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“The Corruption in the Lithuanian Higher Schools”

Introduction

Lithuania is still living under the soviet “convention”, when everything was accessible through bribes. Unfortunately, it seems that corruption in the higher schools is even worsening. Those students who have much money do not have to study and still receive diplomas (they can pay for their studies and for the exams, if they are too lazy to take them). Those who have no money to pay for their studies and for bribes are constantly under pressure to study harder and harder, and even to pay the bribes to the impudent lecturers who implicitly require paying them. Professors and all the lectures receive very low salaries, which guarantee only a minimum standard of living. Therefore, they admit many students to the universities “who are able to pay”... But simply ask ourselves, what is then higher education worth? What specialists will we have when “those paying” are entering the work force? In what society will we live at all?

This topic concerns me, as I from the generation that is educated in such a way; therefore, I decided to research it a little bit.

The case: docent was caught taking bribe

Exams in the academy – the market of grades, this is the title of the article that was published on the 20th of January 2001, on the front page of *Lietuvos Rytas*, the largest and the most popular daily newspaper of Lithuania. The article was about the docent of the Lithuanian Academy of Physical Education. Although there are many rumors about this topic, it was the first real case in Lithuania, when the professor was caught taking bribe. After the exam, most of his students received low grades; only several from the group were evaluated satisfactorily. The docent Kazys Vasiliauskas had introduced his own order: after the exam everybody must come to his cabinet personally in order to amend the grade. Many students talked openly that this professor demanded money in exchange to higher grades. The student Laimonas was unsatisfied with the grade 8, and he decided to try to increase his grade. When he entered the docent’s cabinet alone, docent asked, “Won’t you “bark”?”. Laimonas’ answer was negative, and then docent wrote the prices on the sheet of paper: 6 – 200 LTL (=50\$), 8 – 300 LTL (=75\$), 10 – 400 LTL (=100\$). Laimonas wanted the highest-grade (10), thus he had to pay 400 litas, but he tried to bargain for the lower price. K. Vasiliauskas was very resistant; he explained that earlier the prices were lower, because the economical situation was different. Moreover, he stated that earlier it was enough a bottle (of some alcohol), but nowadays students live better than lecturers; as an example he showed many students’ cars in the parking place. The docent also explained, that in our time nobody studies, **most students buy the evaluations of exams**; therefore he intended to increase the prices. He said, in such a way he wanted to motivate students to study. After such talk, Laimonas gave to the docent 400 litas and at that moment the agents of the Special Investigation Service broke into the cabinet and arrested the docent.

Students talked that after this event “the walls quivered” in the Academy of Physical Education, everybody was afraid even to think about the bribes. The fear to give bribe was felt in the other universities as well. Laimonas said, “The worst now will be for those, who paid money all the time and did not study at all. The pedagogues now will be afraid to take money and those students do not know how to study”.

Hopefully, this case will make stimulus to the research of corruption of higher education. There are no official facts, but most of the students talk about it openly and share each other’s experience how to bribe the lecturer. If there are some rumors, it means something is going on indeed; the rumors do not originate from nothing.

Students' experience

I have interviewed several students, who are my good friends or relatives, so they were open and relied on me when talked about their personal experience. One can say that it is binding, as all the interviewed persons are somehow related to me, but on the other hand, I could not obtain any explicit trustful information on corruption issue from the persons I do not know. Therefore, it is very hard to investigate such type of crime.

One of my closest friends, studying at one Lithuanian University, did not study enough for the exam, failed it and then decided to buy the evaluation. The things went on very easily as he had some good relations: he gave the money (100 LTL) to the reliable person, who forwarded the bribe maybe through several hands, until reached the professor.

The other friend studying at other Lithuanian University told about the similar situation: students usually went to the secretary in order to reach the dean and forward him a bribe. Secretary here works as a "personal representative", "criminal manager" or simply, as an intermediary. Therefore, it complicates the investigation of such crimes, as they are very latent.

One more friend told about her previous class friend. She said, when they finished a high school, he started to work and involved in some suspicious business, but he never studied. However, once being at his home, he wanted to show off and brought to show his higher education diploma: it was the real diploma of one Lithuanian University. One cannot strictly infer, that the university officials did the falsification of diploma, but it is a probability (it might be also that it was done by some criminals, who specialize in falsifying the documents). Nobody can prove now, only some deep special investigations could disclose it.

The last example I will use is from one more Lithuanian university. My friend studied in one faculty, but wanted to change it to another related one. It is possible legally in that university, if one studies well and if there are free places. My friend studied almost perfectly, there were free places in the desired faculty and she tried to agree with the administration to get into that faculty. However, her attempts were futile until she bribed the dean; only then she moved to the new faculty.

Special Investigations Service

As it seemed to me, it is possible to find many examples, although it is impossible to measure, how big population has ever involved in the university corruption. When I started to investigate this topic, my personal opinion was that corruption in the Lithuanian universities was wide spread. Kestutis Zaborskas, the head of division in Special Investigations Service (SIS), approved my opinion. "So far we have only one case of arrest of docent in Kaunas, but SIS knows many more manifestations of it". Eivydas Cekaitis, the head of SIS Kaunas division approved that they have quite much information on this topic, but as they still do not have any real proof, they treat it as operative information and cannot disclose it to the public.

SIS was established in 1997 as a department of Ministry of Interior for the purpose of fight with the corruption in Lithuania. In 2000, SIS was detached from the Ministry of Interior and made accountable directly to the President and the Parliament of Lithuania. In this way SIS became confident institution and its investigations now are absolutely independent. The goal of SIS is to preserve and protect the civils, society and the state from the corruption, implementing the prevention and investigation of it. SIS deals with all the fields in the society.

The major focus is on the State institutions, authorities and servants. They work independently only for one year still, but they have already good results: many corruption cases were disclosed. Kestutis Zaborskas asserted, that it is very necessary to decrease the amount of preconditions of the corruption in universities. As examples he mentioned that the exam valuation system is very imperfect, motivating the professors to be corrupt. After a

student fails the exam, he/she usually hires the same professor as a personal teacher. Such a way is a legal corruption; there is no any laws restricting it.

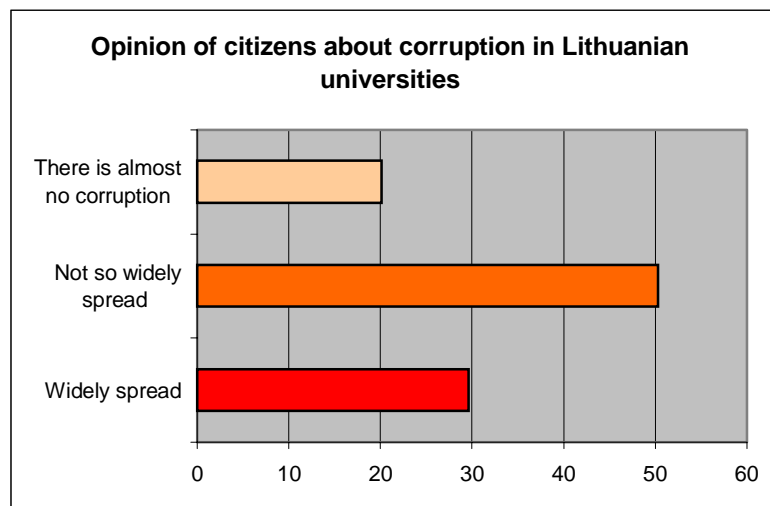
Preconditions and reasons for the corruption in universities

Bronislovas Burgis, the docent of Kaunas University of Technology also thinks, that the level of corruption is big in Lithuanian higher schools. In his opinion, the main reasons for it are:

- Imperfect laws or there are no laws at all
- There is no system of work control
- Universities have too large autonomies
- Hierarchical ties among the officers of university makes decisions corrupt

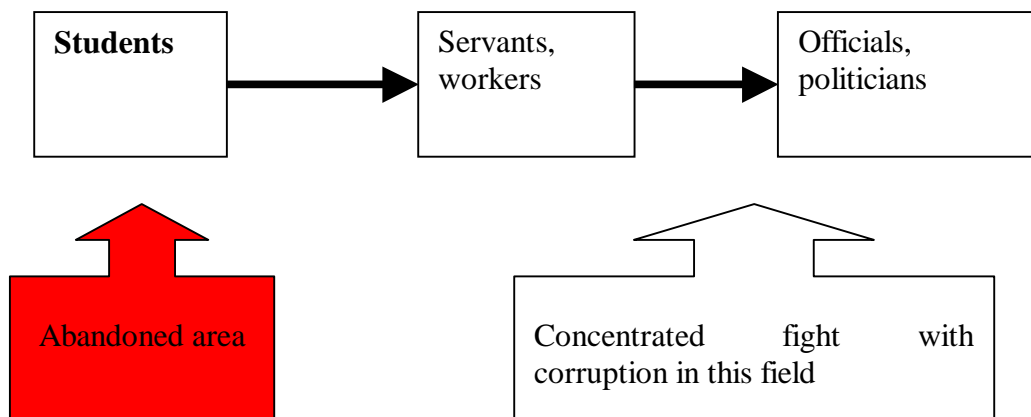
The whole legal system is still poor in Lithuania, as we still live in the transition period. And everybody understands it, that we need improvements, in order to reduce the number of preconditions of corruption. Recently, SIS prepared the new strategy for fight with corruption in many fields. Lithuanian government approved it already, and from now on some strong actions should start. In that strategy I noticed that there was made a thorough research before on private business, public institutions, political unions and international relations, but I missed the stress on educational institutions. There are many plans how to educate young people, but there is no any strategy how to fight the corruption in higher schools.

Maybe those who prepared this strategy thought that this area is not worth for concern, but I think it should be the area of the largest concern. The sociological research “Preliminary Evaluation of Corruption Situation in Lithuania” showed that 29.6 % of the questioned population think that the corruption is widely spread in Lithuanian universities, 50.3 % think that is not so widely spread, and 20.1 % think there is almost no corruption.



We can suppose, that only one fifth of the population (20.1 %) trusts the higher education system in Lithuania, while the rest four fifths more or less agree, that there is a corruption in Lithuanian universities. Terrible numbers should frighten the legislators and state rulers, but as I see, the means they fight with it are very tiny. Of course, it is good that they work much on fighting corruption at a state level, but I think they want first of all abolish the results, but not the causes. The most politicians and state officials have higher education. Some time ago they were educated in the same universities, from which I mentioned facts about the corruption in the first parts of this report. The people are mostly educated when they still are young, and it is very hard for them to change their habits later. Thus, if now the corruption flourishes in our universities, the current students will adjust to such standards of life, and later, when they become powerful officials, their habits will still be the same, i.e. they will tolerate the corruption. The strategy against the corruption should be directed to all the levels of inhabitants, otherwise we will **“cut one leg of the dragon, but the other two will grow up”**. It is not enough only theoretically make courses for students; it is much more important, that they would study in the anti-corrupt environment. The educational programs and courses will be futile, if one lecturer talk how bad corruption is, but all the rest ones take bribes as before.

On the other hand, as dr. Bronislovas Burgis said, it is very hard to expect to have better situation in the universities, if the whole environment outside universities is corrupted. Therefore, it is significant to attack all the areas.



The universities are now so organized, that they have large autonomies and introduce their order. Every university has its own entrance rules, and thus now they argue on the common one. The new system of the state exams is the hot issue, as universities lose control during the student admissions, and cannot make many “black admissions”. This is a good step towards more transparent admission system, but still every university uses its own rules inside and there is no any control system. And nobody tries to control it, as the levels of power are so related, that they do not want to introduce any strict rules for each other. SIS should take an action to change the current situation.

The big problem Lithuania has now is low budget support of professors. The income of professors is just middle, and sometimes even below middle level of standards, while in the

West they are the most respected class of the society. This fact makes professors to take bribes in order to live better; it is a very strong precondition of corruption.

Suggestions

The most important, I think, is to create the appropriate law system. All the educational system should be reviewed, and the preconditions of corruption in universities should be found out and suppressed. SIS works independently and makes results, but it should much more concentrate on the university corruption, because the new generation is educated there and they will lead the country in some time. Probably the separate working group should be created to work, to thoroughly research, evaluate and to issue an especial strategy for fight with the university corruption.

References

Personal communication with:

Friends and relatives from several Lithuanian Universities

Linda Freimane, pro-rector of Riga Graduate School of Law

Jadvyga Pekarskaite, journalist of Lietuvos Rytas (the largest daily Lithuanian newspaper)

Kestutis Zaborskas, head of division in Special Investigation Service

Eivydas Cekaitis, head of Kaunas division of Special Investigation Service

Bronislovas Burgis, docent of Kaunas University of Technology (KUT), editor-in-chief of magazine Kompiuterija and director of KUT Gymnasium

Jolanta Piliponyte, representative at Transparency International Lithuanian Division

WebPages:

Lithuanian Ministry of Science and Education: www.smm.lt

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