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Post-Soviet anti-corruption reforms in higher education: Explaining the success of *external independent testing* in Ukraine

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Corruption during university admission has become an endemic phenomenon in many post-Soviet states. In the last decade, most countries in the region reformed their admission system and implemented external exams to combat corruption and provide equal access to qualitative education. Ukraine introduced its External Independent Testing (EIT) in 2008. Despite a non-favourable socio-political context, experts and the majority of citizens regard the EIT as one of the most successful reforms in Ukraine. How can this positive outcome be explained? The paper argues that in addition to the distinctive political will of key stakeholders and the involvement of domestic NGOs in the reform implementation, external democracy promotion programs which fostered capacity building were a decisive factor for the success. To prove this claim, the article traces the reform process, focusing on the impact of the main external actors.

Key words: Anti-Corruption, higher education, civil-society advocacy, external assessment, external democracy promotion, Ukraine.

Introduction

The collapse of communism and, as a consequence, the complex systematic transformation of the political, economic and societal sphere in the post-Soviet world had an enormous impact on the higher educational systems in the successor countries. The Soviet education system, characterized by, among other things, an ideological orientation towards "real existing socialism", centralisation, tight state control under the ministries, a strong hierarchy, political cadre demand, priority placed on technical disciplines (Mühle 1995), had to be radically reformed and transformed into an internationally competitive and market-oriented higher education sector. For the transition from a socialist to a capitalist system, a completely new labour workforce was required, simply speaking, instead of engineers, economists and lawyers were needed to build up a functioning market economy.[1]

Apart from the challenging tasks of 'de-Sovietising', modernizing and reforming the higher education sector, many post-Soviet countries tried to adopt Western standards and harmonized their regulations with the requirements of the European Higher Education Area framework to join the *Bologna Process* (Dobbins/Knill 2009). However, one of the main problems remained the constant underfunding (Drummond 2011). On the one hand, this was due to a significant *massification*; the number of students and higher education institutions (HEIs) grew rapidly.[2] On the other hand, governments in the newly independent states drew back from financing the public sphere, in general, and the education sector, in particular. Thus, post-Soviet higher education institutions received only 15-40 per cent of the capital they actually needed (Teichmann 2004: 9). Wage arrears were commonplace and even if disbursed, wages were often below subsistence level[3] (Klein 2010: 13). In order to survive, HEIs and their personnel developed systematic formal (mainly tuition fees)[4] and informal compensation mechanisms, e.g. the lending of property or equipment, private tutoring and corruption (Zaborovskaya/Shishkin 2004).

In addition to the problem of underfunding, poorly defined legal frameworks, hybrid state/private funding mechanisms and opaque admission rules and procedures fostered forms of corruption such as embezzlement and nepotism.[5] Bribery and other forms of informal payments were widely accepted as a legitimate way to halt the collapse of the education system, providing underpaid educational staff with an additional salary. Although in recent years the financial and regulatory situation has improved considerably[6], these changes have not resulted in a reduction of corruption and malpractice. On the contrary, corruption has spread continuously and has become highly institutionalized in the region (Democratic Initiatives Foundation 2011; Klein 2011; Osipian 2009; Panin 2010; Rimskij 2010).

During the last decade, the post-Soviet countries[7] implemented analogue central state exams which replaced the non-transparent, inconsistent and corruption-prone Soviet-style entrance examinations (Gabrscek 2010). The new exam was intended to modernize the admission procedure, assure education quality and, as a main function, prevent corruption. This article deals with corruption related to university admissions in Ukraine. Ukraine's *External Independent Testing* (EIT), the so-called *ZNO* (Zovnishne nezalezhne ocinyuvannya), has been compulsory since 2008. In contrast to other cases like Russia[8], in Ukraine, the reform is widely acknowledged among experts and the public for having reduced corruption and is seen as a success story (Democratic Initiatives Foundation 2013). This is interesting, considering the fact that anti-corruption reforms in many countries have failed (Heeks/Mathisen 2012; Hanna *et al*. 2011), especially in the post-Soviet region:

> '*there is growing acknowledgement that the reality of fighting corruption has been a disillusioning experience in Eastern Europe, and even more so in former Soviet countries where corruption situations have only deteriorated*' (Schmidt-Pfister 2009: 135)

Generally, Ukraine is no exception (Khmara 2013; Ukrainian Institute for Public Policy 2011). Given this pessimistic judgement, and bearing in mind the unfavourable Ukrainian reform context with an instable political system (Kubicek 2009), it makes the EIT reform an interesting case and leads to the main research questions of this contribution: *why* is this particular reform regarded as effective and *how* was this success achieved?

In order to investigate the research questions of this within-case analysis, this paper employs the method of process-tracing (George/Bennett 2005; Collier 2011; Beach/Pedersen 2013) to analyse the implementation process and determine the main explanatory factors and causal mechanisms responsible for the successful reform outcome.

The adoption of anti-corruption policies is often explained as a response to pressures and persuasive discourses from above (international actors) and 'from the ground' (domestic civil society). According to Olena Fimyar's analysis of Ukrainian education policy, the introduction of the EIT is such an example (Fimyar 2010: 161). Consequently, as the theoretical framework, a *transnational advocacy* approach, which is usually adopted to human rights issues, but is equally applicable to anti-corruption, is applied (for a short overview, see Price (2003); for a detailed insight, see e.g. Sousa *et al*. (2009) or Keck/Sikkink (1998)). This research gives special attention to the influence of the most important external actors, namely the International Renaissance Foundation and USAID, and their specific roles, in order to understand and clarify: '*How do external structures and agents influence anti-corruption efforts in post-communist countries*?' (Schmidt-Pfister/Moroff 2012: 1).

The data for the analysis is derived mainly from 30 semi-structured interviews (Witzel 2000) that were conducted between May – September 2011 and in April 2012 during a field research conducted by the author. Through snowball sampling, students, policy makers, politicians, university administrators and NGO-representatives have been interviewed, who were involved in the reform process or are somehow related to it. To examine the data, interviews were transcribed and a structured content analysis has been carried out with the help of MaxQDA (Kuckartz 2007). Additional desk research has been done to collect and

analyse reports, strategic papers, policy recommendations, laws, monitoring reports, annual reports, doctrines, newspaper articles etc.

The next section provides a general introduction to corruption in Ukraine's academia, focusing on corruption during university admissions. In the following section, the implementation of the External Independent Testing in Ukraine and the function of domestic and international actors is considered. Finally, the reform outcomes are outlined and the determinants of Ukraine's successful approach are summarized, putting the role of external actors in perspective.

Academic Corruption in Ukraine

Corruption, which is defined by Transparency International and the World Bank as 'the abuse of entrusted power for private gain', in the education sector is usually referred to as education corruption or, if connected with higher education, academic corruption. Hallak & Poisson, who conducted the most comprehensive in-depth research on education corruption, define it as

> '*the systematic use of public office for private benefit, whose impact is significant on the availability and quality of educational goods and services, and, as a consequence on access, quality or equity in education*' (Hallak/Poisson 2007: 29)

Derived from these definitions, academic corruption is defined in this paper as *the abuse of entrusted power for private benefit, whose impact is significant on access, quality or equity in higher education*. According to this understanding, bribing or abusing connections ('*blat*')[9] in order to receive university places as well as making gifts or monetary payments in return for better exam results is categorized as academic corruption. This phenomenon is not new in post-socialist countries like Ukraine but already existed during the Soviet period: In 1963, Nikita Khrushchev stated that '*bribes are given [...] for admission to higher educational establishments, and even for the awarding of diplomas.*' (Karklins 2005: 74). However, with the end of communism, its intensity and nature have reached new dimensions. While in Socialism academic corruption occurred rather sporadically, it has become routine in present-day higher educational institutions of the former Soviet bloc, including Ukraine (Temple/Petrov 2004: 87).

In several studies, such as Transparency International's *Corruption Perceptions Index* (CPI) or the World Bank's *Worldwide Governance Indicators* (WGI), contemporary Ukraine is regarded as one of the most corrupt countries in the world. After the 'Orange Revolution' in 2004, anti-corruption rhetoric emerged and several attempts to curb corruption were made by the new Western-orientated government. However, the political change had only little effect on corruption and according to both CPI and WGI, the level of corruption did not decline.

In the field of 'petty corruption', that is, between ordinary citizens and governmental officials, corruption in the education sector is considered as one of the most affected spheres. A 2011 representative study among students which was conducted by the independent *Ilko Kucheriv Democratic Initiatives Foundation* (DIF) (Democratic Initiatives Foundation 2011) revealed that about 33 per cent of Ukrainian students have had personal experiences with corruption and another 29 per cent have heard about academic corruption from fellow students. Another sociological survey shows that, in 2011, about two-thirds of the respondents who dealt with representatives of HEIs over the previous 12 months had faced corruption, a number that corresponds with the findings of the same survey from 2009 (UNITER 2011). Half of the affected respondents said that they had been extorted, while every fourth bribed on a voluntary basis. Every fifth respondent did not pay a bribe but invoked his personal '*blat*'-networks to 'solve' problems. Marina Zaloznaya (2012) describes how the *organizational culture* of Ukrainian universities fosters corruption and informal practices.

According to David Chapman, corruption in the education sector occurs:

'*At virtually every level, from the central ministry down to the school and classroom. It can happen any time educators operate as gate-keepers to real or assumed benefits. As education is widely viewed as access to life opportunity, higher lifetime earnings, and greater social mobility, even seemingly small decisions are often awarded great value.*' (Chapman 2002: 74)

At Ukrainian universities, corruption usually appears in the following areas:

1. At entrance examinations, to gain admission;
2. During a course of studies, to ensure achievements in the course;
3. At the end of or after studies, to be awarded a degree or doctorate;
4. At the administrative level, e.g. the purchase of materials, licensing, etc.

This article focuses on corruption during the admission process. Generally, the admission procedure is the first stage at which prospective students become involved with corruption.

Academic corruption has several consequences at the micro- as well as at the macro-level: at the micro-level, an admission policy based on corrupt practices is detrimental because it undermines the fair access to free of charge higher education, which in Ukraine is guaranteed on a competitive basis by law. Corruption subverts meritocratic principles, whereby the wealthiest or best-connected students enter university instead of the most talented, increasing social stratification. Another implication is on an ethical level: students learn about the 'positive' impacts of corruption, institutionalize it as a norm and tend to repeat corrupt patterns in their future, as Vladimir Rimskij (2010) and Philip Shaw (2005) have shown. At the macro-level, an education system which allows applicants to enter university through corrupt means will produce less-qualified graduates for the labour market and consequently slow down economic growth (Piñera/Selowsky 1981).

In post-Soviet Ukraine, admission corruption was ubiquitous, as one of the country's sociologists explains:

'*Corruption during admission was just vast; some faculties could not be joined by outsiders. Corruption was not necessarily based on money (...), it was also based on acquaintances. Everyone was aware of rectors' lists, when teachers of the admission exams received lists, whom they had to give which grades. And at some faculties, I repeat myself, because of such practices, no free spaces were available.*' (Interview 7, Irina Bekeshkina, Director of Democratic Initiatives Foundation).

Ivan Vakarchuk became rector of the prestigious National Ivan-Franko University L'viv in 1990. As a response to the extent of admission corruption, he introduced the first objective admission tests in Ukraine and reminds himself of the admissions before his term:

'*At the admission exams teachers invited the applicants to the auditorium and took oral exams one after another. There existed hundreds of requests and lists, it was a horror. There were many hundreds [of names, authors note], all on scrapbook. When I saw it, I was just horrified. And I didn't even see everything.*' (Interview 28, Ivan Vakarchuk, Rector Ivan Franko University L'viv).

Bribes for admission are high and some documented cases indicate that at prestigious universities/faculties, bribes of up to 15,000 USD have been paid (Osipian 2007: 20). Since

corruption is a hidden delict, reliable data on the total spending on corruption payments for admissions is not available. However, Lilya Hrynevych, who was in charge of the implementation of the EIT, estimates that the approximate amount of bribery during admissions before the reform was 180-190 million USD per year (Surzhik/Onishchenko 2013). Thus, there was urgent need to reform the admission system. As an appropriate alternative to the corruption-ridden entrance exams, an admission system based on external assessment was introduced.

External Assessments

External assessment systems[10] have a long tradition; the first ones were developed in the 19th century. They are 'external' because the students' evaluation happens outside the influence sphere of the educational institution, and are usually conducted by special agencies. Due to the 'world educational revolution' (Meyer *et al*. 1977), a massive expansion of higher education took place between the 1950s and 1970s, when the number of students per capita doubled. Many countries decided to introduce external assessment systems to cope with the impetus: the new methods were more efficient, objective, timesaving and, once introduced, inexpensive. A second phase of higher education expansion began in the 1990s, first and foremost through a rapid increase of students in transition and emerging economies. This period, too, is accompanied by an increasing number of national external standardized evaluation systems (UNESCO 2008: 69), because modern and effective assessment systems were needed to cope with increasing numbers of student.

Assessment types differ in their purpose, form and scale (Clarke 2011: 10–11): *Classroom assessment* is not standardized and is meant to provide real-time information to support teaching and learning processes at the classroom level. *Examinations* aim at identifying the student's individual progress, usually by providing certificates about his knowledge, which then are often used for further selection, what is then known as high stakes testing. *Large-scale assessments* are standardized and comparable, in order to evaluate knowledge on a larger regional, national, or international system level. Cross-sectional or longitudinal data allow for monitoring and diagnosis of education quality, performance, trends and problems and provide useful information for educational policy-makers.[11] While assessments generally serve the purpose of obtaining a larger picture about educational outcomes, especially in the post-Soviet region, external assessments were additionally regarded as a possible means to curb admission corruption.

The Ukrainian External Independent Testing

During Ukraine's political and economic crisis of the 1990's, social policy, particularly education policy, was neglected (Åslund 2009: 233) and inevitable reforms were delayed or failed to achieve their goals. It is important to bear in mind that Ukraine launched an early attempt to reform the admission system and introduce standardized exams already in 1993. However, this first attempt failed due to several reasons; the main obstacles being imperfect tests, lack of finances, absence of an independent institution to conduct the testing, insufficient skilled personnel and an unprepared society (Lokshyna 2003: 84).

Ukraine's examination system before the introduction of the EIT was inherited from Soviet times and was constructed in the following way: graduates had to take two exams, one at the end of the 11th school grade[12] and a second to apply for university. Both tests were administered internally by the respective institutions. Admission exams usually took place parallel at most universities. Every university and even most faculties had their own tests. Graduates could therefore apply for only one university at a time and had to wait for another year if unsuccessful, which increased the pressure to pass the exam. For applicants with high scores, the universities, theoretically, provided a certain amount of budgetary places without

tuition fees. In reality, however, those budgetary places at many institutions were not allocated to the best applicants but to the wealthiest or best-connected.

Since the admission tests were non-uniform and mostly held orally, they not only were liable to subjective criteria, undermining equal chances for applicants, but also were easy to bypass through informal practices like bribery, *blat* or 'tutoring': paid tutors were often simultaneously part of the admission committees or had relations to them and guaranteed the enrolment of their tutees (Büdiene *et al.* 2006; Bray 2007). As was already mentioned by Vakarchuk, 'dean' or 'rectors'-lists, in which high-ranking university officials allocated budget places in return for bribes, were a common practice. Grishina and Korchinskij (2006) reported a case in Kyiv where 96 out of 120 budgetary places were assigned beforehand. Because deans and rectors benefit from the corruption, many of them were strong opponents of a transparent admission system:

> '*University executives never will support an independent admission testing – Why? The answer is very simple: because the admission campaign is always – no, not always, but in recent years – closely connected to bribery. Some experts estimate that up to two billion Hryvnia are spent on corruption during admissions. Of course, I do not want to say that only the rectors are the bribe-takers, but there is a mass of people in the admission committees and deaneries and other departments which is engaged in this.*' (Interview 12, Ihor Likarchuk, former Director of the Ukrainian Centre for Education Quality Assessment).

Hence, the admission campaign in summer became euphemistically known as a 'gold harvest' for the rectors, as one interviewee pointed out. Of course, not all admission committees at Ukrainian universities and their faculties were corrupt. Some responded actively to this situation and introduced objective and transparent admission systems based on meritocratic principles. Among them was the Ivan Franko University of L'viv which introduced the first written admission tests based on objective assessment methods in Ukraine in 1991/92. This approach was adopted then by the western-orientated Kyiv Mohyla Academy (Vakarchuk 2005). These universities became the figureheads of a new entrance examination system based on objective admissions. Their approach was not only effective in curbing corruption but also showed the public that even in a corrupt environment, a corruption-free admission system can be realized. The rectors of both institutions became prominent and emphatic proponents of the new admission form, especially the rector of the Ivan Franko University, Ivan Vakarchuk, who later became Minister of Education and under whose government the EIT was implemented on the national level. Due to their corruption-free reputation, both universities became especially popular among those students who wanted to receive knowledge instead of paying for admission, grades and diplomas.

While external standardized assessments generally measure education quality, in Ukraine, like in most parts of the post-Soviet world, the purpose of preventing corruption during admissions is at least regarded as being equally important. Valentin Teslenko, former Deputy Minister of Education and Science, pointed out:

> '*Like some other countries of the world Ukraine develops its own approach to how the external independent testing should be conducted. Reducing corruption is a vital part of our approach. Our goal is to build such a model that would allow our students to enter higher education institutions without any corruption hurdles.*' (USETI 2007)

Thus, an incorruptible admission regime that combines school graduate and university admission exams and creates equal opportunities for all applicants, and at the same time allows for the measurement of the educational quality had to be developed. These goals could

only be achieved through a transparent and objective system with external and standardized testing methods. Potentially corrupt admission committees, 'dean-/rectors'-lists and other informal ways of gaining admission, needed to be excluded.

Around the turn of the millennium, and not before some hesitation due to the unsuccessful attempt in 1993, this need was also acknowledged by the Ukrainian government. Additional external pressure and argumentative discourses finally initiated the admission reform:

> '*This initiative came from the Renaissance Foundation and for some time the Ministry was against it, but when the Minister found out that Russia had the 'Unified State Exam', Lithuania had it, that is all the countries that want to move forward had it, he became a 'promoter' of this initiative. That is one example [of direct pressure] from external sources.*' (Fimyar 2010: 161)

The pilot project of the *International Renaissance Foundation* as the foundation for the reform's success

It was not the government or the Ministry of Education (MoE) who initiated the reform, but the *International Renaissance Foundation* (IRF), which belongs to George Soros' *Open Society Network* that aims at democratising the post-communist societies in Eastern Europe (Soros 2004). IRF has operated since 1990 in the country and is the largest private international donor organization in Ukraine. The foundation has spent more than 100 million USD in innumerable small-scale civil society projects and grassroots movements, of which more than 7.5 million USD were spent on education projects.

In 1999, IRF launched its *Education Policy Support Program* to enhance the Ukrainian government in educational reforms, since education policy was nearly absent on the political agenda. The foundation took advantage of this vacuum and as an influential agenda setter was able to shape the further educational process in a neoliberal direction, introducing new concepts such as good governance, efficiency and cost effectiveness to Ukrainian education (Fimyar 2010). The goal of the IRF's program was to initiate a national discourse on education policy and to assist the government and the Ministry of Education in creating and implementing a *National Doctrine of Education Development* (International Renaissance Foundation 2001). The doctrine was aimed at modernising the education system, to make higher education more accessible in order to reduce poverty.[13] One pillar was the creation of the *Independent Testing Initiative,* which ties in with

> '*IRF's anti-corruption activity in the education field and reacts to the responses of Ukrainian society. The testing program will be developed on the basis of international experience and envisages the creation of a normative base for testing as a system of skill evaluation and a model testing center.*' (International Renaissance Foundation 2001: 78).

IRF's testing initiative evaluated best practice examples from around the world, gathered expertise, pursued capacity building, elaborated how independent testing could be established in Ukraine and carried out public information campaigns to explain and popularize the idea.
As a direct outcome of the doctrine, a new Law on Higher Education was adopted in 2002 which provided a new framework for the higher education system. Not only the Constitution now guaranteed equal access to complimentary higher education at public universities on a competitive basis, but also §1, Article 4 of the new law. As mentioned above, this ideal did not correspond to reality, since, especially at renowned institutions, bribery and *blat* still distorted the admission procedure.

To institutionalise its anti-corruption activities, IRF stipulated the creation '*of an independent institution responsible for test design, testing technologies development, testing result processing, and so on*' (Lokshyna 2003: 99) which was a prerequisite to conduct an independent external assessment. An association treaty was signed between IRF, the MoE and the National Academy of Pedagogical Sciences (NAPS) to create such an institution. Thus, IRF founded the *Testing Technology Centre* (TTC) in 2002. The appointment of Lilya Hrynevych as the director of the new centre gave an impetus for the further development of an external testing system, since she was one of the few distinguished Ukrainian experts in this field, as she had experience in the implementation of the external testing in Poland. The TTC experimented with psychometrical testing methods, a completely new form of assessment in Ukraine, and developed the first tests, mainly based on international best-practice examples (e.g. Poland, Netherlands, Great Britain, Georgia, Lithuania) and recommendations by the World Bank (Hrynevych 2009: 63). The first experimental testing conducted by TTC took place in 2002 with 200 participants. In the following year, more than 3000 graduates passed the test in mathematics or history and received the opportunity to apply without supplementary exams at four universities, involved in the experiment.[14] Of those students who participated in the exam, 76.7 per cent were satisfied with the new approach and preferred it and found it more honest in comparison to the traditional university admission exams (Buskey 2007: 8). In 2004, almost 4,500 pupils took the test and could already apply at 31 universities without additional testing. As the pilot testing worked well, TTC prepared recommendations for the government to introduce the external exam on a national level. These

> '*formed the basis of a decree on the introduction of external testing and quality monitoring issued by the Cabinet of Ministers in 2004. This was a real breakthrough in the fight against corrupt practices during entrance examinations to tertiary institutions.*' (Open Society Foundation 2007)

The Orange Revolution accelerated the implementation of the EIT. Civil society and NGOs, which were the main domestic actors in advocating good governance and anti-corruption, strengthened and gained momentum (Stewart 2009). Their demands for combating corruption coincided with President Yushchenko's reform drive against corruption, which he believed was '*the main problem in the country*'[15]. The period shortly after the Orange Revolution marks a unique 'window of opportunity' where the political will[16] for reforms was supported by civil society and the public and a broad coalition against corruption emerged. The new president vigorously and repeatedly claimed to combat corruption in the education sector, a new demand that had been mostly neglected by former presidents. At the Ukrainian Congress of Pedagogical Sciences in May 2005, shortly before the beginning of the 2005 external testing campaign with 8,700 high-school graduates, Yushchenko stated:

> '*Today our education system will be tested whether it is ripe for our society. Is our faculty able to clean itself? Together we have to overcome the lawlessness and restore the reputation of the faculty in our society. The secondary school exit examinations and higher education admission exams will start soon. I hope they will be transparent and honest. This year should be the first one without corruption during the examination process.*' (Vakarchuk 2005)

All experts who were interviewed during the field study emphasized that the president's personal commitment to combating corruption during admissions was crucial for the further implementation. Exemplarily, Lilya Hrynevych stated during her interview:

> '*In 2005, before the Ukrainian Centre for Educational Quality Assessment was established, Ukraine held presidential elections, and there was such a climate of democracy, the time had come for serious changes. And when we proposed to introduce the independent testing on a state level and governmental accounts, President Yushchenko signed a decree about it. Of course, this was a very crucial political decision and it was perceived by people as very positive.*' (Interview 26, Lilya Hrynevych, former Director of TTC)

Thus, the political will of the country's leadership laid the foundation for a successful nationwide implementation of the EIT.

The establishment of the Ukrainian Centre for Education Quality Assessment

After the successful experimental testing period under the auspices of IRF's Testing Technologies Centre, and with presidential and governmental support, the TTC was handed over from IRF to the MoE. Based on the above mentioned presidential decree №1013 and decree №1312 of the Cabinet of Ministers, the *Ukrainian Centre for Educational Quality Assessment* (UCEQA)[17] was established in July 2005 and henceforth operated as the semi-independent state agency responsible for the nationwide development, implementation and enforcement of the EIT. The costs of establishing nationwide testing were estimated at 96 million USD. Since the government did not have these resources, the World Bank granted a loan of about 86 million USD through its 'Equal Access to Quality Education in Ukraine Project' for the period 2005-2010 (The World Bank 2013).

As Hrynevych left to enter politics, Ihor Likarchuk, who had worked in the education department of Kyiv's city administration since the 1990s and who is valued for this integrity and for his commitment to and enthusiasm for fair admission, became the new director of the UCEQA. A presidential expert commission, together with UCEQA, IRF and other international experts and domestic NGOs, developed a roadmap to gradually introduce the EIT by 2008 (Hrynevych 2009: 66). In 2006, UCEQA focused on the nationwide provision of the test infrastructure. 6,300 instructors and 700 examiners were trained for 178 testing sites throughout the entire country. As a result, in its first year, UCEQA was able to cope with 44,000 exam participants. The following year, already about a quarter of all school graduates (116,000) participated in the testing and since the procedure worked quite well, the go-ahead was given for nationwide implementation.

Apart from establishing UCEQA, the core of the implementation of the EIT was the creation of a strict and secure procedure. It was carefully designed to prevent corruption and fraud and was geared towards similar systems in Georgia or Lithuania, where the testing worked very well (Partskhaladze 2010; The World Bank 2012; Bethell/Zabulionis 2000). UCEQA is responsible for the creation of the EIT test sheets. Tests were developed in cooperation with schools, universities, the Academy of Pedagogical Sciences and international experts. The questionnaire consists of multi-choice and open questions. While a test in the Ukrainian Language is compulsory for all students, other examination subjects depend on the field of study.[18] Print, delivery, etc. are highly automated, confidential and secured by the Security Service of Ukraine. Until today, no information leaks have been known to have occurred.[19] This proves that UCEQA's careful and severe recruiting policy that forces staff to sign an integrity agreement on the test content is effective. During the author's fieldwork, many respondents attributed this success mainly to UCEQA directors Lilya Hrynevych and Ihor Likarchuk.

Before the exams start, students receive all relevant information regarding the EIT and are allowed to participate in a practice run to become acquainted with the testing procedure. The exams do not take place at the institution where students learn but at special testing sites.[20] Every room is supervised by two instructors. To guarantee anonymity, barcodes instead of

names are used on the students' test sheets. Technical devices and other additional material are strictly forbidden during testing and metal detectors are used to discover mobile phones. Instructors note the time when a testee leaves for the toilet; and if s/he needs more than five minutes, s/he can be reprimanded and the results can even be annulled.[21] To avoid a conflict of interests, the tests are sent to other regions of the country where (school) teachers hired and trained by UCEQA proofread the exam. Students can appeal either if they do not trust their results which they can check online at the UCEQA website a few days after the testing, or if they notice procedural violations during the test. When graduates receive their test scores, they can apply for up to five universities. Via the transparent and central 'KONKURS' electronic admission system[22], every university has to reveal the applicants they have selected. If a student is accepted, s/he has to submit his original documents and is automatically enrolled.

Finally, in 2008, the old Soviet-type opaque and corruption-prone admission regime was replaced by the above-described EIT system. External testing became mandatory and the results were the only recognized selection criteria for university admission. The results of the EIT and the decision regarding who would be admitted could not be manipulated by corrupt deans or admission committees anymore. As a consequence, in the school terms 2008 and 2009, corruption at university admissions virtually disappeared. President Yushchenko repeatedly expressed his support for the EIT publicly by inviting the best school graduates who took the exam in that year to join him at a leaver's ball. The president used the occasion to emphasize the fact that, due to the EIT, the competition for free college places was not based on parents' wallets anymore, but on knowledge (Trusova 2008).

Public monitoring is allowed and encouraged to enhance transparency during the exam. Independent NGOs were specially trained and are regularly financed by IRF (and the Ukrainian Standardized External Testing Initiative, cp. next paragraph) to control the testing and admission procedure. The two main NGOs that conduct and organize the monitoring are the 'OPORA Civic Network' (OPORA) and the 'Committee of Voters of Ukraine' (CVU). In 2008, CVU alone sent 700 observers to 600 testing sites (one-third of the overall amount of ca. 1,800 test centres) in thirteen regions of the country (Committee of Voters of Ukraine 2008). In 2010, eleven NGOs sent more than 5,000 independent observers to monitor testing countrywide. During interviews, representatives of OPORA and CVU claimed that the EIT brought an unprecedented level of transparency to Ukrainian higher education and cases of admission corruption were an absolute exception, and not the norm, as was previously the case.

The overall opinion of the interviewees is that, since Ukraine's independence, the EIT has been the most, if not the only, effective anti-corruption and educational reform and that this achievement most probably would not have been possible without the proactive involvement of the IRF. As an agenda setter, the foundation initiated the reform, established the first testing centre which later became the UCEQA, conducted and financed the pilot studies and, as a side effect, started the first public discourse on education and brought education policy on the political agenda. According to Lilya Hrynevych's summary, non-governmental organisations, including the IRF, were decisive to the success of the reform:

> '*Historically, it all started as a project of the Renaissance Foundation. Then it was handed over to the government, but still was funded by Renaissance. But the Renaissance Foundation was the initiator of this whole business. Besides, I would say, that non-governmental organisations played at least the same role as the ministry; they supported it and were engaged in control functions during the examination period. Thus, it [the reform; author's note] was not only initiated and financed by a non-governmental organisation, but NGOs still maintain working on it.*' (Interview 26, Lilya Hrynevych, former Director of TTC).

The Ukrainian Standardized External Testing Initiative as an effective advocacy network

The second external nongovernmental initiative that decisively contributed to the success of the EIT was the Ukrainian Standardized External Testing Initiative (USETI). As already mentioned, after the Orange Revolution, President Yushchenko acknowledged corruption as a serious threat to the country's development. As a response, in 2005 his government signed a contract with the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC), another American foreign aid agency, to implement a Threshold Country Plan (TCP) in Ukraine. Generally speaking, TCPs provide financial assistance for policy reforms, and in this case, the assistance was for the reduction of corruption in the public sector. The program had a total budget 45 million USD and targeted five objectives. Among them, 13 million USD were allocated for '*component 5: combating corruption in higher education through support in implementing mandatory external testing*' (Ukrainian Institute for Public Policy 2011: 192–93). The main ambition of this project was to support and assist UCEQA to

> '*fully implement the external testing system as well as to ensure its integrity. The goal of this component is to reduce corruption in higher education by establishing a legal framework requiring a minimum test score for admission to universities; developing a functioning security system for test results; and ensuring that 100 percent of students are tested and the test centres are fully operational.*'[23]

MCC Threshold Country Plans require partner countries to create special legal entities for implementing the programs. For this purpose, the *Ukrainian Standardized External Testing Initiative* was established in 2007 and has since been regarded as one of the most active players involved in the implementation process. USETI's primary objective is to combat

> '*corrupt practices associated with admissions to institutions of higher education by introducing standardized external testing as a mandatory criterion for university admissions. This process will replace the entry examinations currently administered by individual universities.*'[24]

USETI provided financial support for the infrastructure of the regional test centres and helped to professionalize UCEQA and strengthen its capacities, mainly through providing technical assistance, international experience and knowledge transfer. Furthermore, USETI regularly published opinion polls and pro-actively supported a higher education reform, advocating for new legislation that would strengthen the status of the EIT and establish it as the sole admission criterion for all universities.

USETI actively cooperated with civil society organizations on the national, regional and local level and taught, for example, OPORA and CVU how to monitor the tests. Likewise, USETI cooperated with national media to raise awareness and promote the new admission system to the wider public and to counter prejudices and resistance concerning the EIT. This was crucial for the acceptance of the testing in society and had a seemingly positive effect on attitudes towards the EIT: the high approval rate of the reform seems remarkable for a country where (education) reforms are usually seen critically.

When the MCC Threshold programme expired in December 2009 and brought an end to the USETI initiative, the USAID Mission Director for Ukraine, Janina Jaruzelski, underlined the necessity of an ongoing and sustainable reform process in the education sector and stressed how crucial the work of USETI had been for the successful implementation of the external testing (USETI 2010). Due to the positive assessment of USETI's work, USAID decided to prolong and extend the program. Under the auspices of the *American Councils for*

International Education, which already had experience in developing and administering standardized tests in Kyrgyzstan, Georgia and Russia, the *USETI Alliance* (Global Development Alliance Ukrainian Standardized External Testing Initiative) was created as the successor organization, with one significant difference: the USETI Alliance was no longer composed of a sole U.S. actor but consisted of 15 national and international organizations, including key actors such as UCEQA, the Ministry of Education and OPORA, in an effective *advocacy coalition*.[25] Due to the broad cooperation between governmental institutions on the one hand, and nongovernmental organisations on the other hand, USETI has become an influential actor that lobbies for an institutionally secure and self-sustainable EIT.

Decreasing the role of the EIT – creating new opportunities for corruption?

After Viktor Yanukovych's takeover as President in 2010, he installed the highly controversial Party of Regions deputy Dmytro Tabachnyk[26] as Minister of Education, a distinctive opponent of the independent testing. As one of his first official acts, the new minister changed the admission procedure and created an uneven playing field with opportunities for corruption. While admissions had been based solely on the results of the EIT in the two previous years, the admission system changed radically in 2010. EIT results were no longer accepted as secondary school leaving examination certificates, but solely as entrance examinations to universities. Furthermore, the importance of the EIT was diminished, as additional criteria were introduced: the average mark of secondary school leaving certificates was also reconsidered, and in special cases, universities were again allowed to introduce their own specific admission testing. The rationale behind the new admission regime was political in nature, as the director of the Renaissance Foundation, Evhen Bystrytsky describes:

> '*There was always resistance on part of the university rectors, they don't like this system. Their resistance was expressed in different ways and it is associated with the political interests of the ruling party. Minister Tabachnyk is a typical representative of the ruling party. What does it mean to be the Minister of Education? It is the person who can influence the choice of students and teachers during elections. Somehow, not completely, but this influence is very important. 'Students in dormitories, you have to vote for our candidate!' This is a kind of political corruption …When rectors are dissatisfied… they should be feeded! That means that they must receive some benefits. And the minister says: Yeah, this testing system is bad, let's create some small gaps there.*' (Interview 25, Evhen Bystrytsky, Director IRF).

While most rectors approved of this modification, the proponents of the EIT expressed their concerns that this would bring back corruption and undermine the fair and transparent admission system that had proved to be successful (International Renaissance Foundation 2011). In fact, their fears were partially realised, as Serhiy Rakov, editor of the 'Education Testing and Monitoring' Journal, noted during an interview with the author. He explained that immediately after Tabachnyk had announced that secondary school certificates would be added as a selection criterion, the sale of grade books increased 30 per cent, indicating that grades were being rewritten by teachers for informal payments from parents and due to pressure from school principals. A study by the Centre for Testing Technologies and Education Quality Monitoring confirmed this suspicion. According to the results, in 2009, before school certificates were considered, 4.6 per cent of all school graduates received a silver or gold medal for achieving extraordinary results. However, in 2011, when school certificates were taken into account, the amount of medallists nearly doubled to 8.1 per cent, and in some regions, the number even went up to 14 per cent (Likarchuk 2012).

The increase of corruption and informal practices at the classroom level to obtain better grades correlating with the increased importance of the average school certificate can be easily explained with the composition of the *overall admission score*: the score is composed of four criteria, with a maximum of 870 points. The EIT scores account for the largest amount, namely for 600 points, while the remaining 270 points depend on less transparent and rather subjective criteria: the average secondary school leaving certificate accounts for up to 200 points. Additional points can be acquired through 'extraordinary achievements'. These include vestiges of the Soviet education system, such as *School Olympiads* and the *Minor Academy of Sciences of Ukraine*. Both are organized on local, regional and nationwide levels, and winners of these competitions are awarded up to 50 points. In theory, the best students compete with each other, but in reality, malpractice is common. For example, the daughter of former Deputy Education Minister Yevhen Sulima won three Olympiads in 2011, a result that no Ukrainian student had ever achieved before (Genial'naya doch' zama Tabachnika vyigrala Vseukrainskuyu olimpiadu po russkomu yazyku 2011). Obviously, instead of knowledge and intellectual skills, political pressure and informal agreements seem to decide the Olympiads. UCEQA-director Likarchuk, dismissed after criticising these amendments[27] in January 2011 and replaced by the Tabachnyk-loyal Irina Zaitseva, noted during his interview:

> '*If the participation in Olympiads would not be a bonus, and it is a huge bonus for admission, I think, sooner or later they would have been forgotten. But since they add a bonus, they slowly transformed into a specific mechanism of corruption.*'
> (Interview 12, Ihor Likarchuk, former Director of the Ukrainian Centre for Education Quality Assessment).

According to Likarchuk, the same applies to the Minor Academies, which operate in a similar manner.

A further 20 points may be acquired through participation in preparatory classes at the universities to which prospective students want to apply. Those who cannot afford or join these courses are clearly discriminated against. Thus, this system, although legal, undermines equal opportunity.

Apart from the described potential for corruption and malpractice, disadvantaged or handicapped persons are given privileges. While this is generally understandable – social groups like orphans, children from the Chernobyl-area, disabled persons etc. might otherwise be discriminated against by the strict EIT procedure – in practice, this leads to another informal way to bypass university admissions, as 25 per cent of university places are reserved for them and they do not have to compete with other students. According to newspaper reports, such certificates can be obtained quite easily for 2,000-3,000 USD and it had became popular to simulate having asthma or being an orphan (Kolb 2011). In 2011, president Yanukovych added coal miner's children as well as children of the armed forces and other military units to the list, which was perceived as a populist move to secure votes in the 2012 parliamentary elections. Due to Tabachnyk's far-reaching amendments, the role of the EIT has been gradually diminished and potentially corrupt and informal practices for the admissions procedure have been re-established.

Reform Outcomes: Why the EIT is nonetheless regarded as a success story

Despite Tabachnyk's regressive policy and the gradual abatement of the EIT which once again opened the backdoors to corruption, the external testing itself is widely acknowledged as one of the most effective reforms in Ukraine. This is due to the fact that the main objectives of the reform have been achieved: corruption during university admission has been reduced and a modern, effective and independent assessment and selection system which provides equal access to all applicants and increases the social and geographical mobility of the

students has been established. Trust in the EIT has been increasing every year. Additionally, the debate regarding the future role of the EIT initiated a broad public discourse on education policy and revealed the demand for new higher education legislation.

Regarding the dynamics of corruption, no robust official data is available, as the measurement of corruption is still an unsolved challenge.[28]However, some surveys indicate a significant decrease in corruption during admissions. Philip Shaw's 2003 survey of 1,588 students from across Ukraine found that 56 per cent of respondents had paid bribes or used *blat*-networks to gain admission (Shaw 2005). According to a high ranking official at the MoE, in 2006, approximately one third of students experienced corruption during admissions (Osipian 2007: 10). A study for USETI commissioned the by the Kyiv Institute of Sociology revealed that not only the perception of corruption had decreased (in 2007, about 20 per cent of students thought corruption had decreased in comparison to the year before, one year later, 35 per cent thought so), but more importantly, there was also a decline in personal experience with corruption. While nearly every fourth student (23 per cent) experienced extortion, bribery or nepotism/favouritism during admissions in 2007, after the mandatory introduction of the EIT in 2008, only 7 per cent reported such cases (USAID 2009a). Corruption experience during the EIT itself was reported by 5 per cent of students. However, the reform lead to a spill-over effect: while corruption during university admissions decreased, it gradually increased during school graduation exams and university teaching. For instance, a recent study by the DIF revealed that students now do not have to bribe to gain access to an institution of higher education, but need to do so to avoid being expelled from a university (Ivanova 2013).

With the creation of the EIT, a comprehensive assessment tool to evaluate educational quality was successfully established. Based on objective assessment methods, a transparent and fair admission system was developed. For the first time, prospective students from different social strata (regardless of gender, place of residence, parents' social background, etc.) have equal opportunity to gain access to higher education. A study concluded that admissions based on EIT scores are highly effective. The predictive validity, meaning the correlation between the EIT results and exam grades at the end of the first semester, is 0.522 (internationally, results with a correlation coefficient above 0.5 are generally regarded as highly effective) (Kovtunets *et al*. 2010). The authors even compared Ukraine with Scandinavian countries, which are considered the global vanguards in equity issues.

Due to these positive results, Ukrainians trust the EIT and its procedure. This is remarkable, as on the one hand, (educational) reforms are usually criticized, and on the other hand, Ukrainians do not trust public institutions and regard them as highly corrupt. For example, the trust of university professors, who, as a group, have been viewed with the most scepticism, has increased from 24 per cent in 2007 to 46 per cent in 2008 (Kovtunets *et al*. 2010: 74). In the target groups (school graduates, students, parents), about 80 per cent trust the exam (USAID 2009a) and do not believe that manipulation is possible, as exemplified by the following two students' statements:

> '*There was no corruption, and if it was possible at all, then certainly not during the test. Maybe you can bribe those, who examine the work. But those people who are administering the exams, they are just schoolteachers; they have no influence on the grading, so I have not seen anything like that. And I don't think that it would somehow be possible.*' (Interview 15, female student from Mykolaiv).

> '*Personally, I do not know of any cases of corruption within the EIT. [...] There are rumours that you can buy certificates with good EIT results, but honestly, I do not think that this is possible.*' (Interview 22, female student from Kyiv).

The highest degree of credibility can be found among school administrators and teachers; in 2008, a solid majority of 93 per cent trusted the EIT. This may be explained by their positive

experiences with the UCEQA. Many teachers earn a supplementary income as instructors or proof-readers for the centre and value the well-organized implementation of the exam.

The most comprehensible data on public acceptance of the EIT is provided by the Democratic Initiatives Foundation, which regularly conducts opinion polls on behalf of USETI. In the first edition of the survey in 2008, 41.9 per cent of the population supported the reform and 34.1 per cent were against it, while 24.1 per cent had no opinion. Since then, the popularity of the EIT has increased gradually, and according to the most recent 2013 survey, a majority of 53.4 per cent of the population support the EIT, 24.9 per cent are against it and 20.7 per cent have no opinion on the subject. Lilya Hrynevych summarized the reform outcomes as following:

> *'External Independent Assessment (EIA) implementation is considered by the estimations of both citizens and specialists to be the most successful reform in education, conducted in the recent years. EIA implementation became an effective mechanism of preventing corruption on entering the universities. We also acquired information on the real condition of graduate educational achievements. EIA is also a tool of raising educational standards in schools.'* (Grynevych 2010: 24).

Future prospects of the external exam

As mentioned above, a rather unintended outcome of the introduction of external testing was the triggering of a heated debate on education policy and reforms in Ukraine. After the EIT was successfully implemented in 2008, Minister Vakarchuk drafted a new law for higher education. It was meant to modernize the higher education system, in general, and secure the status of the EIT by law, in particular, in order to sustain the testing and prevent a rollback. But after the change in government in 2010, there was no majority for this bill in parliament. The newly-elected Minister of Education, Tabachnyk, submitted a revised bill that would have meant, among rising education costs, the *de facto* end of the independent testing. This lead to heavy student protests and a nationwide campaign 'Against the degradation of education' and the emergence of 'The campaign to protect the EIT'. They were mainly initiated by the rather conservative 'Resistance' ('Vidsich') and leftist 'Direct Action' ('Prjama Dija') student unions, which organised nationwide demonstrations with thousands of students to prevent the government from passing the law.

The dispute regarding the new law has been ongoing for five years now and numerous drafts have been submitted to the parliament, but none have been approved. One of the most controversial issues remained the role of the EIT: while the latest bill of Tabachnyk's MoE is reactionary in its character and would further eliminate the EIT, in contrast, two opposing draft laws – one from the opposition, another from an academic/civil society expert group – are progressive and strengthen the position of testing.[29]

After the fall of the kleptocratic Yanukovych regime in February 2014, a provisional reform-minded and Western oriented government took power. For the first time, students in Ukraine occupied the Education Ministry until the parliament dismissed Minister of Education Tabachnyk and replaced him with the student-nominated Serhiy Kvit, president of the Mohyla Academy (Luhn 2014). This lead to a fundamental shift in Ukraine's education policy, towards Europe. Kvit is not only regarded as one of the most prominent opponents of Dmytro Tabachnyk's education policy, but is also known for his successful fight against corruption at his former university. Deputy Minister Yevhen Sulima was replaced by Inna Sovsun, an anti-corruption activist and former director of the Centre of Society research, who is also backed by student organisations. Due to their background, it is expected that the new management will combat corruption more systematically. Sovsun pointed out the following during her first statement:

'First of all, our actions will be aimed at maximising openness, transparency and publicity of the decision-making process at all levels, starting with the ministry. Only this makes the fight against corruption possible. […] Equally important are detailed investigations about the activities of the previous cadres of the ministry. I do not think, we will reveal everything what has been done, but we will try to minimize the harm. It is important to learn who the main persons in the corrupt schemes were to be sure that these people do not work with the ministry anymore.' (Kolb 2014).

As one of the first legal acts, Tabachnyk-loyalist Zaitseva was displaced as director of UCEQA for 'flagrant violations of her duties' and former director Likarchuk was reinstated in March 2014. Furthermore, the new government initiated an independent audit and decided not to pass Tabachnyk's bill on higher education. Instead, the progressive draft prepared by the expert group and backed by students will be adopted as soon as possible. However, as of March 2014, the political agenda has been overshadowed by the Crimea Crisis and the forthcoming presidential elections in May. The bill, which would finally codify the EIT into law, will most likely be passed after the elections in May. Another challenge for the new government is financial allocation for the UCEQA. To guarantee a proper functioning of the forthcoming EIT, the centre requires an additional funding of several Million UAH. In times of political and economic crisis and heavy budget cuts, it remains to be seen how the government can ensure the funding.

Conclusion

Since the disintegration of the Soviet Union, corruption in higher education has become a widespread phenomenon in many successor countries. To combat corruption in the higher education admission process, most post-communist states replaced the corruption-prone admission exams at universities, introducing a transparent admission system based on external testing. Under the reform-minded Yushchenko presidency, Ukraine successfully established its programme of External Independent Testing in 2008. Although the reform was mitigated by the Yanukovych government, surveys and monitoring reports of independent NGOs documented a successful reduction in the level of corruption. Citizens trust the EIT and prefer it to the former admission system, as it not only reduces corruption but also provides equal opportunities to all applicants. This explains *why* the Ukrainian public as well as experts regard the introduction of the EIT as one of the countries' most successful anti-corruption reforms. However, it remains to be seen when the new government will finally be able to pass a new higher education law that would sustain the reforms' achievements through securing the status of the EIT in law.

Given the fact that anti-corruption reforms especially in post-communist countries often fail (Heeks/Mathisen 2012; Walker 2011; Mungiu-Pippidi 2010), the second research question, namely *how* this success can be explained, contains broader implications beyond Ukraine. Drawing on the conducted interviews with key stakeholders involved in the reform process, this paper argues that the political will of key politicians (including the President and Minister of Education) within a short democratic 'window of opportunity' after the Orange Revolution provided the necessary preconditions for the effective implementation of the reform. In this context, external (Western) donor organizations, together with a network of pro-active domestic civil society organisations and the MoE, carefully designed a gradual approach for the implementation of the EIT.

Organizations such as IRF, USAID, American Councils for Education, the World Bank, among others, provided a wide range of political support, financial aid and technological expertise. In doing so, they fostered capacity building and the professionalization of domestic

actors in charge of the reform process (Beichelt *et al*. 2014). The IRF and USAID/American Councils, in particular, shaped the process with their language of 'expertise, networking, negotiation, debating, diagnosing, calculation and normalization' (Fimyar 2010: 165)

The IRF, with its Testing Initiative, laid the foundation for an effective, highly automated and secure organizational procedure which could hardly be manipulated by corruption. It created an independent monitoring agency which became the state-run Ukrainian Centre for Educational Quality Assessment and was to carry out the EIT. The management and staff of the UCEQA were selected due to their upright and honest reputation, which, according to Klitgaard, is the key component of successful anti-corruption campaigns (Klitgaard 1988).

A decisive factor for the effective implementation was the close cooperation between the international actors, on the one hand, and central domestic stakeholders, such as the Ministry of Education, NGOs, the media, universities and other actors from the educational community, on the other hand. In this regard, the USETI project played a major role, as it not only financed the reform but served as a broad advocacy network and an '*"honest broker" that brings together diverse stakeholders who ordinarily would not be likely to meet, discuss issues and arrive at a consensus on the next steps*' (USAID 2009b). The involvement of domestic NGOs, in particular, was essential, as Hanna *et al*. have proven that '*anti-corruption strategies appeared to be more effective when a locally trusted NGO was able to provide training and supervision and support implementation.*' (Hanna *et al*. 2011: 50). At a later stage, when the existence of the EIT was at a crossroads, student organisations appeared as a further actor, exerting pressure through nationwide protests. They successfully prevented the government from passing a new education law that would have completely diminished the role of the EIT. Additionally, the wide public support of the external testing played a crucial role as the Yanukovych government feared to lose voters' approval if they abolished the country's most popular reform.

The findings of this article coincide with the report 'Fighting corruption in Eastern partnership countries', which analyses anti-corruption campaigns. The study emphasizes the fact that the preparatory efforts of international donors and Ukrainian NGOs, the political will of the President and the Minister of Education and the proactive cooperation among educational institutions, donors and NGOs were decisive for the successful reform outcome (Ukrainian Institute for Public Policy 2011: 17).

The study has shown that even under unstable and insecure politically conditions in a society where corruption seems to be endemic, effective anti-corruption reforms are possible if they are designed carefully and appropriately adapted to the specific local context, and not according to a 'one size fits all' logic. The reform design under study was adjusted and narrowed down to concrete '"bite-size" chunks' (Heeks/Mathisen 2012: 547), namely corruption during university admission, and was not aimed at the eradication of education corruption in general. This would have produced a 'design-reality gap' and the reform would most likely have failed due to overambitious expectations, as most anti-corruption initiatives do (Heeks/Mathisen 2012: 533).

The progress of the EIT after the change of government demonstrates that if political will is missing, as it was the case under the Yanukovych government, positive achievements can be reversed quickly, despite all the pressure from political opposition, civil society (students) and the international donor community. Thus, the political will to fight corruption seems to be the strongest variable for the explanation of effective anti-corruption programs.

Table 1: Interviewees

Interviewees' Designation	Interviewee's Affiliation
Interviewee 1	Lecturer in Political Sciences, National Karazin University, Char'kiv
Interviewee 2	Lecturer in Sociology, National Karazin University, Char'kiv

Interviewee 3	Serhiy Rakov, Editor of "Education Testing and Monitoring", Char'kiv
Interviewee 4	Stanislav Kutsenko, Ukrainian Student Union, Kyiv
Interviewee 5	Olena Zaplotynska, Education Program Manager at Renaissance Foundation, Kyiv
Interviewee 6	1st year student, National University Mohyla Academy, Kyiv
Interviewee 7	Irina Bekeshkina, Director of Democratic Initiatives Foundation, Kyiv
Interviewee 8	Alla Voloshina, Deputy Director of Transparency International Ukraine, Kirovohrad
Interviewee 9	Serhiy Kvit, President of National University Mohyla Academy, Kyiv
Interviewee 10	Lecturer, Kyiv National "Vadym Hetman" Economic University, Kyiv
Interviewee 11	Nikolay Kuzin, Education Program Manager at OPORA, Kyiv
Interviewee 12	Ihor Likarchuk, Former Director of the UCEQA, Kyiv
Interviewee 13	Yarema Bachynsky, Director of USETI, Kyiv
Interviewee 14	Pavel Polyanskyj, Former Deputy Education Minister, Kyiv
Interviewee 15	1st year student, Petro Mohyla Black Sea State University, Mykolaiv
Interviewee 16	1st year student, Petro Mohyla Black Sea State University, Mykolaiv
Interviewee 17	1st year student, Petro Mohyla Black Sea State University, Mykolaiv
Interviewee 18	1st year student, Petro Mohyla Black Sea State University, Mykolaiv
Interviewee 19	1st year student, Petro Mohyla Black Sea State University, Mykolaiv
Interviewee 20	1st year student, Petro Mohyla Black Sea State University, Mykolaiv
Interviewee 21	1st year student, Petro Mohyla Black Sea State University, Mykolaiv
Interviewee 22	1st year student, Petro Mohyla Black Sea State University, Mykolaiv
Interviewee 23	1st year student, National University Mohyla Academy, Kyiv
Interviewee 24	Lesya Orobets, Member of Parliament, Committee on Education, Kyiv
Interviewee 25	Evhen Bystrytsky, Director of Renaissance Foundation, Kyiv
Interviewee 26	Lilya Hrynevych, Member of Parliament, Chairman of Committee on Education, Kyiv
Interview 27	Ol'ha Strelyuk, Head of Education Program at OPORA, L'viv
Interview 28	Ivan Vakarchuk, Former Education Minister, President of National University L'viv
Interview 30	Larisa Seredyak, Director of RCEQA L'viv Region, L'viv

Notes

1. While Ukraine inherited a rather well-developed education system, its role within the Soviet education System had negative consequences, as some subjects received a disproportionate emphasis: while there were too many engineers, only a few lawyers, economists, sociologists, psychologists, and managers were trained (Kremen/Nikolajenko 2006: 18).I thank my colleague in Poland Sylwester Zagulski for his contribution to our study.

2. The number of students in Ukraine increased 2.5 times from 876,000 in 1991/92 to 2.1 m students in 2010/11. At the same time, the number of public HEIs more than doubled from 149 to 349. Source: State Statistics Service of Ukraine: <http://www.ukrstat.gov.ua/>. The results of the 1990–91 study were published in Melzer *et al*. (1991).

3. For example, in 2000, a professor's salary in Moscow was 41 USD, much less than that of a road sweeper, who earned 85 USD at that time, and one third of the subsistence level of 115 USD.The 2001 study results were published in: Koseła and Jonda (2005).

4. During Soviet times, higher education was strictly free of charge. When tuition fees were allowed in the early 1990s, the share of students on paid enrolment increased to around 50 per cent in most post-Soviet countries.

5. This is best described by Talapina and Sannikova (2008) for the Russian case, but it is no less valid for the other post-Soviet countries.

6. According to a study in 2009/2010 about wages in academia in 28 countries, post-Soviet countries rank at the bottom in paying its professoriate: Armenia brings up the rear and paid on average 405 USD PPP monthly for lectures and 665 USD PPP for professors. Russia paid in 2008 much more than in previous years, but still very little in international comparison − 433 USD PPP for lectures and 910 USD PPP for professors. Even economically weak countries like Colombia (lecturer: $2,064, professor: 4,058 USD PPP), Ethiopia (lecturer: $1,022, professor: 1,580 USD PPP) or Nigeria (lecturer: $2,758, professor: 6,229 USD PPP) remunerate academics much better than most post-Soviet countries, including Ukraine. Not to mention academically prosperous countries like the United Kingdom (lecturer: $4,077, professor: 8,369 USD PPP) or Canada (lecturer: $5,733, professor: 9,485 USD PPP), which are on the top of the list (Altbach 2012).

7. Tajikistan is the only country without an external examination system yet, but it plans to introduce one in 2014.

8. Even Russian President Vladimir Putin has recently admitted that the goal to reduce corruption during admissions with the help of the Unified State Exam has not been realized (Prezident Rossii - Oficial'nyj sajt 2012). Many scandals about sold test answers, manipulated exams, corruption within the testing agency itself etc. lead to public rejection of the reform and initiated heated debates whether the reform should be reversed. While between 2007 and 2013 34 per cent of Russian citizens approved the introduction of the reform, the share of opponents increased from 30 per cent to 43 per cent in the same period as government-friendly VCIOM opinion research centre revealed in 2013 (Vserossijskij centr izucheniya obshchestvennogo mneniya (VCIOM) 2013).

9. The term *blat* describes '*the use of personal networks for obtaining goods and services in short supply and for circumventing formal procedures*' (Ledeneva 2009: 257). This includes the use of *blat* for getting a state-subsidized place at a university. It should be mentioned that *blat* is not necessarily equivalent to corruption, but since most respondents during the interviews used it synonymously, in this case it is considered a specific form of corruption.

10. Assessment means the '*process of gathering and evaluating information on what students know, understand, and can do in order to make an informed decision about next steps in the educational process*' (Clarke 2011: 4).

11. A good example is the German 'PISA-shock': After the first PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) results were published in 2001 and Germany performed below average, a large public debate led to pressure on the politicians and a series of reforms were adopted to counter the negative development (Graeff 2010; Kneuper 2010; Toman 2011). Actually, the 2012 PISA results showed that considerable progress had been made, but whether these can be drawn back to the reforms is disputed among experts.

12. A good example is the German 'PISA-shock': After the first PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) results were published in 2001 and Germany performed below average, a large public debate led to pressure on the politicians and a series of reforms were adopted to counter the negative development (Graeff 2010; Kneuper 2010; Toman 2011). Actually, the 2012 PISA results showed that considerable progress had been made, but whether these can be drawn back to the reforms is disputed among experts.

13. Poverty was a tremendous problem at that time. According to the World Bank, in 1999, about one quarter of the Ukrainian population was poor and possessed less than 75 per cent of the median income. Education was regarded as a way to escape poverty. Especially higher education reduces the likelihood of poverty considerably, as the report shows: while 44 per cent of those Ukrainians with only primary education are among the poor, between 35-37 per cent with secondary education are poor and only 14-16 per cent of the population with higher education live under the poverty line (The World Bank 2001: 192–3).

14. Namely, those were the Universitiy Ivan Franko in L'viv and the Mohyla Academy in Kyiv, which were also actively involved in developing test mechanisms and therefore closely cooperated with IRF. Apart from these two, the National Mechnikov University in Odessa and the Pedagogical Skovoroda University in Khar'kiv joined the experiment as well.

15. The president problematized the issue of corruption during one of his first sessions in the Ukrainian Parliament. The transcript is available at: <http://static.rada.gov.ua/zakon/skl4/7session/STENOGR/04020507_06.htm> [04.04.2013].

16. The concept of political will is still understudied and it often remains unclear, what exactly is meant by this term. A fruitful approach with a particular focus on corruption is provided by Brinkerhoff, who defines political will as 'the commitment of actors to undertake actions to achieve a set of objectives – in this instance, reduced corruption – and to sustain the costs of those actions over time' (Brinkerhoff 2010: 1). 'By applying a model of political will that specifies a set of action-based components that are observable and measurable' (ibid.) the fuzzy concept of political will can be exposed. In the examined case, Yushchenko's political will is especially visible if his education policy is compared with that of the Yanukovych government, which gradually decreased the role of the EIT, increased the pressure on the independent UCEQA (e.g. Likarchuk's dismissal, see footnote 26) and legislated loopholes for corruption.

17. UCEQA consists of a central office in Kyiv which governs the EIT, and regional test centers in Kyiv, Dnipropetrovsk, Vynnytsia, Donetsk, Ivano-Frankivsk, L'viv, Odessa, Simferopol and Kharkiv, which were equipped with the necessary capacity and infrastructure to conduct the testing on the regional level. While the central office designs the tests, regional branches are responsible for training the test site administrators, assistants, senior instructors and examiners and to carry out the testing.

18. The other examination subjects are mathematics, Ukrainian history, biology, chemistry, geography, physics, fundaments of law, fundaments of economics, global history and foreign literature. In 2009, foreign language tests in English, German,

French and Spanish were added to that list. Depending on the requirements of their desired field of study, school graduates pass exams in a variety of these subjects.

19. This is not the case in other countries, where leaks exist: for instance, in Russia during the 2011 exam in mathematics, test sheets were distributed through the Russian social network *vkontakte* and up to 300,000 test takers had access to them. Another example is the website <www.abiturient.pro>, where students could buy the right answers during the exam, as the Teacher's Gazette reports (Grushchin 2011). In recent years, even in western countries such as France and the Netherlands, information leaks were reported.

20. In 2010, more than 55,000 testing sites operated in the country, so that the vast majority of students (98.5 per cent) did not have to travel more than 50 kilometers from their residence (Grynevych 2010).

21. Additionally, video surveillance, which is already in use in other countries like Georgia, was discussed in Ukraine, but was not introduced yet. One reason is that this would be quite costly for Ukraine, where in 2012 more than 330,000 pupils took the EIT – compared to ca. 36,000 in Georgia, which had to spend much less for surveillance.

22. The system is online available under <http://www.vstup.info/> and lists all universities by scientific discipline. Supposed that a school graduate applied at three different law universities for a Bachelor's program, he can easily check his scores and compare it with his competitors at each university. He sees which place he ranks among all applicants and can simply retrace, if he is accepted at the university or not.

23. Website of the MCC Ukraine Threshold Program: <http://www.mcc.gov/pages/countries/program/ukraine-threshold-program>.

24. Website of the USETI Alliance: About USETI Alliance: <http://www.useti.org.ua/en/pages/11/about-useti.html>.

25. Among the Ukrainian participants are the Ministry of Education and Sciences of Ukraine, the Ukrainian Center for Educational Quality Assessment, the OPORA Civic network, the company Pro.Mova, the Fakt Publishing House, the National Academy of Management, the L'viv City Community Organization Center for Educational Policy, the Ivan Franko National University of L'viv, the National University Of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy and the Petro Mohyla Black Sea State University. International actors of the Alliance are USAID, American Councils for International Education, the American Institutes for Research, the International Renaissance Foundation and the European Union Project Tempus IV Educational Measurement Adapted to EU Standards at Mälardalen University, Västerås, Sweden.

26. Tabachnyk is described as 'probably Ukraine's most controversial governmental official' and is regarded as a Ukrainophobe among wide parts of the public, who prefers Russian culture above Ukrainian. For instance, he forced a pro-Russian historical narrative in textbooks and weakened the status of the Ukrainian language. He is widely criticized for his "re-Sovietisation" of the school system and the departure from European standards by cutting school duration from twelve to eleven classes. Therefore, particularly students, but also large parts of the society, regularly protested against him (Lozowy 2011).

27. Rumor has it, that Likarchuk was dismissed due to his stubbornness and unwillingness to allow preferred treatment for children of high-ranking politicians. In his own words, he '*did not follow orders of a large numbers of people, including those who are now in power, to increase the EIT-results of their protégés*' (Bazhal 2011).

28. Usually, the perception of corruption is measured, as for example in Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index. However, this method is inaccurate, as the perception of corruption and the actual experience often significantly differ (Rose/Mishler 2010; Čábelková/Hanousek 2004).

29. The reform of the law on education started already in 2008, and currently three draft laws are under appraisal: No. 1187 from the members of the ruling "Party of Regions",

S. Kivalev, M. Sorokin and G. Kaletnik, No. 1187-1 from the united opposition, among which is the former UCEQA director, Lilya Hrynevych, and version 1187-2 from an expert group enacted by prime minister Mykola Azarov and headed by the rector of the renowned Kyiv Polytechnic Institute, Michael Zgurovskyj. While the Party of Regions' draft reduces the importance of the EIT scores and strengthens the significance of additional criteria such as pre-reform admission test at the university level, Zgurovskyj plans to consolidate the role of the EIT as the main mechanisms, but allows to a certain extent other mechanisms as well (e.g. secondary education certificates). The united oppositions' draft under the auspice of Hrynevych sees the EIT as the principal criteria, which results must be considered at least to 90 per cent for selection processes (Surzhik/Onishchenko 2013).

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