

CONTEXT FOR THE NATIONAL DATA: BULGARIA

After the fall of the totalitarian regime in 1989, the system of higher education in Bulgaria experienced significant changes including increased academic autonomy, appearance of market-influenced programs, introduction of the bachelor-master-doctor educational structure, incorporation of the professional higher institutes - now colleges – into the overall higher education system, establishment of a national agency for evaluation and accreditation of higher education and the appearance of a private sector. In the first decade after the political changes, the higher education system expanded fast, with student numbers rising by roughly 40 percent. Since 2000, the government has initiated a gradual decrease of student enrollments, justified by demographic predictions.

As of academic 2003/2004, 228,468 students are in 92 universities and colleges, of which 78 are state and 14 private. Circa 70 percent of all students are enrolled full-time, and 52 percent are female. The Bulgarian system of higher education has a hierarchical binary structure with universities and specialized institutes in the university sector and colleges in the nonuniversity sector. Most of the 30 institutions from the university sector that existed before 1989, of which three were comprehensive universities and the remaining were institutes of higher education specializing in one or two particular fields, are still functioning. After the political changes, many of these institutions adopted university status. Higher education degree programs include specialist (a professional degree offered at colleges), bachelor, master, doctor and doctor of sciences.

The history of private higher education in Bulgaria predates the communist period: in 1924 the first private Free University for Political and Economic Studies was established. The communist regime eliminated private initiatives and placed higher education under the control of the state. Shortly after 1989, the private sector grew quickly although not to the same size as in other post-communist states. Of the five private universities and six independent colleges established initially, one – the Slavic University in Sofia - existed for four years before being closed by

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Parliament in 1999. In 2003/2004, students in the private sector accounted for approximately 14 percent of all students in the country.

In Bulgaria, the state regulates higher education through Parliament and the Council of Ministers. The development of the whole sector is guided by the 1995 Higher Education Law and its consequent numerous changes and amendments, and the 1972 Law on Academic Degrees and Titles which still dates from the communist period. Issues concerning university staff follow the Labour Code. Financing of state institutions of higher education is directed by the Law on the Construction of the State Budget and the annual Law on the State Budget. State policy is executed through the Ministry of Education and Science. A specialised state organ for the evaluation and the accreditation of the quality of education is the National Evaluation and Accreditation Agency created at the end of 1996.

The major source of funding for the overall state sector of higher education is the state budget. Since 1999/2000, annual student tuition fees, determined each year by the Council of Ministers, have become a second major source of revenue. State institutions of higher education may also rely on finances from the regional authorities. A very small portion of their funds comes also from donors and sponsors as well as from research, consulting, art, medical, and sport activities and ownership rights. The private sector is financially autonomous from the state. Private institutions have the responsibility to raise funds from tuitions fees – which are their major source of funding and which are higher than those in the public sector – and from foreign donors and programs. Although private institutions do not receive state funding, the state approves of the total number of students to be admitted there. State subsidy is dependent on accreditation – non-accredited institutions or programs lose their right to admit and educate students.