

Scoala Normala Superioara Bucharest (SNSB)

A necessary institution for the Romanian academic system

Nicușor Dan
Executive manager, SNSB

Abstract. I will present the SNSB, an institution that complements the mainstream Romanian academic system. Its main goals are to offer our best students professional and material conditions in order to motivate them to continue their studies in Romania and also to attract them towards research. My talk will have three parts. Firstly, I will present the motivation, in which I will also present the close relationship with the topic of the present conference. In the second part I will shortly describe the project and lastly, I will present the problems we have encountered in realizing it.

1 Motivation

The first motivation comes from the phenomenon of “brain drain”, which during the recent years began to involve also the undergraduate students. For instance, from data compiled by the national Mathematical Olympiad committee it appears that every year 90 of the first 100 high-school students in the Mathematical Olympiad are offered scholarships and pursue their studies in the USA. I believe the risk of losing their potential contribution to the Romanian science is bigger than for the scientists leaving at a later stage in their development. These talented people leave the Romanian system at 18. After undergraduate, graduate and postdoctoral studies in the west, at about 30, they will have lost the contact with the Romanian science system and even with Romanian realities.

The second motivation comes from the possibility existing now for the Romanians who made their studies abroad to return to Romania for post-doctoral positions. There is no adequate system in which they could share their knowledge with the interested students: the courses they sparsely give in universities and in institutes of research are not coordinated and not advertised to the best students from other universities. Consequently, the Romanian specialists having made their studies abroad are not sufficiently motivated to come temporarily in Romania.

As a conclusion, the lack of good students and of good post-doctoral assistants continues to affect the level of the Romanian science school. If the appropriate measures are not taken we run the risk that when the material possibilities of doing research will be adequate (in 10-15 years) the Romanian school will be no longer be competitive in the fields in which it has a good tradition.

2 Short description of the project

The SNSB currently covers the following scientific fields: Mathematics, Computer Science, Physics, Chemistry and Biology. For each of these domains a Scientific Council composed by well-known scientists from Romania and abroad is functioning.

The SNSB admits students in their 3rd academic year for a period of four years. They take, in addition to their undergraduate studies, several SNSB courses oriented towards research. An essential tool in the SNSB strategy is to award scholarships to qualifying students. Currently, the scholarships are about 70 USD/month (cumulated with the scholarship normally awarded by the Romanian Government).

For a better scientific orientation, the SNSB has no fixed professors. Each year, the Scientific Council chooses a fixed number of courses from a list in which any professor or researcher from Romania or from abroad can propose a course. In this way, the Romanian specialists from abroad have the opportunity to offer courses to the most interested students.

The activity of the Mathematical Department started on October 1, 2001 and the activity of the Computer Science Department will start in November 1, 2002. They are legally organized as teaching activities of the Institute of Mathematics of the Romanian Academy.

In September 2001 and September 2002 we had the admission examination in the Department of Mathematics. Some of the best students in the country applied to this department. Six students were admitted in 2001 and seven students in 2002. The first admission examination at the Computer Science Department is taking place these days.

3 The problems

Presently there are two main problems we are faced with: administrative and financial.

At the administrative level the structure of the SNSB is not strictly compatible with the Romanian legislation regarding the college studies. It is the reason why the SNSB has not received yet the academic accreditation. We are in close cooperation with the Ministry of Education and Research and with the Romanian Academy and we estimate the SNSB will obtain the accreditation as a special teaching institution in 1-2 years.

Even more serious is the financial problem. The private funding is poor in Romania and a direct consequence of a poor economy. We do not neglect these sources (they allowed us to function up until now) but we share the conviction that they will never permit us to function under optimal parameters. The funds coming from the national budget will be available only after accreditation. But even then the budget funds will not permit scholarships higher than the normal governmental scholarships and salaries better than the salaries of the professors at other universities in Romania. If the funds will be at the level of the private and budget mentioned before, the students will be easily tempted by better opportunities abroad and the position for professors will not be attractive for Romanians from abroad. All the European funds that I know of are restricted to cooperation between universities and are financing the cooperation part of the projects alone. They leave the responsibility of financing the fundamental studies to the national states, which have limited possibilities as I mentioned previously.

I hope I was able to convince you about the necessity of the SNSB and I will be very happy to receive suggestions from you and will welcome any support in establishing this institution.