

## **EDUCATIONAL OBJECTIVES OF EUROPE 2020 – A COMPARATIVE STUDY BETWEEN ROMANIA AND THE EU-MEMBER COUNTRIES**

*Delia Mioara POPESCU<sup>1</sup>  
Maria Cristina ȘERB (TANISLAV)<sup>2</sup>  
Elena STOICA (CONSTANTIN)<sup>3</sup>*

---

### **ABSTRACT**

*Under the conditions of the worldwide increase of the offer of highly qualified labor force, in Europe one can note a tendency of re-assessment of education and acquired skills. The present study aims to realize a comparative analysis between Romania and the European Union countries, from the perspective of the year 2020. Starting from two strategic indicators (early school abandonment rate – maximum 10%, and the rate of the population aged 30-34 having completed tertiary or equivalent education – minimum 40%), one can note a division of the countries in three categories: 1. with both objectives attained, 2. with only one objective attained, and 3. those that have not reached either. Moreover, these two objectives are correlated very well with the results obtained by the pupils/ students at the Pisa tests. Unfortunately, Romania still has a long way to go up to the attainment of the indicators assumed on the European Union level, specific actions, based on concrete elements, being needed.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Europe 2020, educational performance, EU, Romania.*

**JEL CLASSIFICATION:** *I21, N94.*

---

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

The objectives formulated in the work programme of the **European Commission – “Education and Training 2020 in Europe”** concern the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy, aiming to make it capable of a long-lasting economic growth, of providing more and better jobs and of an increased social cohesion degree.

Investments in education and training for skill development are essential to stimulate the economic growth and competitiveness: skills determine Europe’s capacity to increase productivity. To stimulate innovation and the economic growth in Europe, it is necessary to stimulate skills to a higher level, which can lead to economic growth. The massive increase of the worldwide offer of people with a high qualification level of the last decade is putting Europe to the test. The time when competition came particularly from countries that could only provide low qualification manpower is over. The quality of education and the skill offer have increased worldwide, and Europe has to be able to face this situation. The European education and training systems are not able to keep on providing the suitable skills necessary to for professional insertion and do not have a proper collaboration with the business environment or the employers to bring the learning process closer to

---

<sup>1</sup> “Valahia” University of Targoviste Romania, depopescu@yahoo.com

<sup>2</sup> “Valahia” University of Targoviste Romania, crisstinaro@yahoo.com

<sup>3</sup> “Valahia” University of Targoviste Romania, elenactn@yahoo.com

the work environment reality. This skills inadequacy is an increasingly more important concern for the European industry competitiveness (COM, 2014).

**This analysis** relies on the reform of the educational systems throughout the EU for answering the growing demand for high skill levels and lower unemployment. The initiative focuses on three domains that need reform: quality, accessibility, funding. Reforms should be designed so as to increase the basic skills level, promote apprenticeship, promote entrepreneurship and improve linguistic skills (European Commission, 2013; EUA, 2013).

The educational systems must get adapted so as to be able to face the growing demand anticipated for the next decade regarding the skills level on the labor market. Despite the large scale investments, the educational systems of several EU countries are still unable to face these challenges, since in some EU countries, the school abandonment rate is still very high. Also, the austerity measures adopted limit the development of the educational resources.

In order to establish the reference values for the development of the policy based on concrete evidence, an analysis on the country level has been carried out in the EU, monitoring investments in education and training.

The European Commission will continue taking actions and is continuing the discussions meant to assure the introduction of new teaching and learning methods in the educational systems, until 2020, which should allow the endowment of pupils/ students with suitable skills for employment. The initiatives include: "Open Education Europa"; partnerships between education, business environment and research; the establishment of a European skills and qualifications area.

According to the Europe 2020 Strategy, there are two educational directions / strategies:

- lowering the early school abandonment level down to 10%;
- assuring a percentage of at least 40% of the population aged 30-34 having completed tertiary or equivalent education.

School abandonment has different significances and meanings: leaving the education system before having finished the compulsory education period; leaving the system before having graduated from one of its levels; leaving the system, irrespective of the level, without having obtained the diploma attesting the graduation of the respective education level; leaving the educational system without having obtained a certificate providing the possibility of getting integrated on the labor market; leaving the secondary education level prematurely without having become integrated in "second chance" type of programmes etc.

The analysis carried out in 2011 by the Romanian Education Sciences Institute (The results of the documentary analysis, Education Sector, May 2013) highlights that the highest school abandonment rates are recorded for the classes of the beginning of the school cycles: 1<sup>st</sup> grade, 5<sup>th</sup> grade, respectively – over 2%, while for the other grades the values of this rate are +/-1.5%. The discrepancies in favor of the rural environment hold true particularly regarding the middle school education: school abandonment by the students of the rural environment records higher values, especially in the case of the final grades (7<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>), compared to the rate corresponding to the urban environment. On the middle school level, we may note an increase of the school abandonment, preponderantly among the girls of the rural environment.

Skills development is essential for the stimulation of the economic growth and of competitiveness. In the long run, skills can stimulate innovation and economic growth.

Due to the technical and technological progress until 2020, new jobs will require skills on a higher level. Reforms on the country level need to be calibrated so that the high quality skills should be able to support both the economic growth and employment and job creation.

The European educational and training systems cannot provide the suitable skills necessary to the professional insertion capacity and do not cooperate properly with the business environment or the employers to bring the learning process closer to the reality of the work environment. This skills-related inadequacy is a more and more important concern for the European industry

competitiveness (*Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and Committee of Regions – For a European Industrial Renaissance, 2014*).

The flexibility of the programmes and the consolidation of the partnerships with the economic agent is the starting point in the modernization of the European education. On the level of the European Union, efforts are made to reach the objectives of the Europe 2020 Strategy.

A key priority of the Europe 2020 strategy is the application of the lifelong learning policies. Very much of the EU human capital remains unexploited due to the structural barriers in the provision of the learning programme.

Until 2020, the educational and training system has to ponder on rethinking the qualifications, putting a stronger accent on the learning results, reducing the number of people who leave school early and extending lifelong learning, improving partnerships between the education and training institutions and employers.

The reconsidering of education establishes a clear vision for the consolidation of the importance of the skills necessary for all jobs, particularly digital, entrepreneurship and linguistic skills. It focuses on the importance of apprenticeship programmes, an European skills and qualifications area and the potential of ICT and the educational resources accessible permanently and for free for learning, as well as on a higher assistance level (including the financial assistance), given to partnerships. By the use of the European objectives and reference criteria, each member country can assess its progress in certain key sectors, and identify those aspects that would require the investment of an additional effort (EFM, 2013).

## 2. METHODOLOGY

The data of the present comparative study have been taken from the document elaborated on the level of the EU countries on "Rethinking Education: Investing in Skills for Better Socioeconomic Outcomes" (European Commission, 2012a).

At the same time, important sources of the present analysis have been:

- The Europe 2020 objectives (European Commission, 2012b);
- The reference criteria 2020 regarding education and training (European Commission, 2014);
- The recommendations specific to each country (European Commission, 2015).

The study has been based on an analysis regarding the reaching of the progress recorded by different EU member countries and by Romania in the achievement of the Europe 2020 objectives.

The indicators submitted to the analysis are:

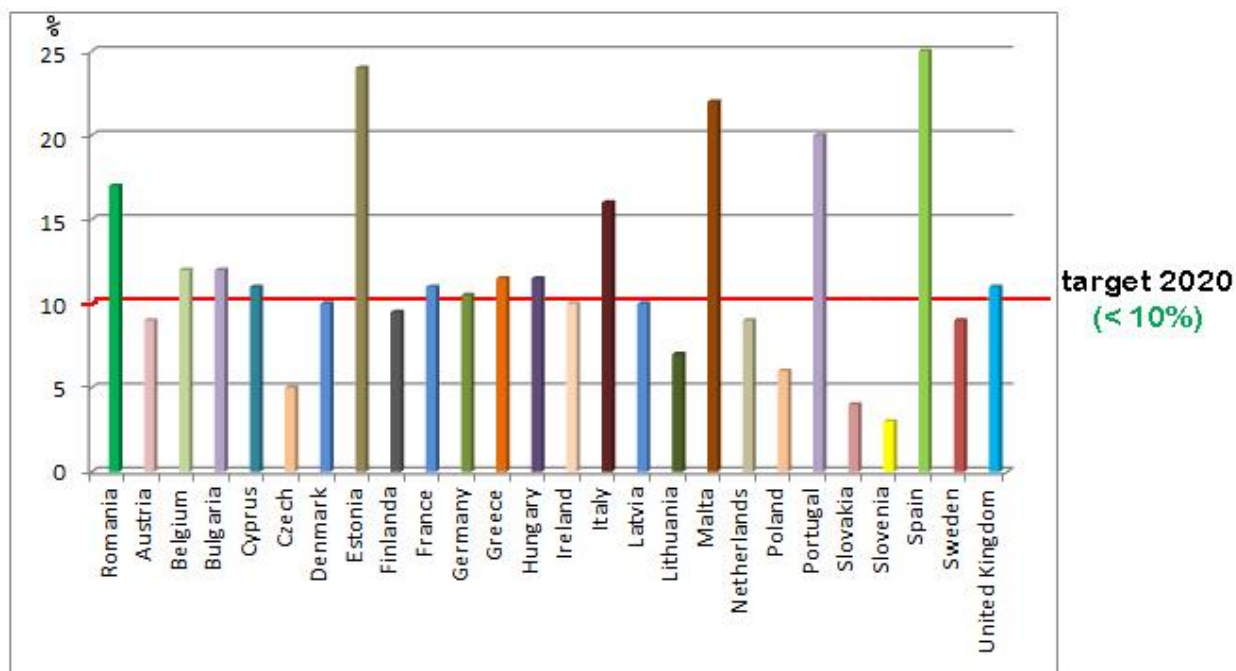
- School abandonment rate on each country's level;
- Training level - tertiary education or equivalent completed by the population aged 30-34.

The level imposed by the Strategy 2020 for the two indicators on each country's level has been 10% for the school abandonment rate and 40% the population aged 30-34 having completed tertiary or equivalent education.

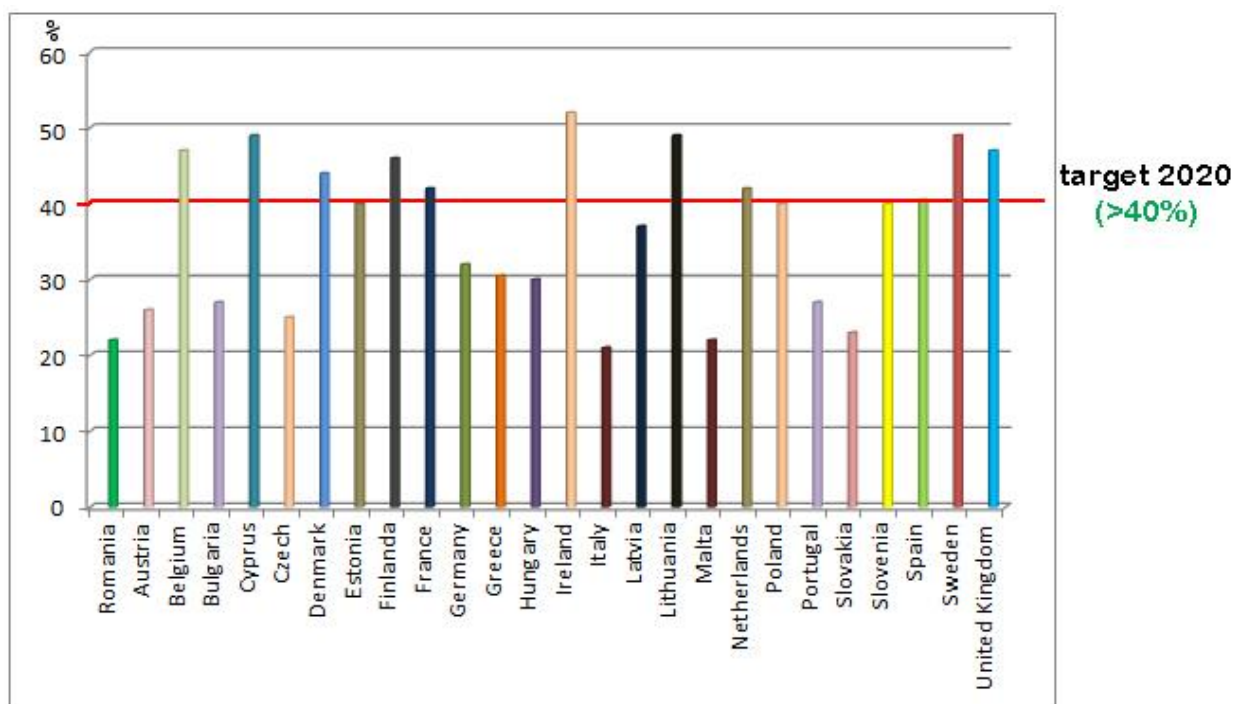
## 3. RESULTS ANALYSIS

These European objectives are related to the national objectives, which reflect different circumstances and traditions. As for the accomplishment degree of the educational objectives related to these two indicators, the EU countries belong to three categories:

1. Countries with very high performances in reaching the objectives;
2. Countries with performances on the level of a single objective;
3. Countries with performances under the objectives.



**Figure 1. The progress recorded by different EU-member countries and Romania in the achievement of the objective regarding the decrease of early school abandonment levels**  
 Source: authors after European Commission (2012b)



**Figure 2. The progress recorded by different EU member countries and Romania in the achievement of the objective regarding the assurance of a percentage of at least 40 % people aged 30-34 having completed tertiary or equivalent education**  
 Source: authors after European Commission (2012b)

- In the first category, there are countries such as: Sweden, Ireland, Poland, Finland, Denmark, the Netherlands, Slovenia, Lithuania.

The national targets of the above-mentioned countries are within the objectives imposed by the Strategy 2020. Compared to the European objectives, they have very good performances, as there are domains where qualifications are obtained faster than the EU average (12.6% -2012). The performance level is very good regarding both of the aspects investigated. In Denmark these objectives reflect different circumstances and traditions. In 2012, it developed better than the EU average. In 2012, the percentage of the young who abandoned school early decreased compared to the EU average of 12.6%, and the percentage of the young aged 30-34 having completed tertiary or equivalent education was still higher than the EU average of 35.8 %. In exchange, in Finland, we may still notice, that the number has remained stable during the last ten years. Nevertheless, the number of young people who leave school early is significantly higher in the immigrant communities, and this trend is increasing. The tertiary or equivalent education among the population aged 30-34 had an increase tendency compared to the EU average in 2012, namely of 35.8%.

The national objectives of Slovenia regarding the two indicators for the year 2012 were of 5% and 40%. Slovenia is still much over the EU average in terms of the early school abandonment percentage. Its percentage in this sense for 2012 was of 4.4% only – compared to the EU average (12.6%). Significant progresses have also been achieved on the level of the tertiary education or equivalent among the young aged 30-34. Slovenia is very close to the accomplishment of the objective of Europe 2020.

- In the second group there are: Belgium, France, Great Britain, Cyprus, Germany, Greece, Austria, Czech Republic, Spain, Latvia, Slovakia.

In this group, the countries have performances on the level of a single objective.

In 2012, Cyprus had one of the highest rates of the population with tertiary education, compared to the European targets, where the average is of 35.8% in 2012. The challenge for them is for the graduates to acquire the skills required by the changing economic environment.

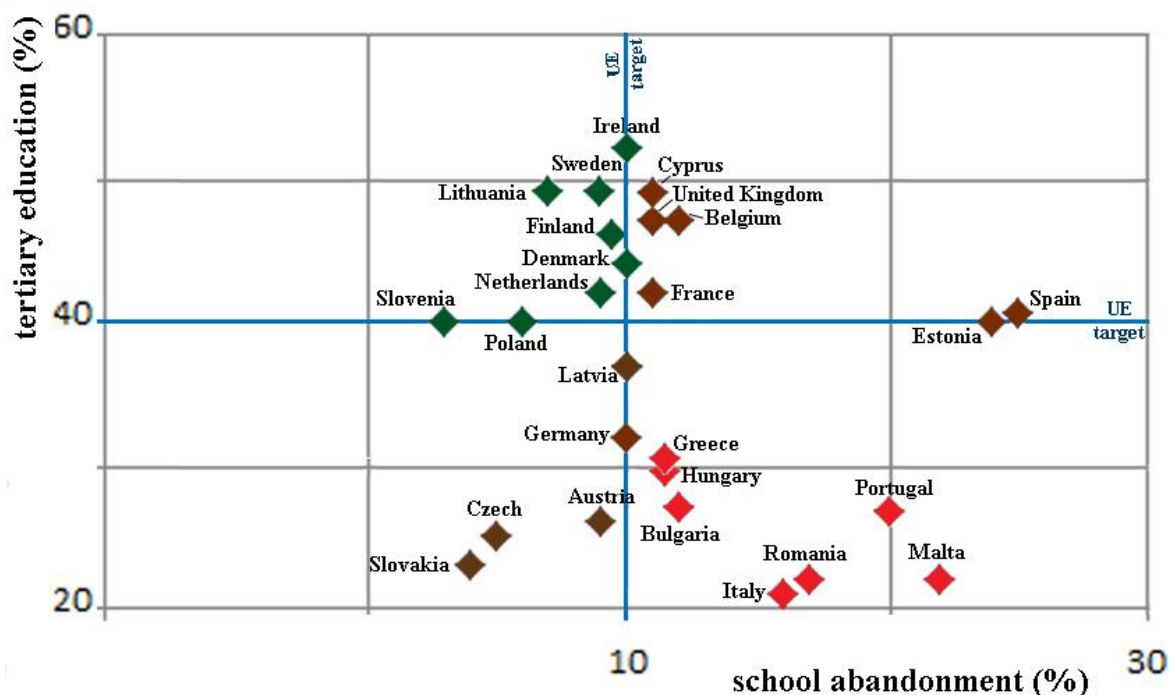
As for the school abandonment percentage, the Czech Republic has recorded one of the best results. Beginning with the year 2006, the percentage of the population aged 30-34 having completed tertiary or equivalent education, almost doubled, although it remained significantly lower than the EU average, which in 2012 increased to 35.8%.

In exchange, the national targets of Austria were of 9.5 % and 38%. Compared to the European objectives, they have very good performances in the school abandonment rate, since there are domains where qualifications are much higher than the EU average (12.6% -2012), but as for the objective regarding the tertiary studies or equivalent, they are much under the EU average. In Germany, the school abandonment rate has decreased constantly beginning with 2006. In exchange, the percentage of the young population aged 30-34 having completed tertiary or equivalent education is under the objective required by the Strategy 2020.

- In the last group there are the countries farthest from reaching the objectives, namely: Italy, Malta, Portugal, Hungary, Bulgaria and Romania.

The national objectives of Bulgaria are of 11% and of 36%. In 2012, Bulgaria obtained results a little lower than the EU average of 12.6%, regarding the early school abandonment rate. An ascendant trend is also recorded by the indicator regarding the tertiary studies or equivalent among the young population aged 30-34.





**Figure 3. Classification of the countries according to the performance attained**

*Source: authors after European Commission (2014)*

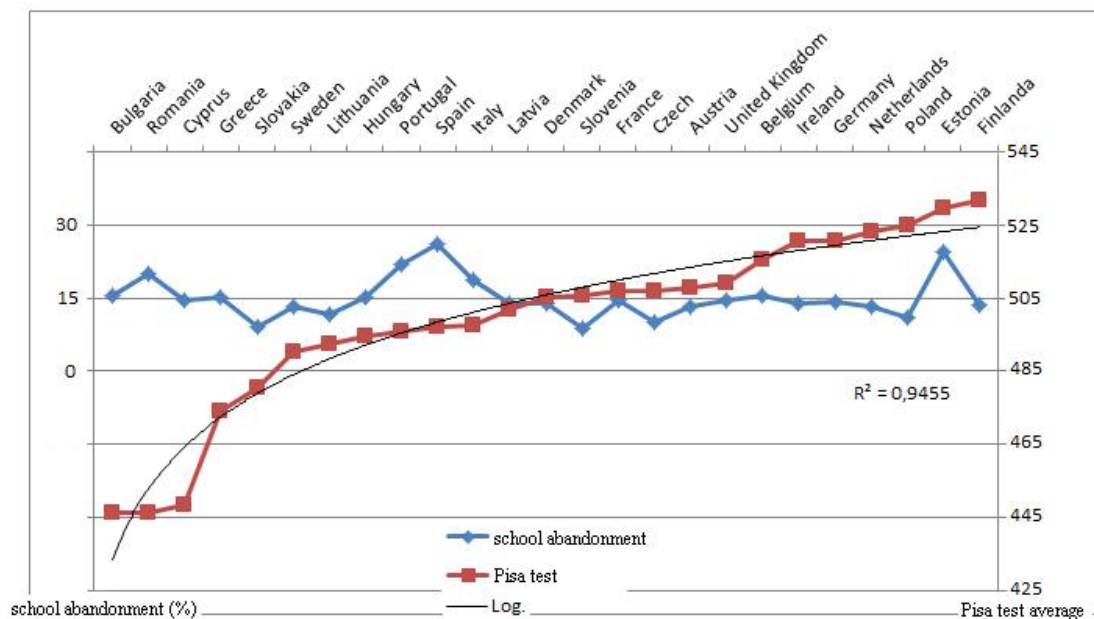
Romania’s performance regarding the objectives of Europe 2020 is not a very good one – the percentage of the young who give up their studies early exceeded the EU average of 12.6 % in 2012, and the percentage of the population aged 30-34 having completed tertiary or equivalent education was under the EU average of 35.8 % in 2012. Nevertheless, since 2006, a quick and significant progress has been recorded.

Despite the progress recorded during the last five years regarding the graduation rate for tertiary studies or equivalent, there will be made the necessary efforts to reach the main objective - of 40% - for the young who have graduated from tertiary education or equivalent.

Despite a significant improvement recorded in the last five years, the early school abandonment still remains at unacceptable levels in too many EU-member countries, like Portugal, with 23.2%. Specific actions continue to be necessary to reduce the early school abandonment level, based on comprehensive strategies, relying on concrete elements, as it has been requested in the recently adopted recommendation of the Council.

Until 2020, 20% new jobs shall require skills on a higher level. Education must improve both the standards and the success levels for the accomplishment of this requirement, as well as encourage the transversal skills necessary to make sure that the young are able to become free lancers and to get adapted to the inevitable changes, which are increasingly numerous, on the labor market, throughout their careers.

Also, the analysis highlights a relation between the level of the Pisa results (OECD, 2014) and the school abandonment rate.



**Figure 4. Correlation between the school abandonment rate and the PISA results**

Source: authors after OECD (2014)

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

All the above-mentioned tendencies are closely related to the reform carried out by each country member, to the development level, and to the investments in the development of the partnership, to the skills level development for improving the economy and competitiveness.

The member countries' priorities regarding the education targets are as follows:

- Promoting excellence in the Vocational Education and Training (VET).
- Improving the results of the groups of students with a high risk of early school abandonment and with a low level of basic skills.
- Consolidating the offer of transversal skills that increase the employment chances, such as entrepreneurship, digital skills and foreign languages.
- Decreasing the number of poorly qualified grown-ups.
- Intensifying the use of ICT-based learning and improving the access to a high quality OER.
- Revising and consolidating the professional profile of all the teaching professions.

The Commission will make sure that this contribution of the education and of investments in skills for the improvement in economy and employment is completely reflected in the European semester. It shall use European dialogue platforms like the open coordination method in education and training, the Bologna process for higher education and the Copenhagen process for VET, as well as funding tools, to highlight the urgent character of the priorities identified in the present communication.

#### REFERENCES

COM, (2014). *Industrial Policy Communication*. Retrieved June 25, 2015 from: [http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/policies/industrial-competitiveness/industrial-policy/communication-2014/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/policies/industrial-competitiveness/industrial-policy/communication-2014/index_en.htm)

- European Commission, (2012a). *Rethinking Education initiative of the European Commission*, retrieved from: [http://ec.europa.eu/languages/policy/strategic-framework/rethinking-education\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/languages/policy/strategic-framework/rethinking-education_en.htm)
- European Commission, (2012b). *Europe 2020 Targets*. Retrieved August 15, 2015 from: [http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/targets/eu-targets/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/targets/eu-targets/index_en.htm)
- European Commission, (2013). *Entrepreneurship Education: A Guide for Educators*, published by Entrepreneurship and Social Economy Unit Directorate-General for Enterprise and Industry, European Commission, Brussels
- European Commission, (2014). *Education and Training Monitor*. Retrieved August 6, 2015 from: [http://ec.europa.eu/education/library/publications/monitor14\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/education/library/publications/monitor14_en.htm)
- European Commission, (2015). *European Semester 2015*. Retrieved July 2, 2015 from [http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/making-it-happen/country-specific-recommendations/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/making-it-happen/country-specific-recommendations/index_en.htm)
- EFM (European Funds Ministry of Romania), (2013). *Results of Documentary Analysis, Educational Domain, May 2013*. Retrieved July 26, 2015 from: [http://www.fonduri-ue.ro/res/2014-2020/Dezbateri%20parteneriale/Rezultatele%20analizei%20documentare/6.Education\\_22%20mai.pdf](http://www.fonduri-ue.ro/res/2014-2020/Dezbateri%20parteneriale/Rezultatele%20analizei%20documentare/6.Education_22%20mai.pdf)
- EUA, (2013). *Financially Sustainable Universities. Full Costing: Progress and Practice*, European University Association, Brussels
- OECD, (2014). *Pisa 2012 Results in Focus*. Retrieved June 28, 2015 from: <http://www.oecd.org/pisa/keyfindings/pisa-2012-results-overview.pdf>