

PROCEDURE FOR THE VERIFICATION OF DOCTORAL THESES WITHIN THE DOCTORAL SCHOOL

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Abstract

This article analyzes the procedure for the verification of doctoral theses within doctoral schools, by reference to the current normative framework in Romania, in particular the provisions of the Higher Education Law no. 199/2023 and the subsequent acts adopted for its implementation. The essential requirements of the doctoral thesis, namely originality and authenticity, are presented, as well as the role of institutional regulations in ensuring compliance with academic integrity standards. The paper analyzes the successive stages of verification that a doctoral thesis must undergo within the doctoral school, namely: self-verification, verification by the PhD supervisor and the guidance and academic integrity committee, posting for public transparency, as well as the verification of the thesis by the doctoral committee. The relationship between the general normative framework and university autonomy is highlighted, emphasizing the possibility of higher education institutions to establish additional standards for increasing the quality of scientific research. Conclusions are also formulated regarding the necessity of adapting the Institutional Regulation for the organization and conduct of doctoral university study programs of the "Nicolae Titulescu" University of Bucharest to the new legal requirements. The article highlights the impact of the verification stages on increasing the quality and credibility of the doctoral process, as well as on the experience of the doctoral candidate, often marked by specific tensions, including manifestations of impostor syndrome, generated by the complexity and rigor of verification mechanisms.

Keywords: *doctoral thesis, verification procedure, academic integrity, plagiarism, public transparency posting, organization of the public defense, impostor syndrome.*

1. Introduction

The need for learning represents one of the fundamental dimensions of human development, being influenced by the social, cultural and educational context in which the individual evolves. Within the higher education system, doctoral university studies occupy a distinct place, being oriented towards the formation of scientific research competencies and towards the generation of original knowledge, thus contributing to the development of a knowledge-based society.

In this context, the doctoral thesis represents the final result of the research activity carried out by the doctoral student, being subject to specific requirements in terms of originality, authenticity and scientific relevance. In order to guarantee these requirements, the current normative framework establishes a complex mechanism for the verification of doctoral theses, structured in several successive stages, carried out both at the level of the doctoral school and at the level of the competent national bodies.

The article analyzes the procedure for the verification of doctoral theses in relation to the provisions of the Higher Education Law no. 199/2023 and the subsequent normative acts adopted for its implementation, highlighting the main procedural stages and the role of the actors involved in this process. The topic has been addressed in the specialized literature, however the new regulations introduced by Law no. 199/2023 require a reassessment of the procedures for verifying doctoral theses.

The paper also includes an applied dimension, through the analysis, as a case study, of the Institutional Regulation for the organization and conduct of doctoral university study programs of the "Nicolae Titulescu" University of Bucharest, highlighting the necessity of adapting it to the new normative framework, as well as the formulation of proposals in this regard.

2. Brief considerations on the doctoral thesis

Doctoral university studies are organized within the Romanian Academy and within higher education institutions that have undergone the accreditation procedure provided by the Order of the Minister of Education

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no. 6153/2016 for the approval of the Methodology regarding the authorization, accreditation and periodic evaluation of doctoral schools. The higher education institution that has obtained accreditation acquires the status of an institution organizing doctoral university studies, referred to as IOSUD in the content of Law no. 199/2023 and in the subsequent normative acts, a designation which will also be used in this article.

Doctoral university study programs are organized within doctoral schools, which are defined in the Framework Regulation regarding doctoral university studies, approved by Order of the Minister of Education no. 3020/2024, as organizational and administrative structures established within IOSUD, which provide the necessary support for the conduct of doctoral studies in a particular discipline or disciplinary or interdisciplinary field.

After completing the admission procedure organized by the doctoral school within an IOSUD, the admitted person acquires the status of doctoral student and follows the doctoral university study program under the supervision of a PhD supervisor. This program has two components: a program of advanced studies carried out within the doctoral school; an individual program of scientific research or applied research¹. The latter component is of major importance, having as its final objective the elaboration of an original doctoral thesis, with a high scientific content, which brings added value to the scientific research field addressed.

The doctoral thesis is elaborated in accordance with the requirements established by IOSUD through its own Regulation regarding doctoral university studies and in accordance with the provisions of the Framework Regulation regarding doctoral university studies, approved by Order of the Minister of Education no. 3020/2024². It demonstrates the doctoral student's capacity to carry out scientific research activity and to present it in an appropriate manner, reflecting the elements of novelty identified with regard to the analyzed subject, as well as possible solutions for improving the activity specific to the field that constituted the object of the research.

The Framework Regulation regarding doctoral university studies, approved by Order of the Minister of Education no. 3020/2024, defines, in art. 2 letter k, the doctoral thesis as the original scientific work elaborated within doctoral university studies, a legal condition for obtaining the doctoral title. Art. 21 para. 2 of the same normative act provides that the doctoral thesis is an original work, the indication of the source being mandatory for any material used.

From the perspective of copyright law, originality is one of the essential conditions for the protection of an intellectual creation. The doctoral thesis is an intellectual creation, within the meaning of Law no. 8/1996 on copyright and related rights, being included in the category of scientific works. According to the provisions of Law no. 8/1996, the copyright over a literary, artistic or scientific work belongs to the author and arises from the mere fact of the creation of the work, and its object consists of original works of intellectual creation in the literary, artistic or scientific field, regardless of the method of creation, the mode or form of expression and independently of their value and purpose.

Considering that the doctoral thesis is the result of the doctoral student's own research activity, which has an original character and is expressed in a concrete form, it falls within the category of scientific works.

We consider that, in assessing the original character of a doctoral thesis, the quality of the information it contains is relevant, as well as the elements of novelty that the author brings forward regarding the analyzed subject, even if it has been previously addressed.

What matters is that the doctoral student approaches the subject of the doctoral thesis in a personal manner, originality implying the imprint of the author's personality on the work, as stated in the specialized literature by several authors who have analyzed this concept. It has been appreciated that "the work is, to a certain extent, the very being of the author, the very expression of his personality", while it has been acknowledged that, in the case of scientific works, "language may limit the possibility of manifesting personality, implicitly originality"³.

In the article "The concept of originality in the field of creation", the author addressed originality as an imprint of the author's personality, in an extended sense, and considered that the originality of a scientific work "does not refer so much to the content, but especially to the way of structuring and organizing the content",

¹ Law no. 199/2023 on Higher Education, art. 62 para. (1), published in the Official Gazette of Romania, Part I, no. 614 of 5 July 2023.

² Law no. 199/2023 on Higher Education, art. 71 para. (1), in conjunction with art. 2 letter (k) and art. 21 of the Framework Regulation on doctoral university studies, approved by Order of the Minister of Education no. 3020/2024.

³ V. Roș, A. Livădariu, C.R. Romițan, Intellectual Property Law – Dreptul proprietății intelectuale – Dreptul de autor și drepturile conexe – Dreptul proprietății industriale Copyright and Related Rights and Industrial Property Rights, C.H. Beck Publishing House, Bucharest, 2025, p. 118.

stating that “the selection of quotations also bears the personal imprint of the author”⁴. Furthermore, in the same article, the author indicated “the form of expression, that is, the manner in which ideas are formulated” as an essential criterion of the originality of a work compared to other existing works. In the same context, it was considered that a relevant indicator of originality may be “the wide echo of a scientific work among specialists and its audience”⁵.

Another essential requirement of doctoral theses is authenticity, which results from the provisions of art. 21 para. 2 of the Framework Regulation regarding doctoral university studies, approved by Order of the Minister of Education no. 3020/2024, which stipulate that the indication of the source is mandatory for any material used in the doctoral thesis. In other words, a doctoral thesis that contains borrowed materials without indicating the source raises questions regarding its authenticity, namely regarding its true author.

The legal provisions that include plagiarism among the violations of the norms of ethics and deontology in didactic and university research activity⁶, as well as among the violations of the norms of good conduct in scientific communication, publication, dissemination and popularization⁷, applicable also to doctoral students, reflect the same requirement of authenticity of the doctoral thesis.

Analyzing the work of intellectual creation, the author of the paper “Guide to action against plagiarism: good conduct, prevention, combating” identified three attributes of such a work: authenticity, originality and value. The author considered that authenticity is “the attribute of a literary work to originate from the activity of a fully identified individual”, while originality refers to “the qualitative aspect of the intellectual creation”⁸. In the author’s opinion, one can speak of an original intellectual work only if its content includes at least one “piece of intellectual creation (a creative concept)”⁹.

Regarding the value of the work of intellectual creation, the author considered that it most often implies “the usefulness of the object of creation” and that “it is an attribute that only time can associate and prove”¹⁰. It was also considered that “plagiarism refers only to the authenticity of the intellectual creation and never concerns its originality or value”¹¹.

Transposing the above to the doctoral thesis, we consider that the elements of novelty mentioned above, as an indicator of originality, represent precisely these “pieces of creation” – “creative concepts”, which derive both from the informational background of the author of the doctoral thesis (from the knowledge he possesses, as well as from that acquired during the scientific research activity), and from the manifestation of his personality.

With regard to the value of the doctoral thesis, viewed from the perspective of usefulness, we consider that, unlike other works of intellectual creation, whose value may be confirmed over time, the value of a doctoral thesis must become evident both during its elaboration and, essentially, at the moment of its completion.

In other words, the author of the thesis must aim to produce a work that meets scientific requirements, and the PhD supervisor must contribute to maintaining a high standard of quality, so that the value of the thesis becomes perceptible within the stages of verification provided by legal provisions and by the IOSUD’s own regulation.

From another perspective, we consider that the perception of the value of a doctoral thesis differs depending on each person’s conception of the notion of usefulness. Thus, for a theoretical approach, usefulness may consist in the development of new concepts or theories, while, for a practitioner, it involves identifying concrete solutions for improving functional or dysfunctional aspects in the analyzed field.

Concluding in this regard, we consider that, at the beginning of this journey, it is necessary for the doctoral student to ask questions and clarify what the purpose and objective of the research activity undertaken are, in

⁴ M. Șt. Rădulescu, *Conceptul de originalitate în domeniul creației științifice*, in *Studia Universitatis Petru Maior. Philologia*, vol. 20, p. 41, accessed via CEEOL on 17 January 2026, available at: <https://www.ceeol.search/article-detail?id=607782>.

⁵ *Idem*, vol. 20, p. 42.

⁶ Law no. 199/2023 on Higher Education, art. 168 para. (1) letter (h).

⁷ Law no. 183/2024 on the status of research scientists, published in the Official Gazette no. 546 of 12 June 2024, art. 52 para. (2) letter (a), in relation to art. 50 letter (b).

⁸ D. Isoc, *Ghid de acțiune împotriva plagiatului: conduită corectă, prevenire, combatere*, Ecou Transilvan Publishing House, Cluj-Napoca, 2012, pp. 31–32.

⁹ *Idem*, p. 28.

¹⁰ *Idem*, p. 32.

¹¹ *Idem*, p. 34.

order to be able to apply optimal research methods, so that at the end of this “journey” they may be certain that they have “grown” together with their work and that it will prove its usefulness in the analyzed field.

3. Procedure for the verification of doctoral theses

By analyzing the legal provisions applicable to the elaboration of the doctoral thesis, several stages of verification can be identified that the scientific work prepared by the doctoral student must undergo, so that, ultimately, it may lead to the granting of the doctoral title by the competent authority.

We consider that the stages of verification of doctoral theses until the granting of the doctoral title are the following: self-verification, verification by the PhD supervisor together with the members of the guidance and academic integrity committee, verification by the institution organizing doctoral university studies, posting of the doctoral thesis for public transparency, verification by the doctoral committee, verification by the National Council for the Attestation of Titles, Diplomas and University Certificates.

This article addresses the first five stages of verification, up to the moment of forwarding the proposal for the granting of the doctoral diploma to CNATDCU.

3.1. Self-verification

Although it is not expressly provided as a formal stage of verification, we consider that the first evaluator of the doctoral thesis must be the author himself. Self-verification is a continuous process that should take place throughout the elaboration of the doctoral thesis and represents not only a moral obligation, but also one that implicitly results from the provisions of art. 259 para. 1 of the Higher Education Law no. 199/2023, according to which the authors of doctoral works are responsible for ensuring their originality.

These provisions are complemented by those of art. 21 para. 4 of the Framework Regulation regarding doctoral university studies, approved by Order of the Minister of Education no. 3020/2024, which stipulate that the doctoral student assumes the correctness of the data and information presented in the thesis, as well as of the opinions and demonstrations expressed therein.

We consider that ensuring originality and assuming the correctness of the data, information and demonstrations expressed primarily require the verification of the content of the thesis by its author.

3.2. Verification carried out by the PhD supervisor and by the members of the guidance committee

The PhD supervisor is the person within IOSUD who coordinates the doctoral university study program¹².

The PhD supervisor is the main support of the doctoral student during the study period, a fact that also results from the content of his obligations provided by art. 14 para. 16 of the Framework Regulation regarding doctoral university studies, approved by Order of the Minister of Education no. 3020/2024, among which, in this context, the following are relevant: the obligation to ensure the scientific, professional and ethical guidance of each doctoral student (art. 14 para. 16 letter a); the obligation to ensure conditions and to stimulate the progress of doctoral students in the research they carry out (art. 14 para. 16 letter c); the obligation to perform objective and rigorous monitoring and evaluation of each doctoral student (art. 14 para. 16 letter d); the obligation to make all efforts regarding the verification of the compliance of doctoral theses with the requirements specific to an original creation (art. 14 para. 16 letter g).

It should be noted that in the previous primary and secondary legislation applicable in the field of doctoral university studies, the obligations of the PhD supervisor were not expressly provided, but were established exclusively through institutional regulations by each IOSUD, namely through tertiary normative acts¹³. The Institutional Regulation for the organization and conduct of doctoral university study programs elaborated by the “Nicolae Titulescu” University of Bucharest based on the previous regulations provided in detail the obligations of the PhD supervisor, emphasizing his role in guiding the doctoral student, in order to ensure that, at the end of the studies, the doctoral thesis meets the requirements in terms of scientific content and originality.

¹² Law no. 199/2023 on Higher Education, art. 62 para. (1).

¹³ Articles 166 and 167 of the Education Law no. 1/2011 referred to the PhD supervisor from a different perspective, without specifically regulating their obligations, similarly to the provisions of Government Decision no. 681/2011 on the approval of the Code of doctoral university studies; however, Article 31 of the latter normative act provided that the activity of PhD supervisors, members of the guidance committee and members of the doctoral committee is regulated in accordance with the institutional regulation for the organization and conduct of university studies.

We consider that the new regulation of the “Nicolae Titulescu” University of Bucharest regarding the organization of doctoral studies may maintain the obligations provided in the previous regulation¹⁴, even if they have a more detailed content than those provided in the Framework Regulation regarding doctoral university studies, approved by Order of the Minister of Education no. 3020/2024, the latter providing only the minimum reference framework regarding the organization of doctoral university study programs.

The mission of the PhD supervisor is not an easy one and we consider that its fulfillment largely depends on the involvement of the doctoral student. In other words, the doctoral student is the one who, throughout the scientific research activity, must take initiative in dialogue and consultation with the PhD supervisor, who can provide the necessary guidance. At the same time, it is equally true that, for the elaboration of a valuable doctoral thesis, this interest of the doctoral student must meet the willingness of the PhD supervisor to offer the support needed.

The relationship between the doctoral student and the PhD supervisor must allow for an open dialogue, beyond the one inherent to meetings included in the study program, so that, at the time of the actual verification of the doctoral thesis, the aspects requiring modifications are not substantial, but rather of nuance.

We consider that the verification carried out by the PhD supervisor is not limited to formal verification related to the completion of the stages of the individual scientific research program, but also includes informal verification, carried out during discussions with the doctoral student regarding the topic of the doctoral thesis or during observation in the context of participation in conferences or other specific activities carried out during doctoral studies.

According to art. 14 para. 11 of the Framework Regulation regarding doctoral university studies, approved by Order of the Minister of Education no. 3020/2024, the PhD supervisor is supported in his activity with the doctoral student by a guidance and academic integrity committee, the method of establishing this committee being determined by the IOSUD's own regulation. Furthermore, art. 14 para. 12 of the same regulation provides that the members of the guidance and academic integrity committee may be part of the PhD supervisor's research team or may be other persons affiliated with the doctoral school or teaching and research staff not affiliated with it, with the requirement that at least one member of this committee be from outside the higher education institution.

Compared to the provisions of Government Decision no. 681/2011 regarding the approval of doctoral university studies, issued based on the Education Law no. 1/2011¹⁵, which expressly provided the number of members of the guidance committee, the provisions of the Framework Regulation regarding doctoral university studies, approved by Order of the Minister of Education no. 3020/2024, do not contain such a provision, the number of members of this committee being to be established by each IOSUD when drafting its own regulation.

The new regulation to be elaborated by the “Nicolae Titulescu” University of Bucharest must adopt the current name of this committee, namely the guidance and academic integrity committee (as opposed to the previous designation, guidance committee), and, regarding its composition, we consider it appropriate to maintain the number of 3 members, provided by art. 30 of Government Decision no. 681/2011 and taken over in the previous regulation, as well as the provisions regarding the establishment of the committee's composition by the PhD supervisor, following consultation with the doctoral student. In addition, the provisions of the new regulation must incorporate the requirement from the Framework Regulation regarding doctoral university studies, approved by Order of the Minister of Education no. 3020/2024, that at least one member of the guidance and academic integrity committee be from outside the higher education institution.

The PhD supervisor, together with the members of the guidance committee, verifies the doctoral thesis, a procedure that may also be carried out in stages, where the reports prepared by the doctoral student according to the individual scientific research program address subjects closely related to the doctoral thesis or represent parts thereof.

The provisions of the Framework Regulation regarding doctoral university studies, approved by Order of the Minister of Education no. 3020/2024, do not detail the content of the individual scientific research program,

¹⁴ The obligations of the PhD supervisor are provided for in art. 18 para. (2) of the Institutional Regulation for the organization and conduct of doctoral university study programs, elaborated by the “Nicolae Titulescu” University of Bucharest, available at: http://univnt.ro/wp-content/uploads/asigurarea_calitatii/regulamente/RG-31_Regulament_IOSUD.pdf, accessed on 17 January 2026.

¹⁵ According to art. 30 para. (1) of Government Decision no. 681/2011, for the conduct of doctoral studies, the doctoral student is supported by a guidance committee composed of three additional members, who may be part of the PhD supervisor's research team, other persons affiliated with the doctoral school, or teaching and research staff not affiliated there to.

it being the responsibility of each IOSUD to include relevant provisions in its own regulation regarding the organization and conduct of doctoral studies.

The regulation to be elaborated by the “Nicolae Titulescu” University of Bucharest based on this normative act must include provisions regarding the individual scientific research program, taking into account, in principle, the provisions of the previous regulation¹⁶, adapted to the current duration of doctoral studies, which is 4 years, and supplemented with provisions regarding the total number of transferable study credits that must be obtained by the doctoral student.

We consider it appropriate to maintain the provision according to which responsibility for the structure, content, conduct and organization of this program lies with the PhD supervisor. The same assessment applies to the subject of the oral presentations that the doctoral student must make before the PhD supervisor and the guidance and academic integrity committee.

It should be noted that the provisions of art. 50 para. 5 of the Higher Education Law no. 199/2023 stipulate that the number of transferable study credits corresponding to doctoral university studies is established by each higher education institution depending on the scientific or artistic field. Consequently, the regulation issued under the law by higher education institutions must include provisions regarding the total number of transferable study credits required for the completion of doctoral university studies.

Returning to the evaluation of doctoral theses, it results from the above that the role of the PhD supervisor and of the guidance and academic integrity committee in verifying the doctoral thesis is very important both during its elaboration and at its completion. The fact that the doctoral student has the opportunity to receive feedback from several persons with a high professional level, with experience both in research activity and in the way its results must be presented in writing, ensures the premises for the realization of a valuable scientific work.

The mission of the PhD supervisor and of the members of the committee, regarding the verification of the doctoral thesis, continues even after another stage of verification, this time carried out by the doctoral school. This consists in verifying the thesis through a software program for similarity analysis recognized by CNATDCU, following which a similarity report is generated.

The Framework Regulation regarding doctoral university studies, approved by Order of the Minister of Education no. 3020/2024, assigns to the guidance and academic integrity committee the task of analyzing and interpreting the similarity report, which must take place before the public pre-defense of the doctoral thesis¹⁷.

In the primary or secondary legislation applicable prior to the entry into force of the Higher Education Law no. 199/2023, there was no similar provision, the steps to be followed after obtaining the similarity report being regulated by the regulations adopted by each institution organizing doctoral university studies. Analyzing the provisions of the Regulation issued by the “Nicolae Titulescu” University of Bucharest, based on the Education Law no. 1/2011 and Government Decision no. 681/2011, it results that the analysis of the similarity report was the responsibility of the PhD supervisor, who, after obtaining and analyzing it, decided by resolution whether the conditions for proceeding to the next stage of the thesis defense were met or not, or, as the case may be, whether the thesis was not admitted for defense¹⁸.

We consider questionable the exclusion of the PhD supervisor from among the persons who analyze and interpret the similarity report, which would also result from the provisions of art. 22 para. 2 letters c and d of the Framework Regulation regarding doctoral university studies, approved by Order of the Minister of Education no. 3020/2024. After assigning to the guidance committee and to other persons designated by the doctoral school the task of analyzing and interpreting the similarity report (letter c of the mentioned article), the same normative act provides that, if the report indicates the need to reconsider certain modifications at the level of the doctoral

¹⁶ “Nicolae Titulescu” University of Bucharest, Institutional Regulation for the organization and conduct of doctoral university study programs, approved by the Senate on 17 November 2021, revised on 21 April 2022, art. 41, available at: https://www.univnt.ro/wp-content/uploads/asigurarea_calitatii/regulamente/RG-31_Regulament_IOSUD.pdf, accessed on 17 January 2026.

¹⁷ Art. 22 letter (c) of the Framework Regulation regarding doctoral university studies, approved by Order of the Minister of Education no. 3020/2024, provides as follows: (c) the analysis and interpretation of the result of the similarity report are carried out both by the guidance and academic integrity committee and by the person/persons designated by the doctoral school, in accordance with the IOSUD regulation. The similarity report must be verified by the guidance and academic integrity committee before the pre-defense and by the designated person/persons before the official submission of the doctoral thesis.

¹⁸ “Nicolae Titulescu” University of Bucharest, Institutional Regulation for the organization and conduct of doctoral university study programs, approved by the Senate on 17 November 2021, revised on 21 April 2022, art. 45 para. (3), available at: https://www.univnt.ro/wp-content/uploads/asigurarea_calitatii/regulamente/RG-31_Regulament_IOSUD.pdf, accessed on 17 January 2026.

thesis, the doctoral student and the PhD supervisor are officially notified by the doctoral school¹⁹ (letter d of the same article).

It would result from these legal provisions that the outcome of the analysis and interpretation of the similarity report carried out by the guidance and academic integrity committee is imposed not only on the doctoral student, but also on the PhD supervisor, who must accept even the indications regarding the modifications that the doctoral student must make to the thesis. However, we consider that the person most entitled to decide in this regard is the PhD supervisor.

The current legislative option differs from the previous one, and it remains for the institution organizing doctoral university studies to transpose the aforementioned legal provisions into its own regulation, in compliance with the new benchmarks established regarding the persons who analyze and interpret the similarity report and the procedure following this verification.

However, we consider that nothing prevents the institution organizing doctoral university studies or the doctoral school, when elaborating its own regulations or procedures, from including the PhD supervisor among the persons responsible for analyzing the similarity report, alongside the persons expressly provided by art. 22 letter c of the Framework Regulation regarding doctoral university studies, approved by Order of the Minister of Education no. 3020/2024. The provisions of IOSUD regulations or of the procedures/methodologies elaborated by doctoral schools may impose additional requirements to those established by the Framework Regulation approved by Order no. 3020/2024, as results from art. 5 of the same normative act.

We note that this approach has been adopted by the University of Bucharest, which, in addition to the Regulation regarding the organization and conduct of doctoral university study programs, has also elaborated a Procedure regarding the completion of doctoral university studies at the level of the University of Bucharest, which provides that the similarity report is analyzed by the PhD supervisor, the guidance and academic integrity committee, as well as by the director of the doctoral school before the pre-defense, and by the person/persons designated by the doctoral school before the official submission²⁰.

Moreover, within the same procedure, the method of action in case the analysis of the similarity report reveals elements of plagiarism has been detailed, expressly providing for the consultation of the PhD supervisor at this stage²¹.

For these reasons, we consider that the new regulation of the “Nicolae Titulescu” University of Bucharest must include new provisions regarding this stage of verification of the doctoral thesis. The provisions of the previous regulation cannot be maintained, as they corresponded to the legislative requirements in force at that time.

We consider that, in the application of art. 22 letters c and d of Order no. 3020/2024, the regulation of the “Nicolae Titulescu” University of Bucharest and/or the methodology/procedure elaborated by the doctoral school must clarify several aspects: the document that the guidance and academic integrity committee will draw up following the verification of the similarity report; the content of this document; the binding nature of its

¹⁹ Framework Regulation regarding doctoral university studies, approved by Order of the Minister of Education no. 3020/2024, art. 22 letter (d).

²⁰ University of Bucharest, *Procedure on the completion of doctoral university studies at the University of Bucharest*, approved by the Council for Doctoral University Studies (CSUD) on 20 December 2024, art. 4 para. (6): “The similarity report is sent to the institutional email addresses by the SDAI within one working day to the director of the doctoral school, the PhD supervisor, the doctoral student and the secretary of the doctoral school. If the director of the doctoral school is also the PhD supervisor, the message shall also be sent in CC to the dean of the faculty. The analysis and interpretation of the result of the similarity report are carried out by the PhD supervisor, the guidance and academic integrity committee, as well as by the director of the doctoral school before the pre-defense and by the person/persons designated by the doctoral school before the official submission. The PhD supervisor completes the resolution on the similarity report (Annex 4)”, available at: https://doctorat.ftoub.unibuc.ro/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/Procedura_finalizare_doctorat-OME-3020_-2024_F_art5_.pdf, accessed on 17 January 2026.

²¹ University of Bucharest, *Procedure on the completion of doctoral university studies at the University of Bucharest*, approved by the Council for Doctoral University Studies (CSUD) on 20 December 2024, art. 4 para. (7): “If the analysis of the similarity report confirms the existence of elements constituting plagiarism, as defined by the applicable legal provisions, in consultation with the PhD supervisor, the director of the doctoral school or, as the case may be, the dean organizes the analysis at the next meeting of the doctoral school council. The director of the doctoral school or, as the case may be, the dean of the faculty informs the secretariat of the doctoral school and the SDAI regarding the result of the analysis carried out by the doctoral school council (including the deadline for revising the doctoral thesis, where applicable). If the similarity report requires the modification of the doctoral thesis, the doctoral student and the PhD supervisor are officially notified by the doctoral school. After remedying the identified issues, the previous stages leading to a new similarity report are resumed; or, in the case of limited corrections, the list of amendments is completed (Annex 5).”, available at: https://doctorat.ftoub.unibuc.ro/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/Procedura_finalizare_doctorat-OME-3020_-2024_F_art5_.pdf.

conclusions for the PhD supervisor (if the supervisor is not involved in the analysis and interpretation of the similarity report); a possible procedure applicable if the PhD supervisor does not endorse or does not agree with the modifications proposed; the time limit within which the doctoral student must remedy the identified issues.

The next stage of verification in which both the PhD supervisor and the guidance and academic integrity committee are involved is the public pre-defense. The provisions of the Framework Regulation regarding doctoral university studies, approved by Order of the Minister of Education no. 3020/2024, expressly establish the public character of the pre-defense (art. 22 para. 1 letter f), unlike the previous provisions (art. 67 para. 2 letter c of Government Decision no. 681/2011), stating that this stage is carried out according to the IOSUD's own regulation.

Consequently, the new regulation of the "Nicolae Titulescu" University of Bucharest must provide procedural aspects related to this pre-defense, such as: the content of the announcement for the public pre-defense; the time limit for its publication in relation to the proposed date; the place where the content of the thesis may be consulted; other documents considered necessary to be made available to the public.

According to art. 22 para. 1 letter f of the Framework Regulation, following the pre-defense, the PhD supervisor, in accordance with the committee's recommendation and the results of the similarity report analysis, decides on the official submission of the thesis and the organization of the public defense.

The role of the guidance and academic integrity committee, as regards the support provided to the PhD supervisor, including in terms of the verification of the doctoral thesis, ends, after the issuance of the recommendation mentioned above, where the PhD supervisor finds that the doctoral thesis meets all the requirements in order to be officially submitted for the organization of the public defense.

In what follows, the amendments that must be made to the provisions of the Regulation of the "Nicolae Titulescu" University of Bucharest relating to this stage of verification of the doctoral thesis (art. 45 of the regulation drawn up according to the previous legislation) will be indicated, in order to adapt them to the new requirements established by the Higher Education Law no. 199/2023 and by the Framework Regulation regarding doctoral university studies, approved by Order no. 3020/2024.

First of all, as regards the submission of the doctoral thesis for similarity verification, it is necessary to supplement the existing provisions by including among the doctoral student's obligations the submission, together with the thesis, of its abstract and of the declaration on own responsibility regarding the originality of the work, documents expressly provided for by the new legal provisions.

Secondly, with regard to the analysis of the similarity report, it is necessary to extend the procedural framework so as to include the guidance and academic integrity committee and the persons designated by the doctoral school among the entities competent to carry out this analysis. In this context, we consider it appropriate to maintain the role of the PhD supervisor at this stage as well, including in the form of a final resolution incorporating the committee's point of view, in order to ensure decisional coherence.

Likewise, it is necessary expressly to regulate the document resulting from the analysis of the similarity report, its content, as well as the nature of the conclusions formulated, including in the event of possible divergences between the PhD supervisor and the guidance and academic integrity committee.

As regards the specialist evaluation carried out before the pre-defense, regulated by the Regulation of the "Nicolae Titulescu" University of Bucharest (although it was not provided for by Government Decision no. 681/2011 approving the Code of doctoral university studies), we consider that its inclusion in the new institutional regulation would represent a useful solution, since it allows a substantial verification of the doctoral thesis, beyond the analysis of similarities, which was the object of the previous verification stage.

With regard to the pre-defense of the doctoral thesis, the new regulations require the consecration of the public character of this stage, as well as the establishment of clear procedural elements, such as the method of announcement and the conditions of access to the work. It is also necessary to clarify the form in which the agreement of the guidance and academic integrity committee for the continuation of the procedure is expressed.

Where breaches of ethics and deontology norms are found, we consider it necessary to supplement the normative framework by expressly regulating the possibility of remedying the content of the thesis, establishing a time limit for this purpose and the consequences in the event of non-compliance with the conditions imposed, including with regard to the resumption of the pre-defense.

Finally, it is necessary to amend the wording referring to the agreement of the PhD supervisor and of the members of the guidance committee, in the sense of replacing the phrase "agreement for the public defense"

with “agreement for the organization of the public defense”, in accordance with the new regulations establishing the intermediate stage of posting the thesis for public transparency.

3.3. Verification of the doctoral thesis by the doctoral school

This stage of verification is provided by the provisions of art. 21 para. 7 of the Framework Regulation regarding doctoral university studies, approved by Order of the Minister of Education no. 3020/2024, and consists in the verification of the doctoral thesis through the use of at least one similarity detection software, the verification being carried out on the basis of the standards contained in the National Guide regarding the drafting of doctoral theses, elaborated by the National Council for the Attestation of Titles, Diplomas and University Certificates (CNATDCU).

From the verifications carried out in the online environment, it appears that, up to the present, the National Guide regarding the drafting of doctoral theses has not been elaborated. Consequently, the provisions of art. 2 para. 3 of Order no. 3020/2024 are applicable, according to which the application of art. 21 para. 7 of the Framework Regulation is postponed until the elaboration of this guide.

Until the elaboration of this guide, the doctoral school will take into account the provisions of art. 22 para. 1 letter b of the Framework Regulation regarding doctoral university studies, approved by Order of the Minister of Education no. 3020/2024, which provide that the similarity analysis is carried out using a software recognized by CNATDCU, and, to the extent deemed necessary, the doctoral school may additionally use another similarity detection software, in accordance with the IOSUD’s own regulation.

For the identification of the software recognized by CNATDCU, Order of the Minister of Education and Research no. 3741/2025 for the approval of the Methodology regarding the analysis of the administrative procedure carried out at the level of the institutions organizing doctoral university studies for the granting of the doctoral diploma, published in the Official Gazette no. 341/16 April 2025, is relevant. Art. 4 para. 2 of the Annex to this normative act provides that, for the purpose of establishing the degree of similarity, the doctoral school uses a program recognized at national level, selected from the list approved by order of the Minister of Education and Research. The same article further provides that the doctoral school may additionally use another similarity detection software, in accordance with the IOSUD’s own regulation, the similarity reports being included in the doctoral file, a provision similar to that of art. 22 para. 1 letter a second thesis of Order no. 3020/2024.

What differs between the content of the two regulations is the reference to the similarity detection software: the provisions of the Framework Regulation regarding doctoral university studies, approved by Order of the Minister of Education no. 3020/2024, state that it must be recognized by CNATDCU, while the provisions of the Annex to Order no. 3741/2025 state that the software used by the doctoral school must be recognized at national level, selected from the list approved by order of the Minister of Education and Research. From the correlation of these provisions it results that the programs recognized by CNATDCU are those included in the list approved by ministerial order.

The normative act approving this list is Order of the Minister of Education no. 3692 of 1 February 2024 regarding the list of programs recognized at national level for the purpose of establishing the degree of similarity for final study works. According to art. 2 para. 1 of this normative act, the programs recognized at national level are: iThenticate; Turnitin; Plagiarism Detector + PDAS (PDAS – Plagiarism Detector Accumulator Server); SafeAssign; SEMPLAG; www.sistemantiplagiat.ro.

Paragraph 2 of art. 2 of Order no. 3692/2024 provides the requirements that similarity detection software must meet, doctoral schools having the possibility to request the inclusion in the national list of other software, provided that they meet the requirements expressly provided by the cited legal text²².

²² Order of the Minister of Education no. 3692 of 1 February 2024 regarding the list of programs recognized at national level for the purpose of determining the degree of similarity for final study papers, art. 2 para. (2): “Software for identifying textual similarities must meet the following requirements: (1) verification against databases held by the developer (subscriptions held by the developer to various journals, reviews, publishing houses, etc.); (2) verification against the internet/web; (3) creation of an internal database and allowing comparison with these documents; (4) uploading and verification of files in the formats: *.doc, *.docx, *.pdf; (5) recognition of Romanian characters; (6) generation of analysis reports containing: (a) the name of the software used; (b) the date on which the report was generated; (c) the similar fragments/sections from the verified document, clearly highlighted either by color and reference link, or framed and accompanied by the link to the suspected source, or by displaying the similar fragments comparatively together with the name of the source.”, published in the Official Gazette of Romania, no. 112 of 8 February 2024.

From the provisions of art. 22 para. 1 letter c of the Framework Regulation regarding doctoral university studies, approved by Order of the Minister of Education no. 3020/2024, it follows that the similarity report is verified not only by the members of the guidance and academic integrity committee, but also by the person/persons designated by the doctoral school, the latter carrying out the verification before the official submission of the doctoral thesis. This provision is of novelty compared to the previous regulations regarding the stages that the doctoral thesis must go through prior to the public defense. Consequently, the new regulation of the “Nicolae Titulescu” University of Bucharest or the procedures elaborated by the doctoral school will have to establish clear benchmarks in this regard, such as: the number of designated persons, their status, and the document to be drawn up following the verification of the similarity report.

Furthermore, art. 22 para. 1 letter d of the Framework Regulation regarding doctoral university studies, approved by Order of the Minister of Education no. 3020/2024, provides that, in the situation in which the similarity report indicates the need to make modifications to the doctoral thesis, the doctoral student and the PhD supervisor are officially notified.

We consider the manner in which the first part of this provision is formulated to be questionable, in the sense that the similarity report itself does not indicate the need to make modifications to the doctoral thesis.

The similarity report is a standardized technical document generated by the verification software, which assists in establishing the authenticity of a work by identifying fragments taken from other sources, such as books and articles stored in various databases, legislative texts, and other resources available online. The report indicates, in concrete terms, the fragments in the analyzed work that are similar to those found in the analyzed sources, usually highlighted in different colors depending on the identified source. At the same time, the report indicates similarity coefficients, but the percentages of similarity established for each coefficient cannot automatically lead to the conclusion that the work must be redone, in the absence of an evaluation of the report by a competent person, capable of distinguishing between legitimate overlaps and possible breaches of academic integrity standards.

In conclusion, we consider that the need to make modifications to the doctoral thesis, referred to in the aforementioned legal text, results from the verification of the similarity report by the competent persons, namely the members of the guidance and academic integrity committee and the persons designated by the doctoral school. This is also the rationale for which the necessity of analyzing this report by competent persons was provided, followed, according to art. 22 para. 1 letter g of the Framework Regulation, by the requirement to attach to the doctoral file the result of the analysis of the similarity report, and not the report in the form generated by the software used.

The “Nicolae Titulescu” University of Bucharest has elaborated the Procedure for verifying the similarity percentage of bachelor’s, master’s and doctoral works²³, adopted by the University Senate on 3 October 2025.

According to art. III of this procedure, the similarity report generated by the authorized software used for the verification of works will contain the following coefficients: similarity coefficient 1 – the percentage of the analyzed text with all fragments of at least 5 words similar, identified in other sources; similarity coefficient 2 – the percentage of the analyzed text with all fragments of at least 25 words similar, identified in other sources. The procedure also provides the accepted similarity percentages within the “Nicolae Titulescu” University of Bucharest for doctoral works, namely: 25% for similarity coefficient 1 and 5% for similarity coefficient 2²⁴.

Within the doctoral school, through the secretariat, another verification is carried out, which does not concern the doctoral thesis itself, but the verification of the fulfillment by the doctoral student of all the obligations within the doctoral university study program²⁵.

For this stage, art. 47 of the Institutional Regulation for the organization and conduct of doctoral university study programs elaborated by the “Nicolae Titulescu” University of Bucharest contains several provisions. These must be adapted so as to comply with art. 22 para. 1 letter g of the Framework Regulation regarding doctoral university studies, approved by Order of the Minister of Education no. 3020/2024, which refers to the documents

²³ “Nicolae Titulescu” University of Bucharest, Procedure for verifying the similarity percentage of bachelor’s, master’s and doctoral theses, approved by the University Senate on 3 October 2025, available at: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1u4J9BFf9i_1Ft7tGzDtB0L5Uf1YbC5hY/view, accessed on 18 January 2026.

²⁴ “Nicolae Titulescu” University of Bucharest, Procedure for verifying the similarity percentage of bachelor’s, master’s and doctoral theses, approved by the University Senate on 3 October 2025, art. III, para. (3) letter (c).

²⁵ Framework Regulation regarding doctoral university studies, approved by Order of the Minister of Education no. 3020/2024, art. 22 para. (1) letter (g).

that must be included in the doctoral file. At the same time, after paragraph 3 of this article, relating to the verification of obligations within the doctoral university study program, one cannot proceed directly to the doctoral application, as the new legal provisions establish an additional stage, namely the posting of the thesis for public transparency, an aspect that will be analyzed below.

3.4. Posting of the doctoral thesis for public transparency

As previously mentioned, the Higher Education Law no. 199/2023 and the Framework Regulation regarding doctoral university studies, approved by Order of the Minister of Education no. 3020/2024, introduce a distinct stage consisting of the posting of the doctoral thesis for public transparency, which must be completed prior to the public defense.

According to this normative framework²⁶, the doctoral thesis and its annexes must be made available to the public for a period of 90 days on a national platform managed by the Executive Unit for Financing Higher Education, Research, Development and Innovation (UEFISCDI)²⁷, in order to allow the submission of observations regarding possible breaches of ethical and deontological standards, including from the perspective of plagiarism.

We consider that this legal obligation goes beyond the function of a simple transparency measure and may be qualified as an additional stage of verification of the doctoral thesis, integrated into the academic evaluation procedure prior to the granting of the doctoral title. The regulation of this stage provides an institutional framework for identifying breaches of ethical standards, including plagiarism, before the conferral of the doctoral title, constituting a shift in paradigm compared to the previous legal framework. The effect of the establishment of this stage should consist in reducing the situations in which serious breaches of ethical and deontological standards are identified after the granting of the doctoral title, generating complex administrative and judicial procedures, sometimes resulting in the withdrawal of the doctoral title.

From the provisions of art. 22 para. 1 letters i-k of the Framework Regulation regarding doctoral university studies, approved by Order of the Minister of Education no. 3020/2024, it results that the procedure for posting the doctoral thesis for public transparency involves several stages: posting the doctoral thesis on the national platform managed by UEFISCDI and maintaining it for a period of 90 days; submission of observations online, to an email address made available by the doctoral school or at the IOSUD registry, by any natural or legal person, regarding the existence of breaches of ethical and deontological standards, including from the perspective of plagiarism; centralization of the observations in a report prepared by the doctoral school; transmission of the report to the Council for Doctoral University Studies (CSUD) for analysis and decision; issuance of the decision by CSUD.

Following the analysis of the report, the Council for Doctoral University Studies may decide: the validation of the initiation of the public defense procedure of the doctoral thesis, in the situation where, following the analysis of the observations, the existence of breaches of ethical and deontological standards is not confirmed; the invalidation of the initiation of the public defense procedure of the doctoral thesis, together with recommendations regarding the revision of the doctoral thesis and the elimination of non-compliant elements. The doctoral student has a period of 3 months from the communication of the decision of invalidation to remedy the content of the thesis, after which the procedure of posting the work for public transparency is resumed.

In the following, several arguments supporting the usefulness of this procedure will be presented, as well as some considerations regarding its limits.

The posting of the doctoral thesis and its annexes prior to the public defense reflects a high level of institutional transparency and contributes to strengthening public trust in academic evaluation mechanisms. At the same time, this procedure also has a preventive function, as the possibility of an extended examination of the thesis by any person may discourage potential intentions of academic fraud.

²⁶ Law no. 199/2023 on Higher Education, art. 71 para. (12), and the Framework Regulation regarding doctoral university studies, approved by Order of the Minister of Education no. 3020/2024, art. 22 para. (1) letters (h), (i).

²⁷ The Executive Unit for Financing Higher Education, Research, Development and Innovation is a public institution with legal personality, under the administrative authority of the Ministry of Education, which operates in accordance with Government Ordinance no. 62/1999 on the establishment of the Executive Unit for Financing Higher Education and University Scientific Research, approved by Law no. 150/2000, with subsequent amendments and additions, and on the basis of the Regulation on the organization and functioning of the Executive Unit for Financing Higher Education, Research, Development and Innovation, approved by Order no. 6692 of 23 September 2024, published in the Official Gazette of Romania, Part I, no. 1059 of 22 October 2024.

We also consider that the posting of the doctoral thesis creates the framework for the involvement in its verification of specialists who are not part of the formal evaluation structures, but who possess relevant knowledge in the field addressed in the doctoral thesis. Through their intervention, the internal procedures for verifying doctoral theses are complemented, which may prove particularly useful in the case of works with an interdisciplinary character or with a high degree of specialization (for example, doctoral theses which, in addition to the field of law, involve the scientific approach of subjects specific to medicine, neuroscience, economics, cybersecurity, informatics, etc.).

Another argument in favor of this procedure is the effect of accountability that it may have both on the doctoral student and on the PhD supervisor, the members of the guidance and academic integrity committee, and the other persons involved in the internal verification of the thesis.

In contrast, there are aspects that may raise questions regarding the effectiveness of this procedure. A first aspect concerns the possibility for any natural or legal person to formulate observations on the thesis, without the establishment of clear benchmarks regarding the qualification of the authors or the minimum standards of argumentation. In the absence of such filters, there is a risk that observations lacking scientific basis may be formulated, with the consequence of overburdening the IOSUD with submissions that do not indicate genuine breaches of ethical and deontological standards.

Also, the fact that both the doctoral thesis and its annexes, including the result of the analysis of the similarity report, which indicates the percentage of similarity, are subject to public consultation, may generate erroneous interpretations among the general public, in the sense of equating this percentage with automatic proof of plagiarism. This confusion may generate unjustified submissions, which would artificially raise questions regarding the authenticity of a doctoral thesis.

Another possible negative effect is the use of the procedure in bad faith, for vexatious purposes, in order to discredit the author of the thesis or to affect the prestige of the IOSUD. An indication of such tendentious use may consist in the formulation of accusations of plagiarism followed by bringing them to the attention of the public before the decision is issued by the competent body, especially where the author of the thesis is a person who holds or seeks to hold public office. Such conduct may also constitute a form of pressure on those called upon to analyze the observations and to issue the decision validating or invalidating the initiation of the public defense procedure.

In this context, we consider that it would be necessary to regulate mechanisms to prevent the abusive use of the procedure, such as: imposing an obligation of confidentiality on the person who formulates observations within the procedure for posting the doctoral thesis for public transparency; imposing an obligation of confidentiality on the persons entrusted with resolving the submissions; establishing the obligation for the person who formulates the observations to submit a declaration on own responsibility showing that the submission is made in good faith, namely for the purpose for which this procedure was established; and sanctioning the abuse of rights in the use of this procedure.

The sanctioning of abuse of rights could be achieved through the regulation of cases of inadmissibility of submissions that do not contain a minimum argumentation regarding breaches of ethical norms or of those that do not contain specific references to the concrete passages of the doctoral thesis that should be analyzed.

It should be noted that the legislator has regulated, in the provisions of the Higher Education Law no. 199/2023, such a filtering mechanism with regard to submissions alleging the commission of acts that may constitute a breach of university ethics and deontology.

More specifically, the provisions of art. 171 para. 4 of the Higher Education Law no. 199/2023 stipulate that submissions which do not contain a reasoned argument regarding the failure to comply with the norms of ethics and professional deontology, with concrete examples and with the indication of the justificatory grounds and documentary sources, shall be rejected as inadmissible. The same article also provides for the possibility of establishing other conditions of inadmissibility through the Code of ethics and professional deontology²⁸. We

²⁸ Code of Ethics and Professional Deontology, approved by Government Decision no. 305 of 4 April 2024, published in the Official Gazette of Romania, Part I, no. 327 of 9 April 2025; see art. 10 para. (1), which provides that, in order to be admissible, complaints regarding the breach of university ethics and deontology rules must cumulatively include the following: the signature of the person submitting the complaint; the identification data of the person submitting the complaint, namely the full name of the natural person or the name of the legal entity, its address and, where applicable, the correspondence address, which may also be an e-mail address; a reasoned argument regarding the failure to comply with the rules of professional ethics and deontology, with concrete examples and with the indication of the justificatory grounds and documentary sources.

consider that it would be useful to adopt similar primary legal provisions also in relation to submissions containing observations regarding a doctoral thesis that is in the procedure of public transparency posting.

In conclusion, we consider that the effectiveness of this procedure will depend on the manner in which it is used at the level of the IOSUD, it being necessary to maintain a balance between the requirements of public transparency and the protection of the doctoral student's rights, in order to prevent its abusive use or its transformation into an instrument of unjustified pressure.

3.5. Verification of the doctoral thesis by the doctoral committee

After the validation decision is issued by the Council for Doctoral University Studies, the procedure for the public defense of the doctoral thesis is initiated by establishing the doctoral committee.

The composition of the doctoral committee is provided for by the provisions of art. 71 para. 2 of the Higher Education Law no. 199/2023 and of art. 22 para. 2 of the Framework Regulation regarding doctoral university studies, without essential changes compared to the previous legislative framework.

According to the aforementioned legal provisions, the doctoral committee is composed of at least 5 members: the chairperson, as representative of the IOSUD, the PhD supervisor, and at least 3 official reviewers from Romania or abroad, specialists in the field in which the thesis was elaborated, at least 2 of whom carry out their activity outside the University.

The doctoral committee was regulated by the provisions of art. 48 of the Regulation of the "Nicolae Titulescu" University of Bucharest elaborated on the basis of the previous legal provisions. These correspond to the new legal framework and may be taken into account in the same form in the regulation that is to be adopted.

According to art. 22 para. 3 of the Framework Regulation, the request for setting the date of the public defense is submitted by the doctoral student at least 25 days before the proposed date for the defense and is endorsed by the PhD supervisor and by the chairperson of the committee. The time limit differs from that provided in the previous regulation, so that the new regulation of the University must be adapted accordingly (art. 47 para. 4 of the current Regulation of the University provides for a period of 20 days, corresponding to the provisions of art. 67 para. 1 letter e of Government Decision no. 681/2011).

With regard to the announcement for the public defense, the current regulation maintains the previous solution both in terms of content and of the time limit for publication, which remains at least 20 calendar days before the date of the defense.

According to art. 71 para. 4 of Law no. 199/2023 and art. 22 para. 6 of the Framework Regulation, the evaluation of the thesis at this stage is carried out by the three reviewers from the doctoral committee, at least two of whom are from outside the IOSUD, these having the obligation to submit the evaluation reports at least 15 days before the defense of the thesis.

In the previous regulation, there was a certain terminological inconsistency regarding the persons who carried out the evaluation of the thesis at this stage, some provisions referring to reviewers (art. 168 para. 3 of the Education Law no. 1/2011), and others to all members of the committee (art. 67 para. 6 of Government Decision no. 681/2011). Consequently, the Regulation of the "Nicolae Titulescu" University of Bucharest included both the PhD supervisor and the official reviewers among the persons who prepare evaluation reports.

At present, both the provisions of the law and those of the order issued on its basis provide that the evaluation at this stage is carried out by the reviewers. It remains for the "Nicolae Titulescu" University of Bucharest, at the time of drafting its regulation, to assess to what extent it is necessary to include the PhD supervisor among the persons who evaluate the doctoral thesis at this stage. We consider that an additional evaluation of the thesis by the PhD supervisor would not be necessary, as he is already involved in the previous stages of evaluation.

The evaluation of the doctoral thesis by the three reviewers, specialists in the field in which the thesis was elaborated, of whom two do not belong to the institution organizing doctoral university studies, constitutes an additional guarantee of the rigor of the verification of the doctoral thesis and contributes to strengthening public trust in the procedure for awarding the doctoral title.

According to art. 22 para. 6 of the Framework Regulation, the defense of the thesis may take place in the presence of at least 4 members, with the mandatory physical participation of the chairperson of the committee and of the PhD supervisor, the other members being able to participate also through online videoconference.

This solution, absent from the previous regulation, must also be incorporated into the regulation of the “Nicolae Titulescu” University of Bucharest.

Also, the new provisions regarding the deliberation of the doctoral committee must be taken into account. While in the previous regulation the committee deliberated on the qualification to be assigned to the thesis, according to the new legal provisions it deliberates on the awarding of the doctoral diploma, in compliance with the minimal standards elaborated by CNATDCU, on the basis of the public defense, the reviewers’ reports, the declaration of originality and the analysis of the degree of similarity.

The minimal standards elaborated by CNATDCU were approved by Order of the Minister of Education and Research no. 3018/2025, published in the Official Gazette no. 78 of 29 January 2025. These represent a set of 35 specific standards grouped by fields corresponding to the specialized commissions of CNATDCU.

In the case of the Legal Sciences Commission, the minimal standards, set out at point 24 of the Annex to the mentioned Order, concern exclusively the conditions that must be met by the three single-author publications whose existence must be proven by the doctoral student, without containing additional express requirements regarding the content of the doctoral thesis, unlike other fields (as regulated, for example, in the case of other commissions: the Commission for Psychology, Educational Sciences, Physical Education and Sport – point 28, the Commission for Philology – point 29).

We consider this clarification useful given that both the text of the Higher Education Law no. 199/2023 and the provisions of the Framework Regulation regarding doctoral university studies, approved by Order of the Minister of Education no. 3020/2024, provide that, in the case of failure to meet the minimal standards required for awarding the doctoral diploma, the doctoral committee shall indicate the elements that must be redone or completed in the doctoral thesis and shall request a new public defense of the thesis.

However, in the case of the Legal Sciences Commission, the failure to meet the minimal standards concerns the conditions relating to the three single-author publications, not the actual content of the thesis, so that this situation cannot be remedied by revising or supplementing the thesis.

On the other hand, as long as the secretariat of the doctoral school has the task of certifying that the doctoral student has fulfilled all the obligations within the doctoral university study program, before initiating the stage of posting for public transparency, at this stage of the verification of the doctoral thesis the issue of failure to meet conditions other than those related to the content of the thesis should not arise.

Another difference compared to the previous regulation consists in the fact that the current legal provisions no longer expressly provide for the qualifications that may be awarded by the doctoral committee. In the previous legislation, the qualifications Excellent, Very good, Good, Satisfactory and Unsatisfactory were provided, as well as the consequences of assigning the qualification Unsatisfactory.

At present, according to art. 71 para. 6 of the Higher Education Law no. 199/2023, the doctoral committee assesses whether or not it proposes the awarding of the doctoral title, by reference to the fulfillment of the requirements provided in the scientific research program and of the minimal standards. The provisions of art. 71 para. 10 of the Higher Education Law no. 199/2023 provide that, in the case of failure to meet the minimal standards, the doctoral committee shall indicate the elements that must be redone or completed in the doctoral thesis and shall request a new public defense of the thesis; if, even at the second public defense, the minimal standards are not met, the doctoral diploma shall not be awarded, and the doctoral student shall be expelled.

These provisions must be transposed and detailed in the University’s own regulation and/or in additional procedures, it being necessary to establish benchmarks for the evaluation of the doctoral thesis by the members of the committee. We consider that the same qualifications from the previous legislation may be taken into account, also mentioned in the provisions of art. 51 of the Institutional Regulation for the organization and conduct of doctoral university study programs elaborated by the “Nicolae Titulescu” University of Bucharest, entitled Grading of the doctoral thesis and of the defense, with the need, however, to also refer to the fulfillment of the minimal standards mentioned above.

From the analysis of the regulations elaborated by other institutions organizing doctoral university studies, it results that their content does not include provisions regarding the qualifications that may be awarded by the doctoral committee. The regulations generally take over the provisions of the Higher Education Law no. 199/2023 and of the Framework Regulation regarding doctoral university studies approved by Order of the Minister of

Education no. 3020/2024²⁹. The provisions regarding the grading of the doctoral thesis have been included in procedures elaborated on the basis of the institutions' own regulations by the Council for Doctoral University Studies, sometimes with reference also to other methodologies elaborated by the doctoral school in this regard³⁰. It remains for the "Nicolae Titulescu" University of Bucharest to establish the type of normative act that will detail the manner of grading doctoral theses, indicating the qualifications and the criteria for granting them.

Where the doctoral student has fulfilled all the requirements provided for in the scientific research program, as well as the minimal standards corresponding to the field of research addressed, the procedure for the verification of the doctoral thesis is completed at the level of the doctoral school by formulating the proposal for the awarding of the doctoral diploma, a proposal that is forwarded together with the doctoral file within a maximum of 30 days to CNATDCU (according to art. 71 para. 6 of the Higher Education Law no. 199/2023).

The structure of the doctoral file is regulated by Order of the Minister of Education and Research no. 3741/2025, which provides for its preparation both in printed and electronic format, the electronic file being uploaded by the IOSUD to the national platform within 30 days from the public defense.

Concluding with regard to this stage of the procedure for the verification of the doctoral thesis by the doctoral committee, we note that it involves, on the one hand, the fulfillment of the formal conditions related to the organization of the public defense, and, on the other hand, the actual verification of the doctoral thesis by the reviewers who are part of the doctoral committee, to which is added the verification carried out through the questions that may be addressed to the doctoral student during the actual public defense.

Thus, the defense of the doctoral thesis is not limited to a synthetic presentation of the conclusions of the work, but, through the possibility granted to the members of the committee and to the public to address questions, it constitutes an additional framework for its verification, both from the perspective of the scientific content and from the perspective of the doctoral student's capacity to support and argue the conclusions of the scientific research carried out throughout the doctoral studies.

4. Impact of the verification procedures on the doctoral candidate

From the above, it follows that, at present, the legislative framework provides sufficient mechanisms for the verification of doctoral theses, both prior to the public defense and after this stage, the last external verification filter, before the awarding of the doctoral title, being the National Council for the Attestation of Titles, Diplomas and University Certificates. It should be noted that obtaining the doctoral diploma, based on the validation of the doctoral thesis as an original and authentic work through the completion of all verification stages, does not mean that it can no longer be subject to verification. Plagiarism, as a breach of the norms of ethics and deontology in teaching and university research activity – provided as such by the provisions of art. 168 letter h of Law no. 199/2023 – may be reported at any time, no time limit being provided within which a complaint regarding the verification of a suspicion of plagiarism may be submitted.

There is no doubt that the mechanism for verifying the doctoral thesis is necessary, as it has the role of ensuring the quality of scientific research activity and of maintaining the standards of ethics and deontology in research. However, viewed from the perspective of the doctoral student at the beginning of doctoral studies, we consider that it may have a strong psychological impact, with a dual valence, both motivational and inhibitory.

Although the person who intends to pursue this higher form of education is aware or should be aware of the requirements imposed by the applicable normative framework regarding the conduct of doctoral studies and scientific research activity, they become more clearly aware of the magnitude of the effort that must be made

²⁹ In this regard, the Regulation on the organization and conduct of doctoral university study programs of the University of Bucharest, available at: <https://unibuc.ro/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/1-Regulamentul-de-organizare-si-desfasurare-a-programelor-si-2-Anexa-activitati-obligatorii.pdf>, accessed on 17 January 2026, and the Regulation of Babeş-Bolyai University on the organization and conduct of doctoral university studies, adopted by Senate Decision no. 116 of 23 September 2024, amended by Senate Decision no. 32 of 10 March 2025, available at: <https://doctorat.ubbcluj.ro/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/HS-nr.-116-privind-aprobarea-Regulamentului-UBB-de-organizare-si-functionare-a-studiilor-universitare-de-doctorat>, accessed on 17 January 2026.

³⁰ The University of Bucharest elaborated the Regulation on the organization and conduct of doctoral university studies, on the basis of which the Procedure on the completion of doctoral university studies at the University of Bucharest was issued, approved by the Council for Doctoral University Studies (CSUD) on 20 December 2024, which refers to other procedures/methodologies drawn up by the doctoral school council; in this regard, art. 8 para. (4), final sentence, provides: "The qualifications that may be awarded are: 'Excellent', 'Very good', 'Good', 'Satisfactory' or 'Unsatisfactory', in compliance with the criteria for awarding the qualifications attributed to doctoral theses established by the doctoral school council.", available at: https://doctorat.ftoub.unibuc.ro/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/Procedura_finalizare_doctorat-OME-3020_-2024_F_art5_.pdf, accessed on 17 January 2026.

only after completing the admission stage organized by the doctoral school and acquiring the status of doctoral student.

The courses in ethics and deontology related to the first year of study, which form part of the training program based on advanced university studies, create the context for analyzing and deepening the norms of ethics and deontology in scientific research activity, while also contributing to the full understanding, by the doctoral student, of the notion of “plagiarism” and of the significant negative consequences it has in society.

In this context, some doctoral students begin to question their ability to meet all the requirements imposed throughout doctoral studies, but especially their ability to elaborate an original doctoral thesis, with a high scientific content, capable of successfully passing all the verification stages provided by law. This is one of the manifestations of impostor syndrome, which occurs frequently among doctoral students and, in some cases, manifests not only at the beginning of doctoral studies, but throughout their entire duration. Impostor syndrome manifests itself through a persistent feeling of self-doubt, the fear of being exposed as “incompetent”, excessively high personal standards, and frequently occurs in individuals who work in a competitive environment in which evaluations are frequent, as is also the case of the doctoral academic environment.

The author of the paper “The Impostor Syndrome”, Jessamy Hibberd, has shown that this syndrome may be triggered by “any achievement or any task that involves approval or may result from a feeling of insecurity related to your knowledge or abilities, especially when you work in a competitive environment and when responsibilities increase”³¹, mentioning among the life situations that may trigger it even admission into higher education.

The stages of verification of the doctoral thesis may amplify the manifestations of impostor syndrome in situations where evaluations are perceived as tests of personal worth rather than of academic progress, or when the feedback received by the doctoral student lacks a constructive dimension. According to the previously mentioned author, at the “core of impostor syndrome lies the fear of not living up to expectations”³², a feeling often experienced by individuals facing a new challenge that involves exposure to repeated evaluations, such as undertaking doctoral studies culminating in the elaboration of a doctoral thesis.

If not acknowledged and kept under control, these types of feelings specific to impostor syndrome may have negative consequences on academic performance and on the psychological state of the doctoral student, who may come to experience intense academic anxiety, lack of confidence in their own academic competencies, procrastination and avoidance, or even academic burnout (a term referring to a form of emotional, cognitive and motivational exhaustion associated with the academic role)³³.

5. Conclusions

The analysis carried out highlights that the current normative framework in the field of doctoral university studies, configured through the Higher Education Law no. 199/2023 and the subsequent acts, establishes a complex and staged mechanism for the verification of doctoral theses. This mechanism is intended to ensure compliance with standards of scientific quality and academic integrity. The succession of stages – from the internal verification carried out by the PhD supervisor and the guidance and academic integrity committee, to the analysis of similarities, the public pre-defense, the posting for public transparency and the evaluation by the doctoral committee – reflects the strengthening of procedural requirements in relation to previous regulations.

The results of the research also reveal the existence of certain aspects that require clarification at institutional level, especially with regard to the analysis and interpretation of the similarity report, the delimitation of the role of the PhD supervisor at this stage, as well as the correlation of internal procedures with the new legal requirements concerning the public pre-defense and the posting of the thesis for public transparency. In this context, the importance of the autonomous exercise of regulatory competences by institutions organizing doctoral university studies is highlighted, in order to detail and adapt the general procedural framework.

The impact of the research consists in highlighting the necessity of a coherent and unified approach to the procedure for the verification of doctoral theses, which should contribute to increasing the credibility of the

³¹ Jessamy Hibberd, *Sindromul impostorului*, Litera Publishing House, Bucharest, 2024, p. 47.

³² *Idem*, p. 167.

³³ *Idem*, p. 45, J. Hibberd emphasizes that “impostor syndrome can cause depression and anxiety and may lead to emotional and physical exhaustion” and that “it has long-term effects on one’s career, undermining the ability to adapt professionally”.

doctoral process and to preventing deviations from the norms of academic ethics and deontology. At the same time, it is emphasized that the rigor of these verification mechanisms produces effects not only at institutional level, but also on the experience of the doctoral student, who may feel specific pressures associated with academic evaluation, including manifestations of impostor syndrome.

From a prospective perspective, future research could focus on the comparative analysis of institutional practices regarding the implementation of verification procedures, as well as on the evaluation of the impact of these mechanisms on academic performance and on the professional trajectory of doctoral students. It would also be useful to investigate institutional support instruments aimed at reducing the psychological effects associated with the doctoral process, in order to ensure a balance between the requirements of academic rigor and the need to support the professional development of the doctoral student.

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