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### **THE ACADEMIA OF APPLIED SCIENCES: A PROSPECTIVE WAY FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE REGIONAL HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM**

Russia's full-scale armed aggression against Ukraine aggravated the previously accumulated problems in the educational sphere and brought to the fore the need to choose the optimal way to modernize educational institutions in Ukraine in the conditions of war and post-war recovery of the country's economy.

The issue of reforming educational institutions has been widely supported in scientific circles. According to Professor I. Kalenyuk, the problem of optimizing the higher education institutions network is relevant, which has both quantitative (the optimal number of institutions for Ukraine) and qualitative aspects (improvement of the management system and the search for new forms of educational organization) [1, p. 53].

Since the beginning of the war, more than 10 million people, mostly women and children, have been forced to change their place of residence. 1,748 educational institutions were affected by shelling and bombing, including 34 institutions of higher education and 42 institutions of professional pre-higher education [2]. In such conditions, it will not be possible to maintain the existing education system. In addition, the trigger for radical changes will be a significant reduction in government spending on education and an increase in “educational migration”.

During 2010–2021, the number of educational institutions decreased by 7% annually on average, the average annual decrease in the number of students was 118.97 thousand people or 7.6%. The tendency to decrease the number of educational institutions in Ukraine will continue in the coming years. Despite the natural reduction in the number of higher education institutions in Ukraine, their number remains significant and economically impractical.

The structure of educational institutions has also undergone significant changes. Thus, in the 2021–2022 academic year, the specific weight of colleges, technical schools and vocational schools increased significantly compared to the previous academic year and amounted to 64.25%. This happened due to a sharp reduction in the total number of educational institutions and an increase in the number of professional pre-higher education institutions among them. Thus, in the 2021–2022 academic year, according to the State Statistics Service, the number of professional pre-higher education institutions was 248 institutions, compared to 129 professional pre-higher education institutions in 2020–2021. The vast majority of higher education institutions in Ukraine have a contingent of up to 4,000 bachelor’s and master’s degree students [3, p. 5]. The contingent of the majority of professional pre-higher education institutions is up to 500 students.

Along with this, there were significant disparities between the labor and education markets, due to the mismatch of the quality characteristics of graduates of higher education institutions with the needs of business. This inconsistency has been aggravated during the martial law. Therefore, it is necessary to establish cooperation between

higher education institutions and business entities of the respective region.

The feasibility of reforming educational institutions is considered on the example of a separate region. An urgent need for the post-war restoration of human capital is to ensure high-quality training for students of educational institutions. It is expedient to optimize the regional network of higher education institutions and create a qualitatively new higher education institution of communal ownership on the basis of promising and progressive educational institutions in the region. Such an institution can be the Academia of Applied Sciences, the activities of which are to be conformed to the Regional Development Strategy.

Cherkasy region is chosen as the region for our study for several reasons. Firstly, Cherkasy region belongs to a large group of regions with a population of 1 to 1.5 million people, and secondly, it is territorially located in the middle of the country, that is, distant from regions where active hostilities are taking place. This creates prerequisites for the development of a pilot project on reforming the regional education system with its subsequent extension to other regions.

There are 23 communal (state) professional pre-higher education institutions and two higher education institutions registered in Cherkasy region, which are funded from the regional budget (including the displaced educational institutions due to military operations). About 80% of all professional pre-higher education institutions have up to 500 students. The specialties provided in the above-mentioned institutions are quite often duplicated, and their optimization today is an urgent need. In addition, there are so-called “small” groups in educational institutions, which is one of the reasons for the education quality deterioration in such institutions. There are only three professional pre-higher education institutions with a contingent of 500–700 students and two higher education institutions with a contingent of more than 700 students in Cherkasy region. The analysis of the specialties of the five largest professional pre-higher and higher education institutions funded from the regional budget of Cherkasy

region shows that these educational institutions are the most successful in their field of training specialists.

The National Plan on the Recovery of Education and Science of Ukraine envisages the creation of a Unified system of professional education through the unification of vocational and technical and professional pre-higher education. In Cherkasy region, there are 17 vocational and technical education institutions of communal ownership, which are potentially subject to reform during the unification of the two components of the education system.

As of October 1, 2022, the total number of students in these institutions is 2,413, of which 4 institutions have up to 300 students, 10 professional (vocational and technical) education institutions have a contingent of 300–500 students. And only three institutions have a contingent of more than 500 people. Therefore, it would be expedient to consolidate small educational institutions or join them to professional pre-higher education institutions or regional leaders of professional (vocational and technical) education according to the territorial principle.

The priority in reforming the educational system should be coordination of institutions when implementing the strategy of national and regional economic development. The above provisions justify the expediency of consolidation of educational institutions with mandatory consideration of the development strategy of Cherkasy region for the period 2021–2027, which defines the SMART specialization of the region.

Today's challenge is to increase the “personal efficiency” of educational institutions funded from the regional budget and to create an Academia of Applied Sciences in Cherkasy region. The most important skills for employees of the coming decade will be analytical thinking and innovation, critical thinking, leadership qualities and social responsibility, stress resistance, and a creative approach to problem solving [4]. It is the Academia of Applied Sciences that should focus on ensuring students' acquisition of the above-mentioned skills. This is due to the practical orientation of education, the transition to a dual education system, and the involvement of a larger number of

stakeholders in the preparation and updating of educational programs. An important function of the Academia will be to provide necessary knowledge to potential employees, taking into account the needs of stakeholders and unification of industrial, educational and innovation policies in the regions.

Thus, the Academia of Applied Sciences is a group of united institutions of higher, professional pre-higher and professional (vocational and technical) education and their interaction with enterprises of the region. The aim of this unification is to create a competitive and effective system of training qualified human resources to meet the needs of the regional economy and its innovative development.

Therefore, the reform of the regional educational space should go in line with changes both in terms of optimizing the number of educational institutions and introducing new approaches to the organization of education. Optimization through consolidation should be carried out around the leading educational institution, which has a positive image in the region, connections with European educational institutions, wide international contacts and the trust of the population. The creation of the Academia of Applied Sciences in Cherkasy region on the basis of such an institution will allow to adjust the content of education and improve the quality of educational services. In addition, the optimization of the network of regional educational institutions will enable to use financial resources allocated for education from the regional budget more effectively.

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