

The Assessment Decision of the EKKA Quality Assessment Council for Higher Education

12/10/2015

A proposal to the Minister of Education of the Republic of Moldova

NOT TO ACCREDIT

the Master's study programme "International Law" of the Institute of International Relations of Moldova

Acting in accordance with the authorization granted by the § 10 (4) of the Universities Act and sections 3.7.1 and 3.7.3 of the Statutes of the Estonian Quality Agency for Higher and Vocational Education (EKKA) and based on section 33.2 of the document "Requirements and Procedure for Accreditation of Study Programmes in Moldova", the EKKA Quality Assessment Council for Higher Education shall state the following.

1. On February 23, 2015, the Director of EKKA approved by her order the following composition of the

Assessment Committee:

Aalt Willem Heringa – Chair	Professor of (Comparative) Constitutional and Administrative Law, Faculty of Law, Maastricht University, Holland
Aušra Rauličkyte	Adviser to the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Moldova
Aliis Liin	Legal Counsel, University of Tartu, Estonia
Stela Buiuc	Deputy Director, Centre for Legal Approximation, Ministry of Justice, Moldova; PhD Student, Law Department, State University of Moldova

2. The Assessment Visit to the Institute of International Relations of Moldova took place on May 20, 2015.
3. The Assessment Committee sent the preliminary report to EKKA on July 6, 2015. The Assessment Committee received the comments of the Institute of International Relations

of Moldova on July 22, 2015, and approved the final version of the component assessments on September 9, 2015.

4. The Secretary of the Council forwarded the assessment report containing the component assessments to the members of the EKKA Quality Assessment Council for Higher Education on September 24. The assessment report forms an integral part of the assessment decision. The report will be made available on the EKKA website.

5. The component assessments were as follows:

Study programme and its development	Does not conform to requirements
Teaching and learning	Does not conform to requirements
Teaching staff	Does not conform to requirements
Students	Does not conform to requirements
Resources	Partially conforms to requirements

6. The EKKA Quality Assessment Council discussed the assessment report along with the comments of the Institute of International Relations of Moldova and other relevant materials at its session on October 12, 2015, with the participation of 9 Council members. The Council decided to point out the following strengths and areas of improvement of the Master’s study programme “International Law”:

6.1.

Study programme and its development	Does not conform to requirements
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Areas of improvement and recommendations

- The Institute of International Relations of Moldova (IRIM) and the Chair of International Law do not have action plans for implementation the strategic development plan. The monitoring process of its implementation is not structured. It is recommended to develop detailed actions plans, which will not simply reflect the usual activities of the units, but will support reaching concrete aims and objectives of the Strategic Plan of institutional development. It is also important to ensure that the monitoring process of implementation of the action plans is in place and involves teaching staff, students and representatives of labour market.
- The study programme does not include any optional disciplines, therefore not being in full compliance with requirements established by the Framework Plan.
- The student workload of independent work is not clearly regulated and the student workload of independent work is not meeting the requirement of 90 ECTS (25-30 hours per credit point). It is urgently needed to align the study load of students and the ECTS

credits and the full time nature of the programme (60 ECTS per annum) in order to meet the international standards.

- The majority of the students are allowed to perform their internship in institutions not directly related to international law, and in these cases the internship is not supporting the achievement of the objectives of the study programme. It is recommended to ensure that the internship is organized only in the institutions, which are directly related with the international or European law application/approximation.
- The content and outcomes of the study programme are not internationally comparable and not always directly related to the study programme content or supported by the studies and internship. The study programme does not consider research skills as a learning outcome. It is recommended to revise the study programme in order to ensure that studies are conducive to achieving the learning outcomes, including the development of research skills.
- The majority of lecturers do not include the sources of other than Romanian and Russian literature in their course programmes, which causes an isolation of the programme and the students from international law developments. It is recommended to ensure that all disciplines include obligatory materials in English/French languages.
- There is no clear evidence about substantial difference between the Master and Bachelor level programme. It is recommended to ensure that there is a clear distinction between the master and bachelor studies. All courses and the master thesis requirements have to be made urgently more challenging, intensive and academic in order to meet the master programme requirements.
- The content of the study programme is very broad, including courses on very different areas of international law and there is no explanation on linking them within the same study programme. There is no clear logical succession of the courses included in the study programme. It is recommended to develop a clear focus and strategy of the master programme with a coherent succession and selection of courses and skills.
- There are no clear channels established to get information on the needs of the labour market in order to adjust the study programme accordingly. It is recommended to establish a formal network with possible employers in order to obtain and exchange the information on the needs of the labour market with the aim to adjust the study programme accordingly. Also, it is recommended to initiate communication and sign agreements with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and other institutions dealing with international law issues more directly.
- It is recommended to organise regular staff meetings in order to coordinate and harmonize the programme and involve in these meetings input from employers, students and other relevant stakeholders.
- It is recommended to install a structure of feedback, curriculum assessment and evaluation and responsiveness to stakeholders and international benchmarks.

6.2.

Teaching and learning	Does not conform to requirements
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Areas of improvement and recommendations

- The up-to-date texts of the regulations of study management are not currently accessible to the students and should be made publicly available on the website of the IRIM in a timely manner.
- There is currently no system in place for using students' feedback for developing the study management. It is recommended to set up a systematic system of gathering feedback from the students and to take the results of the feedback into account in developing and teaching the programme.
- Teaching methods used by the teaching staff are outdated and do not encourage the students to take active role in the learning process. It is recommended to introduce a regular training course for the teaching staff about modern and interactive teaching methods to encourage them to use these in the teaching process. This course ought to relate to modes of delivery and didactical aspects.
- In writing their MA thesis, students use out-of-date materials; the majority of the source materials have been published more than 15 years ago. There are no references to the materials in the English language and other foreign languages besides Russian. The Institute should start acknowledging international law as a discipline of international scope and influence and encourage the students and staff to search for more up-to-date literature and learning materials.
- The duration of internship is too short for 10 ECTS. It is recommended to analyse the duration of the internship and the volume of work the students have to do during the internship and adjust them so that the weekly workload of the students would be reasonable and achievable and truly matches the ECTS requirements.
- Only a few of partner organisations are dealing with the field of international law and students mainly find their own internship places. It is recommended to take a more active role in finding placements of internship to all students and in providing everybody with an internship place which is profiled to the learning outcomes of the study programme "International Law".
- The average grades of the students are unreasonably high. The implementation of the grading system does not make it possible to distinguish the students according to their knowledge acquired. There is a need to analyse the implementation of the grading system and give the teaching staff instructions about correct implementation of the system.
- There is no system of implementing the recognition of prior learning and work experience in IRIM and no cases of actual recognition. It is recommended to implement the national legislation by creating a transparent and internationally comparable system of recognising prior learning experience acquired abroad or in other Moldovan universities as fulfilling the study programmes at IRIM in order to encourage academic mobility.

- It is recommended to systematically gather feedback about the satisfaction with the quality of supervision from the students after they have defended their thesis and use this feedback for improving the skills of supervision of the teaching staff.
- The Involvement of students in research activities is extremely limited. Considering the students' study load, drastic steps have to be taken here to make the programme more research intensive and research linked.
- It is recommended to improve the foreign language skills of the staff and students.

6.3.

Teaching staff	Does not conform to requirements
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Areas of improvement and recommendations

- The number of full-time professors too low for a full master programme, which intends to cover the whole domain of international law, posing a threat to the sustainability of the programme. There is an urgent need to consider possible solutions to the problem with regard to small staff size in order to be able to ensure the full coverage of the whole programme and its courses with relevant and necessary expertise and ensure the sustainability of the programme, e.g., collaboration with practitioners from the labour market, involvement of visiting professors, merging, etc.
- Clear staff development system is missing: development activities are not planned in a longer perspective or implemented in a systemic way, but rather organised on ad-hoc basis. It is recommended that the Institute provides teaching staff a regular training course concerning didactics, modes of delivery and other teaching related aspects.
- In order to become more competitive and international, it is indispensable for the study of international law to include more international source materials in English, French and/or other foreign languages. The limitation of foreign language command is currently not allowing access to the vast variety of materials that are available in English/French nor fostering staff mobility, their participation in international networks and conferences, and doing research in the field. It is recommended to make a shift in cultural attitude and approaches of international law. International Law (including European law) cannot be fully studied in an academic setting with reliance only on Russian/Romanian academic literature.
- No members of foreign visiting teaching staff are involved in teaching the programme. It is necessary to set up and facilitate an international collaboration and exchange policy.
- The role of the Faculty in organising lecturers' scientific activities should be more active and well planned, and financial costs of lecturers' participation in forums, national and international scientific conferences should be fully covered by the Faculty.
- Lecturers do not regularly develop their skills at foreign higher education institutions and participate in international networks. One of the causes of such limited participation must be inadequate knowledge of foreign languages by the teaching staff. It is recommended to

invest heavily in staff, linguistic capabilities, research and teaching planning, international exchange and collaboration. An International Law master programme must certainly show and reflect what it teaches: an international outlook and perspective and openness.

- It is strongly recommended to continue making plans with regard to research activities, but the content of such plans needs to be thoroughly revised in such a way that it would include activities directly connected with research and thus facilitating the monitoring and evaluation of achievement of the goals set.

6.4.

Students	Does not conform to requirements
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Areas of improvement and recommendations

- Only a few applicants are willing to be enrolled in the programme and, as a rule, all of them are admitted even if they do not fulfil the necessary qualifications for the MA programme in International law (foreign languages, for example).
- The information on international mobility on the Institute’s website is insufficient and there have been no cases of student mobility related to this particular MA programme. The student mobility depends mostly on the student’s own initiative rather than encouragement and opportunities provided by the institution. It is recommended to create more mobility opportunities for students, improve the list of references of foreign universities and have more cooperation relations with high rank universities from the EU member states.
- Information on the career development of the graduates is incomplete and there is no clear understanding on who the main recipients are and what the needs of the labour market are. It is necessary to make further efforts aimed at learning about the labour market and establish co-operation agreements with various institutions with competences related to the field of the study programme. It is also recommended to establish an efficient tracking and monitoring mechanism of the graduates that would facilitate a better understanding of the needs of the employers and the degree of the competitiveness of the graduates on the national and international labour market.
- It is recommended to establish a system for career guidance and psychological counselling for students.
- The institute is recommended to continue its efforts aimed at combating academic fraud and to ensure that rules are respected and applied in practice and that there is a regular up-date and improvement of the existing anti-fraud system.
- The drop-out rate is high (20-45%), and bearing in mind the small number of students enrolled for the programme (15) this could pose threats to the MA programme’s sustainability. There is a need to take more effective measures targeted at reducing the high drop-out rates.

6.5.

Resources	Partially conforms to requirements
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Strengths

- Despite the scarcity of resources the Committee commends the Institute for having invested in the renovation of its part of the building.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- It is absolutely necessary to quickly work on a viable situation which can facilitate an academic programme such as International Law. That implies more students, a strong profile and a quality upgrade.
- A permanent situation of low student numbers and cross-subsidization of the study programme are a cause of concern in terms of the long-term sustainability of the programme.
- The library is extremely small and has no room for students' independent work; the staff has to work in a cramped room with many desks on a tiny surface.
- The Institute is strongly advised to analyse its budget – revenues and expenses – and consider ways to allocate the necessary funds needed for updating its library resources, increasing the salary of the academic staff, support staff and student mobility, and foster other important aspects of the study process, such as supporting the development of didactical skills of teaching staff, facilitating their participation at local and international conferences, etc.

7. According to section 33.2 of the document "Requirements and Procedure for Accreditation of Study Programmes in Moldova", if at least one of the component assessments "does not conform to requirements", the Quality Assessment Council shall decide to make a proposal to the Minister of Education not to accredit the study programme.

8. Taking into account the component assessments referred to in clause 5 and that:

- The study programme does not include any optional disciplines, therefore not being in full compliance with requirements established by the Framework Plan.
- The student workload (including independent work) is not meeting the requirement of 90 ECTS.
- The content and outcomes of the study programme are not internationally comparable and not always directly related to the study programme content or supported by the studies and internship. The study programme does not consider research skills as a learning outcome.

- There is no clear evidence about substantial difference between the Master and Bachelor level programme.
- The content of the study programme is very broad, includes courses on very different areas of international law and there is no explanation on linking them within the same study programme. There is no clear logical succession of the courses included in the study programme.
- Teaching methods used by the teaching staff are outdated and do not encourage the students to take active role in the learning process.
- In writing their MA thesis, students use out-of-date materials; the majority of the source materials have been published more than 15 years ago. There are no references to the materials in the English language and other foreign languages besides Russian.
- The average grades of the students are unreasonably high. The implementation of the grading system does not make it possible to distinguish the students according to their knowledge acquired.
- The number of full-time professors too low for a full master programme, which intends to cover the whole domain of international law.
- In order to become more competitive and international, it is indispensable for the study of international law to include more international source materials in English, French and/or other foreign languages. International Law (including European law) cannot be fully studied in an academic setting with reliance only on Russian/Romanian academic literature.
- Only few applicants are willing to be enrolled in the programme and, as a rule, all of them are admitted even if they do not fulfil the necessary qualifications for the MA programme in International law.
- The drop-out rate is high, and bearing in mind the small number of students enrolled for the programme this could pose threats to the MA programme's sustainability.

the Council DECIDED

To make a proposal to the Minister of Education of the Republic of Moldova not to accredit the Master's study programme "International Law" of the Institute of International Relations of Moldova.

The decision was adopted by 9 votes in favour and 0 votes against.

9. Contestation:

- 9.1.** Evaluation proceedings conducted by EKKA may be disputed if the proceedings do not comply with the procedure provided for in this document. The challenge is

filed with the Management Board of the Archimedes Foundation within 30 working days after the person filing the challenge became or should have become aware of the contested finding.

- 9.2.** The assessment decision by the EKKA Quality Assessment Council may be disputed after adoption of the corresponding administrative decision by the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Moldova.

Tõnu Meidla
Chair of the Council

Hillar Bauman
Secretary of the Council