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HOW CORRUPTION DESTROYS HIGHER EDUCATION IN UKRAINE

Abstract

This paper addresses the issue of corruption in higher education in Ukraine and its negative impact on universities. This paper discusses factors of external pressure on the higher education sector, which may be found in such areas as changes in higher education finance, research and quality of education, academic corruption, and the standardized testing initiative. The study argues that external pressure on universities comes primarily from the central government and is supported in part by the large scale education corruption. The external pressure experienced by universities manifests the duality of the aspirations for institutional independence with the de facto acknowledgement of financial dependency on the central government.

Keywords: bribery, corruption, fraud, higher education, university, Ukraine

Introduction

Any study of higher education corruption in Ukraine faces the need to describe the ugly world of rat-race, where professors compete for bribegiving students, which is called politely “vibrant off-the-books economies of local universities.”¹ In corruption-riddled Ukrainian universities, under-the-table monetary exchanges between students and faculty are a norm. These exchanges constitute horizontal corruption. In addition to horizontal corruption, there are intensive vertical exchanges between top university administrators and their subordinates. Under the conditions of virtual absence of any punishment or disciplinary action for nepotism and more explicit forms of corruption, public universities are converted into family enterprises, where relatives and family members occupy administrative and faculty positions. Money and favors change hands, while university administrators and faculty members treat students as their clientele. Shadow tutoring is rife and often takes a form of extortion, when students are forced to take tutoring lessons with their professors. In addition to

tutoring fees, there are bribes, gifts, and services extorted from parents by faculty and administrators.

After gaining independence, rampant corruption combined with further massification of higher education resulted in deteriorating quality of university education. It is not unusual for Ukraine's higher education institutions (HEIs) to be called vocational schools for "dummies" and diploma mill universities.² The quality of education determines the amount of human capital the economy is capable to accumulate and the quality of government as well.³ As Oleksiyenko warns, "the failure of higher education institutions was the underpinning of a failed state."⁴ This paper addresses the problem of higher education corruption in pre-Euromaidan Ukraine, during the consecutive presidencies of Victor Yushchenko⁵ and Victor Yanukovich.⁶ The study focuses on financial aspects of higher education, research and quality of education, higher education corruption, and standardized testing initiative. This paper uses extensively reports on higher education corruption and related issues found in the mass media.

Literature review on education corruption

Thus far, not many scholars have demonstrated the wish to deal with the topic of academic corruption while facing all the difficulties associated with such research. Nevertheless, by now scholars managed to produce a block of literature on educational corruption, mostly in former socialist countries, that offers different approaches to the issue. The problem of corruption in higher education has been addressed in works of Denisova-Schmidt, Huber and Leontyeva,⁷ Graeff, et al,⁸ Kobakhidze,⁹ Liu and Peng,¹⁰ Osipian,¹¹ Ren,¹² Sabcic-El-Rayessa,¹³ Sia,¹⁴ Waite and Allen,¹⁵ Whitsel,¹⁶ Williams and Onoshchenko,¹⁷ and Zaloznaya.¹⁸ In all of these works, the authors present a variety of forms of higher education corruption and explain different occurrences of corruption, supported by anecdotal evidence, specific examples, and data collected from surveys and interviews. They aim at such explicit and illegal forms of academic misconduct as bribery, extortion, embezzlement, and fraud.

Different typologies and classifications of higher education corruption are presented in Johnson¹⁹ and Osipian.²⁰ Noah and Eckstein offer a broad informative overview of cheating in examinations in the US and other countries and also address the issue of fraud in education and research.²¹ Chapman names five different forms of misconduct in higher

education: blatantly illegal acts of bribery or fraud, such as fraud in public procurement; actions to secure a modest income by people paid too little or too late, such as illegal fees collected from students; actions taken to get work done in difficult circumstances, such as bribes to get a certificate on time from the university administration; differences in cultural perspectives, including gifts given to teachers; and behavior resulting from incompetence, including misallocation of funds. In this typology, student cheating and academic plagiarism are missing.²²

According to Rumyantseva's taxonomy of educational corruption, it manifests itself in favoritism in procurement and personnel appointments, ghost teachers, selling admissions and grades, private tutoring, and skimming from project grants.²³ The author further delineates corruption on that involving students and not involving students, with corrupt exchanges occurring between students and administrators, students and faculty, and students and staff. The categorization of corruption in higher education proposed by Osipian includes phenomena: what takes place?; means: what means are used in corrupt activities to achieve certain goals?; locus: what are the areas and processes that get corrupted?; and interactions: what are the interactions, relations where corruption takes place?²⁴ Hallak and Poisson suggest level of occurrence, level of education, actors involved, and nature of exchange as the criteria to be used to classify opportunities for corruption within the education sector.²⁵ Zaloznaya presents meticulously developed ethnographic accounts of academic corruption that she discovers in post-Soviet universities.²⁶ By presenting a most interesting written account of bureaucratic corruption, the author manages to look beyond the clichés of administrative corruption and understand a multiplicity of organizational and sectoral twists of corruption in different settings within post-Communist authoritarian regimes, including Ukraine.

Methodological issues

Investigating corruption in Ukrainian universities is, figuratively speaking, a journey to Alice in Wonderland world of post-Soviet higher education, where positive grades are on sale for a fee and professorships are inherited by family members. The importance of the subject of corruption and the need to trace its development makes it surprising that thus far sociologists and scholars representing other social sciences disciplines have paid little attention to this social illness. The multiplicity

of damages that corruption causes in different types of societies warrants more coverage of academic corruption.

It is always a challenge to investigate the delicate issue of corruption, let alone obtain reliable data on corruption in academia. Petrov and Temple point out the unwillingness of potential respondents to talk about corruption in academic settings.²⁷ The major method employed by Zaloznaya in the study based on extensive fieldwork in two former Communist regimes, Belarus and Ukraine, is participant observation.²⁸ Other forms of investigation include interviews, surveys, analyzing discussion forums on social networks, and comparative historical analysis. In fact, the volume offers a wealth of information that comes from personal accounts of those facing corruption in post-Soviet universities. These accounts include experiences of both victims and perpetrators of corrupt activities. Sobic-El-Rayessa and Mansur offer a favour reciprocation model as a basis for an alternative typology of higher education corruption.²⁹ Scholarly literature synthesis is also a form of researching higher education corruption. Based on a most extensive review of literature on higher education corruption, Chapman and Lindner³⁰ present an exhaustive list of all imaginable forms of misconduct that may be met in academia in different parts of the world. Taking into account the specifics of educational industry and taking steps for further understanding of specifics of academic corruption, including its typology and multiplicity of forms, may be necessary. Educational reform in Ukraine,³¹ including its anti-corruption component,³² also attracted attention of the scholars.

Financing higher education

In the Soviet era, higher education was free, but access to some specialties was limited. During the last two decades, more than half of students attended for-tuition programs. Most for-tuition programs are hosted by public HEIs, while private HEIs enroll around twelve percent of all students. While this change seems to be an additional financial burden for students, it offers flexibility and is more appropriate for market-based reform. The government decides which public colleges and universities to fund and to what extent. Since new rules of financing were imposed externally, any adaptation to these rules may be interpreted as a response for university governance. An adequate response may result in generous funding from both the government and the market, while an inadequate

response forces the university to focus on financial survival and develop the academic curricula accordingly.

The issue of decentralization, so acute for Ukraine,³³ includes the need for reform and decentralization of the higher education sector. The existing system of higher education may be characterized as increasingly decentralized in terms of financing and at the same time showing the least institutional autonomy, including in the area of university finance. Only recently universities in Ukraine were allowed to accumulate funds in bank accounts. At the same time, US type endowments, invested in stocks and bonds or directly into other sectors of the economy, are still unheard of. Indeed, such ethical debates as whether Harvard and Yale should be boycotting and divesting from Israel³⁴ or whether Harvard and Vanderbilt's use of hedge funds for "land grabs" in Africa is wrong³⁵ may leave Ukraine's faculty and administrators absolutely confused. Not surprisingly, the reforms that included cuts in governmental funding were not met with great enthusiasm by the academic community, especially at the beginning. The ousted president of Ukraine, Victor Yanukovich, has suggested thinking about giving universities financial autonomy,³⁶ apparently hinting that some universities may receive the right to form their endowments in the future, while at the same time losing most governmental financial support.

Davies comments on the effects of similar financial cuts that took place in the UK: "Psychologically, such 'cuts' were important in creating an atmosphere in institutions which was a confused combination of defensiveness, gloom, suspicion, realism and injured innocence."³⁷ In regard to the new policy of financing and control, Clark notes that,

The UK is currently the outstanding case of maximization of distrust between government and universities; government sends out its agents – deputized academics – to observe teaching and research activities in thousands of departments, rates those activities numerically, and then funds accordingly. Departments soon learn defensive strategies of how to hide their weaknesses and exaggerate their strengths and turn this national exercise into a foolish game laced with cynicism and chicanery.³⁸

Similar games may be played by the government in Ukraine, with a major tool being governmental licensing and accreditation and the major incentive for universities being governmental funding, which is tied to accreditation.

As of 2017, governmental funding of universities continues to decline. In 2009, the Cabinet of Ministers cut in half the governmental order for certain majors, with an overall decline in publically financed studentships of 13 percent.³⁹ In 2011, the Cabinet of Ministers cut the governmental order for certain majors yet again.⁴⁰ The then Minister of Science and Education, Dmytro Tabachnik,⁴¹ gave a prognosis of further reduction in governmental orders for certain majors in HEIs because of low demand on these specialties on the labor market.⁴² There are around seventy public universities in Ukraine that were granted the status of national universities. These are the nation's leading HEIs. Even though now all public HEIs receive governmental funding, in the future most governmental money may well be channeled to leading, i.e. national, universities. Governmental support will reflect governmental priorities in specific fields of knowledge and research, including the need for certain majors and specialists. Selectivity, in its turn, will raise the issue of funds allocation and distribution among public universities.

Research and quality of education

Another key issue on the agenda is the place of research in the higher education sector. Traditionally, most research has been conducted in Science & Research Institutes (SRIs), which are under the auspices of Ukraine's National Academy of Sciences. Due to the lack of funding and a continuous brain drain to the West, research in SRIs has suffered a sharp decline. One idea to raise the level of research and to incorporate research into teaching programs and academic curricula was to attempt a stronger affiliation between SRIs and universities. Presumably, this move should allow increasing the quality of education in universities. This idea is based on the concept of the Humboldtian university, also known as Humboldtian model of higher education, where basic and applied research and higher education are housed under one university roof.⁴³

In Russia, the government is now considering the possibility of a gradual amalgamation of such research institutions with leading public universities, applying holistic approach to knowledge creation and transfer. In Ukraine, such a change is not even at the discussion stage. Instead, the Ministry of Education and Science is more concerned about taking over universities and specialized HEIs, currently under the auspices of other ministries. The Ministry of Education and Science can take over medical

universities, as agreed by the Ministry of Healthcare, but is not ready to take under its control many other sector-related HEIs and SRIs.⁴⁴ Moreover, the role of the Ministry of Education and Science itself has to be redefined. The process of decentralization and growing university autonomy may leave the Ministry with a lesser role than it played before, preserving such functions as coordination, forecasting, and quality control, but not as much funding and direct governance. Nevertheless, the Ministry of Education and Science claims the need to take over HEIs that are now under the auspices of other ministries, explaining the need for a unified system of coordination and control, including financial and quality control.

The then Minister of Education and Science, Stanislav Nikolaenko,⁴⁵ voiced the ambitious goal of placing all the public HEIs under one umbrella. His successor, Dmytro Tabachnik, has continued this strategy and has gone even further, suggesting that ninety HEIs would be enough for Ukraine and those weaker HEIs should merge with stronger ones. He believes that some weak HEIs are going to liquidate at their own initiative.⁴⁶ Kyiv-Mohyla Academy and Ostrozhskaya Academy already moved under the governance of the Ministry of Education and Science.⁴⁷ Tabachnik is certain that HEIs will not be worse off after reassignment under the auspices of the Ministry of Education and Science. He believes that it will allow for better quality of educational services and standard requirements and procedures in licensing and accreditation, than are already in place.⁴⁸ The Minister claims the monopoly of the Ministry of Education and Science over quality control and adds that even though these HEIs will not receive better funding from the central government, they will not lose financially. Again, such rhetoric manifests the dominance of the central government paradigm, while moving market forces to a position of secondary significance. Governmental control over universities continued through the entire presidency of Yushchenko and tightened under Yanukovich.⁴⁹ There were protests against the dismissal of rectors of leading Ukrainian universities.⁵⁰ These protests included calls from Tabachnik's predecessor, Ivan Vakarchuk.⁵¹ Tabachnik's deputy spread gossip about unreasonably high cost of education at NaUKMA, which he called a "backyard storage space."⁵²

The issues of quality of educational services, number of HEIs in the country, and university autonomy are linked in both media reports and in the minds of government officials and educators. Ukraine's former president, Victor Yanukovich, has talked about the decline in quality of higher education in Ukraine and called for reducing the number of HEIs:

“Do we need such a large number of HEIs, many of which are of a low quality? The answer is obviously no.”⁵³ Reflecting the President’s demands, the then Minister of Education and Science promised to merge around fifty smaller HEIs with their larger counterparts by the end of the 2010/2011 academic year.⁵⁴ The then Minister Tabachnik says that attending HEIs will become cheaper even without centrally planned and authorized governmental interference, due to market forces and competition between universities. He continues to insist that academically and financially weak HEIs should join stronger ones.⁵⁵ Minister Tabachnik also insists that tuition in universities should be set at a minimum of 8000 to 10000 UAH per year (around \$1000 to \$1200), because at lower levels universities will not be able to offer high quality education.⁵⁶ However, this suggestion would contradict market principles of free pricing and price equilibrium.

The now ousted from power, President Yanukovych was ready to discuss the issue of giving autonomy to universities, as is the case in Europe. He remarked: “Perhaps, it is time for us to give leading universities the right to form their educational programs, define and change their organizational structure.”⁵⁷ One of the most significant contributors to the declining quality of higher education in Ukraine is not the large number of HEIs, but rampant corruption. Corruption in Ukraine’s higher education sector appears to be a widespread disease that stretches from admissions to publically funded programs to grades, term papers, and diplomas being available for sale. In this context, Yanukovych diverts public attention from the real cause of the problem of low quality. At the same time, his suggestions on giving universities more autonomy can hardly correspond with actions and claims made by the Ministry of Education and Science.

Higher education corruption in Ukraine

External pressures are not limited to those posed by the government and by the market. Governmental interference creates challenges in terms of funding, regulations, and informal control. The market requires revenue diversification and matching the market demand from both businesses or employers and households or consumers of educational services. There are other external challenges as well. Higher education in Ukraine faces a set of challenges similar to those faced by many other European nations, including insufficient funding, changing curriculum, and structural changes. But in addition to the common problems, Ukraine’s

higher education is riddled with corruption, including its most explicit forms, such as bribery, extortion, and fraud.⁵⁸

Informal and corrupt exchanges in Ukrainian universities may be linked to the hybrid political regime. Ukraine's ruling regime and the legal and normative landscape in the country are not homogenous. In Zaloznaya's words, "a particularly volatile hybrid regime with high leadership turnover and a non-linear developmental trajectory, Ukraine combines institutional and cultural characteristics that are usually associated with different governance systems."⁵⁹ The creation of private segment in higher education sector along with the chaos of transition made it possible to institutionalize corruption-favorable logic, when short-term profits were made from selling diplomas in economics, management, law, political science, public administration, psychology, foreign languages and international relations. Less visible forms of corruption are hidden behind the curtain of kinship, nepotism, blat, and political pressure. The reciprocity principle dominates academic landscape and guides exchange of favors.

The problem of education corruption is openly discussed in the Ukrainian media and is confirmed based on the results of surveys⁶⁰ and interviews.⁶¹ Leading educators and government officials openly express their opinions on the problem of corruption in universities.⁶² Governmental funding of universities on the one hand and demand of households for "easy" degrees on the other hand, create opportunities for abuse. University faculty and administrators take the opportunity to supplement their formal incomes through illegal means and "feed from the service." Publicly funded studentships are for sale by admission committees, and degrees are for sale to those seeking credentials, not knowledge. Corruption creates additional pressure on university governance.

Students and their parents fall victim of corruption in Ukraine. They decide to engage in illicit exchanges based on their knowledge about the level of corruption in each particular university. Some universities are more susceptible to corrupt exchanges than others, trying to stay free of wide-spread horizontal corruption. Apparently, there is still a difference between outright bribery and extortion on one hand and exchange of favors on the other hand. The existence of nationwide cultures of corruption, frequently attributed to countries in transition, is still a point of discord. There is a variety of corruption-friendly settings in different segments, sectors, and organizations of the higher education sector, and students and their parents make decisions about being involved in corrupt activities

based on their preferences combined with specific corrupt environments. In hybrid regimes, such as that of Ukraine, citizens comply with informal rules of different universities rather than simply demonstrate patterns of deviant behavior.

In 2005, President Yushchenko asked public universities to curtail corruption so endemic to admissions processes and called upon rectors and professors to put a stop to the bribery and cronyism that held sway during entrance exams, a widespread practice that he characterized as “shameful and humiliating.”⁶³ Yushchenko pointed out corruption in education in his address to the students of Shevchenko Kiev National University in March 9, 2006:

We are talking about the way to eradicate corruption in higher education institutions, starting from the entry examinations; how to create an independent system of conducting competitive examinations; how to make it possible for the public funds that now extend to 54 percent of all students in higher education institutions, to support those specialists requested by the government who come through truly transparent and honest competition.⁶⁴

The high level of corruption has led the government to reform the system of higher education.⁶⁵ However, this is not an easy task. Corruption in Ukrainian higher education became endemic, systematic, institutionalized, and so deeply entrenched in academic culture that there is a problem of corrupt hierarchies.⁶⁶ So far, there has been no indication that the level of corruption in Ukraine’s universities is declining.

Despite the anti-corruption pledges that come from the country’s leadership, Ukrainian media continues to report cases of bribery in universities every year. Here are just two of the latest reports. In Donetsk, the stronghold of the former President Yanukovych and one of the largest cities in Ukraine, police reported 30 cases of bribery during the 2012 winter examination session.⁶⁷ In yet another instance, Dean of Odessa Naval Academy was sentenced to four years in prison for a bribe of US \$500.⁶⁸ Civil organizations turn to the authorities and the general public through the media outlets, including roundtables and interviews, with stories about bribes and other problems during the admissions campaign.⁶⁹ These organizations have reminded the Minister of Education about the problem of bribery during examinations.⁷⁰ In response, Minister Tabachnik has blamed students for corruption in universities:

In places, where a corruption mechanism exists, it should be destroyed immediately and promptly. The simplest way is universal: no one pays bribes to anyone. But for this to happen every student should master his/her subject. If you learned your subject matter, then you have nothing to pay for, but if you are a fool and do not want to study, then you are looking for other means.⁷¹

This strong statement by the Minister of Education and Science points to the demand for corruption services that comes from students. The market correlation with corruption is explained by the fact that the general public maintains demand for services, including admissions, grades, and graduation, illicitly obtained from the universities. There is also a strong demand for doctoral degrees. Similar to other former Soviet republics,⁷² Ukraine suffers of corruption in doctoral education.⁷³

Standardized testing

The standardized testing initiative is considered one of the key elements of Ukraine's educational reform, which, in addition to implementing the Bologna Declaration, will help align the country's education sector with education sectors in other European nations. Standardized testing, formally known as standardized external testing, is intended as the sole admissions criterion to all HEIs in the country. In order to cope with corruption in admissions to publicly funded programs, the Ukrainian government introduced a standardized computer-based national test for high school graduates following the example of Russia. The standardized test, introduced nationwide in 2008, when Vakarchuk was the Minister of Education and Science, is intended to replace subjective oral and written examinations run by admissions committees in public universities. The introduction of the test was widely supported by the US development agencies in Ukraine. In fact, they were instrumental in designing and implementing the test, first as a pilot project and then as a nationwide campaign. Universities object to the test, because it threatens their monopoly over admissions decisions to public HEIs and, hence, their discretionary power as a ground for generating illicit benefits. The positive impact of standardized tests on reducing corruption in admissions to universities has remained controversial due primarily to both conceptual flaws and lack of reliable data.⁷⁴

Minister Nikolaenko recognized that some of the rectors refused to acknowledge the leading role of the test in regulating access to higher education and to run test-based admissions. Nikolaenko had to explain to these rectors that if they will not recognize the test and will not agree with the policies of test-based admissions, he will find others who will.⁷⁵ What he meant is that those educational leaders who refuse to comply with the new governmental policies will be dismissed or relieved from their duties. Such an attempt points to the strong governmental position on the issue and the need for strong governmental authority over universities. At the same time Nikolaenko had to negotiate for acceptance of the test as well. Replacement of the rectors would not be an easy task. The former Minister agreed that the tests would not replace entry examinations completely. Some oral examinations were preserved. This *a priori* leaves some space for corruption in college admissions. The newly introduced standardized test would also allow achieving implementation of internationally recognized practices in admissions to HEIs. Overall, international experiences show clearly that test based college admissions do not solve the problem of corruption in universities.

Scholarly work on the issue of standardized testing in Ukraine is limited to a comprehensive, yet largely descriptive, paper by Kovalchuk and Koroliuk⁷⁶ and a book chapter on the clash of global and local imperatives in standardized testing and corruption in admissions to Ukrainian universities by Osipian.⁷⁷ At the same time, media reports on standardized testing and problems associated with it are plentiful. In 2007, Nikolaenko proudly announced the Ministry of Education and Science's intention to introduce independent testing at all levels of higher education training, as well as in secondary schools.⁷⁸ Nevertheless, a year later, right after the nationwide introduction of standardized testing in 2008, the then Speaker of Ukrainian Parliament, Vladimir Litvin, put this practice into doubt. He said that the whole world is now abandoning the practice of standardized testing, while Ukraine is only introducing it, and that this practice is erroneous and regressive. Litvin believed that after a while Ukraine would return to the old system of admissions to universities. He also criticized the concept of standardized testing as the key element in the anti-corruption campaign and said that "one cannot fight against corruption successfully; one can only lead it."⁷⁹ Further developments have shown that Litvin was not alone in his criticism of the new system of knowledge testing and evaluation.

The system of standardized testing has been riddled with scandals and has come under fire from numerous critics since its very inception. In September of 2009, when the university admissions campaign was over, media reported that the Ministry of Education and Science “opened hunting season” on fake students with special needs, threatening to dismiss them from universities which they entered unlawfully.⁸⁰ Applicants who qualify as individuals with special needs, including those with disabilities, victims of the Chernobyl catastrophe, orphans, children of miners, and some other categories, were given preferences in admissions to universities, despite their possibly low scores on the standardized test. What followed was a wave of applicants with special needs or special status, many of whom were allegedly carrying fake or fraudulent medical documents bought from doctors and social workers. Not coincidentally, many applicants became “disabled” right on the eve of the admissions campaign. This nationwide scandal over a possible massive fraud received so much publicity and went so high that the government promised to investigate with the help of the Ministry of Healthcare, the State Security Services, and the Prosecutor General’s Office.

In 2010, media reported results of some surveys, according to which 78 percent of parents of 2009 high school graduates consider the system of granting admissions to universities as corrupted. In 2008, this opinion was shared by only 68 percent of parents. Only 37 percent of Ukrainians supported the independent testing, while 42 percent would prefer the old system of entry examinations run by each individual university.⁸¹ In general, the public remains undetermined regarding the role of standardized testing in the anti-corruption campaign. In the meantime, those aspiring for publically funded studentships in universities use new and more sophisticated ways of achieving their goals.

In 2011, the key word in the admissions campaign became the “Olympiad.” Similar to persons with disabilities, high school students who won an academic Olympiad, administered by the government, were given preferences in admissions. It is exactly in this context that the media reports the fact that the daughter of the Deputy Minister of Education and Science won three academic Olympiads, including the national Olympiad in Ukrainian language, the national Olympiad in jurisprudence, and the city Olympiad in English language. The media assures the reader that normally no one wins more than one Olympiad, leaving the reader to arrive at his/her own conclusions.⁸² It appears that representatives of the central authorities themselves do not believe in the effectiveness of the

standardized test as a major anti-corruption tool. Thus, although the test is portrayed and indeed widely advertised as a strong response to corruption in universities, it may be considered a tool of governmental pressure on university governance.

In August 2012, after another scandalous admissions campaign, the then Minister of Education and Science declared that next year all applicants will submit application materials on-line.⁸³ In 2012, some of the applicants used this system and it went down during the very first day, allegedly due to the overload in sign-ins and applications. While the government promises to continue its efforts in improving the system of standardized testing, more Ukrainians become in favor of the old system of admissions. According to the 2011 post-admissions survey, almost 50 percent of Ukrainians count on money and connections in admissions to HEIs, while being nostalgic for old-fashioned entry examinations. 48 percent of Ukrainians want the return of the old system of entry examinations, while only 28 percent do not think that it is necessary.⁸⁴ Technical difficulties may be declared temporary and superficial, but they repeat year after year. Even during the 2016 university admissions campaign, a significant number of applicants were submitting documents personally at specific universities. The real reasons for cultivating distrust in standardized testing may be different from technical failures.

Underlying causes of the malfunctioning standardized testing in admissions to universities should be sought among the groups of interests. Universities respond to the test as to external and unwanted pressure that comes from the central government, while enjoying the discrediting power of negative media reports. People's reaction to such novelty as standardized test is rather traditional and is expressed in the market based approach of buying what is available, be it through legal venues or with the help of corrupt means. Buying the privileged status of an applicant with special needs was a temporary solution. One further invention was academic Olympiads. This is in line with the traditional approach that comes from the Soviet era and may be formulated as "beat the system." No doubt, there will be further inventions of similar character. Litvin's forecasts that Ukraine will return to an examination system are unlikely to come to fruition. Instead, universities will adapt, as they always do, to the standardized test as to a form of external pressure. Responses of university governance are external in character and direction, while keeping internal changes low profile. Internally is exactly where they adapt to tests and other challenges to the university authority and discretion over admissions decisions.

Conclusion

For the post-Soviet space, higher education corruption is here to stay. Neither Victor Yushchenko nor Victor Yanukovych was able to tackle corruption in universities. And this is despite the central government preserves its control over universities. While there were conversations about the need to delegate more authority to universities, university autonomy remains largely a proclamation rather than a reality. Three ministers of education and science—Nikolaenko, Vakarchuk and Tabachnik—were unable to introduce radical changes in the system of financing higher education and quality control. Although these educational leaders were not in support of each other's actions, they nevertheless demonstrated consistency in advancing the standardized testing initiative. One of the explanations to such a consistency is the strong support of US development agencies in implementing the standardized test. However, this initiative was unable to bring any significant impact on reducing corruption in universities. Moreover, even claims about the reduction of corruption in university admissions due to the externally and independently administered test are arguable. Such claims have yet to be substantiated with data.

Nikolaenko, Vakarchuk and Tabachnik were unable to design a single strategic plan for Ukraine's education. Their consecutive successors, Serhiy Kvit and Lilia Hrynevych, have faced same challenges: problems with equity and efficiency, lack of funding, low quality education, diploma mills, fraudulent doctoral degrees, bribery, embezzlement, and fraud in both horizontal and vertical axes of corruption. This implies that the authority that the Ministers possess is insufficient for radical changes, while national leaders do not go beyond declaratory statements. The stagnant situation with corruption in universities may be explained by the unwillingness of ruling political regimes to change the situation for better. Instead, the central government is interested in exercising external pressure on universities. By these means the ruling political regime maintains its control over HEIs. The official rhetoric about university autonomy is confronted by the unwillingness to have universities independent from the government.

The leading role of the government in radically changing the process of admissions to universities through standardized testing is undeniable. If not for the central government, universities would never willingly externalize their function of selecting prospective students.

The government pressures universities with the test as a strategic tool of external control, while universities employ tactical tools on the ground. In response to the governmentally imposed test, universities manipulate technicalities that allow them to decide who to enroll in order to pursue their own interests. No doubt, new loopholes in rules and regulations will be found for each new annual admissions campaign, and new inventions will surface year after year. The external character of the test as related to university administration is also beyond doubt. It is imposed not only on universities, but on the public as well. Moreover, neither of these two constituent groups supports it en masse. Nevertheless, the standardized testing project continues, which means that it is a form of actively used governmental external pressure.

NOTES

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