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Newsletter



QFORTE
*Fortifying higher education quality in Moldova.
No boundaries for quality*

PROJECT IDENTIFICATION

Acronym: QFORTE (Enhancement of Quality Assurance in Higher Education System in Moldova)

Type of the project: National/Structural project

Total Budget: € 992.363,00

Project`s period: 15/11/2020 – 14/11/2023 (36 months)

Coordinating institution: Moldova State University

Link: <https://qforte.usm.md/>

Reference number:

(618742-EPP-1-2020-1-MD-EPPKA2-CBHE-SP)

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Why QFORTE PROJECT?

One of the key factors that will enable Europe to succeed in global competition is the quality of European education, especially, of the higher education. The responsibility for quality assurance lies largely with higher education institutions, which is why various quality improvement policies and guidelines have been developed. Some of them were to promote the revision of the European diploma recognition structure, to encourage the mobility of students, teachers and to promote transparency within the institutions.

QFORTE will seek to ensure that the views of the university sector are taken into account at national-level policy discussions on internal and external quality assurance. It also will support its members in developing internal quality systems and aims to promote institutional quality cultures.

The project will target representatives of ministries responsible for higher education, representatives of quality assurance agencies, promoters of the Bologna process at national level, university rectors and higher education institutions managers.



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Message from the Rector of the Moldova State University

IGOR ŞAROV

PhD, Assoc. Prof.

Dear rectors, lectors, students and partners of the QFORTE project,

The concept of quality assurance in higher education formulated by the Bologna Declaration as a premise for the achievement of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) is one of the basic priorities of the reforms in our country. The establishment of a solid quality assurance system in the Republic of Moldova higher education institutions will continue to be an important guarantee that the study programs offered by higher education institutions meet the highest standards in terms of quality, education and research, the quality of education being an indispensable condition for improving the employment, social cohesion and economic competitiveness.

Being based on rigorous international standards, which comprise the entire portfolio of Bologna Process issues, the concept of higher education quality insurance is one of the main priorities of the academic community in the Republic of Moldova in the near future in order to ensure a high degree of international transparency which is meant to allow the recognition of university qualifications in the European Higher Education Area.

- The implementation of higher education reforms concerning the internal and external quality assurance requires a substantial effort from all actors in the process of developing a culture of quality throughout the national education system.



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- At this stage, substantial efforts have been made in the field of external quality evaluations of undergraduate and master's degree programs, but the process of external quality evaluation has not started for institutional accreditations so far.

- The QFORTE project fits perfectly into the initiated reforms by involving many educational actors, such as rectors and vice-rectors, deans and vice-deans, heads of departments, internal and external quality assurance structures, students.

- QFORTE will seek to ensure that university policies are taken into consideration at national-level policy discussions on internal and external quality assurance. It will also support its members in developing internal quality assurance systems and aims to promote the institutional quality culture.

The key activities of the QFORTE project are expected to result in:

- international institutional accreditation of five national universities;
- improvement of the methodology of external quality assessment for institutional accreditation;
- external quality assessment of joint higher education programs based on the European experience in the field;
- development of quality guidelines;
- enhancing the capacity of internal quality assurance structures;
- promotion of the national quality culture.

I am firmly convinced that quality assurance leads to mutual trust, increased mobility and the proper functioning of the recognition of qualifications and diplomas within the EHEA, and the QFORTE project will make a key contribution to promoting the culture of quality at the national level.



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OVERALL OBJECTIVE:

To contribute to deeper integration of Moldova into EHEA through the enhancing of quality assurance in higher education system

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES:

- To promote and strengthen the Quality Assurance culture in Moldova and to build national consensus of the key-actors on the development issues by November 2023.
- To develop and advance a national legislative framework and stimulate regulatory changes on Quality Assurance in HEIs in Moldova by November 2023.
- To enhance the Quality Assurance management of HEIs in Moldova through International institutional accreditation by November 2023.
- To build the institutional capacities of higher education institutions (HEIs) in Moldova for efficient and effective implementation of Quality Assurance (QA) reform by November 2023.

OUTPUTS & EXPECTED OUTCOMES

National level

- Recommendations for reforming the national Methodology on institutional QA accreditation developed;
- Developed amendments to the Code of Education of the Republic of Moldova;
- Developed evaluation procedures for accreditation of joint programs;
- Developed QA institutional external evaluation guide.



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University level

- University strategies for QA development elaborated and adopted at each institution PCUs;
- QA manuals modernized at each national university involved in the project;
- Action plans for further QA consolidation elaborated after passing the international accreditation (sustainability of the project);
- The methodology of external institutional QA evaluation of HEIs applied;
- Active online platform for institutional QA external evaluation.

Moldovan society

- Developed QA culture in Moldova;
- National consensus of the key-actors on QA;
- Advancement of the national legislative framework on QA in Moldova;
- Enhanced QA management of HEIs in Moldova through international institutional accreditation.



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WORKING PACKAGES

WP1. Preparation

A1.1.2/ Elaboration of the Project's Handbook

A1.1.3/ Elaboration and signature of Partnership Agreements

A1.2.1/ Development and completion of Quality Assurance (QA) evaluation questionnaires

A1.2.2/ Elaboration of country profile

WP2. Development and advancement of national legislative framework on QA

A2.1.1/ Setting up the National Policy Task Force on QA (NPTF)

A2.1.2/ Country workshops on QA development

A2.1.3/ Study visit on institutional QA development at system level (members of the NPTF from Republic of Moldova)

A2.2.1/ Elaboration and adoption of QA tools

A2.2.1.1/ Recommendations for reforming the national methodology on institutional QA accreditation

A2.2.1.2/ Amendments to the Code of Education of the Republic of Moldova

A2.2.1.3/ Adoption and publishing of evaluation procedures for accreditation of joint programs and final

A2.4.2/ Translation, publishing of the institutional QA External evaluation guide

WP3. Advancement of university integrative function on QA

A3.1.1/ Setting up the university QA working groups (UQA)

A3.1.2/ Study visit on UQA strategy development (University of Montpellier/ FRANCE)

A3.1.2/ Study visit on UQA strategy development (study visit to the University of Salamanca / SPAIN)

A3.1.2/ Study visit on UQA strategy development (study visit to the Leipzig University / GERMANY)

A3.1.3/ Development, adoption of institutional QA strategies (including the Action Plan)



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A3.3.1/ Training seminars on QA development and International institutional accreditation

A3.3.2/ Developing the application for international accreditation

WP4. Enhancement of institutional capacities for implementation of QA reform

A4.1.1/ Training seminars for university staff on institutional QA implementation

A4.1.2/ Consolidation of the university structures for QA

A4.1.3/ Acquisition, installation of the equipment

A4.2/ Elaboration of the Action Plan following the external evaluation reports on institutional accreditation

WP5. Quality plan

A5.1.1/ Elaboration of monitoring & evaluation manual

A5.2/ Elaboration of advisory recommendations

A5.3/ Fine tuning of procedures and regulations

A5.4/ External financial audit

WP6. Dissemination, exploitation and impact maximization

A6.1.1/ Elaboration of project`s dissemination strategy

A6.1.2/ Design of project`s identity, promo materials & web page

A6.1.3/ Launching and concluding conferences

A6.2.1/ Country workshops

A6.2.2/ Mass-media dissemination

A6.3.1/ Institutional dissemination events

A6.3.2/ Publication of articles

A6.4/ TG satisfaction survey

WP7. Project management

A7.1.1/ Day by day project coordination

A7.1.2/ Consortium meetings

A7.1.3/ Interim & Final reports



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The first Consortium Meeting of the QFORTE project

During pandemics, setting up a project can be a challenge. Most of the activities that are usually organized offline have been transferred to online. The first meeting of the Consortium took place on February 19, 2020. The session was opened by Prof. PhD Otilia Dandara and Dr. Claudia Melinte, Coordinator of the National Erasmus + Office in Moldova with a welcome speech. The meeting was attended by representatives of 7 higher education institutions from the Republic of Moldova, representatives of ANACEC, of the Ministry of Education and Research and 5 institutions from the European Union that formed a partnership in order to facilitate the integration of the Republic of Moldova in the EHEA.

Moldovan partners

- Moldova State University (USM) – coordinator
- Academy of Economic Studies Moldova (ASEM)
- Balti State University (USARB)
- Cahul State University (USC)
- Comrat State University (KDU)
- Academy of Music, Theatre and Fine Arts (AMTAP)
- University of Political and Economic European Studies (USPEE)
- National Agency for Quality Assurance in Education and Research (ANACEC)

EU partners

- University of Montpellier, FRANCE (UM) -UM
- University of Salamanca, SPAIN (ES)- USAL
- Leipzig University, GERMANY (DE) – ULEI
- European Policy Development and Research Institute, Maribor, SLOVENIA (EPDRI)
- Central and Eastern European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (CEENQA)



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During the meeting, the members of the consortium discussed the organization of the project, the project management structures, the work packages and financial allocations reaching a common denominator regarding the promotional materials, the project logo and the structure of the website (<https://qforte.usm.md/>).

The partners agreed on the objectives and the expected results following the completion of the program which will take place on November 14, 2023. The session ended with the signing of the partnership agreements.



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❖ **The first study visit within the QFORTE project of the Erasmus + Programme, supported by the European Commission**

The first online study visit took place on 11-15 June 2021. The visit was organized by CEENQA / Germany and led by the National Agency for Quality Assurance in Education and Research (ANACEC). The rector of the Moldova State University (USM), PhD Assoc. Prof. Igor Sharov, the president of ANACEC, PhD., Assoc. Prof. Andrei Chiciuc and PhD Assoc. Prof. Olgun Çiçek the representative of the Central and Eastern European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (CEENQA) inaugurated the first day of the visit.

The study visit examined good practices in external quality assurance from Slovenia presented by Nataša Kramar, Deputy Head of the Slovenian Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (NAKVIS), in Northern Cyprus presented by Olgun Çiçek and Germany presented by the project manager of the Accreditation Agency for Study Programmes in Engineering, Informatics, Natural Sciences and Mathematics (ASIIN) and the CEENQA Secretary General, Jan Philipp Engelmann. The head of the international department of NAKVIS, Klemen Šubic reported on how to transform an accreditation system from programme to institutional accreditation.

Finally, Jan Philipp Engelmann referred to the actions needed to keep programme and institutional accreditation side-by-side followed by a guided discussion on how to prepare for institutional accreditation.



❖ **Second Consortium meeting of QFORTE project**

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On 3rd of September 2021, the second Consortium was organized by MSU - coordinating institution. Ms. Nadejda Velişco, QFORTE project coordinator, welcomed the partners of the project and presented information on the workshop that was to take place on September 30, 2021.

The meeting also involved the analysis of the results obtained and the discussion of the next action steps until December 2021, which were presented and submitted by PhD Assoc. Prof. Irina Gîncu, USM institutional coordinator. Among the achieved objectives are the establishment of university QA working groups, the elaboration and signing of partnership agreements, the organization of the first Consortium and others.

In this context, the need to organize study visits to partner universities such as the University of Montpellier, France and the University of Salamanca, Spain was also highlighted. Rodica Crudu, PhD Assoc. Prof., institutional coordinator of the Academy of Economic Studies of Moldova presented the communication and dissemination strategies of the QFORTE project. QFORTE co-coordinator, PhD Assoc. Prof. Olesea Sârbu concluded the meeting with an analysis of the granted budget of the project.

❖ **QFORTE Workshop *National policies in the development of institutional quality assurance systems***

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On 30th of September, 2021, a workshop on national policies in the development of institutional quality assurance systems in a hybrid format (both online and offline) was held at the Moldova State University, attended by representatives of seven educational institutions: USM, ASEM, USARB, US Cahul, US Comrat, USPEE, AMTAP and the ANACEC. Also representatives of the external partners: University of Montpellier, France, University of Salamanca, Spain, University of Leipzig, Germany, European Institute for Policy Development and Research in Maribor, Slovenia and Network Central and Eastern European Quality Assurance Agencies attended the workshop online.

Also, there were invited other national universities. As a result, representatives of 11 non-partner universities joined the workshop and participated in discussions.



Mr. Igor Șarov, PhD. Assoc. Prof., rector of the Moldova State University mentioned that the concept of quality assurance of higher education is one of the main priorities of both the Moldova State University and the academic community of the Republic of Moldova in order to ensure a high degree of international transparency, meant to allow the recognition of university qualifications in EHEA. "I am convinced that this activity, even under hybrid conditions, will lead to the improvement of external quality assessment procedures for the purpose of institutional accreditation, as well as the obtaining of international institutional accreditations by national universities."



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CEENQA representatives, Jan Philipp Engelmann and Natasa Kramar spoke about good practices in institutional accreditation in the EHEA. PhD Lilia Parhomenco, senior consultant at the Ministry of Education and Research of the Republic of Moldova together with PhD Victoria Reinhardt (University of Leipzig), PhD Juan Manuel Corchado Rodríguez (University of Salamanca) and PhD Nadia Lagarde (University of Montpellier) presented their views about the national system of quality assurance in the higher education and the challenges to encounter.

The head of the department of the National Agency for Quality Assurance in Education and Research, PhD Felicia Banu, presented the current methodology and the guide for the external institutional evaluation used by ANACEC.

Finally, the recommendations and opinions of the partners for the improvement of the external quality assessment procedures for the purpose of institutional accreditation were totaled.



More about project activities you can find out on:

- ❖ The official site of QFORTE:

<https://qforte.usm.md/>

- ❖ QFORTE project links of partner universities:

<https://mec.gov.md/ro/content/erasmus>

<https://anacec.md/ro/projects>

<https://uspee.md/proiecte/qforte/>

<https://bri.ase.md/enhancement-of-quality-assurance-in-higher-education-system-in-moldova-qforte/>

[https://kdu.md/ru/nauka-i-mezhdunarodnye-](https://kdu.md/ru/nauka-i-mezhdunarodnye-svyazi/proekty/proekt-qforte)

[svyazi/proekty/proekt-qforte](https://kdu.md/ru/nauka-i-mezhdunarodnye-svyazi/proekty/proekt-qforte)

<https://amtap.md/ro/qforte/>

<https://www.ceenqa.org/projects/qforte-enhancement-of-quality-assurance-in-higher-education-system-in-moldova/>.

<https://epdri.com/index.php/projects/>

<https://bisite.usal.es/es/investigacion/proyectos/internacionales>

<https://usarb.md/despre-qforte/>

<https://proiecte.usch.md/despre-qforte/>

[https://www.sozphil.uni-](https://www.sozphil.uni-leipzig.de/fakultaet/studienbuero/#collapse593141)

[leipzig.de/fakultaet/studienbuero/#collapse593141](https://www.sozphil.uni-leipzig.de/fakultaet/studienbuero/#collapse593141)

<https://www.umontpellier.fr/international/projets-internationaux>

QFORTE- The new project that opens new academic perspectives

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