

ROMANIA – A COUNTRY WHERE PLAGIARISM

IN MEDICAL SCIENCES IS TOLERATED

Recently, a series of Romanian plagiarism scandals have shocked Europe: the Minister for Education, Ioan MANG had to resign after it was proved that one of his papers was plagiarised. Prime-Minister Victor PONTA also lost his credibility after the Bucharest University declared that he plagiarised his PhD Thesis. However, the Prime-Minister refused to resign.

In December 2011 the Bolyai Initiating 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 COPOTIU, 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, 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. On 13 January I organized a press conference, and a series of articles in the Romanian and Hungarian mainstream press were focused on this issue.

Since I didn't get any answer from the Ministry, on 12 February I sent new e-mail-s with a more complete documentation, addressed to the *Romanian Minister for Education* at that time, Cătălin BABA [10]. 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)* as well.

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 [11], 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 information received from 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. Moreover, the Committee was dismissed on 8 June 2012, a day after submitting its report.

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.

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 co-author against his knowledge and his will, although the article was written by one of his PhD students. He added that he only learned about the paper in August 2011, several months after it has been published, and immediately announced the Ethics Committee of the University [12]. I pointed out that the purloined article had been presented at a conference in 2010 where Dr. COPOTOIU had been the honorary chair [13]. 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.

Moreover, how can the Ethics Committee take any measure at all in such a case if the former Rector's wife – Dr. Sandra COPOTOIU – is at the very same time editor-in-chief of the *AMM* and the chairperson of the Ethics Committee? The fact that she herself published a comment on the detrimental nature of plagiarism in Volume no. 57, Issue no. 3 (July 2011) of the *AMM* is rather cynical.

The former Vice-Rector, Dr. BRINZANIUC, asserted that the only thing copied from the foreign publications, is a surgical procedure [14]. I also have to contest this claim: the article bearing the president's name as 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, the former Dean, the present Rector of the University tried to ignore the accusation and did not answer to the journalists enquiring this issue. However, he sent a vague letter to the ARACIS [15]. Note that in his paper researcher from the Bucharest University Hospital „Elias” were also involved.

I also demanded 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) [16].

The Nature magazine, one of the leading scientific journals of the World wrote about the case in 16 August 2012. The vice-president of the dissolved committee, professor Marius ECHIM, declared to the magazine that they **established that plagiarism has been committed in all three cases** (COPOTOIU, BRINZANIUC and AZAMFIREI) and in two of them they recommended the sanction of firing the respective professors [17].

In the meantime new members were nominated to form the *Ethics Committee of the National Council for Scientific Research* and the body reassumed its activities. However, the reestablished body failed to provide me an answer. In consequence, based on Law no.

206/2004 on good practice in scientific research and Law no. 554/2004 on administrative courts, **I sued the Romanian Ministry of Instruction, Research, Youth and Sports** [18]. The first hearing will be held on the 12th of October.

Since, pursuant to Law no. 8/1996 on intellectual property rights and derived rights, plagiarism is a punishable criminal offence in Romania, I denounced professor AZAMFIREI [19]. I asked the Romanian Police to obtain the (presently classified) report finalized by the previous *Ethics Committee of the National Council for Scientific Research* and to organize a hearing with the previous members of his body. The criminal investigation commenced in August. However, I received no notification on any progress.

In the previous 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.

Sincerely yours,
dr. Peter HANTZ
Research Scientist,
Vice-President of the Bolyai Initiative Committee

19 Attachments: see www.bolyai.eu

[1] Plagiarism 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 President of the CNATDU (cc: the Minister for Education) on 12 January

[10] Letter of Dr. Hantz to the Romanian Minister of Education on 12 February

[11] Confirmation of receipt from the National Council for Scientific Research

[12] Abstracts of a conference where the plagiarized paper of Dr. COPOTOIU was presented

[13] "Explanations" of Dr. COPOTOIU addressed to the ARACIS, a Romanian academic organ (having no competence in plagiarism issues)

[14] "Explanations" of Dr. BRINZANIUC addressed to the ARACIS

[15] "Explanations" of Dr. AZAMFIREI addressed to the ARACIS

[16] Complaint sent to the Petition Committee of the European Parliament

[17] Article published in the *Nature* magazine on plagiarism scandals in Romania

[18] Legal act against the Romanian Ministry for Education

[19] Legal act against Rector AZAMFIREI