Higher Education in Divided Societies: Between Ethnic Segregation and Citizenship Integration in Kosovo

Bölünmüş Toplumlarda Yükseköğretim: Kosova'da Etnik Ayrışma ve Vatandaşlık Entegrasyonu Arasında

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ABSTRACT

In the post-conflict societies, education can be a crucial component of political transformation, contributing to peace and reconciliation between former adversaries. However, education continues to be at the centre of ongoing disputes between Kosovo and Serbia, resulting in ethnically parallel education systems. Based on the case of Kosovo, this research examines how ethnic mobilisation and political dynamics are reflected in the Universities, and what can be done to establish integrated higher education. The article follows theory guided process tracing based on a case study and content analysis of relevant reports and legal acts by comparing parallel running universities of two major ethnic communities. The central claim is that dissolving of the parallel university and developing of unitary higher education system improves long-term ethnic relations. Further, it discusses citizenship education as an incentive in integrated higher education that promotes peace in post-conflict societies.

Keywords: Higher education, Divided society, Kosovo, Citizenship education, Integration

ÖZ

Çatışma sonrası toplumlarda, eğitim, eski muhalifler arasında barış ve uzlaşmaya katkıda bulunan, politik dönüşümün önemli bir bileşeni olabilir. Ancak, eğitim, Kosova ile Sırbistan arasındaki devam eden anlaşmazlıkların merkezinde olmaya devam ediyor ve etnik olarak paralel eğitim sistemlerine yol açıyor. Kosova örneğine dayanarak, bu araştırma, üniversitelerde etnik seferberliğin ve siyasi dinamiklerin nasıl yansıtıldığını ve bütünleşik yüksek öğrenim kurmak için neler yapılabileceğini inceliyor. Makale, iki büyük etnik topluluğun paralel çalışan üniversitelerini karşılaştırarak bir vaka çalışması ve ilgili raporların ve yasal düzenlemelerin içerik analizine dayanan teorik rehberlik sürecini takip etmektedir. Temel iddia, paralel üniversitenin çözülmesinin ve üniter yükseköğretim sisteminin geliştirilmesinin uzun vadeli etnik ilişkileri geliştirmesidir. Ayrıca, vatandaşlık eğitimini çatışma sonrası toplumlarda barışı destekleyen entegre yükseköğretimde bir teşvik olarak ele almaktadır.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Yükseköğretim, Bölünmüş toplum, Kosova, Vatandaşlık eğitimi, Entegrasyon

INTRODUCTION

The ethnic conflict in Kosovo at the end of last century, besides an enormous life and material costs, have left a problematic legacy in a peace-building process (Judah, 2008; Franks & Richmond, 2008). Consequently, it exacerbated distant ethnic relations, reflected on the educational system. Like many other issues, education continues to be at the centre of disputes between Albanian and Serb community, resulting in segregated and parallel educational systems. Despite the broad involvement of the international community, mainly through

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international administration by the UNMIK (United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo), and their commitment to promoting peace and integration of the communities, the educational system remained segregated along ethnic lines (Daxner, 2000; Nelles, 2006). The situation in this sector has not been improved significantly also after Kosovo's independence. Since then, the Kosovo government has defined reforms in education as one of their key priorities, to promote democratic and multi-ethnic society (Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology, 2016a; 2016b). Nevertheless, dissolving of the parallel system and integration of Kosovo-Serbs in the formal education system of the state has not been a priority in the government's agenda. On the other hand, Serb community, particularly in the northern part of the country, are contesting Kosovo's statehood and vehemently rejects the integration in its educational system (den Boer & van der Borgh, 2011). Even though Kosovo's state is founded on an approach of multi-ethnicity and provides affirmative policies for all ethnic communities, it remains profoundly divides society. Thus, state-building might be considered as uncompleted and political unity fragile, because it is challenged by the parallel system in education and other segments of state authority. Conversely, in the post-conflict societies, higher education is perceived as a crucial component of political transformation, contributing significantly to peace and reconciliation process (Spinner-Halev, 2003; Milton & Barakat, 2016; Milton, 2018).

To explore implications of the higher education in ethnic relations in Kosovo, first, it is necessary to understand these relationships in broader historical context. Because the University of Prishtina, as most important and for an extended period the only higher education institution, is inseparable from political circumstances of the country. As a result of the Yugoslav dissolution and escalation of ethnic tensions in Kosovo, the 'parallel system' emerged among Albanians (Clark, 2000). This ethnic distance characterized education during the 1990s in Kosovo and marked a full division between Serbs and Albanians in other public spheres of everyday life (Kostovicova, 2005). As Sommers and Buckland stated: "Kosovo lies at or near the core of the break-up of Yugoslavia, and education lies at the centre of Kosovo's conflict" (2004, p. 34). In this sense, the development of the University of Prishtina reflects the very dynamics of the relations between (higher) education and political mobilisation precisely.

The central research question raised throughout this paper is: how ethnopolitical struggles influence Kosovo's higher education system? Further, it asks: what role universities can play to improve ethnic relations and peaceful coexistence? The critical assumption presented here is that ethnic division in higher education can overcome by integrated education system initially through introducing citizenship education concerning language and ethnic diversity. Because parallel universities are both, a reflection of the political disputes and struggle for power among ethnopolitical elites, the dissolution of segregated higher education is a crucial factor in the long-term improvement of ethnic relations. In this sense, higher education that enhances diversity and strengthens citizenry promotes peace

and state-building accordingly. However, it requires a general consent among political elites of ethnic communities for a peaceful solution in managing disputes by establishing a unitary higher education system.

The article will follow theory guided process tracing based on a single case study by comparing parallel running universities of two major ethnic communities. It is based in the combination of several research methods and sources, including semi-structured interviews, and content analysis of relevant secondary sources - including legislation, policy reports, official data and other publicly available information in Albanian, Serbian and English.

Rather than relying on any specific approach, a paper adopts a theoretical framework based on related studies on education and conflict, respectively on political mobilisation and its implication to the higher education system. The first section reviews critical studies and scholar's discussions on this issue, with the primary focus of our case study. Then it elaborates the historical trajectory of the development and the structure of the higher education system in Kosovo. In the following section, the focus is on the emerging of the parallel education, ethnic mobilisation and its societal and political contextualization. In the background of the ongoing negotiations between Kosovo and Serbia, and facilitated by the European Union, we elaborate further prospects of the inclusive higher education system by developing citizenship programs that could contribute to improve ethnic relations, strengthen state legitimacy and promote sustainable peace.

METHODS

Theoretical Debate

Since education influences political stability, democracy, and social cohesion, there was a growing awareness among academics and policymakers to understand and explore these relationships. However, the role that education systems and policies play in fostering violent conflicts, but as well in influencing peacebuilding in post-conflict societies, it became a research topic only lately. Lynn Davies, address a wide range of issues about education and conflict, moving from theoretical discussion to an explanation of different case studies. She examines education extensively in the aftermath of war, considering the reconstruction of education as a transitional period to the creation of new or 'complex adaptive school' that stimulates peaceful educational system rather than undertakes broad educational reform (Davies, 2004).

The report by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), edited by Bush and Saltarelli (2000) introduces two central aspects of education; the positive or constructive and then the destructive face of education. The first or constructive aspect in the post-conflict society includes peace education that cannot succeed without effective measures against destructive educational practices that fuel hostility, prejudices, and ethnic hatred. Guiding principles of peace-building education, according to them, are based in the demilitarisation of the mind, the introduction of alternatives to hatred and violence, and to the

value of mutual memories (Bush & Saltarelli, 2000). However, authors are aware that educational systems are usually under state control and could be manipulated by certain political or ideological forces, thus making conflict transformation very difficult. In a similar vein, Davies (2004) concludes that through the reproduction of economic and social inequality, and with the promotion of nationalism and intolerance, education might contribute more to underlying causes of conflict than it does to peacebuilding and reconciliation.

The issues of diversity and identity related to the educational system were compared and investigated from different approaches and in various ways, in the study 'Education in divided societies' by Tony Gallagher (2005). His central thesis claims that diversity in education not *a priori* or necessarily lead to educational division. Elaborating this argument in examples of decentralised educational systems, like Spain, Belgium, and Switzerland. These cases offer structural solutions in dealing with identity differences by granting certain degrees of autonomy while maintaining a sense of state or political unity (Gallagher, 2005). In the case of divided societies, like his extensive investigation of the Northern Ireland case has shown, social changes are reflected in changing education systems. Gallagher (2005) argues that institutional separation can reinforce division, but it could also serve as an accommodation of diversity. He suggests different school and community activities that contribute to enhancing social cohesion and promotes peaceful co-existence. Similarly, Millican (2014) insists on various student engagements in community and peace activities as an effort toward conflict transformation.

In the past years, remarkable studies on the relations between education and conflict, have also been conducted in case of Kosovo. Denisa Kostovicova (2005) provided ground-breaking field research into causes and events that led to segregation of Albanians and Serbs in educations and consequently to the different identities. She explores the impact of ethnic mobilisation during the Milosevic's regime and its policy of repression on the education sector that resulted in the emergence of the parallel system among Albanians. After describing the structures and the functioning of the parallel system before the conflict period, she claims that the legacy of the segregation in education is one of the crucial challenges to establish a multi-ethnic society in post-war Kosovo (Kostovicova, 2005).

Very insightful overview of the education in Kosovo offers Sommers and Buckland (2004) in 'Parallel worlds: Rebuilding the education system in Kosovo'. This report, as the title suggests, analyses education policies and the overall situation in Kosovo's post-conflict setting. Further, it investigates the role of the international community in the reconstruction and reorganisation of educational systems. The issue of ethnically separated schooling was a key policy concern in their study, criticising UNMIK's Department of Education and Science of failing to build an inclusive education system that includes all ethnic communities. The relations between international and local actors in rebuilding the higher education system until 2007 has been analysed in the article 'International Statebuilding and Contentious Universities in Kosovo' by Nina den Boer and

Chris van der Borgh (2011). They find out that UNMIK, despite authority, proved to be incapable of solving the issue of the parallel higher education. Firstly, there was a lack of consensus among local actors, but mainly because there was a lack of decision-making and approach to acting correctly. As a result, the international community in Kosovo followed a policy of two separated universities, without any real determination to bring them into a unitary educational system. These studies have revealed complexities and challenges of educational systems, particularly the role of the higher education in conflict-affected and deeply divided societies.

RESULTS

Parallel Universities and Ethnopolitical Disputes

As we already emphasized, the University of Prishtina played a crucial role in fostering of national identities and served as a bastion of ideological and nationalist manifestations. In this regard Kostovicova accurately explains:

"The interplay between the ideological and national components of education was most pronounced at and over the University of Prishtina. It was a site where Serbian–Albanian tensions would be played out in the open as a strong sense of national identity tested a fickle ideological concept of brotherhood and unity" (2005, p. 44).

The situation worsened in the 1990s as the Serb government adopted the new Law on Education, which withdrew the autonomy of Kosovo on education and took control over the University of Prishtina. The university staff rejected the new curriculum imposed by Serbian authorities, as a consequence, they were dismissed. In response to this situation, Kosovo Albanians organised its own parallel education system, which marks a milestone of non-violent resistance against Serbian regime (Clark, 2000). During the period of Milosevic regime, the University of Prishtina began to function in a 'parallel system' outside the teaching infrastructure and by *unofficial* textbooks and *informal* curriculum. Because the Serbian government adopted a discriminatory policy, eliminating teaching programs in the Albanian language and introducing a curriculum that promoted only history, literature and national values of the Serbs (den Boer & van der Borgh, 2011). The teaching process was continued in private places or houses, financed mainly by Kosovar Diaspora. Nevertheless, the resistance to the Serbian regime through parallel education has its political and symbolical importance. As Clark described this condition "The struggle for education became a central symbol for the Albanians of Kosovo and proudest achievement of the parallel system" (2000, p. 96).

For instance, diplomas were stamped as being issued by the 'Republic of Kosova', which provided significant enthusiasm. In fact, this parallel higher education did not meet very high academic standards (Daxner, 2010). The University of Prishtina was not only an important factor of a struggle for independence but also a crucial source of elite formation. Regarding the emerging of Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK) political leadership, Malcolm (1998, p. 347) has emphasized, that "its

roots were to be found not so much in the old political class of functionaries in the Titoist system, as in the intellectual circles that developed around the University of Prishtina in the late 1980s". Thus the new political elites of Kosovo were closely associated with the University of Prishtina. Beginning from the Kosovo leader Ibrahim Rugova, who was a literature professor, and followed by other high-ranking officials that had an academic background.

On the other side, Kosovo-Serb University staff continued to be loyal to the Milosevic regime, contributing actively in the ethnic segregation, as was the case with the nationalist Rector of the University Radivoje Papovič (den Boer & van der Borgh, 2011). The University was a place for political antagonisms between ethnic groups, but also an institution faced with enormous political interferences and rivalry within ethnic communities. The international community, through the mediation of catholic goodwill community of Saint' Egidio, helped to negotiate a 1996 Education Accord between Belgrade and Prishtina, which foresaw the return of Albanian pupils and students to their facilities, which failed in implementation; thus the problem of education remained unresolved (Vickers, 1998). It was again the issue of the university that resulted with the students' peaceful protest on the first October 1997 (beginning of the academic year) organised by the Independent Students Union, calling for the release of the seized buildings (Kostovicova, 2005). A brutal intervention of the Serbian police forces against students repressed the announced peace march. This event became a catalyst for the military resistance and marked changes in the political monopoly of the LDK (Clark, 2000). The increasing opposition of the student movement against non-violent resistance and the support for the militant option signified the beginning of the armed resistance. With the public appearance of the Kosovo Liberation Army at the beginning of 1998, it resulted in massive mobilisation among students culminated lastly in violent ethnic conflict. As the Bush and Saltarelli (2000, p. 8) in their report about the role of education and ethnic conflicts, accurately points out:

There can be no doubt that the schism in education in Kosovo was a significant contributor to the upsurge of violence that reached its horrifying zenith in 1999. The point to be emphasised here is that the systematic ethnic cleansing undertaken by the Serbian military forces in late 1999 was in no way a spontaneous event. The precursor to abuse on such a massive scale is the systematic dismantling of the social, political and economic institutions that provide order and stability for a community.

The situation concerning segregation in education in the post-conflict Kosovo has not been changed much, only that this time the parallel education were undertaken from the 'other' side, namely from the Serb community. The higher education continued to be instrumentalised as an arena of ethnopolitical battle, exacerbating ethnic relations further.

After the ethnic conflict in Kosovo escalated, there were several diplomatic efforts to resolve it, including the negotiations between the Serbian and Kosovar delegation in the French castle Rambouillet, conclusions of which were refused by Serbia. As an ultimate response, NATO air strikes against the remained Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro) followed and led to the withdrawal of Serbian forces and the end of the war in Kosovo (Weller, 2009). The UN Security Council through Resolution 1244, placed Kosovo under international Administration that supported the building of self-governing institutions but without prejudice to its final political status. In this post-conflict context, Kosovo's education system has been confronted with the necessity to rebuild destroyed school facilities, reorganise staff and resources and rearrange curricula. During this period, until the establishment of the Ministry of Education Science and Technology (MEST) in 2001, the Kosova higher education system was governed by the UN Administration (UNMIK), respectively its Department of Education and Science. Changes in the political reality in the aftermath of war has been reflected in the shifting of positions in the inter-ethnic relations, in what Nelles (2006) describes with the notion of a 'domination pendulum', whereby Serb community switched roles by organizing education system in parallel system and rejecting integration or cooperation with formal education system in Kosovo (Sommers and Buckland, 2004). While this separation in the early stage of post-conflict was partly due to the security reason, in the meantime it was established as long-term parallelism affecting thus peacebuilding process.

The University of Prishtina reopened in the academic year 1999/2000, and the Albanian students returned to their institutions immediately after the end of the conflict (Sedgwick, 1999). Contrary to that, the University Tina in the Serbian language was relocated and reactivated in the north part of town Mitrovica in the year 2001, functioning as part of Serbia's higher education system. A dispute between both universities begins with the ownership and name of the University, last one claiming to be 'University of Prishtina temporarily settled in Kosovska Mitrovica', whereas the official name of that in Albanian one is the 'University of Prishtina, Hasan Prishtina'.[1] The UNMIK has initiated and promulgated a law on higher education, prepared by the Council of Europe and Kosovar experts, aiming an inclusive and multi-ethnic perspective for the higher education system (Daxner, 2010). However, the removal of parallel and ethnically divided universities has not been achieved, whether by this law nor by other attempts of UNMIK. Nelles (2006, p. 106) has appropriately observed: "By taking over, or bypassing PISG authority for Serb higher education in Mitrovica, UNMIK has essentially (and problematically) legitimated a de facto parallel system which the international community (recalling the former Albanian institutions which operated prior to 1999) shunned".

International community soon left a policy that tried to rebuild divided universities and bring both ethnicities in unified higher

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[1] *https://uni-pr.edu/page.aspx?id=2,1*

education, into an attempt to create a system with two separated universities defined by Den Boer and van der Borgh (2011) as a policy of "two entities, one system". The University of Prishtina in the Albanian language was managed until 2002 by the international Administrator Michael Daxner, who unsuccessfully tried to refuse the political control over the University. Despite the attempts - more rhetorical than practical, to reform the University following the Bologna Declaration on the higher education system, the political influence appears to be very strong during this period. These intentions led to constant and wide resistance to reform attempts and imposed changes. The opposition to the externally driven reforms, a phenomenon which is called 'policy resistance', came by part of the conservative academic staff, because "local actors had a range of interests to protect that were challenged by external pressures for change" (Bache & Taylor, 2003, p. 285). Thus the transformation from *pre-war* to *post-war* political elites came gradually to the shift of the control over the University from one political force to another and more powerful one.

The University of North Mitrovica or as the self-proclaimed 'University of Prishtina temporarily settled in Kosovska Mitrovica', where Serbian is the language of instruction, consists of 10 Faculties, with 746 teaching and 350 non-academic staff and 10264 students.[2] Established after the displaced faculties of the University of Prishtina in several southern Serbian towns were relocated in the north part of Mitrovica, mainly populated by Serbs. After the fall of Milosevic regime in 2001, the new Serbian government in Belgrade showed more willingness to cooperate with the UNMIK administration, which resulted with an agreement on the legalization of the University of Mitrovica, whereby it preserved its autonomy within the UNMIK legal framework and diplomas would contain the UNMIK stamp (Heath, 2009). Besides having access to its language, the agreement holds that the University will be compatible with the Serbian education system (den Boer & van der Borgh, 2011). The UNMIK accredited the University, recognised afterward also by the European University Association (EUA) in 2002 (Heath, 2009). In the report of EUA after site visit of the University of Mitrovica, it concludes that the lack of legal authority is one of the essential problems among other difficulties, but it also expresses a possibility for cooperation and future development of the University (EUA, 2002). However, as a consequence of direct political interfering on the university management from the Belgrade authorities, the legally elected University rector was replaced. As a reaction, the UNMIK in the year 2004 withdrew the license and EUA called for an international boycott which lasted until 2007 when the University management is replaced. At the core of the disputes was the accreditation process by UNMIK, acceptance of the new Kosovo Law on Higher Education and the issue of the University name (Woeber, 2006). The University of North Mitrovica depends still on Belgrade authorities and their political position on the status of Kosovo. This ambiguity reflects in the enduring difficulties surrounding its legal status within Kosovo higher education system.

In divided societies, the education system and universities became a crucial source of power. Therefore, the control over it is also a struggle between different political actors within the ethnic groups. From the appointment of the university boards, university rectors, and faculty deans to the top positions in the student's unions, they were influenced by the ruling political elites. A case in point of political interference could serve here the University of North Mitrovica when the legal university Rector Gojko Savič has been dismissed and the hard-liner, Radivoje Papovič was appointed by the Government in Belgrade as the new Rector (Woeber, 2006). Similarly, the University of Prishtina has been continually politically interfered (Kalaja & Bunjaku, 2013).

DISCUSSION

In the post-war period, problems concerning higher education are inseparable from political and social ones. For deeply divided societies, one of the main challenges is to promote citizenship that integrates all ethnic communities and accepts all ethnicities on an equal basis. In this sense, higher education in Kosovo has been and continues to be a powerful tool in the shaping of the ethnonational and political agendas. Besides being institutionally separated and taught according to different curricula, courses and textbooks are often incompatible and chauvinistic. The symbolic role of the University of Prishtina for both communities is still a matter of dispute about its name, legacy, and ownership. To change this political climate of distrust and ethnic animosities higher education must be transformed into a milieu that generates peace, tolerance, and cooperation among all ethnic communities and promotes a sense of shared society. One way to improve ethnic relations through education is the inclusion of civic education programs in the higher education through the development of appropriate curriculum, textbooks, teacher training and student civic engagements (Laker, Naval, & Mrnjaus, 2014).

The peacebuilding and democratisation of the societies emerging from the period of ethnic conflict require extensive efforts to rebuild trust and strengthen citizen's involvement in the political and state institutions. Thus, civic or citizenship education also raises the issue of political integration and social cohesion. In its broader sense "Citizenship Education is the teaching or fostering of knowledge, values, attitudes, and behaviours related to governance and community" (Nilson, Broom, Provençal, & Bai, 2014, p. 11). Whereby, the notion of citizenship includes three interrelated elements, namely; status, feelings, and practice (Oster & Starkey, 2005). Citizenship education can play a significant role in socio-political changes and in transforming ethnic relations in ways that affect all ethnic and age groups in society, whether or not they attend educational institutions. Although the potential to develop greater civic responsibility and community engagement is to be expected primarily from the students and university staff, because:

"Higher education, with its focus on analysis and its acceptance of difference and debate, is in a good position to challenge

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[2]*https://en.pr.ac.rs/university/*

views that advocate patriotism, the affirmation of nationalism or any stereotyping of 'the other.' By helping students to acknowledge the complexities and contradictions that makeup themselves, they can similarly challenge any essentialist views they may have encountered in their past" (Millican, 2014, p. 112).

It is the development of civic values and mutual trust that provides the possibility to consolidate a democratic and peaceful society, as well as stable and effective institutions. It promotes not only citizenship as a formal membership in a state, but citizenship which promotes an active citizenry, diversity, respect for human rights and state institutions (Oster & Starke, 2005). In our case study, this could be done gradually by developing Slavic respectively Albanology Departments in each University, in providing diverse courses and study programs in peace, reconciliation, transitional justice, intercultural communication, human rights, and civic engagement, and in undertaking revisions of history, law, social science and other related textbooks beyond existing ethnocentric lenses. Further, it should involve increasing cooperation among universities, faculties and study programs; exchange of academic staff, scholars, and students. Citizenship education, however, can succeed in the divided societies only if there is the commitment among academic and political elites and broad support from the society. Moreover, as Staeheli and Hammett remind us: "Citizenship and citizenship education programs seem unlikely to be meaningful if they do not provide a framework for reconciling experience and philosophy" (2010, p. 678). These programs cover diverse subjects and education approaches and are used in a variety of fields, such as human and minority rights, environmental matters, peace and security, conflict resolution and critical thinking studies. Some of the most noteworthy cases are in western European countries like Ireland, Portugal or Germany, where citizenship education are reflected in curricular and extra-curricular approaches to student civic engagement. For example, the University of Oldenburg in Germany offers Master study program in 'Democratic Citizenship Education'. In the case of post-conflict states, there are some applications of citizenship programs based on community-university partnerships in the development of peace and democracy, at the University of Mostar in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Some of those projects include planting trees in areas that had suffered deforestation during the war, or involvement with civil society organizations to identify practical projects in which students could get involved in interethnic activities (Millican, 2014).

In the process of state-building and democratisation, this is not only a desirable pathway in overcoming ethnic division but also a precondition for the peaceful development of the state and society. Since the legal, educational and other social science studies are based on totally different and contradicting curricula, the Serbian students are not well prepared to practice the respective professions in the Kosovo legal, institutional, political or academic system. Thus, Faculties of Law, Education and Social Sciences have a crucial role in building an inclusive higher education system and enabling ethnic integration of the society

CONCLUSION

Although Kosovo and Serbian authorities highlight the need of education to promote peace and improvement of ethnic relations, the reality in the ground shows that little is done in bridging ethnic division and finding an appropriate solution for the unified higher education system. Therefore, political dialogue and concerns around the improvement of ethnic relations should focus more on inclusive higher education to resolve the 'parallel' and ethnically segregated education system. The teaching based on two different and mainly opposing curriculum and textbooks only reinforce parallel realities and divided societies in Kosovo. This duality illustrates clearly the interplay between the political struggles and ethnic mobilisation, using higher education as a battlefield. The main problem of Kosovar higher education is not the existence of various public universities serving different ethnic communities, but the operating of two different and contradictory educational systems. Thus, the maintaining of an ethnopolitical model of the universities remain a key obstacle in the peace- and state-building processes of Kosovo's society.

The existing higher education systems have influenced political and ethnic relations in Kosovo in several ways. First, it serves as patterns for the promotion and preservation of nationalistic attitudes and as a source of power for political elites. Second, it possesses a symbolic capital, thus providing legitimisation source for reproduction of specific collective narratives and memories. Third, universities have extended ethnic distance by reinforcing political disputes and worsening inter-ethnic relations, through enduring nationalistic indoctrination. In this context, parallel higher education reinforces not only the political and societal division but affects immensely on the academic and research quality and the overall advancement of the educational system. Only with the comprehensive integration of ethnic communities in the inclusive education system, by accommodating religious, cultural and language diversity, parallel universities can be dissolved. Because higher education is an essential institution to educate and prepare next generations to overcome contested identities and live in a shared society. This process is essential for the integration of the communities but insufficient step toward dissolution of the segregated educational system. As long as an ethno-nationalistic approach to education continues, the universities will serve the interests of each ethnic group and remain the significant source of power in the hand of certain political elites. In this sense, the solution of the parallel and divided higher education might contribute significantly to improving ethnic relations. Because the tense and contradictory ethnic relations, in the past were influenced profoundly by politicised and ethnicized higher education systems. While higher education alone cannot bridge divisions, it is as a crucial and enduring contribution to the improvement of relations by ensuring the diversity and coexistence between ethnic communities in the post-conflict society.

One of the incentives to bridge successively ethnic division, proposed here, is to introduce civic education programs to

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build trust, cooperation and establish inclusive higher education in Kosovo. It should be noted here that there is a lack of studies on this specific topic in the field of social sciences. Therefore further researchers from the specific field of studies or even interdisciplinary perspectives on this crucial topic are necessary to understanding relations between higher education and ethnic relations, and thus to contribute to in education developments and peaceful transformation of post-conflict in societies.

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