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THE STATUS OF STUDENT SELF-GOVERNMENT IN UKRAINE

Starea de fapt a autoguvernării studentești în Ucraina

Abstract: *The article is about the current state of affairs in the system of student self-government in Ukraine in higher education institutions. The author analyzes the reasons of necessity for the existence of such a body, gives a brief review of historical premises of the development of the legislative field connected with such bodies in Ukraine and studies the subject of existence of such organizations in universities, their influence on the academic and educational processes in general. Also, the author gives recommendations on what tasks student self-government should solve. At the end of the article, the results and forecasts are summed up.*

Keywords: *student self-government, education, student-centrism, educational work, NGO.*

In the past 5 years, the system of higher education in Ukraine has been changing very actively. And such changes are the response to the demand of time, because, after all, higher schooling in Ukraine is gradually shifting from concentrating on teaching to a student-centered position. The institution of higher education in modern Ukraine is an important link that should be, in fact, a mediator between entrants who want to receive quality knowledge according to effective methodology, and employers who want to see specialists with an active civic stand, a creative component of mentality and motivation for self-improvement and self-training in their spare time.

The teaching staff successfully meets the challenges of training specialists, but issues such as active citizenship, creativity development or self-control are tasks that do not fit into university courses` lectures and practical classes. That is the aim of student self-government.

In modern Ukrainian legislation, before the passage of the "Law of Ukraine On Higher Education" from July 1st 2014, the bodies of student

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self-government were assigned an indirect role: the existence of such an institution was recognized, rights and duties were prescribed, but there was no real delegation of power in important university processes.

After the entry into force of the aforementioned Law, a lot of things changed. According to this document, namely Article 40 on "Student Self-Government", the latter is now formed exclusively by students without the possibility of the administration's influence on this process. The role of the moral institution that is the declaration of students' will has also increased: student self-government is an integral part of the general self-government of educational institutions, students are given the opportunity to make proposals for changes in the curriculum of the university, they delegate 15% of voters in the election of rectors and deans, have the right to announce protest actions, as well as to be financed from the budget of a higher education institution at a rate of 0.5%.

So what is student self-government within the current legislative field of Ukraine? It is the right and opportunity for students (cadets, except military cadets) to solve questions of education and life, protect the rights and interests of students, and also take part in the management of a higher education institution. It unites all students (cadets, except military cadets) of the relevant higher education institution. All students (cadets) who study at a higher education institution have equal rights and can be elected to syndical, advisory, elected and other bodies of student self-government. In turn, the bodies of student government act on the principles of voluntariness, constitutionality and openness.

The law also prescribes a number of rights and obligations of student government bodies and regulates their common existence within the educational and scientific life of higher education institutions. It should be noted that the granting of such rights and privileges to student self-government in Ukraine, on the one hand, was a forced decision of time, because the events of the political revolution in Ukraine in 2013-2014 occurred with greater involvement of students that received self-determination and felt their own importance as a social class; on the other hand, this decision allowed to fix the current state of affairs with the student self-government bodies in higher education within the framework of the legislative field and to outline the prospects for the development of this institution.

However, the legislative norm created the basis for the rapid growth of student self-government activity. It is important to monitor whether the students themselves have used this law. The Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine believes that they have. But representatives of the independent analytical center "CEDOS" do not agree with them. According to their survey there was an extremely low social and civic initiative among young people aged 17-23 in Ukraine in 2015. What is really happening in higher education institutions of Ukraine, and what conditioned the situation in which students did not use the rights given to them, or did, but

not in full? According to the same survey, most students “did not believe in the real power of student government” (more than 40%). This fact has the right to exist: having, in most cases, a fictitious system of student government, which was limited to its availability on paper, students could not yet realize that they had a statutory right to assert their rights and interests.

On the other hand, low civic activity is also linked to the general motivation of young people: every year the percentage of people who do not know what to be, how to realize themselves and what to do in view of the general crisis is growing in Ukraine. And passing from schools to higher education institutions, this uncertainty continues, forcing the masses of young people to be inert. It is also worth noting that such large-scale innovations are a long and capacious process. One must not forget that the main part of the teaching and managerial staff of the higher schooling in Ukraine consists of people who, because of their age, mores and upbringing, cannot or do not want to accept all changes as quickly as possible. Because of this, brakes are put on the process of natural development of student initiative.

Firstly, we can note the creation of the Ukrainian Students Association, which only consists of students today and really defends their rights. Secondly, we can also observe some progress in the fact that student self-government approached the norms of the law in the advanced universities of the country, such as the National University “Kyiv-Mohyla Academy”, Kyiv National University named after Taras Shevchenko, Kharkov National University of Radioelectronics, Kharkov National University named after Vasily Karazin, and others. This is confirmed by the actions of the student councils and parliaments of these higher schools. Thirdly, it is the creation of the National Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education in Ukraine, whose main tasks are the issues of accrediting higher education institutions and attesting their employees, which for the first time included students in 2015.

But the logical question arises: why is it so important to defend the position of students in organizing the work of higher education? As it was already mentioned, higher education institutions today belong to the sphere of educational services that meet the demand of students for obtaining theoretical and practical competences of specialists. Consequently, it can also be assumed that the process of providing these services in a competitive environment between higher education institutions will increasingly approach the form and content that students want to see. Who can organize the learning process better than the students themselves? The policy of student-centrism in higher education institutions means, first of all, the coordination of the decisions of the administrative and teaching staff, the interests of the student, the protection of his rights. The task that is put before the student council is to discover this interest, express it and control the protection of the rights of the applicants. On the

other hand, the organization of cultural, scientific, practical and academic life of students is also one of the promising areas of student self-government. The higher school is often unaware of what the current generation is interested in, moreover it cannot provide it to the students. The causes of this gap are both natural (the difference between generations) and specific factors (lack of an established contact between teachers and students, the unwillingness of teachers to hear the point of view of students).

Another important task of modern student self-government is creating an atmosphere of trust and goodwill: a student for a teacher, a teacher for a student. Having such a strategy, we are able to assess the prospects for the development of the Ukrainian educational system in the near future. It is obvious to assume that the role of students in the scientific and educational process will be strengthened; as such, in Izmail State Humanities University, in recent years there has been a significant increase in youth activity both in student self-government and in other youth social movements, such as «Hub Volunteer Service», «FRI» etc. Student self-government and the teaching staff of the University collaborate in forming the students' humanities culture, high moral principles and patriotic ideals, the development of academic and university freedoms, the training of class-conscious student youth, the renewed and enriched intellectual gene pool of the nation, educate its spiritual element and increase its cultural potential.

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