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Higher Education Reform in light of Bologna Process: opportunities, obstacles, context

Recommendations for Eastern Partnership countries

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Content

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Introduction

During the last quarter of a century, the history of higher education in the Eastern Partnership countries has shown more or less successful attempts of reforms and building national higher education systems. Inheriting common soviet education model, new independent states were forced to rebuild it by adapting to new national and international realities. Chosen development ways proved to be very different from attempts to freeze reforms, from different options of incoherent and unfinished reforms to radical transformation of entire education system. At the same time, Bologna process played significant role in higher education reforms for all Eastern Partnership countries being a benchmark for changes in higher education.

Besides direct influence on higher education Bologna process became one of the important instruments of integration into EU norms and standards area. The importance of this process is based, first of all, on the fact that unlike political and economic integration mechanisms such as Association Agreement and Free Trade Zone, Bologna process could be placed in the 'soft law' zone and doesn't envisage hard commitments and clear 'deadlines' on incorporating European law provisions into national education systems. Countries can identify directions and integration speed on its own and have autonomy on how they proceed in terms of Bologna acquis integration into their national system. Second of all, European Higher Education Area (EHEA) is area that allows development of unifying processes even when countries' geopolitical priorities differ. While the Eastern Partnership countries have to choose between integration with EU and integration with Eurasian Union for achieving their political and economic goals, incorporation of Bologna principles doesn't require such hard dichotomy.

With Belarus accession to EHEA in May 2015 all six Eastern Partnership countries became members of EHEA aiming in implementing Bologna principles, which opens additional opportunities and possibilities for developing multilateral cooperation in higher education. Eastern Partnership countries have different experience in higher education reforms as well as different level of convergence with EHEA values, principles and goals. From our point of view, this diversity has a high potential for developing regional cooperation and allows organizing process in way that will result in effective and efficient experience exchange and reciprocal evaluation of higher education reforms processes in Eastern Partnership region.

Although Bologna process is, first of all, the process that includes official state structures and universities into its activities, it also has space for civil society. Furthermore, we believe that civil society organizations' role and contribution into Bologna process development in the Eastern Partnership countries could be more sufficient than we can observe now. By performing the traditional functions of watchdog for national governments actions the civil society is able to prevent negative effects from the imitation of real reforms. As a rule, the process of initial integration is more technical and doesn't have any effect on educational content, strengthening academic autonomy and developing independent system for higher education quality assurance. This is due to the need in universalization of educational systems and the absence of effective mechanism for adapting national educational system to common standards. In this regards, the civil society role as interested party is to prevent emasculating of the reforms essence and to propose more effective mechanisms for transformation. Democratization of education, widening participation of social partners, civil society and other partners interested in higher education reforms remains cornerstone for all our societies.

In 2016 EaP CSF supported the project "Higher Education Reforms Reinforcement in Eastern Partnership countries" that was implemented by the group of civil society organizations from Armenia,

Higher Education Reform in light of Bologna Process:
opportunities, obstacles, context
Recommendations for Eastern Partnership countries

Belarus and Ukraine. The main goal was to identify opportunities and barriers for higher education reforms in Eastern Partnership countries within Bologna process framework as well as to develop joint strategic recommendations for higher education reforms process participants including civil society actors. Specialists from Armenia, Belarus and Ukraine looked at the Bologna process issues in EaP countries through benchmarks described above: actual education system reforms in light of Bologna process, diversity potential of higher education transformation models in Armenia, Belarus and Ukraine as well as potential of civil society participation. The working format envisaged 3 days strategic consultations of academic community, state agencies, international organizations, media, civil society representatives and experts in education from 3 countries (more than 30 participants in total) in a form of activity game (in its specific version 'creative game' used in Armenia) under supervision of experienced game practitioners team from Yerevan. The game format allowed participants to discuss serious issues freely and creatively finding creative solutions and easily compensating shortage of knowledge and misunderstanding if come from different backgrounds, intellectual schools and expert positions.

Here we present meaningful project's results including some recommendations, which we hope will be useful for all actors interested in more modern higher education based on European standards in EaP countries.

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Andrei Yahorau

Sviatlana Antashkevich

Bologna process: general context

Bologna documents' analysis allows us to look at the development dynamic of the process, which aimed on establishing and strengthening European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and European higher education competitiveness on the labour market and is continuing nowadays. 1999 **Bologna Declaration**[1] defined establishing goals that aimed on forming **European Higher Education Area** as such and in particular, adopting the system of clearly identified and comparable academic degrees as well as common quality assurance system. This envisaged intensification of intergovernmental and interuniversity cooperation while the civil society sector involvement was limited to European NGOs participation in this process.

However, 2001 **Prague communiqué**[2] brought to light new goals that arose from changing geopolitical, social and economic landscape due to upcoming European Union enlargement. To the fore come new goals, which, from one hand, underline the need to develop educational modules with 'European' content and, on the other hand, to require flexible approach to different countries education system as well as to provide attractiveness of common European education system. Thus, what we see is that the second document already brings to attention the need to develop two important mechanisms: 1. effective and efficient adaptation mechanism assuming both education systems diversity in general and internal university structures oriented towards variety of student pool (level of differentiation and motivation); and 2. knowledgibility about the European values.

While 2nd document expands educational area boarders by including the social sphere in it (Prague communiqué importance is that higher education became socially responsible), the **Berlin communiqué**[3] underlines the economic need of European society taking into account the fact that during Berlin conference was decided that new countries would be admitted to EHEA and these countries have different political, economic and social level of development. The main requirement set in Berlin document is to ensure process effectiveness measured by all parameters, to ensure close relations between education and research through inclusion of the 3rd tire of higher education — Ph.D. as well as to ensure monitoring mechanisms development and its application in practice. At this level Bologna process becomes self-reflection process.

2005 **Bergen communiqué**[4] specifically paid attention to National Qualification Framework introduction, in development of which all interested parties should participate — governmental officials, institutions representing higher education sector, faculty, students, employers and scientists. The launch of pilot projects is encouraged and welcomed. Such projects' implementation will be able to demonstrate expediency of one or the other interim steps on the way towards non-imitated integration and being based

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[1] See, **The Bologna Declaration** of 19 June 1999. Joint declaration of the European Ministers of Education: http://www.magna-charta.org/resources/files/text-of-the-bologna-declaration.

[2] See, **Towards the European Higher Education Area.** Communiqué of the meeting of European Ministers in charge of Higher Education in Prague on May 19th 2001: http://media.ehea.info/file/2001_Prague/44/2/2001_Prague_Communique_English_553442.pdf.

[3] See, **Realising the European Higher Education Area.** Communiqué of the Conference of Ministers responsible for Higher Education in Berlin on 19 September 2003: http://media.ehea.info/file/2003_Berlin/28/4/2003_Berlin_Communique_English_577284.pdf.

[4] See, **The European Higher Education Area — Achieving the Goals.** Communiqué of the Conference of European Ministers Responsible for Higher Education, Bergen, 19-20 May 2005: http://media.ehea.info/file/2005_Bergen/52/0/2005_Bergen_Communique_english_580520.pdf.

Higher Education Reform in light of Bologna Process:
opportunities, obstacles, context
Recommendations for Eastern Partnership countries

EASTERN PARTNERSHIP
Civil Society Forum

on concrete examples. At this stage the interim steps also include data collection not only on administrative and student mobility but also on student social and economic conditions in participating countries and based on which the monitoring will be conducted.

2007 **London communique**[5] title **'Towards the European Higher Education Area: responding to challenges in a globalized world'** indicates that Bologna process is no longer regarded implicitly but has already been looked at in the context of political, social, economic and cultural challenges of global world explicitly. In this context, Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) influence on societal development (social factor), comparability of different higher education systems while maintaining its traditions' diversity (values and cultural factor), academic freedom, institutional autonomy, equal opportunities, students preparation as active citizens in democratic society (political factor), research and innovation stimulation aiming to increase competitiveness on global labour market (economic factor) stands out especially.

There are a number of obstacles that could be identified on the way to achieve set goals — immigration, qualification recognition, insufficient financial incentives and inflexible mechanisms of faculty remuneration and retirement plans. On the other hand, a set of methodological solutions could be offered to overcome them — development of effective adaptation mechanisms, responsible approach to study plans reforms, active distribution of successful practices. All of these envisage intensive cooperation among higher education institutions both on local and regional and international levels.

Notably, that London communiqué, i.e. in anticipation of initially set deadline for establishing European Higher Education Area end, formulates the response to global challenges as the need to strengthen critical approach to this process by ensuring its full transparency that, in return, will increase confidence in higher education in EHEA, by ensuring awareness of higher education role in creating social unity and by enhancing the responsibility and accountability of all main higher education players to society. This should be done on all levels — European, national and institutional. If we translate this response to the self-critic language then main problems could be identified: formal approach to accreditation, lack of public awareness about the process and as the result, low participation level in it, somewhat higher education isolation from other public processes important for it, excessive concentration on structural and instrumental approaches and as an outcome, weakening of value component of this process in general and without which, it can get stuck on short-term tactical issues and miss the main one — strategic role of education.

Along with evaluating past period results, 2009 **Leuven communiqué**[6] outlined the priorities for the next 10 years. The priorities were given to international openness, data collection on education dynamic and perspectives, developing mechanisms on ensuring transparency in education in different countries and HEIs, financing, innovation based on the quality education. The document encourages more active inter university cooperation, study tours, students, faculty and administrative staff mobility. Having in mind growing number of Bologna members, it is justified and important to encourage and to develop direct contacts between all interested parties.

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[5] See, **London Communiqué.** Towards the European Higher Education Area: responding to challenges in a globalised world: http://media.ehea.info/file/2007_London/69/7/2007_London_Communique_English_588697.pdf.

[6] See, **The Bologna Process 2020 — The European Higher Education Area in the new decade.** Communiqué of the Conference of European Ministers Responsible for Higher Education, Leuven and Louvain-la-Neuve, 28-29 April 2009: http://media.ehea.info/file/2009_Leuven_Louvain-la-Neuve/06/1/Leuven_Louvain-la-Neuve_Communique_April_2009_595061.pdf.

Andrei Yahorau
Sviatlana Antashkevich

While in 2012 **Budapest**[7] and **Bucharest**[8] communiqués concentrated on national aspects of Bologna process such as national education system, national context, national qualification framework, national grants, national legislation, national practice, then in three years time in 2015 **Yerevan communiqué**[9] requirements to intensify activities to ensure practical application of qualification framework come to the fore. In other words, there is an economic and societal demand in connecting the education and society/market.

We underlined the most important provisions of this communiqué:

- Critic of the ostentatious use of the reforms instruments;

- Renewed vision of EHEA includes:

  - implementation of common goals in all member countries to ensure trust in each other's higher education systems;

  - ensuring the faculty and students academic freedom rights and their rightful and full participation in educational organizations' management;

  - ensuring effective education system built on critical thinking, democratic and civic values;

  The document also underlines the equal importance of all set goals implementation including those related to the study process itself and students learning outcomes that should be clearly described as well as HEIs should introduce the flexible educational trajectories to address emerging societal needs to respond to fast technologies development and global change;

- Establishing complementary links between education and labour market, and widening ways of reaching these goals;

- Supporting educational organizations ensuring interconnection between different sectors of education;

- Ensuring coordinated structural reforms with involvement of academic community, politicians and civil society;

- Active best practices exchange;

- Making higher education more socially inclusive.

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[7] See, **Budapest-Vienna Declaration on the European Higher Education Area**, March 12, 2010: http://media.ehea.info /file/2010_Budapest_Vienna/64/0/Budapest-Vienna_Declaration_598640.pdf.

[8] See, **Making the Most of Our Potential**: Consolidating the European Higher Education Area Bucharest Communiqué: http://media.ehea.info/file/2012_Bucharest/67/3/Bucharest_Communique_2012_610673.pdf.

[9] See, **Yerevan Communiqué on the European Higher Education Area**, 2015: http://media.ehea.info/file/2015_Yerevan /70/7/YerevanCommuniqueFinal_613707.pdf.

Higher Education Reform in light of Bologna Process:
opportunities, obstacles, context
Recommendations for Eastern Partnership countries

Following Bologna process development during the last 15 years, we can see the tendency of moving from general and directive approach where the key goal was to involved member countries into EHEA to more deep situational analysis in member countries criticizing very formalized governmental approach to reforms and focusing on study outcomes, which means that EHEA is getting more involved in member countries Bologna process implementation and development. The shift to more in-country focus was determined by joining countries, which educational, social, economic and political traditions differed from European ones.

It is important to note that Bologna process became a reflective process where tactics is analyzed and the strategic priorities are corrected when needed.

Armenia, Belarus and Ukraine national education system formed in 1991-2016, on one hand, inherited a lot from the soviet education system but on the other hand, they went through difficult and controversial transformation. These systems are characterized by too centralized management system and crucial dependency on state financial support. The university autonomy hasn't been incorporated into national higher education system as key principle of university functioning as viewed by the EHEA. The national quality assurance systems are still overwhelmed with bureaucratic requirements and criteria both on governmental level and university one. The deep and systematic innovations are rejected and in many cases the real reforms are substituted by imitation and opportunistic timeserving.

Transformation process in each country had its specifics and differed by its dynamics and development trajectory. European experience in university education development, study and research activities harmonization in national and European context became benchmark for optimal modernization ways search for post-soviet education systems. It resulted in developing multi-level educational models, adopting ECTS and attempting to develop national models for higher education quality assurance and monitoring, forming private higher education sector, establishing licensing and accreditation system for HEIs and educational programs.

Having in mind different modernization pace, existence of periods of active reforms effort and temporarily 'recoils', periodical changes of geo-political priorities, the national education policy makers are obliged to constantly monitor and analyze the development of own systems as well as other countries, which have similar goals and resources limitations. One of the most successful examples of such comparative analysis could be considered the analysis of education, research and management practices in higher education in such Eastern Partnership countries as Armenia, Belarus and Ukraine.

Andrei Yahorau

Sviatlana Antashkevich

Common problems for Eastern Partnership countries in the way to effective reforms of higher education system

Armenia, Belarus and Ukraine have own specifics of higher education reforms including different time of integration into Bologna process. Armenia and Ukraine began this process in 2005 while Belarus just joined Bologna in 2015. These three countries have significant difference in level of state regulation of higher education, civil society activities in this sector and their influence on its development, corruption level and number and quality of private HEIs. At the same time, a lot of issues are similar, in particular, all countries have significant social and economic problems, facing brain drain, widening gap between graduates qualifications and labour market needs and demands, falling level and quality of research as well as the need in universalization of education and ensuring that general Bologna standards are met.

Eastern Partnership countries integration into EHEA requires complex reforms and full implementation of six fundamental principles: three-tire education (BA — MA— Doctor), comparable diplomas with diploma supplement (DS), ECTS introduction, educational mobility, education quality assurance and joint policies in higher education. In its turn, this transformation requires not only adoption of corresponding laws at the national level but fundamental re-evaluation of the education forms and content at large.

All countries are facing a number of problems preventing them from full and effective higher education reformation during Bologna implementation. The major problems are:

1. Non-reflective, irrational imitation of above mentioned fundamental principles implementation.

2. Absence of educational services market as mechanism regulating relations between the customer and consumer.

3. Blurred public understanding about the educational services customer and consumer functions and positions. Today, we don't have defined customer and consumer positions in terms of their relations to the educational services market as well as their functions, requests and expectations concerning HEIs. Besides, it is unclear, what the main employers request is because there is no platform and format where this could be discussed and employers' request to HEIs and demands in educational services could be formed and delivered. Consumers also do not understand their position as a consumer either what it requires and means.

4. Unclear relations between existing national education traditions and innovations dictated by Bologna process.

5. Absence or insufficient information availability for public to better understand Bologna process mission, goals and methods.

6. Need to build own relations with EHEA. In particular, in spite of obvious advantages of Bologna process, each country needs to answer the question whether Bologna process has enough flexibility and reflectiveness to react on fast changes in the world in time and then to change internal processes accordingly and fast. Will countries need to follow up and react on this and if yes, how? What will the

Higher Education Reform in light of Bologna Process:
opportunities, obstacles, context
Recommendations for Eastern Partnership countries

academic community and other higher education stakeholders' role in each of these countries be? What shall the joint efforts be?

7. Reforms imitation and problems associated with it. The imitation of EHEA norms and standards implementation is present on the level of political decision-making as well as on the level of reforms and exact Bologna elements implementation. The reasons for imitations are:

- Resistance to tradition. When traditional vision and innovation collides, the traditional vision disappear or undergo transformation to be able to adapt to new challenges as well as innovation, elements, structures go through the same process. It could also go through the process of misinterpretation and revised adaptation;

- Ignorance, lack of understanding, unthought. In this case, the form is borrowed but the content remains unchanged, which misinterpret reforms meaning and goals. For example, there are very common cases of misunderstanding of credit system, of the need in independent education quality assurance, of changes in specialties and competencies;

- Objective environmental resistance such as values systems striving leading to innovation misinterpretation. The difficulties related to institutions and regulations reforms very often lead to establishment of powerless structures that are supposed to be decision makers but can't perform it due to the fact that the old structures remain legitimate and make decisions instead;

- Undeveloped labour and educational services markets. There is an emerging need in new system of market regulations in the condition of very fast changes in the world, technology development and its spread into all areas of live, disappearance of unneeded specialties and emergence of new ones, transformation of attitude towards knowledge;

- Corruption;

- Universities dependence. In general, universities dependence is understood as its dependence from state, limitation of university rights and freedom in decision making aiming on university system reform and higher education at large. However, HEIs rights are not only limited by the state but also by the number of more general factors such as difficult economic situation, weakness of market regulators, insufficient societal maturity as well as so-called 'soviet heritage' and 'soviet relic';

- Inertia of thinking is very visible in complex situation related to reforms of old and establishing new institutions and developing new standards.

In order to find solutions for existing problems in all Eastern Partnership countries the certain frameworks should be established and without which it will be hard to succeed in higher education reforms:

1. Multilateral dialogue of all interested parties. All interested parties should take active part in reforms development, their implementation, entire process control and monitoring if we want to see the effective implementation of Bologna requirements in these countries.

2. Continuous reflection and situation assessment. At the national level, we need to establish continuous analysis and assessment of situation through the entire reforms process. Besides European structures overseeing Bologna process, member countries created experts group at national level, some universities established separate units that concentrate on reforms analysis but such structures perform one executive and/or advisory functions. In order to organize constant monitoring and analysis we need to establish Monitoring Group involving academic community and NGOs representatives from Eastern Partnership countries working in educational sector to have full understanding of the processes and to react on any sudden changes and moves accordingly. The most important is that the group's activities are transparent and public. The results of its work should be widely discussed and views should be known through different means: public discussions, debates and others. This will ensure 'open window' for others to understand innovation within Bologna process.

3. The public opinion needs to be formed by constant work with society providing public with information about Bologna process, reforms goals and what it would bring to them.

Higher Education Reform in light of Bologna Process:
opportunities, obstacles, context
Recommendations for Eastern Partnership countries

EASTERN PARTNERSHIP
Civil Society Forum

Countries context: some aspects of Bologna reforms in Armenia, Ukraine and Belarus

Armenia

2005-2011 Reforms

Although a number of Armenian higher education institutions began reforms in order to adopt European education system standards at the end of 90th, Armenia joined Bologna only in 2005. One of the important steps undertaken by Armenia in the process of integrating into EHEA was the establishment of National Center for Professional Education Quality Assurance (NCQA) in 2009. In 2012 the Center published the first report on results of higher education analysis in Armenia[10]. The report concentrated on three main issues: external quality assurance, internal quality assurance and quality of teaching and learning.

15 HEIs participated in pilot accreditation project and based on their reports analysis NCQA concluded that majority of HEIs activities do not correspond with their missions. None of 15 institutions presented clear measurable criteria for quality assurance, reliable documents confirming approved strategy implementation as well as facts confirming reforms process.

At the pilot stage, external quality assurance activities were limited to developing founding documents in accordance with Framework Program approved by the Education Council and EC Council. This program included general system procedures for quality assurance at institutional and program levels. The implementation of those principles was associated with inevitable institutional problems during modernization process, in particular, with the need to change the management system, culture and philosophy of education, to learn new competences and skills for using the quality assurance mechanisms. Besides, all institutions participated in pilot accreditation noted academic freedom limitation by the Ministry of Education, absence of National Framework for Quality Assurance, inability to have flexible policies, which would have enabled institution to implement reforms where they are mostly needed and in accordance with their capabilities. Institutions also face difficulties with overcoming old educational methods, need for faculty retraining in most cases and training for ECTS use and not simple dovetail it to the use old system of students' knowledge assessment and evaluation. Moreover, the absence of a legal framework didn't allow to introduce the European credit and accumulation system even within the same university. This lead to fragmented functioning of the system and some institution worked with a great gap between each other.

2011-2015 Reforms

In 2011 Armenia government approved 8-level National Quality Assurance Framework (Framework) and allotted its implementation to Armenian Ministry of Education. Having in mind the requirements listed in the Framework, NCQA presented its second comparative report (2015)[11] analyzing two phases of reforms

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[10] See, **ANQA First System-Wide Analysis 2009-2011**: http://www.anqa.am/en/publications/anqa-first-system-wide-analysis-2009-2011/.

[11] See, **National Centre for Professional Education Quality Assurance Foundation. Armenia System-wide Analysis 2012-2015**, Yerevan 2016: http://www.anqa.am/en/publications/second-system-wide-analysis-2012-2015/.

Andrei Yahorau

Sviatlana Antashkevich

in Armenia. Based on this analysis, the Center prepared recommendations that will allow understanding the process development dynamic in Armenia as well as problems that need to be tackled. The problems are:

- Difficulties in accessing strategy implementation due to the absence of indicators that will allow to measure real results;

- Undeveloped research programs and as the result, the gap between quality and quantity remains huge;

- Either unfinished or undeveloped quality assurance mechanisms and methods as the result of outdated management system and of mechanisms absence needed for all interested parties active involvement internally and externally;

- Low level of management of information system, which becomes an obstacle in real decision making process modernization;

- Unmeasurable congruity between study methods, its evaluation and learning outcomes leading to the need of revising the approach to students' assessment in accordance with study formats variability.

Belarus

Belarus joined Bologna last in 2015 being the last country of Eastern Partnership to become a part of EHEA. Herewith, its joining EHEA was made conditional and required the extensive reforms of country's higher education system in accordance with the Roadmap for Belarus Higher Education Reform. This conditional acceptance became first in the history of EHEA. The Roadmap for Belarus Higher Education Reform[12] envisage the following:

- Developing and implementing the National Qualification Framework (NFQ) and harmonizing the higher education architecture;

- Establishing Independent Quality Assurance Agency in accordance with the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG);

- Introducing Bologna instruments for learning outcomes transparency: European Credit Transfer and Accumulating System (ECTS) and diploma supplement as designed by the Council of Europe, European Commission and UNESCO;

- Diversification of students and staff mobility;

- Developing social dimension of higher education, Lifelong Learning (LLL) and revising the system of guarantee of the first working place to graduates;

- Implementing EHEA fundamental values.

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[12] See, **Roadmap for Belarus Higher Education Reform**: http://bologna-yerevan2015.ehea.info/files/Roadmap Belarus_21.05.2015.pdf.

Higher Education Reform in light of Bologna Process:
opportunities, obstacles, context
Recommendations for Eastern Partnership countries

Therefore in 2015 Belarus took obligations to reform its higher education but along with this it is reluctant to ask the question whether there were any reforms till then and if so what are the facts confirming that those reforms were implemented.

Developing national higher education system in 1991-2015

The beginning of reforms could be dated back to earlier 90th when new intellectual centers: National Institute for Higher Education, Academy for Postgraduate Study, National Institute of Professional Education, etc emerged within the education system. The establishment of new institutions aimed at finding ideas and ways to reform education in the transition and in new historical situations of independent state. In years to follow, Belarusan education went through different change stages out of which the most important were:

1. Education services market segmentation. Private educational institutions emerged along with state although at a smaller scale.

2. Forming informal education system. Today informal education system is somewhat savior for the country and compensates for ineffectiveness of state education system.

3. Forming focus of public management of education. For more than 20 years of education system development and reforms, we hardly formed the focus of public management of education. The education system was managed by the state for a long period of time but with the establishment of Belarusan Independent Bologna Committee[13] and Belarusan National Platform of Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum[14] we can state that public management of education focus has been formed[15].

4. Transition to mass higher education. Belarus faced natural mass higher education tendency and successfully overcame its challenges without increasing the number of higher education institutions but through renaming institutes into university making them a part of higher education system.

5. The core of National higher education legislation was formed. Belarus adopted a few different 5-year concepts, formed educational standards system, introduces the system of centralized testing, developed the quality assurance monitoring system. However, in spite of the fact that legislation development process was intense, we can't say that education reforms were meaningless and consistent.

Thus, we can conclude that Belarus didn't have systematic higher education reforms as such. Everyone talked about reforms, imitated them but in reality, there was no reforms at all. At the beginning of 90th Belarusan experts in education reforms considered reforms as the social sciences and humanities technology accepting modern world challenges and reaching goals set by that. In this case, changing the education management system is regarded as change management (didn't ever happen), and is not as formalized, hard management system (Belarus received at the end).

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[13] **Belarusan Independent Bologna Committee** is civil initiatives that relies on cooperation of interested public organizations, experts and representative of Belarusan universities' social partners in order to overcome Belausian education system real isolation from European Higher Education Area, see: http://bolognaby.org.

[14] **Belarusan National Platform of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum**, see: http://npbelarus.info.

[15] Refer also to **"Public Participation in the Higher Education Governance (Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova)"**: http://bolognaby.org/images/uploads/2016/01/Policy-Paper-Public-Participation.pdf.

After 2015

25 years of inconsistent transformation of Belarusan higher education and postponement of joining Bologna lead to a number of negative results for Belarusan system. Belarus received very formalized system with hard management style and falling quality of education. Belarusan Universities' academic communities remained at the level of being employed collectives and didn't gain the status of partner and full member of education process. Today, the future of education is decided at the political level and the issues of its development further are substituted mainly by arguments of economic and market situation. In addition to this, the hard state management in education imitates the reforms process. The key justification of reforms absence and why we do not need any more reforms in higher education is that higher education has already been reformed. The government tries to present to public simple action such as transition to 10-point knowledge assessment system and credit system introduction as actual reforms but in reality it is impossible to consider these as higher education reforms because the ultimate goals of quality education are not reached.

Belarus also accumulated high intellectual potential related to education reforms process but it can't be implemented in existing situation, which requires not only intellectual ideas from academic and experts' community but also political willingness and consensus on joint public-state strategy for education development. Presently, there is no consensus on that and besides two existing management models — public and state — are rather in confrontation with each other than trying to find the acceptable compromise. Based on the above, we can state that in spite of the fact of having large public and political players such as experts' community and representatives of civil society interested in education reforms and its real modernization but their level of influence on state policy in education development remains very low.

In addition to public and political dialogue issues Belarus education has humanities values conflict between different education systems. On one hand, this is post-soviet system bearing the soviet style of life and system itself and on the other hand, the system oriented to Europeanization of Belarus and its inclusion to European Area. This conflict is very visible in collision of two focuses of education management: state and public and, unfortunately, still doesn't have clear mechanisms of solving it. Public players in education (first of all, Belarusan Independent Bologna Committee, BIBC), which are interested in education development but do not agree with government policy for education development, were able to block Belarus accession to Bologna in 2012. Paradox of this situation was that BIBC was the most interested in accession to Bologna but had to block the decision on values grounds. BIBC insisted that current education management system in Belarus is not ready for accepting important European values: academic freedom, institutional autonomy and student self-governance without relevant reforms. As the result, Belarus joining European Higher Education Area was determined by the need to meet a number of conditions and proceed with fundamental reforms first.

Today, Belarus goal is to implement all Bologna standards including its fundamental values. This will require major education reforms and not only changing education structure, introducing credit system, increasing financial resources, etc. but learning absolutely another system of social and political relations. That's why Belarus faces difficult choice whether or not to implement Bologna requirements and values but a choice of values, content and strategy and this is not simple.

Higher Education Reform in light of Bologna Process:
opportunities, obstacles, context
Recommendations for Eastern Partnership countries

EASTERN PARTNERSHIP
Civil Society Forum

Ukraine

"Before Maidan" development results (2002 — February 2014)

Ukraine higher education development from 2002 till systematic transformation after "Euromaidan" in February 2014 was filled in with a number of not very successful education system modernization attempts. In 2005 Ukraine joined EHEA and began introducing credit-modular system and improving the state funding for education. Along with this, Ukraine has tried to amend the Law on Higher Education and to develop its new edition but Government and the Ministry of Education were approving quite contradicting documents. Nevertheless, Bologna standards were secured in national education system, in particular, after 2008 ECTS was officially introduces, HEIs received autonomy in developing study plans, Concept and Program for MA programs was approved, National Qualification Framework (NQF) was introduced.

Higher education system transformation after March 2014

The reforms process intensified after revolutionary changes in Ukraine in February — March 2014. The Bologna standards implementation process became more consistent. In summer of 2014 new edition of Ukraine Law on Higher Education expanded Bologna standards area, in particular:

- Correcting educational national higher education system cycles structure: abolishing degrees of 'Specialist', 'Candidate of Sciences' and introducing degree of 'Doctor of Philosophy'

- Modernizing programs of the first cycle: abolishing regulatory disciplines, more compact study plans for BA programs;

- Introducing short higher education cycle in new format — through preparing junior BA;

- Developing second cycle programs: introduction of new List of disciplines and specialties (April 2015);

- Reducing number of specialties and increasing its study load, implementing educational programs for MA with 3-4 semesters of study;

- Replacing aspirantura with the Doctor of Philosophy study programs (Spring 2016);

- Licensing for Doctoral Programs (DP);

- Introducing educational component into DP;

- Increasing the study period from 3 years to 4 years;

- Innovation in dissertation defense process and strengthening requirement for research work ethics;

- Encouraging development of joint educational and research programs with foreign partners.

Introduction of new standards changed a lot in existing before education system but also generated natural resistance from accustomed formed of education. In particular, the regular aspirantura was practically replaced by Doctor of Philosophy Program and for the first time ever in history of Ukraine, such program needs to be licensed. Such radical changes came as a shock for research institution as well as

Andrei Yahorau

Sviatlana Antashkevich

academic and industry related institutions simply because they never went through such painful licensing and accreditation process.

During this period, change of management structure and development of university autonomy (March 2014 — September 2016) became one of the most important reforms' vectors. In addition to the Ministry of Education, Ukraine established National Agency for Higher Education Quality Assurance. National Agency assumed responsibilities for:

- Institutions and programs accreditation;

- Standards development, its modernization and approval;

- Establishing, opening and closing programs and institutions;

- Vesting liquidation, right to work for deferent Specialized Academic Councils;

- Degree registration.

Wherein, degree award process is solely responsibility of HEIs and all old structures (HAC, quasi HAC and pseudo HAC) were liquidated.

Nowadays, the university autonomy is expanding and covers educational, research, personnel and financial areas. Students acquire more rights to be able to affect the process of their study plan compilation and to participate in HEI management. University began developing mechanisms for renewing academic management and rejuvenating faculty members. However, this process can't go painless. While in study and research these processes are moving forward and have a positive impact, the work in terms of developing, renewing and rejuvenating personnel meets relatively strong resistance with some misunderstanding both within universities itself and the Ministry of Education. The most difficult moment was allotting financial autonomy to universities. All existing treasury services and budget planning systems create enormous obstacles in this process, which remain to be resolved by Ukrainian experts and professionals implementing reforms.

The National Qualification Framework implementation hadn't always gone smoothly as well. In some ways, its implementation totally failed. NQF was approved in autumn of 2011 and implementation and action plan for 2011-2015 was approved at the same time however wasn't executed. Partly, that happened as there was no resources allocated for its implementation and partly, because the plan was overloaded with actions, which couldn't have been completed physically as well as government didn't pay any attention to NQF implementation at large.

The latest development in Ukraine higher education reform affect issues such as:

- Licensing and accreditation system reform;

- Shifting accents from formal requirements for students and faculty evaluation onto their study and research evaluation;

- Changing criteria for awarding academic degrees;

- Concentrating on internationally recognized research results (SCOPUS, Web of Science);

- Encouraging HEIs competitiveness — introduction of open competition for receiving places on state order (excluding private HEIs);

- Expanding independent external testing zone (approbation of the mechanism to admit to MA program based on applicant knowledge and skills);

- Active debate on the need to establish new stipend allocating system (less populism, old approaches and equality).

In spite of very intensive reform process in Ukraine, there are a lot issues that still can't be settled. In particular, the development of numerous number of important regulations, which never existed in the past, is still far behind the timeline. The new model of state funding for universities requires a lot of efforts and political willingness, which is not in place. The national system of quality assurance has not been launched at all levels. National and Research universities models corresponding to modern conditions are not established. Regulations for university financing are not developed. The issue of preferential state loans for students to study at HEI is not resolved. The management system for university admission is not stabilized. The mechanism for internal academic community self-regulation is not developed as well as its ethics priorities are not set. The professional communication affirming academic honesty is not developed.

General recommendation on further higher education reforms in Eastern Partnership countries

The project's participants came to the principal conclusion: Bologna process is real and legitimate innovative possibility but its principles' implementation and use remains at hands of those who receive it. Reforms content is complex in all countries and paired with multiple obstacles but on the other hand, there is a cluster of quite visible solutions. Eastern Partnership countries should take a notice of the following aspects of reforms' process and of a number of recommendations:

- Although higher education reform is one of the elements within general reforms system implemented by states it may become the locomotive, which will drag the other social spheres.

- Higher education reform can't be successful without serious reforms affecting the entire state system.

- However, limited success in implementing Bologna acqui allows us to assume that joining EHEA could become key factor in Eastern Partnership countries societal development.

- Key issue in reforms progress is reaching public and political consensus by main education stakeholders concerning goals, priorities, pace and instruments for further national education system modernization aiming to earlier integration to EHEA.

- It is necessary to develop and constantly improve national legislation on education, which will accommodate main trends in forming common European education policy combining it with relevant national and resources capabilities.

- There is a need in finding the efficient models to optimize state and corporate funding for higher education, which open possibilities to rational use of all available means.

- There is a need in forming national monitoring system and quality assurance agencies accommodating both European standards and recommendations (ESG) and national university traditions.

- All countries should implement student oriented principles guaranteeing education orientation on openness, cooperation, active, non-directedness, informality in relations, student participation in designing study program and its development, education strategy and trajectory flexibility.

- Approving higher academic ethical standards and principles in Armenia, Belarus and Ukraine, which will be able to provide wanted higher education moral restructuring under the condition of its real autonomy strengthening.

- Certain apprehension exists caused by homogenization of education and uncertainty in terms of institutional goals directed towards preserving and developing national cultural traditions. Bologna documents underline the need to develop national cultures however, the apprehension of national specifics being ignored is in place and it should be taking into account.

Higher Education Reform in light of Bologna Process:
opportunities, obstacles, context
Recommendations for Eastern Partnership countries

- Possibilities of Eastern Partnership need to be efficiently used for experience exchange and establishing the system for information exchange in research, methodology, etc. This should lead to countries' consolidated position on problems related to EHEA.

- Important to note the need of three level approach to integration into Bologna standards system — local (internal university), inter university and regional.

- Key problem for Eastern Partnership community is 'innovation illiteracy'. This means that these communities do not have needed knowledge about Bologna mission and goals as well as have informational vacuum about reforms process in these countries. We need to create conditions to eliminate this illiteracy. Civil society efforts should be also directed towards monitoring and controlling reforms process.

- One more goal is to liquidate outdated institutions and regulations preventing reforms implementation (in particular, full introduction of three tire education — BA, MA, Doctor, elimination of HAC), establishing market with exact roles for educational services customers and consumers.

- Academic community consolidation, which should not only play creative role of generating ideas and models, education services customer and consumer all in one but also lobbyist of university interests role.

- Possibly, for more effective and efficient representation of academic community interests, optimal way would be to establish International Coordinating Council within the Eastern Partnership that will include university representatives (with well thought election system that will exclude the appointing option), experts and NGOs representative specializing in higher education from EaP countries.

- There is a potential in establishing common market to provide employment for graduates in EaP region.

Obviously, some of the above recommendations have strategic importance and can't be implemented immediately as it requires political willingness and societal efforts. At the same time, we can begin getting ready to implement many of them with active participation of interested parties and groups in all three countries. We also want to underline that local and regional (international) cooperation shouldn't be a one-way process of national standards and traditions adaptation to international regulations. Bologna process could be and must be used as 'educational event' for entire society.

Specific recommendations for Armenia, Belarus and Ukraine

Armenia

Based on documents, reports, research and opinion poll analysis related to Bologna implementation in Armenia we could conclude that this process was and remains quite complicated and difficult in moving forwards due to certain reasons caused by:

- Although education system is important but it is only one element in a line of reforms declared by the state and thus requires complex approach in its modernization and reformation;

- Rapid demographic shifts;

- Traditions of social and economic relations prevail;

- Inadequate information availability for public access and misunderstanding of higher education content in new global and local conditions;

- Insufficient human resources that are able to assess, understand and implement reforms;

- Worsening situation in secondary education system;

- Inertia of thinking and approaches;

- Reforms implementation from top down with totalitarian control by universities administration in spite of the fact that key element of successful education paradigm change should have been targeted establishment of democratic academic mechanisms and university autonomy;

- Social stimulation absence among students to obtain quality education;

- The main goal of education in countries in transition is to prepare leaders equipped with modern knowledge and skills and endow creative potential but this fact has been ignored in Armenia;

- HEIs politizations and other factors.

Unconsciousness (or conscious disregard) of these known in advance problems lead to negative outcome. Its correction might be more difficult task than the attempts to avoid them initially. Otherwise, reforms might be reduced to the 'facelift', standard façade decoration on the loose and unreliable basis and tracing without serious consideration of side effect.

Goals laid for Armenia higher education system that has complex and fundamentally important problems, require new methodology, new psychology and new approaches to study and teaching, finance and management. In order to achieve them, the depth study of the situation, problems detection and the most effective solutions development is the must.

Higher Education Reform in light of Bologna Process:
opportunities, obstacles, context
Recommendations for Eastern Partnership countries

EASTERN PARTNERSHIP
Civil Society Forum

Belarus

Belarus joined EHEA only in 2015 with delay of 16 years. Lack of preparation to participate in this pan-European project was so high that for the first time in Bologna process history was used the procedure of candidate country conditional acceptance. The Roadmap Belarus for Higher Education Reform was developed aiming to shorten the gap between Belarusan higher education and leading Bologna process higher education institutions as well as to secure EHEA goals, values and instruments in Belarusan legislation related to higher education.

In spite of having the Roadmap, Belarusan higher education modernization process encounters significant difficulties due to the political willingness absence as well as conservatism of academic environment and society in general. Majority of higher education stakeholders don't know about Bologna goals and don't see their interest in Roadmap implementation. The level of expertise of those who develop amendments and additions to higher education legislations and regulations from the state side is very low. The cooperation and coordination between Ministers and other governmental agencies on the Roadmap provisions implementation is practically nonexistent. Public participation in reforms process is not envisaged at all. Public isolation from legislation development process is worsening by the absence of transparency and total unavailability of information on it.

Having in mind unfavorable conditions for the Roadmap provisions implementation and risk of losing the real reforms content in attempts to save authoritarian style of higher education management, we recommend:

1. Civil society that is ready to support higher education reforms by its expertise and to advocate for higher education stakeholders interests should insist on establishing open and competent platform for discussing the Roadmap implementation plan with all interested parties in its dialogue with authorities.

2. To provide wide informational exchange about the Roadmap implementation between official and public experts including stakeholders' representatives interested in higher education modernization. To seek the inclusion of this request into recommendation of International group (AG2) and Bologna Follow up Group (BFUG) monitoring the Belarus obligations fulfillment.

3. To involve Eastern Partnership countries experts into the process of discussing Belarus higher education reforms in terms of Bologna acquis implementation as much as possible. To invite EaP and other experts in the framework of civil society initiatives and campaigns to assist in developing recommendations of and evaluating legislative amendments drafts.

4. To seek inclusion of this public expertise into the Assistance Program for Belarusan Ministry of Education through BFUG, International Advisory Group 'Support for Belarus Roadmap' (AG2) and other EHEA working groups. To initiate different forms of European civil society participation in the Roadmap implementation monitoring process; to include EaP CSF into Belarus obligations fulfillment monitoring process; strengthen dialogue between Belarusan National Platform of the EaP CSF and European Parliament, EC countries governments, the Council of Europe and other European organizations to pressure Belarusan authorities to fulfill its obligations related to Bologna process.

Andrei Yahorau

Sviatlana Antashkevich

5. To recommend securing in Education Code the norms ensuring the Roadmap provisions based on public expertise.

6. In order to implement the Roadmap provisions related to higher education structure, NQF, transparency instruments (Diploma supplement) we suggest to introduce the following changes and additions to Republic of Belarus Education Code, which:

- Secure transition to three tire higher education structure and provide detailed description of each tire and graduates qualification;

- Secure transition to credit based educational programs and learning outcomes, provide its detailed description;

- Secure NQF implementation;

- Describe educational standards based on ECTS and NQF including programs duration and study load at each level of education.

7. In order to implement the Roadmap provisions related to higher education quality assurance, we suggest introducing amendments that will allow establishing Independent Quality Assurance Agency in accordance with European Standards and Guidelines (ESG). In this regards, we suggest new definition of quality assurance process actors, determine their responsibilities and duties, and provide detailed description of monitoring activities, its terms and periodicity, organizational principles of internal quality assurance.

8. In order to implement the Roadmap provisions related to academic mobility and higher education internationalization we suggest to develop descriptive Plan (National Strategy) for development and diversification of academic mobility based on Bologna process implementation criteria and indicators. To introduce amendments into the Education Code allowing to determine international cooperation goals, to verify its actor, to correct academic mobility definition, to establish Scholarship Fund to boost faculty, students and universities' personnel mobility.

9. In order to implement the Roadmap provisions related to social dimension we suggest to introduce amendments allowing to revise existing graduates employment practices for those who study at state funded places. Instead of forced employment we suggest to develop the mechanism for the first employment place for all graduates and being based on the working places quotes irrespectively of whether graduate studied at state funded place or tuition based as well as professional adaptation system that will enable graduate to adjust to market situation.

10. To ensure credit recognition received outside of formal education process.

11. To ensure availability of preferential study loans for all student categories and delaying its repayment for 2 years after graduation.

12. In order to implement the Roadmap provisions related to fundamental EHEA values we propose to introduce into Education Code provisions based on **Magna Charta Universitatum** and the Council of

Higher Education Reform in light of Bologna Process:
opportunities, obstacles, context
Recommendations for Eastern Partnership countries

EASTERN PARTNERSHIP
Civil Society Forum

Europe **Recommendation CM/Rec (2012)** principles on the responsibility of state to guarantee academic freedom and institutional autonomy.

Experts' recommendations focused on ensuring:

- Universities independence from political influence and economic situation;

- Inseparability of education and research in the universities;

- Freedom of teaching, research and study;

- Mutual knowledge transfer and multicultural cooperation.

  It includes concrete legislative amendments allowing:

- To guarantee rights of protection against external governmental intervention personally and institutionally;

- To secure organizational, financial, human and academic university autonomy in full;

- To ensure constant monitoring of fundamental values implementation;

- To guarantee redistribution of powers in favor of collegial governance in higher education.

Ukraine

Starting from March 2014 Ukraine education policy vector changed radically in European direction. This created opportunity for adopting a new edition of Ukraine Law on Higher Education, which showed the change of the way of thinking and move from declarations to action, from closeness to openness, from centralize management to university autonomy. New education policy and implementation of key provisions of this law created the discussion platform for public and professionals, accelirated formation of renewed regulatory database, intensified research in higher education field and formulated promising strategies for university education reforms in European content.

In this conditions, it seems appropriate to recommend the following:

- To accelerate the development of complex regulatory documents, which will allow fast and with minimal losses to proceed Ukraine higher education 'reboot' in accordance with European standards, approaches and recommendations.

- Approbation and further development of innovative model of state funding for education and search for optimal ratio of it configuration with possible corporate funding for education.

- To use all possibilities for developing National Qualification system to ensure efficient and effecting relations between business, higher education and labor market in order to achieve high level of graduates employment according to their interests and skills as well as social needs.

- To develop mechanism for access to quality higher education for disadvantage social groups though establishing targeted state preferential loans program.

- Institutionalization of higher education quality assurance system at all levels (university— independent assurance agencies — National agency).

- To build mechanism for internal academic community self-regulating, defining its ethic priorities, establishing professional communication based on academic honesty as moral imperative.

Higher Education Reform in light of Bologna Process:
opportunities, obstacles, context
Recommendations for Eastern Partnership countries

Information about the project

The project "Higher Education Reforms Reinforcement in Eastern Partnership countries" was implemented in 2016 with support of Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum (EaP CSF re-granting scheme).

Information on project's partners

Humanitarian Techniques' Agency, Belarus: www.methodology.by.

Belarusan Independent Bologna Committee, Belarus: www.bolognaby.org.

Social and Kultural Innovation Lab Foundation (SKIL Foundation), Armenia: www.skilfound.com.

International Foundation for Educational Policy Research (IFEPR), Ukraine: www.edupolicy.org.ua.

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