



## NEW EDUCATION MODELS: COOPERATIVE UNIVERSITIES

Education, being a key industry in ensuring the development of society, remains an area of the constant search for alternative models and new technologies, sometimes moving away from classical versions for the sake of a dramatic increase in its efficiency in achieving results. Raising educated youth that are capable of contributing to society in social and economic terms is the main goal of many universities in the world. Within this general aim, the most sensitive challenge is the employment of graduates, which would work towards the purpose of training specialists demanded by society.

Nowadays, life shows that the word "higher" in the phrase "higher education" is no longer the key since with the increasing demand for skilled and experienced employees companies require their future personnel to be able to cope with exigencies of their work. Due to different issues, youth unemployment, as figures show, is much higher than general unemployment rates around the world. For instance, the global unemployment rate of youth is 12.7%, while for the European Union the number was 15.2% in 2019. As for Kazakhstan, this rate saw its peak in 1999 at 25.2%, subsequently falling to 3.9% in 2012, and since then it has gradually increased and reached 4.8% in 2019. Regarding the issue of increasing the employment potential of graduates, relevant experts from the global academic community have put forward many different solutions, and among them the cooperative university model looks the most promising. The idea was first proposed and implemented in Spain and is currently being discussed by universities in Great Britain. Mondragon University in Spain, which is part of Mondragon Corporation, already exists as a federal cooperative university with a small number of employees serving four autonomous working cooperative faculties with hundreds of scientists and thousands of students. It was created in 1997 by the association of three educational cooperatives in order to guarantee its graduates a sustainable career and experience: the Faculty of Engineering, the Faculty of Business Research, and the Faculty of Humanities and Pedagogical Sciences. In 2011, the Department of Culinary Science was added to Mondragon University. The cooperative university model of education is aimed at bringing companies and institutions together in order to create a system where students can combine their study with the relevant occupations, which they are going to be employed at after graduation.

Close and constant relationships with the working world allow students to adapt to

the needs of companies and organizations. Within Mondragon Corporation, there are in total 257 companies and institutions where students of this cooperative university have the opportunity to combine their studies with part-time work, which, in addition to supplementing academic education, allows them to pay for their studies. After graduation, students fill job openings at companies and training centers at Mondragon Corporation, which is Spain's tenth largest business.

Each faculty has a legal cooperative structure and works on the principles such as the priority of work and cooperation, democracy and solidarity. These principles are implemented through the equal participation of three groups: working partners (owners of a cooperative with capital), collaborating partners (representatives of cooperative and non-cooperative companies and other institutions) and students. The essence of a cooperative university is that faculties provide official leadership functions not only to staff and students but also to a wider group of stakeholders, including other cooperatives and local authorities. Each faculty has the General Assembly and the Governing Council, which are independent decision-making bodies. The Executive Board, which includes the director of the faculty (dean of the faculty) and members of his/her team manage the daily activities of the cooperative. The Governing Council is a delegated body. Representatives of both the General Assembly and the Governing Council are elected democratically.

Mondragon University has agreements with many national and international higher education institutions. These cooperation agreements include student and staff exchange agreements, as well as research partnership agreements. It is part of the European ERASMUS+ program and the Basque Government Global Education Program for alumni practical courses.

In the case of Great Britain, with the constant rise in tuition fees in recent years and a series of strikes by university teachers in connection with the pension reform, the crisis of university education has manifested itself most vividly, and the search for alternative models of education is extremely active. The Cooperative College, which is a Manchester-based independent charitable organization established in 1919 in order to train employees with necessary skills for cooperatives, now works towards turning itself into a cooperative university. This was aided by the enactment by the British parliament of the Higher Education and Research Act in 2017, which aims to encourage new alternative non-profit providers in the higher

education sector to compete with universities.

The plan is for the university to be run by its staff and students. The cooperative university opens four-year part-time undergraduate courses for the initial enrollment of 90 students through blended learning, combining online classes with full-time studies conducted in the training facilities of other institutions – in Manchester and other places – to avoid the cost of building and maintaining real estate. The idea of universities as self-governing communities is supposed to provide more dedicated staff and better connections with society and business. The British model focuses on blurring inequalities between different social groups in access to higher education, since a significant part of the student body is expected to be mature students. Besides, each application will be evaluated not so much by academic standards that give priority to children of people who can afford private schools and tutors, but, in essence, with a clear understanding that anyone should be able to get higher education regardless of precedence academic education. The cooperative university intends to have branches in other British cities, but this issue is under discussion.

However, it is obvious that even with alternative options the problems of good governance, quality education, and sustainable financing remain relevant. The experience and interpretation of various capabilities of foreign education systems require thorough study in Kazakhstan, in particular in connection with the constantly growing and tightening requirements for university graduates as the final product and proof of the effectiveness of each particular university. It is in this connection that the words of Deputy Prime Minister Berdibek Saparbayev can be interpreted during the meeting of the government commission on the optimization of higher education institutions of Kazakhstan, which was held on December 10, 2019, that the country does not need universities that train incompetent and unclaimed specialists to fill the ranks of the unemployed. As a result, although major changes are not planned in the country's education sector in the upcoming period, it is, however, expected that the discussions on the development of classical methods will increase and the search for alternative education methods like the cooperative university model will continue.

## Politics, Foreign Affairs, and Security

- All five political parties that participated in the parliamentary elections in Uzbekistan gained seats in the Legislative Chamber (lower house) of the Oliy Majlis, the country's parliament. Uzbek voters elected 150 parliamentarians in single-mandate constituencies, and the turnout equaled 71.1%, which became the lowest in Uzbekistan since 1991 (EADaily, 23.12.2019).
- The municipal elections were held at 5,049 polling stations in 118 constituencies across Azerbaijan. A total of 41,462 candidates ran for 15,156 seats on local councils in 1,606 municipalities. According to the country's Central Election Commission, 1.6 million people took part in the elections, or less than 33% of eligible voters (Turan, 23.12.2019; RFE/RL, 23.12.2019).
- According to Kyrgyz President Sooronbai Jeenbekov, Kyrgyzstan is ready to swap territories with Tajikistan in border areas where possible. Jeenbekov also noted that Kyrgyzstan would like to speed up the ongoing negotiations on border delimitation. Only 504 km of the 976-km long Kyrgyz-Tajik border has been delimited and demarcated (Lenta.ru, 25.12.2019).
- President of Tajikistan Emomali Rahmon addressed the parliament on the main directions of the country's domestic and foreign policies. In his speech, Rahmon called on the Tajik law enforcement agencies to take effective action against terrorism and instructed them to draft a new edition of the law "On Combating Terrorism" which had been adopted as early as in 1999 (Asia-Plus, 26.12.2019).
- In an interview to local journalists, President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev stated that the EU's Eastern Partnership program was outdated and did not have clear goals. According to Aliyev, Azerbaijan will not leave the program, but as a self-reliant country does not intend to actively participate in it. In his view, the only factor that unites the Eastern Partnership members is the fact that they are post-Soviet states (Trend, 24.12.2019).
- Georgian Defense Minister Irakli Gariashvili visited Ankara to hold talks with his Turkish counterpart Hulusi Akar. The parties pledged to deepen defense ties and signed an agreement on military cooperation, under which Turkey will allocate a grant of 100 million Turkish liras (about \$17 million) to the Georgian Ministry of Defense (Trend, 25.12.2019).
- Acting Secretary General of the CSTO Valery Semerikov stated that in 2019 the organization's member states conducted an operation codenamed "Mercenary" and identified about 600 members of terrorist organizations and their accomplices, as well as more than 30 channels of illegal migration. According to Semerikov, the concentration of militants in northern Afghanistan is of great concern to the CSTO (Mir 24, 25.12.2019).

## Economy, Finance, and Energy

- During the eighth trilateral meeting of foreign ministers of Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey held in Tbilisi, the parties discussed joint regional energy and transport projects such as the Southern Gas Corridor, the Trans-Anatolian Natural Gas Pipeline and the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway. The ministers adopted the trilateral sectoral cooperation action plan for 2020-2022 and the Tbilisi Declaration (AzerNews, 24.12.2019).
- Kazakhstan exported 1,000 tons of corn to China by container wagons for the first time. 32 train containers with corn produced in the Almaty region passed through the Khorgos dry port and were delivered to Urumqi. It is expected that contracts from Chinese customers will boost corn production in Kazakhstan as China has a large, consistent and stable demand for high-quality agricultural products (Xinhua, 24.12.2019).
- According to Ulaanbaatar Railway, Mongolia's national railway operator, the number of China-Europe freight trains passing Mongolia surpassed 1,000 for the first time. As many as 1,450 freight trains travelled through the Mongolian territory since the beginning of 2019, while this number was 556 and 856 in 2017 and 2018, respectively (Xinhua, 27.12.2019).
- In the first three quarters of 2019, the average amount of remittances sent by labor migrants in Russia to their homeland using payment systems amounted to \$422. Among the CIS countries, the largest average amounts were sent to Kyrgyzstan – \$536, followed by Uzbekistan – \$418, Tajikistan – \$195, and Ukraine – \$182 (Lenta.ru, 24.12.2019).
- The government of Uzbekistan adopted the decree "On Measures to Create a Modern Agrologistic Complex in the Jizzakh Region" to promote deep processing of fruits and vegetables and expand export opportunities of Uzbek agricultural products. In accordance with the document, the Uzbek-Russian joint venture BMB-NRC Agrologistics will be exempt from customs payments and the individual income tax (UzDaily, 24.12.2019).
- Uzbekistan's Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the Trade Department of China's Xinjiang province organized a bilateral business forum and business-to-business negotiations on exports of agricultural products in Tashkent. More than 50 local businessmen and representatives of 25 Chinese companies attended the forum and reached a number of agreements on the supply of Uzbek fruits and vegetables to China (Kun.uz, 25.12.2019).
- Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan attended a ceremony showcasing the prototypes of the first domestically produced electric car held in Gebze, Turkey's industrial heartland. The consortium of five Turkish companies called the Automobile Initiative Group of Turkey, or TOGG, will produce the SUV and sedan models of the car at a factory to be built in the Bursa province (Associated Press, 27.12.2019).

## Society and Culture

- President of Kazakhstan Kassym-Jomart Tokayev declared December 28 a day of national mourning in connection with the plane crash near the Almaty International Airport. The Bek Air Fokker-100 aircraft flying from Almaty to Nur-Sultan crashed minutes after departure, leaving 12 passengers dead and 49 injured. As a result, the authorities suspended the airline's operations (Kazinform, 27.12.2019).
- According to Kazakhstan's Ministry of Ecology, Geology and Natural Resources, in 2018, the volume of harmful air emissions in the country increased by 100,000 tons reaching 2.5 million tons. Under the Paris Agreement, Kazakhstan committed itself to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 15% until 2030 compared to the 1990 level, but their volume continues to grow along with the country's economy (Tengrinews, 24.12.2019).
- The lower house of the Tajik parliament ratified the agreement between the International Development Association (IDA) and the "Housing and Communal Services" state enterprise on the project titled "Rural Water Supply and Sanitation". As part of the project to be completed by 2025, the IDA will allocate a grant of \$58 million to improve the provision of drinking water in seven districts of Tajikistan's Khatlon region (Asia-Plus, 25.12.2019).
- A new full-length documentary called "The revival of Turkistan: the ancient settlement of Kultobe" directed by Aleksey Kamensky was released. The film depicts the initial results of the large-scale archeological expedition at the Kultobe-Yassy ancient settlement situated near the Yassawi Mausoleum in Turkistan. Under the project carried out by the Kazakh Research Institute of Culture, the site will be turned into a modern open-air archaeological park (Kazinform, 24.12.2019).
- The tourism center of the city of Turkistan held an event entitled "Days of the Turkistan Region" in Baku. Representatives of Azerbaijani tourism companies and associations, national cultural funds and government agencies attended the event intended to present the main tourist attractions of the Turkistan region and discuss common tourist routes (Trend, 26.12.2019).
- On the occasion of the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of well-known Nogai poet Kadriye Temirbulatova, the TURKSOY organized a conference in the Turkish city of Yalova to present a book featuring her selected poems published in 12 languages. Following the event, the ceremony was held to name one of the city's avenue after Temirbulatova (TURKSOY, 27.12.2019).
- The Uzavtotrans company launched a regular direct bus service between Tashkent and Moscow to be operated on Chinese Yutong buses. The travel time on the bus route that will run from the Tashkent bus station to the Novoyasenevskaya bus station in Moscow is three days, while the cost of the trip is \$75 (Trend, 29.12.2019).