

The Bulgarian Experience on Effective Teaching about Other Cultures and Legal Systems

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Legal education in the Republic of Bulgaria has a long tradition. It has reflected the changes in the state systems throughout the centuries, the transformations in the legal system, as well as in the concepts of philosophy and higher education, and in the concepts of training law students in particular. In the different historical periods there were a lot of changes, some of which went in dramatically opposite directions. The society transformed from one built on the principles of the capitalistic system into a typical socialistic society with all the totalitarian characteristics inherent to it, and then finally it grew to be a democratic social system regulated by the rules of the market economy.

Now legal education in the country has its foundation on the standard national regulations, as approved by the Council of Ministers. These set 19 obligatory academic subjects, plus the minimal number of classes, which vary from 75 for subjects such as Taxation Law, Insurance Law, Law of Estate, etc., up to 180 classes for Criminal Law, Contractual Law, Administrative Law, etc. This means that the curriculum consists of three elements, the first being the obligatory subjects as set by the Council of Ministers, which provide the fundamental basis of knowledge needed for obtaining the relevant educational and professional degree. The second element are the electives, which provide the students with specialized learning. The third element are the optional subjects, which serve the individual needs and interests of the students. The number of the approved applicants is also to be agreed with the Council of Ministers; the law faculties are of no power to decide on the number themselves.

The accession of Bulgaria to the European Union and the rapid increase of the political and economical collaboration with the other countries have led to the emergence of some brand new requirements, which should be met by the law-students. The process of globalization has brought forward the need of getting profoundly acquainted with the legal systems of the other countries. These objective, as well as

some subjective factors call for a radical improvement of legal education. The tendencies of the changes taking place are as follows:

1. Radical changes in the students' lecture load. Those changes are to affect mainly the contents of the lectures delivered: an emphasis should be laid on examining the legal systems of the other countries, as well as on carrying out comparative studies and analyzes. Both aspects have their advantages. By becoming aware of the other legal systems' structure and way of functioning, the students are now able to acknowledge what is pertinent to the sphere of competence of the different legal organs. In regard to the comparative studies, we see that they aim at outlining the role and the field of operation of the organs in comparison to the Bulgarian institutions. At this point, the problem about choosing the right methodology would seem to be of primal importance. Using visuals proved to be exceptionally useful – for example, viewing images about France's legal system aroused big interest among the students. And by the means of sliders, containing information about the Bulgarian legal system as compared to the Danish one, the students were able to easily master the new material.

With regard to the above said, it will be wise if our organization takes the initiative to encourage the working out of additional materials that would lend a helping hand to the assistance professors in the course of their professional training.

With a view to becoming acquainted with the legal systems of the other countries, the seminars are also considered of some importance. We have recently put into practice various practical forms, among which simulating law proceeding as being heard by the European Court of Justice have proved to be the most effective ones. During the classes the students discuss real cases, and often become not only much engulfed in the game but also fiercely determined to persuade the rest of the team into the correctness of their ideas. Quite recently the some students participated in one such simulated case dedicated to the fight against drugs in some African countries. While getting ready for the "case hearing" the students did a long and scrutinized research into the legislation of six countries.

Solving cases, taken from the actual practice of the supreme courts of some countries, has proven to be a helpful tool in presenting the academic material to the

senior students of law. In class, students had to discuss a couple of cases taken from the Belgium legal practice, which was quite a hard task to handle, for they had to first get acquainted with the laws of the country in question. A Belgium judge was specially invited to attend the discussions. Resolving such cases can be of practical use especially when dealing with International Private Law, Corporate Law, Refugee Law, etc. We have to mention, though, that we are better at organizing various forms of direct and indirect introduction to the European law and the law of the European countries. Still not much is known about the law systems of the countries in the Americas and Asia, and in Australia – in this respect our organization can offer a helping hand.

2. More efforts are being put into making the studying process more personalized and changing the role of the student from that of an object of the educational process into a subject. For some time now we have had the practice of assigning papers (on a competitive principle), which aim at investigating into the legal systems of various countries. Thus students can obtain a more profound knowledge about each system's specific characteristics, and what is more, they are much more resolute and ambitious to write a good paper based because of the competitive nature of the assignment.

Other helpful methodological tools are or game-organizing game-quizzes with questions about the legislative systems of other countries, and setting up study groups led by a lecturer of European Competitive Law, Muslim Law, Common Law, etc.

A huge role is ascribed to libraries, that is why we have been trying to make their activity correspondent to the needs of the students. We receive a considerable amount of specialized foreign literature on a monthly basis, which, however, we consider to be inadequate to meet all the needs we have. Still much has been done in an attempt to expand the scope of the library activities, so that every student can find the volume one is interested in. There is also free access to the internet. But we are not yet satisfied with the assistance we can offer our students – actually they have to manage by themselves. It will be of mutual interest if we start exchanging information on relevant web-addresses.

3. We strive toward bettering the staff's methodological skills. It is beyond doubt that the human factor is of primal importance when it comes down to efficiently examining the other legal systems. We know that the students' interest in the subject

matter depend mostly on the way the university instructor delivers the lecture. That is why newly employed-assistant professors are supposed to pass a one-week training course organized in September each year. Every three months all the instructors of the law department are given specialized methodological seminars.

For all the reasons mentioned above we do believe that the present conference will play a significant role for the further enhancement of the legal education's efficiency.