

CHAPTER

11

POLICY INFLUENCE ON MOLDOVA'S HIGHER EDUCATION INTERNATIONALIZATION

Sergiu Cornea and Elena Mandaji

11.1 INTRODUCTION

Over the past twenty years, the pace of internationalization in higher education has increased. This is both a reaction to the broader process of globalization and deeply intertwined with it, which often leads to confusion in terms and concepts.

Frequently, the terms "internationalization" and "globalization" are used interchangeably to better capture the cross-border activities related to education. Knight (2001) also emphasized the importance of distinguishing between the meanings of these terms when discussing the higher education sector. Globalization can be described as "the broadening, intensification, and speeding up of global interconnectedness" (Held et al., 1999), characterized by the development over the last 30 years of "sophisticated electronic networks linking institutions and individuals, which foster an open information environment and real-time communication" (Marginson, 2004). Due to

advancements in the economic and technological sectors, as well as in knowledge, countries and citizens are progressively integrating beyond national borders. However, Knight and de Wit (1997) argue that globalization impacts each country uniquely, influenced by factors such as history, traditions, culture, and national priorities.

Internationalization, on the other hand, refers to "the process of incorporating an international, intercultural, or global perspective into the objectives, functions, or delivery of higher education" (Knight, 2003). According to Knight (2001), "the central aspect of Internationalization is the concept of relationships between nations or cultural identities, which suggests the preservation of the nation-state and its culture". We often encounter concerns that globalization leads to cultural homogenization (Scott, 1998). However, internationalization should be viewed as a distinct concept, as it emphasizes respect for and the preservation of nation-states. Nevertheless, both concepts are interconnected, as the internationalization of higher education cannot be understood in isolation from the concurrent processes of globalization in the economic and social domains. As Knight (2001) puts it, "globalization can be viewed as a catalyst, while Internationalization serves as a response, albeit a proactive one".

In recent years, there has been a growing interest in the internationalization of higher education, accompanied by the development of various policy frameworks aimed at monitoring and overseeing trends in this area. Some of these trends have sparked heightened attention.

First, globalization in the economic sphere has spilled over into the educational sphere through increased demands for an international dimension of education and training. Indeed, as countries' economic systems become increasingly interconnected, the importance of international skills for operating on the global stage increases. Companies with a global focus seek employees who possess international competencies, foreign language proficiency, and fundamental intercultural communication skills for engaging with international

partners. Governments, as well as citizens, are looking for higher education that can empower students.

Moreover, the rapid acceleration of global economic integration over the past 15 years has resulted in a heightened internationalization of the labor market for highly skilled workers. This, in turn, has contributed to the globalization of certain professions and highlighted the significance of globally or internationally recognized qualifications, especially in fields of knowledge that are essential to transnational corporations and the broader business community (Bennell & Pierce, 2003).

Demographic trends have also fueled universities' interest in Internationalization. It is worth noting that some countries are currently facing a shortage of applicants. The perspective that internationalization serves as a means to offset the decrease in the number of applicants and ensure the sustainability of certain universities is gaining traction.

11.2 METHOD

In the data collection process for the purpose of research, the following methods will be used, depending on priorities and relevance:

- (1) The historical method will underpin the research into the evolution of the internationalization of higher education in the Republic of Moldova. This approach will enable us to uncover the connections between the past, present, and future.
- (2) The institutional method will enable us to analyze the researched issue through the lens of the activities of relevant institutions, helping to illuminate the key aspects of the internationalization and integration of the Republic of Moldova into the European Higher Education Area.
- (3) The behavioral and structural-functional method will enable us to examine the actions and responses of the government, ministries, universities, and the European Union regarding the internationalization of higher education in the Republic of Moldova and its integration into the European Higher Education Area, both from an internal and external perspective.

The analysis of documents is an empirical method, which will serve to research the functioning mechanisms of the institutions and the reports related to the development of the educational and scientific field, as well as the activities carried out within this sector.

11.3 FINDINGS

From a public policy perspective, the most visible form of internationalization is the reform process launched in recent decades in many countries to increase the transparency and compatibility of their higher education systems through the assimilation and streamlining of national degree structures or the convergence of instruments for the transfer and recognition of credits and qualifications earned elsewhere.

This phenomenon of unification has become most indicative in Europe. In June 1999, the education ministers of 29 European countries signed the Bologna Declaration, according to which the key aims of Europe are the creation of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), the improvement of the system of comparability and compatibility of higher education structures and degrees in order to increase the employability of European citizens, as well as the competitiveness and attractiveness of European higher education (European Ministers of Education, 1999).

The Republic of Moldova has not been exempted from the process of internationalization. The main subjects of the internationalization of higher education are the state and universities. These two entities are the ones that spearhead the internationalization efforts within the higher education system. The purposefulness of the state's actions is manifested in the formation and implementation of concepts and strategies for the internationalization of the national system of higher education and universities – in the development and implementation of concepts, strategies, and programs for the internationalization of their activities.

As the driving force behind the internationalization of the national higher education system, the state, while pursuing national economic interests, establishes the conditions necessary for the successful

internationalization of university activities. In turn, universities contribute to the achievement of the goals and objectives that the state sets for itself.

Despite the fact that in the process of globalization of various spheres of human activity and the integration of national education systems (primarily in the financial aspects of their functioning), the role of the state is changing somewhat, it is the ministries of education that are still the main actors shaping policy in the higher education system, including the policy of its internationalization. The formation of a national strategy for the internationalization of higher education, standards, criteria, and requirements; the allocation of budgetary funds for the development of this process; the stimulation and encouragement of the most successful universities in this regard, etc. are areas of activity of the state as a subject of the internationalization of higher education.

It should be noted that, at both international and national levels, politics has a huge impact on the development of higher education. In 2005, the Republic of Moldova signed the Bologna Declaration, officially transitioning its higher education system to a two-tier structure. The integration of national higher education into the global educational landscape was marked by contentious reforms, which included the dismantling of the existing university structure, as well as changes to the methodologies of scientific and pedagogical activities and their evaluation.

The management of the higher education system is a form of social technology that consists of a series of sequential operations and procedures aimed at effectively influencing the execution of plans, programs, and projects to achieve optimal outcomes. The essence of social technologies lies in optimizing the management process, improving its efficiency and eliminating operations that obstruct the achievement of planned results. Management technologies in higher education, on the one hand, are a projection of the state of the management system in the country, and on the other hand, they become a kind of laboratory that develops innovative social management mechanisms (Mandaji, 2023).

Contemporary universities have evolved into complex organizations that encompass new functions and management responsibilities. These responsibilities encompass academic administration, the development and execution of internationalization strategies, the provision of educational products, services for students and faculty, research management, infrastructure oversight, and financial and legal matters. In this context, higher education policy has become the subject of intense attention, social and political interest, and intense debate.

One way or another, based on the current conditions, higher education in the Republic of Moldova began to look for and find viable solutions for survival and further development, based on new realities. Therefore, one of the opportunities for the medium and long term has been the internationalization of higher education in Moldova. It is important to note that the implementation of actions related to joining the Bologna process led to a series of changes in the legislative framework governing higher education in the Republic of Moldova, resulting in significant compatibility with the requirements of the Bologna process (Conference of European Ministers Responsible for Higher Education, 2009).

The development and institutional diversification of Moldova's higher education system is marked by the active involvement of key political forces, with the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova serving as a significant driving force in shaping the system.

After joining the Bologna Process in 2005, Moldova reorganized its former Soviet-style degree structure into a two-cycle degree system (Turcan et.al., 2015), consisting of bachelor's degrees (3–4 years) and master's degrees (1–2 years). This was achieved by 2011. The new Education Code (Republic of Moldova, 2014) expands the tertiary education cycles and introduces cycle III: doctoral studies.

To implement the priorities of internationalizing higher education, several legislative reforms have been undertaken, displaying somewhat contradictory trends that should not be solely attributed to accession to the Bologna Process but rather to the government policies of the past decade. Thus, the main worrying trend is the decrease in student

numbers. For example, when evaluating the number of students between 2007 and 2024, a sharp downward trend is observed; the number of students has almost halved. But we must note that this trend is specific to both cycles: bachelor's and master's, with a sharper decrease for the bachelor's level.

Numerous factors have contributed to this situation, with the most significant being the extremely negative demographic trends of the past decade, large-scale emigration, and the widespread availability of various programs, grants, and international scholarships. However, another extremely important factor, which must be mentioned, is the fact that the last governments practically opposed the massification of higher education in the Republic of Moldova (Popa, 2015). The educational policy pursued by the Government of the Republic of Moldova is, to some extent, aligned with efforts to regulate student enrollment through planning, driven by the necessity to produce a sufficient number of qualified specialists to fulfill the economic demand for skilled personnel.

Higher education reforms—including the implementation of the Bologna process—have been fully supported by the European Union through funding schemes such as TEMPUS and Erasmus+. These programs bring together international consortia of higher education institutions and related stakeholders to promote reform of higher education institutions and higher education systems (Toderas, 2006). For Moldova, in the period 1994–2013, 83 Tempus projects were selected for funding; in the period 2015–2019 — 31 Erasmus+ projects for strengthening capacities in higher education and 27 Jean Monnet projects. At the same time, higher education institutions from the Republic of Moldova participated in several Erasmus+ mobility projects for students and staff (2015 - 2023: 6320 mobility) (National Erasmus+ Office in Moldova, 2023). All these projects contributed to the internationalization of higher education in the Republic of Moldova and promoted the integration of higher education institutions in the European Higher Education Area. However, the real degree of

internationalization of educational institutions in Moldova remains uneven (Wetzinger, 2019).

It should be noted that the integration of the Republic of Moldova into the European Higher Education Area represents an essential strategic objective for improving the internationalization and development of the national educational system and for its alignment with international standards. This integration has multiple benefits and importance, which we can detail as follows:

(1) Improving the quality of education:

Integration into the EHEA requires the adoption of European educational standards and good practices, which leads to an increase in the quality of higher education in the Republic of Moldova. These standards include:

- (a) Implementation of the Transferable Credit System (ECTS), which facilitates the recognition and transfer of academic credits between higher education institutions in Europe.
- (b) The adoption of a clear structure of study cycles (Bachelor's, Master's, Doctorate), which is compatible with the European one.

(2) Student and teaching staff mobility:

One of the fundamental principles of the EHEA is the promotion of student and teaching staff mobility. Integration in this space allows the following:

- (a) Access to international exchange programs such as Erasmus+, which offer opportunities for studies and internships abroad.
- (b) Cross-cultural learning and teaching experiences that enrich the academic and personal perspectives of participants.

(3) International recognition of diplomas:

By aligning with the EHEA standards, the diplomas and qualifications obtained in the Republic of Moldova become more easily recognized and accepted internationally. This brings direct benefits to the graduates:

- (a) Increasing employment opportunities in other European countries.
 - (b) Access to postgraduate studies and research programs abroad.
- (4) Improving Research and Innovation:
Integration into the EHEA stimulates international collaboration in the field of research and innovation:
- (a) Partnerships with higher education institutions from other European countries facilitate access to resources and funding for joint research projects.
 - (b) The exchange of good practices and knowledge contributes to the development of research capacities of Moldovan universities.
- (5) Institutional and Administrative Development:
Participation in the EHEA requires the adoption of institutional and administrative reforms:
- (a) Increasing university autonomy and institutional responsibility.
 - (b) Implementation of effective quality assurance and external evaluation mechanisms.

However, Moldova's integration into the European Higher Education Area required the adoption of a comprehensive legal and political framework. This framework encompasses international agreements and treaties, along with specific national legislation, all designed to align the country's higher education system with European standards.

To align with European standards and support integration into the EHEA, the Republic of Moldova adopted and amended several national laws and regulations. The Education Code, enacted in 2014, serves as the primary legislative framework governing the educational system in Moldova. The Ministry of Education and Research introduced a new approach to the higher education process, aimed at modernizing the education system in the context of Moldova's European integration, in line with the principles of the Bologna Process.

The Education Code aimed to lay the foundations of a new doctrine in education, which first of all assumes the availability of quality education for everyone but also the irreversible overcoming of the involvement of the political factor. According to the Education Code, the main tasks of higher education are:

- (1) Creating, preserving, and disseminating knowledge at the highest level;
- (2) The formation of highly qualified specialists who are competitive on the national and international labor market;
- (3) Creating opportunities for lifelong learning;
- (4) Conservation, development, and popularization of national cultural and historical values in the context of cultural diversity (Republic of Moldova, 2014).

The implementation of the Education Code resulted in the development of several framework regulations, designed to ensure the efficient functioning and high quality of higher education:

- (1) A regulatory framework on the organization of higher education graduation exams.
- (2) A regulatory framework on the standardization of scientific-didactic and research activity in higher education.
- (3) A regulatory framework on the organization and operation of the governing bodies of higher education institutions in the Republic of Moldova (Ministry of Education of the Republic of Moldova, 2015a).
- (4) A regulatory framework for the organization of studies in higher education based on the National System of Study Credits (Ministry of Education of the Republic of Moldova, 2010).
- (5) Framework plan (Ministry of Education of the Republic of Moldova, 2015b).

The Education Code also played a key role in the implementation of the "Education-2020" Strategy, which was approved by Government Decision no. 944 in November 2014. The strategy was built around

three main pillars: access, relevance, and quality. One of the key objectives of the "Education-2020" Strategy was to promote the sustainable development of the educational system, with the goal of shaping well-rounded, active, social, and creative individuals—recognized as essential factors for human development and socio-economic progress (Government of the Republic of Moldova, 2014).

Subsequently, by Government Decision no. 199 of April 22, 2015, the regulation on the organization and operation of the National Agency for Quality Assurance in Education and Research (ANACEC) and its official statutes were approved. ANACEC is an independent entity that operates based on government-approved standards and evaluation methodologies, aligned with the European Quality Assurance Standards.

11.3.1 Internationalization—Part of the General Effort of European Integration of the Republic of Moldova

The Internationalization process, as part of the integral European integration process of the Republic of Moldova, constitutes a fundamental strategic direction for the country's political, economic and social evolution. In this context, universities have a crucial role in educating and developing human resources, advancing European values and principles, and fostering international collaborations and partnerships.

In recent years, the Republic of Moldova has made substantial efforts to conform to European standards and norms, with higher education institutions serving as central players in this process. European integration implies not only the adaptation of the legislative and institutional framework but also the consolidation of an academic culture, which reflects the European values of democracy, human rights, rule of law, and sustainable development. To reach this goal, the Republic of Moldova has introduced various European integration measures, including educational system modernization programs at all

levels, joining the Bologna Process, and implementing the Sectoral Strategy for the Development of Education for 2014–2020, as well as initiatives like Education 2020 and Education 2030. Notably, the Education 2030 Project was founded on the key document, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which was adopted by a resolution of the UN General Assembly in New York on September 15, 2015. The EU Council adopted the 17 strategic objectives outlined in the policy document titled "*A Sustainable Future for Europe: The EU's Response to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*", on June 20, 2017. Together, these actions will help integrate Moldova's educational system into the European space.

As part of European integration, higher education institutions prioritize building international collaborations to internationalize teaching and research activities, recognizing this as a key priority for the local education system.

In order to describe the role of higher education institutions in the process of European integration, we can envision the following aspects, such as:

- (1) Academic and scientific contribution
- (2) Modernization of the educational system
- (3) Promoting European values and principles
- (4) Development of international partnerships

11.3.1.1 Academic and Scientific Contribution

Higher education institutions in the Republic of Moldova play an essential role in the European integration process through their academic and scientific contributions. These institutions actively participate in research projects and international collaborations, fostering the exchange of knowledge and best practices, thereby contributing to the development of a competitive and innovative educational system.

Moldovan universities are active participants in various research projects funded by the European Union, such as Horizon 2020 and

Horizon Europe. These programs support the development of high-level research through funding, resources, and collaborations with prestigious institutions across Europe. Participation in such projects allows higher education institutions to expand their research capabilities and contribute to solving global problems through innovation and technological development.

International collaborations are not limited to research projects but also include *educational partnerships* aimed at improving the quality of higher education. Higher education reforms, including the implementation of the Bologna Process, have also been supported by the European Union through funding programs such as TEMPUS and Erasmus+. These initiatives have contributed to enhancing the internationalization of higher education. These programs bring together international consortia of higher education institutions and related stakeholders to promote reform of higher education institutions and higher education systems (Wetzinger, 2019).

These exchange programs help improve skills and encourage the adoption of innovative teaching methods. Joint study programs, such as the development of master's and doctoral programs in partnership with universities in the European Union, provide Moldovan students with the opportunity to earn internationally recognized degrees.

Teaching staff and researchers from Moldovan higher education institutions actively publish their *research in prestigious scientific journals and participate in international conferences*. This enhances the international visibility and recognition of Moldovan research, facilitating its integration into the global academic community.

The impact on the development of education and research is very high. Active involvement in research projects and international collaborations contributes to the continuous development of the educational and research system in the Republic of Moldova. By adopting and implementing European standards and practices, Moldovan HEIs improve their ability to train highly qualified specialists prepared to meet the demands of the European and international labor market.

11.3.1.2 Modernization of the Educational System

The modernization of the educational system in the Republic of Moldova represents a fundamental component of the internationalization process. This modernization is based on a series of *curricular and structural reforms* aimed at aligning the Moldovan educational system with European standards and requirements. The implementation of these reforms aims to increase the quality of education, improve the relevance of study programs, and increase the competitiveness of graduates on the international labor market. An essential step in the modernization of the educational system was the adoption of the Bologna System, which facilitates the mutual recognition of diplomas and ensures the compatibility of the structure of study programs with those of European countries.

Curriculum modernization is another important aspect of educational reform. This involves revising and updating the content of study programs to meet the needs of the labor market and reflect technological and scientific progress. Curricular reforms include:

- (1) Developing interdisciplinary programs: integrating knowledge from various fields to train specialists with complex and versatile skills.
- (2) Emphasis on practical skills: increasing the share of practical activities and internships within study programs to ensure adequate preparation of students for the demands of the labor market.
- (3) Promotion of innovative teaching methods: the use of modern technologies and interactive methodologies in the educational process to stimulate active learning and the development of critical and creative skills.

Academic mobility programs, such as Erasmus+, play a crucial role in the modernization of the educational system in the Republic of Moldova. These programs offer students and teachers opportunities to study and teach in partner institutions abroad, thus contributing to the improvement of linguistic and intercultural skills and the exchange of good practices. International experiences help develop language skills

and intercultural understanding, essential for European integration. But academic mobility allows teachers to learn and implement innovative teaching methods and academic practices, thus improving the quality of the educational process.

At the same time, it should be noted that *investments in infrastructure and educational technologies* contribute to the internationalization process. The modernization of the educational infrastructure and the integration of modern technologies are essential aspects of the educational reform. These efforts include upgrading campuses and facilities, renovating and equipping laboratories, libraries, and classrooms with modern technology to create an effective learning environment; developing e-learning platforms; and implementing online resources to support distance learning and improve access to quality educational materials.

11.3.1.3 Promoting European Values and Principles

Higher education institutions in the Republic of Moldova play an essential role in promoting European values and principles. These values—democracy, human rights, the rule of law, respect for diversity, and sustainable development—are embedded in various facets of academic and cultural life, thereby contributing to the creation of a more inclusive and informed society.

One of the main ways in which higher education institutions promote European values is the integration of these principles into the curriculum. This is achieved through *courses and study programs*, which address topics such as human rights, democracy, European governance, and European studies. These courses provide students with a deep understanding of European political values and structures.

Promoting European values extends beyond the classroom. Higher education institutions organize a range of *extracurricular activities* and student initiatives aimed at reinforcing these principles through conferences, seminars, roundtable discussions, volunteer projects, and community engagement. The mentioned activities on European themes

bring together experts, politicians, academics, and students to discuss the challenges and opportunities related to European integration.

Another important aspect of promoting European values and European integration is *education for active citizenship*. HEIs in the Republic of Moldova encourage students to be active and involved citizens who understand and value the principles of democracy and human rights by:

- (1) Civic education programs: Developing and implementing civic education programs that encourage active involvement in community life and democratic processes.
- (2) Simulations and practical activities: Organizing simulations of European political processes, such as simulations of European parliaments and councils, to give students a practical understanding of how these institutions work.

11.3.1.4 Development of International Partnerships

The development of international partnerships is an essential pillar of the internationalization and European integration strategy of higher education institutions in the Republic of Moldova. These partnerships enable academic and cultural exchange programs, thereby fostering quality education, innovation, and research that meet international standards. International collaborations also support the transfer of knowledge and best practices, contributing to the modernization and globalization of the Moldovan educational system.

Academic mobility is a central aspect of international partnerships. Through exchange programs, students and teachers can study and teach at educational institutions in other countries, gaining valuable educational and cultural experiences.

International partnerships are essential for the development and implementation of research and innovation projects. These collaborations allow access to financial, technological, and human resources needed to carry out large-scale projects that address global challenges.

Higher education institutions in Moldova organize and *participate in international conferences, seminars, and workshops*, which are essential platforms for the exchange of ideas and research results.

Developing international partnerships also involves *creating and participating in academic and professional networks* that provide support and resources for long-term collaborations:

- (1) Academic networks, such as the European Universities Association (EUA) and the Alliance of Universities for Democracy (AUDEM), etc., offer Moldovan HEIs the opportunity to collaborate with educational institutions around the world. These networks support the development of joint projects and the promotion of international academic standards.
- (2) Professional networks: Collaboration with international professional organizations enables universities to align their study programs and research with the needs and demands of the global labor market. These networks facilitate the exchange of best practices and the development of new skills.

International partnerships have a significant impact on the quality of education and research in the Republic of Moldova. They contribute to improving the quality of education, stimulating innovation, increasing visibility and international recognition, and strengthening their reputation on the global stage of education and research.

But, having a positive impact, it is also necessary to mention the challenges faced by higher education in the Republic of Moldova in the internationalization process:

- (1) Lack of sufficient financial resources – higher education institutions have difficulties in attracting the necessary funds for academic mobility programs, international research, and the development of international partnerships.
- (2) Insufficiently developed educational infrastructure – universities face difficulties in modernizing the infrastructure to meet the demands of an internationally competitive education.

- (3) The language barrier – the predominant teaching language in Moldovan universities—represents an obstacle in attracting international students and professors, as well as in implementing joint programs with universities from other countries.
- (4) Lack of experience in managing international partnerships – some institutions may have difficulty negotiating and managing international agreements, leading to limited integration into global academic networks.
- (5) The need to adapt the curriculum to international standards – changing and adjusting study programs to meet international requirements—can in some cases delay the internationalization process.
- (6) Reduced academic mobility – the limited number of teachers and students who can participate in international mobility programs is an obstacle in diversifying academic and cultural experiences.
- (7) Challenges related to the recognition of diplomas – the international recognition of diplomas issued by Moldovan universities can be a problem in the integration of graduates in the global labor market.

11.4 CONCLUSIONS

It is worth recognizing that internationalization is important at the national level because it allows countries to maintain or improve their economic performance and relative position, as well as to address social challenges. Internationalization enhances the effectiveness of higher education systems in research by developing the scientific component and expanding national innovative capacity, which results from external interactions in knowledge production. Academic exchanges accelerate the circulation and dissemination of research findings from other regions, thereby fostering research and innovation that cannot be accomplished in isolation. Another advantage is the increased opportunity for cost sharing in joint assessments between different research institutions. Internationalization can also serve the third

mission of higher education institutions through their contribution to multiculturalism and the development of intercultural recognition. The impact is most significant for participants in student exchange programs—mobile students and faculty—but the wider student community can also enhance intercultural recognition through the presence of international students on campus or by incorporating more international elements into university curricula.

Currently, the primary tool for promoting the internationalization of higher education in the Republic of Moldova and increasing international mobility is the European Union program Erasmus+, which was launched in 2014.

In the 21st century, advancing higher education is a critical priority for every modern state. Education, particularly higher education, not only underscores its social significance but also serves as a fundamental pillar for a country's political and economic development. This is not only a domestic necessity but also a *sine qua non* condition for strengthening a nation's position in the global arena. Well-trained human capital that can acquire new knowledge serves as the primary driver of social and economic progress. In an interconnected and ever-changing world, investing in higher education is no longer just an option but a strategic necessity for every country. The ability to train specialists trained to solve complex and global problems is essential for addressing contemporary challenges.

In recent decades, trends in the development of global education have evolved significantly. The internationalization and Europeanization of higher education have become common norms, reflecting the increased competition in the international market for educational services and the creation of strong global associations at the national and institutional levels. Diversification of opportunities in higher education and integration in the global educational space have transformed universities into centers of innovation, technologies, and advanced educational services. The ongoing adaptation of the higher education system to current global challenges is vital for guiding the world economy toward a sustainable and innovative trajectory. Higher

education has evolved from being merely an essential public good to becoming an export resource for countries that effectively leverage their intellectual potential in a socially responsible manner.

Higher education in the Republic of Moldova faces numerous challenges and barriers on its way to development but, at the same time, represents a significant source of educational potential. Its main goal in the modern era is to develop and implement a new internationalization model, adapted to global trends and focused on improving the quality of educational services.

This new model of internationalization emphasizes rising consumer demand and relies on the existing infrastructure of both public and private higher education institutions in the Republic of Moldova. In a globalized and rapidly evolving environment, these institutions must adopt effective competitive strategies to address the needs of the increasingly expansive global market.

Education markets around the world play a crucial role in the evolution of modern society. Globalization, internationalization, commercialization, massification, and the integration of innovative educational technologies are among the processes that are shaping new approaches to the development and delivery of educational services. We must remember that higher education is not only a tool for individual development but also a catalyst for national and international development. It is crucial for the Republic of Moldova to persist in its efforts to reform and invest in higher education to secure a prosperous and sustainable future, where educated and innovative youth serve as the driving force behind a modern and equitable society.

In conclusion, we can say that:

- (1) The internationalization of higher education is a necessary and inevitable process for the alignment of the Republic of Moldova with global trends. The conceptual analysis of internationalization shows that it does not only mean the mobility of students and teachers but also the curricular transformation and modernization of the educational system to meet the needs of the international market.

- (2) The strategies adopted by Moldovan higher education institutions in the internationalization process are varied; however, they face considerable challenges such as insufficient financial and infrastructural resources, language barriers, and limited mobility. Nonetheless, partnerships with international institutions and the development of joint programs can enhance the quality of education.
- (3) The impact of internationalization on the quality of education and research is visible, especially through access to global research networks and the improvement of academic standards. The universities of the Republic of Moldova benefit from international partnerships, but additional efforts are needed to attract a greater number of foreign teachers and students.
- (4) International collaborations play a crucial role in enhancing the visibility of Moldovan universities and building academic capacities. These partnerships help diversify academic experiences; however, to achieve a meaningful impact, there is a need for improved management of these relationships and a greater willingness to embrace innovative and interdisciplinary programs.
- (5) The recognition of degrees and the integration of graduates into the international labor market continue to be significant challenges. To address these obstacles, it is essential to collaborate closely with international accreditation bodies and implement reforms that align the Moldovan diploma with international standards.
- (6) Recommendations for enhancing the internationalization of higher education involve providing better funding for mobility programs, developing educational infrastructure, increasing the number of study programs offered in widely spoken international languages, and strengthening long-term international partnerships. These actions can facilitate a deeper integration of Moldova into the global educational network.

REFERENCES

- Bennell, P., & Pierce, T. (2003). The internationalisation of tertiary education: Exporting education to developing and transitional economies. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 23(2), 215–232. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0738-0593\(02\)00022-X](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0738-0593(02)00022-X)
- Conference of European Ministers Responsible for Higher Education. (2009, April 28–29). *The Bologna Process 2020: The European Higher Education Area in the new decade* (Leuven and Louvain-la-Neuve Communiqué). Ministry of Education and Research. https://mecc.gov.md/sites/default/files/leuven_louvain-la-neuve_communique_april_2009.pdf
- European Ministers of Education. (1999, June 19). *Joint declaration of the European Ministers of Education* (Bologna Declaration). Bologna Secretariat
- Government of the Republic of Moldova. (2014, November 14). *Decision regarding the approval of the Education Development Strategy for the years 2014–2020 "Education – 2020" (No. 944)*. Official Gazette of the Republic of Moldova, No. 345–351, Art. 1014. https://mecc.gov.md/sites/default/files/1_strategia_educatia-2020_3.pdf
- Held, D., McGrew, A., Goldblatt, D., & Perraton, J. (1999). *Global transformations: Politics, economics and culture*. Stanford University Press.
- Knight, J. (2001). Issues and trends in internationalisation: A comparative perspective. In S. Bond & J.-P. Lemasson (Eds.), *A new world of knowledge: Canadian universities and globalization* (pp. 1–33). International Development Research Centre.
- Knight, J. (2003). Updated internationalisation definition. *International Higher Education*, (33), 2–3. <https://doi.org/10.6017/ihe.2003.33.6651>
- Knight, J., & de Wit, H. (1997). *Internationalisation of higher education in Asia Pacific countries*. European Association for International Education.
- Mandaji, E. (2023). The power of knowledge: How politics influences universities, but education influences politics. *Scientific Journal of the Cahul State University "B. P. Hasdeu": Social Science*, 17(1). <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.8215700>

- Marginson, S. (2004). Competition and markets in higher education: A "glonacal analysis." *Policy Futures in Education*, 2(2), 175–224. <https://doi.org/10.2304/pfie.2004.2.2.2>
- Ministry of Education of the Republic of Moldova. (2010, September 20). *Regulation for the organization of studies in higher education based on the National System of Study Credits (Annex to Order No. 726)*. https://mecc.gov.md/sites/default/files/regulament_de_organizare_a_studiilor_in_invatamantul_superior_in_baza_snscs.doc
- Ministry of Education of the Republic of Moldova. (2015a, January 14). *Order regarding the approval and implementation of the Regulatory-framework regarding the organization and operation of the management bodies of higher education institutions in Moldova (No. 10)*. <https://mecc.gov.md/sites/default/files/conducere.pdf>
- Ministry of Education of the Republic of Moldova. (2015b, October 29). *Order regarding the approval and implementation of the Framework Plan for higher studies (Cycle I - Bachelor's, Cycle II - Master's, integrated studies, Cycle III - Doctorate) (No. 1045)*. https://mecc.gov.md/sites/default/files/ordinul_nr_1046_din_29.10.2015_regulamentum_de_organizare_a_studiilor_in_invatamintul_superior_in_baza_sistemului_national_de_credite_de_studiu.pdf
- National Erasmus+ Office in Moldova. (2023). *Report on international credit mobility*. <https://erasmusplus.md/mobilitate-internationala-de-credite?year=all>
- Popa, A. (2015). University perspectives in the process of reforming the educational system and scientific research. In *Perspectives and problems of integration in the European research and education area* (Vol. 1, pp. 7–9). Cahul State University "B. P. Hasdeu".
- Republic of Moldova. (2014, July 17). *Education Code of the Republic of Moldova (No. 152)*. Official Gazette of the Republic of Moldova, No. 319–324, Art. 634. https://www.legis.md/cautare/getResults?doc_id=110112&lang=ro
- Scott, P. (1998). Massification, internationalisation and globalization. In P. Scott (Ed.), *The globalization of higher education* (pp. 108–129). Society for Research into Higher Education; Open University Press.

- Toderas, N. (2006). *Aspects of connecting the higher education system to the standards of the member states of the European Union: Educational and youth policies*. National School of Political and Administrative Studies. <http://www.e-democracy.md/files/aspectele-racordarii-sistemului-invatamant-superior.pdf>
- Turcan, R. V., Bugaian, L., Niculita, A., Cotelniceanu, A., Pojar, D., & Todos, P. (2015). Draft legislative proposals. In R. Turcan & L. Bugaian (Eds.), *Restructuring, rationalizing and modernizing higher education sector in the Republic of Moldova* (p. 19). Cuvântul ABC. https://vbn.aau.dk/ws/files/218934776/Restructuring_HE_in_Moldova.pdf
- Wetzinger, J. (2019). Higher education reform in Moldova: Achievements and challenges. *International Higher Education*, (98), 28–30. <https://doi.org/10.6017/ihe.2019.98.11207>