

## CORRUPTION IN THE HIGHER EDUCATION

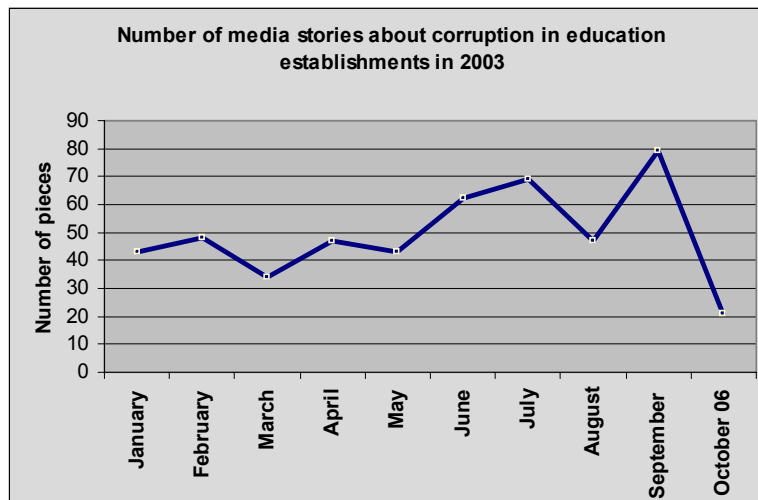
### *Prompting public debate*

In September 2003, the Corruption Monitoring System (CMS) of *Coalition 2000* came into the media spotlight, exemplifying its impact on the policy debate about corruption. The presentation of the quarterly indexes of CMS on September 10 sparked a strong reaction by both critics of corruption in the universities and academic faculty and management. The specific reason was that compared to the previous quarterly data, the CMS registered a substantial increase in the bribery demands on citizens by university professors (21.5% in July 2003, up from 11.8% in May 2003). Overall, the level of corruption pressure for this group has been fairly high (10-14%); what focused the public attention this time was that they topped the rankings of corrupt officials.

*Coalition 2000*'s media monitoring<sup>1</sup> shows that university corruption has not received adequate press coverage. This has picked up in 2003, although the topic is treated generally (20% of the coverage deals with specific allegations). A notable development has been the increasing use of the internet for transparency pressure, including *Coalition 2000*'s own website where a number of whistleblowers have sent information about corruption in their universities.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.anticorruption.bg/eng/mmonitoring/project.htm>



*Source: Media monitoring of Coalition 2000*

As is evident from the chart, the media stories about corruption in the education sector peaked twice this year – around the time of the end of academic year exams in June-July and following the publication of the *Coalition 2000* indexes in September.

*Background: a sector of little (anti-corruption) reform*

The publication of the Coalition indexes prompted a number of articles in the national press by university officials and lecturers claiming that there is an orchestrated campaign against the higher education. The defensive reaction went as far as a special declaration by the Council of Rectors, a consultative body of the heads of universities, claiming that the survey “is biased and provides no specific facts” This state of denial among management and faculty is indicative of the lack of reform measures aimed at tackling corruption in the universities. Higher education has put in strong resistance to any reforms aimed at making universities more open and accountable as institutions of public learning. The sector has not been high on the priorities of the policy agendas of the governments since 1990 owing, among other things, to the lack of a constituency for reform both in the sector and in society in general.

*Identifying priority areas for reform*

In response to enhanced public attention to these issues, on September 30 Coalition 2000 convened a round table which managed to put forward a number of specific measures for dealing with university corruption. The meeting was attended by representatives of most stakeholders – Ministry of Education, Parliament, the National Audit Office (NAO) and other

financial control institutions, university management and faculty from all over the country, civic groups, students, etc. Notable was the absence of the government officials from the Ministry. The input from the NAO was particularly productive helping to identify risk areas in the management of higher education establishments. NAO informed of the results of its auditing of the universities, highlighting the fact that plummeting quality of education is primarily due to the erosion of standards. The latter, in turn, has been brought about by a proliferation of universities (there are currently 48 higher education establishments in a country of 8 mln) most of which face serious financial difficulties.

Among the areas for reform and risk factors, identified at the round table were the exams mechanism, the publication of textbooks and reference material, the level faculty pay, the lack of standards in the registration of universities, campus corruption, etc. MPs informed of pending changes to the higher education legislation.

The approach to the involvement of stakeholders, intended by the Coalition through this round table was comparable to its approach to anti-corruption in the judiciary. A similar reaction came from the judiciary few years ago when the magistrates started to top the corrupt officials list of the CMS. Today, as a result of several instruments through which *Coalition 2000* engaged the magistrates, there are a number of anti-corruption policies in this area, including a national strategy for reform. *Coalition 2000* expects a comparable development to take place as regards the higher education.

#### *Follow up*

Education is an area of priority for both USAID and *Coalition 2000* in its anti-corruption work. In 2000 *Coalition 2000* published an education manual, which is currently being followed up by a second edition to be used by university lecturers and the Coalition is supporting the delivery of anti-corruption education courses in both the higher and secondary education. These will be further promoted through the upcoming round of small grants, provided by *Coalition 2000* to Bulgarian NGOs in the field of anti-corruption.

For further information please refer to the *Coalition 2000* website at [www.anticorruption.bg](http://www.anticorruption.bg) or write to [coalition2000@online.bg](mailto:coalition2000@online.bg)