WIN-WIN STRATEGY FOR IT RESOURCES

Our University is ready to sign contracts with interested companies on annual "production" of IT and software engineers and game developers. The idea is that students, parallel with studying, work for four years in companies and learn about their technologies so that, once they graduate, they are ready to work

CORPORATE

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**Professor
DRAGAN DOMAZET**

President and Rector of the Belgrade Metropolitan University

Professor Dragan Domazet, President and Rector of the Belgrade Metropolitan University, is one of the initiators of the advocacy of introducing dual education into the Serbian higher education system through the DualEDU project.

Can you tell us more about the DualEDU project?

— In the IT business and education sector, we have been facing various challenges such as this one - due to a high demand and lack of IT graduates, IT companies are recruiting IT students, and, as a result, many of them stop studying and never graduate. In the long run, this negatively affects their career, as most of them will not be able to take more complex engineering jobs while continuing to be programmers only. Faculties with IT degree programmes have high dropout rates, as many students start working, after the year 2 or 3 of their studies. The number of students and graduates has been significantly reduced in the last two years. Although public universities are overbooked, they cannot satisfy the high demand for IT engineers. Private universities, such as the Belgrade Metropolitan University, also offer degree programmes in IT and have the capacity and resources to significantly increase the number of IT graduates. But they face another problem. Students enrolling private universities are not eligible for any financial support from public funds. As their families have problems to pay the tuition of approximately 2,000 EUR per year,

students start studying something else at public universities, not IT.

For instance, the Belgrade Metropolitan University could enroll 200 more students in its degree programmes in IT, software engineering, information systems, or in computer games since its campuses in Belgrade and Niš have an excellent IT infrastructure.

A few years ago, I came up with the idea that dual higher education could be a win-win-win solution for students, companies and universities. Students can work and study at the same time and get paid to cover their tuition fees, obtain scholarships and get a good job after graduation. IT companies, which are financially supporting their "dual students", get a stable source of IT graduates, 100% ready for the job, as they become familiar with technologies implemented in the companies since they have been working for them during their studies. Private faculties implementing dual education can significantly reduce their dropout problems, as dual students are, by contract, obliged not to abandon their studies and to graduate. As an overall result, the number of IT graduates could increase significantly, as can their quality and readiness to work.

We have initiated the project proposal for Erasmus+ DualEdu project, the Ministry of Education and five public universities and schools in Serbia supported it, and we got an EU grant. We now expect the new legislation on dual higher education to be adopted in Serbia.

What are the benefits for businesses

> We have prepared a very flexible model for implementation of dual higher education in order to satisfy different requirements of companies

and what for students?

— Students working four years in companies learn about their technologies and when they graduate, they are ready to work. Companies get graduates they need, both in quality and quantity. I carried out a financial analysis and found that this was also a good HR investment for companies. By working in a company 900-1,100 hours per year, a dual student "pays back" everything the company invested in their education.

Which countries are implementing this model and how does it work?

— We visited our partner universities and companies in Austria, France and Spain which are all implementing dual higher education. We will visit our partner in Germany this year. We have learned a lot from them and we saw many good cases of implementation of dual education.

What do you think of the existing dual education model in Serbia?

— We are at the very beginning. The Belgrade Metropolitan University is the pioneer in implementation of dual higher education in Serbia. We have several foreign companies with "dual students", but we expect to have more of them once we get the new legislation for dual higher education in a few months. The Belgrade Metropolitan University is now ready to sign contracts with interested companies on annual "production" of IT and software engineers, and game developers. We can also offer them an office space in our Business and Education Centre in Niš, spanning 800 square metres. Students can than study and work under one roof, in the same building. We are targeting companies in the IT sector, but we are also open for other companies, as we have many different degree programmes.