

EXTERNAL EVALUATION REPORT SCIENCES - National University of Political Studies and Public Administration (SNSPA) – Communication Sciences

I. INTRODUCTION

In spite of its relatively short history that commenced in 2000, The National University of Political Studies and Public Administration (SNSPA) has managed to build its reputation as of an innovative institution of higher education granting doctoral degrees, both within Romania but also increasingly beyond Romanian borders. The institution offers several doctoral programmes within its academic portfolio and they include: doctoral programme in Political Studies, Administrative Sciences, Communication Sciences, Sociology and Management. The SNSPA as an Organizing Institution for University Doctoral Studies (IOSUD) under review has a clearly delineated mission, academic purpose and objectives. During the process of external evaluation the SNSPA was very forthcoming in communication with external experts and prepared all the necessary materials, as well as provided answers to additional questions without hesitancy and in a straightforward way. The SNSPA as a doctoral school displays maximal legal compliance with both legal and institutional framework created by the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), which Romania is part of. Therefore, in terms of its openness and transparency, which is also embodied all the way through in the institution's self-evaluation report, the IOSUD sets the bar of academic standards very high. The same can be said about the doctoral programme in Communication Sciences and its representatives, which constitutes a special focus of this report. The programme was launched back in 2008 and since then it has built up its reputation of a programme committed to academic excellence.

Furthermore, doctoral programme in Communication Sciences boasts with a list of eminent partner institutions abroad, research output of solid quality and impact, good communication between academic staff and students, tailor-made approach to students, as well as with cutting-edge didactic methods used in teaching, which all but guarantee the attainment of very high professional and academic standards. Besides teaching and enrolling new generations of students, the SNSPA has ensured that its activities go beyond the often narrow confines of academic halls via its publishing house Comunicare.ro Publishing House and two research centers, Center for Research in Communication (which has 5 research laboratories) and the Center for EU Communication Studies, both of which foster and cultivate important relationship with non-academic stakeholders. On top of that, the IOSUD under evaluation is also very active in hosting international scientific conferences, multiple workshops and roundtables. Finally, Romanian Journal of Communication and Public Relations, which enjoys a coverage in Scopus since 2015 and is currently ranked in the 3rd quartile, offers a respectable publication outlet to both doctoral students and foreign researchers. The journal is also covered in the Web-of-Science database and is gradually trending upwards in terms of its scientific impact.

The evaluation for the scientific field Communication Sciences was conducted on behalf of the evaluation team composed of: Prof.univ.dr. Coman Claudiu (Transilvania University), Associate Professor Kristijan Kotarski (University of Zagreb) and Anka-Roxana Suba (PhD student, Universitatea de Stiinte Agricole si Medicina Veterinara a Banatului Timisoara). The evaluation started on 12th of July and ended on 16th of July.

II. METHODS USED

- Analysis of the internal evaluation report of the field of doctoral studies Communication Sciences
- Analysis of other documents requested in physical format (list of all courses in English, student-teacher ratio, the structure of the programme and allocation of ECTS points, budgetary-related information, etc.)
- Online meetings with: the doctoral coordinators, directors of research centers, professors, doctoral coordinator of the field Communication Sciences, students, graduates

Unfortunately, due to pandemic restrictions I was not able to travel to Romania as an external evaluator. Therefore, the visit of the physical premises of the IOSUD was conducted by Prof. Claudiu Coman, whom I contacted frequently to obtain valuable pieces of information that was not available in the digital format.

III. ANALYSIS OF PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Domain A. INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY

Criterion A.1. The administrative, managerial institutional structures and the financial resources

The institution organizing doctoral studies (IOSUD) has implemented the effective functioning mechanisms provided for in the specific legislation on the organization of doctoral studies.

Performance Indicator A. 1.1.1.

The performance indicator is fulfilled. Annexes A.1.1.1.A., A.1.1.1.B., A.1.1.1.C., A.1.1.1.D., A.1.1.1.E., A.1.1.1.M., A.1.1.1.N., A.1.1.1.O., A.1.1.1.P., A.1.1.1.I., A.1.1.1.J., A.1.1.1.K. and A.1.1.1.L. provide a comprehensive set of written evidence that the doctoral programme has or is subject to:

- (a) the internal regulations of the Doctoral School;
- (b) the Methodology for conducting elections for the position of director of the Council of doctoral school (CSD), as well as elections by the students of their representative in CSD and the evidence of their conduct;
- (c) the Methodologies for organizing and conducting doctoral studies (for the admission of doctoral students, for the completion of doctoral studies);
- (d) the existence of mechanisms for recognizing the status of a Doctoral advisor and the equivalence of the doctoral degree obtained abroad;
- (e) functional management structures (Council of the doctoral school), giving as well proof of the regularity of meetings;
- (f) the contract for doctoral studies;
- (g) internal procedures for the analysis and approval of proposals regarding the training for doctoral study programs based on advanced academic studies

Furthermore, additional round of interviews with programmes's management enabled the final check of the written documents. There were no anomalies detected and all functioning mechanisms are in place.

After a long period of interim management, 2020 brought about the election of a permanent leadership as a part of competitive process. Prof. Nicoleta Corbu stepped in charge of the institution and management body encompasses heads of all five doctoral programmes implemented at the IOSUD under evaluation. Students are well-represented within the management body (they have 2 out of 12 votes in total) and the management body meets regularly to discuss and decide on key issues.

Performance Indicator A.1.1.2.

The indicator is fulfilled. The doctoral school' Regulation includes mandatory criteria, procedures and standards binding on the aspects specified in Article 17, paragraph (5) of the Government Decision No. 681/2011 on the approval of the Code of Doctoral Studies. The most important issues are clearly regulated and there are no legal grey zones with regard to: conflict mediation, enrollement, prolongation of studies, selection and change of doctoral supervisors, curriculum modification, monitoring supervision, examination procedure, etc.

Performance Indicator A.1.2.1.

The existence and effectiveness of an appropriate IT system to keep track of doctoral students and their academic background of the IOSUD under evaluation is demonstrated. There are numerous available screenshots demonstrating that the system is built around an ORACLE 8i database. This system enables the monitoring of academic progress of every single doctoral student. **Hence, the indicator is fulfilled.**

Performance Indicator A.1.2.2.

The leadership of the doctoral programme in Communication Sciences has demonstrated both written and oral commitment to preventing cases of academic dishonesty and plagiarism. The doctoral school has the access to Sistemantiplagiat.ro software to prevent and detect plagiarism. The software creates the similarity report as well as the Interpretation Guide of the Similarity Report from Sistemantiplagiat.ro to the administrator who initiated the verification. It is commendable that the programme purchased subscription for an additional number of characters, given the greater number of students. Furthermore, it would be commendable in the future to increase the number of characters even more, so the software is regularly used not only when checking for plagiarisms in doctoral theses but also in other written submission by doctoral students. Notwithstanding this opinion on behalf of the external reviewer, **the programme fulfills this indicator.**

Performance Indicator A.1.3.1.

The total budget for the Doctoral School in SNSPA in 2020 amounted to 4.762.576 RON (966.039 EUR), while the total budget for the doctoral programme in Communication Sciences made up 1.185.000 RON (240.365 EUR). Hence, the budget for the IOSUD under evaluation was almost 25% while it is one among five doctoral programmes currently offered at the SNSPA. Hence, its share of the budget

attests to the fact that enough financial resources are available for achieving its stated academic mission and objectives, which was also confirmed to the external reviewer with the representatives of the doctoral programme. According to the information presented to the reviewer the programme has currently 15 out of 72 doctoral students who pay their own tuition fee or receive a scholarship which is not directly funded from the state's central budget. Therefore, the programme receives funding from various sources which are both private and public, as well as domestic and international.

Currently, the programme boast 3 major grants: two national grants called SIPOCA and one grant within Horizon 2020. SIPOCA grants are titled „Strategic planning on strengthening resilience to misinformation and hybrid threats“ and „New tools for the national strategy regarding the continuous education of adults in Romania“. Grant within Horizon 2020 is titled „Strategic planning of regions and territories in Europe for low-carbon energy and industry through CCUS“. It also worthy of mentioning that the programme was part of another Horizon 2020 project from 2017-2020 titled „Accelerating low-carbon industrial growth through CCUS“. The reviewer was provided with a list of 15 various grants which were implemented by doctoral supervisors within the Communication Sciences division at any single point over the last five years. **Hence, the indicator is more than sufficiently fulfilled.** It is highly commendable that the programme is very active in that regard.

Performance Indicator A.1.3.2.

As was already stated above, 15 out of 72 doctoral students who pay their own tuition fee, receive funding from various human resources development grants or obtained a scholarship which is not directly funded from the state's central budget. 12 students were (in the previous academic year) or are enrolled in the project Researcher-entrepreneur on the labor market in the fields of intelligent specialization (CERT-ANTREP) ", SMIS Code 2014+ . Additional 3 PhD students are or were part of the project implementation team for the COST-ACTION project (coordinated by Professor Nicoleta Corbu, PhD), and SIPOCA project (operational coordinator Associate Professor Loredana Radu, PhD), HORIZON 2020 project (coordinated by Professor Diana-Maria Cismaru, PhD).

All the above mentioned facts confirm that up 20,8% of students active at the time of the evaluation, who for at least six months receive additional funding sources besides government funding, through scholarships awarded by individual persons or by legal entities, or who are financially supported through research or institutional / human resources development grants. **Hence, the indicator is fulfilled.** Nevertheless, in the future, the programme should take care not to slip downwards in terms of this important metric.

Performance Indicator A.1.3.3.

Due to onset of the coronavirus pandemic the programme has met certain difficulties in meeting this performance indicator. Hence, lower than 10% of the total amount of doctoral grants obtained by the university through institutional contracts and of tuition fees collected from the doctoral students enrolled in the paid tuition system has been used to reimburse professional training expenses of doctoral students (attending conferences, summer schools, training, programs abroad, publication of specialty papers or other specific forms of dissemination etc.). Nevertheless, after the global pandemic ends and travel restriction will be eased it is expected that this performance indicator shall be fully met. In an interview with doctoral students the external reviewer was informed that grant allocation

is merit-based and they mentioned multiple examples of grants which they have been able to receive so far. **At the moment, this indicator is partially fulfilled.**

Criterion A.2. Research infrastructure

Doctoral schools have a modern research infrastructure that supports the development of activities specific to doctoral studies.

Performance Indicator A.2.1.1.

Unfortunately, the reviewer was not able to travel *in situ* and perform a check of the research infrastructure. Nevertheless, the doctoral programme's management provided ample written evidence that it possesses cutting-edge and relatively new infrastructure, starting with lecture halls, computer rooms and labs, as well access to the library that offers all the necessary books and learning materials to students and professors. **The indicator is fulfilled.**

Criterion A.3. Quality of Human Resources

Doctoral programme in Communication Sciences has enough of an qualified staff with the necessary experience for its implementation.

Performance Indicator A.3.1.1.

Six out of eight doctoral supervisors meet minimum requirements of the National Council for Attestation of University Degrees, Diplomas and Certificates (CNATDCU) in force at the moment of carrying out the evaluation. Therefore, this is more than 50% threshold as stipulated in the Annex 3. They fulfilled this indicator since six of them surpassed minimal criteria in all seven categories under analysis (from C1 to C7), as set by the Ministry of National Education and Scientific Research (MENCS) Order no. 6129/2016. **The indicator is fulfilled.**

Performance Indicator A.3.1.2.

7 of the 8 PhD supervisor in the Communication Sciences doctoral field are tenured in the IOSUD, respectively, Professor Alina Bârgăoanu, PhD, Professor Nicoleta Corbu, PhD, Professor Paul Dobrescu, PhD, Professor Grigore Georgiu, PhD, Professor Tudor Vlad, PhD, Professor Diana-Maria Cismaru, PhD, Associate Professor Loredana Radu, PhD, having a full-time employment contract for an indefinite period within the SNSPA. **Hence, this indicator is fulfilled.**

Performance Indicator A.3.1.3.

The study subjects in the education program based on advanced higher education studies pertaining to the doctoral domain are taught by teaching staff or researchers who have a remarkable academic

track-record and have achieved high standards of academic excellence. All of this was able to verify by looking at their CVs and their Google Scholar profiles. **Hence, the indicator is fulfilled.**

Performance Indicator A.3.1.4.

At the moment none out of six doctoral supervisors exceed the threshold of mentoring 12 doctoral students. **At the moment, the programme fulfills this performance indicator.** However, three of them have 10 and two them 11 candidates, which leaves a little bit of a wiggle room for accepting additional ones in the future, unless additional resources are mobilized.

Performance Indicator A.3.2.1.

The PhD supervisors within the doctoral school carry out a scientific activity that is visible internationally. All PhD supervisors in the doctoral field of Communication Sciences have at least 5 publications indexed in Web of Science or ERIH in journals, and this was relatively easy to check, either by accessing their Google Scholar/Web of Science profiles or by relying on the Appendix A.1.3.1. All supervisors have more than 100 Google Scholar quotations and their H-indices range from 6-19. On top of that, they participated in various international conferences and are part of prestigious epistemic networks and associations. **The indicator is fulfilled.**

Performance Indicator A.3.2.2.

More than 50% of the doctoral thesis advisors in the evaluated domain have at least 5 Web of Science- or ERIH-indexed publications in magazines of impact over the period of last five years and remain scientifically active, as evidenced by the fact that they surpassed at least 25% of the score required by the minimum CNATDCU standards in force at the date of evaluation, necessary and mandatory to obtain the certificate of qualification, over the period of last five years. **The indicator is fulfilled.**

Domain B. EDUCATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

Criterion B.1. The number, quality and diversity of candidates enrolled for the admission contest

The institution organizing doctoral studies has the capacity to attract candidates from outside the higher education institution or a number of candidates exceeding the number of seats available.

Standard B.1.2

Hence, candidates admitted to doctoral studies demonstrate academic, research and professional performance.

Performance Indicator B.1.1.1.

Doctoral programme in Communication Sciences has demonstrated ample capacity to attract candidates from outside the higher education institution or a number of candidates exceeding the number of seats available. In every single year over the period of last five years there were more candidates than empty state-funded slots, as clearly explained in the Appendix B.1.1.1. The ratio between the number of candidates within the past five years and the number of seats funded by the state budget put out through contest within the doctoral studies domain is was least 1,2 in four out of five years, ranging from 1 (minumum) to 1,78 (maximum). This was also confirmed in the conversation with active doctoral students. The programme also profits from students having educational background that is not rooted in the scientific field of Communication Sciences, ranging from 4 (minimum) to 11 (maximum) over the last five years under analysis. **The indicator is fulfilled.**

Performance Indicator B.1.2.1.

Of the 61 PhD students enrolled between 2015-2018, only 14 dropped out or were expelled for failing to meet their obligations (23%) which is below the threshold of 30%, as evidenced in Appendix B.1.2.1.a. and B.1.2.1.b. This is significantly below the percentage that occurs in other comparable countries, such as Croatia, whose situation is well-known to external reviewer. **The indicator is fulfilled.**

Criterion B.2. The content of doctoral programs

The training program based on advanced university studies is appropriate to improve doctoral students' research skills and to strengthen ethical behavior in science.

Performance Indicator B.2.1.1.

The training program, which is based on advanced studies of PhD students in the field of Communication Sciences, contains the following subjects - Social Science Research Methods, Academic Writing, Organizational Development in the Digital Society, Fake News and Disinformation 2.0, The Post-Pandemic Global Order, Communication and Governance (available in the Appendix A.3.1.3.j.) Social Science Research Methods provides solid background to boost doctoral students' research capacity, given the content of the course syllbus (see Appendix B.2.1.1.). Hence, the training program based on advanced academic studies includes at least 3 disciplines relevant to the scientific research training of doctoral students; at least one of these disciplines is intended to study in-depth the research methodology and/or the statistical data processing. **The indicator is fulfilled.**

Performance Indicator B.2.1.2.

As stated in the programme's self-evaluation report, PhD students in the field of Communication Sciences can take up a subject dedicated to ethics in scientific research and intellectual property, a discipline supported by a PhD supervisor from the Management department. The subject/module is called Research ethics and academic integrity (Appendix B.2.1.2. gives the syllabus overview). **The indicator is fulfilled.**

Performance Indicator B.2.1.3.

IOSUD-SNSPA has created mechanisms to ensure that the training program based on advanced university studies aims at "learning outcomes", specifying the competencies and skills that PhD students should acquire after completing each subject or through research activities (in addition to aforementioned subject sheets. Syllabuses covering all six courses clearly specify topics to be taught during the semester, evaluation criteria, bibliography and expected learning outcomes (see Appendix B.2.1.1. Research methods in the social sciences, Appendix B.2.1.3.a. Communication and governance, B.2.1.3.b. Organizational development in the digital society, B.2.1.3.c. Fake news and misinformation 2.0, B.2.1.3.d. The global post-pandemic order, B.2.1.3.e. Academic writing). **Hence, this indicator is fulfilled.**

Performance Indicator B.2.1.4.

Throughout the doctoral training internship, PhD students in the field benefit from the counseling/guidance of functional supervising committees. This aspect is reflected by guidance and written feedback or regular meetings. According to the self-evaluation report prepared by programme's management each PhD supervisor has, in the components of the research team, a guidance committee made up of the doctoral supervisor and 3 teachers from SNSPA who are competent on the topic chosen for the PhD thesis. Appendix B.2.1.4. Communication Sciences Supervising committees reveals that the aforementioned committees consist of six members, which is even better for doctoral candidates due to greater interdisciplinarity and better feedback. The selection of the committee members is based on the expertise of professors in the field of each doctoral thesis and/or research methodologies applied by the doctoral student in doctoral research, as well as on the fulfillment by teachers of the minimum criteria of CNATDCU for the position of associate professor, references for the field of activity, etc. **The indicator is fulfilled.**

Performance Indicator B.2.1.5.

The programme formally fulfills the given criteria for having the ratio between the number of doctoral students and the number of teaching staff/researchers providing doctoral guidance under 3:1. 72 students are taken care of by 38 doctoral supervisors, producing a ratio of 1,89. **Nominally, the indicator is fulfilled.** Nevertheless, this criteria obscures the relatively uneven representation of professors within Supervising committees. E.g. Prof. Nicoleta Corbu and Prof. Paul Dobrescu are represented in more than 40 and 30 committees respectively, which might negatively affect the quality of their input to the doctoral candidates.

Criterion B.3. The results of doctoral studies and procedures for their evaluation

Doctoral students capitalize on the research through presentations at scientific conferences, scientific publications, technological transfer, patents, products and service orders.

Performance Indicator B.3.1.1.

PhD students of the Doctoral School in the Communication Sciences have a sustained scientific activity. The reviewer of the programme received a list of 20 publications published by students who defended their thesis in the last five years (Appendix B.3.1.1.). Nevertheless, the reviewer has not received neither a sample of published article, nor was able to perform any meaningful analysis of their output. **Therefore, the indicator is partially fulfilled.**

Performance Indicator B.3.1.2.

The ratio between the number of presentations of doctoral students who completed their doctoral studies within the evaluated period (past 5 years), including posters, exhibitions made at prestigious international events (organized in the country or abroad) and the number of doctoral students who have completed their doctoral studies within the evaluated period (past 5 years) is 5, which five times the minimum required ratio of 1. They presented their research findings at 103 conferences, 30 of which were organized abroad. Overall, students who defended their PhD theses had published in total 99 articles in academic journals indexed in at least three international databases or proceedings indexed in Web of Science, 6 books published by CNCIS accredited publishers, 21 chapters in published books. **Hence, the indicator is fulfilled.**

Performance Indicator B.3.2.1.

This performance indicator stipulates that the number of PhD theses assigned to a specific referee from a higher education institution, other than the evaluated IOSUD, must not exceed two (2) for the theses that are supervised by the same doctoral supervisor, in a year. According to Annex B.3.2.1, there were two exceptions to this rule, an external referent who was multiple times the referent for the theses coordinated by a single coordinator in 2020. Professor Gabriela Dragan, PhD participated three times in committees where doctoral supervisors were both Prof. Alina Bargaonau and five times in committees where doctoral supervisor was Prof. Paul Dobrescu. This can be inferred from the Appendix B.3.2.1. **Hence, the indicator is not fulfilled.**

Performance Indicator B.3.2.2.

According to the Appendix B.3.2.1. Professor Gabriela Dragan was part of 8 doctoral committees out of 20 doctoral committees that assessed doctoral candidates who successfully defended their PhD theses in the period 2016-2020. Therefore, the ratio between the doctoral theses allocated to one scientific specialist coming from a higher education institution, other than the institution where the defense on the doctoral thesis is organized, and the number of doctoral theses presented in the same doctoral study domain in the doctoral school exceeds 0.3 considering the past five years and amounts to 0,4 (8:20). **Hence, the indicator is not fulfilled.**

Domain C. QUALITY MANAGEMENT

Criterion C.1. Existence and periodic implementation of the internal quality assurance system

There are an institutional framework and procedures in place and relevant internal quality assurance policies, applied for monitoring the internal quality assurance.

Performance Indicator C.1.1.1.

After taking into account the following assessed criteria:

- (a) the scientific work of Doctoral advisors;
- (b) the infrastructure and logistics necessary to carry out the research activity;
- (c) the procedures and subsequent rules based on which doctoral studies are organized;
- d) the scientific activity of doctoral students;
- e) the training program based on advanced academic studies of doctoral students;
- f) social and academic services (including for participation at different events, publishing papers etc.) and counselling made available to doctoral students;

Appendix C.1.1.1., Appendix C1.1.1.a., Appendix C.1.1.1.d., Appendix C.1.1.1.e., Appendix A.1.3.3. and Appendix C.1.1.1.b. provide ample evidence that all necessary steps have been taken to insure high standards of quality management, both with regard to students being able to assess their supervisors and *vice versa*. This mutual feedback enables meeting and achieving higher standards of academic excellence. **The indicator is fulfilled.**

Performance Indicator C.1.1.2.

After holding interviews with doctoral students and checking yearly evaluation form that solicits valuable students' feedback on teaching and supervision quality, the reviewer can attest that doctoral study program implements mechanisms to enable feedback from doctoral students allowing to identify their needs, as well as their overall level of satisfaction with the doctoral study program in order to ensure continuous improvement of the academic and administrative processes. **The indicator is fulfilled.**

Criterion C.2. Transparency of information and accessibility of learning resources

Information of interest to doctoral students, future candidates and public interest information is available for electronic format consultation.

Performance Indicator C.2.1.1.

The doctoral school, through IOSUD, publishes information on the website of the organizing institution, in compliance with the general regulations on data protection, about:

- a) the regulations of the doctoral school;
- b) the admission regulations;
- c) the doctoral studies contract;
- d) the regulations for completing the studies, which should also include the procedure for publicly defending the thesis;
- e) the contents of the study programs;
- f) the scientific profile and research themes/topics of the PhD supervisor in the field, as well as their institutional contact data;
- g) the list of PhD students in the field with their basic information (year of registration; supervisor);
- h) information about the standards for the drafting of the PhD thesis;
- i) links to abstracts of PhD theses to be defended publicly, as well as the date, time, and place where they will be defended, at least 20 days before the defense.

All of the aforementioned facts have been checked by clicking multiple hyperlinks available in the doctoral programme's self-evaluation report. **Hence, this indicator is fulfilled.**

Performance Indicator C.2.2.1.

It is highly commendable that *all PhD students have free access to the platform with academic databases that are relevant for the Communication Sciences field of doctoral studies through ANELIS subscriptions (<http://snspa.ro/cercetare/biblioteca/baze-de-date-electronice/>), both inside SNSPA, and outside the institution. Remote mobile access is based on a user account, configured individually, as per the Access Guide to SNSPA databases.* **The indicator is fulfilled.**

Performance Indicator C.2.2.2.

Each PhD student has access, upon request, to an electronic system verifying the degree of similarity with other existing scientific or artistic creations. Appendix C.2.2.2. contains Antiplagiarism System Guide for Interpreting the Similarity Report, which ensures maximum transparency and ease of use for both students and professors. **The indicator is fulfilled.**

Performance Indicator C.2.2.3.

As stated in the self-evaluation report, *all PhD students have access to scientific research laboratories or other facilities depending on the specifics of the field(s) within the doctoral school, according to internal regulations.* This access comes in a rather advanced form since doctoral programme in Communication Sciences boasts with two research centers: Communication Research Center (CCC) that comes with seven corresponding laboratories and Center for EU Communication Studies. **The indicator is fulfilled.**

Criterion C.3. Internationalization

There is a strategy in place and it is applied to enhance the internationalization of doctoral studies.

Performance Indicator C.3.1.1.

According to the self-evaluation report and conducted interviews with major stakeholder the IOSUD has concluded travel agreements with foreign universities, research institutes, and with companies carrying out activities in the studied field, aiming at PhD students and teachers mobility. The SNSPA concluded 28 international agreements and half of them are with prestigious universities abroad (multiple appendices attest to this fact) and everything is very transparent. At least 35% of PhD students have completed a training course abroad or another form of mobility grant, such as participating in international scientific conferences, which is far more than the minimum threshold of 20%. **The indicator is more than fulfilled.**

Performance Indicator C.3.1.2.

In the evaluated doctoral study domain, support is granted, including financial support, to the organization of doctoral studies in international co-tutelage or invitation of leading experts to deliver courses/lectures for doctoral students. Appendix C.3.1.2.A., Appendix C.3.1.2.B., Appendix C.3.1.2.C., Appendix C3.1.2.D. and Appendix C.3.1.2.E. all provide a detailed list of evidence that SNSPA and doctoral programme in Communication Sciences hosted or co-organized multiple workshops, seminars, roundtables and guest lectures. This is a very praiseworthy and forward-looking step both for academic staff, as well as for students. **The indicator is fulfilled.**

Performance Indicator C.3.1.3.

The internationalization of activities during doctoral studies is supported by practical measures (for example, participation in educational fairs to attract international PhD students; inclusion of international experts in supervising committees or defense for PhD theses, etc. Appendix C.3.1.3.a., Appendix C.3.1.3.b. and Appendix C.3.1.4.c. provide enough of an evidence for the fulfillment of this indicator. It is also noteworthy to explicitly mention the launch of CIVICA, the European University of Social Sciences, a European university consortium, selected by the European Commission as one of the European pilot universities (<http://snspa.ro/lansarea-universitatii-europene-de-stiinte-sociale-civica-la-snspa/>). SNSPA is one among eight CIVICA institutions in Europe in the fields of social sciences. Appendix C.3.1.3. gives a detailed outline of CIVICA and confirms that SNSPA and doctoral programme in Communication Sciences confidently pushes forward by participation in large-scale internationalization projects. **The indicator is fulfilled.**

IV. SWOT ANALYSIS

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dedicated and well-trained academic staff with solid track record in research and teaching • Significant number of international cooperation agreements, especially with prestigious institutions of higher education abroad • Two research centers and corresponding laboratories • Relatively high-level of student and graduates satisfaction • High percentage of doctoral students being included in teaching at the bachelor's and master's level • High degree of digitalization of administrative processes • Boasting academic publishing house Comunicare.ro and issuing a Web-of-Science and Scopus-indexed journal titled <i>Romanian Journal of Communication and Public Relations</i>, with gradually growing impact factor • Flexibility of academic curriculum for doctoral students • Relatively high-percentage of students receiving mini-grants for their research 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficulty in attracting foreign students • Relatively narrow list of courses taught in English • Difficulty in attracting very talented Romanian students due to high-opportunity costs of enrolling a doctoral study programme • The large majority of doctoral coordinators supervise more than 8 students, with a negative outlook to supervise even more of them • Insufficient diversification of doctoral committees with regard to external members
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being able to leverage existing and foster new international partnerships • Improvement in funding options and research reputation by applying for internationally prestigious and competitive projects such as Jean Monnet Centres of Excellence • Organising more conferences and workshops to demonstrate doctoral programme's societal importance to the broader audience (employers, decision-makers, citizens, etc.) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Steady growth trend in the number of doctoral students which might constitute a problem in the long run unless human resources (academic staff) at the SNSPA are also expanded • Emigration of the best and brightest students • Potentially too much of a flexibility for doctoral students in designing their personal academic curriculum, who might in turn miss out on the core competencies within the discipline studied

V. OVERVIEW OF THE JUDGEMENTS AWARDED AND OF THE RECOMMENDATIONS

Out of 34 performance indicators listed in the The External Evaluation Report of a Doctoral Study Domain (Annex 3) the doctoral programme in Communication Sciences fulfilled 30 of them (more than 90%). Two performance indicators are partially fulfilled. It is commendable that there are only two indicators that are not fulfilled. In that regard, the external expert can attest that the doctoral programme under evaluation more than justifies its academic mission and fulfills all major criteria and large majority of performance indicators, as set out in the Annex 3. It is one the best managed programmes I have been able to evaluate in my academic career.

In terms of actionable recommendations to improve the quality of the programme in the future, the management would do well to head the following set of recommendations. First, more courses should be offered in English in order to draw more foreign students and boost SNSPA's international visibility. Second, the existence of opportunity costs for highly-talented students could be neutralized by creating more opportunities to engage in commercial projects with prospective employers in the field of communication, which might then better balance both financial and non-financial incentives for enrolling the programme. Third, the student-teacher ratio threatens to spiral out of control in the long run. Hence, the programme should better balance this ratio, either by mobilizing additional resources or by temporary reducing the enrollment quota. The only final caveat worthy of addressing is that along its internationalization strategy, the programme's management ensures that the bigger extent of documents pertained to the its functioning is translated into English.

VI. CONCLUSIONS AND GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

VII. ANNEXES

No annexes.

SIGNATURE

In Zagreb, 23rd of July 2021

Kristijan Kotarski, PhD

Associate Professor in International Political Economy. University of Zagreb, Croatia