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## **Institutional Evaluation Programme**

*Performance in Research, Performance in Teaching – Quality, Diversity, and  
Innovation in Romanian Universities Project*

# **AIR FORCE ACADEMY “HENRI COANDĂ” BRAȘOV**

## ***EVALUATION REPORT***

*May 2013*

Team:

Lucija Cok, chair

Erdal Emel

Alexandra Raijmakers

Dionyssis Kladis, team coordinator



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## Table of contents

<b>1. Introduction</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>2. Governance and institutional decision making</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>3. Teaching and learning</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>4. Research</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>5. Service to society/Relations with beneficiaries</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>6. Quality culture</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>7. Internationalisation</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>8. Conclusions and recommendations</b>	<b>30</b>



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## 1. Introduction

This report is the result of the evaluation of the *Air Force Academy "Henri Coandă"* (AFAHC) in Braşov. The evaluation visits took place from 12 to 14 December 2012 and from 17 to 20 March 2013 in the framework of the project "Performance in Research, Performance in Teaching - Quality, Diversity, and Innovation in Romanian Universities", which aims at strengthening core elements of Romanian universities, such as their autonomy and administrative competences, by improving their quality assurance and management proficiency.

The evaluations are taking place within the context of major reforms in the Romanian higher education system, and specifically in accordance with the provisions of the 2011 law on education and the various related normative acts.

While the institutional evaluations are taking place in the context of an overall reform, each university is assessed by an independent IEP team, using the IEP methodology described below.

### 1.1 The Institutional Evaluation Programme

The Institutional Evaluation Programme (IEP) is an independent membership service of the European University Association (EUA) that offers evaluations to support the participating institutions in the continuing development of their strategic management and internal quality culture. The IEP is a full member of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) and is listed in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR).

The distinctive features of the Institutional Evaluation Programme are:

- A strong emphasis on the self-evaluation phase
- A European and international perspective
- A peer-review approach
- A support to improvement

The focus of the IEP is the institution as a whole and not the individual study programmes or units. It focuses upon:

- Decision-making processes and institutional structures and effectiveness of strategic management
- Relevance of internal quality processes and the degree to which their outcomes are used in decision-making and strategic management as well as perceived gaps in these internal mechanisms.



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The evaluation is guided by four key questions, which are based on a “fitness for (and of) purpose” approach:

- What is the institution trying to do?
- How is the institution trying to do it?
- How does it know it works?
- How does the institution change in order to improve?

## 1.2 The AFAHC’s profile

The Air Force Academy “Henri Coandă” (AFAHC) in Braşov is one of the seven military higher education institutions in Romania, which are an integral part of the Romanian higher education system. The AFAHC is unique in the sense that it is the only Romanian military higher education institution that provides education programmes for officers in all the air force services, as well as for specialised personnel for other services and the Ministry of Administration and Interior (MAI). From a military point of view, the AFAHC belongs to the air force staff and is subordinate to the Ministry of National Defence (MApN), which means it is faced with several requirements and standards. On the one hand, there are the academic criteria and, on the other hand, the military standards (see below). Like all military universities in Romania, the AFAHC has a double subordination, since in military terms it is subordinate to the MApN while in educational terms (legislative framework, accreditation, quality assurance etc.) it is subordinate to the Ministry of Education, Research, Youth and Sports (METCS).

The origins of the AFAHC go back to 1912 when the Military School of Aviation was established in Cotroceni. The AFAHC, with its current name, exists since 2000 and resulted from successive mergers, re-namings and relocations of various predecessor institutions. The activities of the AFAHC and its latest predecessors are located in Braşov since 1960.

Braşov is a city in central Romania with a population of 260,000 people and a 100-year tradition in aircraft building. The Self-Evaluation Report (p. 9) emphasises that the county of Braşov has the highest level of human development index in the central region of Romania (5% above the national average). In the city of Braşov, there are three universities: two public (the Transylvania University of Braşov and the AFAHC) and one private (the Georg Bariţiu University of Braşov).

The AFAHC has one single faculty; the faculty of aeronautical management with four departments, which offers three Bachelor programmes (180 ECTS) and two Masters programmes (120 ECTS). The Bachelor programme “organisation management” is the only one accredited so far by ARACIS (the Romanian quality assurance authority); the Bachelor programmes “aviation management” and “air traffic management” are temporarily authorised since 2009 and the Masters programmes “air space security” and “management of air force combat systems” are temporarily authorised since 2011. Apart from the



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accreditation procedures, the Bachelor programme “organisation management” was evaluated in 2011 and ranked according to Romanian legislation in category A (best performing programmes) under the domain “military sciences, intelligence and public order”. As we were informed, the AFAHC is going to ask to rename the already accredited Bachelor programme from “organisation management” to “management of missiles anti-aircraft artillery” in order to more accurately reflect the profile of the academy.

Furthermore, following the national classification procedure for Romanian universities, the AFAHC was included in the category described as “universities for education and scientific research”. However, the AFAHC does not yet fulfil the requirements provided by the law for the development of PhD programmes and the establishment of a doctoral school.

In the academic year 2011-2012, the total number of students in the three Bachelor programmes of the AFAHC was 362. The number of academic staff (consisting of both civilians and military staff) in the same academic year was 46 (35 full-time and 11 part-time), thus resulting in an average student to academic staff ratio of 7.9. In the academic year 2011-2012, the two Masters programmes had 27 students.

The Bachelor students of the AFAHC are all state-funded students and have the combined status of student and cadet. Enrolment is based on a two-stage procedure: a pre-selection procedure taking place in regional centres under the responsibility of the MAPN, followed by the final selection stage (entrance examinations) in the AFAHC. As the team was informed during the meetings, there are about four candidates for each position in the final selection stage in the AFAHC. The candidates may be graduates from either general or military secondary schools. One of the specific characteristics of the AFAHC is that military Bachelor graduates will be employed immediately after graduation in their first position as military officers. As a consequence, the number of Bachelor students enrolling every year is defined by the MAPN.

### ***How the military context affects the higher education context in Romania?***

Below, we outline some of the specificities of military higher education in Romania which affect the overall context in which a military university like the AFAHC operates, which in this regard also affects the present evaluation.

a) A military higher education institution is at the same time a military unit, its rector being the commander of the military unit and its vice-rectors being the deputy commanders. The evaluation team was informed during discussions in the AFAHC that there cannot be professors-generals at a military university with a higher military rank than the elected rector/commander. In such cases, they have to move to another military university where they should be under a rector/commander with a military rank at least equal to theirs.



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b) For an officer to be promoted from the rank of major to the rank of colonel, a Masters degree is required (either a military or a civilian Masters degree, obtained either from a military university or elsewhere). However, to become a commander in a military unit a Masters degree obtained from the National Defence University in Bucharest is required. As the team learned during meetings at the AFAHC, this latter requirement is currently debated by the Ministry of National Defence in Romania. The question under debate is whether the requirement to become a commander could be obtained from any military university and not exclusively from the National Defence University in Bucharest. An additional point here is that in order to be accepted for a “Masters degree for commanders” at the National Defence University in Bucharest, a first Masters degree from any military university is required. This means that two military Master degrees are required to become a commander in a military unit, the second one being obtained at present only from the National Defence University in Bucharest. By contrast, there are no similar requirements related to PhD degrees.

c) Bachelor studies in military universities are free of charge, as all military students are state-funded. However, civilian students enrolled in military Bachelor programmes can be fee-paying students as the university has a limited number of subsidised places for civilians each year. In the case of Master programmes, military students can also be fee-paying. Furthermore, it should be noted that students in Romania can study only one Masters programme free of charge during their lifetime. This means that in cases like the ones mentioned in the previous paragraph (b) where two Master degrees are required only one can be free of charge.

d) So far, all students in the AFAHC are military students. However, the inclusion of civilians in the study programmes (either in common programmes with the military students or in separate programmes for civilians) is among the strategic goals of the university. The idea is that civilian students will only be accepted in the programme for pilots and in the air-traffic control programme. Two approaches are under discussion in the AFAHC, which are also supported by the beneficiaries. According to one approach, civilians will study the same programme as military students but with different educational paths; they will both receive 180 ECTS, but the military students will receive additional credits for their military training. According to the other approach, civilians will study separate programmes, which may also result in the establishment of a second faculty offering study programmes to civilians. In any case, the inclusion of civilian students should also be negotiated with the Ministry of Transport.

e) Civilian pilots in Romania are currently trained at the non-higher education level. There is only one private school located in Bucharest offering training for civilian pilots. AFAHC staff, together with the officers of the Air Force Staff, are convinced that civilians will have better chances of employment if they study at the academy. Furthermore, the evaluation team was informed that opening to civilians would not pose a problem with regards to military



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discipline within the academy. From the above it is clear that the inclusion of civilians in the study programmes at the AFAHC would have a positive impact on the training of civilian pilots in Romania, as well as the fee-paying civilian students being an economic benefit for the AFAHC.

### 1.3 The evaluation process

#### *The self-evaluation process*

The self-evaluation process was undertaken by the self-evaluation group consisting of eight members (including one student) that was chaired by Associate Professor of Engineering Mrs Lavinia-Irinel Gavrilă, PhD. The self-evaluation group prepared the Self-Evaluation Report (SER), which was uploaded on the electronic platform of the project along with the related annexes on 14 November 2012.

The evaluation team appreciated the work done in the SER, which covered almost all issues and was supplemented with a significant amount of informative appendixes and annexes. In this regard, we considered the SER a comprehensive, informative, frank and critical analysis, which reflected the strong commitment of the people of the AFAHC to improvement, presenting at the same time the vision and the expectations of the AFAHC for the future.

#### *The two site visits*

The two site visits of the evaluation team to the AFAHC took place from 12 to 14 December 2012 and from 17 to 20 March 2013. During the two visits, the evaluation team had the opportunity to discuss the situation of the AFAHC with many of its actors and with the main stakeholders and beneficiaries, namely:

- The leadership of the AFAHC
- The leadership, members of the academic staff and students from the AFAHC faculty
- Members of the academic senate and the administration council
- Two of the senate commissions
- Persons involved in research projects
- Key administrative staff
- Student representatives
- Recent graduates
- The main beneficiaries of the AFAHC from the Air Force staff.

There were also intense and in-depth discussions with the Rector, Professor Gabriel-Florin Moiescu, with the Presidents of the senate (Professor Doru Luculescu during the first visit and Professor Lavinia-Irinel Gavrilă during the second visit) and with the self-evaluation group. Therefore, the evaluation team had the opportunity to meet the broad spectrum of actors at the AFAHC. All meetings and discussions were efficiently organised by Vice-Rector Laurian



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Gherman who acted as the liaison person between the university and the evaluation team. The logistics of the two site visits were carried out by Mr Octavian Popa on behalf of UEFISCDI.

The evaluation team would like to express its gratitude to the people of the AFAHC for the openness and willingness to discuss all issues during our meetings. Finally, the evaluation team would like to express its sincere thanks to the Rector, Professor Gabriel-Florin Moisescu, and his team for the organisation before and during our two visits and for their warm hospitality.

In between the two visits the university provided the evaluation team with requested additional documentation, which was uploaded in due time on the electronic platform of the project.

### ***The evaluation report***

The present evaluation report is harmonised with the aims of the IEP as outlined above. In this respect, it focuses on the current strengths and weaknesses of the AFAHC regarding its capacity for change, in view of the surrounding opportunities and threats; it expresses a number of recommendations that may be taken into account for the future development of the university.

The evaluation report takes into account all the data provided to the evaluation team in the SER and corresponding additional information. Furthermore, it should be taken into account that the overall analysis, the comments and the recommendations are based on two intense but rather short visits: a two-day first visit and a three-day second visit. The evaluation team also collected a significant amount of information on the Romanian higher education system, especially regarding the recent reform, but it is not possible for the analysis to go into such details. The comments and recommendations, therefore, will be confined mostly to major issues of concern within the AFAHC. The recommendations, together with the corresponding reasoning and analysis, appear underlined in the text of the evaluation report, while a summary of recommendations is presented in the last section of the report. Finally, it should be noted that throughout the body of the evaluation report, many ideas of the evaluation team appear, which should not be considered as real recommendations but as reflections which the AFAHC may consider.

## **1.4 The evaluation team**

The evaluation team consisted of the following members:

- Lucija Cok, former Rector, University of Primorska, Slovenia, as team chair
- Erdal Emel, former Vice-Rector, Uludağ University in Bursa, Turkey



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- Alexandra Raijmakers, Bachelor student, University of Amsterdam, The Netherlands
- Dionyssi Kladis, professor emeritus, University of the Peloponnese, Greece, former Secretary for Higher Education in Greece, as team coordinator

Student team member, Alexandra Raijmakers, attended only the first site visit.



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## 2. Governance and institutional decision making

### 2.1 Philosophy of the AFAHC: Norms and values/Vision - mission - strategic goals

The vision and the mission of the university can be found in the key documents provided by the AFAHC to the evaluation team, namely from the SER, the university's charter of the university and its strategic plan 2011-2015. To paraphrase AFAHC vision statement, the institution aims to be an advanced research university and to offer study programmes, research programmes and expertise services of high scientific level combining academic values with military principles, based on the appropriate educational and scientific environment granted to students and teaching staff and on the increased level of motivation, commitment and professionalism of the teaching staff and students. In this regard, the AFAHC aims to its special contribution within the national and international environments, in the field of education in the spirit of dignity and professional honour of the military system.

The mission of the AFAHC follows as a consequence. According to the charter of the AFAHC (article 3), *"the AFAHC is a higher education institution of the Ministry of National Defence (MApN), whose fundamental mission is to train licentiate officers in the field of 'military sciences, intelligence and public order' for the Air Force Staff, other branches of the Armed Forces, the Ministry of Administration and Interior (MAI), as well as other beneficiaries. Its mission is carried out by means of educational and research activities, following specific elements of a military higher education institution. In the international context, the academy's mission is to educate Air Force and Land Forces officers that participate in international missions carried out in cooperation with NATO and EU member states"*.

According to the same article, the AFAHC in order to achieve its mission *"organises and runs activities of academic scientific research (fundamental and applied), technological development, design, testing-evaluating, consulting, expertise, drawing up and evaluation of standards, so as to meet the requirements of defence structures on request of economic agents, within specific contracts included in the National Plan for Research Development and Innovation and in sectorial plans, as well as national and international research programs"*.

Furthermore, in article 4 of the university's charter it is provided that the AFAHC accomplishes other missions in addition to the abovementioned fundamental mission. Three of these additional missions are worth mentioning: a) deepening knowledge through Masters and post-graduate programmes for continuous professional development, b) providing PhD training soon after the criteria for organising doctoral studies are met in compliance with the national legislation, c) improving foreign language skills of the air force personnel and other beneficiaries through language courses.



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Regarding the mission of the AFAHC, the evaluation team would like to point out that the mission as it stands does not cover the need to open up the student body to civilians as well. In this regard, the mission of the academy should be further refined accordingly.

Finally, the evaluation team considers worth mentioning the values that, according to the SER (p. 11), delineate the activity of all the academic community members, which are: professionalism, dedication, vocation, honesty and loyalty to the academy's organisational culture. For the evaluation team, these values strengthen the potential of the AFAHC in order to pursue its vision and achieve its mission.

The evaluation team observed that the abovementioned vision and mission and the related values shape the overall direction of the AFAHC. The AFAHC is a unique higher education institution in Romania regarding aeronautical, aviation and air traffic education, demonstrating strong tradition and performance in the above fields. Furthermore, the team is really confident that the AFAHC will continue to play an important role in Romanian society by achieving its mission and respecting values embedded into its culture. In this regard, we consider worth noting the intention of the AFAHC to widen its mission by developing programmes for civilian students as well.

Based on the above mission statement and on its charter, the AFAHC has devised a strategic plan for the period 2011-2015 that contains the institution's key strategic goals and is followed by a list of key performance indicators for each goal to monitor their implementation. The evaluation team also had the opportunity to go through the annual operational plan for the academic year 2012-2013, which contains a number of action lines; the respective deadline is given for each action line together with the names of the person responsible and the coordinator for its implementation.

The evaluation team had the opportunity to discuss the key issues of the strategic plan during the second site visit in a meeting with the members of the AFAHC administration council and the president of the academic senate. The evaluation team considers the strategic plan a very good starting platform for the further development of the AFAHC. However, the implementation of this platform requires coherence and a deeper coordination between the strategic plan and the yearly operational plans, which should contain concrete and relevant actions in order to implement the strategic goals. These actions should be prioritised, cost-analysed and time-specific within the validity period of the strategic plan. Furthermore, the evaluation team would also like to stress the need for quantification of the key performance indicators. The team was told that the performance indicators will be quantified after the evaluation of the AFAHC by the IEP. However, as it stands now, the strategic plan appears to contain various goals in a neutral or horizontal sense without any prioritisation. This may be acceptable in theory, but in practice priorities must be set in order to ensure that significant goals are not confused with less important ones. On the other hand, performance indicators



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that are not properly quantified cannot serve in monitoring the implementation of the strategic plan, even if there is a strong alignment between the performance indicators and the respective strategic goals.

According to the above analysis, the operational plan 2012-2013 cannot play the role of the action plan for the implementation of the strategic plan 2011-2015. Furthermore, the relationship between the actions illustrated in the operational plan 2012-2013 and the strategic goals is not always clear. Therefore, although we could assume that the deadlines set for the various actions in the operational plan 2012-2013 presuppose some kind of prioritisation, the overall impression is that all strategic goals are aimed in parallel.

Following the above analysis, the evaluation team recommends that the AFAHC a) develops a concrete action plan for the transformation of the key strategic goals into specific actions which should be prioritised, cost-analysed and time-specific within the validity period of the strategic plan 2011-2015, and b) quantifies as soon as possible the performance indicators to monitor the implementation of the strategic plan.

In parallel, the evaluation team also recommends a stronger and clearer alignment between the strategic goals and the actions included in the annual operational plans of the AFAHC.

Furthermore, the evaluation team would like to raise the question regarding the instruments that oversee and monitor the implementation of the strategic plan and the achievement of the strategic goals and the key performance indicators. In this regard, the evaluation team recommends that this task should be assigned to a specific body attached directly to the rector or to one of the vice-rectors. This body should also have the task to assess the validity of the strategic goals and the respective key performance indicators and reconsider them in all cases that the goals and the key performance indicators could not be achieved.

From the various documents provided by the AFAHC to the evaluation team and from the discussions during the meetings, the team has realised that the major strategic goals of the university in order to meet the challenges of the future, to improve its visibility nationally and internationally and to clarify its profile are the following: a) the enlargement of the student body by including civilian students (together with the consequent reconsideration of the study programmes); b) the development of PhD programmes and the establishment of a doctoral school (by improving or ensuring the required conditions); c) the systematisation of research activities and the re-organisation of research structures (aiming also to clarify and improve the research profile of the university). The evaluation team strongly supports the efforts of the university to fulfil these aims with the certainty that the achievement of these goals will further strengthen the uniqueness of the AFAHC in the Romanian system of higher education.



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## 2.2 Governance and institutional decision making

At the institutional level, the Romanian higher education system follows a dual governance model with the parallel existence of two collective bodies, the academic senate and the administration council. Furthermore, it can be said that the leadership system is rector-centred. The rector appoints the vice-rectors and chairs the administration council consisting also of the vice-rectors, the deans, the administrative general director of the university and one student representative. According to the Romanian higher education law, the administration council ensures the operational management of the universities and applies the strategic decisions of the academic senate, which is considered the highest decision-making body at university level. Furthermore, it is worth noting that in the Romanian system the members of the administration council cannot be members of the senate in parallel. This means that there is a complete distinction regarding membership between the two major bodies of a university.

This governance system is also in place in the AFAHC. The small size of the university and primarily its military status make the operation of this system quite efficient and effective without facing any problems regarding overlapping or internal conflict of responsibilities. As mentioned earlier, the university operates under the status of a military unit, with the rector being its commander and with the two vice-rectors and the administrative general director being its three deputy commanders. In fact, governance in the AFAHC is as a combination of the democratic principles of governance and leadership in a university with the hierarchy and discipline of a military unit. This situation has been described in the SER (p. 13) as follows: *“the academy has to harmonise the principle of university autonomy with the principle of the unit of command”*. The situation becomes even more complex if one also considers the fact that the personnel (teaching and administrative) of the academy is mixed with both military and civilian staff.

In such an environment, it is not easy for an external reviewer to find out where academic democracy ends and where military hierarchy and discipline starts. In the meetings the team was informed that the democratic environment in the AFAHC is unique among military education systems in Romania. The team is aware, for example, of the democratic process for the election of the rector (who is at the same time the commander of the unit) with the participation also of student representatives (who are in fact cadets at the same unit). The team is also aware that three student representatives participate in the academic senate together with eight academics). However, it is not easy to understand whether student participation in governance is fully exercised. Furthermore, it is not easy to understand the extent to which the academic senate does really control the rector’s (commander’s) as well as the administration council’s management activity by means of a commission which reports to the senate on a regular basis (SER, p. 14). Perhaps, the key issue here is that educational academic issues are clearly and fully distinguished from military issues.



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Nevertheless, the evaluation team had the opportunity to realise that governance and decision-making in the AFAHC operates properly and effectively without any problems and any internal conflicts. The team's impression is that this internal balance results from a combination of the democratic and hierarchical principles affecting governance in the AFAHC. In any case, the present governance status and operation, together with the established strategic management and quality management, set good background for the implementation of the mission of the university.

Given the above reality, the only recommendation that the evaluation team would like to make here refers to the way in which the student representative in the administrative council is elected. To the team's knowledge, this is the only case where the student representative is not elected by the students themselves but by the members of the senate after nomination by the three student-members of the senate. The team believes that for consistency reasons the AFAHC should reconsider this procedure.

### ***Autonomy and constraints***

Among the aims of the current higher education reform in Romania is to increase university autonomy. In this respect, universities are allowed to define their vision, mission and strategy; they are also allowed to define their internal structural organisation, their quality assurance mechanisms and, to a certain extent, perform their financial and human resources management; finally they are responsible for their research activities and for curricula design and their implementation.

The evaluation team understands that there is a high degree of autonomy for Romanian universities, the main restrictions applying to issues related to financing. However, the situation seems to be somehow different in the case of military universities. A military university has to deal with at least two ministries: the Ministry of National Defence (MApN) and the Ministry of Education, Research, Youth and Sports (MECTS). More especially, the AFAHC has to deal also with the Ministry of Administration and Interior (MAI), which is partially related to the officers' specialties of pilots for helicopters and air traffic controllers. Finally, the team was informed that the AFAHC has to deal also with the Ministry of Transport with regards to the enlargement of its student body with civilians as well.

As it was outlined in the SER (p. 10), due to its nature as a military university the AFAHC faces some constraints such as: *"the academy's organisational chart is not flexible as it is devised by the Air Force Staff; its curricula and syllabi are subject to Air Force Staff's approval and must include subject matters whose aim is to develop military skills; military activities often affect academic processes; information security policies limit the access to the IT systems allocated for teaching activities; the academy is a tertiary credit accountant with no full competences in*



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*the field of acquisitions*”. These constraints are specific to a military university and do not apply to the other universities.

The evaluation team would also like to mention two more types of constraints specific to military universities, as they are described in the SER. On the one hand, the policy of intellectual property rights, which is much stricter for military universities and, on the other hand, the principle of transparency of information, which, in a military university, excludes classified information.

As for the financial constraints that military universities face, it should be noted that they are also different to those faced by the other universities. The military universities are funded by the MApN and not by the MECTS. In general, funding is restricted as a consequence of the economic crisis. However, we were informed that funding of educational activities as well as funding to sustain students’ needs can be considered satisfactory. On the contrary, funding of research is scarce. Furthermore, the military universities face constraints in their autonomy and flexibility with regards to financial management. As the team was informed, the MApN, together with the approval of the budget of the AFAHC, also approves the allocation of funds along budget lines, thus leaving practically no room for re-allocation to the leadership of the university.

The evaluation team realises that the abovementioned constraints restrict the capacity of the AFAHC to manage efficiently and flexibly its overall activities and to be successful in achieving all its goals. The team realises that most constraints derive from the military nature of the university and that it is a hard task to try to improve this situation. However, the evaluation team supports any effort of the AFAHC to strengthen its autonomy.

### ***Academic structure/academic organisation***

The evaluation team considers two issues worth noting regarding the academic structure of the AFAHC: the existence of one single faculty in the AFAHC and the lack of a doctoral school.

As it was mentioned earlier in section 1.2 concerning the AFAHC’s profile, there is only one faculty in the AFAHC. This issue is not considered a problem by the AFAHC. However, the single-faculty structure might be considered superfluous and it is observed in three small-size military universities in Romania; the National Intelligence Academy in Bucharest, the Air Force Academy in Braşov and the Land Forces Academy in Sibiu. The small size of these universities does not allow for the establishment of a second faculty. However, there is currently a debate in the AFAHC regarding the establishment of a second faculty in the case that civilian students study separate programmes from the military students.



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In its meetings in the AFAHC, the evaluation team raised the question whether the existence of the single faculty was a necessity and whether it could be replaced by a new organisational structure containing only the four departments. From our discussions it became clear that the existence of at least one faculty is a necessity for every Romanian university. This necessity derives indirectly from the Romanian law for higher education stipulating that *“the faculty is the functional unit that drafts and manages the educational programmes”* (article 132, clause 1) and that *“the department is the operational academic unit that ensures the generation, transfer and capitalisation of knowledge in one or more fields”* (article 133, clause 1). This means that the study programmes are drafted by the faculties and then they are operated by the departments. Furthermore, there is no stipulation in the law providing that another body (departments, senate, etc.) would draft and manage the study programmes in the potential absence of the faculties.

Similarly, looking at article 213 clause 2 (responsibilities of senate) and clause 10 (responsibilities of faculty council) of the Romanian law for higher education, we can also identify some problems, since the members of the two bodies (senate and faculty council) all belong (both academics and students) to the same faculty but without being the same persons. What the team learnt however is that this reality does not appear to be a real problem in governance and especially in the vertical relationship between the senate and the faculty council at the AFAHC. The reason is that there is no overlapping in the responsibilities of the senate and the faculty council and that in fact the senate does not act as a hierarchically superior body to the faculty council.

The second issue regarding academic structure and organisation is the lack of a doctoral school. The establishment of a doctoral school depends on the capacity of the AFAHC to organise and carry out doctoral studies, or in other words on the capacity of the academic staff to supervise PhDs. According to the Romanian law for higher education, PhDs should be completed in a doctoral school. The precondition for a university to establish a doctoral school is the existence of at least three professors authorised to supervise PhDs according to the law. As the team was informed during our meetings at the AFAHC, there are only two authorised professors so far. Nevertheless, at the time of our visits there were four members of the teaching staff of the AFAHC undertaking their PhDs at the Transylvania University of Braşov under the supervision of one of the authorised professors of this university.

The evaluation team is aware that the establishment of a doctoral school is among the priorities of the strategic aims of the AFAHC. There are two ways in which this aim can be achieved. The first way is by attracting professors of high level, but this is not without difficulties because of the blocking of new positions at the universities by the government under the current conditions of the economic crisis. The second way should be based on the university’s own forces through ensuring that members of the teaching staff of the AFAHC fulfil the requirements to be authorised PhD supervisors. As the team was told in the



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meetings, currently there is no motivation for an officer to obtain a PhD from the perspective of the Ministry of National Defence. However, it seems that there is an ongoing discussion on this issue. Nevertheless, the evaluation team recommends that the AFAHC continues its efforts towards the establishment of a doctoral school. From both the Bologna and the wider international perspectives, the third cycle of studies is essential to the university status and to survive as a standalone university, especially if it has the ambition to become a research oriented university. In this regard, the evaluation team believes that the AFAHC should address this necessity to both ministries (MApN and MECTS). Furthermore, the completion of AFAHC's study programmes with the third cycle, together with enhancement and focus of its research activity, will help the AFAHC to clarify and further improve its profile and its visibility nationally and internationally.

With regards to the establishment of a doctoral school in the AFAHC, the evaluation team is of the opinion that the MApN and the air force staff should discuss with the academy the significance of PhDs for military purposes and needs also. For example, it should be clarified whether the PhD should be included in the competence requirements for military-related research, administrative and command tasks and rank promotion.



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### 3. Teaching and learning

The characteristics of the teaching and learning environment in the AFAHC (like in all military universities) are very specific. They could be described by the following: a) students are at the same time cadets; b) accommodation for all students is provided by the academy; c) students attend all classes and are in continuous contact with the teaching staff; d) the academic curricula are comprehensive since they have to provide the students with all competences and skills required for their employment as Air Force officers after their graduation.

In discussions with students, the team found out that they are satisfied with their studies, their teachers and the competences and skills that they acquire during their studies. Their only concern was related to the proportion of theory and practice. Students ask for more field practice (e.g., flights). This seems to be a major issue in the AFAHC and it has resulted from the need to adapt military studies to Bologna principles. As the team was told, the European standard is 100 flight hours before graduation. However, they cannot reach this standard because of the ECTS restrictions. They try to achieve a balance between theory and practice. In this regard, they try to increase the number of practice weeks from nine to 10-12 per year. Starting from the current academic year, they will undertake their practice in the private school for pilots in Bucharest with whom the academy will sign an agreement and they will receive both military pilot license and private pilot license. In addition, the graduates receive extra specialised training for nine months after graduation at the Air Force training school in Boboc.

During the meeting with the beneficiaries of the AFAHC (i.e., officers of the Air Force staff) the team observed that they are enthusiastic with the competences of graduates. They praised both specialised and generic skills, but they placed particular emphasis on the operational skills of the graduates. According to the beneficiaries, the academy reflects the development of the Air Force during the last 20 years.

The evaluation team realises that the balance between theory and practice is a difficult issue, especially in a military university. It is a real challenge to satisfy the military needs in an academic environment (where the academic needs as defined by the Bologna requirements are added to the military ones). The evaluation team realised the challenge of combining academic studies of 180 ECTS with 100 hours of flights (i.e., 100 hours of practical training) before graduation, even if they take place in summer sessions. Since there are no facilities (airport and technological support facilities) in Braşov, training in the private pilot school in Bucharest from the current academic year seems to be a good solution to the problem.

Although it is not a solution to the problem, the evaluation team would recommend that the AFAHC considers the idea of organising practice on a simulation basis in well equipped laboratories with interactive training sessions before field practice in order to enhance the



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adaptation of cadets to real application. As a further contribution to meeting the demand for more practice, the evaluation team would recommend some ideas for parallel initiatives, like for example better cooperation from field units for setting up graduation thesis projects for cadets and regular meetings among cadets and graduates organised by the students association.

The evaluation team had many fruitful meetings with students, at both faculty and institutional levels. As mentioned earlier the team noted the satisfaction and the commitment of students regarding their studies in general. Furthermore, the team would like to highlight the recent establishment of the student association in the AFAHC, which is already showing significant activity in promoting student issues and in coordinating the participation of students in university governance at all levels. In this regard the team would also like to praise the very good and effective cooperation of the leadership of the AFAHC with the student association. One last issue that the team would like to raise regarding students in the AFAHC is the encouragement that they receive from the academy in order to build their research capacity. In this regard the team praises the leadership and the academic staff of the AFAHC for encouraging students to publish their work and to participate in national or international conferences. Under these conditions, the only thing that the evaluation team would propose is that the students should continue to be as active as possible in all functions of the AFAHC and that the academy should continue its efforts in supporting its students/cadets.

Finally, the evaluation team had the opportunity to realise the dedication and commitment of the academic staff of the AFAHC, which is one of the major strengths of the university. Under the current economic crisis, academic staff shortages may become harmful for the quality of teaching and learning, and it is only the commitment of the academic staff that prevents such a situation arising in the AFAHC. Furthermore, the team would like to note the psycho-pedagogical and methodological training, which is compulsory for all teaching staff in the AFAHC, and to simply recommend that it continues and further improves its activities and its performance.



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## 4. Research

The evaluation team notes that scientific research is an important component of the mission of the AFAHC. In 2008, the AFAHC was accredited for its research activity by the National Authority for Scientific Research (ANCS), which is subordinated to the MECS. Since the academic year 2008-2009, the position of a vice-rector (deputy commander) in charge of research was set up and three research centres were established for better organisation of the overall research activity. Due to financial difficulties, these research centres have not been accredited so far (SER, p. 24).

The evaluation team also had the opportunity to realise that the research mission of the AFAHC is achieved through various activities, namely research projects, conferences, publications, etc. also including the involvement of students to develop their research competence. However, the major weaknesses in this regard are, on the one hand, the scarce funding for research and, on the other hand, the lack of appropriate research personnel given the low availability of academic staff for research due to teaching overload. Since most of the research topics in the AFAHC are related to technological advancements, any solid study will require a laboratory setting with qualified staff, specialised in the field. Unless these conditions are met, individual attempts by current staff will be insufficient at any rate for achieving their research goals.

The evaluation team discussed in depth the issue of scientific research in the AFAHC, particularly in the context of the discussions concerning its strategic plan. The team is aware that merging the three research centres is high among the strategic priorities of the AFAHC. The intention is to create a strong research centre where all research activities will be consolidated and which will be staffed with full-time researchers, i.e., with personnel that will be hired only for research. The goal is to have this research centre accredited, as a first step towards the classification of the AFAHC as a university of advanced research.

The evaluation team fully understands this strategic goal and supports the efforts of the AFAHC to that aim. However, the team believes that there is an issue regarding the research profile and the research identity of the AFAHC. The team raised this issue during the discussions enquiring about the scientific areas in which the AFAHC is planning to organise and perform its advanced research activity. This is a reasonable question since much of the current research activity (publications, articles in conferences) is based on fundamental sciences and engineering. However, these areas cannot create a research identity of an Air Force academy. The evaluation team believes that this identity can be built only on specific research activities based on the uniqueness of the AFAHC.

The AFAHC is unique in the education it offers in the areas of its five study programmes. According to the evaluation team, it should strengthen and secure its uniqueness through



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research activities in the same fields. However, in discussions the team was informed that the AFAHC is not unique regarding research in these areas. The team was told, for example, that there is a Military Technical Academy in Bucharest in similar fields; there is an agency in Romania specialised in military technology addressed to all branches; and there is also advanced technology in the Air-Force bases. Furthermore, the team was informed that the AFAHC also has to compete in research with the National Defence University (in the operational area) and with the Military Technical Academy (in the technical area). The team understands that the AFAHC will have to develop its research activity in a competitive environment nationally and internationally, if it aims to be a university of advanced research. However, even under these circumstances, the uniqueness of the AFAHC in education is a reality. Even if it cannot be transformed automatically to uniqueness in research too, it remains the academy's major strength and is an opportunity to meet the challenges of competition building in parallel its research profile.

In one meeting the team was informed that under the current conditions the AFAHC has restricted research potential and for that reason cannot compete successfully with universities like the National Defence University and the Military Technical Academy in Bucharest which have much better conditions and opportunities. The pessimistic conclusion of the above discussions was that the AFAHC should adapt its activities to its restricted potential. The evaluation team could not agree with such an approach. This approach is not consistent with the strategic goal of the AFAHC to be a university of advanced research. The evaluation team believes that the AFAHC should start building the appropriate conditions to that aim. The establishment of a research centre where the academic staff will coexist with full-time researchers hired only for research is an important step to that aim and the team supports the efforts of the leadership of the academy to that aim. Furthermore, the scientific focus of research is another important step. The research capacity will be built step by step, reinforcing and concentrating the research potentials, but it should be based on the uniqueness of the AFAHC.

During the meeting with the officers of the Air Force staff the team discussed the issue of research priorities in their capacity as beneficiaries of the AFAHC (not only regarding education and graduates' training but also regarding research). They also agree that the AFAHC should build on its uniqueness. Considering their needs as beneficiaries, they believe that the AFAHC should focus its research activity on the operational area (tactical field). They are aware that in focusing research in the operational area the AFAHC will have to compete with the National Defence University in Bucharest, however they believe that this is the area where the AFAHC will have the best chances. The evaluation team would further expect that the interest from the air force staff would also be translated into real support to the AFAHC in order to meet this challenge.



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Concluding the section for research, the evaluation team would like to point out the issue of competition among the military universities in Romania concerning their research performance, an issue that came up both during the meetings with the AFAHC's members as well as with its beneficiaries. The team fully understands competition as one of the moving forces in higher education in general. However, it is the team's feeling that things are somehow different when it comes to the specialised sector of military higher education. The team understands that the military universities are characterised by their specialised profile, by their uniqueness, which should also be reflected in their missions and in their educational and research priorities. In the team's view, overlapping should not be a common issue or at least it should not affect the uniqueness of a military university. The team considers that AFAHC would gain from a strategic positioning for each military academy in the country, with respect to each academy's mission and uniqueness. In this regard, the AFAHC should address the necessity of strategic positioning to the MApN, as the main beneficiary of military higher education.



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## 5. Service to society/Relations with beneficiaries

Establishing strong and close links with society is one of the major aims of any university nowadays, notably because offering services to society is considered the third mission of modern universities, combined, of course, with their accountability and public responsibility. In the case of a military university this relationship is directed primarily to the military beneficiaries. For the AFAHC the main beneficiary is the Air Force staff. The Ministry of Administration and Interior (MAI), and especially the Aviation Inspectorate, is also a beneficiary of the AFAHC with regards to the officers' specialties as pilots for helicopters and air traffic controllers. Furthermore, and with regards to the planned enlargement of the student body with civilians, the Ministry of Transport is another potential beneficiary.

However, the team should mention here that the AFAHC considers its societal mission in a wider sense than the one related to its direct beneficiaries. This role is described in the SER (p. 17) as follows: *"The academy's educational offer must anticipate social needs and exceed social expectations in the context of an open society by vocational, life-long and entrepreneurial education and training. The academy aims at promoting its skills and knowledge to the society within the national and regional development (social, economic, cultural) partnership by means of life-long learning, research, expertise and consultancy. Therefore, AFAHC encourages entrepreneurship by offering research projects that meet the current needs of the labour market, particularly in the military field."*

In this regard, the evaluation team considers the societal mission of a military university much more composite than of other universities. In a typical meeting with external partners, the team only met Air Force officers and had the opportunity to observe the close links between the AFAHC and the Air Force staff. The team appreciated the very good cooperation and interaction regarding strategic development as well as the involvement of the beneficiaries in further upgrading the curricula. The team have already mentioned earlier in the present report the appreciation of the beneficiaries regarding the academic results of the AFAHC (especially concerning the efficiency and the competences of the graduates), and has also mentioned the views of the Air Force staff regarding research orientation and research priorities of the AFAHC. However, the team should expect that the Air Force staff define topics of interest at Master and PhD level. Finally, as an example of the concern of the Air Force Staff regarding the strategic development of the AFAHC, the team considers worth noting their approach with regards to opening the study programmes to civilians. The beneficiaries consider this opening necessary for economic reasons (due to the fee-paying civilian students) but at the same time they believe that civilians will have better chances for employment when studying in the AFAHC. And finally the team notes their belief that opening to civilians will not be a problem with regards to military discipline in the academy.



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The evaluation team appreciates the sensitivity of the air force staff regarding current activities and further development of the AFAHC. It also praises the sensitivity of the AFAHC regarding its societal mission. The team's recommendation would be that the AFAHC should, on the one hand, retain and further strengthen its cooperation with the beneficiaries in all aspects, given that their influence and their support will be precious and, on the other hand, make its societal mission in its strategic planning more concrete.



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## 6. Quality culture

The term “quality culture” defines the overall attitude of a university which focuses on the concept of “quality” and which thus applies to issues like quality assurance, quality assessment, quality improvement, etc. In the context of the IEP methodology, quality assurance offers the means through which a university will be in a position to know whether it is doing well and accomplishing its chosen mission and goals. It certainly comes from the necessity of going beyond data, figures, statistics, quantitative elements and it deals with the qualitative dimension. Quality is a central element in European higher education today. Furthermore, it has also assumed a key role in the Bologna Process, while the *European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education* (ESG), adopted by the European ministers in Bergen in May 2005, have built a European perspective and a European context for quality assurance in higher education. It is worthwhile to note that every country participating in the Bologna Process is committed to developing its own quality assurance system in compliance with the ESG.

As a key stakeholder in the European discussions for quality assurance, EUA actively encourages its member universities to implement their own internal quality assurance mechanisms and to develop a quality culture shared among universities throughout Europe. As stated in the Berlin Communiqué (2003), “consistent with the principle of institutional autonomy, the primary responsibility for quality assurance in higher education lies with each institution itself and this provides the basis for real accountability of the academic system within the national quality framework”. It is a task therefore for every European university to develop its own structures and procedures ensuring genuine quality assurance.

Referring to the case of the AFAHC, the evaluation team would like first of all to praise its well-organised system of internal quality assurance. The quality management system (QMS) is established in the AFAHC as a requirement set by ARACIS. The QMS runs throughout the overall operation of the university and is based on the ISO 9001 certification. The ISO was not required by ARACIS; however, it was pointed out to the team during the interviews that many Romanian universities are using ISO on the basis of their quality management systems. The implementation of internal quality assurance within the AFAHC includes at institutional level two senate commissions: the senate commission for quality assurance (CEAC) and the senate commission of internal audit (CAI). The details of the QMS and the overall organisation of internal quality assurance in the AFAHC are outlined in the official document “Quality Assurance Code of Educational Process in AFAHC”. Furthermore, the AFAHC has a department for quality assurance, which acts as a supportive administrative unit. The role of the CAI is to follow the standards set by ARACIS for education and research and to evaluate the degree to which these standards are achieved. At the end, the CAI submits its report to the senate, including certain improvement recommendations. The role of the CEAC is to implement the quality assurance system within the AFAHC and to design and draw up related documents.



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The evaluation team is aware that in the past few years AFAHC has undergone many external evaluations of various types, at various levels and for various reasons:

- a) Evaluation by ARACIS (2010), resulting in the recognition of the AFAHC as a “university with a high degree of confidence”
- b) Accreditation leading to the ISO 9001 certification for the quality management system
- c) Classification in the category of universities of education and scientific and artistic research (2011)
- d) Accreditation of the Bachelor study programme “Organisational Management” by ARACIS (since 2009)
- e) Ranking of the Bachelor study programme “Organisational Management” in category A in the domain “military sciences, intelligence and public order” (2011)

The evaluation team understands that the AFAHC has suffered — and still suffers — from an evaluation overload. The reasons are understandable, as they have to do with the need to ensure and improve the quality of the Romanian higher education system. However, the evaluation team also knows that evaluation overload does not necessarily lead to improvement in quality and does not necessarily help in building a quality culture.

The evaluation team paid specific attention to the consistency of the internal quality assurance system of the AFAHC with part 1 of the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG). The implementation of the ESG at the AFAHC was not checked using a “checklist approach” but through an “evidence-based approach”; that is, an approach based on evidence derived from all related documents (SER, strategic plan, quality-related documents) and from the findings during the team’s meetings. Following this approach, the evaluation team noted that the internal quality assurance structures and procedures of the AFAHC follow, to a satisfactory extent, the ESG. This view of the evaluation team is principally based on the following evidence:

- The official document “Quality Assurance Code of Educational Process in AFAHC” provides for all issues related to the ESG.
- The organisation of the quality assurance system of the AFAHC includes at institutional level the senate commission for quality assurance (CEAC), the senate commission of internal audit (CAI) and the quality management system (QMS).
- The study programmes are subject to regular evaluation in terms of meeting the standards, the references standards and the performance indicators for external evaluation, set by ARACIS methodology.
- The teaching staff quality assessment is performed on an annual basis according to the set of criteria specific to teaching staff evaluation methodology.
- The professional lifelong learning of the teaching staff is achieved by psycho-pedagogical and methodological training activities, organised by the institution on a monthly basis,



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presenting the latest trends in teaching techniques and methods with an emphasis on student-centred teaching and specificity of the taught subject matters.

- In all departments of the faculty there are people in charge of quality assurance issues.
- Involvement of students is ensured, on the one hand, through the participation of one student representative in each one of the CEAC and the CAI and, on the other hand, through the questionnaires filled in by the students for the assessment of courses and teaching staff.
- At the end of each semester, the students evaluate the teaching staff, their degree of professional dedication as fundamental benchmarks in assessing the quality of educational processes, analysing the level of satisfaction of students in relation to professional and personal development provided by faculty, representing input information obtained in the process of improving the quality of study programmes.
- Each teacher is informed of the results and recommendations concerning the questionnaires filled in by the students for their performance. There is a wider discussion among all teachers where the problems are presented and analysed.
- Assessment of learning outcomes in the academy is achieved through successful completion of studies by license examination, which consists of the evaluation of theoretical and practical knowledge in specific topics and the graduation project presentation.
- Feedback regarding the quality of educational services in AFAHC is collected by means of the graduates' appraisals and beneficiaries' content assessments in terms of the level of competencies and skills acquired in the academy.

The AFAHC has provided the evaluation team with an analytical document on the implementation of the SEG where further details can be found. In this respect, the evaluation team praises the AFAHC for its internal quality assurance system and for its consistency in following the ESG.

While appreciating the AFAHC's efforts towards building and consolidating their quality management and quality assurance systems, the team would like to remind to the university that, as mentioned earlier, quality culture is not about standards, rankings, or classifications; it is about attitudes, mentalities, and values. Quality culture is not expected to be imposed or regulated or monitored in a top-down approach. Quality culture should be built bottom-up and then spread within the whole higher education community and affect all functions of the university. The involvement of each individual in this bottom-up procedure requires inspiration which in fact acts as stimulation. And conveying this inspiration is a very important role and task for the leadership of the university at all levels.



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## 7. Internationalisation

An internationalisation strategy may be based on the relationships established by a university with international partners. This relationship may be built at the institutional level (e.g., inter-university relationships, relations with international organisations, partnership in international networks and consortia), at the level of the faculties (e.g., joint or dual study programmes and degrees), at the level of research units/activities (e.g., participation in international research projects and financing by international resources) or at the level of individuals (e.g., mobility exchanges of students and staff, attractiveness of international students and staff, involvement of students and staff in international events and activities).

Therefore, an important part of the internationalisation strategy of a university will be of course to develop the appropriate conditions that will help establish and/or further improve the above relationships. However, it should also be taken into account that the above relationships will be built on and will be facilitated and further improved by the international visibility of the university, its research profile, its reputation, and the way in which it promotes its qualities internationally. And these should be considered a constituent part of an internationalisation strategy.

The evaluation team praises the internationalisation efforts of the AFAHC. It noted that internationalisation is high on the strategic agenda of the AFAHC and that the awareness of the need for further internationalisation is strong within the university. Although the scope of a military university is more or less restricted with regards to its international partnerships, the team can see that the AFAHC does not restrict its collaborations only to military universities. In this respect, the team noted AFAHC's few initiatives of cooperation with non-military institutions such as Università degli Studi di Bari "Aldo Moro" in Italy or the Bloomfield College in the United States. Furthermore, it is worth noting the efforts of the AFAHC towards increasing mobility of students and staff, for which it has been granted the Erasmus Charter for the academic years 2012-2013 and 2013-2014.

In view of the above analysis, the evaluation team considers it extremely important for the AFAHC to further develop a comprehensive internationalisation strategy that will cover all the abovementioned dimensions, taking advantage of all opportunities that the existing legislation in Romania allows for. This strategy should aim among others to ensuring requirements for further steps in attracting international projects and to fostering partnerships with prestigious universities abroad. In the context of this strategy, we recommend that the AFAHC puts even greater efforts into improving its international visibility clarifying its research profile and promoting its qualities internationally.

Regarding the cooperation of the AFAHC with the air force academies of NATO countries, the evaluation team considers it particularly important and recommends that the AFAHC follows



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a benchmarking perspective to these relationships and partnerships as a way to improve its operational and strategic approaches.

Furthermore, concerning Erasmus mobility, we recommend that the AFAHC, on the one hand, keeps on improving its performance regarding outgoing mobility students and staff, and, on the other hand improves its attractiveness for foreign students through inclusion of courses taught in at least one international language as it is already provided in its strategic plan.



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## 8. Conclusions and recommendations

### 8.1 Capacity for change

Alongside quality assurance issues, the Institutional Evaluation Programme focuses on the capacity for change. The reason for this is a widespread conviction that European higher education institutions are exposed to increasing demands from society and the labour market and in many countries they are also exposed to growing competition from other institutions of higher education. Especially with regards to European universities, the new landscape connected to the emerging European Higher Education Area and the principles of the Bologna Process is one more reason and necessity for change.

If the universities do not seize the initiative themselves and show their capacity for improving, changing and showing adaptability to radically new conditions in an era of mass higher education, then there may be risks that even the important core academic values, which we undoubtedly all want to preserve, might be in jeopardy.

The capacity for change firstly requires the identification of all the factors requiring change, as well as of the features and the content of the change needed. Secondly, it requires each university to determine its own mission in conjunction with the changes needed and to set its priorities. Thirdly, it requires determining the strengths and weaknesses of each university with respect to its own identity and characteristics and to the existing external conditions. Finally, it requires an efficient mechanism to assess continually the course of each institution towards its objectives, towards the changes required.

Capacity for change presupposes eagerness for change, potential for change and self-knowledge. But above all, capacity for change requires inspiration. It requires inspired, motivated and determined people. It is extremely important to realise that elements of strategic planning do not themselves change universities. Changes in institutions have to be driven by people: staff and students, with an inspired leadership making sure that the actions in the action plans are underway and that the milestones are achieved.

Talking about the AFAHC, we can say that it is a university in the middle of change. The specific situation of Romania and of Romanian higher education, together with the current trends in the European higher education and in conjunction with the current economic crisis, form a rapidly changing and challenging landscape for the AFAHC, and for any Romanian university. Additionally, the AFAHC has to also meet major challenges as a military university in order to adapt its military status to the requirements of Romanian and European higher education.



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The AFAHC has to therefore adapt its strategy to this new landscape, in order to fulfil its mission. The evaluation team is aware of the strategic plan 2011-2015 and is also aware of the analysis that the AFAHC has already done in its SWOT analysis regarding its strengths and its weaknesses together with the opportunities and the threats deriving from the new landscape. In this respect, the evaluation team has the certainty that the AFAHC has the qualities, the potential and the means to be successful in the next stages of development by following innovative strategies helping to cope with the complex environment it is operating in. What is needed is to combine ambitions with realistic goals, having at the same time full support of its beneficiaries and of the respective authorities. Further on, international and national partnerships will strengthen its educational and research potential.

The AFAHC, like all Romanian universities, had to take on an exceedingly high number of tasks in the last two years, following the implementation of the Law of National Education, which entered into force in February 2011. Needless to say that all these processes entailed a huge effort from all the university members and that there are still significant adjustments to be made. Nevertheless, all this work done by the AFAHC community in such a short time proves a high capacity for change.

The team concludes by mentioning some of the qualities that it considers indispensable in order to ensure the capacity of the AFAHC for change:

- A clear mission, inspired vision and ambitious but realistic objectives
- Effective strategic management
- Action plans and milestones through performance indicators
- Effective, efficient and inspiring leadership
- Quality culture
- Committed staff and students
- Close and strong links with its beneficiaries based on mutual trust and effective interaction

Many of these qualities characterise, to a high or low degree, the AFAHC, as the team has already outlined throughout the present report. Other qualities however have to be further improved. In this respect, the team's recommendation on this point would be that the AFAHC improves these qualities in order to strengthen its capacity for change, reinforcing internal trust and ownership for the mission and strategic developments.

## 8.2 Conclusions

The roots of the AFAHC go back to 1912, and since then it has successfully undergone many changes, especially during the last years, demonstrating its capacity to adapt to changing conditions. Furthermore, this history ensures a solid position within the Romanian higher education system, especially in the area of air force education and research. Today, the AFAHC faces the challenge of a new era in Romanian higher education, which of course



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should be considered in conjunction with the current developments in the European Higher Education Area and take due account of the constraints resulting from the economic crisis.

The context in which the current evaluation took place has been described earlier in this report. In this regard, our evaluation aims to find out, understand and assess the qualities of the AFAHC and its capacity to successfully meet the challenges of the future. These challenges should be considered as opportunities for the AFAHC. On the one hand, they offer a clear perspective for the future and, on the other hand, they operate as driving forces motivating and stimulating all the actors within the university.

The team had the opportunity to observe many of these qualities. Further on, it had the opportunity to see a university with a high level of self-knowledge, as it derives from the SER and from the SWOT analysis included there, and with clear vision for the future, as it derives from its strategic plan, which we consider a significant starting point for the future steps of the AFAHC. From the evaluation team's viewpoint, the AFAHC has many strengths to rely on in order to face its challenging future. And the team is convinced that the AFAHC is heading in the right direction for its future.

It is in that context that the evaluation team tried to approach the work done by the AFAHC. The recommendations are intended to be the team's own contribution to the process of change and to help the AFAHC to make the most of the opportunities open to it and to cope with the threats scattered along its route to the future. At the same time, this evaluation report aspires to function as an inspiration for the AFAHC as a whole, but more specifically for all those people, leadership, students and staff, who are concerned by its future. The team hopes that the evaluation work done, including the present report, offers a real help to the AFAHC for its future steps. And it also hopes that the AFAHC will seize the opportunity to realise and demonstrate its great potential.

### **8.3 Summary of recommendations**

In this section of the report the main recommendations are summarised as they have appeared underlined in the respective sections of the text.

#### ***Section 2 Governance and institutional decision making***

##### ***2.1 The philosophy of the AFAHC: Norms and values / Vision - mission - strategic goals***

1. The evaluation team recommends that the AFAHC a) develops a concrete action plan for the transformation of the key strategic goals into specific actions which should be prioritised, cost-analysed and time-specific within the validity period of the strategic plan 2011-2015, and



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b) quantifies as soon as possible the performance indicators to monitor the implementation of the strategic plan.

2. The evaluation team also recommends a stronger and clearer alignment between the strategic goals and the actions included in the annual operational plans of the AFAHC.

3. The evaluation team recommends that the task to oversee and monitor the implementation of the strategic plan and the achievement of the strategic goals and the key performance indicators should be assigned to a specific body attached directly to the rector or to one of the vice-rectors. This body should also have the task to assess the validity of the strategic goals and the respective key performance indicators and reconsider them in all cases that the goals and the key performance indicators could not be achieved.

## **2.2 Governance and institutional decision-making**

4. The only recommendation that the evaluation team would like to make here refers to the way in which the student representative in the administrative council is elected. To the knowledge of the evaluation team, this is the only case where the student representative is not elected by the students themselves but by the members of the senate after nomination by the three student members of the senate. The evaluation team believes that for consistency reasons the AFAHC should reconsider this procedure.

### **Autonomy and constraints**

5. The evaluation team realises that most constraints derive from the military nature of the university and that it is a hard task to try to improve this situation. However, the evaluation team supports any effort of the AFAHC aimed to strengthen its autonomy.

### **Academic structure/academic organisation**

6. The evaluation team recommends that the AFAHC continues its efforts towards the establishment of a doctoral school. From both the Bologna and the wider international perspectives, the third cycle of studies is a key issue to retain the university status and to survive as a standalone university, especially if the institution has the ambition to become a research oriented university. In this regard, the evaluation team believes that the AFAHC should address this necessity to both ministries (MApN and MECTS). Furthermore, the completion of AFAHC's study programmes with the third cycle, together with enhancement and focus of its research activity, will help the AFAHC to clarify and further improve its profile and its visibility nationally and internationally.



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7. With regards to the establishment of a doctoral school in the AFAHC, the evaluation team has the view that the MApN and the Air Force Staff should discuss with the academy the significance of the PhDs also for military purposes and on a military need basis. For example, it should be clarified whether the PhD should be included in the competence requirements for military-related research, administrative and command tasks and rank promotion.

### **Section 3      *Teaching and learning***

8. Although it could not serve as a solution to the problem of the balance between theory and practice, the evaluation team would recommend that the AFAHC considers the idea of organising practice on a simulation basis in well equipped laboratories with interactive training sessions before field practice in order to enhance the adaptation of cadets to real application.

9. As a further contribution to meeting the demand for more practice, the evaluation team would recommend some ideas for parallel initiatives, like for example better cooperation from field units for setting up graduation thesis projects for cadets and regular meetings among cadets and graduates organised by the students association.

10. The evaluation team recommends that the students should continue to be as active as possible in all functions of the AFAHC and that the academy should continue its efforts in supporting its students/cadets.

11. Finally, the evaluation team would like to refer to the psycho-pedagogical and methodological training which is compulsory for all teaching staff in the AFAHC and to simply recommend that it continues and further improves its activities and its performance.

### **Section 4      *Research***

12. The evaluation team believes that the AFAHC should start building the appropriate conditions to facilitate the fulfilment of its strategic goal: becoming a university of advanced research. The establishment of a research centre where the academic staff will coexist with full-time researchers hired only for research is an important step to that aim and the team supports the efforts of the leadership of the academy to that aim. Furthermore, the scientific focus of research is another important step. The research capacity will be built step by step, reinforcing and concentrating the research potentials, but it should be based on the uniqueness of the AFAHC.

13. The evaluation team would further expect that the interest from the Air Force staff with regards to the academy's research activities and performance, especially in the operational area, would be translated into real support to the AFAHC in order to meet this challenge.



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14. The team considers that AFAHC would gain from a strategic positioning for each military academy in the country, with respect to each academy's mission and uniqueness. In this regard, the AFAHC should address the necessity of strategic positioning to the MApN, as the main beneficiary of military higher education.

### **Section 5**      ***Service to society/Relations with beneficiaries***

15. The evaluation team expects the Air Force Staff to define topics of interest regarding studies at the AFAHC including at Master and PhD level.

16. The evaluation team recommends that the AFAHC, on the one hand, retains and further strengthens its cooperation with the beneficiaries in all aspects, given that their influence and their support will be precious and, on the other hand, makes more concrete its societal mission in its strategic planning.

### **Section 7**      ***Internationalisation***

17. The evaluation team considers it extremely important for the AFAHC to further develop a comprehensive internationalisation strategy that will cover all the abovementioned dimensions, taking advantage of all opportunities that the existing legislation in Romania allows for. This strategy should aim among others to ensuring requirements for further steps in attracting international projects and to fostering partnerships with prestigious universities abroad. In the context of this strategy, the evaluation team recommends that the AFAHC makes even greater efforts to improve its international visibility clarifying its research profile and promoting its qualities internationally.

18. Regarding the cooperation of the AFAHC with the air force academies of NATO countries, the evaluation team considers it particularly important and recommends that the AFAHC follows a benchmarking approach regarding these relationships and partnerships as a way to improve its operational and strategic approaches.

19. Furthermore, concerning Erasmus mobility, the evaluation team recommends that the AFAHC, on the one hand keeps on improving its performance regarding outgoing mobility students and staff, and on the other hand improves its attractiveness for foreign students through inclusion of courses taught in at least one international language as it is already provided in its strategic plan.

### **Section 8**      ***Capacity for institutional change***

20. The evaluation team is certain that the AFAHC has the qualities, the potential and the means to be successful in the next stages of development by following innovative strategies



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helping to cope with the complex environment it is operating in. What is needed is to combine ambitions with realistic goals, having at the same time full support of its beneficiaries and of the respective authorities. Further on, international and national partnerships will strengthen its educational and research potential.

21. The following are qualities that the evaluation team considers indispensable in order to ensure the capacity of the AFAHC for change:

- A clear mission, inspired vision and ambitious but realistic objectives
- Effective strategic management
- Action plans and milestones through performance indicators
- Effective, efficient and inspiring leadership
- Quality culture
- Committed staff and students
- Close and strong links with its beneficiaries based on mutual trust and effective interaction

Many of these qualities characterise, to some extent, the AFAHC, as it has been already outlined throughout the present report. Other qualities however have to be further improved. In this respect, the recommendation of the evaluation team would be that the AFAHC improves these qualities in order to strengthen its capacity for change, reinforcing internal trust and ownership for the mission and strategic developments.