

Institutional responses to plagiarism in doctoral dissertations.
A case study of the Romanian military universities

Emilia Șercan, Ph.D.

University of Bucharest

Abstract

Academic integrity is expected to have a great significance in the military educational system where, beyond ethical exigencies, a culture of verticality and fairness is institutionalized. Nevertheless, Romanian media revealed in recent years dozens of cases of plagiarism in doctoral dissertations defended in three of the four military universities which organizes doctoral studies. The three military universities - the National Intelligence Academy “Mihai Viteazul”, the National Defense University “Carol I” and the Police Academy “Alexandru Ioan Cuza” - are subordinated to law enforcement institutions: the Romanian Intelligence Service, the Ministry of Defense and the Ministry of Interior.

A total of 1,880 doctoral titles have been granted in the three military universities from 1990 to 2017. The National Defense University “Carol I” awarded most doctoral degrees – 1,181, followed by the Police Academy – 614 and by the National Intelligence Academy – 85. On the other side, most accusations of plagiarism concerned doctoral theses registered at the National Intelligence Academy within the Romanian Intelligence Service (11 of 85).

Along the years, Ph.D. titles in military universities became very attractive for politicians, civil servants, prosecutors, judges, police officers, servicemen. In a post-communist country such as Romania, where the intelligence services and army have a major influence due to the fragile political institutions and in the absence of a substantive reform of the communist secret police, the belief of politicians or state officials is that they can more easily access governmental functions with the support from intelligence services or military authorities. Thus, the doctoral studies in military universities have become the gateway to the hermetic systems represented by the army and intelligence for the people who wanted to join the elite power.

Along with the growing interest of politicians and senior civil servants in pursuing doctoral studies in military universities, the universities under discussion have implemented,

through a governmental decision, two doctoral areas unique in the world: (1) Public Order and National Security and (2) Intelligence and National Security.

People who have been accused of plagiarism held, otherwise, political or public positions (*i.e.* in government, parliament, justice, secret services, police) or jobs in the private sector (*i.e.* businessmen, managers, lawyers).

The verification process of plagiarism accusations in Romania is a complex one, regardless if a civilian or a military university is involved. The competences in giving verdicts are attributed to a national commission, the National Council for Attesting University Titles, Diplomas and Certificates (CNATDCU). For all that, the university where a doctoral dissertation suspected of plagiarism was defended has the freedom to act, according to national legislation, but also to internal regulations and university autonomy. Although in the last three years the Romanian media has published evidence of about 20 plagiarized doctoral theses, the decision to withdraw the doctor's degree was taken only in three cases. The other cases have not been discussed until now, either by the CNATDCU or by the universities' ethics committees.

In order to examine the institutional responses and challenges for managing the plagiarism accusations in Romanian military universities, an exploratory analysis was conducted. Starting from the effects, we are studying the institutional response of the CNATDCU and of the three military universities where the plagiarism accusations came up. The aim of this exploratory research is to fill the knowledge gap about the factors that seem to influence the efficacy of institutional responses regarding plagiarism accusation in doctoral degrees in military universities. The limitation and implications of this research, alongside with the opportunity of improving the institutional achievements, are being discussed in this paper.

Authors' information

Emilia Șercan is assistant professor at the Faculty of Journalism and Communication Studies of the University of Bucharest. She is also investigative journalist with 21 years of experience. In recent years, as investigative journalist, she exposed dozens of plagiarism cases in doctoral theses of Romanian politicians or public figures (*i.e.* an interim Prim-Minister, a Minister of Home Affairs, a Minister of Defense, a Minister of Health, a Deputy General Attorney etc.). Starting from her personal journalistic investigations, she is focusing on the scientific analyses of the causes and consequences of plagiarism in Romanian Academia.