**International Institutional Accreditation for Five National Universities**

As a result of the external quality assessment process with a view to accreditation, five Moldovan universities were granted international institutional accreditation for a period of 5 years by the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS), within the ERASMUS+, QFORTE project, co-financed by the European Commission:

- Moldova State University

- Academy of Economic Studies of Moldova

- State University "Alecu Russo” from Balti

- State University "Bogdan Petriceicu Hasdeu" from Cahul

- Academy of Music, Theater and Fine Arts

The preparation process towards external quality assessment for institutional accreditation was part of the ERASMUS+ project, QFORTE, and lasted more than 2 years.

The mentioned national universities benefited from the good practices and experience in quality assurance from the QFORTE project partners: Central and Eastern European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies CEENQA, University of Leipzig (Germany), University of Montpellier (France); University of Salamanca (Spain).

During this period of time, the universities participated in study visits to European universities (about 130 people), developed and approved institutional quality assurance strategies (7 strategies), strengthened their quality departments. Trainings on the learned lessons and international experience were organized for over 200 academics.

At the same time, ARACIS organized trainings for QA departments’ staff in order to prepare self-evaluation reports, which were subsequently submitted. The higher education institutions were evaluated in the period May-June 2023 by the evaluation commissions within ARACIS.

During the evaluation process, ARACIS analyzed the compliance of the managerial, administrative, teaching and research activities, as well as the learning and research environments of the higher education institutions with the legislation and with its objectives and development plan. The purpose of institutional accreditation is to support the development of strategic management and quality culture that values ​​the focus on learning, creativity and innovation in the higher education institution, as well as to increase the impact of education, research and development provided by higher education institutions on society in assembly.

Some of the recommendations addressed to the evaluated higher education institutions are:

- Higher education institutions should maintain and further invest in infrastructure and equipment when their own resources and any other funds allow;

- Higher education institutions should focus on maintaining the current situation and manage its resources to maintain the functioning of the system that in an optimal situation responds to the needs of students, employees and external partners, also focusing on further diversification and development (development of new education, online learning and e-learning programs);

- Higher education institutions are encouraged to continue efforts to correlate scientific research with economic and societal needs and requirements, to identify and support long-term research development, including through inter- and trans-disciplinary approaches.

- Higher education institutions should continue their intentions to be more visible and known internationally by increasing the number of students (and staff) who are on mobility in other higher education institutions in Moldova and other countries, through encouraging more doctoral students for mobility, including strengthening the institution's language policy by offering foreign language courses at all faculties.

- To create a true climate of quality culture, institutions are encouraged to do so more actively promoting the purpose and benefits of quality assurance procedures to both staff and students.

In conclusion, the universities in the Republic of Moldova that have been granted international institutional accreditation confirm that they have developed this culture of quality, they are creative and innovative, have a positive image on the labour market, develop good cooperative relations with employers, and academic staff are part of international networks and research activities and can serve as reference points for other national educational institutions.