

Skopje, 17 July, 2006

## Report on the Investigation into Corruption in Education

### **Concealing a serious problem**

Despite the very small number of officially reported and solved cases, corruption in the education of the Republic of Macedonia not only exists, but it exists in the entire educational system. In contrast to the very few officially reported cases, there is a perception in the public that the corruption in the education is a widespread phenomenon, especially in the university education.

Relying on the fact that the number of officially reported cases of corruption in the education is negligible, the teaching staff conceals from the public this serious problem and thus enables the ones who are involved in the corruption to go unpunished, while the problem remains unsolved.

The research has shown that the concealment of the corruption in the education is mainly due to three reasons. Firstly, the weak institutions and mechanisms for protection of the students and pupils who would report a case of corruption; secondly, the personal interest of the students and parents who are involved in corruption to keep silent for the given bribe for procuring the grade; and thirdly, the tacit solidarity of the professors for their corrupt colleagues.

The concealment of the corruption in the education, which effectively disables the fight against it, carries the risk of pupils and students acquiring corruptive habits in the very process of education and the shaping of their personality. In addition, although in these corrupt acts only a part of the teaching staff is involved, by concealing the corruption, the whole profession of teaching as such is degraded. All these factors make the problem of corruption in the education a very serious one indeed.

Professors who are involved in the European integrative processes on the state universities in the country warn that the high perception of corruption in these institutions may impede their becoming members of the European University Association (EUA).

## **Forms of corruption in the education**

The research has shown that the classic form of bribing a professor by giving money by hand or in the student's record booklet is not practiced. In order to avoid such direct contact, mediators come into play, through which the payment is conducted or a return favour is offered for passing the exam. According to the students, in certain cases, the mediators themselves offered their mediating services. Moreover, there are indications that there is a practice of changing the mediators in order to cover up the traces. On the other hand, professors claim that they too fall victims to such mediators who, by taking advantage of a private or professional closeness with the professors, "help" in the passing of the exam and afterwards take bribe for themselves from the students without the knowledge of the professor.

The favour of the professors is also obtained through all sorts of products and return favours, depending on the needs of the professor or the business the student or his/ her parents have. Thus, there are noted cases of students buying their professors medications, technical equipment, and the like; alternatively, the returned favour may involve organizing weddings for the professors' children, summer vacations, or hiring the professors as external consultants in the firm of the students' parents.

According to the statements of both the students and the professors, one of the forms of corruption that was quite common until recently - selling textbooks on the part of the professors based on lists of students and for a much higher price than the real one - is an occurrence that has been significantly decreased, especially with the introduction of the so - called credit - transfer system. With this system, at the beginning of the academic year, the students will receive from the college all the books required for the tuition.

Another form of corruption which has been indicated as present in the university education, but in the secondary education as well, is additional classes that the students and the pupils are required to take separately from the regular tuition. In certain cases, attending a certain number of these additional classes with the professor himself or a friend of his/ hers is a condition for passing the exam or getting a good grade.

The motif of the teachers in the elementary and secondary education for mass correction and amelioration of the grades right before the end of the school year is hard to prove and is therefore called into question. The answer to the question remains open with regard to what extent behind the higher grades the will of the teachers to help their students in the enrolment in the further education is present, and to what extent corrupt motifs are hidden.

In addition to the grades, in the elementary and secondary education other forms of corruption and misuse of state money for personal profit are also pointed out. Some of these include examples of organizing excursions or senior proms through "friendly" agencies and restaurants, from which the school principals afterwards receive a suitable recompense.

Outside the scope of official record, and thus a possible object of misuse of state money, is the renting of the school grounds. A most striking example of this practice

is the renting of the gymnasiums. How much of this, largely unreported, revenue really ends up in the school treasuries depends on the morals of the principals.

A space for corruption still exists in the choice of the textbooks to be used for studying, especially in the elementary education, where the number of pupils, and hence the business interest of the publishing houses, is significantly bigger. Namely, there is no transparency in the process of selecting textbooks, which the students are suggested to purchase. Therefore, there is reason to doubt that the selection is not made on the basis of legal criteria but on the basis of personal interests of individuals in the schools.

### **Insufficient use of the institutions and mechanisms for preventing the corruption in the education**

The research into the corruption in the education has shown that in the Republic of Macedonia the existing institutions and mechanisms for preventing the corruption in this area are insufficiently used. Thus, as opposed to the several surveys of the public opinion, which point to a significant presence of corruption in this area, in the past four years, or since they were formed, not a single student has reported a case of corruption to the two student procurators. It has been a long time too since someone reported corruption on the special phone number of the Ministry of Education for bribe and corruption in the university education.

This absence of official reports for corruption by students is interpreted as fear of the consequences and a result of the personal involvement of the student in the corrupt act, for which both sides are criminally accountable. On the other hand, the absence of even anonymous reports for corruption is indicative of the lack of trust on the part of the students that the established authorised institutions will solve the problem.

The institutions have sent a discouraging message to the few students who in the past period did call on the phone to report bribe and corruption in the university education by not taking any actions against the professor whom most of the calls concerned.

A separate problem is also the insufficient acceptance of the institution student procurator on the part of the teaching staff on the universities. Thus, there is a case of a student procurator who has recently been expelled by the dean of one college, who even called the police to have the procurator removed. This event occurred when the student procurator wanted to promote in front of the students his deputy, who was a student on the college in question.

The research has shown that it is essential to strengthen and promote the role of the student procurators in the direction of fight against the corruption in the university education. According to some, the possibility for making this institution professional should be considered, since it is currently performed on a voluntary basis.

Moreover, the necessity to open offices of the student procurators outside of the premises of the universities is suggested. It is considered that in this manner the students would be encouraged to report cases of corruption.

In order for all this to give results, the degree of protection that will be guaranteed to the students who report corruption needs to be increased.

---