PLAGIARISM IN PH.D. THESSES.
A CASE STUDY OF MILITARY UNIVERSITIES IN ROMANIA

Emilia Sercan, Ph.D.
Assistant professor
University of Bucharest
Plagiarism in the Ph.D. theses in military universities.

The Romanian military universities set up doctoral domains unique in the world: Public Order and National Security and Intelligence and National Security.

The Ph.D. titles in Military Science became very attractive for politicians, civil servants, prosecutors, judges, police officers, servicemen.

14.63% (12 from 82) of the Ph.D. theses from the National Intelligence Academy within the Romanian Intelligent Service are plagiarized.

The plagiarism in the military universities is a large scale phenomenon rather than a hazard discovery.
DOCTORAL STUDIES IN ROMANIA

Number of Ph.D. titles awarded between 1990 - 2016
EXPLANATIONS

- Between 1900 and 1989 have been awarded 1,500 Ph.D. titles.
- Between 1990 and 2016 have been awarded 67,583 Ph.D. titles.
- Explanations of the interest:
  - the limitations imposed by the communist system disappeared;
  - private universities have been set up;
  - many universities set up new doctoral schools;
  - 15% salary increase for an employee from the public system since 1999;
  - other material advantages (EU grants, general, lawyer without an exam);
  - advancement in administrative career or public legitimacy.
PLAGIARISM OVERVIEW

- Before 2012 the question of academic plagiarism was almost nonexistent.
- The former PM of Romania, Victor Ponta, was exposed by *Nature Magazine*.
  - **Tipping point – 2015**
- The interim PM, Gabriel Oprea, was exposed as plagiarist.
- He was Ph.D. supervisor and almost all his doctoral students plagiarized.
- Nine cases of plagiarism in Ph.D. theses were exposed by media in six months.
- Public opinion started to understand the abstract matter of plagiarism.
- Favorite areas for plagiarism: law, economics, theology, medicine, military studies.
THE MILITARY UNIVERSITIES

- The National Defense Academy “Carol I”, subordinated to the Minister of Defense
  - Was established in 1889.
  - The first doctoral program started in 1968. Between 1968–1989 were granted 54 Ph.D. titles.

- The Police Academy, subordinated to the Minister of Interior
  - Was established in 1949 as a communist Militia Officers School.
  - First doctoral program - in 1990, the second one in 2002 Public Order and National Security.

- The National Intelligence Academy, subordinated to the Romanian Intelligence Service
  - Was established in 1992.
  - The first doctoral program started in 2007.
THE MILITARY UNIVERSITIES

Number of Ph.D. titles awarded in Military Universities between 1990 - 2016

- National Defence University: 1112
- Police Academy: 278
- National Intelligence Academy: 82

The common factor: Gabriel Oprea, former Vice PM and interim PM.

Oprea (Ph.D. in law) – became professor at National Defense Academy, became the first Ph.D. supervisor in Public Order and National Security at Police Academy and set up the Doctoral School of National Intelligence Academy.

Oprea supervised 22 Ph.D. theses, 9 in Public Order and National Security at Police Academy and 13 in Intelligence and National Security at the National Intelligence Academy.

Oprea plagiarized his Ph.D. thesis.

9 Ph.D. theses (at least) supervised by him were also plagiarized.
Gabriel Oprea was interim PM.
The Ph.D. students supervised by him were:
- the Deputy General Attorney;
- the Deputy Chief of Romanian Police;
- a former Ministry of Defense;
- the Mayor of Second District of Bucharest;
- his niece;
- his personal secretary.
NATIONAL INTELLIGENCE ACADEMY (SRI)

Number of Ph.D. titles awarded


15 24 8 16 5 14 7
BOGDAN LICU CASE

- Deputy General Attorney

- Become Ph.D. at National Intelligence Academy of the Romanian Intelligence Service under Oprea’s supervision.
- More than half of his thesis was plagiarized.
- Content copied without source indication and quotation marks.
- The paper don’t has a research part.
- Copy-paste plagiarism type.
- All plagiarism sources were available online.
- Sources of plagiarism: books, university courses, scientific articles, news articles.
Number of Ph.D. titles awarded

NATIONAL DEFENSE UNIVERSITY
PETRE TOBA CASE

- Minister of Interior

- Become Ph.D. at National Defense University.
- More than half of his thesis was plagiarized.
- Content copied without source indication and quotation marks.
- The paper don’t has a research part.
- Copy-paste plagiarism type.
- Sources of plagiarism: two Ph.D. theses, books, university courses, scientific articles, news articles.
- All plagiarism sources were available online.
POLICE ACADEMY (MI)

Number of Ph.D. titles awarded

- 2004: 4
- 2005: 2
- 2006: 9
- 2007: 10
- 2008: 17
- 2009: 24
- 2010: 32
- 2011: 32
- 2012: 35
- 2013: 35
- 2014: 23
- 2015: 43
- 2016: 12
ROBERT NEGOIȚA CASE

- Mayor of 3rd District in Bucharest

- Become Ph.D. at Police Academy of the Ministry of Interior.
- The entire thesis was plagiarized.
- Content copied without source indication and quotation marks.
- The paper don’t has a research part.
- Copy-paste plagiarism type.
- All plagiarism sources were available online.
- Sources of plagiarism: books, university courses, scientific articles, news articles.
COMMON ISSUES

- The military universities accepted people with poor academic background, but with high public positions.
- Diploma hunters (scientific legitimization). The military universities accepted as doctoral students politicians, civil servants, prosecutors or judges.
- Doctorates were made when these people occupied public positions.
- The public sustaining were grandiose ceremonies.
- Military universities are prone to plagiarism because are hermetic.

**Explanations**

- **Doctoral supervisors** – many former leading officers became Ph.D. supervisors.
- **Arranged committee** - dozens of identical committees, exclusively from the three universities.
CAUSES OF THE PHENOMENON

- **Material benefits and career advancement**
  - 15% salary increase for public system. In the Minister of Defense – 911 employees received 1.2 million euros in the last two years.
  - Can become general in the Ministers of Defense or Interior without an exam.

- **Poor academic standards**
  - Nonexistent anti-plagiarism policies.
  - Ethical committees to save appearances.

- **Educational control policies**
  - Political subordination of education.
  - Lack of independent control bodies.
RESPONSES

▪ The Society's Responses
  ▪ The subject entered on public agenda by the notoriety of the characters.
  ▪ The subject of plagiarism has become of interest to society.
  ▪ Debates, conferences, new investigations of journalists.

▪ Political Class Responses
  ▪ Attempts to change legislation - the possibility of giving up the Ph.D. title.
  ▪ The control commissions have been changed.
  ▪ The public access to doctoral theses has been limited or forbidden.
  ▪ The political control of the universities through public funding.
The closed system of military universities allowed the development of a parallel doctoral system with the civilian one.

We are in a state of awareness. Unconsolidated democracy, lack of control levers.

Military universities are protected by the force institutions to whom they are subordinate. Lack of transparency, hermetic environment.

Political protection. Those who are able to do something (Ministry of Education, supervising committees, universities) do nothing.

A co-interested relationship between public officials and politicians with Ph.D. and academics. The biased attitude of the academic environment.

Romania needs a Mechanism for Cooperation and Verification (CVM) for Ph.D. as a safeguard measure from the European Commission, because the Romanian Ph.D. Diplomas are recognized and have effects at European level.
THANK YOU!