



**EU TEMPUS project “Innovating Teaching and Learning of European Studies”
(INOTLES)**

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**European Studies in the Republic of Moldova : State of Affairs
and Trends**

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Summary

- The European integration objective of Moldovan governing elites has boosted the interest for promoting European Studies (ES) within the higher education institutions;
- Moldovan universities face the need to adapt promptly to this objective, translated into the national strategy *Education 2020*, as well as the modernisation of higher education in line with the Bologna Process;
- Various specific ES courses are being offered across Moldovan universities, particularly in the Political Science, International Relations and Law disciplines;
- ES has become also a separate specialisation within some Master and Doctoral programs;
- The European Union has supported the exchange of knowledge and practices in the field of European Studies through its funding schemes, such as TEMPUS or Erasmus +. INOTLES

project (TEMPUS VI) represents a core contribution to the implementation of innovative teaching methods and tools within the ES courses and programs in Moldova.

- Despite significant achievements, teaching ES in Moldova is confronting several major challenges. These are the challenge of adopting an inter- or multi-disciplinary approach, the implementation of innovative teaching methods, the establishment of a legal framework favourable to blended and e-learning, as well as the language barrier in accessing international study and research material.

1. Introduction

The declaration of European integration as a foreign policy priority of the Republic of Moldova and the signing of the Action Plan with the European Union (EU) in 2005 boosted the interest for promoting the European Studies (ES) as a field of study within the higher education institutions. The governmental initiative of domestic compliance with the EU norms and standards reveals the need of ES expertise in various policy domains. Most of governmental institutions, such as ministries, have proceeded to the establishment of specific departments or units on European integration. Concomitantly, the Republic of Moldova, being a EU neighbor, has been actively seeking to modernize its higher education in accordance with the Bologna Process. Moldova adhered to Bologna Process in May 2005, during the Bergen Summit.

Moldovan higher education institutions have faced the need to adapt promptly to these realities. One of the first steps was the setting up of specific courses in various ES domains, particularly in the Political Science, International Relations and Law disciplines. Some went even further, offering a separate Master or Doctoral level specialisation in the field of ES.

This policy paper aims at assessing the state of affairs of ES field in the Republic of Moldova. After presenting the national framework regulating the higher education, the paper proceeds with the examination of the institutional practices of teaching ES at undergraduate, graduate and post-graduate levels. The final section assesses the achievements and the challenges of teaching ES in Moldova. Several policy recommendations are provided in the concluding part.

2. National framework

The educational system of the Republic of Moldova has been undergoing reformation in order to address the existing challenges. Several measures were undertaken to improve the higher education. The recently adopted *Strategy for developing the education for 2014-2020* “*Education – 2020*” states that the education represents a national priority in the Republic of Moldova. The education is considered the basic factor for creating and transmitting new knowledge and values within the formation of the national consciousness and identity, but also in the promotion of the European integration aspirations. Thus, the Ministry of Education contributed to the creation of a favorable

environment for the modernization of the higher education and promoting the required study programs. Also, according to the 2014 *Code of Education* higher education institutions in Moldova have full autonomy and they benefit from the freedom of action regarding the didactic and scientific research activity, the choice of the specialties, as well as the elaboration of study plans and course syllabi according to national education standards.

Overall, the existing legal framework provides the necessary prerequisites for the promotion and the implementation of the European Studies in the higher education from the Republic of Moldova. It has to be mentioned that within the *Law on vocational training* (nr. 142 of 07.07.2015)¹ does not refer to the European Studies as a separate specialisation. Instead, the European Studies is referred to the specialisations 311.1 Political Science, 312.1 International Relations and 381.1 Law. The higher education institutions in Moldova include most of the courses dedicated to the European studies within these specialisations for the 1st cycle (BA studies). It has to be mentioned the fact that in the context of the European integration policy, since 2013 the Ministry of Education requested the inclusion of academic courses dedicated to the European integration in all the specialisations of vocational training for the 1st cycle.

Regarding the 2nd cycle of studies (MA studies), although the same specialisations are in place as for the 1st cycle, the higher education institutions may elaborate more varied Master programs. Based on this regulation, the European Studies appears as a separate specialisation at the Master level.

In comparison with the first two cycles of higher education, the European Studies are considered as a distinct specialisation in the 3rd cycle (Doctoral studies). *The Nomenclature of Scientific Specialisations*, approved by the government's decision nr. 199 of 13.03.2012, differentiates between several specialisations related to European Studies. The document includes the scientific specialty 562.04 Theory of European Integration, institutions, processes and European policies, 552.08. International and European Public Law and 553.06 International and European Private Law.

3. University curriculum: Institutional practices

There are 29 higher education institutions registered in the Republic of Moldova, 18 of them are state institutions and 11 of them are private institutions (Ministry of Education 2016). Currently, European Studies courses are taught in all of the above institutions. This is largely linked to the European integration aspirations of the Republic of Moldova. Following governmental order of teaching European Studies, higher education institutions aspire to provide knowledge and skills about European integration process.

But ES teaching dates back to the end of the 1990s – early 2000s. Free International University of Moldova (ULIM) was a pioneer in introducing the ES in the higher education curricula. Initially, the

¹*Nomenclature of vocational training areas and majors for training staff in higher education, 1st cycle, 2015.*

International Center of European Training was opened in June 1997. Its objectives were the promotion of the European idea in the Republic of Moldova by organizing seminars, summer schools, and short-term courses. Subsequently, in collaboration with the Center of European Training from Moldova, ULIM launched in 1999 the first Master program of European Studies in Moldova (field: International Relations, specialisation: European Studies). The program benefited from the financial assistance of Robert Schuman Foundation from Paris. One year later, another higher education institution - the Institute of Political Studies and International Relations - followed the steps of ULIM. It set up the ES program together with a program of American studies within the Faculty of International Relations.

The ES made their way within the majority of the education institutions since early 2000s. But the ES curricula vary from one institution to another and from one specialty to another. The International Relations and Law curricula offer a broad variety of ES courses. This includes courses on European Law (ULIM and European Studies University of Moldova), EU and Human Rights, EU Law and European Integration, European Business Law, European Institutional Law (State University of Moldova), European Union Law (European Studies University of Moldova), etc. The ES are more represented at the Master level at ULIM, the Academy for Economic Studies from Moldova (ASEM), and “Constantin Stere” university. Within these institutions the ES specialisation is offered at Master level in the framework of International Relations or Economics programs. In this respect, the ES are offered within the Master program of Regional Studies (ULIM), the European Studies (USM), European Integration and Neighborhood Policies; International Economy and European Integration (ASEM); International Relations and European Studies, Public Policies and European Integration, International Economy and European Businesses (“Constantin Stere”).

The comparative analysis of higher education programs and courses reveals that the ES are commonly grounded within specific disciplines (history, international relations, economic sciences, law). Although at an early stage, a trend of multi-disciplinary and inter-disciplinary approaches can be observed in the last years.

But the ES courses are well represented beyond the International Relations, Political Science, or Law programs. For example, at the Technical University of Moldova we find courses such as the Theory and Practice of European Integration, including modules on the Philosophy of European Integration, EU Institutions, EU Public, etc. At “Ion Creanga” State Pedagogical University we find the “History of European Integration.” At ULIM, the names of the courses dedicated to the European Integration at the 1st cycle differ from faculty to faculty. Regarding the International Relations discipline, the following courses are offered: The Politics of European Integration, EU Foreign Policy (1st cycle) and The EU Enlargement and the Neighborhood Policy, The European Integration and Institutional Transformation, The EU Policy-making, etc. (2nd cycle).

4. European Studies: achievements and challenges

The assessment of the practical implementation of *The Directive of the Ministry of Education* on the introduction of European integration courses at all the specialisations of the 1st cycle reveals an overall positive outcome. Moreover, the ES are present within all three cycles of university studies. However, it is important to move beyond the basic analysis of university curricula and examine the relationship between the quantity and quality of ES teaching.

The ES university curricula have been undergoing a continuous reform and improvement. On the one hand, we can witness the need of constant update of the content, driven by the evolving European political system and the resulting internal and external changes. These are primarily processes linked to the EU enlargement, global financial crisis, migration, etc. However, one of the challenges confronted by Moldovan staff and students is the language barrier. The universities are expanding their access to international publications and databases, but the accessibility of the material for some students and even staff (particularly senior staff) is limited by their knowledge of foreign languages (mostly English).

The ongoing curriculum reforms are also facilitated by the exchange of pedagogical practices between the Moldovan higher education institutions and their European counterparts. Last, but not least, the reformation of the ES curricula is driven by the need to address the job market requirements. Moldovan universities have been working on knowledge and real-world skill transfer, as well as the collaboration with potential employers (e.g. encouraging internships). In this context, e-learning and blended learning approaches may offer greater opportunities of knowledge and skill transfer, as well as flexibility for various learners' groups (e.g. working students or adult training). At the moment, however, there is no legal framework that would allow the implementation of blended or e-learning courses or programs. Yet the Ministry of Education is already working on opening up the higher education to blended and e-learning approaches.

In sum, the modernization of ES curricula is the result of both internal and external factors. The internal factors refer to the initiatives of the governing institutions but also the academic staff to address the increasing demand of the ES experts and the job market requirements, as well as to implement European educational standards. But the external factors seem as important as the internal ones in determining the successful outcome of curricular modernization. The EU has actively supported initiatives such as the exchange of best pedagogical practices between the higher education staff from the EU and the European neighborhood. By encouraging and supporting the academic mobility, the transnational partnership and exchange of reform agendas, the European programs contribute significantly to the modernization of Moldovan education system. The EU has boosted the promotion and the implementation of the ES in the Republic of Moldova. Through EU funding schemes, such as TEMPUS framework or Erasmus +, Moldovan universities have been actively involved in joint projects and structural reforms aimed at promoting the modernization of the higher

education in line with the Bologna Process. In this context, INOTLES project² represents a core contribution to the implementation of innovative teaching methods and tools within the ES courses and programs in Moldova. This joint project of EU and East European counterparts aims at setting a model of curricular reform, building on international expertise of teaching core ES courses. INOTLES intends to provide adaptable pedagogical resources to universities from the European neighborhood (from Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia) that can be implemented into a wide variety of ES courses.

The two Moldovan universities, members of the INOTLES project, ULIM and Cahul State University (USC), have substantially benefited from the pedagogical training and curriculum development within the INOTLES framework. Their ES curricula at Master level underwent a comprehensive revision. At the moment, several core courses in the ES field, jointly developed within the INOTLES framework, are being taught at both universities. Also, five academic staff from each university took part in the INOTLES pedagogical training. The training was based on innovative teaching methods, such as problem-based learning, simulations, blended and e-learning. Currently, Moldovan teachers are regularly applying these innovative pedagogies in their Master program in order to facilitate knowledge and skill transfer. But a core challenge in promoting and implementing innovative teaching methods is the lack of motivation of East European academic staff. As the INOTLES partners confessed, their universities and Ministries of Education do not provide them with required resources (time, administrative, IT or financial support) for encouraging them to receive a training and implement innovative pedagogies.³

The EU is also supporting the dissemination of information and research on European integration and the EU political system through European Centers. Center for European Studies (State University from Moldova USM) and Center of European Integration Studies (ASEM) provide both teaching programs and contribute to the dissemination of the European. Besides these Centers, there exist EU Information Centers, set up with the EU support within various libraries or higher education institutions. These Centers are found in Chisinau (ULIM, USM, ASEM, University of Medicine and Pharmacy “N. Testemitanu”); in Soroca (“C. Stere” High School); in Balti (“Alecru Russo” University), in Cahul (“Bogdan Petriceicu Hasdeu” University), in Gagauzia (State University of Comrat). The EU Information Centers have the purpose to offer to everyone free access to information on European integration. Despite the significant number of ES Centers, the lack of cooperation and coordination of their dissemination and education activities represent key challenges at the moment.

A novel Center for European Studies has been launched in 2016 at ULIM. Compared to the existing Centers, this organization aims at representing a pedagogical unit of ES teaching expertise in

² Innovating the Teaching and Learning of European Studies, see more at www.inotles.eu .

³ Focus group of INOTLES academic staff from Moldova, Ukraine and Georgia, INOTLES project meeting, December 3, 2016, University of Surrey, UK.

Moldova, as well as an information and dissemination hub. This Center will continue to provide training of Moldovan academic staff in innovative pedagogies used in the ES field. It is expected that ULIM Center will use trainings as a source of financial sustainability after the end of INOTLES project. The EU has assisted with the deployment of equipment and library resources for ULIM Center, as well as for its counterparts at National Kyiv Mohyla Academy in Ukraine and Tbilisi State University in Georgia.

5. Recommendations

Bellow we aim to address the major challenges in ES teaching in Moldova and to provide our policy recommendations.

1. **The ES are still largely grounded within a specific discipline.** This challenge can be overcome by encouraging the inter-disciplinary or multi-disciplinary approach in ES teaching. This can be achieved in two ways. The academic staff needs to undergo continuous knowledge and skills training regarding various disciplinary approaches in the ES field in order to include in their course design inter- or multi-disciplinary approaches. But, at the same time, offering expert sessions might be a solution. Inviting various experts (mostly from Political Science, International Relations, Law, History, Economics) might represent another way of implementing an inter- or multi-disciplinary approach.
2. **Promoting and implementing innovative teaching methods.** Moldovan universities may use their broad degree of autonomy to encourage academic staff to engage with innovative pedagogies. This encouragement may have different forms. But it should provide primarily more time for those that are eager to get a training or (re)design their courses based on innovative pedagogies, as well as administrative and IT support. Also, despite the fact that providing financial incentives may be a greater challenge, the Ministry of Education should implement required reforms that would provide the teachers a remuneration and/or personal development budget that rewards continuous professional training, specifically in innovative pedagogies. Last, but not least, the Ministry should facilitate further access to external sources of educational funding (e.g. bilateral or multilateral agreements with other countries or international organisations).
3. **A national legal framework for the use of blended or e-learning approach** has to be established in the near future. This would ensure that higher education courses and programs could fully benefit from new digital technologies in order to address the needs of various learners' groups and job market requirements.
4. **Language barrier.** Local (university) and national level reforms are necessary to encourage the development of good English language skills among students but also academic staff. These are essential steps for ensuring the equal access to available international study and research material, as well as available mobilities, such as Erasmus + program. Concomitantly,

the universities may facilitate the access to international material by supporting the translation of mandatory course material into local languages.

6. Bibliography

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Websites:

“Innovating the Teaching and Learning of European Studies”: www.inotles.eu

“Center for European Studies”: <http://ces.ulim.md/>