

Iulian Boldea, Dumitru-Mircea Buda (Editors)

CONVERGENT DISCOURSES. Exploring the Contexts of Communication

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MARKET ORIENTATION OF THE HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS. CASE STUDY: MILITARY TECHNICAL ACADEMY

Laurențiu Florentin Stoenică; Călin Petrică Vegheș; Alin Constantin Sava
PhD Student, Bucharest University of Economic Studies; Prof., PhD, Bucharest University of Economic Studies; PhD, Military Technical Academy

Abstract: The educational services market knew few changes, in the last years, the way of forming the offer of the education institutions being seen as a response to the demand, manifested by the consumer public, to their needs and demands. Developing a niche of the higher education services market, the military higher education institutions approached on the educational market through the offer of new study programs, which are attractive to the educational services consumer public, the introduction in the educational offer of admission places with tuition fees, which are intended to the students who only obtain the bachelor degree in the study domain for which they have opted. Market orientation contributed to the positioning of the military higher education institutions in the entire Romanian higher education system, thus the military component of the higher education became visible and attractive to the education consumer public. The military higher education institutions obtained through market orientation a clear vision of the market phenomena, the capacity to anticipate trends and a better image on the education market, being classified in the education and research universities category, a better international visibility, as well as a better satisfaction of the students and graduates.

Keywords: military, higher education, Romania, market orientation, educational marketing

Introduction

In the evolution of society, once with the generalization of goods production, the market became the space in which, in a given timeframe, the sellers and buyers meet, to put face to face the demand and offer of goods/services, to exchange goods (Kotler, 2005), the exchange being the main way of satisfying consumer needs, in essence, representing the acquiring of a good by giving another, of a different nature, in certain environment conditions (Gherasim and Gherasim, 2009).

The market is the space in which institutions from various activity domains put forward the results of the activities, products or services which they have created, each trying to take a more convenient position than the others. Approached in a marketing vision, in constant motion and connected to factors under whose influence it forms and evolves, the market acquires quantitative and qualitative dimensions, specific characteristics, elements which must be possessed in order to elaborate a future marketing strategy of the institution (Balaure, et al., 2002).

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The educational services market is defined as a consistent ensemble of educational components constituted in a national (regional) system or network which offers the society and its members, as consumers (clients), the satisfaction of the need for education, knowledge, formation of certain abilities for the labour market, and also, the satisfaction of certain interests, demands (Ciobanu, 2003; Grigoruț, et al., 2011).

Aspects linked to market orientation are approached in numerous studies, Narver and Slater (1990) showed that the demand of the institutions to create a higher value for the clients and to obtain a long-lasting competitive advantage generates activities for the purpose of creating and maintaining a culture which will produce behaviours which are necessary to reach the proposed goal. Kohli and Jaworski (1990) define market orientation through the behavior of the organization through which is transmitted information about the market at the level of the entire organization, regarding the actual and future needs of the customers, the information is disseminated and an answer of the organization is generated depending on the received information.

Market orientation is the degree to which an organisation generates and uses intelligence about the current and future needs of customers; develops a strategy to satisfy these needs; and implements that strategy to meet those needs and wants (Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka, 2010).

Kohli and Jaworski (1990) define market orientation in terms of three dimensions: the generation of market information about needs of customers and external environmental factors, the dissemination of such information among organizational functions and the development and implementation of strategies in response to the information.

Marketing orientation in the field of education expresses a rethinking of the educational offer, it implies market research and adaptation of the offer to the demand, which means not only as a declaration the construction of a student-centred education, but also the creation of study programmes which are requested by the market (Platis, 2009).

Marketing orientation implies the satisfaction of the needs and demands of the consumers through the creation and delivering of products and services to meet their demands, while the higher education institutions follow the creation and offering of educational products and services in an accessible form to the consumers (Raboca, 2011).

The beginning of the 1990s was characterized by the apparition of changes in the Romanian higher education. After 1989, the higher education went through ample transformation, in the following period being registred a growth in the number of universities, faculties, students and academic staff, the evolution rythms being different for each index.

The Romanian higher education system represents a combination of young higher education institutions, which are not more than 20 years old, their ratio being of 52%, higher education institutions with a functioning period which varies between 50 and 100 years, 41%, as well as universities which are over 100 years old, with a ratio of 18% in the total of institutions of this kind, and on the other hand, universities which are between 50 and 100 years old (23%) – most of these universities from this category being formed after the year 1948 (Hâncean, et al., 2010).

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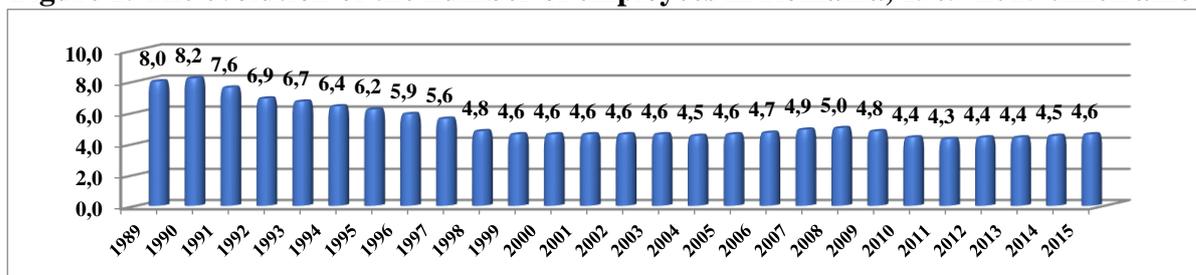
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In the context of the economic transition process, Romania suffered significant transformations. This process was characterized by the explosive growth of the number of students, universities, the reduction of the number of employees, of the active population and occupied population, through the fluctuant evolution of the unemployment rate. Taking as a starting point for the analysis the year 1989, according to the data of the National Institute of Statistics, the number of universities grew from one year to another, from 44 universities to 101 in 2015, the number of students evolved from 164507 in 1989 to 411229 students in the 2014/2015 university year. The economic environment in which the higher education institutions evolve, both military and civil, registered a downward evolution of the number of employees from 8 million in 1989 to 4.6 million in 2015 (Figure 1) as well as the occupied population, from 10.9 million in 1989 to 8.5 million in 2015 (Figure 2).

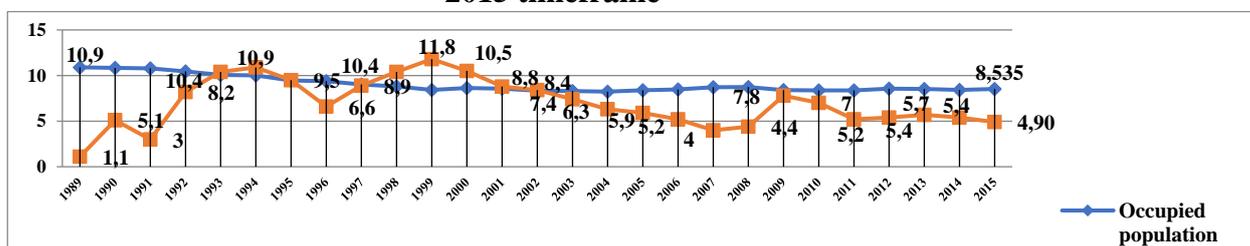
Figure 1. The evolution of the number of employees in Romania, 1989-2015 timeframe



Source: National Institute of Statistics

In the year 1990, the number of employees grew from 8.2 million, so beginning with the following year to decrease to 4.6 million in the year 2000. The evolution of the index in the following period was relatively constant, the growths from 2008 and 2009 to maximum 5 million employees were followed by decreasing, until the year 2015 the number of employees in economy being on average approximately 4.4 million employees.

Figure 2. The evolution of the occupied population and the unemployment rate, 1989-2015 timeframe



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Source: National Institute of Statistics

The timeframe is characterized by growths of the unemployment rate (the ratio of the number of registred unemployed to the active civil population), coming immediately after 1990 to 10.9% in 1994, respectively 11.8% in 1999, as well as decreasing to 4% in 2007.

The unstable economic environment made the educational offer of the military system and the benefits given during the time of scholarization and after graduating from military higher education institutions to be appreciated more and more by the consumer public of educational services.

Military higher education at the moment of 1989

Characteristic to the period before the year 1989 was the polytechnization of the Romanian higher education and the weak identification of the military education in the ensemble of the national education system, being strictly sponsored by the Ministry of National Defence. Although, for certain degrees (medicine, dentistry, pharmacy) were made scholarizations, at the request of the Ministry of National Defence, in civil higher education institutions, being founded in 1976 the Faculty of Military Medicine, within the framework of the Bucharest Institute of Medicine and Pharmacy, subordinated to the Ministry of National Defence, the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Health. During that period, the admission in higher education was contest-based (admission exam), the candidates having graduated secondary education with baccalaureate diploma, coming from military or civil high schools, but also those working in enterprises, the percentage of the last category growing in the 1980-1989 timeframe from 18% to 40% (Opriță, et al., 1986).

The duration of the studies in military education institutions for the preparation of officers was of 3 years in 1989, except for the Military Technical Faculty where the duration of the studies was of 5 years for engineer officers and of 3 years for sub-engineer officers, the Faculty of Military Medicine where the duration of the studies was of 6 years, the Naval Institute which had study programmes of 4 years and the School of Aviation Officers where the duration of the studies was of 4 years for the pilot officers.

An important aspect regards the ensuring of jobs for the higher education graduates, for that purpose, the Education Law of 1978 underlined that „*to all graduates are ensured, according to the preparation obtained through the effectuated university studies, jobs*”.

In 1989, within the framework of the military higher education worked the Military Academy, with degrees for the preparation of militaries for command activities and general staff as well as technical degrees (within the framework of the Military Technical Faculty), which offered engineering or sub-engineering diplomas, the “Mircea cel Bătrân” Naval Institute and the Faculty of Military Medicine.

For the Military Technical Faculty were 9 study programmes to prepare engineer officers and 4 study programmes to prepare sub-engineer officers, the number of graduates in the class of 1989 being of 209 officers, of whom 142 engineers and 67 sub-engineers.

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The „Mircea cel Bătrân” Naval Institute had in 1989 a number of 8 study programmes to prepare military and civilian navy officers, in that year graduating 292 navy officers, of whom 42 militaries and 252 civilians.

The percentage of the academic component in the preparation of future engineer officers, both in the Military Technical Faculty and the Naval Institute was over 60%, the military and political component, at that time, complemented the education from these higher education institutions. For the Faculty of Military Medicine, the academic component was of 90%, comprising the general medicine preparation of future military doctors (Oprîță, et al., 1986).

The evolution of the military higher education during in the 1990-2015 timeframe

Between 1990 and 1993, Romania followed a military path independent of the main military alliances, mainly characterized, in its inception phase, through an amplification of the number of existent military structures, having 9 army corps and 61 brigades of different types, so in the 1994-1999 timeframe, of the Partnership for Peace, characterized by the desire to accede in the euro-atlantic security structures, the army would consecutively transit from the organizational structure of four armies, to that of territorial army corps, and, later, to the one existing in the present day, organized in divisions and brigades, as large basic operative/tactic units. The evolution of the military system as a whole determined the reorganization as well as the increasing of interest towards the military education (Stroea, 2010).

The year 1990 marks the beginning of reforms both in the Romanian society as a whole, and in education in particularly, the military education evolving slowly to adapt to the national system.

The Military Technical Faculty of the Military Academy became again an independent institution, under the name of Military Technical Academy, being organized in four faculties. The Naval Institute was reorganized, becoming the "Mircea cel Batran" Naval Academy, a specialized military higher education institution, organized in two faculties. The Military Academy operates as a higher education institution destined for the preparation of student-officers, to become commanders and officers in the general staffs, subordinated to the Ministry of National Defence. In 1990 the institution functioned with four faculties and 24 specialized chairs which ensured the educational activity. Starting from the year 1991, the Military Academy was subordinated to the commander of the General Staff, according to the tradition, changing the name to Military Higher Education Academy.

In 1990 the military education was still dominated by the officer schools with a 3 year study cycle, while at that time functioned more schools which would be transformed and grouped in 1991 in military institutes, higher education institutions for the formation of officers for different specialities and military branches. In 1991, the Bucharest Institute of Physical Education and Sports created the Military Faculty of Physical Education, subordinated to the Ministry of National Defence and the Ministry of Education and Science, ensuring the specialized higher education, within a military context, of the students for the needs of the army, but also for other internal and external beneficiaries, as well as the organization of post-university education for the graduates of this

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faculty. The faculty functioned then within the framework of the National Academy of Physical Education and Sports until the year 2003, when it was dissolved.

The reformation of the military education continued, so in the year 1995 are constituted military academies in the cities Sibiu and Braşov, by unifying the already existent military institutes. The military higher education system was composed in the university year 1995/1996 of 6 military higher education institutions: the Higher Military Study Academy, the Naval Academy, the Military Technical Academy, the Land Troops Academy, the Aviation and Air Defence Academy and the Medical-Military Institute.

The Land Troops Academy, Aviation and Air Defence Academy changed their names in 2000 to Land Forces Academy, respectively Air Force Academy.

In 2003, the Higher Military Study Academy changes its name in National Defence University, still having the mission of preparing command and general staff officers.

Since 2005, the military higher education system implemented the provisions of the Bologna Process, the duration of the study cycles being of 6 years for the Medical-Military Institute students, 4 years for the Military Technical Academy and Naval Academy students and of 3 years for the Land Forces Academy and Air Force Academy.

The reform of the military education was conceived correlated to the traditions of the Romanian military schools, with the reform program which existed in the Romanian higher education, with the Education Law, in accordance to Romanian's option for euro-atlantic and European integration, taking into account the characteristics of the military education systems of the developed countries: USA, France, Germany, United Kingdom (Mitu, 2010).

The evolution of the Military Technical Academy, 1989-2015

The Military Technical Academy was organized at its inception, in 1949, in five faculties: Weaponry and Ammunition, Tanks and motomechanization, Aviation, Transmissions, Navy.

Starting with 1950, the Military Technical Academy was organized in eight faculties, beside the initial ones, adding Applied Chemistry, Constructions and fortification and Geodesy, and starting with 1953 it was empowered to organise doctoral studies (ARACIS Report, 2010).

In 1959 the Military Technical Academy was included in the General Military Academy, under the name "Military Technical Academy". The faculty was comprised of the departments: Armament, Auto-Tanks, Electronics, Aviation and Navy, Corps of Engineers, Geodesy and Chemistry. As a consequence of the process regarding the organization and functioning of military education institutions for the preparation of officers, starting with 1968, the Technical Sector of the Military Academy was formed, initially organized as four faculties, followed by two faculties (Mechanics, Military Electronics and Electrotechnic) and 2-3 departments (Artillery and Rockets, Military Chemistry, Military Constructions).

In 1989, the Technical Military Faculty had 13 study programs, 9 for the preparation of engineer officers and 4 for sub-engineer officers. That year 142 engineer officers and 67 sub-engineer officers graduated, the duration of studies being of 5 years for engineers and 3 years for sub-engineers. Comparatively, on a national level, in 1989 there were 44 higher education institutions, with 101

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faculties, with a total of 164507 enrolled students, 113185 for technical specializations, 68.8% out of the total. That same year, the total number of higher education graduates was 28113, 19585 of them in technical specializations.

Right after the december 1989 revolution, in may 1990, the Technical Military Faculty became an independent institution, named the Military Technical Academy, organized in four faculties (Armament, Rockets and Ammunition; Aviation and Armoury; Electronics and Informatics; Corps of Engineers, Geodesy and Constructions). In the same year, the specialization for engineers in Navy was transferred to the “Mircea cel Bătrân” Naval Academy in Constanța. The last class of engineer officers in the “Navy” sector, the “Navy Artillery and underwater weaponry” graduated the Military Technical Academy in 1994.

Beginning with university year 1990/1991 the military service was no longer compulsory, the series of students enrolled in the first year of studies including those admitted in 1989, who served a shorter military service. Starting with this year, the duration of studies in the Military Technical Academy rose to 5 years and 8 months until 1994, when the last series of students who went through study programs with this length was enrolled. Also, the duration of studies for sub-engineer officers rose starting with 1990/1991 to 3 years and 8 months, with the last graduates in 1996. Since 1995, the duration of studies was reduced from 5 years and 8 months to 5 years, with the last class graduating the Military Technical Academy in 2008.

On 01.01.1998, the Military Technical Academy was reorganized in three faculties: The Faculty of Armament, Rockets, Ammunition and Engineering Corps; The Faculty of Armoury and Aviation and The Faculty of Radiolocation, Transmission and Automatization Equipment for Leading Troops (ARACIS Report, 2010).

Starting with university year 2004/2005, the Military Technical Academy was reorganized in two faculties: The Faculty of Integrated Armament Systems and The Faculty of Electronic and Informatic Military Systems.

In 2008, the Military Technical Academy was reorganized, in accordance with the demands of modernization and restructuring of the Romanian Army, developing university education activities in 11 domains of study from the fundamental domain “engineering sciences”, with 17 accredited specializations, constantly evaluated by ARACIS, consisting of two faculties, one college and one department, as follows: the Faculty of Mechatronics and Integrated Armament Systems, with 3 chairs, 13 study programs, grouped in 8 bachelor domains, the Faculty of Military Electronic and Information Systems, with 3 chairs, 4 study programs, grouped in 3 bachelor domains, the Technical College of Defence and Security, with the Department of technical systems engineering for defence, security and the management of crisis situations, the Foreign Languages Department.

Romania signed the Bologna Declaration in 1999, the higher education system structured in the three Bologna cycles being mentioned for the first time in Law no.288/2004. The implementation of the Bologna cycles began in university year 2005/2006 and represented an important step for the harmonization of the structures and programs of higher education on the European level and for recognizing studies across borders.

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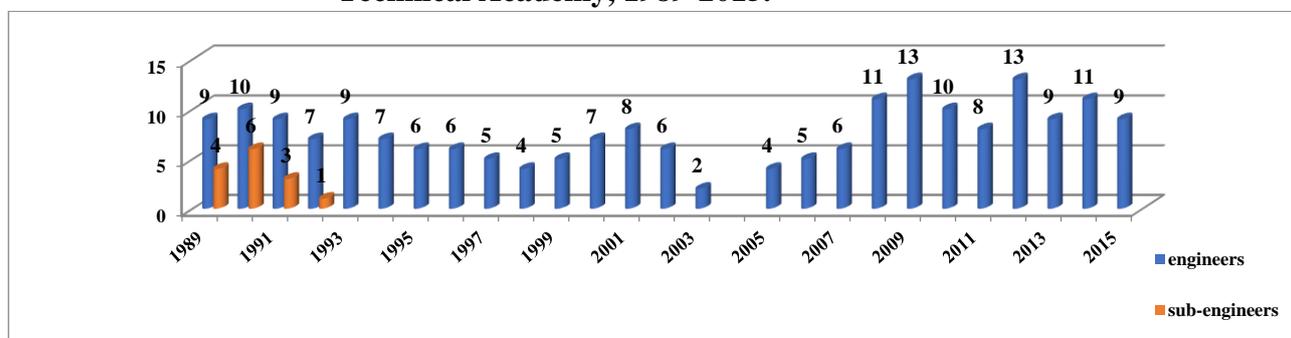
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Thus, in 2004, there was no admittance examination organized in the Military Technical Academy, the class enrolled in 2005 being the first one with 4 year studies, the organization in Bologna system starting with this year.

Currently, the Military Technical Academy is accredited by ARACIS (The Romanian Agency for Ensuring Quality in Higher Education) for 17 bachelor study programs in 11 domains from the fundamental domain “engineering sciences”, 6 master study programs in 5 domains from the fundamental domain “engineering sciences” and doctoral studies in 7 domains from the same fundamental domain, with 36 Ph.D. advisors. In 2015, the Military Technical Academy consisted of two faculties and one department, as follows: the Faculty of Mechatronics and Integrated Armament Systems, the Faculty of Military Electronic and Information Systems, the Foreign Languages, Military Sciences and Management Department. In 1989-2015, the number of study programs developed by the Military Technical Academy changed from 13 in 1989/1990, 16 in 1990/1991, including 10 for engineer officers and 6 for sub-engineer officers, in 2015/2016 existing 9 programs only for engineers (Figure 3).

Figure 3. The evolution of study programs from the educational offer of the Military Technical Academy, 1989-2015.



Source: Military Technical Academy

In university year 1994/1995 the last class of students with the duration of studies of 5 years and 8 months was enrolled, the Military Technical Academy having 7 programs, and beginning with the next year, 1995/1996, the duration of studies was reduced to 5 years, the institution having 6 programs. Thus, in 2000, two classes of engineer officers graduated. Starting with university year 2005/2006 the Military Technical Academy implemented the system in accordance with the Bologna process, thus, in 2004, no admission examination was organized.

The number of students scholarized in the Military Technical Academy grew in the first years after 1989, the organization structure being comprised of 4 faculties, from 723 students in 1990/1991 to 807 students in 1994/1995, then, since 1995, once the duration of studies was reduced from 5 years and 8 months to 5 years, the number of students dropped by 32%, 543 students in university year 1997/1998.

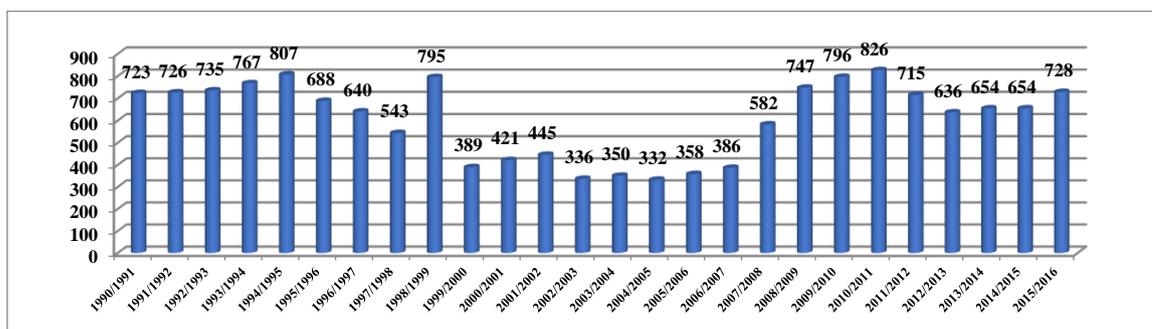
Figure 4. The evolution of the students in the Military Technical Academy, 1990-2015

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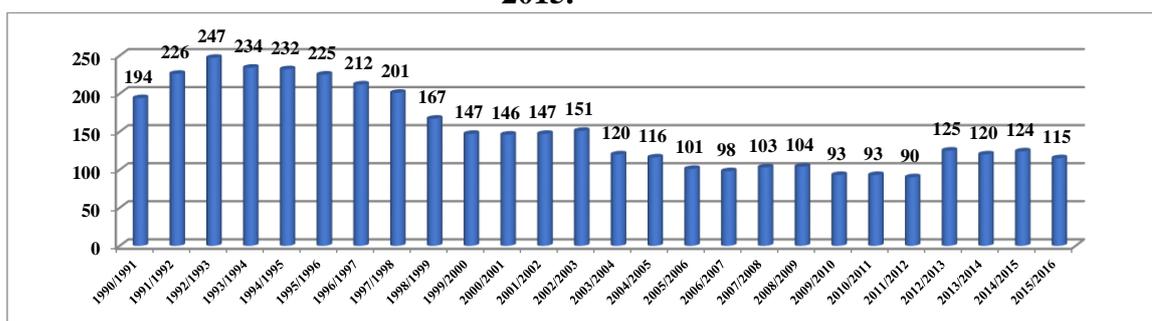
Source: Military Technical Academy

The reduction of the number of students was also due to the fact that programs for sub-engineers were no longer organized, with the last class graduating in 1995, due to the reorganization of the institution in 3 faculties, but also due to the transfer of study programs for navy officers to the Naval Academy in Constanța.

In 2000–2007 the number of students was lower, 377 students on average, and in 2007/2008 the demand for specialists in the technical domain grew, leading to a growth in the number of students, in 2015/2016 the Military Technical Academy having 728 students enrolled.

The number of academic staff in the Military Technical Academy rose in the first years after the reorganization of the institution as an independent academic structure (Figure 5).

Figure 5. The evolution of academic staff in the Military Technical Academy, 1990-2015.



Source: Military Technical Academy

Since 1990, besides the already existent academic staff there were introduced in education through contest, valedictorians as well as experts from the research-development field (Niculescu, et al., 2009).

The constant reorganization of the army had an effect on military education institutions, the permanent adapting and responding to the demands of employers from the defence, public order and national security, of the national academic environment resulted in an evolution in the number of academic staff from the Military Technical Academy from 194 in 1990/1991 to 115 in 2015/2016, during the 1990-2015 timeframe being registered a larger academic staff, the maximum value of 247 places being in the 1992/1993 university year. From 162 graduates in university year 1989/1990,

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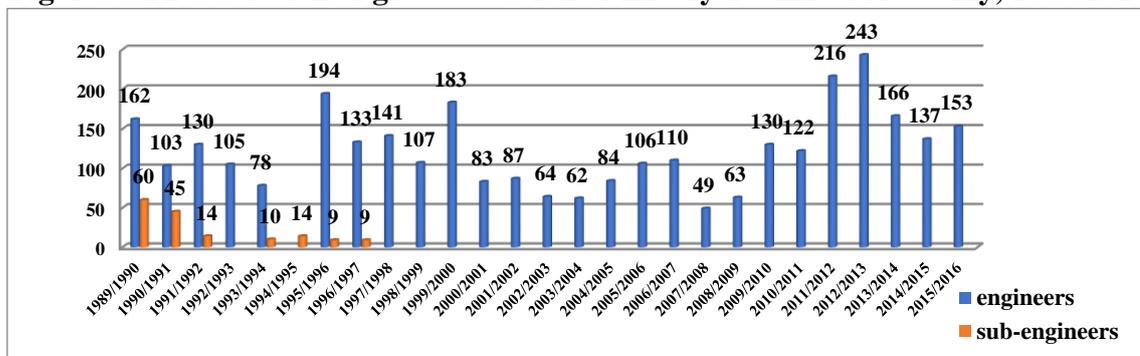
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in 2015/2016 the Military Technical Academy had 153 graduates (Figure 6). In the first years after 1989 the institution still had graduates from the sub-engineer preparation programs, the number dropping from 60 in 1990/1991 to 9 in 1995/1996. The Military Technical Academy also had graduates that followed engineer preparation study programs in specializations of the military navy, the last class graduating in 1993/1994.

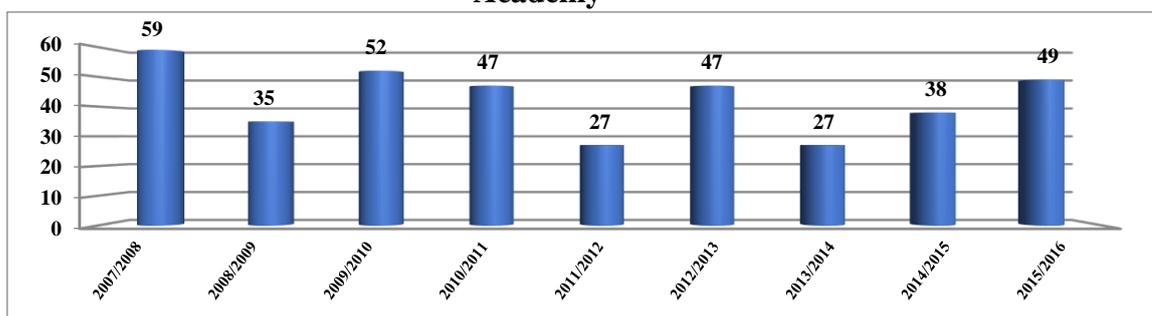
Figure 6. The evolution of graduates of the Military Technical Academy, 1990-2015



Source: Military Technical Academy

Starting with university year 2007/2008 the Military Technical Academy started enrolling students with tuition fees (Figure 7).

Figure 7. The evolution of students enrolled with tuition fees in the Military Technical Academy



Source: Military Technical Academy

The evolution of bachelor students enrolled with tuition fees at the Military Technical Academy registered 59 students in 2007/2008, the number varying since, in university year 2015/2016, 49 students opting for studies with tuition fees, the average rate of variation being -2.29%.

The students admitted with tuition fees follow the same courses as military students, with the exception of the activities from the curriculum that regard military preparation, on graduation obtaining only the title of engineer and they are not compulsory hired by employers, following the same legislative regulations for the civilian higher education. The application for admission exams is

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at the headquarters of the Military Technical Academy, followed by the participation at the exam, on the tuition fee spots, for each specialization.

Conclusion

Since 1989, the Military Technical Academy developed new study programs, adapted to the demands of the educational services consumers and employers, both military and civilian. Numerically, a reduction in the number of study programs offered can be observed, from 16 to 9 in 2015/2016, in this period the programs for the preparation of sub-engineers and military navy engineers being dropped.

The introduction in the educational offer of tuition fee spots added to the value of the university environment in the Military Technical Academy, the students that opted for this product being integrated in the study groups of military students.

The application for admission exams is at the headquarters of the Military Technical Academy, followed by the participation at the exam, on the tuition fee spots, for each specialization. Even though a place of employment is not ensured at the end of the studies, as opposed to military students, the prestige of the institution, the quality of education and the position on the market of polytechnic higher education makes the tuition fee spots attractive for consumers of educational services, the fee being lower than that of other universities in the same domain.

The system of enrolling in military education changed, thus, if 25 years ago the enrolling of students was ensured by military structures in each county, now the selection of candidates medically, psychologically and physically takes place in 3 centres.

Through promotion among secondary education students, detailed information posted on the institution's website and a proactive attitude towards beneficiaries, the Military Technical Academy is an active presence on the educational market, the orientation towards these services being characteristic of educational marketing. According to Webometrics Ranking of World Universities, The Military Technical Academy is ranked 45th out of 106 higher education institutions in the national ranking and 7841 in the world ranking of universities.

The orientation towards the market contributed to the repositioning of higher education military institutions in the Romanian university system, from 3 higher education military institutions in 1989, with 25 study programs, currently their number rose to 6 higher education military institutions, and the educational offer consists of 31 study programs, the military component of higher education becoming more apparent and attractive for the public, as the diplomas awarded are recognized in the work market and in the civilian environment, generally, which leads to an increase in the satisfaction of students and graduates.

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