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## ROLE OF ACADEMIC MOBILITY IN INCREASING EFFECTIVENESS OF TRAINING ON ECONOMIC SPECIALITIES

The article briefly analyzes the development of academic mobility in the framework of the modernization of higher education of the Republic of Belarus, its role in the harmonization of processes of the country's accession to the Bologna process, the experience of academic programmes mobility in Belarusian Trade and Economic University of Consumer Cooperatives is presented as well.

В статье кратко анализируется развитие академической мобильности в рамках модернизации высшего образования Беларуси, ее роль в гармонизации процессов вхождения страны в Болонский процесс, а также рассматривается опыт реализации программ академической мобильности в Белорусском торгово-экономическом университете потребительской кооперации.

**Key words:** Bologna process; European Higher Educational Area; academic mobility; credit mobility; institutional agreement.

**Ключевые слова:** Болонский процесс; Европейское пространство высшего образования; академическая мобильность; кредитная мобильность; институциональные соглашения.

### Introduction

*Nowadays the training of highly qualified competitive specialists remains one of the main strategic objectives of the higher education system of the Republic of Belarus. International academic mobility*

*is one of the most effective ways of modern education developing. The necessity of developing academic mobility as a basic condition for the formation of the European higher education area is constantly underlined in the basic documents of the Bologna process, and the Berlin communiqué (2003) recognizes “mobility of students, academic and administrative staff as the basis for creation of the European higher education area”.*

The trend of modernization of higher school in Belarus in the framework of the Bologna process [1] was supported in 2002 by joining the Lisbon Convention of 1997, adoption of Provisions on the levels of higher education and the Concept of introducing a two-level system of training specialists with higher education of 2004. Article 121 devoted to academic mobility was included in the Education Code of 2011. Credit education technology, competence approach approved in 2006, and recent changes in the concept of export educational services development came into force [2]. In 2012 elective courses on socio-humanitarian disciplines were introduced. Universities were allowed to approve new courses for students, and students got the right to choose courses from the suggested disciplines and to increase up to 50% the proportion of independent work. These measures are aimed at ensuring the competitiveness of the national higher education, based on improving the quality and increasing urgency of education, harmonization of applied University programmes on the bilateral level, development of the processes of training programs integrating with scientific research [3; 4]. Academic mobility as an integral element of the Bologna process and the process of forming a single European space of higher education play a key role here. Belarus joined the EHEA on May 14–15, 2015 and became the 48 participating country.

The Rector of the Republican Institute of Higher Schooling, V. Gaisenok, notes that, since the later decades of the 20th century the number of those studying at any one time has increased from around 13 million to 82 million. Belarus currently boasts about 400,000 students (400 per 1000 of the population). This places us at the fourth place globally, after the South Koreans, Americans and Russians. In addition, every third student studies without paying tuition fees. Meanwhile, more funding is needed, since only 5 percent of GDP is spent on the educational system (including 0.65 percent on higher education). The World Bank has discovered that about 70 percent of companies in Belarus admit to being hampered in their development by lack of sufficiently skilled workers. It appears that our universities have some way to go to ‘catch up’ with the needs of the labour market [5].

Mobile activities such as academic (teaching on higher education programmes, internship), research (scientific research), qualification improvement (design of new curricula, development individual development programmes in internship, exchange of experience) are being realized through the programmes of physical (fixed) International, interregional and regional mobility. Today it can be accessed remotely, this resulted in a distance form of credit mobility. EHEA has the possibility of optimal interaction of different programs at the expense of comparability, mutual recognition, effective interaction between universities and research centers, as well as individualization of educational trajectories. Comparability is reached by common tools for assessing knowledge and skills, convergence training models of processes using common characteristics to describe training courses, as well as their modular structure [6].

According to the results of monitoring analysis of student contingent in the Republic of Belarus, on methodology of the Eurostudent project V (2014–2016, 3.000 students from 17 institutions of higher education of the Republic of Belarus) not more than 1% of students in the Republic of Belarus (Russia – 5%) participates in academic mobility, however, 26.7% of students are planning to participate in academic mobility (in Russia – 31%). Students choose Poland, Germany, Russia, Britain and the United States as the principal countries for academic mobility. The percentage of students who participated in the academic mobility is quite high in some universities of the Republic of Belarus. According to the analysis in 2016 the percentage of students sent within the framework of academic mobility for training abroad (from the total number of students) accounted for: Minsk State Linguistic University – 4.0; IILSR – 3.7; Belarusian State University – 2.7; Mogilev State University named after A. Kulyashou – 2.5; Belarusian State Academy of Arts – 2.4; Grodno State University named after Yanka Kupala – 2.0; Minsk Innovative University – 1.8; Belarusian State Economic University – 1.7; Vitebsk State University named after P. Masherov – 1.7; Belarusian State University of Informatics and Radioelectronics – 1.7 [7].

Development of academic exchanges solves not only educational tasks, but also creates socio-cultural, value-orientation basis of integration processes between partner universities. Today more than 2.5 thousand interinstitutional agreements on students exchange are signed. Joint educational programs are the result of interinstitutional agreements. These are bilateral agreements in the sphere of Economics, Engineering, Law, Management, Languages. The development of international cooperation enables to study national and mental characteristics of the country of temporary staying, learn its language, to enrich

culturally during excursions, leisure activities, visiting the museums, theatres, to get an idea about everyday life through academic mobility. Both students and teachers participating in international academic mobility programs have access to other educational programs and research opportunities. They return to their home country with new knowledge, academic and cultural experience. Credit mobility is aimed at helping a student with access to diverse “European” education on the chosen training profile to the recognized knowledge centers, where traditionally the leading scientific schools were formed, and to enhance knowledge of a student in all the spheres of the European culture, to infuse with a sense of citizen of Europe [8].

Choosing postgraduate employment graduates having mobility experience can adequately evaluate prospects of living and working in other countries. The reverse side of academic mobility, the so-called “brain drain” when more developed countries of the world have a wide range of possibilities for the selection of promising scientists, specialists from poor countries should be stressed here. That is why the EU countries, Canada, the United States, Scandinavia finance independent educational programs. This is VISBY in Sweden, the FIRST in Finland, Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst in Germany, the QUOTA PROGRAM in Norway and other alongside with pan-European programmes TEMPUS, ERASMUS+, ERASMUS MUNDUS [9].

In Belarus academic mobility is implemented mainly through the international educational programs (IAESTE, DAAD, COPERNICUS, ERASMUS+, LINGUA, etc.) based on interstate and interuniversity agreements. On the programme of IAESTE with the supported by the Governments of various countries 50 Belarusian students annually have practice in foreign countries (England, Germany, Belgium, Spain). In 2015/2016 academic year the number of students taking part in the Erasmus+ mobility programme accounted for: from Belarus to European countries – 153 students; from European countries to Belarus – 22 students [7]. Facilitating and promoting international academic mobility contributes to the formation of qualitatively new labour resources, able to occupy its worthy place both in the global labour market and significantly affect the quality of labour resources of national economy [6]. Academic mobility in the education system has a significant impact on the formation of an international network of business elites, the academic elite relying first of all on individual contacts and cooperation opportunities between professionals.

In the Belarusian Trade and Economics University of Consumer Cooperatives the new approaches for education taking into account traditions in training specialists in economics are being actively introduced. Academic mobility of professors, lecturers, students and staff of BTEU is organized for studying, internships, researching, delivering lectures, participating in conferences, seminars, cultural, educational and other events. It is in the framework of such international programmes as: European Commission (Erasmus+, Tempus, Erasmus Mundus); Eurasia Foundation project (Washington DC United States, financed by USAID); BRIDGE project; VISBY programme; The German Academic Exchange Service DAAD; territorial cooperation programmes of Eastern partnership countries Belarus–Ukraine; interuniversity agreements.

Particular attention is paid to the development of interinstitutional relationships. BTEU is strategically oriented on the continuous expansion of international cooperation geography [10]. Academic mobility is based on normative, methodical and organisational accompaniment of University education internationalization services, using sufficient material and high academic capacities of universities, active interaction with the business community. While realizing educational programs of student mobility, the training programmes, plans on organizing outside leisure, cultural and recreational activities are being developed by the parties. These are city of residence excursions, country tours, etc. Students take an active part in scientific students’ projects, conferences, forums and championships. Students can be free-movers (on terms of self-tuition and accommodation) or reside in the country under the programme (grant covers the cost on tuition and accommodation). The host party creates all the necessary conditions for comfortable host partner University. The company in which the future graduate is to work few years after graduation sometimes covers costs of academic mobility. For this purpose the contract is being made beforehand. It includes the deadlines, the funds and the penalties [11; 12]. Annually more than 1,500 Belarusian students are trained (up to one year). It includes practice, internship on programmes of academic mobility in Germany, Russia, Great Britain, Poland, Ukraine, France, Sweden, China, Italy, the Netherlands.

Cooperation of our University with Russian University of Cooperation, Belgorod University of Cooperation, Economics and Law, Bryansk District branch REU named by G. Plehanov and Saint-Petersburg State Polytechnical University named by Peter the Great is one of the successful examples of organization of academic mobility of students within the framework of bilateral agreements on cooperation in the sphere of education. The main idea of this project is interuniversity mobility of students in Russian-speaking environment for studying the specific educational programs. 18 joint programmes have

already been implemented since 2014. 120 students of the partner universities participate in them on an equal footing. Most of the students participating in academic exchange programmes called periods of mobility as one of the best in their life. In general, the process of international cooperation BTEU works on two forms of horizontal programmes of short-term academic mobility:

- the period of staying at the University-partner is about 2–3 weeks. As a result, program participants receive certificates with the number of classroom hours for the disciplines;
- the period of staying at the University-partner is the whole semester. The student is given the document about the current certification (exams or tests) on the disciplines studied.

Criteria for the selection of students for international mobility in foreign countries are tougher, namely: publicity and transparency of the selection procedure with the announcement of the rankings; finishing one or two University courses; average mark, desirable, not below than 7; high social activity; language proficiency at level B1–B2 confirmed on the on-line interview; achievements in the form of scientific publications, developments, premium sheets etc. All abroad ECTS (European credit transfer system) credits are recredited by Belarusian universities using a 10-point scale assessment.

One of the largest educational and research programmes funded by the European Commission is ERASMUS+. Financing instruments are available for the universities of the Republic of Belarus, as a member of the “Eastern partnership” [13]. Within the framework of this programme there are the following directions of academic mobility:

1. Joint Master Degrees. The duration of the program on any discipline is 1–2 years. The joint diplomas are given.
2. Credit mobility. Students and lecturers of BTEU will intern at the European Union universities. This financing instrument of academic mobility has replaced the Erasmus Mundus programme.
3. Capacity building in higher education. Continuation of the TEMPUS project. Its goals are to support modernization, accessibility and internationalization of higher education. The program provides students mobility. The internship will be available within any level of higher education: Bachelor, Master and Post-graduate student.
4. Jean Monnet. It does not provide for academic mobility and is aimed at promoting the development of educational programs and research, specializing in the role of the European Union on the issue of European integration.

Erasmus+ focuses on education, vocational training, youth and sport. The budget accounted for \$14.7 billion euro for 2014–2020, 40% more than the previous budget.

Since October, 2015 BTEU has started implementing the three projects of academic mobility on ERASMUS+ programme in International Business and Management (BA IBM) within the framework of the Interinstitutional agreements with Management University (Bulgaria), the University named by Tomáš Baťa (Czech Republic), and since October, 2016 – with University of Applied Sciences Vidzeme (Valmiera, Latvia). Projects envisage the mobility of students and teachers until 2021. Nine lecturers, staff and nineteen Bachelors, Masters, Postgraduates participated in these projects during the whole semester, with the amount of the grant being €3,275. Mobility of University staff is available for teaching or refresher courses ranging from 5 days to 2 months without taking into account the rout. Mobility for teaching is to include 8 classroom hours a week [13].

All the students who have passed the competitive selection were offered participating in the vertical academic mobility program “double diploma” in the framework of the agreement with the Varna University of Management (VUM). Graduate receives Diploma of Belarusian Trade and Economics University of Consumer Cooperatives (Republic of Belarus); Bachelor's Diploma with a Bachelor degree in Management from the University of Varna (Bulgaria). If at the beginning of the projects about 10 people came to the interview, later more than 30 wished to be interviewed. Many of them were recommended to take English courses, organized after the first year of the projects implementation.

Analysing forming and developing academic mobility of students of Belarus and accompanying process of internationalization of national education, one should take into account the realities of globalization processes, as well as to draw attention to the problems being an obstacle in realizing the mobility of students and lecturers. The most significant of them nowadays are: weak internal mobility with increasing the flow of participants of international mobility, insufficient knowledge of foreign languages, problems with recognition of credits on studied disciplines abroad because of the lack of development of the Belarusian system of recrediting ECTS, essential differences in the curricula of the Belarusian and foreign universities, lack of financial competence of most of the students, especially students of the regional universities, in lack of English-speaking educational programmes for foreigners, dominating language courses programs. These complex problems require participating not only universities, but a number

of ministries and departments and can be solved by joint efforts as it directly affects the rate of passing the Road Map of the Bologna reforms by Belarus.

### Conclusion

For further improving activity on the development of academic mobility variants at the University it is proposed:

- to consolidate the practice of by-turn informing about the proposed mobility and obligatory reports of the participants after completing the mobility in addition, to supplement it with mobility week, when various programs coordinators can characterize all the peculiarities;
- start taking students within the framework of internal mobility from other universities, for example, the Belarusian State Economics University, the Academy of Management under the President of the Republic of Belarus, IILSR, etc. at Master, Postgraduate and Bachelor levels;
- to improve marketing tools of promoting academic mobility for dual degree programmes;
- to intensify the activity on organizing polylingual (Anglo-German-Belarusian-Russian variants of education), underlying the positive qualities of multilingualism; deepening the process of assimilation of the linguistic wealth of mother tongue based on linguistic and cultural comparison in the context of intercultural dialogue;
- to organize the work of the summer semester for obtaining additional education, the so-called summer school in connection with the changes in the Concept of export development services.

Thus, the intensification of academic mobility of students and teachers of universities in Belarus, naturally leads to the intensification of introducing new educational technologies, (which is confirmed by the introduction of distance education as a result of academic staff mobility), growth of effective interaction of partner universities combined with establishing competitive environment in the global market of educational services, expansion of employment opportunities for skilled specialists, increasing commercialization of universities. It will increase the international prestige of BTEU as modern innovation University, training highly qualified specialists for consumer cooperatives, to achieve the world level of education to realize objectives of the innovation development of Belarus.

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