

March 12, 2015, № 02-25/689/дс

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

Dear Ms. Harutyunyan!

The Ministry of Education of the Republic of Belarus is writing this letter to the Secretariat in connection with the forthcoming consideration of our application for joining the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). We would like to ask Secretariat to inform all stakeholders about the actions and policies taken by the Belarusian Party.

Currently Belarusian higher education is going through a very important period of its development. The consistent evolutionary reforms are being held within the framework of the National Program for Development of Higher Education of the Republic of Belarus for the period of 2011-2015. In the flow of this process we are trying to provide the balance between the national interests and the implementation of the Bologna process principles.

Preparing for joining the EHEA Belarus has taken considerable steps: multi-cycle education has been introduced, the basics of the modular-credit system have been elaborated, university academic freedoms have been expanded, international ties of higher education institutions of Belarus has been strengthened, the legislation has been improved. Special emphasis has been made on introducing a learner-centered approach and promoting the students' active role in the educational process.

At present the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Belarus is working on the National Program of Higher Education Development of the Republic of Belarus for the period of 2016-2020. This Program will stipulate, in particular, legislative initiatives and financial support to implement the EHEA principles in Belarus.

The strategic goals of this Program are: all-round measures to adjust the degree cycles of higher education in line with the Bologna process principles, modular-credit system implementation, expanding the international academic mobility, enhancing and strengthening the dialogue with all higher education stakeholders; developing the higher education quality management system; enhancing the role of employers in training of specialists, practical application of the National Qualifications framework, etc. Complete set of goals and measures will be worked out while designing the above-mentioned National Program.

At the same time a number of priority measures to implement the EHEA in the near future can be outlined now. The list of these tasks is attached to this letter and can be viewed as a 'Road Map' for the short-term perspective.

The Bologna process, as we see it, is a consistent and continuous reform and dialogue with all stakeholders. We intend to keep sticking to this understanding in future. While reforming the national system of education following the principles of transparency, dialogue and continuous development, we are ready to cooperate with our EHEA partners. Their support and assistance has been and will always be accepted with great respect and gratitude.

It's our pleasure to point out that we do feel permanent attention of the Secretariat and the Bologna Follow-Up Group (BFUG) to our activities related to joining the European Higher Education Area. The evidence of that are the seminars held in Minsk in November 2014 and March 2015 with the Council of Europe support and with the participation of BFUG experts and representatives of European organizations whom we are sincerely grateful to.

We would like to express hope that our efforts to implement the Bologna principles will be appreciated by the EHEA members, and our willingness to become a EHEA member will be supported by the BFUG and the Bologna Ministerial Conference.

We will be grateful to the Secretariat for sharing this letter with all stakeholders and interested organizations.

We avail ourselves of this opportunity to renew the assurances of our highest consideration.

Minister of Education
of the Republic of Belarus

Mikhail Zhuravkov

Attachment to the letter from
Mikhail Zhuravkov
Minister of Education of the
Republic of Belarus
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ROAD MAP
for Implementation of the European Higher Education Area Tools (2015-2018)

Strategic Goal 1. Designing higher education reform program (the National Program of the Higher Education Development in 2016-2020)

Establishing and fixing the norms ensuring the legislation framework for further implementation of the European Higher Education Area structural components in the legal acts of the Republic of Belarus (The Code of Education and other legislative acts regulating the education sector). The focus will be on the re-design of higher education cycles (introducing Bachelor's and Master's degrees and programs of the integrated Master's courses), completion of the National Qualifications Framework, implementation of the European supplement to higher education certificates (Diploma Supplement), defining the criteria for the assessment for educational achievements, establishment of the framework for the transition to the common European model of higher education quality assurance, implementation of the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS), expansion and differentiation of academic mobility, introducing a learner-centered to the educational process and developing students' active role in the training process.

Developing and approving the national action plan for further implementation of the European Higher Education Area tools by the Government of the Republic of Belarus in the form of the State Program of Higher Education Development for the period of 2016-2020.

Implementation tools.

Approval of the National Program by the Government of the Republic of Belarus, including the financial support of activities for the implementation of the EHEA tools, introduction of amendments and modifications to the Education Code of the Republic of Belarus and amendments to other legal acts regulating the education sector of the Republic of Belarus.

Expected implementation period: starting from 2016.

Strategic Goal 2. Intensifying the dialogue with students about reforms of higher education

Supporting the National Student Council under the Minister of Education and creating new platforms for intensifying the dialogue with students about the challenges and models of higher education development.

Providing conditions for expansion of student participation and involvement in the education system management at various levels. Activating the role of students in

public-private partnership in higher education as well as in insuring higher education quality.

Implementation tools. The following is expected:

Holding seminars and round table discussions aimed at developing the dialogue and interaction with students. Using opportunities provided by the European Student Union, the European University Association and other international organizations working in the field of education. Providing support to students when developing an independent national report on implementation of the European Higher Education Area tools in the national higher education system.

Support to students participating in design of external and internal higher education quality assurance systems. Enrollment of student organizations' representatives in activities of accreditation commissions.

Expected implementation period: starting from 2015.

Strategic Goal 3. Development of academic mobility

Intensifying academic mobility and improving of the modular-credit system.

Expansion of academic mobility at the individual and institutional levels, of its quality assurance and diversification of its types and scope. By 2020 approximately 20 % of students from higher education institutions should be involved in academic mobility. Sufficient funding for students to ensure equal access to and opportunities of academic mobility. Creating conditions for the development and facilitation of the practices and experience of implementing joint educational programs.

Implementation tools.

Providing conditions for academic mobility participants' language training. Shaping the model of large-scale academic mobility inside the country. Increasing public funding of academic mobility at Master's level. Providing higher education institutions with the right to introduce independent academic mobility models. Lowering academic mobility barriers (simplification of the procedures for granting permissions to students to study abroad). Providing legal recognition of the academic mobility achievements. Expanding the practices of applying ECTS. Developing joint educational programs.

Expected implementation period: starting from 2016.

Strategic Goal 4. Further development of the higher education quality assurance system

Higher education quality assurance system optimization to increase mobility and to adapt educational programs to the labor market demands and students' needs. Expanding the number of participants of this process by involving all stakeholders, primarily, students and prospective employers.

Implementing the the "Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the EHEA" in the national quality assurance system. Developing the dialogue with the European partners (ENQA/EQAR/EUA). Creating alternative quality assurance systems. Implementing international accreditation practices and independent public accreditation of higher education programs.

Implementation tools. The following is planned:

Dialogue-forum with EQAR, ENQA and the European University Association on the higher education quality assurance models. Providing students' participation in shaping the external and internal higher education quality assurance systems. Open accessibility for students to take part in accreditation commissions activities as full members of the quality assurance process.

Uploading and posting open-access reports on results of external and internal education quality assurance audits (at the institutional level).

To discuss alternative quality assurance systems at the institutional level the Consortium of four European partners (representing German, Austrian, Danish and Croatian universities) and Belarusian and Armenian universities with education authorities have developed an Erasmus+ Proposal: "Modernization through Implementation – the Bologna Process in Armenia and Belarus" for 2015-2017.

Expected implementation period: starting from 2016.

Strategic Goal 5. Transition to the assessment of the educational process based on students' achievements

Putting into wide practice the ECTS and issuing the Diploma Supplement. Developing strong links of the academic credits with both students' achievements and workload. Ensuring quality higher education for all students, increasing employability of graduates and mobility for improving education.

Implementation tools.

Ensuring legal framework for the credit system and a perspective of issuing Diploma Supplement. Organizing information and methodological seminars on design of educational programs with international experts' participation. Elaborating the new generation educational standards.

Expected implementation period: starting from 2015.

Strategic Goal 6. Implementation of the National Qualifications Framework

Shaping and legal recognition of the National Qualifications Framework compliant with the European Qualifications Framework. Making higher education majors (specialties) of the Republic of Belarus compatible with the International Standard Classification of Education. Ensuring links between the education sector and labor market. Increasing competitive capacity of higher education institution graduates at the labor market.

Implementation tools.

Updating the National System of Specialties and Qualifications by reviewing the National Classifier of Specialties and Qualifications for the purpose of consolidation of classification units. Design of educational profiles in accordance with the Fields of Education and Training -2013 within the International Standard Classification of Education-2011. Focusing all specialties (name, objectives and content) on professional activities linked to the economic ones. Self-certification of the results of implementing the experimental National Qualifications System for the IT and public administration sectors. Completing the design of the National Qualifications Framework for all sectors and fields.

Expected implementation period: starting from 2016.

Strategic Goal 7. Extending rights and responsibilities of higher education institutions

Expanding cooperation between the main stakeholders of the higher education system to improve the quality of the education content and to make it compliant with the consumers' requirements. Creating conditions for the timely update of the education content and response of higher education institutions to the labor market demands. Shaping a variety of educational programs and flexible ways of education acquisition.

Implementation tools. The following is planned:

Introducing amendments and modifications in legal acts to extend rights and responsibilities of higher education institutions in their activities to provide the scientific and methodological support of the educational process. Empowering the higher education institutions with the right to independently make decisions on the training directions within the framework of the given specialty instead of the existing rigid system of specialties and specializations. Increasing (up to 50 %) the ratio of the higher education curriculum developed by the higher education institution. Excluding the detailed description of the state component in educational standards (a list of mandatory disciplines, their hour load and detailed content). Expanding the number of elective disciplines.

Expected implementation period: starting from 2016.

Strategic Goal 8. Establishing the institute of European Higher Education Area providers

Setting a steady trend towards implementation of the EHEA tools in the higher education institutions activities. Establishing the institute of the Bologna Process providers and their professional training for performance of these activities at the institutional level.

Implementation tools. Inviting international experts from EHEA member states to deliver continuing professional development programs for the target group consisting of the representatives of higher education institutions. Establishing the "Bologna Academy" with participation of the European partners in the National Institute of Higher Education.

Expected implementation period: starting from 2016.

Strategic Goal 9. Improving data collection and ensuring transparency of the higher education system functioning

Improvement of the quality of data and information related to higher education. Creating a monitoring system to provide collection of data that will reflect the development and reforming of higher education in compliance with the EHEA principles.

Implementation tools.

Publishing of the National reports on higher education in the Republic of Belarus including information about implementation of the Bologna process principles. Participation in the European monitoring research and surveys (Eurostudent, etc.). Creating a website about membership of Belarus in the European

Higher Education Area. Uploading information on the websites of higher education institutions about the processes of implementing the EHEA tools.

Expected implementation period: starting from 2015.

Strategic Goal 10. Wider access to quality higher education

Increase of the ratio of students who successfully graduate from a higher education institution. Raising the national budget funds to enlarge the number of students for the second cycle of higher education. Making Master's cycle more attractive and popular. Creating conditions for providing educational services in higher education institutions in Belarusian and foreign languages. Extending opportunities for population groups in need of social support to get higher education.

Implementation tools.

Introducing amendments and modifications in legal acts regulating the ratio of graduate (master's) students funded from the national budget. Creating the list of positions (jobs) which would require the master's degree. Introducing distant (online) admissions to higher education institutions. Developing distant (online) training for all cycles of higher education. Creating conditions to conduct education in higher education institutions in the Belarusian and English languages. Enlisting activities for creating non-barrier (inclusive) environment in higher education institutions in the National sub-program of the higher education development for the period of 2016-2020.

Expected implementation period: starting from 2017.