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International Evaluator's Report

Academy of Economic Studies of  
Moldova, Chisinau

7-9 June 2023



## Introduction

I was invited to join to the evaluation team of the institutional evaluation process of the Academy of Economic Studies of Moldova, Chisinau as an external evaluator for the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS). The evaluation took place between Wednesday 7 June and Friday 9 June 2023. In this process as a foreign expert evaluator, I was responsible for establishing an overview of the focusing on the main points of the improvement of quality and future development aspects with outlining the main dimensions of present and future challenges of the university. Before the three-day long visit, I received the self-evaluation report of the institution. During my stay in Chisinau with the help of the colleagues of ASEM I had the possibility to collect information and impressions about the university.

## General Statements

In accordance with the ASEM Charter, Academy of Economic Studies of Moldova – as it can be read in the self-evaluation report of the university, “is a public higher education institution, a legal entity, with a non-profit character, independent of ideologies, religions, and political doctrines, attached to the tradition of free thought, academic freedom, the recognition of fundamental human rights and freedoms and the principle of the rule of law, with university autonomy and economic-financial autonomy”. Academy of Economic Studies of Moldova, Chisinau was founded in 1991. The educational programs offered by the university soon became attractive and the institution managed to follow up the needs of the market. ASEM offers education programs on the field of social and behavioral sciences, administrative sciences, economic sciences, law, information technologies and communications, technologies of manufacture and processing, and public services. The university has 19 Bachelor’s degree programs and 23 Master’s degree programs. There are also two doctoral schools where students could continue their studies (Doctoral School in Economic Sciences and Doctoral School in Law, Political and Administrative Sciences).

It is an important priority for the institution to become a creative, innovative, attractive academic, educational, and cultural center in the country and abroad as well. According to the present socio-economic situation and the educational environment of the country, it is not easy to reach these aims. The higher education in Moldova is facing with an intensive decrease in the number of students, as the younger generation is often continuing their studies abroad, mostly in Romania and other European countries and there is a growing competition among Moldavian higher education institutions for the students. The higher education challenges of the country, including the large number of universities compared to the country's population, the insufficient funding, the relatively demotivated human resources, the lack of jobs in the country, the migration of young people after graduation, the

discrepancies between the education and the labor market, the imbalances between the professional skills of graduates and the requirements of employers also influence the Academy of Economic Studies of Moldova. In these circumstances, the present situation is more understandable, and the efforts to keep and develop the present performance of the university are remarkable. On the other hand, the present educational supply could not be considered unique as there are other competitors who have the same or similar educational programs in the county.

*Comments/Recommendations: The present educational programs offered by the university are not unique as these programs can be found in the other private and state universities in Chisinau, in Moldova and in Romania as well. Parallel with keeping the present good reputation and image, and the management and development of the present existing educational programs, the institution should find market niches where it can operate successfully in a longer run. Among the different directions internationalization and diversification of the educational supply could be an important priority in the future.*

### Managerial Structure

The education and scientific research processes are organized and undertaken in compliance with the principles of university autonomy, of the University Charter and with the requirements of the higher education system. The mission of the university is to maintain an innovative learning and research environment, in compliance with humanistic values, with the purpose of training experts who can support economic and social progress. Quality assurance in teaching and scientific research activities represents an important objective and the key responsibility of a higher education institution.

The university is also focusing on strengthening the connections with other higher education institutions in the country and abroad. These partnerships and connections are very important for the institution. In the future is recommended to strengthen the existing connections parallel with developing new ones according to the research activities and directions of the university that could lead more intensive national and international visibility.

Strategic management is also an important priority of the institution. Academy of Economic Studies of Moldova has a development strategy for the period 2023-2027, identifying and including the most important aims and priority directions. These objectives are in accordance with the National Development Strategy "Moldova 2030", Strategy "Education 2030", the related country and European Union strategies and sub-strategies of the institution. Among the most important priorities we could find the academic excellence, the priority of research, the international visibility, the maintenance of the high institutional and managerial culture, the implementation of the favorable climate for new knowledge and

innovations, the high-quality educational environment for students and teachers and the strong connections with the socio-economic actors of the national and international environment.

Academy of Economic Studies of Moldova has a coherent, integrated, and transparent management system based on an effective and efficient administration, adapted to the mission and objectives of the institution. The current management structures of the university can be found in the University Charter and organization chart.

According to the self-evaluation report of the university, representatives of students are participating in the decision-making process.

All information of public interest is available on the ASEM website in Romanian, English and Russian languages as well. It is important to point out that due to the increasing internationalization strategies of the institution, the information can be found in English could be a perfect framework and basis for the more intensive internationalization in the future.

According to the self-evaluation documentation of the institution and personal field experiences the scientific potential and quality of human resources of Academy of Economic Studies of Moldova is on a good level, the academic and the administrative leadership of university have the appropriate competencies to do their work correctly.

#### *Comments/Recommendations:*

**Although the strategic management is also an important priority of the institution, because of the present higher education challenges the Academy of Economic Studies of Moldova has to monitor the results permanently and adjust the strategic aims to the changing socio-economic environment in the period of 2023-2030.**

#### Teaching Staff

The evolution of educational programs show that the focus of the university has remained the development, perfection and diversification of study programs that satisfy the demands of the labor market and the students. All the present Bachelor's and Master's education programs seem to be marketable although most of these fields are not very 'special' as these programs can be found in many private and state higher education institutions in the country.

The university has implemented the Bologna principles, which allows the institution to connect to the European Higher Education Area.

According to the self-evaluation report of the institution, In the academic year of 2022-2023 272 didactic, scientific – didactic, full-time, and part-time scientific staff is employed, covering 213.35 positions. Of these there are 195 full-time (71.7%). From the full-time scientific-didactic staff 79.5% hold scientific titles of PhD or habilitation. There are 76 people employed part-time (27.9%), of which 64.56 hold scientific and scientific-didactic title. Teaching-auxiliary staff and other categories of staff in the same academic year are 315 people (62.5% of the total number of ASEM employees).

The teaching staff of Academy of Economic Studies of Moldova have proper competencies, qualifications, and academic degrees which certainly results a good level of performance in education processes. It is important to point out that the foreign language skills and competencies of the staff are quite good and high.

The foreign language educational supply of the university is also important. This strategic orientation certainly could help the university to reach and attract more potential national and international students in the next period.

*Comments/Recommendations: It is recommended to raise the salary of the employees, when own resources, and any other funds allow. This question has appeared and discussed on the meeting with the graduates and could be a useful tool to keep the valuable but - from financial point of view - not fully satisfied human resources of the institution.*

### Facilities

Since the founding of ASEM, the management has been concerned with improving the working, teaching, and learning conditions of employees and students. Academy of Economic Studies of Moldova is permanently working on reaching a good material base for education. Physical assets are in accordance with the needs of the students and the educational process. The modern educational and research infrastructure, in all aspects are adapted to the needs of the study, research, work and accommodation for students, teachers and the entire staff of ASEM. There is also a modern, well-equipped scientific library with the large number of book titles in the field of economic sciences, with access to international databases, helpful customer service and good working conditions for students, teachers, and researchers as well.

Overall, the facilities of the institution are good, although it is important to point out that this infrastructure is also suitable for serving a larger number of students. If the present tendencies in the number of students remain, ASEM probably is going to be forced to rethink the infrastructural background of education. Parallel with this, it is also an important issue to continue to invest permanently and maintain the infrastructure of the university.

**Comments/Recommendations: The University should focus on maintaining the present situation and has to manage its resources to keep the system work which in an optimal situation meets the needs of the students, employees and external partners, and parallel with this, the university also has to concentrate on diversification and further development. Further decline of the total number of students could result a decision-making point, so the management of the university must make steps to avoid this situation. Academy of Economic Studies of Moldova should maintain and continue to invest in the infrastructure and facilities when own resources, and any other funds allow.**

### Students

ASEM offers the entire spectrum of specialties in the general field of studies of Economic Sciences at Bachelor's, Master's and doctoral level. The study programs offered by ASEM meet the needs of the labor market and offer graduates the opportunity to develop a successful professional career both in the Republic of Moldova and abroad. ASEM offers foreign language study programs in English, French and Russian as well. The offered programs are marketable and reflect for the socio-economic processes and challenges of the country. The ASEM School of Continuing Education is working on the implementation of lifelong learning programs, the demand for which is growing on the labor market. Initiating the implementation of dual education allows better adaptation of the study process to the requirements of the labor market. Joint study programs and dual study programs with prestigious universities are also a very important part of the education supply of the university.

According to the self-evaluation report, in the period 1991- 2007, there was a continuous increase in the number of students, from 3813 students in the academic year 1991-1992 to the period of 2006-2007 peak with 15253 students. From this period there is a downward tendency. The decrease in the number of students is determined by the demographic situation of the country, the massive migration, and the growing competition in the higher education market of Moldova. It is important to point out that the institution also has to cope with the decrease in the prestige of higher education in Moldova.

In the academic year 2022 – 2023, number of 2025 students were enrolled at ASEM at cycle I, Bachelor - 2055 students at full-time studies, and 2225 students at part-time studies, cycle II, Master – 745 students at full-time studies and 139 students at part-time studies. The present number of students is certainly lower than it was in the earlier periods, but still seem to be enough to keep the operation of the institution in balance. From strategic point of view, it is an important priority to keep this level of students in the next years and with the diversification of the educational supply to grow if it is possible. The insufficient budget funding and the lack of a considerable increase in the tuition fee due to the poor economic situation

and the intensive competition on the educational market does not help the financial situation of the institution.

Growing demand for distance education, including from the Moldovan diaspora abroad and the growing demand for lifelong learning programs could be one strategic direction, and the location of the country could result in more intensive engagement in developing programs dedicated to students from Ukraine or the former post-Soviet states. The university also must make steps to convince the graduates from the bachelor's cycle to continue their studies at the master's cycle, and the graduates from the master's cycle to continue their studies in the doctoral schools of the ASEM.

Students have always been a priority for ASEM. They actively participate in the life of the institution, being members of the Faculty Councils, the Senate, the Board of Directors, in parallel with their involvement in the self-governance process through the Student Senate. The ASEM Senate has 50 members, of which 13 are students from all study cycles, which represents 26% of the total members of the ASEM Senate.

Since 2014 the Academy of Economic Studies of Moldova has a Marketing, Partnership and Career Center of ASEM (MPCC), and this organization unit is responsible for the professional career counselling for students. MPCC maintains cooperation relations with the business environment and with public institutions to conclude internship partnerships and to perform surveys on labor market developments and changes in the qualifications structure.

Making education accessible to disadvantaged groups is essential to promoting social equality and equal opportunities for all students of the institution.

During the 30-year operation, great number of students graduated in Academy of Economic Studies of Moldova, who are working in many areas in Moldova, in Romania and abroad and this unique situation is a great chance for the university to gain more from these large alumni in the future.

The meetings with the students and graduates show clearly that the students of the institution have perfect competences, they are open-minded, determined, talented, motivated, and have a good opinion about the institution.

***Comments/Recommendations: The present number of students is certainly lower than it was in the earlier periods, but still seem to be enough to keep the operation of the institution in balance. From strategic point of view, it is an important priority to keep this level of students in the next years and with the diversification of the educational supply to grow if it is possible.***

## Research

In the knowledge-based society, which is characteristic for the European and international context, Academy of Economic Studies of Moldova is an important national and international education and research institution. The importance of research activities seems to be significant at the university and the results of these activities are apparently integrated to the educational process. The scientific research is organized and carried out in the research institutes and research centers of the university.

For national and international visibility and recognition on scientific, educational, and other fields a higher education institution must develop connections with its academic and social-economic environment. The university promotes the teaching staff participation in research programs, and the collaboration with industrial and services companies, universities, state institutions and nonprofit organizations as well.

In consideration of the institution prestige, it would be important in the future to continue to organize conferences and workshops which could be very important for the national and international visibility of the institution and beside the 'outsider' lecturers and participants it gives possibility for the students and teachers from Academy of Economic Studies of Moldova to present the results of their research activities.

The scientific journals of the institution could increase the number of scientific publications of ASEM's scientific-teaching staff, will increase ASEM's presence in the academic space for publishing research results.

Although national and international collaboration has been in focus from the beginning, the university must concentrate on permanently to participate and generate special research programs which also could lead to create a special image and knowledge which – over the economic education characteristic of the institution – could contribute to find the specific position of the university and offer special programs for the community.

ASEM is a member of many organizations and university networks. ASEM Scientific Library includes a wide variety of works published in the country and abroad, works in the field of economic and social sciences, mathematics, and other fields.

***Comments/Recommendations: For national and international visibility and recognition on scientific research and educational fields ASEM must manage the existing connections and develop new ones in accordance with the institution's strategic goals.***

## Internationalization

Academy of Economic Studies of Moldova pays more and more attention for collaboration with universities, and other institutions in Europe and all over the world. To manage these connections effectively relies on the available financial background, the level of intention to establish and manage partnerships and cooperation from which the partner institutions could benefit and finally, how much work is invested in managing these relationships properly, if partner institutions have the same level of interest.

In case of Academy of Economic Studies of Moldova, it seems that there is strong intention that parallel with managing the present international directions, establish new partnerships to raise the level of international visibility and collaboration of the institution. This strategic orientation could be an important part of the internationalization of the university. With the participation of the colleagues of the partner institutional connections, it is an important priority – even in the present, partially online world – to organize scientific conferences and academic events. Students and teachers also have more and more possibilities to participate in mobility programs, although the present – post-COVID – numbers show that there is more to do to increase interest of the outgoing students and staff members, and parallel with this, it is also important to attract more incoming students and teachers in the future.

The present level of internationalization should be also strengthened as the present number of foreign students is not very high in the institution.

***Comments/Recommendations: Moldova applied for EU membership in March 2022 and was granted EU candidate status in June 2022 which could lead additional possibilities for partnership with universities in the EU space and for increasing internationalization and more intensive participation in the competition for research projects funded by European funds.***

## Quality Management

According to the self-evaluation report of the institution, the first formal confirmation of ASEM's concern in the field of quality was the implementation of the Quality Management System according to the ISO 9001:2008 standard and obtaining the certificate issued by the specialized international organization (AJA Registrars Europe) in March 2009. In the following years, ASEM systematically participated in the evaluation process of the quality of the educational process initiated and carried out by ANACEC and other external evaluation entities. The quality assurance activity within ASEM resides in the Rector's Declaration regarding ASEM's policy in the field of quality, which is constantly updated and which states as its purpose: the implementation and maintenance at the university level of a Quality Management System, designed and documented in accordance with the provisions of the

international standard ISO 9001:2015, the scope of which is also the provision of educational services.

The ASEM Quality Council at the institutional level, the Directorate of Quality Management, Curricular Development and Studies, the Quality Assurance Commissions organized at the level of the faculties and the doctoral schools, and the Quality Assurance Committees organized at department level coordinate, monitor, and analyze the quality assurance and maintenance activities of the institution.

According to the self-evaluation report, Academy of Economic Studies of Moldova has developed the quality assurance structures, policies and strategies to generate the institutional framework for quality assurance and its continuous improvement, to consolidate the quality culture and update its internal quality standards in accordance with national reference standards and performance indicators for evaluation and quality assurance in higher education.

***Comments/Recommendations: Reviewing the structure and activities of quality assurance of the institution, these processes seem to operate well, but it is important to point out that the main principle and objective must be that quality assurance become an integral part of the organizational culture of the institution. The evolution and development of a real organizational culture of quality assurance at every stage of university operation should be in focus permanently.***

### Conclusion

My report is based on what I have experienced; what I have seen, what I have read and have heard before and during my visit. I hope that some of my comments will help the university management in the process of permanent improvement. I recommend the high level of confidence rate for the university with emphasizing the following:

- The present educational programs offered by the university are not unique as these programs can be found in the other private and state universities in Chisinau and in Moldova. The institution has to find market niches where it can operate successfully in a longer run. Among the different directions internationalization and diversification of the educational supply could be an important priority in the future.
- The University has to focus on maintaining the present situation and has to manage its resources to keep the system work which in an optimal situation meets the needs of the students, employees and external partners, and parallel with this, the university also has to concentrate on diversification and further development (developing new education programs, online learning and e-learning programs – if the legal regulation

allows it in the future, focusing on new potential target groups, etc.). Further decline of the total number of students could result a decision-making point, so the management of the university has to make steps to avoid this situation.

- Academy of Economic Studies of Moldova should maintain and continue to invest in the infrastructure and facilities when own resources, and any other funds allow.
- In the future it is recommended to strengthen the existing connections with local and international actors and developing new ones that could lead more intensive national and international visibility.
- ASEM has to strengthen the presence of the institution in international university ratings and increase the number of international students.
- The EU candidate status of Moldova could lead additional possibilities for further partnerships with universities in the EU space and for increasing internationalization and more intensive participation in the competition for research projects funded by European funds.
- The university has to motivate the younger generation to make an academic career more desirable. It is also recommended to raise the salary of the employees, when the budget of the institution, the own resources, or any other funds allow.

Finally, I would like to thank to the Rector of the Academy of Economic Studies of Moldova and all the University staff for the pleasant atmosphere and the support during my stay in Chisinau. At least but not last special thanks to ARACIS for giving me the opportunity to participate in this evaluation process in Moldova.

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