

To:

Viktor Yanukovich, President of Ukraine

Volodymyr Lytvyn, Chairman of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine

Mykola Azarov, Prime Minister of Ukraine

Open letter

from Serhiy Kvit, President of the National University of "Kyiv-Mohyla Academy,"  
about the policies of Dmytro Tabachnyk, Ukraine's Minister of Education and Science,  
for authoritarian and centralized governmental control of higher education in Ukraine  
and the degradation of science and learning in the country more generally.

Honorable Mr. President,

Honorable Mr. Chairman of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine,

Honorable Mr. Prime Minister of Ukraine,

On behalf of the National University of "Kyiv-Mohyla Academy" I am addressing you with the purpose of informing you about current developments in higher education in Ukraine that, in our opinion, will lead to a self-imposed isolation of the country in the sphere of education, as well as to the unacceptable degradation of the nation's science, education, and economy.

The Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine is presently engaged in hurried discussions of a Draft Law "On Higher Education" for Ukraine that threaten to inhibit the normal development of institutions of higher education by not providing them with sufficient autonomy to make it possible for them to attain a level of international competitiveness. This Draft Law includes a number of specific threats, the most important of which are the following:

1. Although there are references in the Draft Law to the subject of autonomy for the institutions of higher learning, it is uncertain what they mean exactly. We believe that responsibility for a university's growth and development should fall on the university itself, and that therefore such institutions should be entrusted with broad academic, financial, and organizational freedoms for the task. The concept of academic freedom, in addition to basic scientific and educational components, also includes freedom for a university to define its own mission and objectives, and to develop a culture of critical thinking, cooperative action, and empowerment for students. Accordingly, institutions of higher education should organize their activities and be able to solve problems independently, while the state and society (that is, the public in general, employers of university graduates, non-government organizations, etc.) should assess the abilities of a university's graduates and the quality of research that is produced there in the marketplace. De facto refusal of the idea that universities should be charged with responsibility for the quality on the labor market of the diplomas they grant, as is proposed by the Draft Law, conflicts with fundamental principles of both European and world higher education practices.
2. The potential for a market-based approach to the funding of universities is being obstructed in an attempt to maintain an unacceptable status quo in which

the universities have at their disposal only those funds that come from the state. Such a situation prevents the normal development of universities and feeds corruption. Instead of diversifying the sources of income for higher education institutions, the current situation will continue the inefficiencies that are endemic to exclusive reliance on state funding for higher education, and will do nothing to reduce the impossibly heavy burden on the state budget that education needs now present.

3. A new "iron curtain" of sorts is being erected by the Draft Law between Ukrainian higher educational institutions and those of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) by virtue of how higher in Ukraine will fail to correspond with that in the rest of the continent: (1) the formal launching of a three-cycle system of higher education in Ukraine (Bachelor – Master - PhD) without creation of any genuine, structured PhD programs; (2) complete disregard for the ECTS (European Credit Transfer System) system; (3) disregard as well for agreed-upon standards that define steps for academic mobility for professors and students alike; (4) continuation of the structural obstacles that have prevented the launching of interdisciplinary academic programs in Ukraine; (5) confirmation of complete dependence of individual universities on higher education standards that would be set unilaterally by the Ministry of Education and Science; (6) the lack of opportunities for students to enroll in at least a bare minimum of elective courses in their chosen programs of study; (7) the lack of a national strategy for the life-long learning in Ukraine; and (8) the absence of any program for the Ukrainian academic community to master the English language, the common language for academic discourse around the world. This last item alone would make it completely impossible for Ukrainian higher educational institutions to be taken seriously and be competitive in the world arena.
4. New higher education standards are being formed without regard for the legitimate interests of potential employers of university graduates and without a strong understanding for the distribution of skills that will be needed in the national and local economies in the future.
5. A much-needed plan to decrease the number of higher educational institutions in Ukraine is being put forward with insufficient attention to the nature and quality of existing institutions. Indeed there is a blanket quantitative regulator being applied, one that is unknown in world practice – for example that comprehensive universities should have a minimum of 10,000 students, and that academies should have 3,000. Such a simplistic approach would exacerbate the problems of higher education in Ukraine by encoding arbitrary standards, as well as underscoring for all to see that Ukraine is not willing to institute positive reforms for genuine improvement of higher education.
6. There is no understanding in the Draft Law that reforms in higher education are directly connected with any university reforms per se, including creation of possibilities for universities to chart their own development and enact innovative activities. Likewise, there is nothing to stimulate new initiatives on the part of universities, nor to increase their academic responsibilities, including that for engagement in research, globally one of the most important activities at institutions of higher learning and a key component for measuring their academic quality. Therefore, special attention is needed in Ukraine to integrate science and education through a real "bridging" between higher educational institutions and the various research institutes of the Academy of Science of Ukraine. Moreover, unless the current very high teaching loads of university faculty members are significantly reduced, any hope for the development of a meaningful research component

in the country's higher educational institutions would be just a no more than empty words. The goal of the educational reforms should be the creation of high quality, competitive universities that would have positive influence on the development of the national economy within a context of a mission based on principles of social responsibility. In this way, our universities could participate as equals with foreign institutions in global discourse on educational and research matters.

7. The Draft Law is in conflict with the Program of Economic Reforms of the President of Ukraine Viktor Yanukovich himself for the years 2010-2014 "Prosperous society, competitive economics, effective state," because it completely ignores the issues of the Bologna process, academic quality, and our ability to be globally competitive.

The many experiences that North American, European, and Asian universities have had with educational reforms point to a different approach: there should be close-up and professional-based cooperation and understanding between various branches of government, academic communities, and society as a whole. Without such an approach successful reforms can never be implemented, nor can there ever be commonly agreed-upon visions as to the goals of higher education.

Taking into consideration what I have mentioned above, I respectfully suggest that we discard this ill-conceived Draft Law that Minister Tabachnyk has put forward.

Serhiy Kvit

President of the National University of "Kyiv-Mohyla Academy"

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