

"Ss. Cyril and Methodius" University of Skopje
Prof. Dr. Savo CVETANOVSKI

Student participation in Governance

The University of Skopje, Republic of Macedonia, consists of twenty four faculties and twelve scientific-research institutes. There study about 30.000 students.

At present, the management of the University is carried out in the spirit of the 1991 Constitution of the Republic of Macedonia, which incorporated the social, economic and political changes that had taken place after Macedonia proclaimed its independence from the Former Yugoslav Federate State. The new Constitution guarantees the autonomy of the University, abandoning the former principles of self-management, and basing participation in the management and decision-making in public institutions on the principles of qualification and competence. Until August 2000, the university management and consequently the student participation in the governance were executed within the framework of the former Law on Guided Education adopted in 1985. On August 3rd, the Parliament of the Republic of Macedonia brought the new Law on Higher Education which more or less adopted the overllall European standards of higher education. Today, the management of the University is carried out in the spirit of the 1991 Constitution and the 2000 Law on High Education. The management organs of the University are the *University Senate*, consisting of two staff members from each respective faculty and scientific research institutes, five appointed members by the Government of the Republic of Macedonia and five students delegated from the Student Organisation; the *University Board*, consisting of the Rector, the Vice-Rectors, the Secretary General, the deans of the faculties, the directors of the scientific-research institutes and one student representative; and the *Rector*.

The students participate in the university governance through delegates/representatives of the University Student Union in the university management organs through their self-organised forms and through other forms incorporated in the state Constitution and the Law of Higher Education. Subsequently, the students participate in governance through their membership in the each faculty's educational and scientific council and through the membership in the each department's educational-scientific councils.

Within their right to participate in the management, the students have the right decision vote, and to propose and realise programs of the various forms and types of interesting activities organised at the University education institutions; their recommendations are being presented to the faculty councils for approval; some are incorporated in the faculty statutes, other general enactment's and give their opinion to the competent bodies regarding such as well as other issues pertaining to the rights and duties of the students ; they elect their representatives for the bodies of the university education institution; participate in the nomination procedure for election of rector, dean or director and participate in the election thereof ; they discuss and make decision on other issues of

interest for the students. The students express their power of interest in the University Senate which role is to perform a number of activities, especially to discuss and vote on issues of mutual interest for the faculties and the scientific research institutes concerning the area of high education and research, as well as on the problems of the students – educational, housing and matters of their participation in the governing bodies of the university and the faculties. The students also participate in the other activities of the University Senate when it provides its expert opinion on the statutes of higher education and research institutes, or when it caters for the well-being of the university, research staff, junior staff members, other workers and students, or in election of the Rector, the Vice Rectors, and the deans and the vice deans of the respective faculties.

Up to now only 5 delegated students from the Student Union are members of the University Senate out of 80 members. The students officially request that their number in the Senate be 20, granted that such a practice is present at the governing bodies of the other European universities. Any enlargement of the number of the students should be regulated in the University Statute. In addition, the student's request that the number of the delegated students to each faculty's educational-scientific council be increased which also should be regulated in the Statute of the respected faculty. Students are also members of various university and faculty committees, although their number is small. For example one student is a member of the University and respective Faculty Committees for Educational-scientific Issues; for Publishing Activities; for Financial-material Issues; for International Cooperation; for Normative Activities; for Student Standard; for quality assurance and self-evaluation. The new Higher Educational Law provides presence of 5 students from the two Macedonian universities (Skopje and Bitola) in the Interuniversity Conference whose total number is nineteen. By and Large, say the questioned students that students participation in the university managing is not effective and students involvement in university and faculty managing is extremely bad and it is on very low level.

So, there are no university governance bodies that give students a say and vote in its deliberative processes, except through the already mentioned university and faculty bodies due to the majority decision - making procedure, namely 2/3 majority.

The students express their power of will through their representatives in the mentioned bodies, and in general, issues of the student interest which require the concurrence of the student organisations as regard housing, sport activities, educational questions, and in electing of the governing university and faculty officials. The university Union of Students and the respective faculty branches of the student organisation also have also committees similar to those of the university and faculty management for the purpose of realisation of their student rights.

Student Self-Governance

In the University "Ss.Cyril and Methodius" there is one global student organisation called "The Union of students", and branches of this student organisation at each faculty. The

student association leader and the leaders of the faculty student's organisations are to be elected by the students in free and democratic elections and not appointed.

Nevertheless, the university, it is said by the interviewed students, especially does not render enough help in reorganising of the already presently disorganised student organisation. The very disorganised student organisation is the reason for the increasing abstinence from voting of the students at the student elections. It is at the same time an excellent indicator for the (un) popularity of the student organisation within the student circles.

Yes, apart from the university and the faculty's' students' organisations, the students manage various students clubs that functions outside of the curriculum and the academic programs, especially cultural, sport, recreation and publishing clubs and centres. In the student-centred clubs as well as in their student organisations, the students have independent financial responsibility. And in matters of finance appear the questioned students stated various disputes.

The student organisation is an organiser of a number of events, happenings, conferences, sport manifestations, but it is not effective in the settlement of conflicts between students confrontations of interests; although, if it had power for that, it would certainly have the mandate of the students to solve such conflicts.

The constitutional or legal mechanisms exist to ensure openness of the decision-making process, but, unfortunately, it does not operate properly very often.

The students are not of opinion that the student organisation represents their interest on the whole although it represents a number of their particular interests.

Student participation in creation and evaluation of courses and programs

The student's participation in creation and evaluation of courses and programs has been through their representatives in the governing bodies of the university and the respective faculties. In addition, at each department or the group, the students, through their students-professor councils, do have opportunity to discuss and give their opinions on matters of educational programs and curricula, but this has been at many departments only the matter of formal students rights and responsibilities, not an active and practical participation in the decision making, in creation of the programs and the curricula. So far, only deliberately some professors, especially those educated abroad, have practised the students to evaluate courses and instructors. With the new Law on Higher Education, however, issues of self-evaluation and quality assurance have been implemented and hopefully they will be accepted both by teaching staff and the students as necessary means for improving of the courses curricula and programs.

University Informing Students about their rights as students

Students are partially informed about their rights because their attention is called mostly to their basic rights. Maybe, because of their preknowledge that they cannot do much for improving of their rights, a good number of students show an apathy towards the university regulations of their rights, and they do not fight for their rights to be increased nor they take care about the rights they have as students. The fact is that the students are indifferent to their rights results in a situation when the students right are not observed on the whole. That, however, directly affects their legal integrity. Although always and without exception those who do not observe the rights and the duties are to be blamed, part of the blame is to be addressed to the students who behave as if they do not like their rights to be observed.

There are courses at the university that promote understanding of civil duties and obligations, but only at departments that directly deal with such or similar problems, particularly at the Faculty of Law or Philosophy.

The students learn mostly about their rights from the university's editions and publications, pamphlets, books and newspapers - *University Newspaper*, *Student Word*, *Student News Letters at each respective faculty*, but especially from the university and each faculty bulletins, which is given to each student during his first enrolment, then, by the faculty dean and the department chairman at the first day of their studies, then from the student administration office, and other professors – student advisors. The students complain that such information is not available on the Internet web site, although the Internet represents the most popular information source and entertainment nowadays.

There is a self-criticism in the professors' answers when they say that the university does not make enough efforts in informing students for their rights. We hope sincerely of one positive trend in developing of relations it that direction, because the errors and rules breaking are mostly due to not being informed adequately. To be uninformed in the world which is based on the information is extremely inscrutable, say the students. The modern way of living does not allow it. The students must have complete advantage in getting information that refers to the matters for understanding their rights. The professors agree partially with the fact that the students have complete advantage for getting information that refer to their rights and their understanding.

According to the Law on Higher Education, students enjoy the following rights:

Right to study as full time students and part-time students; enrolment and education under equal conditions; participation in the management of the university education institution; protection of their own rights and duties as well as the personality of the student and his dignity against misuses in front of the bodies of the university education institution; the right to choose the type of studies; to use libraries and data bases, premises, equipment, software and other scientific and technical infrastructure of the University education institution; to use services of students standard; to use the University sports facilities; to receive national or other scholarships or to use financial credit for support while being at the University.

All previously stated legal rights are included in the Statute of the University and in the respective statutes of the faculties. They declare in great part democratic criteria that under the pressure of the reality are getting more and more imposed. However, the bare proclamation of these University postulates does not favour at all the democratic processes, which are to be implemented. On the contrary, regulation of such legal provision thereof usually complicates the problem turning such postulates into bare norms, practically unused or unusable. Legal provision thereof may appear as alibi in front of the pressure for democratisation. Real democratisation, judging by the answers received from the students, almost does not exist. More or less it is a legal situation of bare norms, and has to be settled as soon as possible in the interest of both parties (university and students) if the university does not want to get itself into an unsuitable situation entangling itself in its own contradiction.

The university and the faculties do provide avenues and mechanisms for students to lodge complaints, voice grievances, or otherwise express concern about violation of student rights – through the student organisation, department councils, faculty discipline committees, faculty boards and councils, and University Senate. In addition, the students are eligible to file an official complaint about university faculty, staff, or administration through the mentioned bodies and as a final solution they can undertake a legal (court) process.

University informing students from other countries in student and university life

Recently, information about Skopje University enrolment policy and student life has been very incomplete, although such informations are on the web site. Because of that the enrolment of foreign students is small in number. The rules of study are same both for home and foreign students. As regards the student's minorities (ethnic and racial), they have the same rights as the other students. But they have privileged status for university enrolment, as there is a special enrolment quota for minorities.

University offices for supervising observance of student's rights

There is no specialised office at the University, which takes care about student rights.

As it is mentioned above the University, within its structure, provides avenues and

mechanisms for students to appeal unfavourable academic, social or legal decisions of university-affiliated organisations, departments or personnel. Students realise their rights in accordance with the prescribed student rights by law and university, and faculty's statutes. For protection of student rights at the university there is the student ombudsman elected on the bases of the University Statute which also regulates his authority and activities. In addition, the students can realise their rights seeking protection through the legal system of the Republic of Macedonia, within which also exists the institution ombudsman.

Participation of students from other countries in student and university life

The foreign students have the same rights and civic responsibilities as the local nationality students. They do not come across any discriminatory conducts. The non-discrimination principals are guaranteed by the state Constitution and are implemented into the Law of Higher Education and the University Statute.

Tolerance/trust in the governance process

Although the University and faculty Statutes provide tolerance in the relationships on "horizontal" and "vertical" levels, such tolerance does not work properly in spite of the overall trust by the professors and the students for the governance principles and processes.

As a part of our explanation of the results of the students' answers, we have also to mention a problem encountered by each student who was questioned - the problem of "sacrosanct" position of the professors and the impossibility of the students "to attain their own justice" with the professors, without exposing themselves to the danger of a public or hidden "revenge" on the part of the affected professors. Generations of students have not been able to find a solution to this problem. It might sound a little bit pretentious but the future of a student might literally be destroyed if he has a showdown with the "vanity of his professor", regardless of the existing University mechanisms for protection of the free will of the students. Each attempt to solve such problem produces additional similar problems. Contrary to previously said, the students are of opinion that the future of a democratic society lies only in the democratically educated students. The future of the students is to depend only on their life determination and studying and their future should not be interfered with and determined by anybody else, not in the least by the professor's caprice.

The questioned students and professors do think that it is necessary to keep with the regulations that regulate the decision making processes which do allow expression of diverse and divergent viewpoints both at the faculty and university level

Transparency of governance

There is transparency of governance through university and faculty mechanisms. The University senate and faculty councils' meetings are open to public and receive public coverage via media reporting. Some major decision-making meetings may not be opened for the public when the majority of the delegates decide so. At the university and faculties there are mechanisms through which professors and students can raise questions about how the university or faculty administration is doing their job, but the questioned students think that in reality such transparent activity is not always properly done. That is why, almost half of the interviewed students agreed that the concerning matters had to be more transparent.

UNIVERSITY TEACHING

Encouraging students to be good citizens

Democracy is taught within the programs of the regular courses, and especially at the humanities. In addition, at the Department for Peace, at the Faculty of Philosophy, and in the programs at the Faculty of Law, there are courses on democracy and on duties and responsibilities of citizenship, as well as lectures are organised on these topics, very often the lecturers are from abroad. Particularly, these programs are intended for creating social and political skills that are needed for students for taking their responsibility as citizens after their graduation.

The answers of the interviewed professors and students were partially positive in regard to this statement, but behind this the failure of the University are hidden in that area.

Discussion political issues or politics of university governance

There are no public meetings and conferences, which are organised at the University for getting back information about matters of university governance from the university community at large. Those matters are the subject of discussion at the university and faculty' governance bodies. There mechanisms which allow faculty, staff, or students to raise governance issues with the administration within the university units /faculties/ and the Rectorat.

Different tendencies for promotion of democracy in the frame of the higher educational system, especially in the range of the humanity sciences and studies, have permanently acted as impulses for democratic transformation of university and its community.

The lectures of the faculties by the experts that not belong to the faculty exist and are in a practice for a long period of time, and we can openly say that has their own tradition. Nevertheless, recently very attempt towards thorough democratisation has some how ended in somewhat in essence "cosmetic" treatment of the issues, which by all means could not foster the very change of the existing atmosphere on the questions of democracy. It is a fact that the Skopje University is an autonomous higher educational institution but financed by the government. There is university official statement that allows the activities of political parties, which my mean that officially their work is forbidden at the University.

Referring to this all our examinees agreed with this fact and there was nothing disputable. Completely opposite is the situation with organising and holding of debates or discussions of societal political issues. Such meetings are not hold frequently and when they are held openly, there is slight interaction as a method of their effectiveness. In most cases debates are not debates but simply adjusting of attitudes, over keeping silence on disagreements. We hope, the interviewed students and professors say that you will agree that these debates are not productive and this situation has to be changed.

The students do not have their own groups that promote or opportunities for democratic activism, that is, there are no student political organisations through which they will be able to present and accomplish their political attitudes and requirements, but the students are involved actively in operation of the existing political parties specially in their party unions of younger members. In addition the University personnel and the students take active part in non-governmental organisations which promote democracy in the whole society.

The members of the university community are less keen towards engaging in "every day" political and societal issues, and they do not engage themselves in the treatment of the political issues which do not concern the university life and organisation.

The University people engage themselves in political parties and a good number become members of different political parties in the country, but, as it is already said, there is no official presence of the parties at the university.

Languages and cultural studies regularly taught and/or required

Multicultural approaches to the study of society is available at this University through the curricula that is thought at the Pedagogical Faculty where teaching is in Macedonian, Albanian and Turkish, and at the Faculty of Philology through the Departments of Macedonian and Southslavic Languages and Literatures, the Department of Albanian Language and Literature, and the Department of Turkish Language and Literature. Subsequently there are various lectures, debates, conferences and cultural multicultural activities at the University. In regard to it is worth mentioning that multicultural activities are organised and at the Departments for Foreign Languages – English, American English, German, French, Italian, Russian, Romanian, Polish, Czech etc.

Foreign language skills are required for graduation from the University due to the fact that at each university unit/ faculty one or two foreign languages are obligatory subjects for four semesters or two academic years, and at some three academic years.

At the above mentioned faculties there is a hiring policy for ensuring the multicultural perspectives are present.

Certainly, there are opportunities for a comparative approach in the study of social and political issues through the curricula of the corresponding teaching subjects where the diverse views are

Being thought and literature in major foreign language on the subjects is recommended or is obligatory.

So far the university has valued only diversity among the different minority groups, but has not taken into consideration differences within majority groups so far, simply because the Republic of Macedonia does not have too large population, but about 2 millions.

Courses that explicitly address democracy

The answers of the Faculty to the first question regarding the existence of a university institute, centre or programs whose purpose is the study or promotion of democracy or democratic practices varied. In fact, although there are such departments and programs at the university, a good number of the professors did not know of them, especially the professors from the natural and technical sciences. It speaks that such programs have not been well promoted among all the faculty members as well as among their students. This certainly shows the partial ineffectiveness of the democratic programs. In regard to the 2nd question, those who knew about the existence of democratic program at the university agreed that the programs should serve the interest of the community, the university, the faculty, and especially the students.

As it was mentioned earlier, there are courses at the Law and Philosophical Faculties, which directly treat the issues of pluralism, political participation, civic duty, and philosophical and psychological foundation of democratic government. For example, courses in these areas: political systems, public opinion and mass communication, international political relations; such as: The international Law for the Human Rights, Local Self-Governance, Parliamentary Law, Political Systems, Political Philosophy, Social Psychology, Political Parties and Interested Groups, International Political Relations, Political Sociology, Law of Societies, Labour Law, International Humanity Law, Philosophy of Politics, Philosophy of Religion, Sociocultural Anthropology, City Sociology, Village Sociology, Sociology of Ethnic Groups etc.

Special institutes, centres, programs on democracy

Universities have no institutional centres or programs aiming only at studying or promoting democracy. The Faculty of Law, the Faculty of Philosophy, the Institute for Sociological, Political, and Juridical Research (which also offers postgraduate courses) have scientific disciplines that deal with studying and promotion of democracy but they more or less act locally and do not satisfy even the requirements of the Universities, not to mention the social requirements.

Small is the number of public events, which promote understanding of democratic processes and democracy. If it is the fact that public events are the most important part of the interaction with wide masses, one has the impression that the possibility of the citizens more closely and on the whole to become acquainted with the democracy and democratic processes is not great, what is not to become a tradition in any case.

There also few programs, and no departments or centres, which deal with specific connections or relations to the outside community.

There various non-governmental centres and societies, as well representative offices of various foreign (European and American) democratic institutions and party organisations which do promote democracy in Macedonia at large. They are self-financed. Their

activities have a good influence on the changing democratic policy of the University, not solely on the community life.

RELATIONS WITH COMMUNITY ENVIRONMENT

Teaching programs addressed to the local community

The University is open for taking courses by every citizen and of any profession in the frame of the regular studies or specially organised studies for those who show special interest in special fields either individual or through working organisations. And they usually enrol at the specialised programs to study for a degree. Up to the present there is no so-called "continuing education". However, this possibility is being in process of discussion.

In the meantime, symposiums, conferences and consultations are the most common programs through which a link is being established between the university and society. Volunteer activities are not very often representative, and there are not any basic or active investigation for activities in which non-traditional students or community residents from the society can participate.

As for experts from community to deliver specialised lectures they are invited, but to teach no due to the fact that any teacher (from assistance professor – to full professor) must be elected by the Educational-scientific Council of each Faculty after a procedure which requires adequate qualifications – Ph. D., publications, etc.

University or joint projects addressed to the local problems and needs

When there is interest there are joint projects between the university and community. The Economic Chamber expressed a wish for training of experts for foreign trade, and such courses are usually organised. Or, for the need of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs courses on diplomacy and foreign politics have been regularly organised, or for the purpose of the Costume Service. Similarly, they're various joint projects between the university and governmental and non-governmental organisations on various issues, including democracy, public life, juridical responsibilities, civic rights etc.

The work that is done by Faculties is positively estimated which does the University work be easily accepted by the society.

The University and the society often collaborate in resolving problems that show up. The partnership between the university and the society is accepted as a duty of the University.

Research projects conducted in the local community

There are research projects in connection with the classroom assignments, which are field-based especially at the faculties of law, natural sciences, agriculture, forestry, veterinary, technology, mechanics, electronics, medicine etc. And the university provides

incentives for faculty conducting research in conjunction with community agencies or for the benefit of the community.

From time to time there are organised projects devoted to civics, civic responsibility and democracy which give opportunities to the students to learn through interaction with the community. These kind of projects are ongoing and various. One cannot mention a specific one.

University facilities open to people from locality

Yes, the university gives access to its facilities to the residents of the community, to community groups, and scientific or educational-cultural societies and associations for holding meetings, conferences, debated on issues of human, scientific, democratic, cultural and scholarly professional nature, but it does not make its facilities available for political, or propagandistic, or nationalistic or racial issues.