

## **Resolution on the Acting Minister of Education and Science of Ukraine Serhii Shkarlet**

On 25 June 2020, Serhii Shkarlet was appointed Acting Minister of Education and Science of Ukraine by the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine. This appointment spurred indignation among the academic community since the past activities and scientific achievements of Serhii Shkarlet raise many questions in society. In particular, Serhii Shkarlet belonged to the party, which opposed democratic values, obstructed Ukraine's European integration, and resorted to brutal acts of violence towards students during the Euromaidan revolution. Also, he is a close aide to the then Minister of Education and Science of Ukraine Dmytro Tabachnyk, who lobbied for a law on higher education in Ukraine aimed at demolition of the universities' autonomy, and restriction of rights of student self-government as well as students themselves. In addition, a group of scientists found a significant part of borrowed texts, i. e. academic plagiarism, in his scientific articles and dissertations, which calls into question the scientific achievements of the so-called Minister of Education and Science of Ukraine. Holding the post of a rector, Serhii Shkarlet carried out dubious acquisitions, including purchasing an expensive car, which the academic community believes is economically unreasonable, as the money could be used to pay extra for teachers and improve the material and technical base. It bears mentioning that the Committee of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine on Education, Science, and Innovation did not support the candidacy of Serhii Shkarlet to the post of Minister of Education and Science of Ukraine. The interview of the Verkhovna Rada Committee on Education, Science, and Innovation with Serhii Shkarlet ended with ambiguous statements. After all, during the interview, Serhii Shkarlet voiced his views on reforming the External independent evaluation, in particular, the support of the abolition of the External independent evaluation for part-time students, reinforcement of the value of the certificate of admission, which was once introduced by the Minister of Education Tabachnyk. Increasing the value of the certificate of admission provoked inequality among entrants and created a space for corruption schemes. That is why the appointment of the Acting Minister of Education and Science by the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine is a violation of the basic principles of democracy, as it is the Verkhovna Rada that is authorized to appoint Ministers, following the recommendation of the relevant committees.

Despite protests, a rather ambiguous past, and a lack of vision for reform, Shkarlet has taken office as Minister of Education and Science. The illegal appointment has caused a flurry of outrage among society, particularly academics, students, teachers, and scientists. On the next day after the appointment, the activists staged a demonstration near the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, and a few days later, near the walls of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine, where the decision to appoint the Acting Minister Shkarlet was made. The main demand of the protesters is the resignation of Serhii Shkarlet, as his ambiguous past and views on education reforms in Ukraine are of great concern.



During the first months of its activity, the Ministry, headed by Shkarlet, prepared a draft Law of Ukraine On Amendments to Certain Laws of Ukraine, namely to the Law of Ukraine On Higher Education. The bill provided for the actual dissolution of the Agency and its transformation into an executive body, which makes it impossible for an independent institution specializing on assessing the quality of higher education to function independently. The National Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education was established to implement the Association Agreement, which defines the ways to implement the European and Euro-Atlantic course of our state declared in the Preamble of the Constitution of Ukraine. Thus, Article 431 of the Association Agreement states that the parties undertake to intensify cooperation in the field of higher education, in particular in order to promote convergence within the Bologna Process, reform and modernize the higher education system, increase its quality and value. In accordance with Article 435 of the Association Agreement, the Recommendations of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 February 2006 on further European cooperation in the scope of assurance of the quality of higher education (No.2006 / 143 / EC) became binding on Ukraine. Since Ukraine is a member of the European Higher Education Area, it is subject to the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG 2015). One of the principles of these standards implies the student-centered approach and involvement of students in external and internal processes of quality assurance of higher education. With the liquidation of the Agency, however, and the establishment of a central executive body, the involvement of students becomes impossible. It also violates the principle of independence of higher education quality assurance institutions and calls into question the recognition by the European Network of Quality Agencies (ENQA) as well as the inclusion in the register of European Higher Education Quality Assurance Agencies (EQAR). Therefore, when adopting this bill, there is a high probability that a higher education diploma obtained in Ukraine will not be recognized in the European Higher Education Area, as it must preserve the principles of independence, the involvement of stakeholders, including students, implementation of ESG 2015 standards and recommendations, preserving membership in ENQA, and be listed in the EQAR register. The National Agency for Higher Education Quality Assurance of Ukraine (National Agency) has now acquired the status of an affiliate member of ENQA and has started the process of gaining membership and inclusion in the EQAR register.

On 11 September 2020, the ethics committee of the National Agency adopted a decision to recognize the fact of textual borrowings in the scientific works of the Acting Minister of Education Serhii Shkarlet. This fact poses great reputational risks for Ukraine, in particular for higher education, as indicates that the government and society in the country are tolerant of plagiarism, which is unacceptable for the European Higher Education Area. There was a lack of situations when the ministers of education resigned after plagiarism was detected in their works (for example in Germany). It also endangers the implementation of reforms in the field

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The European Students' Union (ESU) is the umbrella organisation of 46 National Unions of Students (NUS) from 40 countries. The aim of ESU is to represent and promote the interests of students at the European level towards all relevant bodies and in particular the European Union, Bologna Follow Up Group, Council of Europe and UNESCO.



of higher education (the precedent with the elimination of the National Agency provides an example for it), which are aimed at meeting the requirements of the European Higher Education Area, and the corresponding integration into the European Union.

Failed preparation for the school year provides evidence of making wrong management decisions and even indicates their absence. The education system in Ukraine is completely unable to resist the coronavirus pandemic; the Ministry of Education and Science has not allocated sufficient funds for purchasing personal protective equipment for teachers and students at schools. The lack of recommendations on the educational process during the pandemic, blended or distance learning, as well as the ways to respond to the crisis the possible infection of students or teachers with the coronavirus. No funds have been allocated for the procurement of coronavirus tests to make them available to every student.

The lack of quality management decisions involving stakeholders in the development and adoption of recommendations for the educational process led to the government's decision to introduce distance learning in the area of higher education as well as issue a recommendation for educational institutions to evict students from dormitories. Such actions and guidance provided a logical conclusion to the Ministry's inaction and raise suspicions on the eve of the local elections, as many students are registered in dormitories.

What we feel is regression, a push back to Tabachnyk's time, and we request the support of the European and international community in halting actions that run counter to our pro-European development. After all, we can be cast back to the times when the education system survived the crisis. Thus, here and now, we want to restore democratic principles in our country. We aim to build an education system, which would not exclude the key stakeholders from decision-making, a system without plagiarism, and manifestations of academic dishonesty. We firmly advocate education, which is competitive, abides by the principles of the European Higher Education Area, and is considered prestigious abroad.

To date, the Ukrainian Association of Students is excluded from the governmental communications and ministerial conferences with students remaining outside the decision-making process, which is unacceptable for higher education which is a part of the European Higher Education Area.

The European Students' Union (ESU) supports the development of Ukrainian higher education according to the European Higher Education Area and considers inadmissible to appoint Serhii Shkarlet on the position of the Minister of Education and Science of Ukraine who doesn't comply with the principles of academic integrity, does not support the quality development of education, undermines democratic values and returns education to times of crisis. ESU

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appeals to the Cabinet of Ministers, the Verkhovna Rada, and the Office of President of Ukraine and asks to appoint the Minister of Higher Education and Science of Ukraine according to the democratical principles and values. Also, ESU reminds that the Ukrainian Association of Students as a national union of Ukrainian students must be included in all processes of higher education in Ukraine and be a part of decision-making.

**Proposed by:** UAS

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