

**6<sup>th</sup>** Nordic - Baltic Conference in Regional Science



**6<sup>th</sup> NORDIC - BALTIC  
CONFERENCE IN  
REGIONAL SCIENCE**  
Riga, Latvia, October 4 - 7, 2000

**Nordic - Baltic Sea Region  
on the Eve of **21<sup>st</sup>**  
of **21<sup>st</sup>** Century**

**REPORTS**

REITERNA NAMS, MĀRSTĀĻU IELA 2  
RĪGA, LATVIA

[www.nbr-riga2000.lanet.lv](http://www.nbr-riga2000.lanet.lv)



THE 6<sup>th</sup> NORDIC-BALTIC CONFERENCE IN REGIONAL SCIENCE  
"NORDIC-BALTIC SEA REGION ON THE EVE OF THE 21<sup>st</sup> CENTURY"  
OCTOBER 4 – 7, 2000, LATVIA, RIGA, REITERNA NAMS – MĀRSTAĻU IELA 2

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## **Basis and Continuation of Private Education in Azerbaijan**

### Summary

*The first private University in Azerbaijan was established in 1991. Nowadays there are 29 state universities, and 18 private Universities functioning in the Republic. All in all, out of 110 000 University students, only approximately 20000-22000 students (18-20%) attend the private Universities. Though the private education is still too young, but the system has already left traces in the preparation of qualified specialists. And it makes for choosing the private higher education as a field of research.*

*This article deals with the attitude of the government to the private education, with the world experience in higher education accreditation principles, and with the major problems the private Universities face in the activities in Azerbaijan today. It includes the meddling in enrollment processes to the private Universities by and the identification of major qualifications at the private Universities the government.*

*The main catchword of this article is that if we want to establish the education system appropriate to the world standards the private Universities should be given complete independence in preparing specialists.*

*The article also deals with the necessity of establishing private Universities in Azerbaijan. The main argument for this is that there is only one way out of the crisis the state Universities survive, and it is the development of private Universities. It is noted that in this period in Azerbaijan in order to regulate the budget allocations for the favor of the government all the doors should be open to the private education.*

*The experience of different countries in support for the private Universities is also touched upon by the author and he stresses the importance of working out of state support program to private Universities in Azerbaijan. The author arrives at a conclusion that today due to economic-financial difficulties in Azerbaijan that makes impossible the government support to private universities, the best support to private universities would be the complete independence for private Universities in student enrollment and preparing academic/educational programs.*

### **Relations between the State and Higher Education in Azerbaijan**

It is crucial to understand the relationship between the government and higher education universities. The Ministry of Education of the Azerbaijan Republic carries out the education policy defined by the Cabinet of Ministers. In order to oversee the regulations of the education system and to make certain the plans and normative documents of the State are carried out, an Expert Commission was recommended by the Ministry of Education, and its function and role were

assured by the government.

In 1993 the so-called State High Expert Commission (SHEC) was organized. A main object of this Commission was to work out regulations concerning the establishment of private universities, to define their activities and their accreditation. Because of political changes SHEC was weakened and it eventually stopped functioning. Though there existed no formal mechanism to establish new private universities, these institutions continued to be created.

To regulate the private education system within the framework of state policy in education, on September 24, 1994, a new SHEC was set up by the Cabinet of Ministers by a decree of the President of the Azerbaijan Republic. Such an action contradicts the Law of Education, which stipulates that such a commission be formed by the Ministry of Education. This Commission is given broad powers to support state interests, so a major function of the Commission is to limit the development of private universities by defining the process of accreditation.

The by-laws of SHEC state that it has the power to charge the Cabinet of Ministers and Ministry of Education with certain tasks, to evaluate their material and personnel preparation on the basis of international norms and reality, and to define specialities, and to make recommendations for reform.

It would be acceptable to control the establishment and activity of the private universities. They are growing rapidly and their work is not always consistent with public interests. Studying the leading role of the public institutions SHEC is gradually turning its face to private education and it is creating a legal base for organizing private universities. The changes going on in the society have, indeed, begun to change the legal basis for the development of the society.

### **The Legal Status of Education**

It is not an easy task to form a legal base for education in a period of transition. To accomplish such a task it is necessary to become familiar with international education systems and the entire experience of legislation, to succeed in gaining independence for the organization dealing with education in democratic governing and in arguing between the laws on paper and the real situation of education.

Generally, the legal base of education should regulate the following:

1. Working out the principles for the establishment of new education institutions.
2. Working out principles for the activities of new education institutions.
3. Working out the mechanism to obtain financial support from the government.
4. Working out the mechanism to suspend support from the government.

5. Working out the principles to disestablish education institutions (both public and private).<sup>3</sup>

Only by following these principles is it possible to insure an orderly, legally-based education system. SHEC engaged in the first principle by recognizing the importance of private universities. Today 16 private universities have been accredited. No doubt these accredited universities differ greatly from each other and differ in their effect on public.

### **The Legislation of Higher Educational Institutions in Azerbaijan**

Our intent here is to discuss the accreditation process of education institutions. Mainly there are two types of accreditation: the accreditation of higher education institutions as education centers and accreditation by different professional companies for various fields.

The first type of accreditation is the registration of an education institution as an organization. For this the higher education institution needs to document all its material bases (buildings, classrooms, facilities, and so on). As to second type of accreditation, it is carried out by influential professional companies/associations.

The aim of professional accreditation for private institutions of higher learning is to learn the scientific - educational structures functioning at the higher education institution, to learn the possibilities of training specialists on different professions. In order to have a standard in Azerbaijan we must know what world experience says about those standards. In order to know the level, the university is expected to prepare specialists, we must know for whom and for what purposes that training takes place. Higher education institutions providing the preparation of high-level specialists, must maintain the following priorities in their accreditations procedures:

- Specialists in accredited institutions must be more prestigious and be more attractive to students than specialists in unaccredited institutions.
- Accreditation facilitates the work of the student and corresponding department. SHEC supports this notion in its constitution: SHEC can put a task before the government to support the accredited education institutions in playing a positive role in training specialists for the Republic.
- Specialists in accredited institutions may be easily transferred to other high education institutions.

Specialists from non-accredited institutions are not “terminated;” they are simply deprived of some right and the lack of accreditation does damage to the: prestige. That is why, in organizing the accreditation process the universities themselves should not rely specifically on the government. It should be noted that of the

above mentioned priorities only the first one is found distinctly in Azerbaijan's private education. Since the admission process is centralized, the students are set only to the accredited universities. But still there is no clear definition about whether the accredited and the unaccredited private universities themselves can free admit students, though it is clear that it would be more difficult to attract students to unaccredited universities. As to the second problem private universities do not receive support from the government on the basis of accreditation. When there is no law on private education there is no protection and aid from the government. A law would clarify the protections and support private institutions would receive.

The third problem also is manifested in Azerbaijan that transfers to public universities are only allowed from accredited private universities. However, accreditation plays no role in transferring among the private universities, whether they are accredited or not.

Accreditation should not be limited to private universities. As a matter of fact, the accreditation of public institutions should be the first priority, university getting support, material basis, and laboratories from the government should subject itself to scrutiny from accreditation associations.

Today in Azerbaijan two forms accreditation have been identified. The state even specifies the list of specialties of accredited universities. Such an arrangement might be acceptable in the transition period; however, if we want to establish universities by the following world standards of education, we should not forget that private universities ought to have the right to train specialists of any profession.<sup>6</sup>

### **The Necessity of Organizing Private Education**

And now let us look more carefully at world practices in connection with private education and its development. Though different countries have a lot in common in terms of education, research, culture and service to the society, they vary in terms of the role of public and private education. If the German public education plays a leading role in its education system, in the U.S.A., South America, Western and South-Western Asia the private university is developed more. It should be noted that in certain countries of Europe private education is popular: 65 percent of higher education students in Belgium, and 60 percent in the Netherlands belong to private sector. Private education is also developing rapidly in the former Soviet Republics.

According to World Bank reports world public education is now in a state of crisis, and this crisis shows itself distinctly in developing countries.<sup>4</sup> One of the major steps in the process of reforming according to the experts is to try to

establish private schools and to help their development. Another insight from the World Bank is that the traditional Western Europe university model is very expensive and inappropriate for the realization of social program and economic needs. The World Bank notes that the private university model is more appropriate for the developing countries. Private universities can answer changing demands faster and more effectively. They ease the education budget difficulties of governments. In other words, by means of the private sector the government can regulate the expenses meant for education.

Small universities are typically found to be more dynamic. Mostly private universities in developing countries are small. For example, in China 35 percent of the universities enroll less than 1000 students. Unlike the big universities where thousands of specialists are trained, small universities train a small number of students and the nature of their programs is such that they respond quickly to new conditions and generate new ideas. Thus, they are more competitive in the fastmoving world.

Japan could be an instructive example for us from the point of view of organizing higher education. A major reason for the Japanese economic miracle is explained in the following way. Newly established private universities quickly brought knowledge and science from the West to Japan, and it gave a push for new changes and developments in the industrial sector. Higher education models in Europe and America have been adopted without any limitation in Japan. In 1949, (when the country was in deep crisis following World War II) the number of private universities increased from 23 to 70.

In 1949, the Japanese parliament adopted a law on private schools, in its intent was to protect the rights of the private education sector. The law also led to the creation of the council of private universities. From 1952 to 1970 the number of students increased two times in public universities, but four times in the private sector. Still 60 private universities were in a condition of crisis. The two major reasons of the crisis were - the financial difficulties and a great number of talented students who wanted to study at private universities. The government immediately took measures to solve the problems (very soon saw the crop of its labor). The development of private education was declared as of state importance. The state loaded itself with the responsibility to pay 50 percent of all expenses of higher education institutions.”<sup>5</sup>

### **How to Help Private Education**

Latin America, the Philippines, Indonesia, South Korea, India, Bangladesh, Iran, Hungary, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland, Romania, Russia, the Ukraine, Georgia and many others are countries where private institutions are being developed very rapidly. In all above mentioned countries (with the

exception of the former Soviet Republics) laws defending the private universities and helping them where adopted. The Independence of private universities is one of the factors of democracy.

Generally, the government can support private universities in different forms. In some countries (Chile, Brazil, South Korea) private universities take part in competition to get grants to increase the quality and effectiveness of education. In Brazil and Mexico the private universities do not pay taxes, in the USA, Japan, China and India the private universities are financed directly (in the USA the government pays at least 25 percent of the private university budget). In Iran, Kenya and Uganda the universities are given plots of land and supported in constructing buildings.

But the best way to support the private universities in Azerbaijan today is to give them independence in the enrollment process. The principles of student selection in the admission process are of great importance to train them in high standards as interpreted by programs and syllabi. It should be noted that to increase the number of students on the part of private universities is not their main aim. Analyzing the results of previous years though the number of students admitted by the universities themselves is a little bit more than the students admitted by the SSAC, but their knowledge level is much higher. The information taken from the private Azerbaijan universities, Tafakkur, Western University, Asian University, the Caucasus, and Khazar University once more proved that the level of learning of the programs by the students admitted by the SSAC is very low; 70-75 of them cannot master the programs. No doubt, these cause great difficulties in the education process. That is why they must study together with the students in the preparatory course. According to the World Bank reports one of the two ways of supporting the private universities by the government is to give them independence in the enrollment process. The government can support the private universities in two ways. First, they must be given complete independence in enrollments, the syllabi and programs. Second, they must provide financial support and student loans.<sup>4</sup>

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