

**EMERGING HIGHER EDUCATION IN AZERBAIJAN:
VARIETIES OF INTERNAL CORRUPTION
AND PROPOSED REMEDIES
“WHAT WE’RE DOING IS INTELLECTUAL GENOCIDE.”—
VASIF MOVSUMOV, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, FUND OF
STRUGGLE AGAINST CORRUPTION**

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1. INTRODUCTION

Let me begin by laying out some important matters that I am not going to go into in this paper. I am not going to say much about the positive advances made in the past few years in other areas of higher education reform by the Ministry of Education, the State Student Admissions Commission, the Milli Majlis, or the Presidential Apparatus. It is important to observe that, however slowly, progress has been made on several fronts, including especially the design and administering of national entrance examinations on the part of the SSAC and the transition to a Western-oriented credit system on the part of the MOE. Of course, much work still needs to be done; but these accomplishments are no small matter. Neither am I going to attempt to diagnose whatever problems might exist at or between these four major bodies. Clearly, corrupt behaviors in this sphere must also be identified and rooted out in order for the country's universities to function in a truly outstanding fashion, as they should, and as international standards require. I am not going to address the merits of the draft education law currently before the Milli Majlis. I am not going to discuss the creation of new administrative posts, Vice Rectors for General Affairs (from the Ministry of National Security), at state universities by government decree, or the alleged electronic bugging of administrative offices — except to note here that such actions constitute egregious violations of a key principle of the Bologna Process, namely university autonomy. Neither am I going to attempt to identify, let alone analyze, the many causes of or contributing factors to the universities' internal situations: post-independence “transitional” economic and political contingencies and the Ngorno-Karabakh conflict, for instance, or foreign relations and foreign influences, nepotism in government or within the society as a whole, the plight of internally displaced persons, demographic changes within the teaching profession and among student populations, variations among the regions, national attitudes concerning such topics as family, gender, cultural traditions, the legitimate means to achieving success,

and the purposes and value of education, and so forth. Each of these impinges upon the quality of higher education in Azerbaijan and deserves careful study and effective policy in its own right.

Instead, I am going to focus almost exclusively on the current situation that still exists within the vast majority of universities in Azerbaijan, vis-à-vis corruption. Because I believe it has been greatly overlooked, and overlooked to the detriment of ongoing reform initiatives, what I want chiefly to draw attention to in this paper is the extensive variety of harmful practices that persist within the universities. Extortion and graft on the inside, and other familiar irregularities that intrude from without, are damaging enough. But failure to acknowledge the many different ways that the objectives of higher education are thwarted by individuals working within Azerbaijan's universities invites serious misfortune, especially when it comes to the external assessments and evaluations to which universities will soon be subjected on the part of foreign experts. Subsequently, I offer a number of concrete, practical suggestions for remedying various of these behaviors. Not all of these are new. Nevertheless, reiteration of an old idea is not of necessity without value. Repetition can add up to reinforcement. Ultimately, my hope is that by providing an international perspective on these matters, they can with greater honesty, transparency, knowledge, and thoroughness be discussed among policy makers in the relevant government bodies especially, and, in conjunction with university administrations, members of their faculties, and all other stakeholders, in a timely fashion effectively be eradicated.

2. BACKGROUND

The following does not come close to reflecting the breadth and depth of my experience working on issues pertinent to Azerbaijan's system of higher education; nevertheless, even a brief and partial account might prove helpful here as prelude. During my year as a Fulbright Scholar (August 2004 to August 2005) and throughout the ensuing three and a-half years, I have worked closely on numerous aspects of higher education reform with the MOE, the Parliamentary Committee on Science and Education, the SSAC, and a considerable number of rectors and vice rectors from top universities, both state and private, in Baku and in various regions of the country. In February 2005, with the help and support of the Public Affairs Section of the U.S. Embassy in Baku, and with the help of the rector, top administrators, and colleagues at my host institution, Azerbaijan University of Languages, I moderated a major three-day international conference, "International Integration: Reforming Higher Education in Azerbaijan." This conference, attended by more than 400 persons, brought together all the country's major stakeholders, including all those named

above plus the Academy of Sciences, education NGOs, ambassadors from foreign embassies, and representatives of the commercial sector and international aid agencies, together with experts from the United States, Great Britain, France, Germany, Turkey, and Israel. The purpose of the conference was to promote the means for integrating Azerbaijan into the global community of universities. Panelists introduced such topics as quality assurance and accreditation, strategic planning, independent student admissions, the credit system, curriculum development, grading scales and grade distributions, syllabus construction, and modern interactive teaching techniques. A second, smaller two-day conference for regional universities was held a month later in Sheki. I also helped to organize, and led a panel session at, a follow-up conference on "Academic Writing and Reading in Higher Education Reform," held in May 2005 at the University of Languages in conjunction with the Academic Writing Center of Central European University in Budapest.

In April 2005 President Ilham Aliyev's Council of Ministers invited me to serve as advisor to the MOE on the establishment of an internal system of university attestation. In May, Minister of Education, Misir Mardanov, officially signed onto the Bologna Process in Bergen, Norway. This will turn out, I believe, to be one of the most important steps taken in Azerbaijan in any field of endeavor since this republic achieved its independence. On January 31, 2008 President Aliyev signed a decree solidifying this pact by mandating the formation of a working group to develop measures that will lead to the full integration of Azerbaijan's institutions of higher education into the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). In Section 4 of this paper, I hope to show that the successful pursuit of this goal holds the key to reducing corruption in the universities to the point where it ceases to be a problem of any measurable significance.

In June 2005, I organized a six-week training program for 15 teachers at the University of Languages, in which three Fulbright Scholars (including myself) and three Senior English Language Fellows from the United States conducted intensive practical workshops on such topics as syllabus construction, critical thinking and academic writing, large and small group classroom learning activities, and interactive teaching strategies and practices. In August 2005, with support from a SOROS grant I led a week-long training camp in Sheki for 70 select students from eight target universities on the workings of student government associations at American universities.

In summer 2005 I won a project grant from USAID to facilitate a series of workshops in Princeton, New Jersey the following winter, conducted by the Educational Testing Service (ETS) primarily for the benefit of the SSAC and the MOE. (This grant was administered by World Learning International.) In

February 2006 this two-week training was attended by 15 stakeholder representatives, including the head and staff of SSAC, top officials from the MOE, the Academy of Sciences, state universities, NGOs, and an Azerbaijani education specialist from the U.S. Embassy in Baku.

In November 2006 I was invited by the American Bar Association's Central European and Eurasian Law Initiative (ABA-CEELI) to present two papers and lead a panel at their two-day conference in Baku on fighting corruption in higher education

3. VARIETIES OF CORRUPTION

What is corruption? Although it is relatively easy to find agreement on several clear-cut cases, a satisfactory general definition of the kind that suits the needs and interests of scholars, educational theorists, social scientists, policy makers, and the like is not entirely a simple or straightforward matter. I do not, however, intend in this paper to delve into a lengthy or sophisticated analysis of this important term. The word "corrupt," as any decent English dictionary reveals, comes from the Latin "rumpere," which means "to break." To corrupt something is to break it into pieces. This word is closely related to the word "rupture," which means "to break or bust open," or "to burst open." It might be useful, therefore, to think of corruption in the most basic sense as a disorder not unlike that in which a bodily organ, such as a kidney or an appendix, is burst. It is a kind of disease.

While it has proven difficult to pin down a precise definition, it is crucial to realize that in the context of higher education this particular kind of "disease" takes many forms. It is not confined to the buying and selling of grades. As a way of pointing to a suitably general definition of the term, the following is a list of corrupt practices to which I can attest. These occurred in Azerbaijani universities during my year of residence. Some of these items, while being acknowledged as undesirable, or even downright offensive, perhaps, might be contested as exemplifying a genuine form of corruption. Even so, a negative verdict in this or that case will only help to refine our understanding of the basic concept, but without undermining the need for a remedy to that particular problem. I know that this list is far from complete. But it should nevertheless suffice to establish my main point. Certainly, students, parents, teachers, administrators, and other officials can supply additional examples. All of these need to be brought to light.

1. It is not just that instructors demand money from students; it also works the other way around. Unprompted, students or their parents commonly offer

money to professors in order that they overlook the student's failure to attend class regularly (or at all), or to buy a grade that is not earned on merit.

2. Students offer money to other students to do their school work for them.
3. Students serving as class (attendance) monitors, acting on their own, demand money from fellow students in order to record accurately their attendance, or in order not to falsify the same.
4. Department Chairs and Faculty Deans give lists to instructors, often at the beginning of each semester, containing the names of students who are to receive top marks regardless of their actual performance. Reportedly, some university faculties even establish quotas for various subjects or classes.
5. Administrators and clerical staff demand bribes from students or families for completing official documents or signing papers, when these services are officially supposed to be free of charge.
6. Deans and Department Chairs at certain times of year customarily expect teachers and clerical staff underneath them to give them "gifts." Failure to do so can result in all sorts of unwelcome consequences, such as undesirable teaching hours at locations that require extra expenditures for travel by bus or taxi.
7. With respect even to familiar forms of bribery and graft, some institutions are reportedly systematic: there exists a well-organized system for the collection and distribution of money or goods obtained. And "prices" are "regulated" according to various criteria. Other institutions are ad hoc in this respect.
8. Senior professors enter into the grade books of junior instructors (who possess little or no power to protest) marks for students who are not in their own classes, students who are relatives or whose families have connections — financial or otherwise — to the professor.
9. Classroom lecturing that is routine, based on outdated material, and requires merely rote learning is, in light of international standards of pedagogy, not just a matter of poor quality teaching, but often constitutes another form of corruption. Instructors in Azerbaijan universities commonly lecture, not to their students, but at them. They do not engage students in meaningful discussion that furthers their understanding and broadens their perspectives. Indeed, many instructors feel threatened by and express hostility to students who ask questions of them. In weekly seminars, instructors routinely ignore the rest of the class while interrogating students individually at the instructor's desk at the front of the classroom. At such times students are left free to talk on their cell phones, or to leave the classroom whenever they feel like it, without seeking permission.

Allowing these practices to go on is a kind of corruption. Students are cheated. Taxpayers are cheated. And so is the state.

10. Many instructors create a need for students to require outside tutoring (often done after class, in the classroom) by intentionally refraining from providing them adequate instruction during official class times. This practice is so widespread in Azerbaijan, especially at the primary and secondary levels, as to need no further comment here.

11. All too frequently — indeed, this as a matter of routine for some — instructors do not show up for their scheduled lectures on time — or at all. To accept payment for this time spent outside the classroom is corrupt. A failure to monitor, prevent, reprimand, and punish this form of behavior by university administrators makes them equally culpable.

12. In numerous cases, university rectors have refused to give academic credit to students for courses passed at leading (fully accredited) universities in Europe or the United States. Given the respective differences in quality in virtually every instance, this is an absurdity. Azerbaijani students who study abroad typically have to spend an extra year at their home institution in order to complete their degree.

13. On the other hand, a rector agrees to accept credits the student earned at a top university in the United States, but demands money from a student in exchange for this (ad hoc) decision.

14. Cheating on course examinations is widespread. Students smuggle in answers on hidden pieces of paper or on personal electronic devices. They share answers with classmates when the instructor or invigilator is out of earshot. Indeed, it is common for instructors to leave the room entirely for lengthy periods while exams are going on. Reportedly some do this intentionally, knowing that students will take advantage of the opportunity to cheat. The cheating is one thing; but this intentional negligence is what is corrupt.

15. Masters students in Azerbaijan commonly have to go through the exact same course — same instructor, same book, same lecture material, same tests — as they did as undergraduates. Again this is not merely a way of cheating students out of a decent education or training, and hence a matter of poor quality; I would argue that allowing this to take place with full cognizance constitutes another (generally unrecognized) form of corruption. Professors who “teach” in this fashion might not receive any special compensation for doing so; but the fact that they — and their universities — make any money at all from such a practice, and the fact that students have to pay twice for what is essentially the same course, are what make it corrupt.

16. Doctoral students routinely copy and paste sections of others' theses or published papers and submit this as original work. Allowing plagiarism to go unpunished is a form of corruption.

17. Instructors verbally abuse and even strike students. In most places this is unthinkable. In the United States it would be viewed as assault and battery, and prosecuted severely to the full extent of the law. To engage in such behavior is both immoral and criminal. To permit it to go on inside a university is not only criminal; it is highly corrupt.

18. Expelling students from universities for engaging in "political" activities, such as distributing copies outside the doors of universities of excerpts from the United Nations' Charter on Human Rights or the Constitution of the Republic of Azerbaijan. This is not only a violation of law and of human rights, it constitutes another form of corruption in the sphere of higher education.

19. Instructors have been fired or have had their contracts not renewed because of participating in overseas faculty training programs funded by politically "troublesome" organizations such as SOROS-OSI. Even a senior professor at a top state university in Baku has been threatened with this sanction for the same reason.

20. Hiring appointments, especially of administrators, are often made on the basis of family ties, party affiliation, and the amount of money a job "candidate" can give to the rector in exchange for being awarded the position.

21. Hiring of rectors. The lack of transparency, especially, but also the absence of public and collegial participation in this process makes it not only a flawed, discreditable process; whether or not money, goods, or services are exchanged, this constitutes another form of corruption.

22. Accreditation/attestation documents are "rubber-stamped" on campus without the visiting assessment team being allowed even to begin its campus examination and evaluation. This makes such documents utterly worthless, not only to international bodies, but to students, parents, and domestic businesses and agencies.

23. Conflicts of interest. For instance, university rectors hold seats in Parliament where legislation pertaining to higher education is debated and voted on. This is especially censurable in the case of those who serve on the Parliamentary Committee for Science and Education. The reasons for this should be obvious.

However, it is also important to make clear that few if any of these items are unique to Azerbaijan. Indeed, the same list (and more) accurately reflects the situation at universities in many developing countries, in particular those of

former Soviet republics and satellites .In the United States, too, plagiarism on assigned essays and cheating on exams has become so widespread and pernicious as to require the adoption of special measures to combat them. Instances of harassment, whether sexual or gender-based, racial or religious in nature, continue to erode the ivory towers as they corrupt the workplace, also. One key difference, however, is that in the United States, Western Europe, and other developed systems worldwide, such behaviors are met with utter intolerance on the part of teachers, administrators, business leaders, and public officials alike. As a result, moreover, in all these places the collaborative creation of publicly transparent means for dealing with such unethical and destructive behaviors is already a well-established — and conspicuous — feature of their respective systems of higher education.

Demanding or accepting bribes by any member of the American or British academy, for example, is, in light of my experience, practically inconceivable. It is not say this to boast or to affect a posture of superiority and not the purpose of this discussion either to judge or to condemn, but rather to attempt to stimulate thinking on this matter in ways that will illuminate a path toward effective policy. So, let us be frank. I reject utterly the view that American and British academics possess inherently a greater degree of integrity than their counterparts in Azerbaijan — or anywhere else in the world, for that matter. But — and this is a crucially decisive point — it is, in both countries, a well-known fact of life that a corrupt individual like that takes a grave risk. Effective means are in place both to prevent such behavior and to root it out, to uncover it, once suspected. An institution that did not punish and seriously attempt to prevent such behavior would itself be sanctioned severely. Among other consequences, it would be deprived of its status as an accredited educational institution. This entails, among other things, the forfeiture of all state funding. More than this, the institution could, even if non-accredited and privately funded, be stripped of its liberty to issue any degrees whatsoever, no matter how devalued they had become. This is simply the way it is among respected universities around the world, public or private. The processes and procedures involved are utterly transparent. Ultimately, then, a noncompliant institution's public reputation alone would cause it to be shut down by market forces. No professor would teach there. No student would go to study there. Such structures for combating corruption, indeed, are required by, and comprise a fundamental aspect of, quality assurance. A university lives and dies by these public measures. The integrity of an individual institution, the public trust in an entire nation's system of higher education, absolutely demands this.

4. REMEDIES AND SUGGESTED SOLUTIONS

The important progress is being made in a number of areas pertaining to needed reforms. Even so, for Azerbaijan's universities to be able to assume their rightful place on the contemporary global stage something must be done about these many forms of internal corruption. But what, exactly? Psychologist S.M.Medjidova, expressing a sentiment heard widely throughout Azerbaijan, says, "If we want to change the way people behave, we should start with their attitudes and be capable to influence [sic] them" (2007). This echoes a suggestion of Misir Mardanov, when he says, "We need to change attitudes, ... with 'awareness campaigns'" (2006).

Attitudes on the part of many — towards bribery, graft, nepotism, and other forms of corruption — need to change. An ongoing awareness campaign, carried out energetically, thoroughly, and with the full support of all stakeholders with support from both state-sponsored and independent media organs should make a positive impact. Still, I do not see that attitudes are, as a rule, or even in a majority of cases, the chief source of the problem. Neither do I think this should be the starting point for combating corruption in higher education in Azerbaijan (or elsewhere). After all, it is not as though a great majority of Azerbaijanis firmly believe that bribery and other forms of corruption that persist in universities are morally acceptable. Some hold that bribery and graft, for instance, happen to be, as a matter of contingent fact, unavoidable in the present circumstances. But not all Azerbaijanis today accept even this much. As for university teachers and administrators who have engaged in such practices, I, for one, would not venture to hypothesize that a substantial number of them have done so with the firm conviction that their actions are perfectly harmless and unobjectionable.

Admittedly, my experience is limited to the anecdotal. Nevertheless, insofar as those who engage in such practices offer any justification for their actions, in my experience these have generally taken the form of an appeal to circumstances of need. In other spheres of activity, need may not be the motivating factor. But for low-paid teachers, administrators, and other university staff, it most often is. My main worry, however, is this: if we take the changing of attitudes as our beginning task, then the accomplishment of just this initial goal will in all likelihood require a very long time, indeed. Attitudes are notoriously slow to change. In the meantime, offensive behaviors continue. But even then, if and whenever they do change, we will still be faced with the problem of exactly what to do. It strikes me as naïve, the belief that these unwelcome actions will necessarily come to an end simply because of a fundamental change in attitude. Something causes the attitude to be formed, and I am sure that it has nothing to do with an Azerbaijani diet.

Now, whatever others might have in mind when they suggest that the problem boils down to the changing of attitudes, one should not take Mardanov to be advocating that this is the only course of action. Nor should one take him as advocating the policy that we should first start with efforts to change attitudes and only after this has been accomplished to some significant degree embark on other actions. In fact, he has made several suggestions — some of which I not only endorse but wish to see extended further. I will return to this shortly; but before doing so, I want to consider another thoughtful set of recommendations.

According to Temple and Petrov,

The way forward, we suggest, cannot be to attempt technical fixes for corruption: some new procedures or checks, for example, or even a “complete overhaul of the administration.” Certainly the solution cannot be to graft Western methods, however effective they may be ... in their home countries, onto otherwise unreformed political and higher education structures — for example by adopting US-style Boards of Trustees This would simply be to create profitable new sites of corruption. Instead, the response should be to focus on the broader political and social context, on the strengthening of civil society through the creation of social capital, inside but also outside higher education. Without achieving this, attempts to confront, or “root out” the problem will, we suspect, get nowhere. The solution to the problem of corruption in the university lies beyond the campus (2004: 97).

To be sure, any arrangement, technical or not, that leads to the creation of new sites of corruption, whatever virtues it might otherwise possess, cannot in the end provide an effective remedy. There is little point in trading one form of profiteering or one cast of profiteers for another. Certainly one must avoid at all costs the resurrection of a Hydra: cut off one head and two others spring to life. I concur with Mardanov’s view, fitting here, that “Corruption is not eradicable through purely administrative means.” And I fully agree with Temple and Petrov that the mere grafting of foreign methods onto “unreformed” stock cannot provide a solution. One thing I have stressed repeatedly from the very beginning of my involvement with higher education reform efforts in the southern Caucasus is the idea that “One size does not fit all” (see, e.g., Kortum 2005).

And yet, this does not mean that selective grafting, of some kind, in certain places, to a limited degree, has no place whatsoever in developing a set of structures that can be effective in dealing with instances of corruption in higher education in Azerbaijan. Neither does it mean that reforms in administrative structures and processes can play no helpful role. The solution to the problem of

corruption in the university, may, as Temple and Petrov assert, lie beyond the campus. But it does not wholly lie outside.

What all this does indicate, I believe, is that policy measures must be devised and carried out on all fronts at once. As daunting as this sounds, I am optimistic that it can be achieved in Azerbaijan. But it requires a concerted effort on the part of all stakeholders to address each and every aspect of each and every form of corruption, both internal to the university and externally. And this must be done comprehensively. Which is to say that anti-corruption policies must proceed hand-in-hand with all the other reform efforts now underway. Even more broadly, as both Mardanov and then-ambassador to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), Maurisio Pavisi, stated at the ABA-CEELI conference, this fight against corruption needs to encompass society as a whole (2006). As Ambassador Pavisi said, “One cannot create an ideal island of education in an ocean of corruption.” For this ambitious objective to have any chance of realization, this robust effort must also be pursued in a coordinated fashion. A fragmented, piecemeal approach is doomed to failure. Indeed, I suspect it will lead to the creation of even more problems than it proposes to solve. Everyone must work together. As everybody knows, however, this is much easier said than done.

So, let me now proceed to some specifics. In light of all that has preceded in this paper, especially in consideration of my listed varieties of internal corruption, chief among my proposed remedies are the following: a thorough scientific study of the nature and extent of the problem conducted by an outside agency; state commitment to adequate faculty compensation and support; adoption of what has become known among leading universities in the United States and Western Europe (and in other parts of the world) as “Best Practices” concerning quality assurance; strict adherence on the part of the Ministry of Education and by university administrations and instructors to the points and principles articulated by the European Higher Education Area’s “Bologna Process,” including especially those pertaining to the rights and privileges of students; adoption of internationally-established procedures for university accreditation; and creation of a public oversight agency for ongoing monitoring of state and private universities with respect to all kinds of corruption — an agency that employs a significant number of foreign experts from countries whose systems of higher education are already well advanced.

Elaborating upon these, I wish to make the following ten proposals.

1. The first thing I would like to suggest is an accurate scientific survey, conducted by trained non-governmental sociologists and other specialists from Azerbaijan and abroad, of the extent of bribery and cheating at all universities in

Azerbaijan. This should include data on amounts of money collected, and on the prevalence of all varieties of corruption. At the ABA-CEELI 2006 conference, Mardanov also cited the “need for clear figures” concerning the extent of corruption at both universities and secondary schools. The Baku branch of the Caucasus Research Resource Center could be an effective ally in this initiative. The CRRC administers annual small-grant competitions for a multitude of social sciences research projects oriented toward practical uses. Before any thoroughgoing policy on corruption can be drafted that has a legitimate chance of being successful, a reliable study, both quantitative and qualitative, of the nature and extent of the phenomenon must be carried out. This does not, however, require an inordinate amount of time (or money). But it needs to be carried out very soon. And, to repeat, such an investigation must include the active participation, at every stage, of international experts.

2. The second thing I would like to see happen is another conference devoted exclusively to issues of corruption in higher education in Azerbaijan. Others have called for this, too, including Mardanov (2006) and Pavesi (2006). This series of meetings must not, however, like so many others simply provide participants an opportunity for more “talk.” The time for pretty words is past. A beautiful description of a meal does not satisfy one’s hunger. A menu does not fill the belly. More specifically, this conference should be a practical working group comprised of specialists from Bologna (including Tempus Tacis), the United States, Eastern Europe and abroad, along with representatives of Azerbaijan’s key stakeholders: students, parents, secondary and university administrators and teachers, the Presidential Apparatus, the MOE, the Parliamentary Committee for Science and Education, the SSAC, the Academy of Sciences, the Ministry of Finance, foreign embassies, and various educational NGOs. Findings of the scientific survey should be central to this discussion, and a set of practical resolutions ought to be adopted, to be confirmed by the appropriate political bodies in Azerbaijan. One major drawback of the November 2006 conference in Baku on this same topic, organized by ABA-CEELI and OSCE, was the almost total lack of participation on the part of the universities. In his opening remarks Mardanov was justified in chastising the organizers on this point. Therefore, I propose that at this follow-up conference each and every university be required to send its entire administrative force as well as a substantial body of instructors from all academic and professional disciplines. Likewise, representatives from each student body, selected by the students themselves, must also participate.

3. Salary increases for university administrators, instructors, and non-instructional staff. Many voices have rightly called for this. A small raise was bequeathed to university instructors in Spring 2006. This was necessary as a cost-of-living pay adjustment, but did not go nearly far enough in terms of a

comprehensive equity pay plan. In keeping with international practices, salary increases should be made on a scale, from beginning instructors to “master” teachers. I strongly encourage the MOE and Azerbaijani universities to adopt the kind of distinctions in rank — and in corresponding pay levels — that is exemplified in the United States and other countries by the designations of, e.g., Assistant, Associate, and Full Professor or their equivalents. Annual pay raises must be a part of the comprehensive plan and a clear set of policies at each institution must establish the means by which university teachers can advance in rank over the years. Advancement should not be based solely on seniority (as it is in some European systems), but chiefly on merit.

As demanded by “Best Practices” and by the Bologna principles, these policies must also include teacher retraining programs (as part of a larger ‘faculty development’ scheme), that lead also to pay increases on the basis of merit. Those who achieve outstanding results in terms of teaching and/or research should be rewarded for their accomplishments. Such incentives serve not only to raise the quality of higher education, they act also as deterrents to bribery and other varieties of corruption. Bottom line: as long as wages for university staff are insufficient for meeting even the basic costs of living, corruption will plague the quality and value of higher education in Azerbaijan.

4. Tuition increases. In conjunction with numbers (1) and (3) above, I have another practical remedy. Once an accurate figure has been obtained by scientific survey of the amount of money paid in bribes by students each year at a particular institution, it would be an easy matter to convert this expense into an authenticated and transparent form of income for the university. Simply divide the total hidden sum of what is sometimes euphemistically referred to as “informal fees” by the number of students and add this to the official, published cost of tuition. After all, students and parents are, as a whole, already paying exactly this sum of money for the students’ education. So, for example, if a family is paying 807 New Manats (\$1,000 US) per year to X university for tuition, and on top of this the student has to pay 80 New Manats (approximately \$100 US) per year — on average — in bribes, etc., then the total actual cost to the family is 887 New Manats (approximately \$1,100 US). My suggestion is simply to make this last figure the official, publicly advertised cost of tuition, and for universities to distribute exactly the sum total of this extra income, now transparently and legitimately procured, to its teaching staff.

For students on scholarship, who might not regularly or typically be confronted by demands to pay bribes, the amount of their scholarship awards from state sources can be adjusted very slightly upwards to meet the modest increase in tuition. For those rare students who have not previously been compelled to pay bribes, a small increase in tuition such as proposed here ought to be viewed as a

very small price to pay in order to combat corruption and to effectively raise the standards and the reputation of their university. Moreover, it is important to realize that a small increase in tuition for a very small minority of students will inevitably contribute to elevating the value of their degrees and their diplomas. Please note that I do not advocate that this remedy be adopted by itself as a means of raising teachers' salaries. Nevertheless, I do believe that this could serve as one highly effective step. At the very least, it would enable universities to establish a significant measure of transparency in one of the most problematic areas in need of substantial reform.

5. Creation, at each university, of a University Development Office and an Alumni Association modeled on those of American, European, and other advanced universities worldwide. These semi-autonomous organizations are geared to pursue fundraising activities for the institution. These help fight corruption because alumni will not give money to their alma maters if alumni have had a negative experience there — particularly, if they were compelled to pay bribes, were refused credit for study abroad, or were otherwise mistreated. In order that such “technical” initiatives not beget organizations that degenerate into “profitable new sites of corruption,” funds raised by these bodies ought to be controlled by wholly independent foreign legal and financial entities such as are known within the United States as “501 c 3 charities.” These independent, publicly transparent depositories exert direct and total control over the ingress and egress of all funds; no domestic (i.e., Azerbaijani) persons are involved in the handling of money, including state officials. Such funds can be used in many ways to improve the quality of a university's educational mission, including the formation of a permanent endowment from which can be drawn money for equity and merit pay raises for instructors.

In the summer of 2007, the establishment of such financial corporations has now become common practice with respect to the collection and distribution of money specifically in cases of developing countries within which corruption has been identified as a serious problem. There is nothing to prevent this being done for Azerbaijani universities. Indeed, this constitutes yet another means of satisfying the Bologna demand for university autonomy.

6. Honor Codes and a Student Bill of Rights. Each and every university must publish an annual handbook for faculty and students that includes a clear and precise statement on cheating, bribery, and other forms of academic and personal misconduct. A Student Bill of Rights, detailing the rights and privileges, as well as the duties and obligations, of students has the force of law at the university. Again, something along these lines is required by the Bologna Process.

7. Judicial Review Boards and mechanisms. In conjunction with (6, above), each university must put in place effective, fair, and transparent procedures for adjudicating cases that allege a violation of the honor code and bill of rights. All members of the university must be made aware of these provisions, which must be followed faithfully by the administration as a matter of law. Once an impropriety is alleged — no matter by whom or against whom — these procedures are automatically and immediately set in motion. This is not subject to the judgment of any professor or administrator, including the rector, or indeed a state official. As full partners (as required by Bologna) students must have, not only a prominent voice in the creation of such mechanisms, but full representation on all such boards at every level. As with Student Councils, student representatives must be selected by the student body, not be appointed by the administration.

8. Student Councils (SCs), Student Parliaments (SPs), or Student Government Associations (SGAs). These are not to be confused with Student Unions, as are found for instance at some eastern and central European universities, or in the U.K., at places such as Oxford. University SGAs are not clubs; they are not debating societies, like at Oxford, and they are not a kind of Soviet-style labor union for students. They are fully functioning student governments, with constitutions, executive officers, legislative officers, standing and ad hoc committees, and the rest, all democratically adopted or elected by the students themselves. The legislative and executive bodies address matters of concern to students, including all aspects of the university mission that pertains to the quality of their education such as curriculum design, academic requirements, job placement, extracurricular activities, student fees, services, housing and transportation, and many other things besides. At regularly scheduled weekly, biweekly, or monthly meetings, student legislation is debated on and approved or rejected by democratic procedures. Legislative decisions are presented to the university administration in cases where their input is required. The student body seats representatives of their own choosing and with full voting privileges on all decision-making or policy-setting committees at the university, including rectorates.

One of the key points of the Bologna Declaration is that students are to be enlisted as full partners in the effort to raise standards and attain compliance with EHEA objectives. According to the Berlin communiqué (2003), “Ministers note the full participation of student organizations in the Bologna Process and underline the necessity to include the students continuously and at an early stage in further activities. Students are full partners in higher education governance.” Having students thus engaged is another effective means for combating corruption in all its guises. This is no mere suggestion of mine; such practices are absolutely required by the EHEA’s Bologna Process.

9. External audits and attestations. This includes financial, managerial, and academic audits as well as close evaluation of such things as student services (quality of library facilities, dining options, psychological counseling, and computer support, for instance) and building maintenance. These attestations must be performed by committees that contain licensed, outside experts. This removes the possibility of strictly internal assessment committees merely going through the motions and patting each other on the back as a form of quid pro quo. According to Stuart Garvie of the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (2007), within the Framework of Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area, concerning the 'Procedures for Self-Certification' that Azerbaijan must adopt, "The self-certification process shall involve international experts."

As a singularly valuable preparatory exercise in anticipation of such on-site assessments by authorized teams soon to be dispatched to Azerbaijan from the EHEA, I would strongly recommend that the Ministry of Education invite a group of foreign experts to conduct a preliminary 'mock' assessment of a small number of selected universities in Azerbaijan, one that is transparent and thorough. This would have at least two important benefits. All stakeholders would gain a practical understanding of, one, how such an assessment is to be conducted, and, two, what needs to be done to bring these universities into compliance with required standards in each and every domain of activity. Indeed, a team of highly experienced national and international experts from my own university has already at my prompting expressed a willingness to conduct such an exercise in Azerbaijan, or to play a central role in designing and assisting in implementing such an initiative. All they need now is an invitation.

10. Specifically anti-corruption training programs provided by international experts. One of the main reasons for the sluggish pace of higher education reforms in recently independent and/or developing nations such as Azerbaijan is the lack of internal expertise with respect to the structures and processes that comprise internationally-established "Best Practices" in various areas in need of quality assurance. Key Azerbaijani stakeholders, including especially those representing the state and the universities, need more fully to engage the services of foreign experts in all fields of higher education reform. This should take the form of visitations to Azerbaijan from outside partners, and vice versa: representatives from Azerbaijan must travel abroad in order to gain practical knowledge of these best practices first-hand. Various opportunities already exist for such exchanges, in the form of grant competitions offered by the likes of the American Fulbright, Muskie, and Humphry Fellowships, British Council, the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), the French Ministry of Education Exchange Program, SOROS, Tempus Tacis, and many others. A firm

commitment should be made by the MOE, NGOs, and the universities to take full advantage of these opportunities. But the state should also set aside funds in its annual budget for financial patronage of these kinds of exchanges, as well. Among others, this will require the involvement and full support of the Ministries of Finance and Foreign Affairs.

What I want specifically to propose here is that, when individuals from the Azerbaijani side embark on one of these opportunities to study or participate in workshops and seminars abroad, their “curriculum,” such as it is, should include at least some significant portion of time devoted to working directly with their foreign hosts on matters pertaining to ways and means of combating corruption. In the meantime, there already exists inside Azerbaijan a cadre of alumni of such educational programs. The American-educated Alumni Association (AAA), for example, now contains hundreds of members, most of whom enjoy a practical familiarity with teaching, research, or management methods employed in the United States, and can help advance the reform efforts at home by serving as consultants on various aspects of these initiatives. This store of human resources is considerable and should not be left unused.

CONCLUSIONS

The truth of the matter is plain. Corruption, of any kind, is simply not acceptable. It is unacceptable to the other Bologna signatories. It is unacceptable to universities in the United States and to academic and professional bodies in advanced countries worldwide. In all these places the policy is one of “zero tolerance.” It has to be. It can be no different in the Republic of Azerbaijan. Failure to enact an effective set of anti-corruption measures — on the part of any university, on the part of any country — results in a failure to satisfy international standards. The consequences of this are equally plain. Indeed, they can be dire. In the case of Azerbaijan, failure to end corruption in higher education constitutes a failure to meet the objectives of the European Higher Education Area as set forth in the statutes and principles of the Bologna Process. Noncompliance entails non-certification and non-recognition by this organization. President Ilham Aliyev’s decree mandating that his country join this far-reaching effort will go unfulfilled. Azerbaijan will be cast adrift. It will not be permitted to enjoy the many benefits that accrue to accepted members of this agreement.

The same holds true outside Europe, too, with higher education bodies in developed countries globally. Apart from the possible exceptions of Russia and former Soviet states, still mired for the most part in “transitional” exigencies, there will be little or no integration with academic institutions and professional

programs outside. Diplomas issued by Azerbaijani universities will not be accepted at face-value. They will be severely devalued. Not even Turkey is ready to recognize diplomas issued by Azerbaijani faculties of medicine and law. A news agency's headline for November 13, 2008 says it all: "Disparity of Azerbaijan's Higher Education Program to International Standards Hinders Reciprocal Recognition of Diplomas with Turkey" (Trend 2008). Official academic transcripts of Azerbaijani students will not be treated as trustworthy; neither grades nor course credits will be transferable to undergraduate or graduate programs outside the country. As a direct result, student mobility will be severely restricted. In addition, correspondingly fewer opportunities for meaningful employment abroad will be available to graduates of Azerbaijani universities.

It is not yet all doom and gloom; but, these are serious consequences. To the degree that corruption persists in higher education in Azerbaijan, to that degree will Azerbaijan be saddled with an unfavorable reputation internationally. Such a burden is heavy and difficult to remove. Without a highly educated, respected work force (and a non-corrupt system of job placement in the domestic commercial sphere), productivity and trade suffer. Lacking confidence in a broken system, foreign investment in Azerbaijan's economy will necessarily lag. This will lead to further isolation. Corruption in higher education creates a downward spiral. Oil will not save her. Azerbaijan will continue to experience slow progress; indeed, the signs of economic stagnation are already apparent (MSNBC 2006). Unemployment, underemployment, poverty, and the like will remain at elevated levels. The republic's capacity to achieve a leading role in regional affairs is therefore correspondingly diminished. Ultimately, then, an increased susceptibility to outside influences and domination by powerful, better-educated neighbors become real possibilities.

The risks are too great. The Bologna clock is ticking. The corrosive elements in Azerbaijan's institutions of higher education, the varieties of corruption — each and every one of them — must be eliminated. For the sake of her future, they must be eliminated soon. The resources are available; the means are at hand. It is now only a question of will.

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Summary

**EMERGING HIGHER EDUCATION IN AZERBAIJAN:
VARIETIES OF INTERNAL CORRUPTION
AND PROPOSED REMEDIES
“WHAT WE’RE DOING IS INTELLECTUAL GENOCIDE.”
—VASIF MOVSUMOV, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, FUND OF
STRUGGLE AGAINST CORRUPTION**

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While the attention of Azerbaijani stakeholders and concerned outside parties such as European and American universities — not to mention such august international bodies as UNESCO, the World Bank, and the WTO — has overwhelmingly been focused on the prevalence of bribery in exchange for grades and to problems associated with student admissions processes and institutional licensure, I identify herein an extensive variety of corrupt practices that persist inside Azerbaijan’s institutions of post-secondary education. Led by the Ministry of Education and the

State Student Admissions Commission, reform initiatives in other areas of higher education have in the past three or four years made slow but significant advances. However, both singly and as a whole internal forms of corruption continue to exert a corrosive influence upon the quality and, ultimately, the value of higher education in Azerbaijan. These practices present obstacles to the necessary progress of Azerbaijani universities and hinder their full integration into the European and world higher education communities. They harm students as well as teachers, psychologically and in many other ways, and inhibit their respective capacities for intellectual growth, professional advancement, and the potential to make valuable contributions to improving the quality of life in Azerbaijan. Consequently, at the most fundamental levels these objectionable practices seriously undermine the country's political, economic, and social well-being.

In Section 1 I delineate the range of topics to be discussed in this paper. In Section 2 I highlight the experiences of my recent 12-month posting as a Fulbright Scholar in Azerbaijan and throughout the ensuing three years, during which time I have worked closely on numerous aspects of higher education reform with virtually all major stakeholders, internal as well as external. On the basis of this experience, in Section 3 I provide nearly two dozen examples that cover several major areas of concern. Not all of these will be news, but it is likely that some have not heretofore been identified. In Section 4 I offer some thoughts as to specific, concrete ways that these types of malpractice can be reduced in scale and, within a reasonable period of time, eliminated to the point of negligibility. Key among these is strict adherence to the principles and points articulated in the statutes of the Bologna Process — in particular those that pertain to university autonomy and student rights. Naturally, any successful course of action depends in the first place upon a genuine state commitment to eradicating all forms of corruption. But real change cannot be sustained by a top-down approach merely; students, parents, and families can and ought to play a major role in the accomplishment of reforms, by making known their concerns and collectively imposing their will upon the processes already underway.