

tutional profiles demonstrate variety in age, size, location, academic configuration, ownership, and reputation. For example, the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart is a large, well-established multicampus and multifaculty institution offering all three educational cycles and full research facilities. While it has over 40,000 students and 1,400 tenured staff, the other, much smaller, nonstate universities have only a few hundred students and a handful of staff offering a limited range of education and research services, such as the highly specialized University of Gastronomic Sciences. There is a wide range of disciplines across the sector (including medicine).

In contrast to the worldwide explosion in private higher education provision, the private sector in western Europe has essentially remained a peripheral one that has not attracted the attention of researchers.

While the nonstate universities are based predominantly in the north and center of Italy, with over half of the universities close to or in Rome and Milan, nevertheless a wide geographic spread exists across the country. The profiles of the institutions are also influenced by the different types of ownership that fall into three broad categories: religious (Roman Catholic) ownership or affiliation, local authority institutions, and business groups or individuals (including the recently founded distance-education providers). These categories influence their focus of mission, disciplines, and target groups.

With diversity of reputation, many nonstate universities place emphasis on academic excellence and are well-respected. Yet, some of the more recently established universities are considered less trustworthy, and their ability to meet minimum operational and financial requirements have been questioned both by the sector and the state.

CONCLUSION

The regulatory framework has traditionally focused on centralization and uniformity, which has led to the emergence of an essentially analogous private sector with a strong sense of public mission alongside service to a specific stakeholder community. It remains peripheral despite significant expansion in recent years in response to growth and variety of demand. Italian nonstate universities are hybrid institutions, accountable to both state and market. Precisely because they are forced to ensure their own financial sustainability, the new conditions of a more competitive international environment should be more conducive to their development. The author's recent study of three nonstate universities suggested that international and national market pressures are contrasting the power of the state in determining the environment and playing a

stronger role in defining institutional direction. As the divide between private and public higher education blurs, Italian nonstate universities successful in exploiting their "privateness" have the potential to become examples of best practice. ■

Central Asia: Increasing Diversity

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Although Central Asian nations are linked geographically and historically, their higher education systems are following different paths. The five countries—Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan—even at the time of the Soviet Union's dissolution varied in wealth, natural resources, population size, geography, government control, languages spoken, treatment of nontitular ethnic groups, and existing higher education resources. Since then, they have addressed nation building and the creation of professional elites in different ways and with varied resources and philosophies.

A CLEAR EXAMPLE

In August 2009, the most repressive country, Turkmenistan, prevented students from traveling to Kyrgyzstan, the country with the region's most diverse system of higher education, even physically removing them from airplanes. The focus of Turkmenistan's wrath was the American University of Central Asia, a locally founded university with Kyrgyzstani licensure and attestation. However, it appeared that the more than 60 students who were refused access to that institution would be allowed to attend the American University of Bulgaria, which has both US and Bulgarian accreditation. However, in early October, Turkmen authorities prohibited students from flying to Bulgaria. Currently, rumors say they will be enrolled in Russian universities.

TURKMENISTAN—ONE EXTREME

Turkmenistan is at one end of the continuum of diversity, choice, and academic freedom. Its dictator, Saparmurat Niyazov, who died in December 2006, cut higher education from 5 years to 2 and secondary education from 11 years to 9; closed the Academy of Sciences and most libraries, and required that hours of class time be devoted to the

Rukhnama—his meandering and sometimes incoherent thoughts. Although under Niyazov's successor, Gurbanguly Berdymukhammedov, 5 years of higher education have been restored, additional places have been created in universities (still not as many as in Soviet times), reopening the Academy of Sciences has been promised, and a branch of the Russian Gubkin University of Oil and Gas has begun operations, academic freedom remains nonexistent. Faculty educated under Niyazov have only 2 years of higher education and little knowledge of the world outside. Additionally, payment for admission and grades reportedly is widespread; a dean and several lecturers at the Azadi Institute of World Languages this summer admitted on television taking the equivalent of \$119,000 from eight students. Some blogs attribute the August clampdown—originally widespread and later focused on the American University of Central Asia—to officials upset at losing bribes from students who had other options. However, late in September, 47 new Peace Corps Volunteers at the Philadelphia airport suddenly were told they could not enter Turkmenistan, so the concern may be more about keeping out ideas. In mid-October, reports surfaced that Turkmenistan's natural gas fields held only a third to one half of the amounts claimed just last year. Since the gas revenues are essential in funding Turkmenistan's development, including education, the future is unclear.

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KYRGYZSTAN—CHOICE OR CHAOS?

At the other end of the spectrum is Kyrgyzstan, home not only to the American University in Central Asia, but also to two universities founded by intergovernmental agreements: the Kyrgyz-Russian Slavonic University and the Kyrgyz-Turkish Manas University. In addition, Kyrgyzstan hosts the privately funded Turkish Ala-Too University, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe Academy, half a dozen branches of Russian universities, a Kuwaiti university, an Islamic University, the Kyrgyz-Uzbek University, and a campus of the University of Central Asia, founded by the Aga Khan to benefit mountain peoples. The European Union provides TEMPUS, Erasmus Mundus, Erasmus Mundus External Cooperation Window, and European Training Foundation programs. Six Bologna process centers were created since 2007, and Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan were invited to the policy forum at the Bologna ministerial meeting in April 2009.

The American University in Central Asia and Manas University offer four-year bachelor's degrees; other universities have three-year BAs and two-year master's; others still

offer the five-year Soviet-era *diplom* and the *kandidat nauk* (candidate of science). Some universities use credit hours, some use the contact hours, and some use both. Several of this author's interviewees in the summer of 2009 described the system as *kasha*—literally “porridge” but also a slang term meaning “a mess.” On the other hand, openness to diversity has advantages for a country with few natural resources, one thus dependent on citizens' brains and creativity. In fact, in August 2009, after the Ministry of Education adopted regulations on implementing credit hours, the European Credit Transfer System, the Diploma Supplement, and new teaching methods supporting independent work, it reportedly instructed universities to follow their own curricula until national curricula were designed.

Kazakhstan permits private universities, allowed the creation of the Independent Kazakhstan Quality Assurance Agency, and funds the Bolashak program, which sends students abroad.

KAZAKHSTAN—A MIXED REVIEW

Geographically the largest and, due to oil and gas reserves, the wealthiest nation in Central Asia, Kazakhstan is on a self-proclaimed “Path to Europe” was invited to the 2009 Bologna policy forum, and soon will assume the chair of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. Western-focused universities include the Kazakhstan Institute of Management, Economics, and Strategic Research, the Kazakh-British Technical University, and a small Kazakh-German University, plus the high-profile “world-class” University of Astana that is being developed in collaboration with University College London. Some universities use credit hours. Kazakhstan permits private universities, allowed the creation of the Independent Kazakhstan Quality Assurance Agency, and funds the Bolashak program, which sends students abroad, with the proviso that they return and work in Kazakhstan. However, some signals are troubling: the much-touted University of Astana has no Web site, and the status of its work is difficult to confirm; the Kazakhstan Institute has cancelled contracts with foreign faculty since the economic downturn; the Bolashak program is pressuring students to finish their degrees quickly and to return home; and some private universities have been closed on short notice. Reform and transparency are, at best, uneven.

UZBEKISTAN—LIMITED OPTIONS

Uzbekistan—known for restricting political freedom under Islam Karimov, president since independence—has a rapidly growing number of professional training colleges, low instructor salaries, insufficient places for the expanding youth popu-

lation, and, according to many reports, widespread corruption. A 2007 World Bank report notes that Uzbekistan and Tajikistan have maintained elite systems, whereas Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan have chosen mass systems. Uzbekistan hosts three foreign universities and three branches of Russian universities. One of the four most prominent local universities, the University of World Economy and Diplomacy, has an international focus. Alone among the Central Asian countries, Uzbekistan bars schools sponsored by the controversial Turkish Sufi organization (Fethullah Gulen) having closed them in September 2000 reportedly because of Karimov's concerns about their propagation of a form of Islam that might challenge his rule. Even Turkmenistan has permitted the Fethullah Gulen-sponsored International Turkmen-Turkish University to operate since 1994, although its independence is limited.

TAJIKISTAN—WORRYING ABOUT THE BASICS

The poorest among 15 former Soviet countries, Tajikistan is in a category by itself not only because ethnically and linguistically Tajiks connect with the Persian rather than the Turkic world, like the rest of Central Asia, but also because of its devastating civil war (1992–1997) and its insecure border with

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Afghanistan. The International Crisis Group, in a February 2009 report titled “Tajikistan: On the Road to Failure,” estimates that half the working-age population has migrated abroad and that 70 percent of Tajiks live in “abject poverty.” Electricity often is available only a few hours a day. Tajikistan struggles to provide adequate elementary and secondary schools, particularly in rural areas. The capital, Dushanbe, hosts the Russian-aided Tajik-Russian Slavic University, Khorog is home to one of the three campuses of the Aga Khan-funded University of Central Asia, and according to the 2007 World Bank report, 19 laws on higher education reform have been passed since independence. Yet, restructuring or even maintaining state-supported higher education is difficult for a government beset with crises.

DIVERGENT PATHS

Central Asian nations, although connected by geography and history, are separated by wealth, resources, government priorities and control, and international connections, and increasingly follow divergent paths. Higher education systems, reflecting and responding to local conditions, no longer mirror one another but rather plan for unique futures. ■

The Goals for Higher Education in Kazakhstan

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As part of its transition from the post-Soviet era and in response to the market economy and the effects of globalization, Kazakhstan (with a population of 16 million) has set ambitious goals for improving the quality of higher education. Fueled by enormous oil reserves, Kazakhstan is determined to become one of the top 50 competitive economies of the world in 2012, as indicated in the annual global competitive report published by the World Economic Forum.

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Kazakhstan's public universities suffered from poor resources, low faculty salaries and an outdated choice of specialties. Demand-absorbing private universities filled niches created by the market and witnessed explosive growth. In 1994, the system contained 32 private universities; 10 years later there were 130. In 2000/01, 29 percent of Kazakhstan's 440,000 students were studying in private institutions; by 2003/04 those figures rose to 45.3 percent and 685,000. With the recent introduction of accreditation, 20 private universities have been closed. The strongest privates are the English-language universities, with the North American-style Kazakhstan Institute of Management, Economics and Strategic Research appearing to be the most preferred private institution. With 57 public and 110 private universities, the higher education sector is overbuilt, and the number of private universities should continue to decline.

AN ACTIVIST GOVERNMENT LOOKS ABROAD

Seeking to enhance the quality of its higher education sector, Kazakhstan has looked to western European standards for higher education. For example, in 1997, Kazakhstan was the first country of newly independent states to adopt the policy of the Lisbon Recognition Convention, which calls member countries for mutual recognition of qualifications and equivalency of academic diplomas. The Ministry of Education and Science is also working on reforming the higher education system along the general lines of the Bologna process. In this context, Kazakhstan has encouraged the implementation of the European structure of academic degrees (baccalaureate, master's and doctoral), a national quality-assurance system and a Western-style credit system.