zakhstan. Some deputy ministers in Russia and Ukraine, and the minister of education in Kazakhstan, did not have an active for-profit affiliation at the time of data collection, but based on employment history and national expert assessments, are expected to go through the “revolving door” into a salaried or shareholder position at a university immediately after completing their mandate in the public sector. To the extent evidence is available, for-profit affiliations with universities are also common at a lower level of decision-making: among the heads of departments for higher education in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Moldova, Russia, and Serbia, and among legislators in charge of education in Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia, Moldova, Serbia, and Ukraine.

The most common form of for-profit affiliation with universities by target group members is practiced by salaried staff in public universities. In the region of the Western Balkans, the benefit of being on the payroll of a higher education institution is usually combined with the provision of fee-based expertise. In some countries (Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Serbia, and Ukraine), holders of public office are also owners of (private) higher education institutions, or are expected to resume ownership upon completion of their tenure. In addition, in Azerbaijan, the for-profit affiliation of some deputy ministers includes the provision of procurement services to universities, and, in Croatia, the benefit of affiliation of a high-level civil servant in the ministry is expected to be an academic credential (a Ph.D degree) from a public university.

**Why It Matters**

The threat of “academic capture” has manifold and detrimental implications. Thanks to “captured” individuals with regulatory responsibilities, the higher education sector may secure channels of influence on policy decisions and achieve favorable policy outcomes—where many of these outcomes would have been detrimental to the sector, and/or come at the expense of other education and public policy priorities. Consider, for example, the hypothetical case of a smaller, regional higher education institution that expects a fair approach to the accreditation of its new study programs, only to discover that the accreditation authority has rejected them, while applying a double standard in favor of the alma mater of the minister of education. Or imagine a discussion about public budget allocations, which year after year concludes with a decision to increase investments in an already oversized university network instead of addressing a persistent and acute shortage of kindergarten places.

Finally, consider all the ways in which a tertiary educational institution that has influence over its regulators can harm itself by exercising its influence to prevent the very changes it might need in order to improve. As a sector-specific risk of regulatory “capture,” “academic capture” deserves to be treated with the same urgency and attention as any other form of conflict of interest in the public sector. The alternative—leaving distortions in higher education policy-making unexplored and their harmful, long-term side effects unaddressed—means accepting that certain groups among educational actors are wrongfully and systematically put at a disadvantage, that trust in public education policy is undermined, and resistance to change encouraged.

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