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Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance  
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International Evaluator's Report

„Bogdan Petriceicu Hașdeu” State  
University of Kahul

7 – 9 June 2023

Introduction

Quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area has a great and undeniable priority. It servers to improvement of the higher educations' institutes management, makes them more transparent and helps to build up better international cooperation as well as contribute into the further development of their qualifications, educational programs and research activity.

Higher education is very important in reaching many purposes, preparing students for their future successful professional activity, open them a perspective for being employed and develop their further carrier, backing up their personal development, contributing into their civic education and competences, and paving a way to their active participation in society affairs.

Nowadays the University must actively promote and harmonize their educational and research activities together with their contribution into local, regional, national, and international cooperation, aimed at the resolution of the most topical issues of the related communities. It all embarks a heavy pressure on the teaching staff and leadership of the higher education institutes and poses a true challenge for them. What is true in general for European HEI is an especially burdensome challenge for Republic of Moldova Universities. They face with a protracting lack of financial and demographic resources, remained soviet-

styled traditions of public relations and management, chronic poverty and vital security threats, originated from Transnistria conflict, exacerbated by protracting Russia-Ukraine's war now. All those issues are to be carefully considered, while dealing with „Bogdan Petriceicu Hașdeu” State University of Cahul (SUC) evaluation.

The higher education system in Republic of Moldova is undergoing deep and comprehensive reforms recently, which try to approximate it with the EU system of higher education. Moldova recognition as a Candidate State to the EU encourages and prompts country authorities and Universities leadership to hurry up with those reforms pace. Still the transition of Moldova to a consolidated democratic and functional European state with a modernized higher education system is not completed. Many of urgent tasks should be performed without any unjustified delay. I am sure, that ARACIS evaluations of some Moldavian Universities will make an important contribution into Republic of Moldova Europeanization process and support the whole advancement of the country perspective accession to the EU.

Duly performed quality assurance will help to assure the higher education institution proper actions and support the quality of their activities in all the principal aspects of them. Quality assurance and quality advancements are intrinsically intertwined. They make attended and covered all HLL development embraced, from the students and academic staff to the leadership and management of the related University.

I had a pleasure and honor of being invited by the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS) to be a member of the evaluation team for the institutional evaluation of Cahul State University. Prior to the site visit, I had an opportunity to make acquaintance with related documents and look at University presence and representation online. The visit to Cahul together with our international team (representatives of Republic of Moldova, Romania, and Ukraine respectfully) was carried out on-site from 7th to 9th of June 2023. I enjoyed an opportunity to get more detailed and all-comprehensive information that I received about the SUC and its activities by and large.

The visit begun with a preliminary meeting of experts, who are the members of the evaluation team run by Professor Mihai Florin. There we had discussed all issues related to the evaluation process and procedures. Then, there was a meeting with the leadership of the University and representatives of all stakeholders of the SUC. We had worked all the days intensively, as a rule exceeding formal hours of our teamwork to closely examine the University of Cahul pros and cons. I had attended all of plenary/group meetings with representatives of the SUC teaching staff, their students, alumni, and the group of the most active employers of university graduates. Also, a set of individual conversations and in-group discussions with representatives of various Universities representatives took place during the face-to face meetings and conversations.

I got received freely any additional documents concerning some aspects of the mission, which granted me a chance of deepening my understanding of the University activity. Thanks to that, I used a possibility of carefully studying information about the management and governance, budgeting, education, research and international engagement of the University, their quality assurance, and other aspects of the University day-to-day operation accordingly with evaluation mission's goals. Also, I had seen the main premises of the SUC and its material base.

It makes sense to address my appreciation of Mrs. Claudia Milea's helpful attitude, an ARACIS officer as far as she makes all possible to assist all members of our evaluation teams. I also grateful to all our teams' members for their cooperation, the director of the mission Prof. Mihai Florin and Prof. Giurgiu Adriana, the coordinator of the expert evaluators' team. They demonstrated a great professional expertise and a true devotion to our mission success. A valuable part of our activity was knowledge and contributions from our Colleagues who represent Republic of Moldova, namely Prof. Totos Petru and Dr.hab. Liliana Condratikova. They together with two students who were in our team helped very much to better understand local and national peculiarities at time of evaluation.

Gathering all those sources of needed information, I submit my report on CSU institutional performance as I have understood it. Despite my limited knowledge of the everyday life of the respected University, I tried to add my personal understating learned from many years of contacting and working together with my Colleagues and partners from Republic of Moldova, which helped me to understand the general context and aims of HEI of the country. I do hope that my evaluation and some recommendations made, would be considered as a modest part of our team to support SUC with their attempt of enhancing their strength and achievements as well as overcome some problems they must deal with.

### General Statements

#### Institution Internal Self-Evaluation Report (SER)

The Evaluated Institution has taken the evaluation process very seriously and carefully prepared a Self-Evaluation Report (SER). This document contains all necessary information for the evaluation and is accessible. The State University of Cahul provided also with all statistical and all other information, regarding the number of students, enrolment process, teaching staff quality and quantity, financial information. The annexes were addressed as links to documents publicly available online in digital format. These documents were later added with other additional documents, upon request from the evaluation panel. All these documents were available to the ARACIS cloud or distributed directly to the evaluation team members.

#### Mission statement

State University of Cahul is a State's owned and run university in Republic of Moldova, duly institutionally accredited and legalized. It has celebrated its 24th Birthday right at the first day of our team mission. So, it's a young and yet developing HEI in Moldova.

The mission of the University of clearly defined and University leadership and staff try their best to follow them up. University comprises all the three main pillars which every higher education institution should have, teaching, research/development, and service to public reach. Particularly, the University declares and performs particular mission of being a leader of higher education in the South of RM, that is accordable with its ambitions and activities.

The University has developed its strategic documents to reach those goals, they are accessible and serve to the University community as the leading guidance into the near future.

Thus, the mission of the SUC seems to be rightly defined and has a potential to be fully achieved.

#### Academic freedom and academic integrity

CSU strives to provide good practices of academic freedom and cultivate their values. University tried to find out more sources for its activity, working closely with principal stakeholders to resolve existing problems, which are truly demanding. Very important fact is that academic values are prioritized in the University discourse and agenda, especially regarding prevention of any inconstancy of academic virtues, e.g., fighting against plagiarism, any kind of misconduct etc. Truly positive aspect of those steps done and designed for the future is active cooperation of university administration with teaching staff and students.

The University operates in the conditions of certain academic autonomy, and academic freedom, making accent on the free and equal access to all its resources and facilities, cultivating public responsibility and accountability.

As far as our meeting and information proves the Ethics Commission in the SUS is the key body dealing with those issues agenda, it works regularly and are opened to any concerns and request. The Commission seems to be working well and it has adequate aid from the University management and staff. The issues of academic freedom and virtues are closely supervised with University authorities and reported to University Senate. Mainly, they covered some problems with teaching staff interactions and bodies in charge can properly resolve some issues should they happened.

To my mind the institutional structure and everyday activity of the University fully respect national legislation and provide the faculties with the respective academic freedom.

#### *Comments/Recommendations:*

Define and clarify University mission as the leader and key provider of the Higher education in the South of Moldova, considering the realities of a new administrative-territorial reform of the State to come soon.

Try to find a way to better enrolment of students, international students including.

Look at a possibility of establishing the Council of key stakeholders as a consultative border for the University.

Start to communicate closely with more stakeholders (employers) from private and corporate sectors in the region and nationwide.

## Managerial Structure

### Organization and management

The reviews institutions have developed all administrative structures and subdivisions that enable their management system to act adequately. The relationships of the hierarchical subordination that are established between them are specified in the University's statutory documents and fully correspond both with them and national legislation. The mission did not discover any principal inconsistency of them. The competence and duties of administrative bodies and managerial staff are well defined and did not provoke tensions or misunderstanding amid personal or students.

The SUC has all regulatory documents, which clearly outline managerial processes and procedures in the institution. Those provisions and regulation are respected and work well. The University's Statute as well as the other of key regulations are reviewed by the Senate in compliance with the national legislation on higher education and aims of Moldova to be a member of the EU in the future.

The structure of the university includes two faculties and their respective subdivision. Because the University is a small one, the institutional system of the SUC is more simplified in comparison to other bigger University. However, it does not make a harmful effect on governability and quality of management in the University. I saw the rector of the University (Prof. Sergiu Cornea) and his team, deans and heads of the University's units are competent and devoted persons.

The founding principles of the University organization and its functioning are clearly and publicly characterized, and they are effective as far as key areas of institution's operation are concerned. The process and procedures of election and competing for vacant administrative and teaching positions in the University are transparent and respected. The management system included e-government, intranet information and communication systems. They are also represented in social media.

I see that students are adequately represented in decision-making and executive structures within the AUO but Ethics commission (where they should be represented as well).

### *Comments/Recommendations:*

Add students' representatives to the Ethic Commission.

Reexamine the Role of Research Centers in the hierarchy of the University institutional design, making them a focal point for advancement in education and research activities.

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### Teaching Staff

The SUC has advanced to hire and maintain qualified staff as for the regional HEI. They are good enough to secure the functions of all educational programs as well other relevant activities in the University.

The recruitment of the teaching staff (which are at the same time researchers) at the University are regularly done on a competitive basis. The University provides equal opportunities, without gender, race, or ethnicity discrimination (nor other criteria to discriminate) to candidates for teaching and administrative positions. Teachers and management at SUC look very well-motivated and there have been reached considerable progress over the recent years. I must mention especially the recruitment of full Professors to the University as a real achievement of the institution.

Our team checked up the teaching staff qualification parameters and they satisfactory for the HEI, on both bachelor and master studies levels.

University does not run its PhD program individually. However, it is done in the framework of the existing Moldavian University consortium, where SUC can prepare some new teaching staff when needed.

Teaching staff is well trained for both on-line and off-line techniques and pedagogy. They regularly make affords to better their professional qualifications both domestically and less regularly abroad.

University develops thorough system of teaching staff evaluation, including the evaluation of the University managers' monitoring, peers' review, and students' evaluation. All of them are proved with the related documents. Students' opinions and comments are taken into consideration with due respect too. Regular evaluations are an integral part of the staff development. They are systematically analyzed and discussed on the Departmental and other Faculties' meetings and concluded with Deans and Rectorate summarization.

The teachers carry out hours of consultations in which they are available to the students. Also, they run their course' and final (diploma) papers. They are opened for extra classes activity for students and that part of their job is well-regulated and excised orderly. Students and stakeholders are satisfied with their quality of education and treatment they receive from teaching staff and administration.

Many of University's teachers are well-cooperating with their peers from Romania, some of them with other EU members and Ukraine. Still, regarding international cooperation of teachers, concerning their educational activity and professional growth there remains much bigger potential to be developed.

University authorities try to encourage teachers for more professional records. They imply both material (financial) and moral stimulus and encouragement. However, national regulations minimized financial encouragement to only 10 % to add to a regular salary. It's hardly good for fair remuneration of the best teachers' contribution and incentives for most advanced and industrious University professors.

***Comments/Recommendations:***

It makes sense to consider one-year appointment for a research position (free of teaching duties) for the best teachers who got the highest results in their academic activity.

It also worthy to organize a regularly University rating (annually) on both teachers and university unites to recognize and stimulate best of all and to make alarmed those who lagged. The best of the teachers and unites are to be rewarded and encouraged both morally and financially.

The University need to encourage teachers to make more active academic exchange both in the framework of Erasmus + and use some other possibilities to bring in the teaching ads administrative practice more fresh air, and best samples of teaching methods and techniques.

**Facilities**

**Finance and infrastructure/Premises and equipment**

The financial aspects of SUC are working in accordance with national regulations. The university's budget is made from the state budget, tuition fees, research contracts and grants etc.

The annual budget is approved by the University Senate and is rigorously respected with Rectorate and Central authorities in Chisinau. Special vice-rector oversees the financial issues together with a chief-accountant and a special Department. The University has a strict policy on maintaining the accuracy in planning budget and realizing subsequent financial expenditures.

SUC provides scholarship opportunities (stipends) to the students of different level due to their academic merits and records. The system of financing them are clear and transparent and is regulated by national laws and University legal norms.

University works upon expanding its international cooperation to get involved in some grants realization and got positive results with this activity. Students are also invited to cooperate in academic events, student competitions, publication activities etc.

Financial management reported to our team, and it looks in line with the financial policy of the University and national Ministry of education. It has been periodically controlled with the internal financial audits, still is lacks international audit.

Looking at the infrastructure, one must admit, the SUC has developed certain possibilities for teaching and research activity, and sport plan to do much more. As I can see at some centers and laboratories, as well as classes in the University, many of them are up-

to-date and equipped with both contemporaneous soft and hardware's.

There are also dormitories at the University, a library with a solid supply of books and periodicals, some specialized classes, good facilities for students' self-government, sports, and spending leisure time. University encourages students' activity and helps students to organize their events, providing certain financial support for them.

The University develops facilities for distant and blended learning, expands its e-government system also, tries to actively cooperate with some local and national stakeholders to make its system of education and research more modern and attractive for current and perspective students.

***Comments/Recommendations:***

International audit would be suggested as an asset for the University further progress.

To work on diversification of incomes, primarily actively contributing into participation of the international cooperation, grants, and projects.

To expand e-books and academic journals subscription, as well as to go on with further process of computing laboratories, centers, and class.

Revise the research and teaching laboratories equipment and invest more resources in buying newest research facilities for the development of engineering and applied sciences.

Find a way towards dormitories reconstruction and modern facilities for teaching staff and students' comfortable environment.

**Students**

Students at the University are actively engaged in the process of education and management in the HEI, as well as to a certain extend in their research activity. In the latter case they partake into Conferences and Seminars. They have publications of their proceeding as well as joint academic papers with their teachers and academic supervisors. They are regularly asked about their teacher's evaluation and management of the University. They also take part in major part of University's governing and consultative bodies, the Senate including.

Students' self-government is function regularly form of all thorough activity of Students Union. Students proposed some steps for university activity improvement and organize different academic, cultural and sport events. The rectorate creates some important facilities for students to address and realize their concerns and interests. It should be noted that current students and alumni, who I spoke with, have a strong identification with the SUC and are proud to be a part of them. What students asked and proposed – to add more time for their professional practices and grant them more psychological support when they face a challenge while going them through.

***Comments/Recommendations:***

It will be reasonable to establish the association of the SCU alumni.

Centers of professional carrier should be more active with regard to students orientation



on the vacancies in the region and country.

Open the center of a position of practical psychologist to support students with their fight against stresses and challenges at time of their education.

### Research

Research activity of SUC is both mandatory and complementary to teaching staff. There are good records of some researchers' involvement in international and national projects and grants implementation. Two of Journals, published in the University are in National list of "B" periodicals. It means that they have earned some national and international reputes. Some scholars have their publications in Scopus and Web of Science and the University leadership aims at increasing their number. University also promotes partnerships with other Moldavian and Romanian Universities to realize and expand its research agenda, especially in the field of applied science.

Research activity of the teachers are scrutinized and encouraged with the administration of the University. Some of teachers used their professional contacts to get engaged into prestigious research projects and other forms of the international cooperation of scholars. Despite of many advancements the University made for the recent years and first decades of its existence, there are many opportunities for the University to be developed more regarding research agenda, profiles, and achievements.

### *Comments/Recommendations:*

*To look for an institutional partnership with the Universities, which publish Journal(s), registered in Scopus and Web of Science as co-editing institution.*

*To take an active part in the National research grants and program competition and adjust University evaluation to encourage professors and teaching staff to be more active and fruitful.*

*To support scholars with a distinct record of their academic and research activity with Universities' grants annually.*

*To promote University visibility and international ranking, aiming at achievement of the criteria of those international competition.*

### Internationalization

SUC has worked upon its internationalization and a network of professional partnership and contacts. The most prosperous cooperation exists amid Romanian Universities and SUC. More episodic project-oriented cooperation is fixed with Italian, German and some other Universities and research centers. The University is willing and takes a part in Erasmus + programs, mainly on the level of students' academic exchange, University time by time invited visiting Professor from neighboring countries to teach students some courses.

At the same time the international repute of the University required much more concerted

affords of the leadership and teaching staff. While University has a portfolio of successfully implemented projects and grants, they are made mainly in partnership with more advanced and active partners leadership. It seems that in this field the University leadership and staff need more energy and initiatives to get considerable results.

***Comments/Recommendations:***

Organize a series of workshops and trainings to prepare administrative and teaching staff to more active international stance and effective fundraising and grant management in the fields of research.

To look for the reliable partners from other EU member states, for instance from France, Spain, Portugal, Italy, FRG etc.

Work closely with Ukrainian and Georgian partners as far as the way towards full EU membership require their closer and intense research cooperation.

Invest certain share of University budget in funding publications in Scopus and Web of Science journal, participation in prestigious Conferences and Seminars, to make research profile of the University more visible and internationally recognized.

**Quality Management**

In my opinion the quality assurance and appropriate management is developed very well in SUC.

The University elaborated its system of quality assurance of educational and scientific research services in accordance with national legislation and best practices.

The institutional dimension and the very processes of quality assurance are developed on a ground of solid regulations and attention of the staff and administration to those issues. Quality assurance is a true priority for the University, and it's reflected in main documents available.

During our meetings and conversations, I learned about the systematic work of the University in that field on all levels, starting from the Departments and Faculty and concluded with the Rectorate.

Regulations are focused on QA strategic goals and everyday procedures, the methodology of evaluation of are well-thought. Including students' evaluation, the quality of the teaching staff performance, evaluation of the learning activities.

Self-evaluation and peer evaluation are complemented with the monitoring of University's authorities.

Students are taking active part in the evaluations every term. They are aware of those procedures, their meaning and importance. The results of all evaluations are reported regularly and followed with conclusions and practical steps of educational activity betterment.



### Comments/Recommendations:

To make students better informed about the results of their comments and suggestions on teachers' evaluation.

To enhance the process of choosing the actual benchmarks for the evaluations process and link it up with the professional carrier of the university staff.

Discuss widely the ways of further improvement of teaching quality in the University more publicly to gain fruitful and feasible results of evaluation process.

### Conclusions:

SUC is a young and small University, with some ambitions and good records and achievements and effective managerial team, well-motivated staff, and students who like and respect their university. The State University of Cahul is marked with a descent quality of education and research. It has many ways to be developed and advancement further in order to coop with many challenges of higher education development.

I am sure that SUC makes considerable contribution into Moldavian society via all directions of its activity. I hope that my opinion and some practical recommendations would serve to the University brighter future.

I recommend providing the State University of Cahul with institutional accreditation.

22 June, 2023

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