

Katažyna MIKŠA\*

## Legal education in Lithuania

### 1. Introduction

The main purpose of the paper is to provide an insight into the legal education system in the Republic of Lithuania. First, the paper deals with the legal education in Lithuania from the historical perspective. Second, it provides information about main concepts of the reform of legal education in Lithuania. Third, the paper discusses internationalization and quality assessment of legal studies. Overall it presents institutions which are authorized to provide legal studies, the programs offered by these institutions, and challenges that they are facing. The ending presents conclusions, based on the gathered materials.

For a long time now legal studies have been considered to be one of the most popular majors in Lithuania. Statistics of the last three years' time show that popularity of the studies in the field of law is fairly stable,<sup>1</sup> even though the number of students has been decreasing. It is the consequence of both population decline and emigration. Currently there are four universities – three public and one private, which prepare lawyers. Moreover, legal studies are offered by some specialized schools, the so-called colleges or universities of applied science. Nevertheless, after completion of these studies a person needs to complete special courses at a regular university to obtain a diploma of legal studies,

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<sup>1</sup> Statistics are provided by the Association of Lithuanian Higher Institutions LAMA BPO: <http://www.lamabpo.lt/bendrojo-priemimo-rezultatai/2016#1132> [accessed: 2016.12.04].

which will allow working in traditional legal professions (e.g., as an attorney or a judge).

Generally, the education is provided in the form of full-time and part-time studies. After completion of the studies there are many options open to graduates to pursue their careers: one can decide to continue his/her academic career or to go into legal practice within one of the legal professions, e.g., attorney, judge, notary, prosecutor, etc. Notably, these professions require additional specialist training or practice which can last from 2 to 5 years. Such trainings are run by local government bodies and are referred to as apprenticeship, ending with the final professional exam.

## 2. The history of legal studies in Lithuania and the reform of 1991

Training of legal practitioners was begun in 1567 in Vilnius Academy<sup>2</sup> – the oldest higher institution in Lithuania. In 1641, on 11 October, the King of Poland and Grand Duke of Lithuania, Władysław IV Vasa, by the privilege had established Vilnius University Faculty of Law. For almost two hundred years at the Faculty prominent scientists of that time as: H. Stroynowski, A.A. Olizarowski, A.L. Capelli, I. Daniłowicz, I. Oldachowski, S. Malewski, J. Jaroszewicz and J. Lelewel worked there. At the beginning, the duration of studies in the field of law was 4 years, and after the reorganization in 1803 – 3 years.

The university was closed by Nikolaj I, Emperor of Russia in 1832. It was re-established only in 1919, at the time when the region was annexed by Poland, thus Lithuanian School of Law continued to work in Kaunas (since 1922).<sup>3</sup> In 1930, the university in Kaunas was renamed to Vytautas Magnus University.

During the Soviet period legal education in Lithuania followed the Soviet system of higher education. The duration of the law studies was 5 years. Currently such qualification is equated to the level of Master's degree.<sup>4</sup> Until 1991 the model of one-stage studies in the field of law had

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<sup>2</sup> E. Bilevičiūtė, J. Čižikienė, Legal education system in Lithuania: nowadays & new challenges, *Social media : challenges and opportunities for education in modern society : research papers = Socialinės medijos : iššūkiai ir galimybės suaugusiųjų švietimui*. Vilnius : Mykolas Romeris University, Vol. 1, No 1, 2013, P.19.

<sup>3</sup> Vilnius university Faculty of Law information: <http://www.tf.vu.lt/en/about-the-faculty/history> [accessed: 2016.12.04].

<sup>4</sup> Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education: <http://www.skvc.lt/default/en/education-in-lithuania/higher#soviet> [accessed: 2016.12.04].

been used for the preparation of lawyers. Nowadays two universities: Vilnius University and Vytautas Magnus University use the model of one-stage studies.

After the restoration of independence of Lithuania in 1990 one more actor on the stage of legal education appeared. In 1998, Law Faculty at the Law Academy in Vilnius was established. Later this higher education institution was renamed The Law University of Lithuania, to finally be again renamed – Mykolas Romeris University. This university chose a different model of studies: 3.5 years of Bachelor's degree studies, followed by 1 or 1.5 (depending on the curriculum) – Master's degree studies.

On 12 February of 1991, the Supreme Council of Lithuania adopted the Law on Science and Studies.<sup>5</sup> The Law provided relevant academic institutions with the opportunity to divide studies in the first- and second-cycle studies (also in the field of law). These provisions were in force until 2002, when the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania adopted Law on Amending the Law on Science and Studies. The last significant amendment was made in 2009 when the new Law on Science and Studies was adopted.<sup>6</sup>

### 3. Models of legal studies

Lithuania was one of the countries which signed the Bologna Declaration in 1999 and implemented its ideas. The most significant changes were: creation of Diploma Supplement, Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education scrutiny, implementation of the system of ECTS points, all ensuring transparency and standardization of European higher education. However, the legal studies are conducted as two-cycle studies only by Mykolas Romeris University, both Vilnius University and Vytautas Magnus University still conduct study courses as uniform Master studies. Vytautas Magnus University offers also Bachelor courses in law but the program is specialized: Law and Finance.

On the one hand, breaking studies into two parts could result in obtaining more complex education. Students after completing the first cycle at one university could continue their studies in another higher education institution, and possibly they could be more eager to go to study abroad. On the other hand, the practical value of the divided legal studies could raise some serious doubts. It has been already said that

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<sup>5</sup> Lietuvos Respublikos Mokslo ir studijų įstatymas, 1991 m. vasario 12 d. Nr. I-1052.

<sup>6</sup> Lietuvos Respubliko Mokslo ir studijų įstatymas, 2009 balandžio 30 d., Nr. XI-242.

after completion of legal studies the graduate can work as a representative of one of the traditional legal professions. Notably, this is possible only after completion of Master studies. General subjects taught during the bachelor studies are not sufficient to assure high quality of the legal service. Thus the requirement after completion of Bachelor studies to participate in an admission to the Master studies (thus, it is already a “second round” of admission) could be perceived as a significant disadvantage.

General requirements for the admission to higher education (both Bachelor studies and one-stage studies) are provided in the Law of Science and Studies. Admission to the first cycle of studies or one-stage studies requires at least a secondary or equivalent education.<sup>7</sup> The competitive score is based on the exam grades for history, the Lithuanian language, a foreign language and a school grade for the subject of mathematics.

To be admitted to the second cycle of studies a person is required to hold a Bachelor’s degree diploma or equivalent. Also a person holding professional Bachelor’s degree diploma (earned at a non-university higher education institution) can be admitted to the second cycle studies, but only after completion of supplementary courses (the so-called bridging studies) or after passing additional exams.

Mykolas Romeris University and Vytautas Magnus University provide Master’s degree studies in law for non-lawyers. Generally, graduates who are awarded Bachelor’s or Master’s degree diploma but not in the field of law can apply for this kind of studies, as well. The overall duration of these studies is from 2.5 to 3 years. The first year is dedicated for the preparatory studies and the following 1.5 or 2 years (depending on the curriculum) for the Master studies. Nevertheless, not all Master programs in the field of law are available to non-lawyers. Mykolas Romeris University offers these candidates to study in the following majors: Administrative Law, Biolaw, Law of Labor and Social Procurement, Financial Law. Vytautas Magnus University offers International Business Law Master study program for the persons holding Bachelor’s diploma in law and in other fields, but the latter are required to pass additional exams. It is worth mentioning, that persons, who obtained Master’s diploma in the specific area of law but do not hold Bachelor’s degree diploma in law cannot enter traditional legal professions. The purpose of these legal studies for non-lawyers is to deepen their knowledge in specific areas of law. This can be for instance economists

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<sup>7</sup> Art. 52 of the Law on Science and Studies of the Republic of Lithuania.

working as tax advisors, officers of public institutions, accountants, directors, managers, etc.

Discussing models of legal studies in Lithuania, there should be mentioned one more possibility to obtain Master's in Law diploma. Higher institutions running one-stage legal studies offer students, who completed professional legal studies in a non-university higher education centre and who hold a professional Bachelor's degree in law diploma, as well as students holding Bachelor's degree in law diploma to enter for Master's legal studies. For instance, Vilnius University gives a possibility to these students to enter studies at the third year of their courses. It should be noticed that students holding professional Bachelor's degree diploma are required to pass additional exams. All these students will acquire Master's in Law diploma.

All the above-mentioned universities are public institutions of higher education. There is one more university teaching law – Kazimieras Simonavičius University. It is a private institution of higher education. The university offers one-stage studies in the field of law, after which students are awarded with Master's in Law degree diploma. Moreover, the university offers two LL.M programs taught in English: International Commerce and Business Law and European Union Law and Global Challenges. Both programs are open also for non-lawyers, but they are subject to special conditions: students are required to complete supplementary studies.

According to Article 6 of the Lithuanian Law on Science and Studies there are two categories of higher education institutions: universities and colleges. After completion of the latter the person is awarded with the professional Bachelor's degree which corresponds to the sixth level of Lithuanian Description of Qualifications,<sup>8</sup> the sixth level of the European Qualifications Framework<sup>9</sup> and the first cycle of the European Higher Education Qualifications Framework.

International School of Law and Business offers studies in International Business Law, the program is taught in English and lasts 3 years. Legal studies in Lithuania are provided by the following colleges: University of Applied Sciences in Kaunas (Kauno kolegija), University of Applied Social Sciences (Socialinių mokslų kolegija), University of Applied Sciences in Vilnius (Vilniaus kolegija), Kolping University of Applied Sciences (Kolpingo kolegija), Northern Lithuania College (Šiaurės Lietuvos

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<sup>8</sup> Government of the Republic of Lithuania Resolution on the approval of the description of the qualification framework of 4 May 2010, No. 535.

<sup>9</sup> Descriptors defining the levels in The Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area <https://ec.europa.eu/ploteus/content/descriptors-page> [accessed: 2016.12.07].

kolegija), University of Applied Sciences in Panevėžys (Panevėžio kolegija). Graduates of colleges can continue their studies in the second cycle of studies, according to the procedures of the individual higher education institution.

#### **4. Study programs – *curricula***

Lithuanian higher education institutions enjoy much freedom in creating study programs and determining their curricula. Their autonomy is ensured by Art. 40 of the Constitution of the Republic of Lithuania<sup>10</sup> and are also concretized in the Law of Science and Studies. However, the general standards are provided by the Minister of Education and Science. Universities determine their assessment and grading procedures, examination and set their internal laws. Higher education institutions are free to decide on the education they want to provide. Nevertheless, the programs have to be accredited by the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education.

Lithuanian labor market, in comparison with Poland or Ukraine, is quite small hence, universities in order to have their learning program accredited have to prove its necessity and uniqueness. Moreover, due to the decrease in the number of students, Lithuanian politicians began to discuss mergers of universities in order to optimize higher education. Universities perceive these initiatives as very controversial. This can lead to the creation of a monopoly in some fields of education. For instance, if two public universities were merged and a third one were closed due to the shortage of candidates, legal education would be provided only by one university. Thus, a person willing to work within one of the traditional legal professions could study only in one public university. It is worth mentioning that state funding for the studies can be received exclusively in public universities. Therefore, universities try even harder than ever before to prove their uniqueness, high quality of the teaching programs and research. Below, programs of the major actors on the stage of legal education are presented.

Mykolas Romeris University offers seven Bachelor's degree programs: Law, Law and Customs Activities, Law and Management, Law and Penitentiary Activities, Law and Police Activities, Law and Pretrial Process, Law and State Border Guard. The purpose of the Bachelor's degree studies is to provide students with systematic knowledge and understanding of recent achievements in the field of law. Students will

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<sup>10</sup> Lietuvos Respublikos Konstitucija, adopted by the referendum on 25 October in 1992.

be capable of applying legal concepts in an appropriate manner. Students learn the purpose of law and history of its formation and development, modern theories of law, are acquainted with key law institutions. They are provided with knowledge of legal responsibility, creation of legal norms, implementation of legal acts, key legal principles and content of legal institutions.

Traditionally, during the first-cycle of legal studies students are taught these subjects: Legal Theory, History of Law, Constitutional Law, Civil and Civil Procedure Law, Criminal and Criminal Procedure Law, Administrative and Administrative Procedure Law, Labor Law, International Law, European Union Law, Finance Law. Other compulsory and optional courses depend on the curriculum.

After the completion of Bachelor's degree studies students are eligible to enter Master's degree programs. During their Master's degree courses students deepen their knowledge of law. The purpose of the Master's programs is to provide students with proficiency in applying knowledge and conception in legal activities, ability to evaluate the research results, ability to solve the law enforcement issues, to assess the consequences of legal decisions. Mykolas Romeris University offers a number of Master's degree programs: Administrative Law, Biolaw, Business Law, European and International Business Law (joint study program with University of Savoja, France), European Union Law and Governance, Healthcare Law and Policy (joint study program with Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv, Ukraine), Intellectual Property Law (joint study program with Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv, Ukraine), International Law (English), Law (there are possible 3 specializations: Civil Law, Criminal Law and Criminology and International law), Legal Regulation of Public Administration and Human Rights (joint study program with Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv, Ukraine), Mediation, Private Law (joint study program with Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv, Ukraine). These programs provide specialized knowledge in a particular area of law. They are composed of compulsory and optional subjects, all being related to the chosen specialization. Part of these programs are joint study programs, which means, that part of the study time is spent at one and another part in the other of the cooperating universities.<sup>11</sup>

Vilnius university offers one-stage studies in the field of law. During the first 3 years' time students, similarly as in Mykolas Romeris University, are provided with general courses in the field of law. Beginning with the fourth year, they can choose a specialization. Vilnius

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<sup>11</sup> More about internationalization of the studies can be found in the last part of this paper.

University offers a wide range of different study programs: Criminal Justice, Labor and Social Law, Finance and Tax Law, Private Law: Civil Procedure, Private Law: Company and Capital market Law, Private Law: Intellectual Property and Competition Law, Applied Jurisprudence, International and European Union Law: European Union Law, International and European Union Law: International Law and Public Law. During 2 years of studies students participate in compulsory and optional specialized courses and write their Master's theses. Moreover, the university provides four 1.5-year-long Master's degree programs: Criminal Justice, European Union Business Law, Public law and European Union and International Law. These programs are dedicated to students already holding Bachelor's or Master's in Law diplomas. Their aim is to deepen the knowledge in a specific area of law.

Vytautas Magnus University provide both separate specialized Bachelor's and Master's degree programs both one-stage program in the field of law. Bachelor's degree program of Law and Finance, on the one hand, provides general legal courses, on the other hand – gives an insight into such subjects as: Economy, Finances and Accountancy. Graduates in this course program are eligible to continue studies both in the field of law and in the field of finances. They can pursue their studies in the Master's course in International Business Law. The program is also opened to non-lawyers, however under special conditions: the candidate is required to pass additional exams during the studies. Moreover, the university offers one-stage program in Law. According to the information provided by the university quite a large number of courses offered by the Faculty of Law are taught by law professionals from different countries, e.g., Italy, Spain, USA, UK and others.

The last issue that is worth addressing is internationalization of the studies. Each of the universities has its own policy on the internationalization. Vytautas Magnus University invites prominent foreign professors to give lectures. Vilnius University has established a number of foreign law centers, offers LL.M. studies in English and Russian. Mykolas Romeris University offers a joint study program in European and International Business Law, a joint study program with University of Savoja, France; LL.M. in International Law in English with one semester abroad (students usually go to the Ghent University). For the students it is a good opportunity to practice foreign languages, master their skills and become more competitive in labor market.



## 5. Quality assessment

The Lithuanian Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education was established in 1995. The Centre is a specialized agency founded by the Lithuanian Ministry of Education and Science as an expert institution. The main functions of the Centre are to assess the quality of higher education, assess the qualifications concerning higher education, provide the information on higher education systems and qualification recognition. Moreover, the Centre advises higher education institutions on self-assessment in order to improve the quality of their activities. Each new program that a university wants to run has to be assessed and registered by the Centre. To carry out external assessment the Centre invites foreign and national experts, students and professionals. According to the Law on Science and Studies each year the Centre has to present conclusions of quality assessment of higher education institutions and their programs. All the final evaluation documents are public. The criteria and methodology of the evaluation are adopted by the Centre.<sup>12</sup>

Every higher education institution, in order to have its study program accredited, has to send appropriate request to the Centre eighteen months prior to the deadline of the accreditation of the program. Then a self-evaluation, which is the basis for the assessment, needs to be prepared. It is evaluated by experts appointed by the Centre. The visit of the experts to the higher education institution is an inseparable part of the evaluation. After the experts get acquainted with the self-evaluation and visit the university, they prepare the evaluation report, which is later discussed by the Studies Evaluation Committee.

The self-evaluation must include the following issues: program objectives and learning outcomes, program structure, subjects of study, the content of subjects and study methods, information about teaching staff qualifications and achievements, facilities and learning recourses, the process of studies and assessment, program management. Practice shows that universities are preparing very detailed self-evaluation reports, which include all the above-mentioned points. Reports submitted by the experts are of great importance because they show weak points of programs or of the higher education institution itself.

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<sup>12</sup> Methodology for evaluation of higher education study programmes, approved by Order No 1-01-162 of 20 December 2010 of the Director of the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education.

It is worth pointing out that each higher education institution has very clear quality assurance policies.<sup>13</sup> For instance, they can include establishment of special committees responsible for quality of the university programs or special requirements for the university staff. Moreover, in order to secure high quality of their study programs universities provide rules on approval, monitoring and periodical review of study programs and awarded qualifications.<sup>14</sup>

## 6. Conclusions

On the one hand, higher education institutions offering legal studies try to comply with Bologna requirements: they offer not only one-stage but also two-stage legal studies. On the other hand, they try to teach all the general subjects of law indispensable to provide high quality legal services. The university programs are oriented not only towards providing students with generic and subject specific competences, but also with transferable skills. The law faculties cannot benefit from the past glory and general popularity of the legal profession, they face the same challenges as the other faculties, among others, a decrease in the number of students and changes in the labor market. Therefore, they try to make legal studies more attractive to prospective candidates by offering a choice of an attractive specialization, studying abroad or obtaining a double diploma.

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<sup>13</sup> For instance: <http://www.vu.lt/studijos/studiju-kokybe>; [http://www.mruni.eu/en/current\\_students/quality\\_of\\_studies/mru\\_legislation\\_regulating\\_internal\\_system\\_for\\_studies\\_quality\\_management/](http://www.mruni.eu/en/current_students/quality_of_studies/mru_legislation_regulating_internal_system_for_studies_quality_management/) [accessed: 2016.12.07].

<sup>14</sup> For instance, p. 9.2 of the Regulations of the System of Internal Study Quality Assurance at Mykolas Romeris University.

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**LEGAL EDUCATION IN LITHUANIA**

**Abstract:** The paper analyzes the system of legal education in Lithuania. It provides a short historical overview and recent developments in this area. On the one hand, higher education institutions try to implement main goals of the Bologna Process and to provide two-cycle studies in the field of law. On the other hand, there are still very strong ties to the traditional one-stage model of legal studies. Thus, universities try to combine both these models and offer both two-stage and one-stage studies. In such a situation students are given an opportunity to choose the model they prefer. The paper gives an insight into the programs of studies offered by the universities in Lithuania. The last thing discussed in the article is the issue of securing quality of legal studies.

**Keywords:** LEGAL EDUCATION, STUDY PROGRAMS, LITHUANIA