



**Interim Evaluation Report
of the
Epoka University's Strategic Plan 2013-2017**

By

Academic Evaluation and Quality Improvement (AEQI) Board of the Epoka University

Tirana, Albania, 29 July 2016

Preface

Dear Epoka University students, staff members and stakeholders,

It is with great pleasure that the Academic Evaluation and Quality Improvement Board of the Epoka University presents this internal interim evaluation of the Epoka University's Strategic Plan 2013-2017.

Epoka University strives for quality in teaching, learning and research for all members of the its student and staff community. Directly, the Epoka University works with a student body of around 1600 students and staff members of around 100. Indirectly, considering that the total population of Albania is estimated at around 3 million people, Epoka University by working on improving the education infrastructure in Albania has benefited the whole population of this country. The Epoka University is believed to have contributed to the improvement of the Albanian higher education quality perception in the region and internationally as assessed by the international external evaluations. The work of the Epoka University has been instrumental for the dissemination of a need for quality human resources and importance of quality human resources for economic and social development of Albania and of wider region of the Balkans.

This report, prepared by the AEQI Board, with the particular contribution of its member Ms. Reina Shehu, provides an important assessment of the results achieved by the University. This evaluation should provide to students and to staff of the Epoka University with an opportunity to learn and further enhance their efforts in the future. On this occasion, we would like to thank all members of the staff community of the Epoka University for their contribution to this report.

AEQI Board, Epoka University

Tirana, Albania

28 July 2016

1. Introduction

The Academic Evaluation and Quality Improvement (AEQI) Board conducted an internal interim evaluation of the Strategic Plan of Epoka University (2013-2017). The evaluation was conducted in the period of April – July 2016 as a result of the decision of the AEQI Board on 4 April 2016 to undertake an evaluation of the Strategic Plan 2013-2017 under the lead of Ms. Reina Shehi, a member of the Board.

This report provides interim evaluation of the Strategic Plan 2013-2017 as part of functions of the AEQI Board.

Ms. Reina Shehu, lecturer in political sciences and international relations at Epoka University and a member of the AEQI Board, carried out this evaluation, in cooperation with other members of the AEQI Board as well as with contributions of relevant units and departments at Epoka University.

1.1. Background to the Epoka University

Epoka University was founded in 2007-2008, being one of the non-public/private universities founded under the Albanian Higher Education Act to provide a higher education system for Albanian and international students. Epoka University's student body is composed of around 1,600 students, of whom around 10% are international students. Each year it enrolls 400-500 new students. Epoka has 11 programs linked with 7 departments that operate under two faculties: Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences and the Faculty of Architecture and Engineering. Epoka University offers education in three study cycles, including Bachelor, Master of Sciences, Professional Master, integrated second cycle and PhD study programs. Epoka has declared a specific mission in its Strategic Plan, aiming to provide education, research and contribution to the society, while reflecting both national priorities and international standards. The language of all study programs is in English, with the exception of the Bachelor study program in Banking and Finance being in Albanian.

1.2. Epoka University, Strategic Plan 2013-2017, “on creating public value”

Epoka University's Strategic Plan 2013-2017 was prepared in 2003 as a leading roadmap for the University's teaching, research, and administrative activities. The plan identifies important building blocks for the university and has set important targets with the aim to improve developing institutional relations and institutional infrastructure and to sustain its development. The objectives are grouped in four categories: Scientific, Educational, Institutional Relations, and Institutional Development. All objectives were accompanied by performance indicators to measure their accomplishment.

1.3. Scope of this interim evaluation

The interim evaluation assesses the Strategic Plan's progress, achievements and challenges, with measurement of the output level achievements. The evaluation focuses on the Strategic Plan's performance so far in terms of delivery of its commitments, targets and goals set. This report incorporates the findings, results from the data received from respective units of the University and further analysis of the same. It also provides overall findings, lessons and conclusions. It documents results achieved. The evaluation covers the period from 2013 till mid-2016.

1.4. Structure of the Report

The findings of the evaluation are structured in this report according to the objectives of the Strategic Plan: Scientific, Educational, Institutional Relations, and Institutional Development.

1.5. Evaluation Methodology

The evaluation of the Strategic Plan 2013-2017 was conducted in the period of April – July 2016.

The methodology followed for the evaluation was “Interim Summative Evaluation”, an outcome evaluation by comparing the actual results with the strategic goals and performance indicators planned under the Strategic Plan of 2013-2017. Statistical data were collected from the relevant departments of the University. The evaluation methodology deployed mixed data collection methods and analytical approaches to account for results of the Strategic Plan.

The evaluation process was divided in three phases:

- 1) Desk review research was conducted resulting in raw data. At this phase, the author of the report was provided with key sources of information. At the end of this phase an initial draft of the evaluation was produced.
- 2) Meetings were held with the respective departments and units of the University as well as with the rector himself for more in-depth discussions in order to complete data collection and information analysis.
- 3) Documenting evaluation findings, resulting in this Evaluation report.

2. Findings

Overall it is assessed that majority of the activities and indicators envisioned by the Strategic Plan 2013-2017 are fulfilled and the remaining activities are likely to be fulfilled by the end of the timeline of the current Strategic Plan. It has been revealed that, although in some places it was difficult to measure indicators envisioned by the Strategy Plan, overall the goals and outcomes have been realistically planned and they have provided practical guidance for the work of the University. As the current Plan's period shall end in 2017, this evaluation report suggests starting with the preparations for the next strategic plan (2018-2022).

The details of the evaluation can be found below in the tables where assessment is based on the goals and indicators included in the Strategic Plan.

Based on the analysis of information from available documentation and meetings conducted, the evaluation finds that the Strategic Plan 2013-2017 delivered as planned. It appears that expected outputs have been honored particularly in all of its objectives, including Scientific, Educational, Institutional Relations, and Institutional Development.

The evaluation also finds that by achieving those outputs, the Strategic Plan 2013-2017 contributed to achievement of wider mission of Epoka University aiming to provide education, research and contribution to the society, while reflecting both national priorities and international standards. The university staff are equipped with skills and knowledge to carry out their tasks effectively particularly in the fields of teaching and research.

In the implementation of the Strategic Plan 2013-2017, Epoka University has employed robust processes in implementing activities with involvement of its staff and students as well as other related stakeholders from Albania and internationally, including national authorities, universities, non-governmental organizations and private sector. In doing so, the Epoka University team, as a whole, has done very well to achieve the goals set, and the so far results can provide basis in the planning and conduct of the next Strategic Plan.

2.1. Scientific objectives

The evaluation team is proud to confirm that the scientific objectives and outcomes as set in the Strategic Plan have been met and even surpassed some of the team's expectations. The number of international research activities, projects and publications has increased every year. By 2016 the University has participated in more than 100 national and international research projects. The research capacities at Epoka University have steadily increased both in terms of human and financial resources. In 2016 the number of academic staff participating in research activities and projects grew beyond levels envisaged at the Strategic Plan 2013-2017.

Activities of the University successfully targeted and supported the key relevant units and departments of the University through capacity building in the field of research and project skills and visibility. The university built capacities of its staff members to honor their commitments as regards research and project participation. One of the major strengths of the Epoka University is the knowledge and skills of its staff members. They have increased their research outputs and have built close relationships with most of the major players in this field that in turn has led to participation of the University staff in national, regional, European and international projects. At each of these activities, Epoka University provided necessary technical and financial support to promote participation in research and projects.

Research and project participation have been mutually coherent and reinforcing each other. The evaluation found evidence of the joint work among staff members to enhance research and project planning and participation. However, more systematic University-directed coordination between these activities may produce better results. Also, better definition of the performance indicators may help for better review and assessment of the results.

Table 1 - Scientific objectives

Strategic Goals	Performance Indicators	Until 2013	2013-2016	Status
1.1.1. Be integrated into the criteria of EU research projects within 2014 and within 2017	Total number of EU projects	1	8	Fulfilled
1.1.2. Within the 2017 increase the number of international research projects for which an application has been filed by 25%	Total number of referred projects	4	11	Fulfilled
1.1.3. Within the 2017 increase the number of national research projects for which an application has been filed by 25%	Total number of national projects	-	62	Fulfilled
1.2.1. Increase by 50% by the year 2017, the number of projects supported by national or international institutions and share the scientific results with the public in the country and abroad	Number of publications at scientific meetings with project results	-	-	In progress
1.2.2. Increase by 25% by the year 2017 the number of internationally recognized scientific publications.	Number of project outcomes and articles published in journals	-	-	In progress

1.3.1. Increase by 25% by the year 2017, the participation of our academic staff and research in scientific events	The number of teaching assistant with the participation of the scientific activity	280	-	In progress
1.3.2 Increase by 25% by the year 2017, the number of organized national and international scientific events.	The number of scientific activities organized by international institutions	120	-	In progress
	The number of international scientific activities organized by institutions	12	-	In progress
1.4.1. Within 2017, in accordance with the technological and scientific developments, promotes the research into two new subjects or areas each year.	Number of interdisciplinary programs carried out	3	3	In progress

2.2. Educational objectives

The Strategic Plan 2013-2017 achieved its objectives in the field of education through collaboration and exchange programs with other universities in Europe and wider, trainings given to staff members inside University and outside, and update of the syllabi. The University signed up to the Erasmus + program of the European Union that enabled the University to be part of the whole Europe exchange and mobility program for its students and staff members. The university has been able to mainstream the practice of mobility in education throughout all its departments. Among other key achievements include building the community of master and PhD students that in turn should enhance the education infrastructure in the university. However, it is yet to develop an environment that is conducive to the specific needs of its master and PhD students. Also, course syllabi and materials are constantly updated however the University staff members need further awareness on enhancing the content of the syllabi in order to provide for certainty and clarity to expectations by the students and also to enhance research, multi-disciplinary and internationalization aspects of the courses. Continuous support is needed to academic staff members in enhancing their course materials to reflect the contemporary international practices and standards in the respective fields. The University also has organized several conferences, workshops and open forums, to which its staff and student community have had access to in order to enhance their knowledge.

Table 2 - Educational objectives

Strategic Goals	Performance Indicators	Until 2013	2013-2016	Status
1.4.2. By the end of 2017, achieve a collaboration agreement with other Universities and institutions in the field of R&D	The number of interdisciplinary cooperation made by university with other institutions	-	4	Fulfilled
2.1.1. Giving importance in the direction of training done by protocols by the end of 2017	The number of protocol signed with the aim of education	5	-	In progress
2.1.2. By the end of 2014 all the courses contents should be updated in accordance with international and national trainings programs	Total number of lessons	528	All curricula have been updated.	Fulfilled
2.1.3. Increase by 25% the number of students to be sent in Turkish universities with Mevlana exchange program	Total number of students sent	-	17	Fulfilled
2.1.4. Increase by 25% the number of students to be accepted in Turkish universities with Mevlana exchange program.	Total number of accepted students	3	12	Fulfilled
2.2.1. Increase by 25% by the end of 2017 the number of students of professional postgraduate/high degree scientific program.	Number of professional master programs	5	6	In progress
	Number of professional master students	121	59	In progress
	Number of scientific master programs	7	9	Fulfilled
	Number of scientific master students	123	242	Fulfilled
2.2.2. By the end of 2017, establish and operate Distance Education for professional postgraduate students	Number of distanced professionals in master and students	-	-	In progress
2.2.3. Increase by 25 % by the end of 2017 the support given to the thesis of PhD students.	Number of project supporting theses	-	5 applications	Fulfilled

2.3.1. Increase by 25% by the end of 2017 the number of research topics, short run researches, courses, participation in congress and seminars and the number of instructors and lecturers send abroad.	The number of lecturers gone outside for short term	70	41	In progress
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2.3. Institutional Relations objectives

In the light of the Strategic Plan 2013-2017, Epoka University generated new reforms in the context of its institutional relations nationally and internationally. It developed internal rules and legislation in line with national legislation and European standards. It provided encouragement to its staff members for cooperation with other universities nationally and internationally, businesses, civil society organizations, experts, researchers and professors. The University showed leadership in responding to the emerging developments in the context of the functioning of the universities. Its visibility is high among the key stakeholders nationally and internationally.

The activities implemented helped the University to consolidate its human resources, to sign partnership agreements with universities and civil society organizations, to build infrastructure for its institutional relations with other stakeholders, including in the field of institutional evaluation and accreditation. The University has managed to establish cooperative relationships with the relevant stakeholders in order to work together on key areas.

Table 3 - Institutional Relations objectives

Strategic Goals	Performance Indicators	Until 2013	2013-2016	Status
2.3.2. Increase by 25% by the end of 2017 the numbers of instructors and lecturers send abroad for PhD program	Total number of lecturers send for PhD	12	14	In progress
2.3.3. Increase by 25% by the end of 2017 the number of lecturers employed	Total number of employees	14	-40 (full time) -101 (part time)	Fulfilled
2.3.4. Increase by 25% by the end of 2014 the number of lecturers going in Turkish universities with Mevlana Exchange program	Lecturers coming with Mevlana exchange program	-	28	Fulfilled

2.3.5. Increase by 25% by the end of 2014 the number of lecturers coming from Turkish universities with Mevlana Exchange program	Lecturers gone with Mevlana exchange program	-	-	In progress
2.4.1. By the end of 2017, increase student mobility of undergraduate and graduate education system with Socrates and Erasmus program	Number of students gone with Socrates and Erasmus program	-	5	Fulfilled
2.4.2. By the end of 2017, make the necessary infrastructure in accordance with EU norms for external evaluation and accreditation	Number of received program accreditation	-	12	Fulfilled
3.1.1. Increase by 25% by the end of 2017 the relations with members' state of EU	Number of communications passed to science center	6	?	In progress
	Number of existing cooperation protocols	1	?	In progress
3.1.2. Increase by 25% by the end of 2017 the activities with Albanian and international universities for collaborative effort to work, scientific meetings and workshops.	Total number of activities	120	?	In progress
3.2.1. Increase by 25 % by the end of 2017 activities with industrial organizations in seminars, courses, meetings and workshops	Total number of activities	20	10	In progress
3.2.2. By the end of 2017 apply with support of industries and companies for patent and useful models.	Number of patents and utility model applications	-	-	In progress
3.2.3. By the end of 2017 order laboratory analysis of infrastructure needs of the industrial companies.	Number of analysis performed for industrial companies	-	-	In progress

3.3.1. By the end of 2017 reinforce after graduation the relations student- university by opening Alumni association	Number of Graduated students	235	572 (BA)	Fulfilled
	Number of graduated students contacted	180	557	Fulfilled
3.3.2. By the end of 2017 complete the information and establishment feedback mechanisms for the graduated students.	Number of graduated students transmitted to information system	200	557	Fulfilled

2. 4. Institutional Development objectives

Epoka University has also been active in increasing social awareness inside university and outside. It has provided institutional support to various social actors in Albania. It has also invested in improving material and social infrastructure within the University. Some of these investments are likely to be sustained for considerable future. Epoka University stands as credible institution in the eyes of local stakeholders in bringing them together for joint social actions and projects.

The information relating to the part on Institutional Development objectives are taken from the Dean of Students Office. The document gives an overview of all activities organized each semester. The number of activities is very high; however, there is no categorization according to the performance indicators written in the table below. Thus, it is very difficult to know how many of them are socially oriented projects, how many have been done in cooperation with local institutions, how many of them are culturally oriented etc. It is kindly requested from the Dean of Students to organize the activities according to the example below.

Type of Activity	Total Number
Number of realized social projects	
Number of supported projects by professional associations, civil society organization, and local governments	
Number of cultural events organized	
Number of social sensibility events	

Table 4 - Institutional Development objectives

Strategic Goals	Performance Indicators	Until 2013	2013-2016	Status
3.4.1. Increase by 25% by the end of 2017 the organized activities of physical and mental health of the community towards the development of formal partnership with private and voluntary organizations.	Number of realized social projects	18	20	In progress
3.4.2. Increase by 25 % by the end of 2017 the support of the professional associations, civil society organization, and local governments for joint projects carried out	Number of supported projects	-	-	In progress
4.1.1. To increase by 50% by the end of 2017 the participation of students in extra activities (seminars, concerts, and student clubs)	Number of cultural events organized	72	More than 150	Fulfilled
4.1.2. To increase by 25% by the end of 2017 the contribution on activities like employee loyalty and satisfaction	Number of events organized for institutions to develop a culture	12	-	In progress
4.1.3. To increase by 25 % by the end of 2017 the impact of the corporate culture on social awareness activities	Number of social sensibility events	24	-	In progress
4.1.4. By the end of 2017 to contribute every year in Albania-Turkey common culture heritage with the aim of contributing to the spread of the main events	Number of events organized	-	3	Fulfilled
4.1.5. By the end of 2017 to contribute with "Days in university" program, aiming to participate in international fairs once in two years	Number of fairs organized for university presentation	6	5	Fulfilled
4.2.1. To increase by 25 % by the end of 2017 mental health services for students' guidance	Number of students for guidance service	300	-	In progress
4.2.2. By the end of 2013 to create and develop career office and employment office	Number of students for career development and employment	70	3 career fairs	Fulfilled

4.3.1. By the end of 2013 complete the improvement of the business determination processes and software processes	Number of processes in written form	-	-	In progress
4.3.2. By the end of 2013 ensure the strategic management of the university	Number of strategic plans for evaluation	-	1	Fulfilled
4.3.3. By the end of 2013 implement staffing norms regarding academic and administrative rules.	Number of staffing norms determinants	-	-	In progress
4.3.4. By the end of 2013 establish success and performance rewarding working mechanisms	Number of awards for created	-	Publication Promotion	Fulfilled

Conclusion

To conclude, the evaluation finds that the Strategic Plan 2013-2017 delivered on its aims. The evidence provides that the outputs have been delivered as planned and that they have contributed to achievement of wider mission of Epoka University in providing quality education, research and contribution to the society, while reflecting both national priorities and international standards.

Please find below two separate tables that give overall assessment of the results. Table 5 gives a final picture of the number of fulfilled goals, unfulfilled, goals that need to be reevaluated and Table 6 offers concluding remarks on the main strengths and weaknesses noted throughout the evaluation of the Strategic Plan.

Table 5 - Number of fulfilled goals or in progress

No. of fulfilled goals	23
No. of goals in progress	36

Table 6 - Concluding remarks on the main strengths and weaknesses noted throughout the evaluation of the Strategic Plan

Strengths	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> √ Integration into EU Projects √ A good number of applications into international and national research projects √ Collaborative agreements with other universities and institutions √ Updated curricula in accordance with national and international standards √ Successful implementation of Mevlana Exchange Program in terms of students sent and received √ Successful implementation of student mobility of undergraduate and graduate education system with Socrates and Erasmus programs √ Increase of number of students registered in scientific programs √ Participation in International Affairs that promote Epoka University √ Performance rewarding working mechanisms for the academic staff √ Establishment of career office and realization of career fairs √ Establishment of Alumni Office that keeps updated information for graduate students and enables the functioning of feedback mechanisms
Weaknesses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> √ Decline of number of students registered in professional master programs √ Lack of a distance education programs for professional master students √ Low number of lecturers from Epoka going to Turkey through Mevlana Exchange Program √ Low level of cooperation with the industry in terms of common projects and services that the university may offer to companies (ex. Trainings, seminars, laboratory analysis etc.)