



The Bulgarian academic profession in transition

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Abstract. In this essay I analyze the current status of the academic profession in Bulgaria at a time of difficult socio-economic transition. After providing a brief overview of the historical development of Bulgarian academia, I discuss faculty working conditions, the career path within the profession and the legal framework for the professoriate. Numerous problems with respect to finances, institutional infrastructure and legal environment challenge the status quo of the Bulgarian faculty. The essay closes by highlighting the future key issues for the academic profession that focus around its financial viability, difficulties in recruiting a new generation of scholars, the quality of teaching and learning, and faculty entrepreneurship.

Keywords: Bulgaria, higher education/universities, faculty/academic profession, teaching and learning, transition

This chapter examines the current status and workings of the Bulgarian academic profession in a period of dramatic transition. The difficult passage in postcommunist Bulgaria to liberal democracy, a civil society, and a market economy has been under way now for more than a decade. The 1989 abolition of the totalitarian regime restored academic freedom, at the same time sweeping away overnight values that had guided Bulgarian academic life for close to half a century. At present, the Bulgarian professoriate is facing enormous challenges – including problems with respect to institutional infrastructure and financial support, faculty remuneration levels, academic legal structure, recruitment of a new generation of scholars, demands for professional accountability, and the legacy of socialist science and education. At the same time, the new reality offers various opportunities for international cooperation and entrepreneurial initiative.

Historical development

Political intervention and bureaucratic norms

In comparison with other European states, Bulgaria's academic system is not old; its first university – the St. Kliment Ohridski University of Sofia – was founded in 1888.¹ During its relatively short history, the academic system quickly expanded in numbers of students, faculty, programs, and institutions –

its evolution marked by strongly centralized governance and frequent political intervention. The state and its fluctuating political commitments have exerted an inordinate amount of influence on the development of higher education, often at the expense of the system. Higher education policy suffered greatly from the lack of stable, long-term planning strategies, which resulted in rather unpredictable changes at the national level.

St. Kliment Ohridski University of Sofia was established 10 years after the liberation of Bulgaria from five centuries of Turkish rule. The university symbolized Bulgaria's new intellectual autonomy and over the years came to serve as an important motor in the modernization of the country. Its four regular and three visiting faculty members – all of whom were men – were the founders of the Bulgarian academic profession. It was at Sofia University that the scientific titles of professor, docent, lecturer, and assistant were established; the academic criteria for promotion evolved, with equal prominence given to research and teaching (a feature revealing the strong influence of the German university); and faculty-based administration through the academic council took root. Throughout the institution's history, government incursions into institutional autonomy resulted in clashes between the university community, the central administrative organs, and the Bulgarian government. Nevertheless, faculty members enjoyed growing public prestige for their work and for the status of their occupation. The communist regime came to power in 1944. With it, political and bureaucratic control over the academic system reached new heights, stifling academic freedom and institutional autonomy. The Communist Party imposed controls on teaching subjects and content. Research was taken out of the schools of higher education and placed in separate institutions. Teaching staff were appointed in accordance with political beliefs, all at the expense of academic standards. Universities and institutes operated in a uniform framework with the goal of producing a highly qualified workforce for a centrally planned economy. At the same time, during the communist period, the academic system expanded, with increased opportunities for access.

The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 also signaled an end to communism in Bulgaria. The political changes were accompanied by immediate attempts to reform the academic system. Until then, higher education had a hierarchical, binary structure comprising establishments of higher learning, universities, institutes and academies, and postsecondary institutes comparable to the German *Fachhochschulen* or some British colleges (Veld, Fuessel and Neave 1996). As of 1989, there were 33 universities, institutes, and academies and 45 postsecondary institutions (Ministry of Education 1992). All of these institutions were public. Students numbered 170,000, as compared to 85,000 in 1962 (Dimitrov and Toshev 2001).

Academic reform initiatives in the 1990s

Understandably, university autonomy emerged as a central issue after the fall of communism. The first noticeable change within the institutions was the immediate disappearance not only of ideological subjects and content but also of the Communist Party secretaries positioned as observers throughout all university structures. In 1990, the law on academic autonomy was passed. This law – a creation of the first postcommunist democratic government – opened a Pandora's box for higher education by providing universities with numerous freedoms such as the right to define their organizational structures (including the establishing of new faculties), select the specialties they offered, create new programs, and appoint staff without prior approval by the state. As a result, student numbers quickly increased, student degree programs multiplied severalfold, and the number of higher education institutions doubled. To respond to the rising demand for higher education, state universities started admitting fee-paying students on top of the state-subsidized quota. New faculties in different fields opened at many institutions. In addition, institutions established branches, called *filials*, in different towns around the country. By 1999, around 5.8 percent of the student population was enrolled at filials. The courses in these new programs were usually taught by “traveling” faculty members from the parent institutions. Many state institutions of higher education applied for and acquired university status – in the belief that being a university was much more prestigious than being simply an institute.

The most dynamic developments, however, were concentrated in specific fields. The enormous increase in enrollments occurred in areas such as law, economics, business, and applied linguistics. Moreover, no internal mechanisms existed for the regulation of teaching quality, an issue that subsequently emerged as a primary concern. Lack of adequate financial support for teaching and research contributed to the decline in academic standards. Spending on higher education plummeted, which in turn led to growing numbers of fee-paying students with demands of their own. The proportion of the national budget allocated to the higher education sector decreased from 3.2 percent in 1992 to 0.9 percent in 1997 (*Education Statistics* 1998). The opinion spread that universities had abused both their position and the public trust, a development that was further intensified by the general lack of institutional accountability. As a consequence, the socialist-led government that returned to power in 1994, responded by passing the 1995 law on higher education. This legislation reestablished the strong regulatory role of the state. As a way of instituting mechanisms for quality assurance, it created “unified state requirements” for course content at all institutions and a State Register of Specialties with nationally approved specializations.

The law created a National Accreditation Agency that, as in many post-communist countries, oversaw mandatory accreditation of both institutions and programs, based on compliance with state requirements. The bachelor's and master's degrees were also introduced, dividing higher education into two sequential tiers.

After near economic collapse in 1997, the Bulgarian Socialist Party was voted out of government and replaced by the Democratic Party. The Democratic Party's contribution to higher education legislation was the 1999 changes and amendments to the 1995 higher education law – a document that in the scope and number of its changes basically constituted a completely new law. It eliminated fee-charging programs and introduced tuition fees for all students. In reaction to the growing number of “traveling faculty” at institutional filials, it mandated minimum numbers of permanent habilitated staff (those who have attained habilitation) in most university structures. (In the Bulgarian context, habilitation denotes a professional step in academia that corresponds to the titles of docent and professor and qualifies the holder to offer a course in a given discipline and to give lectures.) According to the revised law, a faculty should include at least 40 academic staff members on permanent contracts, at least 20 with habilitation; and a faculty council should have between 25 and 35 members, at least two-thirds with habilitation (Article 26). Similar regulations apply to the department, the institute, the *filial*, the college, and the chair. The new provisions of the law also called for procedures for internal evaluation of educational standards and academic staff – combining institutional autonomy with increased responsibility and accountability. As it now stands, all changes in programs, staffing, and equipment made by institutions must be justified; new programs and courses are to be externally evaluated and approved; and enrollment levels are to be limited by the actual abilities of institutions to offer instruction. The Ministry of Education and the National Accreditation Agency verify the levels of compliance.

Throughout the 1990s, politics continued to complicate academic reform. With respect to the academic profession, one example of this is the 1992 law, passed by the Bulgarian Parliament, which barred former members of the Communist Party from occupying administrative positions at institutions of higher education (the so-called “Panev law,” named after its author – the member of Parliament Georgi Panev). This law was enforced for three years before being repealed by another special legislative act, the so-called “anti-Panev law.”

Present status of the academic system

Today, 258,230 students are enrolled at 41 universities and 47 colleges in Bulgaria. Colleges offer specialist degrees to 7.7 percent of the students; their teaching staff comprise 8.8 percent of all academic staff (National Statistical Institute 1999, 2000). The state university sector consists of 8 comprehensive universities, 12 specialized universities, 6 academies, 4 institutes, and 7 military schools (the latter with 4 percent of the students). The separate research sector has been maintained. Its major institutions are the National Academy of Sciences and the Agricultural Academy. The number of people engaged primarily in research – both in the research sector and at institutions of higher education – has significantly decreased since 1989.

Of all students, 10.6 percent study at the 4 private universities and 6 private colleges. Private higher education in Bulgaria reemerged after the fall of communism. Within a few years, five private universities and six private colleges had been established, three as independent structures within state institutions of higher education. The New Bulgarian University, the Burgas Free University, and the American University in Bulgaria were all founded in 1991, followed in 1995 by the Varna Free University. The Slavic University, in Sofia, only remained in existence for four years before being closed down by Parliament in 1999.

In its short history, private higher education has succeeded in differentiating itself from public higher education not only in the form of ownership but also in funding sources, institutional structures, and educational forms. The founders of private institutions, whether individuals or organizations, bear the responsibility for the institutions' governance, activities, and financial viability. Institutions draw upon both internal and external funding sources, with tuition fees making up a large proportion of their budgets. Unlike public universities, private ones receive – to varying degrees – little or no regular state funding. In addition, private universities do not follow the faculty-chair structure that is the norm at state institutions. Instead, private institutions exhibit different structures as well as different models and programs of education. Both the New Bulgarian University (with close to 8,000 students) and the American University in Bulgaria (with 640 students) follow the liberal arts model. At the New Bulgarian University, students study in faculties that correspond to the degree level: Free Faculty, Bachelor's Faculty, and Master's Faculty (doctoral programs are offered in the latter). The institution also has a special Center for Distance Education. The American University in Bulgaria offers only bachelor's degrees in eight majors in the humanities, the social sciences, and the natural sciences. Both universities evaluate student progress with the help of a credit system not yet used by other institutions.

The Varna Free University (with approximately 9,500 students) has integrated its programs into five scientific and educational complexes. The faculties of the Burgas Free University (with approximately 6,400 students) are organized in centers. Both institutions offer the specialist, bachelor's, and master's degrees. With the exception of the American University in Bulgaria, private universities rely primarily on faculty hired on hourly contracts. For the 1995–1996 academic year, 90 percent of all faculty at the New Bulgarian University, 90 percent at the Burgas Free University, and 86 percent at the Varna Free University were hired on hourly contracts (Ministry of Education and Science 1996). The American University in Bulgaria provides contracts modeled on the American educational system to its American, international, and Bulgarian teaching staff.

In Bulgaria, higher education reform is still in progress. Although it is difficult to predict the educational reform priorities of the new government, some general issues will in all probability remain at the top of the agenda.² One set of priorities will most likely continue to be a consolidation in the number of public higher education institutions, a reform of institutional filials, and a reduction in the (high) number (around 475) of narrow specialties. The gradual decline in student enrollments, initiated by the previous government (the Bulgarian government designates the number of students to be accepted at institutions of higher education each year) and justified by demographic predictions, will also continue. This policy has been characterized as the “demassification” of higher education (Popov 2000). Attention will also be paid to various aspects of the specialist-bachelor's-master's-doctoral degree structure, as well as to the transition between degrees, greater mobility within and among educational programs, and the creation of educational programs that reflect the current needs of society.

General overview

Over the last couple of decades the Bulgarian academic profession has expanded unevenly (see Table 1). Due to the difficult financial situation in the wake of 1989, there were two main periods of decline in faculty numbers: from 1992 to 1994, and in 1997. Moreover, a decreasing proportion of faculty are hired on nonterm, permanent contracts in the process of expansion of the academic profession: whereas in 1992/1993 they made up 79.3 percent of all academic staff, in 1999/2000 that figure had shrunk to 63 percent.

Of all the faculty in academic year 1999/2000, 35 percent held a habilitation: professors comprised 9 percent and docents, 26 percent (see Table 2). Of all teaching staff, 81 percent worked at state universities. State universities also employed 84 percent of the country's habilitated teaching staff.

Table 1. Bulgarian higher education, 1985–2000

	1985/86	1990/91	1992/93	1994/95	1997/98	1998/99	1999/00
Universities and specialized institutes	30	38	40	40	42	42	41
Postsecondary institutes and colleges	45	46	47	48	44	46	47
Academic staff	14,409	20,716	18,895	21,227	19,416	24,490	26,735
Students	130,000	184,000	192,000	221,000	250,000	259,000	250,000

Note: Colleges replaced postsecondary institutes after 1995. From Ministry of Education and Science 1992; National Statistical Institute 1995, 1998, 1999, 2000.

Of the nonhabilitated staff (assistants and instructors), 62 percent were hired on permanent contracts. Assistants support professors and docents in their lecturing and research. Their teaching load is twice as heavy as that of habilitated staff. The rank of researcher at higher education institutions is given to staff involved primarily in research at university laboratories and institutes. On rare occasions, such staff can be hired to teach on an hourly basis. The high percentage of administrative/support personnel (denoted by “other” in Table 2), compared with the number of faculty can also be observed. Thus at institutions of tertiary education, the ratio of administrative or support staff to faculty is 1:1.5. This heavily loaded administrative structure is a remnant of communism and contributes to the bureaucratization of institutions.

Women entered the profession only gradually: the first women assistants appeared in academic year 1922–1923; the first woman, Vera Zlatareva, defended her doctoral thesis at Sofia University in 1930 (Naumov 1988). While women’s professional emancipation was an achievement of communism, women in the academic profession tend to be promoted at lower rates than their male colleagues. Although well-represented in the profession as a whole – for the 1999–2000 academic year, women comprised 42.5 percent of all staff – the higher academic titles of prestige and power still elude them. For 1999/2000 only 19 percent of the professors and 31 percent of the docents were women. As a rule, the lower ranks of the profession have a greater proportion of women: in 1999/2000, women made up 59 percent of all instructors and 47 percent of all assistants. Of all women in the profession, 78 percent taught at state universities.

A 1999 study of 902 faculty members from 14 institutions of higher education concluded that “the number of women who reach the highest levels of the profession tends to grow” (Raicheva and Ilieva 1999). Other findings of the study show that women in the academic profession start their careers earlier than men. Thus, by age 25, most women academics have already entered the profession. However, men tend to advance professionally faster than women.

Table 2. Academic Staff, 1999 and 2000

	Total	Women	On basic contracts	On additional civil contracts
<i>Institutions and academic staff</i>				
Faculty	26,735	11,370	16,781	9,954
Professors	2,447	467	1,388	1,059
Docents	6,840	2,118	4,461	2,379
Assistants	12,264	5,703	9,211	3,053
Instructors	4,930	2,929	1,467	3,463
Researchers (at higher education institutions)	254	153	254	–
Other	17,334	–	–	–
<i>Universities and specialized institutes</i>				
Faculty	24,368	10,153	15,768	8,600
Professors	2,318	456	1,373	945
Docents	6,277	1,935	4,335	1,942
Assistants	11,428	5,265	8,732	2,696
Instructors	4,093	2,344	1,076	3,017
Researchers (at higher education institutions)	252	153	252	–
Other	16,513	–	–	–
<i>Colleges</i>				
Faculty	2,367	1,217	1,013	1,354
Professors	129	11	15	114
Docents	563	183	126	437
Assistants	836	438	479	357
Instructors	837	585	391	446
Researchers (at higher education institutions)	2	–	2	–
Other	821	–	–	–

Note: From National Statistical Institute 1999, 2000.

Interruptions in a woman's career due to family responsibilities may be seen as one explanation for this trend. Women faculty tend to attain habilitation on average between 40 and 45 years of age, as opposed to their male counterparts, who on average do so between 35 and 40 years of age. A further problem revealed by the 1999 study is that women as faculty and researchers

are evaluated mainly by men, as scientific councils (*nauchni saveti*) and other university committees are comprised mainly of men – some of whom are still strongly influenced by old beliefs about women.

At the same time, a relative increase in the number of women doctoral students is evident. Of the 2,490 doctoral students in 1999/2000, 1,233 (49.5 percent) were women. With respect to distribution by field, women doctoral students comprised 53 percent of all students in the natural sciences, 35 percent in the technical sciences, 49 percent in the medical sciences, 53 percent in the agricultural sciences, and 57 percent in the social sciences. Of the 283 doctoral candidates who received the scientific degree of doctor in 1999, 110 were women. In the same year, the doctor of sciences degree was conferred on 43 persons, of whom 11 were women (National Statistical Institute, 1999 and 2000).

The Bulgarian professoriate governs all aspects of teaching, academic staff, and institutional organization encompassed by the institutional budgets allotted by the state. The professoriate's interests are protected by the principles of institutional self-governance and are promoted at the national level by the Rector's Council. The council was legalized by the 1999 changes to the higher education law. Composed of the rectors of all public and private universities and specialized institutes, this rather conservative body (which is also predominantly male – with only two women, who are rectors of innovative private universities) represents the institutions of higher education before the state. Within institutions, the election of governing bodies is a prerogative of the faculty, although the participation of students and support staff has been gradually increasing. In the Bulgarian context, the faculty-chair (chairs are called *katedras*) institutional structure is predominant. The general assembly, the academic council, and the rector are the governing bodies of the institutions. Faculties are governed by faculty assemblies, faculty councils, and deans, while chairs have chair councils and chair heads. Faculties and chairs have greater control over decisions regarding faculty hiring, promotions and appointments, and approval of new academic programs. Decisions concerning budget priorities, the hiring of key administrative personnel, setting admissions criteria, and determining workloads are generally made by the university's administrative officials. Rectors, deans, and chairs govern as *primus inter pares* for a given mandate. The different university units are fairly autonomous in their internal affairs. Furthermore, the faculties continue to be very isolated from one another, both administratively and academically – a factor that hinders interdisciplinary cooperation. Chairs are formed around narrow specialties, much like “guilds” of independent professors in their respective fields. Academic staff enjoy high social prestige and may

have great influence outside the institutions. Many are active politically, in the business world, in the media, or in nongovernmental organizations.

Academic degrees and titles

Academic and scientific degrees

At present higher education in Bulgaria is guided by the 1995 law on higher education and its 1999 amendments and changes. Higher education degrees include specialist, bachelor, master, doctor, and doctor of sciences (*doktor na naukite*). The specialist degree is a professional degree acquired at colleges and was incorporated into the higher education system by the 1999 changes to the law on higher education. Most colleges, which replaced the former post-secondary institutes, remained as integrated parts of public universities and specialized institutes after the changes. The bachelor's and master's degrees replaced the previous five-year professional diploma programs modeled on Soviet higher education. The bachelor's degree consists of four years of study, and the master's degree involves an additional year, on average. The 1999 changes to the law went a step further in defining the bachelor's level as broadly based education, while master's programs were to be more narrowly specialized in focus.

Similar to the Russian system, the Bulgarian academic system has two tiers of doctoral degrees that are termed "scientific degrees" (each of these degrees requires defense of a dissertation or major research work). Scientific degrees are conferred on teaching and research staff at both academic and research institutions. The conferral is regulated by the law on scientific degrees and titles. The first of these two degrees, the doctorate, replaced the old candidate of sciences degree. This type of graduate studies used to be called *aspirantura*; currently, its name is *doctorantura*. In essence, the organization of this degree has changed very little. One change is the current legal requirement of completed course work for doctoral students, with final exams. Doctoral courses are offered both at institutions of higher education and research organizations. In practice, though, the majority of doctoral students still prepare independently for the final specialized exams.

Another new feature of the present *doctorantura* is the option of so-called paid doctoral studies, open to qualified applicants who can cover the fees. By contrast, regular and part-time doctoral studies (without fees) are also offered to students on a competitive basis. The number of graduate students is set by the government every year; the regular doctoral student receives a government stipend that as of April 2001 was increased from 190 to 220 leva (\$110) per month.³ Finally, faculty members who are in the process of working toward

their degree are granted a certain period (usually two years) by the chair to complete the dissertation. Doctoral dissertations are publicly defended before the institution's scientific council, with final approval coming from the High Commission on Certification (*Vissha atestatsionna komisija*) – a governmental agency authorized to award the two scientific degrees (doctor and doctor of sciences) and the two scientific titles (docent and professor). This commission can confer a degree even if the candidate has been rejected at the lower level by the institution's scientific council.

The doctor of sciences degree – in a sense, the second doctoral degree – is the highest scientific degree in the profession. A candidate for this degree must defend a major research work (also called a dissertation) and have a significant record of refereed publications. Approval by the High Commission on Certification is again the final stage before the degree is awarded. Faculty members usually work independently toward the doctor of sciences degree at the institution at which they are teaching. In academic year 1999–2000, there were 10,192 doctors and 1,692 doctors of sciences among the total number of academics in the higher education and research sectors (National Statistical Institute 2000).

Scientific titles

Bulgarian academia distinguishes between scientific degrees and scientific titles. Whereas scientific degrees denote academic achievement, scientific titles correspond to employment levels. At institutions of tertiary education the academic titles include assistant, senior assistant, head assistant, docent, and professor; the last two titles require habilitation. Only habilitated staff – that is, docents and professors – have the right to lecture at institutions of higher education. On rare occasions, and with the permission of the chair, head assistants with the scientific degree of doctor can offer courses as well.

Habilitation is achieved after the completion of a major research work, collection of articles, or other creative activity in the relevant specialty. Habilitation is an (additional) achievement that should not be confused with the dissertations for the scientific degrees of doctor and doctor of sciences. One paradox still theoretically present in the Bulgarian system is the lack of a direct link between scientific degrees and titles. As a result, it is still possible for a faculty member to habilitate without having the degrees of doctor or doctor of sciences. This phenomenon is a remnant of the communist system, under which political activity and loyalty were rewarded – thus allowing people to bypass the dissertation defense and still occupy positions of importance. However, this practice has been strongly criticized both within and outside academia and has been rejected by most universities.

The title of docent is conferred on people with appropriate higher education credentials who have publications or research at a high scientific level in their specializations and a specified minimum of teaching experience. Candidates for the position of professor should have appropriate higher education credentials and publications of original research at an especially high level; teaching experience is also taken into consideration. These titles have their respective parallels in the research sector: second-level senior research fellow and first-level senior research fellow correspond to the titles of docent and professor; habilitation is not required for researchers. In addition to the scientific titles at institutions of higher education, there are also the positions of instructor and senior instructor; staff in such positions are hired to teach languages, sports, and art. There are also the titles of extraordinary (*izvanreden*) professor and docent as well as guest lecturer. All of the university titles except for the position of guest lecturer are conferred on a competitive basis.

The law on scientific degrees and titles

The system of academic appointments and promotions in Bulgaria is strictly guided by the law on scientific degrees and titles. This law, which dates from 1972, is currently undergoing a process of revision. As a remnant of communist times, the law appears in many ways to hinder faculty development. Indeed, the system it promotes serves as a protective shield for the status quo in the academic profession. Thus, academia has only one professional “entry,” at the bottom of the career ladder; all who wish to enter must climb up the same ladder. In communist times, the only other way to penetrate the system was to accumulate political credit.

Over the years there have been some cosmetic changes to the law on scientific degrees and titles, directed predominantly at its explicitly political aspects. However, even these have not been wholly “cleared”; and text referring to the “socialist development of the country” and the “political qualities” of the candidates is still found. Attempts to reconsider procedures for appointments and promotions occupied much of the 1990s. The latest draft of the law to be accepted and approved by the Council of Ministers was introduced in Parliament on July 31, 2000. The draft is still under discussion (it passed only its first reading in the previous government and is awaiting consideration by the new one); a number of changes have been recommended, but many controversial issues remain. It is certain that disagreements between academicians and the central administration over the solution of some of these issues will continue.

Above all, the new draft makes three very important, and rather contentious, proposals for changing the system of appointments and promotions.

First, it eliminates the second scientific degree of doctor of sciences. Moreover, the draft demands that habilitation is awarded only after the degree of doctor, the only remaining scientific degree, has been achieved. As justification for this step, the creators of the draft explain that such a system will promote staff development. In effect, this change would overcome the confusion between scientific titles and scientific degrees and provide a direct link between them. The draft is also aimed at decentralizing the process of conferring of scientific degrees and titles and empowering institutions to make decisions on appointments and promotions. It proposes the abolition of the High Commission on Certification as the central organ for awarding scientific degrees and titles. In its place, a National Certification Agency is to be created to guarantee the fairness and lawfulness of the process. The agency will nominate academics for a national experts' list, which will be selected by authorized scientific councils as evaluators and as members of a jury. This jury will confer degrees and titles and will consist of a small number of experts from the respective academic fields, convened for each case, and with open voting.

Finally, there is a proposal for the creation of unified, minimal state criteria of a quantitative character for conferring degrees and titles, to be approved by a council of the new National Certification Agency. This proposal comes in response to criticism that existing criteria are not spelled out, which has allowed for a high degree of subjectivity in rendering decisions on the part of the scientific councils and the High Commission for Certification. In addition, criteria have varied by academic field because of differences in development due to political interference (in the social sciences), or the outdated approach and technology of scientific research (in the natural and technical sciences), or other objective reasons after decades of "socialist science."

The new draft has raised many concerns in the academic community. Above all, there is the fear that the elimination of the High Commission on Certification will lead to a devaluation of scientific degrees and titles by making them easily attainable (Pushkarov 2001). According to a study conducted by the Science Foundation of the Union of Bulgarian Scientists, more members of the academic community support centralized conferral (approved by the central High Commission on Certification) with regard to degrees and decentralized conferral with regard to titles (Vatskitchev 1999). Supporters of the present centralized system believe that the commission has been successful in hindering the "gray stream of mediocrity" in dissertations and habilitations. Decentralization would only lessen controls and lead to the rapid local production of doctors, docents, and professors.

The academic career path

The decision to pursue an academic career is usually made in the course of an individual's studies. Despite the fact that only a select group of students continue on to the doctoral degree, the decision usually does not depend on the availability of teaching or research positions. Moreover, although it offers a competitive advantage to the candidate, a scientific degree is not a prerequisite for a faculty position. The first step on the academic career ladder is the position of assistant. Theoretically, this position is open on a competitive basis to anyone with a higher education degree. However, it is most likely that former graduate students of the chair who apply for the position will be given preference. The degree of competitiveness surrounding the position, as well as the qualifications of applicants, varies with the school and the faculty. Older universities in larger cities will have more applicants to a position and can thus set higher standards. In the case of such highly competitive positions, the possession of a doctoral degree is not only decisive but is also gradually becoming a necessary requirement.

Assistant positions are requested by the chair and approved by the faculty council and the academic council. Overall, the number of faculty members hired is determined by the institutions themselves on the basis of their annual budget as well as the availability of teaching hours. Competition for the position of assistant include a specialized exam and interviews with members of an appointment committee. All applicants for the position of assistant must pass the initial exam. Actual selection takes place after the successful completion of this exam. There is a maximum age limit of 35 years for applicants; the limit is age 40 for applicants with a doctoral degree. People hired as assistants without a scientific degree are not required to enroll in a doctoral degree program. For that matter, there are no formal requirements placed on assistants to progress up the academic ladder. Although the initial period of the position of assistant can be viewed as a kind of probationary period, in reality no limits exist on how long a person can occupy this position. Theoretically, the system would allow someone to retire at this initial position. Assistants are evaluated at three-year intervals; promotion to the higher levels of senior assistant and head assistant is usually linked to these assessments and is based on performance, experience, and publications. Student evaluations may on very rare occasions affect these decisions. Assistants who already possess a doctoral degree may request promotion directly to the position of head assistant.

The scientific titles of docent and professor are awarded for corresponding positions. These titles require habilitation. In Bulgarian higher education, habilitation is a very important step in a professional career; habilitated faculty members control the decision-making and governing process of insti-

tutions. Administrative positions of power are occupied by habilitated staff, with only rare exceptions. In addition, such positions strongly augment the person's possibilities for international academic contacts; access to information and easier financing of research or working teams; and promotion of the members of that particular faculty member's team. Finally, among the advantages that accrue with habilitation are the following: docents and professors have twice as much free time as assistants (lecturing is much less time consuming than leading seminars), get invited to lecture at other institutions, have priority in receiving travel and research funds, may have their textbooks published, have the right to advise graduate students (with additional remuneration), and receive extra payment for examining students over the minimum number assigned to them. Their prestige both within and outside academia is very high.

Procedurally, the habilitation process is rather complex and ill-defined, involving several stages and often taking as long as two years to complete. At the institutional level, the scientific councils sponsor competitions for docent and professor, appointing evaluators and making the final decision, through secret ballot. These scientific councils are formed at the faculty level (quite often the faculty council assumes this role) and are approved by the state High Commission on Certification. The councils authorized to grant scientific degrees and titles are not numerous and are situated in a few select institutions. This set up stemmed in part from the strong centralizing tendency in the recognition of academic achievements inherited from the communist regime. Another factor lies in the rules governing the composition of these councils: habilitated staff or doctors of sciences should number no fewer than 19 and at least half the council plus one should be habilitated staff or doctors of sciences in their respective academic fields. These requirements cannot be met by smaller schools with fewer faculty members or schools that rely mostly on young nonhabilitated staff and faculty on fixed-term contracts. Institutions that do not have authorized councils must redirect their applicants elsewhere as determined by the state commission. It is not surprising that larger and older institutions of higher education will be the ones more likely to have councils authorized to decide on habilitation cases. The High Commission on Certification, with its numerous specialized committees, renders the final judgment on applications for habilitation. The commission also has the authority to rescind scientific titles.

A critical factor in the system is that competitions for habilitated staff are generally conducted internally, although the possibility exists for outside faculty to participate in competitions. Traditionally, institutions have tended to reproduce themselves with people drawn from the same institution. One reason to restrict competitions to "insiders" is to protect internal norms

and ways of functioning. Faculty members select their future colleagues from within, for positions from entry-level assistants to the more senior ones. An outsider might also disrupt the traditional distribution of lectures among faculty members. The filling of academic administrative positions also follows this pattern of internal reproduction – chairs, deans, and rectors are drawn from the university community. The participation of an external candidate in these competitions is viewed as an infringement on institutional autonomy, especially if it is imposed on the institution. It can be argued that internal reproduction hinders the development of competition and represents a potential threat to the establishment of a system based on merit.

Given this practice of internal recruitment, staff mobility in the sense of changing jobs between different institutions of higher education is the exception. Faculty members may teach at different institutions, but they are fully employed by one institution. The rest are visited on an hourly basis or, infrequently, on fixed-term contracts. A different aspect of this phenomenon is the disparity among institutions. The division between capital and provincial universities was inherited from the communist past when institutions in Sofia were given priority by the central authorities. The division between old and new schools places new institutions, including the four private universities, in a disadvantaged position in comparison to older ones such as Sofia University. Finally, large schools of higher education also have priority over small schools. Thus, one may assume that if there is some movement between institutions, the desired career path would be from the country to the capital and from the new and small to the old and large universities.

Faculty contracts, workload, and salaries

Faculty contracts

In general, there are three types of contracts that can be offered to academic staff. The 1999 changes to the law on higher education demanded that all assistants, docents, and professors be hired on nonterm contracts. Nonterm contracts, also known as basic or permanent contracts, are used for positions that are included in the state budget; these positions specify a set number of teaching hours (usually 360 per year). Nonterm contracts include full benefits such as health insurance, retirement, and protection under the country's labor code. These contracts ensure secure employment to staff. The other contract options are fixed-term contracts, different forms of which are customary for the position of instructor and for nonregular staff. These contracts are also known as basic contracts because they offer the same employment conditions as the nonterm contracts but only for the agreed

period of time. Laws regarding fixed-term contracts have been rather inconsistent, and the numerous changes to the labor code have directly affected the academic profession. For example, the 1995 law on higher education included an attempt to make assistants' contracts fixed in order to impose some sort of a probationary period on newly hired junior staff. However, this proposal was quickly reversed by the 1999 changes and amendments to the law. The latest developments with respect to fixed-term contracts are reflected in the changes to the labor code – according to which, as of April 1, 2001, serious justification needs to be made for such contracts; in addition, they can be used only for very short periods of time.

The third type of contract is the civil, or hourly, contract signed for a given session of teaching. For their services, lecturers receive payment (*honorar*), the amount of which is set by the employing institution. The use of this contract type for all academic positions has recently become more common as many faculty members teach on hourly contracts at a number of institutions.

With the increase of students and course offerings, many institutions are experiencing a shortage of habilitated staff. Habilitated positions are specified in the institutional budgets, and it is a challenge for institutions to find faculty with the qualifications for habilitation and who are ready to meet the requirements of the central commission. Even greater difficulties in this respect are experienced by institutions in smaller towns and by new universities – such as private universities and filials.

It is cheaper for institutions of higher education to offer hourly contracts to teaching staff. Faculty members are hired only for specific courses, and the institution has no further obligations to them. The hourly payment at public institutions of higher education is not high and depends on the faculty member's title – between 2 leva and 5 leva (\$1–\$2.50) – but in the scheme of things it represents a lucrative second source of earnings for faculty members with permanent contracts at other institutions. The job involves holding classes, lecturing, and examining students at the end of the semester. The hourly payment at private institutions is higher (depending on the institution) and is even higher for habilitated staff or popular faculty. Not surprisingly, faculty members prefer to do their teaching on hourly contracts at private institutions.

The rise of the “traveling professor” phenomenon has been noted both within and outside academia and has generally been criticized. This type of lecturer has been targeted by the media and blamed for many of the university's problems. While academics themselves justify this practice by referring to their low salaries, the public has responded rather negatively. A countermeasure, introduced by the government, is the legal requirement in the 1999 changes and amendments to the 1995 law on higher education that

all university units need to be staffed with a certain number of permanent, habilitated staff. The National Accreditation Agency demanded compliance in this regard by the end of 2001. As a result, many institutions of higher education find themselves in desperate need of hiring habilitated staff or promoting existing faculty to habilitated status.

Faculty workload

The academic workload consists of classroom teaching and other teaching-related and administrative work – measured in academic hours. This workload varies by institution and averages around 510 hours per year. There are two main forms of teaching: formal lecturing (*ex cathedra*), performed by habilitated staff, and seminars (problem solving, seminar discussions, laboratory and field work, etc.), conducted mostly by assistants. The average teaching load for habilitated staff varies from 120 to 180 hours per year (for example, Sofia University's workload for habilitated staff is 120 hours per year, while Southwest University's is 180 hours per year), which translates into 4 to 6 hours per week. Nonhabilitated staff who teach the seminars and related sessions that accompany lectures are responsible for 240 and 360 hours of teaching per year, amounting to 8 to 12 hours per week. By law, teaching loads are mandatory, and every faculty member must teach classes. A consequence of this measure is that students are required to complete an increasing number of courses, many of which are not really needed. Here, we see how the curriculum is often determined not by the knowledge a student needs to acquire for effective professional development but by the number of hours a professor needs to teach in order to survive. The remainder of the workload involves other teaching-related and administrative activities – such as exams, tests, consultations, advising doctoral students, developing and launching new programs, student admissions, and chair and faculty council meetings. Any additional hours (over the minimum) in this category are remunerated. In case faculty members are unable to carry the required minimum teaching load, they can be assigned additional teaching-related work hours as a replacement for the lack of classes. Up to 20 percent of these nonclassroom hours may compensate for the lack of teaching hours.

Faculty salaries

Institutions of higher education are authorized to set faculty salaries once their budgets have been approved by the Council of Ministers. The government revises the base rates in periods of inflation. For 2001, the minimum salary before taxes per month for a professor on a nonterm contract was 330 leva (\$165); for a docent, 275 leva (\$138); for a head assistant, 220 leva (\$110);

for a senior assistant, 198 leva (\$99); and for an assistant, 176 leva (\$88). Salary levels at public institutions are determined by rank and seniority. Thus few tangible incentives exist that would make faculty members work harder or be more productive. Some miniscule, state-mandated sums of money are available, based on the person's experience (calculated in years), education, and number of children. Administrative work is also remunerated with a slight salary increase and reduction in teaching load.

Faculty salary increases depend on state regulations, the institutional budgets approved by the state, and the institutional governing body. In reality, institutional budgets are based on the number of students. Individual institutions have to maintain a certain student-faculty ratio. As a result, institutional governing bodies, comprised of habilitated faculty staff, seek to maintain the maximum number of faculty to the allotted number of students and to keep salaries at minimum levels in order to avoid faculty layoffs. Institutions lack the resources to supplement faculty salaries. Faculty salaries are higher at private institutions of higher education and may vary, depending on the position as well as the individual faculty member.

Overall, during the country's difficult transition period, state spending on higher education has decreased drastically, leading to a reduction in salaries for teaching staff. Frequently, economic constraints have hindered budget expenditures or suspended them altogether. In addition, high inflation rates have often resulted in further reductions in remunerations. A sizable portion of university budgets eventually ends up being paid out in salaries. Nevertheless, junior staff salaries are so low that the profession is having trouble attracting applicants. Moreover, the distinctions in salary among the different scientific titles are too small to motivate junior faculty to undertake the cumbersome procedure required for habilitation. The minimum monthly salary of \$88 for the position of assistant provides an income level on the verge of poverty. (By way of comparison, the legally mandated minimum monthly wage for any Bulgarian employee is 79 leva, or \$37.) The situation is little better for more senior academicians. Salaries for habilitated staff correspond approximately to the average salary in the country, which is barely adequate to cover people's basic needs. Under these circumstances, it is virtually impossible to use even a small portion of one's salary for buying books, computers or other equipment, or attending conferences and seminars. Since the institutions themselves also lack the funds for faculty research and development (including technological infrastructure and offices), faculty professional growth is strongly jeopardized.

Concerns over low academic salaries have been the subject of debates both within institutions and nationally, but with little practical effect. Many in the profession have left the halls of academe. One way for academic staff to

supplement their meager salaries has been to hold additional jobs both outside and within academia. Until now, schools of higher education have permitted additional employment on a part-time basis. The changes in the labor code of April 2001 removed all restrictions on additional jobs. This practice has been followed by many academic staff members – most often at the expense of teaching and research. One of its consequences is the “traveling professor” phenomenon, in which faculty shuttle between different institutions or their filials located in various cities, delivering a lecture or a series of lectures for which they collect an hourly payment. Although pervasive throughout academia, faculty “moonlighting” has flourished above all in certain specialties with high student enrollments, such as law, economics, and business. Generally, “traveling professors” from the large, old public universities teach at the smaller and newer institutions, both private and public, or at newly established faculties and institutional filials.

Terms of employment, promotion, and evaluation

In the Bulgarian context, faculty members hired on nonterm, permanent contracts enjoy security of employment. As of April 2001, with a change in the labor code, all assistants, docents, and professors are appointed on such contracts. In effect, then, academic staff on basic contracts are tenured. However, the labor code concerning employment contracts of faculty has been revised numerous times over the past decade, and security of employment remains a concern. Nonterm contracts cannot be suspended without just cause. To protect their academic staff, in the event disciplines are eliminated from the program, the universities try to reassign staff to closely related fields or to special or elective courses.

In practical terms, what secures a faculty position is to keep courses taught by that faculty member in the program. One sure way to preserve the programs was achieved through the introduction of the so-called “unified state requirements” which were written into the 1995 law on higher education and were developed by faculty representatives. These requirements are mandatory for every institution in the country, and accreditation of both institutions and programs depends on compliance with them. Lists of required courses are drawn up for all specialties. The proportion of required courses on these lists can cover as much as 90 percent of all course work. Also contained in the unified state requirements are a number of other specifications: the type of school that may offer higher education in a particular specialty; the formats in which the specialized degrees may be offered (e.g., full-time, part-time, and evening courses); student admissions procedures; the length of study – including minimum number of hours, type of exams and composition

of the exam committees; and the types of courses offered in the specialty (required, elective, and optional) – together with the course load for each of them, the type of faculty who may give lectures, and the number of hours of practical work. With respect to protecting faculty positions, the circumstances surrounding the preparation of the unified state requirements need to be described. Although these requirements were intended as a uniform set of standards for teaching content, the various working groups, composed of habilitated staff from different universities, turned the listings into a way to retain the existing number of courses for individual disciplines per semester and thus secure the existing academic positions. The absurd situation has evolved in which the coursework that used to fill a five-year course of study has been preserved and now fills the four-year bachelor's programs – resulting in heavy course loads for both students and faculty.

On the other hand, threats to job security are constantly posed by the changing environment. Higher education reform has had to take into consideration the unintended negative effects of the unified state requirements, and their modification or even elimination is pending. Moreover, overall trends in student demand indicate a general shift away from technical subjects toward the humanities and, particularly, economics and law. Around 25 percent of all students are currently educated in economics (Buchkov 1999). Thus faculties with declining student numbers will have to start discontinuing programs and eliminating faculty positions. Although the average student-teacher ratio for the country is 13:1, there are considerable differences across institutions and faculties. In economics this ratio has reached 45:1 and even 67:1, whereas in some natural sciences faculties the ratio is 2:1 (Totomanova 1999). The over-inflated size of the academic staff, a relic of the communist past, is becoming a critical issue, the more so in the context of inadequate state subsidies (*Education* 1998). In an attempt to address the problem of faculty numbers, the state is gradually reducing annual student quotas (faculty numbers depend on student numbers in institutional budgets). Results of this approach are still awaited. Faculty retirement is another strategy being considered for the resolution of this problem.

Promotions are directly connected to the central issue of faculty evaluations. Evaluations precede every promotion decision and dissertation defense. Regular evaluations take place every three years for nonhabilitated staff and every five years for habilitated staff. According to the 1999 changes to the law on higher education, at minimum evaluations should consider course attendance; development of new seminars and related exercises; textbooks and readers; research and participation in research contracts and international research cooperation; and advising students and consulting with specialists. On this basis, institutions of higher education have developed

their own evaluation criteria. Evaluations are conducted mainly through peer review by the scientific council (which consists mostly of habilitated staff) at the faculty level. Thus, the opinion of habilitated staff is what really matters, for the system of external academic evaluation is short and bureaucratized by the High Commission on Certification. In reality, regular evaluations are rather routine, rarely yielding any significant results. The procedure comes down to counting courses taught, students, exams administered, publications, and meetings attended. Negative evaluations are the exception. No permanent mechanism exists devoted to quality assurance in teaching and faculty performance. Given the low levels of academic remuneration, the difficult working conditions, and the overall economic situation in the country, evaluations are carried out in a rather perfunctory manner. There is a belief that in a sense, unofficial faculty evaluations are conducted internally at the chair level through the distribution of courses. Courses are "entrusted" to faculty on the grounds of their performance from the previous year, prestige among academic staff and students, and research and publications on the course topic.

The use of student evaluations has gradually increased at some institutions, but not to the extent that would allow them to be employed as a mechanism for the improvement of teaching. Although limited in scope, a 1997 study of social science faculties in the country concluded that student evaluations were conducted in no more than 12 percent of all courses (Civic Education 1997). In reality, at many institutions student evaluations do not exist; and where they do exist, it is often only due to the goodwill of individual faculty members that student feedback is sought. Results from student evaluations are only rarely taken into consideration in faculty evaluations and promotions. Academic staff often view student evaluations as a new and dangerous idea since, in their opinion, students' intellectual immaturity precludes their having much to say (Billing 1999). Moreover, universities have not yet analyzed the student data that might inform academic administrative policies, nor have they developed programs to support or advise students.

In spite of the consensus that institutions need to find better ways to evaluate teaching performance, little has been achieved. Teaching as a process does not play a role in faculty evaluations or promotions; class attendance carries more weight. Furthermore, universities are not making any effort to enhance the development of pedagogical qualities and skills. Although most faculty members belong to professional organizations and attend conferences (mostly within the country, for lack of funds) or seminars where colleagues discuss their teaching experience, nothing resembling introductory training sessions of a more general pedagogical character exists at the chair level for

incoming teaching staff. As mentioned earlier, much of the burden of the teaching process is carried by assistants.

Promotion and status within the university, as well as institutional and programmatic accreditation, depend largely on research and publication records – especially in quantitative terms. Institutions expect faculty to engage in ongoing research activity. However, academics have carried out very little actual research. As the former minister of education noted, “Scientific research is to be found at the specialized research organizations, while at the institutions of higher education it is only wishful thinking . . .” (Dimitrov and Toshev 2001). By law, state subsidy for university research should amount to 10 percent of the overall allocation, although in reality, few institutions receive even 1 percent for research (Radeva et al. 1999). In 1990, a national research fund began offering grants on a competitive basis. Bulgarian academics are gradually beginning to participate in international research and development programs, such as the programs of the European Union designed specifically for Central and Eastern Europe. However, Bulgaria still lacks the necessary material conditions to sustain research.

Assessing current faculty research productivity in Bulgaria is difficult. Some institutions of higher education compile an annual list of publications from their faculty. Faculty evaluation procedures also require the presentation of such lists. However, Bulgaria does not have a general index on publications. Instead, the Bulgarian academic community often looks to the Science Citation Index (SCI), especially in the case of faculty in the natural and technical sciences. This index summarizes information on the number of publications by Bulgarian scholars in international periodicals. It should be noted that Bulgarian journals are not indexed in the SCI: the one Bulgarian journal indexed there – namely, *Reports of the National Academy of Sciences* – was discontinued after 1994. According to the SCI, there has been a slight increase in publications by Bulgarian scholars in international journals after 1990. Especially fields such as ecology, the technical sciences, materials science, physics, and botany and zoology show increases. Other fields, such as computer sciences, neurology, psychology and psychiatry, and microbiology have registered increases over time. Fields such as chemistry and the social sciences have experienced a slight decrease in the numbers of publications. Interdisciplinary fields are the only area that have suffered a sharp decline in publications by Bulgarian scholars (Rozhkov, Ivancheva and Shaposhnik 2000).

In 1997, there were a total of 154 scientific periodicals in Bulgaria. Some of them do not appear regularly, because of the difficult financial situation of most of these journals, and articles accepted for publication often appear only after significant delays. More and more Bulgarian academicians publish

their research not in journals but rather in various collections of essays with small print runs. Faculty research productivity varies significantly by field, at the international and national level: whereas 70 percent of publications by natural science faculty members appear in international journals (and are indexed in SCI), only 10 percent of their publications appear in Bulgarian journals. The situation is practically reversed in the social sciences: a small number of individual publications are indexed in SCI, while more than half are published in national journals (Rozhkov, Mutafov and Melamed 1998).

With respect to employment conditions, a number of issues related to the changing labor market need to be addressed. One such issue concerns the bleak academic prospects of the new generation of professors. The decision to start an academic career has to take into account both developments within the profession and economic conditions in the country. So few incentives exist to induce young people to pursue a career in academia. Low salaries for junior staff discourage young graduates from continuing along that path or staying the course, if they have already entered the profession. Career prospects for young faculty members are also not attractive: climbing the career ladder requires waiting for openings among the limited number of positions for habilitated staff at the chair level. As discussed earlier in the chapter, the habilitation procedures are themselves extremely cumbersome, time consuming, and fraught with bureaucratic wrangling. Finally, with the opening of borders, younger scholars, who are more mobile, are attracted by more promising prospects abroad, and as a result the emigration rate is quite high.

The fading aura of academia for the younger generation has increasingly been recognized as a problem – one that will become especially acute as the projected habilitation crisis develops because of the advanced age of habilitated faculty. High retirement rates will very soon empty institutions of people qualified to teach courses. The deficit in teaching staff has reached such a level that it will not abate even with a decrease in student numbers (Totomanova 1999). Of habilitated staff, 42 percent of docents are above 55 years of age. Of professors, 21 percent are between the ages of 55 and 59, and 69 percent are above age 60 (40 percent between 60 and 65 years of age and 29 percent between 65 and 69); in other words, 91 percent of professors are above age 55 (*Education* 1998).

Retirement represents one of the main ways in which positions of habilitated staff are made available for junior staff. However, academia is still winning battles with respect to retirement age. The retirement age of habilitated staff is now 65 years. The 2000 higher education law adds another two years on top of this age at the discretion of the Academic Council (§11). Nevertheless, institutions have been authorized by the 2001 changes to the

labor code to retire those who have reached retirement age only if they wish to.

Key issues for the future

The changing political and socioeconomic environment as well as the reform of the higher education system have strongly influenced the Bulgarian academic profession. A variety of complex problems concerning the academic workplace have emerged. The major ones include the lack of finances for education and research, the deteriorating quality of teaching and learning, an aging professoriate along with the lack of incentives for young scholars, and the challenges associated with the new market economy. Serious consideration of these issues by government and academia may prove decisive for the future development of the profession.

Financial viability

The fiscal integrity of the academic profession and its working conditions are issues that need immediate attention. Universities are starved for resources, which has led to a drastic reduction in infrastructural investments, with a negative impact on the quality of the education offered. Classrooms are often inadequate, sometimes lacking even the bare minimum of amenities such as heating. Obsolete research equipment, underfunded libraries and publishing centers, a lack of teaching technology, and inadequate faculty office space are common facts of life. The quality of faculty work is also affected. In the information age, new technologies are becoming indispensable for the creativity and development of academic staff. The problem is even more acute for institutions outside the capital Sofia. The lack of resources extends to all aspects of the academic profession: teaching, research, and faculty development. Faculty morale and commitment have also suffered. As the rector of Sofia University recently exclaimed: "Our lecturers are poor, hungry and forced to roam the country like nomads, they wear themselves out physically and psychologically. Each one of our lecturers maintains courses at four to five other faculties . . ." (Biolchev 2000).

In Bulgaria, university financing depends mostly on the state. However, the state has had neither the resources for higher education (due to the difficult economic conditions in the country) nor the desire to relinquish its hold on the powerful financial instruments of control over higher education institutions. This situation heightens the tension between the state and universities. The state limits the different means of support for academic activities: it defines the number of students to be educated as well as their fees and funds

research development within higher education institutions. As a consequence, in many ways the academic system has been kept on the brink of extinction. Furthermore, compounding these problems is the fact that in its attempt to be the main regulator of developments, the state tends to treat universities with suspicion. As a foreign educational expert exclaimed, "It is often thought that institutions aim at self-reproduction, at inflating their own structures, at hiring cheap traveling lecturers; that they are financially immature, and even irresponsible, and create conditions for corruption. There is a prevailing desire to control everything and even after accreditation to create some kind of all-seeing organ that will constantly follow what is happening at the schools of higher education" (Billing 1999). Seen in this light, there is an urgent need to reconsider the existing financial policies both at the national and institutional levels.

Quality of teaching and learning

The period of transition has had a negative effect on the overall quality of a university education. Both the central administration and the institutions themselves need to address this problem. Recently, some legal steps have been taken in this direction. The 1999 changes and amendments to the law on higher education require a certain number of permanent habilitated staff as the core of every institutional unit to ensure the high quality of teaching. In addition, institutions of higher education must establish internal mechanisms to maintain the quality of education and academic staff. These mechanisms should involve reliable evaluation procedures of the different aspects of the teaching process and would also assess teaching performance and incorporate student opinion. The development of such mechanisms presents a real problem for institutions. Many believe that there needs to be more guidance at the national level on the composition and development of such mechanisms. Many in the academic community fear regular control mechanisms because of widespread misunderstanding of evaluation processes. Thus many academics perceive any new evaluation scheme more as a punishment than as a way to stimulate and promote faculty work and development.

To address the issue of educational quality, academia will also need to reexamine some aspects of the educational process. Greater faculty interaction with students both inside and outside the classroom and more creativity in teaching methods will have to be emphasized. In spite of the obvious need for improvement, progress here has been very slow in coming. To some extent, the very nature of established programs has supported the status quo. Because the uniform state requirements still include long lists of required courses, academic staff have continued to teach more or less the same classes over and over again. Promoting student involvement and establishing avenues

for student feedback have been exceptions. And, finally, teaching centered around lecturing is still the norm. The 1997 study of social science faculties in the country revealed that the active methods of teaching are practiced in only 36 percent of advanced courses (Civic Education 1997).

Attracting junior staff

Attracting young scholars and promoting them within the profession is another pressing issue, especially in light of the advanced age of the professoriate. Different measures should address the low salaries of junior academic staff as well as their disadvantaged position in institutional decision-making structures. Development of professional programs as well as more opportunities for travel and specialization are also likely to increase the appeal of the profession. The eventual decentralization of the system of academic appointments and promotions will facilitate career opportunities for young scholars and increase possibilities for professional growth. In this connection, the proposals of the new draft of the law on academic degrees and titles hold promise for the opening up of the profession and for making it more appealing to the best and the brightest.

The professoriate and the market economy

The regulating principles of the market in a knowledge society is a question that demands serious attention. It is becoming more and more obvious that institutions of higher education can no longer rely solely on the state for funding. Policies stimulating institutions to seek out market niches need to be developed. Faculty entrepreneurship and the ability to secure funds and resources for their work will also become increasingly important. In this connection, there should be more consideration of the needs of the students as the consumers of higher education. Student feedback on the educational process and content should become mandatory for institutions of higher education. Such feedback could augment any internal mechanisms for faculty evaluation as well as stimulate faculty work and creativity. More attention should also be paid to the growing unemployment rates among university graduates, for the rates may reveal problems with the quality of preparation for changing labor markets. Programs that respond more effectively to the demands of social reality as well as offering greater flexibility to students during their studies are a necessity.

Conclusion

This chapter was written at a time of ongoing transformation within the Bulgarian educational system. Higher education reform has followed three general directions: the transition from totalitarian higher education to education in a market economy and democratic society, the shift from education based on narrow professional specialization to more broadly based programs; and, finally, the synchronization of the Bulgarian higher education system with European educational structures (as one component in the country's efforts to join the European Union). The reform efforts have progressed mostly from the top down at the initiative of the central authorities. Often, conflicting policies have had a negative impact on the system and its development.

For more than a decade now the academic profession has been facing serious challenges to its status and operation generated by numerous forces of both local and international origin. Crucial issues confronting the profession have been addressed with only marginal success, including the quality of teaching, the system of promotion and conferral of scientific degrees and titles, and professional development programs. And what is more, concerns about the fiscal integrity of the academic profession and the deteriorating working conditions have only grown. Yet despite all these difficulties, the professoriate has continued to function and adapt to the dynamically changing realities, even if often only slowly. Although the future of the profession will depend to a large extent on factors outside the higher education system, such as the country's economic development and political stability, much remains in the hands of the academicians themselves. One can only hope that, with adequate institutional support, in the coming years the Bulgarian professoriate will be better able to cope with the many problems that lie before it.

Notes

Author's note: This essay is part of an international project, the Changing Academic Workplace in International Perspective. Data on the Bulgarian academic profession were collected through an extensive literature review (of both national and international publications, materials prepared by the Bulgarian government, and institutional documentation), analysis of legislation, informal interviews, and institutional visits. For the purpose of the study, 11 interviews/discussions were conducted with 11 faculty members from five different Bulgarian institutions of higher education, 2 doctoral students (one from the Academy of Sciences), and 1 lawyer. Institutional visits included: five universities, the Ministry of Education and Science, the Sofia Institute for Educational Research, the Parliamentary Information Center, and the National Statistical Institute.

1. Before 1944 (the year of communist ascendance to power), there were four professional schools of higher education in the country, in addition to Sofia University: the School of Painting (founded in 1896) and the Music School (1904), which became the Art Academy and Musical Academy, respectively, in 1922, and two postsecondary vocational schools in Varna (1921) and Svishtov (1936). In addition, in 1924, the private Free University for Political and Economic Studies was established. On the eve of World War II, there were more than 10,000 students in the country.
2. On June 17, 2001, 42.74 percent of the Bulgarian population voted for a new party called the Movement for King Simeon. On July 12, King Simeon II, the exiled king of Bulgaria and descendant of the German Saxe-Coburg-Gotha dynasty, became the country's prime minister. His term follows a successful but compromised four-year administration of the Party of the Democrats
3. Throughout the chapter, currency conversions to the dollar are based on the approximate exchange rate of 2 leva for \$1.

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