

REPORT

# CONFERENCE “ACADEMIC INTEGRITY - ACHIEVEMENTS AND FUTURE PERSPECTIVE FOR MONTENEGRO”



16 - 17 May 2017  
Bečići, Budva

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## Introduction

The two-day conference "**Academic integrity – Achievements and future perspective for Montenegro**" was held on 16-17 May 2017, in Bečići, Montenegro. The event, which served as a platform for the conversation on sustainable policies for implementation of ethical standards in higher education, gathered around 90 participants from government institutions, private and state universities, student organizations, academics, the media, international organizations, prominent researchers from Europe and the region.

The main goal of the conference was to evaluate national policies in Montenegro and practice in higher education, to identify shortcomings and propose adequate model for improving this area, based on European and regional experiences.

The conference was organized under the project "*Strengthening Integrity and Combating Corruption in Higher Education*", co-funded by the European Union and Council of Europe as part of the European Union – Council of Europe programmatic framework "Horizontal Facility for Western Balkans and Turkey". The project is implemented by the Council of Europe Education Department in cooperation with the Council of Europe Programme Office in Podgorica. The overall project objective is to strengthen integrity and combat corruption in the higher education system through applying preventive mechanisms based on Council of Europe standards and practices

The conference was opened by **Angela Longo**, Head of Operation at the Council of Europe Programme Office in Podgorica. Welcoming speeches were delivered by **Radmila Vojvodić**, Rector of University of Montenegro, **Mubera Kurpejović**, General Director of Directorate for Higher Education in the Ministry of Education, and **Vesna Atanasova**, Programme Manager of the Council of Europe's Education Department. The opening addresses stressed out **achievements of the on-going educational reform in Montenegro and future paths in higher education.**

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**Radmila Vojvodić** emphasized key elements of the ongoing educational reform, firstly accreditation of the University of Montenegro, within the new European study model, which has finalized three-year reform process and secondly new legislative and institutional framework that allowed for establishment of new institutional units at the University: Scientific Committee, Centre for studies and quality control and Centre for Doctoral studies. The Rector said that this reform has been focusing on the quality of research, mobilization of teachers and students for their future internationalization, harmonization of the Montenegrin study models and standards with the European ones, and allignment of education system with the labour market needs. Some of the positive changes she underlined refer to free of charge studies at University of Montenegro, equal treatment for doctoral, master and primary studies, independent and transparent regulatory agency, which will monitor the quality of education in Montenegro.



**Mubera Kurpejović** spoke on recent achievements of the Government and the Ministry of Education in higher education system. She reminded that the Ministry, with the assistance of World Bank HERIC project, prepared "Feasibility study on the proposed tailor-made system(s) for the prevention of plagiarism in Montenegro". The study *inter alia* recommended endorsement of a law on academic integrity. Speaking about the amendments to the Law on Higher Education, Kurpejović highlighted the recommendation of the recent Baseline study commissioned by the Council of Europe on the need to reconsider the status of the Council for Higher Education and on establishing the independent national quality assurance agency. She added that such an agency should contribute to further strengthening of academic integrity and fight against all forms of corruption in higher education. Young generations need to be educated on the negative effects of plagiarism, she concluded.

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**Vesna Atanasova** spoke on Montenegro's contribution to the Pan-European discussion and dialogue, emphasizing that Montenegro is one of the first piloting countries for testing the competence of democratic framework, and is a member of Pan-European Platform on Ethics, Transparency and Integrity in Education (ETINED). She specifically highlighted the recommendations of the Council of Europe on quality education where every individual has to be given the right to quality education, which means education free of corruption. She addressed the much-needed change of behaviour of all actors, the students, teachers, academic staff and parents, who have to adopt ethical principles and contribute to strengthening integrity in education. Atanasova assured that the Council of Europe will provide support to the Ministry of Education in developing the Law on Academic Integrity and in capacity building of the new agency on quality assurance once established.

This report will outline the presentations of experts from the region and Europe on different approaches and measures undertaken in order to strengthen academic integrity, combat corruption and preserve quality education. The report will summarize what was discussed at the conference by focusing on two topics: (i) *ethics, transparency, and integrity in higher education*, and (ii) *academic integrity – good practices from the region and EU*. Two parallel workshops took place following the first topic and resulted in specific recommendations. Final section of the report outlined general conclusions and recommendations from the conference.

### Ethics, transparency and integrity in higher education

During first session three topics have been discussed by European experts: *Muriel Poisson*, Task manager of the International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP-UNESCO)'s project on Ethics and Corruption in Education, *Maria Golubeva*, Development Director of the Centre for Public Policy PROVIDUS, Latvia, and *Thomas Lancaster*, Associate Dean for Computing and Digital Technologies at Staffordshire University, United Kingdom. The topics were: academic corruption, ethical code in higher education and academic integrity policies in South-Eastern Europe. All of the experts presented various types of corruption in higher education, which they have encountered during their research, and have presented recommendations and possible solutions to fight it, which will be presented further on in detail.

**Muriel Poisson** presented the work of IIEP on academic corruption and integri-



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ty. Her presentation focused on incentives for plagiarism and various types of corruption that impact higher education institutions, in the areas, such as: **financing** (plagiarism of grant proposal, bypassing criteria, misappropriation of funds, degree mills receiving public funds), **facilities** (fraud in public tendering, embezzlement of funds, payment for non-needed facilities, ghost deliveries, misappropriation of university property), **academic staff management** (selling of academic posts, fraud in appointment and deployment of academic staff, fake diplomas' use, course description plagiarism, ghost academic staff), **exams** (selling of exam questions, paper mills, substitution of scripts, copying, manipulation of exam results), **ethical values** (staff absenteeism-teaching in private HEIs; offering private tutoring during teaching hours, nepotism, over grading students to meet achievement criteria, etc.), **research integrity** (plagiarism, falsification and ghost authorship), and addressed strategies to fight it, listed below.

#### *What can be done?*

- **Piloting higher education integrity reviews** (reviewing standards, reviewing integrity climate in regard to fair access to education, textbooks procurement, staff hiring and firing, fraud detecting in schools' finances management);
- **Making norms integrity sensitive** (adopt chart of ethics, clearly define improper conduct, include integrity concerns in quality assurance and accreditation frameworks, establish whistle-blowers or complaint mechanisms);
- **Capacity strengthening** (establishing ethics committees, capacity building in accounting, staff and exam management procedures, outsourcing exams management to testing agencies, strengthening internal and external control and audit mechanisms, conducting awareness campaigns on the negative effects of fraud);
- **Sharing innovative use of ICT** (signature track (biometric data, etc.) to verify student identity (MOOCs), anti-plagiarism software, statistical detection of "improbable results", qualification and credentials checks);
- **Promoting university report cards** (promoting public access to information (admission requirements, budget, new posts, exam results, accredited

institutions, PhDs, etc.));

- **Engaging young people** (participating in ethical charts development, designing integrity indexes, organizing perception surveys and focus groups, getting involved in youth anti- corruption networks (GYAN)).

**Maria Golubeva** reflected on benefits of the code of ethics/conduct as expressions of the academic community's values and principles, as means which strengthen the ethics of the professional community of university teachers and of the student community, as well as tools to improve the education experience for students, guide, and support and professionally socialize teachers and students. She reminded that the key conceptual questions are whether there should be national or institutional code of ethic, as well as that in some countries (e.g. Netherlands) codes of conduct in higher education are national in scope. In other countries, codes of conduct in higher education are institutional in scope and are monitored by higher education institutions' internal ethics bodies (ethics committees). She reflected on *Guidelines for an Institutional Code of Ethics in Higher Education* and underlying values and principles, specifically focusing on the issue of plagiarism, which is not referring simply to master and doctoral thesis, but it is referring to academic staff research. Special attention has been given to good practices for general education that can be used in higher education, such as:



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- Stakeholder involvement in the development of codes of ethics;
- Integrating dissemination activities (of code of conduct) with higher education staff hiring and professional review, including contractual procedures;
- Practical workshops and seminars for higher education teachers with the involvement of professional bodies responsible for the code of conduct;
- Adequate disciplinary procedures (the possibility to lodge a complaint or other triggers for the review of professional conduct in a fair procedure by a respectable professional body).
- Regular reviews of the code (of ethics);
- Professional bodies providing consultation and guidance on the application of the code.

**Thomas Lancaster**, indicated the flows of the current educational policies in Montenegro, based on the findings of research within *South-East European Project on Policies for Academic Integrity (SEPPAI)*. He presented survey data, based on focus groups with students, as well as surveys of teachers and academic staff. The research tackled the strength of policies for teachers to deal with plagiarism, ghost writing, as well as the strength of the penalties. Key findings of the research indicated the need for **more training for both teachers and students on avoidance of plagiarism and academic dishonesty**. He recommended the use of spoken examinations in order to check that



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students understood their subject, the development of academic integrity policies based on partner institutions, and the importance of opportunity to study abroad, where teachers would bring good practice back with them.

Three experts have moderated three working groups which resulted in conclusions and recommendations on strengthening institutional tools for un-academic behaviour, fighting plagiarism and effective implementation of the code of ethics.

### Workshop I - Institutional tools for un-academic behaviour facilitated by Muriel Poisson

Participants presented three different subtopics on how far the existing institutional tools have been implemented for un-academic behaviour.

#### Subtopic 1: Integrity plans in Education



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Participant from Anti-Corruption Agency in Montenegro reminded of the existing obligations for state authorities in developing and implementing integrity plans, and emphasized some of the Anti-Corruption Agency` key achievements by date (700 integrity plans submitted to the Agency, Report on implementing of the integrity plans and the Agency`s recommendations on further steps). The following recommendations were put forward:

- Every higher education institution must be capable and ready to recognize risks for corruption;
- The obligation of developing integrity plans should be expanded to private higher education institutions, which is not prescribed by the existing legislative framework.

### Subtopic 2: Establishment of the Ethical Committee

The group presented the recommendations based on the practice and experience of the university from Serbia that had established an Ethical Committee. The group emphasized that cases of corruptive behaviour should be resolved on the lowest level that is to say on the level of faculty. However, in case the procedure does not end there, the case should be taken to university level and then to the national.

Participants debated the role of ethical committees, the issues which should be addressed by ethical committees, frequency of their meetings, who should be included in their work, and sanctions which should be imposed.

The answers are the following:

- The main mission of the ethical committee should be resolving the cases of corruptive behaviour, un-academic behaviour and plagiarism. Ethical committee should resolve any ethical issue on all levels, from academic to non-academic groups.
- It should meet optionally, twice a year and produce semi-annual report on its implemented activities.
- Professors, academic staff and students, should be included in its work, where every group could deal with issues on its own level. For example, students would not be able to resolve the issues of plagiarism.
- The most severe sanction should be revocation of a degree if a finding of academic misconduct (e.g plagiarism) is established.

### Subtopic 3: Examination fraud and strategies that have been introduced

Participants have identified examination frauds and put forward the recommendations how to address them. The issues they have identified as risks are the exam questions design, which repeat every year, resulting in students memorizing them. Therefore, the exam questions should be changing continuously. Other recommendations concern prevention of cheating in examinations by electronic jamming devices and other technical support, education of academic staff invigilating their own examinations on their responsibilities in this regard, harmonization of examination criteria, criteria improvement on transfer of students from one level to another. In regards to testing, participants reminded that multiple choice tests suffer from lesser quality.

### Workshop II - Mechanisms for effective implementation of Code of Ethics facilitated by Maria Golubeva

The workshop covered three topics:

- *Culture of discussion, enabling informed critique of academic practices or abuses in the academic community;*



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Participants have agreed that of all underlying values and principles from the *Guidelines for an Institutional Code of Ethics in Higher Education* (International Association of Universities), principle 4 - **Critical analysis and respect for reasoned opinions** – needs strengthening the most in Montenegro's academic community. According to participants, attitude towards academic critique in Montenegrin HE system is sensitive and personal, and it is hard to have critical discussion about practices in academic institutions.

- *Reactions to the gaps identified in Baseline study on integrity in higher education system in Montenegro;*

The participants expressed their opinion on the identified gaps by Ian Smith and Thomas Hamilton in the Baseline study and recommended the following:

- The mechanism for applying sanctions for plagiarism has to be made more effective and higher education institutions should take greater responsibility for implementation.
- Practices of applying the Code of Ethics should be exchanged and compared among Faculties in order to arrive at regular application of the same practices.
- Managerial bodies of the Faculties are currently not asked to deal with ethical issues, but they should be.
- Objective, rigorous and transparent procedures and clear communication with the public are essential to avoid the abuse of complaints/accusations for 'character assassination'.
- Raising awareness: Faculties should organise orientation weeks introducing students and new teaching staff to Code of Ethics. Organising public debates is another way to raise awareness.
- In case ethical decision-making for alleged academic misconduct at the HEIs does not end within specified time-limits, the procedure should move to the Ministry of Education level. The Minister then appoints the committee tasked to decide upon the case (provision of the Serbian draft Law on Higher Education communicated by the Serbian Ministry of Education's representative).
- *Benefits and drawbacks of national-level code and/ or implementation mechanism*

In the third part of the workshop, the participants were invited to discuss whether the option of developing a national-level Code of Ethics for HE and/ or introducing national mechanism to monitor compliance would be a viable option for development. Opinions were divided as to whether a centralised approach (e.g. a national Code of Ethics) for HE or a common body to monitor compliance (like, for instance, the Dutch association of universities) is currently needed in Montenegro. Participants proposed inclusion of monitoring of implementation of ethical principles (and institutional Codes of Ethics) among the responsibilities of the new national quality assurance body in Montenegro, and to make the existence and quality of procedures for resolving ethical issues a requirement in the accreditation process.

### **Workshop III – Approaches in plagiarism prevention facilitated by Thomas Lancaster**

Participants focused their discussion around one question - *What can be put in place to stop students plagiarising?* - having in mind current political situation in the country, and lack of accountability for those who have committed



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plagiarism. The discussion aimed at proposing tools for rising students' aspirations, who will stay in the country, due to the inevitable process of internationalization; support for students from the early age; support in academic writing, which should be brought in the courses at universities; fair penalties for everyone; evaluation of teachers in order to improve their performance. The common conclusion was the following: "Not everyone should get a degree, because this model represents threat to academic integrity and the educational system must be fair."

### Academic Integrity - good practices from the region and EU

On the second day, participants were introduced to some of the good practices from Slovenia, Serbia and Sweden on strengthening academic integrity and fighting corruption. The presentations were delivered by the following experts - Klemen Miklavič, Expert of the European Assurance Agency (EQAA), Pero Šipka from the Centre for evaluation in education and science (CEON) from Serbia and Sonja Bjelobaba, educational developer at University of Gothenburg.

**Klemen Miklavič** reminded of the need for reforming the existing educational systems, since we face mass higher education today, followed by mass students body, mass teaching staff, mass administrative staff and multitude of institutions. Some of the challenges to academic integrity he presented, in various settings around the world are the following:

- **Quickly expanding systems** (followed by HEIs without tradition, lack of qualified teaching staff, deficient quality assurance and accreditation system such as in Brazil, China, India, Malaysia...);
- **Weak/transitional state institutions** (followed by sudden drop of budget, such as in post-socialist Europe);
- **Systems with a considerable share of private higher education institutions;**
- **Systems substantially relying on private funding;**
- **The power of international recognition, reputation and rankings** (Pressure on the faculty to fit the ranking criteria (rewards & threats) which leads to overproduction of bad quality research, plagiarism, adjusting results, lowering standards);
- **Global competition for students and prestige** (higher education be-

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comes export commodity).

In his presentation, Miklavič pointed out two types of approaches to fight corruption - bottom up and top down. **Bottom up** approach is implemented within universities, where the discussion must be brought up and where no one, as a perpetrator, can feel safe. One of the ways to target public discussion is to make the issue visible to media. Setting up web based communication with public (including Facebook & other social networks) is important. Cases of public pressure raising and legitimacy for the reforms and change are characteristic for Germany, Slovenia, and Serbia. The other approach is **top down**, which should be followed by: identifying weaknesses and bringing them to surface, opening public debates, devising arguments in favour of change, acting with determination and good arguments and using policy mechanisms and instruments. This approach is practised by Estonia and Kosovo, which had to challenge and fight the issue of mushrooming of private education institutions. Estonia dealt with it via quality assurance accreditation agency which cleaned up those institutions, which could not be considered as universities, and Kosovo dealt with it via two consecutive evaluations by a foreign evaluation body (British Accreditation Council).

**Pero Šipka** talked on the implementation of academic ethical standards in Serbia, with special reference to the survey recently conducted by the CEON among teachers and students. The survey relates to the issues such as perception of relevant legislation, issues in the work of the ethical bodies, the perception of teachers of integrity violation in HEIs, focusing mostly on publishing integrity. According to the survey results, existing mechanisms for strengthening academic integrity are implemented at the university level in Serbia but partly implemented at the faculty level. Also, awarding gift authorship in papers and projects are on the top of the list of violations. Šipka further noted that abuses are easily recognized in publishing academic papers. Serbia has good practice of transparency and openness of the magazines and articles, thanks to efficiency of detection technology. Šipka concluded that the existing system of integrity protection, as we know it within the higher education institutions in Europe, is only at its beginning. He warned of the small number of resolved cases of academic corruption in Serbia and of the slow process of democratization of society, which is a condition for the progress in protecting academic integrity. "System of integrity is still in its infancy, and to accelerate it, action is needed", he concluded.

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**Sonja Bjelobaba** gave an insightful overview of the research she has been doing since 2013, on the academic integrity promotion and plagiarism disciplinary measures. According to the research, plagiarism is the most common reason for conducting disciplinary measures among students of the University of Gothenburg. She emphasised the lack of students' knowledge on plagiarism and the so-called grey area of plagiarism, defined in the following quote.

"If it happened, it's because I did not know about it. I always indicate references, but sometimes I write a lot of a certain article. Now when I think about it, I do not know the exact rules. How much can you reproduce (but of course, in your own words), how often do you have to refer to a specific source in the text if a longer piece is from the same article? There are things that I'm not sure of, that's why I do not know if I have plagiarized accidentally." (answer from a student, Survey on plagiarism, spring 2014)

The result of the survey conducted at the university has been the new policy for the prevention of plagiarism, as well as new definition of the plagiarism. Bjelobaba highlighted the development of the online course where students can learn about academic integrity and academic writing, and later on gain diploma. This course has been effective in educating students at University of Gothenburg on plagiarism, since teachers have integrated it into their modules. In her presentation, Bjelobaba recommended the following: focus on the

process, not the product, meaning that teachers have to be engaged in the process of students' writing from the beginning till the end.

In her closing remarks, **Mubera Kurpejovic** focused on plagiarism prevention. She reiterated that it's not that important to be repressive in preventing plagiarism but more attention is needed in fostering culture of academic honesty. In addition, one has to raise awareness among pre-graduate students and train them on how to write scholar papers. She called for a wide ranging campaign against plagiarism to be carried out among academic community and students. The Ministry of Education decided to address the issue of plagiarism in a separate law on academic integrity. She reminded that the current Law on Higher Education spells out that higher education institution is responsible to declare void academic titles acquired through use of plagiarised papers. Plagiarism would be incriminated according to the latest draft of amendments to the Criminal Code. Also, the proposal of the new Law on Higher Education more precisely defines plagiarism and provides a reference to the Law on Academic Integrity once adopted. She highlighted importance of the agency for quality assurance in higher education which will be established by the new Law on Higher Education. The anti-plagiarism software is now in place at the public University of Montenegro and will be used free of charge by all higher education institutions in Montenegro. Kurpejovic complained that



students and teachers are not so responsive to surveys conducted by the Ministry for the purpose of designing relevant policies so additional motivation and proactivity among them should be encouraged. Speaking about the latest reforms in higher education, Kurpejovic briefly elaborated on reformed model of studying, financing of higher education, link to labour market demands, and the recognition of diplomas acquired abroad.

*The conference resulted in several conclusions and recommendations:*

- *regulatory framework related to academic integrity in Montenegro needs to be further improved. The Council of Europe should underpin this process by providing technical assistance;*
- *the necessity for academic integrity building from an early age, which is still a non-existing practice in Montenegro; establishing a strong culture of academic integrity is a long-term process that will require a number of intensive nationwide promotional campaigns to target students, teachers, researchers as well as general population;*
- *training is of utmost importance and should provide an overview of policies, procedures, and resources around academic integrity;*
- *the importance of integration of academic writing modules into studies, in order for students to learn what plagiarism looks like, what are different types of plagiarism, and therefore avoid it;*
- *the issue of having national or institutional code of ethics in higher education should be subject of a wide debate. The new national quality assurance body should be awarded with responsibility to monitor implementation of ethical principles as a requirement in the accreditation process;*
- *“shaming and blaming” approach as well as media and public pressure in general, could be effective in reducing un-academic behaviour and corruptive deeds.*

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