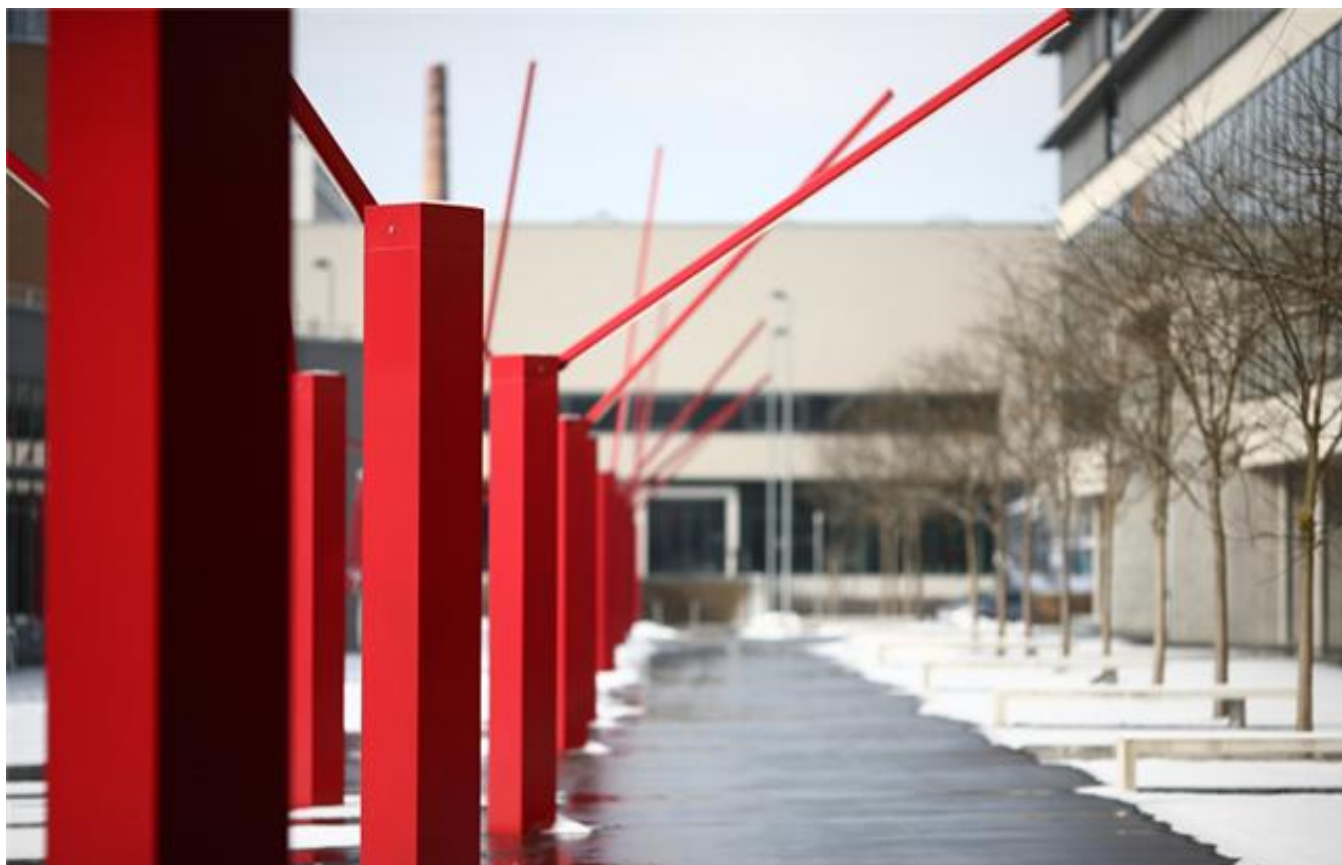


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Europeanisation of Doctoral Reform in Ukraine. Recent State of Play and Future challenges

Current system of Higher Education (HE) in Ukraine inherited its foundation from the Soviet Union. Among all fifteen Soviet republics, Soviet Ukraine had one of the most advanced industrial potential. In order to support this economic might the Soviet Ukraine generously funded the HE and research in order to train high quality academic and research cadre, which contributed significantly to the Soviet advances in space industry, nuclear energy, machinery, physics and many other areas. Students enjoyed privilege of free HE, teaching staff and researchers had moderate but sufficient standards of living.

Drastic economic downfall, which Ukraine faced immediately after its independence in 1991, implied tightening of HE and research funding. As a result the Ukrainian academia experienced a steadily growing “brain drain” and lowering of quality of teaching in higher education institutions (HEIs). In this situation the Ukrainian government had no choice but to open doors for factual self financing of the HEIs. It was done by permitting private HEIs and by allowing public HEIs to collect fees from students which were admitted beyond the governmental quota. As a result of this policy the number of HEIs in Ukraine had jumped from 140 in 1991 to 940 today. Unfortunately this reform took

place on expense of quantity and quality of HE in Ukraine and implied further deterioration of quality of teaching and research. One of the reasons for it was the lack of qualified and competent teaching and research staff able to fill in new teaching positions in newly established HEIs. To prevent further decline, the Ukrainian government started to look for possible scenarios for reform. The emerged in 1999 Bologna Process appeared to be the most suitable seed to be planted into the Ukrainian soil of HE. In a short period of time the Ukrainian government succeeded in implementing most elements of the Bologna Declaration (introducing the 2 cycle system of HE and of uniformed HE diplomas' supplements). However some elements of the Ukrainian HE remain barely changed till today. One of them is the doctoral education.

This article will focus on the phenomena of the reform of doctoral studies in Ukraine. In the first half of the article the recent system of doctoral education in Ukraine is analysed. In the second half of the article we shall look at governmental reforms in this area. Furthermore we shall look at reforms conducted by some of Ukrainian universities. In conclusion, we shall try to forecast the future of the doctoral studies reform in Ukraine.

2. Bologna Process and the Ukrainian doctoral education

The Soviet system of HE was based on the Russian tsarist system of HE which in

own turn had inherited traditions of continental higher educational system, mainly from Germany. In the core of the Soviet system of HE was the 2 cycle system. The first cycle was the fundamental graduate degree called "specialist" which usually lasted up to 5 years. The second cycle comprised two levels. The first level was called "aspirantura". It lasted up to 3 years and led to acquiring the "first doctoral degree" which is still called "candidate of science". At the end of this level, a doctoral candidate was expected to submit a doctoral thesis and to defend it publically. The final level of doctoral education was called "doctorantura" and allowed a candidate of science to obtain a "doctor nauk" degree upon publication of a doctoral monograph (closest equivalent is habilitation in today's Germany) and its public defence.

The system of HE in the Soviet Union ensured that teaching and research were separated. While the HEIs concentrated on teaching, most of research work was conducted under aegis of the National Academy of Science (NAS) which comprised hundreds of research institutions generously funded by the state. No surprise that majority of the research institutions were of science nature. Need for economic and political reform during the perestroika in 1990ies have shifted priorities of HE from science to economics, finance and law. However the major challenge of that time was to shift priorities

of the HE from scholastic teaching towards the education of independent thinkers who could think critically.

The Ukrainian government expressed great enthusiasm to join the Bologna Process from the early days of its launch. Adherence to the Bologna Process was viewed as act of open declaration of European integration ambitions of Ukraine and was in fact perceived as the most efficient way of displaying successes of domestic reforms to the outside world. Eventually Ukraine has signed the Bologna Declaration along with Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Moldova in May 2005. Since that time the Ukrainian government has achieved serious successes in HE reforms. Among them: encouragement of better students self-government; implementation of the ECTS system; establishment of the unified Bologna Declaration two-cycle system (4 years Bachelor and 1-2 years Master); issue of the Bologna Declaration style diploma supplements. One of the most significant achievements of the HE reform in Ukraine was the launch of the School Graduate Certificate which allowed school graduates to apply directly to Ukrainian universities without taking entrance exams. This system contributed tremendously towards diminishing corruption in HEIs in Ukraine.

However many other priorities of the Bologna Process have not been achieved yet by the Ukrainian government. Among them are: student mobility, university

autonomy and doctoral reform. Today's doctoral studies in Ukraine do not differ very much from the Soviet system. On completing the second cycle of HE (Master degree), a holder is regarded as having complete higher education, which entitles him/her to pursue the third cycle – 3 years doctoral study which lead to the “candidate of science” degree (almost equivalent to PhD programmes in European universities). Before completing their doctoral thesis doctorate candidates have to pass qualification exams, which usually include philosophy, foreign language and a professional exam. In addition to it doctorate candidates should follow up to 200 hours of classes annually on subjects like research methodology, professionally related disciplines, pedagogy and others.

Recent studies show that mainly domestic factors caused drawbacks in achieving the Bologna Declaration's objectives. Among them: centralised administration which imposed reforms on the Ukrainian HEI without close cooperation with them; insufficient training of the HEI administrators and academics on fundamentals and objectives of the Bologna Reform; insufficient resources of the HEI which is a consequence of poor funding from the government; attachment of the HEI administrators to the old Soviet system of education. HE elites in Ukraine expressed open distrust to the Bologna Process fearing decreased quality and loss of national HE traditions.

The reason of the slow pace of doctoral and research reform in Ukraine lays in the current system of strongly centralised state control of the HE. The head institution in this system is the Ministry of Education and Science (MES) of Ukraine which is responsible for setting up the programmes and standards of HE and awarding licenses and accreditation of the HIEs. However, the key power in area of doctorate education is concentrated in hands of the Supreme Attestation Board (SAB). This is a separate state-public administrative body that organizes and manages the Specialized Academic Councils (SAC) that are responsible for awarding research degrees in Ukraine. As a rule the SACs are attached either to the HEIs or research institutions of the NAC. SACs functions in line with very narrow specialisation fields. For example, the SACs do not cover the whole law discipline but accept thesis and conduct viva only within narrow subfields like criminal law, civil law, international law and etc. As a result applicants must write their doctoral thesis in such a way to suit requirements and specialisation of a particular SAC. As a consequence applicants are really discouraged to conduct interdisciplinary research. For instance, there is no single SAC in Ukraine in EU law. Therefore, applicants willing to prepare doctoral thesis in EU law have no choice but to prepare their thesis either in international/comparative law or within one of major national law fields. Furthermore,

decisions of the SACs are not final, but must be approved and could be overruled by the SAB. This body sets up not only procedural rules for doctoral thesis and viva but also defines the list of academic journals where articles by doctorate candidates could be published (ironically these lists do not include either of internationally recognised peer reviewed journals) and even sets up style and methodological standards of academic articles in Ukraine.

Ideally, it is envisaged that the doctoral education in Ukraine is based on close collaboration between the HEIs and research institutions. However in reality, researchers have quite limited collaboration with university staff. It happens because university staff is overloaded with teaching workload which could comprise up to 900 hours per year. Therefore, HE lecturers simply have no time to conduct high quality research outside their teaching.

The high level of centralisation of managing research and doctoral education in Ukraine has caused rather formalistic attitude towards its quality on behalf of general public. In the time being, major attraction and objective to conduct research in Ukraine is to get a research degree in order to acquire further promotions. Ironically matter of getting research degree became quite a popular undertaking among civil servants and politicians. They use administrative pressure and influence to acquire research

degrees often without personally being involved into conducting their "own" research. For example, today a majority of research degree holders work either in politics or in civil service. Therefore, the doctoral education in Ukraine faces serious structural financial and ideological crisis risk jeopardising further research activities. All attempts to reform this system have been facing obstacles from the highly centralised system of SAB.

Further steps to reform doctoral education in Ukraine

Today the Ukrainian government faces several choices to pursue the reform of doctoral education. The first choice is to preserve the inherited Soviet system of doctoral education based on centralised administration and separation between research and teaching. In this case the government has to increase funding of the HEI and research institutions. In time of global economic crisis it would be rather a difficult task to fulfil. Another option is to align the doctoral education with standards of the Bologna Declaration. In this case, the absence of really autonomous HEIs in Ukraine serves as the major impediment to this process. Since early Soviet times, the HEIs in Ukraine are not authorised to issue own style doctorate diplomas instead all HE diplomas are being uniformly issued by the SAB. In 2009, the Ukrainian government has launched a long awaited experiment. It granted autonomous status to five selected universities with long standing traditions in HE. The autonomous

status allows these universities to award undergraduate, graduate and doctoral degrees and to issue own style diplomas. On the one hand, this initiative was warmly welcomed by HEIs in Ukraine. On the other hand, this reform represents a serious challenge to the Ukrainian HEIs because none of them have strong traditions of truly autonomous academic life. In this situation, some members of the first cohort of autonomous HEIs decided to launch experiments. For instance in 2008 the Kiev Mohyla Academy has established a Doctoral School which is based on Western traditions of doctoral education. A major emphasis of this initiative is to encourage doctoral candidates to conduct world class research in line with best international standards. Doctoral candidates are encouraged to prepare articles in English for peer reviewed journals, to participate in international conferences and workshops, to follow courses on Western academic and research methodology. It is expected that other autonomous HEIs will follow this initiative and set up own doctorate schools. Acquiring truly autonomous status poses many challenges for the Ukrainian HEIs. A major of these challenges is to acquire not only domestic but also international competitiveness. Meanwhile, none of the Ukrainian HEIs is in internationally recognised university rankings. International citation index of Ukrainian academics is low. Move from centralised system of HE to the autonomous system

would imply the necessity to create a truly new academic infrastructure and system of evaluation which should be based on international standards.

Conclusions

The example of Ukraine represents a typical case of a HE reform in transition. This is the case when a country with strong HE traditions has to find new ways to substitute state funded HE and research and to make it internationally competitive. The Bologna Declaration offered a unified approach towards reform of HE in whole Europe. The Ukrainian government was ready to adopt this system looking at it as a best mean to ensure European integration of Ukraine and to enhance its quality and self sustainability. However, the Ukrainian government has to face difficult dilemmas on the road towards these targets. If the two first cycles of HE (undergraduate and postgraduate degrees) became more

or less compatible with the centralised administration of HE in Ukraine, the third cycle which is doctoral education proved to be totally incompatible with it. The central administration which is in hands of the SAB could not ensure high level competitiveness of doctoral education in Ukraine. The emerging cohort of autonomous HEI will serve as a leading force to experiment with the reform of the doctoral education in Ukraine. For this purpose, considerable structural reforms

have to be conducted. Most important among them is the launch of internationally recognised peer reviewed journals, revision of requirements for doctoral degrees and enhancement of prestige of the doctoral education among academics.