

ANOSR's reaction regarding the proposed reform for doctoral titles

Following the proposals addressed to the entire academic community in Romania about **eliminating the Ministry of Education and Research from the processes of granting the doctoral degree and the habilitation certificate**, the **National Alliance of Student Organisations in Romania (ANOSR) opposes to the anesthetizing the verifying mechanisms at national level and calls for rigor and consistency in decisions that revolve around this issue.**

The **National Council for Attesting the University Degrees, Diplomas and Certificates (CNATDCU)** is a consultative body at national level, and one of its main attributes is the validation of the proposal for granting doctoral degrees and the granting of habilitation certificates. Frequently, the activity of CNATDCU was brought to the public attention due to the doctoral theses of some public figures in Romania, proven to be plagiarized. **The repercussions of granting a doctorate are reflected throughout society**, so we believe that the attention paid to this topic should have taken one of the first places in the priorities of the decision-makers. We, also, regularly notice universities and cases **of plagiarism in a continuous form**, where, paradoxically, not only do the measures taken not prove to be more drastic, but, in most cases, the dishonest conduct of the person in question is not punished in any way. **There is a legitimate public interest in taking action in the next period for creating a true culture of academic integrity** in higher education institutions in Romania, in which university autonomy is respected, but which permanently counterbalances the **public responsibility.**

Another aspect that is completely forgotten in the actual public controversy is the purely formal accreditation of doctoral schools in Romanian universities. Absolutely fundamental structures for the third cycle of studies, **the doctoral schools were accredited through Government's Emergency Ordinances no. 96/2016 and no. 79/2019, without benefiting so far from a qualitative filter of a concrete external evaluation.** Therefore, the valences of the proposals should be synchronized with the expectations of the stakeholders only after a relevant review of the current doctoral schools.

Moreover, even at the moment, the Romanian higher education system does not have clear punitive principles for those who intentionally violate academic integrity. Even if **ANOSR** has repeatedly requested the introduction of a system of sanctions that is clear and easy to apply, the **sanctions are either mild or totally absent.**

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Since the analysis conducted in 2016, "*Copy-paste universities: the phenomenon of plagiarism and academic imposture in the Romanian higher education - the perspective of students*", **ANOSR stated the need to quickly introduce harsher sanctions for such violations.** 4 years later, we notice that these requests still remain our desire. Therefore, **we call again** for their introduction, urgently and transparently, in all the Romanian universities:

1. **For doctoral schools**, among our proposals are: **the suspension of the right to enroll new doctoral students** for any doctoral school in which a case of plagiarism was detected, until the situation is clarified < **the liquidation of doctoral schools** in which at least three proven cases of plagiarism were registered or the **definitive exclusion from the academic community** of those who were found guilty of plagiarism, as well as of the coordinators who supervised and guaranteed the writing of these works.
2. **For people who are proven to have plagiarized in writing scientific papers**, we request: **the withdrawal of the academic title** obtained through fraud, **refund of all the funds obtained** from bonuses or professional promotion due to a plagiarized academic paper and the **elimination of the possibility to give up to an already obtained academic degree.**
3. **For the teachers that have been coordinating plagiarized works**, it is mandatory to **harmonize the legislation in force** and **to definitively exclude from the academic community the coordinators who have knowingly supervised and endorsed the drafting of plagiarized works.**

It is noticeable that **the entire process of granting the doctoral degree and the habilitation certificate requires many prior amendments** and we can develop, over time, clear mechanisms and tools, able to outline a vocation to transpose the role of the universities, but we believe that a complete dissolution of this structure (i.e. CNATDCU) does not find its reasoning in the Romanian educational system now. More precisely, using a coherent approach, several attributions can be given to universities in granting the doctorate, and the role of CNATDCU can increase exponentially towards the orientation of universities and monitoring the process of granting the doctor titles.

Last but not least, we would like to underline the fact that **2020 is an election year.** We are aware of the existing stakes and the usual political attitudes that serve the public interest, but we draw attention to the fact that **fundamental changes in the education system should not be allowed, in the context of a fluctuating political environment**, which generally leads to serious legislative and decision inconsistencies. Such decisions can only be taken after consistent public debates, with the involvement of all the stakeholders and the direct beneficiaries.

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The academic integrity in Romania has been constantly shaken in recent years, and such spontaneous changes erode more and more the image of the educational system; we request the prioritization, regarding this subject, of the urgent changes, in order to outline a transparent, fair and objective process for granting the doctoral title and the habilitation certificate.

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