation of the agency (December 2017);
- ARACIS receiving from ENQA the *results of the preliminary examination process into the Self-Assessment Report* drawn up by the agency (December 2017), the deadline for supplementation of this Report being set for January 2018.

In furtherance to the external evaluation process, in March 2018 an evaluation visit of ARACIS will be conducted by ENQA. In accordance with the data contained in the calendar, ENQA will issue the *External Evaluation Report* in May 2018, and the external evaluation will be completed in 2018.

In order to enforce the ENQA policy in connection with the active involvement of agencies in the activities undertaken by the association, in 2017, ARACIS attended the following events organized by ENQA:

- **15 – 16 June**, Brussels (Belgium) – ENQA Seminar “Quality assurance in the European context” (attendants: Adina Nică, Adriana Popoiu – Experts, Division for International Relations, Projects and Cooperation, ARACIS);
- **03 – 05 October**, Brussels (Belgium) – informal meeting with representatives of ARACIS, ENQA and of the World Bank (attendants: Cristina Ghițulică – Vice-President of ARACIS);
- **25 - 27 October**, Sèvres (France) – General Meeting of ENQA (attendants: Iordan Petrescu – President of ARACIS);
- **23 – 25 November**, Riga (Latvia) – European Quality Assurance Forum (EQUAF) organized by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), European Union of Students (ESU), European University Association (EUA) and European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE). In addition to the actual

participation to this Forum, ARACIS also prepared and presented the paper titled “Study on the evaluation of quality of the ARACIS activity by the management of higher-education institutions in Romania” (attendants: Jordan Petrescu – President of ARACIS, Simona Lache – Head of Department, ARACIS, Dorian Cojocaru – Member of the ARACIS Council, Emilia Gogu – ARACIS Expert Evaluator, Ștefan Stanciu – Expert Evaluator, President of an ARACIS Commission).

3.2.2 Activities in EQAR – the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education

ARACIS is listed in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education - **EQAR** and undergoes regular international external evaluation procedures set out for maintaining this status. ARACIS’ listing in EQAR is confirmed until 30 September 2018.

In 2017, ARACIS completed the online application for renewing its status as agency listed in EQAR and, in reliance upon the External Evaluation Report, to be issued by ENQA in 2018, the EQAR Register Committee will decide on whether to maintain ARACIS in the Register.

As part of the cooperation between ARACIS and EQAR, in 2017, ARACIS became one of the quality assurance agencies partners in the project “The Database of External Quality Assurance Results (DEQAR)”, coordinated by EQAR.

3.2.3 Activities in ENAEE – the European Network for Accreditation of Engineering Education

ARACIS is a member of the *European Network for Accreditation of Engineering Education* (ENAEE) and it is authorized by ENAEE to award the EUR-ACE® Label to Bachelor’s Degree or Master’s Degree study programs in the field of engineering, which were accredited further to the evaluations carried-out by ARACIS. This authorization, which was initially granted for the period comprised between 2013 and 2017, was extended until the end of 2018.

In 2017, ARACIS initiated the process of external evaluation by ENAEE in view of reacquiring the authorization for the agency to award the EUR-ACE® Label. After the application was drawn up and it was submitted to ENAEE, between 1 and 3 November 2017, a visit was conducted by the team of evaluators to Bucharest. According to the internal regulations of ENAEE, the external evaluation process will further continue in the early 2018.

In reliance upon the documents prepared by ARACIS in 2016 and as a follow up to the training sessions organized in November 2016, dedicated to expert evaluators and representatives of employers, in 2017, 8 evaluation visits were organized for awarding the EUR-ACE Label. The outcome of these evaluation sessions are detailed in the tables below.

The list of Bachelor’s Degree study programs with EUR-ACE Label, awarded by ARACIS in 2017 and approved by ENAEE is given in *Table 3.2.3.1*.

Table 3.2.3.1

Item	University	Study program
1	Politehnica University of Bucharest	Energetics and environment technologies
2		Applied electronics (in English)
3		Technologies and telecommunication system (in English)
4	Technical University of Cluj-Napoca	Machine manufacturing technology
5	Transilvania University of Braşov	Mechanical Engineering
6		Industrial Design
7		Mechatronics
8		Civil, industrial and agricultural constructions

ARACIS was represented, every time, in the events organized by ENAEE in 2017:

- First ENAEE Forum: **18 - 19 October**, Catholic University of Leuven, Belgium, representatives of ARACIS: Simona Lache, Director of Accreditation Department within ARACIS and Dorian Cojocaru, member in the ARACIS Council;
- General Assembly of ENAEE, **21 November**, Brussels, Belgium, representatives of ARACIS: Simona Lache, Director of Accreditation Department ARACIS.

3.2.4 Activities in CEENQA – the Central and Eastern European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education

- **27 – 29 April**, Zagreb (Croatia) – *the General Assembly* of the Central and Eastern European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (CEENQA) (attendants: Iordan Petrescu – President of ARACIS, Cristina Ghiţulică – Vice-President of ARACIS).

In 2017, Ms. Vice-President Cristina Ghiţulică was appointed for a second mandate as member in the Executive Board of CEENQA.

3.2.5 Activities in INQAAHE – the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education

ARACIS has been, ever since it was set up, a full member of INQAAHE and takes part in the activities thereof, such as: polls, contributions to Newsletter, electing the network’s management, etc.

3.2.6 Other international activities

In March 2017, in Sibiu, **ARACIS and the National Agency for Quality Assurance in Vocational Training in the Republic of Moldova (ANACIP)²** have signed a Partnership Agreement aimed at promoting and developing the cooperation between the two quality assurance agencies.

According to the provisions set out in the above-mentioned agreement, the cooperation between ARACIS and ANACIP will refer to the sharing of experience and good practices of quality external evaluations in the higher education system of the two countries; the sharing of information concerning external evaluation procedures; the appointment of expert evaluators to form part of the teams/panels of external evaluation/accreditation in national-level missions; taking part in joint projects in the field of quality assurance for education, financed from national funds or by other European or international institutions/organizations; joint organization of events in the quality assurance field, such as conferences, workshops, informal meetings, exchange of publications, etc.

In May 2017, the President of ARACIS was member of the delegation the Ministers of National Education, which attended the **first edition of the Romania-Azerbaijan University Forum organized in Baku (Azerbaijan)**. The participants, which included representatives of the management of Romanian and Azerbaijan universities, discussed on underlying issues of the higher education reform in the two countries, such as the transition to a new university model, the relationship between the academic environment and the labor market, adjusting the higher-education institutions to an increasingly competitive and demanding environment.

The representatives of ARACIS attended, in November 2017, the **Annual Symposium on quality in higher education** “La Francophonie Universitaire face au défi de la qualité: pour un rapprochement des forces”, organized by the Agence Universitaire de la Francophonie - **AUF** in Beirut (Lebanon). The goal of the said symposium was to identify specific and efficient methods for a closer cooperation of francophone entities in the fields of evaluation, quality assurance and accreditation.

Furthermore, also as part of its international cooperation, ARACIS took part in **several surveys launched by various international institutions/entities**, such as: “Global survey on EQA and IQA” (CEENQA, October 2017), “Study to evaluate the progress on quality assurance systems in the area of higher education in the Member States and on cooperation activities at European level” (December 2017, the Department for Education, Youth, Sports and Culture within the European Commission) and others.

² On the date when this report was issued, the name of ANACIP had been changed into the National Agency for Quality Assurance in Education and Research (ANACEC), following the reorganization of this institution

4. INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION

ARACIS Website

The main means of presenting the information on the activities conducted by ARACIS consists of the website of the Agency: www.aracis.ro, that was permanently updated in 2017 with information of public interest regarding the outcome 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.

National Press Monitoring

Moreover, in 2017, the Division for International Relations, Projects and Cooperation (DIRPC) within ARACIS monitored the references to ARACIS published in the national press and summarized the articles published in the online media, on the topic of higher education, which were included in the “Press Review” delivered to the members of the ARACIS Council and to the Accreditation and Quality Assurance Experts and Specialty Inspectors.

Press Releases and Newsletter

Also, throughout 2017, several press releases were drawn up and issued in connection with the activities undertaken by ARACIS, in view of disseminating such information to the Romanian public.

The information activities carried out by DIRPC also included an international component, as draft articles were submitted by ENQA for the purpose of inclusion thereof in the electronic newsletter, which is regularly published by this association. Thus, the ENQA Newsletter of September 2017 included information on the launch of the project “Improving public policies in higher education and enhancing the quality of regulations by updating quality standards – QAFIN” (SIPOCA Code 16), a project in which ARACIS acts as partner, the beneficiary being the Ministry of National Education – The Unit for the Management of Externally Financed Projects.

Subscriptions to international publications

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 sharing its own experiences on the quality of the higher education in Romania, ARACIS uses electronic and printed means of information. Thus, in 2017, ARACIS continued to subscribe to two journals:

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

Quality Assurance Review for Higher Education (QAR)

In 2017, ARACIS published two issues of the *Quality Assurance Review for Higher Education (QAR)*. The QAR review is an academic publication focusing on the issues concerning quality assurance in higher education in Romania. This review aims to amount to an instrument facilitating the transfer of good practices and communication among national and international experts and to play a part in the promotion of development of a quality assurance culture. QAR is intended for those interested in the theory, practice and policies pertaining to the above-mentioned sector. Further details on the main topics of the two issues may be found in the **Publications Section** of the ARACIS website.

European Quality Assurance Forum (EQAF)

Furthermore, in 2017, at the international level, at the European Quality Assurance Forum (EQAF), ARACIS contributed the paper “Study on the evaluation of quality of the ARACIS activity by the management of higher-education institutions in Romania”, a paper that was presented during the Forum.

5. PROJECTS

5.1 National projects – ongoing

5.1.1 The QAFIN Project

In 2017, the financing agreement was signed for the project *“Improving public policies in higher education and enhancing the quality of regulations by updating quality standards”* (SIPOCA Code 16). The project implementation period is comprised between 29 May 2017 and 28 May 2020.

The beneficiary of the QAFIN project is the Ministry of National Education – The Unit for the Management of Externally Financed Projects, and ARACIS acts as partner in the project.

This project is co-financed from the European Social Fund (ESF), through the Operational Program Administrative Capacity 2014 – 2020, Priority Axis 1: Efficient public administration and judicial system, Specific objective 1.1: Developing and introducing common systems and standards in public administration that optimize decision-making processes oriented towards citizens and the business environment, in line with the Strategy for strengthening of public administration 2014-2020.

The aim of the project is the achievement and implementation of evidence-based public policies, respectively the correlation of strategic planning with program budgeting, in the field of financing of higher education institutions, through the enhancement of regulations regarding external quality assurance, classification and ranking of higher education institutions and study programs. Also, the project aims at the improvement of administrative capacity of the Ministry of National Education and of ARACIS, by adapting structures, optimizing processes and training human resources, and

enhancing the use of transparent public consultation mechanisms that ensure citizen participation in decision-making and by applying European quality standards.

Relevant goals of the project:

A) Optimizing the strategic planning and program budgeting, through:

a. the provision of necessary instruments, methodologies and guidelines on the external evaluation of quality in higher education, in particular the classification and hierarchy of higher-education institutions, study programs respectively, for making informed decisions on the allocation of funds to higher-education institutions and the study programs which they organize,

b. the clarification of the role and mandates assigned to the institutions involved in the quality assurance for higher education.

B) Implementation of methodology and guidelines for the classification and hierarchy of higher-education institutions, study programs respectively, based on clear and transparent sets of indicators and data;

C) Building the administrative capacity of the Ministry of National Education and of ARACIS at system level, by developing managerial instruments on internal organization and operation, internal procedures, manuals, good practice guides, and by training their own personnel, but also the personnel of higher-education institutions, in view of implementing the instruments thus prepared and in respect of EU practices in this sector.

In 2017, in the QAFIN project (<http://www.aracis.ro/en/projects/qafin/>), several activities were implemented, among which:

- Publication of the press release concerning the project launch;
- Contracting services with the World Bank for the fulfillment of several of the relevant goals of the project;
- Initiation of expert selection for the project management and implementation teams;
- Publication of project-related information in the ENQA Newsletter of September 2017 etc.

5.2 National Projects Completed – Sustainability

5.2.1 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 focusing on the continuous enhancement of quality in higher education institutions, through management skills training at institutional and system level, as fundamental pre-requisites for enhancing the quality of

study programs, but also the relevance thereof for the integration on the labor market and for a 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 are also available on the ARACIS website dedicated to the QUALITAS project: <http://www.aracis.ro/proiecte/qualitas/>.

In this project, in 2017, the following steps were taken:

- in April 2017, the ex-post verification mission was conducted, on site, in respect of the manner in which project sustainability was ensured; the examination team was made up of officers of the Intermediate Body for the Sectoral Operational Program Human Resources Development – MoNE, and the outcome of this visit consisted of ARACIS ascertaining the fulfillment of obligations undertaken by means of the above-mentioned financing agreement;
- follow-up and reinforcement of the project outcome, as per the financing application and ensuring the sustainability of the project, several measures taken in that respect being as follows:
 - publication, in 2017, of the “Quality Barometer 2015” in English (in 2015, this paper was drawn up in Romanian, printed in Romanian and translated then into English the translation costs were covered by funds of the QUALITAS project);
 - publication of other materials drawn up by ARACIS, which contribute to the sustainability of the QUALITAS project, more specifically:
 - *Specific standards on the external evaluation of academic quality for Bachelor’s Degree and Master’s Degree university study programs* (13 brochures, by Permanent Specialty Commissions of Experts of ARACIS);
 - *Offer of the higher education system in the academic year 2016/2017* (authors: Iordan Petrescu, Emilia Gogu);
 - *Review Report. Evaluation of the quality of the activity conducted by ARACIS* (authors: Simona Lache, Emilia Gogu, Mădălin Bunoiu, Vlad Cherecheș, Dorian Cojocaru, Nicoleta Corbu, Florin Mihai, Iordan Petrescu, Ștefan Stanciu, Nicolae Tunsoiu);
 - *Quality Assurance Review for Higher Education* – two issues published in 2017, in particular: volume 7, no. 1, July 2017 on the topic “Good practices, recommendations and suggestions to improve the internal evaluation instruments for quality assurance at the level of higher-education institutions, in view of enforcing ESG 2015”, and respectively volume 7, no. 2, December 2017 on the topic “ESG 2015 – Recent Developments of External Evaluation Standards for Higher-Education Institutions”;
 - Organization, in 2017, of three training sessions for expert evaluators listed in the National Register of ARACIS Evaluators;
 - Carrying on the cooperation, in respect of institutional evaluations conducted by ARACIS, with the international expert evaluators selected in the QUALITAS project etc.

5.2.2 The 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 – Politehnica University of Bucharest, “Dunărea de Jos” University of Galați, “Gheorghe Asachi” Technical University of Iași, “Transilvania” University of Brașov and the company S.C. ARWEN PROFESSIONAL SERVICES S.A. (S.C. RED POINT S.A.) of Iași. The ACAD-INOV Project was implemented between April 2014 and November 2015.

The **general objective** of the project 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 a knowledge-based society.

Regarding this project, in 2017, the following activities were conducted:

- in April 2017, the ex-post verification mission was conducted, on site, in respect of the manner in which project sustainability was ensured; the examination team was made up of officers of the Intermediate Body for the Sectoral Operational Program Human Resources Development – MoNE, and the outcome of this visit consisted of ARACIS ascertaining the fulfillment of obligations undertaken by means of the above-mentioned financing agreement;
- follow-up and reinforcement of the project outcome, as per the financing application and ensuring the sustainability of the project.

5.3 International Projects – ongoing

5.3.1 The TARGET Project

ARACIS signed, in 2017, as partner, the Financing Agreement for the project “Taking a Reflexive approach to Gender Equality for institutional Transformation – TARGET”, financed from European funds, through the program Horizon 2020. This project is coordinated by the Institute for Advanced Studies of Austria and will be implemented for a period of 48 months.

The project will spear institutional change in seven innovative institutions in the field of gender equality from the Mediterranean area, including research organizations, research financing organizations and a network of universities.

TARGET (<http://www.gendertarget.eu>) adopts a reflexive approach going beyond the formal enactment of a gender equality plan, by focusing on an iterative illustration of the progress achieved, but also by setting up a community of practices for the implementation of institutional transformation.

5.3.2 The DEQAR Project

The project “Database of Quality External Evaluation Reports” is co-financed by the European Union through the ERASMUS+ Program *Key Action 3*. This project is coordinated by EQAR and its partners are quality assurance agencies listed in EQAR, leading European organizations (ENQA included) and a research partner; ARACIS is one of the partners.

The implementation period for the project is of 24 months (November 2017 – October 2019).

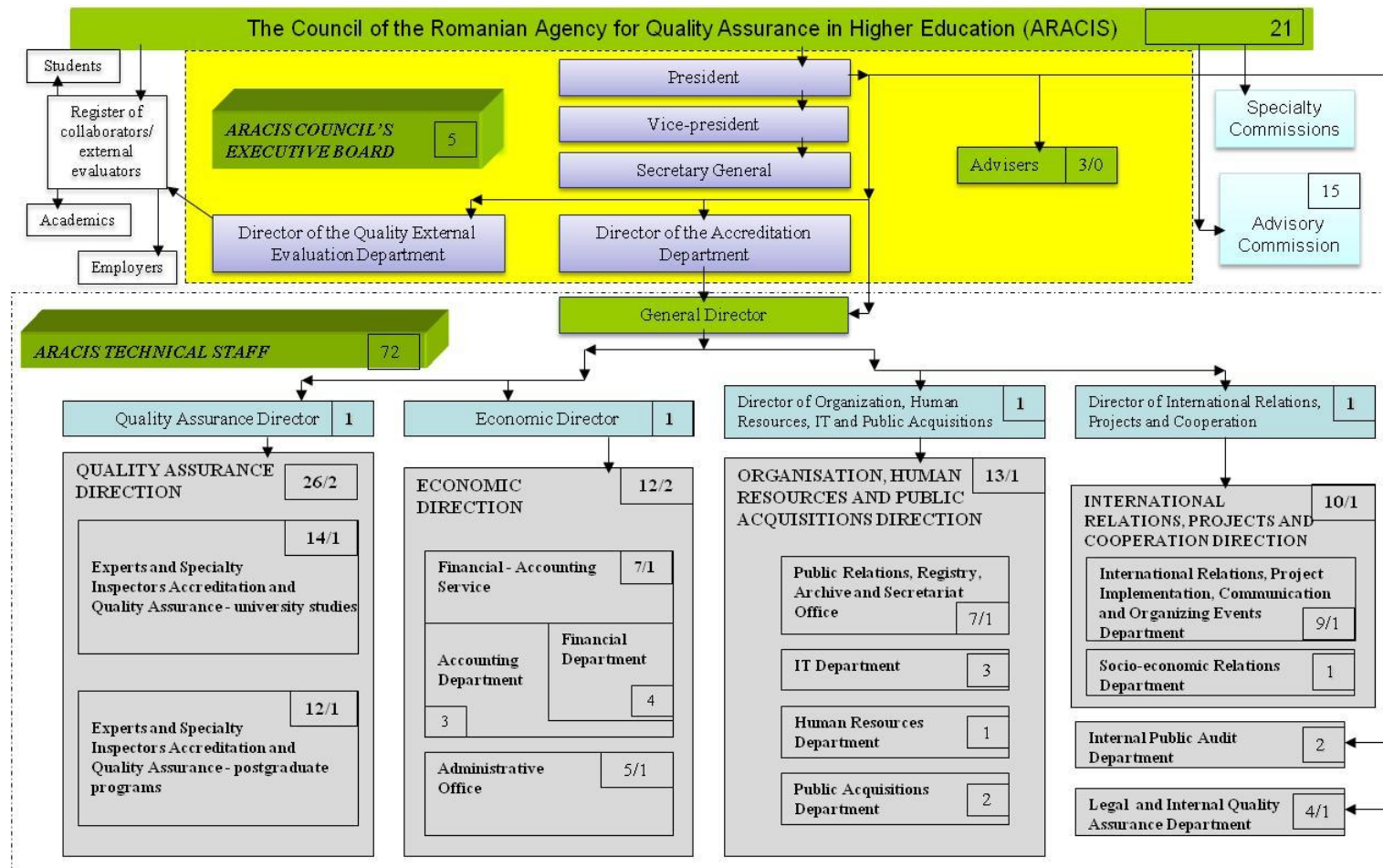
This project aims to build a database at European level whereby to improve access to information concerning the external evaluation of higher-education institutions and study programs, performed by quality agencies.

The database will allow users to identify whether a higher-education institution was subject to external evaluation, in accordance with ESG, carried out by an agency listed in EQAR (at institutional level or at the level of the study program) and to easily access external evaluation reports issued as a result of such evaluations.

ANNEXES

Annex 1 – Organisation chart of ARACIS

ORGANISATION CHART OF THE ROMANIAN AGENCY FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION



Annex 2 – Members of the ARACIS Council

President:

1. Prof. Univ. Dr. Eng. Petrescu Iordan

Vice-President:

2. Prof. Univ. Dr. Eng. Ghițulică Cristina

General Secretary:

3. Prof. Univ. Dr. Ianoș Ioan

Director of the Department for Quality External Evaluation:

4. Prof. Univ. Dr. Bunoiu Mădălin

Director of the Accreditation Department:

5. Prof. Univ. Dr. Eng. Lache Simona

Members:

6. Prof. Univ. Dr. Eng. Cojocaru Dorian
7. Prof. Univ. Dr. Corbu Nicoleta
8. Prof. Univ. Dr. Grigoraș Gheorghe
9. Prof. Univ. Dr. Eng. Hadăr Anton
10. Prof. Univ. Dr. Iamandi Luca
11. Prof. Univ. Dr. Lascăr Ioan
12. Prof. Univ. Dr. Nagy Ladislau
13. Prof. Univ. Dr. Opre Adrian
14. Prof. Univ. Dr. Oprean Radu Nicolaie
15. Prof. Univ. Dr. Popa Ion
16. Prof. Univ. Dr. Eng. Seghedin Neculai Eugen
17. Prof. Univ. Dr. Stan Vasilica
18. Dr. Eng. Erbașu Romeo Cristian
19. Cherecheș Vlad – student
20. Tunsoiu Nicolae – student

Annex 3 – Advisory Commission of ARACIS

Acad. Ionel Haiduc

Prof. Dinu Airinei - “Alexandru Ioan Cuza” University of Iași

Prof. Cezar Birzea – National School for Political and Administrative Studies of Bucharest

Prof. Oprea Călin – “Nicolae Titulescu” University of Bucharest

Prof. Dumitru Gașpar – Western University of Timișoara

Prof. Viorel Lefter – Bucharest Academy of Economic Studies

Prof. Mircea Cristel Muthu – “Babeș-Bolyai” University of Cluj-Napoca

Prof. Gheorghe Popa – “Alexandru Ioan Cuza” University of Iași

Prof. Alexandru Popovici – “Oil-Gas” University of Ploiești

Prof. Zoltan Rostas – University of Bucharest

Prof. Gheorghe Solomon –Politehnica University of Bucharest

Prof. Emilian Stancu – University of Bucharest

Prof. Paul Șerban Agachi - “Babeș-Bolyai” University of Cluj-Napoca

Prof. Mircea Ivănescu – University of Craiova

Prof. Adrian Miroiu - S.N.S.P.A

Prof. Mihai Octavian Popescu - Politehnica University of Bucharest