

CHALLENGES OF HIGHER EDUCATION QUALITY STANDARDS IN ALBANIA

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ABSTRACT

The future of humanity depends to a large extent on the cultural, scientific and technological challenges that have put the higher education institutions in Albania in front of some major duties and responsibilities, as they are the institutions shaping knowledge, research and training.

The signing of the Bologna Declaration on 18 September 2003, made it mandatory for the Albanian government to reform the system of higher education based on standards published and accepted by all member countries of the Bologna Process.

The quality standards set by public institutions are essential element of the assessment and accreditation of study programs, as well as institutional accreditation. Based on these standards, higher education institutions in Albania should offer highly qualified study programs, comparable with similar educational systems in Europe.

The implementation of the Bologna process required the establishment of a national system of quality assurance. There used to be no agreed standard as defined in the Law on Higher Education until 2011. Under these conditions, the implementation of new programs of study for the three cycles is done based on the European Standards and Guidelines for Internal Quality Assurance in Higher Education Institutions and the Law on Higher Education and regulations adopted pursuant to it.

Given that the standards are the main mechanisms of evaluation, quality assurance and certification, this paper aims to address the role they have played in implementing of new programs of study in the higher education institutions.

Keywords: *standard, quality, higher education, program of study, institution*

I- Historical overview on the necessity of setting quality standards in higher education

The signing of the Bologna Declaration on 18 September 2003, made Albania participant to a full process that marked its beginnings in 1999 with a final goal the creation of a European Area of Higher Education from 2010. This act set to our country the obligation to reform higher education based on standards adopted by Member States in this process. This would make the Albanian system of higher education comparable and compatible with other European systems.

The Bologna Declaration identified as one of the fundamental objectives that would result in creating a European Area of Higher Education, the promotion of European cooperation for quality evaluation, with the view of developing comparable criteria and methodologies.

The Lisbon Convention for the recognition of professional qualifications of higher education in the European region, of April 1997, defines in its strategy that quality assurance in higher education is not a European concern only. There is a worldwide growing interest in the quality and standards, reflecting both the intense growth of higher education and its cost to the public and private portfolio. Therefore, if Europe aspires to be the most dynamic economy and based on knowledge, it is for the European higher education to demonstrate that it takes seriously the quality of its programs and degrees, and it is willing to put in practice the assurance and the demonstration of such quality¹.

A set of several objectives, principles and priorities were determined and defined in the Salamanca Convention of European University Association held in March 2001. They would all serve to prepare the input for the next meeting of the responsible Ministers of higher education of the countries involved in the Bologna Process. Quality was defined as the cornerstone of higher education. The way to the creation of the EHEA set the obligation of determining at European level the mechanisms for the mutual recognition of quality assurance results. These mechanisms should have to respect the national, linguistic and disciplinary diversity and to not overload universities.

At the meeting of European Ministers of Higher Education, representing 32 signatories, held in Prague in May 2001, the Ministers recognized the important role played by the systems of maintaining and ensuring quality in achieving high quality standards and in facilitating the comparability of qualifications in Europe. They emphasized that the quality of higher education is and should be an important determinant of international competitiveness and European involvement. This was the reason for requiring an appropriate balance between the internal creation and development of the “quality culture” and the role the procedures could play for external quality assurance when setting the standards and guidelines.

In the Communiqué of the Conference of Ministers of Higher Education in Berlin, in September 2003, it was reaffirmed the importance of the social dimension of the Bologna Process. Quality assurance was in the spotlight at the meeting in which ministers undertook to support the further development of quality assurance at institutional, national and European level, and underlined the need for processing of common criteria and methodologies to ensure quality. It was agreed for such reason that by 2005, the national systems of quality assurance should include:

- A definition of the responsibilities of the responsible bodies and institutions;

¹ *The Bologna Declaration on the European Space for Higher Education:*
<http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/educ/bologna/bologna.pdf>

- Evaluation of programs or institutions, including internal and external assessment, student participation and publication of results;
- A system of accreditation, certification or comparable procedures;
- Participation, collaboration and international networking.

In the Berlin Declaration of the Ministers in charge, it is emphasized that "*in accordance with the principle of institutional autonomy, the primary responsibility for quality assurance in higher education lies in each institution itself and this provides the basis for real accountability of the academic system within the national framework quality*".

The ministers called for ENQA for achieving these goals. The ENQA was given a dual mandate in order to develop "*a system of approved standards, procedures and guidelines on quality assurance*" and "*to explore ways of ensuring an adequate peer review quality assurance and / or accreditation agencies or units*" with the help of its members and in cooperation with EUA, EURASHE and ESIB,

The EHEA is composed by a number of states which are characterized by a large diversity of their political and higher education systems, socio-cultural traditions, education, languages, aspirations and expectations. Therefore, the processing and establishment of mechanisms such as standards and quality assurance should have constituted the minimum requirements to be respected from the member states, in order to enable compliance with these differences.

II- European standards and guidelines for quality assurance

The Declaration of the Association of the European Universities with 13 member states held in Graz in July 2003, which stated that "*the purpose of the European dimension in quality assurance is to promote mutual trust and improve transparency respecting the diversity of national contexts and fields*", served as a starting point for the standardization in the area of higher education. In this area, the Communiqué of the Conference of Ministers Responsible for education in Bergen in 2005 adopted the first document, which sets standards and guidelines for quality assurance in higher education in the EHEA. The setting of these standards as important mechanisms would bring as a consequence that higher education institutions and quality assurance agencies in the EHEA, would be able to use common reference points for quality assurance. Moreover, the setting of such standards would further encourage the introduction of quality assurance methods in higher education and the promotion of European cooperation in this field.

Standards and guidelines are designed in such a way as to be applicable to all higher education institutions and quality assurance agencies in Europe, regardless of function, structure and size, and the national system in which they are located. European standards are organized into three sections covering respectively, the internal quality assurance in higher education institutions, external quality assurance in education, and agencies for external quality assurance. European standards and guidelines for internal quality assurance are focused on the following aspects:

1. Policies and procedures for quality assurance, as per which institutions should have policies and associated procedures for the quality assurance and standards for programs and diplomas issuance. The development of a culture that recognizes the importance of quality and its assurance in the work of institutions plays an important role in respecting and implementing

of this standard. It is emphasized because of the fact that Europe "before Bologna" was not aware of the essential role played by the concept of "quality assurance culture". Just being aware of this fact will lead to the achievement of the promotion of European cooperation in quality evaluation in view of developing comparable criteria and methodologies², which is of one of the objectives of the Bologna process.

2. Approval, monitoring and periodic review of programs and degrees, whose realization requires well designed, monitored and periodically reviewed study programs.
3. Assessment of students who have performed on the basis of criteria, regulations and procedures, published on a regular basis.
4. Quality assurance of teaching staff, whose implementation requires that institutions must have ways of ensuring that the staff involved in teaching is qualified and competent to do so.
5. Learning resources and student support, which requires that institutions should ensure that the resources available to support student learning are adequate and appropriate for each program offered
6. Information systems. Institutions should ensure that they collect, analyze and use relevant information for effective management of their programs of study and other activities.
7. Public information. Institutions should regularly publish impartial, objective, quantitative and qualitative information about the programs and degrees offered.

III- Review of European Standards for Internal Quality Assurance in the Higher Education legislation in the Republic of Albania

Law no. 9741 dated 21.05.2007 "On higher education in RA", imposed to all public institutions of higher education, the task of reorganizing both the internal structure and their study programs in accordance with this law, within a year from the entry into force³. There was a four year gap from the imposing of such obligation to the approval of state standards. This period was necessary to reorganize almost all existing study programs, adapting their organization study cycles with that of the Bologna process.

It is the spirit and principles of ESQA that influences the Law no. 9741 dated 21.05.2007 "On higher education in RA" and all the acts and regulations adopted pursuant to it.

1. Regarding the policies and the procedures for internal quality assurance, the law provides the establishment of structures such as the internal unit of quality assurance which have the task of periodic evaluation of the efficiency of education, research, administrative and financial activities of the institution. Also, the highest governing body of the HEI – the Academic Senate, is charged by law with the assessment, ensuring and the responsibility for internal quality assurance in the institution in accordance with state standards.
2. Approve, monitor and reevaluate periodically the programs and degrees. The implementation of this aspect is provided in great details and very carefully by the legislator. It has been shown care when providing that the official approval for these programs must not come from the group that gives or offers such programs. Thus, drafting a program of study starts from the basic unit (department), it is then approved by the governing body of the main unit-the Faculty Council and the governing body of the HEI, the Academic Senate, and at a later stage

² - *The Bologna Declaration on the European Space for Higher Education:*
<http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/educ/bologna/bologna.pdf>

³ - *Law no. 9741, dated 21.05.2007 "On higher education in RA", as amended, article 83.*

sent to the MES in the form of a proposal. Until year 2010, the proposals were approved by the Council of Ministers, after evaluation of the study program from the Council of Higher Education Accreditation⁴. Legal improvements to this article, provisioned also that the adaptation of programs/profiles studies approved under this law, which does not affect their basic objectives, are proposed by the department and approved by the Council of faculty, after first obtaining the consent of the Academic Senate of the HEI. This provision had a positive impact, as it simplifies the procedures and reduces considerable time limits needed to improve a program of study, approving it with decision making within the HEI. It makes its units more constitutively accountable and more flexible to reflect deficiencies or problems that may arise during the implementation of the curriculum of a particular program of study. The HEI should consult in advance the representatives of businesses, services or respective professions in order to have a reference of market needs and requirements⁵ when developing a curriculum.

3. Student assessment is among the most important elements because it plays a crucial role in the continuation of studies in further cycles of study, as well as in their employment. Regarding compliance with this standard, the MSE guidance⁶ charged HEI-s with the obligation of providing the procedures for evaluating student performance when attending a study program, as well as various forms of knowledge control, etc. all these through appropriate regulations. Further determination of the student's evaluation elements, stands in the evaluation of the institutions themselves. It is essential that in the teaching regulations, HEI-s provides that the evaluation forms to be used in the curriculum must make possible the following: measurement of the learning outcomes, clear and published assessment criteria, the assessment of knowledge to rely on the judgment of more than one person, clear rules and procedures for the organization of examinations, the right of appeal for the exam procedures as well for the examination results, to be subject of administrative control for implementing strictly all the procedures.
4. Providing qualitative academic staff. The teacher is the only and the most important source of learning, available to most of the students.

This aspect consists in two elements:

First, Academic staff should be encouraged to his/her further pedagogical and scientific training; academic staff with lower qualifications should be given the opportunity to improve his/her skills. To achieve this element, the law⁷ has provided the sabbatical year or quarterly

⁴ - Article 22 of the Law no.10307 dated 07.22.2010, changed Article 42 of Law no. 9741 dated 21.05.2007, and the competence of opening new programs of study in all cycles of public higher education or closing them, passed by the Council of Ministers to the Minister of Education and Science, after the request of the higher education institution.

⁵ - Guidance of the Minister of Education and Science no. 15, dated 04.04.2008 "On the organization of studies at public higher education institutions".

⁶ - Guidance of the Minister of Education and Science no. 15, dated 04.04.2008 "On the organization of studies at public higher education institutions".

⁷ - Law no. 9741 dated 21.05.2007 "On Higher Education in RA", as amended, Article 52 "academic staff with titles in the higher education institutions entitled to every seven years, for periods up to a year to work for his academic progress according to the criteria specified in the statute and regulations of the institution, upon approval of the faculty council of the main unit. During this period, academic staff tasked not teaching. Academic staff can attend this year specialization courses up outside the quarterly".

specializations. This disposition in the law, in my opinion, is problematic. The way the provision is formulated is not completely correct as it entitles only the academic staff holding titles such as, "Professor", "Associate Professor" and "Assistant Professor" to benefit from the sabbatical year, or three months specializations. What about that part of the academic staff holding the scientific degree of PHD, Postmaster specializations, or "Master of Science"? How can they benefit or be encouraged to further enhance pedagogical and scientific training, taking into consideration the fact that it is the most integral part of the academic staff and that really has the most pressing need for further training.

Second recruitment of academic staff must be performed based on clear, professional, objective and transparent criteria. The legislator has set transparent legal recruitment procedures of academic staff through public competition. Considering it to be an important aspect in the process of recruitment, in the further legal improvements⁸, the right of determining the winner of a public contest goes directly to the ad-hoc committee set up for this purpose.

5. Learning resources and student support, this requires that institutions should ensure available resources to support adequate and appropriate student learning for each program offered. The elements of this aspect are barely reflected in the Law on Higher Education and mentioned as the right of the students to exploit libraries, computer rooms and other services offered by the institution. In sub-legal acts we can find the provision of orientation and custody activities, which have in their target the orientation of students on study programs offered by the institution, its integral structures, and the services offered to help students, student orientation on the labor market, etc. Other elements for the implementation of this standard are under the jurisdiction of HEI-s themselves, within and respecting the institutional autonomy.
6. Information Systems. Institutions should ensure that they collect, analyze and use relevant information for effective management of their programs of study and other activities. Implementation of this standard is very important for the recognition and self-esteem of a higher education institution, having to do with the progress of students and their success rate, employment after the graduation, the efficiency of programs of study which appears in the rate of acquisition by the students, etc. Overall this is one aspect, the realization of which is under the jurisdiction of HEI-s. Currently, there are career centers that operate at institutional level in several private institutions of higher education such as the European University of Tirana and New York University, while among the public institutions, it is in the University of Tirana only that these centers except that at institutional level, are set up and operate in the faculty level. Their main purpose is to provide best services to students, staff and other interest groups in order to improve the quality of education, have full information on the labor market in terms of the desired job search, the ability to participate in this search in the most professional manner possible, to create links between students and potential employers in order to serve as a source of recruitment for many organizations and institutions, etc.
7. Public Information. Institutions should regularly publish information, impartial and objective, quantitative and qualitative, about the programs and degrees offered. The legislator has

⁸ - Law no. 9741 dated 21.05.2007 "On Higher Education in RA", as amended, Article 50, paragraph 3, "for the appointment of the academic staff, the governing authority of the main unit, presents to the governing authority of the PHEI, the candidate ranked first in the classification made by the ad-hoc public contest, conducted by the managing authority of the main unit. "

provided HEI-s obligation to announce publicly the accredited study programs offered prior to application for admission⁹. Implementation of such obligation, allows prospective students to be oriented clearly to the direction they will take towards knowledge and later career after graduation. The HEI in addition to the above information, are obliged to publish the main acts of their internal organization and functioning of the institution in their official websites, because such processes enable the general public and prospective students to be informed on the profile institutions, infrastructure, student assessment procedures and services offered by the institution.

IV- State standards for quality assessment and accreditation in higher education in Albania and their compliance with the legislation on higher education

The definition of the quality of state standards is an obligation that derives from the Law no. 9741 dated 21.05.2007 "On Higher Education in RA", as amended, under which *the evaluation and accreditation is based on national quality standards. These standards are defined by sublegal acts of the Ministry of Education and Science. The proposals for quality state standards are made by the Council of Higher Education and Science in cooperation with the Public Agency for Higher Education Accreditation, supported also in the guidance of the Quality Assurance in the European Area of Higher Education.*¹⁰

State Quality Standards for Higher Education in the Republic of Albania and the State Quality Standards¹¹ for assessment and accreditation of first, second and third cycles programs were approved by the Minister of Education and Science in 2011 only. These standards help higher education institutions to have access to the procedures, results and their potential. State standards of quality, as basic mechanisms for the assessment and accreditation in our institutions of higher education should have the characteristics of being enforceable and applicable, explicit and concrete, because ultimately they are the parameters intended to be achieved by the HEI in order to have same levels with the international universities.

It should be noted that the ESQA relate to the three cycles of study in higher education outlined in the Bologna Declaration only, and are not intended to cover the field of research or general institutional management. While State Standards reflect in a comprehensive and detailed way all aspects of principles and standards required by the European Quality Assurance Standards, and have gone even further. We come to this conclusion because, beside the chapter covering the "Study programs", there are also included two other chapters dealing with the definition standards on scientific activity and management of the institution with the aim of fulfilling its function.

From an overview of SQSHE, it is noted that the provisions of law and regulations in force are reflected as standards. Being formulated in such a way, it is not easy to be understood by the implementers what is the purpose of establishing this standard and which ways should be followed to achieve it. Standards should come in harmony and in full compliance with the Law

⁹ - Law no. 9741 dated 21.05.2007 "On Higher Education in RA", as amended, Article 25/3.

¹⁰ - Law no. 9741 dated 21.05.2007 "On Higher Education in RA", as amended, Article 61.

¹¹ - Order of the Minister of Education and Science no. 126 dated 17.03.2011 "On the approval of state standards of quality for institutional evaluation and accreditation of higher education institutions" and Orders nr. 134, dated 21.03.2011, nr. 135 dated 21.03.2012 and nr. 136, dated 21.03.2012.

on Higher Education and all regulations adopted pursuant to it. In some standards, are used terms like "policy" or "institution has a policy", without defining clearly what kind of policy. Normally, the general policies in higher education are made by the Ministry of Education and Science, as this is the responsible executive institution entitled to do so¹², because it is the government that makes the policy and not the implementer, who are HEI-s. From an overall analysis, there are contradictions between legal and sub-legal provisions that regulate various aspects of the organization and functioning of higher education institutions. Setting of some standards is done in contrary of the principle of university autonomy and academic freedom, enshrined in Article 57, paragraph 7, of the RA Constitution and recognized by the Higher Education Law, Article 3, paragraph 1, according to which *the autonomy of higher education institutions and academic freedom are guaranteed by law*. We get to this conclusion because in the State Standards of the Third Cycle of Studies, the legal provisions regarding the HEI-s autonomous right to determine on their own the criteria for the admission of students in study programs¹³ are exceeded. The Law on Higher Education in its Article 34, provides that the acceptance criteria in the third cycle, is defined in the HEI-s statutes and recommendations CHES. By setting as the only admission criteria the results achieved by the applicant in the second cycle of studies, it is also omitted the assessment results for the first cycle of studies, which ultimately has to do with the basic educational formation of the future dissertate. This definition is also inconsistent with the Directive no. 21 dated 30.07.2009 "On the procedure of admission and enrollment in doctoral study programs in HEI-s", paragraph 4, which states that the main units of PHEI, determines the acceptance criteria of the candidates, after the preliminary opinion of the Council of Professors and makes them public in advance. Another criterion in this standard contrary to the law on higher education is criterion no. 4, which requires that the student must hold an international certificate for the English language, at least of "C1" level. The Higher Education Law, Article 26, paragraph 1.3.1, paragraph "c", provides that *institutions of higher education establish qualifying standards and criteria for the recognition of the English language, on the basis of internationally recognized tests*.

On these basic principles of organization and functioning of higher education institutions, the Constitutional Court Decision no. 9/2008 has provided the following motivation:

"The direct sanctioning in the Constitution of the autonomy of educational institutions and scientific and academic freedom constitutes an obligation for the legislator to limit his powers on their activities in the field of research and teaching".

¹² - Constitution's Article 100, paragraph 1, *"the Council of Ministers determines the main directions of the state's overall policy."*

¹³ - Law no. 9741 dated 21.05.2007 "On Higher Education in RA", as amended, Article 23, paragraph 2, letter "c" provides that *the autonomy of higher education institutions in the state have the right to set criteria for accepting students in programs studies. Order of the Minister of Education and Science no. 136 dated 21.03.2011 "On the approval of state standards for quality assessment and accreditation of study programs of the third cycle of higher education institutions", Chapter I, I.3 Standard, criterion 1, provides that "A student accepted in the doctoral program of study has been graduated with an average grade (> 80% of points) second cycle studies and earned a university degree "Master of Science"/"Master of Fine Arts" or an equivalent degree after completing university studies that include a scientific thesis award ECTS 30-40.*

"Since higher education is a public service, the controlling competences on universities may be delegated to the executive power bodies, but these powers should be balanced and proportionate, so that their exercise does not affect the autonomy of higher education institutions that is the essence of self-government, and to contribute to the positive development of bilateral relations".

"Exercising of the decision-making power, constitutes an expression of the effectiveness of the institutional autonomy and the state intervention at this essential aspect will bring difficulties in implementing the law and would violate constitutional standards of this academic freedom and autonomy."

Another criterion that should be taken into account when drafting the standards, is respecting the regulations adopted pursuant to the Law on Higher Education. It is important to note this aspect since there are some criteria that exceed the decrees of the Council of Ministers, which regulate specific aspects of scientific training or research programs.

In order to assure that the institution has in place a policy of assessing the capabilities of its staff, the criterion that *a minimum experience or academic research of at least 1 year at a Western university¹⁴ is imposed, as a prerequisite for the promotion to the title of "Professor"*. This criterion comes in excess of DCM no. 467 dated 18.07.2007 "On establishment of criteria and procedures for scientific and pedagogical qualifications of the academic staff", item 2.3, subparagraph 2.3.1, paragraph "c", which provides that *the candidate who intends to promote for the title "Professor" must have a teaching or research experience of at least one year in a teaching and research institution abroad.*

Bearing in mind that this document was adopted on 21.03.2011, it is noted that in the criterion nr.5 of Standard II.5, the requirements to be met by the candidate to receive his /her degree, are not in accordance with the DCM no. 864 dated 05.12.2007 "Doctoral study programs in HEI-s and determining the requirements to be met by the student for graduation for the scientific degree "Doctor", as well as the changes that were made to it by the DCM no. 593 dated 18.08.2012.

Other problems that are observed in these documents are:

Chapter V, Standard V.1, Criterion 1, determines that the Higher Education Institution must provide for teaching purposes, buildings constructed or reconstructed with contemporary and qualitative materials which meet the hygiene and sanitary conditions for the students, academic and administrative staff, avoiding dangerous components.

It is also determined the criteria for the normative standard used area per student being of 3.8-4.0 m/student (minimum) up to 7.5-8.0 m/student (maximum). The achievement of these criteria by public institutions of higher education depends on the funds and assets available to it from the state budget or otherwise from its own revenues.

The total number of personnel in each PHEI-s is determined by the Minister of Education and Science¹⁵. But at the same time, in the SQSHE for the first and the second study cycle in HEI-s, it is defined as a standard for the academic staff employed full time in the institution that it must constitute at least 70% of the academic staff engaged in the implementation of the first

¹⁴ - *Order of the Minister of Education and Science No. 126 dated 17.03.2011 "On the approval of state standards of quality for institutional assessment and accreditation of higher education institutions", Chapter IV "Human Resource Management" Standard IV.3, criterion no.1.*

¹⁵ - *Law no. 9741 dated 21.05.2007 "On Higher Education in RA", as amended, article 47/4.*

and second program cycle¹⁶. Setting such standards is part of the policy and strategy pursued by the executive power for the higher education, and can not in any way be part of the decision making powers of the institution from the moment that the number of its employees is determined by MES, and it may be that the number of full-time teacher overcome those being on contract. Achieving this standard in PHEI-s is not part of the institution's policy, but it's an obligation for the executive.

CONCLUSIONS:

State standards for quality assessment and accreditation are key tools for the assessment and accreditation of study programs as well as the institutions of higher education in Albania. They represent targeted parameters to be achieved by all higher education institutions in Albania, in order for the study programs they offer to be consistent, qualitative and comparable to other systems of higher education in Europe.

Challenges that lie ahead to all the HEI-s in Albania are to achieve these standards, so that within the EHEA: all the academic staff have knowledge and assessment studies conducted in the context of European research, teaching or training, for the students to have access to study, to qualify and to recognize them.

The institutions of the executive power and the policies they make and to a small extent the public institutions of higher education themselves, in compliance with the legislation in force have the key role in achieving these standards by the PHEI-s.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

State standards of quality for institutional assessment and accreditation as well as study programs of all levels, should come in full compliance with Law no. 9741, dated 21.05.2007 "On education in RA", as amended, and all regulations issued pursuant to it. In my opinion, the state standards define the mandatory minimum level for opening of study programs, their accreditation or institutional accreditation.

All policies defined and applied by the executive related to the activity and functioning of the HEI-s, and particularly of the public ones, should be such as to facilitate the implementation and achievement of such standards.

Higher education institutions should use all the opportunities and gaps provided by legislation to find the means and the safest ways to achieve these standards.

References:

1. Law no. 8417, dated 21.10.1998 "The Constitution of the Republic of Albania", as amended.
2. Law no. 9741, dated 21.05.2007 "On higher education in RA", as amended.
3. Convention "On recognition of qualifications in higher education in the European region" Lisbon, April 11, 1997 - ETS 165 <http://conventions.coe.int>
4. The Bologna Declaration on the European Space for Higher Education: <http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/educ/bologna/bologna.pdf>
5. "Bologna in 7 Steps", edition of the "Open Society for Albania" Soros, Tirana 2004.

¹⁶ - *Orders of the Minister of Education and Science no. 134, dated 21.03.2011, no. 135 dated 21.03.2012 and no. 136, dated 21.03.2012.*

6. Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education <http://www.aaal.edu.al/sq/standartet-ne-al.html>.
7. DCM 467 dated 18.07.2007 "On establishment of criteria and procedures for scientific and pedagogical qualifications, academic staff", as amended.
8. DCM 864 dated 05.12.2007 "On opening the doctoral study programs in HEI-s and determining the requirements to be met by the student for graduation for the scientific degree" Doctor ", as amended.
9. Guidance of the Minister of Education and Science no. 49, dated 23.11.2007 "On the organization of studies in the form of part-time study and the measures to be taken for its implementation in the first cycle of studies".
10. Guidance of the Minister of Education and Science no. 04, dated 22.01.2008 "On opening, closing and reorganization of academic programs Master Level One and Two."
11. Guidance of the Minister of Education and Science no. 15, dated 04.04.2008 "On the organization of studies at public institutions of higher education."
12. Guidance of the Minister of Education and Science no. 21, dated 30.07.2009 "On the procedure of admission and enrollment in doctoral study programs at public institutions of higher education."
13. Guidance of the Minister of Education and Science no. 05, dated 22.01.2008 "On the determination of the required academic standards for opening, closing and reorganization of doctoral study programs as well as the basic elements upon which higher education institutions must prepare regulations".
14. Order of the Minister of Education and Science no. 126 dated 17.03.2011 "On the approval of state standards of quality for institutional evaluation and accreditation of higher education institutions" <http://www.aaal.edu.al/sq/standartet-ne-al.html>.
15. Order of the Minister of Education and Science no. 134, dated 21.03.2011 "On the approval of state standards for quality assessment and accreditation of study programs of the first cycle of higher education institutions" <http://www.aaal.edu.al/sq/standartet-ne-al.html>.
16. Order of the Minister of Education and Science no. 135 dated 21.03.2012 "On the approval of state standards for quality assessment and accreditation of study programs of the second cycle of higher education institutions" <http://www.aaal.edu.al/sq/standartet-ne-al.html>.
17. Order of the Minister of Education and Science no. 136, dated 21.03.2011 "On the approval of state standards for quality assessment and accreditation of study programs of the third cycle of higher education institutions" <http://www.aaal.edu.al/sq/standartet-ne-al.html>.
18. Regulation of Tirana University, approved by the Academic Senate, Decision no. 5, dated 12.04.2010 - <http://www.unitir.edu.al/>

Abbreviations:

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| EHEA - | European Higher Education Area |
| ENQA - | European Association for Quality Assurance |
| EUA - | European University Association |
| EURASHE - | European Association of Institutions in Higher Education |
| ESIB - | National Unions of Students in Europe |
| MES- | Ministry of Education and Science |
| DCM- | Decree of the Council of Ministers Decision |
| HEI- | Higher Education Institution |
| PHEI- | Public Higher Education Institution |

ESQA- European Standards of Quality Assurance
SQSHE- State Quality Standards of Higher Education
CHES- Council of Higher Education and Sciences