

Who is Guilty and What to Do? Popular Opinion and Public Discourse of Corruption in Russian Higher Education

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**Qui est coupable et que faut-il faire? L'opinion populaire et le
discours public de la corruption dans l'éducation supérieure russe**

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Abstract

Corruption in higher education in Russia is a growing problem. This paper considers the scholarly and popular discourse in Russia around this corruption and the discussion examines its context within the overall corruptness of the society and reflects on measures of comprehensive educational reform. Drawing upon a theoretical framework linking popular opinion and public discourse, discussion in the scholarly and popular press between 1998 and 2011 is analyzed, and the themes of the discourse are traced. Results focus on the reasons for corruption in the higher education sector, as well as on current and potential ways to tackle corruption, including the newly introduced standardized testing. Even though the national test will not solve the problem of corruption in education, its full scale, country-wide implementation at this point appears to be inevitable.

Résumé

La corruption dans l'éducation supérieure russe est un problème croissant. Cet article examine les discours académiques et populaires en relation avec la corruption. La discussion définit le contexte général de la corruption dans la société russe et met l'accent sur des mesures à mettre en place pour qu'une réforme globale du système éducatif soit factible. Ce travail se base sur un cadre conceptuel qui met en relation l'opinion populaire et le discours public. Il analyse les discussions populaires et publiques dans la presse entre 1998 et 2011. Cette analyse retrace les thèmes principaux inhérents à cette discussion. Les résultats de l'analyse se concentrent sur les raisons de la corruption dans l'éducation supérieure russe, sur les différentes façons possibles pour abattre la corruption et sur l'introduction de l'examen standard. Même si cet examen national ne peut pas résoudre le problème de la corruption dans l'éducation supérieure, sa mise en place dans tout le territoire russe paraît pourtant être inévitable.

Introduction

Perceptions are in no way a perfect measure of corruptness, be it in Russia or any other country. Nevertheless, publicized perceptions are important when it comes to shaping popular opinion and directing public discourse. The 2011 Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) by Transparency International (2011), which measures the perceived levels of public sector corruption in 183 countries and territories around the world, assigned Russia a score of only 2.4 out of 10. Russia was placed in the 143rd position, so the country ranks with such former Soviet republics as Belorussia and Azerbaijan, and such African nations as Nigeria and Uganda. The CPI ranks countries based on how corrupt their public sector is perceived to be, on a scale of 0 - 10, where 0 means that a country is perceived as highly corrupt and 10 means that a country is perceived as very clean.

This paper considers corruption in higher education in Russia, including such aspects as corruption in admissions to higher education institutions (HEIs) and in grading and assessment of academic progress. It sets a theoretical frame of public discourse around traditional questions set by Russian classics Chernyshevsky, Gertsen, Tolstoy, and Dostoevsky: “Who is Guilty?” and “What to Do?” (Tarasov, 2008, pp. 7-8). Corruption is considered in the context of comprehensive educational reform. The major focus of this study is on the likely reasons for corruption in the higher education sector, as well as current attempts and possible ways to tackle corruption, including the newly introduced standardized testing. The discourses around corruption in Russian HEIs, as perpetuated through the popular media, have particular effects. This study analyzes the way the media have covered the problem of corruption in higher education in Russia for the period from 1998 to 2011 in order to demonstrate that HEIs focusing on the EGE deflects attention away from internal corruption within the HEIs. As entry examinations are not the cause of corruption, standardized testing is no treatment for corruption in higher education.

The problem of educational corruption

Corruption is generally defined as the abuse of public office for private gain (Anechiarico & Jacobs, 1995). Petrov and Temple (2004) narrowly define corruption as an act that implies illegality. They do not accept the notion of “grey areas” as related to corruption (Osipian, 2012). Thus, they deny the possibility of an existing continuum from uncorrupt to corrupt. The notion of a grey area as it relates to educational corruption may be introduced in order to point to the existing grey areas, not in the legislation itself, but in the way the legislation may be interpreted in respect to corruption in the education sector. According to this approach, the issue is one of interpretation and applicability rather than that of continuity. However, corruption in higher education can also be defined as a system of informal relations established to regulate unsanctioned access to material and nonmaterial assets through abuse of the office of public or corporate trust (Osipian, 2007). There are a variety of forms of corruption that may be found in higher education in Russia, including bribery, embezzlement, extortion, fraud, nepotism, cronyism, favoritism, kickbacks, transgressing rules and regulations, reduced class time and increased class size, unauthorized tutoring, ghost instructors, bypass of criteria in selection and promotion, office malfeasance, cheating, plagiarism, research misconduct, discrimination, and abuse of university property. A bribe can be in the form of cash, merchandise, service, or a monetary donation. Forms of educational corruption in Russian

higher education are not unique to Russia and may be found in other countries as well.

Classifications of forms of corruption in higher education and their detailed analysis are presented in the works of Hallak and Poisson (2007), Osipian (2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2012), and Rumyantseva (2005). The authors delineate major functions of higher education and show how they are affected by corruption. The model of corruption and coercion as a mechanism of state control and prevention of university autonomy, as related to post-Soviet transition, is presented in Osipian (2007a, 2008a, 2008c, 2009, 2010). Hallak and Poisson (2007) present an exhaustive list of forms in which corruption manifests itself in the education sector throughout the world. They develop a managerial or an administrative approach to reflect on corruption in secondary and higher education institutions in several countries, including Russia. Petrov and Temple (2004) offer a review of major problems of corruption in higher education in the Russian Federation and Azerbaijan, with the emphasis on need-based bribery versus extortions. The authors comment that while in Azerbaijan bribery takes the form of a direct extortion committed by faculty against students, in Russia, corruption among faculty members is largely explained by the low salaries and the need to ask students for gifts and donations. These assertions are based on a series of interviews conducted by the authors.

The higher education sector in the post-Soviet states is certainly not a zone free of corruption. The Rector of Moscow State University (MGU), Victor Sadovnichy, admits that “corruption touched education as well.” (*Gazeta.ru*, 2007) He sees the root of widespread corruption among the faculty members in their low pay (NTV, 2001). Sanghera and Romanchuk (2002) come to a similar conclusion, pointing out the importance of the miserable salaries of educators as well as the willingness of many students to bribe their way into academia. Round and Rodgers (2009) use interviews in selected HEIs in Ukraine as the basis for qualitative research on corruption in higher education. The problem of educational corruption is also linked to social cohesion.

Theoretical frame

This paper focuses on the notion of public discourse for the theoretical framework of the study. Wolf (2004) presents the following view on public discourse and its role in influencing mass opinion:

I understand public discourse to be largely a mediation of experience, a medium that shapes how people think about major events and then responds to popular thinking. It is comprised primarily of news and critical commentary, reports and analyses of public reaction, and then further observations based on popular response. In France, where wars of words are common and the views of

intellectuals especially prominent, it is not only an indication of what opinion-makers are thinking, but also a window onto popular opinion. The latter is a rather transient phenomenon, refracted only partially through each of the various lenses through which it can be viewed, and public discourse is no exception. But to the extent that commentators both shape and are shaped by mass opinion, public discourse is an ongoing dialogue between critics and the populace (p. 3).

Stromberg (2001) offers a model which presents a number of testable hypotheses concerning the mass media's effect on redistribution, taxes, corruption, trade barriers, and political business cycles. He asserts: "Empirically, we would expect to see more corruption and generally less efficient government policies in countries or regions where only few voters have access to an independent media source." (Stromberg, 2001, p. 657) The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) presented a very basic analysis of media coverage on the topic of corruption in higher education between June 5, 1999 and September 5, 2003 in Bulgaria. With the fall of the Soviet bloc, the media is much less controlled by the state. A relatively free and independent media reports on problems which, in the Soviet era, were left unattended. One such problem is corruption in higher education.

The media facilitates distribution and dissemination of information further among the masses, shaping and channeling public perceptions, and when it reports on public perceptions, it enforces the trend even more. There is more to it, however. The media may be as good at shaping popular opinion and directing public discourse as it is at disguising or hiding certain issues, which may be even more important and more fundamental than those the media is highlighting. Thus, the role of the media, including both official news sources and independent media, is not only to focus on urgent problems, but also can be to distract the attention of the masses from underlying processes and forces hidden beyond the reforms. Simply put, the media makes some processes and phenomena even more visible, while keeping others, including fundamental changes, much less visible than they really ought to be.

The media has some responsibility over what and how it reports, and often resorts to the use of manipulative techniques in order to advance certain political agenda. As far as the Russian higher education sector is concerned, corruption and its widely publicized antidote, standardized testing, are the focus of a heated public debate. Specifically, by presenting interviews, cases, and some superficial data on higher education corruption, the media manipulates public opinion and diverts the discussion from such fundamental issues as commercialization and privatization taking place in Russian higher education. Corruption is a consequence, not a cause. Furthermore, notable social figures,

who take part in media discussions, as well as the institutions they represent, use the discourse, set by the media, in order to channel the attention and the discussion away from real problems and into imaginary solutions. Naturally, the standardized test becomes a subject of national public discourse. The discussion over standardized testing, including its merits and shortfalls, even though productive and useful, is still far short of the deep analysis needed to comprehend the magnitude and depth of the problem of corruption in education.

Methodology

In order to follow public discourse on the problem of corruption in higher education in Russia, we study two major news outlets, *Gazeta.ru* and *Newsru.com*, both of which are published daily in the Russian language. These are independent media outlets, not connected with the Russian government. The first source, *Gazeta.ru*, features a large specialized “Education” section. We take into account news both in this specialized “Education” section and in other sections. The second source, *Newsru.com*, offers news reports on all aspects of life in Russia and abroad, including news in science and education. It absorbs media reports presented in numerous Russian media outlets and presents them in a more concise way, giving proper reference to original sources. *Newsru.com* is, in a way, a composite index of the Russian media, similar to the Dow Jones Index on the New York Stock Exchange (NYSE), if such a comparison is at all possible. We have read these two media sources daily for fourteen years, from 1998 to 2011. We found reading news sources a much more reliable way for selecting necessary reports, rather than simply using key words to search these sources’ archives. We were recording the news on bribery, kickbacks, fraud, embezzlement, extortion, nepotism, cheating, plagiarism, misconduct, office malfeasance, corruption scandals, abuse of faculty and administrative offices for private gain, operation of diploma mills, and production of fraudulent diplomas. It appears that such occurrences and practices in the Russian higher education sector are not rare. Selected media sources feature news on higher education corruption every year.

The media follows particular cases of corruption in higher education, be it a faculty member caught red-handed while accepting a bribe in exchange for arranging an admission to a prestigious HEI, a university official embezzling funds from the HEI’s budget, or well-trained and academically strong impersonators taking college admissions tests instead of their clients, high school graduates, who allegedly pay them for such services. Media also reflects on legislative changes, such as new education laws, state licensing and accreditation, college admission rules, number of state-financed scholarships, and introduction

and administration of standardized testing. Lastly, the media presents interviews with leading Russian educators and educational officials, expressing their opinions and sharing views on the problem of educational corruption and numerous related issues. It also offers views and insights of politicians on the problem of corruption in HEIs along with their suggestions on how to curb education corruption.

In addition to the aforementioned three major blocs of reported subjects—particular cases of corruption in higher education, legislative changes and their implementation, and interviews with leading educators, educational officials, and politicians—there is also a public opinion bloc. One part of this public opinion bloc consists of results of polls and surveys on the topic of education corruption, conducted by public opinion research groups and state agencies and reported in the media. Another part of this bloc consists of opinions of individuals expressed in media outlets and resembles a kind of public forum. For instance, *Gazeta.ru* features a section of notes and opinions where representatives from the general public express their views and share their experiences related to educational corruption. Specifically, some individuals from the general public share their experiences in entering HEIs, taking the standardized test, and reporting on experiences of their relatives, friends, and acquaintances. Even though such accounts are less reliable than media reports on particular cases of corruption investigated by law enforcement agencies, they are no less important in terms of influencing public perceptions and shaping public opinion on educational corruption.

Educational corruption in Russia

There are over one thousand HEIs in the Russian Federation (RF), of which some are funded by the federal government, some by the regional authorities and local municipalities, and some as private, for-profit colleges. In addition, there are numerous public community colleges and vocational schools. Public HEIs accommodate around 80 percent of all the nation's students, while another 20 percent attend private colleges. Half of all the students in public colleges and universities are funded by the government (Goskomstat, 2010). The admissions to governmentally funded scholarships in educational programs are corrupt. Course grades can also be bought from faculty members. Other items and services for sale include diplomas, theses, term papers, and even accommodations in student dormitories.

The level of tolerance of corruption in higher education in Russia is relatively high, as corruption is considered a part of everyday life. Petrov and Temple (2004, p. 92) note that "In Russia, our interviewees also despised bribery,

but at the same time expressed the view that, perhaps, in the present situation, corrupt practices in higher education were inevitable.” Based on the 1999 survey, Spiridonov (2000, p. 245) concludes that in Russia the corrupt bureaucrat is regarded as an “absolutely normal element of real life.” The level of transparency is high as well, with corruption in education often being highlighted in the mass media, by both official and independent sources (RosBusinessConsulting *RBC News*, September 20, 2003). These publications are based on interviews with leading educators and public officials, simple generalizations, and particular legal cases. The presence of corruption in education is acknowledged by the state authorities while the problem is discussed openly in society (*RIA Novosti*, 2004).

Numerous accusations of corruption as related to higher education, admissions and academic process, and, more recently, the standardized test, which is described below, necessitate presenting some estimates about the scale and scope of corruption in the nation’s education industry. There were over eight thousand economic crimes in education reported in Russia for the period of 2000 to 2005. In the year 2005 alone, there were more than three thousand crimes committed, including 849 cases of bribery and 361 cases of embezzlement, gross waste, and misallocation of the resources that came from the central budget (*Gazeta.ru*, 2006). Most of these crimes were committed by the heads of colleges and schools, members of the admissions committees, students, and high school graduates. The Higher School of Economics in Moscow conducted research on corruption in education and came out with the following astonishing estimates: During the 2002-2003 academic year Russians spent 26.5 billion rubles on informal payments for their children’s education. Of this money, 21.4 billion rubles were spent on bribes for admissions and positive grades in colleges (*Newsru.com*, 2004a).

According to the Chief of the Department of Economic Security of the Ministry of the Interior, in 2005 the sum of the material damage caused by the criminal activities was equal to more than 430 million rubles, i.e. less than 20 million nominal CAD. Sixty-seven criminal cases concerning heads of educational institutions and officials of selection committees, including six members of the selection committees, nine officials of the territorial educational organizations, five rectors and deans, seven professors and senior lecturers, and forty directors and assistants to directors of educational institutions have been investigated. Criminal charges were brought against the members of the admissions committees in the Omsk, Volgograd, and Lipetsk regions (*Newsru.com*, June 21, 2006).

Forged educational documents turned into a big business with international connections, pointing to a price of up to 20,000 CAD for some

forgeries. Criminal groups involved in production and distribution of diplomas and other educational documents and certificates were exposed all over the RF, including the Sakhalin, Hakassia, Kaluzhskaya, Kaliningradskaya, Moskovskaya, Tul'skaya, and Krasnodarskiy regions. Dozens, if not hundreds, of Russian websites still offer diplomas for sale. The scale and scope of corruption in the Russian education industry is impressive. It might be no different from many other countries, and is likely less prevalent than in Central Asia and Caucasus (See, for instance, Orkodashvily, 2010, 2011; Osipian, 2009; Rumyantseva, 2004; Sanghera & Romanchuk, 2002; Silova, Johnson & Heyneman, 2007), but the rate of growth of the criminal activities in education in Russia is alarming. From Kaliningrad in the West to Sakhalin in the Far East and from Moscow to Krasnodarskiy kraj in the South, corruption in education is being exposed and investigated. At the same time the number of accused corrupt educators is incredibly small.

Reznik (*Gazeta.ru*, 2010) presents the case of an extortion of \$15,000 from a private HEI for additional permission to use a historically significant building in Moscow, committed by a Moscow government bureaucrat. A famous Russian blogger and anti-corruption activist, Alexei Naval'ny, complained to the Prosecutor's office and demanded an investigation about the rector of Ural's HEI, who bought a luxury Lexus at the university's expense while already having two BMWs (*Newsru.com*, 2011a). The roof of Sankt-Petersburg Conservatory, which just went through a major repair, is leaking: forty classrooms and the library are flooded (*Newsru.com*, 2011e). A second criminal investigation has been opened regarding the embezzlement of state funds in Sankt-Petersburg Conservatory (*Newsru.com*, 2011d). Economic crimes and misallocation of funds, including the alleged theft of state funds in the Conservatory case, misuse of the HEI money in the Lexus case, and similar cases are not examples of academic corruption, but still manifest corruption in the higher education sector.

The majority of investigated cases target educational officials, including rectors of colleges and directors of schools, who embezzle from the state budget. This means that those involved in corrupt activities other than embezzling from the state funds are virtually invulnerable. Even in the broadly publicized case of a bribe-taking faculty member from MGU, who demanded a bribe of 35,000 Euro in exchange for arranging an admission to MGU, the perpetrator received a suspended sentence (*Newsru.com*, 2011c). In yet another case, a Vice-Rector of one of Moscow's HEIs received a suspended sentence for taking bribes from students (*Gazeta.ru*, 2011). The message is clear to educators and the public. If educational corruption is widespread and at the same time only a few corrupt educators are prosecuted, then participating in bribery and extortion appears to be

a relatively safe business for faculty members, students, and their parents. Also, this information strengthens the public's perceptions that everything can be bought and sold, the risk of being prosecuted is nominal, and there is no reason to try to appeal to the law (*Newsru.com*, 2008). An increase in such perceptions further facilitates an increase in corrupt activities.

Standardized testing as a response to corruption

In the USSR, all colleges and universities were fully funded by the state. At the same time in Russia, a country consisting of eighty-nine regions, a population of one hundred and fifty million, and covering eleven time zones, there was no universal national standardized examination for high school graduates. In order to enter any HEI, high school graduates had to be present at the college of their choice to pass competitive entry examinations. Some households were unable to cover travel expenses for their children to a university of their choice to take entry examinations. Some candidates with high academic potential did not risk competing for places in top schools. If not accepted, they would not be able to compete even in lower tier colleges, since the time for entry examinations would be over.

The reform, which was enacted in 2001, involved introducing a standardized, computer-graded examination to be used for entrance to universities. The Unified State Examination (Edinyj gosudarstvennyj ekzamen or EGE) is analogous to US national educational tests, such as the SAT and ACT, the French Baccalaureate, and other national examinations, and is referred to as the national test. The test is now administered nationwide and considered, nominally, as the major criterion in admissions decisions.

Supporters of the new examination system argue that the reform will create equal opportunities in access to higher education, prevent corruption, and make higher education a demand-driven industry. Intervention is based on the assumption that since low-income households cannot pay tuition and cannot afford to pay for their children to travel far from home to take entry examinations, and that entry examinations are corrupted, implementation of the national examinations will increase access to higher education for children from lower-income households (Adamskiy, 2002).

The support for the standardized testing and admissions to colleges based on the results of the test is as strong as the opposition to it. One of the most outspoken opponents to standardized testing is the Chair of the Council of the Federation, Sergey Mironov. He blames the test not for its poor organization, but for its concept and major underlying ideas: "Such an approach in evaluation of knowledge disorients the entire national system of education, disorients young

people, who are being told that the deepness of knowledge is not that important; what is important is the ability to memorize or even guess the right answer to the question, which itself is not necessarily a correctly formulated question.” (*Newsru.com*, , 2010)

In 2004, an open letter, entitled “No to the destructive experiments in education,” signed by over four hundred leading educators and researchers was sent to the then Russian President, Vladimir Putin (*Newsru.com*, 2004b). The testing agencies are being accused of corruption (*Newsru.com*, 2007a), and the results of the test are also being placed in doubt (Semenova, Dolgih & Shergina, 2007; *Newsru.com*, 2007b). The President of the All-Russian Education Fund, Sergey Komkov, says that the major problem of the EGE is that it strengthens corruption in education. The Director of the Federal Testing Center, Vladimir Hlebnikov, also admits the fact of corruptness in the EGE (Lemutkina, 2005, 2006).

Scandals accompanied standardized testing from its very inception, strengthening positions of those who criticize the testing initiative. In a recent scandal, which shook the credibility of the test results, a group of highly trained impersonators sat the test instead of high school graduates. These Moscow students, who took the EGE instead of school pupils, will be dismissed from HEIs, although they may be reinstated later (*Newsru.com*, 2011b).

What to do?

The media reports the annual volume of corrupt money in Russian education at \$5.5 billion (*Gazeta.ru*, 2010). This highly speculative estimate underlines the admission that Russian higher education is corrupt. The acceptance of guilt necessitates a public repentance, but even more so, it urges an active response. The question of “What to do?” anticipates a political activist agenda. Can standardized testing be the satisfactory and continuing answer to this question, an exhaustive solution for the problem of educational corruption, or at least the solution to corruption in admissions to colleges and universities?

HEIs are guilty, because they de facto allow faculty members to take bribes in exchange for positive admissions decisions; the state is guilty because it pays low wages to faculty members, forcing them into corrupt activities; and the test is also “guilty” because it is also corrupt. HEIs are happy to switch public attention from their internal corruption problems to the corruption problems with the EGE, for this kind of shift leaves HEIs with more room for maneuvering and indeed improving their reputation, badly damaged by corruption scandals. HEIs continue to invent new ways of retaining control over admissions decisions, taking the test results as one of the components for decision making, but not the

only one. As the EGE is no longer perceived by the public as a panacea against higher education corruption, the question of “What to do?” remains open.

The high cost of education and a growing demand for higher education from the population, along with the low salaries of the faculty and staff, create necessary grounds for corruption. An increase in public perceptions of corruption in higher education, oftentimes supported by the media, facilitates a further increase in corruption, as well as in the total amount of graft accumulated by the faculty and staff. Newly designed rules and mechanisms of admissions policies and administering entry examinations are all parts of a centralized governmental effort to restructure the higher education sector and to curb corruption.

In order to sort out the most important determinants from the rest, one should consider first of all economics and demographics in the country and in the education industry. While the economy is now booming after a decade-long crisis and stagnation, the number of school students declines, as does the overall population. The Minister of Science and Education, Andrey Fursenko, predicted that the number of school students in Russia would decline one-third in 2006, down to around thirteen million. He said that this number has already declined by five million during the past few years (*Newsru.com*, 2006c).

A stable decrease in population will inevitably lead to a decline in enrollment numbers in HEIs. However, in the long run, the lack of students will only be partially compensated by the inflow of students from the other former Soviet republics and from the developing nations. The projections point to the fact that soon the number of places in Russian HEIs, licensed and accredited by the government in accordance with all the requirements, will be higher than the number of those who apply to higher education programs. In fact, the rapid decline of the number of children in the country, which has already led to the decline in the number of high school graduates, makes entry examinations unnecessary. Indeed, the number of places in HEIs will soon be higher than the number of those who would like to obtain higher education (Lebedev, 2004).

The real competition is not for places in colleges, but for state-funded scholarships in colleges. The number of the state-funded scholarships in HEIs has declined in absolute terms. In 2006, Minister Fursenko said that the number of state-funded places in the Russian HEIs would be reduced. (*Newsru.com*, May 19, 2006). Russians became accustomed to the idea that education should be free as in the Soviet era, but this no longer reflects the reality. The situation is such that parents who received free higher education themselves now have to pay for higher education for their children. Many perceive the presence of money in the education sector as a clear indication of corruption, whether it is tuition or bribes. The Director of the Department of the State Policy in Education, Isaak Kalina,

asserted in 2006 that the federal HEIs will be able to enroll 529,000 students in state-funded studentships in 2007, of which 372,000 will be full-time students in day-time programs. The number of state-funded studentships will be reduced only in the humanities, economics and management, as well as pedagogical sciences and education because there is not sufficient demand for these qualifications in the labor market. At the same time, the number of state-funded places in vocational schools was to increase one percent (*Newsru.com*, 2006a).

Supporters of the EGE consider the test an ideal measurement tool for the academic progress and success achieved by high school students. They think that the EGE is good because it presents a real picture of the knowledge of high school graduates. It is still unclear, however, why it would be necessary to consider the EGE as a prerequisite for entering a HEI. If the standardized test will not serve the role of the single most important criterion in the selection process and admissions decisions, especially to the state-funded places, then it will only be left with its function of control over high school outcomes. This function will denigrate the EGE to yet another useless threshold in academic life that can easily be ignored.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we would like to highlight the following few points. The Russian higher education sector suffers from a significant level of corruption. Educational corruption and its widely publicized antidote, standardized testing also known as EGE, are the focus of a heated public debate, which is played out in the media. The media manipulates public opinion and diverts the discussion from such fundamental issues as the commercialization and privatization taking place in Russian higher education. It makes some processes and phenomena even more visible, while keeping others, including fundamental changes, much less visible than they really ought to be. Corruption in entry examinations is a consequence of an imbalance in the distribution of market-based and state-based incentives for faculty, HEIs, and students, i.e. providers and consumers of educational services. It is not a cause of unfair admissions. Accordingly, the EGE is no treatment to HEIs, riddled with corruption. The EGE is not even able to solve the problem of corruption in admissions to HEIs, less so corruption in retention, grading, examinations, and other academic benchmarks and requirements. At the same time, HEIs focusing on the EGE deflect attention away from internal corruption within the HEIs. Furthermore, notable social figures, who take part in media discussions, as well as the institutions they represent, use the discourse, set by the media, in order to channel the attention and the discussion away from real problems and into imaginary solutions. Supporters of the new examination

system argue that the reform will create equal opportunities in access to higher education, prevent corruption, and make higher education a demand-driven industry. Naturally, the EGE becomes a subject of national public discourse. The discussion over standardized testing, including its merits and shortfalls, even though productive and useful, is still far short of the deep analysis needed to comprehend the magnitude and depth of the problem of corruption in Russian higher education. As the EGE is no longer perceived by the public as a panacea against higher education corruption, the question of “What to do?” remains open.

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