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INTERNATIONALIZATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION: IMPLEMENTATION EXPERIENCE IN BELARUSIAN TRADE AND ECONOMICS UNIVERSITY OF CONSUMER COOPERATIVES

The article presents the experience of implementation of higher education internationalization in Belarusian Trade and Economics University of Consumer Cooperatives, factors influencing higher education internationalization, and directions of its development.

В статье рассматривается опыт реализации интернационализации высшего образования в Белорусском торгово-экономическом университете потребительской кооперации, факторы, оказывающие влияние на интернационализацию высшего образования, и направления ее развития.

Key words: higher education; internationalization; international activity; international project; export of educational services.

Ключевые слова: высшее образование; интернационализация; международная деятельность; международный проект; экспорт образовательных услуг.

Introduction

Belarusian Trade and Economics University of Consumer Cooperatives (BTEU) has been successfully cooperating with Seville University (Spain) over a number of years. This long-term cooperation has enabled us to implement a number of joint international projects:

“Upgrading the Management at the Belarusian Trade and Economics University of Consumer Cooperatives to EU Quality Standards” TEMPUS Programme (2008–2010);

“Internationalization in Central Asia and the Eastern Neighboring Area” – ICAEN TEMPUS Programme (2012–2015);

“Development of approaches to harmonization of a comprehensive internationalization strategies in higher education, research and innovation at EU and Partner Countries” – HARMONY ERASMUS+ Programme (2016–2019).

HARMONY project is of a particular importance in the listed projects. It was developed to increase the attractiveness of the higher education space, strengthen the integration of education, science and innovation, as well as strengthen the internationalization of higher education systems in accordance with basic provisions of the Bologna process. The project is currently being implemented.

International project activity has given a serious impetus to development of internationalization process at BTEU, and this experience is actively disseminated by the university at various levels, including the highest ones. For example, materials on internationalization of higher education in Belarus, highlighting the place of BTEU in this process, were twice submitted for consideration to the Presidium of the Republican Council of Rectors of HEIs of the Republic of Belarus:

- On experience of development and implementation of internationalization strategy for universities in the Republic of Belarus (22.02.2017);
- On activities of higher education institutions for development of service export in context of the Concept of the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Belarus for 2018–2020 (28.02.2018).

Problems and ways of implementing the directions of internationalization of higher education at BTEU were reported at the following international research conferences:

- International research and methodological conference «Open Distance Education as a form of manifestation of globalization: experience, problems and prospects» (16 September, 2016), Karaganda Economic University of Kazpotrebsoyuz, Kazakhstan, 2016 [1];

- International research and practical conference “150 years of Ukrainian Consumer Cooperatives: appreciating the past denoting the future” (13–14 December 2016), dedicated to 150th anniversary after establishment of the first consumer society in Ukraine and 200th anniversary after founding of Lviv University of Trade and Economics, Lviv University of Trade and Economics, Ukraine, 2016 [2];

- International research conference “Education and Sport in epoch of Potency and Happiness” (9–10 November 2017), Turkmen State Institute of Economics and Management, Turkmenistan, 2017 [3];

- International research and practical conference “Modern Trends in Education and Science: condition and prospects” (16 March 2018), Karaganda Economic University of Kazpotrebsoyuz, Kazakhstan, 2018 [4];

- International research and practical conference “International Cooperation of HEIs as Important Factor in Improving of Education Quality”, (19–20 June 2018), Tajik State University of Law, Business and Politics, Tajikistan, 2018;

- International research and practical online conference “Research Days–2018” (4–5 April 2018), Siberian University of Consumer Cooperatives, Russia, 2018.

Internationalization of higher education at the present stage of development of the world community is becoming global and multidimensional in nature. A number of factors influence the formation and development of this process:

1. Significant severization of requirements to the level of professional training and availability of international competencies among specialists.

2. Impact of demographic trends, since due to the decrease in the total number of school graduates, internationalization makes it possible to compensate for reduction in the number of students in universities through the export of educational services.

3. Intensive development of modern technologies, methods and innovations in higher education.

Researchers of the problems of international education give many definitions to the meaning of “internationalization”. The most succinct and frequently cited definition of internationalization of higher education was proposed by Canadian researcher Jane Knight: internationalization in the field of education is defined as the process of integrating of international intercultural and global aspect into goals, functions and methods of providing higher education [5].

Internationalization has acquired a special relevance for higher education in the Republic of Belarus taking into account the country’s inclusion in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). Beginning from 2015 the higher education system is gradually reorganized according to the requirements set out in the Roadmap for development of the system of higher education in the Republic of Belarus.

Internationalization of higher education for Belarusian universities is currently an essential resource for improving competitiveness and prestige not only in national but also in international scientific and educational area. The lag in this issue is a threat of non-compliance with modern permanently increasing requirements for a higher education institution. Today universities as well as in many other fields of activity, must assume a part of responsibility not only for internationalization of their activities, but also for internationalization of economy, culture and other areas of state activity. At the same time, the path of each university can be connected with the choice of one of known directions and forms of internationalization, or with a combination of these directions and forms depending on their specifics, an actual assessment of available resources and prioritization.

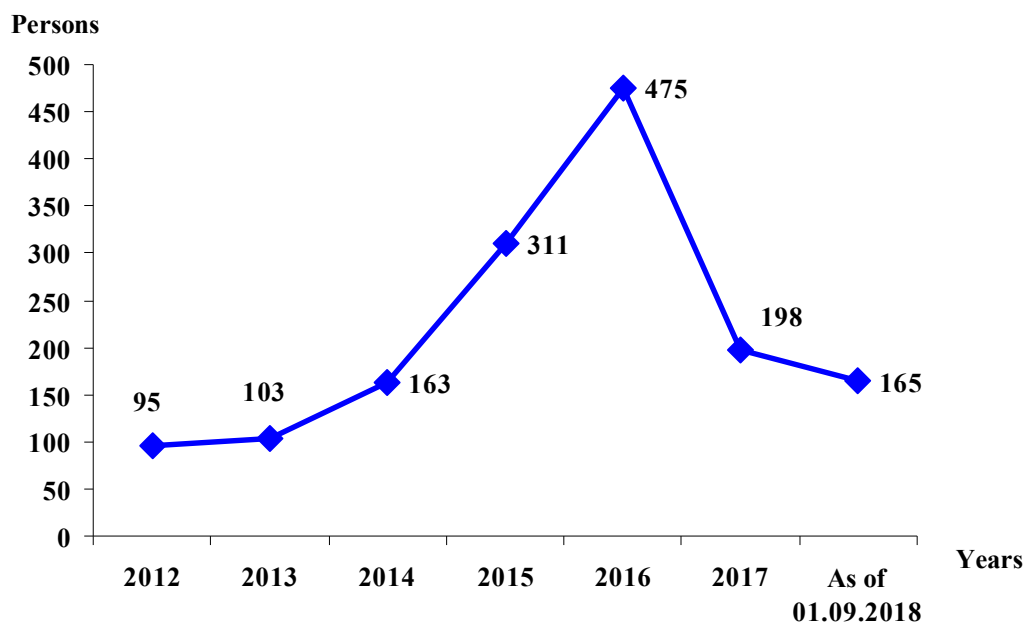
Moreover paying tribute to internationalization, each higher education institution should preserve its unique character, develop and implement its own approach to internationalization based on clearly defined objectives and expected results, taking into account national, historical, economic and other features.

Belarusian Trade and Economic University of Consumer Cooperation has been forming and implementing its development strategy for more than 10 years taking into account a comprehensive approach to internationalization as one of the most important components of the effectiveness and prestige of a higher education institution in the educational services market.

The main forms of higher education internationalization inherent with the features of educational space of the Republic of Belarus were reflected in the educational and research activities of BTEU.

1. Export of educational services.

Geographical expansion as well as increase in export volume of educational services is one of the directions of international activities. The largest number of foreign citizens (475 persons) studied in 2016 (Picture 1).



Picture 1 – Export of educational services at BTEU for 2012–2017 years and as of 01.09.2018

Later there was a slight decrease in the number of foreign citizens in the number of students at BTEU mainly due to the strengthening of a regulatory impact of the Ministries of Education of foreign countries towards increasing the number of students in higher educational institutions of their states. In addition the following factors had a negative impact on export of educational services at BTEU in 2017–2018:

- In some cases unapproved study invitations for foreign citizens from countries with increased migration activity by Citizenship and Migration Office of the Republic of Belarus (India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nigeria, Iraq);
- Refusal of entry to Belarus during a boarder control at the International Airport “Minsk” (presence of an invitation does not guarantee possibility of arriving in the Republic of Belarus and getting education for a foreign citizen), and visa denial for foreign citizens to enter the Republic of Belarus by the Embassy of the Republic of Belarus;
- Absence of bilateral agreements with individual countries on the mutual recognition of higher education documents;
- Prohibition on entry to the Russian Federation for further travel to the Republic of Belarus (the problem is relevant for citizens of Tajikistan), etc.

Geography of educational services exports of BTEU is currently represented by such countries as Azerbaijan, Israel, the Russian Federation, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Ukraine.

2. International academic mobility.

International cooperation of the University is a mutually beneficial and purposeful interaction with educational and research institutions of different countries, aimed at the exchange of intellectual resources (ideas, new developments, teaching materials, technologies); at development of educational mobility of students, undergraduates and postgraduate students, as well as academic mobility of faculty members; at strengthen of intercultural and business ties. Academic mobility at BTEU is implemented in the framework of inter-institutional agreements and on a parity basis.

Students of Belarusian Trade and Economics University of Consumer Cooperatives take the training course with obtaining a relevant certificate at foreign universities of the Russian Federation.

As of today there are academic mobility agreements with Belgorod University of Cooperation, Economics and Law (BUCEL), Russian University of Cooperation (RUC), Plekhanov Russian University of Economics (RUE), Peter the Great St. Petersburg Polytechnic University (SpbPU), Tajik State University of Commerce (TSUC), Tajik State Finance and Economics University (TSFEU). Table 1 shows academics mobility in the framework of concluded agreements at BTEU for the period from 2015 to 2017 and as of 01.09.2018 (Table 1).

Table 1 – Students exchange in the framework of concluded agreements at Belarusian Trade and Economics University of Consumer Cooperatives y/y 2012–2017, persons

Universities	2015	2016	2017	As of 01.09.2018
BUCEL	8/8	9/9	5/5	6/6
RUC	5/5	5/5	5/5	6/6
RUE	x	x	x	5/5
SpbPU	–	7/7	5/5	–
TSUC	0/1	–	–	–
TSFEU	X	X	X	0/1
Total	13/14	21/21	15/15	17/18

Academic mobility in the framework of international project and programmes is very important for BTEU (Table 2).

Table 2 – Academic mobility at BTEU within international project y/y 2014–2017, persons

	2014	2015	2016	2017	As of 01.09.2018
Students	2	3	7	1	3
Graduate students	2	2	2	–	–
Postgraduate students	1	1	–	–	–
Teaching staff	1	–	4	3	2
Total:	6	6	13	4	5

Over the past five years, university's students have stepped up grant applications to German Academic Exchange Service (Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst) DAAD for obtaining scholarships under the programme of International Summer University Courses. According to the selection results 3 scholarships were obtained in the amount of from 680 to 850 Euros.

3. Institutional partnership.

In general, year on year we can notice increase in international contracts and cooperation agreements concluded by Belarusian Trade and Economic University of Consumer Cooperation with various foreign universities (Table 3). Their geography is rather wide and covers European and Asian countries: Armenia, Belgium, Bulgaria, Georgia, Kazakhstan, China, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Moldova, Poland, Russia, Serbia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Turkey, Uzbekistan, Ukraine, Switzerland and Sweden.

Table 3 – Contracts and agreements of Belarusian Trade and Economic University of Consumer Cooperation y/y 2012–2017 and as of 01.09.2018

2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	As of 01.09.2018
38	40	47	44	60	78	77

Educational Institution “Belarusian Trade and Economic University of Consumer Cooperation” is an active member of such international organizations as German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), European Retail Academy; International public organization “Council of the Heads of Cooperative Educational Institutions”, Academic Methodological Association of Russian HEIs on education in the field of management.

Network University “Cooperation” was founded and is functioning involving Belarusian Trade and Economic University of Consumer Cooperation. It should be noted that it is a promising project for integration of higher education cooperative institutions aimed at pooling of potentials of participating universities, and it could be an important factor in rapprochement and integration of higher education systems, increasing their competitiveness in the international market of educational services. Consortium for foundation of Network University “Cooperation” united nine cooperative institutions from seven CIS countries: Belarusian Trade and Economics University of Consumer Cooperatives (Republic of Belarus), Karaganda Economic University of Kazpotreboysuz (Kazakhstan); Trade cooperative University of Moldova (Moldova); Belgorod University of Cooperation, Economics and Law, Russian University of Cooperation, and Siberian University of Consumer Cooperatives (Russian Federation); Lviv University

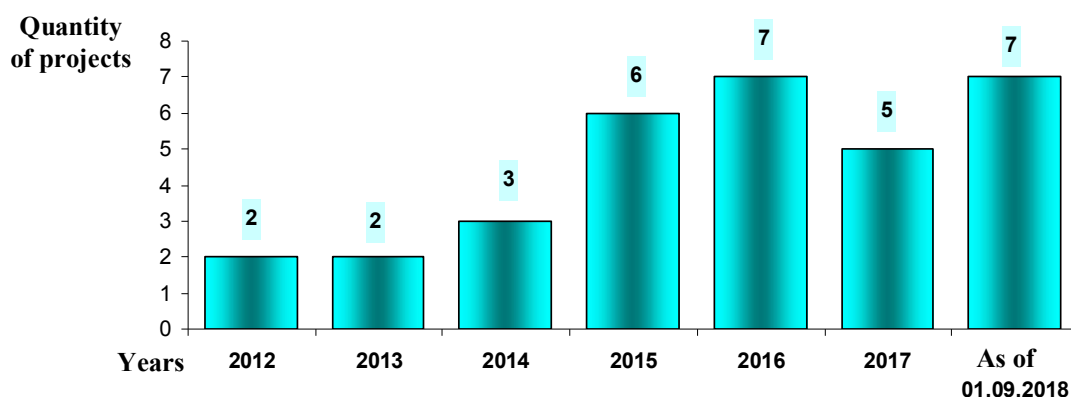
of Trade and Economics, and Poltava University of Economics and Trade (Ukraine); Tajik State University of Commerce (Tajikistan).

Belarusian Trade and Economic University of Consumer Cooperation develops such basic cooperative values and principles as “education, enlightenment”, “cooperation”; implements the principles of the European policy of higher education “strengthening of cooperation based on partnership”; pursues the policy of formation a “system of looking forward training”, which is represented as a source of its innovative development under objectively changing circumstances of an external environment. Therewith the University actively promotes further development of a unique form of internationalization – “comprehensive internationalization”, i.e. international cooperation on formation of an effective educational space for educational institutions of consumer cooperation system, primarily CIS countries.

At the end of 2017 an agreement on founding at the University a network department of UNESCO as a subdivision of the UNESCO Department “Education for sustainable development of cooperatives” at Belgorod University of Cooperation, Economics and Law was signed.

4. International research activity.

For more than a decade BTEU staff has implemented 16 International projects funded by foreign foundations, organizations, programs (Eurasia Foundation, VISBY programme by the Swedish Institute, programmes of the European Commission such as TEMPUS, ERASMUS MUNDUS, and ERASMUS+ etc) (Picture 2).



Picture 2 – Quantity of International projects implemented at Belarusian Trade and Economic University of Consumer Cooperation in 2012–2018 years

At the present time 7 International projects including 5 projects within ERASMUS+ programme are being implemented at BTEU (Table 4).

Table 4 – Running International project in 2018 in which Educational Institution “Belarusian Trade and Economic University of Consumer Cooperation” is a participant

№	Title of the project
1	“Development of approaches to harmonization of a comprehensive internationalization strategies in higher education, research and innovation at EU and Partner Countries” – HARMONY 2015–2019 ERASMUS+
2	Academic mobility project within Erasmus + programme with Varna Management University (Varna, Bulgaria) 2015–2021
3	Academic mobility project within Erasmus + programme with Vidzeme University of Applied Science (Valmiera, Latvia) 2015–2021
4	SME activation in the cross-border regions of Ukraine-Belarus (Eastern Partnership Territorial Cooperation Programme Belarus–Ukraine
5	Fostering university-enterprise cooperation and entrepreneurship of students via SMART Caffes ERASMUS+
6	Higher Education Institutions for youth entrepreneurship – HEIFYE ERASMUS+
7	Scholarship programme of German Academic Exchange “International Summer University Courses”

Much attention is paid to a foreign publication activity of BTEU academic staff (Table 5). Increase in number of publications of several departments is noticeable for the last three years. Decrease in the total number of publications by 2017 compared to 2016 is due to the optimization of the organizational structure of the university.

Table 5 – Publication activity of BTEU academic staff in foreign publications y/y 2015–2017

Department	Quantity of publications		
	2015	2016	2017
Banking, Analysis and Audit	22	47	34
Merchandising	34	43	43
World and National Economics	29	32	21
Foreign languages	20	32	26
Marketing	26	30	33
Law and Economic Theory	13	28	14
Trade Economics	16	23	24
Commerce and Logistics	15	20	18
Information and Computer System	5	16	8
Accounting	20	15	26
Economics in Agro-Industrial Complex, Service Industry and Statistics	10	14	x*
Economic and Law Disciplines	12	14	12
Physical Culture and Sports	3	2	3
Accounting and Financial Management	—	1	2
TOTAL	225	317	264
* Department was disestablished in the case of optimization of the organizational structure.			

The University also implements other best practices that Belarusian HEIs use in the field of organization of International activity.

Foreign lecturers are actively involved in lecturing. For example, over the past three years, the following academics attended the University and delivered lectures for students and teaching staff:

- Kerstin Muller, Head of Information Bureau of German Academic Exchange DAAD in Belarus, and Lyudmila Yurkevich, member of the Bureau (April 2016);
- Prof. David Glass, Associate professor of School of Computing and Mathematics of the Ulster University (Ireland, Great Britain) (March 2017);
- Kozlova Natallia, PhD in Economics, Associate Professor of Peter the Great St. Petersburg Polytechnic University, Deputy Director for International Activities of Higher School of Internal and Foreign Trade (April 2017);
- Aigars Andersons, Dean of the Faculty of Social Science, Vidzeme University of Applied Science (December 2017);
- Mohamed Fakiri, president of the Association of graduates of universities of the former Soviet Union and Hassan El Mardi, Vice-President of the Association (April 2018);
- John Frederick Davis, Professor of Birmingham City University Business School (Great Britain). Prof. Davis is a regular guest lecturer for a number of years.

Active work is being carried out to stimulate teaching in foreign language, primarily in English. For example, at the beginning of 2018/2019 academic the following disciplines for study in English were offered: “Competitive strategies”, “Money, credit, banks”, “History and theory of the cooperative movement”, “International Economics”, “Macroeconomics”, “Marketing”, “Marketing and Price Formation”. Also a Master’s program in specialty 1-25 80 02 “Global Economics” is fully taught in English.

In the framework of inter-institutional agreements on various international programs BTEU academic staff visiting professorships and deliver lectures at foreign universities. For example, for the period of 2016–2018 the following lecturers have professorship and deliver lectures: at Central School of Marseille (Marseille, France) – PhD in Economics, Associate Professor Shablouskaya Tatsiana, and PhD in Techniques, Associate Professor Kravchenko Sviatlana; at Tomas Bati University (Zlin, Czech Republic) –

PhD in Economics, Associate Professor Shablouskaya Tatsiana, and PhD in Pedagogic Dubovtsova Tatsiana; at Alexander Technological Educational Institute (Thessaloniki, Greece) – PhD in Economics, Associate Professor Yatsevir Natallia; at Vidzeme University of Applied Science – senior lecturer of the Department of World and National Economics Maksimchikava Volha.

Increasing competition has prompted higher education institutions in Belarus to advanced planning of their activities, focused on achieving long-term success; to intensification of work related to internationalization. At BTEU the prospects for development of international activities are reflected in the Strategic Development Plan of Educational Institution “Belarusian Trade and Economic University of Consumer Cooperatives” for 2011–2020 as one of the most important strategic directions of development highlighting targets for international activities. When developing BTEU Development Strategy a State’s comprehensive strategy set out in the National Strategy of Sustainable Social and Economic Development of the Republic of Belarus for the period up to 2030 and State programme “Education and Youth Policy” for 2016–2020 were taken into consideration.

Internationalization of higher education should be focused not only on introducing (implementing) of international, intercultural mechanisms into the education area of the Republic of Belarus, but also on expansion of Belarusian vector to other countries: experience, ideas, culture, but also when working with foreign nationals coming for study.

Conclusion

In general it may be noted that at present time a stable system of international activity management has been formed in Belarusian system of higher education, which is able to provide effective control over the processes of internationalization, and BTEU is not an exception.

At the same time there are aspects of work that require a certain improvement both at the Republican level and in the educational institution “Belarusian Trade and Economic University of Consumer Cooperation”. The following can be referred to the directions for activity development for implementation of internationalization strategies of higher education:

- Development of a Comprehensive Internationalization Strategy of higher education system based on recommendations of ERASMUS+ HARMONY and TEMPUS PICASA projects, as well as legal mechanism of its implementation;
- Setting the strategic tone to public funding for international mobility of teaching staff;
- Development and founding of Belarusian programme of academic mobility ensuring funding mobility of foreign students and lecturers;
- Formation of a national system for assessing university’s achievements in accordance with international criteria;
- Development of the strategy for internationalization of higher education institutions;
- To make an accessible and open strategy of internationalization of HEIs as well as in foreign languages in order to increase recognition of higher education of the Republic of Belarus at the international level and to enhance the image for foreign partners.

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