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Reformation of higher education in the EaP countries: cultural dimensions under the shadow.

Irina Sikorskaya

ABSTRACT

In the article, the complexity and interconnection of the cultural characteristics that impact higher education institutions in the Eastern Partnership countries are presented. The six countries, united in 2009 by Brussels in one block, have a similar policy of the reformation of their higher education systems which has a distinct European vector. The paper is designed to study the higher education reforms and higher through the prism of cultural dimensions portrayed at national and institutional levels. To perform this task Geert Hofstede's cultural value dimensions and World Value Survey database (2010-2014) were employed as well as findings of the individual researchers. In short, this paper aims to discuss the culture implication in academic environment and changes occurring within the higher education institutions of the six countries of Eastern partnership and to explain them by use of G. Hofstede's cultural dimensions. Considering higher education institutions performance with the help of cross-cultural analysis can facilitate analysis of the education practices, teaching and learning methods, readiness to institutional change and external challenges, policies and practices undertaken by academic systems to cope with the external and internal academic environment and modes of the implementing the reformation strategies in the selected countries.

KEYWORDS: Eastern partnership; Higher education institution; Higher education reformation; Cultural dimensions; World Value Survey.

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I. INTRODUCTION

The six states - Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine united by Brussels in the Eastern Partnership block in 2009 - have undergone for more than 25-year period of deep economic and social transformations. The Eastern Partnership (EaP) countries share economic, political, and cultural history, although they have different characteristics like size, religion, population, languages, etc. One of the most comparable features of these countries is the policies towards reform of their higher education systems. Since the collapse of the USSR, the EaP governments have strived to conduct the higher education reforms as a result of the new liberal economic and political agenda, combined with the impact of the EU accession conditions. Saying briefly, the EaP countries have a common, but not shared history where the point of reference is a Soviet past, but in each country (and within each country) this point of reference is interpreted differently. Also, the six countries generally have a distorted perception of their neighbors based on real and imagined history, sometimes influenced by a contemporary conflict, as in the case of Armenia and Azerbaijan (Alieva, 2015).

All the EaP countries have gone through the turbulent time of transforming the centralized administrative economies onto the market economies. While building independent statehood, there have been traced the deep-rooted changes in all spheres of the social relations due to the new conditions experienced. Naturally, under these conditions, there has become an urgent need for the human resources, capable to meet the requirements of the newly formed labor market. Thus, reformation of their education systems in general and higher education (HE) in particular has become one of the major challenges for these countries.

Since obtaining independence in 1991, the EaP countries have been facing a challenge of elaborating a new approach regarding its partnership with Western Europe, increasing its efficiency, adaptability, and ability to react against various internal and external shocks, expecting in response the adequate support. The Eastern Neighborhood Programme launched and designed in 2009 is considered as a tool to enhance bilateral and multilateral cooperation between the European Union and EaP countries.

On the way towards building a knowledge society, HE has become under the focus of the EaP governments and public attention as the most visible sector of the societal improvements. Assuming that national culture is omnipresent within the institutional culture of higher education institution (HEI) and serves as an explanatory factor why the university operates this or another way, the present research seeks to trace to what extent cultural characteris-

tics matter for the HEIs operation in the EaP countries under ongoing reforms. Every society has a dominant culture or a dominant ideology that dictates the laws, influences different aspects of society including educational institutions, and sets the norms (Scott and Marshall 2005).

HEIs perform definite functions due to their educational, cultural, ideological, and social roles assigned to them by society. These roles influence the HEIs actions towards reformation policies and practices and depend on the level of development of a country as well as of an institution itself. As it was stated by Smerek (2010, p. 406): “understanding the “multiple, cross-cutting cultural contexts” in which people operate helps us better understand the complexity of higher education organizations and improve administrative action (Smerek, 2010, p. 410).

There is plenty of literature addressing higher education reformation process in the EaP countries, but surprisingly there is little research on the cultural dimensions influencing the process which could shed additional light on its strong and weak sides, reasons for achievements and shortcomings. Thus the idea of the research is to tackle this task. The author provides here the initial findings in this field as the present research has been challenged by some contradictions and limitations. Therefore, future research in this area is encouraged to employ more variables related to the culture implication in academic environment and of the higher education institutions functioning.

II. HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE EAP COUNTRIES: THE CONTEXT

Former Soviet and Eastern bloc nations had remarkably similar higher education systems when the economic and political transition began, and their transition trajectories were remarkably similar as well, stated by Heyneman (Orosz, 2016). During the last two decades, the EaP countries have adopted the new Laws on Higher Education focusing on its reformation and approximation to the higher education systems predominantly in Western Europe.

Starting from 2005 and further on the HE systems in the EaP countries, triggered by the Bologna process were officially directed at joining the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). The EaP countries have their own specifics of HE reforms including different time of integration into Bologna process, but uniting feature here is the fact that all the countries strive to reform their HE systems according to with the European standards. Some of them eagerly adopt European policy prescriptions, while others prefer a more selective approach. In any case, the Bologna Process and integration to the European higher integration process are noticed, debated or even integrated in-

to domestic political games (Dakowska and Harmsen, 2015).

The wider objective of reformation and modernization of HE in the EaP countries has been marked by the European vector, and recognized by the scholarship and policy-makers as “Europeanization of higher education”. From the massive literature sources, it can be learned that Europeanization of higher education was conceptualized and it is presented in many definitions. The present research is grounded on the following ones: “Europeanization is a process in which domestic politics, policies, and polities are changed through engagement with the EU system” (Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier, 2005). This process became one of the most important means of addressing definite domestic problems in the field of education for the EaP governments. Europeanization is considered as the institutionalization of different rules with the help of European international organization (Vukasovic, 2013).

Europeanization in the EaP countries has proven to be a challenging, as well as a strategic endeavor. Firstly, it was an attraction for the population of the post-Soviet country that looked at Europe as a proper, much better way of constructing and managing different spheres, and particularly that of education. Secondly, Europeanization of HE was part of the EaP governments’ aspiration for Europeanization themselves. Thirdly to a certain extent the Europeanization is a process that is closely linked to the countries’ attempt to break through the Soviet past and legacy in the field of education. In all the EaP countries since 1991 till present, the reformation of HE has become an ongoing process along with the political, economic and social transformations.

At that the reformation of HE in the EaP countries is witnessed and recognized by the national academic communities and a wider public, as it is the area which reflects the reality of society, providing better knowledge on potential and perspectives to adopt the European values, principles and economic and social patterns. Societal values represent ideas what is good, right, and desirable that find expression in the individual behavior of a country’s residents and also in the country’s institutions as reflected in institutional goals and modes of operation (Kuchinke, 2002)

Europeanization expects to benchmark to the practices of the Western European universities, which is difficult and it is lagged behind the initial plans in many cases due to the cultural characteristics of the HE and behavioral models of the university personnel. The Europeanization factor has added complexity to the HE reformation process in regards to its readiness to rapid change and transformation under limited resources.

According to the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency’s Overview of the of the higher education system of each country they all

demonstrate definite progress in the reformation process of HE, namely they all undertook considerable restructuring procedures in order to update their HE systems introducing the new laws and sub-legislative acts, enhancing quality assurance, improving national qualifications framework, system of accumulation and transfer of academic credits, enlarging academic mobility, advancing rules for admission, licensing/authorization. The reforms vastly focus on the internationalization introducing the European academic credit system, encourage international cooperation, and make international funds available for academic exchange programs. At the same time, the EaP countries have significant social and economic problems, facing brain drain, widening the gap between graduates qualifications and labor market needs and demands, falling level and quality of research as well as the need in the universalization of education and ensuring that general Bologna standards are met. All these countries are facing a number of problems preventing them from full and effective higher education reformation during Bologna implementation (Yahorau and Antashkevich, 2016).

All the above-mentioned achievements and disadvantages in HE reforms have been to a big degree caused by political, social, and economic factors, in other words - by the national contexts. The national context may include un/favorable political, economic environment, stability/instability, government policies and laws. In addition, national environments can be distinguished in terms of stability versus instability, technology, and culture as suggested by Rosenzweig & Singh (in Root *et al.* 1992).

In spite of the more than twenty years of transformations the national cultures of the EaP countries still remain to some extent influenced by the seventy years of Soviet ideology, which is reflected in the academic culture organizational level. Hofstede (2001) and many other authors pointed out that organizational culture is influenced by national culture. Clarke (2004) described Soviet managerial style as “authoritarian paternalistic”. In the Soviet system managerial and organizational behavior was formed according to not only to economical but also to the political structure of the general system. Although the socio-political situation in the EaP countries has been changed gradually, and the transformation processes are quite evident, HEIs can be characterized by a rather stable even conservative institutional culture which is “a sum of beliefs, values, proceedings, behaviors, standards, and symbols” (Folch and Ion, 2009, p. 146).

III. GENERAL STATE OF RESEARCH

While researching whether the cultural implications can be verified true in the context of the EaP countries, it will be fair to say that cultural dimensions have become increasingly applied in social sciences to interpret societies and to explain people actions and interpersonal relations, as well as modes of behavior. Cultural dimensions and various methodologies for measuring national culture have been studied intensely during the past few decades by G. Hofstede (1980, 1985, 1997, 2001, 2010), E. Hall (1973), F. Kluckhohn and F. Strodtbeck (1961), Ch. Hampden-Turner and F. Trompenaars (1997), R. House (2004), H. Triandis, (1989,), Sh. Schwartz (1999, 2012).

Hofstede (Hofstede *et al.*, 2010, p. 5) defined culture as “the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another”. In other words, “culture consists of the unwritten rules of the social game. It is the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from others” (Hofstede *et al.*, 2010, p. 6).

The present research also relies on the grounded analysis of culture implication in academic environment resented by an American scholar Ryan Smerek in his work “Cultural Perspectives of Academia: Toward a Model of Cultural Complexity” (Smerek, 2010), where he pointed out that the analysis of the cultural differences can be realized only on the base of certain criteria, which make the comparison possible. In higher education organizations, culture is formed through many complex influences both in the organization and as the result of the environment (Smerek, 2010). Along with that, it is fair to mention that core aspect of culture are extremely difficult to change and can justify the continuity of specific social forms (such as institutions, laws, public organizations) (Hofstede *et al.*, 2010).

The cultural dimensions offered by Hofstede (1980) were chosen for this research as they are recognized as measurable cultural criteria. Hofstede’s work has been numerously applied in cross-cultural research for many countries and is recognized as the most comprehensive research in the field. Geert Hofstede suggested five cultural dimensions: Power Distance, Individualism vs. Collectivism, Masculinity vs. Femininity, Uncertainty Avoidance, and Long-Term Orientation. The research outcomes on culturally heterogeneous/homogenous nations and regions (Minkov and Hofstede, 2012; Minkov and Hofstede, 2014) were found applicable to this research as well. Hofstede’s dimensions are fully presented in his works (Hofstede, 1980, 1985, 2001, 2010) and can be found at his websites: <http://www.geert-hofstede.com> and www.hofstede-insights.com.

Short characteristics of each dimension can be presented here:

Power Distance Index (PDI)

This dimension expresses the degree to which the less powerful members of a society accept and expect that power is distributed unequally. The fundamental issue here is how a society handles inequalities among people. People in societies exhibiting a large degree of Power Distance accept a hierarchical order in which everybody has a place and which needs no further justification. In societies with low Power Distance, people strive to equalize the distribution of power and demand justification for inequalities of power

Individualism versus Collectivism (IDV)

The high side of this dimension, called Individualism, can be defined as a preference for a loosely-knit social framework in which individuals are expected to take care of only themselves and their immediate families. Its opposite, Collectivism, represents a preference for a tightly-knit framework in society in which individuals can expect their relatives or members of a particular in-group to look after them in exchange for unquestioning loyalty. A society's position on this dimension is reflected in whether people's self-image is defined in terms of "I" or "we.

Masculinity versus Femininity (MAS)

The Masculinity side of this dimension represents a preference in society for achievement, heroism, assertiveness, and material rewards for success. Society at large is more competitive. Its opposite, Femininity, stands for a preference for cooperation, modesty, caring for the weak and quality of life. Society at large is more consensus-oriented. A society is called feminine if the gender emotional roles overlap: both men and women must prove modesty, tenderness, and preoccupation for the quality of life.

Uncertainty Avoidance Index (UAI)

The Uncertainty Avoidance dimension expresses the degree to which the members of a society feel uncomfortable with uncertainty and ambiguity. The fundamental issue here is how a society deals with the fact that the future can never be known: should we try to control the future or just let it happen? Countries exhibiting strong UAI maintain rigid codes of belief and behavior, and are intolerant of unorthodox behavior and ideas. Weak UAI societies maintain a more relaxed attitude in which practice counts more than principles.

Long Term Orientation Versus Short Term Orientation (LTO)

Every society has to maintain some links with its own past while dealing with the challenges of the present and the future. Societies prioritize these

two existential goals differently. Societies who score low on this dimension, for example, prefer to maintain time-honored traditions and norms while viewing societal change with suspicion. Those with a culture which scores high, on the other hand, take a more pragmatic approach: they encourage thrift and efforts in modern education as a way to prepare for the future. In the business context, this dimension is referred to as “(short-term) normative versus (long-term) pragmatic”.

Still the limitations for our research are though obvious – there no data on particular post-soviet countries in the Hofstede’s works except Ukraine, Belarus. As to the other countries, the World Value Survey (WVS) database and surveys of various scholars in the field were used.

The World Values Survey (www.worldvaluessurvey.org) is a global network of social scientists studying changing values and their impact on social and political life, led by an international team of scholars, with the WVS Association and WVSA Secretariat headquartered in Vienna, Austria. The survey, which started in 1981, seeks to use the most rigorous, high-quality research designs in each country. The WVS consists of nationally representative surveys conducted in almost 100 countries which contain almost 90 percent of the world’s population, using a common questionnaire. The WVS seeks to help scientists and policymakers understand changes in the beliefs, values, and motivations of people throughout the world. In the research, we refer to the data of the WVS of 2010-2014.

IV. METHODOLOGY

The present paper is the author’s trying to present an interpretive and mostly literature-based study with its limitations as such must be acknowledged. In other words, the author tries to draw attention to the problematic of the cultural dimensions of the reformation process of higher education systems in the chosen countries. As largely relying on the research of others, this paper serves to act as a guide about what and how to approach problems (Wenger 2009, p. 215). Therefore, the results should be taken with carefulness as the Hofstede’s cultural dimensions show a rather general picture of the set of values prevailing in the EaP societies in the context of higher educations, and tell us little about other cultural similarities and differences, in particular on the individual level.

With the help of the information collected through the secondary data research, personal observation, websites of the HEIs in the six countries, EACEA documentations it is traced, described and analyzed how cultural dimensions

influence the HEIs functioning in key aspects: governance, administrative relations, the degree of decentralization, autonomy, and flexibility the distribution of power between the departments and units, teaching and learning methods, rules and norms, etc

V. FINDINGS

Considering Hofstede's definition of culture as "mental programming" it is logical to assume that it translated into values, norms, roles, and values in societies in general and further into institutional culture of any organization, including higher education establishments. HEIs staff behaviors are respectively linked to cultural values of the country and this association is based on the framework of Hofstede's cultural dimensions.

As it has been mentioned above the research relied on the three major sources: Hofstede's dimensions, World Value Surveys (2010-2014), and cross-cultural research of independent scholars.

The HEIs institutional cultures in the EaP countries are described according to each of the following Hofstede's cultural dimensions: Power Distance, Individualism, Masculinity, Uncertainty Avoidance, and Long Term Orientation. Findings are discussed according to what emerged in the data analysis of each country, representing differences and similarities.

Power Distance Index (PDI)

Dimensions of National Culture for Belarus and Ukraine were found at Hofstede's website <https://www.hofstede-insights.com/models/national-culture/>

The PDI for Ukraine (PDI=92) and for Belarus (PDI=95) are high, Individualism for Ukraine (IDV=25), for Belarus (IDV=25) low, Masculinity index is low, for Ukraine (MAS=27), for Belarus (MAS= 20), while Uncertainty Avoidance scores for Ukraine and for Belarus (UAI=95) are equal and high, Long term orientation takes middle position: for Ukraine (LTO=55), for Belarus (LTO=56). Moldovans, as it is stated by Gnedrovici and Ostapenko (2016) in many ways share post-Soviet traditional values, despite their closeness to Europe and their long-established relations with Romania, now a member of the EU. Ukraine is close to Moldova in business culture, insofar as the countries share a common Soviet past. In Moldova, it is a still pro-collectivistic mentality, a skeptical attitude to the accumulation of wealth, endless corruption in the government bureaucracy, and high-risk avoidance. As it is mentioned by (Kushnarenko and Cojocari, 2012): "Moldova self-perception is as of a small

state with great potential for sharing: “we need to stop thinking in the previous categories of a small republic of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics”.

The World Value Surveys of 2010-2014 was used as a source for the missing data of Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia. The questions correlated with the five Hofstede’s dimensions were chosen and analyzed. The findings of independent scholars related to these cultural dimensions in the EaP countries were studied.

The WVS on the question if “greater respect to authority is a good thing”, the EaP countries show from middle to higher scores: Armenia (AM)50,9, Azerbaijan (AZ)66,4, Belarus (BE)48,1, Georgia (GE)61,6, Ukraine (UA)49,5.

The PDI high scores in all the countries show that HE is characterized by rather high power distance, the type of organization where the hierarchy is based on power distance. The reason why unequal power distribution is accepted for all the EaP countries is that seventy years of political centralization and the command-administrative system has resulted in a tradition of submission.

The HEIs in the EaP countries display a centralized system of management. The HEIs leadership (rector, vice-rectors, head of departments, administrators) - “rectorat” is the principal authority; the subordinates prefer not to argue with rectorat and not to criticize their behavior. The university leadership often demonstrates paternalism toward the subordinates, providing the latter a restricted choice of behavior options. To the opinion of most of the academic and administrative staff, the main problems of the inefficiency of the HE reforms are grounded in the lack of financing of the education system. The EaP countries HEIs teaching and administrative staff work in the hierarchical system, strongly in subordination to the university leadership. Academic and administrative staff behaviors mostly demonstrate loyal, supportive attitude. They share the ethical views of the rector even if they disagree with these views. Students view an authoritarian approach as a social norm, thus they are more accustomed to being passive recipients of a professor’s top-down authoritative teaching style. The older academic members, usually full professors chair the academic departments.

Employees reluctantly if ever tend to express disagreement with HEIs leadership. The HEIs are mostly centralized, with evident hierarchical pyramids where the decisions are made after approval of the leadership. Loyalty towards the rectorat is considered to be a virtue. There are considerable differences between older and younger HEIs employees demographically, with greater dominance of the older ones. The way the relationship plays itself out within an organization is related to both the national and organizational culture of the leader-subordinate relationship. Geert Hofstede found that higher

PDI was associated with lower levels of education, authoritarian values, conformity, tradition, older leaders, and negative associations with power and wealth (Hofstede, 2000).

PDI is also well presented in the HEIs classroom and is detected within the “teacher-student” relationship. The way students address teacher by name and middle name demonstrate respect towards seniority and teacher’s authority as well as it also emphasizes a power distance.

In Azerbaijan the HEIs demonstrate a high level of respect and worship towards not only institutional leadership, but also to the authorities at all levels, like quotation, mentioning and referring to the current and former presidents is traced through numerous scholars’ articles related to education (Makhmedova, 2014, Bayramov and Ahmedov, 2013, Pashaeva, 2016)

High PDI leads to distorted information from bottom to top resulting in intention to present the reform in a better light, without actual deep structural and content advancement. The reform bears a superficial character without profound analysis and discussion of the appropriate ways for implementation. Khusnullina (2018) describes this issue in Armenia: “the formalistic approach towards implementing the Bologna guidelines was one more negative characteristics of the reformation process of higher education in Armenia.”

The formalistic approach towards HE reform caused by the top-down communication of the governmental bodies with the HEIs is mentioned in the works of numerous researchers in all the EaP countries. In Belarus, the rigid state focus of governance very efficiently imitates the process of reforms. The development priorities proclaimed in official documents were in fact slowed down, turning into formalistic events and reports on the work done afterward (Matskevich, 2016).

Individualism Versus Collectivism (IDV)

Hofstede (2001) stated that the relationship between the individual and the collective in society was not the only concern of ways of living, either separately or in a broader group, it was intimately linked with societal norms. Therefore, it affects both people’s mental programming and the structure and functioning of many institutions besides family (e.g.: religious, education, political or utilitarian). Besides, at the societal level, individualism and economic development have been proposed to be strongly related (Hofstede, 1985).

The domination of individualistic orientation is considered the main cultural feature of modern Western civilization, whereas collectivist orientation is considered more characteristic to traditional societies (e.g., Hofstede, Triandis). According to studies, individualism exists in developed and Western countries, while collectivism prevails in less developed Eastern countries

(Ritson, 2002). The republics of the Caucasus are collectivist cultures and have similar evolving patterns of Soviet legacies (Ohanyan, 1999).

WVS show high scores in respondents' reply on the question "how important family is in your life": AM 93,9; AZ 96,9; BE 88,3; GE 98,4; UA 92,0.

All the six countries show the extended family relations which usually form a base of more collectivistic societies. First parents are committed to children while they are growing, then children are committed to their parents, trying to make their lives easier when aging. The institutional culture in the EaP countries HEIs is also based on collectivistic values. People tend to act in the interest of a group, for the sake of the organization. In the HEIs the personal commitment and loyalty to the collective is usually high. Individual interests are often seen as selfish pursuits. Collectivistic ideology is disseminated, encouraged and praised among the teaching and administrative staff, and is reflected on students in a similar way.

The examples of the high collectivistic index in the EaP countries HEIs are numerous. Most of the professorship feels uncomfortable with the evaluation of their teaching. Competition is not welcome in the area of incentives for performance, not in the competition for resources. In most cases, HEI staff feels well with the state funding of HE and prefers to rely on these assets only. Nepotism is a well-witnessed tradition in the HEIs which affects promotions with those closer to the rectorat in-groups, as well as obtaining preferential treatment.

In addition to the HEIs formal organizational structure and governance, there is a number of other, like teaching methods that are also culture-dependent. As it is seen in all the countries – lecturing in front of the big group is the preferred teaching method.

Students' independent study work does not work well as they were not prepared to work independently and prefer the tutorship and supervision. Lecturer most of the time is behind the desk or tribune. His/her teaching style in most cases can be described as conveying information to students. Students sit at the desk by two or more and must look, listen to a lecturer and take notes (Pashaeva, 2016).

The positive side of collectivistic cultures is that most of the research and surveys show that collectivists are generally more co-operative than individualists, the work in a group or collective groups are more effective in collectivist countries than in individualist ones.

Masculinity versus Femininity (MAS).

According to the WVS 2010-2014 wave, the respondents' answers to the

question “if competition is good and stimulates people to work hard and develop new ideas” in all six countries showed low scores: AM 32,6; AZ 21,6; BE 18,5; GE 33,9; UA 20,0. These scores indicate that cooperation and friendly atmosphere is more valued in the HEIs. Conflicts tend to be resolved by compromise and negotiation. Incentives such as free time and flexibility are favored. The focus is on well-being and status is not shown or emphasized. Pessimism about the ambitions and leadership abilities of other colleagues is witnessed. To have good relations at the department and structural units is preferable models of co-working in the HEIs. Emotional openness is expected in the classroom, as well as the meetings. Compassion and empathy to the colleagues “in-need” are welcome.

Uncertainty avoidance index (UAI)

Communist countries have traditionally been described as having high uncertainty avoidance and been identified as espousing collective, as opposed to individualistic values (Hofstede, 1996; Ledeneva, 2001).

The indexes for Ukraine and Belarus of 95 scores (Hofstede, 2013) prove these findings.

Hofstede (2001) found that countries with high UAI depended more on rules and regulations, felt more stress on the job, felt restlessness and the accompanying need to feel productive, were more expressive of emotions, need clarity and structure, respected and feared older people, had less subjective wellbeing, and depended more on experts. In the EaP countries at HEIs like in other workplace employees expect detailed instructions on how to complete an assignment, they prefer to have context and background information. The often held meetings and gathering are the popular form for organizational routine, and formality is a sign of respect. Following Hofstede’s suggestions, in the countries with high scores on UAI and PDI one would expect that organizational cultures to be characterized by an emphasis on the formal rules orientation and respect for authority.

The idea of higher education establishment as a private organization is not popular by the majority of the population in all six countries. The private universities are few and under-represented in Azerbaijan, Belarus, Moldova, and Ukraine.

The latest data show the following distribution between the public and private institutions. As it is seen from the Table 1, there is a definite disproportion in presence of public and private HEIs in the EaP countries. The different situation is in Armenia and Georgia, where private universities prevail, however, the number of students per public and private institution shows that the majority of the population prefer state-owned universities. Number

of students in Armenia in academic year 2014/2015: in public institutions - 83.209 persons, in private - 10.890 persons. Similar situation with the distribution of studentship is in Georgia. This fact indicates of low trust of the population towards the private HEIs established, whereas the traditional public form is more accustomed and trustworthy.

Table 1. *Public and private HEIs in the EaP countries*

Country	N of public institutions	N of private institutions
Armenia	23	39
Azerbaijan	40	13
Belarus	52	9
Georgia	20	55
Moldova	19	12
Ukraine	520	144

Source: EACEA (2017), Overview of Higher Education System in partner countries. http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/erasmus-plus/library/overview-higher-education-system-in-partner-countries-regions-1234-and-7_en

Administrative and academic staff experience constraints due to the bureaucracy which is often attributed to the numerous and constantly changing regulations from the governments. There is an observation of the need for a lot of rules and regulations which in combination with high power distance mean that usually people stick to rules, and are constantly expected to be checked or controlled. In the HEIs it leads to the requirement to prepare a lot of paperwork as extra work to teaching load. The documents must be signed stamped and registered according to the instructions. There are cases that academic and administrative members try to avoid policies and bureaucratic procedures that they consider useless or if they are sure they will not be inspected by the authorities. The desire to avoid risk or uncertainty had been countered by “heavy bureaucracy, centralization and detailed strict law. Therefore, employees refrained from displaying initiative, individual decision-making, and taking on the responsibility” (Najimudinova, 2013).

The WVS 2010-2014 shows low scores in respondents’ reply if they support the statement of “being creative, on new ideas, to do things in one’s own way”: AM 29,0; AZ 15,5; BE 17,2; GE 12,5; UA 9,5. In a similar way, “imagination” is not important for the learning process to the respondents from all countries: AM 13,3; AZ 6,1; BE 12,1; GE 9,2; UA 13,0. Conveying information from lecturer to student dominate in teaching methods, as well as memorizing this information in most cases is regarded as the academic credential.

“Today the task of the entire educational system is to set up Azerbaijani

youth not only to memorize information but also to analyze it, draw conclusions and make independent decisions” considers one of the officials in Azerbaijan posted at <http://www.1news.az/news>. There is also a regressive tendency in the sphere of ideas and thinking, consisting of affirming and prejudicing that the new is worse than the old one (Pashaeva, 2016). Low tolerance to uncertainty in the perception of others is also evident in the HEIs. When individuals interact with unknown persons, they prefer to be very formal and distant. Although the principle of autonomy of the HEIs was stipulated in the new laws, the process of implementing autonomous functioning of the HEIs in all the EaP countries has been delayed. In some cases, autonomy being closely connected with academic freedom reluctantly introduced by the HEIs leadership due to incapability to cope with unfamiliar responsibilities and tasks, and due to the lack of instructions how to cope with new challenges (Gunchenko, 2016).

In general, uncertainty has remained the main feature of the social transformation period in all the EaP countries. People feel uncomfortable with it and don't like it. They prefer to work in a highly structured and rule-bound working environment. On the other hand, the uncertain environment and rapidly changing situations made a need to attract young people to the HE system capable to quickly and creatively adjust to new conditions in the changing environment.

Long Term Orientation Versus Short Term Orientation (LTO)

Long term orientation takes a middle position for Ukraine (LTO=55), for Belarus (LTO=56). In the EaP countries, planning has no longer time horizon, hence the HEIs enjoy the values-oriented towards rather the present moment and fast results.

According to the EACEA “Overview of higher education” mentioned earlier, all the EP countries declared the lack of the national strategies for their HE development, emphasizing that in neither country a long-term strategic vision on the development of the education system has not been adopted yet. It is necessary, however, to note the negative consequences of the reforms, such as lack of an integration educational program and the insufficiently thought-out long-term national strategy of the educational system, which often leads to a simple copying of the experience of European countries without taking into account national specifics (Avetisjan and Zaslavskaya, 2017).

In all the EaP countries the legislative documents state that they strive to preserve national traditions of the higher education systems but to end the system of central ministry control, replacing it with much greater financial, academic and administrative autonomy for higher education establishments.

VI. CONCLUSIONS

Resuming the findings presented above, the EaP countries strive to be positive and active in their endeavor to reform their higher education systems. The EaP countries have quite a number of similarities on the way to reconstruct their HE systems towards a more autonomous academic environment, flatter hierarchical structures and more independence in decision-making at all level of governance.

The reformation process of HE in all the EaP countries has gone through different stages of success and shortcomings, though this process is steady and is driven by the integration of the HEIs in the EaP countries into European higher education area. Under these circumstances a more complete analysis of this process through the spectrum of cultural characteristics, dimensions and frameworks are needed to strategize and integrate efforts for the benefit of all its advocates.

In the present research, the cultural characteristics of the HEIs in the EaP countries were analyzed through the prism of G. Hofstede's dimensions in order to trace their influence on the HEIs operation and performance. Based on the data available and analysis of the secondary literature the author reached the conclusion that the power distance index in all countries is high, and the unequal distribution of power is socially accepted; countries are still collectivistic, although all countries show some individualistic traits, masculinity index is low, uncertainty avoidance is high indicating the need for laws and instructions, long term orientation in Belarus and Ukraine is indexed in the middle position, while there are no data on the rest four countries.

During the transition period, the HE systems in the EaP countries have been gradually replaced by a reformed modernized HE system obtaining new features in terms of the image of HEI, its mission, leadership, management processes, readiness for change, teaching and learning methods, as well as models of interpersonal relationships. However, as it was stated by R. Inglehart, the transition period of the post-communist era did not ruin core national values, which proves that economically developed societies have been changing rather rapidly, while countries with developing economies showed little change in their culture characteristics (Inglehart *et. al.*, 2014).

There is no doubt that the nature of institutional culture in HEIs in the EaP countries is slowly changing, although in most cases they remain too outdated, too conservative. Along with that, students as the young generation in post-Soviet countries have been exposed to Western European education system through the reform, and Europeanization/Westernization of institutions

such as higher education has created a favorable environment for changed values and norms (Olson, 2002).

Cultural dimensions indisputably present in the HEIs institutional cultures, and by this can interfere with their performance. Cultural dimensions help understand the core of the cultures, although it will be sensible to note high dynamism of modern academic culture due to the impact of the national political, social and economic environment. Considering cultural dimensions while reforming HE can help understand why some reforms are quite successful and some are lagging behind.

It can be fair to assume that in the EaP countries, in the context of today's renovations of the HE systems, the optimal combination of the national traditions along with the necessary innovations is one of the key challenges, and by this more sophisticated approach towards culture dimensions needed to account. Neglecting sociocultural environment, cultural dimensions, inadequate elaboration of the national reformation strategies of the educational system has lead in many aspects to a simple copying of the practices of the HEIs of Western European countries, to some extent simulation of the management style without taking into account their own, translating problems in the education system to a populist level without thorough analysis of the consequences of such reforms. All in all, the EaP countries can use the potential of their own diverse experience for further development and advancement.

The significant effect of cultural dimensions on the HIEs operation in the EaP countries is quite obvious, however, this research was challenged by definite limitations. Therefore, future research in this field might need to employ more variables related to cultural dimensions impact on the HEIs operation which is at the initial stage in the EaP countries. Despite its limitations, further research could highlight the relevance of the cultural dimensions while studying HE and too often underestimated by higher education researchers. A better understanding of national and organizational culture in the operating and functioning of the HEIs in the EaP countries may contribute to the discourses on quality and efficiency, steering models, governance in the reform processes as well as in establishing partnership relations with the wider academic world.

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