
Corruption in Higher Education: Public Ostracism as a Remedy

Elena Denisova-Schmidt

Elena Denisova-Schmidt is a Research Associate at the University of St. Gallen (HSG), Switzerland, and a CIHE Research Fellow, elena.denisova-schmidt@unisg.ch

Corruption in higher education may seem to be only a domestic issue, but it can be exported and become a challenge for another country's academic system as well. One example of this involves Lomonosov Moscow State University (MSU), one of the oldest and best-known public universities in Russia. MSU has several branches around the world, including—until late 2012—a center in Geneva in Switzerland. The International Center of Lomonosov Moscow State University (ICL) was established in 1997, but the first students were enrolled only in 2004 (Kutuzov, 2009). The idea for ICL came from the MSU law faculty and was supported by the university's rector, Victor Sadovnichy, as an example of 'integrating Russian education into the European framework.'

For a long time, ICL remained unknown to the general public and the broader academic community in Switzerland and Russia; it only became 'famous' because of a car accident in November 2009, when a few young people organized a race—which is prohibited—between Geneva and Lausanne. During this race, a German retiree was injured, and the offender fled the scene. The three young people involved were all enrolled at ICL. Moreover, it is interesting to note that all of them were children of one of the richest Russian entrepreneurs.

Who are these students, who are studying at the most expensive university in Russia? Do they really come to Switzerland to study, or have they simply obtained student status in order to stay legally in the country? According to Tamirlan Gassanov, the rector of the Geneva branch, half of the students at ICL come from the Russian North Caucasus. They are enrolled in an accelerated, module-based course of studies that can be completed in Russian, at the end

of which they receive two degrees, one each from ICL and MSU. The students have to pay a minimum of US\$22,000 per academic year for their studies, not including living expenses in one of the most expensive areas in Switzerland (Kutuzov, 2009). Just to compare, in the 2018-2019 academic year, the University of Geneva charged its students CHF 500 (US\$507) per semester and the University of Zurich CHF 720 (US\$731) per semester for undergraduates.

The professors working at ICL have stressed the low educational level of the students; this was also confirmed by Gassanov. According to an interview with Gassanov, in the first year, there were 16 students, only one of whom was considered to be a good student. A French teacher of one of the car-racing participants remembered that he had difficulties with many elementary tasks, such as listing the months of the year in their proper order in Russian (Russian is the main official language in Russia, but the majority of people in the Russian North Caucasus learn it as their second language) (Parfenov, 2013). After the accident, this student was expelled for breaking the rules of the country of residence. Gassanov explained that each student had to sign such an agreement with the university before beginning his or her studies. The expulsion of the organizer of the race was not an isolated incident, about 70 (!) students have been expelled from ICL for similar reasons over a six-year period (Sedych, 2009). The Russian State Duma initiated an investigation into this. One of the initiators was a member of the Communist Party, who later received a signal from above to stop any investigations (Parfenov, 2013). The public pressure was high, however, and, as of late 2012, ICL began operating as an independent

institution and not as a brunch of MSU, though it continued to cooperate with professors from MSU and other Russian universities until its closure in 2018. It should be noted, however, that not all ICL students were rich and poorly educated Russians; some of them were brilliant, dedicated students who liked the idea of starting their integration into European higher education by getting an undergraduate degree in their native language and then switching to traditional Swiss universities at the graduate level. Indeed, many ICL graduates have continued their MA studies at the University of Geneva.

Nevertheless, the existence of this school raises many questions: was the idea behind the establishment of the school really integration into the European framework, or was the motivation meant to be a good source of additional income for MSU professors or something different altogether? Gassanov alluded to the second possibility during one interview: “The situation in the 90s [in Russia] was different, Professors were not paid” (Parfenov, 2013). Ironically, in 1992, Gassanov was accused of fraud in the amount of 10 million USD from the Azerbaijan state budget and was arrested in Moscow in 2005. He was released on the personal guarantee of one of the leading professors of the MSU law faculty (Sedych, 2009), a close relative of Gassanov. What financial agreements had existed between Moscow and Geneva? Kutuzov (2009) estimated that, in

2009, ICL paid MSU about RUB 220,000 (approximately US\$7,500) for each student per year; hence, MSU received about US\$750,000 annually. All these Swiss adventures – car-racing, spoiled children of Russian oligarchs, and the role of MSU – were widely discussed in the Russian media and, to some extent, damaged the image of this old Russian university, despite its long tradition. Some years later, the entire institution in Geneva was closed.

The story of ICL suggests that public ostracism might be a tough, but also efficient, tool to mitigate corruption in higher education.

REFERENCES

- Kutuzov, R. (2009, November 26). Skol'ko stoit otkryt MGU. *Forbes*. Retrieved from <https://www.forbes.ru/karera/obrazovanie/30449-skolko-stoit-brend-mgu>
- Parfenov, Leonid. (2013, March 27). Krest na obrazovanii: Zhenevskii filial MGU iznutri. TVRain. Retrieved from <https://www.forbes.ru/karera/obrazovanie/30449-skolko-stoit-brend-mgu>
- Sedych, Igor. (2009, November 26). Zhenevskogo gonchika lishili prava. *Kommersant*. Retrieved from <http://www.kommersant.ru/doc/1280860>

The Place of Learning Outcomes in Accreditation within the EHEA

Jean Baptiste Diatta

Jean Baptiste Diatta is a doctoral student and a graduate assistant at CIHE, frdiatta@bc.edu.

A central concept for the European qualification framework, as well as its quality assurance (QA) framework, is the concept of Learning Outcomes (LO). In this framework, LOs describe what a student is expected to know, “understand and be able to demonstrate after successful completion of a process of learning. They are statements of concrete

and verifiable signs that witness/certify how the planned competences, including the required levels of knowledge, are being developed or acquired” (Lokhoff et al., 2011, p. 22).