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**Abstract**

In this article, we explore affiliations of high-level public officials in East and South-East Europe and Central Asia with higher education institutions, which create a risk of undue influence because of conflict of interest. We collected evidence about formal affiliations that were bringing holders of public office in education benefits in the form of additional income and/or academic credentials. Our research covered decision makers in government and the legislature with direct responsibility for higher education as well as heads of departments in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Kazakhstan, Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro, Russia, Serbia and Ukraine. The evidence shows that at the time of our research in 2016, the public officials in a majority of these countries had a conflict of interest through their affiliation with a higher education institution while in office. The most common forms of problematic affiliations were salaried positions in universities and the provision of fee-based services to universities. In some countries, ownership of higher education institutions and the provision of procurement services by companies connected to public office

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holders were common as well. Our article concludes with a discussion of the threat to the integrity of the public and higher education sectors posed by such affiliations, and with a call for a broader exploration of the problem and its implications for integrity, quality, and equity in higher education.(HRK / Abstract übernommen)