

*Note: First draft, comments are most welcomed!*

**Nesting Europe  
The State of European Studies and Research in Romania**

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## **Abstract:**

The aim of this paper is to initiate the building of an accurate image on the European Studies area and try to offer some information and perspectives which can help the both Romanian institutions concerned and the community of scholars in orientating their policies and efforts towards a faster institutionalization of this disciplinary and research area. Even though it is country focused, there is a relevant number of similarities with several other EU member and accession countries which allows further comparative exploration.

The paper starts with a basic evaluation of the disciplinary links between Political Science, International Relations and European Studies in Romania. This is followed by a look into the Romania's university general patterns of cooperation, both inside and outside the country. I then move to the description of dominant approaches in studying and teaching Europe emphasizing on the need of bringing together in an integrative and comprehensive manner the efforts in this specific disciplinary area. Next is the presentation of two alternative, but still compatible/complementary visions on the development of European Studies in Romania and possible in other accession countries. A special attention is granted to EU concerned think tanks and NGO's in their efforts to promote the study of Europe. Expanding the conceptual and institutional frames of EU studies is a natural process providing the scholars concerned a good chance to gain more resources, to improve their academic status and even enjoy a better visibility in the academic and public spheres. Finally, a short note is made on our students, the people who not only will study more or less Europe, but they will also participate in its construction.

The European Studies courses, programs and research started to gain more weight in the Romanian higher education environment. Even so, there was no effort to critically assess and foster these new academic and educational trends. This report is very necessary as these developments are generally characterized by lack of communication between Departments, both at national and international level, low interest in the current agenda and academic achievements in the European issues and an almost complete ignorance of the needs of those Romanian institutions primarily involved in the European integration processes.

Hopefully this paper will be followed by a full scale research whose results will be become available as soon as they are ready. A short note on the sources used is necessary to be made. The overwhelming majority of the information used is World Wide Web based as their nature is mainly institutional thus present on the corresponding websites. However, the attention devoted to such communication means shared by several Romanian institutions is not a generous one. Out of nine European Studies Centres founded in several Romanian universities only four had WWW basic presentations to be found following extensive browsing. Part of this research, a questionnaire has been drafted and electronically administered to a number of institutions, organizations and individuals concerned with EU. Unfortunately, the current questionnaires filled and returned are not as numerous to allow a systematic use of the information gathered.

## What are the European Studies and to whom do they „belong“?

The attempts to identify the exact borders between disciplines in today's social sciences, increasingly marked by multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary, are not at all new and neither successful most of the times.

This is the case for the areas which currently experience substantive „unrest“. The problematic triangle formed by Political Science, International Relations and European Studies is reshaping and offers an interesting case of sociology of knowledge. The first two have always been the „Siamese twins“ of social science, separate, yet naturally linked. The identity problems were always there. As the European construction evolved the European Studies became more important, blurring further the already unclear disciplinary boundaries. The processes of either *unification*, *adoption* or *assimilation* unfolded by these disciplines are especially interesting in the Central and Eastern European countries currently seeking EU membership.

In this case, their long term relations seem to work in the benefit of the late comer, as its birth coincides for all three. European Studies were something completely new only for a few generations of students. On a medium term perspective the students will no longer see it as a new area, compared with Political Science and International Relations, but a „natural“ one, having fully legitimated disciplinary status. Intuitively, we could foresee the speed of „Europeanization“ of the social sciences education in Central and Eastern European countries being faster than the one experienced throughout decades by the current members states.

In Romania, the first Departments to be founded were the Political Science ones (usually including a relevant share of courses from the IR field) which immediately engaged in fierce competition for students with the more traditional ones like Law, Economics and even Journalism. Their approximate number is hard to be indicated as many of them still have uncertain legal status, being in the process of authorization. However, they are about 10 Political Science in Romania. Independent ones are only two, the rest being under the administrative tutelage of the older/ larger Departments as Law (Ex. University of Sibiu and the University of Oradea) or Sociology (University of Iasi). The private universities responded more quickly to the increasing interest on the discipline creating Departments as Political Science and Political Marketing (!!!) (Dimitrie Cantemir Christian University) and even European Studies (Spiru Haret University). In the latter cases there are some concerns over the quality of teaching and the commitment to academic performance.

Political Science Departments were soon seconded by Public Administration ones in the competition to bring European Studies under their disciplinary and institutional umbrella. Even now they are the biggest competitors in gaining a privileged status over the European Studies education. Apparently this is not the case in the universities which merged the two in a single one (University of Bucharest and Babes-Bolyai University in Cluj). When turning to what Political Science has to offer to the other disciplines, we are facing a consistent reaction of refusal, situation resembling what J.L. Quermonne called the „*the corporatist obstruction*“ of other academic disciplines (Quermonne, 1996, p 13).

## **Competition vs. cooperation / Europe vs. Romania**

One of the most striking features of departmental dynamics in the European Studies is the competition for attaining academic respectability. The problem is that yet this competition has its landmarks outside the country. The status of one department or study program is given mainly by the existence of various funds, contacts with foreign organizations and institutions and very importantly, the presence of highly renowned scholars in their activity. This is a present trend across all Romanian universities as they are acting externally orientated and notably less internally. For this reason many disciplines lack a nationally strong agenda for research and a corresponding organizational support towards creatively reform the substance and the shape of these disciplines..

Apparently this orientation towards external agencies helps a lot. Indeed, yet the way these resources are distributed creates problems.

There are two basic approaches in designing and implementing educational projects. The first one is *symbolic* and consists in the constant race to gain a certain status and visibility in the academic and public life. One of the main destination of funds is the “event” related activities. This practice of extensive attendance of conferences has of course, its grounded motivations but if turned into a routine without any institutional outcomes it misses the very role of the whole activity.

At the other end of preference scale are the time, energy and money-consuming activities as research, publication activity and or building information infrastructures (ex. libraries). These are all *investment orientated* activities, which can contribute a great deal to the development of the internal scientific community.

There is also an important aspect, which has to be addressed in this section. The Erasmus/Socrates program offered Political Science Departments a good chance to join a various institutions and networks. To many of them probably provided the only consistent external contact. Even though I did not gathered specific data on the structure of the partnerships established under these programs, by activating in this environment I have identified certain patterns of cooperation which are „culturally’ driven. In an overwhelming majority all the partnerships of the Political Science Department are with Universities and Department from France and Italy. This trend can be of course explained by the traditional links established in the educational area with France at least. It has been a great joy to see for example that Romania is represented also in EpsNet by an important number of PhD students who are studying in French institutions. Yet, the Romanian scholars have to become aware that also German, Dutch, Nordic and even Central and Eastern European Department are in position to offer useful information and expertise on European integration.

Hopefully this line of research will be able next in order to thoroughly evaluate the impact of these programs on the Romanian Political Science education.

## **Main trends in teaching Europe in Romania**

The way Europe is taught in Romania is highly influenced by the initial structure of education in humanities. Clearly the academic agenda is following the political one and for sure Romania could not afford to wait for a new generation of European Studies scholars

to be formed so the gaps were filled by scholars and researchers specialized in other fields. At some point this is the specificity of the European Studies, the diversity of approaches constituting its strength and not its weakness. In understanding European Studies today, the following issues are especially relevant. First, in the Romanian social sciences the scholars and the faculty had to pass a broader period of transition from a closed, ideological and highly authoritative approach of teaching to a more modern, communication orientated one. Moreover, the “*tabula rasa*” state describes well enough the situation of these disciplines during communism. For example, in Romania at the time of the change in 1989 the Sociology discipline survived by the effort of few teachers and students marginalized within the larger Faculty of Philosophy (University of Bucharest). We can hardly trace rudiments of Political Science and International Relations teaching within the „Stefan Gheorghiu Academy’ which was the institution in charge with the training of Romanian communist party officials. Needless to say this could be a satisfactory base for teaching Europe. This process of reform may take time but the trend is very consistent, facilitated already by the infusion of young scholars trained abroad. Leaving the ideological handicap aside, there were „pockets” of expertise in different disciplinary areas (ex. Economics, Law, History and even Philosophy) that had a lot of catching up to do in order to be able to contribute to the European Studies agenda. The first departments who were interested in covering the aspects of European integration were the Law ones. This fact is relatively easy to explain. The law scholars had a well-trained previous expertise and a natural access to what is the most accessible information about Europe namely the legal documents of the fifty years long European construction. The other disciplines were soon to follow mainly by the reorientation of certain scholars toward the new area and less by the conscious reform of the old curricula.

At least for the Political Science Departments there is constant and positive dynamic as regards to the European orientated programs and courses. It is too early to assess whether a certain the equilibrium state has been reached. Probably this state will see when virtually every Political Science Department will introduce in their curriculum core of courses dedicated to the European integration. Moreover this state of equilibrium will have to be defined not only in terms of *curriculum coherence* and/or *novelty* but also in relation with the *general interest* on the academic products. This interest can be defined by the existence of resources for such programs and courses, faculty to fill a reasonable number of positions, and a stable number of students attending and after graduation, using their education in European issues.

In Political Science Departments and not only the most influential approach was the above mentioned one, the *legalist –historical* brought by the infusion of law scholars who entered the newly established structures. This trend is even more visible for the Public Administration Departments where the Law scholars not only covered the European issues but also confiscated the whole process of training in the detriment of other complementary disciplines as Economics, Management and even Political Science. This development is confirmed by the European Commission through the Directorate - General for Education and Culture, Jean Monet Project, who between 1990 and 2002 supported several academic initiatives (5 European modules, 9 permanent courses and 4 Jean Monet Chairs) in a number of 9 Romanian universities. Taken together they form a group of 18 successful academic initiatives under several disciplinary titles (History 4, Community law – 4, European economy-6, Political Science- 2 and multidisciplinary 3). However these

disciplinary headings are not reliable enough to understand the content of the modules, chairs and courses. For example, the permanent course “European Union policies for public management” (C02/0086) with the National School of Political Studies and Administration is under the Political Science heading yet it is not a course easy to include in the PoliSci area and moreover, it was not taught in the Political Science Department but into to the Public Administration one.

This „stage” of development marked by a legal and historical stance is to be overcome especially in the Departments having a substantive international cooperation. Soon it became clear that the European construction did not mean only treatise and steady economic integration. The influence of parties and party families, the question of identity and culture, the transatlantic relation during the Cold War era were soon brought in debate in an attempt to make these processes more explicit. Looking at the majority of European centered courses today this initial phase is certainly remote and many of the Political Sciences Departments are starting a stage „specialization”. Specialization means that the study of Europe starts to be strongly linked to various theoretical and paradigmatic backgrounds. Even though very necessary this trend presents some faults. As I had stated earlier this trend is due to the effort and lobbying capacity of certain professors and not the result of clear policies of curricular reform. The effect of this „mushrooming” is the lack of coherence and systematization in teaching. The students gain for sure more information than five years ago, for example, but the complete picture is far too heterogeneous and disorganized.

The International Relation faculties deserve one short note. They are not so developed at the undergraduate level but more to the graduate level. In some cases the International Relations and European Studies were not separated as they were naturally bounded together. This supports the statement this is a big chance for the European Studies to develop together with the more established discipline as Political Science and International Relation. Naturally in the IR or common IR /ES department the approach on the European integration is dominated by the specific attention on security related issues

The two above-mentioned approaches unfold themselves on different speeds and magnitudes. There is however a certain feeling that this two approaches have been left aside yet still used within a desirable integrated and comprehensive approach on European Studies

Given the material and human constraints Departments are forced to focus their academic agenda on certain curricular lines. However if answering yes to the question whether an integrated approach possible and necessary we have to bear in mind some principles, which will enable the adoption of ES schemes into the Romanian social science institutions.

The core probably has to be *simple, flexible, comprehensive* and *cheap*. As usual, the vision of a core curriculum of European studies and European integration was promoted firstly in a western European framework, the contribution of CEE scholars being more or less consistent.

Last but not least, in these schemes more attention should be granted to what is specific in the Central and Eastern European research into the wider picture of research at the European level. One of the main problems is that the Romanian research and academic community with little exceptions links itself to the Western driven and financed research

agenda. The problem is not the actual cooperation, which is normal and necessary, but the lack of specific input from the Romanian community. This is a common problem for most of the accession countries problem. (Malova, 2002) This asymmetry is harming the long-term scholarly capacity to initiate, and carry out research and also the overall quality of teaching.

### **Institution vs. Community: two visions of European Studies development**

Until recently, there were not any structured attempts to organize the efforts around teaching Europe. One of the latest meetings on this topic was organized in April this year by the Romania branch of *Civic Education Project* a US scholarly organization in cooperation with the *Romanian Society of Political Science* (SRSP) and consisted in a seminar on European Studies curricular development which intended to be regional but turned to be national in the sense that the participants were overwhelmingly Romanian. Even so, the initiative, which is very generous in terms of vision, namely the establishment of a CEE regional scholarly and expert network dedicated to the development of European Studies, has done some really necessary steps by pointing out the elements of a future agenda. The most probable continuation of this initiative is the formation of a Romanian network of interested individuals. This project brings two new elements that are very interesting from our perspective. First, this is a network formed by individuals and not institutions. Some universities in Romania are already part of networks dedicated to European Studies but their flexibility and adaptability is rather small. The newly established *Romanian European Integration Studies Association* is composed by only two think tanks - Romanian European Institute, the Institute of Global Economy and 8 Universities (Lower Danube University - the European Studies Center for Environmental Policies, West University - the School of Highly Comparative European Studies, Al. I. Cuza University - the European Studies Center for Regional Development, Babes Boylai University -the European Studies Departments, Agricultural Sciences and Veterinary Medicine University, University of Bucharest -the Sociology and Social Assistance Department, the Economic Studies Academy, the University of Craiova Economics Department. The incentives for bringing all these institutions together have to be very consistent, especially in financial terms. A network of individuals can second projects by this large organization and generally become more open to change and initiative. Secondly, the CEP-SRSP network has declared its focus on curricular development in this area. There are several arguments this kind of initiative can be more effectively than the university driven activities. Rather than improving curriculum by institutional pressure, maybe its preferable to influence the scholars towards using updated quality sources and contributions. The permanent practice of exchange and verification can bring the necessary standards of good practice in teaching Europe; this is what we can call the “*community approach*” to European Studies development

A solid trend towards institutionalization will be constructed only by combining these two approaches. The Universities have to provide a proper and feasible framework for the individuals and faculties interested in European studies, facilitate their access to funding and different institutional environments, and on the other hand, the individuals will have to

create and maintain active national and international cooperation in order to facilitate the transfer of sound expertise and a set of good teaching practices.

### **Romanian think tanks and NGO's: an active helping hand.**

As we might expect, the transformations in the political agenda are usually followed by a consequent inflow of resources and increased public attention. The think tanks are far more sensitive to these transformations than any other organization. In Romania the think tanks didn't reached yet this maturity, with few notable exceptions. The Romanian Academic Society is constantly promoting a quality research activity and a attitude extremely conducive to the growth of a genuine Political Science community. In this effort we have to note the activity of the Romanian Society of Political Science, which is becoming an important organization in the Romanian social sciences realm.

The Romania branches of international civil and/or cultural agencies represent a special category. I am referring especially to the Open Society Foundation and British Council. The first has and still is one of the most important promoters of the engaged expertise, developing a wide range of projects that influenced positively the academic environment and even the quality of public policy, especially in the area of human rights. The Foundation in collaboration with European Commission carried out a research with the aim to explore in-depth the position of leading social, economic and cultural actors regarding the current European integration. The study, without being designed as comprehensive, is a necessary and exemplary exercise. The contributors were selected on open and competitive basis from the most active and trained representatives of the academic and civil society sector in Romania (Weber, 2003, 1). The latter, Romanian section of the British Council developed a project of high interest for all the EU concerned scholars, in cooperation with four Political Science /European Studies faculties in Timisoara, Cluj, Bucharest and Iasi.

The effort done so far focused on building an agenda for EU curricula development, the transfer of teaching and good practice techniques from the UK scholars to the Romanian counterparts and last but not least, in cooperation with SISEC, Timisoara, the establishment of a scholarly journal "*The Romanian Journal of European Studies*" If this initiative will be carried on it is very probable to find quickly a stable base of readers and contributors in the growing group of individuals interested in Europe. The European Studies in Romanian Universities programme is very promising especially in opening a road for similar efforts.

Yet, the lead in promoting the European Studies is a government think tank, the Romanian European Institute. This government think tank supports the only Romanian journal, which has its as specific focus on European issues. *The Romanian Journal of European Affairs* is trilingual publication edited three times a year and has reached its fourth number already. The European Commission through the Phare programme finances this journal and its contributors are mainly Western academics and researchers, while the Romanian contributors are keeping a low profile. I have to note the contributions coming from another accession countries are still rare.

The dimensions this institute is working are: research, training, and translation of the aquis, cooperation and communication.

Even though it can be considered as the beneficiary of organized and centralized EU fund spending organization, this institute filled a gap in the overall academic production of

expertise in European issues. For example under the research dimension, again with the financial support of Phare programme, it generated 26 impact studies on various issues related to the European integration. Another very important dimension is the cooperation one. Romanian European Institute graciously accepted the responsibility to coordinate a series of actions that resulted in establishment of several European Studies Centers within several Romania universities. These universities are united into the newly established *Romania European Integration Studies Association*, and organization that has been mentioned earlier.

Without downplaying the role this Institute has in the development of the European Studies in Romania, it is highly recommendable that several other institutes and think tanks to develop consistent research, training and communication programs.

### **European Studies: a niche for academic entrepreneurship**

The emergence of this new disciplinary area offered to a large number of scholars the opportunity to re-orientate their activity towards a more actual, challenging and resourceful direction.

Yet, some activities are problematic. The project managers, who are usually more or less respected scholars, have an agenda that is not investment orientated. One common practice is to accommodate leading figures in the academic and political world in various activities and „confirm’ the value of institution. It is quite common in the Romanian universities, especially in the private ones, to see in the leadership highly ranked public officials, usually well paid who provide to the university more visibility and a great deal of „protection”.

Teaching and carrying European research provides an important niche for the Romanian scholars and researchers. For most of them it seems that this is new train back in the political and administrative arena. For understanding the behavior of this category of scholars we have to look at the real of academic elite in the formation of the new political and administrative elite. There was an initial period when the academic status could offer the right background to enter the public life. This route was chosen by an important number of academics after 89 and I have to note that almost none of these scholars haven’t renounced formally of the academic status. The University remains one of the few institutions clean and respectable enough to offer some epistemic authority that can be easily turned into political legitimacy. Many of the Romanian politicians returned to the academic realm fact that stabilized the University as one of the respectable institutions where politician usually want to be associated with. Not many scholars preferred in this initial period to become part of the bureaucracy, at least the medium one. The status and the familiarity with an environment where the constraints and hierarchies are not so strict kept them from joining public administration. Yet, many of them joined public institutions in leading positions.

This is partially caused by the existence of the „secret dream’ of some scholars to enter politics or join public institutions. The political life still exerts a certain fascination completed by a certain sense of entitlement. The academic elite considers natural their presence, physical or symbolical in the public and political life. Moreover such position

could offer the necessary incentives for a more sustained financial support and openness on the part of education state agencies.

Looking at the overall picture the insertion of scholars into high public offices has its advantages. Surprising or not the most important interface between the politics and academia is the European agenda. For example the Romania Ministry of European Integration, anyway an original formula of government design compared to other CEE countries, is lead by renowned scholar from University of Timisoara. Moreover, the Romania Chief negotiator for EU is also a scholar with intense previous and current academic activity.

### **Enough with teaching Europe...what about *learning* Europe?**

Before ending this exploratory effort, there is one last important „actor” in European Studies development namely the students. Their actions and opinions are a good instrument in evaluating the success of certain study programs / scheme. In Romania choosing, where available, a major in European studies can be one of the wisest options for students (only one Department is offering such a major yet). The number of EU related an available position is important and steadily increasing. Moreover, the EU courses and programs are seconded by diverse and attracting collateral educational opportunities as conferences, seminars, training courses mainly coming from the civil society. Unfortunately there are no data on how the students specialized on EU are doing on the job market. There is no study also on the patterns of student exchange between departments in the Erasmus projects. Their dominant perception over the issue is positive, but not without shortcomings. There is a potential gap between the „dynamic” Europe, the unprecedented political and even civilizational project and the „dry „ Europe represented by the institutional complexity and bureaucracy coming with it. Who can blame the students if between the European Convention and the legislation on food safety for example they would go for the first? The middle way is again the most recommendable one. If the scholars and the academic community are successful in showing how Europe is influencing the lives of our fellow countrymen and Europeans there is a chance for an appealing Europe. If this is too much and too early maybe we can at least convince them these times are great to be a social scientist.

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LIST OF SUCCESSFUL UNIVERSITIES IN ROMANIA 1990-2002

<http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/programmes/ajm/ajm/directory/Romania.pdf>

\*\*\* Romanian European Institute, [www.ier.ro](http://www.ier.ro)