

Higher Education and Corruption: Macedonian Alumni Experiences

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Abstract

Corruption (lat. *corruptio, corrumpere, pervert*) means dishonest or fraudulent conduct by those in power, typically involving bribery. The most general meaning of corruption, as systematic phenomena (Dinkovski, 20012: 12), is impurity, infection, or decay. It is abuse of public power for personal interests that distort the social institutions. This destructive phenomenon is very present in the Balkan countries. Some 50 % of the population of the Western Balkan believe that corruption practices occur often or very often in a number of public institutions (from central and local government, parliament, hospitals, judiciary and the police). One in six citizens of the Western Balkans citizens had either direct or indirect exposure to a bribery experience with a public official. (Bisogno, 2010: 9, 15)

This research is done in 2012 and includes interviews with 25 alumni from different universities in Macedonia, treating the abovementioned issue from clients', i.e. student's perspective, based on the experience of corruption during the years of studies. From the analytical approach we concluded that other forms of corruption (favoritism, book buying, sexual services) are more present than bribery or direct payment in our universities, that reporting corruption cases is not

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occurring from revenge fear and that all student declare that corruption damages education and their future prospect.

Key words: higher education; corruption; ethics; students' experience; Republic of Macedonia;

1. Ethics: General Overview

The concept of ethics has a long history in different disciplines of social sciences. Usually, ethics is understood as reflecting on and recommending concepts of right and wrong behavior. Ethics can be defined as "the study of right and wrong; of the moral choices people make and the way in which they seek to justify them" (Thompson 1999: 1). Ethics deals with right and wrong and reflects of one's moral.

The core of ethics consists in values that describe desired states and behaviors (Tušen & Žager, 2006:144 in Krasniqi, 140). Ethics can be defined as an entirety of moral rules and values (Tokić, 2003) which direct man's act in certain conditions and times. It deals with judging human acts as right, wrong, preferable or undesirable on the ground of certain values and standards in a social environment or beyond. Its duty is to show right and true values. Philosophers, religious organizations and other social groups have their own definitions for ideal moral rules and values. (Krasniqi, 141)

It is a global phenomenon, from our country (bank robbery, rapes, increase of divorces etc.), to nearby countries like Montenegro ("Deep Moral Crisis"- HGI, Radio Tivat), Slovenia ("Moral Crisis", Dnevnik, 22.03.2012) to faraway ones, like USA, "the country of dreams" about which one can find on the web articles like this: "12 factors that are turning streets of America into a Living Hell" (Out Of Control Gang Violence, Naked Criminals Going Crazy, Jersey Shore In Real Life, Horrifying Abuse Of Children, Nightmarish Abuse Of Wives And Girlfriends, Horrifying Abuse Of Animals, America's Meth Epidemic, Mob Robberies etc.).

Albania sociologist G. Tushi says they are right when they say we are all in a general social crisis that appears not only in the social chaos of human life, but also in the great natural turmoil, as there are happening things which in parallel affect our reality, while our society is being "poisoned", nature is "perishing" and man is being "corrupted" (Tushi, 2010).

The alarm appearing throughout the planet calls for the acute need for a "moral framework" to save the world from a moral crisis that is graver

than the global financial crisis (Pope Benedict XVI), for a global enterprise to enliven the respect for life and peace, solidarity and justice, tolerance and honesty, for the realization of interests without violence, for social justice in economy, for fighting corruption and other evils that are deepening the crisis every day, and for a new ethical framework.

2. Macedonian Universities and Bologna Process

University, i.e. higher education is *spiritus movens* of society. In 2009 RM had 7.2% of citizens with high education, 25.000 unemployed with university diploma, while 15% of the employed were university graduates. In Macedonia, the period of transition brought wide liberalization of the market of higher education services (Poposki, 2010: 14), active role of the private initiative and the birth of new universities, phenomena described it as a "University boom". The chart of the places of the high education in the Republic of Macedonia brings in front of us these institutions:

Table 1: Universities in the Republic of Macedonia**Public Universities**

- Ss. Cyril and Methodius University of Skopje
- St. Clement of Ohrid University of Bitola
- Goce Delčev University of Štip
- University for Information Science and Technology "St. Paul The Apostle" in Ohrid
- State University of Tetovo

Private Universities and Faculties

- South East European University
- International Balkan University
- Euro College Kumanovo
- International University Of Struga
- FON University
- University American College Skopje
- University of Tourism and Management in Skopje
- Slavic University
- European University-Republic of Macedonia
- University of Studies Struga "Euro College"
- MIT Faculties
- New York University Skopje
- University for Audiovisual Arts - Parisian European Film Academy ESRA - Skopje
- International Summer University
- BAS - Business Academy Smilevski - Skopje

Source: Macedonian HEIs Ranking 2015-2016.

During the recent years new faculties and study programmes were opened in almost all cities of Republic of Macedonia, a process known as dispersion, deconcentration, or simply fragmentation of high education, as a tool for as great an inclusion of students as possible. This phenomenon is accompanied by many problems, like the educational staff (a traveling caravan from a city to another, lectures held mostly by assistants or demonstrators), inadequate conditions for education (lessons held in kindergarten, elementary and high schools, restaurants, cultural centres, malls, administrative buildings etc.) and administration, finances, the lack of methods to increase the number of students... (Poposki, 2010: 5-6)

In the meantime, the changes in the Law for University education, have been dealing with accreditation and evaluation, which mingled with the academic circles. The objective of these changes in the Law was to implementation of the accepted standards in the European area of education, implemented by ENQA-European Network for Quality Assurance, and others as well. This evaluation is made by commissions of different fields from at least three professors of internationally recognized Universities. In the so far laws for the high education from 2000 and 2008 the process of evaluation and accreditation were separated processes. There was the Accreditation Board (permanent) and the Evaluation Agency (from time to time). In the new Law of 11 February 2011, is formed a new mutual Board for evaluation and accreditation, in order to establish a system of values and quality of the high education.

According to the Decree of the Government for the regulations and standards for the establishment of the activity of the institutions of the high education (Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia, nr. 168 from December 24, 2010):

The existing institutions of the high education which realize studying programmes of the third cycle/PhD, the mentor should have: in 2010, at least two reviewed works in scientific international magazines, in the specific field; and at least one participation during the last five years in an international conference;

From the 1 January 2011, at least three revised works published in international scientific magazines, in the specific field, at least two participations in international conferences, and from January of 2012, 4 publications and 2 participations in international conferences.

In 2015 are requested publications in international magazines with impact factor.

The other changes have to deal with the criteria of realizing the third cycle of studying programmes. (The Official Gazette of the RM, nr. 168, December 24, 2010 and nr. 17, February 11, 2011; Pajaziti & Jashari, 2012: 13)

According to the State Statistical Office, there were 58 747 enrolled students in the Republic of Macedonia in the academic year 2011/2012. The number of enrolled female students was 31 233 or 53.2%. The highest number of students, or 84.6%, were enrolled in public tertiary institutions, while 15.0% were enrolled in private tertiary institutions. There were 18 152

students enrolled in the first year of studies, which is 30.9% of the total (students that are enrolled in the first year for the second time, third time or more are also covered here). (Pajaziti & Jashari, 2012)

3. Corruption and Higher Education

The word corruption steams from Latin *corrumpere*, which means “to break”, “to destroy”, “to annihilate”. Corruptive acts break the law, moral and human duties and norms, the basic principles of honesty, that’s why some dictionaries have defined it as moral deviation, foulness, baseness. Merrem-Webster defines it as impairment of integrity, virtue, or moral principle, as “inducement to wrong by improper or unlawful means (as bribery)”. The World Bank defines it as “unlawful use of public resources for personal gain”, similarly to Transparency International, which defines it as “the abuse of entrusted power for private gain”. The Development Program of UN defines corruption as “abuse of public power or authority for personal gain – through bribery, abuse of duty, trading of influence, nepotism, deceit, and abuse of funds. IMF defines this social cancer as “abuse of public authority or trust for personal gain”. (Danilet, 2011: 14-17) Transparency International has published the Corruption Perception Index for 2012, which ranges 176 countries according to their levels of corruption. Findings show that corruption continues to challenge societies throughout the world. Macedonia remains at the same position as the last year, at 69.

The government of RM defines fighting against organised crime and corruption as the highest priority. The term corruption as pertaining to the Law against Corruption means the use of public function and authorization, of official duty and position to achieve any personal gain.

Education-specific corruption, defined by Rumyantseva (2005: 86) as “corruption that involves students as agents and has direct effect on their values, beliefs, and life chances”. According Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD) there are several forms of corruption in education: economic (bribery, embezzlement, fraud, unethical procurement), abuse of power and preferential treatment (extortion, favoritism, nepotism) and academic misconduct (teacher shirking, student shirking, ghost teachers, academic dishonesty, academic bribery, grade inflation). (EDC, 2012: 11-13)

It is important to analyze and tackle corruption in *education* because it sets negative standards and norms that shape the behavior of new

generations. Corruption in the higher education is neglected form of corruption, but that is the most dangerous one, that affects whole social structure and system. Corruption in education affects not only students but the entire society. In terms of the number of people affected education is probably the worst hit sector that undermines education quality, equitable access to education services. Exacerbates social cleavages and, consequently, undermines social and national cohesion. Retards transition to or consolidation of democracy and economic development (through decline of education quality). (Fajfer, 2012)

In South East Europe there is an Anti-corruption Student Network that contributes to decrease of higher education corruption level and influences higher education reform. The main goals of this Network are the research on presence and different forms of corruption at universities and faculties; informing and raising awareness across academic community target groups (students, professors and administrative staff) and general public about presence of corruption in education; attract students, professors and administrative staff to actively engage in anti-corruption activities; motivating and training students to participate in the reform process; monitor higher education reform process; create transparent higher education environment and its institutional and legal framework; take transparent University regulation and inform about its content; advocate introduction of regulations and mechanisms for stopping corruption; exchange of experience and good practices with other activists within and outside of the country.

According to Transparency Zero Corruption in Macedonia corruption in education is still a taboo. There is a high level of perception of corruption and fight for its prevention is not serious. Students do not report such cases to university management. Students do not speak loudly on the topic of bribery or other forms of corruption. The Ombudsman registered several cases of symbolic student complaints.

Very few are researches in Republic of Macedonia about the relation between high education and corruptive acts, although behind curtains it is spoken about a great spread of abusive acts by university lecturers, a part of whom have dishonestly achieved Master and PhD degrees (as in the case of diplomas bought in neighbor countries), or about politicians who “deal with problems in state universities) while they graduate people in private universities (of coalition partners. Foundation Open Society Institute (2003), Center for Civil Communication (2006), NGO – Youth Educational Forum

(Mladinski Obrazoven Forum), Anti Corruption Student Network (2011) etc. have dealt with the problem of corruption.

From the research conducted form Foundation Open Society Institute was suggested that 30 % of the students said that professors' signatures can be obtained through "connections" and acquaintances. 26 % of the respondents said that they had been requested to pay bribe to take an exam. 79% Pedagogy, 90% Economic Faculty mentioned "hearsay" on bribe. 55% of students declared that some professors sold books and 23 % that majority of university professors sell their books to their students; 86% of the respondents did not heard about heard of a student having initiated a procedure because of bribe requested, 11% had heard of procedures that had been completed. (Eigen, 2003: 2-4)

At the time of Minister Todorov, the Ministry of Education and Science, in cooperation with student associations in five state universities, began a campaign for fighting corruption in high education. The campaign consisted in opening offices for students to report cases of corruption or any other irregularity in the work of faculties, a website through which students and other persons involved in high education would be able to denounce corruption cases anonymously or with their full name.

The research by Youth Education Forum, conducted with 330 students of Ss Cyril and Methodius University, shows that corruption makes up the fourth problem in weight in high education, after unserious approach by students, weak formation of educational staff, and low educational level in general. According to the same research, 23% of students have expressed readiness to give money in order to pass the exam, and 20% for a bed at the dormitory. 91% of them would not denounce corruption cases if they would be to their advantage. (*Nova Makedonija*, 29.06.2011) According to the same organization, students complain about corruption. Most often professors demand they buy their books and ask for bribery. Such complains have reached the student ombudsman (Jovanovska, 2011).

According to a research by Transparency International, OSCE mission to Skopje and Rating Agency, with 1800 citizens (September 26-30, 2012) from 84 communes in Macedonia, 55.1% of respondents believe corruption is much more spread, while 56% think there is too much corruption in high education. According to this research, 26% of students in the survey have given or have been asked for bribe to pass faculty exams.

The press has registered specific cases like that of sponsoring professor's book for a grade (Lobi, 2003), of the "macro-method" (with intermediary),

of three tools for passing “the chair, the pocket or the bed”, of “the gun method” (Fakti, 2005) etc.

4. Alumni Narratives on Corruption Affairs in Universities in Republic of Macedonia

*“One of my friends paid electricity bills of professor’s household”
(25 years, student of economy, 2012)*

Our empirical research (realized in cooperation with our university colleague Shqipe Gërguri), based on a semi structured questionnaire (21 questions), conducted in March-April 2012 with 24 former students of the two Albanian universities in Tetovo, and of Ss Cyril and Methodius University and FON, in Albanian and Macedonian language. The respondents were selected randomly.

Table 2: Number of interviewees by Department

University Departments	F
Machinery	1
Art	1
Pedagogy	2
Veterinary	1
Political Science	2
Law	5
Diplomacy	2
Economy	3
Architecture	1
Sociology	1
Geography	1
Work and Social Policy	1
Public Administration	2
Philology	1
Total	24

Source: Author’s own work

As it is seen in the table, students of various departments of high education, of social as well as exact sciences, have been included. After pressing the questionnaire and selecting the persons to be included, we made the appointments and with a dictophone recorded their answer which then we transcribed.

Table 3: Interviewees by year of graduation

<i>Year of graduation</i>	
2006	1
2007	3
2008	4
2009	3
2010	4
2011	8
2012	1
Total	24

Source: Author's own work

From this research we have reached the following main findings:

Other forms of corruption are more widespread than bribery or direct payment.

Ethnic Macedonian students use more networking and gifts, and Albanians, cash or payment in kind.

Professor sell their book to students as condition to give opportunity to young to pass exams.

- Favoritism is omnipresent phenomenon.
- Another form is using family relations of professors to get unfair help.
- In some high education institutions students act/perform as intermediates for bribing.
- There are some says about students sexual services to pas exam or to get better grades.
- Some professors offer private courses, sometimes compulsory.
- They usually ranked the university corruption as lower occurring than the government.

- Most corrupted departments of pedagogy, medicine, economy and law.
- Professors are more corrupted than Dean's office and Secretary.
- Reporting the abuse is not occurring, because of fear of revenge by the professors.
- Assistants have better reputation than their tutors, more transparent. "In cases of senior chosen interventions, the younger gave us the chance to learn!"; "Assistants were more transparent. The result was positive" (31 year old teacher). "An old professor disrupted my notebook. You have the book, no need for notes." (24 years old student, graduated in 2011)
- Increasing a grade by intermediary in 100 % is considered as act of injustice, as non-appropriate behavior.

Table 4: Example of alumni narrative

29 years old. Working. Graduated on law, 2008. Do you have a good feeling about your time at the university? Not at all. Undergraduate studies were a very bitter experience with low quality; I was autodidact (self-educated), with a very poor (weak) staff. The most difficult course, first year: Roman law. We were beginners, and the subject was complicated. I pushed this subject for later. **Contact** with lecturer: not, he was an authoritative person, socialist. No contacts *via* friends. They have contacted. "I am not corrupted, but he was also corrupt," but he had a sexual affair. Private courses, no, my friends, yes. English language, Macedonian language (student from Kosovo, Albania). **Books** bought, yes. First year. He (the professor) went around with the conversation (indicated indirectly) that we should buy it (the book). "You'll have questions from there on the exam." - But there weren't any questions! He only wanted to sell the book. The classmates also have bought it. He was not very authoritative, not very professional. First year. After the lecture, the window (Window Server Administration) was filled with students; we could not even take the turn (in the line). Book sells, before the exam, during the lectures. They'll pass better (easier). I felt bad, he was obliging us (doesn't leave us an option) financially. ... I do not buy book, neither his books, nor those of the other ones (professors). If the book had quality, I would have bought it. **Intervention:** no. **Mediator:** no. Others yes: 50 Euros *per grade*. It is like he has put the students in a market - to find consumers (byers). In the evening

he (a student) went to the professor's apartment, had a cup of coffee, the transcript has been signed, he (the professor) has taken the money. It was the third year of study. He was around 50 years old. I felt bad. We showed solidarity with other students. You cannot avoid hearsays. **Gift**, not, nor have I heard friends ... I have heard, for the registering-injustice. **Favours**: I have heard. According to me increasing grades is unfair. Undervalue the quality of studies. It happens very often in the administration. ... Some would pay 200, 130 Euros per semester-various fees. In peripheral universities... Money and books. There were also **sexual affairs**. Monopolization of assistants by professors. You will be discriminated, if you are a dissident. Teachers most corrupted. Complaint: They are an entire line, chain (they come one after another). Prosecutors, police-need complaint. Most corrupted - the ministries. Economic status: 3. No doubt on interview, all of it true.

Interview, done by this article's author, 2013.

5. Conclusions and recommendations

Corruption is an anomaly, a great evil of our time that shows its face everywhere. It is the foundation of all problems and has a destructive effect on the social structure (Eigen, 2003). Ethics is a factor of tremendous importance in building healthy men and societies with stable development and a bright future. From our research we conclude that:

- We don't dare to talk about corruption in education and everywhere else, as if it were a taboo or an *off limits* issue, because it touches all of us. It is a pick that digs the ship we are on so we all must take action against it.
- Students did not have a very pleasant university experience, that corruption is present in academic circles.
- Corruption has involved a part of the intellectual elite and of students as well, who because of unconsciousness seek to establish ties with some professors through money and various gifts.
- Students' fear to declare corruptive acts and the lack of consciousness for the detection and recognition of more sophisticated forms of corruption and protectionism, continues to be characteristic for the new system too in high education ("if we speak studies are over").

- All of the graduates think that these forms of corruption at the university most certainly damage the education system but also their future prospects.
- Most frequent in Pedagogy, Medicine, Law, and Economy. The worst image: Pedagogy (Skopje).

Universities in RM should approve ethical codes which would determine the basic principles of conduct and relations between students and pedagogues and which would serve as a moral framework of academic life. On 31st December 2012, a NGO made a very significant action, by offering citizens in Tetovo diplomas which at their bottom had a seal that contained the words "Let your conscience seal". We hope the message has been conceived by those with a living conscience.

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