

Editorial Note

Shift in Education Policy and Prospects for Young People in Georgia

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Education projects introduced by the Chancellery of the Government of Georgia with initiative of the Prime Minister of Georgia demonstrates shift in education policy in Georgia. This coherent approach taken since 2013 renders prospects for young people and wider public in this South Caucasus country in Europe's neighbourhood. This case study column examines an example of International Education Centre – IEC that shows a fundamental shift to sustained and consistent education policy in Georgia.

The IEC project established within the Government Planning and Innovations Unit at the Chancellery is unprecedented in substance and scope for several reasons. First, by supporting education, training and lifelong learning it is expected to facilitate social and economic development of the country. This policy was promulgated in the Decree on IEC adopted in April 2014. Second, the range of opportunities to the beneficiary population extending from students, and mid career professionals to faculty members is unique in itself.

Primary objective behind this project is to train highly qualified personnel for civil service. To foster this objective, notions of civic responsibility and loyalty have been regularly conveyed by the government. This has been supplemented with specific information about funding opportunities and application procedure regularly communicated by the senior management of the administration with outreach meetings at the regional cities of Batumi and Zugdidi. The Prime Minister of Georgia Irakli Gharibashvili during various meetings with the students, most notable of these at the Ivane Javakishvili State University in 2014, by attuning to their needs and sharing similar experience, connected to the youth and instilled hope among students.

In the course of planning this education policy, the interagency commission set up to define state development priorities in Georgia revealed the necessity to further law, agricultural sciences, technology, education, public health, humanities, social sciences, and defence (CIE, 2014). Students admitted to those subject areas at the inclusive top hundred universities with Times World University Rankings have been eligible to apply. Furthermore, the scholarship commission board members, involved in higher education management, for decades have applied transparent tools to select applicants based on merit and need. This just selection process allowed 88 students in 2014-2015 to commence their studies worldwide, gain international education, and professional skills. Such student mobility has also been supported with pastoral care both individually and groupwise by the IEC.

Another remarkable aspect of this project is its timing. Against the backdrop of decreasing number of international scholarship programs in Georgia this project was a blessing for many. The centre was set up in nearly three months, with legal basis for administration and budgeting, the first online national funding application system that received 1,279 applications enthused to build fair and open society in Georgia.

This education support initiative is the first of its kind national project that provides not only scholarships to both MA and PhD levels, as well as partner universities scholarship programme, but also entails professional training to mid career professionals, and internship scheme for the graduates. In addition, the first student

residence accommodation that the government is constructing at the outskirts of Tbilisi will host students from low-income families. It has a real meaning for the students that resonates in a quote of a grantee from the first cohort: “The academic scholarship is a tangible support from the Georgian Government that encourages us to push beyond possible and shape the country’s future both in normative and practical terms” (Int. 1). This project is a testament to a sustained education policy.

The next challenge the project is ready to take up is helping the graduates in their transition and readaptation process. The project seems to be carefully devised to exercise such support together with the Civil Service Bureau by offering graduates to join public service. While for most of the students secured employment is reassuring, for some the luring prospect of going global before returning local is something to explore though. The medium term prospects was captured by the Prime Minister of Georgia in his address at the first grantees’ reception: “Within five years, we will have internationally educated and highly qualified human resources who, after having returned home, will be guaranteed to have jobs in government bodies for three years” (GoG, 2014). For now, the peer support system, notably communications space in media and alumni network is in place.

Last but not least, as a new dimension of social implications, the grantees staying in their respective countries are asked to share their academic work and reflect about the project at the local events. One of the first was their contribution to the annual Georgian Studies Day organized by the Georgian Society and the Embassy of Georgia to the United Kingdom in 2014 in London; and to an inaugural seminar on Policy Shifts in Georgia organized by the St Andrews Georgian Society in 2015 in Scotland.

Future of the young people has been shaped by the Government’s innovations. It is equally demanding for the youth to face the joy and challenge to sustain and take this initiative further.

Sources:

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