



**RE-ACCREDITATION OF THE  
DEPARTMENT OF ECOLOGY, AGRONOMY AND AQUACULTURE  
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF ZADAR**

**Date of the site visit  
24/25 April 2013**

**April 2013**

## COMPOSITION OF THE EXPERT PANEL

- Jasna Čačić, Ph.D., The Economic Interest Association of Croatian beverage producers, Croatia
- Charlotte Poschenrieder, Ph.D., Universidad Autònoma de Barcelona, Spain
- prof. Tito Žimbrek, Faculty of Agriculture, University of Zagreb, Croatia
- prof. Mohácsiné Farkas Csilla, PhD, Corvinus University of Budapest, Hungary
- Nives Kalit, student, Faculty of Agriculture, University of Zagreb, Croatia

Expert panel was supported by:

- Emita Blagdan, coordinator, Agency for Science and Higher Education
- Katarina Šimić Jagunić, assistant coordinator, Agency for Science and Higher Education
- Duško Čavić, interpreter at site visit
- Lida Lamza, report translator, Agency for Science and Higher Education

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## INTRODUCTION

### *Short description of the evaluated institution*

NAME OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION:

Department of Ecology, Agronomy and Aquaculture, University of Zadar

ADDRESS: Trg kneza Višeslava 9, 23 000 Zadar

NAME OF THE HEAD OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION:

prof. dr. sc. Jozo Rogošić, Head of Department

ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE:

Bodies of the Department of Ecology, Agronomy and Aquaculture are: Expert Committee, Administrative leadership (Department head, Deputy of Department Head), Departmental Expert Committee for Quality Assurance, Program coordinators and secretary.

Administration services of the Department of Ecology, Agronomy and Aquaculture: all non-academic services and offices are organized at the University level, while the only administrative staff of the Department is the Department Secretary.

LIST OF STUDY PROGRAMMES:

At Department for ecology, agronomy and aquaculture there is one undergraduate study program under name Applied Ecology in Agriculture.

Study program lasts 3 years, or 6 semesters (180 ECTS credits). During third semester students choose one of two offered majors:

- Mediterranean crop production
- Mediterranean ecosystem management.

Upon finishing undergraduate university program and by completing and defending final project and thesis student receives baccalaureate/ baccalaureus of agronomy (univ. bacc. ing. agr.).

NUMBER OF STUDENTS: 117 (69 full-time students, 48 part-time students)

NUMBER OF TEACHERS: 20 full-time, 7 external associates

NUMBER OF SCIENTISTS: 10

TOTAL BUDGET OF UNIVERSITY OF ZADAR (BALANCE): in calendar year 2011. – 145.786.809,00 kn

#### SHORT DESCRIPTION OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION:

Department of Ecology, Agronomy and Aquaculture, University of Zadar, Croatia was established in 2002 by the Code of the University. The Department effectively started with the work in 2006, when the first faculty and staff members for the natural and biotechnological science section were employed. Activities of the Department also include the Agricultural experimental and practical station: University agricultural facility "Bastica" and Centre for Sustainability in Velika Plana, county Lika). University agricultural facility "Bastica" since 2007 contains a vineyard with 30,000 grapevines of various sorts of wine. Two years later we expanded and incorporated a 5.5 hectare apple orchard to the same facility. Since 2010, with the active involvement and contributions of the Department, this facility produced and marketed several types of University red and white wines. The wines were used for the promotional and internal purposes, and were distributed to local markets in limited quantities.

As an integral part of the University of Zadar, Department of Ecology, Agronomy and Aquaculture held an initial title of "Department of Mediterranean agriculture and aquaculture". A Statute decision on January 25th, 2012. regarding the changes to the existing Statute of the University of Zadar, the Department was renamed to the Department of Ecology, Agronomy and Aquaculture (in further text: the Department).

In the academic year 2010/11, Department of Ecology, Agronomy and Aquaculture has established and initiated the program titled "Applied Ecology in Agriculture" with its charter class enrolled in the fall of 2010. The program of study was aligned with the Bologna declaration and has two tracks: 1) Mediterranean plant farming, and 2) Mediterranean ecosystem management.

#### Mission and Vision

Although the University of Zadar has a long tradition and heritage in humanistic and social sciences, the current strategic plans emphasize its development and further strengthening as a general type of a university. Needs of the modern society and regional development of the Zadar and neighbouring counties have warranted the development and implementation of new programs of study, especially in the fields of applied ecology (natural sciences) and Mediterranean agriculture (biotechnology). That was directly correlated with the state plans for national and regional development, and with the proposal for the establishment of the University of Zadar. Likewise, the contemporary trends and needs for international approaches within different programs for the development of the institutions for higher education and science warrant for rational exploitation and management of renewable natural resources along the Mediterranean. That has led to the

proposal to initiate and implementation of the study program "Applied Ecology in Agriculture". Therefore, the goal of the Department of Ecology, Agronomy and Aquaculture, University of Zadar, is to find and define its position among other Croatian agricultural educational institutions and institutes.

The mission of the Department is a continuous enhancement of the quality of the study programs, that is implemented in the accordance with recommendations and regulations of the State institutions and agencies, legislature, legal acts and regulations of the University of Zadar, with directions and defined European standards for higher education, as well as with direct needs and requests of the agricultural sector and producers. That mission is carried out by the implementation of the undergraduate studies in Applied Ecology in Agriculture, through the education of the young experts in agronomy specialized in applied ecology and Mediterranean agriculture, and through practical application of basic and applied scientific research generated within various research projects of our faculty in the field of Mediterranean agriculture and applied ecology.

Besides striving to a continuous improvement in the quality of the existing undergraduate study program, the Department's long term goal is to initiate the graduate study program in the field of Applied Ecology in Agriculture, in order to solidify and make a full circle (5-years) of the study programs offered by the Department.

#### Structure of students enrolled

Most of previously enrolled students completed vocational school (approximately 80% of the total). In the program there are students whose overall GPA was 3.5 regardless of the type of high school they finished. Knowledge of students who completed grammar school (gymnasiums) is at a slightly higher level than the students who have completed vocational schools.

## ***The work of the Expert Panel***

For its work the Panel drew upon the Self-Evaluation Report, prepared by the Department of Ecology, Agronomy and Aquaculture, University of Zadar. A site visit was carried out on 22<sup>th</sup> April 2013. During the visit to the Institution the Expert Panel held meetings with the representatives of the following groups:

- the Management,
- the Working group that compiled the Self-Evaluation,
- representatives of the Board for quality improvement,
- the students, i.e., a self-selected set of students present at the interview,
- teachers,
- teaching assistants,
- vice-Dean for teaching and representative of Committee for international cooperation.

The Expert Panel also had a tour of the library, IT rooms and the classrooms at the Department of Ecology, Agronomy and Aquaculture, where they held a brief question and answer session with the students who were present. The Expert Panel also visited Agricultural experimental and practical station, "Bastica" (vineyard and apple orchard), nearby Zadar.

# DETAILED ANALYSIS BASED ON STANDARDS AND CRITERIA FOR RE-ACCREDITATION

## ***1. Institutional management and quality assurance***

1.1. The Department of Ecology, Agronomy and Aquaculture (Department) is an integral unit of the University of Zadar. The Department has autonomy in the execution of the programme in the field of education and research and implementation of activities, but all legal rights are held by the University. The Department as an institution of higher education has a well-defined mission in the sense that its aim is to contribute to the development of the society by developing education, learning and research in the field of Mediterranean agriculture. The vision broadly expressed in the self-evaluation, as well as the research activities of the Department members and the study plan are specifically focused on the importance of the preservation of the natural and agricultural resources of the Mediterranean area of Croatia. A long-term goal is to initiate graduate studies in the fields of *Applied Ecology and Agriculture* in order to make a full 5 year cycle of the study programme. The distinctive features of the studies and research activities developed are, to the opinion of this expert panel, more in line with a Degree in *Mediterranean Agroecology* than with the profile of academic and technological competence required for a degree in Agronomic Engineering (Univ. Bacc. Ing. Agron.). Transformation of the current proposal into *Graduate studies in Mediterranean Agroecology* may be highly attractive both for local students with a strong interest in the preservation of their unique Mediterranean agricultural landscape and for students from abroad with a strong interest in sustainable agriculture, in the conservation of natural and agricultural biodiversity, and in ecosystem processes. The proposed change also can positively influence the social impact of this graduate studies, especially in relation to agrotourism, ecotourism, and healthy food production.

1.2. As part of the integrated University of Zadar, the Department developed its own organizational structures and formalized them in the corresponding legal documents.



- 1.3. The Department has aligned its strategy with the strategy of the University of Zadar and contributes to achieve the university goals. The change proposed in 1.1. regarding the orientation and denomination of the graduate studies to be offered by the Department will further improve the alignment with the University's strategy.
- 1.4. As it stands, the study programme is poorly aligned with the mission to offer graduate studies in Agricultural Engineering. The content of study programme and the expertise of the involved teacher and researchers are much better aligned with a Degree in *Mediterranean Agroecology*. It should be recommended that Department (University) change the name of the graduate study in accordance with relevant Croatian legislation.
- 1.5. Quality policy is defined and procedures for quality assurance and enhancement are mostly implemented.
- 1.6. The institution has started to collect and analyse relevant information to improve management efficiency. Students are implied in these processes but more involvement of stakeholders is desirable. The use of the collected information to improve the activities should be further pursued.
- 1.7. The institution has started to implement systems to monitor teaching quality. The work overload of some teachers and the fact that apparently a broad range of different subjects needs to be lectured by a single teacher requires further monitoring to assure sustainability of the teaching system and its quality. Department should force his teachers to accelerate progress into their higher scientific teaching position.
- 1.8. The mechanisms for monitoring and improving research quality are partially implemented; the development of the project of the new campus with new research facilities will help to increase research activities and its quality.
- 1.9. The institution has fully implemented mechanisms for highest levels of ethical behaviour and students and staffs are aware of these mechanisms.

## **2. Study programmes**

- 2.1. Processes by which new study programmes are proposed and approved and implemented are defined. During the last years the study programmes have been partly innovated. These processes should be used to make the reorientation proposed in point 1.1. The stakeholders should be also included in this process of reorientation.
- 2.2. The needs of the society in relation to enrollment quotas should be better defined. There is not persuasive evidence about of the existing enrollment quotas.
- 2.3. Match between enrollment quotas and the institutional resources for quality teaching is in the starting phase. Some institutional resources are in line with enrollment quotas, like experimental stations for student practice, but the other are not, like laboratories and library. A reorientation of the studies will help to improve this alignment.
- 2.4. Study outcomes stated by the teachers at the level of study programme and its courses are partly implemented. Especially the level of practical laboratory competences must be improved. A broad range of different subjects needs to be lectured by a single teacher and this does not guarantee fully appropriate study outcomes.
- 2.5. Assessments of the study outcomes are mostly implemented.
- 2.6. Allocation of ECTS is mostly reflecting realistic students' workload. The allocation has been adjusted during the development of the study programme and only some minor adjustments are being proposed by the students.
- 2.7. The content and quality of the study programme partially conforms to internationally recognized standards. Improvements, especially in the laboratory practice competence, are required.
- 2.8. Adequate teaching strategies are mostly implemented.
- 2.9. Supplemental resources that aid with knowledge acquisition are partly implemented. The fact that University of Zadar mainly is dedicated to teaching of humanistic degrees, while science oriented studies have only recently been started, explains a low number of scientific resources

in the library and an inadequate equipment of student's laboratories for practical learning. In conclusion, improvement is required especially in the library and laboratory resources.

- 2.10. Internships and practical teaching are partly implemented and should be further developed, especially for the students of the third year to improve their practical skills and to introduce them into process development and professional research activities. The practical training or student practice starts in the IV semester, mainly in the V semester, so there is not enough evidence about the learning outcomes because the courses of undergraduate program of *Applied Ecology in Agriculture* started in 2010/2011 academic year.

### **3. Students**

- 3.1. The competencies of applicants evaluated upon admission are not fully in line with competencies in future career of students. Students are enrolled without proper knowledge of chemistry and mathematics, and this distorts the quality of teaching and slows further progress of students. Introduction of written prequalification exams in these subjects and providing classrooms for preparatory classes thereof is recommended.
- 3.2. Institution provides sufficient support to students in their extracurricular activities, informs them of upcoming events related to education, and includes students in them. The students themselves agreed with these.
- 3.3. Institution has not perfected vision and plan for professional development. It should increase the number of research projects in which students would be involved, and introduce higher level of education (diploma study) in order to be able to continue to educate students in this institution.
- 3.4. College has secured accommodation for students within student campus, canteen and transportation of students in areas designed for practices that are outside of the city of Zadar. Thus we believe that the level of standards of studying in this institution are qualified.

- 3.5. Students are satisfied with objectivity of professors, grading system and possibility of improving knowledge. Methods and procedures for student assessment are defined and very good.
- 3.6. The Expert panel cannot assess guideline that indicates contact with alumni of the institution, since the first generation of students have not finished their studies yet.
- 3.7. Students are involved in work of the institution through their representatives, and thus affect the decision-making and problem-solving that concern them directly.
- 3.8. The institution have small groups of students and because of that, communication between them and between teachers is very good. Nevertheless, there is no institution-developed mission in terms of future employment of students.
- 3.9. Students have their representatives in the Council through which they can express their opinions and suggestions to improve the work of the institution.
- 3.10. The students are informed about the measures implemented on the basis of their suggestions and opinions by their colleagues who are council members.

#### **4. *Teachers***

- 4.1. Number and qualifications of teachers is in starting phase to reach the strategic goals of the institution. Some of the teachers are working in other departments and teaching more subjects. It is recommended to increase the number and qualifications of teachers to cover adequately the core disciplines.
- 4.2. Due to inability of employment of new, qualified teaching staff the institution is not able to fulfill the requirements. Development of human resources is highly recommended.
- 4.3. The institution is in starting phase the employment of sufficient numbers of full-time teachers endangering to ensure the quality and continuity of teaching. It is recommended to increase the number of full-time teachers.

- 4.4. The ratio between students and full time teachers is optimal and meets the requirements and regulations of higher education institutions.
- 4.5. As it is stated in the beginning of the report the mission of the institution is not clear and development of policy for teaching staff to ensure their development is only partly implemented. Institution should develop defined policy for teachers' development to advance the institution's mission.
- 4.6. Assessment of qualifications and expertise of the teaching staff is performed according to the national criteria for employment and promotion. Development of own methods of assessment extending national criteria for employment is recommended.
- 4.7. Policies governing the assignment of teachers' workload fair and equitable distribution are not implemented. The workload of teachers' is sometimes not equitable distributed, some of them are teaching several and distant subjects. This can only be solved by hiring new teaching staff.
- 4.8. The Department is an integral part of the University of Zadar. The institution ensures the adequate commitment to teaching and research.

## ***5. Scientific and professional activity***

- 5.1. Establishment of a research agenda is partly implemented, the strategic program of the University is not defined on the level of the Department. Development of a research plan at Department level specifying monitoring and defining success indicators is recommended.
- 5.2. The University of Zadar has a general strategic program of scientific research. One of the main goals is to encourage research partnerships and cooperation with other scientific organisations and industry.
- 5.3. Research is acknowledged at the institution, but policy of promoting research excellence is not demonstrated at Department level.

- 5.4. The institution supports its young researchers both with financial support (for conferences and participation for PhD courses) and non-financial support (institutional and inter-institutional support). Planning of scientific work of young researchers and monitoring of the progress is performed at the Department.
- 5.5. The research excellence is promoted at University level. Policy of promoting research excellence has to be demonstrated at Department level.
- 5.6. Academic publishing is demonstrated, but development and implementation of policy in this regard is not shown. Clear policy has to be developed and implemented for encouraging academic publishing.
- 5.7. Scientific productivity (such as publications in international journals, citations etc.) of the Department is good. In the last 5 years number of research papers that are included in the CC, WoS and Scopus databases by teaching staff amounts to 51 (for 10 researchers), and number of other reviewed publications considered for the appointment to scientific grades amounts 35 (for 10 researchers).
- 5.8. The institution must ensure conditions for knowledge and technology transfer in a larger extent.

## ***6. International cooperation and mobility***

- 6.1. The Department is at a beginning phase of promoting mobility of students from other HE institutions. Mobility is ensured by recognition of ECTS credits obtained at similar study programs in accordance with the Rulebook of Studying of the University of Zadar. However, it should be recommended to make a plan of activities related to internal mobility in order to promote it and to inform students from other HEI about the possibilities (for example through web pages).
- 6.2. Students have many opportunities to complete a part of their programme abroad and they have used it. They are involved in Erasmus, Erasmus Mundus and CEEPUS. Students are informed

about possibilities for international cooperation and mobility through web page of the Department notice board and lectures for students. Taking into account short time of existence of the Department it could be concluded that they have made lot of efforts in achieving this strategic goal.

6.3. Department encourages international cooperation and mobility of its teachers through Erasmus mobility, different international scholarships, study visits and staff exchange. Teachers were educated in different foreign universities such as University of Georgia, USA, University Wesleyan Connecticut, The Rockefeller University of Seattle University USA, Sapienza University in Rome, Italy, Western University of Health Sciences in Pomona, USA, University of Utah, USA, and University in Antwerp, Belgium.

6.4. Department as a part of University of integrated type is not a legal person and therefore can't be involved directly in international institutions but international cooperation is organized at the level of the University through Office for International Cooperation.

The University of Zadar is involved in following international institutions:

- European University Association (EUA)
- Danube Rector's Conference (DRC).

The representatives of the Department participate in activities of these institutions.

6.5. Ensuring conditions for attracting students from abroad is well organised. Two courses in English language are accredited from the Senate of the University (Human nutrition and Environmental science). Counseling in English is possible for almost all courses performed at the study and counseling in Italian is also possible for certain courses.

6.6. Department (University as legal person) has developed different forms of inter-institutional cooperation. Many bilateral agreements have been signed out of which three with institutions that have similar programs as the program of Applied Ecology in Agriculture (University of Teramo, Italy, Mendel University of Agriculture and Forestry in Brno, Czech Republic, Faculty of Agrobiological Sciences, Food and Natural Resources of the University of Life Sciences in Prague. Department also participate in different projects (bilateral projects, IPA, FP7).

## **7. Resources: administration, space, equipment and finances**

- 7.1. University buildings and classrooms are high quality and well-equipped. Computers resources meet the needs of students. It should be emphasised that University has land on which agricultural production (orchards, vineyards) is organized enabling students to participate actively performing exercises and practical work. Library resources are not sufficient and laboratories are not equipped in line with the mission of the Department. Department also doesn't have autonomy of utilization of classrooms because they are not only for the Department but for whole University. It makes difficulties in making schedule of their usage. It should be recommended to either equip existing University library with books necessary for the study programme performed by the Department or to establish new library only for Department's needs. It is also necessary to have proper laboratory with all equipment needed for the study programme. According to the financial resources it should be taken into account to improve utilization of present classrooms for the study programme and to define priorities in usage within the University.
- 7.2. Department has 21 teachers that are employees of the University and only one non-teaching staff (secretary of the Department on a temporary position as part-time worker). As the most of the administration has been done by the University staff it could be concluded that the ratio between the teaching and non-teaching staff is favourable. Taking into account further increasing number of students it would be advisable to have at least one person as full time non-teaching employee in the Department.
- 7.3. Department has well-developed policies for non-teaching staff enabling them to attend seminars and workshops regularly in order to develop themselves.
- 7.4. Laboratory equipment is not sufficient and protocols used are in starting phase of implementation. It should be recommended to have proper laboratory with all equipment needed for the study programme in order to be able to use protocols and recognized international standards.
- 7.5. Department has necessary equipment and provides technical support for its use in order to be efficiently used and to meet the needs of students. This comment is not related to laboratories.



7.6. University has library of 840 m<sup>2</sup> at two University locations. There is a separated area for silent work for students. However, this library doesn't meet the needs of students from Department because it is not equipped with literature related to the study programme. It should be recommended to either equip existing University library with books necessary for the study programme performed by the Department or to establish new library only for Department's needs.

7.7. As Department is not legal person, it doesn't have separate account. According to the balance sheet of the University and financial evaluation, financial stability is harmonised with its mission and sources of finance are transparent. Finances don't limit institutional autonomy.

7.8. Department is financed from University's financial resources (as a part of the University). It has some amount of own funds coming from different projects and students' fees. Departments own funds are used to raise the quality of teaching and scientific activity.

# **FINAL REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS BY THE EXPERT PANEL FOR THE ACCREDITATION COUNCIL**

## ***ADVANTAGES (STRONG POINTS)***

1. The Department works as an integrated institution of the University of Zadar;
2. Teaching staff is highly dedicated, teachers have good relationship with the students;
3. Ratio between students/teachers is good;
4. Existing vineyard and apple orchard are good support for the field work of the students;
5. The institution cares for the level of the student standard, facilities (e.g. dormitories) are good, and good relationship was seen between students.

## ***DISADVANTAGES (WEAK POINTS)***

1. Laboratories and library are not adequate to reach the goals of the study program;
2. Number of researchers from the field of biotechnology doesn't meet the criteria;
3. Scientific activity should be increased;
4. Number of full-time teachers is low, and the workload of teachers' is sometimes not equitable distributed, some of them are teaching several and distant subjects.

# RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT OF QUALITY

## 1. Management of the Higher Education Institution and Quality Assurance

- The features of the studies and research activities developed are more in line with a Degree in *Mediterranean Agroecology* than with the profile of the academic and technological competence of a degree in Agronomic Engineering. Transformation of the current proposal into *Graduate studies in Mediterranean Agroecology* may be highly attractive both for local students with a strong interest in the preservation of their unique Mediterranean agricultural landscape and for students from abroad with a strong interest in sustainable agriculture, in the conservation of natural and agricultural biodiversity, and in ecosystem processes.
- It should be recommended that Department (University) change the name of the graduate study in accordance with relevant Croatian legislation.
- Students are implied in collection and analysis of management activities, but more involvement of stakeholders is desirable. The use of the collected information to improve the activities should be further pursued.
- It should be recommended to either equip existing University library with books necessary for the study programme performed by the Department or to establish new library only for Department's needs.

## 2. Study Programmes

- Processes by which new study programmes are proposed should be used to make the reorientation proposed in point 1.1. The stakeholders should be also included in this process of reorientation.
- The needs of the society in relation to enrolment quotas should be better defined;
- Improvements in the laboratory practice competence is required;
- Improvement is required especially in the library and laboratory resources;
- Internships and practical teaching should be further developed, especially for the students of the third year to improve their practical skills and to introduce them into process development and professional research activities.

### **3. Students**

- Introduction of written prequalification exams in some subjects (e.g. chemistry, mathematics) and providing classrooms for preparatory classes thereof is recommended.
- Increase the number of research projects in which students would be involved, and introduce higher level of education (MSc programme) in order to be able to continue to educate students in this institution
- There is no institution-developed mission in terms of future employment of students.

### **4. Teachers**

- It is recommended to increase the number and qualifications of teachers to cover adequately the core disciplines of the institution;
- Development of human resources is highly recommended;
- It is recommended to increase the number of full-time teachers;
- Institution should develop defined policy for teachers' development to advance the institution's mission;
- Development of own methods of assessment extending national criteria for employment is recommended;
- To achieve fair and equitable distributed workload of teachers hiring new teaching staff is recommended.

### **5. \*Research and professional activity**

- Development of a research plan at Department level specifying monitoring and defining success indicators is recommended;
- Policy of promoting research excellence has to be demonstrated at Department level;
- Clear policy has to be developed and implemented for encouraging academic publishing;
- The institution must ensure conditions for knowledge and technology transfer in a larger extent.

### **6. International Cooperation and Mobility**

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\* to be filled in by higher education institutions not listed in the Register of Scientific Organisations of MSES; related to the Criteria for the Assessment of Quality of Polytechnics and Colleges

- Institution should make a plan of activities related to internal mobility in order to promote it and to inform students from other HEI about the possibilities (for example through web pages).

#### **7. Resources, Administration, Space, Equipment and Finance**

- It is recommended to either equip the existing University library with books necessary for the study programme performed by the Department or to establish a new library specifically covering the Department's needs. It is also necessary to have proper laboratory with all equipment needed for the study programme. According to the financial resources it should be taken into account to improve utilization of present classrooms for the study programme and to define priorities in usage within the University.
- Taking into account further increasing number of students it would be advisable to have at least one person as full time non-teaching employee in the Department.
- It should be recommended to have proper laboratory with all equipment needed for the study programme in order to be able to use protocols and recognized international standards.