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UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES IN BULGARIA TODAY

The use of modern information and communication technologies in the last years had its enormous effect on university libraries in Bulgaria. There is a transition from the traditional printed to the electronic catalogue. The introduction of diverse electronic resources based on the Internet established new forms of access to and use of information by the main customers (students and lecturers) of the academic libraries.

The changes in the last decade in the public, economic, social and technological environment of the university libraries in our country were a hindrance to their synchronic development. Today they are at **different levels of computerization of the library and information processes, with unequal levels of technological insurance, development of library funds, qualification of the personnel**, etc. The predominant part of the universities libraries works with Bulgarian software, as AB (Automation Library) or with own works. The University Library "St. Kliment Ohridski" was the first fully automated library in the country, which since 1992 introduces the library-information system ALEPH and since 1994 give up the electronic catalog through Internet.

The analysis of the general development of university libraries for the period 1990 to date take to the conclusion for **lowering of the level of financing basic activities of libraries, especially in respect of the acquisition of library funds**. The decreased financing is the basic reason for the pass between the growing up requirements of the academic society and the offering level of information insurance from the libraries as basic resource and information sections in the structure of the universities. An exception is the University Library "St. Kliment Ohridski", which keep high indicators of contemporary information insurance.

Other important problem is related to **the material equipment for academic libraries**. With a few exceptions, as concerns buildings, available space and technical equipment, they stand far from contemporary requirements. The majority of university libraries have no special buildings and are accommodated in the university buildings in adapted premises. Insufficient space for reading rooms and book storage characterizes most of the libraries. The reading places and especially the automated places with connection to Internet are very limited too. There are also breaks up – for example the library by the University for national and world economy in Sofia in 2006 opens new reading room with 100 equip with computers places; the material base have improved also the libraries by the Technical University, Gabrovo; the library by the University of Forestry, Sofia etc.

Seriously backward in comparison with the world standards is also the **technology insurance** of the university libraries. **New information technologies are introduced with difficulty due to restricted financing**. Almost there are no funds for activities on protection

of library funds like binding, conservation, and restoration of library materials or prevention against disasters.

Leading library practices indicate that to answer the requirements of information society and the strive for a unitary European educational space, it is necessary to implement a consistent strategy for the development of university libraries, orienteer to building communication links between the libraries, integrated library systems and databases for interlibrary exchange. They must introduce new models of organization of access to scientific editions, with effective mechanisms of managing the finances and the information resources of individual libraries and groups of libraries. It is necessary to be consolidated the processes of cooperating between the libraries, of creating consortiums for shared use of the electronic databases and publications.

In the moment in Bulgaria isn't **state strategy and operating normative documents, which must regularize the work, activity and the role of the university libraries** in the development of the educational and scientific area, in the building of information society, based on the knowledge. In the Ministry of Education and Science is no section and even an expert, who must coordinate the interaction with the libraries by the High schools.

That's why, in the last years **basic mechanism for the development of the university libraries** were common **initiatives with the rector boards and the participation in national and international programs and projects.**

In 1999 with the support of the Arts Development Fund in program PHARE the University Library "St Kliment Ohridski" was realized the project "Union of Bulgarian University Libraries and Scientific Organizations Catalog", which place the beginning of the building of **unified information environment**. The Union Electronic Catalog includes the bibliographic catalogs of the University Library "St Kliment Ohridski", of the Library by University for national and world economy in Sofia, of the University Library by the University of Shumen "Episcopo Konstantin Preslavsky" and of the Library by the Burgas Free University and is open for accession of another participants. It is accessed in Internet on address: <http://nsk-libsuni-sofia.bg>.

There are realized and other projects for building of **union catalogs in regional principle** as the Academic regional library-information network for north-east Bulgaria (<http://library.ru.acad.bg/abss>) and the Union catalog of the high schools in Plovdiv (<http://lib.pu.acad.bg/ABCW/abs.htm>). The basic thing is that these union catalogs have the **same or compatible software decisions and platforms which allow their improverishment and representation in unified Internet portal in the near future.**

The university libraries in Bulgaria have **seriously traditions in their common development**. Right in the 1978 under the leadership of the University Library "St. Kliment Ohridski" was formed Council of the Directors of the libraries by the high schools. As continuity and enrichment of this long-lived experience, in 2000 the University Library initiates the creating of Association of the University Libraries (AUL). The aim is to develop a strategy; to apply a methods of approach for library investment, combined – state and non-state form of financing; to confirm the role of the university libraries as information and educational institutions – basic factor for the building of contemporary information culture and for security of the free access to information in the sphere of the high education and to carry out the participation of the university libraries in the process of education, teaching and scientific research.

The mission of the Association of University Libraries in is to aid the improvement and development of library and information services in higher education in Bulgaria, the stabilization of the professional community of university libraries and establishment of their leading role in information society. The basic tasks of the AUL are the

protection of common interests of university libraries in solving problems of their status, place, financing and turning them into digital libraries as a natural and necessary component of the development of education in our country. Important direction in the activity of AUL is the development of the international collaboration with university libraries from Europa and the world. The web-site of the Association of University Libraries in Bulgaria is accessible in Internet on the address: <http://www.libsu.uni-sofia.bg/aub> and it offers rich information for the realized ideas and initiatives.

In generalization we can conclude that the passing way from the university libraries in Bulgaria during the last 16 years was difficult and put many problems to solve. The important is that it was reached very good decisions, it was placed the beginning of many constructive projects. There was proved the high professionalism and adaptability to the new challenges in front of the library specialists from the academic libraries. To these positive results contribute and the active interaction with the others major libraries in the country, with the Union of the library and information services officers, with the library society.

In the future we hope for serious engagement from the state institutions with the problems of the libraries by the high schools and of the library-information insurance.