VEERA LAINE, Research Fellow, The EU's Eastern Neighbourhood and Russia Research Programme, Finnish Institute of International Affairs, PO Box FI-400, 00161 Helsinki, Finland. *Email*: veera.laine@fiia.fi

http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09668136.2016.1152053 

Serghei Golunov, *The Elephant in the Room. Corruption and Cheating in Russian Universities*. Stuttgart: Ibidem-Verlag, 2014, 120pp., £19.90/€24.90 p/b.

CORRUPTION AND CHEATING AT UNIVERSITIES CONSTITUTE A CHALLENGE FOR higher education around the world. While in some countries, corruption and cheating are a deviation, and are sanctioned as soon as they are detected, in other countries, corruption and cheating—or at least some forms of them—are a norm, which can be publicly ignored. They are 'the elephant in the room', according to a metaphor used by Serghei Golunov in his latest book, which provides a very detailed analysis of the dramatic situation at Russian universities. The study is based on the author's personal experience, including teaching, research and online activism in Russia, as well as on an analysis of the biographies of some Russian leaders from government and universities, focusing on their academic background. Golunov's book starts with a short introduction describing the problem and the current state of research, then goes on to present some of the vulnerabilities of the Russian higher education system (Chapter 2), emphasising corruption and cheating (Chapter 3) and finishing with possible remedies (Chapter 4).

'The Russian higher education system remains one of the largest in the world, being in the top five countries both by the number of universities and by the number of university students' (pp. 23–24). Indeed, in the 2014–2015 academic year there were 950 universities in the country, including 548 state and 402 private schools, in addition to more than 2,000 regional branches. Although some universities are currently merging or closing, their number remains high: just to compare, there are also about 3,000 universities in the entire European Union, which has a total population of about 500 million people (the total population of Russia is 146 million). The massification of higher education—which is to say, the expansion of higher education enrolment far beyond the traditional social elite—as well as the establishment of the private sector, authoritarianism, bureaucratisation and marginalisation of the faculty are the main challenges Russian universities face, according to Golunov. All of these trends might 'support' or even 'promote' corruption and cheating.

The author distinguishes between the two terms 'corruption' and 'cheating': corruption is 'the abuse of power for private gain' (p. 50), while cheating encompasses 'specific malpractices (e.g. embezzlement, bribery, fraud, extortion, and favoritism) … and spheres in which [they] happen' (p. 52).

In analysing corruption, Golunov looks at this phenomenon at three different levels: ministries, universities and entrance exams. Some of the areas of corruption at the ministerial level include the 'attestation and accreditation of universities, opening programmes, and dissertation councils' (p. 54), while some 'retired influential officials' (p. 54) might also consider employment as a university rector. Corruption at this level might take different forms: non-monetary forms that can be masked under a generous Russian hospitality tradition—'transport[ing] [officials] in good cars, treat[ing] them in restaurants, arrang[ing] city tours, and … [giving] expensive souvenirs' (p. 54)—or monetary forms such as 'evident bribes' (p. 54). Universities do this in order to make the ministerial official more 'appeasable' and likely to make positive decisions with regard to the accreditation of universities and opening new programmes (p. 54). The author presents data concerning manipulation in the appointment of rectors and analyses in-depth the scandals surrounding the Higher Attestation Commission (*Vysshaya attestatsionnaya komissiya*—VAK)—the agency responsible for confirming academic degrees, such as the *kandidatskaya* (PhD) and *doktorskaya* (Habilitation), awarded by universities. The scandals focus on the selective treatment of plagiarism in dissertations depending on the status of the authors.

Corruption at the university level might involve all actors—administration, faculty and students. As regards the administration, some of them might be 'receiv[ing] procurement kickbacks from suppliers of various goods and services for universities' (p. 58), 'selling … diplomas' (p. 58), 'collect[ing] "tributes" from those successful collectives that obtained funding for their projects' (p. 59) or 'forc[ing] subordinates to mention them as co-authors' (p. 59). The administration might also be involved in academic tourism and in other activities such as nepotism, cronyism or favouritism in hiring and promoting as well as the manipulation of dormitory places. As for the faculty, the most common form of corruption at this level, according to Golunov, is 'bribery … in exchange for positive marks' (p. 61). Positive marks can also be arranged in exchange for services, as the author points out. Bribes can be given by students 'who perform poorly … and are [usually] happy … to solve their problems by bribing' (p. 63). There are, however, a large number of students who are pushed by the faculty to bribe. The *Edinyi Gosudarstvennyi Eksamen* (EGE—Unified State Exam)—which serves as both secondary school finals and university entrance exam, was piloted in some regions in 2001 and has been obligatory across the entire country since 2009—was introduced, among other things, to reduce corruption at this level. The author, however, states that it has in fact had the opposite effect, introducing new forms of corruption such as 'EGE tourism'—situations in which young people travel to other regions, such as the North Caucasus, where they can secure good results through bribery. Manipulations are still possible through fake enrolment and in the results of competitions (*olimpiady*) among school students. In the latter case, young people are allowed to enter universities regardless of their EGE results. Finally, Golunov identifies three common cheating techniques—'cribbing or resorting to unauthorized hints, plagiarism, and ghostwriting' (p. 67). Plagiarism in particular seems to be very problematic in Russia today, even among the faculty. While working on this book, the author downloaded 22 papers on the topic from elibrary.ru, the most significant Russian database, and 'managed to find plagiarism in four of these papers without making any special searching efforts' (p. 69).

Why is corruption in Russian higher education so endemic and what can be done about it? The author describes some official efforts—including reforms involving public punishment such as the arrest of university rectors—and suggests some new remedies, including (online) social activism.

In spite of the fact that the author ignores the current debates on international higher education, including its massification, the growth of the private sector and the role of a university teacher in global perspective—things that might be helpful in understanding the high level of corruption and cheating at Russian universities—this book is very well done. It would be of interest not only to experts on Russia and/or higher education, but also to scholars and practitioners managing projects with Russian universities or hosting students from Russia and other countries with endemic corruption. Moreover, the author makes a very brave confession by admitting that, during his time as a faculty member at one Russian university, he 'was not always impeccable in terms of academic integrity … but [he] never took bribes' (p. 16). This statement makes the author appear very sympathetic.

ELENA DENISOVA-SCHMIDT, Lecturer, University of St Gallen (HSG), Gatterstrasse 3, 9010 St Gallen, Switzerland; and Visiting Fellow, Aleksanteri Institute, University of Helsinki, Unioninkatu 33, 00014 Helsinki, Finland. *Email*: elena.denisova-schmidt@unisg.ch

SERGEY MEZENIN, Branch Manager, Ural Federal University named after the first President of Russia B. N. Yeltsin, ul. Mira 19, 620002, Ekaterinburg, Russia. *Email*: s.m.mezenin@urfu.ru

http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09668136.2016.1152049