

## **Appeal to the BFUG members**

### **Extension of Belarus Roadmap for higher education reform and AG2 mandate is necessary**

February 2, 2018

Dear BFUG members,

You are soon going to receive the final report of BFUG AG2 at your upcoming meeting in Sofia on February 5-6.

In 2015, Belarus was admitted to European Higher Education Area (EHEA) under the condition to comply with the requirements set in the Belarus Roadmap for higher education reform (Roadmap). Belarus should have completed the implementation of the Roadmap by the end of 2017. This process embodied the hope of the Belarusian civil society for higher education modernisation and democratisation. However, the monitoring of the Roadmap implementation conducted by Belarusian Independent Bologna Committee and the EaP CSF Belarusian National Platform showed that Belarusian authorities not only failed to fulfil their obligations in time but also returned to systematic repressions against the leaders of independent student organisations.

Higher education modernisation process, characterised by selective approach to the Roadmap implementation, had been slowing down until it practically disappeared from the official agenda by the end of 2017. Belarusian government has not transposed any of the Roadmap provisions into national legislation. The new draft Code of Education was not put on the agenda of the National Assembly deliberations at the end of 2017 as planned and the changes introduced in the draft remain unknown to public.

Despite the gloomy assessment, we appeal to you to take into account our arguments when considering the future of Belarus and its Roadmap in EHEA after the Ministerial Conference in Paris. We believe that:

- Belarus should remain on the EHEA agenda as a special case

*Why: Belarus is the only country that joined the Bologna Process 16 years after its launch, and the only country admitted conditionally after agreeing to implement the Roadmap for higher education reforms. The whole Bologna Process could be weakened if the BFUG were to acknowledge the lack of leverage over its implementation and give*

*up on the Roadmap after relatively short period of time while nobody could expect the process to go smoothly.*

- The oversight (BFUG AG2) of the implementation of the Belarus Roadmap for higher education reform should be extended until 2020.

*Why: Belarusian higher education system has not been able to develop a modernisation strategy on its own; it means the gap with EHEA leaders will be growing further with students and citizens falling victims to such a development. The extension of the Roadmap implementation and of the AG2 mandate would give additional time to assist the Belarusian side in the modernisation of legislative and academic practice. Moreover, the Roadmap and access to AG2 have been until now the only effective mechanism for inclusion of the independent Belarusian civil society and for its active participation in the higher education modernisation process. The independent civil society and international community should unite in the efforts to return Belarus to the reform path.*

- Belarus should not fall into the group of non-compliant countries.

*Why: While the problem of non-implementation in EHEA rests on the absence of a mechanism for addressing serious cases of non-compliance, Belarus's obligations to reform higher education are consolidated in a special document – the Roadmap. It is a tool that, together with continuous oversight and control mechanisms set by BFUG and international community, can push the government in the right direction, perhaps in synergy and conditioned by the implementation of the EU agenda (Partnership Priorities). Placing Belarus into the group of non-compliant countries will completely stall the process and provide the government with a reason not to continue any reforms (due to the absence of any mechanisms engaging or reviewing the non-compliant countries). It would send a signal that Belarus is pushed to the EHEA periphery.*