



UNIVERSITY AUTONOMY IN THE CONTEXT OF OPTIMISING THE NETWORK OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

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Abstract

The relevance of the article is determined by the importance of strengthening the autonomy of higher education, its ability to really influence the acceleration of Ukraine's recovery and the need to resolve a number of contradictions (between the launched higher education reform and imperfect regulatory, legal and organisational mechanisms for its implementation; public awareness of the inefficiency of the higher education network and the importance of its optimisation, and the insufficient level of awareness of the importance of ensuring democratic and transparent processes by senior education managers).

The aim is to analyse the prerequisites, features and prospects for optimising the network of higher education institutions in the context of implementing the right of universities to autonomy for accelerating Ukraine's recovery.

Methods: theoretical analysis of official, statistical, scientific and journalistic sources – to study the functioning peculiarities of the higher education network in Ukraine and the development of their autonomy; comparison and generalisation – to identify factors that hinder the autonomy development of Ukrainian higher education institutions and conditions that facilitate it.

Results: the dynamics of the higher education institutions network expansion and their contingent is studied; the peculiarities of acquiring the "national" status by higher education institutions are analysed; the factors of inhibition of the university autonomy development in Ukraine are identified; the conclusions of Ukrainian scientists on creating conditions for ensuring the process effectiveness of the higher education institutions optimisation are summarised.

Conclusions: the autonomy development of higher education institutions in Ukraine is hampered by an imperfect regulatory framework, non-state actions of educational managers at the institutional and national levels, and an unbalanced national education system; uncontrolled expansion of the higher education institutions network has disrupted the balance of the national education system (decline in vocational education, deterioration in the quality of higher education); the autonomy of higher education institutions in the context of an unbalanced national education system, weakened links with regional labour markets, and underdeveloped public-private partnerships cannot become a means of a restorative breakthrough for the Ukrainian education system to ensure Ukraine's post-war recovery; the need to optimise the network of higher education institutions is obvious and urgent, but it is undemocratic and non-transparent, which provokes unhealthy sentiments among the scientific and pedagogical community and undermines the authority of higher education in Ukrainian society; the process of optimising the network of higher education institutions needs to be regulated (development of relevant regulations, methodological recommendations, clear algorithm), taking into account the achievements of Ukrainian scientists and European experience.

Keywords: *higher education, vocational education, network optimisation of higher education institutions, autonomy of educational institutions, academic freedom.*

Introduction. The autonomy of higher education institutions (hereinafter referred to as HEIs) is one of the fundamental principles of the Bologna Process, which entails "self-sufficiency,

independence, and responsibility of higher education institutions in making decisions regarding the development of academic freedoms, the organization of the educational process, scientific

research, internal management, economic and other activities, and the independent selection and placement of staff within the boundaries" established by the Law of Ukraine "On Higher Education" (2014). The implementation of ambitious post-war reconstruction plans in Ukraine forces the state and society to finally address the issue of imbalance between higher and vocational education, acknowledged in a 2014 letter from the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine to university heads (Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, 2014). For a long time, the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine hoped that the inflated network of higher education institutions would be "corrected" by the demographic crisis and changes in financing (Novosad, 2020). However, this did not happen, and it is now absolutely clear that the structure of higher education is suboptimal

and the network of its institutions is inefficient, as assessed by scientists as fragmented and dispersed, excessively duplicated, professionally inadequate, and resource-decentralized (Kremen, ed., 2021, p. 82). At the beginning of the 21st century, there was a rapid increase in the number of HEIs of III-IV accreditation levels in Ukraine (fig.1), which was not accompanied by adequate resource provision (financial, personnel, material-technical). Essentially, there were only two significant limiting factors for the expansion of the HEI network – the demographic factor and the financial capability of Ukrainian families. The classification in 2014 (Law of Ukraine, 2014) of colleges as higher education institutions led to many of them losing their production-oriented priority and transformed a significant portion into sources for replenishing the deficit in university contingents.

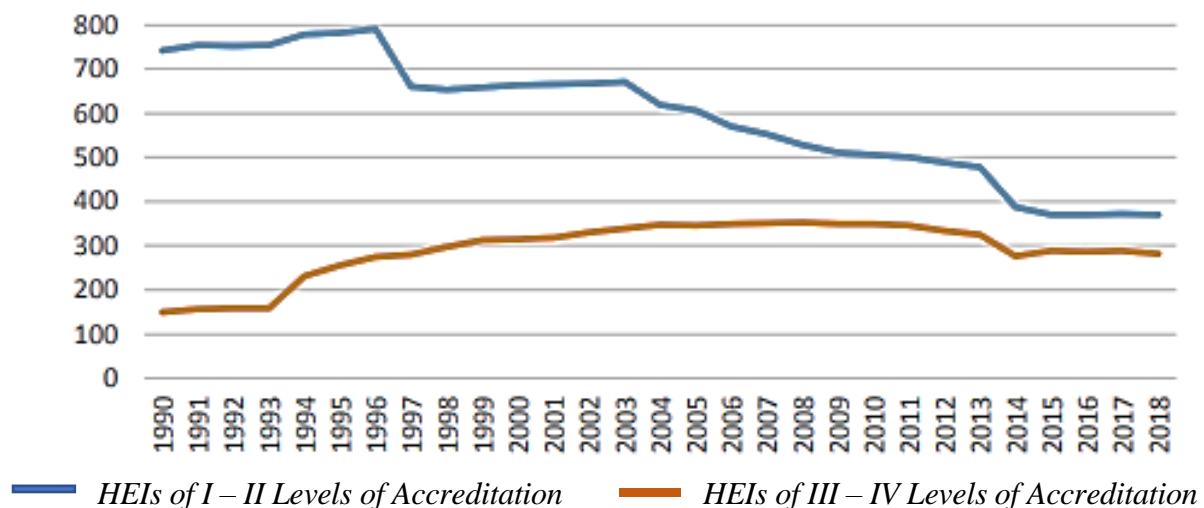


Fig. 1. Network of Higher Education Institutions by Levels of Accreditation (Source: Mykolaiev & Sovsun, 2019)

As a result of the change in the ratio between the number of applicants to professional and higher education institutions, the coverage of the Ukrainian population with higher education reached 73% in 2022 (Kremen, ed., 2021, p. 82). The rapid quantitative growth of HEIs (Fig. 2) formally raised

Ukraine's Human Development Index, but in practice, it adversely affected the development of domestic professional education and significantly reduced the quality of higher education, although the post-Soviet society has been quite tolerant towards this issue.

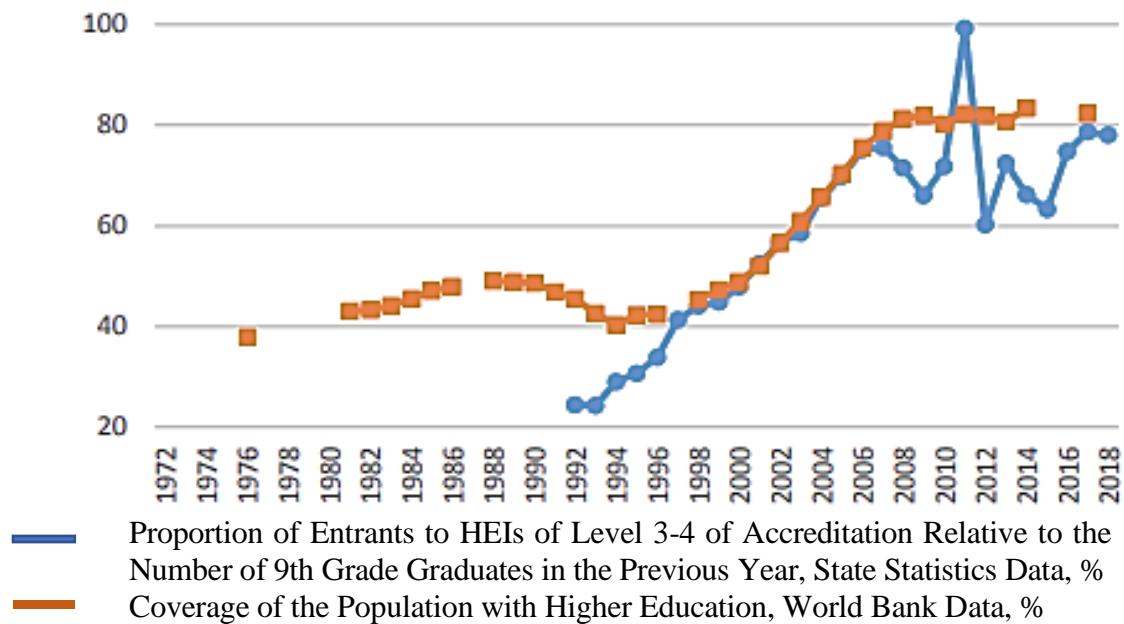


Fig. 2. Coverage of the Ukrainian Population with Higher Education (Source: Mykolaiev, & Sovsun, 2019)

Meanwhile, the demographic crisis of the early 21st century led to a significant drop in the number of higher education seekers, which only began to increase again after 2018 (Fig. 3). Thus, the

rapid growth in the number of higher education institutions was accompanied by an equally significant decrease in their student population.

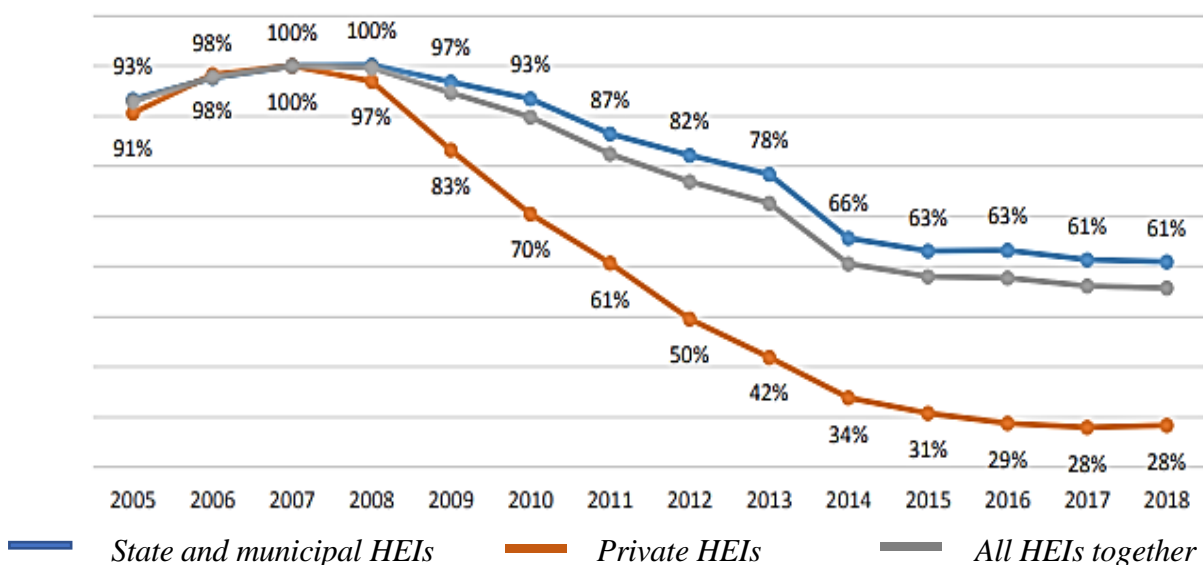


Fig. 3. Student enrollment in higher education institutions with II-IV levels of accreditation (Source: Nikolaiev, & Sovsun, 2019)

In 2008, there were 350 HEIs, and each had an average of 6,700 students, whereas in 2021, with 300 active HEIs, each had an average of only 3,400 enrollees (Tarasovsky, 2024). During the years 2018-2019, there were approximately 10 students per Ukrainian lecturer (compared to 12-20 students per lecturer in European countries). However,

domestic higher education institutions, in an effort to prevent unemployment among teaching staff, did not carry out the objectively necessary reduction of teaching personnel. Consequently, their expenditures on the salaries of scientific and pedagogical staff reached 60-80% of the institution's budget, which hindered their full development,

especially in terms of updating material and technical resources and conducting scientific research.

It is worth noting that the quantitative expansion of the network of higher education institutions occurred simultaneously with several "waves" of their status enhancement. Starting in 1993, Ukraine saw a mass elevation of HEIs to the IV level of accreditation and their renaming from institutes to academies and universities, despite the inadequacies of their material-technical base and staffing to the assigned status. Thus, dozens of institutes (pedagogical, technical, economic, etc.) became universities. For instance, if in 1994 there were 118 institutes in Ukraine, by 1995 only 72 remained, as the others had formally changed their status to higher (Nikolaiev, & Sovsun, 2019).

At the end of the 1990s and the beginning of the 2000s, a new "wave" formed—the granting of "national" status to academies and universities. According to the Regulation on the National Institution (establishment) of Ukraine (1995), such

status should have been granted only to those educational institutions that achieved the highest indicators in their sectoral group in terms of utilizing the intellectual potential of the nation, realizing the idea of national revival, gaining international recognition, and leading in the development of the humanitarian field (Presidential Decree of Ukraine, 1995). There could be no more than three such institutions in each sectoral group (Presidential Decree of Ukraine, 1998). It should be noted that there were between 13 and 17 sectoral groups over various years. Hence, according to current legislation, the number of "national" educational institutions should not have exceeded 51. However, this process became widespread and by 2013, there were 117 national higher education institutions. Furthermore, the process of status elevation of educational institutions took on a distinct political hue, as most presidential decrees granting "national" status to educational institutions appeared particularly in presidential election years (Fig. 4)..

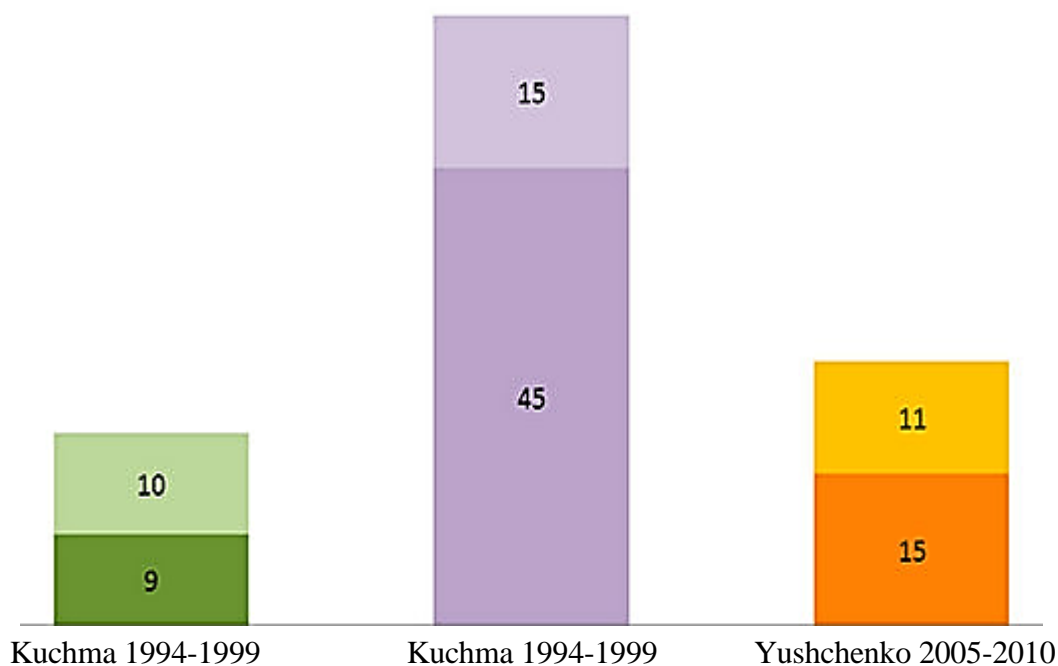


Fig. 4. Number of 'national' statuses granted (during the term and in the election year)
(Source: Stadnyi, 2013)

In essence, the status of "national" has become a form of payment by presidents for the electoral loyalties of university collectives, which on the website of the National Agency for Corruption Prevention (2022) is termed "political patronage" (providing universities with charitable aid in exchange for informal services of higher education

institutions), and in scholarly publications, it is categorized as an intangible manifestation of corruption (nepotism, lobbying, clientelism) (Vdovichenko, 2016). On one hand, this demonstrated the non-statist values of the state leaders (who did not cultivate national values among Ukrainian citizens but openly traded them), and on

the other hand, the anticipated increases in state funding and autonomy for national universities turned out to be unrealized for most institutions due to a financial crisis and legal unregulatedness of this process (Stadnyi, 2013). Under such conditions, the "national" status not only failed to provide financial preferences to the educational institutions that received it, but also quickly depreciated, losing its expected image value. From today's perspective, this appears as a vivid testament that trading national interests yields only ephemeral dividends.

In 2022, representatives of the Association of Rectors of Ukraine approached the Minister of Education and Science of Ukraine, S. Shkarlet, with a proposal to enact a war-time reduction in the number of universities from 300 to 115 (Decision of the Presidium of the Association of Rectors of Ukraine, 2022). They also submitted a bill titled "On Ensuring the Competitiveness of Ukrainian Universities," which, however, was rejected that year (Zagorodniy, 2022). The following year, the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine finally announced its intentions to optimize the network of higher education institutions, which in 2023 consisted of 332 institutions (191 state, 25 municipal, 116 private). These institutions educated 1,112,965 people, with 114,045 scientific and teaching staff members, all employed by institutions under the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine (Institute of Educational Analytics, 2024).

However, the initial practices of the declared optimization indicate a number of axiological and organizational problems that negate the autonomy of higher education institutions as an important achievement of the democratic development of society, education, and science, and undermine the significance of the critically important process for Ukraine of rebalancing its educational system.

Sources. The issue of developing autonomy and academic freedoms in higher education institutions has often been discussed by Ukrainian lawmakers and scholars in the context of the need to reform the education system in Ukraine. This is particularly evident in the search for approaches to optimize the national network of higher education institutions. The importance of this process is highlighted in the letter from the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine "On Optimizing the Network of Higher Education Institutions" (2014), in speeches and statements by ministers S. Kvit (2015), L. Hrynevych (2017), H. Novosad (2020), S. Shkarlet (Zagorodniy, 2022), in the appeals of rectors of Ukrainian universities

(Decision of the Presidium of the Association of Rectors of Ukraine, 2022), and in analytical works by Ukrainian scholars (Nikolaiev & Sovsun, 2019; Kremen (ed.), 2021; Kremen et al., 2022; Kalashnikova & Orzhel, 2022), on the pages of many online publications (Educational Policy. Public Experts Portal (2016), Hlavkom (2017), Ukrainian Pravda (2022), Economic News (2024)). The analysis of these sources indicates a complete consensus among official, public, scientific, and scientific-pedagogical communities regarding the necessity of optimizing the network of domestic higher education institutions. At the same time, higher education institutions, their stakeholders, and authorities have been unable to develop a common vision for the mechanisms of its implementation.

Objective: To analyze the prerequisites, characteristics, and prospects of optimizing the network of higher education institutions in the context of implementing universities' right to autonomy to accelerate Ukraine's recovery.

Methods: Theoretical analysis of official, statistical, scientific, and journalistic sources – to study the characteristics of the functioning of the network of higher education institutions in Ukraine and the development of their autonomy; comparison and synthesis – to identify the factors that hinder the development of autonomy in Ukrainian higher education institutions and the conditions that facilitate it.

Results and Discussion. Ukrainian higher education institutions have been granted the right to autonomy since 2014. However, an overall assessment of the development level of various autonomy dimensions in Ukraine, according to the methodology of the European University Association (EUA), showed low scores across many criteria (Panych, 2019). For instance, in academic autonomy, the right of an institution to independently set admission rules is poorly implemented. In organizational autonomy, underdeveloped rights include the ability to independently (following its own procedure) choose a leader without subsequent approval by a government body; to independently set the criteria for the leader's candidacy, determine the term of office, and establish the procedure for their removal; and to invite non-employees to its governing bodies. In staff autonomy, the right to independently set salaries for teaching and senior administrative staff is poorly realized. In financial autonomy, five out of six criteria are underdeveloped, including the ability of the institution to take loans (including regulating

the interest amount, obtaining special permission, or the right to independently take a loan); to freely manage remaining funds; and to own buildings.

The problem of implementing academic autonomy in Ukraine is directly related to the quality of education issue. Opponents of academic autonomy argued that it would provoke substandard education. It must be acknowledged that experts and scholars indeed recognize the unfounded expectations regarding an increase in creativity in the process of improving educational programs, and thus regarding the pace of their quality improvement (Yershov, 2021; Petrenko, 2019; Research on the Readiness of Educational Staff..., 2020, pp. 13, 19, 34, 35, 37, 39, 44). The blame, in this case, is attributed not so much to the developers, guarantors, and educators of the programs as to their lack of motivation for creativity due to the need to increase the contingent, which, unfortunately, mostly focuses not on the content of the educational program but on the cost of education, the advantageous location of the educational institution, and the availability of opportunistic specialties. Therefore, as long as the competitiveness of an educational institution is determined by the preferences of potential students and not by the real needs of the labor market, the content of the educational program will remain on the margins of the developers' motivation.

Despite the fact that the organizational autonomy of modern higher education institutions fundamentally differs from those of the post-Soviet era, experts from the European Association of Universities (EAU) still believe that the way Ukrainian universities utilize their granted rights "preserves" university life, transforming it into a closed system overly dependent on internal influence groups, which does not promote the competitiveness of the educational institution.

The staffing autonomy of higher education institutions in the selection of executive personnel is often guided not so much by standardized qualification requirements for scientific and pedagogical staff, as by traditions and habits acquired over decades of practice. Therefore, in the competition for positions in higher education, high qualifications of the candidate do not always play a key role, often giving way to their loyalty to the institution's leadership and various types of nepotism (such as favoritism) (NAZK Website, 2022). The existing system of faculty salary payment remains rigid and lacks motivational potential.

The most problematic aspect remains the financial autonomy of Ukrainian higher education institutions. On one hand, the state continues to strictly regulate the flow of funds in public educational institutions. However, on the other, cases of improper use of university property are still found, provoking public suspicion towards any attempts to expand the financial autonomy of higher education institutions.

The war of the Russian Federation against Ukraine has forced Ukrainian society and the state itself to question many existing traditions and to start building new paradigms for the development of various spheres of life and state. One of these relates to revising approaches to the development of academic freedoms and autonomy of educational institutions. The essence of this lies in the need to maintain a balance between the economic and axiological components of the mission of higher education institutions.

On one hand, an institution of higher education should not only be viewed as a self-regulating and authoritative academic environment that creates and disseminates knowledge, but also as an independent financial-organizational structure that enables educational institutions to be effective and competitive in the educational service market. Given this, the autonomy of universities increasingly acquires economic significance (the concept of the "entrepreneurial university" by B. Clark). This implies that the instability of student populations, unpredictability of the labor market, and reductions in state funding can also be seen as opportunities for universities to diversify their funding sources, thereby enhancing their financial independence from the state (Panych, 2019). On the other hand, universities must finally create real conditions for the quality training of higher education seekers as effective individuals, conscious and active representatives of the national elite of the country, with a formed state-oriented stance, capable of defending the national interests of Ukraine in their professional and public activities. That is, the balance between the economic and axiological dimensions of autonomy is intended to change the image of the university, help respond more promptly to market needs, employ more flexible development strategies, cultivate the tastes of consumers of educational services, rather than appeasing them. However, an ineffective network of higher education institutions prevents the establishment of such a balance.

To describe the optimization process in the network of higher education institutions, a variety of terms are employed, the most resonant among them being: mergers, acquisitions, annexations, enlargements, and consolidations. Clearly, the content of optimization will depend on the choice of term, dictating policies, actions, tools, and mechanisms for its implementation (Kalashnikova & Orzhel, p. 96). In practice, optimization is typically implemented based on the principle of "annexation," which provokes a negative emotional reaction from the leadership of the education institutions being "annexed" or "acquired." Regrettably, they often disregard an important provision of the 2014 Law of Ukraine "On Higher Education," which requires that in implementing the principle of institutional autonomy, such self-organization and self-regulation should be introduced that are open to criticism, serve the public interest, and establish the truth regarding challenges facing the state and society. Instead, the leadership of these institutions often initiates real marginal wars not for a democratic mechanism of absolutely necessary unification, but for the "right of suzerainty" in this process. This undeniably indicates the non-state ambitions of many educational managers at the institutional level. Simultaneously, the unhealthy atmosphere around this critical issue of optimizing the network of domestic higher education institutions also indicates an undemocratic and opaque approach to optimization by educational managers at the national level.

In September 2023, the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine proposed for public discussion a draft Law of Ukraine "On Amendments to Certain Laws of Ukraine (Regarding Creating Preconditions for the Modernization of the Network of Higher Education Institutions)," developed by the Ministry with the aim of achieving Operational Goal 1.2 "An Effective Network of Higher Education Institutions: the system of higher education contributes to the state fulfilling its obligations, state higher education institutions are effective," and fulfilling Task 1.2.1, outlined in the Strategy for the Development of Higher Education for 2022 – 2032, as well as the Government's Priority Action Plan for 2023 (Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, 2023). The explanatory note to the draft law states that "the main goal of modernizing the network of higher education institutions is to enhance the quality and efficiency of the higher education

system, and to increase societal and business trust in higher education" (Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, 2023, p. 1). It is also mentioned that the draft law aims to "create preconditions for the modernization of the network of higher education institutions." However, these preconditions only concern "the regulation of changes in the organization of functionally detached structural subdivisions of higher education institutions, colleges, and the sphere of higher education management, as well as changes to the conditions of admission for obtaining a Ph.D. or Doctor of Arts degree." The term "optimization," which is delicately replaced with the term "effective network," is not used in the text of the draft law. Meanwhile, the explanatory note and the conclusions of the public discussion indicate that the development of this act "responds to the recommendations of the European Commission within the Framework of the 2023 Enlargement Package, which envisage the implementation of a plan to optimize the network of educational institutions" (Report on the Public Discussion of the Draft..., 2023, p. 1). Yet, despite expectations, the "regulation" of optimization has not occurred, resulting in loud scandals and intrigues surrounding the attempts by the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine to implement the unification program for 2024 (Economic News, 2024).

The concept of integrating weaker higher education institutions into stronger ones, as proposed by the ministry, remains unregulated and subjective, thus causing genuine outrage within the scientific and educational community. The negative emotional backdrop of this process will continue to grow until clear monitoring criteria for the effectiveness of educational institutions are developed and transparent mechanisms for their integration are introduced. The optimization process should be based on a special provision and relevant methodological recommendations. These documents should include tasks recognized and expected by the educational community, such as: facilitating the restoration of balance in the national education system and its consolidation; preserving the age-old academic and educational traditions of each institution, their property complexes, and material-technical equipment; rationalizing the use of personnel, financial, material, and property resources in each region; eliminating duplication of many specialties by several universities in one region; discontinuing non-profile specialties in educational institutions without proper staffing and corresponding scientific

traditions; strengthening the ties of higher education with the regional labor market; enhancing the research and competitive potential of universities and their competitiveness in the domestic and global market of educational services; improving the quality of higher education and strengthening its prestige in society and the world.

In developing the legal framework for optimizing the network of higher education institutions (HEIs), it is essential to consider the success factors identified by Ukrainian scholars, presented in three main dimensions: institutional (a trusted team; a clear and inspiring mission and strategy; engagement of the academic community; communication strategy and tactics; interaction with external stakeholders), systemic (directive state policy and legal framework; system-level vision; financial support for processes), and value-based (trust, cooperation, openness). Thus, optimizing involves considering key value dimensions and aligning goals at all levels, balancing objective and subjective factors at all decision-making stages (Kalashnikova & Orzhel, 2022, pp. 122, 124). Developing and implementing mechanisms for optimizing the domestic network of HEIs should also consider the rich European experience, thoroughly studied and summarized by Ukrainian scholars (Kalashnikova & Orzhel, 2022, p. 106; Nitcenko, Havrysh, & Zakharchenko, 2018, pp. 34-35). However, judging from the legal basis of the optimization process in Ukraine, it has not yet been sufficiently accounted for in Ukrainian educational legislation.

It is evident that in the context of unregulated network optimization of higher education institutions, the autonomy of universities ends where the will of the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine begins. Therefore, the state should provide the academic community with a democratic and transparent algorithm for optimizing the network of higher education institutions, which will not undermine the fundamental principles of their autonomy but will strengthen them. Considering this, the alternative concept of network optimization "One region - one national university" seems appropriate. This concept is based on the creation of a single national university in each region by merging public higher education institutions of that region. It is clear that this concept will most challenge the ambitions of university leaders, who find it difficult to relinquish power and who often use their administrative levers to stir up situations and incite protest sentiments within their communities. This could be avoided by

developing and implementing a detailed unification algorithm that would ensure the democracy, transparency, and fairness of the planned optimization. Undoubtedly, it is crucial to make this process not a manifestation of officials' will but a result of the consolidated efforts of the public and the academic staff of higher education institutions through the activation of all their possibilities for autonomy and academic freedom.

The first step could be, for example, the decision of the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine to create in each region a group of crisis managers to monitor the state of higher education and prepare for the merger of all public higher education institutions in the region into a single national university. Such a university, through the creation of relevant profile institutes required by the regional economy, must guarantee the preservation and rational use of the scientific and educational traditions, property complexes, material and technical equipment, and highly qualified personnel of each merged institution. The crisis management group could be formed from representatives of each higher education institution to be merged, authorized by the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, local authorities, the National Agency for Higher Education Quality Assurance, professional associations of the region, and others. It would be appropriate for crisis managers from educational institutions to be elected by the general assemblies of their work collectives. During their tenure preparing educational institutions for unification, crisis managers may be relieved from their main jobs while fully preserving their salaries and employment records, particularly those representatives from higher education institutions.

During a clearly defined period (for example, six months), a group of crisis managers, with the support of local authorities and all educational institutions based on an analysis of their resources and populations, should: identify a list of specialties and specializations necessary for the region; justify the structure of the new university, the approximate staff of each structural unit (institutes - faculties - departments); prepare a provisional charter for the university and a strategy for its development over the first five years; establish clear and transparent criteria for the recruitment of teaching, scientific-pedagogical staff, and other personnel; develop the main provisions necessary for organizing the educational process, etc. The work of the crisis managers' group should be completed 4-5 months before the end of the academic year. Their results must be published and

approved at the meetings of the scientific councils of each of the higher education institutions involved in the merger.

It is advisable to open the new university after the crisis managers have developed and discussed its structure, staff, and foundational documents. To support the operation of the new university, an interim acting rector should be appointed (without the right to participate in his elections) and a competition committee formed, which, according to the criteria developed and approved by the educational institutions and current legislation, will announce and organize the recruitment of new staff. Faculty and other employees of the educational institutions to be merged can thus submit applications to the competition committee for vacant positions at the new university even before the dissolution of the institutions where they work. It is important to meticulously specify in the regulations for optimizing higher education institutions in the region the composition of the competition committee and the conditions ensuring its transparency and public visibility. The work of the competition committee must be completed before the start of the admissions campaign. The new staff should have the experience and time to organize it. In our opinion, it is advisable to hold the elections for the rector of the new university after the completion of the admissions campaign, according to current legislation and the provisions collegially developed in the newly established educational institution.

In our view, the campaign to develop such an algorithm should be open, transparent, and prompt. The Ukrainian education system cannot afford prolonged contemplation and disputes, as these undermine the authority of educational institutions, damage the image of Ukrainian higher education globally, and hinder Ukraine's recovery processes. The content generation of this algorithm should be the prerogative of the higher education institutions themselves and nationally conscious and active members of the scientific and pedagogical community, with the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine ensuring the legal and regulatory support for this process and its alignment with the country's economic and national interests. In this

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organized union, the essence of academic freedom is upheld (Petrenko, 2019), facilitating the integration of higher education institutions into regional and local communities to promptly respond to the challenges and needs of regional labor markets, eliminating the basis for unhealthy competition, and motivating the scientific and pedagogical community to actively participate in transforming universities into powerful regional hubs for professional training and scientific thought.

Conclusions. The uncontrolled expansion of the network of higher education institutions has disrupted the balance of the national education system (caused the decline of professional education, led to the deterioration of the quality of higher education, and resulted in its 'inflation' both in society and on the global market of educational services). The autonomy of higher education institutions in the context of an imbalanced national education system, weakened links with regional labor markets, and an underdeveloped public-private partnership is incapable of serving as a means for the educational renewal necessary for Ukraine's post-war recovery. The need for optimizing the network of higher education institutions is evident. Meanwhile, the optimization process is happening undemocratically and opaquely, provoking unhealthy sentiments within the scientific-pedagogical community and Ukrainian society, further undermining the credibility of Ukrainian higher education. This highlights the necessity of regulating the optimization process, for example, through the development and approval of regulations for optimizing the network of higher education institutions, appropriate methodological guidelines, and the justification of a clear algorithm for optimization procedures. Taking into account the work of Ukrainian scholars and European experience in optimizing the higher education sector, restructuring, and reorganizing to ensure the real autonomy of Ukrainian higher education institutions, enhancing their effectiveness and competitiveness on the global educational services market becomes crucial.

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АВТОНОМІЯ УНІВЕРСИТЕТІВ У КОНТЕКСТІ ОПТИМІЗАЦІЇ МЕРЕЖІ ЗАКЛАДІВ ВИЩОЇ ОСВІТИ

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Реферат:

Актуальність статті визначається важливістю посилення автономії вищої освіти, її здатності реально впливати на прискорення відновлення України та необхідністю розв'язання низки суперечностей (між розпочатою реформою вищої освіти та недосконалими нормативно-правовими й організаційними механізмами її реалізації; суспільним усвідомленням неефективності мережі закладів вищої освіти і важливості її оптимізації та недостатнім рівнем усвідомлення освітніми менеджерами вищого рівня важливості забезпечення демократичності і прозорості цього процесу).

Мета: проаналізувати передумови, особливості і перспективи здійснення оптимізації мережі закладів вищої освіти у контексті реалізації права університетів на автономію для прискорення відновлення України.

Методи: теоретичний аналіз офіційних, статистичних, наукових і публіцистичних джерел – для вивчення особливостей функціонування мережі закладів вищої освіти в Україні та розвитку їх автономії; порівняння й узагальнення – для виявлення чинників, що стримують розвиток автономії українських закладів вищої освіти, та умов, які йому сприяють.

Результати: досліджено динаміку розростання мережі закладів вищої освіти та їх контингенту; проаналізовано особливості набуття закладами вищої освіти статусу «національного»; виявлено чинники гальмування в Україні розвитку університетської автономії; узагальнено висновки українських учених щодо створення умов для забезпечення ефективності процесу оптимізації закладів вищої освіти.

Висновки: розвиток автономії закладів вищої освіти в Україні гальмується через недосконалу нормативно-правову базу, недержавницькі дії освітніх менеджерів інституційного і загальнодержавного рівнів, розбалансовану вітчизняну систему освіти; неконтрольоване розростання мережі закладів вищої освіти порушило баланс національної системи освіти (занепад професійної освіти, погіршення якості вищої освіти); автономія закладів вищої освіти в умовах розбалансованої національної системи освіти, ослаблених зв'язків з регіональними ринками праці, нерозвиненого державно-приватного партнерства не спроможна стати засобом

відновлювального прориву української освітньої системи для забезпечення повоєнного відновлення України; потреба в оптимізації мережі закладів вищої освіти є очевидною і нагальною, але відбувається недемократично і непрозоро, що провокує нездорові настрої у середовищі науково-педагогічної спільноти і підриває авторитет вищої освіти в українському суспільстві; процес оптимізації мережі закладів вищої освіти потребує унормування (розроблення відповідного положення, методичних рекомендацій, чіткого алгоритму) з урахуванням напрацювань українських учених і європейського досвіду.

Ключові слова: *вища освіта, професійна освіта, оптимізація мережі закладів вищої освіти, автономія закладів освіти, академічна свобода.*

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