

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.

As part of its strategic development plan for higher education, the government has been implementing the State Program on the Development of Education 2005–2010. One key goal of this program is the adoption of a three-tiered degree structure (baccalaureate, master's and doctoral). Currently both public and private universities offer baccalaureate and master's programs. In 2005 two public universities, Eurasian National University and Kazakh National University, began piloting PhD programs. As part of this process Eurasian National signed memoranda of agreement with western European, Turkish, Japanese, South Korean, and North American universities. This cooperation has bolstered the quality of postgraduate education and enhanced opportunities for the university's ENU doctoral students, with the ministry's support, to study abroad and be supervised by Western professors.

In developing human capital, Kazakhstan has increased its investment in the country's most talented young scholars. In 1993 the government launched the “Bolashak” Presidential Scholarship Program. With the term *bolashak* [future], the program is evidence the government believes educating its elite abroad will ultimately enhance national welfare. Approximately 3,000 undergraduate and graduate students, primarily from the urban centers, study abroad every year with the United Kingdom, United States, and Russia the preferred destinations. The program strengthens the state infrastructure as the preponderance of “Bolashak” graduates return to assume key government posts. However, the Ministry of Education and Science understands the program draws too heavily from urban areas, with the rural areas significantly underrepresented.

REFORM HAS SPAWNED CHALLENGES

Concurrent with these ambitious efforts and reforms the Kazakhstani system of higher education has experienced local and international challenges. For example, continuous issues have arisen with quality assurance. In 2001 rules of state accreditation of higher education institutions were approved, but only 25 percent of the universities passed the first stage of accreditation. In 2006, within the education budget, the share of tertiary education was one of the smallest in the world, at about 0.3 percent. At this juncture, an academic career had only a marginal attraction. For nearly a decade after 1991, university faculty needed to teach at two or more universities for standard-of-living income and supporting their families. At present, faculty salaries are still based on teaching load, leaving most professors disinclined to engage in research and creating a gap with the State Program on the Development of Education 2005–2010, which attempts to expand faculty research.

Not unlike other countries in Central Asia a considerable education inequity exists between the urban and rural areas of Kazakhstan. Universities in rural areas lacking financial support and academic infrastructure have difficulty in providing a high-quality education or recruiting young teachers to work in

rural areas. Kazakhstani professors and students, in general, suffer from a lack of up-to-date professional literature as universities lack sufficient funding to subscribe to important European and North American journals. Electronic media resources also appear to be underdeveloped.

Kazakh-language-medium higher education also needs further development. The legacy of Russification has left universities with only a small number of well-rounded specialists who hold an effective command of Kazakh. The absence of Kazakh-written teaching-and-learning materials further complicates efforts to expand Kazakh-medium instruction. The status of Kazakh language needs to be addressed as ethnic Kazakh students begin to form a greater proportion of students in higher education. Another serious issue is English-language competence among students and professors. The ministry and university administrations are exerting pressure to ensure that university faculty hold a sufficient command of English to present at major international conferences and to publish their research in respected international journals.

The Ministry of Education and Science is also working on reforming the higher education system along the general lines of the Bologna process.

After the Soviet Union's collapse Kazakhstan began implementing higher education reform that has greatly accelerated over the last five years. Major steps have been taken to improve the structure and quality of Kazakh higher education as evidenced by the State Program on the Development of Education 2005–2010. However, economic and societal issues—such as student and academic staff mobility, educational inequity between urban and rural population, difficulties in accessing current literature, and a lack of English-speaking academics—have hindered attainment of goals outlined in the 2005–2010 plan.

SUBSTANTIAL CHALLENGES REMAIN

In terms of quality control, a shift is needed in the mindset of some Ministry of Education and Science staff and university management leaders who tend to view accreditation as a tool for greater government control rather than a vehicle for institutional self-improvement. There is an urgent need to develop a culture of institutional accountability and transparency across the universities. Thus, on many fronts, developing the quality of the educational system is critical for Kazakhstan's efforts to achieve international competitiveness. ■