



Ensuring Quality Education in B&H: *A future for quality teaching in higher education?*

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Introduction

In a TV program dedicated to higher education and brain drain in Bosnia and Herzegovina which was broadcast at the beginning May on the national TV channel BHRT, professor Slavenka Vobornik, Vice-Rector for Teaching at Sarajevo University, declared that Bosnia is still very attractive to international researchers and that we should not fear migration of human capital, because our universities have all that is needed to keep up with other universities.

This would be great news for us if there weren't other indicators that the situation is slightly different. Let's take a brief look at the following information: "The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) estimates that **more than 92,000 young people left B&H between 1996 and 2001**. And, according to a report done by the Commission for Coordination of Youth Issues in B&H, **in 2007, more than 57 per cent of youth would leave the country if offered an opportunity**; this data correlates with the **youth unemployment estimate, which is 58.2 per cent** (Commission for Coordination of Youth Issues in B&H, 2007)".¹ Two other facts are relevant to our theme of quality teaching in the university sector. The first one is the number of **11220 Bosnian students enrolled in tertiary education in foreign countries in 2004**.² For a small country of 4 million, the student population represents approximately 80,000 people. In percentiles, the percentage of those pursuing their education abroad represents 13% of the total student population.

¹ Valentina Pellizer, Migration: The case of Bosnia and Herzegovina. (In) European Social Watch Report 2009, Migrants in Europe as Development Actors, between hope and vulnerability. http://www.socialwatch.eu/wcm/Bosnia_Herzegovina.html retrieved on May 6th

² http://www.socialwatch.eu/wcm/documents/Student_Migration_and_Brain_Drain.pdf retrieved on May 4th.

Another important fact that can influence their decision to pursue studies in a foreign country is related to the **financial support to scientific research in Bosnia and Herzegovina** and consequently to overall quality: currently these investments represent approximately **0.0014% of our GDP in 2009**.³ This is well below the minimum 2% of the overall investment into higher education required to be achieved by the Lisbon strategy (2005).

And last but not least, according to the Ranking Web of World Universities, among a total of 8000 top universities in the world, Bosnian universities are ranked as follows: the University of Sarajevo is ranked at the "best" 2285th place, while the least attractive, 7923rd position belongs to the Džemal Bijedić University, Mostar.⁴ Although universities ranking could be questioned due to their methods, one obvious conclusion can be made. Higher education is a market and students/future employers' demand requires some sort of ranking to facilitate their selection.

Quality teaching in the university sector is not the key to all youth problems in Bosnia and Herzegovina, but it is undeniably an important one. If we want to prevent future brain-drain from Bosnia and Herzegovina, this could be one way to avoid losing further important human capital necessary to rebuilding the economy and society we are living in.⁵

³ Gavrankapetanovic, *Ensuring Quality Education in B&H: Quality Teaching in Higher Education - University Sector*. Open Society Fund Bosnia and Herzegovina.

⁴ Compared to this, Ljubljana holds the 155th position, Belgrade the 384th and Zagreb the 1144th <http://www.webometrics.info/top8000.asp?offset=7900> retrieved on May 8th.

⁵ Migration of human capital is estimated to be as high as 28,6% for Bosnia which places her at the second place in Europe, after Croatia with a percentage of 29%. (Source BHRT)

Summary

The following brief considers several options necessary for the readjustment of Bosnian higher education into the discourse of European Standards of Quality Assurance. Taking into account that the introduction of good practices will lead the BiH university system through the accreditation process, incorporate it into the global labor market, and eventually prevent a further brain drain from Bosnia and Herzegovina, it is obvious that this process demands urgency. The current context for quality control, both internal and external, is complicated by sometimes contradictory legal procedures. One important factor for the implementation of good practices was the establishment of an Agency for Development of Higher Education and Quality Assurance. Several factors obstruct and complicate its efficiency. This policy brief is based on a policy research project conducted with the support of the Open Society Fund Bosnia and Herzegovina through the Policy Development Fellowship Programme, the "Ensuring Quality Education in B&H: Quality Teaching in Higher Education - University Sector".

Context

In post-Dayton Bosnia and Herzegovina, the sector of higher education is, as many others, facing serious difficulties in the process of re-adjustment to the new economic system and ever-changing labor markets. The current political structure(s) are not facilitating the timid attempts to readjust Bosnian higher-education system to European standards such as Bologna Process. The recent establishment (at the end 2008) of an Agency for Development of Higher Education and Quality Assurance, however, marks a step forward in this attempt. Just as higher education is not immune to the problems Bosnian society has been facing since 1992, the Agency reflects the contradictions of the BiH political apparatus, as well. The Agency's decisions are under control of lower administrative bodies (entity ministries); legal provisions give it an advisory role; non-expert government officials are included in the decision-making processes; and the provided financial support necessary for efficient functioning is highly dependent on political will. These constraints can, under certain conditions, represent a complication for its efficient functioning, that can in turn result in consequences with far-reaching and multiple negative effects.

Even if we imagine that all the aspects and steps in this attempt of reorganization are positive, a reform of higher education (to improve quality of teaching provided, increase accredited institutions, promote mobility, and develop human capital on the long run) will take, under current socio-political influences, a terribly long time. Unfortunately, recent political developments in Bosnia and Herzegovina show that there is not much time left.

Why do we need such a change? The reason is simple: a strong academia will foster superior and competitive students.

Without it, there is a risk to see one part of future generations sink as underdeveloped and cheap labor for the geographically closest markets. The other part, the educated population might decide to leave and become lost human capital.

In the meantime, the risks (or obstacles) we are currently facing in respect of the quality of higher education can be summarized in the form of five impediments, which have been identified during the interviews with a) academic staff, b) students and c) representatives of administration, in the process of preparation and research for this policy proposal.

These are regrettably associated with the university world and are summarized as follows:

- Corruption
- Nepotism
- Plagiarism
- Absence of control of teaching provided
- Lack of support for further academic/scientific development of the teaching staff

At least three of these (plagiarism, absence of control, lack of support) can be addressed ***immediately*** through targeted support to faculties (as administrative units of universities) that would be defined as invariable standards, and that, as such, ***ought*** to be respected. The propositions of standards control will vary according to the type of policy chosen.

Critique of policy option(s)

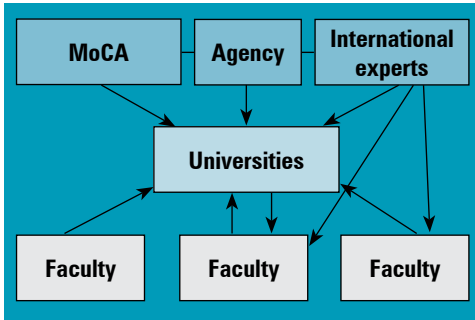
The current situation shows the immediate need for changes in the academia. Several symptoms such as police investigations at Faculty of Law or the scandal of PhD thesis proposals at the Faculty of Architecture (both at the University of Sarajevo) have illustrated an incapability: a) of faculties to deal alone with problems of unethical behavior/plagiarism; b) of relevant institutions i.e. education inspectors to effectively proceed to sanctions; and c) of rectors to impose decisions of ethical committees to their subordinated. This means that existing mechanisms will need either total adjustment or other different, coordinated approaches to be solved. Also, as the market of education has increased drastically, opening up to private capital and international stakeholders, the necessity for efficient control of the teaching provided has grown significantly. This is a concern for all levels of education, but especially for the one preparing citizens to take an active part in the society in which they are living - the sector of higher education.



Policy recommendations

Quality augmentation through international cooperation.

The primary aim of this option would be establishing standards for external quality assurance.



This bottom-up variant will consider the possibility of implementing a quality standard first at the level of faculties. The next step will be coordination at the next level of university. In the higher education sector in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which is highly fragmented, both administratively and institutionally, this option presupposes a minimized opposition on the part of the faculties. They would be guided in the process of accreditation and quality assurance through coordinated efforts of the Agency, international and local experts and faculties.

One problem to this option could be the understaffed and still developing Agency, whose experts will need time and experience to adapt to the different types of education proposed (i.e. Art and Music Academies, Medical Schools). The general standards have been defined in accordance with Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area.

Complementary to this is the following **Even-handed Quality Self-Assessment**.

Within this model, faculties' managements will need trainings in order to be enabled to articulate different segments necessary for functional self-evaluation procedures. Standards for internal quality assurance and its consistency among different stakeholders will be required. Certain universities that participated in the survey have already created offices for quality assurance.

This shows that, although timid, the initial elements necessary to quality self-assess-

ment are present, at least in five of eight public higher education institutions.

Also, this implies a conscience of the future framework of the higher education institution, profiles the hiring of future staff and, as a consequence, the specific orientation its different departments will take.

The problem would be to implement self-evaluation standards in the institutions that do not have quality assurance units or the budget / capability to effectively apply them.

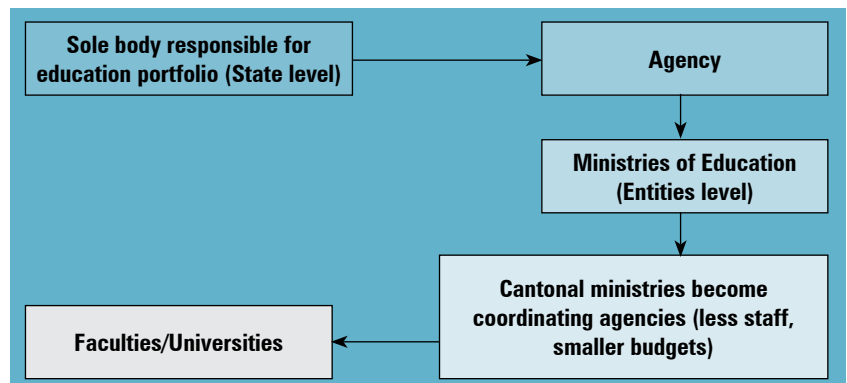
During research for the policy proposal on which this brief is based, **only a minor part of contacted universities and colleges, both private and public (10 out of 31) actually took the time to take part in the survey.**

There can be several reasons for this. It is either quality teaching is not a priority (this would be highly questionable, as far as their primary goal as institutions is concerned) or they fear the consequences of such surveys. In both cases, it would be a euphemism to qualify it as being irresponsible.

This however reflects the need to work directly in the field and give faculties/universities the tools to do it efficiently. The parallel implementation of these two policy options is, in this case, fundamental. Ideally, they would be completed with an additional third option, which is outlined below.

Two-fold centralization

The powers of university rectors should be increased through the depletion of the influence of individual faculties, and at the same time, cantonal ministries should devolve into minor public coordination agencies that will have significantly less staff and influence.





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Conclusion

Although these options are presented as three separate alternatives to increase efficiency in control and assessment, they would be most effective when applied in parallel. Most of the tools for their implementation already exist, and their application should be accelerated through a planned accreditation of institutions for higher education. Reform of higher education and the control of quality of teaching provided could have multiple positive effects on short terms by increasing attractiveness of Bosnian universities and prevent further brain-drain. On the long term the country's economy would benefit from adapted education and eventually facilitate its path to European Higher Education Area. To resume, more control and sanctioning is necessary in order to strengthen universities' capabilities and increase their attractiveness on the global market.

Sources Consulted or Recommended

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A "Policy Development Fellowship Program" has been launched by the Open Society Fund BiH in early 2004 with the aim to improve BiH policy research and dialogue and to contribute to the development of a sound policy-making culture based on informative and empirically grounded policy options. The program provides an opportunity for selected fellows to collaborate with the Open Society Fund in conducting policy research and writing a policy study with the support of mentors and trainers during the whole process. Sixty three fellowships have been granted in three cycles since the starting of the Program. All policy studies are available at www.soros.org.ba