

ROMANIA – A COUNTRY WHERE PLAGIARISM

IN MEDICAL SCIENCES IS TOLERATED

In December 2011 the Bolyai Initiative Committee (BIC), an NGO fighting for academic freedom in Romania, found out that certain leading officials of the Medical and Pharmacy University of Târgu-Mureş (Marosvásárhely, Neumarkt) try to increase the number of their academic publications by recurring to plagiarism. Dr. Constantin COPOTOIU, former Rector (presently the President of the University Senate) Dr. Klara BRINZANIUC, former Scientific Vice-Rector (presently member of the University Senate) and Dr. Leonard AZAMFIREI, a former Dean of the University (presently the Rector of the University), were senior authors of a number of scientific articles that turned out to be plagiarized versions of scientific publications from abroad [1-3]. I contacted the authors of the original articles who confirmed that their work was stolen and demanded the offenders to be pulled on responsibility [4-8].

On **12 January 2012** I wrote an e-mail to the Romanian Ministry for Education, Research, Youth and Sport, and I asked for taking the right measures. It was a hard job to send an e-mail to the Ministry: although we are in the 21st century and Romania is member of the EU, the leading officials or offices of this Ministry, except the Press Office, have no e-mail addresses published on the homepage of the Ministry www.edu.ro. Therefore, I had to ask the switchboard operator for a valid e-mail address (cabinet@medu.edu.ro). On 13 January I organized a press conference, and a series of articles in the Romanian and Hungarian main-stream press were focused on this issue.

Since I didn't get any answer from the Ministry, on 10 February I sent new e-mail-s with a more complete documentation, addressed to the Romanian Minister for Education at that time, Cătălin BABA [9]. I sent my e-mail to Béla MARKÓ, Vice Prime-Minister at that time responsible for education issues, and to several organs of the Ministry for Education dealing with higher education issues, like the National Council for Attesting University Degrees, Diplomas and Certificates (CNATDU).

To be on the safe side, I sent the above-mentioned letters also by recommended mail with recorded delivery. On **13 February** József KÖTŐ, Member of the Romanian Parliament personally handed the documentation to the Head of the Minister's office. One month (!) later, on **12 March** I got a confirmation of receipt from the National Council for Scientific Research, an organ of the Ministry for Education [10], mentioning that the Ministry received the documentation on 13 February.

According to the Romanian Regulation nr. 5735/2011, such an issue has to be solved **within 90 days**, but I never received any answer. According to the Secretary of the Ethics Committee of the National Council for Scientific research, they finalized their report, but due to political reasons the Ministry for Education does not allow them to publish it. They also communicated that they did not have the mandate to check the truth of some information delivered by the accused persons.

During his visit at the Medical and Pharmacy University, the previous Romanian Minister for Education, Cătălin Baba, deplored the fact that the plagiarism was exposed, and Leonard Azamfirei was recognized by the Ministry for Education as the Rector of the University. No wonder that the next Romanian Minister for Education, Ioan Mang, also glossed over this problem during his visit at the University: couple of days later he had to resign due to accusations of plagiarism. Recently, Prime Minister Victor Ponta is also accused of plagiarizing his PhD Thesis.

As soon as the plagiarism affair has been made public, the former Rector and the former Vice-Rector of the University put forward to journalists a number of absurd and contradictory explanations.

The former Rector, Dr. Copotoiu, who is presently the President of the University Senate, did not shy away from claiming that there is only one way to talk about a medical problem. He also claimed that his name had been listed as senior co-author against his knowledge and his will, although the article was written by one of his PhD students. He added that he learned about the paper only in August 2011, several months after it has been published (note that his wife is the editor-in-chief of the journal), and immediately announced the Ethics Committee of the University [11]. I pointed out that the purloined article had been presented at a conference in 2010 where Dr. Copotoiu had been the honorary chair [12]. Strangely, the Ethics Committee took a decision only four month later, (in December 2011, a week after the scandal broke out), while according to its regulation, it has to decide within a month. Considering all these facts, it is very probable that the Rector is not telling the truth.

The former Vice-Rector, Dr. Brinzaniuc, asserted that the only thing copied from the foreign publications, is a surgical procedure [13]. I also have to contest this claim: the article bearing her name as senior co-author had been almost entirely cut-and-pasted from two foreign publications. As a proof I provided the declarations confirming the plagiarism of the authors of both original papers.

Dr. Azamfirei, a former Dean and the present Rector of the University, senior co-author of a plagiarized article, tried to ignore the accusation and did not answer to the journalists enquiring this issue. Note that in his paper researchers from the Bucharest University Hospital „Elias” were also involved.

I demand the plagiarizers be impeached for this academic crime and to resign from their offices. According to the Art. 141 of the Romanian Law 8/1996, **plagiarism is a criminal act in Romania. However, in the previous four months no measures were taken to punish the plagiarizing persons. Such an attitude destroys the reputation of the European medical and academic system as well.**

The Bolyai Initiative Committee considers that the Romanian authorities act against the TFEU Art. 118 and Art. 179. The EU could act to solve this issue along TFEU Art. 4/2j and Art. 6/e. According to Art. 41/1 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU, this affair has to be handled fairly and within a reasonable time.

I demand the Petition Committee of the European Parliament to make the appropriate arrangements in order to persuade the Romanian authorities to eliminate plagiarizing persons from the management of the Medical and Pharmacy University of Târgu-Mureş (Marosvásárhely, Neumarkt).

Sincerely yours,

dr. Peter HANTZ

Research Scientist,

Vice-President of the Bolyai Initiative Committee

25 June 2012

13 Attachments:

- [1] Plagiarism by University Senate President Copotoiu
- [2] Plagiarism by University Senate Member Brinzaniuc
- [3] Plagiarism by Rector Azamfirei
- [4] Declaration on Plagiarism by Prof. Wiggers
- [5] Declaration on Plagiarism by Dr. Kelder
- [6] Declaration on Plagiarism by Dr. Learmonth
- [7] Declaration on Plagiarism by Dr. Rammal
- [8] Declaration on Plagiarism by Prof. Stachon
- [9] Letter of Dr. Hantz to the Romanian Minister for Education on 10 February
- [10] Confirmation of receipt from the Romanian National Council for Scientific Research
- [11] Abstracts of a conference in 2010 where the plagiarized paper of Dr. Copotoiu was presented
- [12] "Explanations" of Dr. Copotoiu addressed to the ARACIS, a Romanian academic organ (having no competence in plagiarism issues)
- [13] "Explanations" of Dr. Brinzaniuc addressed to the ARACIS