

Emancipating Higher Education in Ukraine from the Post-Soviet Legacy: A Problem of Trust and Academic Excellence

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Abstract

In this article the problems and challenges in the Ukrainian higher education arising from its Soviet legacy are disclosed and analyzed. Among others, decline of humanities and social sciences, divorce between education and research within university setting, myth of self-sufficiency and reluctance towards international collaboration, corrosion of culture of academic freedom and university autonomy, corruption of academic ethos are discussed. Special attention is paid to the contemporary attempts to promote university autonomy and culture of academic excellence which are seen as essential prerequisites for emancipation of higher education in Ukraine from its most conspicuous Soviet remnants. The potential of higher education institutions to become the vehicles of social change and cultural transition in Ukraine is studied.

Key words: higher education, Ukraine, Soviet legacy, university autonomy, academic excellence.

“Laws without morals are useless”

The motto of the University of Pennsylvania¹

Introduction

The Soviet Union disappeared from the political world map more than 20 years ago. As Ukraine and other post-Soviet countries got their political independence in 1990-1991, legally speaking, the Soviet communist system of governance ceased to exist. Next year, the first generation of university graduates that was born in independent Ukraine will enter the scene of public life in the country. The Soviet Union is left behind in history as a political entity. But was it overcome and given up in cultural memory and everyday practices of common people and social elite in Ukraine? Did it not continue to exist “on the major hemispheres of people’s brain” (ANDRUKHOVYCH, 2002, p.33)? Did it lose not only legality but also legitimacy? Do not Soviet *ordo amoris* and social structures keep reproducing themselves in people’s behavior, cultural practices, and social institutions of contemporary Ukraine?

¹ Penn’s motto comes from a line from Horace’s III.24 (Book 3, Ode 24), “quid leges sine moribus vanae proficiunt.”

The post-Soviet elements and traces of social adaptation of the Soviet in contemporary life abound in economics, social reality, education, cultural memory, everyday life. In this article, I am going to focus on the effects and repercussions of the Soviet legacy in higher education in Ukraine. I am not so much interested in the visible traces and hard facts of post-Soviet presence in Ukrainian education, like the preservation of certain Soviet-born educational agencies and even their old names, or Soviet-like systems of State financing of higher education, or even constitutional limitations on the rights of religious organizations to establish institutions of higher learning entitled to confer state recognized academic degrees, etc. I am rather concerned with cultural, psychological, and symbolical appearances and workings of the Soviet in Ukrainian higher education. George G. Grabowicz (1999, p.4) calls it *cultural style*. In his opinion, “independent Ukraine in many respects keeps living by the rules of the Soviet system. Its institutions, its cadre, its political style, its state agencies, its cultural and academic policies, different forms of hybridity and mimics, and perhaps, even the style of its corruption very naturally fit the Soviet model.” Ukraine and its higher education still remains a battlefield between two interpretations of the modern Ukrainian identity – European and post-Soviet, even if, unlike in Russia, the Soviet identity does not get an outspoken institutional support from the government and it exists more by inertia.

Where did the Soviet legacy make itself manifest and palpable in higher education most of all? It manifested itself in the severe decline of humanities and social sciences. It caused the divorce between education and research within the university setting. It gave rise to a myth of self-sufficiency and engendered reluctance and anxiety about international collaboration. It brought up a collapse of culture of academic freedom and severely handicapped university autonomy. And, finally, it led to far-reaching corruption and corrosion of academic ethos. In this sense, the Soviet legacy significantly impeded and crooked the potential of higher education institutions to become the vehicles of social change and cultural transition, engines of dynamic and irreversible transformation of the whole of social life in Ukraine.

Universities across Europe and worldwide are cast in motion by discussions about their changing role as social institutions. In Europe, this happens under the influence of the Lisbon strategy declared by the European Council in 2000. According to this strategy, universities are called to become partners in creating the most competitive and dynamic, knowledge-based economy in the world. Universities are urged to assist European society to become more sustainable in its economic growth, to create more job opportunities and achieve better social cohesion. This goal is supposed to be reached through consistent modernization of the higher education system which is being implemented in Europe under the title of the Bologna process.

Ukraine is an example of delayed modernity where the processes of nation-building are far from being completed, the processes of cultural self-identification and social consolidation are still under way, and, finally, post-communist traumas are still strongly felt. In this context, Ukrainian universities have to perform both traditional and modern tasks. They have not only to pursue truth, develop civil virtues, and shape national identity but also take into account this new role of universities in the contemporary world, their mission to transform society into the competitive and appealing living space.

To a large extent, Ukraine remains a post-Soviet country, in particular in its higher education. In my opinion, the emancipation from the Soviet legacy can be achieved by (1) the improvement of the quality of higher education through internationalization of the universities; (2) modernization of higher education by increasing the autonomy of higher education institutions; (3) radical reduction of corruption practices by strengthening accountability and promoting solidarity of academic community for the academic excellence.

A new start: challenges and opportunities

What can be done for quality improvement of higher education in Ukraine? It is widely acknowledged that the Soviet Union had a system of higher education that was strongly bound on the world largest industry of military production and trade. Mathematics, natural and technical sciences enjoyed enormous intellectual and material resources. In some sense, Soviet natural scientists were setting world standards in their fields. Importantly, they could practice these sciences with relative *freedom of conscience*, always under severe control of security service, but never – with some exceptions – under direct ideological pressure in their scientific work. Humanities and social sciences were quite another story. They were vigorously dominated by the communist ideology and finally denigrated into the status of indoctrination vehicle. Theology was downgraded to superstition and manifestation of intellectual impotency and denied any access to the temple of science. It is no wonder that during the Soviet time it were mostly scholars from natural sciences like Andrey Sakharov who became prominent as human rights activists and defenders of political freedom. Free-thinkers in humanities could not be born within the system.

It is worth mentioning that at its dawn the Soviet Union tried to dispense with such institutions as universities. These were perceived as dangerous and potentially disloyal for the project of coining a new anthropological type – *homo sovieticus*. Universities were first reorganized into vocational institutions of higher learning to prepare professionals in applied sciences and crafts. In the thirties they were brought back into the system but deprived of their genuine mission and resources to do and advance science. Research was moved almost completely into the structure of the Academy of Sciences while universities were subdued to perform the didactic task to train ideologically minded pragmatic specialists and educate loyal citizens. Around the same time the Higher Attestation Committee was created with a centralized power over the whole Soviet Union to award academic degrees and monitor all doctoral theses in order to avoid the conferring of doctoral degrees to ideologically unreliable scholars. It is notable about Ukraine that this institution has formally survived into nowadays. Though it ceased to perform direct ideological functions, it keeps exercising centralized state control over universities and their practice of conferring doctoral degrees.

After the breakdown of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War the military industry was significantly reduced. Ukraine still remains one of the largest world producers and exporters of military equipment, but this is incomparable in scale with the Soviet military system. It was a sobering and painful experience to realize that it is not that easy to move smoothly from missiles to home electronic equipment production. The severe economic crisis of nineties undermined the prestige of natural sciences education and drove large quantities of talented intellectuals forever away from this occupation. Those who wanted not only to stay in the field but excel in it were forced to emigrate and inaugurated the brain drain trend in Ukraine. A troublesome discontinuity of old and very young generations of scholars became manifest and felt. Only during recent years the situation started getting better with the rise and rapid growth of software companies² in Ukraine that make mathematical and technical sciences appealing once again to younger generation.

After communist ideological assault on humanities and social sciences there was a need for a new start in these fields almost from scratch. This was true both about traditional areas like philosophy, history, sociology, psychology, etc. and about new ones like

² Lviv is an outstanding example of the proliferation and business success story of software companies in Ukraine. For the last eight years, software development production in Ukraine increased ten times becoming a strong rival for its counterparts in India and Russia.

management, entrepreneurship, social communication, computer sciences, etc. In some fields it was only natural to borrow scholars from the neighboring subjects and make them familiar with new knowledge through special training programs. But it was also not rare that imitation or mere ideological twist was adopted as a strategy for a new start. Thus, history became a victim of ideological twist rather than methodological or paradigmatic innovation when it was employed for history politics and cultural wars. Likewise, religious studies were occupied by the former scholars of the so-called *scientific atheism*.

Those who cared about academic quality had to be industrious, creative, and patient. A good case study in this regard is a situation with the return of theology to the Ukrainian intellectual scene. Since theology as an academic subject was banned in the Soviet State, after gaining independence there was no theologian with an academic degree available in Ukraine. A deep distrust to theology inherited from the Soviet times made intellectual establishment reluctant and even inimical about the recognition of theology as a university subject and its return to the university curriculum. Any institution that committed itself to establishing a theology program came across the complaint “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” (John 1:46). Institutions of higher learning inspired by religious organizations were confronted with the same questions. Can one really expect from the higher education institution that was given rise by some religious community a genuine commitment and capability to maintain high academic standards? Can spiritually inspired education correspond to the rigorous criteria of research and intellectual culture that are current in secular academic communities? The only way to argue convincingly was to create and run high quality programs. It took 14 years before theology was recognized by the government and students of theology could receive academic degrees recognized by the Ukrainian State. And the only way to start such a program was to make students learn modern foreign languages, invite visiting professors from abroad, send best graduates to international universities for doctoral studies and urge them to return back to Ukraine and establish a new faculty.

Ukraine has never made a persistent and successful effort to cope with the separation of research and education epitomized in the institutional distinctness of universities and the Academy of Sciences. Though research is conceived to be an integral part of mission and academic career at the university, the overwhelming portion of state funding for research goes to the Academy of Sciences and not universities. A dynamic cooperation between research, innovation based industries and universities is rather an exception and for the time being has no significant effect on accumulation of research funds. Thus, return of research into university should become a priority for any reasonable reform of higher education in Ukraine. It can not only revitalize didactic practices and bring the content of university education more up to date. It can be also conducive for quality improvement of higher education thus making it more appealing to different stakeholders. Otherwise, universities run the risk of becoming the museums of outdated knowledge, conservative institutions for knowledge reproduction rather than leaders of social advancement.

In terms of its content, Ukrainian higher education suffers much from excessive bureaucratization. Ukraine badly needs a new generation of standards that bring academic subjects to international level of research in respective areas, to the competitive demands of constantly changing social and economic environment, to the needs of local communities. Today the interaction between the Ministry of Education and Science and universities is a perfect example of paternalistic culture which makes universities reluctant to show any initiative for reform and unable to act on the principle of subsidiarity. The content of the curriculum is defined from 65 to 85% by the ministry as if academic community is ignorant about what needs to be taught. Students are given very limited possibility of choosing the subjects on their own and are denied the power to avoid lectures of a bad professor by signing

up for another class. This kills their motivation and literally drives many of them out of the classroom to look very early for a job where they can get more relevant knowledge and skills.

In 2005, Ukraine signed the Bologna declaration and joined the Bologna process aimed at the modernization of higher education in Europe. This made Ukrainian universities more active in various international projects and networks. International exposure is crucial for updating academic standards and culture, for overcoming seeming self-sufficiency and self-complacency of many Ukrainian universities. During the Soviet times scholars were separated from international academic community and discourse. It is hardly possible to believe now that to read a book by some *bourgeois* philosopher one had to get a special permission from the security service. These restrictions are gone but what is not gone is a very limited knowledge of modern foreign languages among the majority of middle- and old-aged professors in Ukraine. This hampers not only their scholarly activity but also communication with their peers abroad. The number of scholarly publications in English among Ukrainian scholars is negligible. This prompts Ukrainian academic establishment to erect a *wall of separation* from international community and promote a myth of scholarly nativism thus adopting a protectionist attitude towards anything that comes from outside the system. The best example of protectionism is a severely bureaucratized, complicated and time-consuming procedure for the recognition of academic degrees earned by Ukrainians abroad. Any degree in any subject conferred by any university in the world needs to be officially approved by the ministry after tiresome and even humiliating verification procedure that includes the second defense of the thesis in front of the academic council. It is not the university that makes the final decision about the recognition of a degree but the ministry. The applicant feels like a traitor who by his/her decision to pursue a degree abroad declares the Ukrainian system of higher education impotent and unreliable.

Drive for university autonomy: a problem of trust

One of the most important steps in the modernization of higher education is an attempt to promote the autonomy of higher education institutions. This could endorse the accountability of the universities for the results of their work. Though there is always some risk of abusing such freedom, however, any such risk could be controlled and reduced. It is important to acknowledge that academic community could be creative and productive only when it does not work under pressure and there is an internal engine in its desire to create new knowledge. For this it needs autonomy.

If Ukrainian universities want to become the centers of quality education, rigorous science, efficient management, and mature academic culture, where honesty is respected, they will need more autonomy and university self-governance. The research done by the European University Association (2009, 2011) has shown that the culture of academic excellence directly depends on the level of institutional autonomy of a university. The less autonomy a university enjoys, the less motivation its administration and professors have for taking responsibility for the final result of their work.

Moreover, the students are the ones who need more autonomy to really start caring for the quality of their education. It is impossible to give a student good education, if he/she does not want it. And how can we learn about his/her intention? We can give him/her opportunity to choose among the best of what the university offers. Perhaps, this will also help a professor to recognize in a student his/her younger partner, individual person and not a member of a crowd. The opportunity to independently design at least half of the curriculum can grant to a university and its students a unique profile. There will not be a uniform history or sociology curriculum any more, but each program will enjoy its distinctive character and shape non-

average graduates. Educational managers will be urged to think more about issues of marketing, of conveying the distinctness of their program among others, making it more recognizable and appealing to young people.

For a Ukrainian university the issue of financial self-governance is crucial. The cumbersome and discriminating system of financial management does not allow achieving efficient concentration of talents among students and faculty. Such a concentration is a precondition for a breakthrough in preparing highly qualified professionals. There is no impossibility in becoming financially autonomous. One has to work more creatively. One has to respect and love one's students to make them appreciative for their studies at the university. A human person is good and apt to gratitude. Why not follow the example of American universities in their success to unite their graduates around their *alma mater*? Why not start working closely with entrepreneurs for designing such programs that would respond to their concerns? Why not compete for international grants? To achieve this, one needs to learn modern foreign languages and engage young talented professionals who come back to Ukraine enriched with professional contacts and robust ambition to spend their energy for research and not for competition with centralized bureaucracy, for getting their diploma or academic degree recognized.

There is no ready-made solution for full financial independence. Even in the US the most self-governed universities engage in various types of collaboration with the State and receive funds from the government. Ukraine needs to stimulate collaboration of higher education institutions with businesses by introducing appropriate legal changes concerning more favorable tax policies or private investments in higher education and research. To achieve this, universities have to discover their dignity, their potential to make difference, and their responsibility for social change.

Sometimes there is a fear about increasing university autonomy. What if this idea fails and gets compromised? Any good idea could be abused, unfortunately. Autonomy is indeed a delicate instrument and will not work in the hands of a barbarian. That is why universities should be required to demonstrate openness, transparency, and accountability. What matters is accountability not only to the State but rather to society. University stakeholders should be given a possibility to evaluate the efficiency of resources management, the university's fidelity to its strategic plans, the level of its graduates' employment, the adequacy of university performance to its mission, and other Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). Rectors must become public figures and bear responsibility for the promotion of civil society rather than simply look into minister's pocket. The best test of the results of introducing university autonomy should be the public opinion of experts, employers, journalists, and public leaders. It is critical not to stay silent but to call things by their true names with all responsibility and commitment.

The turning point for the realization by the larger academic community and general public in Ukraine that university autonomy in the country had only been an empty declaration was the presidential election campaign of 2004. Many universities complied with outspoken political pressure on the part of the authorities in various nasty ways. Some rectors became official representatives of the government candidate; others signed declarations in his support or exerted pressure on the students to vote for him. Servility in the Ukrainian academic establishment became a commonplace rather than an exception.

In response to that, eight universities, both state and private, with the help of the Renaissance Foundation launched in 2005 the project called "Consortium for University Autonomy". This consortium was a civil initiative *from below* and aimed at exploring and introducing a new model of genuine university autonomy. It implied more self-governance

and accountability in academic, managerial and financial issues. For example, it stressed the right of a university to have the final say on awarding an academic degree or more power in defining the structure and content of academic curricula, and so on. In a word, it was a classic example of an attempt at democratization and decentralization of academic and higher education governing policies, an attempt to implement the classical principle of subsidiarity in the academic world, that is, to locate decision-making mechanisms as much as possible on the level at which problems and challenges arise.

Though university autonomy became one of the major concerns of the academic community in Ukraine (so much that even the Ministry of Education and Science could not ignore the fact and included some references to university autonomy in its proposal for the new law on higher education), the project has not fully succeeded to date. There is still a lack of trust between universities and the Ministry of Education and Science. In general, one can talk about a vicious circle that impairs policies for academic freedom and university autonomy. On the one hand, universities are not trusted because they compromised themselves by their servile attitude, for example, by granting degrees to politicians for nothing. Of course, this happened for an obvious reason, namely, because universities were vulnerable to outspoken political pressure. And why was that? They were obviously not autonomous enough. Discovering how to break out of this vicious circle is one of the most urgent challenges for the Ukrainian higher education.

The culture of excellence versus the *culture of irresponsibility* in the academia

In 2005, after the Orange revolution removed all political pressure, many academics, surprisingly enough, have kept behaving as if infected with deeply seated conformism and a lack of motivation and skills to be fully free and make use of their freedom. A telling example was the election of Volodymyr Lytvyn³ publicly accused of plagiarism to the position of the Vice-President of the National Academy of Sciences⁴. This election happened without any pressure, only because the majority of people acted paternalistically towards somebody influential enough to take care of them and maintain or even bring some more privileges.

Thus, in our opinion, the principal obstacles at present to implementing the principles of academic freedom and university autonomy in Ukraine are not so much of a political, legal or economic but of cultural character. A powerful handicap against the promotion of university autonomy in Ukraine is not only bureaucracy as an external antagonist but the academic community itself. A culture of excellence and its promotion and internalization cultivated by the larger academic community is an indispensable prerequisite for academic freedom and university autonomy. Moreover, academic excellence cannot be built and defended without solidarity in fighting academic dishonesty, and the international cooperation of both faculty and students in establishing a mature academic culture with new appealing standards and values.

According to general acknowledgement, the fundamental problem in governing higher education in Ukraine is the lack of trust between universities and the structures responsible for

³ Mr. Lytvyn authored 40 books of which 3 books were written in 2000, 8 in 2001, 6 in 2002, 6 in 2003, 8 in 2004, and just 2 in 2005. It is instructive to see overlapping in his scholarly productivity and political career. In 1999 -2002, Mr. Lytvyn served as a Head of the Presidential Administration and, in 2002-2004 he was a speaker of the Ukrainian parliament.

⁴ In 2001, Volodymyr Lytvyn translated and attributed to himself an article by Thomas Carother's "Civil Society". On numerous occasions he copied the original article word by word. It is also ironic that in 2002 Mr. Lytvyn published a book entitled "The Protection of Intellectual Property". In 2006, two eminent Ukrainian historians demonstrated Mr. Lytvyn's plagiarism in several of his history books.

governing education. One of the typical arguments against the need for wider autonomy and its expediency for solving chronic problems of Ukrainian higher education comes from the ministerial bureaucrats, who, perhaps defending the *honor of their uniform*, believe that granting greater autonomy will lead to the loss of leveraging influence and control on the part of the Ministry of Education and Science regarding the activities of universities. And that, it is said, inevitably will lead to more abuses in the sphere of higher education. As a consequence, we have a constant temptation to move along the path of stricter and stricter legislation, limiting the activities of higher education and subordinating it to a centralized control on the part of the executive branch of the government.

In the long run, the path of legislative limitations and centralized control is self-defeating. A paternalistic approach to the governance of the educational realm does not automatically remove dishonesty from the university environment; rather it demoralizes a healthy intellectual community. So, the question is how to create an academic realm imbued with public trust?

In our opinion, it is necessary to look for an answer by leaving the vicious circle of suspicion and distrust. On the one hand, legislation should focus on the principal things, and not imprison academics in small details which do not help solving real problems but rather serve to remind intellectuals about who is the boss. On the other hand, the academic community itself, being aware of its specific mission and identity, should create a public culture of non-tolerance for any violation of academic honesty and abuse of academic freedom. Unless it demonstrates solidarity in fighting corruption, by openly discussing cases of the misuse of academic values, we will not be able to create an alternative to *Potemkin villages* in Ukrainian higher education. As long as the academic community remains a “silent community” which silently tolerates awarding counterfeit academic degrees to politicians, continues to invite to conferences and place in honored positions government plagiarists⁵, to close its eyes to corrupt patterns of relations between student and teacher, as long as it does not start discussing and condemning all this openly and bravely in the public space, as long as it pretends that everything in the house is perfectly all right, so until that time we will not see any Ukrainian university in the higher league of world universities. In the long term perspective, public solidarity in the moral rejection of academic dishonesty could be more efficient than any restrictive or punitive measures implied by legislation.

We should reject the idea that the State Authority is often trying to persuade the public, that the only alternative to the omnipotence of the law is lawlessness and anarchy. The real alternative to both extremes is autonomy, literally self-governance, a civil society. In this light both authoritarianism and anarchy become manifestations of heteronomy, making the human person dependent on factors which do not allow one to lead the free life that corresponds to human dignity. Real autonomy, as Kant (1788) convincingly argued, has nothing in common with particular egoism. It is closely connected with respect for the dignity of another person and his or her inseparable rights and it precisely foresees the rule – as opposed to the omnipotence – of law as a necessary pre-condition for creating a space in which dialogue and compromise for the benefit of the common good become possible.

It is generally known that the weaker the moral connections and ethical guidelines of an academic community are, there is more temptation for government interference in its life,

⁵ In August, 2011 Raisa Bogatyreva, then the Ukrainian Secretary of National Security and Defense and now the Minister of Health Care of Ukraine, plagiarized Steve Jobs’ Stanford Speech in 2005. She was addressing the participants of the convocation ceremony at one of the most prestigious Ukrainian universities “Kyiv-Mohyla Academy”. The Ukrainian Security Council said that “Bogatyreva „reads a lot” and that Jobs’ speech may have inspired her.”

the more there is a danger of transforming the law into a stick for the disobedient and a punishing sword for the disloyal. A healthy ethos will protect the law from its potential deformation into simply a mechanism for preventing the committing of evil acts, in the better instance, and in the worse, into a means of leveling and punishing any deviation or difference from the single correct opinion coming down from above, that of those who are in power. In a civil, republican society with a developed and internalized ethos, the law is able to carry out its natural function – to create possibilities for doing good things and harmonizing the common good with the right of the citizen to free self-realization.

A separate challenge to the balanced existence of ethos and law is the radicalized post-modernist position with its *anything goes* slogan. Washing away general ethical norms in the name of unlimited individual freedom, interpretation of the very category of universality as a discursive strategy for domination leads to a misbalance in the co-existence of ethos and law. Hence, the direct danger of substituting an all-encompassing law for ethos and its functions, legalism for civic trust, all the way to the characteristic distortions that one could see in the example of being obsessed with the legalistic perception of any human relations. The paradox lies in the fact that even the most perfect legislation, the most indulgent in details, cannot become a panacea for abuses. So there is no surprise at the fact that for all the postmodernist *playing with notions*, the modern liberal lexicon is not able to reject the clearly value-oriented and far from neutral categories of *respect for the law*, *law abiding status*, *the primacy of law*, and *a culture based on law*, as a consequence of becoming aware that, without an appropriate ethos, legal practices cannot have that effect that they are expected to bring.

George Grabowicz (1999) makes the illuminating observation that one can hardly give an example of some VIP person in Ukraine who would voluntarily resign after being accused of violating some professional principles and norms. The most recent example from October, 2011 was a scandal with the brand-new English published book “Opportunity Ukraine” by Viktor Yanukovich, the President of Ukraine. He was accused of plagiarism in the book with many parts of it being borrowed with the help of “copy-paste” procedure from various sources. Yanukovich’s office first denied all the accusations. But, finally, the entire fault was attributed to the translator of the book into English who was said to carelessly delete most of the footnotes from the book. Needless to say, that Mr. Yanukovich remained in office⁶.

Based on such social experience, Grabowicz speaks about a *culture of irresponsibility* which results from despising and being indifferent to any appeal to one’s subordination to and internalization of certain standards as wishful thinking, as utopian idealism. Hence, a commitment to quality in teaching and research is not an imperative of the general academic public. No academician can live up to the demands of academic freedom and university autonomy unless one is first free in one’s academic conscience of all disgrace that comes with academic dishonesty. If one carefully looks at what is published in Ukraine in numerous university journals or what is sent as proposals for presentation in response to conference calls, the lack of a culture of excellence becomes obvious. There is hardly any culture in the strict sense, if one means a certain degree of internalized norms of scholarly production, social demand for academic excellence, institutions and symbolic means for promoting excellence and expelling poor quality, creative environments committed to excellence, and so on. Andriy Portnov is definitely right when he stresses that the “imperative of excellence is a private matter of the academic conscience of an individual scholar, and not of the corporate

⁶ It is instructive to compare the Ukrainian situation with two cases from Germany. In March, 2011 German Defense Minister Karl-Theodor zu Guttenberg voluntarily resigned after being accused of plagiarism. It was found that more than a hundred pages in the minister’s doctoral thesis were copied without being cited. And, in February, 2013 Education Minister Annette Schavan resigned after Heinrich Heine University in Duesseldorf decided to withdraw her doctorate, finding that she plagiarized some parts of her thesis written back in 1980.

culture.” (PORTNOV, 2006, p.18) In other words, *structures of justification* of academic excellence are still missing.

It is no wonder that the Ukrainian higher education establishment has developed a highly sophisticated system of privileges and distinctions administered by the State which, for the most part, have nothing to do with excellence but serve as markers of power and career success in the academia. In such an environment an academic career is a matter of being in tune with political correctness and the current Zeitgeist.

A culture of excellence depends very much on a culture of critique which presupposes fundamental confidence that each of us is really concerned about the quality of our academic work, that excellence is a common good of the academic community. This lack of confidence, as it was indicated above, partially explains attempts at more severe regulation of the academic space from outside through more and more detailed legislation. Hence, appealing exclusively to quantitative rather than qualitative indications for rating universities. Hence, the outright suspicion of the State Authorities towards private schools and giving preferences in the new draft of the law on higher education to state universities.

Now, a culture of excellence and the internalization of honesty cannot be commanded or enforced. Students and teachers are to be convinced, persuaded, that academic freedom and university autonomy do make a difference in a decent intellectual life. To become motivated, excited about academic freedom and university autonomy, people need to meet those who witness to the blessings of academic values through their attitude and work. In this context, the international mobility of Ukrainian academics is critical as a tool for making Ukrainian scholars more familiar with the best models of intellectual life. The students bring back home not only the intellectual achievements of modern international scholarship but also an academic culture and values, professional norms and standards. A powerful impulse for academic quality should come from students and society in general. Excellence in education becomes more of an appeal to people the less corrupted society is in its social transactions. There is no way to realize a modern, complex society without commitment to academic excellence and university autonomy.

Let us return to the question of whether it is possible, and how, to create in Ukrainian higher education the space of public trust and healthy academic culture that is needed to foster academic freedom and university autonomy. Certainly this will not happen in one day, all at once and completely. Here, rather, the tactic of small victories can work. The radius of trust needs to spread gradually, relying on the already existing positive experience of institutions of higher education with fairly limited but real autonomy and developed academic culture. Their witness in maintaining high standards of education and scholarship are the best argument for the benefit of autonomy as a synthesis of an active academic ethos with the authority of an internalized law.

By way of conclusion I would like to mention the fact that annually about 75% of Ukrainian high school graduates become students at the universities. So it is clear that the better universities are, the more positive and far-reaching impact they can have on the whole of Ukrainian society. There is still much to be done to overcome distrust between the State, universities, employers, students and professors so that all of them work for their common good. As a post-Soviet country, Ukraine badly needs to establish a new higher education system and style to educate qualified professionals, responsible citizens, and people with good common sense.

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