Abstract: The paper reviews the crisis in Romanian universities since the country’s political transition in 1989 and describes the government’s strategy for revitalizing the lifelong learning in higher education system. Attention is drawn to the technical universities in terms of the access to higher education and the transition to an educational system appropriate for a society based on individual freedom, political pluralism, and market economy. The government’s reform strategy involves the harmonization with the European approach, the receptiveness to educational innovation and the ability of meeting the needs of society. The emphasis is put on the domains of the curriculum, of the infrastructure, of the connection to the great information channels, and international cooperation.

Key–Words: training, labour market, reform, lifelong learning, communication, qualification, knowledge society, curriculum, infrastructure.

1 Introduction

Education in Romania is in the process of reform as long as the society we live in is moving towards big changes in education, working conditions to a diversification of how to practice career. All components are subject to higher processing actions: institutional organization, relational issues, assessing system, teacher training etc.

Romania’s European Union accession to and acceptance of Bologna process has led to a number of consequences, the most important one is improving the national education in European format: to cope with a knowledge society, to put greater emphasis on abilities and skills, to build a more flexible education with several options and with the possibility of adapting the educational process in everyday life and labor market needs.

2 The European Framework

The Romanian curriculum cannot be outside the major trends in European education. From this point of view, disciplines of study programs must take into consideration the European documents on education, documents to which Romania joined. The European Commission has made a document that describes a profile of European training, as a recommendation proposing new basic skills which required all persons to meet the demands of society and economy and facilitate access after school to lifelong learning [2]. These basic skills (key competences) which aims to compulsory schooling are:

- Helping workers and enterprises adapt to changing circumstances in the economy
- Enhancing access to employment and participation in the workforce
- Improving training and skills, both for individuals, and through better education and training systems
- Promoting partnerships between actors such as employers, trade unions and non-governmental organisations, for reform in the fields of employment and inclusion in the labour market
- Reinforcing the social inclusion of disadvantaged people and combating discrimination in the labour market

The proposed European Union 2020 Strategy, which will be a core tool for the new European Commission, allots a key role to education and training as drivers of
the higher skills that will fuel sustainable, knowledge-based growth in Europe. As Odile Quintin, Director General for Education, Training, Culture and Youth, European Commission has said, we need to move beyond rhetoric to genuine lifelong learning. Investment in people and their skills is crucial, Quintin has emphasized, to creating new sources of growth, even when budgets are under pressure; this means prioritizing investment in high-quality education and skills development. This message needs to be heard in the wider political arena but also by those responsible for funding and systems development in adult education’ [8]. The economic crisis is also stark reminder that lifelong learning needs to support individuals throughout the economic cycle - the booms and the busts. Recessions bring change. And change requires new skills.

Even before the crisis, work was changing, with more and more jobs requiring a mix of high-level skills and soft skills. Clearly, to work in a particular sector, people need the relevant technical capacities. But these have to be underpinned by the cross-cutting skills that help people meet new demands: teamwork, problem-solving, initiative-taking, creativity. At the Grundtvig 10th anniversary conference on 26-28 January 2010, in Brussels, it was clearly expressed that education and training must evolve. The New Skills for New Jobs initiative aims to do just this: to improve the capacity to anticipate the new job trends, and to gear the people’s skills for the changes ahead and to ensure that everyone can benefit from change and not feel threatened by it. This is also what the Grundtvig programme proposes, with its dual objective of responding to the educational challenge of an ageing population in Europe and helping to provide adults with pathways to improving their knowledge and skills. Given the demographic trend which provide the backdrop for the European Union 2020 strategy, it is clear that education and training must be reconsidered to give far more weight to helping adults improve their existing skills and develop new ones.

3 Romania’s Lifelong Learning Priorities

As the strategy and the European cooperation framework make clear - education and training are not only about preparing for jobs; they are vital for leveraging innovation and for creating the socially inclusive societies that must be a European hallmark. Romania’s ESF (European Social Fund) Operational Programs take an approach to the country’s complex economic and social challenges, aiming to bring education and training, including doctoral studies and more university research activities, into line with labour market requirements at all levels. Romania’s ESF Operational Programs adopt a two pronged approach to tackle the challenges the country is facing [3]. The first Operational Program is entitled Human Resources Development and is dedicated to making the most of the Romanian workforce. The second one, Administrative capacity development, is designed to improve the public policy and service infrastructure in order to achieve the human resources development objectives.

3.1 Human Resources Development

The Sectoral Operational Program for Human resources plans to help 1 650 000 people by increasing their education level, their employability and adaptability. It has seven different priorities, all aimed at dealing with difficulties in the country’s labour force:

- Lifelong learning (aimed at ensuring a better transition from school to working life, preventing early school leaving - particularly among vulnerable groups, encouraging companies to boost their employees’ qualification levels, and improving workers’ qualifications generally);
- Education and training aims to modernise initial and continuing education and training (including higher education and research), by focusing on management, quality assurance, teaching staff training and promotion of doctoral and postdoctoral programs;
- Increasing adaptability of workers and enterprises (to promote greater adaptability amongst workers and enterprises by increasing on-the-job training and by encouraging flexible attitudes to working practices);
- Modernizing the public employment service (to get increasing numbers of people back into employment and to enable particular groups, for instance the young, long-term unemployed and the elderly, to be targeted).
- More action to help people into work (to encourage people to enter the workforce);
- Promoting social inclusion (the priority six concentrates efforts on getting the groups at risk of social exclusion (disabled, young people leaving state protection institutions, etc.) back into mainstream employment).
• Technical assistance focuses on technical assistance which will underpin efforts made in the other six priorities and support the broad aims of the OP.

3.2 Administrative Capacity Development

The second Operational Program sets out to streamline the workings of the state in order to facilitate the human resources development strategy. It will achieve this via three priorities:

• Improving public policy and management (to create real improvements in the structure and process of public policy and management);
• Improving public services on a decentralised basis (to modernise and create efficient public services in Romania); Technical assistance (to underpin and support the efforts made in the first two priorities)

4 Developments of Lifelong Learning in Technical Universities

Higher education technical institutions offer four types of postgraduate studies following the first degree, long-term university studies, as follows: in-depth specialization studies, master’s degree studies, postgraduate academic studies, postgraduate studies of specialization and doctoral studies and postgraduate thoroughgoing studies for graduates of short-term and long term university studies. Also, universities provide assistance on a contract basis to initiators of adult training schemes as part of continuing education and re-training programs, or may initiate such schemes by themselves.

Ministries, national authorities, commercial companies or other legal entities, jointly with education units or separately, run adult training and refresher programs, to improve qualifications of their present or future employees or re-train them. These training courses grant qualification certificates or professional competence recognized on the labour market.

The law stipulates incentives for those who follow further-training courses for professional training, namely the right to standard salary, for those issued from public institutions and the payment of housing, per diem and transport, for those who take courses in other localities than that of their domicile.

For the training of adults the same law stipulates the possibility of organizing institutions and networks of open or distance education, that make use of modern communication and information technologies. These provisions of the law are applied in all universities. In order that content changes should be possible, a flexible reference framework is needed to enable various intervention modalities: the adding of new contents, the infusion of various novelty elements and/or the integration of certain domains of knowledge that have functioned separately [9].

The solutions found for Romania are: curricular areas, the same for the whole duration of education but adapted to its different stages and the introducing of the curriculum decided upon by the school (CDS) as part of the national curriculum, having various modalities of approach (extension, deepening, elective subjects at the level of subjects proper, of the curricular area or of several curricular areas).

The strategy for continuing the curricular reform takes into account the priorities brought to the fore by the analysis of the social need for development. A series of programs have been conceived for these needs [4].

The promoting of international partnerships between the education institutions in Romania and their counterparts in Europe, through participation in European programs of cooperation in the domain of education was materialized in:

- the programs Socrates and Leonardo da Vinci,
- the signing of international agreements for the equivalence of certificates of study and diplomas,
- the extending of full university education in one of the main international languages: English, French, German,
- the drawing up of curricula by Romanian institutions in a partnership relation with institutions in other countries,
- the participation in the setting up of multinational research units,
- the setting up of international educational institutions based in Romania,
- the extending of the international mobility of pupils, students, teaching staff,
- the application of the South-Eastern Europe educational program included in the Stability Pact.

5 Trainers’ Training

The problem of teacher education has become essential not only for school systems, but for all contemporary societies. Education has always been one of the main elements of maintaining a culture and social development [1]. More than in all previous periods, at present, education is considered one of the key pillars of building a knowledge-based society. In the context of the knowledge society, the education system regains a central role and the teacher once again becomes one of the main actors. The decreased number of teachers and the relative decline in their
quality of teaching have made the issue of training teachers become a central element of social policies in many countries. Without an initial and continuing training of teachers we can not adapt to European requirements. Therefore the training programs are aimed at: changes at a behavioural level and at the level of practice, changes at the level of persuasions and of the points of view on the entire reform process. The new reference framework in the domain of continuous training and of the initial training is being designed and one of its key elements concerns the standards of professional training. These standards correspond to new requirements that teachers must meet: new teaching methods fitted to the novelty elements that the curriculum introduced (including textbooks), new modalities of evaluation, the preparation of the students for their career, the integration of the new informational technologies in the didactic approach, etc.

The training offer has become varied, the continuous education in universities being a new element, a modality through which schools can establish the strategies for implementing innovating ideas. Diversity represents a characteristic of the modalities of organizing training, the interactive sessions having the greatest weight. The latter allows for the introduction of new content elements, the reflection on the modalities of work and the sharing of one’s own professional experience. Stimulating change at universities level starts from the premise that every person is an agent of change and envisages several objectives:
- the change of the structure of the teaching load in the education system;
- the occupying of the teaching position in the university colleges for educators;
- the recognition of the right of the private higher education system institutions to have access;
- to participate in the competition of projects for the financing of research, for investment of funds, for research grants, for doctoral scholarships or for scholarships for postgraduate studies abroad;
- the solving of problems by finding certain group solutions, the sharing of a common vision of the needs and interests of the university and the participation of all human resources in building up this vision, the contacts of the university with the wider environment in order that the occurrence of isolated activities should be avoided.

In Romania, the reform measures have created the framework for the development of educational institutions. Thus, by the new national curriculum, the universities have the possibility of individualizing their educational offer, the central role being played by the curricular offer.

In spite of the progress achieved in the curriculum (at both a conceptual and formal level), the latter cannot reflect all the changes that are taking place in the area of academic subjects and of the interdisciplinary domains where there is a great mobility of the concepts, methodology and contents. This gap has partly been bridged by introducing the new curriculum offers, but remains a fundamental problem of the evolution in time of the educational contents.

A solution to this problem could be the recommendation that can be made to the teachers to devise and put into practice a curriculum that should be predominantly an interdisciplinary one, or one focusing on new domains [5].

Though there are new programs (that have an advanced internal structure), the users encounter important difficulties in perceiving, understanding and applying them. The syllabuses, which are pretty heavily loaded, materialize in school practice by a type of education focused on the informative aspects, and, generally, overemphasize the contents. This has been also favoured by the existence of some very dense training supports (textbooks).

This problem could be solved by conceiving some coherent programs enabling the teachers to understand and apply the curriculum. We consider that the continuous training in the area of the curriculum can lead to a considerable improvement on the way in which the latter can be applied.

The initial training of teachers which is currently achieved is, generally, inappropriate for the application of the new curriculum. That is why it is necessary to focus continuous training on the problems that are characteristic for the university curriculum.

6 A New Conception of University as an Institution

In the last twenty years, the numerous legislative changes having a general character have been precariously spread into the academic system. Modernizing the content of education has always been an integral part of the reform strategies that have succeeded one another since 1990. It started with the program of modification and adjustment measures (that was the very beginning of the reform activity) which was later followed by the introduction of the concept of global reform meant to speed up and complete the transition period. The first decade of the 21st century in Romania has been characterized by a dynamic continuity in that it has been taking over adapting and deepening everything that is valid in the comprehensive reform
started in 1998, and is realistically oriented to the process of changing the structures and the contents of education. At present as in the past, the motivation for change has the same sources (the philosophy of education) and involves the same levels of clarification. In the first years after the events of December 1989 the source of legitimacy for the changing/adapting of the contents was the imperious need of social and cultural mutations for the transition period as an irrevocable passage from the centralized and authoritarian educational system to an educational system appropriate for a society based on individual freedom, political pluralism, legitimate state and market economy.

After Romania has joined the Council of Europe, the impact of these factors was stimulated by the international developments, and mainly by the European ones, for which the Romanian government manifested a constant interest as it envisaged our country’s joining the EU structures. Besides the evolution towards European structures, a growing receptivity for the current problems of the world has become an important source of motivation in devising reform in Romania:

- the scientific and technological progress in the computer age, and, generally, the extending of human knowledge;
- the growing weight and influence of the media in the international society;
- the need for alternative pedagogical approaches.

These tendencies have been taken over by the official discourse on the social and cultural development and, naturally, have become a main source of motivation for educational modernization in Romania [6]. Having a decisive role at the level of social macrostructures motivation, these objectives are mainly advancing a new conception of university as an institution, a conception according to which the configuration of contents is reshaped because:

- university is no longer seen as the only source of models and the unique valid place where knowledge is transmitted;
- accumulating sheer knowledge is no longer a priority in the educational process, as acquiring competence, values and attitudes becomes more important;
- far from representing a handicap, the new position of universities as institutions in the current informational environment stimulates educational institutions to develop a threefold strategy:
  
  1) to integrate fresh knowledge in the curricula;
  2) to pass from learning based on memorizing data to solving problems, developing the people’s capacity for self-education and their ability of adapting to change;
  3) to promote interdisciplinarity;

Universities are called upon to enhance their educational mission, by diversifying the modalities of education in the spirit of certain values: solidarity, cooperation, tolerance, democratic attitudes, respect for life, for the environment, for the cultural heritage, for multiculturalism.

These objectives can be found in different phrasings and proportions in the regulating documents of curricular reform in Romania. These documents also emphasize:

- the necessity of reconsidering the hierarchies of contents from the perspective of education centered on the capacity of learning through interaction;
- the necessity of diversifying learning activities and stimulating individual study.

The emphasis on values is materialized in the curriculum by delimiting certain subdivisions of formal education and by promoting a new learner’s behaviour based on formative interaction. As this involves the transition from information to formation, the disciplines in the common core (see the curricular areas language and communication, man and society, counselling and orientation) suggest many valid entries for the education for values. As for the segment curriculum decided upon by the university it offers many opportunities of projecting certain optional subjects that aim at:

- entrepreneurial education, education for the environment, education for peace and cooperation, education for private life, education for democratic citizenship, education for the future that introduce the students to values such as tolerance and mutual comprehension, making them discover the respect for identity and the acceptance of difference.

Seen from the perspective of contents and learning activities, intercultural education is about to strengthen its position among the extracurricular activities (informal programmes socially oriented to increasing the degree of ethnic and social tolerance), in many social cases being perceived not only as a space of encounters but as a genuine community home, as well.

Given the multicultural character of many areas in Romania, intercultural education can be seen as a domain of social education through which the new curriculum tries to meet the expectations of civil society. All the documents of educational policy of the first years of
the 21th century endorse this domain of educational intervention in Romania.

Important steps have been taken in this direction not only by curriculum specialists, but also (or mostly) by trainers, by cultural mediators and by various bodies and associations acting at community level. Though it is a very young domain, intercultural education in Romania can provide a convincing example of social partnership in the field of education.

Generally speaking, the motivating factors for modernizing the educational contents are convergent to the expectation that the shifting of emphasis from information to training, from authoritarianism to autonomy, from the unilateral conveying of information to cooperation, from a subordinate position of students to their active participation in the pedagogical activity will have a relevant impact on the quality of learning.

Summarizing the statements above, we can say that the manner in which the lifelong learning contents in Romania is justified today combines in a balanced way an extrinsic motivation (the harmonization with the European approach, the receptiveness to educational innovation) and an intrinsic motivation (the ability of meeting the needs of society).

7 Conclusion

The most important achievements of the lifelong learning initiatives are those in the domain of the curriculum, of the infrastructure and of the connection to the great information channels, of the interaction between the school and academic management and of international cooperation. This brief presentation is an argument in supporting the statement that Romanian education is in full process of reorganization, a consequence of the changes in which our whole society is employed. Therefore all the steps should lead to the following goals:

- providing a basic education for all the citizens of the country, in the form of some minimum abilities necessary to the life and work in a democratic society;
- promoting an open and flexible education able to meet the most various interests, aptitudes and aspirations;
- building up of new professional abilities, management and trade skills, economical and financial behavior, aptitudes and social relationships requested by the market economy;
- development of the interest in education and permanent emancipation through an education concentrated not on the limited needs of a certain profession, but on the continuous availability for knowledge and action, for reflection and social criticism in the view of adaptation to a changing social context.

References: