



POLICY BRIEFS

KOSOVO



Konrad  
Adenauer  
Stiftung

**KOSOVO'S PUBLIC  
UNIVERSITIES –  
ACADEMIC INTEGRITY IN  
JEOPARDY**

April 2014

[www.kas.de/kosovo](http://www.kas.de/kosovo)

Dr. Qëndrim R. Gashi

Associate Professor

University of Prishtina\*

## 1. CONTEXT AND IMPORTANCE OF THE PROBLEM

### 1.1. Introduction

"The ability of the University to achieve its purposes depends upon the quality and integrity of the academic work that its faculty, staff, and students perform. Academic freedom can flourish only in a community of scholars which recognizes that intellectual integrity, with its accompanying rights and responsibilities, lies at the heart of its mission. Observing basic honesty in one's work, words, ideas, and actions is a principle to which all members of the community are required to subscribe."<sup>1</sup>

According to the International Center for Academic Integrity, *academic integrity* is "a commitment, even in the face of adversity, to five fundamental values: honesty, trust, fairness, respect, and responsibility."<sup>2</sup> In 2013, a sixth value, "courage to act on them in the face of adversity"<sup>3</sup> was added to this list.

Recently, accusations of grave breaches of fundamental norms of scholarly integrity rocked the largest university in Kosovo, University of Prishtina. These accusations affect not only the reputation of the oldest university in Kosovo, but also the quality of learning outcomes and experiences its students are offered. And, it is precisely the quality of learning outcomes and "not the length of schooling, which makes the difference."<sup>4</sup> Human capital, innovation, and knowledge are thus victims of an academic environment lacking integrity, and consequently the impact is felt in the wider society.

This Policy Brief gives a short overview of the state of affairs regarding academic integrity in Kosovo's institutions of higher education, with an emphasis on public universities, and it gives some concrete recommendations to address the present alarming situation.

---

<sup>1</sup> Princeton University (2013), *Rights, Rules, and Responsibilities*

<sup>2</sup> The Center for Academic Integrity (1999), *The Fundamental Values of Academic Integrity*

<sup>3</sup> The Center for Academic Integrity (2013), *The Fundamental Values of Academic Integrity*

<sup>4</sup> OECD (2010), *The High Cost of Low Educational Performance: The Long-run Economic Impact of Improving PISA Outcomes*, PISA, OECD Publishing

### 1.2. Recent debates on the University of Prishtina

October 2013 was not just the start of a new academic year at the University of Prishtina (UP). It also marked the beginning of the untangling of a web of corrupt practices and egregious violations of academic integrity at the premier institution of higher learning in Kosovo. It all started with the news that the leadership of the university had published articles of extremely low quality in dubious international journals in order to get promoted to higher academic ranks.

The reputation of the university sank to a new low when a month and a half later the Kosovo police arrested 11 individuals who were operating as part of a criminal ring that was influencing various university decisions, from student enrollment and course grades, to administration appointments.

And the coup de grâce took place when a humorous article poking fun at Karl Marx and university management appeared in the same journal that the then-UP rector and some of his colleagues had published.

The furor that ensued manifested itself in the form of a student protest in front of the UP Rector's Office, which was also joined by prominent civil society and human rights activists and media representatives. In the course of the protest violence was used both against and by the protesters, although it is not clear who started the acts of violence in each case. The protesters demanded the resignation of the rector and, after a two-week struggle, their demand was met. Academic integrity, long neglected in this part of the world, won its first battle, but enormous challenges remain at UP and for all other institutions of higher education in Kosovo, both public and private.

### 1.3. Background on the University of Prishtina and other public universities in Kosovo

Founded in 1970, the University of Prishtina has been a central institution in Kosovo's education system. Until a decade ago, it was also the only university in Kosovo.

From its inception, UP played a key role in political developments in Kosovo and it was, at the same time, a victim of political interferences.

It was the scene of massive student-led protests in 1981 that demanded wider rights for Albanians in the former Yugoslavia, but also endured intellectual purges and intimidation by the Yugoslav communist regime.

It is important to note that due to academic staff shortages, during the first decade of its existence, UP invited guest lecturers from other former Yugoslav universities (Belgrade, Zagreb, etc.) and from University of Tirana. One could argue that, unfortunately, incoming mobility in the 1970s was much stronger than in subsequent decades and that mobility had important positive consequences on building an intellectual environment in and around UP.

During the 1990s, UP was banned by Milosevic's regime and was forced to operate in private houses, under suppression and intimidation and isolated from the rest of the world. UP hosted the 'intellectual elite', which rapidly became the 'political elite' of the aspiring country and organized the 1990s pacifist struggle for Kosovo's independence. UP inevitably came under the control of that elite. After the war, the influence over the university changed hands to the political parties affiliated with the 1998-1999 armed struggles. Yet again, the university found itself at the receiving end of political developments, with serious consequences for its ability to fulfill its mission.

The period after 1999 in Kosovo has seen the mushrooming of private for-profit institutions of higher learning. In addition, the number of students enrolled at universities has skyrocketed. For example, the number of students at UP has more than doubled since 2007, without an accompanying increase in staff or investment in infrastructure, and thus with disastrous effects on the quality of studies offered at UP.

Kosovo's second public university (offering courses in Albanian) was opened in Prizren in 2010. Following what could be easily interpreted as decisions without appropriate planning and preparation, four additional public universities were subsequently opened in 2012 in four different cities (Gjakova, Gjilan, Mitrovica, and Peja).

These new institutions face substantial challenges in having qualified academic and administrative staff, in addition to having leadership that is often tainted by accusations of cronyism and nepotism. Hence, the risk that academic integrity will be sacrificed from the start at those institutions is very high.

Moreover, political interferences in internal decisions continue to pose a serious challenge in almost all institutions of higher education in Kosovo.

#### 1.4. Regional and societal context

Kosovo's higher education sector remains more isolated than those of other countries in the region, but when it comes to problems with academic integrity and corruption, Kosovo is only a piece in the larger Balkans puzzle.

A study conducted in 2003-2004 in Albania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Moldova, and Serbia claimed that "[...] a high level of corruption in higher education exists in South East Europe and that resistance to a corruptive environment is minimal. [...] Very large portions of students also know of bribing for a grade or an exam. [...]"<sup>5</sup>

In the last two decades, countries of the region have experienced a rapid expansion in the number of institutions of higher education and also a 'massification' within public institutions. In addition, due to the serious challenges with the rule of law, universities are often victims of undue political influence by powerful politicians and criminal groups.

In many universities, there is no proper oversight, which many professors interpret as academic freedom from accountability, thus aggravating the situation. "In those countries where the private sector has proliferated the most (Kosovo, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia), the multiple employment of professors has also substantially deteriorated the education process at the public universities."<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> M. Popovic, *Corruption and academic Malpractice: the Students' View point, The Management of University Integrity, Proceedings of the Seminar of the Magna Charta Observatory, 19 September 2007, Bononia University Press*

<sup>6</sup> P. Zgaga et al, *Higher Education in the Western Balkans: Reforms, developments, trends*, Faculty of Education, University of Ljubljana, CEPS, Ljubljana, 2013

Some are quick to blame the 'failure' of the market for the poor quality of many for-profit institutions of higher education, but it can be argued that it is the governments, through dubious hiring practices in the public sector, as well as an information asymmetry, that are propping up many of those institutions. In fact, corruption and nepotism, and a lack of necessary information, create demand for degrees that do not equip graduates with adequate skills and knowledge.

The influence of universities within societies goes both ways. For example, students who are involved in dishonest actions are more likely to conduct themselves as such in the workplace.<sup>7</sup> At the same time, the situation is more delicate for universities, since "[f]or social purposes, visibility is more important than content. Integrity thus becomes the touchstone of the university's presence in society."<sup>8</sup>

Most universities in the Balkans have a long way to go in addressing academic misconduct and the low quality of studies and research. Von Humboldt's idea of not just advancement of research and thinking, but an "all-round humanist education" needs to win more battles.

## 2. CRITIQUE OF POLICY OPTIONS

A recent study proposed a useful model to measure academic integrity, AIMM (Academic Integrity Maturity Model).<sup>9</sup> In an attempt to compare academic integrity across the EU, it offered nine categories to determine the "maturity level" of academic integrity in a country. The categories are:

1. Transparency in academic integrity and quality assurance;
2. Fair, effective and consistent policies for handling plagiarism and academic dishonesty;
3. Standard range of standard sanctions for plagiarism and academic dishonesty;

4. Use of digital tools and language repositories;
5. Preventative strategies and measures;
6. Communication about policies and procedures;
7. Knowledge and understanding about academic integrity;
8. Training provision for students and teachers;
9. Research and innovation in academic integrity.

UP and other public universities in Kosovo were not part of the above study. However, they would most certainly obtain extremely low scores in each of the nine categories.

For example, despite serious difficulties in the past few months, UP has yet to open a public, thorough, and introspective debate on academic integrity. The acting leadership of UP is yet to show signs of grasping the gravity of the situation surrounding integrity of both staff and students.

The body that should be addressing with urgency issues of academic misconduct at UP, the Ethics Committee, is not functional and some of its members are themselves tainted by the recent accusations. Other public universities did not even establish such mechanisms.

University staff and students are not informed about their rights and responsibilities. For them it is not clear what procedures to follow if they have any grievances or complaints.

It is not just in policies that universities in Kosovo are lagging. Even in terms of having the right internal structures in place that would address grievances, universities need to do much more. A case in point is the non-existence of a Student Ombudsperson, which can give informal and confidential advice to students regarding their concerns.

---

<sup>7</sup> S. Nonis and C. O. Swift (2001), *An examination of the relationship between academic dishonesty and workplace dishonesty: A multicampus investigation*, Journal of Education for Business, November/December, 60-76

<sup>8</sup> Observatory Collegium and ESIB (European Students' Union) Executive Board (2005), *Statement of Concern*, in *Academic Malpractice, Threats and Temptations*, Bononia University Press 2007

<sup>9</sup> I. Glendinning, *Comparison of Policies for Academic Integrity in Higher Education across the EU*, IPPHEAE Consortium, October 2013

A good example in the region is the Student Ombudsperson at the Saints Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje, whose role, according to its chair Ms. Simona Jandrevska, is to "mediate in disputes that arise among students and university administration, academic personnel such as teaching assistants and professors, and also to educate students about their rights and obligations due to the laws that protect and advance the higher education."<sup>10</sup> Ms. Jandrevska claims that the Student Ombudsperson "has contributed towards raising the awareness that there has to be an ethical code of behavior at the university."<sup>11</sup>

It is also the case that, more generally, public universities have failed to implement proper systemic oversight and establish financial, legal and ethical accountability. In addition, political interference at universities does not get addressed.

### 3. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to address problems in the domain of academic integrity, this policy brief recommends the following to the institutions of higher education in Kosovo:

- The academic community in Kosovo and the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology (MEST) should start an open, thorough, and substantive debate on academic integrity and ethics at universities, which should include students, staff, civil society, and the media.
- Universities should invite in-residence scholars of ethics and administrators who have achieved results in fighting for academic integrity.
- MEST should initiate an Academic Integrity Day, with important events taking place annually.
- Universities should adopt, publish and distribute to all students, incoming and present, a Code of Conduct, similar to the Princeton University's *Rights, Rules, and Responsibilities* (2013). All students and staff should be required to sign a document acknowledging that they have read, understood and accepted the rules and responsibilities of the Code of Conduct.

- University of Prishtina's Ethics Code should be aligned with the Code of Conduct above (for example, it should specify procedures of complaints and grievances, sanctioning, etc.) and it should apply to the management and students, and not only to academic staff.
- Universities should have an Ethics Committee, and in the case that it already exists, it should work in a transparent manner, unhampered by undue influence.
- Universities should periodically publicize an anonymous list of all cases brought forward for disciplinary action regarding any type of academic misconduct.
- Universities should institute Student Ombudspersons.
- Universities should institute a grade of XF, that is given in cases of cheating.
- Universities should collectively, under one umbrella, join the International Association of Universities, a UNESCO-based worldwide association of higher education institutions, and adhere to its policy statements.
- Universities should collectively share experiences with the International Centre for Academic Integrity.
- Universities should encourage incoming mobility and regional exchanges.
- Universities should create a common repository of all PhDs and a list of published scientific works by their academic staff.

The above recommendations can only succeed in a wider environment where the rule of law and proper and functional oversight mechanisms are in place, and there is an able, willing, transparent, and accountable management at universities. The seriousness of the situation, however, warrants immediate and consistent actions.

To conclude, a paragraph from the famous Kalven Report at the University of Chicago reminds us of the role of universities: "The mission of a university is the discovery, improvement, and dissemination of knowledge. Its domain of inquiry and scrutiny includes all aspects and all values of society.

<sup>10</sup> Private communication

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

A university faithful to its mission will provide enduring challenges to social values, policies, practices, and institutions. By design and by effect, it is the institution which creates discontent with the existing social arrangements and proposes new ones. In brief, a good university, like Socrates, will be upsetting.<sup>12</sup>

Kosovo's universities should be upsetting through their ideas and discoveries of knowledge, and not through academic scandals. The alternative puts the entire system of education in Kosovo in jeopardy and robs the people and the country of a prosperous future.

#### Sources consulted or recommended

[1] The Center for Academic Integrity (1999), *The Fundamental Values of Academic Integrity*

[2] The Center for Academic Integrity (2013), *The Fundamental Values of Academic Integrity*

[3] I. Glendinning, *Comparison of Policies for Academic Integrity in Higher Education across the EU*, IPPHEAE Consortium, October 2013

[4] S. Nonis and C. O. Swift (2001), *An examination of the relationship between academic dishonesty and workplace dishonesty: A multicampus investigation*, Journal of Education for Business, November/December, 60-76

[5] Observatory Collegium and ESIB (European Students' Union) Executive Board (2005), *Statement of Concern*, in *Academic Malpractice, Threats and Temptations*, Bononia University Press 2007

[6] OECD (2010), *The High Cost of Low Educational Performance: The Long-run Economic Impact of Improving PISA Outcomes*, PISA, OECD Publishing

[7] M. Popovic, *Corruption and academic Malpractice: the Students' View point*, *The Management of University Integrity*, Proceedings of the Seminar of the Magna Charta Observatory, 19 September 2007, Bononia University Press

[8] Princeton University (2013), *Rights, Rules, and Responsibilities*

[9] University of Chicago (1967), *Kalven Report*, University of Chicago Record, Vol. 1, No. 1, November 11, 1967

[10] P. Zgaga et al, *Higher Education in the Western Balkans: Reforms, developments, trends*, Faculty of Education, University of Ljubljana, CEPS, Ljubljana, 2013.

#### About the Author:

Dr. Qëndrim R. Gashi is an associate professor of mathematics at the University of Prishtina. Prior to that he was an EPDI Fellow 2008-2010 in Bonn, Cambridge, and Paris. He attended University of Chicago (PhD 2008, MS 2004), University of Cambridge (MA St 2003), and University of Prishtina (Diploma 2002).

[\* Views of the author and not necessarily of the institution where he works.]

**The views expressed in the paper are the author's personal points of view and they do not necessarily represent the views of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung.**

#### Contact:

##### **Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung**

Kosovo Office  
Boulevard Mother Theresa 30-3/6

KO-10000 Pristina  
Telefon +381 (0) 38 229 874

[Prishtina@kas.de](mailto:Prishtina@kas.de)

[www.kas.de/kosovo](http://www.kas.de/kosovo)

---

<sup>12</sup> University of Chicago (1967), *Kalven Report*, University of Chicago Record, Vol. 1, No. 1, November 11, 1967