

**MODERNIZAREA CADRULUI DOCTORAL ÎN REPUBLICA MOLDOVA PRIN
INTEGRAREA MODELELOR EUROPENE ȘI A CERCETĂRII POSTDOCTORALE**
**MODERNIZING THE DOCTORAL FRAMEWORK IN THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA
THROUGH THE INTEGRATION OF EUROPEAN MODELS AND POSTDOCTORAL
RESEARCH**

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Abstract. This study examines the structural, regulatory, and functional challenges currently affecting doctoral education in the Republic of Moldova, with a particular focus on the uncertain accreditation framework, the declining interest in habilitation degrees, and the limited integration between higher education institutions and the economic sector. Using a combined methodology that integrates a bibliometric analysis of recent European trends and an institutional assessment of Moldovan doctoral schools and ANACEC practices, the research identifies three major systemic issues: regulatory inconsistency, diminishing attractiveness of academic careers, and insufficient valorisation of research outputs. The findings suggest that gradual alignment with European practices, especially the transition from habilitation theses to competitive postdoctoral programs and the implementation of dual/industrial PhD models, could enhance career attractiveness, strengthen internationalization, and increase research applicability. The study concludes that a phased legislative reform, supported by stronger partnerships with industry and greater research visibility, is essential for modernizing the national doctoral system and ensuring its long-term sustainability.

Keywords: Doctoral reform; Postdoctoral programs; Research policy; Accreditation; Academic career development

JEL Classification: I23; I28; O30; O38

Introduction. The doctoral studies system in the Republic of Moldova is currently undergoing a period marked by reform pressures and institutional uncertainties. Although the general framework for cycle III is established by Government Decision 1007/2014, which defines the structure of programs, evaluation mechanisms, and the activity of doctoral schools, the Ministry of Education and Research has recently requested proposals from higher education institutions to amend the regulation, in the run-up to the accreditation process planned for 2026. This overlap between regulatory review and accreditation preparation creates difficulties of interpretation and uncertainty regarding the criteria that will form the basis for the evaluation of doctoral schools.

At the same time, the system faces major structural challenges, including declining interest in habilitation theses and the difficulty of establishing scientific councils and specialized seminars in accordance with the requirements of the regulations. This imbalance between the provisions of the legal framework and the availability of human resources indicates the need for alternative solutions for academic advancement, adapted to current realities. At the same time, European trends and international best practices highlight the gradual shift from the traditional habilitation-centered model to competitive, interdisciplinary, results-oriented, and internationally collaborative postdoctoral

programs. In the same spirit, several countries have successfully implemented the dual professional doctorate, a model in which the economic environment becomes an active partner in the development of advanced expertise, strengthening the applied nature of research.

In this context, the objective of the research is to identify the main systemic problems of the doctoral framework in the Republic of Moldova and to propose directions for modernization compatible with European trends. The study answers two central questions:

1. *What verifiable discrepancies exist between the key provisions of the regulatory framework and the actual capacities of doctoral schools (human resources, processes, results)?*
2. *What European mechanisms (competitive postdoctoral studies, doctorate, performance-based evaluation) can be gradually adapted to increase the attractiveness, practical relevance, and sustainability of cycle III in the Republic of Moldova?*

The study uses a mixed approach: (i) bibliometric analysis of European trends in third-cycle reform; (ii) institutional assessment of current practices in Moldovan doctoral schools and the ANACEC procedural framework. This dual perspective allows for a comparison of norms with institutional reality and the calibration of modernization directions.

Content. The comparative analysis of the regulatory framework highlights four recurring tensions: (i) human resource requirements that are difficult to given the reduction in habilitations; (ii) the explicit lack of a dual/industrial doctoral model; (iii) postdoctoral studies are anchored in the logic of the habilitation thesis, contrary to European practices focused on projects, mobility, and teams; (iv) successive transitions/repeals that fragment the framework [2], [3], [4]. As a result, quality criteria remain focused on structures and management rights, not on scientific and applied impact.

Recent studies illustrate the transformations of doctoral education in the Republic of Moldova and Romania over the last 30 years and highlight differences in quality, organization, and visibility, reinforcing the need to modernize and clarify the current doctoral framework [5]. Literature data indicate a decline in doctoral schools (from 46 to 21, 2017–2023) and annual enrolments, along with a disproportionate dependence on foreign doctoral students (mainly from Romania), which raises questions about the internal sustainability of the system. These developments confirm the pressure to comply with regulatory requirements and the need for mechanisms to attract and retain doctoral students [1].

Changing the rules close to accreditation increases uncertainty and the risk of inconsistent interpretation of criteria. Building a credible evaluation system requires regulatory stability, and simultaneous changes in requirements make it difficult for doctoral schools. The lack of a clear regulatory horizon affects predictability, program planning, and the confidence of the academic community.

In our opinion, regulatory dependence on habilitated doctors conflicts with the decline in interest in habilitation, affecting the stability of committees and seminars in the field. European models suggest a gradual abandonment of this formal level in favor of competitive, interdisciplinary postdoctoral programs focused on international scientific performance. These allow for meritocratic, flexible academic advancement anchored in evaluations based on results, not formal structures.

Integrating postdoctoral research into academic development strategies could boost the sector, offering real opportunities for young researchers. The benefits identified include stimulating innovative research, increasing international mobility, and participating in European networks of excellence. The temporary coexistence of the traditional and modern models would allow for a balanced transition.

Therefore, the experience of Romania and other European countries shows the positive impact of industrial doctorates on connecting research with the real economy. In such programs, economic entities are financially and strategically involved in the training of doctoral students, generating applicable skills and innovation-oriented results. Adopting this model in Moldova would help reduce dependence on budgetary funding and facilitate the integration of research into the economic ecosystem.

Practice in the field highlights the fact that many theses remain unutilised, not being implemented or disseminated in the real economy, education or public policies. This deficit affects the social relevance of research and the ability of institutions to demonstrate impact. Strengthening technology transfer mechanisms and developing partnerships with the business environment are necessary conditions for genuine reform.

Attracting doctoral students is a major challenge. The lack of financial motivation, limited career opportunities, and the system's misalignment with European trends are driving the migration of young people with scientific potential. A revitalization strategy must include competitive scholarships, incentives, international mobility, and campaigns to promote the image of the research profession.

Conclusions. The analysis highlights multiple vulnerabilities in the doctoral system in the Republic of Moldova: regulatory instability, a crisis in human resources at the habilitation level, a lack of exploitation of research results, and low attractiveness for young people. At the same time, the study shows that the modernisation of this system can be achieved by adopting validated European models: strengthening postdoctoral programmes, implementing dual professional doctorates and increasing the international visibility of academic results.

The reform must be gradual, coherent, and based on international assessments of scientific performance, avoiding sudden regulatory changes. Future research directions include a comparative analysis of doctoral models in other EU countries, an assessment of the impact of industrial programs, and the development of a framework of indicators to measure the real value of research in the economy and society.

The study's contribution lies in correlating, on a bibliometric and institutional basis, regulatory and practical discrepancies with European modernization mechanisms (competitive postdoctoral studies, dual doctorates, results-based evaluation), offering a phased implementation plan.

Limitations. The analysis is based on recent institutional documents and observations. Future research will expand the empirical component (surveys/interviews in doctoral schools and time series analysis of results and professional integration).

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