



## A widely open door to international academic opportunities

Thousands of young Romanians eager to pursue academic studies in renowned universities worldwide attended the first Romanian International University Fair on 2 April 2005 in Bucharest. The event was initiated by a group of Romanian students from prestigious Western universities, in partnership with UNDP through its project to support the training of public managers. For the first time ever, the Fair offered young people a wealth of information from direct sources on opportunities for professional development and fulfillment in top Western academic institutions.

"There is overwhelming interest from young Romanians to study in leading international universities and compete with their colleagues from other countries – but our challenge is to convince them to return to the country with their knowledge and vision, and drive Romania's profound transformation over the coming years. And this is exactly what the Romanian Government Special Scholarship program for managers in the public sector is trying to achieve", said Dan Dionisie, Head of the Governance Section at UNDP Romania, at the press conference to launch the Fair.

Launched in October 2004, the Romanian Government Special Scholarship program is a joint initiative of the Ministry of Education and Research as main financier, and UNDP as co-financier and implementation partner, through which the Government offers scholarships to young Romanians with high academic and leadership potential to study at leading universities abroad. The beneficiaries have a contractual obligation to return to the country after the completion of their studies, and assume management positions in the public sector. The scholarship scheme aims at enhancing the professionalism of Romania's public administration by building up an elite body of efficient, transparent, accountable and politically neutral public managers. UNDP ensures a fully transparent and merit-based selection of the candidates, by independent experts. Standards are so high, that only 46 qualified for the scholarship in 2004, out of the almost 900 applicants.



At a roundtable on reducing the "brain drain" with senior government representatives and young graduates from Western universities, Alexandru Popa, President of the Commission for the Romanian Government Special Scholarship and initiator of the scholarship program, explained how the program has managed to raise the interest of young performers for a public sector career in Romania. Creating attractive opportunities for a

professional career at home, as an alternative to working abroad, is the proper response to the exodus of highly qualified youth. It also represents one of the missions undertaken by UNDP and its partners under the Romanian Government Special Scholarship programme.

Students participating at the Fair heard from Alexandru Popa, himself a Stanford graduate who returned to Romania, about the challenges and opportunities of returning to the country after completing studies abroad. The Romanian Government Special Scholarship program offers both the opportunity to study at top universities, as well as the perspective of a high-level career in public sector upon return. At the presentation stall arranged at the Fair, the UNDP project team answered questions from youngsters interested in learning more about the program. Promotional materials were disseminated to the participants, together with a questionnaire assessing the motivation of young students and graduates to pursue a career in the public sector after studying abroad, which almost 400 of them returned.



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