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An Outsider's Perspective: Is It too Much to Hope that the University of Zagreb Be the Engine of Positive Social Change and Transparent Governance Rather than the Last Bastion of Cronyism?

To the Editor: I have been following the plagiarism case of Asim Kurjak with increasing dismay and would like to offer an outsider's perspective (1).

The University of Zagreb was founded more than three hundred years ago and is the oldest and most prestigious of Croatian universities. Located in the capital city, the university dominates the academic, social, and political life of the country to a degree that is hard for foreign academics to fully appreciate. The leaders of the university are thus charged with a special responsibility – to uphold the highest possible ethical standards and thus set an example to which the rest of the country might aspire.

Sadly, I have to report that generations of the university's senior leadership have failed in this fundamental responsibility

and, in so doing, have done terrible harm to the international academic reputation of the institution. The case in point, Dr Kurjak's self-admitted scientific misconduct, reeks of the worst kind of cronyism. At every step, those charged with protecting the reputation of the University have, instead, opted to protect the reputation of an influential and powerful colleague. One hardly needs point out that had accusations of plagiarism been dealt with promptly and properly when they were first made, the University and Dr Kurjak might have been spared the current ordeal in the media. With the Honor court's decision not to pursue the Kurjak matter further, the University is now seen to implicitly sanction Dr Kurjak's appalling behavior. To her lasting shame, the Dean of the Medical School has embarked

on a vendetta against the editors of the medical journal that helped bring Dr Kurjak's misconduct to light.

I imagine that the average Croat will read about the events at the University of Zagreb and simply give a shrug of resignation. After all, this kind of thing was commonplace in the former Yugoslavia. Surely, however, the war for Croatian independence was, at least in part, about changing the pervasive culture of political corruption. Is it too much to hope that the University of Zagreb be the engine of positive social change and transparent governance rather than the last bastion of cronyism?

One gets the impression that the university's leadership neither knows nor cares that the world is watching – but I can assure them that it is. Those of us in the inter-

national academic community with colleagues at the University of Zagreb are embarrassed on their behalf and saddened to see the reputation of this venerable old university sullied in the name of cheap political favors. What is to be done? By her actions, the Dean of the Medical School has clearly shown herself unfit for her office. If she has any regard for the university she should resign immediately, be-

fore its reputation is damaged beyond repair. It is no exaggeration to say that the ongoing crisis at the University is now beginning to negatively affect Croatia's reputation in fields beyond academia. The Minister of Education (or the Croatian equivalent) should, therefore, move quickly to install a new Dean, one capable of restoring confidence in the moral and ethical leadership of this

most important of Croatian institutions.

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References

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