



**МІНІСТЭРСТВА АДУКАЦЫІ
РЭСПУБЛІКІ БЕЛАРУСЬ**

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**МИНИСТЕРСТВО ОБРАЗОВАНИЯ
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На № _____ от _____

Gayane Harutyunyan
Head of the Secretariat
Bologna Follow-Up Group
Secretariat
Alek Manukyan 9
0070 Yerevan, Armenia

Dear Ms. Gayane Harutyunyan!

Ministry of Education of the Republic of Belarus presents its compliments to the Head of the Bologna Secretariat and notes high importance of international cooperation of the national academic community and administrative subjects of education with foreign partners in order to develop a global system of education on the European continent. Such relationship assists to achieve interstate understanding and mutual cultural enrichment, as well as to promote international humanitarian principles taking into account educational traditions and ethnic diversity of all the countries of the European continent.

Belarus is interested in more active participation in the process of formation and development of the European Higher Education and Research Area and in inclusion of our country in the number of members of the European Higher Education Area.

Implementation of the instruments of the European Higher Education Area into the national system of higher education is carried out on the basis of the State Program of Higher Education Development for 2011-2015, approved by the Government of the Republic of Belarus. This program provides guaranteed state financial support, system adjustments to the structure of the higher education levels, expansion of the international mobility of students and teachers, introduction of Diploma Supplement to all students, implementation of the module-rating system of education, and also organizes foreign experts' engagement into the teaching in higher education institutions and etc.

Recently, into the optimization process of national higher education, were made structural adjustments that include the expansion of university

autonomy, students' participation in management decision-making in the field of higher education, educational public-private partnership development.

Ministry of Education, teachers and students community of the Republic of Belarus realize the importance of accession to the European Higher Education Area for all stakeholders in the education system and this process sets them new challenges and goals. We know the difficulties that encounter us in this process and we are ready to overcome them.

The Belarusian side declares adherence to further improvements of the national education system in accordance with the formation principles of the European Higher Education Area and national needs, and proposes to consider the inclusion of the country in the number of member states of the European Higher Education Area at the next Conference of Ministers of Education of the member states of the European Higher Education Area on 14-15 May, 2015.

The Belarusian side emphasizes that only the fully legitimate participation of Belarus in the European Higher Education Area will be an incentive for further development of the national higher education in all fields of scientific and educational activities of students and teachers.

To continue with the consideration procedure of the Republic of Belarus as a candidate country for accession to the European Higher Education Area we send completed application form and confirm the readiness of the Republic of Belarus to hold expert seminar for international experts, to provide on request additional information on the ongoing modernization of the national higher education system.

Belarus is still open to the equitable and mutually beneficial dialogue with European partners on all issues in the field of higher education modernization.

Let me take this opportunity to express my deep respect to you,

Minister



S.A.Maskevich



EUROPEAN
Higher Education Area

November 8, 2013

**INFORMATION TO BE PROVIDED BY COUNTRIES
APPLYING FOR ACCESSION TO THE EUROPEAN
HIGHER EDUCATION AREA (EHEA)**

DETAILS REGARDING THE APPLICANT

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I. OVERVIEW OF THE NATIONAL HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM

- Please describe the national higher education system including a) an outline of the main regulatory documents b) the governance arrangements of the system (main regulatory bodies, their competences and interactions) c) the institutional structure underpinning the national higher education system (number and types of institutions, student enrolment and academic staff structure).**

A. The legal regulation of higher education system of the Republic of Belarus is ensured by the following documents:

- the Code on Education of the Republic of Belarus (Law No. 243-3 dated from January 13, 2011) as well as legal acts adopted for further development of the Code (the documents are available on-line at www.etalonline.by);
- Decrees of the President of the Republic of Belarus, which determine the national admission rules for higher education institutions (No. 80 dated from February 7, 2006), education activities licensing requirements (No. 450 dated from September 1, 2010), establishment of new state-owned universities, social support of students and talented young people, etc.;
- resolutions of the Government of the Republic of Belarus, which determine duties and powers of the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Belarus (No. 1049 dated from August 4, 2011), national rules for second cycle (master's course) admission (No. 110 dated from February 2, 2012), procedure for foreign qualifications assessment and

recognition (No. 981 dated from July 21, 2011), procedure of involvement of foreign academic staff in educational process (No. 362 dated from May 10, 2013), procedure of students outgoing mobility financed from the national budget funds (No. 1617 dated from November 30, 2011), action plans for the National Qualifications Framework development (No. 34 dated from January 17, 2014), procedure for establishing the status of the education institution, opening of new programs in educational institutions, job placement procedures, etc.;

– orders of the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Belarus, which determine rules and regulations for admission of international students to higher education institutions (No. 87 dated from July 25, 2014), procedure of record-keeping in the Classifier of specialties and qualifications of education (No. 46 dated from April 22, 2014), rules of student assessment (No. 53 dated from May 29, 2012), rules of loaning higher education tuition fees (No. 86/243 dated from August 26, 2011), ratio of students and academic staff, issues of students transfer and re-admission, samples of higher education diplomas and their description, procedures of activities of educational and methodological associations in the field of higher education, standard forms of agreements with students in the field of higher education, powers and activities of self-governing bodies in higher education institutions, etc.

The State Program of Higher Education Development for 2011-2015 is an important legal strategic document providing a set of actions and activities with the relevant funding (Resolution of the Government of the Republic of Belarus No. 893 dated from July 1, 2011).

At present a review of the Government's powers and capacity in the field of education and transfer of a number of its functions to the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Belarus as well as transfer of some powers of the Ministry of Education to higher education institutions are carried out.

B. Governance in the higher education system of the Republic of Belarus is regulated by the state and public and it is stipulated in the Education Code of the Republic of Belarus (Chapter 11).

The state governance in the field of education is carried out by the President of the Republic of Belarus, the Government, the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Belarus, other national authorities, local executive and regulatory authorities within the scope of their powers.

The President of the Republic of Belarus determines the national policy in the field of education and ensures implementation of its major trends and directions. The Government ensures implementation of the state policy in the field of education and carries out general governance of the education system of the country. The Ministry of Education ensures functioning of the education system, its general governance, monitoring and supervision education quality, pursuing the national staff policy in the field of education, issuing licenses for educational activities, organizing content development of higher education programs and curricula, organizing development and publishing textbooks, manuals, etc.

The public (social) governance in the field of education is carried out by: the Republican Rector's Conference, the Regional Rector's Conference, the institutions responsible for functioning of the higher education system, academic (educational) and methodological associations in the field of higher education, the leading higher education institutions.

The Republican Rector's Conference unites heads of all higher education institutions of the Republic of Belarus (both public and private) as to develop recommendations in the field of higher education. As a rule, the Republican Rector's Conference considers and reviews the most significant higher education development strategies and then sends these recommendations to the Ministry of education; it is also involved in considering nominees for rector positions of all higher education institutions of the country. The Regional

Rector's Conferences unite heads of higher education institutions from a specific region of the Republic of Belarus as to develop recommendations for determining common approaches and policies of efficient higher education, science and research governance with the regional development specificity.

The institutions responsible for and ensuring functioning of the higher education system include the following: the Republican Institute of Knowledge Assessment providing organizational and legal support of the centralized testing; and the National Institute for Higher Education providing scientific and methodological support of higher education development and carrying out foreign educational qualifications assessment for recognition purposes.

As to improve the quality of specialist training there are academic (educational) and methodological associations in the field of higher education functioning at the most important higher education institutions (there are 31 associations at majors of higher education). These academic (educational) and methodological associations include academic staff as well as representatives of the labor market of Belarus (perspective employers). Their competences encompass development and improvement of higher education programs content, revising training manuals and textbooks, reviewing and providing recommendations regarding opening of new specialities.

To improve the higher education system and to develop updated educational technologies and techniques several higher education institutions are awarded with the status of a leading higher education institution. 10 universities were awarded this status by the Government of the Republic of Belarus.

Academic staff and student professional unions (trade unions) available in every higher education institution, are involved in the development of local legal acts in the field of education (e.g. of the Education Code), in social support and protection of students and academic staff, in raising the social status of academic staff.

C. The national higher education system is a predominantly university system. There are 45 state-owned (public) higher education institutions and 9 private higher education institutions in the Republic of Belarus. Among 54 higher education institutions in total there are 34 universities, 7 academies, 9 institutes, 4 higher colleges. The Education Code (article 207) provides each type of a higher education institution with the relevant requirements.

Higher education institutions are located in all regions of the Republic of Belarus. All types of higher education institutions are entitled to train students at the first cycle of higher education. Training graduate students at the second cycle of higher education (master's course) can be carried out only by universities, academies and institutes.

In 2013-2014 academic year the share of students was the following:

Higher Education Cycle	State-owned HEIs, persons	Private HEIs, persons	TOTAL, persons
First	354 054 (89.6 %)	41 214 (10.4 %)	395 268
Second (graduate school, master's course)	7 063 (93.5 %)	489 (6.5 %)	7 552
Doctorate (aspirantura, doctorantura)	4 344 (83%)	886 (17%)	5 230

The number of second cycle students is 2 % of the number of all students trained at the first cycle of higher education (in 2012 – less than 1 %) and year by year second cycle programs become more popular and demanded as well as stimulated in terms of development of new programs by the authorities as well as the universities leadership.

The following structure of training specialists in majors exist in the Republic of Belarus at present: natural sciences - 4.8 %, humanities – 16.8 %, teaching (pedagogy) – 21.0 %, medicine (health care) – 3.7 %, economics – 23.0 %, engineering (technologies) – 22.0%, agriculture – 6.6 %, military science – 2.1 %.

The total number of academic staff is 36,856 with 1,348 Doctors of Sciences and 8,932 PhDs (Candidates of Sciences). The Education Code of the Republic of Belarus recommends the academic staff/student ratio at a higher education institutions as 1:10.

2. Please give a description of the strategies that your country is currently pursuing in the field of higher education.

Recently the Higher Education Development Strategy has been discussed and adopted at the session of the Republican Rector's Conference (October 9-10, 2014), and this document provides the following:

- adaptation of the higher education specialities framework to the requirements of the International Standard Classification of Education and Economic Activities. Formation of the **National Qualifications Framework based on the European Qualifications Framework**; optimisation of the number of specialities by enhancing their qualification units; improvement of the planning system for training staff with higher education;
- capacity building for higher education system governance and structure of higher education. Establishment of additional entities of state-public (public-private) partnership in the field of governance of higher education, optimisation of the number and types of higher education institutions, formation of university complexes (clusters), **introduction and piloting of a bachelor's educational program, module-structured educational programs, integrated (1+2 cycles) higher education programs; development of distance learning options, network education, joint educational programs**;
- change of principles of state funding of higher education institutions. Establishment of the norms of budget endowment of expenditures per one student depending on a speciality, differentiation of scholarship (stipend) support depending on academic performance, **providing autonomy in management of a university budget, raising national budget expenditures for the educational system (to 8 % of GDP)**;
- empowerment of higher education institutions and expansion of their responsibilities in the national higher education field. **Assignment of the right to assess foreign educational qualifications by higher education institutions** for academic purposes, **empowerment of universities in defining the content of educational programs (50 % at the first cycle of higher education)**, providing universities with the right to independently develop and implement profile (specialized) educational programs within a newly-opened speciality, etc.;
- raising quality and practice-based nature of higher education. **Introducing obligatory academic mobility requirement for academic staff and students, expanding available practices and experience of training students in educational-scientific-industrial environment**, strengthening the requirements to the quality of training of school graduates, implementation of practical training of students in perspective job settings.

3. What are the partnership arrangements underpinning the system? Is there any specificity of your national higher education system that needs highlighting?

Participants in the process of modernization of national systems of education:

- The Ministry of Education of the Republic of Belarus;
- National group of experts on higher education reform;
- National Bureau of Erasmus+;
- Belarusian ENIC;

- Interdepartmental group for introduction of elements of the Bologna process in the national education system;
 - The Council of Rectors of institutions of higher Education;
 - National Institute for Higher Education;
 - Educational and methodical association of institutions of higher education by profiles of education (31);
 - Leading institutions of higher education of the Republic of Belarus (10);
 - Professional associations of the teaching staff and student associations.
- Specificity:* Postgraduate education is traditionally an independent cycle of education in the Republic of Belarus, which includes two degrees: postgraduate degree (candidate of sciences, or PhD-equivalent) and doctorate degree (doctor of sciences).

4. What are the main challenges that the national higher education system in your country is facing?

The national higher education system is preparing the necessary system changes to apply for the EHEA. Therefore the mentioned reforms are prepared. To reach one of the core targets of the Bologna process, a stronger orientation on the student- centered-learning approach, the higher education system in the Republic of Belarus has to face accompanying challenges that could also be observed in other countries of the EHEA:

- aging of the teaching staff of higher education institutions;
- quality deterioration of education at the first cycle of higher education as a result of massification of higher education;
- delayed response of the education system to demands of economy fields for new generation specialists leading to imbalance between the number of graduates, the structure of specialties and qualifications, and the needs of the national economy;
- insufficient capacity of some higher education institutions to get involved in programs of academic mobility as full-fledged participants (insufficient funding, students' low proficiency in foreign languages);
- insufficient integration of science, education and high-tech production.

The reform agenda in the higher education system of the Republic of Belarus will lay the ground for further developments, to get to the core of the Bologna ideas, the attention of the authorities as well as the Rector's Conference will highly focus on the dissemination into the higher education institutions.

5. Why does your country want to join the EHEA?

The following is expected after joining the EHEA:

- enhancement of the academic culture and dissemination of academic values and traditions among academic staff and students as a required foundation for differentiation of academic freedoms;
- adoption of new forms and methods of training in higher education, institutional models of the training process to come to more student centered teaching-learning-scenarios;
- integration of higher education institutions of the Republic of Belarus in international associations, involvement in scientific, research and development projects;
- using the chance to renew the engagement of external stakeholders in the educational dialogue;
- raising the level of interaction between the higher education system, science and community, piloting and implementing tools for education quality assurance;
- enhancement and differentiation of academic mobility of academic staff and students;
- raising trust among the nationals to the national higher education;
- integration of the national education system and university science and research in the European Higher Education Area.

II. STRUCTURAL REFORMS

The EHEA is built on structural components: quality assurance, degree structures/qualifications frameworks and the recognition of qualifications. This part of the questionnaire covers each area.

1. Degree structure system/ Qualifications Frameworks/ Employability

A. Please describe the higher education degree system/qualifications framework of your country. Specifically, please describe how this relates to the overarching framework of qualifications of the European Higher Education Area¹ (QF-EHEA) adopted by Ministers in 2005 as well as the further procedure² and timetable for self certifying your national framework against the QF-EHEA. The description should specify whether any study programmes are exempted from the three-tier structure and, if so, describe their position in your higher education system and indicate the proportion of the student body concerned.

According to the Education Code (article 202) the higher education in the Republic of Belarus is – actually – divided into two cycles.

The first cycle of education provides training of students possessing fundamental and specialized knowledge, who acquire the professional qualification of a specialist with higher education (e.g. “lawyer”, “economist”). The higher education at the first cycle provides the right to employment and continuing education at the second cycle of higher education (master’s course).

Term of training at the first cycle of education is 4-4.5 years with taking into account the 11-year-long period of general secondary education. There are 384 specialities at the first cycle of education with the term of training equal to 4 years – 47 % of all specialities, and with the term of training equal to 4.5 years – 18 % as well as 5 years – 32 %.

There are also 12 specialities at the first cycle of education with the term of training 5.5-6 years (mostly these are medical specialities, complex engineering specialities, etc.). There are 4 % of the total number of students, who are trained for these specialities.

At the second cycle of higher education (master’s course) comprehensive and profound training of specialists is performed with awarding them with a Master’s degree (e.g. “Master of Engineering”, “Master of Radiobiology”). The higher education at the second cycle (master’s course) provides the right to employment and further education at the postgraduate level (PhD degree). The term of training at the second cycle of higher education is 1-1.5-2 years. Currently there are 319 specialities at the second cycle of higher education. Master’s course specialities are differentiated as (a) the educational programs with a science and research component (“academic-focused master’s course”) – 193 specialities, and as (b) the educational programs with comprehensive training for innovative activities (“practice-focused master’s course”) – 126 specialities.

The first cycle of higher education of the Republic of Belarus with the term of training – 4-5 years – is compatible with EQF-level: Level 6; the second cycle (a master’s course) of higher education in Belarus is compatible with EQF-level: Level 7. The EQF-level: Level 8 in the education system of the Republic of Belarus is represented by an independent level of postgraduate education consisting of 2 cycles: postgraduate studies (aspirantura) and doctorate studies. Postgraduate studies are aimed at training specialists possessing skills of independent research, sound theoretical knowledge, which will allow to prepare a scientific thesis (dissertation) as to become a Candidate of Sciences (PhD). Term of training within postgraduate studies as a full-time student is 3 years. Doctorate studies are aimed at training specialists possessing skills to organize scientific and research activities within contemporary trends of research or to develop the existing relevant research trends as well as skills of analytical summary making of the results of scientific work leading to

submission of a qualification scientific thesis (dissertation) to become a Doctor of Sciences. Doctorate studies on a full-time basis last 1 year.

The higher education programs integrated with secondary specialized education curricula widespread at higher colleges in the Republic of Belarus correspond to short-term QF-EHEA programs. Term of training within such a program as a full-time student is no more than 3 years. The number of students enrolled in such programs does not exceed 2 thousand people.

The National Institute for Higher Education with taking into account the findings of the Review of Two-Cycle Higher Education – 2013 drafted amendments and changes in the Education Code, which were approved by the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Belarus in 2014 and introduced to the Government for their further implementation in 2015-2016:

- introducing the name “Bachelor’s Degree” for the first (I) cycle of higher education for specialities with the term of training 4-5 years;
- maintaining the name “Master’s Degree” for the second (II) cycle of education;
- introducing independent “continuing educational program of higher education” for specialities with the term of training 5.5-6 years (integrated training at the first (I) and second (II) cycles of higher education) and recognizing their graduates legal equal to those with a Master’s Degree (for the 12 most complex specialities that are currently enlisted in the first cycle of higher education);
- content re-design of each cycle of higher education.

The National Qualifications Framework in the Republic of Belarus is currently in the process of its development. The Ministry of Labor and Social Protection of the Republic of Belarus is responsible for development of the framework.

Trial application of some components of the National Qualifications Framework in the IT sector and in management and administration sphere has been performed during 2014. “The National Qualifications Framework for Pilot Economy Sectors” was developed and approved for these fields (Resolution of the Government No. 34 dated from January 17, 2014), two sectoral qualification councils were established (based in the High-Tech Park and at the Academy of Public Administration under the aegis of the President of the Republic of Belarus). At present the development of professional and qualification standards for the IT sector and in the field of management and administration is being carried out.

Based on the findings and results of the Review “National Qualifications Framework for Pilot Economy sectors” some proposals on the structure and functioning of the National Qualifications Framework will be submitted to the Government in 2015.

The self-assessment and self-certification procedure for the National Qualification Framework in terms of its meeting the requirements of the QF-EHEA will be carried out after the National Qualifications Framework has been formed.

B. The development of the national qualifications framework is, among other things, closely linked to the concern for improving the employability of higher education graduates. Please provide a description of your policies and priorities for improving the employability of higher education graduates and, in doing so, please cover the public as well as the private sector of the labor market. Please address the extent to which first cycle degrees (Bachelors or equivalent) are considered for employment, with specific reference to both the public and the private sector.

Professional qualifications and primary positions are determined for each and every speciality in the Republic of Belarus and it allows students and employers to be fully aware of their employment opportunities and perspectives. This correlation of specialities,

qualifications and positions is exposed in the National Classifier of the Republic of Belarus “Specialities and Qualifications” OKRB 011-2009.

The Education Code (article 83) states that all students trained in state-owned higher education institutions as full-time students at expense of the national budget funds will be on a mandatory basis provided with the first job related to the acquired professional qualification, and the higher education institution will bear responsibility to search for such job placements. The legislation stipulates cases and categories of graduates entitled to self-employment. At the same time the HEI graduates having a job placement are entitled to refuse it, but in this case, they shall reimburse funding spent for their training from the national budget.

The higher education institution provides a job placement in a specific (either state-owned or private) organization. The priority will be given to the requests for job placements from employers and organizations, which cooperate with a higher education institution. Conditions for job placement in private organizations are the same as those for public (state-owned) organizations. As a rule, 75 % of graduates are employed in the public (state-owned) sector, and 25 % - in the private sector.

The mutual employment obligations between a graduate and an employer extend 1-2 years. The HEI graduates, who paid tuition fees, solve their employment issues by themselves or they can apply to their HEI for a job placement.

In the academic year of 2013-2014 the first job placement was provided to 19.281 graduates of the state-owned education institutions, who were full-time students and studied at the expense of the national budget funds. 95 % of them were employed on the basis of the job placement.

2. Quality assurance

Please describe the national quality assurance arrangements in your country, with reference to both the internal quality development at higher education institutions and arrangements for external quality assurance, normally conducted by quality assurance agencies.

A. For internal quality assurance, describe whether higher education institutions in your country have quality assurance arrangements in place and, if not, what the plans and timetable are in this regard.

Internal quality assurance tools have been formed in HEIs of the Republic of Belarus, which, in general, correspond to “Standards and Guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area Recommendations (ESG)”.

Since the beginning of implementing education quality management systems meeting the standards ISO 9001 in higher education institutions of the country, the following system of internal quality assurance and management has been formed:

- higher education institutions developed and approved education quality assurance policies, which are available at the websites of the relevant HEIs and on information boards inside institutions;
- educational and scientific activities of higher education institutions are described as processes and procedures and are stated in the relevant quality standards of each HEI. These standards include sections describing quality monitoring and supervision procedures and permanent quality improvement;
- organizational structures (units) as well as Quality Management Councils including students as the main stakeholders (e.g. the Student Education Quality Management Council at the Belarusian State University) have been established to develop internal university quality assurance systems;

– organizational structures of higher education institutions carry out annual internal audit of the university quality management system, developing mechanisms for quality improvement based on the audit results.

Currently all higher education institutions of the Republic of Belarus have passed the international certification on compliance with ISO 9001 standards.

Assessment of the educational programs content in a higher education institution is carried out by the Council of the institution or by the scientific and methodological council of the institution no less than once in a 5-year period. The assessment requirements for HEI's educational programs content are established in the relevant Educational Methodological Guidelines developed by the National Institute for Higher Education.

Assessment of students' knowledge level is performed within the training period by the relevant examination commissions formed by the education institution. The final knowledge assessment of students is performed by the state examination board, which also includes representatives of perspective employers as well as members of the teaching staff from other higher education institutions. Knowledge assessment of students is carried out according to the document (Resolution of the Ministry of education of the Republic of Belarus No. 53 dated from May 29, 2005) called the Rules of Attestation (Assessment) of Students, Military Students and Trainees when Learning the Content of Educational Programs in Higher Education Institutions.

Quality assurance of the university teaching staff is ensured by the entry quality monitoring: members of the teaching staff are elected for positions by the Council of the education institution for the term of 1-5 years according to the established legislative procedure and requirements to the nominee. Annually the commission of the higher education institution on its own evaluates the quality of teaching staff, and as a result, provides representatives of the teaching staff with relevant financial supplements (allowances).

Assessment of the educational programs content in a higher education institution is carried out by the Council of the institution or by the scientific and methodological council of the institution no less than once in a 5-year period. The assessment requirements for HEI's educational programs content are established in the relevant Educational Methodological Guidelines developed by the National Institute for Higher Education.

Apart from that, the higher education institution carries out self-audit, which can be used by the external supervisory body as initial information prior to external quality audit.

In the course of self-audit visual examination, documentation study, actual conditions analysis, attendance of classes, discussions with the educational process participants, students' knowledge testing (in writing, verbal, equipment-based testing, practical assignments) are carried out. As a result of self-audit each department provides the self-audit commission with an information note containing the analysis, specific conclusions and proposals regarding the training content, level and quality. The self-audit commission works out an aggregate report based on the materials of information notes, control tests used to assess students' knowledge in the subjects checked during the self-audit, which then will be submitted to the external education quality assurance body.

¹ <http://www.ehea.info/Uploads/Documents/QF-EHEA-May2005.pdf>, see also the background report http://www.ehea.info/Uploads/Documents/050218_QF_EHEA.pdf

² It may be useful to refer to the "10 steps" identified by the Working Group on qualifications frameworks, see <http://www.ehea.info/article-details.aspx?ArticleId=69> and <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20100202100434/http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/londonbologna/upload/documents/WGQF-report-final2.pdf>

B. For external quality assurance arrangements, the description should focus on the way in which the competent authorities of your country comply with the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG)³ adopted by Ministers in 2005. To the extent that your country does not comply with the ESG, the description should include your plans for doing so and the timetable for achieving this. Elements that may be covered include cooperation with quality assurance agencies of other countries with a view to assessing the quality of your institutions as well as with organizations and networks such as ENQA.

External quality assurance tools are implemented in the Republic of Belarus and correspond to “Standards and Guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)”.

The external quality assurance tools in the Republic of Belarus are as follows: licensing and state accreditation of higher education institutions, organized by the Education Quality Management Department of the Ministry of education of the Republic of Belarus.

A license to perform educational activities is issued by the Ministry of Education according to the results of the audit of the education institution organized by the Education Quality Management Department.

The state accreditation of education institutions means a confirmation of compliance of the educational activities in the given educational institution with the legislation on education, content and quality of the provided education as well as with the educational standards requirements, and the state accreditation also ensures the right to issue state educational certificates. The state accreditation is carried out no less than once in 5 years for each speciality and type of education institution (e.g. university). Prior to the state accreditation procedure a higher education institution carries out a self-audit procedure, which can be the source of initial information for the external supervisory body. Criteria for each type of an education institution and the relevant criteria for speciality accreditation are established for carrying out the state accreditation according to the legislation.

Within the procedure of state accreditation the Education Quality Management Department monitors activities of the given education institution. For this purpose, the Department forms an interim independent commission composed of representatives of university teaching staff and specialists from various education institutions, who are entitled to carry out the audit.

The commission works out a report based on the results of the audit, which is submitted to stakeholders. The decision of the Education Quality Management Department on issue of a license, on accreditation is approved by the Board of the Ministry of Education.

Responsibilities of the Education Quality Management Department include the following (Resolution of the Government No. 976 dated from July 31, 2006):

- carrying out management in education quality assurance in education institutions having a license for performance of educational activities independent of their forms of property and subordination;
- drafting analytical reviews, introducing proposals and recommendations for elimination of the detected drawbacks and for improvement of educational activities, based on the results of audit and supervision actions;
- carrying out state accreditation of education institutions;
- record-keeping of education institutions, which have passed state accreditation, forming and keeping the register of licenses.

The Education Quality Management Department is a member of the Eurasian Quality Assurance Network – EAQAN and it implements the EAQAN quality management components in the national education system.

Besides, the external quality management system audit of higher education institutions certified for compliance with the international ISO 9001 standard, carried out by

independent Belarusian and international agencies (e.g. the Russian registry (Russki registr), Bureau Veritas, etc.) can be also treated as external quality assurance tools in the territory of the Republic of Belarus. According to the academic staff attitude survey the implementation of the quality management systems in education institutions resulted in raising the quality of educational process and its outcomes (74.5 % respondents).

Since 2012 the community-based education quality management experiment has been conducted by means of feedback of graduates and employers about education quality in a specific higher education institution (“Criteria and Indicators of Education Institutions’ Activities”).

The legislation of the Republic of Belarus does not restrict higher education institutions in carrying out additional procedures for external education quality assurance. The Republic of Belarus aims to join the ENQA network.

At the session of the Republican Rector’s Conference (October 9-10, 2014) the decision was made and further submitted to the Government on necessity of external accreditation of educational programs by various employer’s associations and on establishing the National Quality Assurance Agency. It stipulates the following:

- transformation of the Education Quality Management Department at the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Belarus into an agency responsible for education quality assessment, which will be independent of the Ministry of Education;
- transfer to the agency functions related to external knowledge assessment of school graduates, who are going to enter higher education institutions;
- involvement of students in all processes of external education quality management and assessment

For both internal and external quality assurance, it is suggested that the description outline the responsibilities of the bodies involved.

3. Recognition of Qualifications

A. The fair recognition of foreign qualifications is a prerequisite for academic mobility and the fundamental principle of the Council of Europe/UNESCO Lisbon Recognition Convention. If your country has not yet ratified the convention⁴, please indicate your plans and timetable for doing so. Regardless of whether your country has ratified the convention or not, please outline your actions, plans and priorities in regards to the recognition of foreign qualifications in your country, with an indication of a timetable. It is suggested the description comprise the organisation and competence of the national competent authorities for recognition and the role of ENICs/NARICs. Arrangements and policies for the recognition of qualifications earned through alternative learning paths/lifelong learning should also be addressed.

Since 2002 the Republic of Belarus has been a member of the Lisbon Recognition Convention (Decree of the President of the Republic of Belarus No. 5 dated from January 4, 2002). Since 2002 the office of Belarus ENIC (currently headed by Ms. Ina Mitskevich) has been operating in Belarus based in the National Institute for Higher Education. The main principles of the Lisbon Recognition Convention and the explanatory report gave a base for the national legislation in the field of recognition.

According to the Education Code, article 102, recognition of foreign qualifications as a formal decision is a task of the Ministry of Education. Recognition of academic and scientific degrees and titles lies within the competence of the Higher Attestation Commission of the Republic of Belarus.

The current procedure for the assessment of foreign educational qualifications is regulated by the Resolution of the Government No. 981 dated from July 21, 2011, and is a function of

the National Institute for Higher Education (www.nihe.by) which incorporates in its structure the Foreign Credentials Assessment Department (Belarus ENIC).

A foreign qualification holder wishing to have the qualification recognized has to apply to the National Institute for Higher Education with the following set of documents:

application form,

foreign educational qualification with its supplement (copies),

certified translations of qualification and supplement (if necessary),

passport copy.

During the assessment procedure the following is found out:

- authenticity of the submitted foreign educational qualification;
- the right of the foreign institution to issue state recognized qualifications (accreditation or other form of recognition);
- accreditation of the programme (or other form of recognition);
- applicability of norms from international agreements on mutual educational qualifications recognition regarding the submitted document;
- compliance of the foreign educational programme with the minimum requirements of respective educational standard of the Republic of Belarus in terms of level, workload, profile and function (in case there is no international agreement on mutual recognition with valid provisions covering the submitted document).

The assessment results with an expert report concerning the possibility of recognition the qualification in question. The report can be presented in a form of:

- a) recommendation on full recognition of the foreign educational qualification as a comparable to an educational qualification of the Republic of Belarus. In this case a formal recognition is made by the Ministry of Education, and a certificate on recognition is issued.
- b) recommendation on partial recognition. In this case the qualification holder receives the expert report. For example, the qualification can be recognized for academic purposes only.
- c) refusal to recognize the foreign qualification. According to current practice this is made in following cases:

- submission of false educational document;
- lack of institutional or programme accreditation.

The assessment is made within 30 days – without enquiries to a foreign state, and within 2-4 months – with enquiries to a foreign state.

The civil legislation provides a person with the right to appeal in court against a report issued by the National Institute for Higher Education.

The number of assessments performed by the Belarus ENIC is increasing every year 2007 (244), 2008 (285), 2009 (431), 2010 (498), 2011 (558), 2012 (989), 2013 (1195), 2014 up to October 2014 (1582).

Performing its informational function the National Institute for Higher Education with its Belarus ENIC office provides foreign partners with the required information on Belarusian qualifications and higher education system.

The assessment of periods of study as well as of qualifications with the purpose to access higher education is carried out mainly by higher education institutions. In some specific cases institutions can consult the Belarus ENIC office or to ask for qualification assessment.

Starting from January 1, 2015 there will be no need to receive qualifications recognition for the nationals of Armenia, Russia and Kazakhstan when they are employed in the territory of the Republic of Belarus (except for teaching, law, health care and pharmaceutical activities) – according to the Treaty on Establishing the Eurasian Economic Union, article 109.

So far the Republic of Belarus has had a number of agreements and treaties on mutual recognition of educational qualifications with the following countries: Russia (1996), Ukraine (1998), China (1998), Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan (1998), Moldova,

Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan (2004), Poland (2005), Vietnam (2007), Turkmenistan (2010), Azerbaijan (2011), CIS member-states (2014).

In 2011-2013 drafts of agreements on mutual recognition with Lithuania, Georgia, Israel, Serbia, Poland (updated version), etc. were worked out.

Within adjusting the national education system to the European Higher Education Area the international experience of recognition of informal learning is analyzed to develop the relevant national tools.

In 2014 the draft of amendments and changes to the Education Code was developed and sent to the Government, stipulating the following: the Ministry of Education shall maintain its function of qualifications recognition only for the professional purposes (in case there are no relevant international agreements). The function of foreign qualifications assessment for academic purposes is supposed to be completely assigned to educational institutions admitting students for training.

B. The Diploma Supplement and the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) are important transparency instruments for improving recognition and Ministers have committed to implementing both; in the case of the Diploma Supplement to deliver it automatically, free of charge and in a widely spoken language. Please describe the current state of implementation of these instruments in your country as well as your plans, priorities and timetable for further developments.

At present 100 % of graduates from HEIs of the Republic of Belarus receive the national supplement to a higher education diploma, which looks like a transcript with subjects, total number of academic hours and the number of credit units for each subject (since 2013).

In the Republic of Belarus the issue on introducing the national supplement to a higher education diploma, compliant with the European Diploma Supplement in its structure and content, was considered and approved by the Republican Rector's Conference in 2010. The National Institute for Higher Education developed in 2011 the National Supplement to Diploma in compliance with the European recommendations and submitted it for approval to the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Belarus.

In 2014 the draft of amendments and changes to the Education Code was developed and submitted, stipulating introduction of the Diploma Supplement instead of the effective national supplement to a higher education diploma, i.e. transcript from the credit and examination record. After the Parliament has approved these amendments in the Education Code, the National Supplement to Diploma correspondent to the structure and content of the European Diploma Supplement will be issued to all students.

The National Diploma Supplement correspondent to the structure and content of the European Diploma Supplement will:

- be in Belarusian, Russian and English;
- contain description of the national education system, qualifications, rights;
- include description of the educational process in credit units;
- contain information about the assessment system.

Implementation of the National Diploma supplement will allow to increase academic mobility of students from the Republic of Belarus and to provide complete information to perspective employers and other stakeholders about students' educational performance.

The national credit units as an element of the credit-module education were introduced in the national education system in 2003 for the first time, and then they were established in the second generation higher education standards. These credit units were an initial step to the adaptation of the national educational standards to the world requirements, and they were not in a full compliance with the ECTS requirements.

In 2011-2013 the National Institute for Higher Education developed a new national system of credit units adapted to the ECTS requirements. It is based on the following provisions:

- one credit unit equals 36-40 academic hours (1 academic hour is 40-45 minutes);
- a credit unit represent student's contact activities during lectures, laboratory, practical or seminar classes, other types of classes, as well as independent student work (preparing to exams, other knowledge assessment forms and techniques);
- credit units are accumulated for a student after testing his/her training performance results;

– the sum of credit units equals 60 per one academic year when acquiring higher education. This system of credit units was approved by Order of the Ministry of Education No. 405 dated from May 27, 2013 in the form of the Instruction for calculation the workload of higher education programs with application of credit units system, afterwards it was implemented and is used now in the educational standards of the first and second cycles of education. Since 2013 higher education institutions graduates have received diploma supplements with workload both in academic hours and credit units. Currently the developed system of credit units performs a transfer function and contributes to the participation of more students in international academic mobility. At the same time the traditional system of academic hours is continued in cases of domestic academic mobility inside the country.

The Republican Rector's Conference made a decision on October 9, 2014 to recommend the Ministry of Education to expand application of credit units system when organizing domestic academic mobility and to implement the function of credit units accumulation when training students in several education institutions.

Changes and amendments to the education Code, based on the recommendations of the Republican Rector's Conference, have been already sent to the Government (2014). They stipulate the following:

- making credit units the main unit for students' academic performance;
- using credit units when organizing transfer-re-admission of students in another education institution, another speciality or form of education as well as when organizing academic mobility;
- introducing an opportunity to accumulate credit units according to the results of student's learning of some individual courses in different higher education institutions.

³ Available at http://www.ehea.info/Uploads/Documents/ESG_3rdedition.pdf

⁴ A constantly updated overview of signatures and ratifications will be found at <http://conventions.coe.int/Treaty/Commun/ChercheSig.asp?NT=165&CM=8&CL=ENG>; this site should update automatically.

III. OTHER KEY AREAS

In addition to its structural reforms, the EHEA seeks to develop a common understanding and joint policies and guidelines in a number of other key areas of higher education policy. This part of the questionnaire seeks to assess the state of the implementation as well as the level of commitment of your country in two areas of key importance to making higher education in Europe both more attractive and more accessible to all.

1. Academic mobility

A. Please provide a description of the place of academic mobility, defined as the mobility of higher education staff and students, in your national higher education policy. Your description should comprise the current situation as well as your plans, priorities and timetable for further development. In particular, the description should outline your country's plans regarding the objective adopted by EHEA Ministers in 2009 of attaining 20 percent mobile graduates in the EHEA by 2020.

According to the monitoring survey carried out in the framework of the international project Eurostudent V, no less than 1 % of students from the Republic of Belarus are involved in short-term academic mobility. And quite many Belarusian young people acquire higher education abroad (e.g. over 30 thousand Belarusians study in Russia).

An opportunity for Belarusian nationals to get higher education in foreign higher education institutions is implemented in two main ways: training with acquisition of final qualification and a short-time training.

Few students, who are sent to the countries that signed with the Republic of Belarus the relevant agreements on cooperation in the field of education, acquire education at the expense of the national budget funds. Training is carried out in specialties, which are not available in the national higher education system. 100 students were sent for training abroad in the academic year of 2013-2014 (China, Russia, Lithuania, Spain, Germany, etc.).

Over 50 master's degree students are sent annually for one-year training in foreign higher education institutions at the expense of the national budget funds according to the Government's Program (Resolution of the Government of the Republic of Belarus No. 1617 dated from November 30, 2011).

Short-time training is carried out according to the agreements between HEIs, student's personal initiative as well as within implementation of exchange programs. Today there are over 2 thousand agreements signed between higher education institutions on mutual student exchange. Every year more than 1,500 students from Belarus go to foreign universities for training within the frameworks of academic mobility programs (for the period up to one year), for internships, externships, etc.

The priority entry countries (in descending order) are as follows: Germany, Russia, the United Kingdom, Poland, Ukraine, France, Sweden, China, Italy, and the Netherlands.

The activities of the Network CIS University (Belarus is presented by the Belarusian State University) and development of "double diploma" programs in national HEIs are aimed at the development of academic mobility. "Double diploma" programs (there are over 30 of them) have been developed in several higher education institutions with the universities from France, Russia, Norway since 1994.

Academic mobility is implemented primarily within the frameworks of the international educational programs (IAESTE, DAAD, COPERNICUS, ERASMUS MUNDUS, LINGUA, etc.), with support of governments of different countries as well as within the frameworks of international agreements and the ones between higher education institutions. Approximately 50 Belarusian students have internship and practice in foreign countries (England, Germany, Belgium, Spain) within the IASTE program.

Academic mobility of academic staff is organized only within the framework of inter-university agreements. Academic staff is sent to partner higher education institutions for delivering lectures, holding seminars and workshops, participating in scientific activities within joint science projects, implementing joint research projects.

Academic staff has an opportunity to participate in academic mobility individually organized and sponsored by foreign states, international foundations and programs.

The total number of academic staff involved in academic mobility is no more than 1 %.

The main reasons for low academic mobility level are related to low proficiency of foreign languages for efficient participation in academic mobility. To improve this situation, higher education institutions additionally opened foreign languages courses for academic staff and students (<http://edu.gov.by/ru/main.aspx?guid=18021&detail=117043>). Besides the mandatory requirement of final examination in foreign languages is introduced for all school graduates.

Proposals on including the provisions on mandatory domestic and international academic mobility of students and academic staff in legal acts were developed and submitted to the

Government in 2014 (decision of the Republican Rector's Conference No. 1 dated from October 9-10, 2014).

B. It is suggested that the description include reference to financial incentives, such as scholarships, grants and loans offered to staff and students wishing to go abroad for a period and incentives (financial or otherwise) offered to foreign staff and students wishing to spend a period in the country, as well as to whether loans and scholarships are portable.

The financial incentives for students of the Republic of Belarus to take part in academic mobility programs include the following:

- Resolution of the Government No. 1617 dated from November 30, 2011, where state funding is established for students trained abroad, including entry visa fees, tuition fees, accommodation and meals, health insurance, travel expenses to training location by air (twice), etc.;
- funding of students participating in mobility is covered by the university itself in case of participation in academic mobility within the frameworks of agreements between higher education institutions;
- in case of participation in academic mobility under international agreements on cooperation where the number of students sent for training is determined thereby, students are paid a scholarship according to the provisions of the international agreement;
- in case of participation in academic mobility within international programs, the financing terms provided in the international programs are in effect.

The State Program of Higher Education development for 2011-2015 aims at development of academic mobility, stipulating a number of actions, including funding activities, where the state is involved in sending the most gifted and talented students of the second cycle of higher education (master's degree) of the Republic of Belarus to train abroad.

In the Republic of Belarus exist different financial incentives for university teaching staff members to participate in academic mobility programs.

The National Program of Exports Development for 2011-2015 provides a number of activities aimed at attracting foreign students to the Republic of Belarus and increasing incoming mobility. The fact that the Republic of Belarus within a number of international agreements on cooperation committed itself to ensure scholarships and social support of foreign students can promote this program. The educational process for a number of specialities was organized in English as to improve higher education capacity in Belarus for foreign students.

As for foreign students so far the Republic of Belarus has not proposed any programs or scholarships with the national budget funding, however the legislation permits higher education institutions to do it (e.g. the Belarusian State University provides some foreign students with scholarships).

As for academic mobility of foreign academic staff in Belarus, there are financing tools proposed by the Government (Resolution of the Government No. 362 dated from May 10, 2013), which include funds for travel, accommodation and pay.

C. It is further suggested that the description refers to any specific impediments to mobility that you may have identified for your country as well as to how your country plans to overcome them.

Some specific impediments for expanding academic mobility in the country are the following:

- insufficient number of specialities where the language of instruction is English;
- insufficient number of joint educational programs;

- low level of awareness of educational services in the Republic of Belarus among foreign school graduates and perspective applicants;
 - insufficient number of student dormitories for accommodation of foreign students.
- As to tackle the above-mentioned impediments at present the following actions are undertaken:
- changes were introduced in the Education Code, stipulating establishment of the mandatory domestic and international academic mobility for university teachers and students;
 - higher education institutions expand the number of educational programs taught in English;
 - higher education institutions expand the number of joint educational programs and network forms of education;
 - construction of all dormitory buildings in the Student Campus in Minsk are being completed currently;
 - changes were introduced in the Education Code, stipulating entitlement of HEIs to establish international scholarships for foreign students;
 - additional programs of foreign languages courses for university academic staff and students are organized in higher education institutions;
 - state funding for academic mobility of students and academic staff is provided in the State Higher Education Development Program for 2011-2015.

2. The Social Dimension of Higher Education

Work to strengthen the social dimension of higher education aims at realizing the aspiration expressed by the EHEA Ministers at their 2007 meeting that “the student body entering, participating in and completing higher education at all levels should reflect the diversity of our populations”. Please describe the social support mechanisms for students in your country.

Please provide a description of the main achievements in strengthening the social dimension of higher education in your country as well as of the main challenges in strengthening it further, including your priorities, plans and timetable in this respect.

It is suggested the description comprises an outline of the social composition of the student body in your country, including an overview of possible under-represented groups and whether your country has any national targets for access and completion in higher education of students from under-represented groups. In this context, it may be relevant to describe whether there are systematic differences between study programs and/or institutions (e.g. in terms of the profile of study programs or the geographical location of the institutions within the country) and whether there are national or institutional strategies in place for making the student body reflect the diversity of your national population. A description of current data collection in this area as well as plans and timetable for further improving such data collection would also be welcomed.

Access to higher education is established in the legislation of the Republic of Belarus. The Constitution of the Republic of Belarus guarantees equal access to higher education on a competitive basis. The decree of the President of the Republic of Belarus approving the unified Rules for Admission to Higher Education Institutions of the Republic of Belarus, establishes equal access to higher education for both nationals of the Republic of Belarus and foreign nationals. The nationals of Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan are

entitled to get higher education at the expense of the national budget funds of the Republic of Belarus.

Admission terms for nationals of the Republic of Belarus to higher education institutions do not contain any discriminatory norms or practices. All nationals independent of their sex, social status, residence location have equal terms for entering and training in higher education institutions. Privileges when competing for higher education are stipulated for some categories of applicants (children with disabilities, orphans, winners of subject Olympiads, etc.).

The social composition of students:

62.8% of students are female;

15.2 thousand foreign students (Turkmenistan, Russia, China, etc.);

1.8 thousand orphans;

1.6 thousand people with disabilities (PWD);

14 thousand people affected by Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant disaster;

36% students are trained at the expense of the national budget funds.

There is a system of beneficial loaning of higher education acquisition for people from low-income families, established by the legislation. As a rule, students, who pay tuition fees, pay no more than 65 % of the total cost, the rest of the sum is compensated by the state.

Annually after admission campaign the collection of statistical data is carried out and further discussed by the Board of the Ministry of Education, and afterwards tools for improvement of the next year admission campaign are developed. The information on the current year admission campaign is available at the website of the Ministry of Education (<http://edu.gov.by/ru/sm.aspx?guid=1311473>).

All higher education institutions created a non-barrier (accessible) open environment for students with disabilities.

In the process of acquiring higher education at the expense of the national budget funds students get scholarships (among which there can be honorary, study, social, special scholarships and personal scholarships assigned by the council of a higher education institution). Some categories of students, including the ones paying tuition fees, who have average performance lower than established for a scholarship, can be entitled to social allowance (orphans; people with disabilities; students having children; students from the areas affected by Chernobyl Nuclear power plant disaster; etc.).

Non-resident students are provided with accommodation in student dormitories. When renting accommodation out of student dormitories the state partially reimburses rent expenses.

All students are entitled to free use of libraries, sports infrastructure of higher education institutions, etc.

The system of collecting and providing statistical data in the education system and composition of students has been formed in the Republic of Belarus. Access to the statistics is open at the Ministry of Education website (<http://giac.unibel.by/ru/main.aspx?guid=14521>).

IV. VALUES AND FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES

The European Higher Education Area is characterized by major areas of policy reform and by being based on a number of fundamental values of European societies and their academic tradition. In addition to the policy areas covered in sections II and III above, this section of the questionnaire addresses three further values underlying the EHEA.

1. Academic freedom and institutional autonomy

Please describe the fundamental values underlying your higher education system and provision. It is suggested that the description includes an outline of the legal provisions concerning academic freedom and institutional autonomy as well as a description of how these fundamental values are ensured in practice. It is further suggested that reference be made to provisions of the Magna Charta Universitatum⁵ in this respect.

The values of the national higher education system are the following:

- equal rights of nationals to acquire higher education, its accessibility. It is ensured by various requirements and conditions established in the legislation for the acquisition of higher education, social support of vulnerable groups of nationals, introduction of special conditions for education of people with disabilities. At the same time the state promotes development of the private education system founded on tuition fees and provided to people interested in higher education on a tuition-fee basis;
- free higher education in state-owned higher education institutions for all nationals according to the enrollment competition results. The state allocates approx. 5 % of GDP to develop the national education system, conditions for out-of-budget activities by higher education institutions are created with all profits at the disposal of higher education institutions. Every year the Ministry of Education agrees upon the planned number of applicants for admission to every speciality of each higher education institution financed by the state. In state-owned higher education institutions 143 thousand students (36 %) in the academic year of 2013-2014 were trained at the expense of the national budget funds;
- state and public (community-based) nature of education governance, ensuring participation of state authorities and other organizations, including public (civil initiative) associations in development of the higher education system. While preserving the basic role of the Ministry of Education in governing the education system, still a number of powers and functions were transferred to other organizations, including public (community-based, civil initiatives) ones: the Republican Rector's Conference, regional Rector's Conferences, the organizations and agencies ensuring functioning of the higher education system, educational and methodological associations in the field of higher education, the leading higher education institutions. These powers include the following: development of recommendations for the field of higher education, consideration of nominees for positions of HEI heads, content design and admission campaign, assessment of foreign educational qualifications, scientific and methodological support of higher education development, development and improvement of higher education programs content, agreement upon manuscripts of manuals and textbooks and drafting conclusions on reasons for opening new specialities, etc.;
- humane, individual and differentiation approaches to higher education, its independence of political and ideological impact preventing objective scientific knowledge acquisition. It is ensured by mandatory study of social and humanities subjects in the initial years of higher education (10-12 % of all subjects within a 5-year training period), by an education focus on meeting the demands of nationals and community for personal development, by secular nature of educational activities, by upbringing activities of higher education institutions, including the formation of moral values among nationals, healthy lifestyle, citizenship, patriotism, sense of responsibility and hard work. The legislation of the Republic of Belarus prohibits political and religious activities in education institutions both for students and university teachers. This restriction is not applied for the above-mentioned people at out-of-class out-of-work) time;
- integration into the global educational area maintaining and developing traditions of the national education system. The Republic of Belarus is an active and consequent participant in formation of the education area within the Commonwealth of Independent States, the

Eurasian Economic Union, the Union State of Belarus and Russia. The national education system supports and implements all UN initiatives in the field of education.

Lack of the status of a member-state of the European Higher Education Area does not allow the national higher education system to completely align the processes of higher education modernization with similar processes in the EHEA.

- empowerment and expansion of responsibilities of higher education institutions. It is ensured by entitlement of a higher education institution to independent determining the content of an optional part of the higher education standard (now it is 40 %, it is planned to make it 50 % in 2015, and as for master's course specialities now it is 70 %), to developing elective student courses, to joining international associations (consortiums), to selecting teaching staff members, to forming innovative structural units, etc.

Further expansion of rights and responsibilities of universities is provided by changes and amendments in the Education Code (2014):

- increasing the number of student elective courses developed and approved by the higher education institution;
- providing the higher education institution with the right to independently define 50 % of training content at the first cycle of higher education;
- providing the higher education institution with the right to independently define the content of training within the framework of a speciality in the higher education institution;
- increasing economic autonomy of higher education institutions for allocation of funds without agreeing upon it with financial authorities of the country.

According to the Magna Charta Universitatum:

- the universities are located in each region of the Republic of Belarus and play a role of scientific and methodological centres in the location. As a rule, the university research activities aim at meeting needs and demands (economic, scientific, social and cultural) of the regions and of the Republic of Belarus, in general. As to achieve the best effect, higher education institutions located in near-border regions, are active in interacting with foreign partners, join the relevant inter-state regional associations (the Program “Baltic University”, the Baltic Sea Region University Partnership (BSRUN), the Central European Initiative University Network (CEI UniNet), the Inter-University Centre for Research and Cooperation in Eastern and South-Eastern Europe (CIRCEOS)). Taking into account the fact that for a majority of higher education institutions 50 % of their budget is formed from funds the higher education institution earns, it is possible to speak about a relative economic autonomy. At the same time, the mechanism of appointment for a position of a head of a higher education institution by the Ministry of Education is still in practice (under agreement with the President of the Republic of Belarus or the Minister of Education), but in general, it meets the demands of domestic policy of the state in these conditions;

- in higher education institutions of Belarus research activities of university students and teachers are unalienable from the educational process. Students within the process of higher education acquisition have to carry out a number of research works when completing each year of training (a course project, a course paper) and when completing the relevant cycle of education (a diploma project (paper), a master's thesis) with the relevant procedure of defence of the work done. Besides, student research activities are organized on voluntary basis by professors and members of the National Academy of Sciences in each higher educational institution. In the academic year of 2013-2014 there were 98 student research laboratories, research and development offices, over 1,000 scientific circles functioning in higher education institutions;

- the higher education program establishes requirements to the content of subjects (a university teacher has the right to change 30 % by him/herself), being a mandatory component for studies in the process of higher education acquisition. These requirements for a specific subject are presented as a thematic plan of the relevant educational program.

The above-mentioned programs are composed by the most distinguished university teachers

of the relevant subjects, revised and reviewed by representatives of higher education institutions and approved by the Ministry of Education as samples for designing university programs. The term of validity of such sample subject programs is up to 5 years, but their revision can be initiated at any time by university teachers. The designed sample subject programs are recommended to be applied in all higher education institutions where teaching of the relevant subjects is performed;

– to ensure research freedom, higher education institutions within their financing capacity contribute to the material and technical support of the relevant research trends meeting the activities of the higher education institutions. As to make applied research in higher education institutions active, the State Program of Higher Education Development for 2011-2015 the funding is provided for study and laboratory base update in each HEI. Today the majority of higher education institutions provide university teachers and students with an open access to Internet resources and e-bases of international science publications;

– selection of the university teaching staff members is carried out according to the legislation by organizing and holding a call of proposals for the relevant vacancy. Among the requirements to a nominee there is a requirement to be involved in organizing and participating in research activities by the HEI. Representatives of the university teaching staff with a scientific degree (equivalents of PhD and Dr) should also submit an annual report to the head of the higher education institution on the carried out scientific and research activities, which allows them to apply for additional financial allowance;

– a higher education institution organizes training and upbringing processes according to the established requirements to implementing educational and upbringing programs. Every student before he/ she starts training gets familiarized with the Rules of the higher education internal regulations he/she abides to follow, containing rights and obligations of university teachers, students and the higher education institution itself. The higher education institution shall guarantee observing students' freedoms as established by the Rules of the higher education institution internal regulations. The education institution also organizes cultural, leisure and sports activities free of charge for students as to help them achieve their cultural and educational goals;

– mutual information and research projects exchange is carried out by higher education institutions of the Republic of Belarus by means of taking part in international student and university organizations as well as by participating in international scientific and research projects and programs. Higher education institutions of the Republic of Belarus are presented in the Eurasian university Association (EuAsUA), the Central European Initiative University Network (CEI UniNet), the International Association for Exchange of Students for Technical Skills Acquisition (IAESTE), the European Association of Universities (EAU), etc. In 2013 higher education institutions conducted 900 fundamental and applied scientific researches, implemented 12 projects aimed at creating and developing innovative infrastructure. Higher education institutions maintain partner relations in the field of scientific and engineering interaction with educational and research organizations from 58 countries of the world (700 agreements), participate in implementation of over 130 international projects (the 7th Framework Program, Erasmus+ , etc.);

– Mobility empowerment of university students and teachers is carried out within the frameworks of inter-university agreements (there are over 2 thousand agreements) as well as within the framework of academic exchange programs Erasmus+, the German Academic exchange Service (DAAD), and “double diploma” programs.

None of the higher education institutions as of November 1, 2014 joined the Magna Charta Universitatum. However, on November 3, 2014 it is planned to hold the international seminar for the administrative staff of HEIs of the Republic of Belarus on issues of joining the Magna Charta Universitatum by Belarusian universities with the President of Observing Office of the Magna Charta Universitatum Sijbolt J. Noorda and members of the Council of the Magna Charta Universitatum.

2. Public responsibility for higher education

EHEA Ministers have twice – in 2001 and 2003 – stated that higher education is a public good and a public responsibility. Please describe how the public responsibility for higher education is organized and put in practice in your national higher education system. It is suggested that the description comprises a consideration of the role and responsibilities of various actors as well as a consideration of the main challenges in this area and your plans, priorities and timetable for meeting these challenges.

Public (state) responsibility in the field of higher education is primarily implemented by the Ministry of Education.

The Ministry of Education:

- establishes the structure of cycles of higher education and the relevant requirements to them in higher education standards;
- determines the structure and content of specialities and qualifications of higher education by way of forming and record-keeping of the unified classifier “Specialities and Qualifications” (OKRB 011-2009);
- opens (changes/ cancels) specialities, including new specialities and qualifications under the request from a higher education institution;
- bears responsibility for holding admission campaigns and ensuring equal access to higher education;
- finances higher education specialities in state-owned higher education institutions;
- finances manuals and textbooks design and development for further publication;
- carries out licensing of educational activities, establishes education quality criteria and carries out state accreditation of higher education institutions;
- determines volume of funds and material technical support for the sectoral state-owned higher education institutions;
- establishes limits for the tuition fees;
- carries out the state human resources policy in the field of higher education;
- ensures organizing and conducting fundamental and applied researches, promotes implementation of their results and findings in various fields of economy, development of innovative activities;

The Ministry of Finance:

- determines the volume of annual funding of the education system (in 2014 – 4.8 % of GDP). The national budget expenditures for higher education in 2014 equal 13.2 % of the funds allocated for the whole education system;

The Government:

- defines guarantees and compensations to students;
- bears responsibility for carrying out target training of students for branches of economy and social sector with a sustainable lack of specialists;

Other state authorities:

- develop a forecast of perspective demand for specialists with higher education;
- ensure the first job placement.

There are the following challenges:

- study, laboratory, material and technical base of higher education institutions is not in full compliance with the contemporary requirements for training specialists (especially in engineering and natural sciences specialities), and conducting relevant researches;
- imbalance between training specialists and the demand available for them in various branches of economy and social sector;
- insufficient funding of the education system and research activities;

- partial compensation of expenses for training students, who pay tuition fees.
- As to solve the above-mentioned problems the following is carried out:
- the State Higher Education development Program for 2011-2015 stipulates allocation of funds for updating study, laboratory, material and technical base of higher education institutions;
 - the production sites and base of perspective employers are used to increase practice-focused training of specialists with higher education;
 - changes are introduced in the Education Code stipulating state financing of the education system at 8 % of GDP.

3. Cooperation among stakeholders and student participation

Within the EHEA, higher education policies are developed in partnership between public authorities, the higher education community and other stakeholders. Please provide a description of who you see as the main stakeholders in higher education in your country, how these stakeholders are involved in developing higher education at present and what you see as the main challenges in this area, including your plans, priorities and timetable for addressing the challenges. In view of the fundamental role of student participation, the description should be explicit on the role of students in higher education governance at both institutional and system level, including whether student representatives are elected by the student body and whether there is an independent, democratic and representative national student union open to all students.

Functioning and developing the national higher education system is carried out in close partnership among state authorities in the field of state administration of education, the academic community, employers and general public.

The main stakeholders in the field of higher education are students, academic staff and employers.

Academic staff is involved in higher education development by way of participation in activities of educational and methodological associations in the field of higher education, which improve the education content, introduce recommendations for opening new specialities, provide consultations on education quality improvement. At the higher education institution level academic staff fulfills its powers by participating in the self-governing body of the higher education institution – the Council of the education institution. The Council of the education institution: takes decisions on development prospects and improvement of the education institution structure, on formation of the student composition, on organization of the educational process, on development of science and cooperation with partner organizations, etc. Members of the education institution Council are elected by the university academic staff. The Council decisions are mandatory for all staff members and students of the education institution. A number of administrative and governing functions is carried out by the university teachers by way of their participation in sectoral professional (trade unions) unions and associations: regulation of social and labor relations, establishment of time norms for calculating the workload, etc.

The employers are involved in higher education system development by participation in formation of higher education standards, participation in activities of the councils of education institutions, providing requests for training specialists in the relevant majors, participation in the final assessment of students' knowledge. An organization within the framework of the agreement on cooperation with the higher education institution ("basic organization") is obliged to organize externships and internships (practices) for students, to hold practical classes with them, to develop material technical and social cultural bases of the higher education institution.

Students take part in governing higher education primarily at the higher education institution level. The legislation stipulates that the share of students in the higher education institution council (faculty council) shall be 25 % of the number of the council members. Students representatives are elected by raising hands or by secret ballot in student training groups, student associations according to the Statute of the higher education institution. In the capacity of council members, students have equal rights with university teachers to govern the higher education institution, to participate in decision-making and implementing administrative decisions.

Insufficient participation of students in decision-making in the field of higher education can be resolved by introduction of university education quality management systems, which allows students as stakeholders to influence the teaching quality and to ensure education quality assessment after their training.

Within the recent two years participation of stakeholders in the decision-making process related to optimization of the higher education policy has been expanding. This tool is implemented by crowd sourcing (e.g., when developing changes and amendments to be introduced in the Education Code of the Republic of Belarus in 2013, when making a comprehensive analysis of the higher education system in 2014).

Student self-governance in higher education institutions is presented by student public organizations and associations, collegiate student bodies and student formations:

student public (community-based) organizations, associations (the primary organization of the Belarusian Republican Youth Union, the primary student professional (trade) union); collegiate student bodies, including faculty committees, student professional union, faculties professional (trade union) bureau, labor affairs headquarters, volunteers council, faculty student self-governance councils, faculty monitors, student councils in dormitories, monitors' council of foreign students;

student formations include volunteer teams; student teams, including labor, teaching teams, etc.; editorials boards of newspapers; youth information group, initiative groups; temporary creative groups and teams, etc.

The higher body of student self-governance is the student steering (coordination) council (Students' Conference).

The number of student self-governing bodies in higher education institutions of the Republic of Belarus is 2,392 (in 2014), with 70,453 students participating in them (2014).

The main activities of student self-governing bodies include the following: advocacy of interests of students in interactions with the higher education institution administration, student campus administration, faculty deans; social protection of students; holding cultural and entertaining programs and actions; development of international contacts in the field of training, research and leisure-time activities.

The student self-governing university council is entitled to initiate, participate in the discussion, in organization and coordination of issues on training, research, working and information activities of the university, issues on living conditions of students, to delegate its representatives to the university Council with the capacity to vote.

Specialized elected collegiate student councils were established in a number of higher education institutions: the Student Education Quality Council (the Belarusian State University), the Student Rector's Board (Grodno State University named after Ya. Kupala), the Student Guild (the International State Ecological University named after A.D. Sakharov). For instance, the objective of the Student Education Quality Council is to promote education quality improvement, to raise culture of mutual relations between the educational process participants, to observe academic freedoms and obligations, to develop self-governing principles.

In the Republic of Belarus the Republican Student Council of the Belarusian Republican Youth Union is the official body advocating students' interests. Its goal is to make the role of studentship in developing higher education, improving the educational process and its

quality active. Representatives of student councils from every higher education institution are members of the Republican Student Council.

Student self-governance in Belarusian higher education institutions is currently undergoing its active stage of formation connected with search for the most suitable forms meeting the contemporary environment of development of the Belarusian society and the demands of students.

Taking into account the challenges in the public-private partnership in the field of higher education, a draft of changes and amendments to the Education Code was developed and submitted to the Government in 2014. The draft stipulates the following:

- creation of conditions for formation of additional social institutes for public-private partnership in the field of education;
- activity of employers' qualification councils;
- wider students' involvement in education quality management by their involvement in accreditation commissions;
- wider employer's engagement in the educational process and his/her impact on the training content.

⁵ http://www.bologna-bergen2005.no/Docs/00-Main_doc/880918_Magna_Charta_Universitatum.pdf