

Conclusion

In spite of the apparent convergence with Western education systems, Romanian universities remain focused on the needs of the provider rather than the demands of student “customers.” Disciplines and the number and geographic distribution of places and funding are based on the structure of the existing labor force, and the reforms that have been implemented tend to reflect the desire to raise the status of the teaching profession rather than to address the needs of the economy.

The higher education sector is experiencing great change, responding to the strong pressure of demand—as reflected in the improving Romanian statistics in comparison with other countries. Where the reform process has been less successful is in qualitative change. Most of the shortcomings inherited from the communist regime are still present. The Ministry of Education has attempted to make the education system responsive to societal and economic needs: to replace the mechanical reproduction of information with the generation of knowledge through new study programs and new teaching and testing methods, to reunite teaching and research, and to improve the

training of professors. However, little of this vision has reached the classroom so far.

We identify three factors responsible for this situation. First, financial resources are clearly insufficient. Second, the ministry no longer possesses the administrative leverage to impose changes upon universities. The main legal innovation of the reforms—university autonomy—did not result in the expected improvement. It may be that autonomy requires more time to “deliver the goods.” However, without hierarchical subordination or effective competition for public resources, there is little pressure on universities to change, innovate, and improve. As mentioned earlier, the new private sector has thus far failed to provide an adequate alternate to the public sector. Finally, the array of task forces and committees created will soon have to move beyond institution building to qualitative reform in order to realize their proposals for change. ■

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Kazakstan’s Higher Education in Transition

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After the collapse of the Soviet Union, an independent Kazakstan embarked on the search for a new identity. Adopting a market-oriented economy, it looked both to the West and the Asian “tigers” for models. From 1993 Kazakstan’s higher education started veering away, at least in form, from Soviet tenets. Today, seven years since the restructuring began, questions may be asked about how much the fundamentals of Kazakstan’s higher education have in reality shifted.

New Wine in Old Bottles

A key issue for Kazakstan’s higher education during the transition period concerns the relaxation of Soviet-style centralized control, which had been deeply embedded in higher education legislation and a multitude of regulations. These regulations had been the backbone of the system, determining its human and material inputs and outputs, and controlling everything from policy to delivery. The relationship between the state and the universities was characterized by one-way traffic in the form of top-down directives. If that structure made some sense under the Soviet

system, the dynamics of the nascent market economy have quickly rendered it out of date and in need of change.

Universities have urged the government to grant them greater autonomy, especially in policymaking, management, and program development. Even the Soviet-trained technocrats who sit at the head of these institutions have recognized that excessive state control, coupled with significantly reduced state financing, would stifle the universities. Their calls for change have contributed to the adoption of several measures promoting the democratization of institutional arrangements and academic planning. Elected university rectors and their deputies have acquired more say in institutional governance. They have been adding new subjects to existing programs, while trying to engage in income-generating activities to keep pace with the new economic realities. Content in social science subjects has been adjusted, glossing over Marxism-Leninism and introducing Western philosophy.

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Notwithstanding these new features, the restructur-

ing of Kazakhstan's higher education has been slow. Although the rectors now have more leeway, their universities are still largely state managed. Deregulation has been sluggish. The cabinet, the Ministry of Education, and the Ministry of Finance have been reluctant to relinquish their hold, since for them the decentralization of higher education represents a threat. Up until now higher education had been overseen by a cumbersome, overmanned structure. Decisions about standards, curricula, degrees, staffing, and even modes of delivery continue to be made at the Ministry of Education. Financial decisions rest with the Ministry of Finance.

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The Ministry of Education, however, has been anxious to update its own management style. The ministry has used aid money to install a modern system for information management and to computerize aspects of its administration. These new management tools will only be effective if policymakers are interested in using them purposefully. There has to be a radical change in the approach toward the collection and use of higher education information for the analysis of the system's quality, relevance, and efficiency.

Where there has been readiness for change, good intentions have been frustrated by shortages of experience at all levels of management. It is not unusual for education policymakers to seek advice from their erstwhile Russian colleagues, which has tended to bind them to the very framework they were seeking to break away from. Practical difficulties, coupled with a lack of initiative, have also contributed to thwarting reform efforts. Although the need to make study programs flexible and more responsive to the new socioeconomic situation is recognized, progress has been impeded by the scarcity of appropriate textbooks and teaching materials. Redesigning the curriculum and producing new textbooks have started, but this is an enormous undertaking, requiring time and huge financial investment. Interim measures could have been introduced—such as translating into local language the appropriate teaching materials that exist in other countries, or inviting external specialists with knowledge and experience in the needed areas to give seminars and lectures. Instead, much of the old framework for planning the curriculum lives on, and the textbooks from the Soviet era, in which training was highly specialized in narrowly

defined fields, continue to be the main reference for both teachers and students.

Private or Nonprivate?

The emergence of private higher education in countries that previously had a command economy no longer is cause for much excitement—with so many countries having opened up in recent years. Nevertheless, if one takes into account the fact that in other Central Asian countries, sharing the same Soviet mold, private higher education is still not a possibility, then what has happened in Kazakhstan places it in the region's vanguard.

Courses in high-demand fields such as informatics, management, banking, and the English language have mushroomed in the (former) capital, Alma-Ata, and in the big cities. Private “universities” have been set up providing courses in these fashionable and marketable disciplines, to cater to private enterprises, banks, and joint ventures. In other cases, private “schools” were created within the state universities themselves, where they enjoy a significant advantage as facilities are made available to them on preferential conditions. Two years after the privatization drive was set in motion, Kazakhstan already had 65 private institutions of higher learning. Yet, with fees ranging from U.S.\$500 to U.S.\$1,500, enrollment in nonstate education is out-of-reach for the majority of Kazaks.

The Kazak version of private higher education is, however, little more than a combination of private payment and continued state control. Lack of understanding and experience on the part of the education authorities has slowed the private sector's budding development. The view of private higher education is influenced by preconceived ideas. The law on licensing of private institutions is based largely on outdated standards for state universities. This has placed private institutions at a disadvantage compared to their state cousins and those private schools that were spun off from state institutions. The state of affairs shows the misconception of the role and function of private institutions by the education authorities. Regulations, ministerial orders, and detailed norms for licensing and certification have been more controlling than facilitating. Many private universities see such an intrusion from the state as an attempt to contain the growth of private institutions and to protect public universities. Within a few years since the introduction of private establishments, the licenses of close to two-thirds of them had been revoked. This is believed to be due in no small part to excessive state control.

Officially, private and public institutions are to be treated on an equal basis. In practice, this means that they have to follow similar centrally defined criteria, standards, and procedures. From the financial point of view, private establishments receive no government incentives in any form. At the moment no institution has registered itself as a charity, and all private institutions are seen as for-profit

establishments. Thus they are obliged to pay taxes on their net revenues.

From the point of view of creating healthy competition with public higher education, private institutions still have a long way to go before they can generate reformative effects on public education. So far private education has been more of a spontaneous response to the lack of skills needed by the new market-oriented economy, rather than being a full-fledged private system in its own right. Although private institutions claimed to have put highest priority on the quality of teaching, rather than on making a profit, they are, at least for now, more complementary to, than competitive with public universities. As private education focuses on programs that are not offered by public universities, the spirit of competition between them for more efficiency and higher standards has not yet emerged. The threat from private education is too

feeble for public institutions to feel the need to improve, especially since they are still safe under state protection.

Conclusion

The restructuring of Kazakhstan's higher education has been aimed at enabling it to respond effectively to the new market-oriented economy. However, tradition and resistance to change have been major stumbling blocks. Those currently in charge of Kazakhstan's transition are the product of decades of entrenched Soviet principles.

In the hands of the old guard, the country's comprehensive transformation is unlikely. Although Kazakhstan has changed much since independence, the goals of restructuring have not yet been reached. The future of Kazakhstan's higher education, and indeed the health of the country itself, lies with the restless young generation of today. They will lead the country without being bogged down by the vestiges of the Soviet era. ■

Internationalization in Belarus: The Post-Soviet Experience

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Internationalization of higher education has not been defined as a priority in Belarus, but many universities have taken initiatives on their own, introducing various changes. In this article we highlight some of the approaches used by the Belarusian higher education community to introduce international education into institutions of higher learning, as well as some of the constraints encountered by Belarusian universities in the attempt.

General Overview

The Republic of Belarus, situated at the western border of the former Soviet Union, was one of the most industrially developed republics, with very strong higher education and science sectors. As of the 1999–2000 academic year, the state system of higher education comprises 42 higher education institutions. The nonstate sector of higher education is represented by 15 institutions. Belarusian institutions of higher learning currently enroll 243,700 students (the population of the republic is 10 million).

At present 50 percent of students attend programs in economics and the humanities. Admissions to technical and science education have declined. The list of programs offered has expanded substantially and now includes more than 200 fields and over 1,000 specializations. This makes it possible to provide trained specialists in practically all branches of the economy.

Internationalization Efforts

Institutional Changes. At many state universities and most nonstate universities, departments of international relations have been created. The main objective for such departments is to develop international linkages for the university by assisting faculty members to participate in international educational and scientific exchanges and educational programs, by supporting foreign faculty and students at the university, and by seeking out opportunities for international cooperation.

Belarus has only one Internet provider—the Belpak Company—which is fully controlled by the government.

Many universities have introduced administrative positions to deal with issues of international education—often these positions are ranked at the level of vice rector. It is obvious that universities with both an international relations department and a vice rector for international affairs are quite