

## Reforming Higher Education In Albania: The Scientific Research

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**Abstract** *In the current development and perspectives in the Albanian education, reforms on the high education, bears the internal tendency for development, aiming on the integration of the Albanian society in the European regional development. This paper has on its focus the analysis of functioning and malfunctioning of the scientific research in Albania, which would highlight some of the problems it faces, such as: a) Low research level; b) Unclear financing strategies and c) Deep separation between research and university as well between research conclusion and market. System reformation of scientific research and technological development will lead to a rational frame in which the actors would feel estimated and the society itself would experience the investment. In terms of an opened market the process of research integration in universities is unavoidable defined from the adjustment of university offers and labor market demands.*

**Keywords:** *Scientific research; Educational reform; Challenge; Perspective.*

### 1. Introduction

Scientific research is estimated as a fundamental element for an economy oriented to the knowledge and is important in all its stages, despite its different manners. Albania has not made any progress in these developments because of the need to be concentrated in finding the “bases” for a proper progress (education, legal framework, abolition of poverty. etc). If Albania aims to achieve its long term intentions for development, it’s time to invest more in the creation, distribution and application of the knowledge.

Reforms of scientific research system and technological development, will lead in a rational framework in which, on one hand actors would feel estimated and on the other the society experiences the results of the appropriate investment. Some of the questions raised during the interviews on scientific research, among members of the staff, who lead the biggest university in Albania, as the one in Tirana, answered : “ *University in Albania on these days has many challenges, but two of them are the most important : a) diploma quality and b) scientific research. These are and will always be challenges to survive in an opened market. There could not exist universities without research. University can be differently named scientific research and then education. The government benefits from the knowledge, the university provides them. Both have benefits in common.*

Only comprehending the scientific research and the university interaction, the education would:

- play a very important role in the progress of the country.
- be more integrated within the country
- be more involved in the regional European courses
- be more efficient and helpful in the creation of a suitable motivated environment to minimize brain drain.

### 2. Methodology and Main Objectives of Studying

Information used in this study is based on different sources. For this purpose is explicated not only the experience and the previous studies of the authors, but also many other materials from Albanian and foreign authors This questionnaire intends collecting information based on the knowledge and

educational system implementation in private and public universities in Tirana. Through the interviews we tried to identify some of the problems related with this process as how to issue conclusions for the necessary strategies for the future of the education.

The interviews mainly contain structured and half-structured questions, with the intention to allow the freedom of expressing thoughts, assessments, comments and suggestions. These questionnaires are addressed and distributed to managerial level of educational institutions, in different faculties of public and private universities.

### *2.1 Basic objectives*

On the focus of this paper is the analysis of functioning and malfunctioning of scientific research in Albania, which would highlight some of the main problems which faces scientific, such as: a) Low research level; b) Unclear financing strategies; c) Deep separation between research and university as well between research conclusion and market.

System reformation of scientific research and technological development will lead to a rational frame in which the actors would feel estimated and the society itself would experience the investment. In terms of an opened market the process of research integration in universities is unavoidable defined from the adjustment of university offers and labor market demands.

## **3. General Overview of the Current Situation in the System of SHTI**

### *3.1 Legal Framework and the Process of Taking Decisions*

The legal framework which regulates the problems that are connected to the science, technology and innovation has made a big progress during last years, with the passing of the law in 2001 on the High Education and the reviews of the law on the Science Academy. The law of 1994 should be revised according to the international standards, taking into consideration the opening of national programmes in accordance with EU priorities, with the rules of government financing for K&ZH.

The law of 2007 on High Education created a flexibility and greater objectivity in universities' financing, and the Strategy on High education defines a number of ambitious targets to improve the functioning of this sector. The Strategy on High Education has on its focus improvement of the quality of teaching in the universities and in the Master stage, but as well is focused on a number of directions related to the academic research, including here the doctorate and those post graduate studies.

For instance, the Strategy on High Education highlights low levels of students in the scientific programmes, mathematics and engineering (6% compared with 25% in the region); or with the need to bring u\standards of PhD in accordance with high education in region. These issues are very fundamental for the future potential of the Albanian research system.

The development of the academic research should pass several stages; considering the investment in infrastructure or in researching programmes, versus not only the "proper plans" but also versus the capacities to perform it.

As was previously noticed, a great progress happened with the amendment of law on Scientific Academy, which resulted in the integration of the previous institutions of the scientific Academy in the universities. The role of academy, as in other European countries, is more advisory for the science than performing a research. Except these functions, it continues to manage the scientific editions, such as bibliometrics on the magazines in Albanian language, as well motivation of science through conferences and premiums.

Currently, "research policy" is managed from the Science Department in the Ministry of Science and Education(MSE). Research-development financing was possible through the institutional fund from the government, through the programme of MSE and through an international collaboration.

Although there have been some visible efforts to centralize resources and to implement some competitive standards, this policy is not generalized yet.

Policy-making capacities in MSE for research are not sufficient enough even though members of the staff are involved in the policies collaboration. Science department misses the director and the staff of 4-5 persons tries hard to enable the current programme with restricted funds for the applicants (delays in selections and annual terms of disbursement make them feel disgruntled in this process).

### 3.2 Vision, Priority and Strategy Targets

Science's vision, technology and innovation is based on the only and the most important resource for an economy oriented to knowledge. Accomplishment of this vision requires:

- Improvements in the base infrastructure of research, sufficient to supply the university in its three levels (BSc, MSc, PhD);
- Creation of scientific excellence in researching fields the most important to the country.
- Education, and retention of the qualified people
- Good comprehension of science and awareness on the role of innovations and new technologies<sup>1</sup>.

These may happen only through big investments and good oriented, through modern and suitable management of the policies, as well the gradual integration of the system in the European zone of research (EZR)<sup>2</sup>.

There is an important need for fundamental knowledge for teaching in universities or to provide services for the enterprises or even to answer to the social needs. However, concentration is a condition for the excellence as is expected in the European level.

So that the system can increase gradually, collaboration between different elements is demanded to work with organizations that represent economic sectors to enable those who motivate companies for innovation. Also it is requested to have trainings on the SHTI strategy, setting up respective fundamental capabilities and encouragement of technological enterprising capabilities, so they can work with institutions of high education in defining student's syllabus.

Consequently, the vision of Albanian system for the scientific research is:

***(i) Achievement of a necessary or critical research to support universities formation in its three stages ( Bsc , MSc and PhD) as well (ii) achievement of the excellence in some of the fields in 2015, through concentration of the national and international human resources<sup>3</sup>.***

### 3.3 Targets and Stages

The vision and priorities mentioned above must be translated in targets and concrete stages, with the purpose to drive to a systematic progress monitoring. The small part that occupies research-develop in the educational sector is mainly explained with the absence of the direct finance for many years during the transition period and also with the absence of the disposable human resources.

There are not too much probabilities that the private companies will start to invest widely in this fields (in the developed countries, in this direction, the private sector contributes with 2/3 of the funds of K & Zh)<sup>4</sup>.

### 3.4 Up to Now Reforms in the SHTI System

Considering the population, Albania is a very small country but with low level of incomes. To make possible a regulation of the activities with much more knowledge in 2006 it was initiated a reform for the system of scientific research, a group of academic experts compiled a platform for the reform:

The main results are summed up as below:

- a. Science Academy is reorganized according to the model of other European countries. It acts between a selected organizations of scientists organized in sections.
- b. Institutions of Science Academy are divided from it and are integrated in the system of high education. Some of the institutions are on the dependence of the respective ministries and some others on the dependence of the main universities, such as:

- 1) Three interdisciplinary researching centers
  - Intercollegiate Centre of Albanological studies

<sup>1</sup> Law nr 9655, 11.12.2006 amended on 27.12.2007 and 07.07.2008

<sup>2</sup> European Zone of Research

<sup>3</sup> Law N°9655, 11.12.2006 amended in 27.12.2007 and 07.07.2008

<sup>4</sup> (Bejtaj) "Analiza e tregut të punës dhe nevojat për aftësi"

- University research centre of Energy, water and Environmental in the Polytechnic University of Tirana (P.U.T)
- University research Centre of Geosciences in the P.U.T<sup>5</sup>
- 2) Two new faculties :
  - Faculty of Information and technology
  - Faculty of Biotechnology and Nutrition
- 3) Two new departments in the faculty of Natural Sciences in the University of Tirana (UT)
  - Centre of Applied and Nuclear Physics.
  - Department of biotechnology

Respective ministries' research centers were organized and created 12 centers of distributing technology and also agencies depended on the ministries, their main mission is transferring technologies and knowledge and also technical support for policymaking in the respective fields<sup>6</sup>.

With the end of the reform in 2008, also with the integration of research institutions in the Academy, leads the research system in Albania in line with the most European countries, where the high education is integrated in the scientific research, which is basic for modern scientific science.

### 3.5 The System of Scientific Research and its Components.

Science system includes institutions of high educations, scientific research of developing knowledge and technology. So it does not include only public fundamental institutions but also enterprises acting in education.

The undertaken reforms at the department of education and at the one of research firstly aims integration of those two systems, which up to now have been totally separated from each-other, also they are expected to be innovative and efficient.

**a) Universities** are teaching – research institutions that according to its strategy (2008) have as its mission, scientific research and development. Currently there about 12 public universities and 34 private ones. The private ones are new (the first has only 6 years of experience), however some of them have collaborated in the research field for instance those who collaborate as consortium.

**b) National research centers** are teaching-research centers which mission is scientific research, good university formation in the second and third stage, development and transferring knowledge and technology. So far is created the Centre of Albanological Studies based on the reorganization of the respective institutions of the Scientific Academy. Universities and the scientific research centers should begin to use contracts so it can reflect the spent time for each academic staff in these activities.

So, on this base it will be made the periodical assessment for the scientific “product”. Those public ones which have limited capacities for research, is important to support creation of *regional development centers*, where researchers from faculties and different departments collaborate through important projects for the region.

**c) Centers/Public Agencies for development and technological transfer.**

Their mission is to make studies and projects also transferring knowledge and technologies in producing products and offering services.

**d) Centers/Agency/Institutions** and other enterprises which act in searching, developing and transferring of knowledge and technology. This link of the system in Albania is still at the beginnings. Currently exist some private ones as institutes or NGO which have clearly defined their profile in several fields, mainly in those social and economic ones. Recently, there have been created more such private enterprises. Initiatives like those in other fields for the economic and social development are fewer. For instance: there are few private enterprises on energy, agriculture, molecular biology, biotechnology, natural sources etc.

In Albania there are limited possibilities to manage research, in general they are far from the standards that could made possible collaboration and integration in international European programmers. Also on the other hand, scientific infrastructure is almost in each aspect old and insufficient to support a qualitative research.

It's necessary for a stable programme to equip the institutions in order to have at least a minimal

<sup>5</sup> National Strategy of Science, Technology and Innovation 2009-2015, June 2009

<sup>6</sup> Integrated plan 2005, MSE

quality because: a) studying in all fields; b) to develop new specializations and to enforce existing ones. Recently the limited number of scientific editions and the number of patents confirm the low level of the “product” in the research system.

#### 4. High Education in Albania Today- Challenges

Education is one the main priorities for the future of Albania, as a decisive factor for the economic progress, equality, lowering poverty and the education of the citizen in a democratic society. Education will create to each Albanian citizen to maximally increase his potential.

Nowadays Albanian educational system offers challenges multidimensional, starting with: sufficient environments to accommodate the increasing number of students; supplying with the contemporary technical literature, financial autonomy of the universities, opening of non public universities, organization of private universities according to the legislation.

In the current developments in the Albanian education, reforms on high education, bears with it an inner tendency for development, aiming integration of Albanian society in the European regional developments. According to the interviews the situations of the universities in the country, reconciles with social-cultural-economical developments. “It’s typical Albanian”.

**Today**, the educational system faces new philosophies of life, of free-market economy and European integration.

The Albanian educational system should offer to the students at least:

- a. to be democratic citizens
- b. to face labor market
- c. to increase competitive capabilities.

Achieving European standards stands delicate problems which need relatively quick solutions so that the high education gradually:

- a. to be integrated in European network (Bologna system)
- b. to be adopted with the market demand
- c. to have the necessary institutional autonomy
- d. To achieve high level of admissions

*Currently is identifies the developing platform, which offers an educational system which will fulfill:*

- Upbringing the society with democratic values
- Upbringing success skills in the market- economy

High education reform aim to transform it in a diversified system, to achieve the modern concept. In this frame, our university system has entered in the process of reformation of the structures and of the syllabus, based on the bologna declaration, which adheres since September 2003.

In the questions raised on educational reforms in Albania, members of academic staff, nearly agree that have been some of those, “*but are confusing. There are so many frequent changes that could not achieve a standard. Changes in education should be thought properly, the system in general has been in movement, but the reforms need time to create the educational framework*”<sup>8</sup>.

It’s clear that there is not any method or any experience of involving of research in the universities. We’re talking about involvement as these research centers are often seen separated from the universities. Extremely there are institutions that exist only formally but there aren’t any footprints of activity.

Analyzing functioning and non-functioning of the research centers highlights the problems like this that the research faces in Albania:

1. low level of research
2. deep division between research and university
3. deep division between research and market
4. unclear strategy of financing

On this point, it’s necessary to mention some of the western’ experiences. Let say the most known and not the most successful, because in this situation they are two different things.

Firstly, it is recognized a high percentage of the public funds spent for research administrated from the universities. In the OECD countries is on the average is 65%. In the countries as England, Sweden, Canada, Austria and Belgium, this fund passes 70% of the total expenditures for research.

<sup>7</sup> Strategjia Kombëtare e Shkencës, Teknologjisë dhe Inovacionit 2009–2015, June

<sup>8</sup> Dedaj, R & Kristo, J “Dekanët dhe rektorët konflikt për kompetencat”, and “rikthimi në luftën e klasave”, 19 May 2008, “Shqip”, Tirana

The second peculiarity is the mucilage shape that has the diagram of transferring public fund for research from research institution at the universities. A typical example is France, traditionally conservatory for education. On the other hand we must add that the process of increasing “confidence” and the efficiency of managing the research, has had a parallel progress with the process of increasing autonomy in the universities, notably after the 60s.

Let us stress that today the number of private universities has passed that of public, there are 34 private ones but still the “burden” is still in the public universities. Liberalization of public universities in October 2005, was considered to change the number of the students who would prefer to study in the private universities, especially when the last ones can progress qualitatively to compete dignified public universities. The most common method of integration in universities is that of combining individual job between research and study.

One of the first visible effects of the collaboration between research institutions and university is the fact that the results usually are absorbed from the institutions that offer possibilities for carrier in comparison to the classical stability of being a pedagogue. This one of the main reasons why universities are interested in preserving or creating autonomous research groups. Research-pedagogues are automatically interested to work more for the sake of the research than for the values it brings.

Western tendency of research is clearly defined: University is considered more and more as the institution most suitable for developing scientific research.

The main reasons are two:

- *The direct relation of scientific research with the process of teaching*
- *Research integration with an institution that is nearer to the labor market than with any other<sup>9</sup>*

In the terms of an open market of high education, the process of integrating research in the universities, needs some suitable measures;

*Firstly*, abolishing independent institutions that does not fulfill important research functions or that does not work on fields in public interest.

*Secondly*, integration of research institutions in the universities where is possible or even creating separable institutions in the universities.

*Thirdly*, distribution of public funds designated for research. So the public investitures will have to distribute funds not on the prearranged subscriptions but based on competition. Two of the recommended criteria would be: a) project innovation b) its value for the arrangement of the students for the labor market

*Fourthly*, the permanent estimation of the individual work of the research pedagogues according to the research work and eventually the differed financed stimulation. Countries like England, Denmark; the financing quota of the research group is directly depended on the measurable results.

## 5. The Scientific Research and the Market

The whole reorientation process of research is inevitably defined by the necessity of the conformity of the university offer to the needs of the labor market. The establishment of the competitive criteria to benefit the public funds for the research by the universities serves to approach the labor market. Up to now the rigidity of the public financing of universities and of the research institutions have made the connection to the market really abstract producing degrees that don't serve as an employment tool. It is obvious that the research in university is a process that may involve directly the student, especially at the high studying levels. The new 3+2 systems give a hand to this new function.

An element that should be seriously discussed is the financing by the private companies. This element is already present in countries like USA, where big companies finance the university researches having back special rights for the utilization of the research results licenses, or directly influencing through the contracts on the research orientation in specific fields with interest for the market. The essential argument against this practice is the contraction of the research field with public interest. But the argument is variable because it looks at the field of the research as a defined abstract object not as a pluralist object, subjective like the nature of the market itself.

On the other hand, the involvement of the alternative finances by the market itself, is a warranty that the university research will be oriented through the obvious interests and needs of the market and the society. After all the public finance may finance that part of research that may be necessary for the

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<sup>9</sup> Johnstone D. B.(2005), The Economics and Politics of Cost Sharing in Higher Education: Comparative Perspectives

society, even without being financially necessary for the private sector.

The common and the biggest challenge of the universities is the introduction of a common cultural space, and that certainly aim to reach the European standards in education.

One of the main weaknesses of our higher education, which continues to make a difference in proportion to the higher education in other countries, is the limited research activity of our academic staff, which has been more evident especially in experimental and technical sectors, causing the limitation of the main activity mainly on the pedagogical plan. As a result the university mission, in many faculties is focused only on the educational plan causing the loss of the university physiognomy as a centre of education and scientific research. The reduction of the research activity especially in applied and technical sciences, mainly related to the financial institutional factors, without having the necessary laboratory resource as well as the impossibility to get integrated in many research programmer of European Community, has caused the lack of the intellectual potential in our universities. The research activity can't be stimulated and developed without the minimum necessary laboratory equipment, without mentioning the salary, the low level of which has brought to an evacuation of the universities. The limited research activity of the professors has even had an influence on the limited commitment of the students in experimental field and on their deficient education with the elementary elements of the scientific research, different from what is noticed in other European universities where students, during the preparation of the diploma theses are part of the research staff of the professors. Apart from the forming aspect, this is also the most important moment for the evidence of the personal qualities and the differential stimulation of the future scientists.

One of the factors influencing the decline of the quality of the scientific research is the simplification of the scientific qualification system<sup>10</sup>. The unification in 1993 of the degrees Candidate of sciences to the Doctor of sciences in most of the cases was accompanied by dissertation and lack of interest to continue the scientific work. While during the 1975 – 1993 period there were 201 doctors and 1998 science candidates ( almost 2200 dissertations in 18 years), in the period 1993 – 97 there were 697 dissertations, almost 30 % more in a year. The unification of degrees and their elimination from the second step relieved the researchers from this obligation and this led to the fall of further studies. Another thing that is noticed both in universities and research institutions is the lack of interactive studies which need highly qualified staff and the necessary facilities. The combination of intellectual and technical capacities of universities with the ones of research institutions would be an important factor. The realization of institutional interactivity would have contributed positively on this, maybe gradually and in suitable forms. Moreover, the unfair share of the budgets between lectures and scientific research has influenced negatively. In order to overcome this difficult situation, we think that the best and most effective way, apart from the institutional efforts on providing with lab facilities, is to cooperate with other European universities on the scientific research field and on the realization of the common complex research projects. We should not forget that a university without scientific research is not complete so it is also needed that the Ministry together with the universities should encourage any form of cooperation with the foreign institutions to achieve the target.

The lack of a well developed economy in our country makes it impossible for the universities to use other alternatives as financial sources such as the mutual cooperation with the industry etc. It is expected that the increase of the autonomy may have a positive effect<sup>11</sup>.

Among the drawbacks of our university education it is obvious the existence of undeserved and bad organized post university qualifications. Considering the post university qualifications as part of High Education, efforts are being made in order to improve the current legislation so that it will be an effective tool for the further development of university culture and to meet the needs of qualified staff. A question is being raised by post university qualification courses which function detached from university: Will we have post university qualification detached from university system?

Some disadvantages are noticed in the second and third steps of studying whose introduction and function have not been supported by unificated criterion<sup>12</sup>. In our opinion the creation of qualifying spaces should not only be the result of institutional initiative and interest but of the cooperation with the national scientific policy as well. According to the interviews with many lecturers about his problem, it was clear the need of the reorganization of masters on the basis of uninfected criterion and standards as

<sup>10</sup> Bologna with Students Eyes -The National Unions of Students in Europe, 2007, 21.5.2007

<sup>11</sup> Standarte dhe Udhëzime për Sigurimin e Cilësisë në Hapësirën Europiane të Arsimit të Lartë, December 2007

<sup>12</sup> De Groof J., European Higher Education in Search on a New International and Legal Order. - Towards a Sustainable Strategy for the European Higher Education Area, Draft 2010-2020.

well as the increase of the rigor and the qualities of their realization.

For example their pursuit for qualification needs of new pedagogues engaged in universities may be an exception, as our educational system suffers the absence of qualified staff. Cooperation agreements with western and European universities for the qualification of new pedagogues in different research fields, would give a hand to increase the quality of pedagogical staff and of the new researchers in academic field.

An important problem, which seems to have come to a solution, is that of the institutional autonomy. From this point of view the existing legislation is being reviewed in order to establish it in European standards improving its financial autonomy which will guarantee the faculties and the departments more space in the use of financial resources. On the other hand, the increase of autonomy should be accompanied with an increase on the control of the Rectorate over the lower levels (faculty and department) for the right usage of the financial resources, as well as with an increase of the responsibility of the faculty and department directors to use these resources effectively for the teaching process and for the scientific research.

Another positive component in the administration of the financial resources in the administrative structures in universities would be the presence of graduated or qualified administrators in the field of management or information technology.

One of the important aspects where actually is being worked with in the higher education is the introduction of important international standard elements like the system of institutional accreditation and the equivalence of the degrees, the years of studies and the scientific, academic and professional degrees and titles. The first will lead to a real and continuing assessment of the conditions of the higher education and research institutions through the application of international criteria and not the subjective assessment, while the second will facilitate and favor significantly the students' and graduated mobility through the decrease of real barriers that exist in this respect. The final result would be the increase of the institutional quality and credibility in our higher education and its easier integration in international plan.

Each of these will certainly influence in the increase of the actual higher education level in Albania as well as in new institutional initiative conditions and spaces and in the active interuniversity collaboration.

## 6. Conclusions

1. The real autonomy is the key to quality, efficiency and responsibility.
2. To the consolidation of financial, structural and administrative autonomy of universities shall be attributed non-profitable unit legal status. This shall permit universities the required autonomy, the financial management of staff and to other operations the possibility to face new challenges.
3. Universities shall have clear intellectual property right and the right to open or to link with other profitable special companies, to commercialize the expertise and their licenses.
4. Decentralization is a good way to empower departments, to take and to become aware of the distribution of financial sources. Strategic initiatives require a method balanced from upside-down and vice-versa.
5. It is required to double the number of researchers and the training of new researchers for an academic qualitative development so that our universities may approach European ones, toward which they aim.
6. The sector is dominated from public research institutions. Most of universities have a small number of medium-aged researchers due to emigration.
7. The general situation of scientific research infrastructure is much or more poor. If it is well managed the public scientific research might help in the modernization of technology.
8. The increase of public scientific activity in collaboration with private companies is considered as necessary in order to create the organic connection of universities students market.
9. The combination of intellectual and technical capacities of universities with those of research institutions would be an advantageous factor.
10. The evaluation of the individual work of research-professors according to research work results and to the differentiated financial stimuli, in fact, does not exist in Albanian universities.
11. The creation of special institutions or the integration of research institutions in universities is a necessity.
12. The most effective method for the integration of universities according to western standards is one of the combinations between work of research individual and universities.

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