

Higher Education, Ideology and Politics in the Post-Soviet Countries

Multifaceted developmental processes called by the generic name of “globalization” are changing social systems around the world. These changes have led to fundamental shifts in ideological contents and political practices of contemporary societies. This on-going global development requires cadres with new competences who are able to effectively function in the new institutional structures of public and private spheres. Thus, globalization has placed unprecedented requirements on higher education systems in the West and the East, in the North and the South.

Part of globalization is being channeled through the expansion of higher education systems outside of national borders. This expansion is simultaneously competitive and collaborative. It reshapes local, national, and regional academic landscapes. It creates new opportunities for educational champions and risks to those who lag behind. Higher education can become the crucial factor for improved understanding and advancement of knowledge for the whole of humankind, and yet can enforce competition among nations. The future of nations is now in direct dependence upon how adequately and creatively they are able to respond to global needs and challenges.

Post-Soviet countries have had too many developmental problems in the past two decades to respond to globalization effectively and in a timely manner. Ukraine, Russia, Belarus, and Moldova have barely managed to support the effective growth and functioning of their educational systems. Adequate educational reforms still remain a critical need and the aim, but not the reality, in Eastern Europe.

Scholars, educators, and leaders of university communities have met in Kyiv in April 2012 to discuss successes and drawbacks of educational progress in Ukraine and the wider region. The conference “*Higher Education in Ukraine: Internationalization, Reform, Innovation*” was initiated by the Fulbright Program in Ukraine as part of the 20th anniversary celebration of its establishment in Ukraine in 1992. The Conference Organizing Committee united a large number of organizations, agencies, institutions, and foreign embassies which have been working since Ukraine’s achievement of independence in 1991 to enhance higher education in Ukraine and to provide international educational

and research opportunities to Ukrainian students, scholars, and professionals.¹ In addition, a number of these programs support students and scholars from their countries to work, study, conduct research, and teach in Ukrainian institutions of higher education, research institutes, and non-governmental organizations, thus enriching the educational experiences of all involved. The goal of this conference was to provide an open and public forum for discussion of the principal areas of reform - as defined by the governmental organs of higher education in Ukraine, universities, and agencies and organizations working to improve higher education - which will bring Ukrainian higher education to new levels of excellence and greater integration and competitiveness in the global educational sphere. Conference speakers included prominent education professionals from Ukraine, the U.S., and Europe, including from many countries that have made the transition from a Soviet education system. They discussed the reforms that have already been attempted and those that would be implemented, and shared their experiences and results in initiating these changes in their countries and institutions. The main issue of all discussions was the improvement of higher education - the hope and aspiration of Ukraine and all other countries as they strive to define and secure their place in the world of the 21st century.

The editorial team of the Ideology and Politics Journal and specialists of the Fulbright Program in Ukraine have selected reports from the conference to present views from around the world on perspectives of educational reforms in Ukraine and neighboring countries, as well as on global challenges and local responses from governments of Eastern Europe. The current issue of the Ideology and Politics Journal presents an array of global questions, glocal responses, and ideological challenges that have arisen in the course of the formation of new post-Soviet societies. We hope that this publication will assist decision-makers in political and academic communities to better understand the aims and tested approaches in making higher education become a driving force of a nation's success.

Mykhailo Minakov

Editor-in-Chief, Ideology and Politics Journal

Foundation for Good Politics, Kyiv, Ukraine

Myron O. Stachiw

Director, Fulbright Program in Ukraine

Institute of International Education, Kyiv,
Ukraine

¹ The whole list of dedicated partners participating in the Conference Organizing Committee can be seen at the conference site: <http://www.educationconferenceua2012.org.ua/index.php/conf1/2012>