White Book 2018

Belarusian Higher Education: European perspectives

VŠĮ «Socialinės ir politinės ekspertizės agentūra»
Vilnius
2018

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Edited by Vladimir Dounaev

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The second White book is prepared by the Belarusian Independent Bologna Committee experts and provides a detailed analysis of Belarus Bologna provisions implementation in comparison with other European Higher Education Area (EHEA) member countries. The book's structure and methodology ensure maximum compatibility with the 2018 EHEA Implementation Report.

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Foreword

In 2011, preceding consideration of Belarus' application to join the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), the Independent Bologna Committee, an initiative which included independent experts and civil society organisations interested in practical implementation of the Bologna Process values and tools in the national higher education system, was established in Minsk[1]. In cooperation with the Belarusian National Platform of the European Partnership Civil Society Forum (EaP CSF) and in dialogue with European organisations and institutions, the IBC monitors modernisation of the Belarusian higher education system and advocates the interests of higher education stakeholders successfully using such tools as alternative reports, monitoring reports, policy papers, and recommendations.

In 2013, we prepared the first *White Book. Reforming of the Belarusian Higher School in accordance with the aims, values and main directions of the European Higher Education Area policy*[2] in which we attempted to answer the question to what extent the Belarusian governmental education policy is compatible with the EHEA development strategy. However, our objective is not simply to state numerous problems of the Belarusian higher education system. We strive to outline a clear and well-founded action plan, which would enable our country to move forward along the path of modernising the higher education system decisively.

In 2015, Belarus was accepted to the EHEA upon undertaking to reform its higher education system according to the Roadmap. By 2018, the new Bologna architecture, other EHEA tools and values should have been formalised in the Belarusian laws. As our monitoring[3] and the final report of the Bologna advisory group[4] demonstrate, Belarus has not been able to make any significant progress in the Roadmap implementation. However, it is possible to understand the real condition of the Belarusian higher education system and its European prospects only in comparison with other EHEA members, their achievements and problems. In reality, implementation of the EHEA policy declared by ministerial sum-

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1 http://bolognaby.org.

2 БЕЛАЯ КНИГА «Реформирование высшей школы Беларуси в соответствии с целями, ценностями и основными направлениями политики Европейского пространства высшего образования». Минск: Общественный Болонский комитет, 2013. July 16, 2013. Accessed November 22, 2018». http://bolognaby.org/index.php/2016-04-11-14-03-5/publikatsii-obk/530-belaya-kniga-2. White Book. Reforming of the Belarusian Higher School in accordance with the aims, values and main directions of the European Higher Education Area policy. July 16, 2013 Accessed November 22, 2018. http://bolognaby.org/index.php/en/publications-en/ibc-materials/493-white-book

3 6th Monitoring Report on Implementation of Belarus Roadmap for Higher Education Reform (May-October 2017)16 October 2017 Accessed November 22, 2018. http://bolognaby.org/index.php/en/131-research-and-analytics-en/681-monitoring6-2

4 Advisory Group 2 "Support For The Belarus Roadmap" Final report on progress concerning the Belarus roadmap . April 16,2018. Accessed November 22, 2018.http://ehea.info/media.ehea.info/file/20180424-25-Sofia/43/0/BFUG_BG_SR_60_4d_FinalReportAG2_935430.pdf

mits, in various countries is not always successful and not equally successful in all aspects. The 2018 Implementation Report[5] prepared for the Paris summit distinctly demonstrates this. The Ministry of Education of Belarus has provided some information for the report. However, as our analysis demonstrates, this information is incomplete and at times not absolutely reliable. The Independent Bologna Committee has prepared the second White Book *European Prospects of the Belarusian Higher Education*, which fills the gaps of the official report by the Ministry of Education and permits to compare Belarus' implementation of the Bologna tools and principles with the situation in other EHEA countries.

The analysis structure and methodology in the White Book follow the structure and methodology of the Implementation Report (**IR 2018**) mostly to ensure maximum comparability of the results. In a number of sections of the White Book, we used other international and European databases as well, for comparative analysis of the value dimension of higher education in particular.

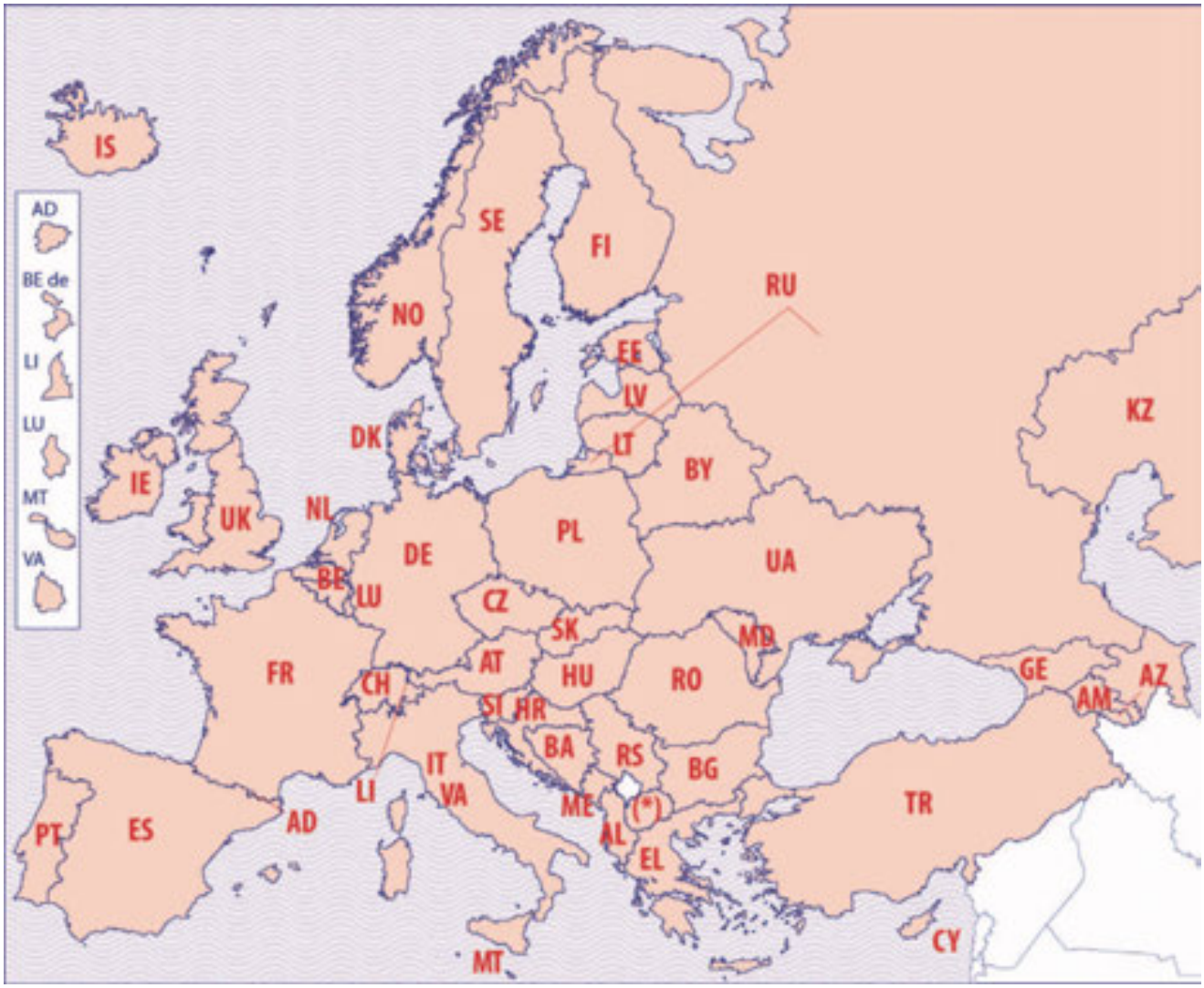
In some cases, comparative analysis becomes difficult because of significant differences in the statistical values calculated or of the lack of information in public access. The Belarusian higher education system lacks transparency. In recent years, its transparency has decreased. However, without rejecting critical assessment of the situation with the reforms of the Belarusian higher education system, the authors of the White Book considered it their duty to record positive changes in the educational policy and academic practice, and to appreciate the European prospects of the Belarusian higher education system in the challenges it faces.

The paper was prepared by a group of authors: the introduction was prepared by Vladimir Dounaev and Irina Dounaeva; chapter 1 by Vladimir Dounaev; chapters 2 to 5 by Olga Kryzhanovskaya; chapter 6 by Siarhei Vetokhin; chapter 7 by Andrei Laurukhin; chapter 8 by Pavel Tereshkovich; the conclusion by Vladimir Dounaev. The analysis of the regulatory framework was provided by Aleh Hrableuski.

The authors of the White Book would like to thank Ulad Vialichka, Tatiana Kouzina, Christina Rikhter, Aliaksandra Kuzmich as well as their colleagues from the Belarusian universities and universities of other EHEA member states, members of the BFUG's Advisory Group 2 *Support for the Belarus Roadmap* (AG2), Belarusian student organisations, the Belarusian National Platform of the EaP SCF, the EaP SCF Secretariat, and the European Students' Union for assistance.

[5] The European Higher Education Area in 2018: Bologna Process Implementation Report. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union 2018 [Electronic resource]. Mode of access: https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/sites/eurydice/files/bologna_internet_0.pdf

Country Codes



AD	Andorra
AL	Albania
AM	Armenia
AT	Austria
AZ	Azerbaijan
BA	Bosnia and Herzegovina
BE de	Belgium – German-speaking Community
BE fr	Belgium – French Community Belgium
BE nl	Belgium – Flemish Community
BG	Bulgaria
BY	Belarus
CH	Switzerland
CY	Cyprus
CZ	Czech Republic
DE	Germany
DK	Denmark

EE	Estonia
EL	Greece
ES	Spain
FI	Finland
FR	France
GE	Georgia
HR	Croatia
HU	Hungary
IE	Ireland
IS	Iceland
IT	Italy
KZ	Kazakhstan
LI	Liechtenstein
LT	Lithuania
LU	Luxembourg
LV	Latvia
MD	Moldova
ME	Montenegro
	(*) The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (Provisional code)
MT	Malta
NL	Netherlands
NO	Norway
PL	Poland
PT	Portugal
RO	Romania
RS	Serbia
RU	Russia
SE	Sweden
SI	Slovenia
SK	Slovakia
TR	Turkey
UA	Ukraine
UK-ENG	United Kingdom – England
UK-NIR	United Kingdom – Northern Ireland
UK-SCT	United Kingdom – Scotland
UK-WLS	United Kingdom – Wales
VA	Holy See

Introduction.
Overview of Belarusian Higher Education

Over the years, the humble task of harmonizing the architecture of higher education of four European countries set in the 1998 Sorbonne Declaration twenty years ago has evolved into an ambitious programme of building the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) on the territory from Lisbon to Vladivostok. In the circumstances of a new geopolitical division and a deepening crisis of the common European structures of security and economic cooperation, the Bologna Process remains one of the few tools enabling to prevent the humanitarian space of Greater Europe from utter meltdown.

In 2015, Belarus officially acceded to the EHEA as the 48th member. A special place of Belarusian higher education in Europe is determined by the fact that Belarus stated its intention to accede to the EHEA quite late. It happened after the European Higher Education Area shaped and determined the main areas of reforms. It proved to be complicated for the Belarusian education system to join the modernisation process of the higher education system not only because of the backwardness and deliberate preservation of components of the Industrial-age university education but also because of a deep value conflict with traditional academic imperatives forming the basis of European university culture.

The Belarusian side needed time to recognise the relevance of the dramatic overhaul of the higher education system as a condition preceding accession to the EHEA. For the first time in the history of the Bologna Process, a candidate country saw a roadmap of such reforms [1] prepared and an international advisory group – Advisory Group 2 Support for the Belarus Roadmap – established to monitor and assess fulfilment by Belarus of its obligations.

Three years after Belarus' accession to the EHEA, we are able to provide a detailed analysis not only of its performance of the Roadmap but also to see to what degree the Belarusian higher education system has been able to integrate in the common education area of Europe.

The 2018 EHEA Implementation Report gives an opportunity to compare the Belarusian higher education system with other European systems by the criteria on the agenda of the Bologna Process upon the Yerevan (2015) and Paris (2018) summits.

Besides such general characteristics as the structure of the student population, composition of the academic staff, and the amount of governmental funding, we are able to compare the Belarusian higher education system to the higher education systems of the EHEA concerning the implementation degree of the Bologna architecture, tools of recognising qualifications and quality assurance – three universal obligations of all member states announced by the Paris summit to be the fundamental foundations of the EHEA requiring complete and urgent implementation [2].

Other Bologna tools certainly remain on the agenda – the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS), European Diploma Supplement, mobility and internationalisation of the higher education system.

The recent two EHEA summits paid special attention to the issues of accessibility and inclusivity of higher education and to strengthening traditional fundamental academic values uniting the European higher education systems.

1. Students

According to the understanding of the Bologna higher education architecture, students include everybody who studies in the programmes of the 2011 ISCED levels 5-8, i.e. in the short cycle, first (bachelor), second (master), and third (doctoral) cycles (levels) of education.

According to the 2018 EHEA Implementation Report, in the academic year 2014/15 the EHEA countries had around 37.7 million students (Fig. 1). Andorra had the lowest number of students (457 persons), and Russia had the highest (7 million or 19.7% of all the EHEA student population) [3, p. 22]. Countries with a high number of students included Turkey (6 million) and Germany (2.98 million). France and the UK had over 2 million students. Four countries had over 1.5 million students: Italy, Poland, Spain, and the Ukraine.

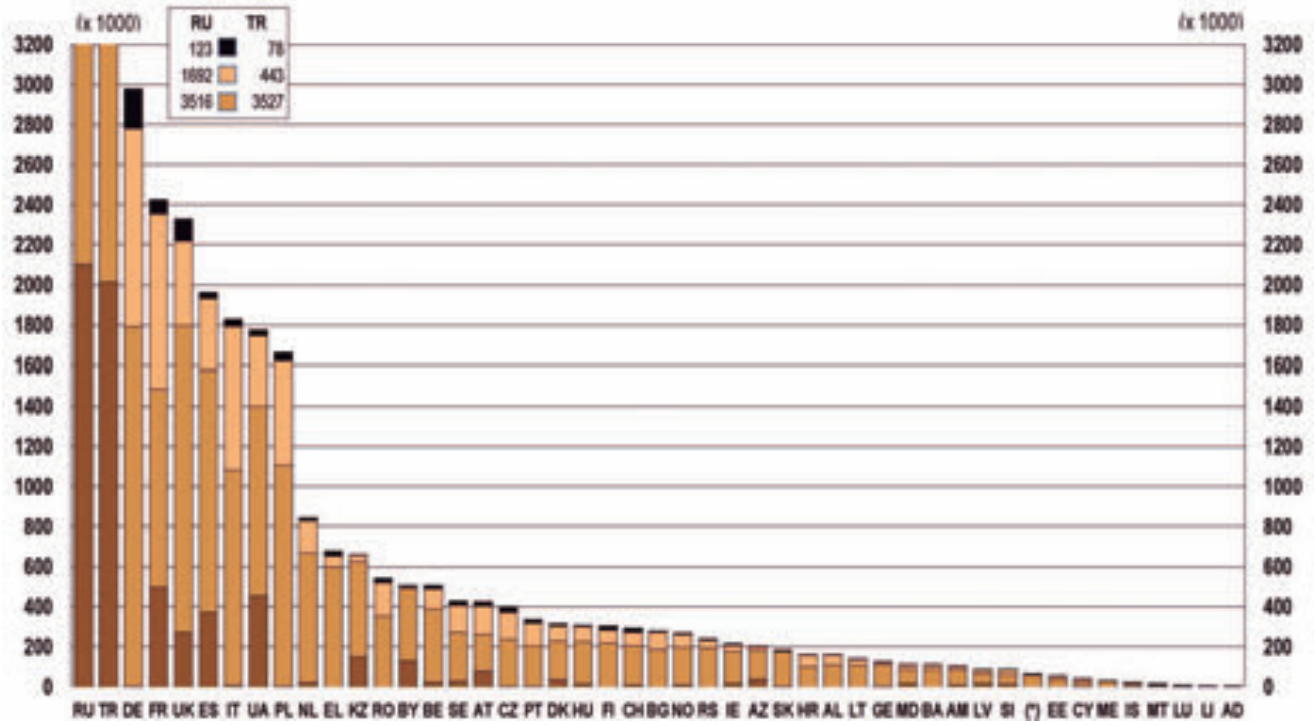


Fig. 1. Distributions of students by tertiary education levels (cycles) in the EHEA countries in the 2014/15 academic year: – ISCED 5; – ISCED 6; – ISCED 7; – ISCED 8

Source: IR 2018. P.23.

Belarus is included in the most numerous group of countries with the student population below 1 million persons. In the academic year 2014/15, Belarus had 505,637 students who were referred to the category of the tertiary education students in the EHEA Implementation Report [3, p. 23]. Belarusian statistics include a significant number of students of secondary specialised education institutions among the tertiary education students for the

purposes of comparison among countries. The accuracy of this method gives rise to doubt while it is based on unfounded identification of this education level with the short cycle of higher education according to the EHEA classification. Internal statistics, the statistics of the Ministry of Education in particular, does not include this group of students in the total number of the students of higher education institutions. Moreover, the student category includes the students of the first cycle (ISCED 6) only. In 2014/15, the country had 362.9 thousand students according to the data of the Education in the Republic of Belarus in 2017/2018 Bulletin of Statistics (Table 1) [4, p. 38].

The Belarusian student population is distributed structurally in the Implementation Report as follows: ISCED 5 includes 128,975 persons, ISCED 6 has 362,907, ISCED 7 has 8,855 (Table 2) while ISCED 8 has 4,900 persons.

Relevance of ISCED 8 presence in the Belarusian higher education statistics can give rise to the same doubt as in the case with ISCED 5. The third cycle of higher education according to the EHEA classification is not integrated in the Belarusian higher education system yet. At the same time, one has to turn a blind eye on lack of relevance of some of Belarusian statistics for the purposes of comparative analysis.

Distribution of students by education levels reflects the deformed structure of Belarusian higher education as compared to the average EHEA data. Using the data provided for the Implementation Report, the structure of Belarusian higher education is as follows:

ISCED 5 – 25%, ISCED 6 – 71.8%, ISCED 7 – 1.75%, ISCED 8 – 0.97%.

In the EHEA, the student population is distributed among the higher education cycles quite differently [3, p. 22]:

ISCED 5 – 16.8%, ISCED 6 – 58.3, ISCED 7 – 21.7%, ISCED 8 – 3%.

This disparity in the structure of the Belarusian higher education system is indicative of shifting the focus in the education policy significantly to accessibility of lower qualification levels (ISCED 5, ISCED 6) to the detriment of the higher ones (ISCED 7 and ISCED 8). Without considering ISCED 5 level, the structure of the student population remains as disproportional:

ISCED 6 – 96.3%, ISCED 7 – 2.3%, ISCED 8 – 1.3%.

The student population in the EHEA countries does not remain stable. However, multidirectional development can be observed in different countries. In the period of 2009-2012, 25 countries witnessed an increase in the student population while 18 - a decrease. After 2012/13, the student population increased in 19 countries and decreased in 26 countries.

Belarus falls into the category of the 11 EHEA countries in which an increase in the student population reversed to a decrease. In some countries, a decrease in the student population was quite substantial in 2010-2015. E.g., the student population in Romania dwin-

dled by 45.8%. The student population decreased by over 30% in Lithuania and Ukraine. The student population shrank by 20–30% in Armenia, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Slovakia, Slovenia, and Poland. However, the student population kept growing in half of the EHEA countries. The growth was most substantial in Turkey (71.8%) [3, p. 25].

Table 1. **Changes in the Belarusian student population of ISCED 6, thousand persons**

Academic year	2005/06	2008/09	2010/11	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18
Number of students	383,0	420,7	442,9	362,9	336,4	313,2	284,3

In Belarus, the student population continuously grew from the early 1950s. It reached its peak in the 2010/11 academic year and began to decrease subsequently. In 2017/18, the student population dwindled to the 2000/01 level losing almost 36% of the 2010/11 numbers.

Table 2. **Changes in the Belarusian student population of ISCED 7**

Academic year	2010/11	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18
Number of students	4,805	6,088	7,552	8,855	10,227	11,782	14,947

In contrast with the decrease in the student population of ISCED level 6, the number of master students keeps growing. As compared to 2010/11, it increased more than three times [4, p. 43]. As a result, the structure of the student population has improved gradually. If master students amounted to 2.3% of the students of the first and second levels (ISCED 6 and ISCED 7) in 2014/15, their proportion increased to 5% in 2017/18. However, representation of the main student groups is still far below the European pattern.

The reasons behind the changes in the student population of the EHEA countries are demographic processes as well as economic and institutional environment beneficial or detrimental to enrolment at universities.

In the EHEA, the statistical value of the enrolment rate for the 18-34 age interval is broadly used. It is quite stable in the majority of European countries. The median value was 15.9% in 2015 and has remained quite stable since 2012. In some countries in which the student population decreases for demographic reasons mostly, similar to Belarus, the enrolment rate in the 18-24 cohort does not decrease but increases owing to broadening options for enrolment and continuation of studies at universities. This happens in Denmark, Germany, Norway, Serbia, Switzerland, and Turkey. Unfortunately, it is difficult to compare it with the Belarusian situation since such statistics are missing in Belarus. However, another value is calculated in Belarus: the rate of enrolment at higher education institutions (Table 3). It is the ratio of those enrolled at higher education institutions to the population at the age of 17 expressed as percentage.

Table 3. **Rate of enrolment at Belarusian higher education institutions, %**

Year	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Enrolled students	82.3	85.6	84.3	71.0	69.8	70.2	68.6

After 2010, the number of secondary school graduates decreased significantly. If it included 92.6 thousand persons in 2010, 58.8 thousand young adults got secondary education in 2017. Enrolment at higher education institutions contracted as well. If 100.5 thousand persons were enrolled in 2010, 62.7 thousand were enrolled in 2016 [4, p. 18]. However, as the cohort of the 17-year-olds decreases, their percentage among the students decreases as well [4, p. 19]. It is difficult to explain this contraction of the rate of enrolment by demographic factors only. Economic and institutional factors should be taken into consideration as well, and this can be done as part of analysis of the social dimension of higher education.

At the same time, demographics have a decisive effect on the student population development. According to the 2018 EHEA Implementation Report, almost ¾ of the countries are guided by demographic forecasts when planning the education policy. Belarus is among such countries [3, p. 28] but none of the recent programme documents (Conceptual Approaches to Development of the Education System of the Republic of Belarus until 2020 and in the Prospect until 2030, 2016-2020 Education and Youth Policy Government Programme) analyse and mention the demographic situation among the risk factors. At the same time, the demographic forecast looks quite unpromising despite the temporary growth of the number of new-borns. A significant decrease in the number of 18-38-year-olds is expected in 20 years [5; 6].

2. Social Dimension of Higher Education

The EHEA policy in the social dimension is aimed at improving access to higher education for various social groups as a method to create inclusive societies in our countries.

Returning to the rate of enrolment at higher education institutions, it should be noted that decrease of the enrolment rate in the cohort of the 17-year-olds cannot testify to limited access to higher education if enrolment opportunities for other cohorts improve. However, the age structure of the student population remains quite stable since 2010, except for the cohort older than 26 years. The representation of the cohort increased from 13.2% to 17.9% in 2010/11-2016/17 although the absolute quantity of this student category decreased [7, p. 143-144].

The changes in enrolment of students from under-represented groups do not show improved access to higher education. In the first place, this is the case of access of such a numerous group of young people as graduates of rural secondary schools to higher education institutions. A separate enrolment competition for the graduates of rural and urban secondary schools was a tool of positive discrimination in relation to this category of prospective university students. However, the separate enrolment competition not only cultivated inequality of requirements for the prospective university students but was also one of the

cornerstones of the education policy created following the results of the 2001 presidential election. At that time, the fear of protest sentiment of university students motivated the authorities to start forming a system ensuring loyalty of this social group, and manipulating the social composition of students became one of the main tools. Enrolment privileges for the rural young people should have improved their access to higher education institutions and should thus have diminished scepticism among the students since the rural population was considered as the electorate loyal to the president.

On 20 March 2014, President Lukashenka signed Amendments of Edict of the President of the Republic of Belarus No. 80 of 7 February 2006 Edict No. 130 under the pressure of the university rectors who explained their position by concern about the quality of prospective university students. This regulation approved of a new version of the admission regulations of higher education institutions which set forth the single requirements for university applicants. As a result, the percentage of the graduates of rural secondary schools among the students newly admitted to higher education institutions dwindled by 40% in 2017/18 as compared to 2010/11 (from 12.1 to 7.3%) [8, p. 135; 11, p. 237–238]. At the same time, they amount to 20 % among the secondary school graduates (who got general secondary education).

During the same period, the percentage of groups poorly represented in the student population as the people with disabilities and orphaned children decreased. If 1,684 persons with disabilities or 0.44% of the student population studied in the programmes of ISCED level 6 at higher education institutions in 2010/11, in 2017/18, 915 or 0.34% [8, p. 86; 11, p. 183]. People with disabilities amounted to 0.94% of the secondary school students in the 2016/17 academic year. The situation with the orphaned children and children left without their parents' custody did not improve. If 2,113 students of the group, which amounted to 0.55% of the student population, studied at ISCED level 6 in 2010/11, 1,136 persons or 0.5% studied in 2017/18 [8, p. 86; 11, p. 183]. In Belarus, this population group has benefits when applying to higher education institutions – the right for non-competitive enrolment in the majority of study programmes of the first level of higher education (ISCED 6). However, numerous other issues which do not permit to use this benefit for entering and studying at a higher education institution have not been resolved [9].

One of the key tasks of the education policy in the EHEA member states is the gender balance in access to higher education. As appears from the 2018 Implementation Report, many education systems were designed to increase the share of male student population and to mitigate gender imbalances in some programmes. The percentage of women among those enrolled at higher education institutions in the majority of the countries decreased in the ten years between 2004/05 and 2014/15 alongside relatively stable median values at the EHEA in general. Men still remained a minority.

Belarus followed this pan-European trend. Although the percentage of women decreased since 2015/16, the gender balance persisted. Similar to many EHEA countries, a decrease of the female student population had a different social meaning at different higher education levels.

In 17 EHEA member states, the share of women was higher at ISCED level 6 and lower

at ISCED level 8. In 8 of the 17 countries, the dominance of women or balance with men exists among the students newly enrolled at all the three levels. Men dominate in the third cycle in such countries as Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Czech Republic, Germany, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Slovakia, Switzerland and the UK. In Germany, men dominate among the students newly enrolled in the first year of higher education. In the other 11 countries, the share or women enrolled in the first year of all education levels is below or approaches 50% [3, p. 162].

In Belarus, changes in gender balance can be observed from the statistics of the number of women at different education levels. We can see a gradual decrease of the share of women in the first level of higher education from 58.2% to 55.4% in the period of 2005/06 to 2016/17. Although gender imbalance remains, development of the education system follows the European trend [7; 1 0, p. 156].

Gradual gender rebalancing can be observed in the third cycle, although this level is not integrated in the higher education system yet, it can be compared to the third cycle in the EHEA with reservations. In 2005-2009, the share of women in postgraduate programmes increased from 54.0% to 58.4%. The percentage of women at this education level began to decrease later. In 2016, women made up 52% of postgraduate students [7, p. 164; 10, p. 181].

Enrolment in master programmes demonstrates the general trend of a decreasing share of women among the students newly enrolled at this level of education. However, a new gender imbalance arose instead of gender balance. The share of women among those enrolled in master programmes dwindled from 57.0% in 2010/11 to 41.4% in 2017/18 [11, p. 205].

Gender imbalances are especially noticeable in relation to various fields of education.

Similar to Europe, some groups of professions in Belarus have been established as male or female (Table 4). The percentage of women in education programmes of Pedagogy (Education), Art. Humanities, Healthcare, Engineering and Technologies and other profiles at the Belarusian higher education institutions correlates to the median values in the EHEA.

Table 4. **Share of female student population by field of education (ISCED 6), %**

Profile	**Belarus, 2016/17**	**EHEA, 2014/15**
Pedagogy (Education)	55.4	79.5
Healthcare	70.0	77.5
Humanities	77.7	65.6 *
Art and Design	71.8	
Science	54.3	54.4
Communication. Law. Economics. Management	69.6	55.9**
Engineering and Technologies	24.6	25.3

Note: * Arts and Humanities according to EHEA classification; ** Business, Administration and Law according to EHEA classification [7, p. 146-147; 12, p. 163].

Attempts to improve women's access to engineering study programmes, which corresponds to the pan-European trend, were unsuccessful in Belarus. In 2010/11-2016/17, the share of women studying in the profile decreased from 27.7% to 24.6%.

Virtually no progress could be seen as to attempts to address gender imbalances in other fields of education.

In the Belarusian education system, monitoring of the social structure of students, similar to the majority of other EHEA countries, is limited to gender, age, disability, the orphan status, and the level of previous education. The issues of socio-economic inequality, religious and national characteristics, and migration status of the prospective university students remain beyond the attention of education statistics. At the same time, although Belarus is included in the 2018 Implementation Report among the countries which have a policy to plan access of underrepresented groups to higher education, no measurable values of such accessibility have been found in any policy document on education development. Long-term planning is rare in Europe. However, a number of countries have it. They include Austria, the Czech Republic, France, and the UK. E.g., the 2016-2020 five-year plan of higher education development in the Czech Republic sets the task to bring the percentage of students with special education needs closer to their percentage among secondary school graduates [3, p.171].

One of the most common methods to improve access of underrepresented groups to higher education is their preferential treatment or positive discrimination. In 18 education systems of the EHEA, the quota allocation method is used; it reserves a certain share of places in the first year for representatives of such special groups as national minorities, orphans, disabled, displaced persons, etc. [3, p. 173].

Another popular method is preferential treatment with more lenient requirements for the prospective university students from underrepresented groups. This method is used in Belarus, although to a limited extent. At present, orphans, children left without their parents' custody as well as retired service personnel, officers of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and other law-enforcement agencies are entitled to preferential treatment in case of enrolment to some unpopular study programmes if they apply to the relevant study programmes within the determined quota of 30%. The graduates of rural schools had preferential treatment until 2014.

In a number of countries such as Austria, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, the Netherlands, the UK, etc., prospective university students from underrepresented groups are entitled to consultations concerning selection of the appropriate profession. This kind of assistance is not provided in Belarus. [3, p. 174].

To improve access to higher education to representatives of underrepresented groups which have been unable to successfully complete their studies in the secondary school, the EHEA countries use various options of indirect routes to enter universities. These are the so-called bridging programmes (e.g. evening classes, an additional follow-up year, etc.), "second-chance" programmes, preparatory courses, etc. aimed at receiving the standard upper secondary education certificate entitling to enter higher education institutions [3, p. 174].

In Belarus, this function is performed by evening schools (studies), involving persons

with special education needs. At the same time, it should be noted that the number of evening schools decreases constantly. In 2012–2014, the issue of closing them on economic grounds was on the agenda.

Alternatives to bridging programmes are the programmes which ensure receiving a qualification different from the secondary education certificate but enabling to enter a higher education institution. Similar programmes are available in Denmark, France, the UK and other countries. In Belarus, this function is performed by programmes of technical and vocational education.

Article 213 of the Education Code determines qualifications enabling to enter a higher education institution to get first-level education. Besides general secondary education, this right is provided by vocational education with general secondary education (ISCED 4) and by secondary specialised education (ISCED 5B) If the share of those enrolled in the first year with secondary specialised education remains quite stable. In 2010/11-2017/18, the percentage of first-year students with secondary specialised education changed insignificantly from 27.0% to 26.7%. The share of first-year students with vocational education dwindled during the period from 4.4% to 2.6% [10, p. 16; 11, p. 238].

The EHEA has other non-traditional routes to access higher education which are absolutely foreign to the Belarusian higher education system. In particular, this concerns recognition of non-formal and informal education and previous work experience as the preconditions sufficient to enter a higher education institution in case of no formal qualifications.

A similar approach is actively promoted in the communique of ministerial summits starting with the 2012 Bucharest summit. However, almost in half of the EHEA higher education systems, this model of improving access to the higher education system remains unimplemented.

The possibility to enrol on the basis of procedures selected by universities themselves is equally foreign to Belarusian practice. This requires a high level of institutional autonomy not inherent in the Belarusian higher education institutions. However, alternative entering routes are not widespread in the majority of European countries yet.

Against the background of other countries, Belarus with its quite limited range of tools of alternative and preferential access to higher education appears to be quite advanced. However, it should be mentioned that this range of tools and its ideology are the heritage of the Soviet era. The European strategies of developing the social dimension of higher education do not resonate with the Belarusian education policy.

The possibility to get higher education in no small measure depends on its financial accessibility. It especially affects social groups with a low economic status. The EHEA governing documents bind the governments to pay special attention to financial support of such students at the expense of the budget funds. The students' education expenses are not reduced to tuition fees but also include other expenses (accommodation, travel, study materials expenses, registration fees, payment for certificates etc.). Thus, students often consider such expenses as tuition fees even in the countries in which university education is free.

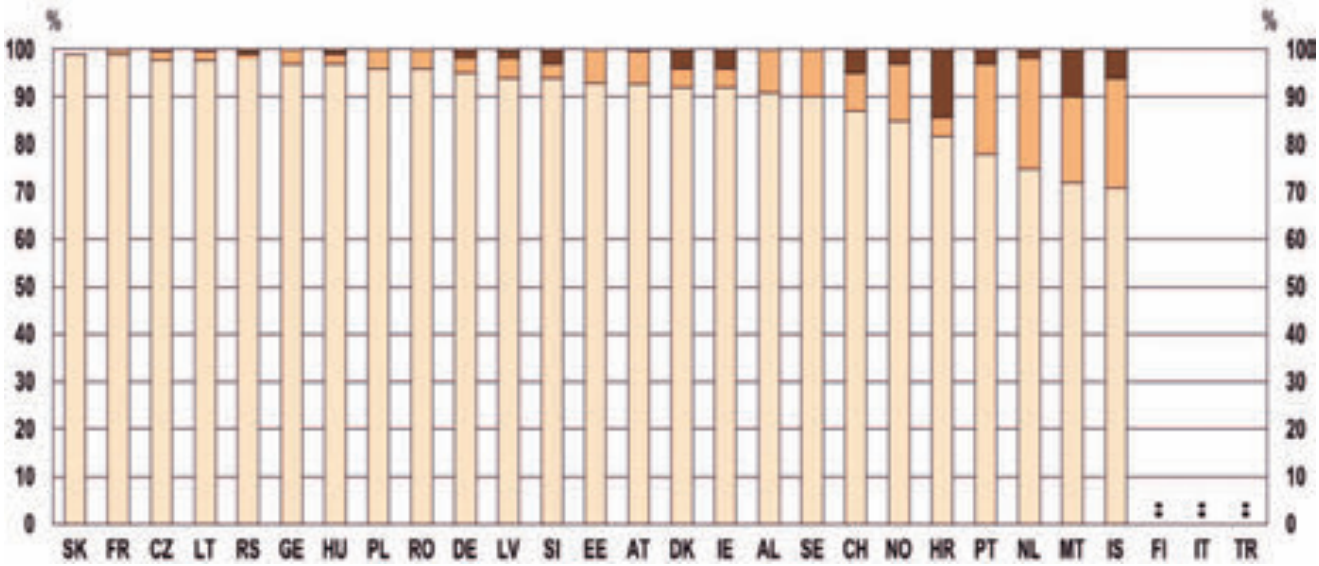


Fig. 2. Share of students using standard and alternative procedures to enter higher education institutions: – Standard route: entry with the standard upper secondary qualification; – Delayed route: entry with the standard upper secondary qualification obtained later; – Alternative route: entry without the standard upper secondary qualification.

Source: IR 2018.P.177

The 2018 Implementation Report enables to compare fees for education services and systems of financial support for economically disadvantaged students in different countries (Fig. 3).

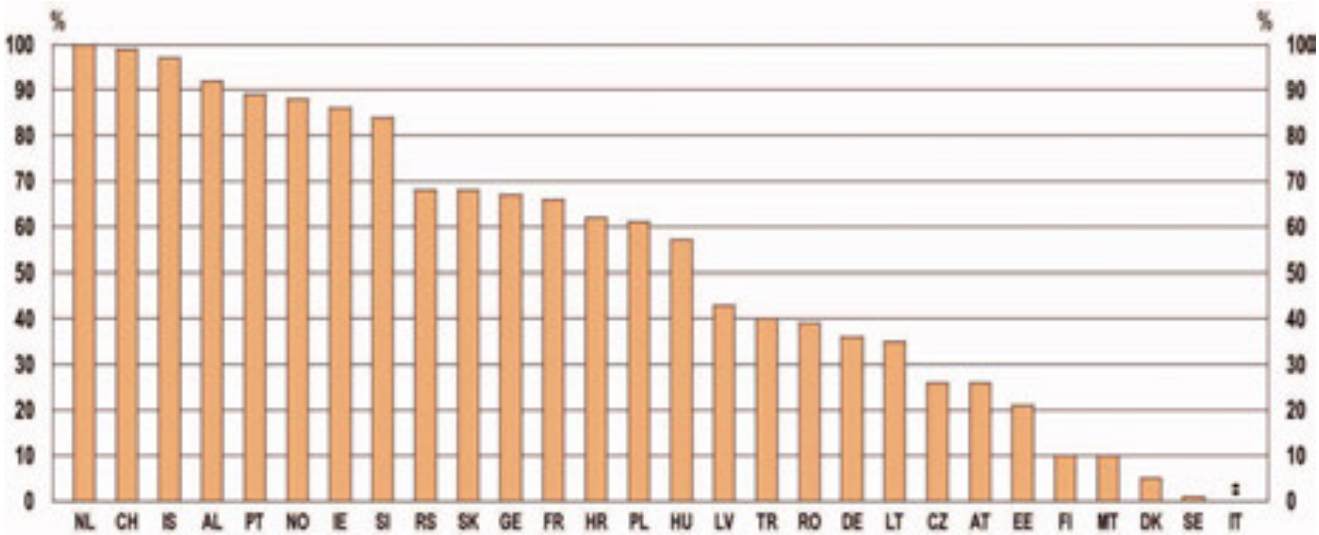


Fig. 3. Percent of students of ISCED 6 level who pay tuition fees, 2016/17.

Source: IR 2018.P.181

In 13 education systems, all home students pay tuition fees. In seven countries, education is free of charge or costs below 100 euros per year. In 31 systems, some students pay tuition fees while others study at the expense of the government budget. At the same time, the same payment mode usually exists at all levels of higher education.

The data on Fig. 6 is provided following a students' poll. At the same time, it should be taken into consideration that students of public universities do not pay tuition fees actually in such countries as Denmark, Finland, Germany, Norway, and some others. In some cases, they pay administrative fees as well as membership or social fees at student organisations which they consider as tuition fees. Belarus is included in the third group of countries [3, p. 181].

According to the National Statistics Committee, 58.3% of students studied in ISCED level 6 programmes with tuition fees in Belarus in 2016/17, 51.2% thereof at public higher education institutions and 7.1% at private ones.

Since 2010/11, the percentage of students paying tuition fees has dwindled. Such students amounted to 66.2% in 2010/11. This decrease has resulted from a threefold decrease in the number of students of private education institutions mostly. In the situation of a demographic crisis, the authorities use administrative limitations of the enrolment targets of private higher education institutions in the competition between public and private higher education institutions [7, p. 139].

During enrolment in the first year of the Belarusian higher education institutions, the socio-economic status of prospective students is not taken into consideration; therefore, tuition fees are a barrier for the representatives of vulnerable groups. In 23 of the EHEA countries, students may be exempt from tuition fees if they belong to such groups. In some other countries, tuition fees may be reduced for such students. Belarus is among the 14 countries in which the socio-economic factors are ignored during enrolment. Similar to Belarus, enrolment with no tuition fees depends on the results of the entry tests or secondary school certificate in Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Hungary, Kazakhstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Montenegro, Romania, and Serbia [3, p. 183].

The level of tuition fees affects access to higher education as well (Fig. 4). To compare, tuition fees in the countries with varying economic development are compared to the national GDP per capita in the relevant year.

According to the Implementation Report, Belarus belongs to the countries with the annual fees in the first cycle of higher education approaching 20% of the GDP per capita. In 2018, the average tuition fees amounted to 2,200 Belarusian rubles which was equal to 1,058 US dollars at the time of the new fees announcement or 19% of the GDP per capita. However, prestigious study programmes at the metropolitan and provincial universities have tuition fees approaching 30% of the GDP per capita [13]. The fees in the second cycle hardly differ from the fees in the first cycle. Thus, Belarus falls into the category of the countries with the highest relative tuition fees among the EHEA countries sharing the first place with the other post-Soviet countries.

For the underrepresented groups, tuition fees are a significant barrier on their way to higher education. To mitigate the situation, the EHEA countries use various tools of financial support for the students. In the first place, it includes reduced tuition fees, grants, loans, tax benefits and family allowances. Some countries, with Belarus among them, assist by providing cheap accommodation (dormitories) and subsidising meals at higher education institutions. Some countries subsidise public transportation.

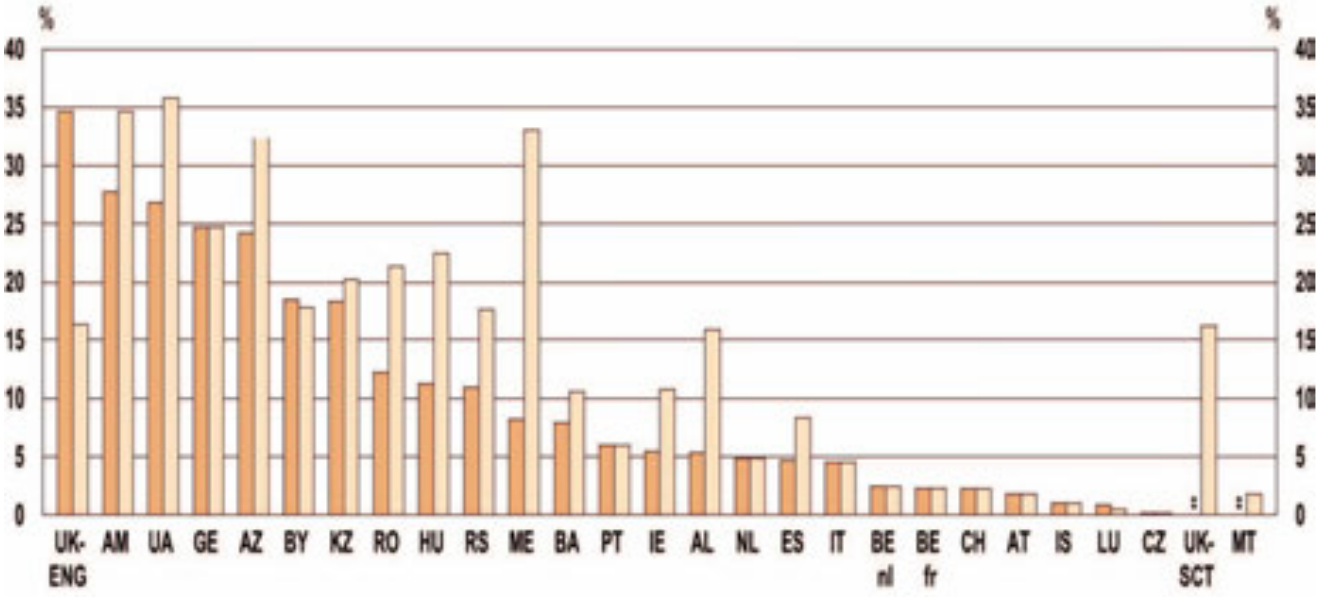


Fig. 4. Most common amount of yearly fees for full-time home students as a percentage of GDP per capita, 2016/17: – ISCED level 6; – ISCED level 7.

Source: IR 2018. P.183

General and need-based grants for students are provided in all of the EHEA countries, except Iceland, Latvia, and Serbia. However, the percentage of the students who are granted scholarships differs in different higher education systems significantly. If 80 to 100% of the full-time students are granted scholarships in the Scandinavian countries, below 10% are granted in Austria, Greece, Italy, Kazakhstan, Lithuania, and the UK [3, p. 187]. At the Belarusian public higher education institutions, academic as well as social scholarships from the governmental scholarship fund are granted only to the students studying in full-time study programmes at the expense of the national budget or local budgets [14]. According to the National Statistics Committee, the relative share of the students who are granted scholarships in the total number of full-time students decreased from 58.0% to 54.6% in 2005/06-2016/17. Social scholarships provided to economically disadvantaged, disabled, orphan students, and other vulnerable groups of students were granted to 1,000 persons only. In 2005/06-2016/17, the number of such scholarship holders dwindled more than three times [7, p. 156; 10, p. 171]. The students paying tuition fees as well as the students of private higher education institutions, irrespective of their socio-economic situation, have no right to the governmental scholarships. These students may be provided scholarships or one-time financial assistance only at the expense of the profit derived by the higher education institution.

Preferential loans provided by the government are another tool of financial assistance to economically disadvantaged students. Such loans are not provided in 16 of the 50 EHEA education systems only. In some countries such as Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Sweden, and the UK, over 30% of the students take preferential loans in addition to scholarships or instead of them. In the majority of the countries, less than 10% of the students take loans. The Implementation Report places Belarus among the countries in which 10 to 20% of the

students who get their first higher education take loans [3, p. 188]. However, it should be taken into consideration that the Belarusian system of preferential loans covers neither the students of private higher education institutions nor the part-time students, nor covers other expenses, except the tuition costs; it limits the payment to the amount required to pay for one year of studies, requires a security in the form of a pledge or a guarantee. Besides, the loan repayment begins immediately upon awarding a diploma and is limited to five years.

To conclude, it could be mentioned that the Belarusian governmental education policy declared is aimed at restructuring professional education by decreasing the higher education percentage in it. However, this strategy is not accompanied with measures to ensure inclusivity of the higher education system. Accessibility of higher education to vulnerable groups does not improve and even deteriorates due to curtailing some old preferential tools and insensitivity of the system to the new European mechanisms of ensuring inclusivity.

3. Higher Education Institutions and Staff

The Implementation Report provides information about seven EHEA countries, the number of universities in which exceeds 200 (Fig. 5). They include France, Germany, the Holy See, Italy, Poland, Russia, and the Ukraine. The Holy See has a significant number of Catholic universities and colleges all over the world. The number of such institutions is variously estimated from 1,358 to 1,861 [15].

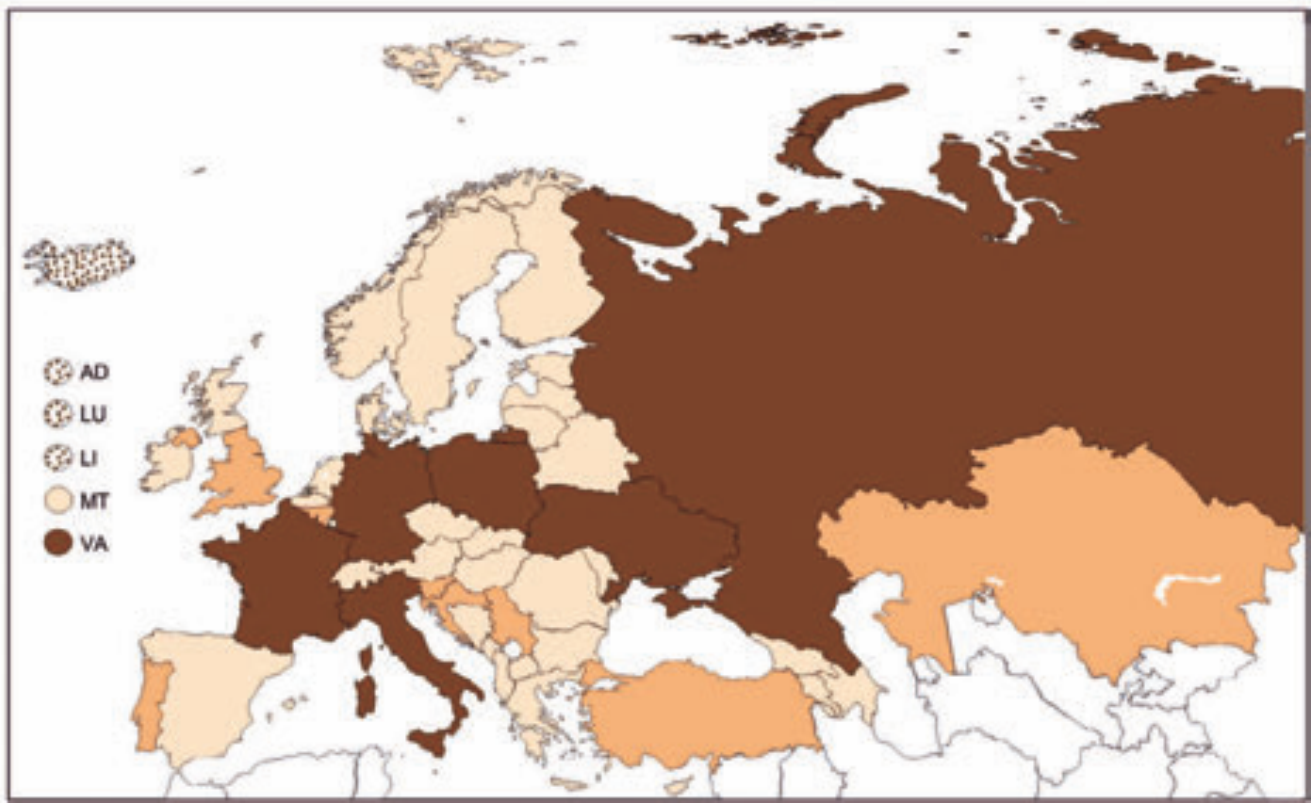


Fig. 5. Number of higher education institutions in EHEA countries in 2016/17: – Over 200; – 101 to 200; – 11 to 100; – fewer than 10.
Source: IR 2018.P. 29

Eight of the EHEA countries have 101 to 200 universities, and 30 higher education systems have 11 to 100 higher education institutions. Belarus is included in the last, the most numerous group of countries.

In 2016/17, Belarus had 51 higher education institutions: 42 public and 9 private ones. From 1950/51 until 2012/13, the number of public universities increased from 29 to 48 and then decreased to 42. The number of private higher education institutions which appeared in 1991 reached 20 by 1994/95. Upon 1996/97, it kept dwindling as a result of administrative measures and reached 9 by 2012/13. The number of students of private higher education institutions decreased three times from 60 thousand to 19.17 thousand persons in 2010/11-2017/18 [11, p. 11].

The number of the academic staff at the EHEA universities increased in the majority of the countries in 2000-2016 (Fig. 6). The most significant growth was observed in Cyprus (204%), Malta (184%), and Slovenia (186%). In contrast, the number of faculty decreased in five countries (Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, Romania). The period of 2005-2010 is characterised by a decrease in seven countries, and the period of 2010-2016 in 14 countries. It is significant that changes in the number of faculty do not necessarily follow changes in the number of students. While there is correlation in some countries (Cyprus, Finland, Malta, Romania), changes in the number of students and academic staff go contrariwise in seven countries (Belgium, Bulgaria, Ireland, Slovenia, Sweden, Switzerland, and the UK). It is especially noticeable in the period of 2010-2016 [3, p. 29].

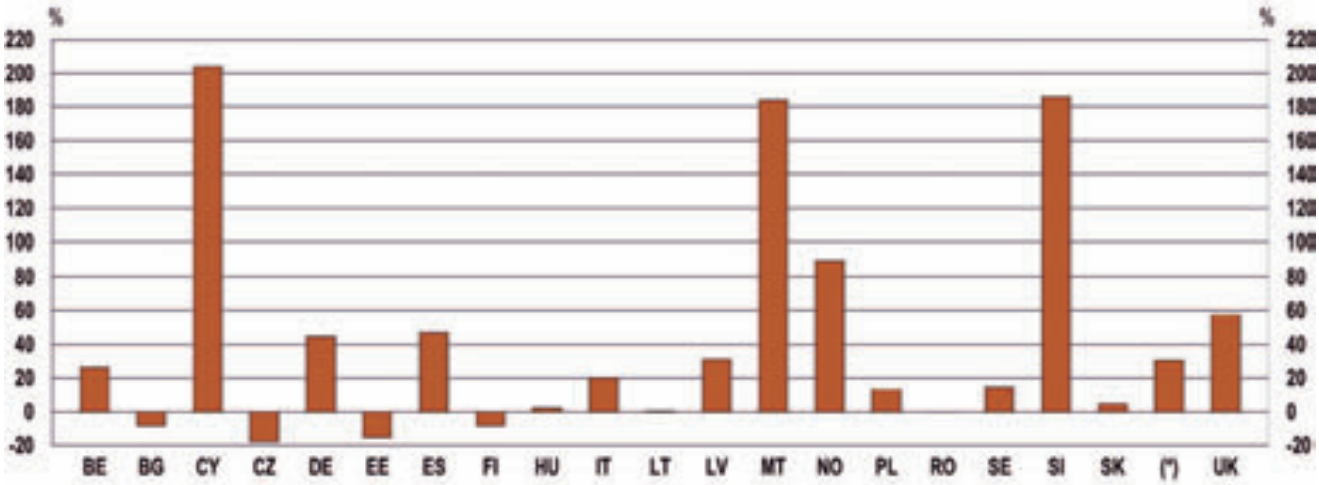


Fig. 6. Percentage change in the total number of academic staff between 2000 and 2016
Source: IR 2018.

In Belarus, increase in the number of faculty was observed in 2000/01 until 2011/12 (Table 5) [10, p. 170; 16, p. 76; 17, p. 156].

In 2011/12, the number of academic staff reached the maximum of 24,673 persons and began to decrease gradually. At the same time, the decrease rate of the academic staff lagged behind the decrease rate of the students significantly. In 2000-2005, the number of students grew by 137.9% and of the academic staff by 114.2%. In 2005-2010, increase in the number of students was 115.6% and of the academic staff 106.6%. By 2016, the number of students

decreased to 70.7% against the level of 2010 and of the academic staff to 88,4% respectively, i.e. by 11.6% as compared to 29.3% in case of the students.

Table 5. **Changes in the number of the academic staff at Belarusian higher education institutions**

Academic years	Number of academic staff	Number of students (ISCED 6), thousands
2000/01	20,086	277.7
2005/06	22,939	383.0
2010/11	24,451	442.9
2016/17	21,623	313.2

Breakdown of the Academic Staff by Age

In the majority of the EHEA countries, the highest percentage of the academic staff can be attributed to the cohort of 35-49 years which amounts from a third to a half of the staff depending on the country (Fig. 7). In half of the countries, the academic staff below 35 years amounts to 17% and less than 10% in Italy, Slovenia, Spain and Switzerland. At the same time, this group accounts to 42-58% in Germany, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, and Turkey. In most countries, the cohort of 50-64 years is larger within the academic staff than the group of young faculty at the age below 35 years (23 out of 30 countries) but smaller than the group of 35-49 years in 25 countries. The senior cohort of 50-64 years is relatively numerous (40% and more) in Bulgaria, Finland, Greece, Italy, Slovenia, Spain, and Switzerland. The academic staff over 65 years is small in numbers. In half of the countries, it amounts to less than 4% but reaches 10% in Bulgaria, Estonia, Italy, Latvia and Slovakia [3, p. 30].

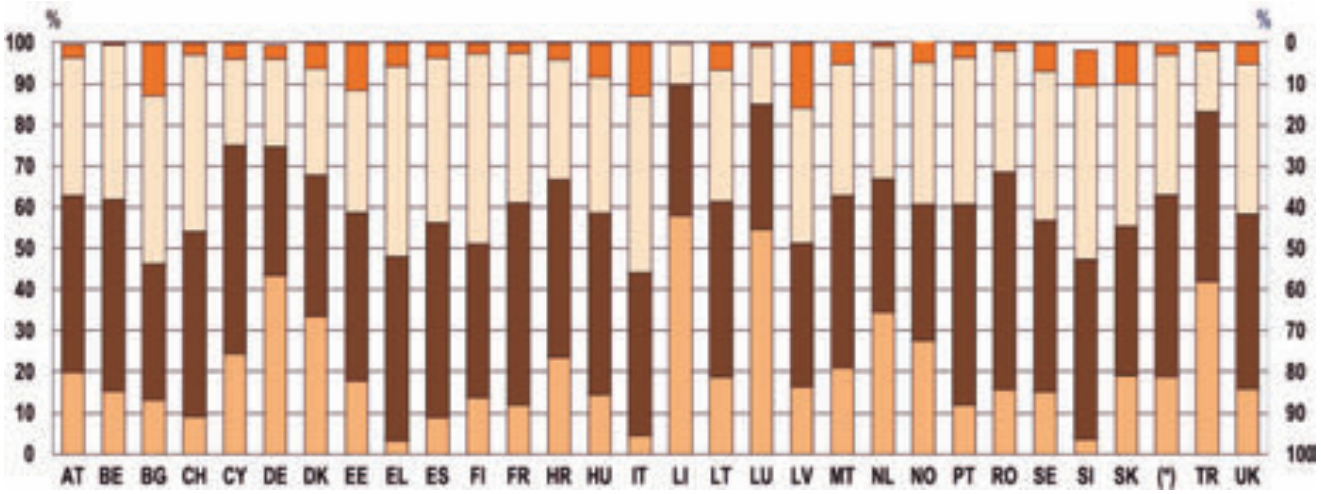


Fig. 7. Academic staff by age groups (%), 2015: – younger than 35 years; – 50–64; – 35–49; – 65 and older.

Source: IR 2018. P.31

The Belarusian statistics break down the academic staff of higher education institutions by six cohorts which do not always coincide with the age groups used in the EHEA report. However, distribution of the academic staff by age in the Belarusian higher education system can be compared to the situation in other EHEA countries in general. At the Belarusian higher education institutions, the group of young faculty younger than 29 years old is small and decreases gradually. If it amounted to 15.4% in 2008, it decreased to 9.1% in 2017 [18, p. 12]. The percentage of the young people in the academic staff decreased almost by 40% quicker than the decrease rate of the total number of the academic staff at the Belarusian higher education institutions in the same period – below 23%. Similar to the majority of the EHEA countries, the academic staff of the age group of 51-65 years is more numerous than the group of faculty younger than 30 years. The percentage of the group changed insignificantly during the decade. In 2008, it included 31.3% of the faculty and 29.8% in 2017 [18, p. 12]. Similar to the majority of other countries, this cohort is smaller than the age group of 30-50 years amounting almost to half of the academic staff at the Belarusian universities – 46.7% [18, p. 12].

Since 2008, three cohorts increased their representation in the academic staff. The percentage of the faculty of 60-65 years and older than 65 years increased significantly from 9.5 to 11.4% and from 10.5% to 14.4%. The percentage of the academic staff of 41-50 years increased from 18.2% in 2008 to 23.5% in 2017 [18, p. 12].

The human resources policy of the Belarusian higher education system enables to clearly observe the tendency of resolving the social problem to preserve the workplaces of the academic staff at the expense of the young people in the situation of the decreasing number of students. However, even when the number of students at the Belarusian higher education institutions grew, the percentage of the young academic staff decreased stably, and the percentage of pensioners (60 years and older) grew as stably.

Breakdown of the Academic and Administrative Staff of Higher Education Institutions by Gender

In half of the EHEA countries, women amounted to 44.4% of the academic staff in 2016 (Fig. 8). The feminisation level of higher education was lower in Greece (32.7%), Switzerland (34.3%), Liechtenstein (35%), and Malta (35.4%). Women amount to 50% and more of the academic staff in five countries only. These countries are Romania (50%), Finland (51.7%), Latvia (55.7%), Lithuania (56.5%), and Macedonia (70.7%). As compared to 2000, the percentage of women in the academic staff increased in all countries, except Latvia [3, p. 31].

In Belarus, women amount to 54.9% of the academic staff. Their percentage has actually remained unchanged since the early 2000s. In 2005, it was equal to 53.0%, in 2010 to 55.3%. However, despite a significantly high feminisation level of the Belarusian higher education system, obvious phenomena of vertical segregation can be observed in the field. Gender asymmetry in the personnel structure of the academic and administrative staff of higher

education institutions can be seen in the decrease of the percentage of women along the position hierarchy. If the percentage of women among lecturers and assistant lecturers is 65.8%, 52.2% of women occupy positions of associate professors. The percentage of women among department professors is even lower – 23.3%.

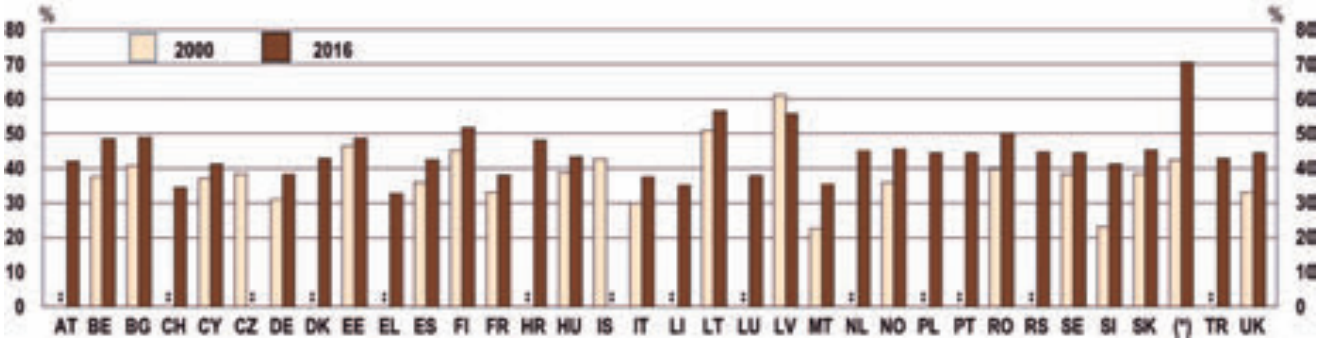


Fig. 8. Female academic staff (%), 2000 and 2016
Source: IR 2018.P. 31

The percentage of women among the senior administrative staff decreases along the position hierarchy as well. Women amount to 38.0% of department heads, 31.7% of deans, 23.8% of vice rectors, and 9.6% of rectors of higher education institutions [3, p. 29]. At the same time, as compared to 2010, this asymmetry decreased a bit. In 2010, women accounted for 47.7% associate professors and 19.8% of professors. Among the senior administrative staff, women accounted for 31.7% of department heads, 34.1% of deans and vice deans, 22.1% of vice rectors, 7.1% of rectors [18, p. 20].

4. Expenditure on Higher Education

The expenditure of public funds on higher education expressed as a GDP percentage is deemed to be a reflection of the priority of the higher education system in the governmental education policy. This value enables to compare higher education systems with a different level of economic development (Fig. 9). In 2014, half of the EHEA countries spent on tertiary education over 1.2% of the GDP from the public funds. 2% and more was spent by Denmark (2.3%), Norway (2.2%), and Finland (2%). Austria, the Netherlands, Sweden, and the Ukraine spent over 1.5% of the GDP. These eight countries have the tertiary education enrolment rates in the 18-34 cohort above the median for the EHEA (15.9 of the median). Less than 1% of the GDP is spent by Albania, Armenia, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Georgia, Hungary, Italy, Kazakhstan, Luxembourg, Portugal, Romania, Russia, Slovakia, and Spain. These countries face a decrease in enrolment to higher education institutions starting from 2012/13. Armenia, Georgia, and Kazakhstan spend below 0.5% – 0.31; 0.31; and 0.38 respectively [3, p. 32].

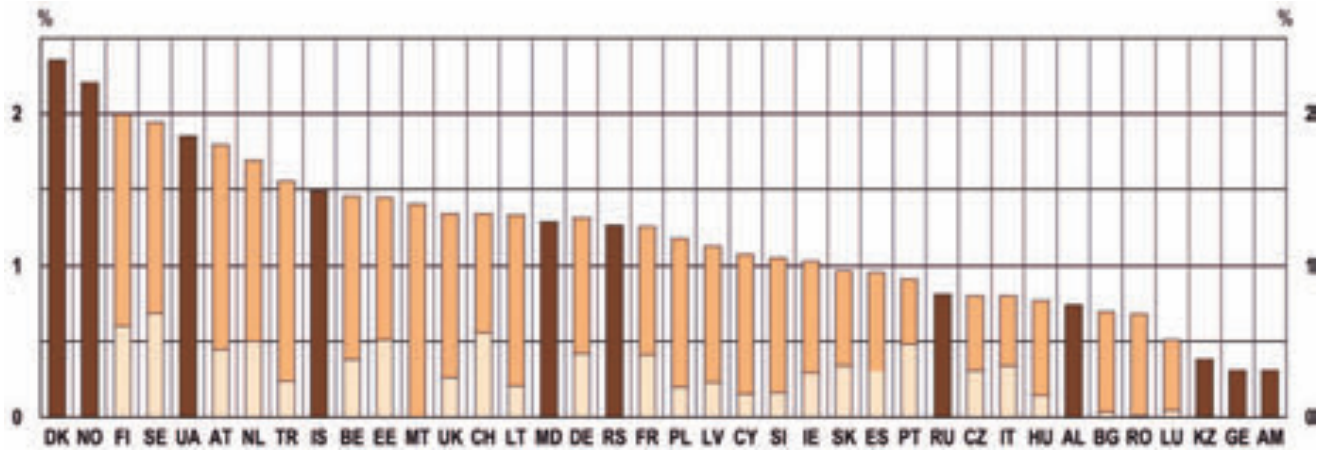


Fig. 9. Annual public expenditure on tertiary education, % of the GDP (with and without R&D): – R&D; – expenditure without R&D; – Total expenditure.
Source: IR 2018. P. 33

Belarus belongs to the group of countries spending below 1% of the GDP on higher education from the public funds. Differences in the structure of the values complicate comparison with the EHEA statistics but do not exclude it. In 2016, expenditure on higher and postgraduate education amounted to 11.3% of the total public expenditure on education [17], which amounts to 0.56% of the GDP. At the same time, the GDP percentage of the public expenditure on higher education keeps decreasing. If 0.76% of the GDP was spent on higher and further education in 2005, 0.66% was spent in 2010. The percentage of the GDP to finance this field of education decreased by over 26% by 2016. Decrease in the governmental financing of higher education reflects the overall trend of decrease in the governmental support of education in real terms in general [3, p. 33]. The relevant percentage of the GDP has decreased constantly. If 6.4% of the GDP was spent in 2005, 5.4% in 2010 [10, p. 15], the GDP percentage dwindled to 4.8% in 2014 and 2015. However, it increased to 5% in 2016 [7, p. 17]. It should be taken into consideration that prior to 2011, i.e. prior to passing the Education Code, the standard of the public expenditure on education of at least 10% of the GDP had been set forth by law. This standard was never followed but the authorities declared their intent to achieve the level by 2010 [19]. Upon 2011, the 10% level has never been mentioned either in laws or in political declarations.

The 2018 Implementation Report includes information about changes in the budget spending of the EHEA countries to finance tertiary education in real terms (Fig. 10). This time Belarus is present among the other EHEA countries. The absolute expenditure on tertiary education increased in two countries only – Denmark and Luxembourg – in 2011-2015. In 16 countries, the expenditure decreased by less than 5% and by over 5% in 19 countries in 2011-2015 [3, p. 35-36].

Judging by the Implementation Report data, Belarus demonstrated a stable increase in the expenditure on higher and further education which, upon 2013, was replaced with a record decrease in financing among the EHEA countries by 32% by 2015.

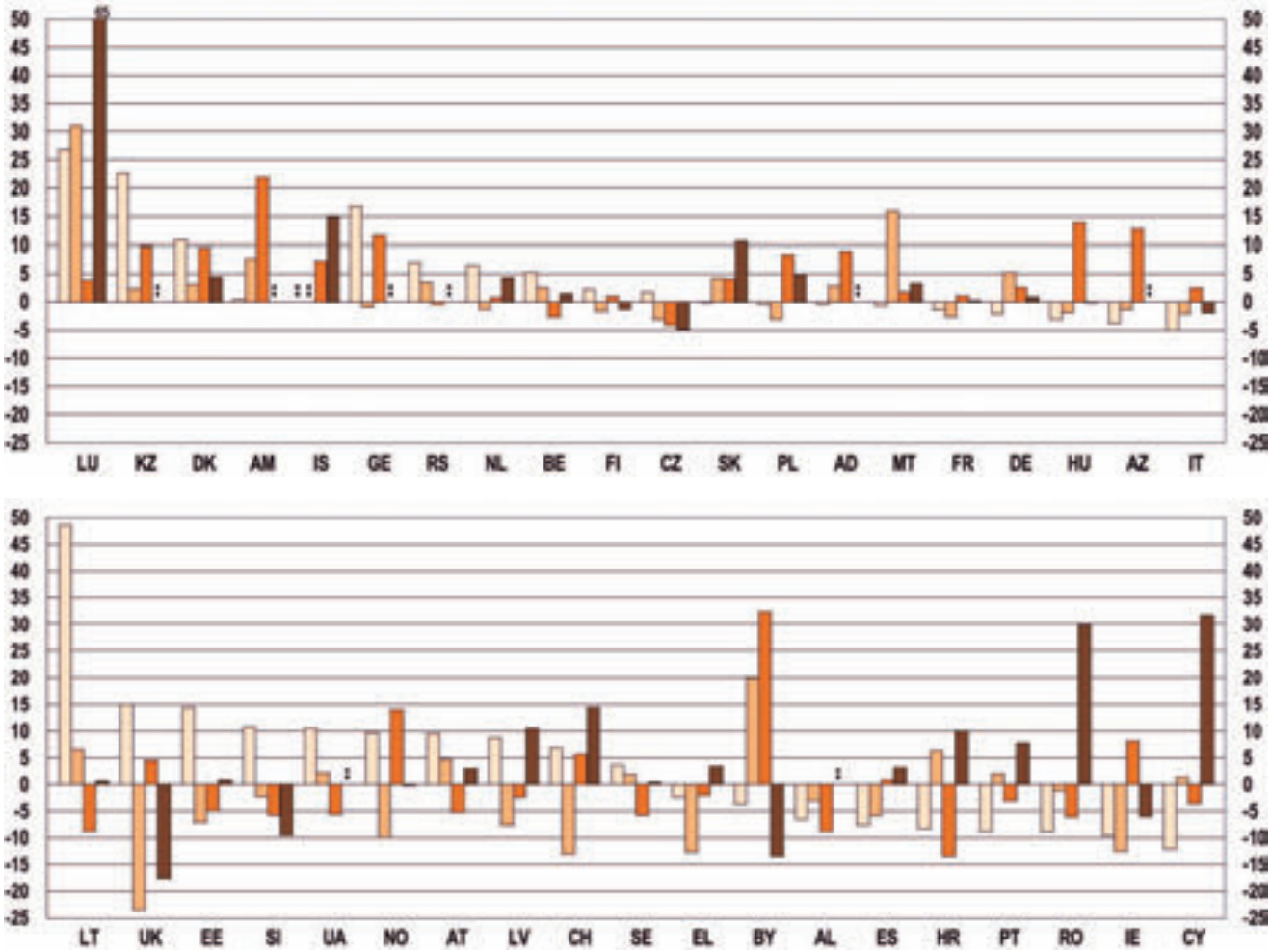


Fig. 10. Yearly changes in real public expenditure on tertiary education between year 2011 and year 2015 (price index 2010=100): – 2011–2012; – 2012–2013; – 2013–2014; – 2014–2015.
Source: IR 2018. P. 36

The data of the National Statistics Committee of the Republic of Belarus enables to work out in detail the situation [7, p. 20]. In case of translating the data on the budget spending on higher and postgraduate education in the US dollar at the average annual official rate, changes in the expenditure are as follows (Table 6).

Thus, the expenditure of the consolidated budget on higher and postgraduate education decreased by 44% on 2016 against the 2013 level.

In the EHEA, another value – the percentage of the total public expenditure on tertiary education – is used, this value permits to estimate importance of higher education as compared to other fields financed by the government budget (healthcare, social security, infrastructure, law enforcement etc.).

The highest percentage of the state budget is spent on tertiary education in Denmark (4.2%), Norway (4.8%), and Switzerland (4%). Eight countries are on the other extreme, they spend below 2% – Armenia, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Georgia, Hungary, Italy, Luxembourg, and Portugal [3, p. 34].

Table 6. **Budget spending on higher and further education**

Year	Expenditure, billion Belarusian rubles	US dollar exchange rate	Expenditure, million US dollars
2010	1,122	2,978.1	376.7
2011	1,798	4,623.47	388.9
2012	3,525	8,335.86	422.9
2013	4,244	8,875.83	478.1
2014	4,646	10,215.53	454.8
2015	5,100	15,864.62	321.5
2016	530*	1,988.5	266.6

* million Belarusian rubles taking into consideration the denomination

Belarus can be added to this group of countries. The percentage of the consolidated budget spent on higher and postgraduate education in 2016 amounted to 1.94% (Fig. 11). Starting from 2005, when the percentage was 1.58% [10, p. 15], the spending of the consolidated budget on higher and postgraduate education increased and reached 2.27% in 2012. After that, the governmental spending began to decrease. In 2016 it fell below the 2% level [7, p. 16]. Increase in the budget spending on the field coincided with the increase in the number of students, then the spending began to fall in alignment with the decrease in the student population. However, the public spending has been below the European median in the recent decade. The development of the value partially coincides with the changes of the spending in half of the European countries although such impressive achievement as in the UK which increased the public support of tertiary education from 2.7% to 3.8% in 2008-2014 is not demonstrated. At the same time, decrease in the governmental spending on higher and further education in Belarus upon 2012 does not demonstrate the same fall as in Cyprus where it dwindled from 4.56% to 2.2% in 2011-2014.

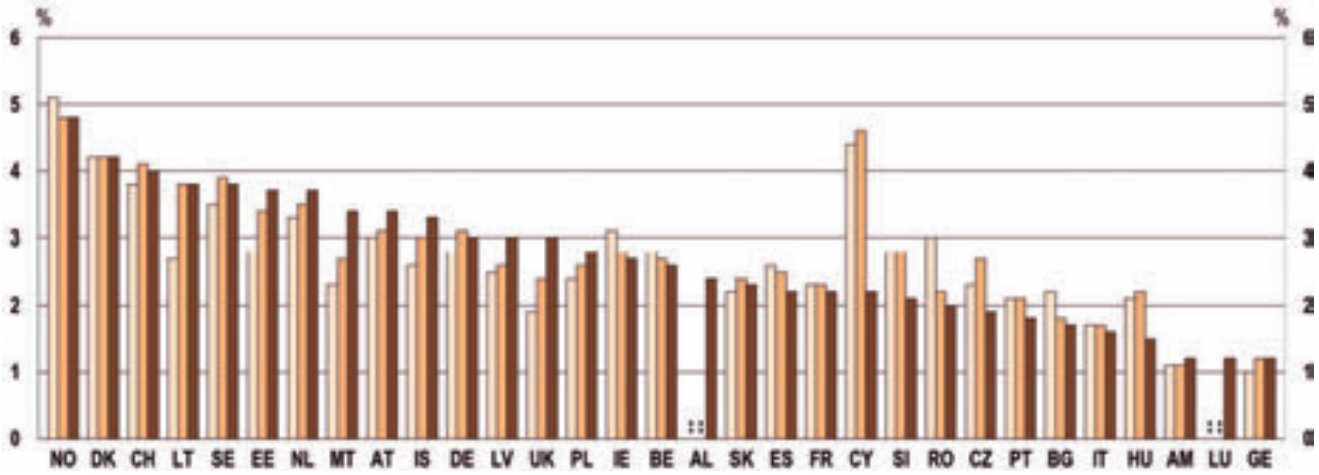


Fig. 11. Annual public expenditure on tertiary education as a % of total public expenditure, 2008, 2011, 2014 : – 2008; – 2011; – 2014.

Source: IR 2018.P. 35

The comparative analysis of the higher education expenditure cannot but consider the size of the student population. The EHEA statistics provide such a comparison in terms of translating the annual public and private spending on education in spending per student (an equivalent of the full-time student) considering the purchasing power standard (PPS). It is especially important to consider significant changes in the number of students in the EHEA countries (Fig. 12). In Europe, significant variation of the value is observed from 34,209 euros in Luxembourg to 4,180 euros in Romania (2014 data) [3, p. 38]. However, Belarusian statistics do not account for the spending in these terms.

The situation with higher education financing in real terms demonstrates even greater variation of the results among the EHEA countries. The one extreme includes such countries as Luxembourg, Norway, and Switzerland spending 40,777, 38,012, and 29,599 euros per student annually respectively. The other extreme has such East European countries as Romania, Serbia, and Bulgaria where the spending is below 2,000 euros per year: 1,965, 1,678, and 1,275 euros respectively.

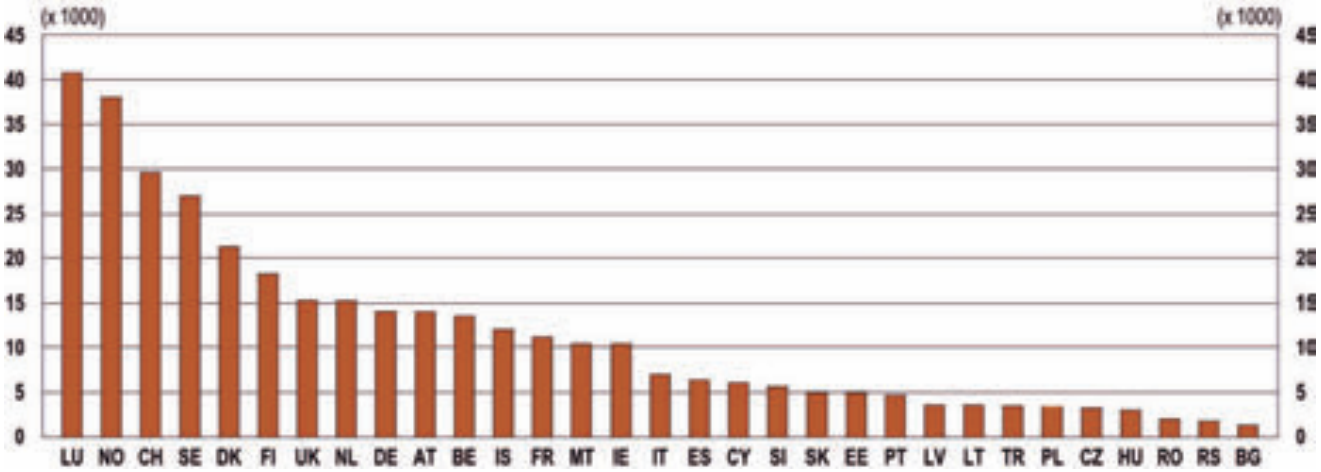


Fig. 12. Annual public expenditure on public and private tertiary education institutions, per full-time equivalent student in euro, 2014

Source: IR 2018.P. 38

The data of the National Statistics Committee of Belarus concerning the consolidated budget spending per student of higher and postgraduate education enable comparison to the EHEA data [7, p. 21].

Translating the spending data in the euro at the average annual official exchange rate, we can have the data of Table 7.

The spending of the consolidated budget per student in 2010-2016 was significantly lower than the European median (7,009 euros). At the same time, Belarus spent on higher education in 2014 somewhat more than the three outsider countries exceeding the limit of 2 thousand euros. The changes in the spending in Belarus demonstrate a certain increase in the spending in absolute terms in 2010-2013, similar to other values, and return to the initial value in 2016, The spending concerning the value decreased by 25% in 2013-2016.

Table 7. **Spending of the consolidated budget of the Republic of Belarus per student by education cycles (in the effective prices; million Belarusian rubles), without expenditure on capital construction: Higher and further education**

	2010	2011	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Million Belarusian rubles	6,7	10,9	22,3	27,8	30,8	35,8	3,8*
euros	1696,2	1694,6	2081,5	2291,5	2269,0	2032,9	1726,9

* Thousand Belarusian rubles

5. Conclusion

The glance at the Belarusian higher education using the European optics enables to see its significant deformations and imbalances which are otherwise difficult to register and assess. Any other way, it is impossible to create a strategy to modernise the higher education system in response to the challenges which Belarus faces, similar to the rest of Europe. Public self-delusion and illusion of the normal which support the conservative motivation of the majority of the higher education stakeholders are hard to cultivate when it is possible to escape self-isolation and see oneself from the outside.

As compared to other education systems, more advanced as to the reaction to the challenges, the irrelevance areas which should cause discomfort and necessity to correct the education policy are obvious. Structural, personnel, social imbalances are not the symptoms of the authenticity of the national higher education system. They speak of the mistakes and untimeliness of the political decisions resulting in deterioration of academic, professional, and social standards of higher education and motivate demand for structural reforms able to transform the conservative material with the Bologna tools.

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Chapter 1. Fundamental Academic Values: Legislative Guarantees

Starting with the Bologna Declaration, the Bologna Process documents confirmed on numerous occasions that any reforms of European education were possible based on the traditional academic values only. Countries aspiring to accede to the Bologna Declaration should abide by these imperatives not only as historical privileges but, firstly, because the responsibility of higher education institutions to society is based upon them.

Although the term "academic values" is not directly defined in the EHEA documents, it is understood as institutional (university) autonomy, academic freedom, equal opportunity for higher education, and democratic principles of the higher education system governance.

The 2015 Yerevan [1] and the 2018 Paris [2] communiques additionally included academic integrity and public responsibility of higher education institutions into academic values.

The Road Map understands implementation of fundamental academic values in the Belarusian higher education system as legislative recognition of the principles of Magna Charta Universitatum [3] and the Recommendation of the Council of Europe (Rec/CM(2012)7) [4] concerning the responsibility of public authorities for academic freedom and institutional autonomy.

1.1. Legal Basis for Academic Freedom

The 2018 EHEA report mentions that the degree of academic freedom is hard to study. It is often easier to register threats to than guarantees of this most important imperative. However, it is possible to note that the very concept of academic freedom is present in the laws of virtually all EHEA countries. Belarus, the Flemish Community of Belgium, Hungary, and Malta are the exception [5].

Absence of the relevant term from law does not mean immediate absence of academic freedom from the life of universities. However, lack of terms defining academic values in laws in the case of Belarus correlates with serious limitations of the academic rights of students and academic staff of higher education institutions.

Currently, the Belarusian laws do not use the terms "academic freedom" and "institutional (university) autonomy" (and it is not planned to use them) although they were present in the Education Law (Article 34) until 2009 [6]. Other terms referring to the EHEA values are missing as well.

Efficiency of a provision of law referring to academic values should certainly not be overestimated in the situation of widespread legal nihilism in Belarus. Article 34 in force in 2002-2009 could not stop the repressions against independent higher education institutions, Belarusian students and academic staff. However, lack of terminology certainty results in legislative collisions and provides massive opportunities for abuse of administrative power.

The ***Education Code*** passed in 2011 had no room for the terms defining fundamental academic values either. It can be defended by the fact that the rights are enshrined in laws although the term "academic freedom" is not used.

The proponents of the point of view refer to the fact that a number of the Code articles set forth the teacher's right to creative initiative, freedom of choice of pedagogically sound teaching and personal development forms and techniques, textbooks and teaching aids, unionisation, joining other non-governmental associations whose activities do not contradict the law. The students' rights to participate in non-governmental associations and education institution governance are declared as well.

However, these norms of the Code concern students and teachers of all education levels, including preschool education, are not customised for the students and academic staff of higher education institutions, are of proclamatory nature, and do not include right exercise mechanisms or liability for right violation. The Code and its detailing bylaws do not guarantee the right to teach, study, and research with no fear of disciplinary action, dismissal or other penalties.

At the same time, several articles limit academic freedom or do not establish hindrances for its arbitrary violation.

The requirement of ***clauses 2.1, 3, 5.2 of Article 18. Personal Development in Education System*** to ensure personal development of students based on state ideology limits the students' as well as the teachers' academic freedom. Basically, this regulation justifies ideological censorship and repressions against the dissenting.

Despite **clause 1.6. of article 52** declaring the right to participate in research and creative work, **limitations of the right to disseminate and publish research results freely** are practiced at the institutional level. Numerous Belarusian higher education institutions apply various **limitations to research mobility of the academic staff** – from complicated procedures of obtaining permits to travel abroad to coercion of the academic staff to reject their salaries during travel. Crossing of the border by the academic staff is controlled by the law-enforcement agencies, and the information is provided to the administration of higher education institutions.

Clause 3 of Article 50. Teaching Staff includes a list of academic staff positions to be filled in on the competitive basis. However, the academic staff have no right to a tenure contract, and rectors of higher education institutions may arbitrarily execute contracts with selected academic staff for a period shorter than their selection period. The academic staff are deprived of real possibility **to participate in the higher education institution governance**. Rectors appointed by governmental agencies do not report to the academic community, the councils of higher education institutions or faculties are deprived of the right to pass final resolutions on the key issues of operation of higher education institutions and their units. The councils of higher education institutions consist of the heads of units mostly.

Under the law, students may participate in the governance of a higher education institution through participation in the work of councils of the higher education institution and its faculties. The Ministry of Education's Regulations of the Education Institution Council provides for 25% representation of students at these self-governance bodies. Although the

councils have no powers due to concentration of power in the rector's hands, and the administration's control over the elections (if any) holds out little hope of independence of the student representative body, this formal requirement does not comply with at a number of higher education institutions.

Clause 7.7. of article 3 declaring the right to select the level of educational subjects, academic disciplines, academic subject areas and topics is devalued because of preservation of standardised syllabi and curricula regulating 50% of the content of the first-cycle educational programme (which was a decrease as of 2018) and up to 30% of the content of the second-cycle educational programme. In this situation, the students' selection of the educational path is significantly limited. According to a poll, 72% of the students indicate lack of possibility to select course units. http://bolognaby.org/images/uploads/2016/12/gemiusAdHoc-study-for-OBK-Dec2016.pdf

Clauses 1.23. of article 31 and 1.10. of article 52 declaring freedom of association for students and academic staff are null and void since the rights to establish and register non-governmental associations and other non-profit organisations are governed by the Civil Code and the Non-Governmental Associations Law (Non-Governmental Associations Law of the Republic of Belarus No. 3254-XII of 4 October 1994). The analysis of the law and other regulations demonstrates: a) the procedure for governmental registration is of permissive and not of declarative nature, the procedure is complicated, provides for arbitrary refusal to register any organisation being established; b) operation of unregistered non-governmental associations is prohibitedand entails an administrative penalty, until recently its violation results in imprisonment up to two years (article 193.1 of the Criminal Code); c) the laws substantially limit financing of non-governmental associations from domestic and foreign sources; d) the right of non-governmental associations for peaceful assembly as well as freedom of expression are limited to a significant extent.

1.2. Academic Integrity

Balance of academic freedom and responsibility is one of the most important EHEA imperatives. As a matter of fact, the issue of moral and legal responsibility for violating academic integrity standards is broadly discussed and codified in numerous post-Soviet countries. In Belarus, academic integrity remains in the periphery of public attention to a significant degree.

An opinion poll commissioned by the Independent Bologna Committee has demonstrated that academic dishonesty is widespread at the Belarusian higher education institutions [7]. However, it is impossible to state that the situation with plagiarism or cheating during examinations differs significantly from what we can observe in other countries. In the opinion of the respondents, 44% of the students only pass examinations and pass-fail examinations honestly and independently without cheating. A majority use various types of cheat sheets or cheat. When preparing written assignments, only 1/3 declared that they did not plagiarise, 74% of the students downloaded free research papers from web sites from time to time at least, 63% paraphrased others' texts without a reference to the source,

61% copied others' texts without a reference to the author, 30% purchased research papers, term papers, graduation theses, and other written works while this violation of academic standards is of repeated nature for 17% only [8].

The main types of neutralising and rationalising academic dishonesty used by the Belarusian students are comparable to the excuses used by students in other countries. A majority of students of the Belarusian higher education institutions tend to justify violations of the academic ethics standards by external circumstances, 54% of the students refer to lack of practical value of assignments for their professional training, 48% to lack of applicability of and disinterest in such assignments. A widespread motive is reference to defects in the teaching and learning process organisation: overburdening with assignments (30%) and lack of training in academic writing and of research culture (29%). A popular type of neutralising academic dishonesty is reference to the overall atmosphere of plagiarism tolerance by the students and academic staff (22%), the academic staff's laissez-faire attitude towards plagiarism in students' works (17%), low professional level of the academic staff (16%). Consequently, the students shift responsibility for academic standards violations on those who should control them – a widespread type of rationalising the students' behaviour in numerous higher education systems [9].

Similar to other countries, the Belarusian students tend to justify their behaviour by lack of damage to their professional training through violation of academic integrity standards: 46% of the respondents rationalised the violations in this manner, and 37% saw a harmless component of the student way of life in examination cheating and plagiarism at all times.

A special place among the reasons justifying academic dishonesty is occupied by reference to isolation of the Belarusian higher education from European academic values and traditions. 28% of the students tend to explain the academic community's insensitivity of academic integrity standards by distinct basic values of the Belarusian higher education system. In other words, low academic freedom results in similar responsibility [10].

Certainly, it is impossible to completely rely on the students' assessments of academic integrity at Belarusian higher education institutions because of the degree of the study representativeness and insufficient transparency of the education system. However, one cannot but admit that the issue is not the focus of attention of the academic community, and struggle against academic dishonesty has not occupied a significant place in ensuring education quality until recently.

Antiplagiat system in its various versions has been mandatorily used since 2008 to check candidate and doctoral (analogue of the third-cycle) dissertations. The system has been used at the other levels at higher education institutions selectively – at separate universities and at the discretion of separate lecturers. Higher education institutions connect to the system one by one. As of the beginning of 2018, 13 universities used Antiplagiat[1]. At

[1] Consultation workshop for higher education institutions titled Combatting Plagiarism and Commissioning of Term Papers, Graduation Theses, Master's Theses and Other Written Works of 15 February 2018: http://www.nihe.bsu.by/index.php/ru/novosti-instituta/1900-ceminar-soveshchanie-dlya-uvo-protivodejstvie-zaimstvovaniyu-i-vypolneniyu-na-zakaz-kursovykh-i-diplomnykh-proektov-rabot-magisterskikh-dissertatsij-i-inykh-pismennykh-rabot

some universities, emphasis was laid on updating and applicability of students' works, their greater practical orientation during the struggle against academic dishonesty. However, the Belarusian education system is still oriented mostly to disciplinary action to solve any issue.

Although availability of efficient legal mechanisms promotes strengthening academic integrity standards, it is not control and disciplinary action that play the main role in shaping academic culture. Because of the lack of autonomy and academic freedom at Belarusian higher education institutions, it would be naïve to hope for students' self-control and corporate university solidarity in the struggle against academic dishonesty. Disqualification of students from assessment and decision-making concerning examination cheating and plagiarism facts aggravates internal disunity and opposition in the academic community and provides for estrangement from the values of academic morality.

1.3. Public Participation in Higher Education Governance

The overall tendency for the majority of the EHEA countries is the growing decentralisation of higher education governance and autonomy of universities. Belarusian laws are not designed to support such changes in academic life. On the contrary, the history of the national education witnesses the strengthening of authoritarian and centralist principles in governing the area.

Article 2 of the Education Code of the Republic of Belarus states that the governmental education policy is based on the principle of governmental and public governance (http://www.pravo.by/document/?guid=3871&p0=hk1100243). However, actual distribution of powers indicates significant limitation of public participation in decision making.

The Education Code specifies four institutional entities governing the education system in the Republic of Belarus: the President, Council of Ministers, Ministry of Education, local executive and administrative bodies.

Article 107 of the Education Code reserves for the President of the Republic of Belarus the exclusive right to determine the governmental education policy and to guarantee implementation of its major lines. No other governance entity is authorised to participate in determining the governmental education policy. Not only the government and Ministry of Education but also the National Assembly are disqualified from establishing education policy under the law. As compared to the previous education laws, the Education Code has significantly increased accumulation of power in the President's hands.

The President's participation in establishing education policy is manifested in issuing decrees, approvals, minutes of instructions to the government based upon public speeches, verbal orders, etc.

However, it is impossible to find publicly available systemic statement of education policy. 27 out of the 49 current presidential decrees on higher education issues are dedicated to organising enrolment campaigns of higher education institutions. The other ones are related to the issues of reorganising, renaming universities, peripheral issues of staff training or social protection of certain categories of higher education institution students and staff.

Clause 5, article 2 of the Education Code sets forth that the organisational foundation

of the state education policy is the education system development programme approved by the Government of the Republic of Belarus for a five-year period. No mechanism of translating non-systemic presidential orders into such programme documents is directly stated.

Besides approving the programmes, the Council of Ministers carries out the following functions: implementation of the state education policy; overall governance of the education system; determination of areas of cooperation between the governmental agencies and local executive and administrative bodies in the field of education; implementation of the foreign economic policy in the field of education in the Republic of Belarus and taking the necessary measures to implement it (article 108).

Pursuant to the Education Code (article 109), the Ministry of Education is granted powers to ensure implementation of the governmental education policy, the education system operation, organisation of international cooperation, development of education standards, syllabus documentation of educational programmes, personal development programmes, etc.

Although the Education Code does not mention local authorities as a higher education governance entity while higher education institutions report to the national authorities, regulations of some local executive committees include such functions, However, it should be taken into consideration that local executive and administrative bodies directly report to the President and are actually not local self-governing bodies. Even very modest powers can be interpreted by the heads of regions quite broadly. A series of dismissals of the academic staff of Hrodna State University in 2013-2014 initiated by the chairman of the regional executive committee S. Shapira can illustrate such administrative interference of the local authorities in the operation of higher education institutions. As a matter of fact, the university rector fell victim to the administrative abuse of power in Hrodna [11].

The laws order all national and local higher education governance entities to coordinate with non-governmental organisations (non-governmental associations, trade unions, religious organisations, and associations of legal entities). If participation of the governmental stakeholders is governed by the law (article 109 of the Education Code) and can significantly influence the decisions of the government and of the Ministry of Education, non-governmental organisations have a less defined status. The most obvious form of cooperation of non-governmental stakeholders with higher education governance entities includes public councils with advisory functions.

The supreme advisory body in the higher education system is the *Republican Council of Higher Education Institution Rectors* established by a presidential decree in 2001. The Education Code (article 116) specifies that the President of the Republic of Belarus defines the competence, composition, and procedure of operation of the Republican Council of Rectors [12]. According to the Regulations, the Council is established to prepare recommendations on higher education issues, improve the education and personal development processes, to develop research, and to improve the physical infrastructure of higher education institutions. The elected chairperson of the council reports to the President about the council operation. The members of the council are rectors of higher education institutions appointed or approved by the President as well as rectors of private higher education institutions

appointed by the minister of education. Consequently, the council consists of officials appointed by the governmental governance entities and cannot be deemed to be a channel of public participation in preparation of resolutions concerning higher education although it assists in engaging important stakeholders in the process.

The Education Code permits establishing steering and other councils in different education areas whose regulations are approved by the Government of the Republic of Belarus or its authorised body consisting of the staff of governmental bodies, education institutions, non-governmental associations, and other organisations by the Government of the Republic of Belarus, the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Belarus, other governmental bodies (article 116). Such councils include the *Public Advisory Council on Education* of the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Belarus (https://edu.gov.by/about-ministry/obshchestvenno-konsultativnyy-sovet-po-voprosam-obrazovaniya/). The Council Regulations were approved by the minister of education on 26 April 2017. The tasks of the new advisory body include preparation of suggestions and recommendations concerning development and improvement of the education system. Establishment of the council had been constantly delayed, although announced by the heads of the Ministry of Education on numerous occasions. In one of the interviews, the minister of education I. Karpenka defined the function of the council to be "a sui generis forum to determine potential risks, which can arise in the education system in order to prepare high-quality managerial decisions, discuss the most urgent issues" [13]. The Council Regulations seem to indicate the democratic nature of its creation: the Council is to be established voluntarily while consisting of prominent education, science, and other experts, heads and representatives of education institutions, research and other organisations, personnel customers, parents, non-governmental associations, other stakeholders, scientists and artists with professional expertise and experience in the areas referred to the council's competence or otherwise interested in addressing their tasks, representative of governmental bodies (http://www.economy.gov.by/uploads/files/OKS-y/Minobrazovaniya/Minobrazovanie-Polozhenie.pdf). However, the minister determines the composition of the council. The minister may include as well as exclude from the council any person. It is not surprising that the council consists of the employees of governmental institutions almost completely; it has no representatives of employees, and only two of the 26 members represent non-governmental organisations. The council has no public control functions or rights to insist on considering its suggestions.

In the run-up to considering Belarus' application to accede to the EHEA in Yerevan, the *Republican Public Student Council* was established under the auspices of the Ministry of Education on 31 January 2015 https://vk.com/studsovetmo. One of the motives for its creation was an attempt to demonstrate student self-governance in Belarus in response to the criticism. According to the regulations approved by the students at the first session on 24 February 2015, the council is a collegiate advisory elective body of student self-governance of higher education institutions. The council includes one representative from each higher education institution. The core area of activity of the council is to prepare suggestions on implementation of the state youth policy considering the issues of the student youth: im-

provement of the education process, joining efforts of student self-governance bodies to implement and protect the youth's rights, participation in various programmes and projects, analysis and representation of the youth's interests, organisation of cooperation of the Ministry of Education, heads of higher education institutions and student self-governance bodies. Representatives of universities at the council are elected at a joint meeting of student self-governance bodies. However, an online poll of students in April 2015 demonstrated that they know virtually nothing about the activities of the council (only 12% of the respondents had heard about it and 10% knew who represented their higher education institution). Only 14% of the students believed that students' representatives protected the students' interests and rights at self-governance bodies [14].

The European Students' Union does not consider the Republican Public Student Council to be a legitimate representative of the Belarusian students.

The powers of public councils are limited to recommendations to governmental agencies at most. The agencies are not required to consider them and resolve on the recommendations. The procedure for composing public councils does not provide for democratisation of the higher education system governance. Arbitrary appointment of a certain person to or removal from the council results in dependency of the council members on the body under whose auspices the council was established, permits to manipulate the composition, erodes the stakeholders' trust in it. This procedure of establishing the council does not ensure representation of the complete spectrum of stakeholder organisations, civil society organisations in particular. As a rule, non-governmental organisations are represented by government-organised non-governmental organisations (GONGOs). The role of public councils is reduced to façade functions to a significant degree, the ministry tends to operationalise them to imitate public participation in decision-making.

We will consider public participation in higher education governance at the institutional level within the context of ensuring university autonomy at the Belarusian higher education system.

1.4. Institutional Autonomy

The Recommendation of the Council of Europe (Rec/CM(2012)7) includes an appeal to the authorities to guarantee organisational, financial, staffing, and academic autonomy of higher education institutions fully. The essence of the imperative for reforming the Belarusian higher education system can be explained via detailed analysis of understanding institutional autonomy in the current conditions.

Although university autonomy is not an end in itself, it is deemed to be the most important prerequisite for successful performance of their mission by the European higher education institutions in the situation of creating an advanced society based on knowledge.

The current understanding of institutional autonomy is determined in the EUA's Lisbon Declaration of 2007. Since 2007, the European University Association has monitored and analysed the condition of institutional autonomy in the countries whose universities are members of the organisation.

Officially, Belarus has never participated in such studies. At the same time, the Independent Bologna Committee has applied the EUA's methodology to analyse the situation with institutional autonomy in the Belarusian higher education system. The results of the analysis were provided in the IBC's publications starting from the White Book 2013. *Reforming Belarusian Higher Education System according to the Objectives, Values, and Main Policies of the European Higher Education Area* [15].

Using the EUA's methodology to describe and analyse the situation with institutional autonomy in Belarus faces a number of serious challenges. The EUA's indicators are not always able to reflect the nature of the Belarusian academic ethos and the real practice of governance of universities. It is complicated to fully reproduce the procedure of measuring the indicators in the situation when the universities themselves and the Republican Council of Rectors are not involved in the process. However, it is important to preserve the EUA's methodology approach to the maximum to compare assessments of institutional autonomy in Belarus and other EHEA countries,.

The research methodology was based on singling out four main dimensions of the university autonomy and expert evaluation of each indicator characterising the dimension. The full list of indicators grouped by blocks in the 2017 version is provided below [16].

Organisational autonomy

Selection procedure for the executive head (rector)
Selection criteria for the rector
Dismissal of the executive head
Term of office of the executive head
Inclusion and selection of external members in university governing body
Selection of external members in governing body
Capacity to decide on academic structures
Capacity to create legal entities

Financial autonomy

Allocation of public funding
Ability to keep surplus
Ability to borrow money
Ability to own buildings
Ability to charge tuition fees from national students
Ability to charge tuition fees from foreign students

Staffing autonomy

Capacity to decide on recruitment procedures of senior academic and senior administrative staff
Capacity to decide on salaries of senior academic and senior administrative staff
Capacity to decide on dismissals of senior academic and senior administrative staff
Capacity to decide on promotions of senior academic and senior administrative staff

Academic autonomy
Capacity to decide on overall student numbers
Capacity to select students
Capacity to introduce and terminate programmes
Capacity to choose the language of instruction
Capacity to select quality assurance mechanisms and providers
Capacity to design content of degree programmes

1.4.1. Organisational Autonomy

The organisational autonomy of the Belarusian higher education institutions can be assessed by the criteria of the European University Association with reservations and references to the specific conditions of the Belarusian higher education governance system.

Selection Procedure for the Executive Head (Rector)

Under the Education Code of the Republic of Belarus (article 208 *Higher Education Institution Management*), the head of a state higher education institution is appointed and dismissed according to the procedure set forth by the President of the Republic of Belarus.

Procedure for Appointing to (Approving of, Dismissing from, Suspending from) and Consenting to Appointment to (Dismissal from, Suspension from) Certain Positions Included in the Personnel Register of the Head of State of the Republic of Belarus Edict of the President of the Republic of Belarus No. 645 of 8 November 2001 sets forth the following procedure for appointing rectors.

The rectors of state higher education institutions are appointed by the Council of Ministers upon recommendation by the Ministry of Education and approved by the President of the Republic of Belarus. The President appoints the rectors of the Belarusian State University and of the Management Academy of the President of the Republic of Belarus. As a matter of fact, appointment and dismissal of the rectors of all state higher education institutions is fully controlled by the President.

The Republican Council of Higher Education Institutions Rectors has an advisory function in selecting rector nominees. Clause 3.5 of the Council of Rectors Regulations provides for the Council's participation in consideration of nominees to the positions of the heads of higher education institutions, in creating a reserve for filling in the positions of the heads of higher education institutions. The Council of Rectors consists of the heads of higher education institutions reporting to the governmental agencies; it does not report to any representative bodies or organisations of the academic community.

The academic community, collegiate executive bodies of a higher education institution have no influence on the selection of the executive head of the higher education institution. Generally, the process of considering rector nominees occurs in a situation of lack of information, and the choice of the authorities comes as a surprise to the staff of the higher education institution.

The head of a private higher education institution is appointed and dismissed by the minister of education upon recommendation by the founder.

The new draft revision of the Education Code provides for a change in the transparency of rector nomination: "Nominees to the position of the head of a higher education institution shall be nominated on the competitive basis according to the procedure set forth by the founder of the higher education institution or by the authorised body unless otherwise determined by the President of the Republic of Belarus". However, the procedure for appointing the head will not probably change significantly.

Selection Criteria for the Rector

Belarus has no procedure for selecting the executive head of a higher education institution. However, the requirements for a rector nominee are determined by Amendment of Issue 28 of the Single Employees' Qualification Reference Book Ordinance of the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of the Republic of Belarus No. 105 of 21 October 2011, which sets forth the qualification requirements and official duties of the rector of a higher education institution. According to the document, the position nominee should have a higher education, the academic degree of a doctor or candidate of sciences, work experience in managerial positions of at least five years. Nevertheless, the ordinance of the Ministry of Labour may not limit the President's right to select a nominee for the position of the executive head of a higher education institution. However, the university's powers are insignificant in determining the criteria for selecting its rector.

Dismissal of the Executive Head

The capacity to dismiss a rector is the key factor of its accountability to an institution or stakeholders.

A higher education institution has no authority to dismiss its rector according to article 208 of the Code. Procedure for Appointing to (Approving of, Dismissing from, Suspending from) and Consenting to Appointment to (Dismissal from, Suspension from) Certain Positions Included in the Personnel Register of the Head of State of the Republic of Belarus Edict of the President of the Republic of Belarus No. 645 of 8 November 2001 sets forth the same procedure for dismissing rectors as in case of their appointment. The procedure is fully controlled by the President and deprives the rector of any legal remedies against arbitrary dismissal.

Terms of Office of the Executive Head

Neither law nor a higher education institution determines the terms of office of its head. According to the Code, they depend on the President's or the Ministry of Education's decision. A contract executed by the Ministry of Education with a rector is no guarantee against arbitrary dismissal. It may be terminated upon the President's consent or his/her decision at

any time. This dependence on the superiors' will makes the rector an extremely dependent person.

Inclusion and Selection of External Members in University Governing Body

Inclusion of external members in the university governing body (the council of a higher education institution) in Belarus is governed by the Regulations of the Education Institution Council approved by Ordinance of the Ministry of Education No. 84 of 18 July 2011. According to the Regulations (clause 5), "the council may consist of the representatives of local executive and administrative bodies, other governmental bodies, personnel customers, non-governmental associations, and other organisations". At first glance, this wording enables to suppose certain autonomy of the higher education institution on the issue. However, this assessment can be not quite adequate.

Selection of External Members in Governing Body

In the European countries, the governing structures of universities essentially differ from the principle of governing higher education institutions that is customary to Belarus.

In Europe, three types of governing structures are singled out: unitary, traditional dual, and asymmetric dual (Fig. 6.1).

However, collegiate governing bodies have full authority and the right to make final decisions in all the models [17]. All European models essentially differ thereby from the Belarusian model, in which the higher education institution council is just an advisory body of the rector (clause 60 of the Higher Education Institution Regulations approved by Ordinance of the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Belarus No. 93 of 1 August 2012).

The demand for greater transparency, accountability, and social responsibility of university not violating the fundamental value of their institutional autonomy is implemented by including external members in the governing bodies of universities: representatives of national, regional or local authorities, business, civil society, research and academic institutions.

In Belarus, the Regulations of the Education Institution Council set forth the procedure for selecting and including external members in the higher education institution council vaguely: "Representatives of local executive and administrative bodies, other governmental bodies, personnel customers, non-governmental associations, other organisations shall be included in the council on the basis of proposals of the heads of the above bodies and organisations". However, the council composition is approved by the rector. The information about the actual composition of the higher education institution councils is fragmentary and hard to access. The administration of numerous higher education institutions limits access to it knowingly. However, available information shows insignificant interest in participation of external stakeholders in the governing bodies of a higher education institution. The reason for that is not only the risk of arbitrary selection of nominees by the management of the higher education institution but also lack of actual power of the university councils.

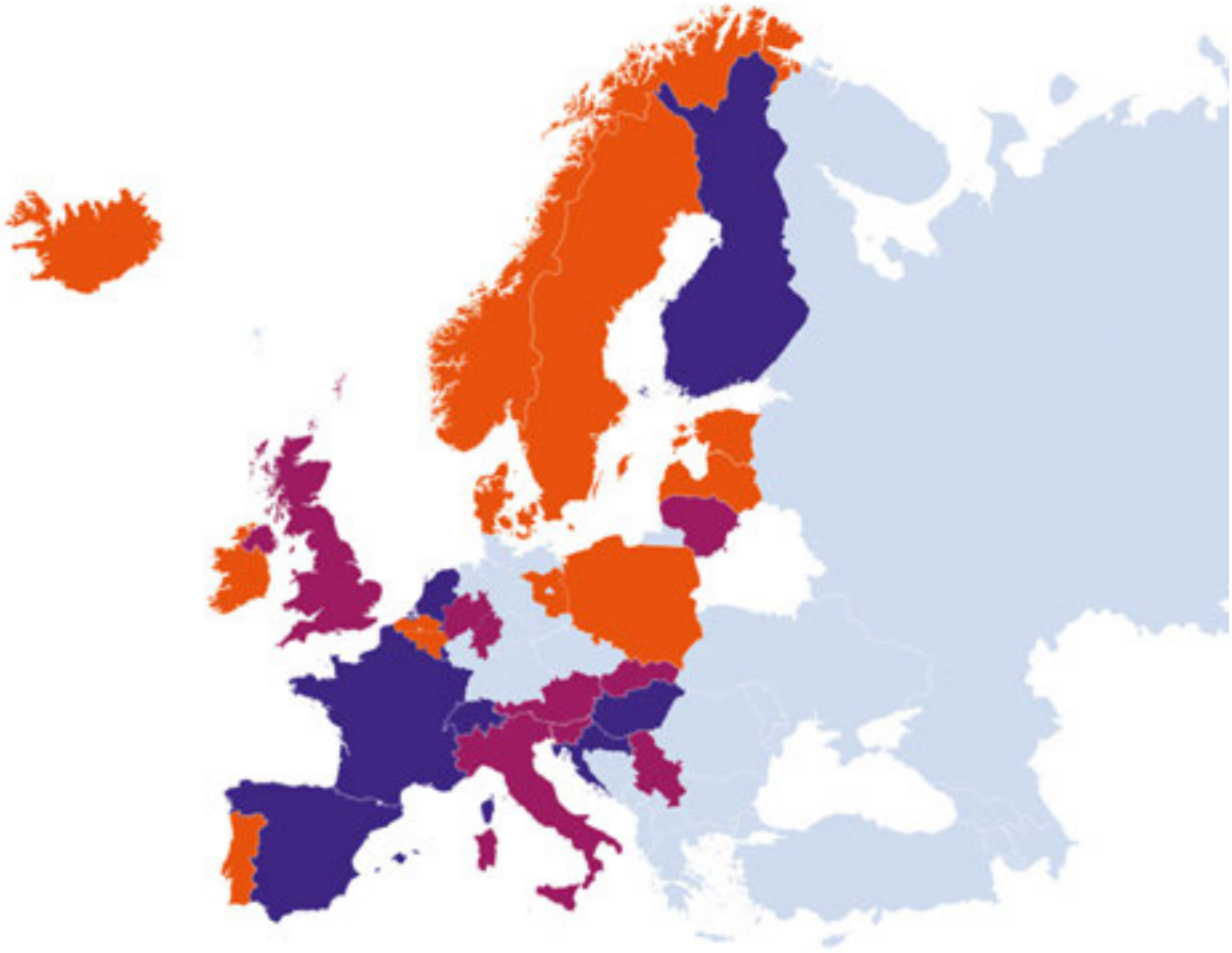

Fig. 6.1. Types of governing structures: unitary governing structures; dual governing structures (traditional); asymmetric dual governing structures

Source: University Autonomy in Europe III – The Scorecard 2017. P. 18

Capacity to Decide on Academic Structures

In Belarus, higher education institutions determine their structure pursuant to article 23, clause 7 of article 207 of the Education Code of the Republic of Belarus, Higher Education Institution Regulations No. 93 of 1 August 2012 (approved by the Ministry of Education), other regulations, and their charters. The names, functions, terms of establishment, and the governance system of all units of a higher education institution is regulated by law.

Neither the higher education institution council nor the rector nor another body of a higher education institution has the authority to make decisions on the academic structure in Belarus. At the state as well as private higher education institutions, changes of the academic structure are sanctioned by the founder upon recommendation by the higher education institution council.

Capacity to Create Legal Entities

The Belarusian higher education institutions may establish or co-establish units and businesses with legal identity. However, this has to be sanctioned by the higher education institution's founder.

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As the analysis demonstrates, the organisational autonomy of the Belarusian higher education institutions is extremely low as compared to the European universities (Fig. 6.2).

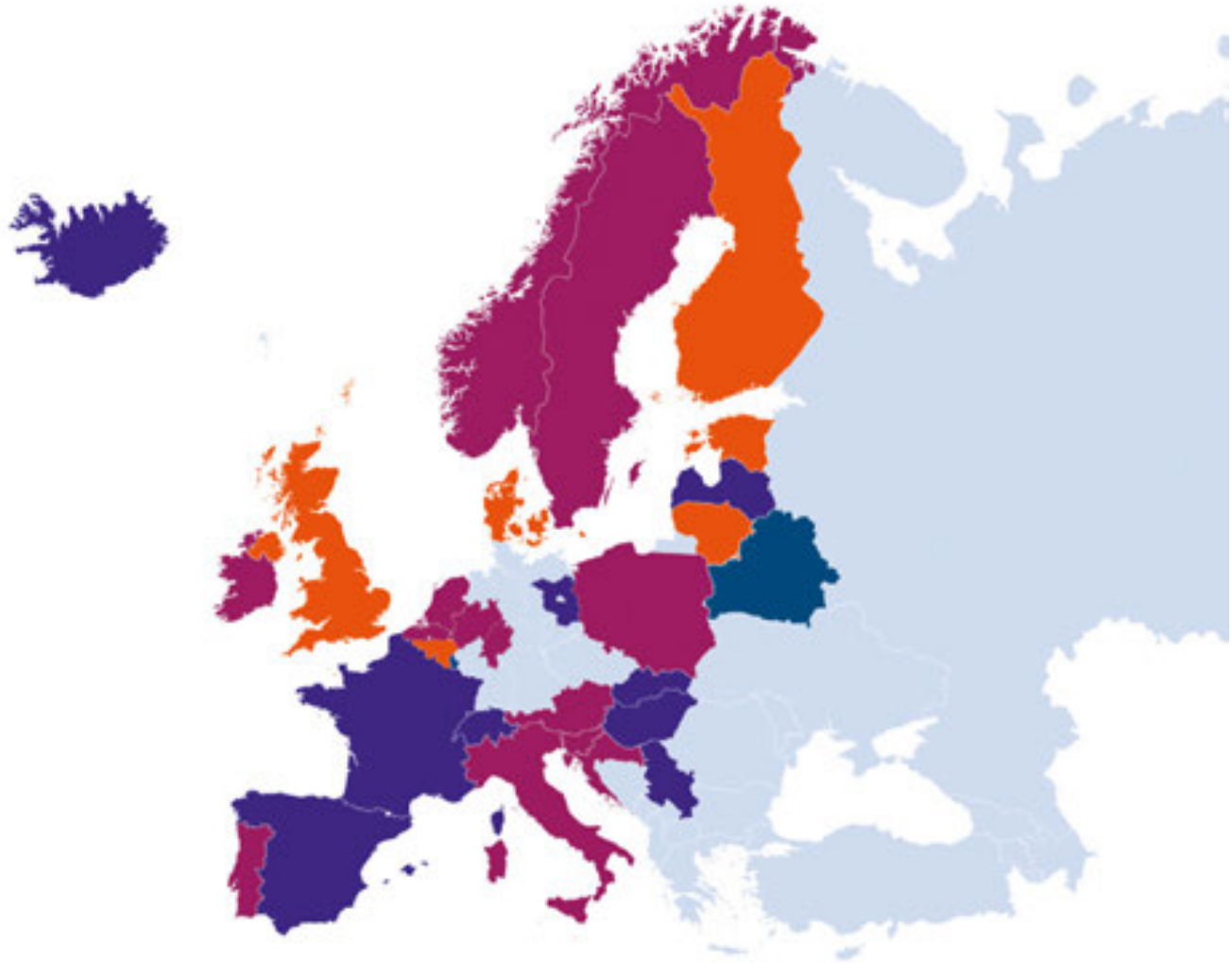

Fig. 6.2. Organisational autonomy: high (81-100%); medium high (61-80%); medium (41-60%); low (0-40%)

Source: University Autonomy in Europe III – The Scorecard 2017. P. 41

Out of the eight values, only one shows certain independence of the Belarusian higher education institutions – the right to include external members in the university councils although the higher education institution council can hardly be considered a full-fledged

governing body. As far as appointment, dismissal, terms of office of the rectors is concerned, the Belarusian higher education institutions demonstrate absolute dependence on the decision by external entities. They are dependent on the founder as to the issues of changing and creating their units and legal entities.

In 2013, an attempt was made to provide qualitative description of organisational autonomy in the White Book. At that time, we assessed this dimension of institutional autonomy at 24 points out of the possible 100. In the five years, which have passed since the publication of the first report about the condition of institutional autonomy in Belarus, no positive changes occurred despite the country's accession to the EHEA in 2015. The obligations to modernise the higher education system concerning organisational autonomy included in the Roadmap were not fulfilled. Belarus is still a European outsider. Only three European higher education systems were assessed below 50% in the 2017 study: Iceland – 49%, Slovakia – 42%, Luxembourg – 34%.

1.4.2. Financial Autonomy

In most European countries, a clear trend of the growing autonomy of higher education institutions concerning institutional policy and budget management is observed. In some countries such as Iceland, the Netherlands, and the UK, financial autonomy of universities has a history of many decades or even centuries, autonomy in the field expanded in the middle of the past decade in other countries.

Allocation of public funding

The budget period of the Belarusian higher education institutions equals one year just like many other European universities, which does not help to increase their financial autonomy.

However, Europe has virtually no countries applying the line-item method of funding higher education institutions [18].

Belarus applies exactly this method of funding state higher education institutions. Education institutions consume the funds provided for their own needs under the budget classification items according to the Budget Code of the Republic of Belarus. To manage the financial resources of the budget efficiently, to improve control over receipt and intended use of the public funds in Belarus, a single centralised system of treasury bodies reporting to the Ministry of Finance was established.

Although the funding model of private higher education institutions allows greater flexibility of using funds, it results not from greater autonomy but from the founder's arbitrariness. By the standards of the European University Association, this is very low autonomy of the higher education institutions.

Ability to Keep Surplus

Since Belarus applies the line-item method of funding higher education institutions, universities are not allowed to include the surplus in the budget for the following year. Consequently, the Belarusian higher education institutions have no autonomy in terms of this parameter.

Ability to Borrow Money

In Belarus, higher education institutions may use funds raised, besides their own sources of income, including loans obtained from banks, financial companies, certain funds on the terms of collectability and availability against interest payments. However, a higher education institution may use a bank loan upon its founder's consent only.

Ability to Own Buildings

The Education Code (Clause 1, Article 139) clearly establishes a standard according to which the physical infrastructure of education institutions is created by the founders according to the requirements set forth by the law.

Clause 9.4 of the Higher Education Institution Regulations approved by the Ministry of Education on 1 August 2012 explains that a higher education institution disposes of the property assigned to it under the operating management right according to the procedure set forth by the law.

Consequently, the Belarusian higher education institutions have no sufficient autonomy in terms of this parameter.

Ability to Charge Tuition Fees from National Students

According to the studies of the European University Association, the European countries have four models of charging tuition fees or the registration fee.

The resolution to charge fees is passed by the university exclusively or as a result of negotiations between governmental bodies and the university or this issue is governed by law or by resolutions of governmental bodies, which, in particular, set forth the tuition fees ceiling or free education only is available to the national students [19].

In Belarus, tuition fees are governed by the laws which permit charging fees from students at state education institutions for additional types of training not financed from the national and local budgets as well as from persons enrolled in excess of the places financed by the budget. Tuition fees are set forth by the heads of higher education institutions according to the law. Tuition fees are governed by the Instructions of the Cost of Fee-Paying Education approved by Ordinance of the Ministry of Education No. 38 of 20 April 2006 and are connected to the first-class rate of remuneration, fluctuations of heat and power rates, the inflation rate. The tuition fees are also governed by the Procedure for Setting Forth Tui-

tion Fees In Fee-Paying Higher and Specialised Secondary Education Programmes at State Education Institutions Instructions No. 210 approved by the Ministry of Education on 29 July 2011, which replaced Instructions No. 38.

Consequently, one of the third model variants is used to set forth tuition fees for the national students in Belarus. It can be interpreted as medium autonomy on the issue.

Ability to Charge Tuition Fees from Foreign Students

The European universities have more freedom in setting forth tuition fees for the foreign students than for the national ones.

In case of Belarus, the financial terms of training foreign students are set forth by the higher education institution itself unless governed by international treaties. Instructions Nos. 38 and 210 actually exclude the issue of setting forth the prices of educational services for foreign students from the general procedure of setting forth prices and rates. The Instructions (Clause 7) stipulate that tuition fees for foreign nationals are determined pursuant to the treaties executed. This enables to assign quite high autonomy in terms of this parameter.

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The European universities have been subjected to two opposite trends of changes in financial autonomy in the recent decade (Fig. 6.3). The consequences of the economic crisis affected not only the scope of higher education financing but also resulted in growing control over spending in a number of European countries. At the same time, the process of expanding the universities' rights and powers as to borrowing at financial markets, buildings ownership transfer to universities and a more flexible use of paid educational services to fund their budgets has evolved consistently.

When assessing the financial autonomy in the Belarusian education system according to the methodology of the European University Association, one would have to conclude about low autonomy of the Belarusian higher education institutions as regards financial issues. In Belarus, higher education institutions are limited by a short budget period and the method of funding, which has almost disappeared from the practice of European universities. Significant limitations of the autonomy of the Belarusian higher education institutions exist with regard to line-item budgeting, the use of surplus, determining tuition fees for the national students, and the right to own their buildings. The only issue in which the Belarusian higher education institutions are free is setting forth tuition fees for the foreign students.

In our 2013 study, an attempt was made to assign weighted values of financial autonomy as it had been done in the study of the European University Association. The qualitative value of financial autonomy was 26.5 points. In the recent years, the laws governing the financial activities of the Belarusian higher education institutions have seen no significant amendments; consequently, the value gives an idea of their financial autonomy. To put this

in perspective, financial autonomy is below 50% in only seven European higher education systems and below 40% in only two systems– in Hungary (39%) and in the State of Hesse (Germany) (35%) [20].

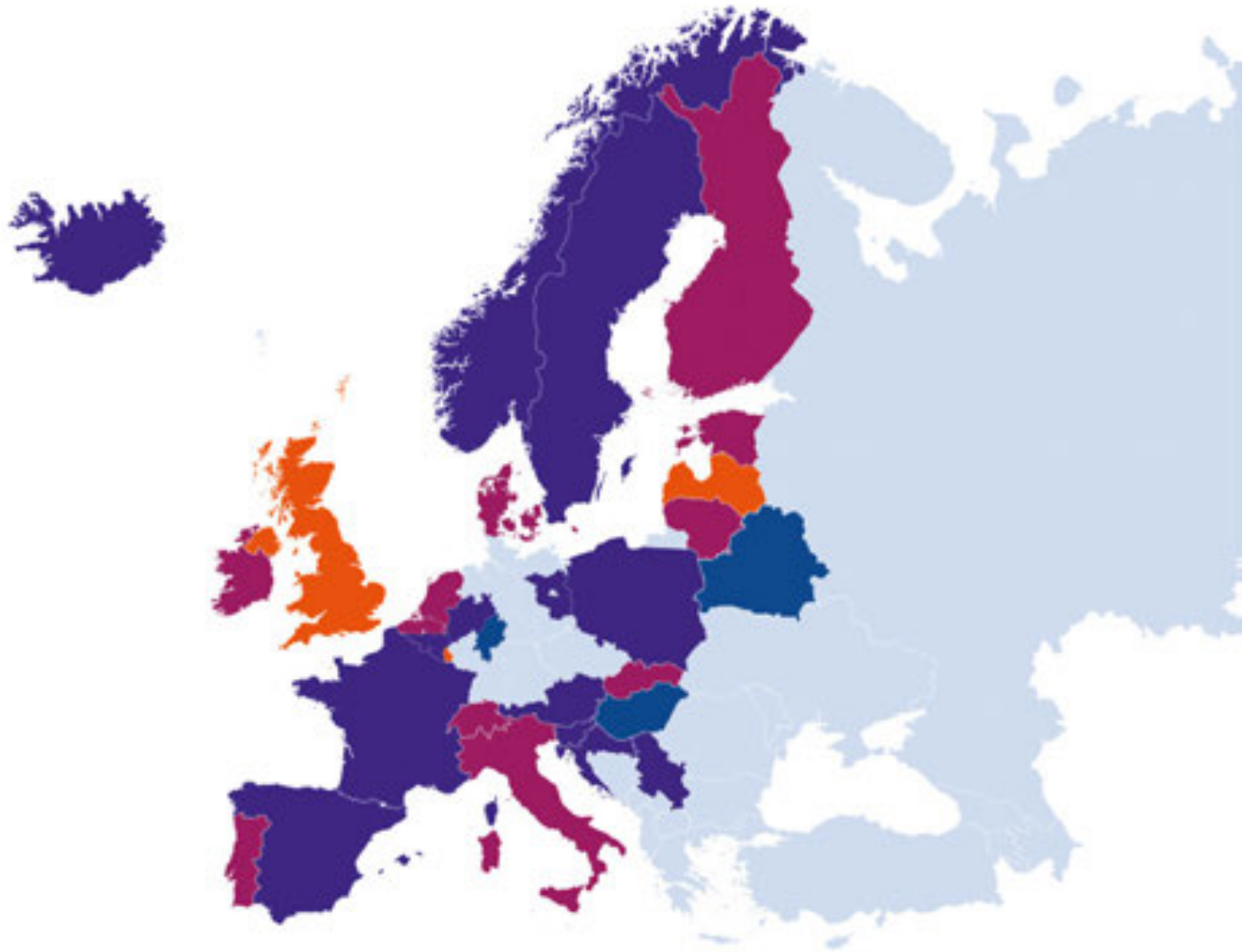

Fig. 6.3. Financial autonomy: high (81-100%); medium high (61-80%); medium (41-60%); low (0-40%)

Source: University Autonomy in Europe III – The Scorecard 2017. P. 44

1.4.3. Staffing Autonomy

Although detailed comparison of staffing autonomy indicators is complicated because of a variety of labour standards and employment regulations in the European countries, a significantly high autonomy of higher education institutions on the issue is ensured in the overwhelming number of the higher education systems. As to staffing issues, difference among the countries is related, in the first place, to the senior academic or administrative staff having or lacking the civil servants' status.

In Belarus, neither the academic nor the administrative staff of higher education institutions have the status of civil servants. Formally, the procedures for employing, dismissing or promoting the academic and administrative staff in Belarus do not differ from some

European models of staffing autonomy in particular. At the same time, implementation of the traditional university patterns to resolve staffing issues has its specific features in the Belarusian situation, which limit the rights of the staff as well as of the higher education institutions.

Capacity to Decide on Recruitment Procedures of Senior Academic and Senior Administrative Staff

Europe has a significant diversity of the recruitment procedures of academic staff – from complete autonomy to formalised procedures requiring approval by external authorities. However, almost all higher education systems use the procedure of pre-screening nominees at the faculty or special committee level for the university or faculty body authorised thereto to pass staffing resolutions [21].

In Belarus, the procedure for employing the academic staff is determined by the Regulations of Competitive Selection of Academic Teaching Staff for Teaching Positions at Higher Education Institutions of the Republic of Belarus approved by Ordinance of the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Belarus No. 806 of 21 June 2011 (National Register of Legal Instruments of the Republic of Belarus, 2011, No. 72, 5/34007). Higher education institutions may not employ academic staff without open competitive selection for an extended period. Competitive selection is announced in relation to vacancies and to positions, whose selection (contract) period has come to an end. However, a more significant limitation of the autonomy of the higher education institution is that, to be selected, a nominee should comply with the qualification requirements set forth by the Regulations and by Amendment of Issue 28 of the Single Employees' Qualification Reference Book Ordinance of the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of the Republic of Belarus No. 105 of 21 October 2011. In particular, the nominees to the positions of senior academic staff should have the relevant academic degrees and titles awarded by the governmental agency, the Higher Attestation Commission. Without such a sanction, the higher education institution may employ academic staff for a year maximum with further competitive selection. Employing in the professor's or associate professor's position depends on the external governmental authority awarding the relevant title.

The procedure for appointing senior administrative staff in Belarus is set forth by the Education Code and by the Higher Education Institution Regulations No. 93 of 1 August 2012 approved by the Ministry of Education. The Regulations (Chapter 8) determine that all senior administrative staff (vice rectors, deans, heads of laboratories etc.) are appointed by the rector's orders. The heads of departments appointed by the rector's orders upon their selection by the council are the exception. The vice rectors and the chief accountant are appointed upon the Ministry of Education's consent.

Formally, the decision to employ is made by the head of a higher education institution and not by the external authority but considering the fact that the rector him/herself is only an element of the vertical administrative power structure, and some of his/her appointments require formal or informal approval by a superior authority, it is difficult to consider

the procedure for appointing senior administrative staff as manifestation of institutional autonomy.

Capacity to Decide on Salaries of Senior Academic and Senior Administrative Staff

In the European countries, universities often do not have absolute autonomy in determining salaries for academic staff.

However, considering limitations of the rights of numerous European universities in determining salaries of senior academic staff, they have much more autonomy on the issue that the Belarusian higher education institutions [22].

In Belarus, the rate of remuneration of the teachers is determined pursuant to Clause 4 of schedule 1 to Actions to Improve Terms of Remuneration of Staff of Budgetary Organisations and of Other Subsidised Organisations Which Staff Is Equivalent to Staff of Budgetary Organisations as to Remuneration Ordinance of the Ministry of Labour of the Republic of Belarus No. 6 of 21 January 2000.

The ordinance covers activities carried out at the expense of the funds of the relevant budget as well as of the funds from non-budgetary activities (Clause 1.1 of Schedule 1 to Ordinance No. 6).

Based on Clause 1.2 of Ordinance No. 6, the rates of remuneration (salaries) of the staff are determined by multiplying the first-class rate of remuneration set forth by the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Belarus by rate ratios of the Single Table of Employees' Rates of the Republic of Belarus considering adjustment rates and rising rates considering the complexity of the work carried out.

Private higher education institutions are guided by the same regulations but the founder resolves on salaries.

Consequently, the Belarusian higher education institutions are formally close to the universities of Flanders (Belgium), Germany, and Portugal concerning salary determination. Unlike those higher education systems, autonomy limitations are not designed to protect the rights and privileges of civil servants but are a relic of the rate and qualification system of the Soviet past.

At the European universities, the situation with the salaries of senior administrative staff is similar to the situation with the academic staff. Still, higher education institutions of most countries resolve on the issue independently.

The salaries of senior administrative staff in Belarus are determined according to Ordinance No. 6. It means that the autonomy of the Belarusian higher education institutions concerning the salaries of teaching as well as administrative staff is extremely limited.

Capacity to Decide on Dismissals of Senior Academic and Senior Administrative Staff

In Belarus, the procedure for dismissing academic staff is governed by law, the Regulations of Competitive Selection of Academic Teaching Staff for Teaching Positions at Higher

Education Institutions of the Republic of Belarus (Clauses 7, 34), and other regulations. The academic staff have no right for a tenure; consequently, their position is quite vulnerable. They should be periodically certified in the form of competitive selection for the position occupied. The senior academic staff usually passed competitive selection once every three to five years. The situation deteriorated upon the issuance of Additional Measures to Strengthen Labour and Performance Discipline Presidential Decree No. 29 in 1999. The practice of executing short-term contracts contrary to the resolutions of the higher education institution council (Regulations of Competitive Selection) provided the rectors with ample opportunities for arbitrary dismissals.

According to the methodology of the European University Association, the existence of supra-university regulations governing dismissal of academic staff is deemed to limit institutional autonomy.

In Europe, the regulations of and procedure for dismissal of senior administrative staff comply with the standards governing academic staff dismissal resolutions mostly.

In Belarus, the procedure for dismissal of senior administrative personnel is set forth by the Higher Education Institution Regulations No. 93 and by the labour laws. The issues are not related to those, which are governed by the education institution charter. The contract system, just like the case of academic staff, has expanded the area of administrative arbitrariness.

Capacity to Decide on Promotions of Senior Academic and Senior Administrative Staff

In Belarus, the procedure for promoting senior academic staff is set forth by the Regulations of Competitive Selection of Academic Teaching Staff for Teaching Positions at Higher Education Institutions of the Republic of Belarus. These Regulations detail the terms of and procedures for promoting academic staff. Formally, promotion is possible in case of a vacancy only to be filled in by open competitive selection and secret ballot of the Higher Education Institution or Faculty Council. This procedure means that a higher education institution may not simply promote a lecturer. S/he should participate in competitive selection at least formally. Another circumstance devaluating the procedure exists. The Regulations provide the rector with the right to determine the contract duration at will ignoring the Council's resolution. This rule does damage to the traditions of university democracy. It limits the higher education institution's autonomy not only formally but essentially since the rector is a representative of the external authority in the current higher education system in Belarus.

In Belarus, any issues related to appointment, dismissal and promotion of senior administrative staff of higher education institutions is set forth by law. The administrative staff may be promoted to a vacancy provided for by the staffing table of the higher education institution. The list and number of senior administrative staff positions in the staffing table is set forth by Model Staff and Standards of Quantity of Certain Staff Categories of Higher Education Institutions Ordinance of the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Belarus No. 43 of 10 July 2013.

Unlike many European countries, neither academic nor administrative staff in the Belarusian higher education system have the status of civil servants with the right of a permanent employment contract and other privileges.

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The recent decade in Europe was marked by expanding rights of universities as to staffing issues (Fig. 6.4).

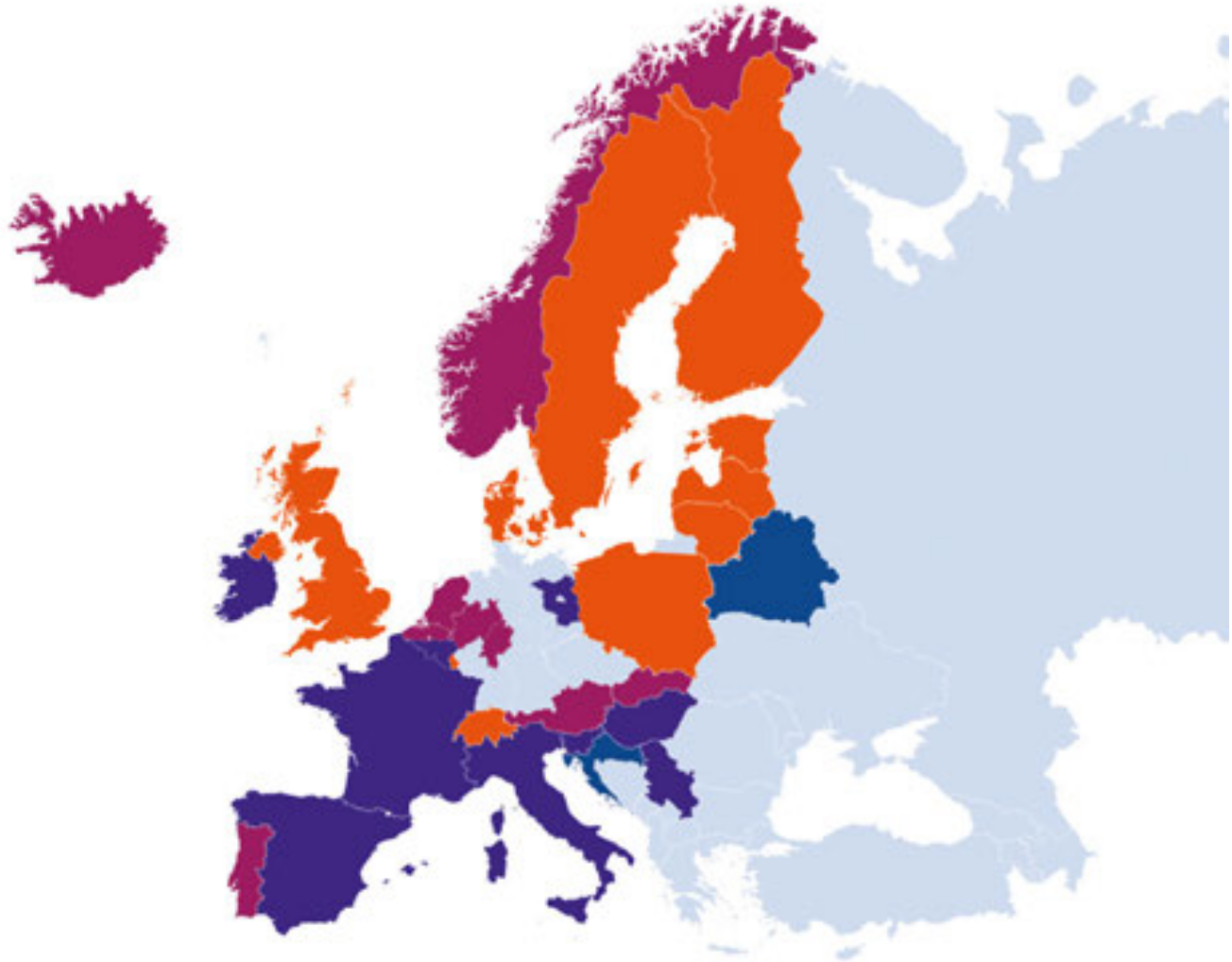

Fig. 6.4. Staffing autonomy: high (81-100%); medium high (61-80%); medium (41-60%); low (0-40%)

Source: University Autonomy in Europe III – The Scorecard 2017. P. 47

Autonomy has increased in connection with amendments of the civil service law. Owing to the reform, in a number of countries, universities became exclusive employers of academic and administrative staff. At the same time, decrease in public financing of the education sector as a result of the economic crisis resulted in increased governmental control over the salaries of academic and administrative staff and redundant staff in some countries.

The legal as well as administrative and bureaucratic control over this sphere of the higher education system turned Belarus into a European outsider with regard to independent staffing policy. In essence, the procedure for appointing, dismissing, and promoting senior academic and administrative staff, salaries of these categories of staff are strictly governed by external legal acts.

In the 2013 study, we attempted to assess the autonomy of the Belarusian higher education institutions, being guided by weighed values of the staffing autonomy indicators. It was equal to 25%. To compare: 10 European higher education systems have a value over 80%, 9 over 60%, 9 over 40%, and Croatia only has the autonomy of 37% [23].

In the past five years, no positive changes occurred in the staffing autonomy of higher education institutions in Belarus.

1.4.4. Academic Autonomy

Capacity to Decide on Overall Student Numbers

Europe has four models of deciding on the number of students enrolled in a higher education institution:

- The university may set forth the number of first-year students;
- The government determines the enrolment figures;
- Admission may be free;
- A cooperation model may be used which permits to determine the enrolment target as a result of negotiations between the government and the university during accreditation or the government sets forth the enrolment target for government-funded places, and the higher education institution determines the number of fee-paying students independently [24].

In Belarus, the Education Code (Aticle 57), Certain Issues of Shaping Demand for Staff Training Ordinance of the Council of Ministers No. 972 of 19 July 2011 establish that the student enrolment targets for higher education are determined by the founders of the higher education institution based upon the professionals' training demand shaped by the governmental bodies reporting to the President, the National Academy of Sciences, national governing agencies, other governmental organisations reporting to the government, Minsk City and Regional Executive Committees, by the results of forecasting the demand for human resources according to the procedure established by the government. The enrolment targets for the second-cycle higher education are determined considering the requirement to ensure competitive selection when enrolling persons for the first-level postgraduate education (corresponds to the third cycle EHEA)

The enrolment targets for the postgraduate education are determined by the State Science and Technology Committee of the Republic of Belarus according to the laws on planning, financing, and controlling training the academic staff, which is highly qualified. However, in the authorities' opinion, even this mechanism of enrolment planning provided

too much autonomy to the universities [21].

Expecting an improved system of planning demand for staff intended by Certain Issues of Forecasting Economy Demand for Staff Ordinance of the Council of Ministers No. 1016 of 28 December 2017, the Ministry of Education carried out the so-called "defense of the request for the reservation of specialties and specializations, taking into account the profile of the university" in February 2017, as a result of which the higher education institutions were set forth rigid enrolment targets for the government-funded as well as fee-paying study places. At the same time, private higher education institutions suffered the highest losses; enrolment to them was reduced significantly.

If previously approval of the enrolment targets used to have some elements of the co-operation model, the practice of shaping demand for staff training became obviously prescriptive.

Capacity to Select Students

In all of the European higher education systems, a prospective should have a secondary education to be admitted to a higher education institution. This condition is set forth in the national laws and is not deemed to be a limitation of university autonomy. At the same time, the enrolment mechanisms can differ significantly.

In the majority of the European countries, the student enrolment criteria are determined by the university itself or designed by the university together with the governmental bodies. These criteria are shaped without higher education institutions' participation in eight countries only. These are mostly the countries with free admission to the first-cycle programmes of everybody willing. E.g., this happens in Austria, Belgium, France, and Switzerland [25].

The Belarusian variant is referred to the model of enrolling students based on the rules set forth by the authorities. Irrespective of the form of ownership, all higher education institutions are guided by the Education Code as to the selection of prospective students (Article 213. General Requirements for Admitting Persons for Higher Education); the Rules of Admission to Higher Education Institutions approved by Edict of the President of the Republic of Belarus No. 80 of 7 February 2006 as amended, the list of administrative procedures carried out by governmental bodies and other organisations upon citizens' applications approved by Edict of the President of the Republic of Belarus No. 200 of 26 April 2010 as amended; the Regulations of Procedure for Submitting Documents on Which Basis the Right to Governmental Social Benefits, Rights and Guarantees Is Implemented by Certain Categories of Citizens approved by ordinance of the Council of Minister if the Republic of Belarus No. 1738 of 13 December 2007 as amended; the Regulations of the Admission Committee of the Higher Education Institution approved by ordinance of the Ministry of Education No. 23 of 23 March 2006 as amended; other legal acts. Upon introduction of centralised testing and enrolment to the higher education institution according to its results, Belarusian higher education institutions lost any autonomy concerning student selection. The government determines the minimum thresholds of the centralised testing points for various professions and the terms for enrolling prospective students.

Capacity to Introduce and Terminate Programmes

European universities practice several models of opening new educational programmes:

- Programmes may be opened without prior accreditation;
- To receive public funding, programmes should be submitted to accreditation prior to opening;
- All new programmes should be submitted to accreditation prior to opening [26].

In some countries, universities face other types of limitations, which still provide some space for academic autonomy.

In Belarus, higher education institutions may not resolve on opening new educational programmes at their discretion. If a profession to be trained in is not available in the Professions and Qualifications National Classifier, the classifier should be amended in advance according to the Instructions on the Procedure for Maintaining and Applying the Professions and Qualifications National Classifier No. 42 of 1 July 2009 approved by the Ministry of Education. The Ministry of Education resolves on the issue (Article 18). If a profession is already introduced in the classifier, the Ministry of Education resolves on beginning training in it upon the consent of the relevant governmental bodies and organisations according to the Regulations of the Procedure for Introducing Training in Education Profiles, Education Areas, Professions, Profession Areas, Specialisations No. 849 of 27 June 2011 approved by the Council of Ministers. This procedure for introducing training in new educational programmes concerns both state and private education institutions, including foreign ones and their branches established pursuant to international treaties of the Republic of Belarus.

Resolutions to introduce training in the Art and Design, Healthcare education profiles are passed upon the consent of the Ministry of Culture and Ministry of Healthcare respectively, in the Agriculture education area upon the consent of the Ministry of Agriculture and Food. However, these procedures do not replace accreditation of educational programmes. The Education Code (Article 29) sets forth the deadlines for accreditation of educational programmes. In case of failure to confirm governmental accreditation of an education institution, the resolution of governmental bodies and organisations to introduce training should be withdrawn according to the procedure set forth by law (Clause 8 of Regulations No. 849). Consequently, Belarusian higher education institutions have low autonomy in terms of this parameter of academic autonomy.

Capacity to Choose the Language of Instruction

In 20 European countries, universities may freely select the language of instruction in the first cycle of higher education and in the second cycle of higher education in 21 education systems. Nine countries have various limitations at the bachelor's level: from the right to use a foreign language to train foreign students to prohibition of public funding of educational programmes in foreign languages. Similar limitations exist in eight countries at the master's level [27].

In Belarus, "the language of instruction and personal development shall be determined by the founder of the institution taking into consideration requests of students (legal representatives of minor students). At education institutions, organisations carrying out postgraduate educational programmes, education and personal development may be carried out in a foreign language if the conditions are provided and upon the consent of the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Belarus" according to the Education Code (Article 90).

Consequently, an education institution may not choose the language of instruction without the founder's sanction.

Capacity to Select Quality Assurance Mechanisms and Providers

In the majority of the European countries, universities are unable to freely select quality assurance procedures. Almost in every country, quality assurance mechanisms are inbuilt in the programmes of periodic mandatory accreditation or institutional audit [28].

In Belarus, Article 124 of the Education Code is worded as follows: "Education quality assurance is the activity of the authorised governmental bodies to inspect compliance of education with the education standard, syllabus documentation of educational programmes, educational activities, legal requirements".

Ordinance of the Council of Ministers No. 820 of 22 June 2011 approved the Regulations of the Procedure for Governmental Accreditation of Education Institutions, Other Organisations Provided with the Education Right according to the Laws and for Governmental Accreditation Confirmation. These procedures have no alternative, they may be insignificantly modified by standardised quality assurance systems of higher education institutions.

As a result, the situation in the Belarusian higher education concerning selection of quality assurance procedures is formally similar to the position of universities in most European countries.

In 21 higher education systems, universities may not select a quality assurance agency. In Austria, Estonia, Finland, Hungary, Switzerland, the states of Germany, higher education institutions may select, at their discretion, one of the accredited agencies, including foreign accreditation agencies from the European Quality Assurance Register [29].

In Belarus, the Education Code (article 124) unequivocally states that the President of the Republic of Belarus shall determine the governmental bodies authorised to assure education quality, the assurance procedure and periodicity. The Quality Assurance Department of the Ministry of Education resolves on accreditation of an education institution, another organisation or on accreditation withholding (following accreditation procedures). It is the only body authorised to assure quality. Consequently, Belarusian higher education institutions may not select an agency. Moreover, they may not select a foreign agency from the European Quality Assurance Register.

Capacity to Design Content of Degree Programmes

In 26 European higher education systems, universities design the content of degree pro-

grammes at their discretion. Specifications limiting academic content exist in three countries only: in Italy, Latvia, and Lithuania [30].

In Belarus, the profession (profession area, specialisation) curriculum of a higher education institution is designed on the basis of the standardised profession (profession area) curriculum and determines the list, sequence, and scope of academic subjects of the national component, which are mandatory to study, the number of academic hours for the higher education institution component and specialisation, the sequence and time to study academic subjects, the time of internship, mandatory and maximum weekly study workload per student, military student, attendee, types of classes, forms and time of academic assessment according to the Education Code (article 217).

Standardised profession (profession area) curricula are designed by organisations providing methodological support of higher education and by academic associations in the field of higher education (Inter-University Methodological Clusters) and are approved by the Ministry of Education. Moreover, even a syllabus of a higher education institution is designed on the basis of the standardised syllabus approved by the Ministry of Education.

It is proposed to abandon the term "standardised curriculum" in the new draft revision of the Education Code. It is proposed to replace it with an «exemplary»

curriculum the national component (the compulsory state curriculum component) of which will not exceed 50% of its scope for the first cycle of higher education and 30% for the second cycle.

Although the new draft revision of the Education Code was not passed in 2018, important steps to implement the new standards were made immediately upon the end of the Paris EHEA summit. Guidelines to design new educational standards and curricula (generation 3+) were approved by the minister of education of the Republic of Belarus on 30/05/2018. The ratio of the national component to the higher education institution component was set forth as 35-55% to 45-65% at level 1, and 25-35% to 65-75% at level 2 by the new standard. The amendments extended the rights of the Belarusian universities to design curricula somewhat but fell short of completely lifting the institutional autonomy limitations on the matter.

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The analysis of the six indicators of academic autonomy graphically demonstrates even greater lack of autonomy and dependence of the Belarusian higher education system on the authorities than it is observed in the financial, staffing or organisational field (Fig. 6.5). Belarusian universities are unable to demonstrate high autonomy in terms of any of the indicators. In all the cases, the founder (ministry) makes the final decision. While European higher education institutions follow the path of expanding the powers and responsibility of universities for education quality, even modest attempts to expand university autonomy are stalled in Belarus. The data of the 2017 study by the EUA demonstrate that, in Europe, only eight higher education systems have academic autonomy below 50% and only three below 40%: France and two communities of Belgium (37-32%) [31]. We assessed the Belarusian

autonomy at 10% in 2013. In the recent years, no significant extension of autonomy has occurred, except the insignificant extension of the right to design a part of the curriculum independently. Other modest legal reforms, which were expected, still remain a draft.

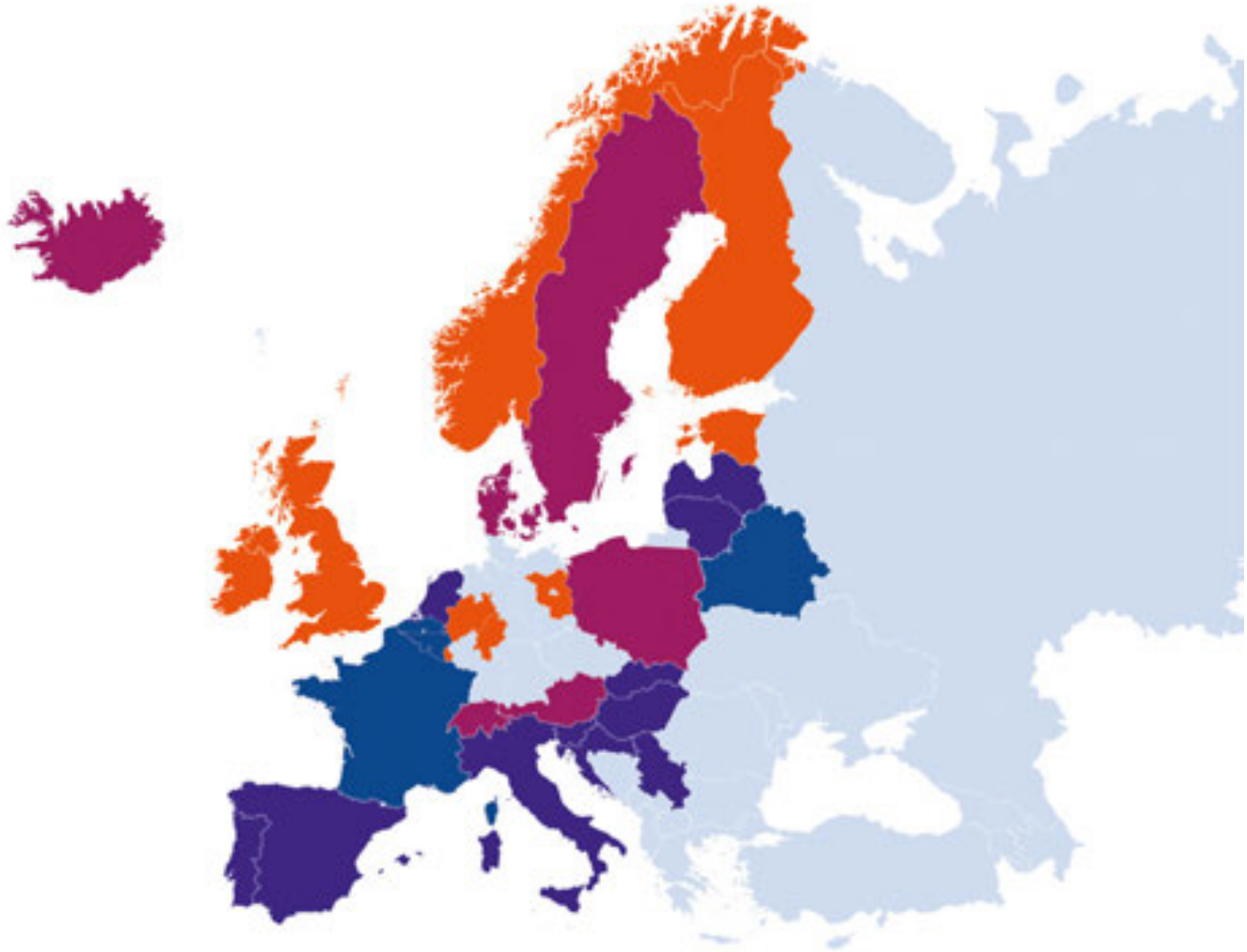

Fig. 6.5. Academic autonomy: high (81-100%); medium high (61-80%); medium (41-60%); low (0-40%)

Source: University Autonomy in Europe III – The Scorecard 2017. P. 50

1.5. Conclusion

The comparative assessment of institutional autonomy of Belarusian and European higher education institutions was based on the recent monitoring of organisational, financial, staffing, and academic autonomy of universities in Europe carried out by the European University Association in 2017. In the recent years, European higher education institutions have achieved significant progress in further strengthening of their autonomy. At the same time, the very understanding of university autonomy has been revised markedly. Adapting to the challenges of the time, European higher education institutions demonstrate increasing openness to the demands of the labour market. The collegiate governing bodies of universities develop to involve a growing number of social partners of higher education

institutions in the decision-making process. The binary structure of university governance distributing the authority between the internal (senate) and external (governing board) stakeholders of the higher education system gains acceptance. This new configuration of institutional autonomy is a challenge to the traditional values and models of academic democracy. Greater flexibility, openness, and economic efficiency are required from universities today.

Against the background of these transformations, the Belarusian higher education system seems to be irreparably backward and lacking autonomy. Of the 24 indicators of institutional autonomy, only two demonstrate sufficient autonomy of Belarusian universities. In all other cases, it is either low or higher education institutions are virtually deprived of autonomy.

The Belarusian higher education system has struck out a line of its own just increasing the gap with the European academic values. Conditional accession of Belarus to the Bologna Process in 2015 required the management of the education sector to implement the European imperatives in the laws and practice of academic life. The roadmap of reforms of the Belarusian higher education system requires governmental guarantees of academic freedom and institutional autonomy. However, this does not come out of nothing. Essentially, it requires overcoming the conflict of traditional and new imperatives in higher education. Development of the autonomy of higher education institutions conflicts with the narrative prevailing in the higher education system to preserve complete external controllability of higher education institutions and to produce graduates loyal to the authorities and lacking independence in their thoughts and actions. However, this ideal of the higher education system is hardly compatible with the tasks of ensuring quality and economic efficiency of higher education. Comparative analysis of the institutional autonomy indicators permits to understand the reasons for stagnation of the Belarusian higher education system better and to determine realistic measures to find a way out.

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24. University Autonomy in Europe III.P. 33

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Chapter 2. Belarusian Higher Education System: Bologna ArchitectureImplementation

2.1. Harmonisation of Higher Education Structure. Bologna Context

The Bologna Process is a voluntary cooperation of the education systems of European countries, their convergence and harmonisation to establish the European Higher Education Area. Its commencement can be referred to the mid-1970s when the Council of the European Communities passed a resolution of the first cooperation programme in the field of education [1].

The prerequisites for the Bologna Process were the Sorbonne conference and the Joint Declaration on Harmonisation of the Architecture of the European Higher Education System signed by the education ministers of France, Germany, Italy, and the UK in 1998 [2]. The declaration stated the necessity to create "a Europe of knowledge" besides a "Europe of the euro and of the economy".

The resolutions to approve the higher education structure were formalised in the Bologna declaration signed by the education ministers of 29 European countries in Bologna in 1999[3]. The declaration defined the main objectives resulting in the harmonisation of the national higher education systems in the European countries.

The principal ideas of the Bologna declaration capitalised on the Magna Charta Universitatum signed in Bologna in 1988 [4], the Lisbon convention executed in Lisbon in 1997 [5], and the Sorbonne declaration executed in Paris in 1998.

It is commonly known that one of the central provisions of the Bologna declaration is to establish a multilevel higher education structure consisting of two main cycles: undergraduate and graduate.

The 2001 Prague communique [6] noted the success achieved in developing the architecture in the majority of European countries.

The 2003 Berlin communique [7] resolved to further implement the two-cycle system by 2005 and to include the doctoral as the third cycle of higher education considering the importance of research. It determined 2010 as the year to complete transition to the three-cycle architecture.

Despite availability of various higher education systems in Europe [8], all of the countries participating in the Bologna Process changed their higher education systems significantly [9-12]so as to declare the creation of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) at the following conference of the education ministers of the Bologna Process member states in Budapest and Vienna on 11-12 March 2010, the tenth anniversary of the Bologna Process. The EHEA was designed to provide more comparable, compatible, coherent, and attractive higher education systems in Europe [13].

The Bologna Process continued higher education reforms throughout Europe. The European higher education structures became more comparable and compatible. Significant success has been achieved in introducing higher education based on three cycles. Higher

education qualifications become more and more comparable in different countries; involvement of various stakeholders in the field of higher education has expanded [14,15].

The Yerevan conference of education ministers on 14-15 May 2015 demonstrated that the EHEA had become a reality as a result of 16 years of intense work and had proved that education is the key to stable development of European societies in the globalised and competitive environment [16]. The 2015 Yerevan communique outlined an optimised and updated agenda dedicated to honouring the four key commitments: enhancing the quality and relevance of learning and teaching, fostering graduates' employability, greater inclusiveness of education systems, and coherence of the reforms being carried out.

During the Yerevan conference, Belarus was finally accepted to the Bologna Process as the 48thmember of the EHEA but on the condition of implementing the Roadmap for Higher Education Reform according to the values, principles, and objectives of the EHEA [18, 40].

On 24-25 May 2018, the 10th anniversary conference of the education ministers of the Bologna Process member states was held in Paris [20, 36]. The European Higher Education Area in 2018: Bologna Process Implementation Report (here in after the "2018 Report") [21] presented detailed information about the EHEA development since the 2015 Yerevan conference. Following the conference, the ministers passed a communique [22] in which the countries' achievements in creating the EHEA were outlined and the areas to implement the previous resolutions as to ensuring quality, academic mobility, complete implementation of the ECTS were contemplated. An updated Diploma Supplement was approved, and an increasing role of the short cycle of higher education was mentioned [22].

The Bologna Follow-Up Group determined three key commitments which are top-priority at the current EHEA development level. They included implementation of a three-cycle system compatible with the overarching framework of the EHEA qualifications and scaling of the first- and second-cycle degrees by the ECTS; recognition of qualifications according to the provisions of the Lisbon Convention, and quality assurance in compliance with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area.

2.2. Implementation of Three-Cycle System of Higher Education

The Bologna Process promotes a three-cycle structure consisting of the bachelor programmes (first cycle), master programmes (second cycle), and doctoral programmes (third cycle) with the possibility of bridging (short cycles) of qualifications connected with the first cycle [2, 7, 22].

The 2012, 2015, and 2018 Implementation Reports [15, 16, 21] provided evidence of changes in higher education systems.

At present, the dominant European model is a clearly structured three-cycle system of higher education (Fig. 2.1).

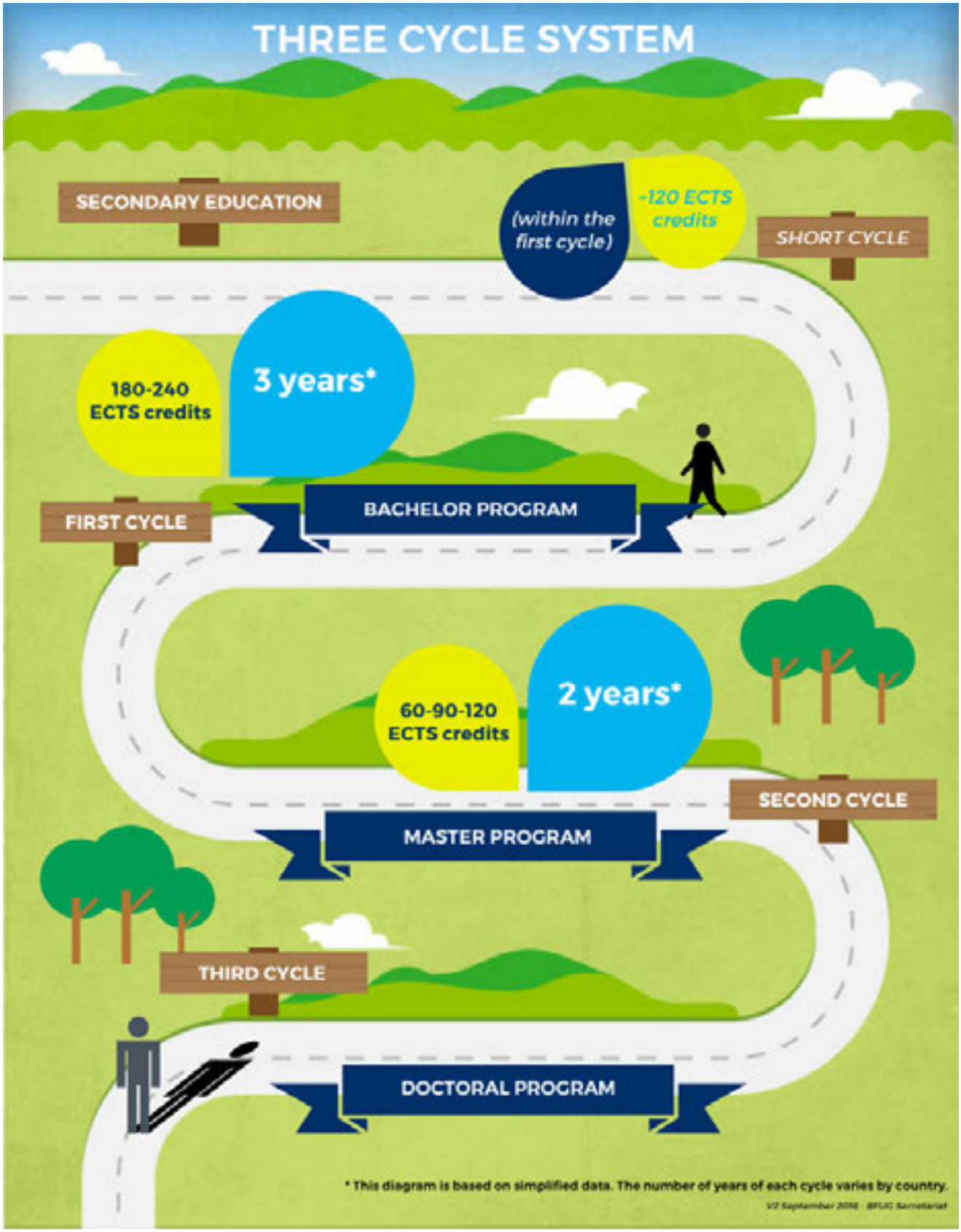


Fig. 2.1: Three-cycle system of higher education (Bologna model).
Source: (Ehea.info, 2017)

In particular, the commitment to establish a structure of degrees with three cycles (bachelor – master – doctor) was honoured in all the countries, and a high number of students in programmes corresponding to the Bologna model is recorded in the majority of the countries.

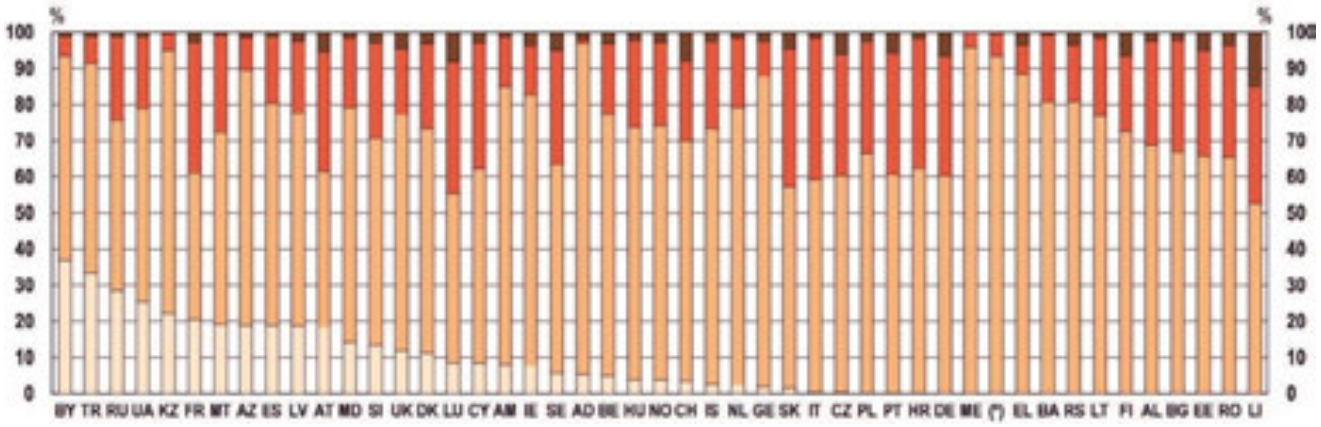
To understand and interpret the features and processes in educational systems at the global level correctly, it is particularly important to ensure compatibility of the data. It is ensured by applying the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) approved at the 36th session of the UNESCO General Conference in November 2011 [30, 50]. The 2011 ISCED classification standardises the cycles (degrees) of tertiary (higher) education, which includes not only what is commonly understood as academic education but also specialised vocational education, which covers ISCED 5, 6, 7, and 8 levels. Belarus has no concept of "tertiary education", and compatibility of higher education with the 2011 ISCED levels and is as follows [30,50,51]:

2011 ISCEDlevelname	**Equivalent in Belarus [51,37]**
ISCED 5– short cycle of tertiary education	Secondary specialised education (non-tertiary, i.e. non-higher education)
ISCED 6– bachelor programme or its equivalent	First-cycle higher education
ISCED 7 – master programme or its equivalent	Second-cycle higher education
ISCED 8 – doctoral programme or its equivalent	Postgraduate education

Fig. 2.2 demonstrates distribution of students in the three main cycles corresponding to ISCED 6-8 (bachelor, master, and doctoral or equivalent programmes [21]) as well as the percentage of students enrolled in ISCED 5 programmes (short cycle of higher education) is provided [21, p.95].

In the EHEA, the majority of students (58.8%) participate in the first-cycle programmes (bachelor or equivalent level), 21.7% in the second-cycle programmes (master or equivalent level), and 16.8% in the short cycle of higher education. Only 3% of students study in the third-cycle programmes (doctoral or equivalent level) [21, p.46].

According to the National Statistics Committee of the Republic of Belarus (Belstat) (2014/2015) [52], in *Belarus,* 505,937 persons studied in all the programmes in total in 2014/15, including secondary specialised education (ISCED 5), postgraduate/doctoral programmes (ISCED 8), which includes 129,000 persons (25.5%) in the programmes of secondary specialised education (ISCED 5), 362,900 students (71.73%) in the first-cycle programmes (ISCED 6), 8,855 graduate students (1.75%) in the second-cycle programmes (ISCED 7), 5,182 persons (4,900 are postgraduate students, 282 are doctoral students (1.02%)) in the postgraduate/doctoral programmes, which somewhat differs from the data present in the 2018 Report (Fig. 2.2) and does not completely correspond to the levels and average values of the 2011 ISCED in the EHEA. This shows certain discrepancy between the structure of higher education in Belarus and the Bologna model with tertiary education of the 2011 ISCED.



%	BY	TR	RU	UA	KZ	FR	MT	AZ	ES	LV	AT	MD	SI	UK	DK	LU	CY	AM	IE	SE	AD	BE	HU	NO
ISCED 5	36.7	33.2	28.3	25.5	22.2	20.4	19.2	19.0	19.0	18.8	18.3	14.1	13.4	11.7	11.1	8.5	8.4	8.0	7.7	5.9	5.3	4.8	3.8	3.7
ISCED 6	56.8	58.2	47.3	53.3	72.5	40.9	53.2	70.3	61.3	59.0	43.1	65.0	57.1	65.4	62.2	46.9	53.8	76.8	75.2	57.5	91.5	72.5	69.8	70.4
ISCED 7	5.4	7.3	22.8	19.5	4.9	35.8	26.8	9.2	18.1	19.7	32.9	19.1	26.4	18.1	23.5	36.4	34.8	14.0	13.3	31.6	1.1	19.4	24.1	23.2
ISCED 8	1.2	1.3	1.7	1.7	0.3	2.8	0.9	1.4	1.6	2.6	5.6	1.8	3.1	4.8	3.2	8.3	3.0	1.2	3.8	5.0	2.2	3.3	2.3	2.8

%	CH	IS	NL	GE	SK	IT	CZ	PL	PT	HR	DE	ME	(*)	EL	BA	RS	LT	FI	AL	BG	EE	RO	LI
ISCED 5	3.5	2.6	2.2	1.8	1.5	0.4	0.3	0.2	0.1	0.1	0.0	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:
ISCED 6	66.4	70.7	76.8	85.7	55.6	58.9	59.9	66.3	60.4	62.3	60.2	95.8	93.4	88.4	80.9	80.8	76.9	72.5	68.6	66.9	65.7	65.4	52.4
ISCED 7	22.1	24.0	19.3	9.8	38.0	38.9	33.6	30.9	33.8	35.7	33.2	4.0	6.1	8.1	18.4	15.7	21.3	20.9	28.9	30.7	29.0	31.0	32.4
ISCED 8	8.0	2.7	1.7	2.7	4.9	1.8	6.2	2.6	5.7	1.9	6.6	0.2	0.5	3.5	0.8	3.5	1.9	6.6	2.5	2.4	5.3	3.6	15.2

Source: Eurostat, UOE and additional collection for the other EHEA countries.

Figure 2.2: Distribution of students enrolled in ISCED 5-8 programmes, 2014/15[21, p.95] Source:IR 2018, p.95

The Draft Strategic Action Plan on Implementation of the Major Objectives of the Education System Development in Line with the EHEA Principles and Tools presented by Belarus at the Paris ministerial conference of 24-25 May 2018 [20, 22] provides for "- harmonisation of the national system of classification of educational programmes (State Classifier of the Republic of Belarus "Specialties and Qualifications" OKRB 011-2009)[54] with the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED 2011), which includes referencing education programmes to the BelQF and the QF-EHEA;" [22.2, p.2/4];however, nothing is said about the methods/techniques of achieving the "harmonisation".

2.2.1. Implementation of Three-Cycle System of Higher Education in Belarus

Belarus' path to implementing the Bologna structure in the higher education system is quite intricate. In 2002, Belarus ratified the Lisbon Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications related to higher education in the European region. A hope arose that the Belarusian education system will become an integral part of the Bologna Process. It was furthered by development of the relevant regulatory framework. The Education Law of the Republic

of Belarus of 29 October 1991 (article 32 of chapter 8) determined that "the higher education structure contains two cycles, including the bachelor and master programmes" [31].

In furtherance of the article, Belarus passed the following regulations enabling to bring the Belarusian higher education system closer to the Bologna model: Approval of the Regulations of Higher Education Cycles Ordinance of the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Belarus No. 1419 of 14 October 2002 [32] and Approval of the Framework of Implementing the Two-Cycle System of Training Professionals with Higher Education in the Republic of Belarus Ordinance of the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Belarus No. 605 of 24 May 2004 [33].

The Regulations of Higher Education Cycles stated: "The first cycle of higher education lasts for at least four years (at least 120 academic weeks). The total duration of studies in the first and second cycles of higher education is at least five years (150 academic weeks) or 6 years (180 academic weeks) depending on the training profile and considering defence of a master thesis". It was believed that it was required to preserve the bridging cycle of the professional to facilitate transition to the two-cycle system of studying at higher education institutions at the initial stage.

During 1994-2007, various models of the two-cycle system of higher education existed in parallel where the bachelor was a student who additionally studied a set of academic subjects (300 academic hours) in the graduation (fifth) year and a student with four years of theoretical training mostly.

The experiment in the field of two-cycle education began in Belarus at the beginning of the second millennium on the basis of the European Humanities University (EHU) and the Belarusian State University (BSU):according to the "bachelor-master" model using experimental curricula at the EHU (Regulations of Experimental Training of Professionals with Higher Education at the European Humanities University approved by the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Belarus in 2003), according to the "bachelor-professional-master" model at the BSU. According to this model, students received basic education during the first two to three years of education (depending on the specialties) at the BSU. Considering the academic success achieved and the research aptitude demonstrated, competitive selection was carried out to continue education in the three professional programmes: the four-year bachelor, the five-year professional or the six-year master programme. Irrespective of the programme, all students were awarded the diploma of the first-cycle higher education (bachelor) concerning compliance with the requirements of the bachelor standard [49]. It was not the classical "bachelor-master" model, and this stage could be still considered transitional. During that period, transition to the two-cycle higher education was designed on the basis of a serious methodological framework and advanced educational technologies considering 12 years of studies at school. However, following an impulsive decision by the head of state, the secondary education system was switched to 11 years of studies in 2009, and the two-cycle higher education was never adopted. The Bologna model of higher education (bachelor-master) was not developed in Belarusanyfurther [41].

Beginning from 2004, restoration of the Soviet higher education system commenced in Belarus. Higher Education Law of the Republic of Belarus No. 252-Z of 11 July 2007 [34]

put an end to the idea of implementing the two-cycle Bologna model of higher education. Article 6 *Higher Education Structure. Training Periods at Higher Education Institution* of the law stated:

"1. Higher education shall be divided into two levels:

1.1. The first level of higher education shall ensure training of professionals with higher education possessing fundamental and special knowledge and skills and shall be completed with awarding a qualification and issuing a higher education diploma. The training period at this level shall be four to five years.

1.2. The second level of higher education (master programmes) shall ensure acquiring knowledge and skills of scientific and pedagogical as well as research work and shall be completed with awarding the master degree and issuing the master diploma. The training period at this level shall be one to two years". The role of master programmes was reduced to training prospective students to enrol in postgraduate programmes.

This article of the law was further developed in the Regulations of the First Level of Higher Education and in the Regulations of the Second Level of Higher Education approved by Certain Issues of Higher Education Ordinance of the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Belarus No. 68 of 18 January 2008 [35].

The Education Code of the Republic of Belarus No. 243-Z of 13 January 2011 (hereinafter the "current Code") [37] legally enshrines the structure of higher education degrees in Belarus returning the country to training professionals. According to the current Code (clauses 3-5, chapter 37, article 202), higher education is divided into two levels. However, the first level of higher education provides for training not of bachelors but "professionals possessing fundamental and special knowledge and skills with awarding of the qualification of a professional with higher education" prepared for independent professional work and able to continue studies in master programmes. The training period at the first level is 4 to 5 years (6 years in the most complicated professions) of full-time studies. The second level of higher education (master programmes) is designed to prepare research and pedagogical staff as well as to train the professional in depth and completes with awarding the master degree. The training period at this level of higher education is one to two years of full-time studies. The doctoral level remains in the postgraduate education system designed to train Belarusian researchers. A two-cycle system of higher education actually exists.

The Belarus Roadmap for Higher Education Reform states in relation to transition to a three-level system that, to achieve the necessary results, Belarus will undertake obligations of "… introducing the three-cycle system on the agreed Bologna model…" [18,40].

To that end, a number of measures related to modernising the higher education system and improving the content of higher education were taken in 2016. On 12 October 2016, the Implementation of the EHEA Tools in the National Education System National Roundtable took place [42]; on 30 November 2016, the Current Issues of Preparing Higher Education Standards of 3+ Generation Applied Research Workshop was held [43]; on 13 December 2016, the Education as Human Right: Higher Education Modernisation in Reaction to the Challenges of the 21st Century 4th Annual Belarusian-Dutch-Polish Conference was held [44]. On 30 March 2017, the Contemporary Techniques in Syllabus Support of Higher Edu-

cation International Workshop was held [45]. At the above events, some amendments of the draft Education Code were presented [39], the issues of preparing draft educational standards of the new 3+ generation based on the competency-building approach using learning outcomes and ECTS, preparation of a new form of the diploma supplement corresponding to the Diploma Supplement in content and structure were discussed [46,47].

On 9 March 2017, a roundtable of the Standing Committee on Education, Culture, and Science of the Chamber of Representatives of the National Assembly of the Republic of Belarus and of the Ministry of Education was held to discuss the draft new revision of the Education Code of the Republic of Belarus (hereinafter the "draft Code") was held. However, nothing is known about the fate of the "ill-fated" Code yet.

The draft new revision of the Code attempted to establish a three-cycle model of higher education: the "bachelor", "master" terms appeared, the following levels of higher education were introduced: bachelor education (basic higher education), master education (in-depth higher education), and research-oriented professional education (postgraduate education) instead of postgraduate education as well as a continued higher education programme merging bachelor and master studies for certain professions.

However, no significant progress in introducing the three-cycle system of higher education according to the Bologna model is observed while the regulatory framework to carry out systemic changes in higher education is not amended according to the EHEA documents and has not been passed until now.

The commitments to introduce the three-cycle system according to the Bologna model approved are provided for in the draft Code although terminological and structural difficulties are preserved and can complicate the Bologna architecture implementation.

According to the assessment by Advisory Group 2 *Support for the Belarus Roadmap* [29], "The draft Education Code of the Republic of Belarus (the latest one that the Advisory Group had access to) looks as if it were generally in line with the Bologna model and meets some of the Roadmap requirements concerning the introduction of a three cycle higher education system. Yet, the fact that the three-cycle system was introduced while the two-cycle system is still in place, substantively complicates the sound implementation of the Bologna model. Currently, two systems run in parallel and it is unclear how long and to what extent this situation is intended to last. In several countries, a limited number of study programmes – medicine is a typical example – is not organised according to the three cycle system. However, in Belarus, the exceptions to the three-cycle system are more numerous and the timetable of further reforms is uncertain. It still remains unclear when the revised Education Code will be adopted and how the BA and MA-cycles will be linked to the NQF." [29, p. 8].

"**Three-cycle higher education system:** Following the Roadmap, the New Code introduces a three-cycle higher education system by mentioning the terms "bachelor" and "master" but at the same time preserves the term "specialist". By sticking to both models, the New Code complicates the incorporation of the Bachelor-/Master-system."[29,p. 9].

2.2.2. First and Second Cycles of Higher Education

Fig. 2.3,2.4 demonstrate the study workload of the first- and second-cycle programmes expressed in the ECTS credits. Both values demonstrate that various credit models often co-exist within the same system although one credit model prevails in the majority of the systems.

Educational programmes of 180, 210, and 240 ECTS credits correspond to the Bologna commitments. Programmes with a different number of credits can complicate articulation and comparison of learning outcomes with programmes in other EHEA countries [21].

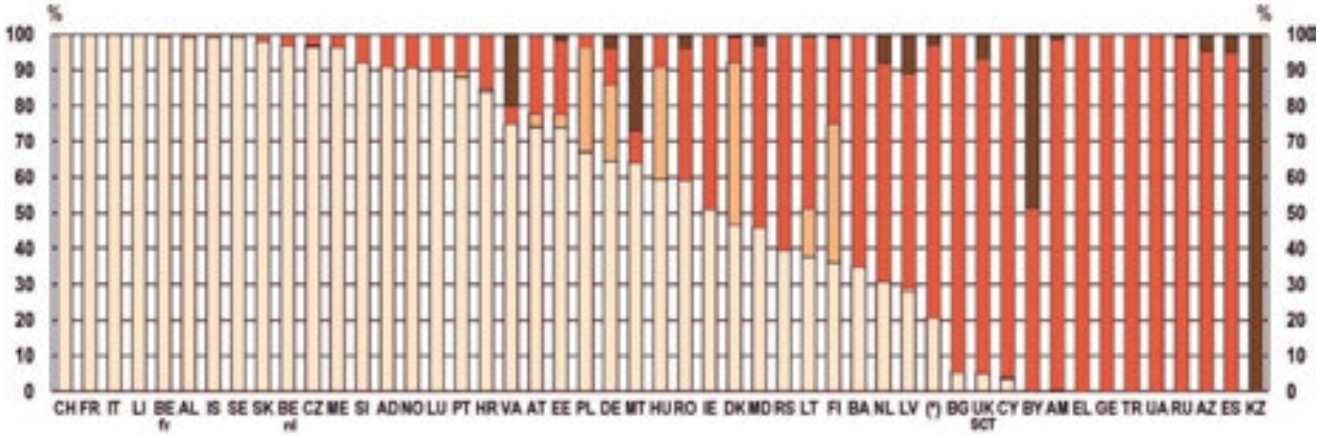


Figure 2.3: Share of first cycle-programmes with a workload of 180, 210, 240 or another number of ECTS credits, 2016/17[21, p.96] : – 180 ECTS; – 210 ECTS; – 240 ECTS; – Other.

(*): the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

Source:IR 2018, p. 96

Other workload models are relatively uncommon. They still include *Belarus* as well where almost half of all first-cycle programmes use a "different" workload, mostly 300 (28%) and 270 (18%) ECTS credits [21, p.96] despite the fact that the Belarus Roadmap for Higher Education Reform states in relation to the transition to the three-cycle system that, to achieve the necessary results, Belarus will undertake the obligations of "… establishing a first degree of 180-240 ECTS credits … to gradually phase out the remaining 5 year bakalavr degree, and subsequently measure student work load in ECTS, as stipulated in the revised ECTS Users' Guide." [18, 40].

Despite the concept of "credit" introduced, the total workload of educational programmes in the current Code is set forth not in credits but in years: the duration of the first-cycle programmes is four to six years (clauses1-2 of article206)[37].

It is necessary to mention that, despite the requirements of the Roadmap, the new wording of the higher education architecture according to the draft Code (article 200, clause 1of article 202) [39] does not include a range of ECTS credits for each education level in the definitions of cycles (levels) of higher education although the duration of education in bachelor programmes is set forth as four to four and a half years.

According to the assessment by Advisory Group 2 *Support for the Belarus Roadmap* [29],

"**Three-cycle higher education system**: The draft Education Code from 2017 introduces shorter Bachelor programmes of up to 4-4.5 years (240-270 ECTS). The goal is to increase the number of 4-year programmes, introduce 1-2-year Master programmes and to decrease long cycle programs (some up to 6 years)."[29, p.9].

The 2018 Report data shows that, in the second cycle (Fig. 2.4), the model of 120 ECTS credits is the most widespread one as of today; it is present in almost all of the EHEA systems [21, p.97].

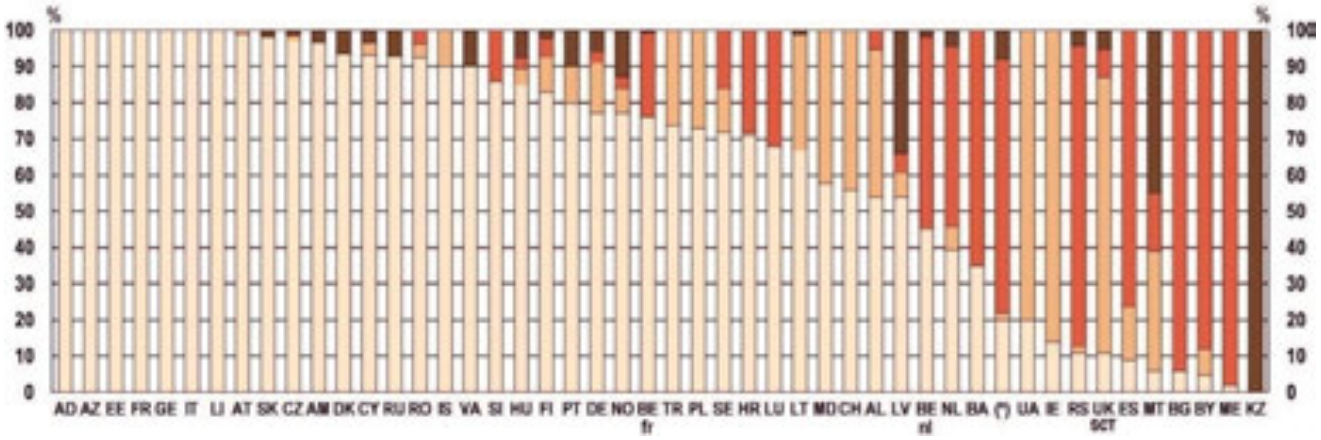


Figure 2.4: Share of second-cycle programmes with a workload of 60-75, 90, 120 or another number of ECTS credits, 2016/17[21, p.97] : – 120 ECTS; – 90 ECTS; – 60–75 ECTS; – Other.
(*): the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.
Source:IR 2018, p. 97

In *Belarus*, the dominant model is the model of 60-75 ECTS credits [21, p.97]. Similar to the first-cycle programmes, the total workload of master programmes is determined in years and not in credits: the duration is one to two years (clause 8 of article 206) [37]. The draft Code does not provide for using the credit system to assess the workload of master programmes but the duration of studies in years [39].

Based on the above workload values, the 2015 Bologna Process Implementation Report provided an overview of various workload models of the first and second cycles of education together [16, p.54].

According to the 2018 Report, Fig. 2.5 provides the most general combined workload of the first- and second-cycle programmes providing information about the minimum level established – 300 ECTS credits or more [21, p.99].

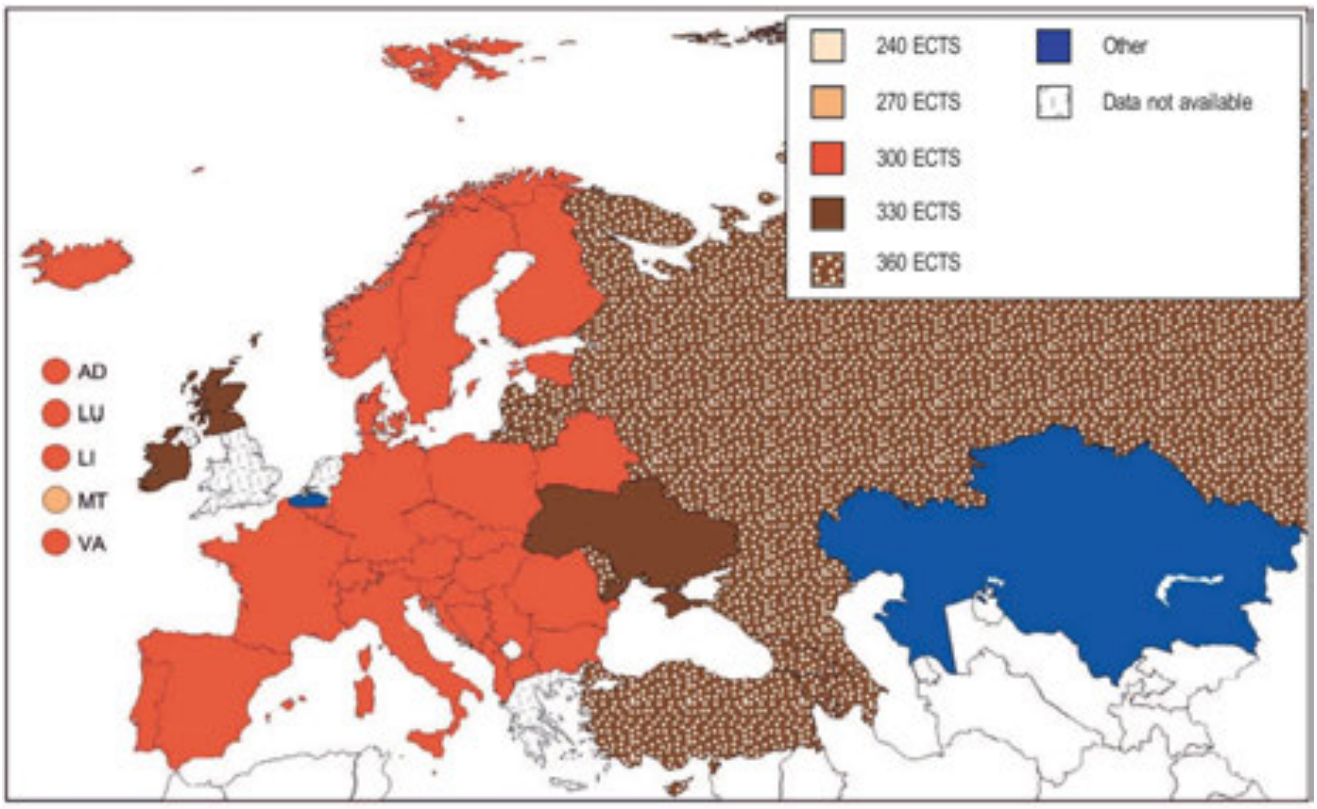


Figure 2.5: Centrally set minimum total workload of first- and second-cycle programmes, 2016/17 [21, p. 99].

Source:IR 2018, p. 99

In *Belarus*, as Fig.2.6 shows, the most common workload is around 300 ECTS credits which, applying the terminology of training duration used in the country (clauses 1,2,8 of article 206 of the current Code [37]), equals five years of training or six years of training in the most complex professions, the list of which is set forth by the government in total [38]. The situation is not changed by the prepared draft Code [39], which provides for training duration in years (semesters etc.) but does not use the credit system to assess the workload of educational programmes.

In approximately half of the EHEA countries, the majority (three quarters) of the first-cycle graduates continue their studies in second-cycle programmes. In certain Central European countries, the values are relatively high as well (50-74.9%) while a quarter of the countries have below 25% of students directly continuing their studies in the second cycle. This can reflect significant differences in the acceptance of the first-cycle qualification in the EHEA by the labour market [21, p.100].

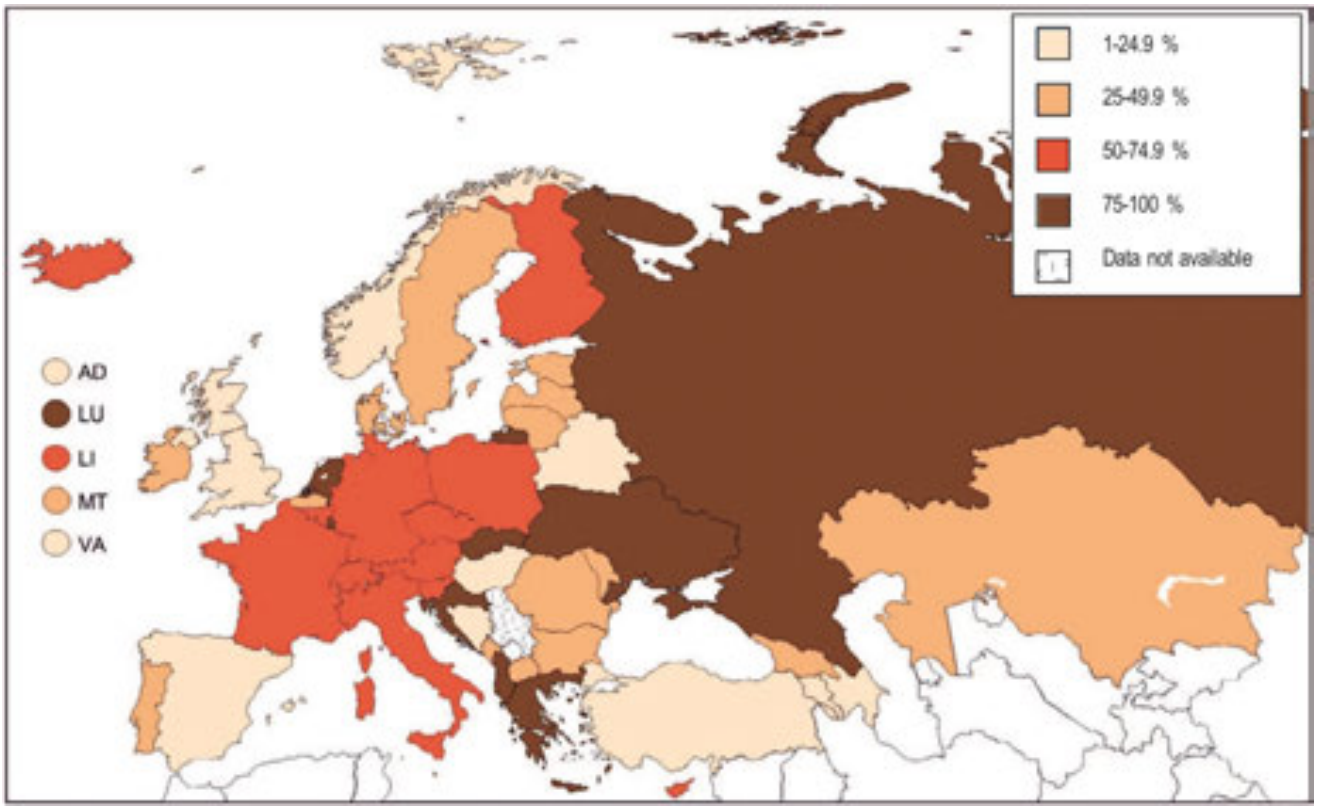


Figure 2.6: Proportion of first-cycle graduates entering a second-cycle programme within one year after graduation, 2016/17 [21, p.100].

Source:IR 2018, p. 100

In *Belarus*, despite the overall tendency of much easier access to the following level, although the Regulations of Admission to Master Programmes provide for the possibility to continue education in the second cycle of education, access to the following cycle upon completing first-cycle programmes provides for passing entrance examinations, except some cases with certain categories of students (winners of academic competitions, etc.), studying of additional courses or availability of the mandatory work experience.

According to Belstat(2016/2017) [53], during the period (2016/17), 74,600 graduates completed education at the first level. 7,654 persons, i.e. approximately 10.3% of the graduates, continued education at the second level of higher education, which refers Belarus to the countries, in which the value is below 25%.

2.2.3. Programmes of Short Cycle of Higher Education

The possibility of bridging or short cycles of higher education was discussed already at the early stage of the Bologna Process. In 2015 in Yerevan, education ministers of the European countries brought up the issue again and resolved to undertake to include the short-cycle qualification in the Overarching Framework of Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area (QF-EHEA) [17]. Particularly as the descriptors of higher education cycles known as the Dublin descriptors (accepted in 2005) included a clear reference to "a

short-cycle qualification within the first cycle or related to it" [30.1].

In 2018, the education ministers in the Paris communique stated: "We are therefore including short-cycle qualifications as a stand-alone qualification within the overarching framework of qualifications of the EHEA (QF-EHEA). Each country can decide whether and how to integrate short cycle qualifications within its own national framework." [22, p.2/5]. This was reflected in Appendix III *Overarching Framework of Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area (revised in 2018)* to the Paris communique "… the Paris Communiqué underlined the role ECTS-based short cycle qualifications play in preparing students for employment and further studies as well as in improving social cohesion." [22.3].

For a certain period of time, about two-thirds of the EHEA countries have offered programmes referred to the category of the "short cycle of tertiary education" (ISCED 5), which are usually interpreted as vocational ones but with the workload of 120 ECTS credits typically, besides the three main cycles (please refer to Fig. 2.2).

In 2016/17 (Fig.2.7), short-cycle programmes considered as part of higher education already existed in approximately half of all of the EHEA system.

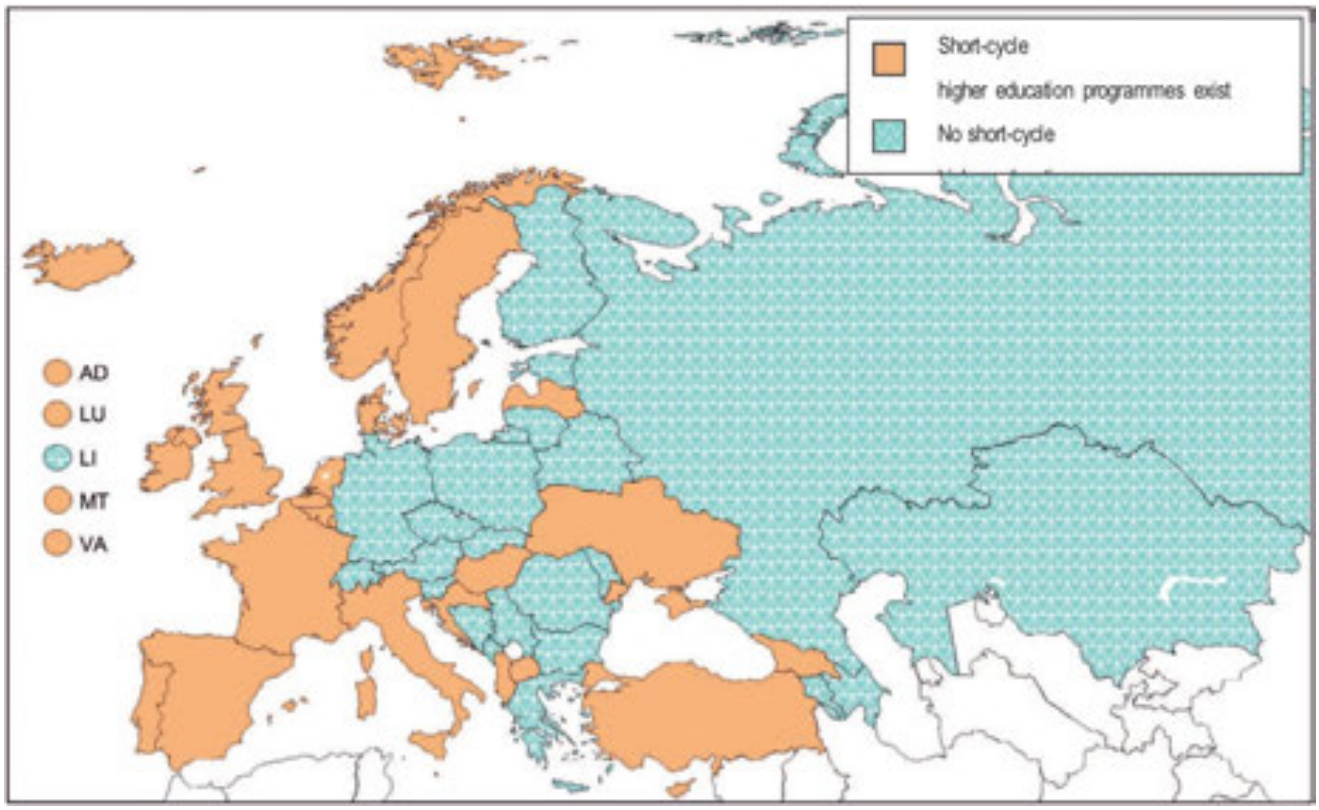


Figure 2.7: Presence of short-cycle programmes considered as part of higher education, 2016/17 [21, p.101].

Notes: The presence of short-cycle programmes considered as part of higher education refers to situations where national qualifications frameworks and/or top-level steering documents recognise the short cycle (or short-cycle qualifications) as part of the higher education system.

Source:IR 2018, p. 101

Considering the data of Fig.2.7 and 2.2, it is possible to conclude that to a certain degree the concept of the short cycle of higher education differs from the concept of the short cycle

of tertiary education (ISCED 5). "The discrepancy between the two data sets can partly be explained by wording of ISCED level 5, which can be associated with a wide range of programmes. More specifically, the classification states that '[p]rogrammes classified at ISCED level 5 may be referred to in many ways, for example: higher technical education, community college education, technician or advanced/higher vocational training, associate degree, bac+2' (UNESCO-UIS, OECD and Eurostat 2015, p. 73)."[21, p.101].

Indeed, around a quarter of all of the EHEA countries do not inform about the existence of educational programmes of the short cycle of higher education (Fig. 2.7) but the Eurostat's data available point to availability of ISCED 5 programmes in the countries (Fig.2.2) [21, p.100]) but it is not always clear whether such programmes can be classified as higher education.

In *Belarus*, the short cycle does not exist in the structure of higher education formally (please refer to Fig. 2.7). ISCED 5 programmes may not be deemed part of higher education. According to the current Code, they are classified as secondary specialised education [37, section X]. Accordingly, a high percentage of ISCED 5 students –36.7% – (please refer to Fig.2.2) does not characterise the situation with implementation of the short cycle in the architecture of the Belarusian higher education.

While numerous education systems of the EHEA countries strive to integrate short cycles of vocational education in the Bologna architecture according to the Dublin descriptors and other official EHEA documents, the Belarusian education system follows a different path. The Conceptual Approaches to Development of the Education System of the Republic of Belarus until 2020 and in the Prospect until 2030 document [55] claiming to define the educational policy prospects set the task to integrate secondary specialised education with vocational non-tertiary education (ISCED 4), instead of upgrading the status of secondary specialised education to the level of the short cycle of higher education with the relevant qualifications awarded (ISCED 5) within the "harmonisation of the structure of the basic education system". Consequently, it is not supposed to include the short cycle as an independent level of the national framework of qualifications of the Belarusian higher education even in the long run.

2.2.4. Third-Cycle Programmes

In 2003, the Bologna Process education ministers resolved to include doctoral programmes in higher education [7]. Two years later, the Overarching Framework of Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area was approved; it recognised doctoral studies as the third cycle of higher education [9]. Doctoral studies ensure implementation of programmes resulting in awarding the academic degree of PhD or Dr in the majority of the EHEA countries [24].

The Bologna seminar in Salzburg [25] became the forum for discussing some issues and challenges related to the doctoral level. One of the important conclusions was that doctoral students were not just students but researchers significantly contributing to creating new knowledge, although at an early stage of their careers. It was noted that, to achieve better

results, it was necessary to improve the synergy between the higher education sector and other research sectors as well as between the European Higher Education Area and the European Research Area.

For this reason, the third cycle is covered by special regulations known as the Salzburg Principles [25] and Salzburg II Recommendations [26], and prospective doctoral students are recognised as entry-level researchers (EUA, 2010, European Commission, 2011) [21, p.105]. Reviewing the results of the five years between 2005 and 2010, Salzburg II Recommendations (EUA, 2010) note successful implementation of extensive reforms in organising doctoral studies in Europe, in creating doctoral schools in the first place. Doctoral schools have been broadly developed all over the EHEA and exist in more than 30 higher education systems. In a number of countries, third-cycle programmes can result in awarding industrial or business-oriented doctoral degrees, professional doctoral degrees or doctoral degrees in the field of arts[15, p.41].

During the Bergen conference (2005), the importance of interdisciplinary training of doctoral students based upon structured programmes was particularly noted [9].

Structured doctoral programmes differ from the traditional doctoral research.

The concepts of the "structured programme" and "doctoral school" coincide to a significant degree. The data of the European University Association (EUA) demonstrates that there is shared understanding that education institutions should participate actively in developing structured programmes beyond the traditional model of the "supervisor-student". Certainly, concepts can change but the overall objective of expanding institutional responsibility for doctoral education is typical of the whole continent [15, p.41].

Doctoral schools involved programmes of doctoral studies with a clear structure of topics and mandatory attendance of lectures and seminars and, as a rule, interim assessment (awarding ECTS credits).

Unlike "certain doctoral degrees", structured doctoral programmes encourage social integration of doctoral students while supporting in-depth study of their area. Structured doctoral programmes often have a significant international orientation.

The EHEA doctoral programmes began using the ECTS credits [21, p.107-108]. In the 2016/2017 academic year, about half of the EHEA education systems awarded the ECTS credits for all elements of doctoral programmes and about a quarter of the systems for taught elements only. In some higher education systems, regulations determine the precise number of the ECTS credits related to doctoral programmes.

The features of most reforms of doctoral studies in the EHEA can be described as follows: an increased degree of orientation, manageability, integration of programmes, more teaching of the required professional skills as well as more institutional structures ensuring broad interdisciplinary exchange and training. These things correspond to the spirit of the Bologna reforms in the best way possible. As indicated previously (please refer to Fig. 2.2), doctoral or equivalent programmes (ISCED 8) usually include an insignificant fraction of all the students, below 5% in most countries.

The percentage of students in the programmes in *Belarus* is 1.3% according to Fig.2.2 [21].

As compared to the 2015 data [16], the 2018 Report [21] notes a decrease in the number of second-cycle graduates enrolling in third-cycle programmes. The percentage decreased in approximately a quarter of the EHEA countries, although it increased in several countries(Fig. 2.8).

In *Belarus*, according to Belstat [60], 5,034 persons graduated from master programmes in 2016/17. 1,519 persons entered postgraduate programmes. The percentage of students continuing education in postgraduate programmes (first-level postgraduate education) was 30.17% accordingly. The confidence level of the calculations is low as "persons entering postgraduate (junior research assistant) programmes should have higher education" according to the Regulations of Training Top-Qualification Research Staff in the Republic of Belarus [56, clause 30]; however, the level of higher education is not stipulated. Accordingly, not only master graduates but also professionals with higher education can enter postgraduate programmes. Belstat's collection does not provide for such diversification. Specifically, if one considers that graduates with higher education (74,600) and master graduates (5,034) amounted to 79,600 persons, the percentage of those continuing education in postgraduate programmes decreases to 1.9%.

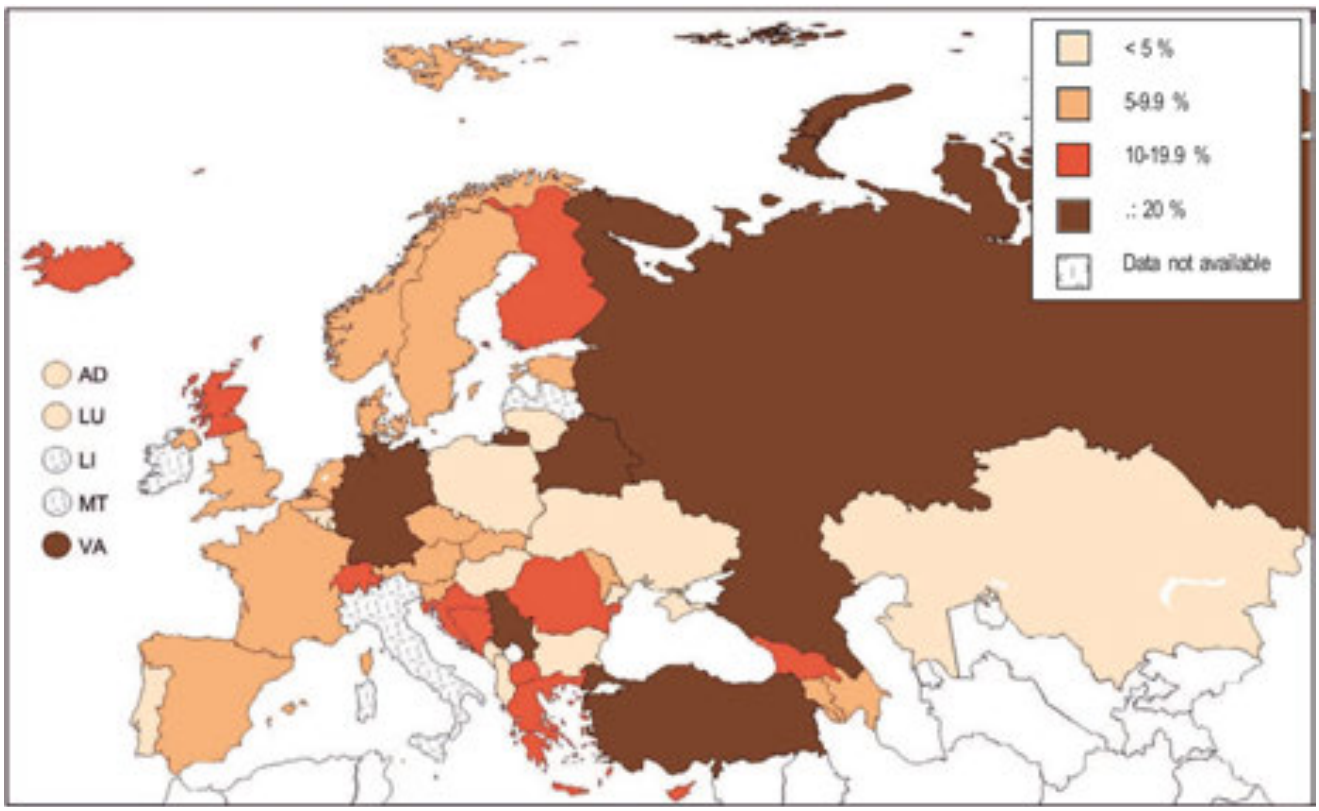


Figure 2.8: Proportion of second-cycle graduates eventually entering a third-cycle programme, 2016/17[21, p. 105]

Source:IR 2018, p. 105

In 2016/17, doctoral schools exist approximately in three-quarters of all of the EHEA countries (Fig. 2.9). However, in a number of higher education systems (12 systems), only about 25% of all doctoral students follow their programmes within the structures. In six

countries all doctoral students are included in doctoral schools [21, p. 106].

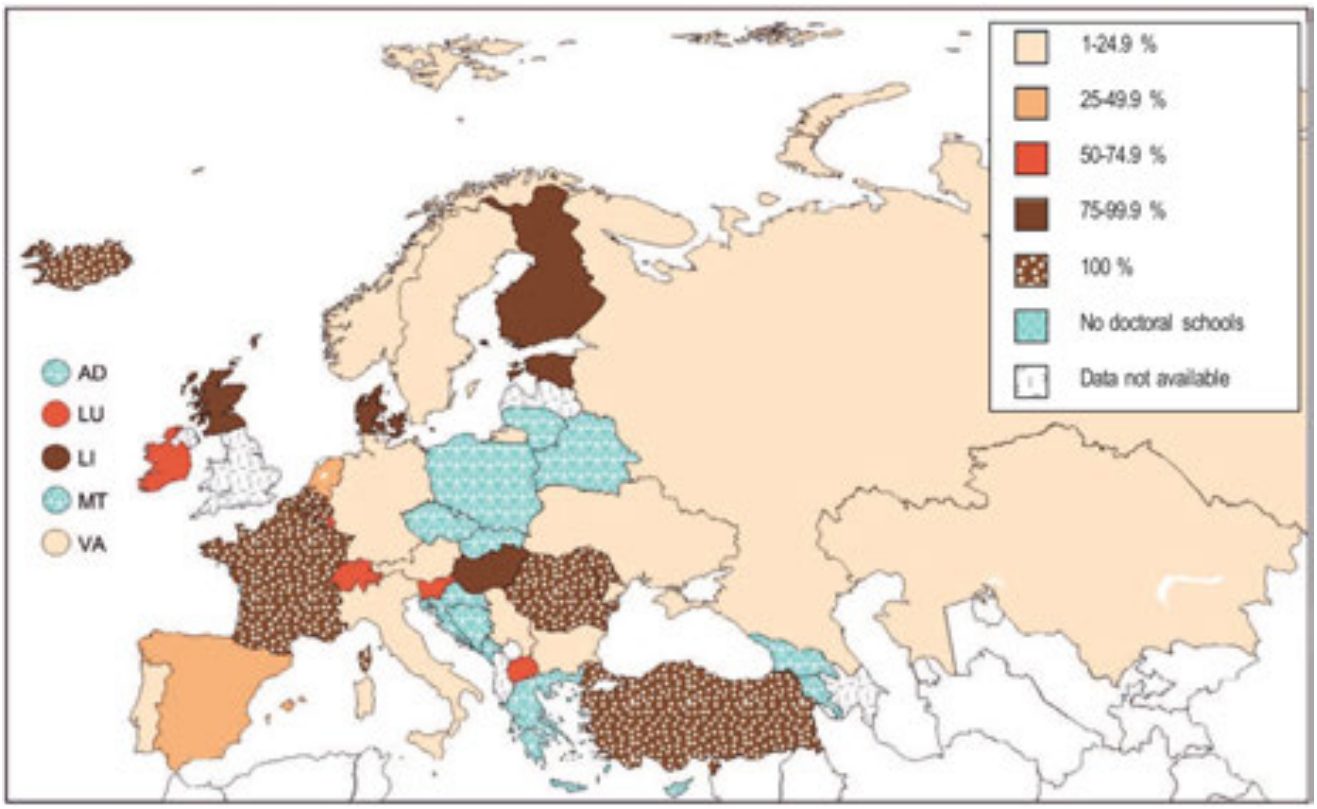


Figure 2.9: Percentage of third-cycle candidates in doctoral schools, 2016/17[21, p. 106]
Source:IR 2018, p. 106

The Salzburg Principles [25] provide for the duration of full-time doctoral programmes of three to four years. In fact, the duration is three years in 20 EHEA systems, up to four years in eight systems, and three to four years in 14 systems [21, p. 106].

In *Belarus*, the duration of studies at the postgraduate education level is three years in full-time postgraduate programmes, four years in part-time postgraduate programmes, five years in external postgraduate studies, three years in full-time doctoral programmes, five years in external doctoral studies.

Fig. 2.10 shows a relatively broad use of the ECTS credits in doctoral programmes. During 2016/17, about half of all education systems in the EHEA awarded the ECTS credits for all elements of doctoral programmes and about a quarter of the systems to taught elements only. In 11 higher education systems, the ECTS credits are not used in doctoral programmes.

However, it should be mentioned that comparison of the EHEA statistics with Belarusian statistics is not absolutely correct.

In *Belarus*, the third cycle of higher education provided for by the Bologna Process is formally absent while training of the staff of the top research qualification is referred to postgraduate education according to the current Code [37, article 218 of chapter 42].

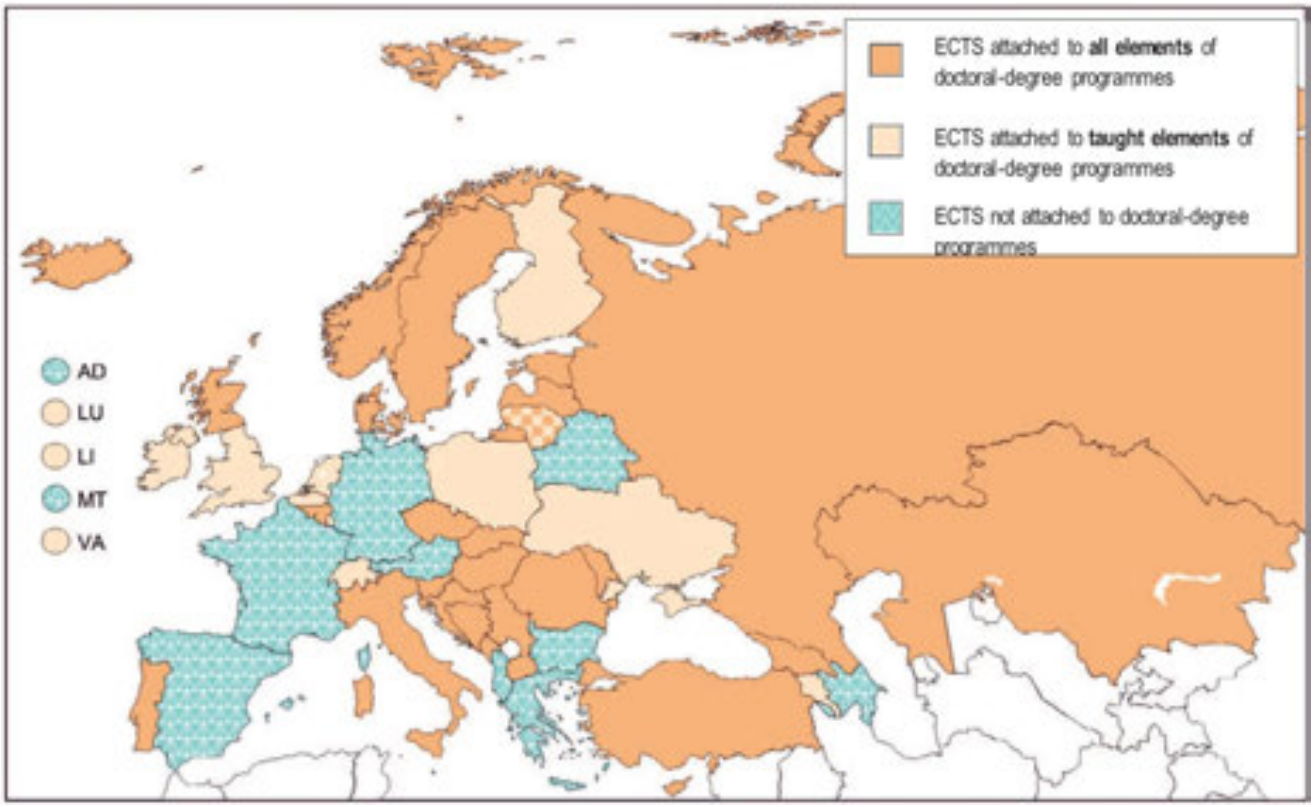


Figure 2.10: Use of ECTS in third-cycle programmes, 2016/17 [21, p.108]
Source:IR 2018, p. 108

Training is carried out according to the Regulations of Training Top-Qualification Research Staff in the Republic of Belarus approved by Edict of the President of the Republic of Belarus No. 561 of 1 December 2011 [56] concerning research professions provided for by the Nomenclature of Research Staff Professions of the Republic of Belarus approved by Ordinance of the Higher Attestation Commission of the Republic of Belarus No. 4 of 8 June 2009 [57].

The list of research professions is a separate document, which is, to a certain degree, not comparable with the Professions and Qualifications National Classifier [54] that confirms detachment of research staff training from the first two levels of the Belarusian higher education system.

Certificates of research professions, the minimum programmes of qualifying examinations in postgraduate programmes are not interdisciplinary, do not correspond to the Dublin descriptors as to the learning outcomes [58].

The number of academic courses to study, which is designed for passing postgraduate qualifying examinations, and their content are strictly regulated by the minimum programmes of qualifying examinations and by the above Regulations. The curricula of postgraduate/doctoral programmes include virtually no special and/or interdisciplinary academic courses aimed at acquiring flexible skills, obtaining an additional qualification and/or professional postgraduate/doctoral degree. The curricula do not provide for the use of the ECTS credits.

An individual supervisor (consultant) is the prevailing option in the traditional Belarusian model of postgraduate (doctoral) programmes.

Despite the fact that the Belarus Roadmap for Higher Education Reform states in relation to transition to the tree-cycle system that, to achieve the necessary result, Belarus will undertake the obligations of "… introducing the three-cycle system on the agreed Bologna model,…" [18,40]; however, the old Soviet two-level model prevails in the system of training research staff in Belarus: the first level is postgraduate studies (the duration of studies is three to four years) and the second level is doctoral studies (the duration of studies is three years). However, the current Code [37] has included such a qualification for the persons who have completed their studies in postgraduate (junior research assistant) programmes as the "researcher" with the researcher diploma awarded upon completing the postgraduate educational programme (the first level of postgraduate education) without thesis defence. Upon completing studies in postgraduate (doctoral) programmes and defending the candidate thesis, the candidate degree is awarded, and the doctoral degree upon defending the doctoral thesis. The national feature which, according to the authorities, partially corresponds to the European practice is that prospective candidates of sciences may receive a PhD diploma upon filing an application instead of the traditional candidate of sciences diploma (diploma of the Doctor of Philosophy, PhD) (clause 12 of the Regulations of Awarding Academic Degrees and Titles in the Republic of Belarus) [59].

However, in Belarus, the principal difference from the European model is the traditional academic nature of the programmes of training the staff of the level, insignificant structuring of programmes [41], which do not provide for the inclusion of a broad range of special and interdisciplinary courses which provide new knowledge and are aimed at developing additional required skills for occupational advancement and improved competitiveness of their graduates.

The draft Code prepared by the Ministry of Education [39] attempts to create a three-cycle model of higher education: it is proposed to exclude from the current Code the term and definition of the "doctoral student"; research-oriented professional education (postgraduate studies) is introduced, which is transformed from postgraduate education and should correspond to the third cycle (doctoral studies) of the Bologna architecture of higher education. At the same time, the draft Code states that "the education system includes … the higher education system, the research-oriented professional education…", which permits to conclude that the third cycle of "research-oriented professional education" is not completely integrated in the higher education structure [39].

According to the assessment of the Advisory Group 2 *Support for the Belarus Roadmap* [29], "**Three cycle higher education system**: … Currently the third cycle is a separate level under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education as it is funded by the Ministry. There are two types of degrees awarded: diploma of candidate of sciences (after the examinations, before thesis defence) and diploma of researcher which is approved by an Accreditation Committee after the thesis defence" [29, p. 9].

The Draft Strategic Action Plan on Implementation of the Major Objectives of the Education System Development in Line with the EHEA Principles and Tools presented by

Belarus at the Paris conference of ministers of 24-25 May 2018 [22.2, p.2/4] provides for "introduction of the multi-cycle system of higher education", "harmonisation of the national system of classification of educational programmes";however, it does not state anything about the inclusion of the doctoral studies as the third cycle of higher education to comply with the Bologna structure and about creating the relevant regulatory framework for the purpose.

2.3. Integrated (Long) Programmes and Programmes outside the Framework of the Typical Bologna Model

A majority of the EHEA countries offer programmes outside the three-cycle architecture. Integrated or long programmes [21, p. 109], which include the first and second cycles with the duration of at least five years leading directly to the second-cycle qualification, i.e. the master degree, exist in a majority of the EHEA countries. This type of programmes mostly results in awarding qualifications in regulated professions, i.e. in the fields of medical science, odontology, veterinary medicine, nursing care and obstetrics, architecture but, in some countries, in engineering, law, theological studies, teachers' training and some others.

As a rule, presence of integrated (long) programmes is substantiated by Recognition of Professional Qualifications Directive 2005/36/EC [29], which determines qualification requirements for certain professions (medical science, odontology, veterinary medicine, pharmaceutical science, and architecture), including the duration of studies.

Fig. 2.11 demonstrates integrated (long) programmes immediately resulting in the second-cycle degree [21, p. 109].

Belarus has its characteristic features. Irrespective of the duration of studies, whether four or six years, despite the list of programmes regulated by the government pursuant to Ordinance of the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Belarus No. 1049 of 4 August 2011 [38], all programmes are referred to the first-level programmes, and the professional, and not the master; qualification is awarded to their graduates upon completion. Master programmes, even in medical science, which have the longest duration of studies (up to six years), exist separately as the second cycle of studies.

Thus, it is quite complicated to discuss integrated programmes in the Belarusian higher education. In the Belarusian higher education, this term denotes programmes of secondary specialised education integrated with programmes of higher education in a number of professions [24, clauses 3-6 of article 207].

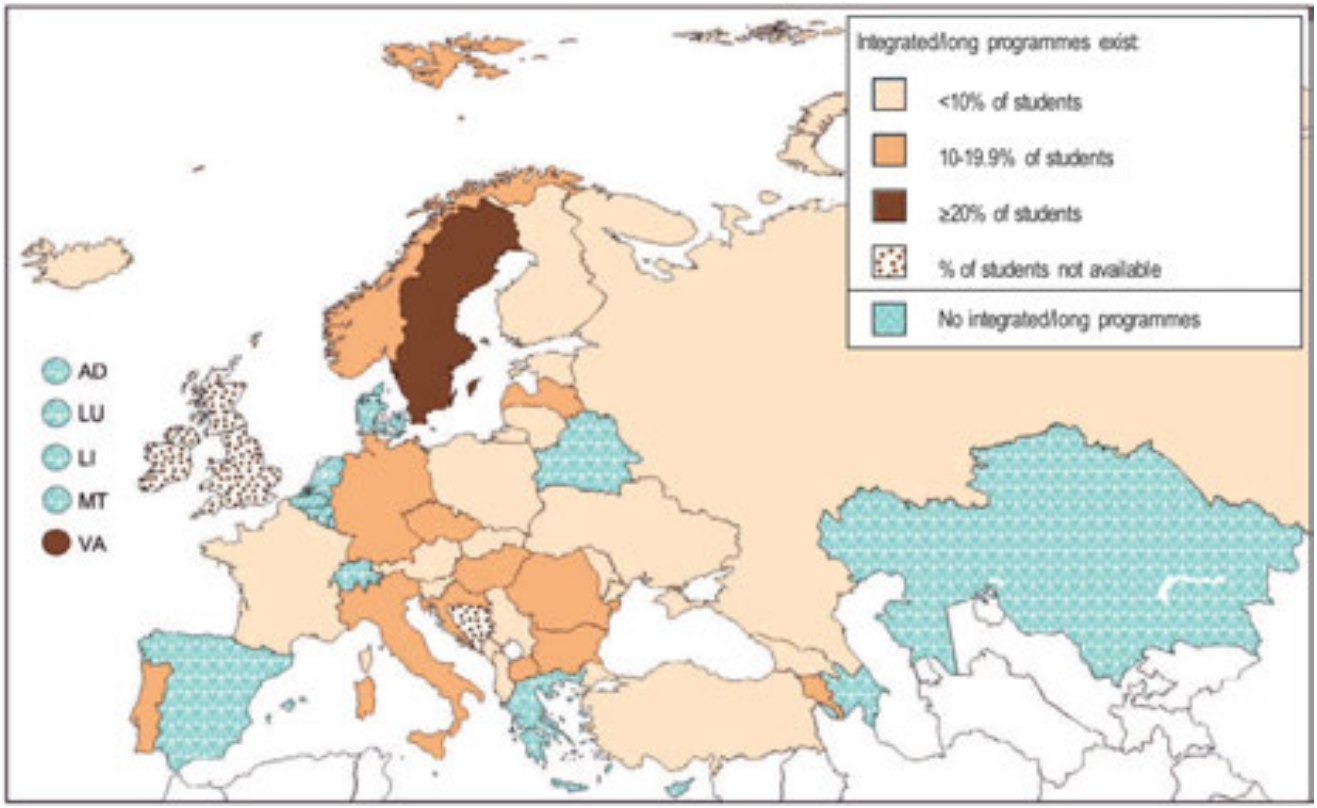


Figure 2.11: Presence of integrated/long programmes leading to a second-cycle degree and the percentage of students in these programmes, 2016/17[21, p. 109]

Notes: Integrated/long programmes refer to programmes including both the first and the second cycle, and leading to a second-cycle qualification.

Source:IR 2018, p. 109

Fig. 2.12 demonstrates that around a quarter of all EHEA systems have programmes outside the Bologna model, which differ from integrated (long) programmes. The nature of the programmes varies from one higher education system to another: they are related to various education cycles and can be included in as well as excluded from the national frameworks of qualifications [2,p.111].

In *Belarus*, according to the 2018 Report [21, p.112], such programmes included the doctoral programme resulting in the degree of the "doctor of sciences" with the duration up to three years. However, the Belarusian doctoral studies is actually outside higher education.

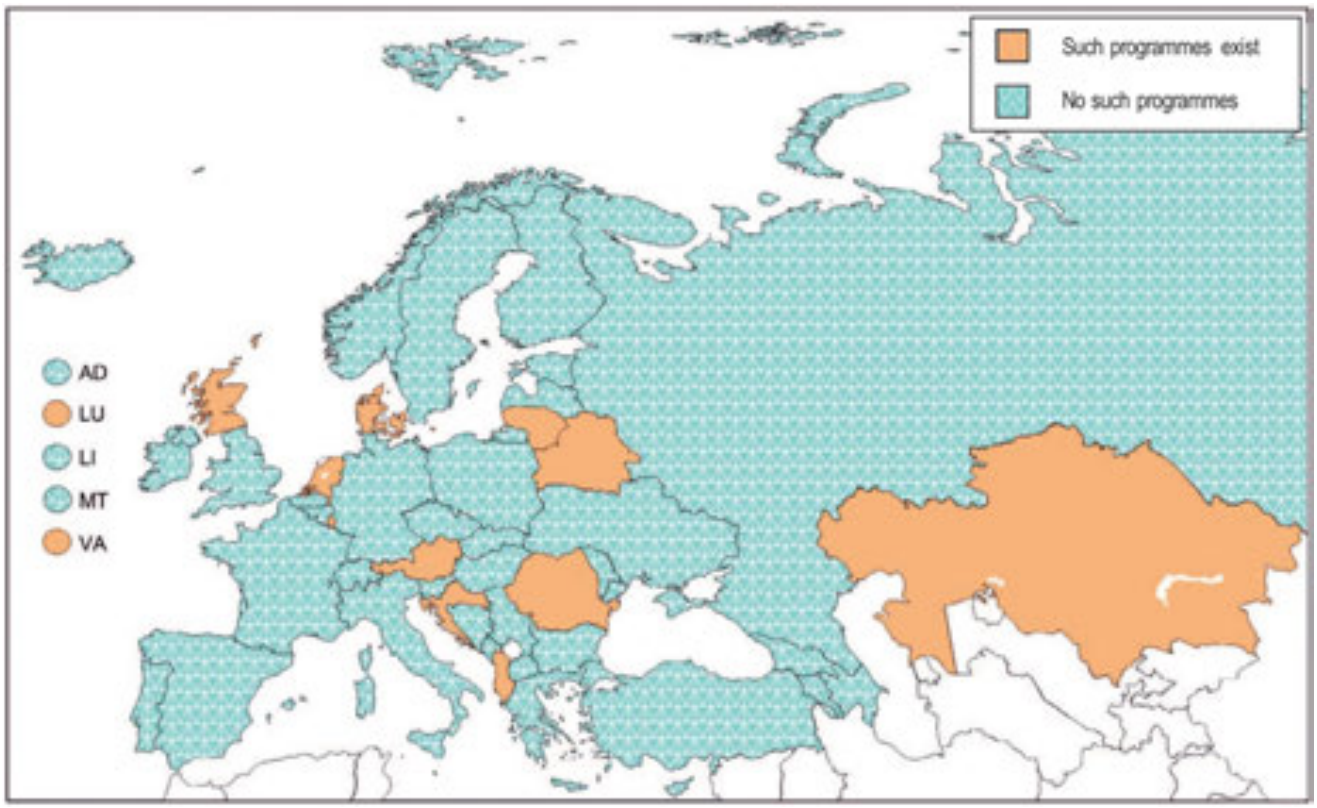


Figure 2.12: Programmes outside the Bologna-degree structure (other than integrated/long programmes), 2016/17[21, p. 111].

Notes: Within the Bologna Process, ministers committed themselves to implementing the three-cycle degree system, where first-cycle degrees (awarded after completion of higher education programmes lasting a minimum of three years) should give access, in the sense of the Lisbon Recognition Convention (20), to second-cycle programmes. Second-cycle degrees should give access to doctoral studies (the third cycle). Within the three-cycle degree system, ministers recognised the possibility of intermediate qualifications (the short cycle) linked to the first cycle. When referring to programmes outside the Bologna-degree structure, the figure refers to programmes that do not fully comply with the above ministerial engagements [21, c. 111].

Source: IR 2018, p. 111

2.4. Bologna Architecture Implementation Results

The 2018 Report [21] has a number of values providing information about various aspects of the Bologna Process and is intended to track the countries' progress in honouring the Bologna commitments.

The Report and proposals prepared on behalf of the BFUG by the Advisory Group *Dealing with Non-Implementation* in cooperation with the Working Group *Fostering Implementation of Agreed Key Commitments* [28] attempt to create a combined value assessing overall compliance of higher education systems with the Bologna agreements as to the implementation of the structure of academic degrees. This combined value is based on five indicators:

"1) The first (Figure 2.3) shows the share of first-cycle programmes with a workload of

180, 210, 240 or other ECTS credits. 180, 210 and 240 ECTS all conform with Bologna commitments. Other amounts may not, and this may create problems in articulating the learning outcomes of such programmes with those of the programmes in other EHEA countries.

2) The second indicator (Figure 2.4) shows the share of second-cycle programmes with a workload of 60-75, 90, 120 or other number of ECTS credits. These specified credit ranges conform to Bologna agreements, while other numbers of credits may imply non-alignment with Bologna agreements.

3) The third indicator (Figure 2.5) shows the most common total workload for the first- and second-cycle programmes combined. While there is no Communiqué statement specifying a total workload for the combined length of first- and second-cycle programmes, the spirit behind the Bologna agreements is that the total should normally not exceed 300 ECTS.

4) The fourth indicator (Figure 2.11) shows the percentage of students within integrated/long programmes leading to a second-cycle degree. While these programmes are most commonly found in regulated professions, (particularly medicine, dentistry, veterinary medicine and architecture) they may also exist in some countries in fields where, for other EHEA countries, Bologna structures are used. … Thus, where more than 10 % of students are enrolled in integrated programmes, it is likely that there possible reforms could still be made to improve the alignment of certain subject areas with the spirt of Bologna commitments.

Finally, the fifth indicator (Figure 2.12) shows the existence of programmes other than integrated/long programmes that are offered outside the Bologna degree structure"[28, p.17/34-21/34].

The combined value considers five components; the fewer components there are, the more a country corresponds to the Bologna architecture.

The five components are as follows:

"1) More than 10% of first-cycle programmes do not conform with agreed ECTS workload for the first cycle (This is the case for Belarus, Holy See, Kazakhstan, Latvia and Malta.)

2) More than 10% of second-cycle programmes do not conform with agreed ECTS workload for the second cycle. (This is the case for Estonia, Kazakhstan, Latvia and Norway.)

3) The most common total for the first and second cycle is in excess of 330 ECTS (This is the case for Armenia, Azerbaijan, Cyprus, Georgia, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Russian Federation and Turkey.)

4) Students enrolled in integrated programmes exceed 10 % of the total population. (This is the case for Armenia, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Germany, Holy See, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Norway, Portugal, Romania and Sweden.)

5) There are programmes other than integrated programmes, outside the agreed Bologna structures. (This is the case for Albania, Austria, Belarus, Croatia, Denmark, Holy See, Kazakhstan, Lithuania, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and Romania.)"[28, p.22/34].

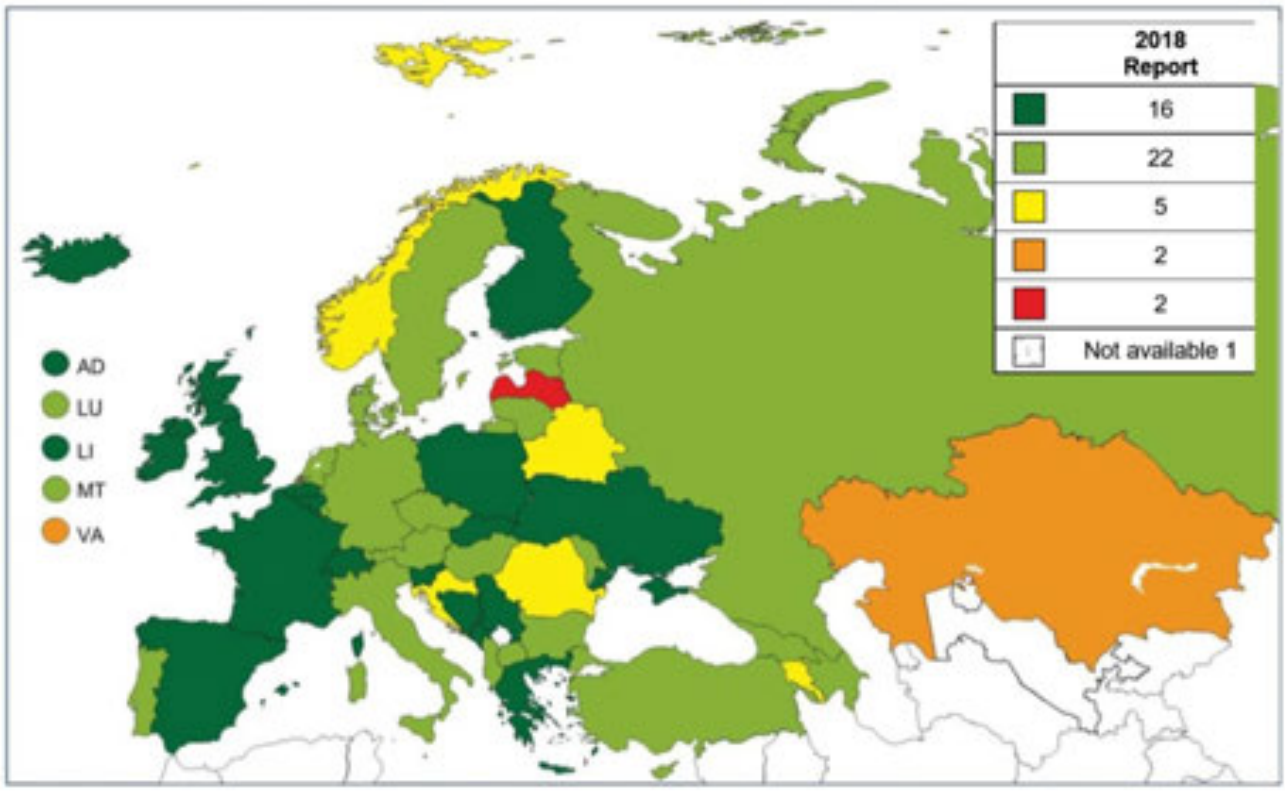


Figure 2.13: Composite scoreboard indicator: Compliance with Bologna Process degree structure agreements [28, p.22/34]

	Proposal for 3 cycles
	0 elements
	1 element
	2 elements
	3 elements
	4 or 5 elements

Source: REPORT OF WORK AND PROPOSAL, 24-25 May 2018 Paris, p. 22/34

It should be noted that the value will be further used when the countries would be proposed independently to identify their needs and experience to assume responsibility for actions with which they can ensure more efficient implementation of the key commitments of the Bologna Process in the EHEA in general[22.1, Appendix I, p. 2/3].

This value is still flawed, which can be demonstrated on the example of *Belarus*: if the indicators proposed are used, then, according to the integrated value of indicators, Belarus' position is reasonably good (two elements) as to general compliance with the Bologna agreements concerning implementation of the degree structure. However, as previously seen, in case of more correct analysis of the Belarusian higher education system as to implementation of the Bologna architecture, the structure of the Belarusian higher education is still far away from the Bologna model concerning interpretation of the first and second cycles as well as inclusion of the postgraduate/doctoral studies in the postgraduate education level outside the Bologna structure instead of the third cycle within it.

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Chapter 3. Implementation of European Credits Transfer System (ECTS)

3.1. ECTSas Basis for Understanding European Higher Education Programmes

The European Credits Transfer System is a student-centred systematic method of describing higher education programs by awarding credits by components (modules, courses, level, work on the thesis, etc.) to make education programs easily readable and comparable to all, national and foreign, students, to encourage students' mobility and recognition of formal, non-formal, and informal education/learning, to help universities organise and review their educational programmes [1].

In 1989, the ECTSwas established as a pilot plan within the Erasmus programme to ensure recognition of periods of study abroad. Later on, the Bologna declaration mentioned the ECTS in the context of credit transfer, in 1999, "… as a proper means of promoting the most widespread student mobility"[2].The Praguecommunique (2001) considered the ECTS as a system ensuring not only transfer but also accumulation of credits, including lifelong accumulation, if they are recognised by receiving universities[3]. The 2003 Berlin communique stressed once again that the ECTS should be used not only for credit transfer but also for credit accumulation [4], and approximate scopes of credits for the first two cycles were agreed in Bergen in 2005 [5].

In 2015 in Yerevan [15], the updated ECTS' Users Guide was passed as an official document of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) [1]. The revised Guide took into consideration the latest achievements of the Bologna Process: the establishment of the EHEA, the consolidation of lifelong learning, the paradigm shift from teacher-centred to student-centred higher education, etc. [1].

The ECTS is a tool assisting in designing, describing, and implementing educational programmes; it enables integration of different types of lifelong learning considering learning prospects, awarding higher education qualifications as well as assists in student mobility by simplifying the process of recognising qualifications and periods of study.

In some countries, the ECTS is approved by law as the national system.

In the recent years, credit systems have evolved significantly. If previously distribution of credits was carried out based upon teacher-student contact hours and credits were allocated according to the student's workload, currently the trend is to distribute credits on the basis of the student's workload as well as learning outcomes. When designing and implementing educational programmes, the emphasis is shifting from the traditional approaches centred on the teacher to approaches based on students' needs and expectations.

The credit is aquantified means of expressing the volume of learning based on the achievement of learning outcomes and their associated workloads necessary to achieve the learning outcomes expected at a certain level [9]. 60 credits are distributed by learning out-

comes and related workloads of one full-time academic year or its equivalent and usually include a number of educational components to which credits are allocated (based on the learning outcomes and workload)[1; 7; 8; 10].

The term "credit" in the ECTS is directly related to such processes and acts as allocation, awarding, accumulation, transfer of credits [1, p. 11-12].

Learning outcomes are related to the ECTS, they represent statements of what a person knows, understands, and able to do upon completion of the learning process [1; 8; 11].

Learning outcomes are defined in three categories: knowledge, skills, and competences [12].

The European Higher Education Area is characterised by structuring educational programmes from the point of view of learning outcomes and competences. Most countries follow the twonon-antagonistic models of determining learning outcomes above one of which is based on the Qualifications Frameworks in the European Higher Education Area – QF-EHEA (what a student is expected to know, understand, and be able to do), and the second one is adopted from the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning – EQF-LLL (knowledge, skills, and competences).

Workloads are the basis for determining the "weight" of the programme components in terms of credits. The concept of workload is also the basis for the system of calculating credits within the ECTS [1; 7; 8; 10].

In the ECTS, students' workload for a full-time academic year is 60 credits or 1,500-1,800 academic hours (including classes, independent work of students, project work, preparation for examinations, etc.), one credit corresponds to 25-30 hours of work [13; 7]. In the majority of the EHEA countries, the number of hours of the student's work is within the range of 25 and 30.The correspondence of the workload of 60 credits to a full-time academic year of formal education is often formalised by law at the national level.

Use of the ECTS relies on a number of supporting documents (Course Catalogue, Learning Agreement, Transcript of Records, and Work Placement Certificate/Traineeship Certificate. The ECTS also contributes to transparency in other documents such as the Diploma Supplement [1; 7; 8].

During the Bologna reforms, the ECTS was additionally supplied with the accumulation function. Despite the addition, the system preserved the short abbreviation of ECTS.

As the European Higher Education Area in 2018: Bologna Process Implementation Report (hereinafter the"2018 Report") demonstrates, the majority of the EHEA countries have integrated the ECTS in higher education as a system of credit accumulation and transfer, and the learning outcomes and students' workload are used as the basis for allocation of credits. The combination of the learning outcomes and students' workload places the student in the centre of the teaching and learning process in the design and implementation of programmes.

All of this provides the basis for understanding European higher education programmes. However, a lot has to be done for the 2015 Users' Guide passed by the ministers to become the basis for the correct implementation of the ECTS in all of the EHEA countries [14].

3.2. Introduction of Credit System in Belarus

The first attempt to introduce the credits as a component of credit-based modular learning in the national higher education system in Belarus was made in 2003. However, it did not spread and was not used. Instead of the term "credit", the term "cumulative point" was used further on.

The Belarusian higher education standards of the second generation introduced as of 1 September 2008 already associated each academic discipline with the total workload of academic hours and cumulative points. The Instructions of Calculating Workload of Higher Education Standards and Formalising Educational Standards Using Cumulative Point System were prepared and approved on 28 January 2008.An attempt was made in them to adapt the national educational standards to the European requirements. In the Instructions, one cumulative point was equal to 28 academic hours: 17 academic hours of classes and 9 to 13 academic hours of independent work (depending on the discipline complexity). The duration of one academic hour is 45 minutes. However, a conclusion was made later on (2008-2009) that it was necessary to adjust the instructions because of the failure to comply with a number of the Bologna Process requirements in the cumulative point system. However, instead of adjusting (reforming, optimising) the content of educational programmes based on the Bologna model requirements (180-240 ECTS credits in the first education level (bachelor programme), 90-120 ECTS credits in the master programme), the path of playing with the terms "academic hour" and "astronomic hour" was used. "Considering that the student's workload in the ECTS credits is measured not in academic but in hours of work, we have 25-30 hours of the workload corresponding to 33-40 academic hours of 45 minutes and 37.5-45 hours of 40 minutes. However, a cumulative point began to correspond to 34-36 academic hours of total workload per 45 minutes (25.5-27 astronomic hours) or 38-39 academic hours of total workload per 40 minutes (25.5-26 astronomic hours)" [21; 22].

Despite the fact that in the majority of the EHEA countries the number of the student's hours of work per credit is within the interval of 25 and 30 according to the Bologna documents[13; 7], the Instructions of Calculating Workload of Higher Education Standards and Formalising Educational Standards Using Cumulative Point System approved by the minister of education of the Republic of Belarus on 6 April 2015 (hereinafter the "current Instructions") [23] still introduce a cumulative point equal to 36-40 academic hours, and all generations of educational standards already prepared and being prepared provide for the above value of the cumulative point.

Thus, in Belarus, the ECTS use is still perceived as a superficial transition of the national terminology to the common European language and not as the basis feature of the educational programme structure.

As Fig. 3.1 demonstrates, the ECTS is used in the majority of the ECTS countries as the national credit accumulation and transfer system.

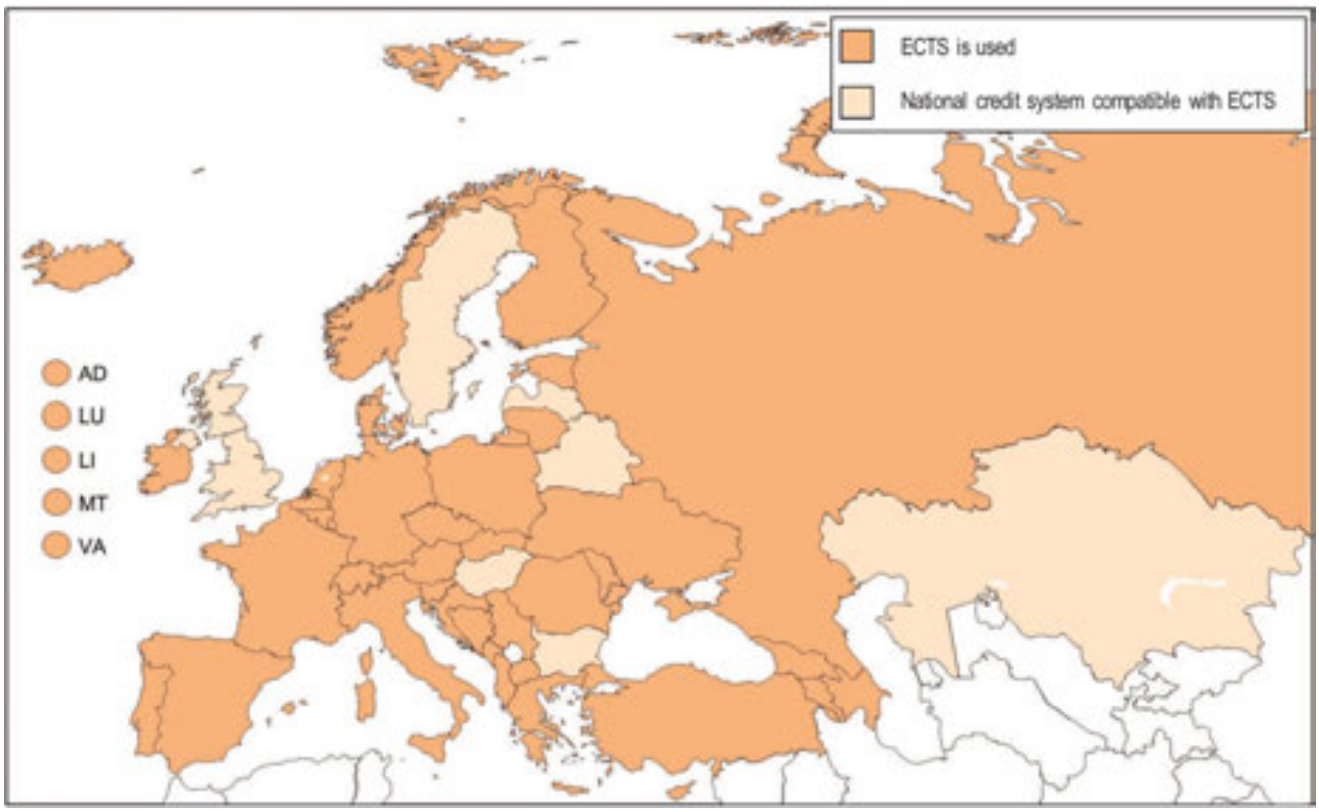


Figure 3.1: Credit system used for the accumulation and transfer of credits, 2016/17 [14, p. 51]. Source:IR 2018, p. 51

Following the information provided in the 2018 Report [14,p.51], Belarus uses a national credit system compatible with the ECTS (Fig. 3.1). However, the degree of "compatibility" is nominal.

The Belarus Roadmap for Higher Education Reform passed at the conference of the education ministers of the EHEA countries in Yerevan in 2015 [17;20] states as to the ECTS implementation that, to achieve the necessary results, Belarus would commit as follows: "By the end of 2015, develop a plan to implement ECTS in accordance with the revised ECTS Users' Guide by the end of 2017 …"[17; 20].Nevertheless, the ECTS implementation plan promised is publicly unavailable.

Upon adoption of the revised ECTS Users' Guide [14] the current Instructions were not revised and no other document corresponding to the ECTS Users' Guide was prepared despite that fact that Organisation of Teaching and Learning Process at Higher Education Institutions in 2016/17 Academic Year letter of the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Belarus No. 08-19/4097/ds of 14 October 2016 to higher education institutions stated that joint measures with the Republican Higher Education System Institute were to be taken during 2016 to prepare "implementing regulations governing measurement of the teaching and learning process workload in cumulative points according to the ECTS" [27].

According to the assessment by Advisory Group 2 *Support for the Belarus roadmap*"**ECTS**: It is claimed that the ECTS system is applied in Belarusian HEIs, though ECTS credits are not explicitly mentioned in the draft Education Code. The previous credit system

is used in parallel. So far, ECTS, which is called "cumulative points" in Belarus, 9 is solely understood as reflecting contact hours and workload. One "cumulative point" equals to 36-40 working hours by a student, which is far more than the typical ECTS range in the EHEA (26-30 hours). Accumulation and transfer functions of ECTS credits are not employed. The Learning Outcomes concept has not yet been introduced. The 2015 ECTS Users' Guide is translated into Russian and is available to HEIs." [18, p.8-9].

In the draft Strategic Action Plan on Implementation of the Major Objectives of the Education System Development in Line with the EHEA Principles and Tools presented at the Paris ministerial conference on 24-25 May 2018, Belarus pledged once again, " - further improvement of HEIs implementation practice of measuring the student workload in ECTS in line with the revised "ECTS Users' Guide"[19; 29, p. 2/4]. In particular, it was stated that by 2020 measures would be taken to introduce the system pursuant to the revised ECTS Users' Guide [19; 29, p. 3/4].

Against the background of the commitments, the information about the ECTS use in the 2018 Report is quite inconclusive.

3.3. ECTS Implementation in Belarus As Compared to European Participants of the Bologna Process

As the 2018 Reportshows, the ECTS is sued by all or most higher education institutions at least in the context of international mobility in all the countries, including the national credit systems [14, p. 51].

Fig. 3.2, 3.3 demonstrate the percentage of higher education institutions and programmes using the ECTS to accumulate and transfer credits. In 2016/17, 45 countries use the ECTS in all higher education programmes of the first and second cycles as compared to 36 countries in 2013/14. In general, the figures show that the ECTS use to accumulate and transfer credits develops momentum in Europe [14, p. 52].

In Belarus, according to the information provided in the 2018 Report [14, p. 52], 100% of higher education institutions use the ECTS credits for accumulation and transfer in the first- and second-cycle programmes, moreover, in relation to all components of educational programmes (Fig. 3.2, 3.3), which means that the ECTS in the Bologna interpretation is used at the Belarusian higher education institutions.

From the institutional point of view, designing an educational programme means preparation of a curriculum and its components in credits, description of learning outcomes and workload related to it, learning activities, teaching methods, and assessment procedures (criteria). The actual situation in Belarus is indicative of the following. It can be deemed absolutely positive that model curricula (although the very existence of model curricula is an anachronism) and curricula of higher education institutions include a line defining the workload of academic disciplines and other types of students' work in cumulative points, and the academic year corresponds to 60 cumulative points. This is confirmed by theanalysis of model curricula and curricula of higher education institutions.

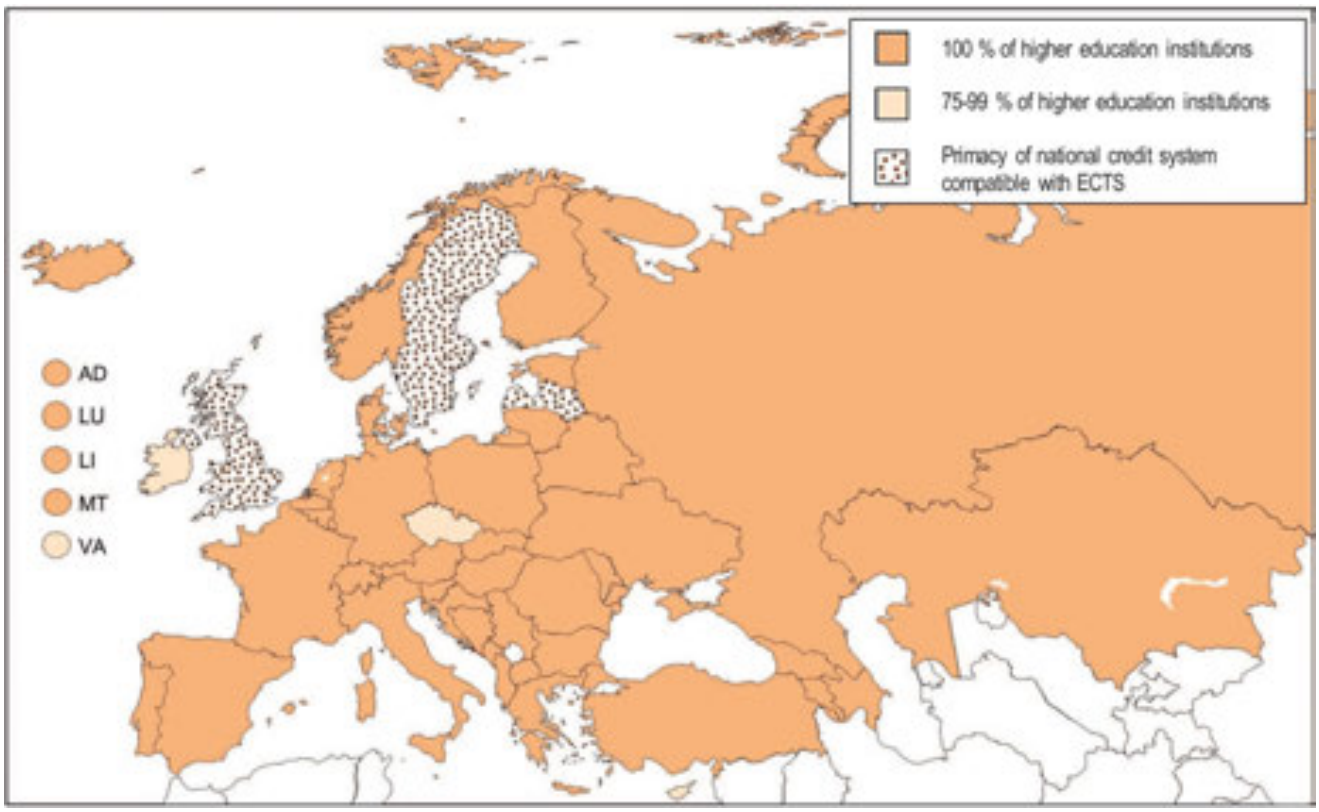


Figure 3.2.: Share of higher education institutions using ECTS credits for accumulation and transfer, first- and second-cycle programmes, 2016/17[14, p. 52].

Source:IR 2018, p. 52

Figure 3.3: Share of first- and second-cycle programmes using ECTS credits for accumulation and transfer for all elements of study programmes, 2016/17, 2016/17 14, p. 52].

Source:IR 2018, p. 52

Some model syllabi include the total workload of the syllabus in "cumulative points" but without indicating the workload of its separate components. A provision is made that names, number of hours and cumulative points of mandatory and special modules would be included in students' academic record books, permanent academic records, and certificates of study.

The Instructions of the Procedure for Filling Out Documents Certifying Education, Supplements Thereto, Documents Certifying Learning, for Registration and Issue of Documents Certifying Education, Supplements Thereto, Gold, Silver Medals for Academic Excellence, Documents Certifying Learning approved by Ordinance of the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Belarus No. 194 of 27 July 2011 (as amended by Ordinance of the Ministry of Education No. 92 of 1 August 2012), transcripts of records (as diploma supplements but not of the European form) have references not only to hours but also to cumulative points.

However, comprehensive transition from calculating students' workload in academic (including contact) hours to a system of calculating workloads according to the current revision of the 2015 ECTS has not been completed yet. The current Education Code [24] as well as the latest revision of the draft new Code [25] demonstrate that.

Despite the fact resolution of the Presidium of the Republican Council of Rectors No. 2 of 22 February 2017 indicates that "in the draft Education Code of Republic of Belarus… the duration of studies is set forth in cumulative points (credits) by types (cycles) of education" [26], this information is not factually accurate. Neither level descriptors nor the range of the ECTS credits for each level (cycle) of education have found their way into the draft Code [25]. It provides thata system of academic hours and/or a system of cumulative points (credits) can be used to design higher education programmes and to determine their workload. This means that use of the ECTS credits is not mandatory. One must admit that the draft Code does not use the cumulative points to design, implement, and monitor educational programmes. Neither they are used to organise mobility and recognition of periods of study.

According to the 2018 Report, Fig. 3.4 demonstrates the degree of relation between the ECTS credits and learning outcomes in higher education programmes in the EHEA. Significant process has been made in the field as compared to the situation of 2013/14 r.[14, p. 53].

In Belarus, resolution of the Presidium of the Republican Council of Rectors No. 2 of 22 February 2017 indicates that "the draft Education Code of the Republic of Belarus… describes each level of education in terms of learning outcomes (competences)" [26]. As a matter of fact, the draft Code has not term "learning outcomes" at all.

The definition of the cumulative point (credit) provided in the draft Code [25] does not include a reference to the learning outcomes, does not consider the complexity of an academic discipline, its importance as well as types of teaching and learning activities in calculations, which does not correspond to the requirements of the Roadmap and does not correspond to the provisions of the 2015 ECTS Users' Guide in full.

The Belarus Roadmap for Higher Education Reform provided that Belarus would prepare "By the end of 2015 <…> a plan to implement ECTS by the end of 2017, with a strong focus on learning outcomes,<…>"[17; 20]. However, as previously indicated, this plan is publicly unavailable.

At the same time, at the level of designing draft educational standards of the 3+ generation for bachelor and master programmes, attempts are made to found them on the competence approach using the learning outcomes and the scope of cumulative points for the relevant education level (however, in the Belarusian version of their number of hours). The drafts are provided on the National Portal of Draft Higher Education Standards website [28]. The above indicators have not been developed for the so-called research-oriented professional education still remaining outside the Bologna model. However, approved draft educational standards of the 3+ generation and educational standards prepared on their basis are not available yet, which can be determined by lack of the legal and regulatory framework to pass them.

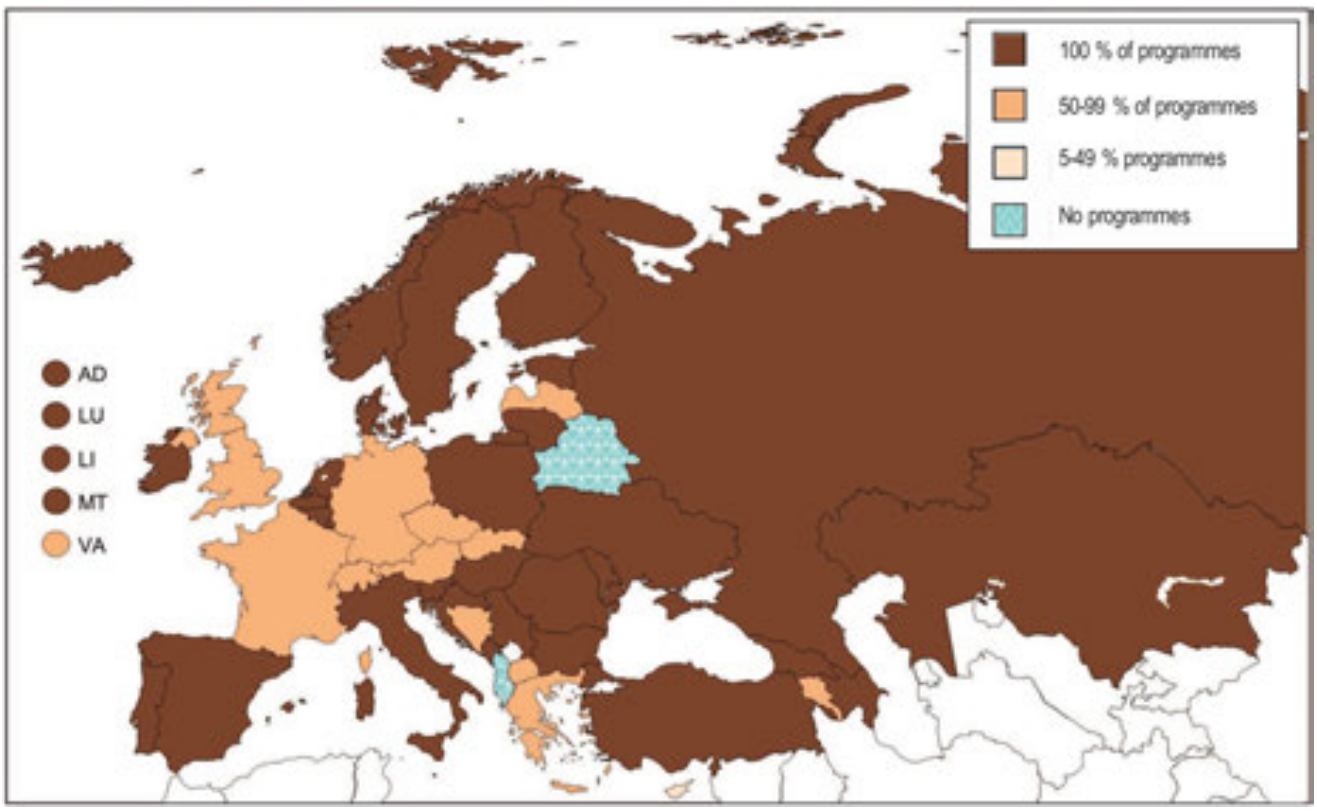


Figure 3.4: Extent to which ECTS credits are linked with learning outcomes in higher education programmes, 2016/17[14, p. 53].

Source:IR 2018, p. 53

The updated 2015 ECTS Users' Guide passed in Yerevan [1] differs from the previous one by greater student-centredness, it is particularly oriented to the learning outcomes.

Fig. 3.5 demonstrates how this agreement is implemented. Most countries inform that the ECTS credits are allocated based on the learning outcomes and the relevant students' workload.

A number of countries allocate credits to the programme components based on a combination of students' workload and teacher-student contact hours. These approaches take into consideration the contribution of time but do not provide a clear understanding of what should be studied within the time indicated. Systems which do not require detailing

of the learning outcomes create difficulties for the EHEA as a whole since the objective of transferring credits among countries in a transparent and fair way is eroded [14, p. 54].

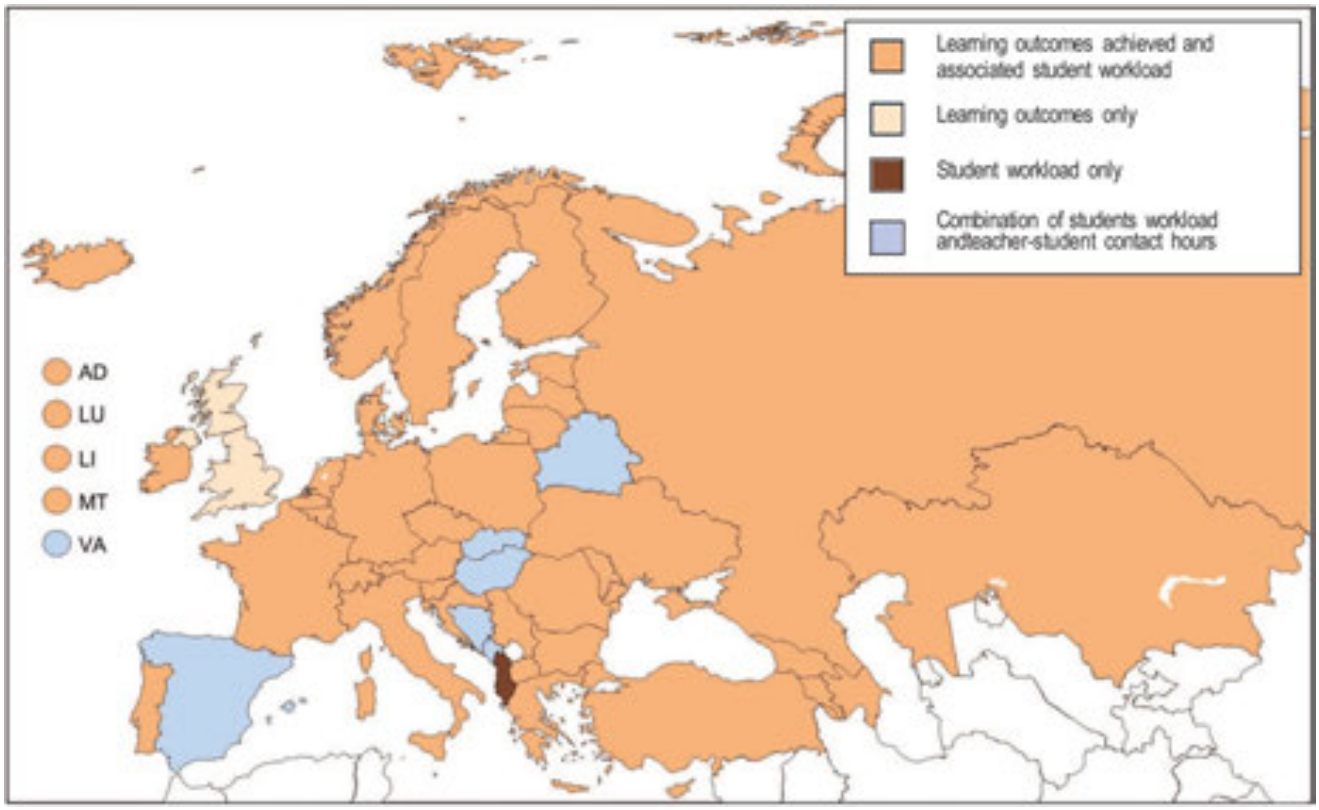


Figure 3.5: Basis to allocate ECTS credits in the majority of higher education institutions, 2016/17, 2016/17 [14, p. 54].

Source:IR 2018, p. 54

In Belarus, the cumulative points (credits) are allocated on the basis of a combination of the workload and teacher-student contact hours according to the 2018 Report [14, p.54],although this combination is not compatible with the ECTS.

Based on the analysis of the content of the prepared draft syllabus materials of educational programmes, it is possible to state that, upon their approval, allocation of "cumulative points" will be carried out following the model of a combination of the workload and teacher-student contact hours later on.

The draft Strategic Plan (Paris ministerial conference on 24-25 May 2018) provides that "…Special attention will be paid to learning outcomes, curriculum design and delivery as well as assessment and opportunities to implement academic mobility programmes. This process will be based on the outcomes of the Erasmus+ project "Fostering Competencies Development in Belarusian Higher Education (FOSTERC)", Project Ref. 574087-EPP-1-2016-1-ES-EPPKA2-CBHE-SP."[19; 29,p. 3/4]. However, these are just plans that are not properly detailed.

In most countries, higher education institutions have the right to design educational programmes and allocate credits. Owing to their important role in governance of higher education systems, the national authorities have the potential of creating framework condi-

tions which would define and support institutional changes to consistently implement the approach to the learning outcomes in the higher education system as a whole.

Fig. 3.6 demonstrates to what degree national-level governance exists to that end.

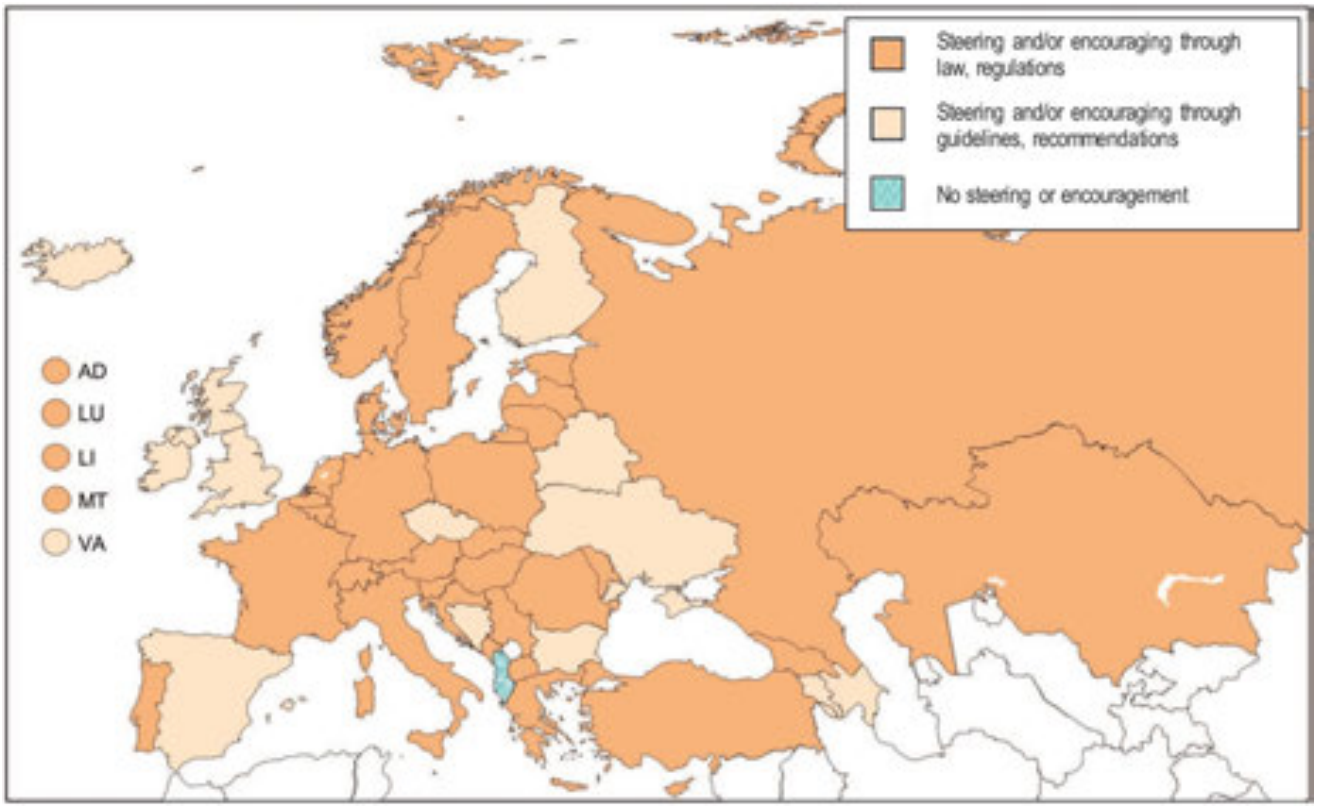


Figure 3.6: Steering and/or encouraging use of learning outcomes in national policy for programme development, 2016/17[14, p. 56].

Source:IR 2018, p. 56

As the 2018 Report demonstrates, little has changed in relation to governance tools used by the national bodies to stimulate higher education institutions to use learning outcomes in designing educational programmes in the EHEA in the period from 2015. As Fig.3.6 shows, most countries use laws or instructions [14, p. 56].

Besides a formal guide to use learning outcomes, a number of countries have implemented other measures of supporting or stimulating higher education institutions to use the ECTScorrectly: training of higher education professionals, rules (instructions) or recommendations to use the ECTS etc. [14, p. 57].

In Belarus, as the 2018 Report demonstrates [14, p. 56], governance and/or stimulation (promotion) of using learning outcomes in the national policy to design educational programmes is carried out via "guidelines and/or stimulation (promotion) with recommendations, instructions". However, individual instructions and letters of instruction of the Ministry of Education do not reflect the "national policy" concerning the use of learning outcomes to design educational programmes.

3.4. Use of External Quality Assurance Systems at National and European Levels for Consistent ECTS Implementation

It is noteworthy that the 2015 ECTS Users' Guide [1] indicates directly that the ECTS should be provided with quality by the relevant assessment processes (e.g., monitoring, external and internal quality reviews, and students' feedback) and continuing quality improvement. The quality assurance standards and guidelines in the EHEA (ESG, 2015) [16] are also referred to the fields related to the ECTS. Therefore, according to the 2018 Report, external quality assurance systems at the national and European levels are the best options to control availability of the necessary procedures and practice to ensure consistent implementation of the ECTS at the higher education institutions [14, p.58].

From this point of view systematic monitoring is of interest to support implementation of learning outcomes and of the ECTS.

To assess to what degree implementation of the ECTS at the national level considers the principles set forth in the 2015 ECTS Users' Guide, the 2018 Report considers the following two aspects: firstly, the basis for external quality control to monitor the ECTS; secondly, monitoring of the key ECTS principles [14, p. 58].

Considering that the issues of assessing the correct use of the ECTS and of the degree of the system implementation in the EHEA countries are central, it is worth detailing how the 2018 Report suggests using the quality system to that end.

According to the 2018 Report, 28 of the 50 systems have been able to include the principles of the 2015 Users' Guide in their quality standards or external quality assurance laws as the basis for the ECTS monitoring in the recent three years. Other 11 systems found monitoring on the national laws, quality standards or guidelines but not on the principles of the 2015 Users' Guide. This means mostly that the countries have not reviewed their national rules or guidelines, and the 2015 Users' Guide is not included in their external quality assurance systems yet. Finally, monitoring is not required by the governmental bodies in 11 systems [14, p. 59].

Fig.3.7 demonstrates whether the requirement to control the ECTS implementation is present in external quality assurance systems indicating the main reference point for external quality assurance [14, p. 59].

Fig. 3.8 considers monitoring of some key ECTS principles and demonstrates to what degree higher education institutions control implementation of the following six ECTS indicators within external quality assurance:

"x ECTS credits are awarded on the basis of learning outcomes and student workload;

x ECTS credit allocation is regularly monitored and followed up by appropriate revision if necessary;

x ECTS is used as a credit system for the accumulation of credits acquired within higher education institutions;

x ECTS is used as a credit system for the transfer of credits for student learning outcomes acquired in other institutions within the country;

x ECTS is used as a credit system for the transfer of credits for student learning outcomes acquired during periods of study abroad;

x Appropriate appeals procedures are in place to deal with problems of credit recognition." [14, p. 60].

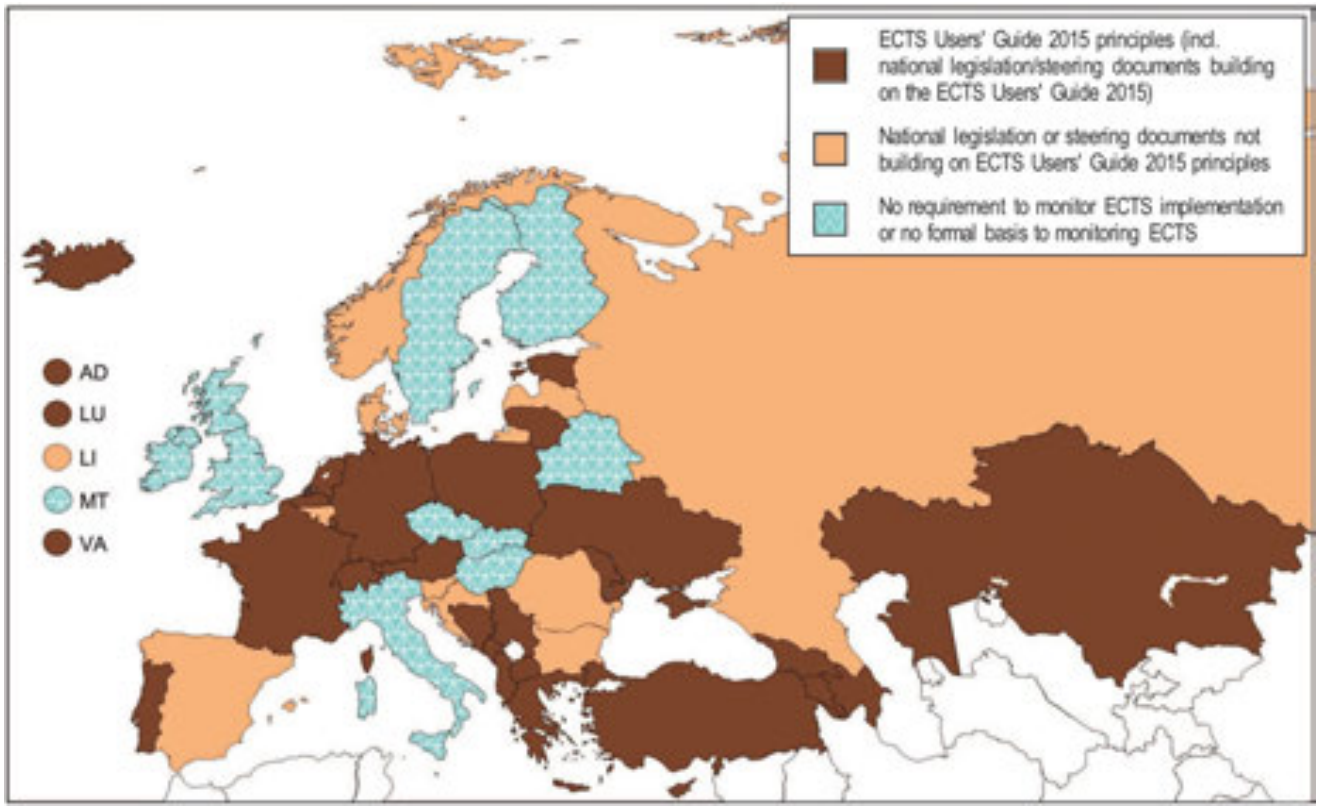


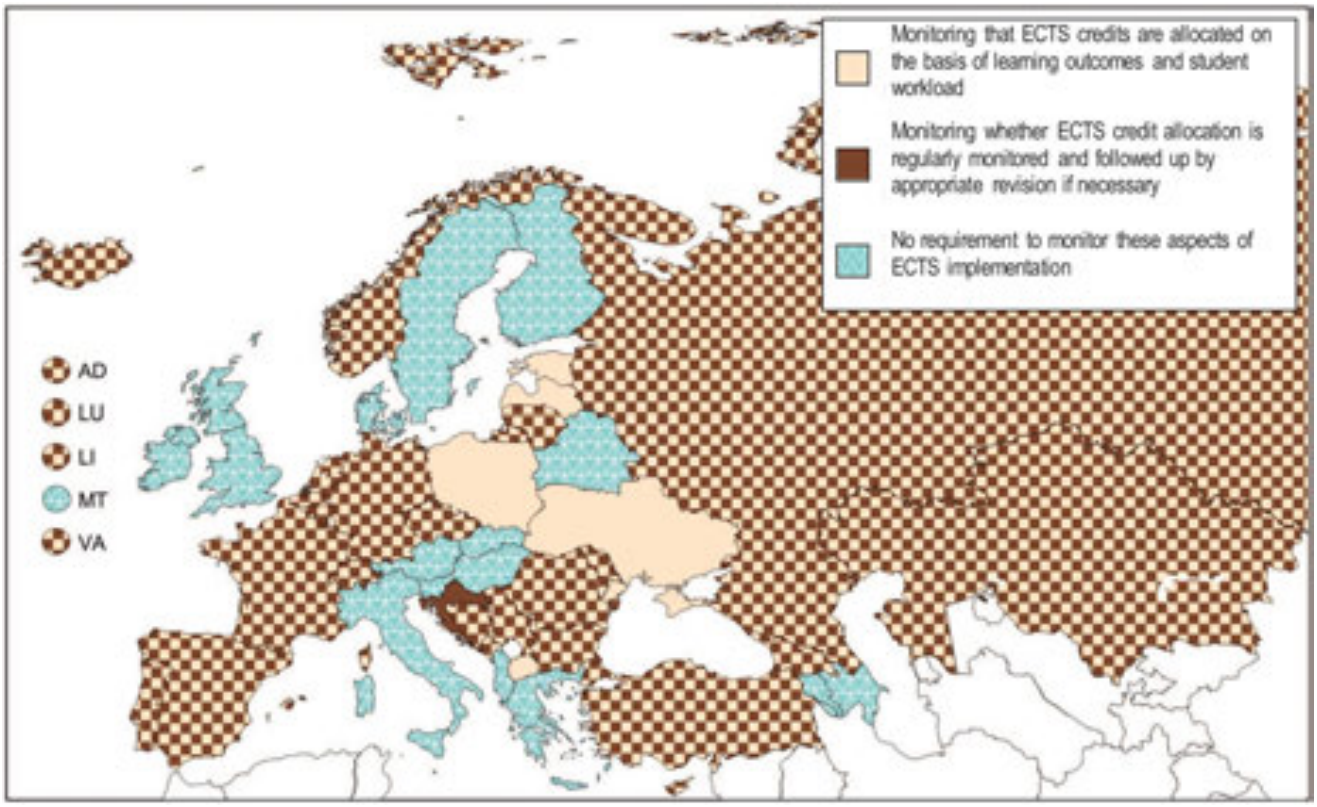
Figure 3.7: Basis for external quality assurance to monitor ECTS implementation in higher education, 2016/17, [14, p. 59].

Source:IR 2018, p. 59

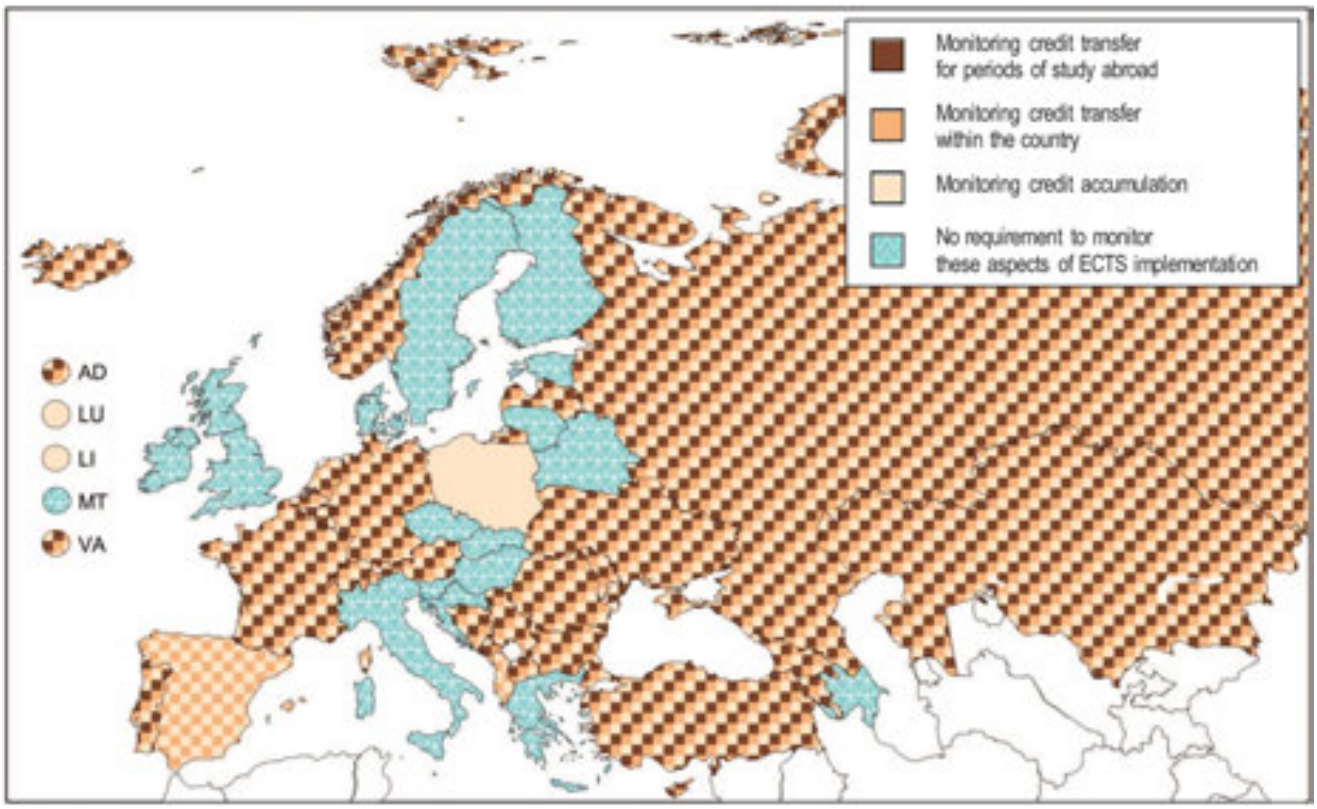
Fig.3.8 consists of three parts (A, B. C). The first part focuses on allocation and monitoring of credits. The second part of the figure demonstrates whether the correct use of the ECTS is controlled as to credit accumulation and transfer. Finally, the third part demonstrates whether external quality assurance checks availability of the relevant procedures for appeals related to credit recognition issues.

The 2018 Report stresses one of the conclusions: 31 countries do not require monitoring of the availability of the procedures enabling students to submit an appeal if they face issues when recognising the credits they were awarded. However, as the 2018 Report indicates, the possibility to submit appeals is an important missing component since otherwise the national authorities will not have the information whether students have guarantees of the correct use of the ECTS and recognition of their credits. This can result in lack of feedback from students and will not assist in improving the education system in the country and in Europe in general [14, p.62].

Figure 3.8: Monitoring key aspects of ECTS implementation by external quality assurance, 2016/17[14, p.60],

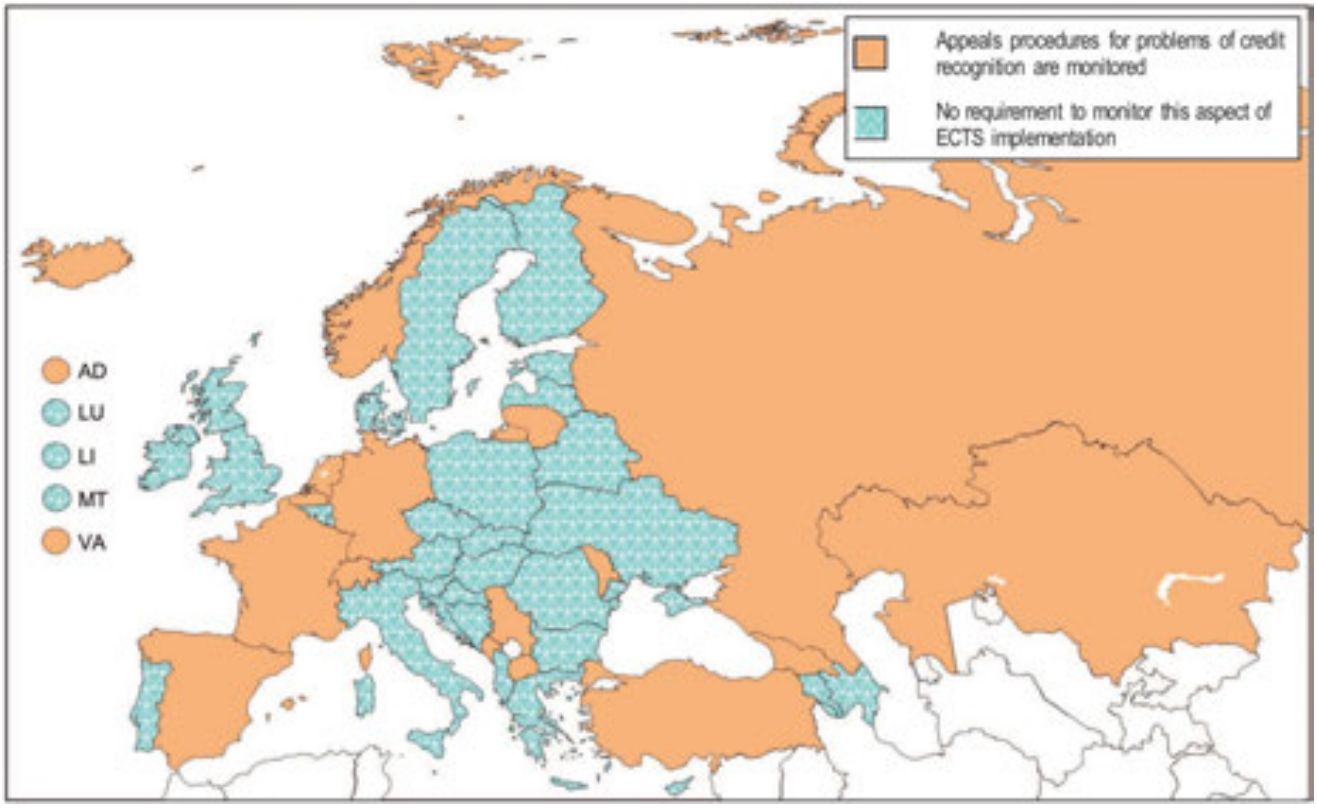


A) Requirement to monitor learning outcomes and credit allocation [14, p. 60], Source:IR 2018, p. 60



B) Requirement to monitor credit accumulation and transfer[14, p.61],

Source:IR 2018, p. 61



C) Requirement to monitor appeals procedures for problems of credit recognition [14, p. 61], Source:IR 2018, p. 61

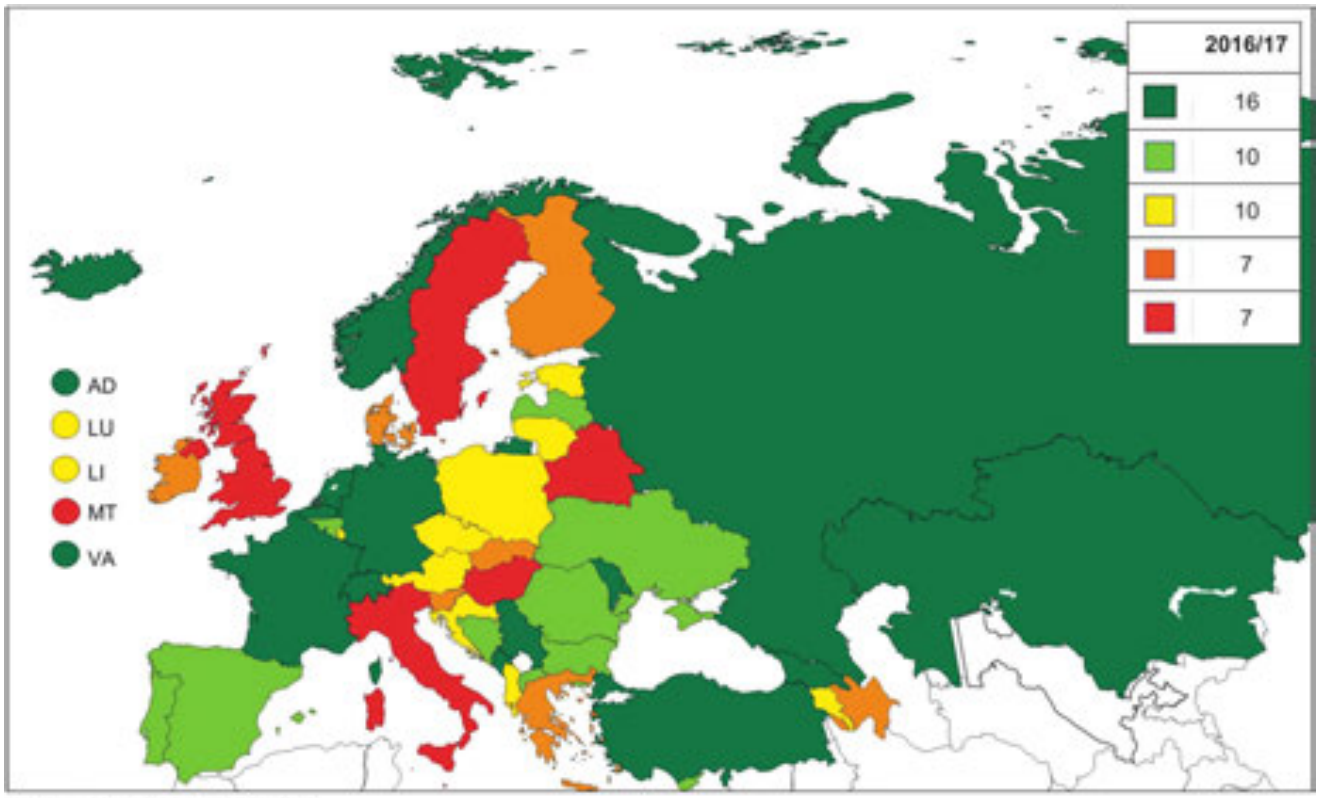
As Fig. 3.9 demonstrates, most countries require external quality assurance agencies to monitor at least one key aspect of the ECTS implementation. In general, the system of indicators confirms that a lot has to be done to ensure complete implementation of the ECTS [14,p.64].

As previously mentioned, according to the Roadmap, Belarus should have prepared"By the end of 2015, <…> a plan to implement ECTS in accordance with the revised ECTS Users' Guide by the end of 2017, with a strong focus on learning outcomes, curriculum design, delivery as well as assessment and applied to mobility programmes" [17; 20]. However, it has not happened. Therefore, it is no wonder that concerning all of the items on the above figures Belarusis included among the countries which "are not required to control the ECTS implementation or have no official framework to monitor the ECTS".

The 2018 Report pays special attention to two functions which are fundamental for comprehensive use of the ECTS:

- Allocation of the ECTS credits based on learning outcomes and students' workload;
- Regular inspection of whether the learning outcomes intended can be achieved within the time determined.

However, Belarus is still too far from implementing the functions. Therefore, the conclusion can be made that introduction of a credit system compatible with the ECTS is breaking fresh ground.



Source: BFUG data collection.

Figure 3.9: Scorecard indicator n°1: Monitoring the implementation of the ECTS system by external quality assurance, 2016/17[14, p. 65]

Scorecard categories:

■	The ECTS Users' Guide 2015 principles are required to be used by external quality assurance as a basis to assess the implementation of ECTS in all higher education institutions. All the following issues are monitored specifically: o ECTS credits are allocated on the basis of learning outcomes & student workload; o ECTS credit allocation is regularly monitored and followed up by appropriate revision if necessary; o ECTS is used as a credit system for the accumulation of credits acquired within higher education institutions; o ECTS is used as a credit system for the transfer of credits for student learning outcomes acquired in another institution in the country; o ECTS is used as a credit system for the transfer of credits for periods of study abroad; o The higher education institution has an appropriate appeals procedure to deal with problems of credit recognition.
■	The ECTS Users' Guide 2015 principles are required to be used by external quality assurance as the basis to assess the implementation of ECTS in all higher education institutions. Four or five of the above issues are monitored specifically.
■	The ECTS Users' Guide 2015 principles are required to be used by external quality assurance agencies as the basis to assess the implementation of ECTS in all higher education institutions. One to three of the above issues are monitored specifically.
■	The ECTS Users' Guide 2015 principles may in some cases be used by external quality assurance as the basis to assess the implementation of ECTS.

■	The ECTS Users' Guide 2015 principles are not required to be used by external quality assurance agencies as the basis to assess the implementation of ECTS in higher education institutions.

Source:IR 2018, p. 65

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Chapter 4. Qualification Transparency: Diploma Supplement

4.1. European Diploma Supplement

The Diploma Supplement (DS) is a standard European supplement to an official document certifying higher education, which serves to describe the nature, level, context, content, and status of the studies successfully completed by the education qualification holder. The basis for defining the term "diploma supplement" was the model developed by a working group set up by the Council of Europe, European Commission, and UNESCO-CEPESin 1996-1998 [1].

The Diploma Supplement is an integral part of several initiatives in the field of higher education internationalisation and qualification recognition [2;12].

The first of them is the Lisbon Convention on Recognition of Qualifications (Lisbon, 1997 г.) [3] calls on the countries, which signed it, to distribute the Diploma Supplement or another equivalent document via national information centres or otherwise.

The second initiative – the Bologna Process – applied the Diploma Supplement for the first time in 1999 when the higher education ministers of the European countries agreed to approve a system of easily readable and comparable degrees to provide for employment of the European nationals and competitiveness of the European higher education system via introduction of the Diploma Supplement [4].

The Berlin conference of the higher education ministers of the European countries (2003) set an objective to introduce the Diploma Supplement universally as of 2005, which should be issued to the graduates automatically and free of charge and should be issued in a widely spoken European language [5].

Finally, the Diploma Supplement is provided as one of the five transparency tools of the Europass initiative promoted by the European Commission [6].

The objective of the Diploma Supplement is to provide comprehensive independent data to improve international transparency of the education awarded, objective academic and professional recognition of qualifications (diplomas, degrees, certificates etc.) for further studies and employability of graduates.

The Diploma Supplement should be free from any judgements, statements of equivalence or recognition suggestions. Information should be provided in all sections of the Supplement. If it is missing the reason should be stated [7].To that end, the structure of the Diploma Supplement was approved[9], and the main principles and general rules of its preparation were developed [10].

In connection with changes in higher education related to the EHEA development and establishment, the necessity to review the Diploma Supplement arose to ensure reflection of the latest achievements of higher education considering the revised 2015 ECTS Users' Guide [15], to improve the practicality of the Supplement in the assessment of learning outcomes and recognition procedures, to study the possibility of a digital version of the Diploma Supplement, to ensure its conformity with development of the Doctoral Supplement

within the European Research Area.

Some structural and content amendments and addenda helping to understand better how to fill out and use the Diploma Supplement were introduced[12; 14].

At the Paris conference of 23-24 May 2018, the education ministers approved a revised Diploma Supplement consisting of the Diploma Supplement template and the Explanatory Notes thereto including the Principles and General Guidelines for Those Producing Supplements, the Outline Structure for the Diploma Supplement, and the Diploma Supplement Explanatory Notes [12; 13; 14].

The Diploma Supplement consists of eight sections, which include:

"1 INFORMATION IDENTIFYING THE HOLDER OF THE QUALIFICATION (1.1 Last name(s): 1.2 First name(s): 1.3 Date of birth (day/month/year): 1.4 Student identification number or code (if available):)

2 INFORMATION IDENTIFYING THE QUALIFICATION (2.1 Name of qualification and (if applicable) title conferred (in original language): 2.2 Main field(s) of study for the qualification: 2.3 Name and status of awarding institution (in original language): 2.4 Name and status of institution (if different from 2.3) administering studies (in original language):2.5 Language(s) of instruction/examination:)

3 INFORMATION ON THE LEVEL AND DURATION OF THE QUALIFICATION (3.1 Level of the qualification: 3.2 Official duration of programme in credits and/or years:3.3 Access requirements(s))

4 INFORMATION ON THE PROGRAMME COMPLETED AND THE RESULTS OBTAINED (4.1 Mode of study:4.2 Programme learning outcomes: 4.3 Programme details, individual credits gained and grades/marks obtained: (if this information is available in an official transcript it should be used here) 4.4 Grading system and, if available, grade distribution table: 4.5 Overall classification of the qualification (in original language))

5 INFORMATION ON THE FUNCTION OF THE QUALIFICATION (5.1 Access to further study: 5.2 Access to a regulated profession (if applicable)

6 ADDITIONAL INFORMATION (6.1 Additional information: 6.2 Further information sources:)

7 CERTIFICATION OF THE SUPPLEMENT (7.1 Date: 7.2 Signature: 7.3 Capacity: 7.4 Official stamp or seal)

8 INFORMATION ON THE NATIONAL HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM (N.B. Institutions who intend to issue Diploma Supplements should refer to the explanatory notes that explain how to complete them.)" [14, p.6/14].

The 2018 Bologna Process Implementation Report (hereinafter the "2018 Report") [2] noted improvements in the implementation of the issue of the Diploma Supplement as compared to 2012 and 2015. Fig. 4.1 demonstrates four main obligations at the ministerial level related to the Diploma Supplement issued to graduates of the first and second cycles of higher education [2, p. 114].

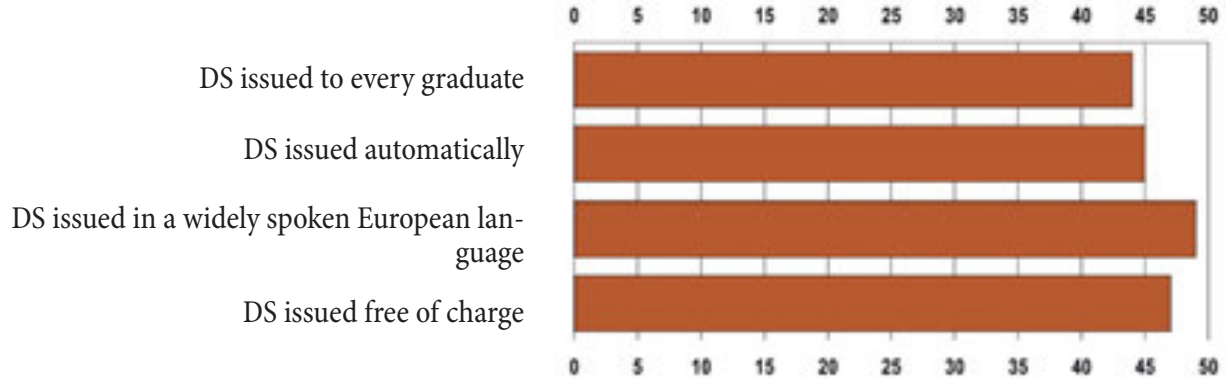


Figure 4.1: Number of higher education systems issuing the Diploma Supplement according to the agreed principles, first and second cycle, 2016/17.

Notes: The figure is based on data supplied by 50 higher education systems.

Source:IR 2018, p. 114

In 2016/17, all graduates of the first and second cycles received the Diploma Supplement in the majority of the EHEA systems (44 of 50)[2;12]. Among the countries, Belarus is the only country, which has not implemented the Supplement yet. In a number of countries, the Supplement is usually issued but not to all graduates. In general, it reflects some degree of institutional autonomy [2, p.113].

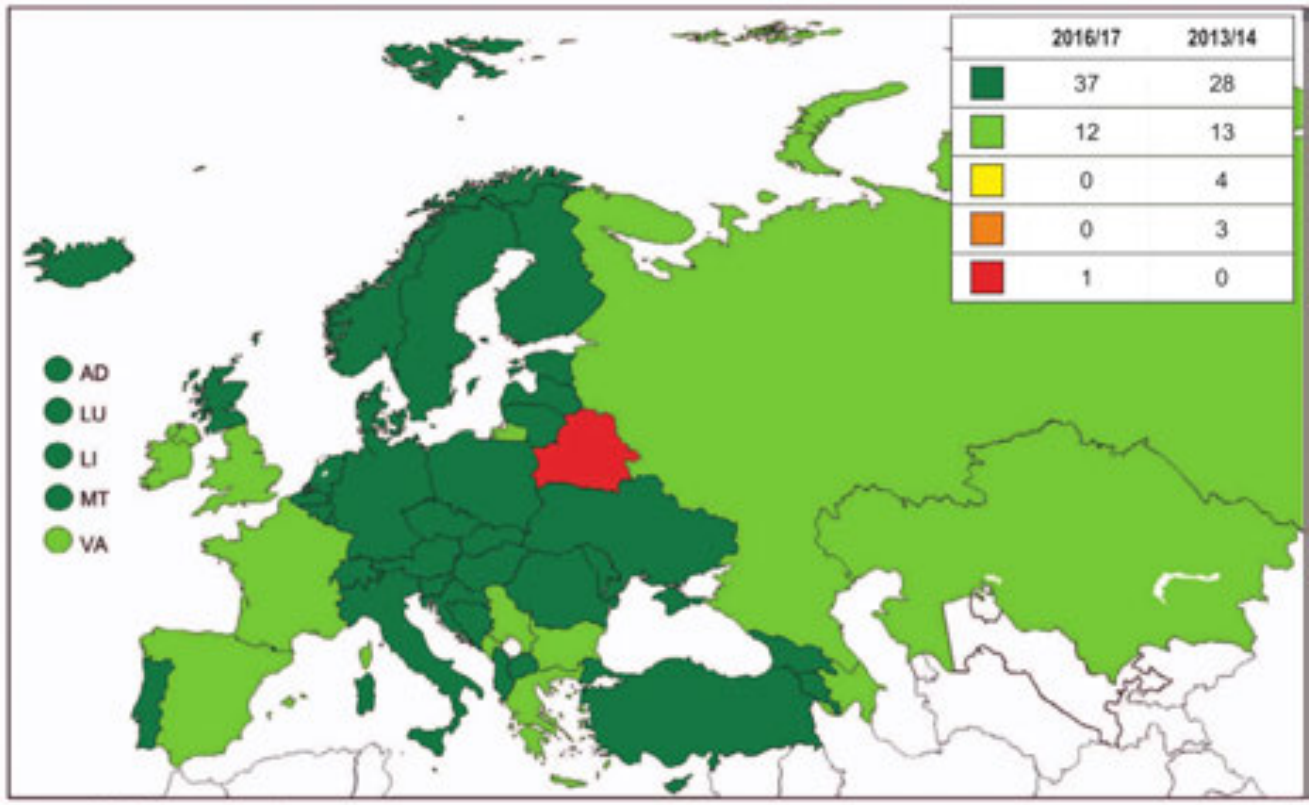
Automatic issue of the Diploma Supplement is closely related to the above aspect. Although in the majority of the higher education systems of the EHEA (45 systems, except Belarus), the document is issued automatically (in all or some cases), it is expected in four systems that graduates will request it themselves [2, p.113-114].

In all of the EHEA systems (except Belarus), the Diploma Supplement is issued in a widely spoken European language. The 2003 Berlin communique [5] does not contain definitions of the concept of a "widely spoken European language". As to foreign languages, the five most widely spoken languages in Europe are English (38%), French (12%), German (11%), Spanish (7%), and Russian (5%). Consequently, they can be deemed "widely spoken European languages" [2, p. 114]. In most cases, the Diploma Supplement is issued in the national language and in English. However, the DS is issued in a widely spoken language upon request only in some countries.

The Diploma Supplement is usually issued free of charge.

When the Diploma Supplement is issued free of charge, a fee may still apply to services outside the scope of the standard terms. E. g., in several countries, the Diploma Supplement is issued free of charge in the first language and in one of the official EU languages but for a fee in a second official EU language or in a non-EU language.

All of the above components are joined in a system of indicators (Fig. 4.2)[2, p. 115; 11, p.4/10].



Source: BFUG data collection.

Figure 4.2: Scorecard indicator n°2: Stage of implementation of the Diploma Supplement, 2016/17 Scorecard categories

	Diploma Supplement in the EU/CoE/UNESCO Diploma Supplement format is issued to first- and second-cycle graduates: – to every graduate o automatically – in a widely spoken European language – free of charge.
	Three of the above criteria are met.
	Two of the above criteria are met.
	Only one criterion is met.
	None of the above criteria is met.

Source: IR 2018, p.115

The indicator shows that the majority of the EHEA countries currently comply with all the commitments, i.e. the diploma supplement is issued to all graduates of the first and second cycles automatically in a widely spoken European language and with no amendments. Twelve countries do not comply with one of the requirements. At the same time, Belarus is not part of the DS issue process (red).

Concerning the issue of the Diploma Supplement in programmes of the short cycle of higher education, as indicated previously, programmes of the short cycle considered as higher education exist in a limited number of the EHEA countries only. In the majority of them, the Diploma Supplement is issued to all graduates of the short cycle. Graduates usu-

ally receive it on the conditions comparable to the first and second cycles, i.e. automatically, free of charge, and in a widely spoken language [2, p. 115].

As to the third cycle, the Diploma Supplement is issued to all graduates in 23 higher education systems, to some graduates in 13 systems, and is absent from 14 higher education systems of the EHEA. In other words, the Diploma Supplement was still not the standard in the third cycle in 2016/17 [2, p. 116].

4.2. Implementation of Diploma Supplement in Belarus

Aspiring to accede to the Bologna Process, Belarus attempted to develop the Diploma Supplement corresponding to the European standards.

In 2010, the Presidium of the Council of Rectors of Belarus considered it expedient to prepare a draft national supplement to documents certifying higher education, which corresponded to the European Diploma Supplement by structure and content [21]. Starting from 2010/11 and then from the 2011/12 academic year, it was suggested that national diploma supplements should be issuedagainst a fee upon request first and later on probably to everybody [25]. However, this issue has remained open until now.

In the Roadmap, Belarus committed to prepare"By the end of 2017, …a plan to issue the Diploma Supplement in the format developed by the Council of Europe, the European Commission and UNESCO to all students automatically, free of charge and in a widely spoken language (other than Russian)." [16; 23].

However, the issue remains open.

According to the assessment by Advisory Group 2 *Support for the Belarus roadmap*, "The automatic and free of charge delivery of the Diploma Supplement in a widely spoken language other than Russian is not conducted systematically across all higher education institutions. (Students still have to make efforts to ensure receiving their Diploma Supplement). The draft Education Code does not guarantee an automatic and free of charge issuance of the Diploma Supplement." [17, p. 12].

The problematic nature of issue of the diploma and Diploma Supplement in a widely spoken European language (other than Russian), which is mentioned by the Roadmap, is confirmed with the correspondence of a student of the Belarusian State University who applied for the issue of the diploma and supplement according to the European form with the management of the higher education institution (letter of the BSU No. 0308/2495 of 14 July 2017) and the Ministry of Education (letter of the Ministry of Education No. 08-2013-K (0)-0 of 27 July 2017). The reply of the higher education institution and of the Ministry of Education is quite similar and straightforward: "The procedure for issuing documents certifying education in the Republic of Belarus is regulated by the Education Code of the Republic of Belarus (hereinafter the "Code") [19] and by the Instructions of the Procedure for Filling Out Documents Certifying Education, Supplements Thereto, Documents Certifying Learning, for Registration and Issue of Documents Certifying Education, Supplements Thereto, Gold, Silver Medals for Academic Excellence, Documents Certifying Learning approved by Ordinance of the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Belarus No. 194 of 27 July 2011 [20] (hereinafter the "Instructions").

Pursuant to clause 5 of the Instructions, documents certifying education shall be prepared in Belarusian and Russian …

Issue of diplomas and supplements thereto harmonised with the European diplomas and diploma supplements to the graduates of Belarusian universities is possible in the Republic of Belarus upon making the relevant amendments of and addenda to the Code and Instructions. The issue of making amendments of the Code is being explored by the governmental agencies (Ministry of Education, Government, House of Representatives of the National Assembly of the Republic of Belarus etc.)".

Consequently, the transcript of records in the form established (clause 35 of the Instructions) serves as the Diploma Supplement. It is noteworthy that the structure and content of the form does not correspond to the contemporary European requirements while it characteristically exhibits low information capacity, lack of protection against forgery, lack of a single approach to describing the education, degree, qualification received etc. In this form, the transcript of records cannot serve as an international document enabling to recognise the education and qualification (degree) receivedadequately, to ensure mobility of the Belarusian nationals.

In Belarus, it is possible to judge what can be done concerning issue of the Diploma Supplement only from the latest version of the draft new revision of the Education Code (hereinafter the "draft Code") [24].

The draft Code provides for issue of the bachelor and master Diploma Supplement according to the European form; however, automatic issue of the DS in a widely spoken language (other than Russian) free of charge is not mentioned anywhere. It remains unclear whether it would be possible for the Belarusian nationals to receive the Diploma Supplement "in a widely spoken language (other than Russian)" while the draft Code provides for issue in other languages but "to foreign nationals and stateless persons temporarily staying or residing in the Republic of Belarus who have completed education in the Republic of Belarus" only [24].

On the basis of the draft new revision of the Education Code it is possible to conclude that issue of the Diploma Supplement is not intended to the persons who have completed education in a continuous higher education programme and have been awarded a higher education diploma, e.g. a medical doctor's diploma. It is indicated that the higher education diploma is accompanied with the Diploma Supplement in the form of a transcript of final marks (extract from the student's academic card) which is invalid without the relevant document certifying education.

In the draft Strategic Action Plan on Implementation of the Major Objectives of the Education System Development in Line with the EHEA Principles and Tools presented at the Paris ministerial conference on 24-25 May 2018, Belarus committed once again to introduce the DS: "… Legal framework will be developed for issuing a free of charge and multilingual Diploma Supplement in the format approved by the Council of Europe, the European Commission, UNESCO (also in the digital format) to all students. International experts/consultants, including those from the World Bank, will be asked to advise on implementing transition to the digital Diploma Supplement."[18, p.3/4;22]. However, nothing is

said about completion deadlines thereof in the draft Strategic Plan.

Considering the introduction of issue of the new Diploma Supplement in higher education in Belarus, attention should be drawn to the fact that the Belarusian higher education system will simultaneously have to address a number of issues determined by its current situation and legal framework.

In the first place, it is noteworthy that according to the international regulations, the right to design, provision, and issue of the national Diploma Supplement belongs to higher education institutions and not to the governmental bodies (the Ministry of Education in case of Belarus) while the Diploma Supplement is a document not of the national level but an international (European) education document prepared by the supranational bodies of the European Union and UNESCO. The role of the Ministry of Education in this case should be reduced to formulating the general rules and recommendations to prepare and issue the national higher education diploma supplement compatible with the comprehensive Diploma Supplement.

Attention should be drawn to the fact that from the point of view of content, and work with it the European Diploma Supplement is a complex document that requires special training of the staff in the rules of filling out the relevant sections. Considering the fact that the ECTS is not fully implemented in Belarus, its main documents have not been prepared, including the Course Catalogue in English, introduction of the Diploma Supplement will not be as easy as representatives of the official education agencies believe [25].

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24. Проект Закона Республики Беларусь «О внесении изменений и дополнений в Кодекс Республики Беларусь об образовании» [Electronic resource]. Mode of access: http://www.academy.edu.by/component/content/article/850--l-pr-zak.html [on-line 03.02.2017]

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Chapter 5. National Qualifications Frameworks

5.1. QualificationsFramework

The qualifications framework is a tool to develop and classify qualifications (e.g. at the national or industry level) according to a set of criteria (e.g. using descriptors) applicable to certain levels of learning outcomes.

The qualifications framework can be used to: establish national standards applicable to knowledge, skills, and competences; to determine the area for education quality improvement; to create a system of coordination and/or integration of qualifications to ensure the possibility of qualifications comparison; to assist in providing access to learning, transfer of learning outcomes, and learning progress [1].

Frameworks were included in the agenda of the Bologna Process policy since 2001.In 2003, a communique was passed at the conference of the educationministers of the Bologna Process member states; it commenced the development of frameworks [2].

In the context of the Bologna Process, in 2005 in Bergen [3], the European education ministers passed the Overarching Framework of Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area (QF-EHEA) [4] as well as agreed to prepare national frameworks of qualifications (NQFs) by 2007, their introduction and evaluation of compatibility with the QF-EHEA in all the signatory countries of the Bologna declaration by 2010.

As the conference of the education ministers in Yerevan in 2015 demonstrated, a few countries reached the 2010 threshold, and only around half of the member states certified their national frameworks to comply with the QF-EHEA independently [5], which assisted in the acceleration of efforts to develop and introduce the NQFs as one of the key commitments in the Bologna Process.

The Framework of Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area is an overarching framework with a high level of generality. It includes three main cycles and a short cycle within the first cycle, general descriptors for each cycle based on the Dublin descriptors [4, p. 101-102] established from the point of view of learning outcomes as well as ranges for the ECTS credits for the first and second cycles (please refer to Fig. 2.1).

National qualifications frameworks of higher education compatible with the QF-EHEA provide information about qualifications from the point of view of the level (cycles), learning outcomes, students' workload, and demonstrate possible promotion paths. Each qualification included in the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) should correspond to the criteria and should be supported by the quality guarantee [4].

National qualifications frameworks developed by the Bologna Process member states should be compatible with the Framework of Qualifications of the EHEA according to the criteria established [4, p.102-103].

Besides the Framework of Qualifications of the EHEA, the European Commission proposed the Qualifications Framework for the EU. The European QualificationsFramework for Lifelong Learning (EQF-LLL) was considered a meaningful initiative, which should

stimulate national and industry reforms to support lifelong learning.

The EQF-LLL is the European reference system for qualifications at all levels of education (ISCED 0 –ISCED 8) and all types of (general or vocational) education acquired in different learning contexts (formal, non-formal, andinformal); it consists of eight common European reference levels, each of them is described in terms of knowledge, skills, and competences. It enables to compare qualifications among countries and is a reference point for the development of the National Qualifications Framework[7].

The QF-EHEA is compatible with the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning (EQF-LLL) [8]; there by 35 of the 39 countries participating in both European initiatives have developed or are developing national qualifications frameworks for lifelong learning related to the overarching European framework [9, p. 119].

Meeting the commitment undertaken in the Yerevan communique [10, p. 4], on May 24-25, 2018 the Paris conference of the European ministers in charge of higher education passed the updated Overarching Framework of Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area [11], which includes the short, first, second, and third cycles, general descriptors for each cycle based on learning outcomes and competences as well as ranges of credits in the short, first, and second cycles (Table 5.1) [12].

Table 5.1. ***Qualifications Framework for the European Higher Education Area (QF-EHEA)***

	Learning outcomes	**ECTS credits**
Short cycle qualifications	Qualifications that signify completion of the higher education **short cycle** are awarded to students who: - have demonstrated knowledge and understanding in a field of study that builds upon general secondary education and is typically at a level supported by advanced textbooks; such knowledge provides an underpinning for a field of work or vocation, personal development, and further studies to complete the first cycle; - can apply their knowledge and understanding in occupational contexts; - have the ability to identify and use data to formulate responses to well-defined concrete and abstract problems; - can communicate about their understanding, skills and activities, with peers, supervisors and clients; - have the learning skills to undertake further studies with some autonomy.	Typically include 90-120 ECTS credits

First cycle qualification	Qualifications that signify completion of **the first cycle** areawarded to students who: • have demonstrated knowledge and understanding in a field of study that builds upon their general secondary education, and is typically at a level that, whilst supported by advanced textbooks, includes some aspects that will be informed by knowledge of the forefront of their field of study; • can apply their knowledge and understanding in a manner that indicates a professional approach to their work or vocation, and have competences typically demonstrated through devising and sustaining arguments and solving problems within their field of study; • have the ability to gather and interpret relevant data (usually within their field of study) to inform judgments that include reflection on relevant social, scientific or ethical issues; • can communicate information, ideas, problems and solutions to both specialist and non-specialist audiences; • have developed those learning skills that are necessary for them to continue to undertake further study with a high degree of autonomy.	Typically include 180-240 ECTS credits
Second cycle qualification	Qualifications that signify completion of the second cycle are awarded to students who: • have demonstrated knowledge and understanding that is founded upon and extends and/or enhances that typically associated with the first cycle, and that provides a basis or opportunity for originality in developing and/or applying ideas, often within a research context; • can apply their knowledge and understanding, and problem-solving abilities in new or unfamiliar environments within broader (or multidisciplinary) contexts related to their field of study; • have the ability to integrate knowledge and handle complexity, and formulate judgments with incomplete or limited information, but that include reflecting on social and ethical responsibilities linked to the application of their knowledge and judgments; • can communicate their conclusions, and the knowledge and rationale underpinning these, to specialist and non-specialist audiences clearly and unambiguously; • have the learning skills to allow them to continue to study in a manner that may be largely self-directed or autonomous.	Typically include 90-120 ECTS credits, with a minimum of 60 credits at the level of the 2nd cycle

Third cycle qualification	Qualifications that signify completion of the third cycle are awarded to students who: • have demonstrated a systematic understanding of a field of study and mastery of the skills and methods of research associated with that field; • have demonstrated the ability to conceive, design, implement and adapt a substantial process of research with scholarly integrity; • have made a contribution through original research that extends the frontier of knowledge by developing a substantial body of work, some of which merits national or international refereed publication; • are capable of critical analysis, evaluation and synthesis of new and complex ideas; • can communicate with their peers, the larger scholarly community and with society in general about their areas of expertise; • can be expected to be able to promote, within academic and professional contexts, technological, social or cultural advancement in a knowledge-based society.	Not specified

*Source:*Paris Communiqué Paris, May 25th 2018. – Appendix III: Overarching Framework of Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area (revised 2018), p.2/1-2/2

5.2. Development, Use, and Implementation Stages of National Qualifications Frameworks

5.2.1. Development of National Qualifications Frameworks

To manage and control development and introduction of national frameworks of higher education qualifications, in 2007, the EHEA Working Group on Qualifications Frameworks (Bologna Working Party, 2007) determined ten standard steps of implementing the National Qualifications Frameworks,which, starting from 2009, served as a reference point to monitor the progress in development and introduction of the NQFs provided in the Bologna Process implementation reports [5; 9; 13].

In 2015, the eleventh step was added; it required the information about the NQFs and self-certification report to be publicly available. Transparency of the process and challenges, which the countries face following various paths, are necessary to support trust in the QF-EHEA [9].

Table 5.2 shows the state of play of NQF implementation in EHEA countries according to the 11 steps.

Table 5.2. P**rogress in development of national qualifications frameworks according to the 11 steps, 2016/17**

Step 1	Decision to start has been taken by the national body responsible for higher education	-
Step 2	The purpose(s) of the NQF has/ve been agreed and outlined	-
Step 3	The process of developing the NQF has been set up, with stakeholders identified and committee(s) established	BY
Step 4	The level structure, level descriptors (learning outcomes), and credit ranges have been agreed	RU
Step 5	Consultation/national discussion has taken place and the design of the NQF has been agreed by stakeholders	AD, AZ, CZ, RS
Step 6	The NQF has been adopted in legislation or in other high-level policy document	SK, UA
Step 7	Implementation of the NQF has started with agreement on the roles and responsibilities of higher education institutions, QA agency(ies) and other bodies	AL
Step 8	Study programmes have been re-designed on the basis of the learning outcomes included in the NQF	BA
Step 9	Qualifications have been included in the NQF	AM, CH, FI, GE, KZ, MD, VA
Step 10	The Framework has self-certified its compatibility with the European Framework for Higher Education	BG, CY, RO
Step 11	The final NQF and the self-certification report can be consulted on a public website	AT, BE fr, BE nl, DE, DK, EE, ES, FR, HR, HU, IE, IS, IT, LI, LT, LU, LV, ME, (*), MT, NL, NO, PL, PT, SE, SI, TR, UK-ENG/WLS/NIR, UK-SCT

(*): the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia
Notes: Greece: Data not available.
*Source:*IR 2018, p.120

5.2.2. Use of National Qualifications Frameworks

The national bodies in 34 out of the 44 systems are registered to use the NQFs created by themmost broadly. E.g., according to Cedefop's report, most NQFs for higher education are integrated in the comprehensive NQFs for lifelong learning covering all education levels and sectors (Cedefop, 2016). The comprehensive NQFs ensure a common set of learning outcomes to develop standards and qualifications for secondary, higher education, vocational education, and adult learning, education as well as non-formal and informal learning under certain circumstances [9, p. 122].

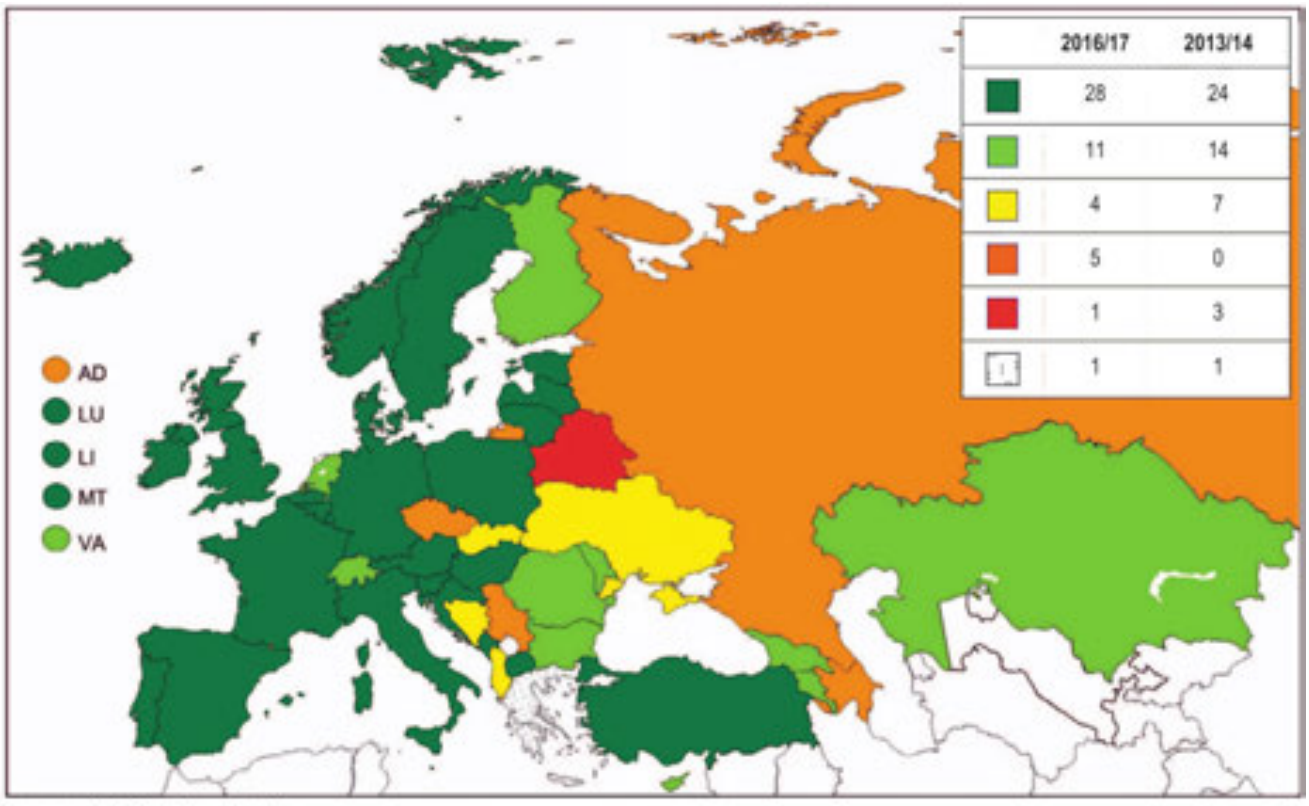
In the foreign qualification recognition policy, 31 systems use the NQFs although the authorities of 49 systems are committed by ratifying the Lisbon Recognition Convention [16]. In 2015, the Convention signatory countries consented to use the NQFs in qualifica-

tion recognition and for professional purposes [17]. The national authorities of 19 countries use the NQFsonly in the dialogue with the participants of the labour market or in forecasting skills. There exist other fields in which the NQFs are used such as recognition of previous learning, quality assurance or creation of schedules for governmental officials [9, p. 122-123].

5.2.3.Implementation Stages of National Qualifications Frameworks

The scorecard indicator (Fig. 5.1) summarises the situation of development, introduction, and use of national qualifications frameworks for higher education.Both of the previous indicators: the situation of the NQF implementation and the NQF use by the national authorities are considered in this part of the 2018 Report [9, p.124].As the figure demonstrates, most countries meet their commitments concerning national qualifications frameworks currently.

Consequently, it is possible to note that progress in implementation of the national qualifications frameworks is observed. Most countries have created NQFs for higher education, certified them to compliance with the QF-EHEA, and the national authorities use the NQFs in the governmental policy. In most countries, the NQFs for higher education are integrated in the NQFs for lifelong learning, which assumes the NQF use to coordinate qualifications by education areas and levels.



Source: BFUG data collection.

Figure 5.1: Scorecard indicator n°3: Implementation of national qualifications frameworks, 2016/17

Notes: The indicator is defined as the current state of the implementation of national qualifications frameworks. The state of implementation is measured against the steps of the implementation of NQFs.

Scorecard categories

	Steps 10-11: o 11. Stakeholders* use the NQF (as a reference point) for at least one specific agreed purpose. o 10. The NQF has self-certified its compatibility with the Qualifications Framework for the European Higher Education Area.
	Steps 7-9: o 9. Qualifications have been included in the NQF. o 8. Study programmes have been re-designed on the basis of the learning outcomes included in the NQF. o 7. Implementation of the NQF has started with agreement on the roles and responsibilities of higher education institutions, quality assurance agency(ies) and other bodies.
	Steps 5-6: o 6. The NQF has been adopted in legislation or in other high-level policy fora. o 5. Consultation/national discussion has taken place and the design of the NQF has been agreed by stakeholders.
	Step 4: The level structure, level descriptors (learning outcomes), and credit ranges have been agreed.
	Steps 1-3: o 3. The process of developing the NQF has been set up, with stakeholders identified and committee(s) established. o 2. The purpose(s) of the NQF have been agreed and outlined. o 1. Decision to start developing the NQF has been taken by the national body responsible for higher education and/or the minister.
	Data not available

Source: IR 2018, p. 124

Although numerous countries have progressed in the NQF development significantly, there remain some countries in which the development rate is low or virtually absent. These countries, including Belarus, risk missing the possibility to improve transparency of their systems of qualifications inside the country and for international partners and students outside their national borders [9, p.126].

5.3. Introduction of National Qualifications Framework in Belarus

In Belarus, the issue of the National Qualifications Frameworkdevelopment was on the agenda during the recent decade. In 2010, an interdepartmental working group of the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection was created. It included representatives of 17 national governmental bodies, the National Academy of Sciences of Belarus, Academy of Manage-

ment of the President of Belarus, associations of sole traders and employers, other non-governmental organisations. Unfortunately, no significant results of its work were observed.

On 26 April 2013, A. A. Tozik, the Deputy Prime Minister of the Republic of Belarus, approved the Comprehensive Development Plan of the National System of Qualifications of the Republic of Belarus in 2013-2015(No. 30/223-89), which included a number of measures to develop the NSQ [19].

However, in 2013Belarus saw little progress as to labour and education laws.

Until today, the only regulation paying attention to the National Qualifications Framework and laying foundation of the process of its development in the form of pilot projects in the field of IT and management has been Some Issues of Development of the National System of Qualifications of the Republic of Belarus Ordinance of the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Belarus No. 34 of 17 January 2014 [20].

Despite its focus on innovation, this ordinance is quite a superficial document; it does not include a comprehensive description (only an "outline") of the National Qualifications Framework, its structure and levels, it does not establish which qualifications will be included in the NQF and how, it does not include recommendations as to the preparation of professional standards or their standard form. The ordinance does not clearly registercomponents of the National Qualifications System (NQF, sectoral qualifications councils, qualification, "partial qualification", professional standards, certification centres, the procedure of personnel assessment as to compliance with the requirements of professional standards etc.) and of the system of their relations.

As far as the development of the National Qualifications Framework is concerned, the Belarus Roadmapfor Higher Education Reform states that, to achieve the necessary results, Belarus will commit "… to developing a National Qualifications framework compatible with the QF-EHEA. … to establishing a timetable for this work and to identify a national steering group by the end of 2015 and to launch work on the NQF in the first half of 2016." [14, p.1;34].

Despite the commitments undertaken by Belarus in the Roadmap, the situation with the NQF development goes poorly. Until the present moment, the legal formalisation of separate components of the National System of Qualifications is absent; it is determined by the fact that the Ministry of Justice requires a comprehensive approach to introducing new regulation mechanisms: simultaneous submission of all laws and regulations, which will govern operation of the National System of Qualifications [21, p. 403].

The labour laws (Labour Code of the Republic of Belarus [22]) as well as the new draft Education Code of the Republic of Belarus (hereinafter the "draft Code") [24], not to mention the current Education Code (hereinafter the "current Code")[23], have no references to the National System of Qualifications, professional standards, and related terminology and procedures yet.

A number of documents passed by the Republican Council of Higher Education Institution Rectors (Creation and Introduction of Qualifications Frameworks in Consideration of Accession of the Republic of Belarus to the European Higher Education Area resolution No. 1 of 16 June 2016 [25], Creation of the National Qualifications Framework to Ensure Quality

of Higher Education, Its Compliance with the Needs of the Contemporary Labour Market resolution of the Presidium No. 2 of 22 February 2017[26]), the letters of the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Belarus to higher education institutions (Organisation of Teaching and Learning Process at Higher Education Institutions in 2016/17 Academic Year letter No. 08-19/4097/ds of 14 October 2016 [27]; Organisation of Teaching and Learning Process at Higher Education Institutions in 2017/18 Academic Year letter No. 08-19/5447/ds of 23 August 2017 [28]) refer to intentions to develop the National Qualifications Framework (still with references to the above ordinance) rather than to specific results of the implementation of pilot projects and plans of further promotion of creation of the National Qualifications Framework in general.

For instance, the resolution of the Presidium of the Republican Council of Rectors of the Republic of Belarus (No. 2 of 22 February 2017) advised back in February 2017:

"1. The Ministry of Education of the Republic of Belarus:

1.2) To approve the draft National Qualifications Framework of Higher Education of the Republic of Belarus (BelQF) and conduct its discussion at the national and international levels;

1.3) To approve the Development and Introduction Plan of the National Qualifications Framework of Higher Education of the Republic of Belarus (BelQF);

1.4) To determine the procedure for supporting and updating the National Qualifications Framework of Higher Education of the Republic of Belarus (BelQF).

2. The Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of the Republic of Belarus:

2.1) In development of the National Qualifications Framework, to consider the National Qualifications Framework of Higher Education of the Republic of Belarus (BelQF) approved by the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Belarus;

<…>

3. The Republican Higher Education System Institute and the Republican Vocational Education Institute:

<…>

3.2) To submit proposals to the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Belarus concerning the main structural elements and number of levels of the National Qualifications Framework corresponding to the EQF-LLL;

3.3) To prepare and submit to the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Belarus the Development Plan of the National Qualifications Framework Corresponding to the EQF-LLL (As a Component of the National System of Qualifications);

<…>

3.5) To organise public and professional discussion of the draft National Qualifications Framework of Higher Education of the Republic of Belarus (BelQF) and National Qualifications Framework Corresponding to the EQF-LLL developed" [25].

It became known from the available sources that the Outline Plan of Measures to Improve the National System of Qualifications of the Republic of Belarus (2016-2019) prepared at the Labour Research Institute of the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection was presented and provided for a number of items completion of which was scheduled for the period of 2016 to 2019, including the creation of the legal framework for the development

and introduction of the National System of Qualifications:

"1. Introduction and formalisation of the terms and concepts of the new model of the National System of Qualifications (professional standard, NQF, qualification level etc.) – 2017.

2. Preparation and review of the draft National Qualifications Framework of the Republic of Belarus and its preparation for approval –2017" [29].

An interesting situation occurred concerning information about the composition of the NQF development group and about the Development and Introduction Plan of the National Qualifications Framework of Higher Education of the Republic of Belarus (BelQF). In October 2017, information appeared on the web site of the Advisory Group 2 *Support for the Belarus roadmap* (http://ag2.bsu.by/) concerning the establishment of the National Working Group to Develop the National Qualifications Framework consisting of five persons - the heads of the education system and education institutions by the Ministry of Education in November 2016 (ag2.bsu.by/sm_full.aspx?guid=8773 [access online on 5 October 2017]) - concerning the Development Planof the National Qualifications Framework of the Republic of Belarus approved by the First Deputy Minister of Education V. A. Bogush on 24 February 2017(http://ag2.bsu.by/ [access online on 5 October 2017]). According to the Plan, the development, public discussion, and approval of the BelQF should have been completed by September 2017, and it had been planned to commence introduction of the BelQF by higher education institutions as of 1 September 2017. However, the information promptly disappeared from the web site. At present, the Development and Introduction Plan of the National Qualifications Framework of Higher Education of the Republic of Belarus (BelQF), the Development Plan of the National Qualifications Framework Corresponding to the EQF-LLL officially approved, which were mentioned in the resolution of the Presidium of the Republican Council of Rectors (No. 2 of 22 February 2017) [25] as well as the Outline Plan of Measures to Improve the National System of Qualifications of the Republic of Belarus (2016-2019) [29] are publicly unavailable.

On 25 January 2017, the Ministry of Education and Science of the Federal Republic of Germany (Berlin) hosted the 4th meeting of the Advisory Group 2 *Support for the Belarus roadmap* at which the issue of the development of the National Qualifications Framework of Higher Education Levels of the Republic of Belarus was discussed and the draft National Qualifications Framework of Higher Education of Belarus was presented in the version of January 2017 in English [30]. The draft included four levels, three of which (higher education, cycle 1; higher education, cycle 2 (master programmes) and postgraduate education, cycle 1 (postgraduate or PhD programmes)) correspond to the QF-EHEA, and postgraduate education, cycle 2 (doctoral programmes or Advanced Research Degree Programme), has no equivalent in the EQF system [30].

According to the Information Report of Completion of the Working Plan to Introduce the Tools of the European Higher Education Area in the National Education System in 2015-2018 presented at the meeting of the Republican Council of the Higher Education Institution Rectors on 10 May 2018, "In the summer of 2017, a package of works was completed to develop a new version of the BelQF (Belarusian National Qualifications Framework.

– *author's note*), which required amending the Working Plan. The amended Working Plan to Develop the National Qualifications Framework of Higher Education was approved by the First Deputy of Minister of Education on 4 October 2017. The new version of the BelQFand the amended Working Plan to Develop the National Qualifications Framework of Higher Education were discussed at the regular meeting of the Advisory Group 2 *Support for the Belarus roadmap* in Rome on 18-19 October 2017" (http://srrb.niks.by/info/agenda.pdf).

However, it has been impossible to obtain public official information concerning the NQF development stages and results, and it is not provided on the web site of the Advisory Group. Separate presentations and publications still remain the sources.

Despite the fact that in the draft Strategic Action Plan on Implementation of the Major Objectives of the Education System Development in Line with the EHEA Principles and Tools presented at the Paris 2018 conference Belarus indicated that "By early 2018 the Republic of Belarus had drafted the Higher Education National Qualifications Framework (BelQF) …"[18, p.2/4], we have to use available publications in the BelQF analysis while other official sources are unavailable.

In S. I. Ramaniuk's article *National System of Qualifications of the Republic of Belarus: Approaches to National Qualifications Framework Development*, possible content of the National Qualifications Framework of the Republic of Belarus is proposed with indication of qualifications levels and general characteristics of learning outcomes by levels; an attempt is made to compare it with the European Qualifications Framework (EQF)(Table 5.2) [31, p. 7-10]. The National Qualifications Framework of Higher Education is provided with the learning outcomes described (Table 5.3)[31, p. 10-11]. As the author mentions, the materials of the article were presented at a meeting of the Presidium of the Republican Council of Rectors as well as at a meeting of the AG2 *Support for the Belarus roadmap* [31].

Table 5.3. **Levels of qualifications and their general characteristics in the National Qualifications Framework of the Republic of Belarus**

BelQF level	EQF level	Education level, education completion (years and/or ECTS credits), previous education level required	Qualifications achieved (document certifying education, qualifications). Principal competences (general characteristics giving an idea about the level)
10	– no analogue	Postgraduate education, stage 2 (doctoral programmes), 3 years, previous education level required – postgraduate education, stage 1	Academic degree of doctor of sciences (diploma of doctor of sciences) in case of successful certification by the Higher Attestation Commission of the Republic of Belarus. Establishment and/or management of a research school. Initiation of addressing and addressing comprehensive (global) fundamental research, research and development or social issues
9	8	Postgraduate education, stage 1 (postgraduate programmes), 3 years, previous education level required – higher education	Researcher (diploma of researcher). Academic degree of candidate of sciences (diploma of candidate of sciences) in case of successful certification by the Higher Attestation Commission of the Republic of Belarus. Initiation of addressing and addressing specific research, technology or social issues
8	7	Higher education, stage 2 (master programmes), 1–2 years (60-120 ECTS), previous education level required – higher education, stage 1 **or** higher education, stage 1 (specialist programmes), 5-6 years (300-360 ECTS), previous education level required – specialised secondary education/vocational education with general secondary education /general secondary education	Master degree (master diploma) or professional with higher education (diploma of higher education or diploma of higher education with honours). Strategy planning, management of processes and activities(including the focus on innovation) with decision-making at the level of an organisation or unit of large institutions. High level of managerial qualities
7	6	Higher education, stage 1 (specialist programmes), 4-4.5 years (240-270 ECTS), previous education level required – specialised secondary education/vocational education with general secondary education /general secondary education	Professional with higher education (diploma of higher education or diploma of higher education with honours). Independent professional activities involving determination of tasks for personal work and/or for subordinates to achieve an objective. Medium level of managerial qualities

6	5	Specialised secondary education (elevated level, with qualification of professional with specialised secondary education), 2.5-4 years, previous education level required – vocational education with general secondary education /general secondary education / general basic education	Professional with specialised secondary education (diploma of specialised secondary education or diploma of specialised secondary education with honours). Independent professional activities to complete standard practical tasks requiring independent analysis of the situation at work. Professional with basic managerial training
5	4	Specialised secondary education (basic level, with qualification of worker with specialised secondary education), 2-3 years, previous education level required – vocational education with general secondary education /general secondary education / general basic education **or** vocational education (elevated level), 1-3 years, previous education level required – general secondary education / general basic education	Worker with specialised secondary education (diploma of specialised secondary education or diploma of specialised secondary education with honours) or worker with vocational education (diploma of vocational education or diploma of vocational education with honours).Skilled labour; independent performance of professional duties with self-control of results of work. Planning of personal activities and/or activities of a group of employees based on the tasks set. Responsibility for completing the tasks set or for the result of work of a group of employees
4	3	Vocational education (w/o general secondary education), 1-2 years, previous education level required –general basic education **or** general secondary education, 2 years, previous education level required – general basic education	Worker with vocational education (diploma of vocational education or diploma of vocational education with honours) or w/o professional qualification (certificate of general secondary education). Guided activities with independence in completing standard professional tasks. Planning of personal activities based on the task set by the manager. Individual responsibility
3	2	General basic education, 5 years, previous education level required – elementary education	W/o acquiring professional and academic qualifications. Skills necessary for employment and unskilled labour. Guided activities with independence in completing known tasks. Individual responsibility
2	1	Elementary education, 4 years, previous education level required – no requirements	W/o acquiring professional and academic qualifications. Reading, writing, and counting skills, basic knowledge of the world around required for social adaptation and performance of simple work. Guided activities, Individual responsibility

1	no analogue	Preschool education, 1-4 years, previous education level required – no requirements	Basic information about the surrounding objects and phenomena and their characteristics. Skills of communicative interaction and self-assessment in completion of individual and group tasks

Source: С.И. Романюк «Национальная система квалификаций Республики Беларусь: подходы к разработке национальной рамки квалификаций», p. 7-10

Table 5.4. **National Qualifications Framework of higher education**

BelQF level	**EQF level**	**Education level, education completion (years and/or ECTS credits), previous education level required. Qualifications achieved**	**Descriptors**		
			Knowledge (theoretical and/or factual)	**Skills**	**Personal competences, social competences, and autonomy**
7	6	Higher education, stage 1 (specialist programmes), 4-4.5 years (240-270 ECTS), previous education level required – specialised secondary education/ vocational education with general secondary education / general secondary education. Professional with higher education (diploma of higher education or diploma of higher education with honours)	General, professional, and special knowledge in profession. Independent search for, analysis and assessment of professional information	Skills of applying professional and special knowledge to complete a broad range of professional tasks. Capability to determine completion methods and to analyse their efficiency in completing professional tasks. Development, introduction, control, and assessment of components of professional activities, new technology and procedural solutions	Independent professional activities involving determination of personal tasks and/or tasks of the subordinates to achieve an objective. Ensuring cooperation of the employees in related business units. Responsibility for the result of personal work as well as work at the business unit or organisation level

8	7	Higher education, stage 2 (master programmes), 1–2 years (60-120 ECTS), previous education level required – higher education, stage 1. Master degree (master diploma) **or** higher education, stage 1 (specialist programmes), 5-6 years (300-360 ECTS), previous education level required – specialised secondary education/ vocational education with general secondary education / general secondary education. Professional with higher education (diploma of higher education or diploma of higher education with honours)	General and in-depth knowledge in research or applied profession or general, professional, and in-depth special knowledge in profession. Understanding methodological framework of activities. Capability to expand knowledge in related professional sectors. Generation of new applied knowledge in a sector and/or of cross-sectoral knowledge	Specialised skills of theoretically substantiated or design of project, applied solutions in a theoretical or applied area. Completion of development tasks in a professional sector and (or) organisation applying various techniques and technologies, including the focus on innovation. Development of new techniques, technologies, etc.	Determination of a strategy, management of processes and activities (including the focus on innovation) with decision-making at the level of an organisation or unit of large institutions.Responsibility for the operation results of an organisation or a business unit of large institutions
9	8	Postgraduate education, stage 1 (postgraduate programmes), 3 years, previous education level required – higher education. Researcher (diploma of researcher). Academic degree of candidate of sciences (diploma of candidate of sciences) in case of successful certification by the Higher Attestation Commission of the Republic of Belarus.	Specialised, systematised, and up-to-date knowledge on a research subject and capability to expand knowledge in special academic disciplines	Skills of addressing research and project issues related to improving efficiency of processes managed	Initiation of addressing and addressing specific research, technology or social issues. Determination of a strategy, management of processes and activities (including the focus on innovation) with decision-making at the level of large institutions. Responsibility for the operation results of large institutions

10	ana-logue missing in EQF	Postgraduate education, stage 2 (doctoral programmes), 3 years, previous education level required – post-graduate education, level 1. Academic degree of doctor of sciences (diploma of doctor of sciences) in case of successful certification by the Higher Attestation Commission of the Republic of Belarus	Comprehensive knowledge in a specific and related academic fields. Generation of new fundamental interdisciplinary and cross-sectoral knowledge	Addressing methodolog-ical, research, and project issues related to development and improving efficiency of sophisticated social, produc-tion, research processes	Establishment and/or man-agement of a research school. Initiation of addressing and addressing comprehensive (global) research, technical or social issues. Determi-nation of a strat-egy, management of complex social, production, and research process-es. Prominent and distinctive contribution to a certain field of ac-tivities. Respon-sibility for results of activities on a sector, country scale, at the inter-national level

Source: С.И. Романюк «Национальная система квалификаций Республики Беларусь: подходы к разработке национальной рамки квалификаций», p. 10-11

Analysis of the qualification frameworks presented by the author has demonstrated that the number of education levels in them does not correspond to the eight-level European Qualifications Framework by quantity (EQF) as was the case in the January version of the 2017 framework [31]. The main argument is that the current Education Code of the Republic of Belarus sets forth ten levels and stages of main education: preschool education; general secondary education (stage 1 – elementary education, stage 2 – basic education, stage 3 – secondary education); vocational education; specialised secondary education; higher education (stage 1 – specialist programmes, stage 2 – master programmes); post-graduate education (stage 1 – postgraduate programmes, stage 2 – doctoral programmes), and each country may set forth the number of education levels "independently, based on historical experience, national interests, and current laws" [31].

Consequently, it is possible to conclude that the National Qualifications Framework of the Republic of Belarus is not designed for the future but is created on the basis of outdated laws and regulations requiring revision (the Code), which include the higher education architecture not corresponding to the Bologna model and dos not consider the progress made in the recent version of the Education Code.

According to the assessment of the *Advisory Group 2 Support for the Belarus roadmap* "**National qualification framework (NQF):** The NQF is not yet in place. The new Education Code does not mention the NQF and also does not mention programmes that are referenced to the NQF. The adoption of NQF has been postponed. A national consultation with stakeholders has been conducted in 2017. The draft qualification frameworks presented to the advisory group was rather an occupational standards framework than a qualification framework outlining generic competences laid down along the Dublin Descriptors."[17, p.8]

In the draft Strategic Action Plan on Implementation of the Major Objectives of the Education System Development in Line with the EHEA Principles and Tools presented at the Paris ministerial conference on 24-25 May 2018, Belarus committed to pass a draft NQF once again. The draft Strategic Plan states that "By early 2018 the Republic of Belarus had drafted the Higher Education National Qualifications Framework (BelQF) (the 4th step of the development of the NQF). Taking that into consideration, measures will be taken to adopt it by 2019 and to prepare it for self-certification in 2020." To that end, the draft plan envisaged certain stages of work in the period indicated [18, p. 2/4;33].

Hopefully, Belarus' plans to introduce the NQFwould come to fruition according to the draft Strategic Plan although the experience of the NQF development since 2010 gives rise to doubt.

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Chapter 6. Belarusian higher education: Bologna instruments implementation for quality assurance and recognition

6.1. Instruments for higher education quality assurance

Ensuring the quality of higher education in accordance with Bologna Declaration (1999) is the one of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) goals. At the same time, member–countries are called upon to support the "promotion of European co-operation in quality assurance with a view to developing comparable criteria and methodologies" [1]. In order to achieve this goal and fulfill the obligations set by the Council of Europe Recommendations (98/561/EC, 24 September 1998), the European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education was established in 2000, which was transformed into European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) in 2004 [2]. In 2005 the Bergen Ministerial Conference approved The Standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG), which played a key role in establishing quality assurance system in Europe in the following years. The 2007 Ministerial Conference gave a start to developing the European Quality Assurance Register in Higher Education (EQAR) that came into force in March 2008; it is based on ESG principles [3].

The work of these organizations led to the new ESG edition that came into light in 2016 [4]. According to it, subsystems for internal and external quality assurance should be singled out when designing and evaluating quality assurance systems as well as considering quality assurance agencies' activities. The sets of minimum required standards are envisaged in the framework of these three subsystems.

While European countries were developing a common quality assurance model, the post-Soviet countries were mainly discussing other, more simplified, quality assurance models, in particular, those that were based on Total Quality Management (TQM) principles reflected in the quality management system standards ISO 9000 series.

This led to the situation where Belarus and other CIS countries use accreditation as the most effective quality assessment and recognition method. Its features are best described in the "Thematic Review of Tertiary Education" by V. Kis [5] prepared for OEDC [6].

In education history the Belarusian national quality assurance system dates back to 1992 when the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Belarus was established (Decree of the Supreme Council of the Republic of Belarus # 1389-XII of January 10, 1992). Despite the establishment of the new Ministry of Education, the Belarusian education system continued to function according to the Soviet regulatory and legal framework and also used and referred to Regulation [7] about the Ministry of Public Education of Belarusian SSR (BSSR Council of Ministers decree #11 of March 25, 1969). Only in 1993, the new Regulation was approved and came into force that year (Decree of the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Belarus #295 from May 6, 1993).

This Regulation (p. 2.6) entrusted the Ministry with "organizing the development and further improvement of the educational context for all types of educational institutions,

dissemination of pedagogical knowledge, modern teaching and learning forms and methods". At the same time (p. 3.5) the Ministry should "attest educational institutions in accordance with a set procedure", which could be considered as a prototype of the modern quality assurance system.

Nevertheless, the State Inspection for education establishments, which existed through the Soviet times and was part of the Ministry of Education, remained untouched and secured its functions and given powers.

The 1995 Regulation on Ministry of Education and Science (Decree of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Belarus #318 of June 22, 1995) did not disclose the Ministry's structure and responsibility for quality assurance; however, the law enforcement function in education was assigned to them.

In 1998, the State Inspection was withdrawn from the Ministry of Education (Decree of the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Belarus 31586 of October 1998) but the quality assurance control function was sealed as State Inspection competence (p.1) (Regulation "About the National State Inspection for Education System of the Republic of Belarus" [Decree of the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Belarus #376 of March 17, 1999]). The State Inspection status was described "as the agency exercising state control over the functioning of the Belarusian education system" and [it] is not part of the Ministry of Education (p.2.): "State Inspection activities fall under the jurisdiction of the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Belarus". Hence, the accreditation process was excluded from the scope of the Ministry of Education's activities.

This regulation defines the term "quality control" in a very mild form (p.7.5): "assess the education system establishments' compliance with and their quality of education according to requirements set by regulatory acts and state educational standards".

The State Inspection had been assigned the quality monitoring function and was to play a consulting role to advise HEIs on quality issues (p. 7.7). Its main activities (p. 8 of the Regulation) are to "study, analyze and review how education establishments execute legislative acts; implement management decisions and decisions delivered by the territorial education authorities; provide feedback, testing, oral and written knowledge assessment including pupils' and students' skills and competences as well as interviewing students, staff and leadership of the educational establishments, organizations, and enterprises where the graduates work. The Inspection monitors, studies and analyses the experts' assessments results, and the elimination of identified shortcomings and implementation of observations". At the same time, it demands that "the results of these measures are recorded in a form of statements, certificates, protocols, informational releases, memorandums and instructions and are communicated to the management of educational establishment and relevant governmental bodies" (p.9).

However, the State Inspection still retained some degree of dependency on the Ministry of Education through its obligation to report to them (p.2) and having staff positions and hiring approved by the Ministry as well (p.12).

The next development stage began with adopting the Regulation on the Ministry of Education (Decree of the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Belarus #1554 of October

29, 2001), entrusting them to "exercise control of the education system on behalf of the state" (p.3.5). In regard to quality, it stated that the Ministry "carries out inspection, attestation and accreditation of educational establishment within the national education system of the Republic of Belarus" (p. 4.4). This regulation also introduced licensing of some types of educational activities (p. 4.7) as well as identified the need for educational standards development (p. 4.8.). The Ministry "establishes educational and methodical associations by specialists' profiles (specialties, field of study) at the leading higher education institutions (HEIs) and approves regulating their activities acts." (p. 4.9-4), which is considered an important step in further development of the education system. On one hand, these associations became a kind of public form of ensuring the quality of curricula and educational and methodical literature, but, on the other hand, they became the Ministry of Education's tool, which in turn, was establishing them by its order.

In the same year, the Department for quality assurance was established at the Ministry of Education. All State Inspection functions were transferred there (Decree of the President of the Republic of Belarus #516 of September 24, 2001) resulting in national quality assurance agency completely losing its independence.

The Regulation on Department for quality assurance (Decree of the Ministry of Education #2 of February 2, 2002) has a more rigid wording but also introduces more modern approaches to external quality assurance procedures for HEIs. The main departmental goals are (p.4):

"4.1. to exercise control of the education system of the Republic of Belarus on behalf of the state;

4.2. to monitor the quality of education provided by educational establishments of all types and by other educational organizations regardless of form of ownership and departmental subordination;

4.3. to develop regulatory and legal framework for quality assurance in the education system;

4.4. to study international experience in improving forms and methods of monitoring education system functioning".

The Department activities also include but not limited to:

"5.1-1. preparing material for approval by the Ministry of Education Board…deciding on issuing (declining) special permission (licenses) for educational activities…;

5.2. inspecting, conducting attestation and accreditation of HEIs within the national education system of the Republic of Belarus;

5.3. developing assessment and other materials necessary for implementing controlling measures;

5.4. assessing the compliance of educational establishments including the quality of education with educational standards requirements, Ministry of Education legal acts and other legal acts of the Republic of Belarus in the field of education;

5.5. preparing analytical reviews based on the assessment results, making recommendations on eliminating identified shortcomings and improving educational establishments' functioning".

The Ministry of Education Decree # 75 of December 29, 2009 sets that "the key method of monitoring the quality of education at Belarusian educational establishments is reviewing the compliance of educational content and quality of education provided by the educational establishment with legal requirements in the education field, educational standards, and curricular and educational programs developed on their basis".

The Ministry of Education's monopoly on quality assurance process was confirmed in 2011 by adoption of yet another Regulation on Ministry of Education (Decree of the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Belarus #1049 of August 4, 2011) where it states, "The Department for quality assurance is included into the Ministry of Education structure as a legal entity" (p.1, Chapter 3). It also includes "the control over the quality assurance" as one of the Ministry's goals (p.3.6) identifying it further as: "issues licenses for educational activities in accordance with relevant legislation (p.4.11) and it "accredits educational establishments and other organizations that have the right to provide educational services in accordance with law as well as reconfirms their accreditation" (p. 4.12).

This is done in a link with the definition of the quality of education given by the current Belarusian Education Code (article 1.4.): "quality of education is compliance with educational standard requirements and educational program documentation for a relevant educational program".

At the same time, the first Belarusian law in the field of education Law "On Education" (#1202-XII of October 29, 1991 Law 1991) did not define the term "quality assurance" but gave instruments for state control of it (article 47), such as inspection, self-assessment and attestation. A certain independence of quality assurance agencies was provided in article 47 (p.7): "The regularity and frequency of the state control over ensuring the quality of education is defined by the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Belarus while state bodies (organizations) carrying this out in practice are identified by the Government of the Republic of Belarus". It means that the Ministry did not have the right for overall control of the quality assurance process although it fully set its rules.

The Law "On Higher Education" adopted in 2007 (#252-3 of July 11, 2007 Law_Higher_Education_2007) did not defined the term "quality assurance" either but included it as principles for forming state education policy (article 3). The law's authors envisaged that quality assurance requirements and assessment's criteria would be delivered through educational standards (article 7). However, the quality standards had not been developed yet. The accreditation was named as a key instrument for determining the level of quality of education (article 14). The National HEIs Council of Rectors was legalized in article 17 "to provide an overall assistance to the development of the higher education system" (The Council was established on February 8, 2001 by the President of the Republic of Belarus Decree #71). The Council's powers and competences were to be determined by the President of Belarus that, in turn, gave them independence from the Ministry of Education in decision-making. The scope of Education and Methodical Associations' activities were described more clearly. The law provisions also suggested including representatives of "governmental bodies and other organizations interested in preparing specialists of certain profiles" (article 18).

The current Education Code has taken these approaches to the next level but only to some extent (article 28 transferred the responsibility for quality assurance to HEIs; article 124 refers the appointment of organizations responsible for quality assurance to the presidential competence although leaving the formal window for establishing independent quality assurance agencies; article 210 requests the participation of employers as those who receive the graduates, in their final attestation; article 211 provides details on regulations for HEIs' Education and Methodical Associations' activities).

Currently, the following forms of quality assurance are used in the Republic of Belarus:

– State accreditation of educational establishments,
– Licensing of educational activities,
– Certification of educational establishments' quality management system (QMS).
– Monitoring of learning outcomes,
– Centralized testing,
– Self-assessment of the quality of education.

The law does not have provisions for certification and monitoring procedures although they are carried out in accordance with state standards, which are not connected with the specifics of education. Moreover, organizations should form their mission, goals and prepare a development program also in accordance with state standards (National Institute for Education carries out monitoring of learning outcomes in the secondary education system).

Despite Belarus' desire to integrate more into EHEA in recent years, the old approaches make the national system of quality assurance and subsequently HEIs internal ones quite different from Bologna models. In this regard, for the first time in Bologna history, the country's accession to it was made conditional and the Roadmap for Belarus higher education reform (Roadmap) was approved [8]. But the Belarusian education system readiness to join Bologna was very low [9,10].

The 2015 Roadmap has one section dedicated to quality assurance where it states that Belarus would "commit to establishing, by the end of 2017, the legal basis for an independent quality assurance agency in conformity with the European Standards and Guidelines", "by the end of 2015, develop a timetable for establishing this agency" and "through the BFUG, invite foreign quality assurance experts to advise on the timetable and plans for establishing the agency as well as on the process leading to its establishment".

Despite the simplicity of this Roadmap provision, its fulfillment turned out to be very difficult because the national legislation's provisions contradict EHEA principles and ESG provisions. In fact, the current Education Code that appearing in May 2015 also calls for its revision but does not envisage the fulfillment of this Roadmap provision. Thus, considering draft Education Code of February 2, 2017 [11] we can state that:

"Quality of education" (p.1.8, article 1) is defined as "compliance with educational standards, and educational and program documentation of the relevant education program". At the same time, the process of ensuring the quality of education is entrusted to HEIs (p. 5.2, article 20 and p. 4.1, article 28). Besides, the improvement of quality of education is included into the main functions of organizations providing research and methodological support

for education (p. 2, article 79) and into "the main requirements for organizing educational process" (section 1, article 83).

When describing the quality assurance system, the Code indicates that the monitoring of the quality assurance and issuance of special permissions for educational services (licenses) falls into the Ministry of Education's powers and is conducted through its sub-divisions (article 101). The local authorities also have the rights to monitor the quality of education irrespective of the level of education (article 103).

Nevertheless, article 104 of the Code states that the licensing procedure is subject to specific legislation but does not disclose it.

On the positive side, the draft Education Code envisages the inclusion of "official statistical information, departmental reporting data on the quality assurance monitoring results" (p. 3, article 107) into informational support in the education field complying by this with ESG requirements.

The Code (p.1, article 29) identifies accreditation as an instrument of quality assurance. At the same time, accreditation process is defined as "governmental activities", which excludes the participation of any other organizations. Thus, the possibility of establishing an independent quality assurance agency is not foreseen.

The accreditation (p.6, article 29) is affirmed as a mandatory procedure: "Educational establishments and other organizations must reconfirm their state accreditation", which is conducted according to state rules and approved by the government (p.9, article 29). This excludes the option of coordinating the assessment agenda and its criteria with HEIs as set in ESG.

Article 13 dedicated to quality issues does not contain the term 'accreditation'. In turn, it is being absorbed by the term "quality assurance monitoring". Compared with the current Code, the draft Education Code excludes the norm where the Ministry of Education's unit is the only agency that has the right to proceed with HEIs accreditation, which could constitute a positive shift in Belarusian education development in terms of quality assurance. In spite of this, the monitoring activities are delegated only to "authorized governmental bodies" (p.1, article 116), and the only mechanism of obtaining this right is stated in article 116 (p.2) "Governmental bodies authorized to monitor quality assurance in education, its regularity and frequency are determined by the President of the Republic of Belarus".

Article 117 of the draft Education Code defines the term "self-assessment of quality of education" and refers it to HEIs' competences. This reflects the widening of HEIs autonomy but only partially. At the same time, the new edition defines (p.3.5, article 86) "monitoring and assessment materials" as part of research and methodological educational support that has to be developed by research and methodological organizations". This internal instrument could hardly be developed by the national organizations for HEIs with their diversity of programs, disciplines and methodologies.

The draft Education Code does not envisage any direct legislative intervention in regard of guarantee quality of education; neither does it envisage its link to other legislative acts. All measures and procedures for external quality assurance fall under unidentified autho-

rized organizations' competence while at the level of the system itself it falls within the President's powers.

Comparative analysis of the draft Education Code and the current one shows certain steps towards implementing the Roadmap provisions including the transparency of statistical information about the quality assurance monitoring results. At the same time, the new edition neither give quality assurance definition nor sets its goals except reviewing it for "compliance with educational standards' requirements and educational program documentation for a relevant educational program". We can only hope that these requirements will be revised and set in accordance with ESG principles.

Neither are changes in quality assurance practice envisaged. The accreditation system, its regulatory and legislative basis, and licensing procedures remain unchanged. The involvement of foreign experts and cooperation with foreign quality assurance agencies are not envisaged. The Belarusian quality assurance system does not meet ESG requirements because of the absence of National Qualification Framework (NQF) and professional standards built on knowledge, competences and skills obtained. Neither does it use the majority of ENQA criteria. For example, stakeholders do not participate in the quality assurance process, students are not aware of their learning outcomes assessment criteria, the external and internal quality assurance reports are not published, the Department of Quality Assurance of the Ministry of Education does not publish the results of its activities either.

The Department's activities do comply with ESG requirements to a very little extent and have not been revised at all although they could meet ESG requirements even without the Code amendment. Table 1 below shows the level of compliance with ESG requirements by the main indicators [12]:

Table 1

ESG #	Indicator	Need in legislation amendment	Need to change current practice	Compliance with Roadmap requirement
1.10	**Cyclical external quality assurance** Institutions should undergo external quality assurance in line with the ESG on a cyclical basis.	No	No	Yes
2.1	**Consideration of internal quality assurance** External quality assurance should address the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance described in Part 1 of the ESG.	Yes Not taken into account	Yes No practice	No

2.2	**Designing methodologies fit for purpose** External quality assurance should be defined and designed specifically to ensure its fitness to achieve the aims and objectives set for it, while taking into account relevant regulations. Stakeholders should be involved in its design and continuous improvement.	Yes Interested parties are not involved Their goals are not taken into account	Yes	No
2.3	**Implementing process** External quality assurance processes should be reliable, useful, pre-defined, implemented consistently and published. They include: • self-assessment or equivalent; • an external assessment normally including a site visit; • a report resulting from the external assessment; • a consistent follow-up.	Yes In terms of self-assessment	Yes In terms of rechecking data in self-assessment report	No
2.4	**Peer-review experts** External quality assurance should be carried out by groups of external experts that include (a) student member(s).	Yes, in terms of student involvement	Yes, in terms of student involvement	No
2.5.	Criteria for outcomes Any outcomes or judgments made as the result of external quality assurance should be based on explicit and published criteria that are applied consistently, irrespective of whether the process leads to a formal decision.	No	No	Yes
2.6.	**Reporting** Full reports by the experts should be published, clear and accessible to the academic community, external partners and other interested individuals. If the agency takes any formal decision based on the reports, the decision should be published together with the report.	Yes	Yes	No
2.7	**Complaints and appeals** Complaints and appeals processes should be clearly defined as part of the design of external quality assurance processes and communicated to the institutions.	No	No	Yes

3.1	**Activities, policy and processes for quality assurance** Agencies should undertake external quality assurance activities as defined in Part 2 of the ESG on a regular basis. They should have clear and explicit goals and objectives that are part of their publicly available mission statement. These should translate into the daily work of the agency. Agencies should ensure the involvement of stakeholders in their governance and work.	Yes	Yes	No
3.2	**Official status** Agencies should have an established legal basis and should be formally recognized as quality assurance agencies by competent public authorities.	Yes	Yes	No
3.3	I**ndependence** Agencies should be independent and act autonomously. They should have full responsibility for their operations and the outcomes of those operations without third-party influence.	Yes	Yes	No
3.4	**Thematic analysis** Agencies should regularly publish reports that describe and analyze the general findings of their external quality assurance activities.	Yes	Yes	No
3.5	**Resources** Agencies should have adequate and appropriate resources, both human and financial, to carry out their work.	Yes	Yes	No
3.6	**Internal quality assurance and professional conduct** Agencies should have in place processes for internal quality assurance related to defining, assuring and enhancing the quality and integrity of their activities.	Yes	Yes	No
3.7	**Cyclical external review of agencies** Agencies should undergo an external review at least once every five years in order to demonstrate their compliance with the ESG.	Yes	Yes	No

The Republic of Belarus Development Program for 2016-2020 (Program) [13] does not envisage the establishment of an independent quality assurance agency; neither does it align its regulatory framework with ESG provisions.

However, there are some prospects for fulfilling Roadmap requirements albeit with a long-time lag. An important initiative has been taken by the National Higher Education Institutions Council of Rectors at their meeting #4 on July 26, 2017 that was to carry out the analysis of the current quality assurance system in Belarusian HEIs. Its results showed

the need to use ESG recommendations in HEIs practice and in procedures carried out by respective state agencies responsible for quality assurance. Based on that, the Council decided:

– to recommend the Ministry of Education to consider changes into HEIs accreditation procedures in accordance with international practices;

– to work together with the Ministry of Education on establishing a structure responsible for higher education quality assurance in the context of Roadmap provisions;

– to consider the possibility of Belarusian representatives joining European and International Associations.

The outcome of the Council's decision implementation could be Mr. Karpenko, Minister of Education's, statement about the need to establish a Center that will ensure the development of an independent quality assurance system in Belarus, which should become an agency on quality assurance in education. This statement was made at the "National Teachers' Council" meeting on August 24, 2017. According to the Minister, this agency will be established through the merger of the Department of Quality Assurance and the Institute for Knowledge Assessment both subordinated to the Ministry but working on totally different tasks.

Later on, at the Collegium meeting (Minister's speech), the Minister raised the issue of improving the quality of education and listed "Improving the quality of education that meets the personal, societal and country's sustainable development needs" and "Establishing an independent quality assurance system" among its imminent objectives. However, there have not been any actions taken to achieve these objectives. Apparently, the agency's independence, proclaimed by the report, will be related only to HEIs but not to the Ministry of Education, to which this agency will remain subordinated. Thus, the only planned step in implementing the Roadmap provision is to remove the accreditation agency from the Ministry's structure while maintaining its subordination to it.

This move was confirmed by the Independent Belarusian Bologna Committee monitoring of the Roadmap implementation report (Implementation monitoring report) in the final report of which it stated: "the absence of any progress in establishing an independent quality assurance agency and compliance with 4 out of 15 criteria that assumes 30% of ESG standards implementation". Moreover, the compliance reflected in the percentage should not be ever considered as obligations one-third fulfillment. It only shows some similarity with certain ESG provisions. Nevertheless, the Ministry of Education prepared a "Plan for establishing independent higher education quality assurance system", which was approved by Mr. Bogush V.M, the first Deputy to the Minister, on February 14, 2017 and was presented at the seminar "Developing independent quality assurance system" by Titovich I.V, Vice Rector, National Institute for Higher Education, on December 1, 2017 (Plan, NIHE). There is no information available regarding the implementation of this plan.

Based on the above-said, at the Paris Ministerial Summit, the Ministry of Education was able to report on Roadmap provisions implementation by presenting only a draft Action Plan for the Roadmap provisions implementation. This plan and the results of its implementation were discussed at the National HEIs Council of Rectors meeting and led to the

disguised statement of failure, "The participants of National HEIs Council of Rectors meeting noted some progress in implementing certain EHEA principles and instruments within the national education system" [14].

The Belarusian Ministry of Education's actions to implement Roadmap provisions and fulfill its obligations were also negatively received by many interested parties.

For instance, the European Student Union in its Resolution of January 25, 2018 stated that there are no significant changes in the Belarusian higher education system [15]. AG2 final report on the Roadmap provisions implementation also included tasks to be fulfilled in terms of quality assurance, such as:

- Provision of legal basis for the establishment of an independent quality assurance agency that distinguishes assurance activities and quality enhancement activities.
- Drafting of a package of legal documents for implementation of external quality assurance in line with ESG.
- Raising awareness of ESG and its application within higher education institutions.
- Capacity development of an independent quality assurance agency staff.
- Piloting new evaluation procedures.

The too sluggish work on the Roadmap provisions' implementation was reflected in the European Higher Education Area in 2018: Bologna Process Implementation Report (Report-2018) [16], in which Belarus had consistently been shown among the least successful by quality indicators assessment, and there is no mentioning of any progress in improving the situation. It leads to the assumption that submission of relevant information to the Bologna Follow Up Group (BFUG) and other organizations has not been done in a proper manner if at all.

Thus, regarding distance learning programs Belarus (Report - 2018, figure 2.32) was listed among a few other countries where online education is absent at all. Although, Belarusian State University of Informatics and Radioelectronics (BSUIR), Belarusian State University (BSU) and some other HEIs have been offering online education for some time already. Belarus was also not included into the European survey on student satisfaction (Report – 2018, figure 2.38) with the quality of education, either.

Concerning internal quality assurance systems, in Report-1028, Belarus was listed as a country with a lack of legal framework in accordance with which HEIs are obliged to establish and support such systems as well as publish its quality assurance strategies (Figure 1). Herein, Belarus was the only country in Europe where this information is not published.

Lagging behind is quite incomprehensible because progress in this field could be made even without government's or legislator's intervention, especially, having in mind that the internal quality assurance process is partially conducted using QMS based on ISO 9001 and HEIs development plans or programs.

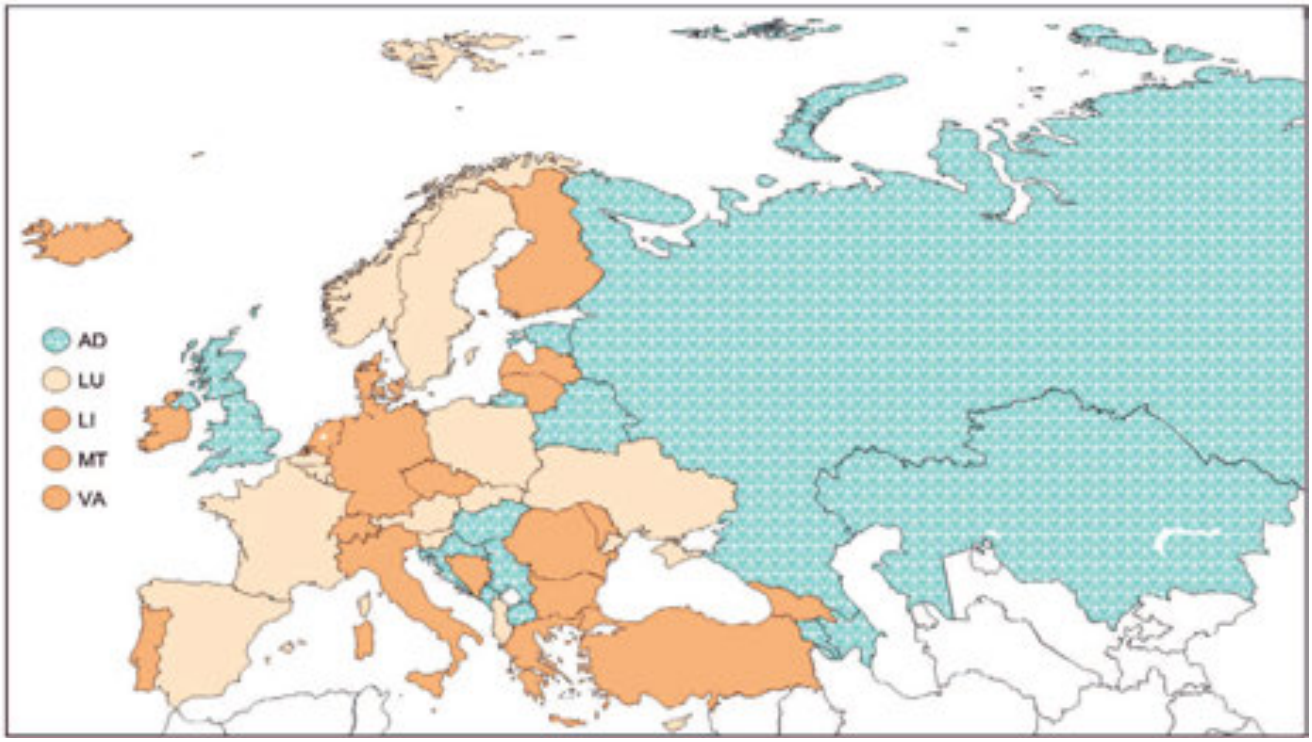

Figure 1 (Figure 4.1, Report – 2018). Requirements for higher education institutions to develop and publish quality assurance strategies, 2016/17: – HEIs are legally required to have a strategy for quality assurance, and to publish it; – HEIs are legally required to have a strategy for quality assurance, but are not required to publish it; – HEIs are not legally required to have a strategy for quality assurance.

Source: BFUG data collection.

Regarding the external quality assurance system, when the Bologna Declaration was signed in 1999, quality assurance systems in higher education were inexistent in most signatory countries but Belarus had already had it. However, during the last two decades, EHEA has significantly progressed in its development: new standards and guidelines for quality assurance criteria are agreed upon and new assessment methods are developed but all of them have steadily been ignored by the Belarusian quality assurance system. As a result, we have a huge gap that demonstrates practically complete incompliance of Belarusian quality assurance system with ESG requirements. This resulted in Belarus being listed as the country that doesn't have external quality assurance system in compliance with ESG (Figure 2).

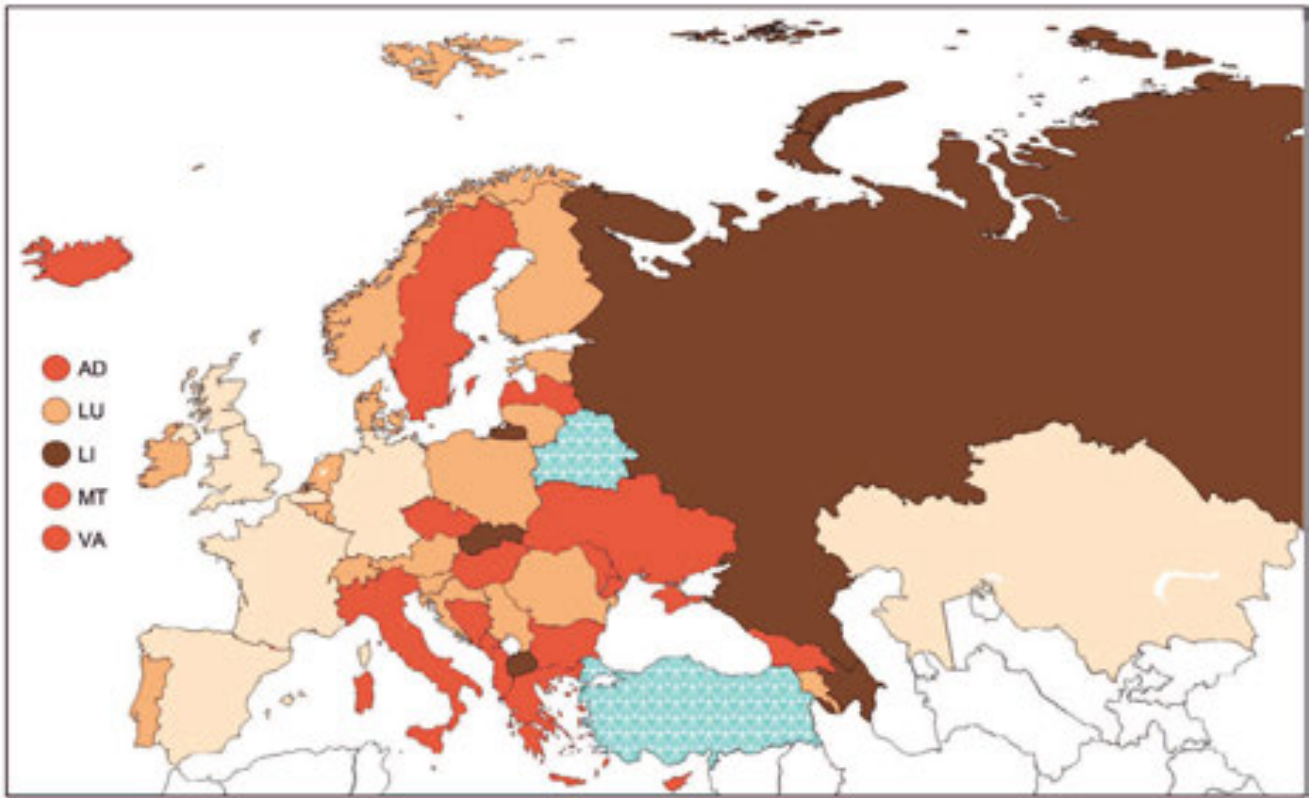

Figure 2 (figure 4.2 Report – 2018) Responsibility for external quality assurance, 2016/17: – Government/government body; – Single EQAR registered agency/agencies; – Several EQAR registered agencies; – Agency not registered on EQAR; – No external quality assurance system.
Source: BFUG data collection.

Much attention in EHEA is also given to quality assurance and accreditation agencies' powers while Belarus maintains an outdate system where the government or a state body is directly responsible for the quality assurance process.

Besides, the Belarusian Ministry of Education has also not been capable to resolve the issue of student participation in quality assurance process for many years (Figure 3 shows that along with Belarus, Bulgaria and Montenegro do not include students into the quality assurance process). It is also applicable to other higher education stakeholders' participation in this process, for example, the employer (Figure 4).

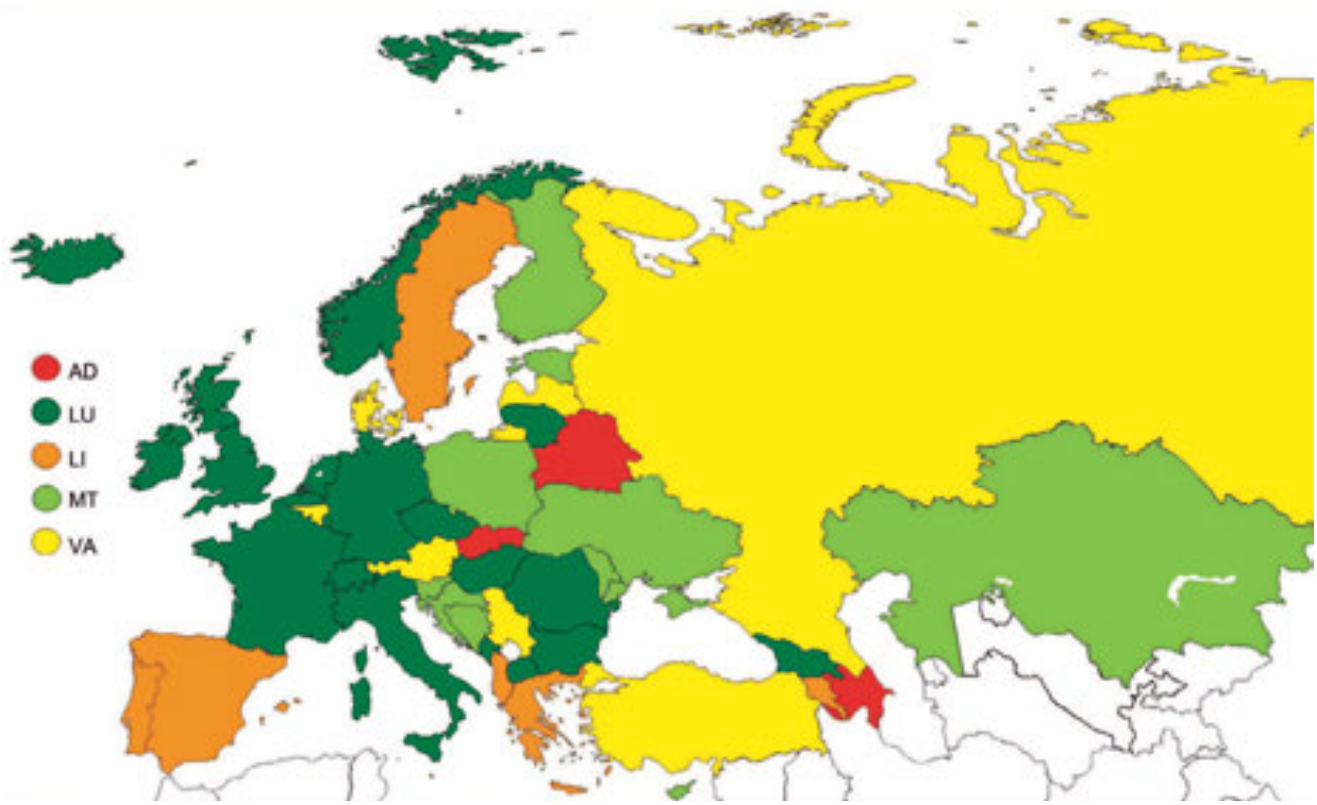

Figure 3 (figure 4.6 Report – 2018) Level of student participation in external quality assurance system, 2016/17: – In all quality assurance reviews, students participate as full members at five levels (in governance structures of national quality assurance agencies; in external review teams; in the preparation of self-evaluation reports; in the decision-making process for external reviews; in follow-up procedures); – students participate at four of the five levels mentioned above; – students participate at three of the five levels mentioned above; – students participate at two of the five levels mentioned above; – students cannot participate or participate at only one level mentioned above.

Source: BFUG data collection.

Here, Belarus is among those countries that involve students into the external quality assurance process, which does not match the reality and is contrary to the current regulatory legal framework. Students could have been involved into this process at the self-assessment stage but it does not include those sections where students' competences are concerned.

Figure 4 (Fig. 4.7, Report-2018) Required involvement of employers in quality assurance governance bodies and external review teams, 2016/17: ■ – Compulsory involvement of employers in QA governance bodies; ■ – Compulsory involvement of employers in QA external review teams; ■ – Involvement of employers is not a requirement.

Source: BFUG data collection.

The situation with involving foreign experts into the external quality assurance process is similar to the one we have with students' participation. Belarus simply does not invite anyone (fig. 4.8, Report-2018).

Report-2018 also confirms that Belarus failed to progress in establishing a reliable quality assurance system fully aligned with ESG -2015 (fig. 4.10, Report-2018).

The Report-2018 conclusions resulted in the final Communiqué of Paris Ministerial Summit specifying tasks to be fulfilled by the Belarusian side in order to meet EHEA quality assurance requirements (Appendix II – Belarus strategy. Communiqué 2018):

"The Republic of Belarus has developed the concept of establishing the national independent system of higher education quality assurance. Taking that into consideration, measures shall be taken to further improve the procedures of internal quality assurance in HEIs by 2020 and to develop a legal framework for the activities of an independent quality assurance agency with the purpose of launching its full-scale practical activities by 2022.

The activities aimed at establishing the independent higher education quality assurance system and preparing the national independent quality assurance agency to associate with ENQA/EQAR will be carried out in compliance with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG-2015).

International experts/consultants, first of all, ENQA/EQAR representatives, will be asked

to advise on implementing measures that are specified in the "Action Plan on Development of Independent Higher Education Quality Assurance System of the Republic of Belarus" (adopted 14.02.2017). The development and capacity building of the quality assurance system and activities of the national agency will cover all levels of education" [17].

Thus, the Belarusian quality assurance system in higher education remains at the old level far from Bologna process principles. This frozen situation is not acceptable in conditions of the fast transformation of the entire higher education system and leads to the decline of the quality of education because, as a matter of fact, education system management assesses not HEIs performance but their own efforts for supporting them. Indeed, accreditation procedures primarily envisage the assessment of indicators related to financial and tangible means that are actually regulated by the state instead of concentrating on the discussion of the quality assurance development strategy and of monitoring its results, which are more likely to be hidden from the Peer-review Committee because its faults would be looked at as HEI's fault and not as opportunities for further development. Students' learning outcomes assessment is conducted to show that it is done accompanied by massive training in solving those tasks that are included in the test. The quality of educational programs is assessed against formal requirements rather than content and relevancy. The learning outcomes are not assessed as competences acquired, etc. The transition to a shorter period of study at the first cycle of education and a gradual, albeit very slow, second cycle of education development requires the replacement of the quality assurance paradigm, differentiation of approaches to HEIs, different specialties groups', and levels of education. It is impossible to continue ignoring employers' and students' positions and opinions when conducting quality assurance and to continue pushing for state's and individual HEIs' interests. In this regard, the draft Education Code still presents a hopeless old quality assurance system, and is just the first and not a very complicated step of this system's reform process. The introduction of new approaches and methods into practice could be met with misunderstanding and rejection by the government bodies responsible for financing education and regulating labour market as well as by all governmental bodies, which consider that problems with the quality of education are solely problems of the education system itself.

Aligning the Belarusian quality assurance system with ESG-2015 requirements, not being an end in itself, has not yet led to understanding that these recommendations are just a minimal set of requirements complying with which it is possible to provide the country with so-long-thought-of level of quality. ESG-2015 in itself is a set of conclusions and recommendations resulting from the long-standing analysis of national and international quality assurance systems' actions.

6.2. Recognition of qualification, study periods and previous education

The issues of recognition of foreign qualifications had been constantly the concern of the Belarusian government. Upon acquiring independence the former USSR Republics required to streamline their relations in regulating national labour markets, thus, making national legislations adhere to new realities.

The first step was made in 1991 by approving Belarusian Education Code (# 1202-XII, Article 14) that entrusted the responsibility for the recognition of foreign qualifications to the Ministry of Education. However, the issue of academic degree recognition was attributed to the competence of the High Attestation Commission (HAC) (Decrees #564 and #563 of September 18, 1992).

The problem of mutual recognition of official documents on education of any level including academic degrees and retraining from Soviet times and during the first few years of post-Soviet existence was solved by the "Agreement on cooperation in education" signed by the Commonwealth of Independent States' (CIS) heads on May 15, 1992 in Tashkent. The Agreement (article 5) confirmed unidentified timeframe for the recognition of awarded qualifications and academic degrees prior to 1991 as well as future recognition of qualifications on the basis of bilateral or other agreements (Decree of the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Belarus #466 from July 14, 1993). Since then, Belarus has signed the recognition agreements with dozens of countries. The Decree of Belarus Cabinet of Ministers (#243 of April 5, 1996) sealed HAC powers to proceed with the recognition of foreign academic degrees. This Decree also automatically recognized "Ph.D. (kandidat nauk) and Doctoral degrees, professors and associate professors' certificates issued by former USSR countries and Russian Federation attestation bodies".

In the years that followed, Belarus became a member of the European Network of Information Centres (ENIC) and the National Academic Recognition Information Centres (NARIC) established by the Council of Europe and UNESCO in 1994 to develop and implement procedures for the recognition of foreign qualifications. Another important step in developing Belarusian recognition of foreign qualifications systems was its joining Lisbon Recognition Convention (LRC, ETS #165) in 2002 (Belarusian President's Decree #5 of January 4, 2002).

Despite the above-said, Law "On Education (part 2, article 38, #252-3 of July 11, 2007) yet again reassigned the function of recognition of foreign qualifications to the Ministry of Education but this was not extended to academic degrees; their recognition procedure remained under HAC.

The modern terms and conditions for the recognition of foreign academic degrees was approved by Belarusian President's Decree in 2004 (#560 of November 17, 2004) in the form of "Provisions on awarding academic degrees and academic titles in the Republic of Belarus" where chapter 12 envisaged foreign academic degree nostrification (recognition) procedure as subject to an intergovernmental agreement or re-certification in other cases.

Until 2008, the recognition of foreign qualifications except academic degrees was done in accordance with international agreements' provisions by the National Institute for Higher Education (NIHE) where one of its units played the role of Belarusian ENIC, on behalf of the Ministry of Education. In 2008, in order to provide transparency of recognition processes, the Council of Ministers (Decree # 68B of January 18, 2008) approved the "Regulation on the procedure of confirming the equivalence of documents on education, of recognition and determination of periods of study and higher education courses, and of

confirmation of higher education degrees of the Republic of Belarus and other countries" developed in accordance with LRC [18].

The Belarusian Education Code (# 243-3 of January 13, 2011, Article 102) confirmed the Ministry of Education's role in the recognition process and defined the term "recognition" – "Recognition of foreign qualifications and confirmation of their equivalence to the documents on education of the Republic of Belarus is to grant the holders of these documents equal rights – just like those who hold the documents on education of the Republic of Belarus". At the same time, the recognition of foreign academic degrees as the outcome of completing Ph.D. (aspirantura) or Doctorate study referred to as post-graduate study, has remained the prerogative of HAC (Article 218).

In spite of what has been mentioned above, some concerns are expressed in relation to the recognition of postgraduate study, in particular the Ph.D. (aspirantura) degree. The Education Code allows awarding the qualification of "Researcher" to those who successfully completed the study at the Ph.D. level and award them the relevant degree (article 98). Its status has an uncertain value and this qualification is not referred to in any other official documents. On the one hand, the qualification "Researcher" means the completion of higher education study but, on the other hand, the targeted qualification of the third cycle of education in the form of scientific degree is regulated by another document and has a different procedure. The latter is under the HAC supervision and has another procedure for the learning outcome assessment such as dissertation defence and is unrelated to the education process and final thesis defence at other levels of education. This creates difficulties for recognizing the third cycle degree of Belarusian higher education abroad. Formally, the qualification of "Researcher" should be the same as Ph.D. or its equivalent but there is no internal recognition of this degree; thus, its recognition abroad becomes impossible.

From this perspective, we can conclude that Belarus has a working system of recognition of foreign qualification in accordance with international agreements, in particular, LRC although it does not fully comply with them. The Independent Belarusian Bologna Committee's monitoring of the Roadmap provisions' implementation in 2015-2017 reconfirmed the latter [19].

The Roadmap provisions envisaged that Belarus would:

"By the end of 2016, review legislation and practice with a view to identifying any modifications needed to bring them into conformity with the obligations undertaken by Belarus as a State party to the Lisbon Recognition Convention.

By the end of 2017, implement any required modification of practice that does not require amending legislation.

By the end of 2017, develop a timetable for the implementation of required legislative modifications".

However, there is no published information on the results of assessment of legislation and its application in practice. No amendments of current legislative acts were made.

The draft Education Code (article 114) establishes the rule where the study period determination falls under the competence of HEIs. However, this article does not link it to ECTS, which in current practice leads to formal calculation of the time that students

spent at another HEIs, but does not lead to recognizing their learning outcomes even in the framework of official mobility programs.

Neither does the draft Education Code settle the situation with additional and informal study abroad. The internal mobility is excluded from it because of the uncertainly with study period recognition. Nor is there legislative framework for refugees' education recognition. The recognition process excludes the qualification recognition awarded after completion of the third cycle of education because it is subject to other laws than legislation on education. The qualification "Researcher" does not have any value at the internal labour market and as a result can't be a case for recognition abroad. The recognition of the foreign academic degree (Ph.D., Doctorate) is within the competence of HAC and lies outside the education legislation scope.

Despite these shortcomings, the Republic of Belarus' Development Program for Education for 2016-2020 does not propose any changes in the recognition of foreign qualification procedures.

The Ministry of Education's guidance letter "On education process organization in higher education institutions for 2017/2018" (#08-19-5447 of August 23, 2017) does not envisage any changes in the legislation and practice of recognition of foreign qualifications.

In 2017 Belgian (Flemish) ENIC/NARIC [20] conducted the assessment of Belarusian ENIC. With a positive overall assessment, the peer reviewers made some recommendations and suggestions that were reflected in AG2 final report [20] presented at the Paris Ministerial Summit in 2018. Belarusian counterparts did not publish the assessment report and it is not available to the public.

Having in mind Belarusian ENIC inaction, both achievements and shortcomings of the Roadmap provisions' implementation were presented in Report-2018 [21], in AG2 final report and in Appendix II – Belarus strategy to Summit's Communiqué [22], in which the goals to improve recognition procedures were set and the following actions should be taken:

"By 2019:

– Measures will be taken to facilitate the information support of ENIC Belarus activities (presenting information about ENIC Belarus activities in English);

– The legal framework for the procedure of prior learning recognition and the procedure of recognition of these qualifications will be developed;

– The procedure of recognition of refugees' qualifications will be developed".

The set goals are achievable and must be reflected in the new Education Code.

The current situation in the Belarusian system of recognition of foreign qualifications is presented in Report – 2018 (Chapter 4) [23]. The keys issues here as well as before were compliance with and application of Lisbon Recognition Convention, transparency of recognition procedures and its compliance with Bologna process principles. The report's authors analyzed how the main principles of the LRC are specified in national legislation. The principles highlighted in the indicator are that 1) applicants have the right to fair assessment; 2) recognition takes place if no substantial differences can be proved; 3) legislation or guidelines encourage comparison of learning outcomes rather than program contents; 4) in cases of negative decisions the competent recognition authority demonstrates the existence

of substantial difference; 5) applicant's right to appeal the recognition decision. Figure 5 (figure 4.13, Report -2018) shows these indicators' implementation in EHEA countries.

Figure 5. Principles of the Lisbon Recognition Convention in national legislation, 2016/17: ■ – All five LRC principles specified in national legislation; ■ – Four of the principles specified in national legislation; ■ – One to three of the principles specified in national legislation; ■ – None of the principles specified in national legislation.

Source: BFUG data collection.

Belarus was included into the first group of most successful countries where national legislation provisions are in compliance with the LRC principle. This arouses doubts regarding compliance with the 3rd principle because Belarusian ENIC can't carry out the learning outcomes assessment simply because of inexistence of this term in Belarusian legislation.

It seems that EHEA also has some difficulties with implementing standards1.4 of the ESG, which refer to student admission, progression, recognition and certification, specify the importance of fair recognition of higher education qualifications, periods of study and prior learning, including the recognition of non-formal and informal learning. With the adoption of the ESG in Yerevan (2015), there has been an additional strengthening of the link between quality assurance and recognition. Figure 6 (figure 4.14, Report – 2018) examines whether this ESG standard is now monitored through external quality assurance procedures.

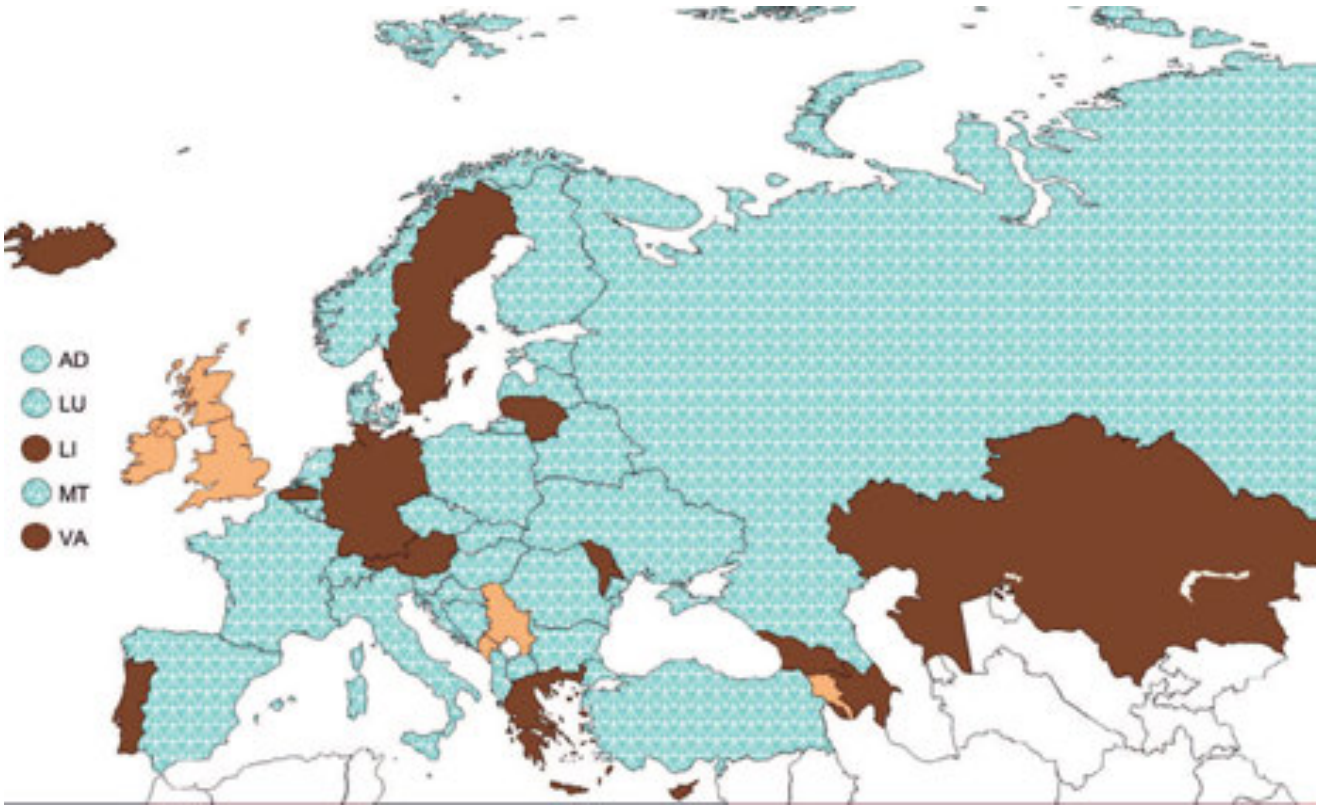

Figure 6. Principles of the Lisbon Recognition Convention monitored in external quality assurance, 2016/17: ■ – Legal requirement; ■ – No legal requirement, but usually happens; ▨ – No legal requirement, and would be unusual practice.

Source: BFUG data collection.

Figure 7 (figure 4.15, Report – 2018) shows that in the majority of EHEA countries HEIs are responsible for taking final decisions on recognition of foreign qualifications for academic purposes. Belarus was included into this list, which is a mistake because according to the Education Code, this is a prerogative of the Ministry of Education.

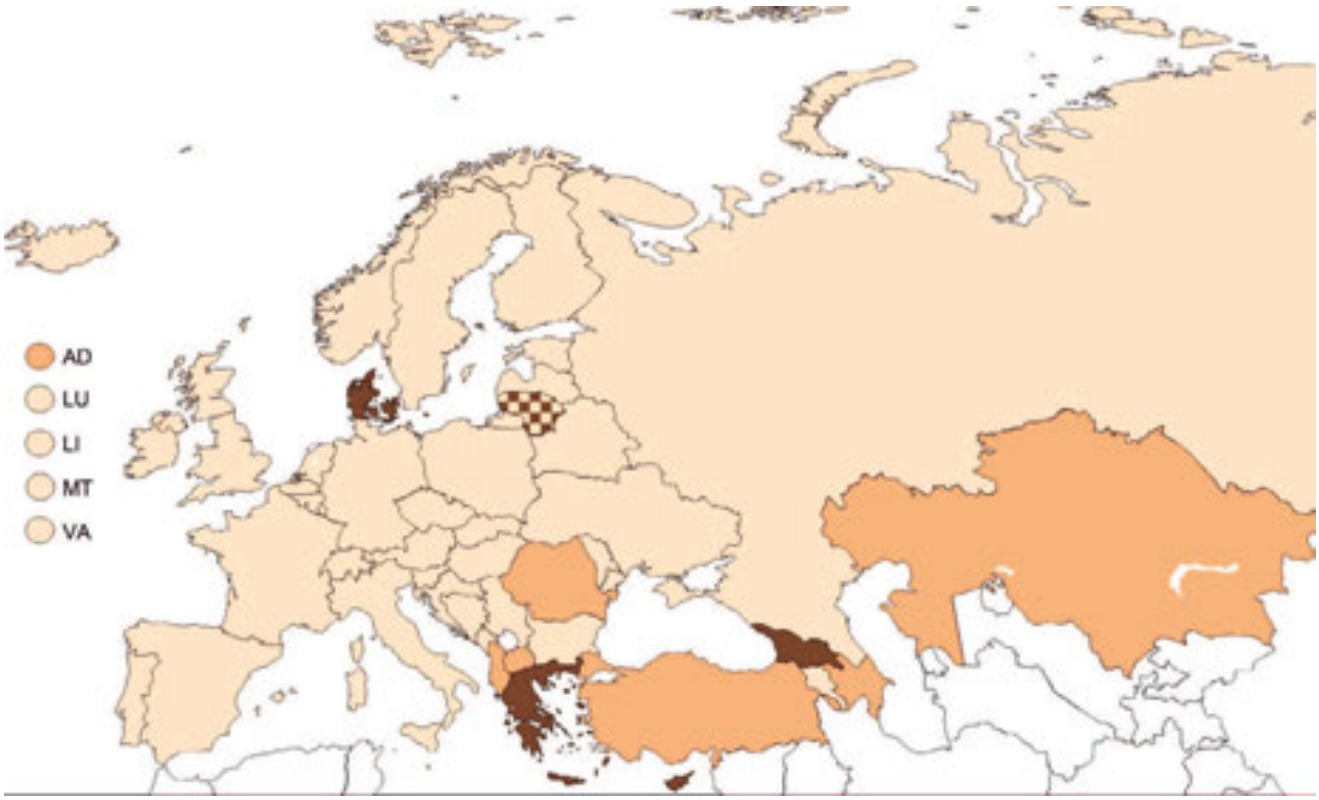

Figure 7. Institution which makes final decisions on recognizing foreign qualifications for academic purposes, 2016/17: – Government responsibility; – ENIC/NARIC centre or other body; – Higher education institutions.
Source: BFUG data collection.

Despite many EHEA positive developments, the 'automatic recognition' of foreign qualifications was not yet ensured. In many EHEA countries including Belarus, foreign qualifications are not recognized automatically (Figure 8 (figure 4.17, Report – 2018)). Automatic recognition is in place if the following conditions are met:

1. National legislation has been reviewed and, if necessary, modified to ensure that the principles of LRC are respected,
2. HEIs or recognition bodies receive clear guidance on implementing the principles of the LRC properly,
3. Recognition decisions are taken within a four-month limit,
4. Appeals procedures are in place, and decided within a clear and reasonable time limit,
5. Recognition practice in HEIs is monitored by external Quality Assurance (QA) in line with the ESG 2015.

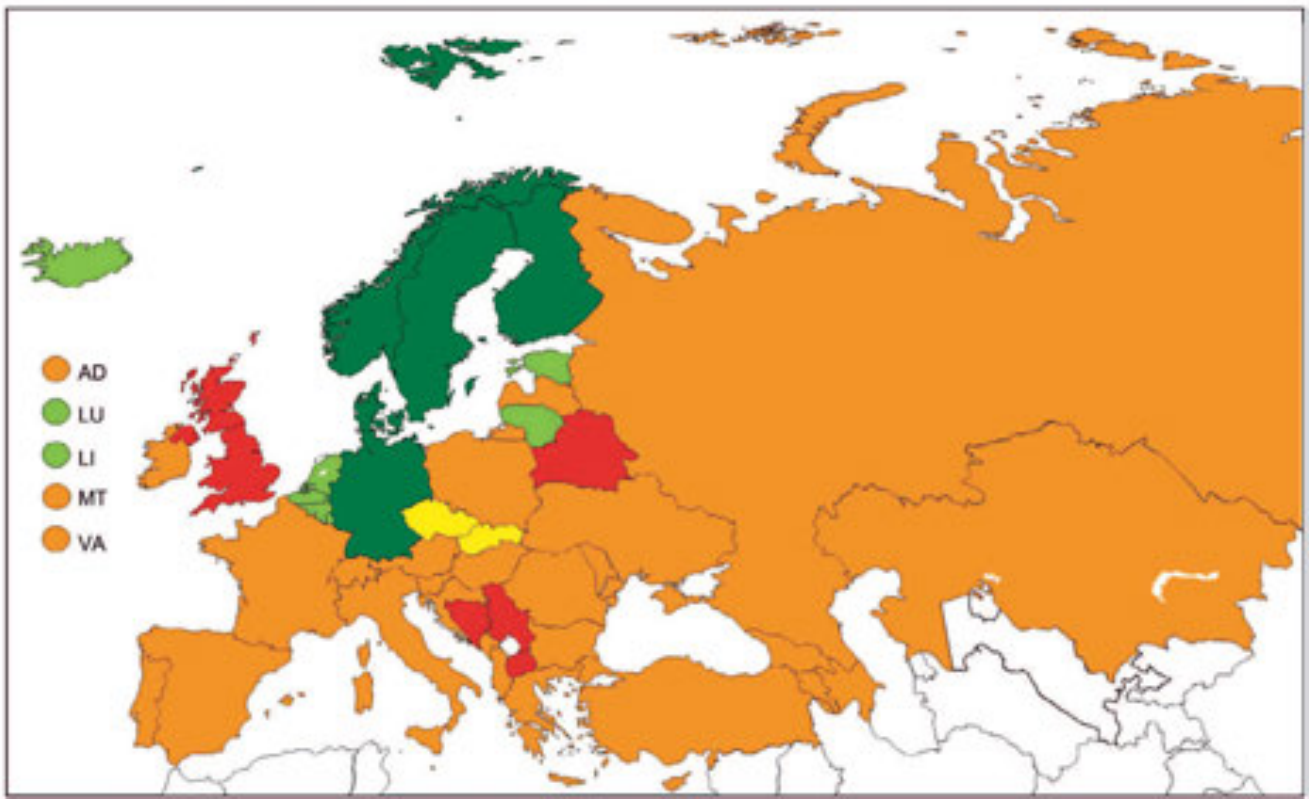

Figure 8. System level (automatic) recognition for academic purposes, 2016/17:
■ - Automatic recognition is in place, meaning that all higher education qualifications issued in other EHEA countries are recognised at system level on an equal level with comparable academic qualifications in the home country and give the right to be considered for entry to a program of further study at the next level. All of the conditions apply to recognition practice, ■ - Automatic recognition is in place for a subset of EHEA countries. All of the conditions apply to recognition practice, ■ - Automatic Recognition at system level takes place with a subset of European countries. For qualifications from other countries some but not all of the conditions apply to recognition practice, ■ - There is no automatic recognition. At least two of the conditions apply to recognition practice, ■ - There is no automatic recognition. Less than two of the conditions apply to recognition practice.
Source: BFUG data collection.

Evidently, Belarus can ensure and implement automatic recognition of foreign qualifications at least for those countries with which we have signed agreements. Besides, principles 2, 3 and 4 could be implemented in practice without waiting for approval of the new Education Code, which could incorporate all the 5 above-mentioned principles but none of drafts has it included.

In recent years, Europe has faced the problem of qualifications recognition of refugees, displaced persons and persons in a refugee-like situation. The recognition procedure of qualification of those individuals that have been fleeing from conflict zones becomes challenging. It is often associated with the lack of information on legal obligation and impossibility of obtaining any information on their prior qualifications. In such cases, article VII of the LRC serves as a framework for developing good practice. With the emerging crises in recognizing the qualification of refugees, the Committee of the Convention of the Rec-

ognition of Qualifications worked on adjusting article VII to current situation that led to adopting additional recommendations to resolve the tension in 2017 [24].

The Belarusian "Law on Refugees" (#3605-XII of February 22, 1995) does not mention the issue of recognition of their foreign qualifications. The Education Code (article 7) gives the refugees, permanently living in the Republic of Belarus, the "right to education equal to citizens of the Republic of Belarus". Thus, the shortcomings of Belarusian legislation on this matter underlined in the 2016 monitoring report on LRC principles implementation and in the Report – 2018 (figure 9 (figure 4.18, Report – 2018)) should be promptly resolved within the limits of the Ministry of Education powers.

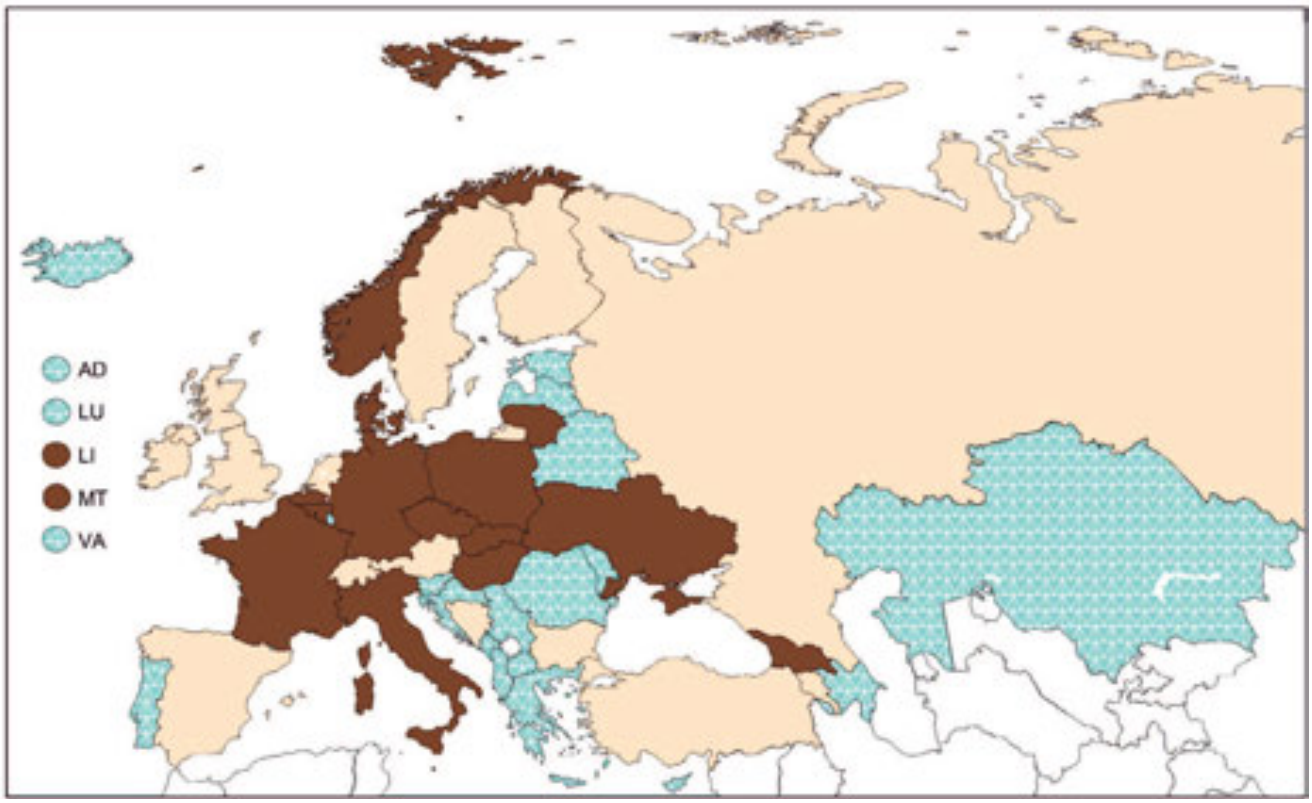

Figure 9. Implementation of Article VII of the LRC at national level, 2016/17:
■ - Legally required, ■ - Not legally required, but procedures are in place, ▨ - Not legally required, and procedures are not in place.
Source: BFUG data collection.

This peer-review shows that the provisions of the Roadmap and the requirements set in the 2018 Paris Ministerial Summit final Communiqué quite correspond to the real situation in Belarus as well as to EHEA development trends. We can also state that the Belarusian system of recognition of foreign qualification existing since 1996 requires some modernization but it is not inferior to some of EHEA countries systems.

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Chapter 7. Higher Education Institutions Graduates Employability Problems: Belarus in Focus of EHEA Indicators

Employability problems of higher education institutions graduates are in the focus of European countries education policy and especially of Bologna member states, which track pan-European trends and countries' specifics based on expert analysis of education development by key indicators. With Belarus' admission to Bologna, we have a possibility to look at graduates' employability problems analyzed by corresponding EHEA indicators but also in cross-country perspective. This study presents the opinion based on The European Higher Education Area in 2018. Bologna Process Implementation Report (Report – 2018) [1], Advisory Group 2 final report 'Support for the Belarus Roadmap' (AG2) [2], Education at a Glance analytical review (EG) [3] as well as on the official statistics data available and on the results of official and independent experts' studies.

7.1. Scope, limitations and study aim

Before we analyze the situation with graduates' employability in Belarus according to EHEA indicators, we would like to underline a few factors defining Belarus case specifics and those limitations and misrepresentations that anyone conducting such analysis is facing.

The first is related to key (methodology-wise) interpretation of employability. In EHEA graduates' work placement is understood as employability (the possibility to be employed) or, in other words, 'the ability to receive the first work place or to become self-employed, keep employment, being able to move freely within the available labor market' [4]. In the framework of such understanding of employability, the higher education role is to 'provide students with knowledge, skills and competences needed at work place and are required by the employer as well as to guarantee them the possibility of maintaining or improving their skills and competences through their term of employment' [5]. Based on this definition it is clear that employability is not identical to employment.

In the Republic of Belarus, work placement is mainly understood as employment and carried out through the work placement procedure: compulsory in case of those whose education is financed by public funds and possible in case of those who study on tuition fee basis. Divergence in terminology and understanding of employability as employment are the symptoms of deeper methodological differences both in graduates' employability analysis and in the state policy to increase their work placement opportunities.

No less significant are the differences in the classification of education levels in accordance with International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) 2011 and the Education Code of the Republic of Belarus (2011). In case of ISCED level 0-4 (in Belarusian education system - from pre-school education to the XIth year of secondary education, college or professional secondary education institution) in principle [6], international and Belarusian systems match but there are nuances in ISCED level 5-6. So, in accordance with

current Belarusian Education Code, the professional secondary education, in spite of its name, could be classified as ISCED 4 ("post-secondary but not higher education"). Higher education (ISCED 5-7) starts from ISCED 6 ("specialist" or/and "bachelor") while "the short cycle of higher education" (ISCED 5) is not present in the Belarusian education system. However, in Belarus the first cycle of tertiary education system (ISCED 6) still keeps the Soviet notion of being called 'specialist', which unites two sublevels of higher education – ISCED 6 ("bachelor") and ISCED 7 ("master"). This, in turn, makes the collection of differentiated data on sublevels ("bachelor" and "master") of tertiary higher education system and its analysis difficult [7]. Finally, the last level of tertiary education system ISCED 8 (Ph.D. [aspirantura] and Doctoral programs) is called "postgraduate" (art.12) in current Education Code (2011) that is in effect at the moment when this analysis was written. This means that this level of tertiary higher education system is outside the country's higher education system in general [8]. In fairness, it should be noted that the new draft Education Code (2018) suggests bringing back the second level of tertiary higher education system and calling it "research-oriented professional education". However, AG2 experts rightly pointed out that the content and timing problems for coordinating the existing Belarusian levels of higher education ("specialist", "bachelor", "master", "Ph.D." and "Doctoral") with EHEA education cycles (ISCED 6 – "bachelor", ISCED 7 – 'master" and ISCED 8 "doctoral") remain open [9].

The third, and not the least important factor is incompatibility of data presented in Report -2018 and Belarus' official data available for public access. For instance, Report -2018 presents the unemployment rate for people aged 20-34 while the Belarusian National Statistic Committee (NSC) aggregates data by the level of education and not by age. For higher education graduates Report – 2018 gives the information on unemployment only for the first cycle of education – 'bachelor" (3,3%) while the NSC website shows 14.6% for higher education graduates of all age groups (without differentiation by level of higher education). However, in accordance with the Report -2018 Belarus along with Island and Lithuania are those few countries, which don't have data on master programs graduates' unemployment [10]. Thus, the question arises based on what data and from what sources 3.3% of unemployment rate among bachelor programs graduates was calculated to be included into Report -2018 and how it corresponds with NSC data.

Due to the above-mentioned incomparability of data and analysis methods in Report-2018, the information for a number of indicators measuring unemployment rate among Belarusian university graduates is either not available or questionable because databases are not accessible. The persistent shortage of information on the methods how this data is collected and analyzed is also in place. Here is the list of key indicators on which there is no information available and the absence of which leads to misunderstanding and misinterpretation of the situation with: Belarusian university graduates work placement; level of unemployment among people with higher education in terms of time since graduation; level of unemployment among people with higher education in terms of time since graduation by sex; level of unemployment among people with higher education by specialty; income level based on education; risk of being below the living threshold by the level of education; over- qualified workforce by specialty.

Finally, attention should be paid to the fact that it is very difficult to access available databases based on Report – 2018 indicators. It is also coupled with considerable time to be spent on official requests (the feedback on official request takes up to 14 days to obtain) and with expenses (state statistics agencies and centers charge fees for provided information).

All the above-mentioned circumstances have caused a number of limitations and set a specific research goal within the framework of Report-2018 indicators: to create a more relevant understanding of reality. We will mark all 'gaps' (data shortage and/or lack of information about analysis methods) as well as possible misrepresentation of information submitted for Report-2018. We will also provide comments or working hypotheses based on available data where possible. This approach can be a starting point to revise data and its further relevant analysis.

7.2. Graduates of higher education institutions in the labor market

7.2.1. Belarusian higher education graduates' unemployment rate and unemployment ratio

The key index for graduate work placement analysis is 'unemployment', which is measured by two parameters: unemployment rate and unemployment ratio.

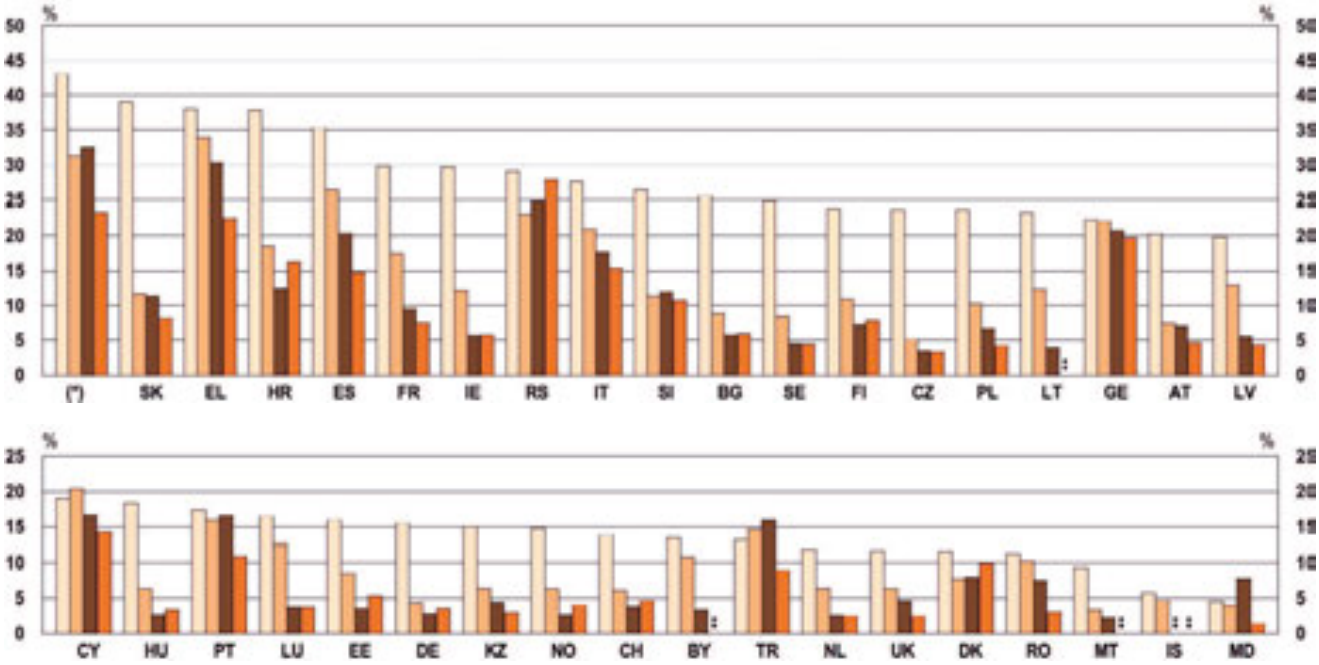


Figure 1. Unemployment rate of people aged 20-34 by educational attainment level (%), 2016: : – Low level; – Medium level; – Bachelor; – Masters.
(*): the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.
Source: IR 2018, P. 217

The data presented in Figure1 shows that Belarus is among 3 EHEA countries with the highest gap by unemployment rate between people with bachelor and medium qualifica-

tion level: Luxembourg (3.7% vs 12.5%), Belarus (3.3% vs 10.8%) and Lithuania (4.0% vs 12.4%) [11].

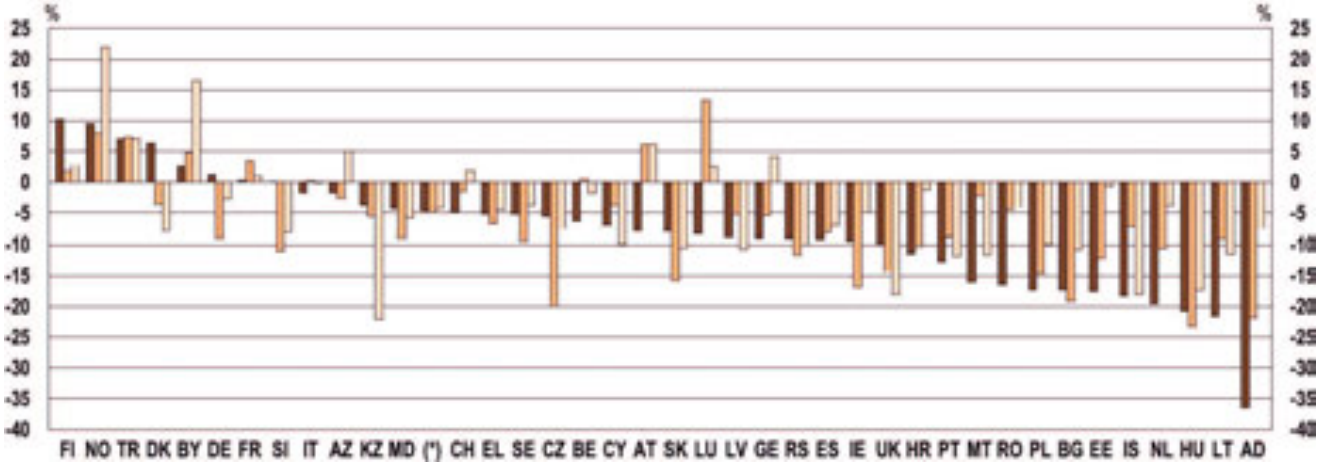


Figure 2. Compound annual growth of unemployment rate by educational attainment (%), 2013-2016: – High level; – Medium level; – Low level.

Notes: The unemployment ratio is calculated as the share of the unemployed at the total population of a given educational attainment level and age group.

Data are sorted by the growth rate of unemployment of the highly educated.

EHEA: Refers to the EHEA median, which was calculated based on countries with available data for all levels of education.

Source: IR 2018, P. 218

Figure 2 shows that during 2013-2016, Belarus was not only able to stop the growth of unemployment across all target groups (unemployment growth rate among people with high educational attainment was 2.6%, with secondary – 4.7%) but together with Norway (22%) demonstrated the highest unemployment growth rate among people with secondary level of educational attainment (16%) [12]. If we compare the growth rate of unemployment for a longer period of time (2000-2017), then the dynamic of unemployment growth rate among people with higher education will become even more evident: the share of unemployed people with higher education among all those registered with labour, employment and social protection agencies for the last 17 years has doubled – from 7.6% in 2000 to 14.6% in 2017 [13].

7.2.2. Qualification specifics (vertical) mismatch in Belarus

Figure 3 shows that in Belarus the density of people with higher education performing the task of the 3rd level in accordance with International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISCO) is lower (17.1%) than in Kazakhstan (20.3%) but higher than in Lithuania (14.3%). This certifies not only the high demand for higher education but also speaks of more significant gaps between 1-2 and 4-9 ISCO levels required by the Belarusian labour market.

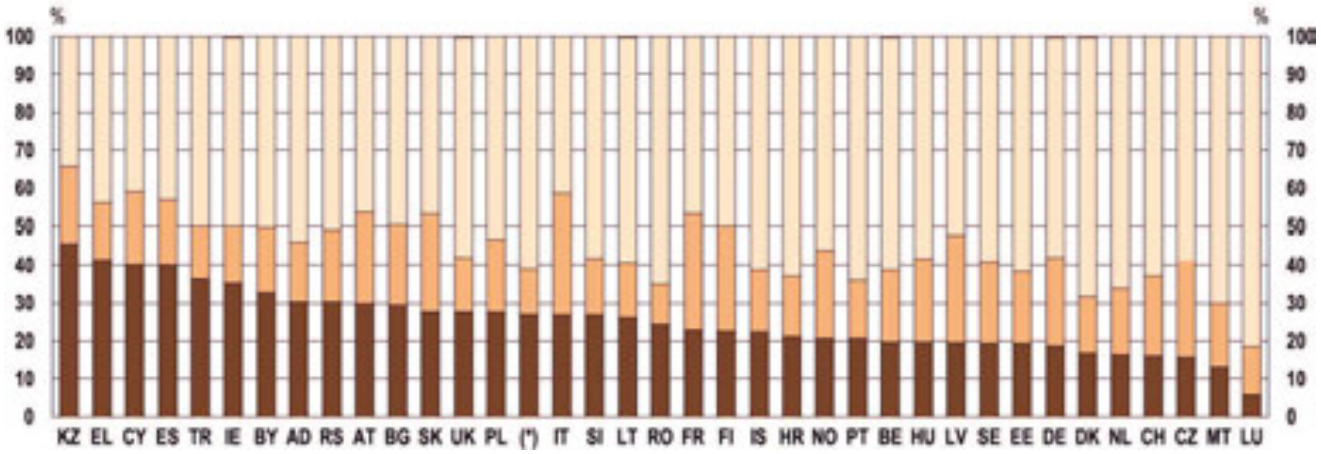


Figure 3. Distribution of people with tertiary education (ISCED 6-8) aged 25-34 and employed in ISCO 1 or 2 (legislators, senior official, managers and professionals), in ISCO 3 (technicians and associate professionals) and in ISCO 4-9 (%), 2016 – ISCO 1 or 2; – ISCO 3; – ISCO 4 to 9.

Source: Eurostat, Labour Force Survey (LFS) and additional collection for the other EHEA countries.

Notes: ISCO 0 (armed forces) and ISCO missing excluded.

Data are sorted by the percentage of people working in ISCO 4 to 9.

Source: IR 2018, P. 226

Figure 4 illustrates the change in share of over-qualified young graduates between 2013 and 2016 by EHEA country.

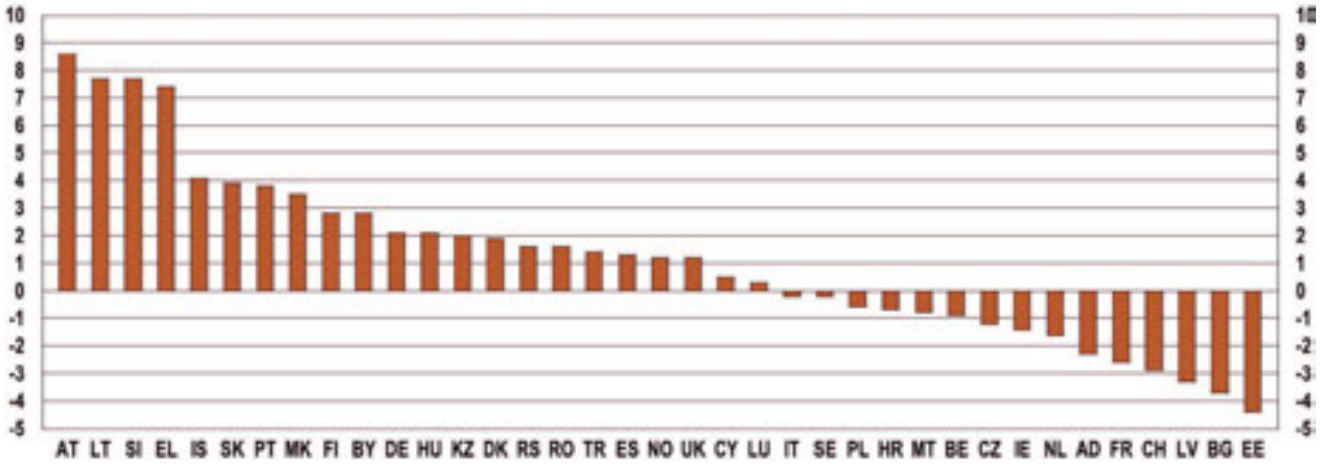


Figure 4. Change in percentage point (pp) of the share of people with tertiary education (ISCED 5-8) aged 25-34 and employed in ISCO 4-9, 2013 to 2016.

Source: Eurostat, Labour Force Survey (LFS) and additional collection for the other EHEA countries.

Notes: Data are sorted by the change in percentage points between 2013 and 2016.

EHEA: Refers to the EHEA median, which was calculated based on countries with available data for both reference years.

Source: IR 2018, P. 227

Unfortunately, in Belarus there is a tendency of the growth of the share of over-qualified graduates from 30pp in 2013 to 32.8pp in 2016. The growth rate of over-qualified graduates in Belarus has been 2 times more significant than on average in EHEA countries (2.8pp vs 1.2pp) for the stated period.

However, the presence of the high level of over-qualification in Belarus doesn't eliminate problems of mismatch between knowledge and skills obtained at universities and demands of labour market. The survey data collected by the World Bank experts in 2008-2009, is indicative in this case: Belarusian companies are not able to find employees with the 'right' skills even in those cases where there is a significant number of specialists with higher education degrees (Fig.5). Belarus had the highest percentage of such companies at that time.

Figure 5. Allocation of companies in Europe and Central Asia that consider employees' skills as 'key' and 'very significant' restraining factor, 2008.

Source: World Bank 2011

Answering the question about possible reasons, at that time, World Bank experts noted that "skills mismatch is also obvious in the agricultural sector where ¼ of employees has a higher or professional education and could possibly find better employment in more promising economic sectors but they don't do this. This could also be partially related to the quality of education, the mismatch between skills demand and supply is also the result of inefficient resources allocation (in particular, human resources) when a significant part of workforce including highly qualified persons is held at state owned enterprises" [14]. Recent polls conducted by the Research Center RABOTA.TUT.BY [15] and the Belarusian Institute for Strategic Studies [16] show that there has still been a shortage of qualified workforce even in shrinking labour market over the past 3 years.

If we compare the data and conclusions made by World Bank experts 10 years ago and relevant data in Report-2018 as well as actual education and labor market assessment results conducted by independent experts, we can formulate the working hypothesis: the mismatch between education services and labour markets during the existence of the independent state that has arisen in post-Soviet period has aggravated and led to the rupture of two poorly coordinated with each other coordinate systems – the one that exists in the higher education system and produces over-qualified workforce and the other that operates in labor market and diagnoses constant shortage of qualified workforce even among people possessing such qualification.

7.2.3. Graduate over-qualification by sex: the problem of male over-qualification

EHEA countries' differences between the over-qualification rates of female and male graduates are relatively small, though women are more likely to get jobs under the level of their qualification (see Figure 6).

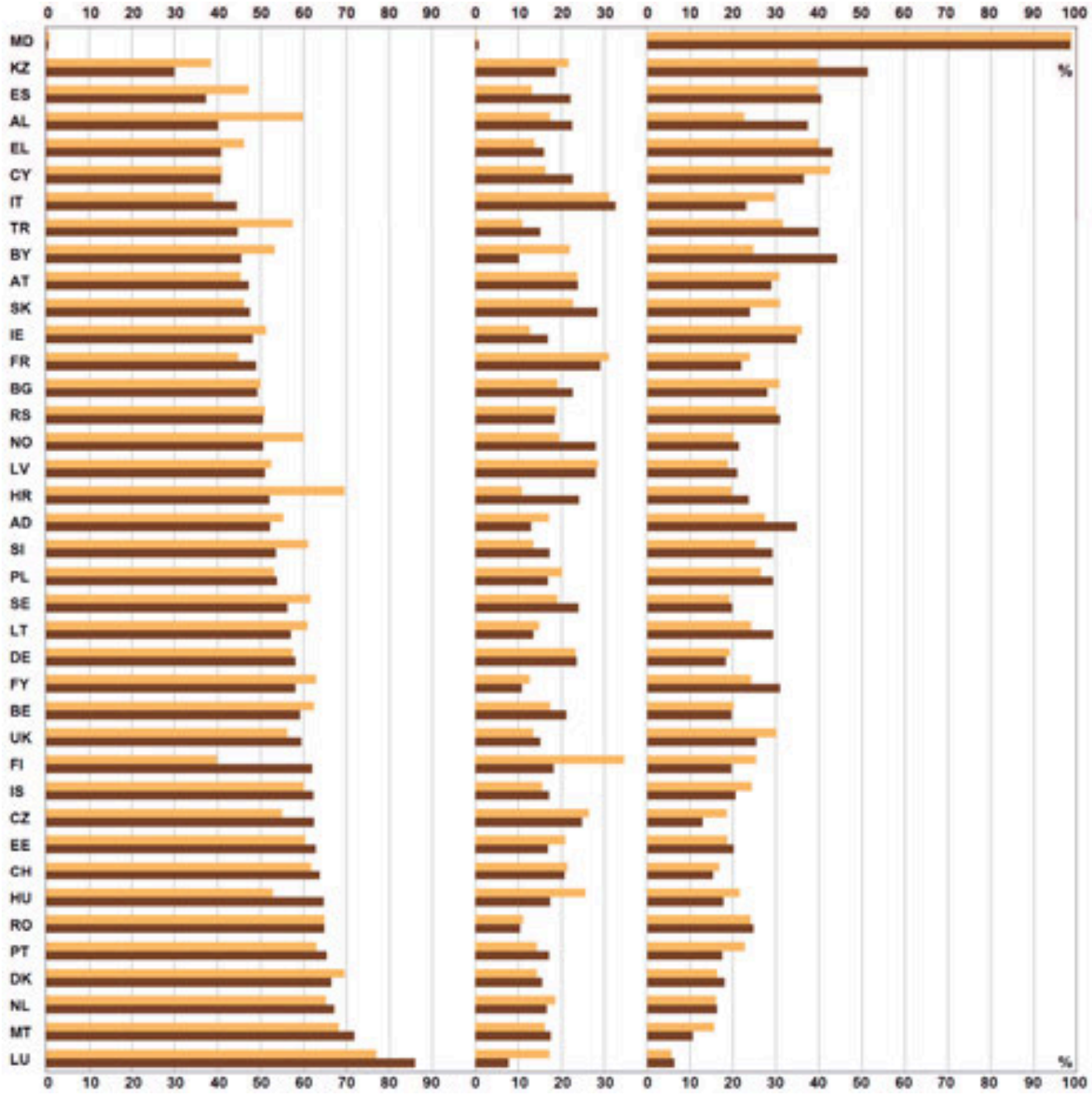


Figure 6. Distribution of people with tertiary education (ISCED 5-6) aged 25-34 and employed in ISCO 1 or 2 (legislators, senior officials, managers and professionals), in ISCO 3 (technicians and associated professionals) and in ISCO 4-9, by sex (%): – Female; – Male.

Notes: ISCO 0 (armed forces) and ISCO missing excluded.

Source: IR 2018, P. 228

Belarus is an absolute leader in differences between female and male over-qualification: Belarusian men in ISCO 4-9 have higher over-qualification levels than women. In order to answer the question 'why?' we will need to conduct a separate study. Here we will limit ourselves to the working hypothesis, according to which the level of income in workplaces with higher qualification is lower than in ISCO 4-9 and such situation suits Belarusian men less than women.

7.3. Policies for enhancing graduates' employability in Belarus

According to the data in Figure 7, more than half of the students in 15 countries feel that their studies prepare them well for national labour market.

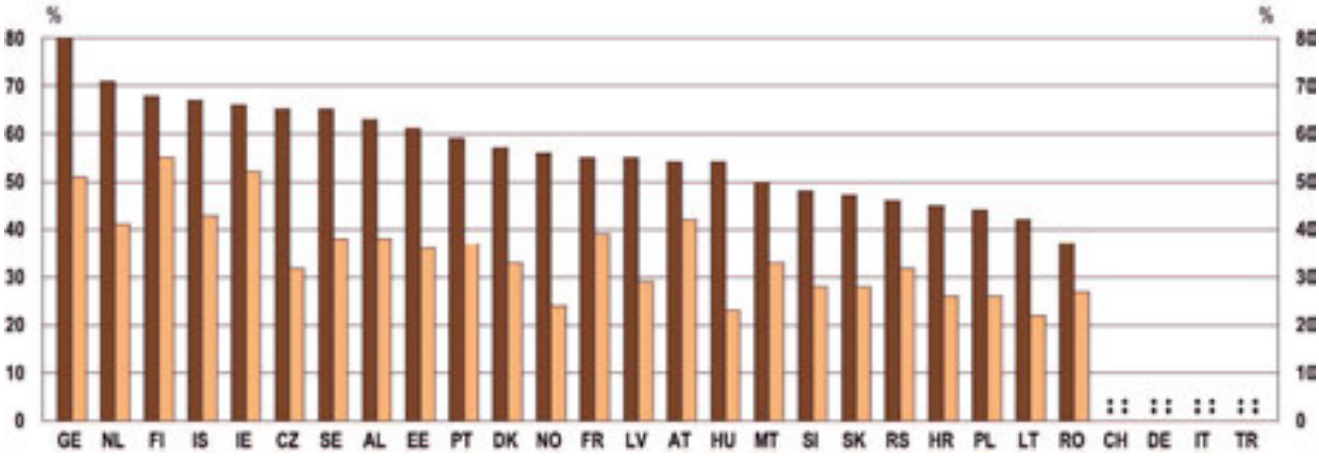


Figure 7. Students' self-assessment of their chances on the national and international labour market based on the competences gained during studies (for all students and/or different focus groups), 2017 : – National labour market; – - International labour market.

Source: IR 2018, P. 230

Unfortunately, Eurostudent survey by this indicator was not conducted in Belarus. However, in accordance with Belarusian students' survey conducted by E. Kukso in September 2013 (Salenko 2013), in which 662 students from 47 Belarusian universities (87% of total student population as of 2013/2014 academic year) took part, students rated their perspectives of employment (without differentiation into national and international labour market) at 3.15 points (on the ten points scale) and ranked it at the bottom three of students' ranking. At the same time, the difference in this parameter's grading between students of the first and last year of study is 1 point. Given the importance of work placement system under which 42.6% of total number of student fall according to the 2017/2018 academic year data [17], Independent student organization BOSS conducted a survey among the students who had their first work place through the work placement system as a part of students' work placement monitoring campaign (Monitoring report - "Young specialists work placement in 2016-2017 academic year"), and which shows that only 34% were satisfied with their employment [18]. Not less indicative is the data from the students' survey conducted by Baltic Internet Policy Initiative commissioned by Belarusian Independent Bologna Committee in

December 2016-January 2017 where when they were asked the question "How do you rate the graduates' compulsory work placement system existing in Belarus?" 57% of the respondents answered that "The state uses the compulsory work placement system to plug holes where none wants to work because of poor living and working conditions" [19].

7.3.1. Belarusian specific of labour-market and skills forecasting as an information source

In the majority of EHEA countries, labour market and skills forecasting is undertaken regularly at national or regional level (see Figure 8).

Figure 8. Labour-market and skills forecasting at national level, 2016/17: – Regular forecasting; – Ad hoc forecasting; – No forecasting.
Source: IR 2018, P. 231

Most countries conducting labour market forecast make efforts to take their results into account in higher education planning at central level (see Figure 9).

In the Report -2018 (see Figure 8-9), Belarus is marked as a state that conducts regular labour market forecasting and that its results affect accreditation procedure and programs' development as well as university's quotes for students' enrollment in places financed by public funds. However, this formal approach doesn't give an understanding of quality-wise specific and doesn't allow assessing the effectiveness level of the Belarusian forecasting model.

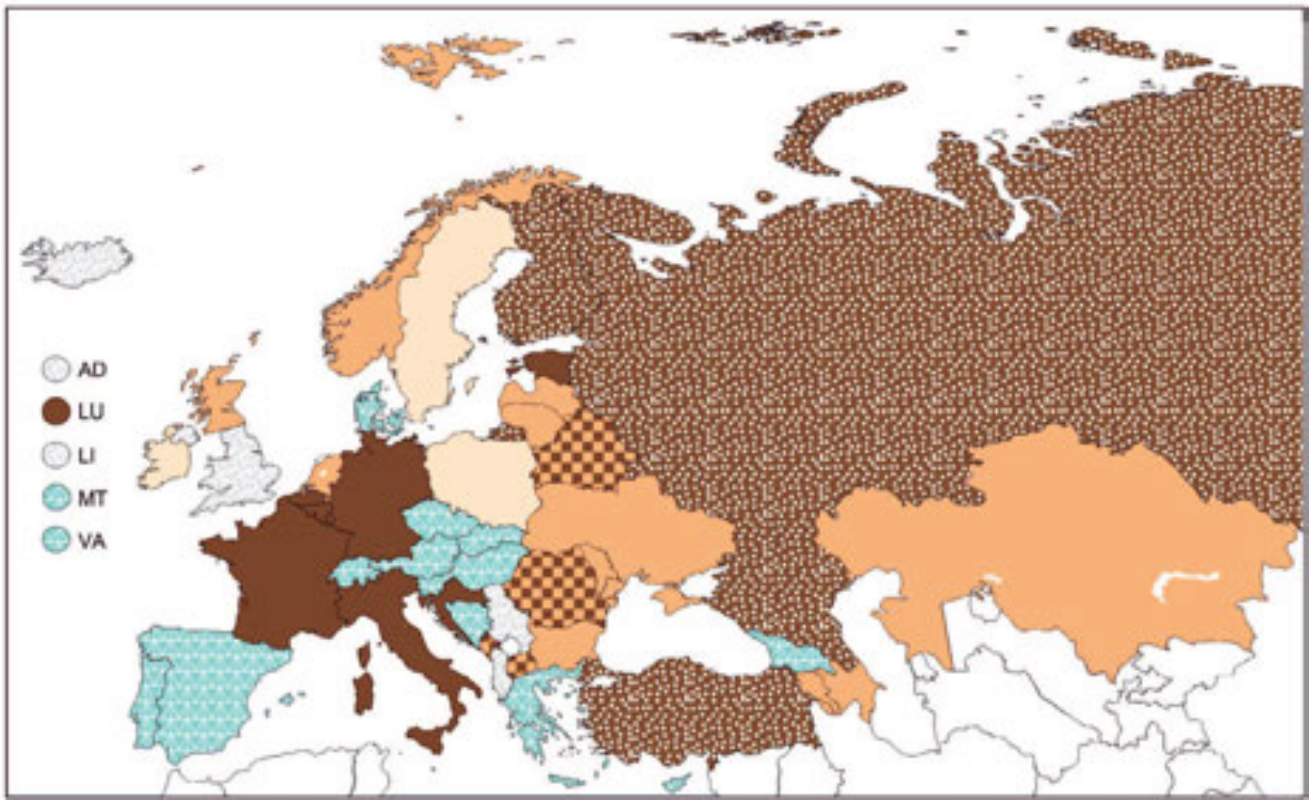


Figure 9. Using labour-market and skills forecasting at central level, 2016/17: – Programme accreditation/development; – Enrolment quotas/state funded study places; – Funding for priority areas; – All three uses; – No systematic use at central level; – No forecasting.

Source: IR 2018, P. 232

As it is known, Belarus uses declarative forecasting model [20], which implies that enrollment target figures for higher education institutions are formed in accordance with the National Classification of the Republic of Belarus "Specialties and Classifications" and based on the results of enterprises' application to the government bodies about the future needs in workforce [21]. However, the quite correct model, from the formal point of view (employers set demands), doesn't take into account the specifics of state-owned enterprises behavior on the labour market: enterprises' demands in workforce are derived from directly imposed production volumes (projected production indicators) and quantitative growth rate, which are ensured by the workforce growth in conditions of extensive economic growth and social employment priorities. In the meantime, the quality of products and effective use of workforce is left out. As a rule, such enterprises have not only an excess of unsold products but also of workforce. Moreover, as financial situation and higher deprecation of fixed assets is worse as the higher staff turnover and the need in it is (based on experts' assessment, the need in workforce in agriculture, construction and machine engineering sectors amounts up to 60% of the average number of people employed in these sectors) [22]. Thus, according to official experts, "enterprises submit unjustified requests to education service providers at the stage of forecasting their needs in specialists" [23].

This situation is aggravated by unjustified higher education institutions initiatives that are interested in an increase (or at least in preserving) the enrollment target figures and ac-

tively impose the need in workforce on enterprises. We also need to point out that such behavior of higher education institutions on labour market is caused not only by their interest in keeping the enrollment target figures (and subsequently, the level of state funding) but by the obligation to provide the first work place for graduates whose study is funded by public funds in accordance with the existing compulsory work placement system [24]. As a result, rightly pointed out by official experts, "enrollment plans are formed by education service providers themselves based on forming inertial extrapolation forecasts for workforce with higher and professional education attainment demand on the principle "from the figure achieved" [25]. Thus, the declarative forecast model closely connected with the compulsory work placement system suffers from significant misrepresentations in forecasting labour market demands. Moreover, these misrepresentations are caused by key players – employers (represented by state-owned enterprises) and higher education institutions – that, in turn, negatively affect the implementation of both demand-side and supply-side policies.

Besides, the deficit of financial resources pushes higher education institutions to increase the number of tuition fee places (as of 2017/2018 academic year, their share was 57.4% of the total number of students) [26] and focus on social demands (from educational services consumers) rather than economic demands (from labour market) while offering fee charged services. The advantage of this is that the compulsory graduates' work placement system doesn't apply to students paying tuition fee. As a result, due to the prevalence of education services consumers' demands over labour market demands, higher education institutions are oriented not so much towards coordinating employers and education services consumers interests but towards solving their financial problems.

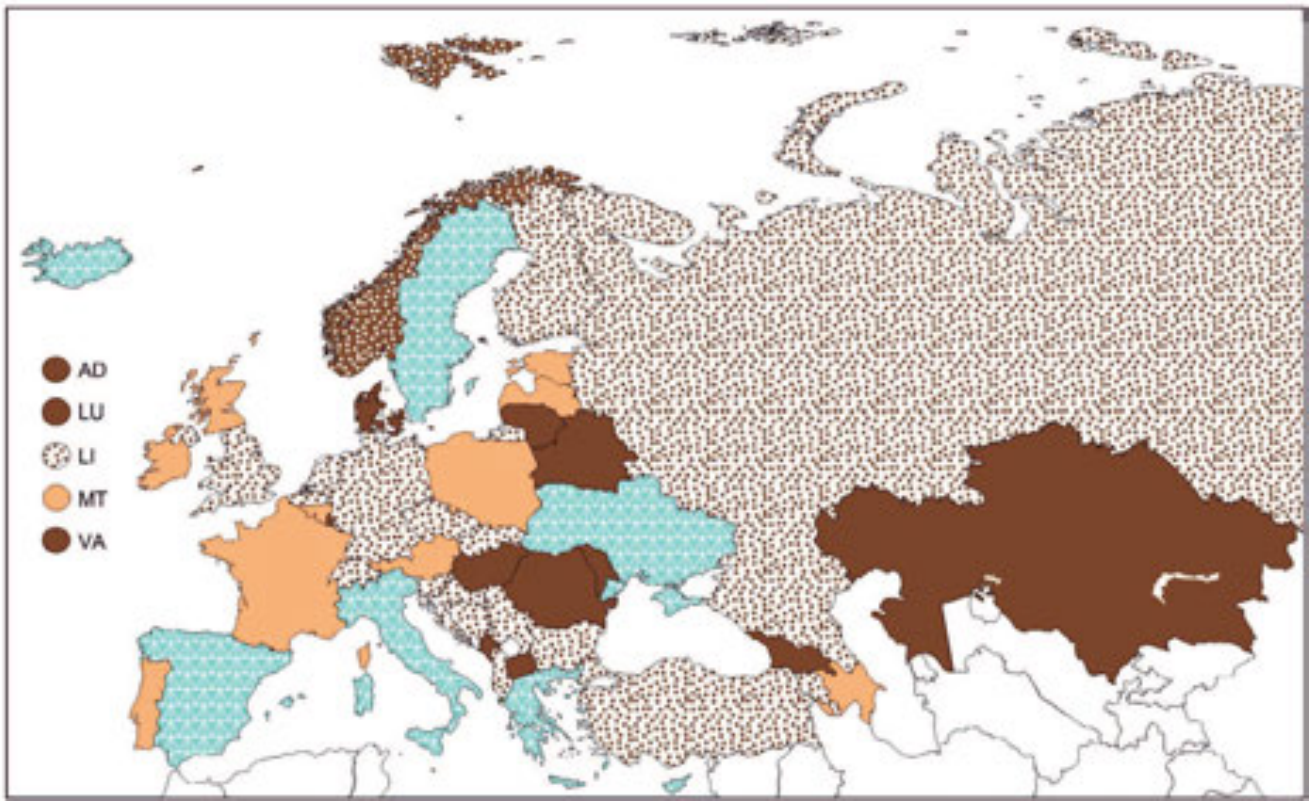
7.3.2. Cooperation between employers and higher education institutions: formal and actual reality

In accordance with Report – 2018 (see Figures 10A and 10B), Belarus is the country where employers' involvement in curriculum development and in higher education institutions' decision-making bodies is compulsory.

However, employers' involvement in higher education is predominantly formal in Belarus. Belarusian higher education-related legislation and legal acts are riddled with distrust concerning employers. We will not find the term "employer" (as subject to labour law) in the Education Code. There is a more abstract, from the legal point of view, term "hirer". A number of universities included special clauses on employers' participation as fully pledged partners in their Statutes and regulations but in reality, this is pure formality that never worked.

The absence of professional standards in Belarus has a negative impact on employers' active participation in higher education development. Employers are still forced to use Soviet-era "Classification of Employees' Occupations" that doesn't envisage any position for bachelor and master programs graduates. The Education Code (2011) doesn't even mention professional standards. National Qualification Framework is still far from being developed not speaking about its implementation (see AG2 report above).

A) Curriculum development, 2016/2017



B) Higher education institutions' decision-making bodies, 2016/2017

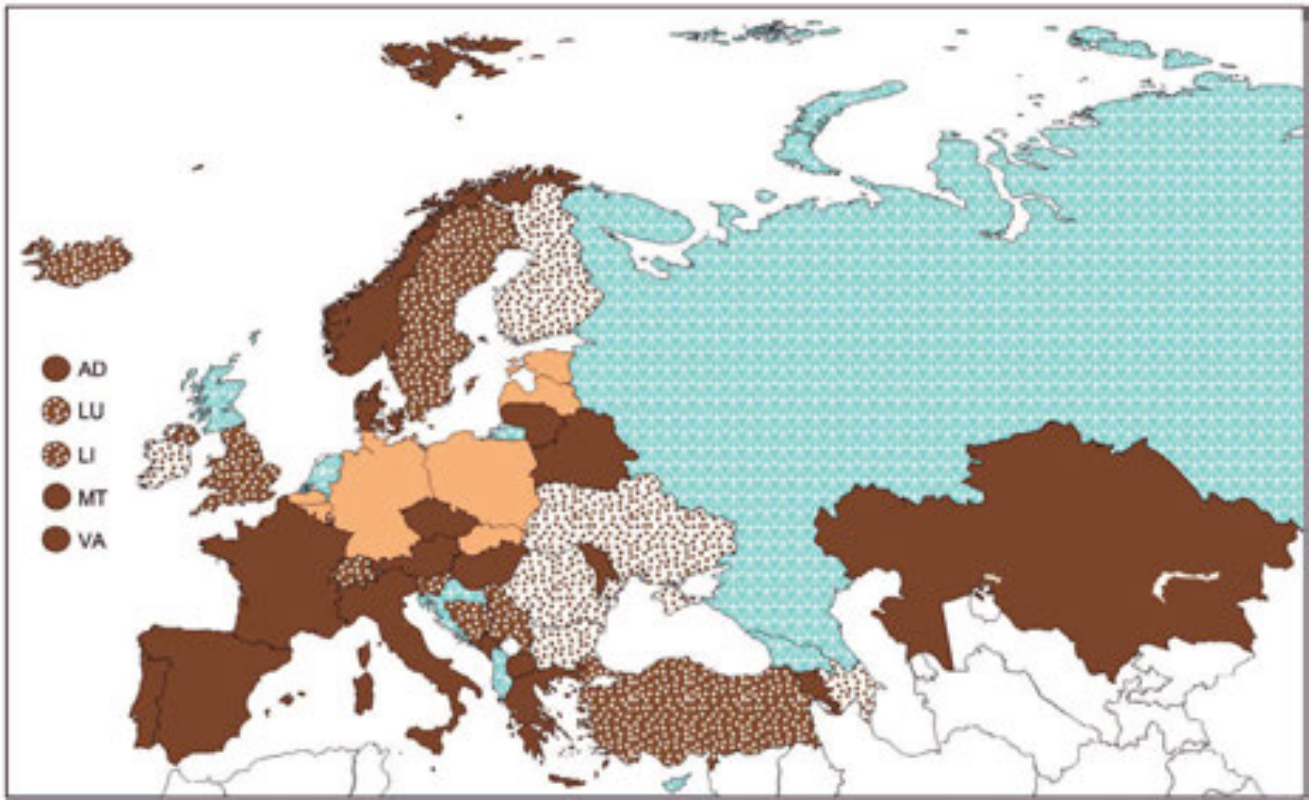


Figure 10. Involvement of employers in higher education planning and management: ■ – Compulsory for ALL HEIs/programmes; ■ – Compulsory for SOME HEIs/programmes; ■ – Typical in-

volvement in ALL HEIs/programmes; – Typical involvement in SOME HEIs/programmes; – No involvement of employers.

Source: IR 2018, P. 233

7.3.3. Practical training and work placement: discrepancy in performance evaluations

Report -2018 (see Figure 11) shows Belarus among the leading countries that have both monitoring the proportion of students that have training at work place and proportion of programs with compulsory work placement.

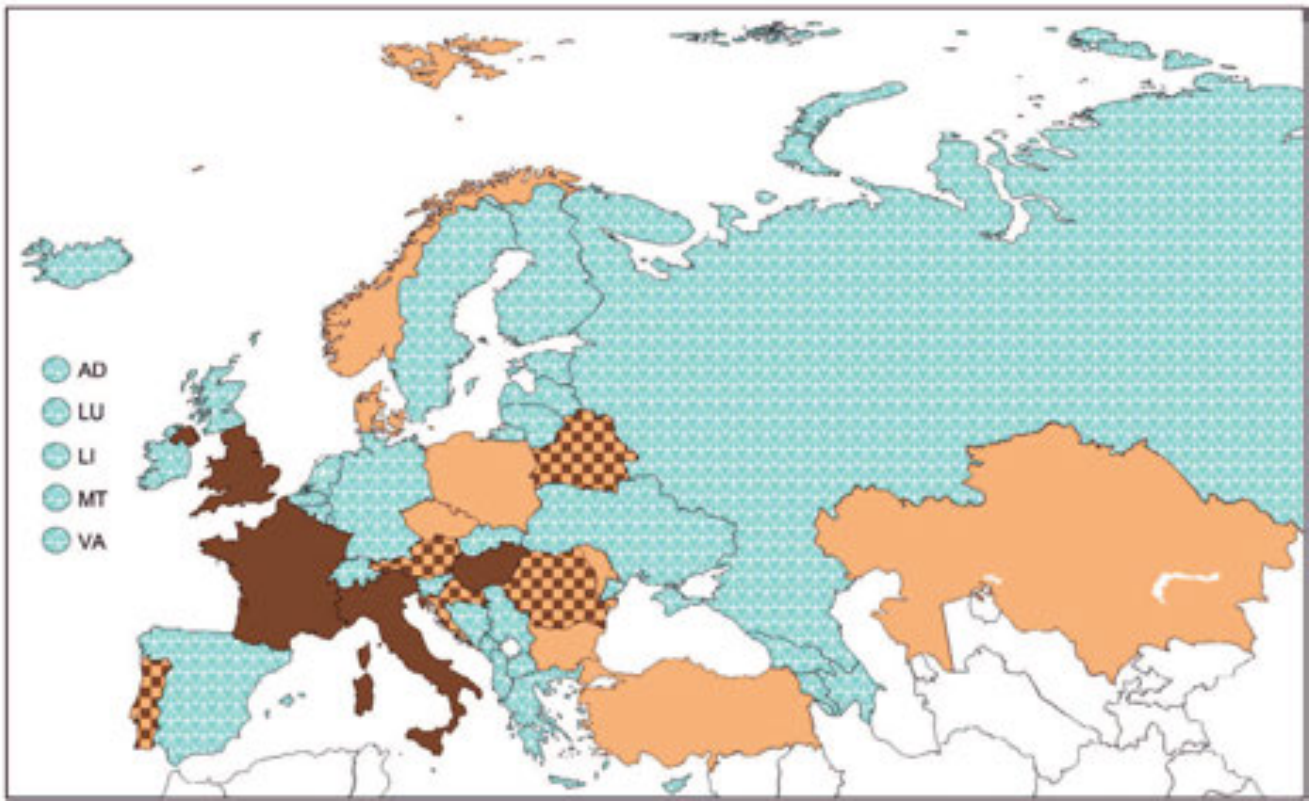


Figure 11. Monitoring the proportion of students that have training at work place and proportion of programs with compulsory work placement, 2016/17 : – Monitoring proportion of students participating in work placements; – Monitoring proportion of programmes requiring work placements; – No monitoring.

Source: IR 2018, P. 235

However, the openly available information doesn't give us an understanding of what it means exactly, what methods it is based on and how effective monitoring and implementation of practical training and work placement is. There is no accessible data on this indicator either in the National Statistics Bulletin "Education in the Republic of Belarus" or in databases of the National Statistics Committee of the Republic of Belarus or in the Main Information and Analytical Center of the Ministry of Education websites as well as in other ministries and official agencies. At the same time, within the framework of the

students' survey conducted by Baltic Internet Policy Initiative commissioned by the Belarusian Independent Bologna Committee in 2015, where when asked the question of "Whether the internship to prepare for transitioning to work by specialty was meaningful?" 31% of respondents answered that "It would have been useful if was better organized" and 27% of respondents said that "it was totally useless" [27].

7.3.4. Students' transition to work: compulsory graduates' work placement system through the eyes of students, experts and officials

Report-2018 places Belarus among the countries that higher education institutions are obliged to support students' transition to work (see Figure 12).

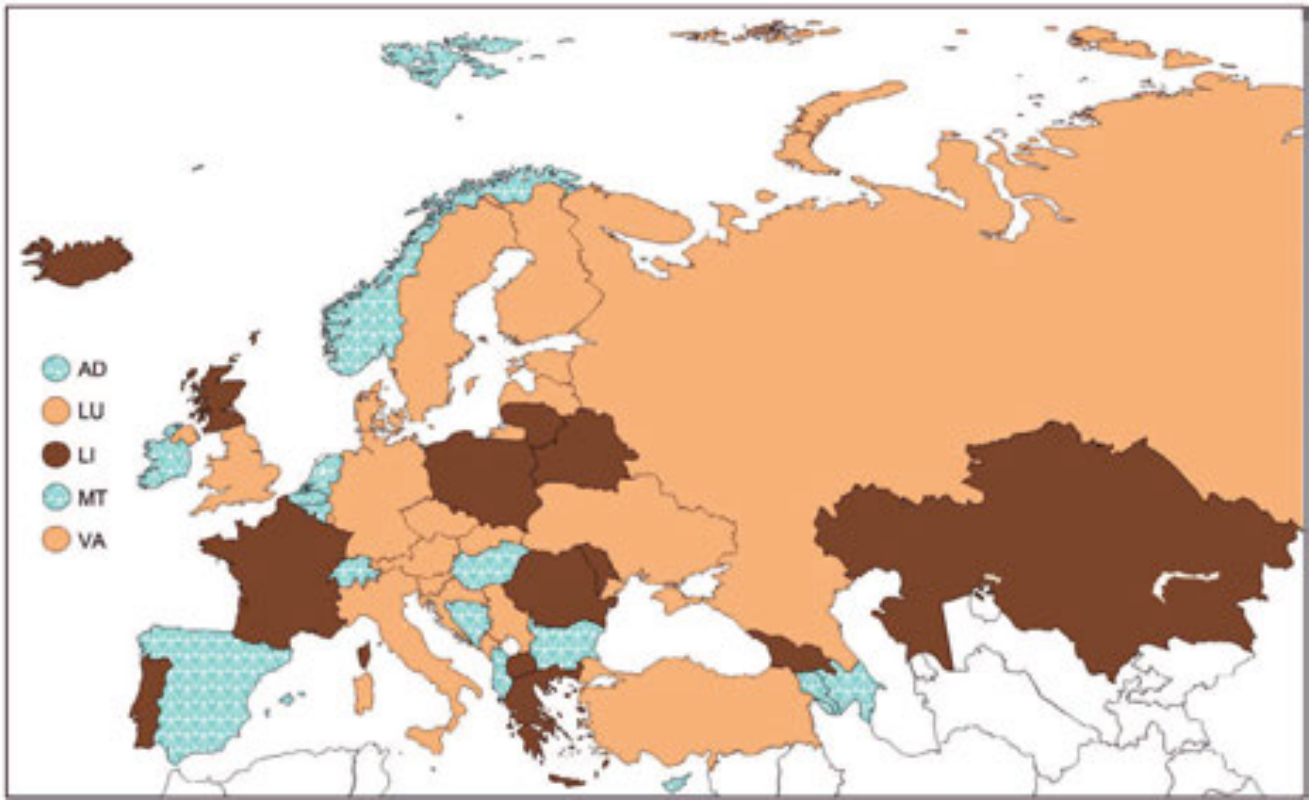


Figure 12. Obligations and incentives for higher education institutions to support students' transition to work, 2016/2017 : – Institutions are required to support students' transition to work; – Institutions are encouraged through incentives to support students' transition to work; – There is no obligation or incentives to support students' transition to work.

Source: IR 2018, P. 236

This obligation obviously means the higher education institutions' compulsory graduates' work placement system legally secured in the Code on education and in other legislative acts [28]. However, this obligation is related only to graduates whose study is financed by public funds, which is related to 42.6% of the total number of students according to 2017/2018 academic year data [29]. Other graduates (i.e. 57.4% of the total number of students) are deprived of their right for the first work place. Neither state nor private higher education

institutions are obliged to support students' transition to work. Independent experts, students and human rights activists [30] have been consistently pointing to the fact of student discrimination based on whether their study is supported by public funds or is tuition fee-based, but all their efforts were in vain. In addition to this, there are cases where universities' obligations to assist students' transition to work are shifted to students themselves. Not less indicative is the data from the students' survey conducted by Baltic Internet Policy Initiative commissioned by the Belarusian Independent Bologna Committee in December 2016-January 2017 where 65% of respondents said that higher education institutions administration recommended them to look for jobs themselves referring to the lack of applications from employers [31]. Students' dissatisfaction with the work placement system is reconfirmed in K. Richter's reports, the data for which have been collected through consultations and regular student surveys conducted during past 3 years within the framework of the project "Young specialists compulsory work placement" [32]. BOSS experts also came to the same conclusion in their report on monitoring violations through the work placement process ("Young specialists compulsory work placement in 2016-2017 academic year") [33]. According to this report, 42% of graduates have a negative attitude toward compulsory work placement and 65% thought of avoiding this [34]. AG2 final report "Support for the Belarus Roadmap" also questions the effectiveness and legitimacy of compulsory work placement system, and whether this system is set in accordance with fundamental EHEA values upon which EHEA builds. This reports also states that AG2 was not aware of similar, generalized work obligation tied to public funding in any other EHEA country [35].

In spite of all the things mentioned above, the graduates' work placement system application as of 2016/2017 academic year attests that this system continues to be used in Belarus without any significant changes. Moreover, based on the analysis of current regulatory and legal framework in accordance with which the compulsory graduate work placement system operates and was conducted by National Institute for Higher Education in 2017, it was found that no changes are required in "regulatory legal acts regulating graduate compulsory work placement system" [36].

7.3.5. Monitoring and evaluation: the problem of low quality

Figure 13 shows that Belarus only conducts institutional surveys that, from our point of view, adequately reflect the real situation and apparently, mean graduate compulsory work placement for 2 years term.

However, the problem lies in the fact that career development of those graduates who studied on the tuition fee basis and the number of which is 57.4% of the total number of student population, is not even taken into account in institutional surveys. In addition, the depth of institutional surveys is limited to 2 years of compulsory work period at the first work place (in case of some specialties – 5 years): what happens with graduates upon completion of this 2-year term is unknown (there is no data on this indicator but based on unofficial graduates' surveys [37], the majority of them leave the first work place after the 2-year term expires). All this shows the very low quality of the process to track down the

graduates' career development in Belarus, which doesn't allow to conduct a multidimensional evaluation of their employment opportunities upon graduation.

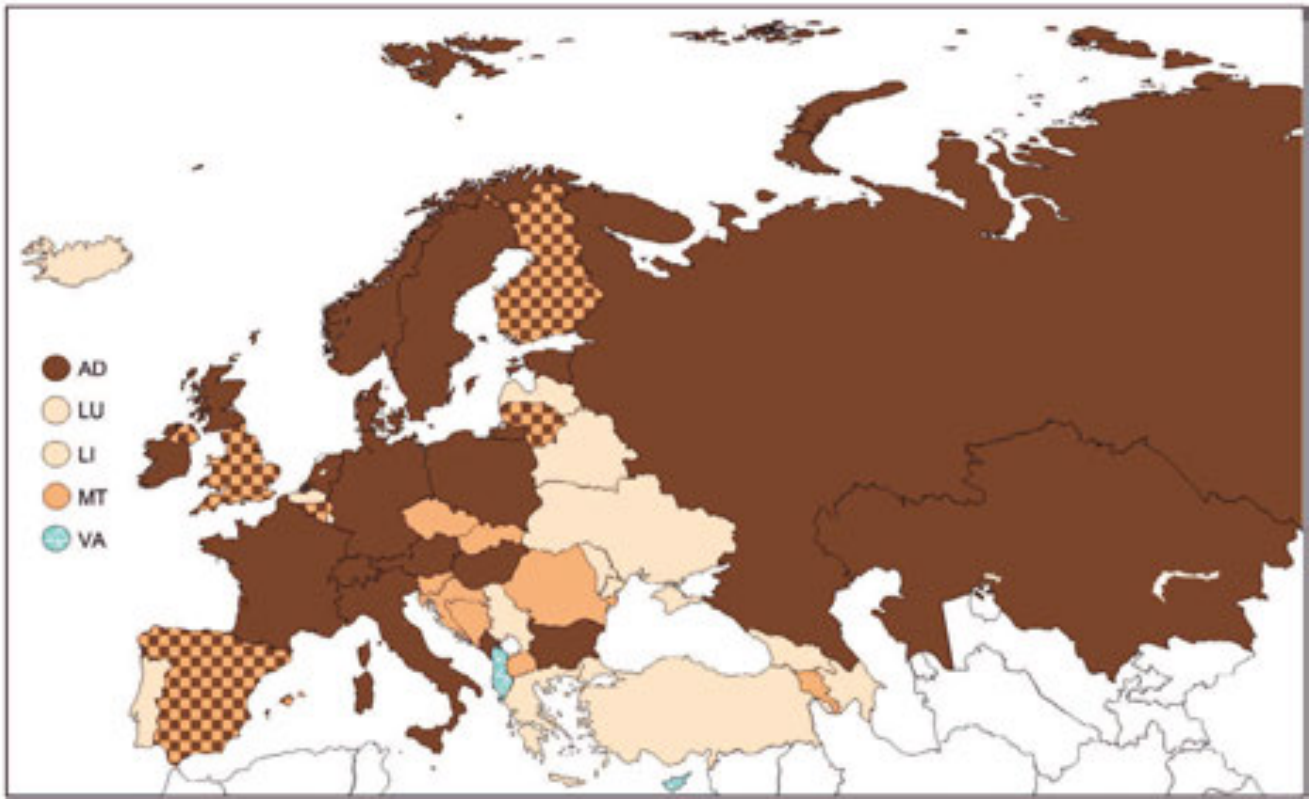


Figure 13. Following graduates' career developments – different approaches, 2016/17 : – Regular surveys conducted on national/regional level; – Ad hoc surveys conducted on national level; – Only institutional surveys; – No surveys conducted.
Source: IR 2018, P. 237

7.4. Conclusion

In conclusion, we will point at alarming moments which should be taken care of when analyzing the current situation and developing policies to increase employment opportunities for Belarusian higher education institutions' graduates.

Firstly, this is a problem of absence of full and relevant data on all key indicators for the unemployment rate among people with educational attainment in Belarus. It is clear that in conditions of information non-transparency and unavailability of data, methods of their calculation and their analysis we can't talk about the reality of current situation, forecasts and policies to increase higher education graduates' employment opportunities. In some cases, we have reasons to believe that the data on Belarus is misrepresented in Report-2018. This is related to "Students' transition to work" and "Practical training and work placement" indicators where the data from independent students' and graduates' surveys as well as from higher education insiders contradicts too optimistic official data.

Secondly, according to the 'vertical mismatch' indicator Belarus is among a group of countries with the highest level of over-qualification (higher than 32.8% with average

EHEA level at 24.4%). At the same time, in light of EHEA countries trend to decrease the number of over-qualified graduates, the situation in Belarus is opposite: the share of over-qualified graduates is more than twice higher than the average in EHEA countries (2.8pp against 1.2pp). According to the 'over-qualified male graduates" indicator, Belarus tops the list among all EHEA countries. This means that graduates' competences still do not meet employers' needs and expectations.

Thirdly, this is the situation with unemployment growth rate. If in the majority of EHEA countries the unemployment growth rate was decreasing during 2013 – 2016 then in Belarus the unemployment growth rate was increasing in all target groups (unemployment growth rate among people with high educational attainment was 2.6%, with medium – 4.7%, and with low level of educational attainment – 15%). The data on unemployment growth rate among higher education graduates for the period from 2000 to 2017 is even more alarming. The share of unemployed persons with higher education attainment among all those registered with labour, employment and social protection agencies for the last 17 years doubled – from 7.6% in 2000 to 14.6% in 2017. It is obvious that the attempt to embellish the real situation and to imitate efforts to improve graduates' work placement instruments, which will have negative consequences for both Belarusian education services market and its labour market.

In this context, the European experts' conclusion is noteworthy and perhaps, will dispel the myth in Belarus that the situation will improve by itself with the economic crisis being over: the improvement of the economic situation in the years after the crisis did not necessarily have a positive impact on higher education graduates [38]. Efforts to improve graduates' employability should be continued. At the same time, as European experts' note, the success of strategy implementation, on the demand side (correctly respond to labour market needs), depends on how successful the problem of obtaining correct information about labour market demands by higher education institution is solved. Unfortunately, despite the fact that in Report-2018 Belarus showed progress on indicators measuring the effectiveness of political strategy to improve graduates' employability perspectives on demand-side, this problem still remains because of the presence of significant misrepresentations in the forecast of labour market needs. These misrepresentations are generated by the ineffective forecast model, by the absence of graduates' career development monitoring system, by higher education institutions' focus on social demand to the detriment of economic demand as well as ineffective and discriminatory compulsory graduate work placement system. All this has a negative impact on the implementation of the policy to increase graduates' employment opportunities based on labour market demands. Contrary to the positive data that appeared in Report – 2018, we also have to state that implementation of Belarusian political strategy to improve graduate employment opportunities on supply-side is unsatisfactory. The reasons for this are: absence of NQF, underdeveloped instruments and absence of institutions that support effective cooperation between labour market and higher education institutions as well as unjustified higher education institutions initiative to impose the need in workforce on enterprises. The attempt to reform the forecast model by transferring it from the Ministry of Education to the Ministry of Economics and the Ministry of Labour

and Social Development while keeping the social dimension, as the focus on the Belarusian economic model will not produce expected outcomes.

In this context, it is important to underline the European experts' second conclusion: economy sets certain limits upon higher education institutions' positive influence on graduates' employability. In Belarus' case, such restriction, first of all, is the ineffective public sector, which is flushing down state budget, according to European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) current data (Sajac 2018). Having in mind that compulsory graduate work placement system is the core of current Belarusian policy on strengthening graduates' employability and primarily serves state-owned enterprises, this remark of EBRD Vice President could be complemented with correlative thesis on higher education: compulsory graduate work placement system washes away workforce with high educational attainment. All the above-mentioned circumstances provide a strong basis for seriously rethinking the status of compulsory work placement system as the only and, in fact, non-alternative regulator for coordinating educational services and labour markets in Belarus.

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Chapter 8. Internationalization and Academic Mobility

8.1. Higher education internationalization in global context

"Earning money is a key motive for all internationalization projects in the for-profit sector and for some traditional nonprofit universities with financial problems" [1]. This is said by such world-known experts in this field as Philip Altbach and Jane Knight. It is difficult to argue with them. However, there are other reasons for modern higher education internationalization. The majority of projects on internationalization of education are more politically motivated than driven by mercantile interests. This can also include academic imperialism (soft power) of both great and not so great powers forming common European identity within the framework of the Erasmus project. But what Altbach and Knight are right about is that the academic component doesn't play a leading role in the hierarchy of motivating internationalization.

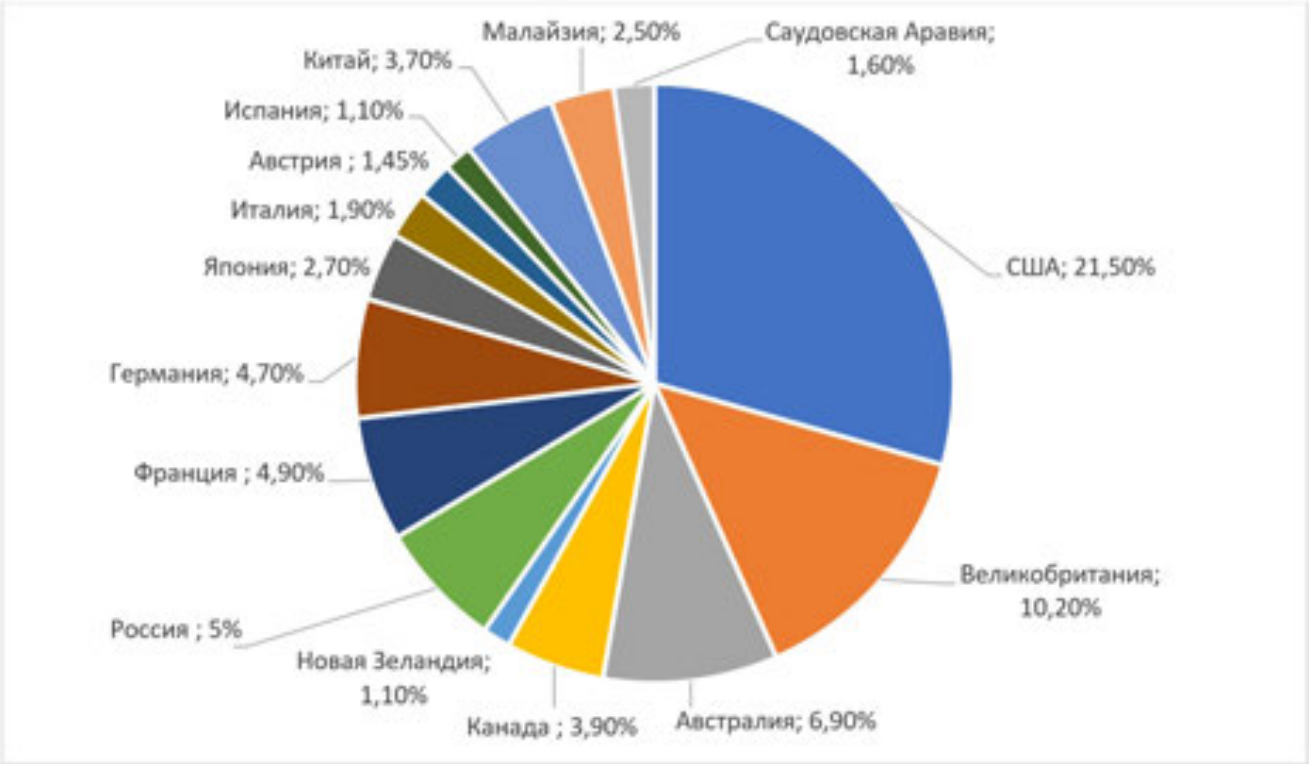
At the same time, internationalization is one of the major trends in modern higher education development. It positively affects not only global educational market players but also those countries, which are predominantly consuming these educational services. Internationalization is higher education's response to globalization challenges. This allows to increase competitiveness of both countries and single higher education institutions as well as its graduates' value on the international market. On the individual level, it helps to obtain competences and skills needed for professional development at a global labor market.

Internationalization effectiveness mainly depends on its planning at both national and institutional levels. Ideally, national plan or national strategy should include not only goals and objectives of international education policy but also availability of financial means, target numbers for outgoing and incoming student mobility, special objectives for faculty and staff mobility, etc. In spite of the obvious advantage of internationalization strategic planning, in the global context, this is more an exception than a rule: more than 80% of 195 countries included into UN higher education database do not have national strategies for internationalization [2]. The USA is among the 80%, being considered a world leader and driver of the internationalization process at the global level. Only 11% of the countries have detailed internationalization strategies. However, internationalization strategic planning is a relatively new phenomenon: the majority of national strategies started to appear only 5-6 years ago [2, p. 6]. Strategic planning is mainly a European phenomenon. Among European countries Germany, Finland, UK, Poland and Spain have national development strategies for internationalization while among the former Soviet countries, only Lithuania and Kazakhstan have it.

International academic mobility is a key element of higher education internationalization, and internationalization itself is often associated with academic mobility. The academic mobility flows, especially student mobility, are subject to statistical counting at the global level enabling us to analyze and see its development vector. In conditions of mass higher education development and intensification of universities' struggle for attracting potential

students, incoming academic mobility is considered as one of the most important resources for universities' economic well-being.

Through the XXth century academic mobility scale was steadily rising worldwide, but only at the turn of the XXth and XXIst centuries it had become a massive global phenomenon. Currently, the number of foreign students grows by 100,000 people annually and, in accordance with the forecast, it will reach 7.5 million by 2025. According to UNESCO, the total number of foreign students increased from 3,961 to 4,854 million people between 2010 and 2017, i.e. amounted to 22.5% [2]. At the same time, there is a point of view according to which the peak of increase in the number of foreign students has already been passed. The slowing down of this process is due to re-orientation of Chinese and Indian students to their national universities, which provide a relatively high quality of education. The increasing popularity of anti-immigrant rhetoric in the largest countries of educational services 'export' also has its influence on this process. [3]



The share of foreign students by the largest host countries, 2017.

Joint programs (mainly at Master and Doctoral levels) refer to inter-institutional arrangements among two or more higher education institutions that lead ideally to a joint degree. A joint degree is a single document awarded to students who successfully completed a joint program, and it should be recognized by the appropriate authorities of the countries participating in this program. Having the intercultural experience through joint programs they receive an advantage in employment at global labor market. In 2009, EHEA had more than 2,500 joint programs [4]. In the same year, the regional initiative "Campus Asia" was launched boosting cooperation between Japanese, South Korean and Chinese universities. The growing transatlantic interregional cooperation between European and North Amer-

ican universities also became a steady feature [4, p.15]. One of the main problems of joint programs is its degree recognition. In EHEA countries, no more than 10% of the universities recognize the joint degree; therefore, the practice of awarding double or multiple degrees by each partner university has become widespread.

The trend of establishing Overseas Campuses by western universities has quite a long history behind it. For example, American University in Beirut was established in 1866. However, it has been actively developing in the past 20 years thanks to establishing offshore educational zones in several countries of the Middle East, South-East Asia and China. The top five countries of overseas campuses 'export' include USA (31%), UK (15%), France (11%), Russia (8.5%) and Australia (5.6%). In this case, English speaking countries (including Canada and Ireland) play a dominant role with more than 56% of the market share. They are considered to be truly global players while Russia, for instance, established its universities' overseas campuses in CIS countries, mainly in Central Asia and the Caucuses [5]. Among the largest 'receiving' countries are China (13%), UAE (13%), Singapore (4.8%), Malaysia (4.8%) and Qatar (4.5%). At the same time, there are quite a few critics of the international educational zone who have noted that their economic efficiency turned out to be lower than expected. As a result, a significant number of overseas campuses ceased to exist and, in recent years, their number practically doesn't grow.

Massive open online courses (MOOC) are the newest higher education instrument of internationalization.

Although, distance learning is not openly positioned as a means for internationalization, but, in fact, it surpasses all other forms of education by the scale of audience coverage. The rapid development of online education has been met with mixed reaction both at the global level and in the academic community itself. MOOC adherents underline the cross-border nature of new technologies and their democratic approach to teaching, which opens access to high quality higher education for all population groups including the disadvantaged and low-income people, etc. It is widely believed that distance learning is the main development vector not only for higher education but also for education in general.

On the contrary, MOOC critics believe that this form of education doesn't contribute to but deepens social inequality: traditional full–time education becomes more expensive and elitist while a wide group of consumers of educational services will be able to get access only to distance learning 'fast food' in the near future. Although most of online courses are available free of charge, this form of education is the most monetized. MOOC multimillion students' population makes it the most profitable form of education in spite of a huge drop-out (85% on an average). However, from the critics' point of view, the intention to keep students by all means harms the quality of education. At the international level, MOOC opponents consider distance learning as the most aggressive form of academic imperialism that threatens national and regional universities.

Today, large-scale internationalization is an integral part of global higher education landscape. Most of internationalization projects are dictated by pure commercial interests but it also has a huge political influence including international relations.

Internationalization is not identical with westernization although Western education

system' dominance, mainly of English-speaking countries, is obvious. The small and medium states' goal is to find an optimal internationalization strategy allowing maximum benefit within national interests.

8.2. Higher Education Internationalization in the Republic of Belarus: priorities evolution, legal framework and financial resources

During the last decade, the understanding of internationalization of higher education and its meaning has changed significantly in the official discourse of the Republic of Belarus. It is related to internationalization objectives, its hierarchy, legal framework and financial resources.

In USSR, Belarusian higher education didn't play and couldn't play an independent role in internationalization development. First of all, it was related to incoming student mobility where foreign students were "redistributed' centrally to the relevant Soviet republic to continue their studies. However, the share of foreign students (3.8% of the total number of students in 1988-1989) was significantly lower than in the USSR in general. In 1990s, the number of incoming foreign students decreased to its minimum, being visible only on account of those foreign students who were admitted to the universities during the times of the USSR and who were completing their studies. The Concept of higher education development in the Republic of Belarus, approved in 1998, regarded 'training professionals for foreign countries' as a promising vector in higher education international development but unfortunately, no goals and objectives were set to move forward [6]. The policy of self-isolation, caused by events in the Ukraine in 2004, had a negative impact on international cooperation development. In 2006, the foreign student population in the Republic of Belarus was 1.4% of the total number of students [7]. In this regard, the Ministry of Education prepared a special Action Plan for developing higher education services export for 2007-2010 In spite of the correspondence of Belarusian state ideology of the 2000s to the Soviet era, this action plan set purely pragmatic goals: an increase of foreign student population by 20% annually, bringing the educational services export volume to $ 20 million by 2010 [7, c.14].

The same focus was maintained in the State Program for Higher Education Development for 2011-2015 (Program). Internationalization was the last out of 7 objectives of higher education development after the problem of providing students with dormitories [8]. The section vocabulary didn't contain the terms "internationalization" and "student mobility" at all while the objective itself read as 'educational services export and international cooperation'. It is obvious that education services export in particular, which meant receiving revenues from long-term incoming student mobility, was the priority of internationalization. The exact indicator was set to achieve these objectives – an increase in revenues from education services export to $186.71 million [8, c.12]. The other sub-objectives were subordinated to this indicator: expected entry to Bologna, use of Belarusian Diplomatic missions abroad to promote Belarusian universities and attract potential applicants, to launch an English language higher education portal, design and develop English language programs

including distance learning ones.

The outgoing mobility objectives were set in the Program section "Higher education capacity building". It included a possibility for Belarusian faculty and researchers to take up internships at leading international organizations and research centers, to participate in international Doctoral programs, invite visiting foreign faculty to deliver innovative courses at Belarusian universities. Interestingly, both short-term and long-term student mobility was mentioned in this Program except the one where 20 best graduates (0.03% of the total number of graduates) were going to continue their MA study at leading foreign education institutions and research centers. Their study would be financed from public funds. The list of leading education institutions and research centers includes, in particular, the Network University of the Commonwealth of Independent States, which, in reality, is not a higher education institution.

Among the positive aspects of the Program is the provision on developing necessary organizational and economic conditions to invite foreign visiting faculty. It was implemented in relevant Council of Ministers' decree # 236 dated 2013 "On the issues of attracting foreign specialists to deliver higher education programs" [9]. According to the decree, the level of hourly payment for visiting specialists was set in the amount of 300% of the tariff rate for the first category of specialists (sum equals to $60). It also envisaged the reimbursement for travel and accommodation expenses. Thus, the approved framework created relatively acceptable conditions for inviting foreign specialists. The approved level of reimbursement was consistent with European universities' standards for faculty hourly payment and for support of staff of medium level.

The implementation of the State mobility project, which envisaged sending from 50 and 100 Belarusian students to study abroad and finance them from public funds, began in 2012 within the framework of this Program.

The adoption of the State Program "Education and youth policy" for 2016 -2020 marked certain changes in understanding internationalization of higher education goals and objectives [10]. The key was the understanding of internationalization as means and indicators to improve the quality of higher education. The scale of academic mobility ("number of higher education faculty participated in internship programs abroad") was one of the three indicators evaluating the achievement of objective to improve the quality of education of specialists with tertiary education. In order to "improve Belarusian higher education competitiveness at international level", it is envisaged, in particular, the development of "cooperation between Belarusian higher education institutions and foreign and neighboring countries' higher education institutions in delivering educational programs" and "boosting student and faculty mobility both on national and international levels" [10, c.7-8]. In contrast with the previous higher education development program, the new one doesn't contain the 'education services export' indicator.

Publicly available information allows us to review the state funding for academic mobility and internationalization. According to this data, the available funding for 'organizing mandatory internships for faculty of general and professional disciplines at other organizations including ones abroad' is 21.28 million Belarusian rubles (9.2 million euros) for

2016-2020, for ' higher education institutions' faculty advanced training (studying English)' is 2.24 million Belarusian rubles (0.97 million euros), for 'attracting foreign specialists, including ones from abroad, to deliver innovative courses at higher education institutions, which are designed using latest achievements and findings in respective fields' is 14 million Belarusian rubles (6.08 million euros), for 'sending promising higher education students and graduates to study at leading foreign educational and research centers in priority subject areas for the country's economic development' is 5.3 million Belarusian rubles (2.30 million euros). It should be emphasized that publishing information about international programs funding indicates the growing degree of transparency of state education agencies' activities. The total funding for these programs is at about 18.55 million euros.

At the same time, the Program didn't envisage funding for academic mobility at the third-cycle of higher education programs (post-graduate programs). In this regard, the decision-making document of the National Rectors' Council stresses the fact that 'there are no grants for supporting research activities of those studying abroad (work in foreign archives, carrying out tests in foreign organizations, etc.), participation in international conferences' [11].

The implementation of the Belarus Roadmap for higher education reform provisions for 2015-2018 focused on solving 2 goals related to internationalization: strategic planning and limiting bureaucratic obstacles for academic mobility.

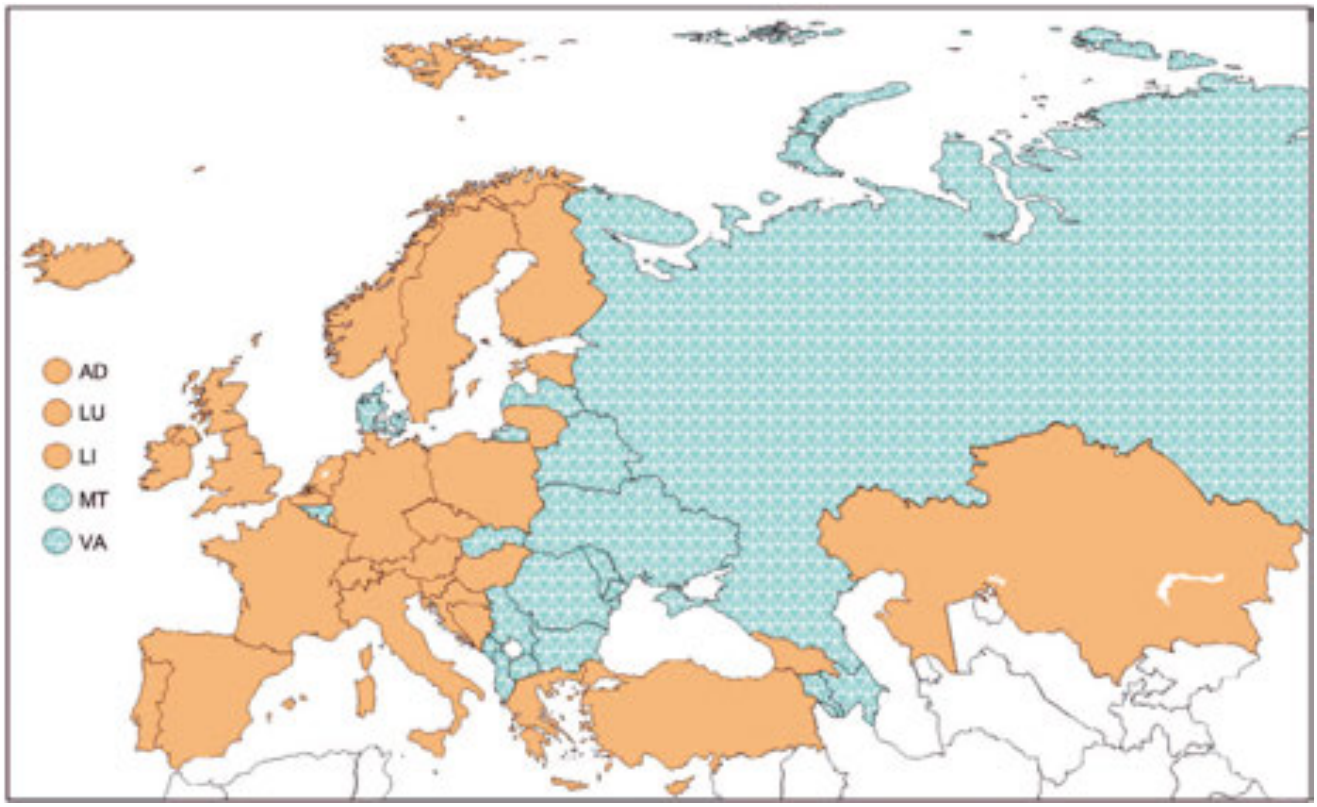
Although actions to achieve the first goal were reduced to developing a draft of "Concept for developing international academic mobility within the European Higher Education Area" (October 2016) [Concept], the work on this document helped to review and to reformat goals and objectives for internationalization. Draft Concept contained the short analysis of academic mobility state, set goals and objectives, priorities and vectors of its development as well as action plan aimed at supporting, developing and diversifying international faculty and student mobility both coming to study at Belarusian higher education institutions and going to study abroad. In particular, draft Concept identified sources and scale of financial support for academic mobility, set strategic planning goals in this field and the goals to increase the quality of administering the international mobility programs. It is worth of noting that draft Concept set alone the goal of 'preparing legislative acts regulating academic mobility in accordance with provisions of draft version of new Code of Education'.

Based on Implementation report of the European Higher Education Area development in 2018 (Report - 2018), all the efforts done by Belarus were not appreciated. Belarus was shown as a country that doesn't have a National strategy for internationalization of higher education.

At the same time, according to Report - 2018, between 26% and 50% of Belarusian HEIs have own internationalization strategies. It is hardly possible either to confirm or deny this because there is no publicly available data on this matter. [12]

It is important to emphasize that it is the legislative framework reform, which causes significant problems in further developing internationalization of higher education. This includes the procedure for obtaining permission to travel abroad, which requires the Min-

ister of Education's permission for students and faculty enabling them to travel outside the country for more than 10 days.



National strategies for internationalization of higher education. 2016/17. (IR 2018, 243)

This procedure is approved by the Belarus Council of Ministers' decree (#254 dated March 23, 2012) and is mandatory not only for education establishments but also for all governmental organizations. In its turn, this Council of Ministers' decree was adopted to implement the relevant decree of the President of the Republic of Belarus dated December 27, 2011. The Ministry of Education's order "On processing documents for business trips abroad of all employees in organizations under the supervision of the Ministry of Education" (#108 dated February 10, 2016) issued upon Belarus' accession to Bologna left the procedure unchanged. The current procedure for traveling abroad was introduced in the mid-2000s as a reaction to the events in Ukraine (the first "Maidan"). Purposefully restricting contacts with foreign, especially Western, universities led to the increased number of instances controlling access to international cooperation. Presently, this procedure is a formality and could be called an anachronism of the system.

Conceptual approaches to Belarus' higher education development until 2020 and further until 2030 in the field of internationalization reconfirmed the need to 'intensify joint fundamental research in cooperation with leading international research centers' and 'increase higher education competitiveness on the global education arena' [13]. However, proposals to develop an 'educational and methodological guide on how to teach Chinese' and the 'national database of effective pedagogical practices for Chinese language teachers' looked quite unexpected. It should be noted that cooperation with Chinese universities has a very

small share in the structure of Belarusian higher education international relations – 5.7% of all international cooperation agreements and 6% of the total number of foreign students. At the same time, China pursues an active policy supporting the study of its language and culture abroad. It also tops the list of the countries that opened its centers outside (15.6%). However, China doesn't view cooperation with Belarusian institutions as its priority. As a rule, it assigns provincial universities, which do not have a high international ranking, to be partners for Belarusian HEIs. At the same time, its motivation and goals have not been disclosed. In terms of the content, this document as a whole yield to the provisions of the State Program "Education and Youth Policy".

New objectives for internationalization of higher education appeared in the Strategic Action Plan for implementation of the key objectives for higher education system development in accordance with European Higher Education Area principles and instruments in April 2018 [14]. They included provision of legislative framework for implementing joint study programs and issuing joint degrees, award of grants to foreign nationals to study at Belarusian universities, and development of terms and conditions for recognizing the outcomes of short-term student mobility programs including 'mobility windows' introduction. We would like to underline that this is a relatively new EHEA requirement. The majority of the countries did not meet this requirement in the academic year 2016/2017. Germany is the only country that did it and makes it mandatory for all its higher education institutions. In May 2018, the Strategic plan was approved by EHEA Ministerial Summit in Paris.

Changes in understanding internationalization goals and objectives set at the Programs' level didn't find its way into the draft Code of Education (Code) of the Republic of Belarus. In general, it maintains previous approaches to this issue identifying it as international cooperation. Although the Code claims to have a comprehensive description of the education field and to regulate relations in education, the fundamental terms defining internationalization are either not identified in there (strategic planning, internationalization goals and objectives. Academic mobility types, joint programs, etc.) or presented in a form that doesn't correspond to its modern understanding and meaning. For example, academic mobility is purely understood as 'student, faculty and support staff exchange between the Republic of Belarus and a foreign state to study, to receive advanced professional training and to improve pedagogical skills' [15]. Compared with the existing Code, the new edition includes a separate article that regulates relations between the state and those individuals who are sent to study abroad. It also identifies the terms 'specialties', which are 'in demand in the Republic of Belarus because there are no study programs preparing such specialists', and specialties, which 'have not been sufficiently developed in the Republic of Belarus' [15, art. 80]. Thus, the practical sense of academic mobility is expanded. According to the new Code edition, the government of the Republic of Belarus has the right to identify these specialties as well as sets the procedure for selecting candidates to study abroad in these fields. The introduction of the provision allowing to provide living allowance for foreign students studying in Belarusian universities in the new Code edition could be considered as significant progress in higher education system development.

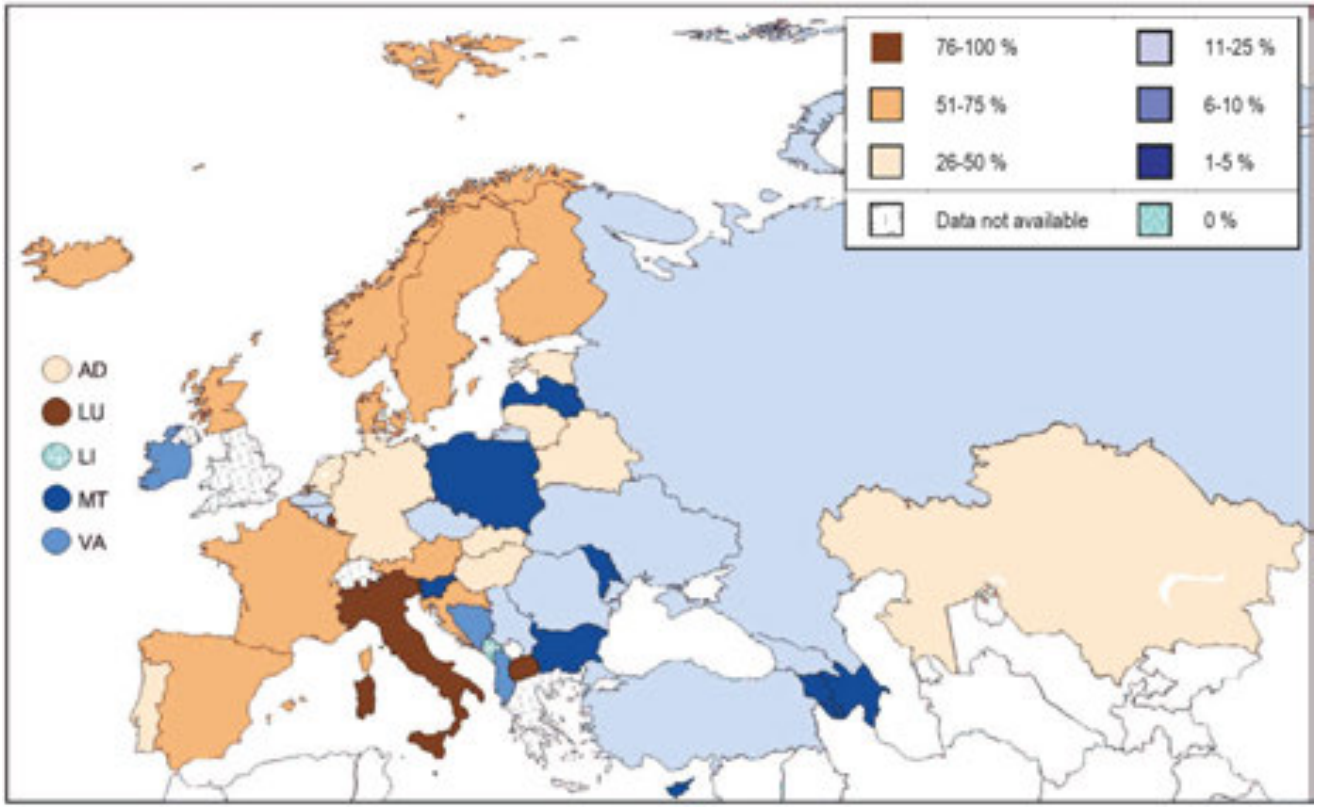
In general, we can state that in the 2010s the attitude toward internationalization and academic mobility in Programs and other documents prepared and issued by the Belarusian Ministry of Education and the Belarusian government has undergone a significant evolution. The term 'ranking' has gone up. The pure pragmatic and one-sided presentation of internationalization as 'education services export' has changed to being understood as providing quality of education and increasing competitiveness of the country's higher education. At the same time, a comprehensive strategy for internationalization development has not been formed. Indicative in this respect is that even today, international terminology is not adopted in various programs related to internationalization.

Belarus is lagging behind other CIS countries in preparing progressive higher education development programs, for example, Kazakhstan. The State Program for Education System Development in the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2011-2020 (Program -1) [16] sets internationalization as its priority. In particular, integration into EHEA is listed as objective #2 for Kazakh higher education development. It includes detailed requirements for improving Kazakh higher education institutions' international ranking, for accreditation according to international standards, for the share of faculty with publications in international journals with a high impact-factor, for the use of best foreign textbooks, for developing joint programs in partnership with leading foreign universities. Program-1 pays special attention to academic mobility including the establishment of Bologna and academic mobility center, setting a scholarship fund (up to 3,000 scholarships per year) for studying at MA and Doctoral programs abroad as well as short-term mobility for undergraduate students. Lithuanian policy for internationalization of higher education stands out with even greater dedication. Since admission to Bologna, a number of programs and action plans to boost internationalization and academic mobility has been developed and implemented. Lithuanian policy concentrates on increasing the quality of education and higher education institutions' competitiveness. It also clearly defines priorities for partnerships (Baltic and Northern countries, European Union and fast developing countries). One of the specific features of Lithuanian strategy is its active engagement of Lithuanian diaspora in promoting Lithuanian language study abroad [17].

8.3. Internationalization and academic mobility practice in the Republic of Belarus

8.3.1. Joint programs and overseas campuses

According to Report – 2018, Belarus has rather a high index of joint program development. It is relatively higher than Poland, Slovenia or Latvia. According to O. Kungurtseva, "nowadays, more than 15 higher education institutions deliver 32 joint educational programs. The total number of students including Ph.D students studying in these programs is 1,871" [18]. Unfortunately, there is no detailed information available to confirm or contradict this. The analysis of a number of examples allows us to say that in reality, not all of them meet EHEA standards.



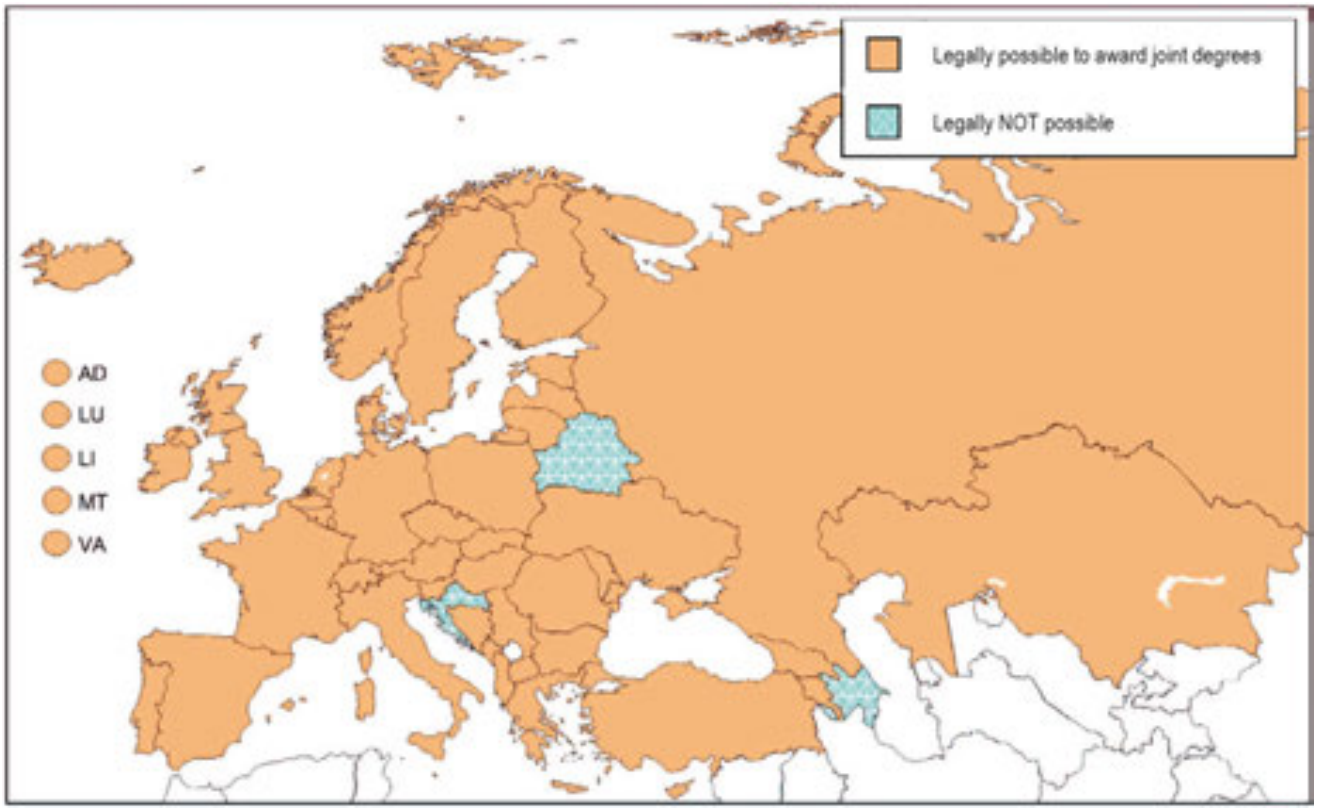
Estimated percentage of higher education institutions that have adopted an internationalization strategy, 2016/17. (IR 2018, 247)

Among the best-known examples of joint programs development is the story of partnership between Belarusian State University of Informatics and Radioelectronics (BSUIR) and American Computer System Institute (Skokie, Illinois). Belarusian mass media presented this partnership as a Belarusian higher education break-through on American education market. It said that BSUIR opened the department of "Information and Computer System Design" at an American institution. It also stated that "thanks to prompt actions taken by the Ministry of Education and BSUIR specialists, both parties agreed on this specialty's educational standards, which meet both USA and Belarus requirements", "plans, curriculum, assignments' subjects and seminar topics have been developed" including a special course on the history of Belarus. However, the problem is that Computer System Institute is not an education establishment. It was established by BSUIR graduates in 1989 and is focusing on providing educational services in the form of courses (from one to three semesters) in the field of medical services, computer systems' administration, business administration for adults and high school graduates from depressed areas, and immigrants. Surely, this is a successful project of its kind and a good example of embedding immigrants from the former USSR into US educational space. For Computer System Institute cooperation with BSUIR is a great marketing move and a step to increase its prestige but the same can be hardly said about the most popular Belarusian technical university [19].

Another example is cooperation with Hohhot Vocational College located in the capital of the autonomous Mongolian region in China [20], which has become a partner of almost

every second Belarusian HEIs that has any relations with China. This College is placed at 7221st position in "Webometrics" university ranking. It is difficult to judge what kind of establishment it is. According to English language institution's name on its website (except the official name, there is no other information available in English), it is College. However, it is known that Hohhot Vocational College delivers joint (!) educational programs in partnership with Belarusian HEIs including Belarusian State University (BSU) to prepare specialists in "World economy" specialty that envisages a 3-year study in China and 3 years in Belarus. One can only guess what quality of education this program achieves.

One of the main barriers for developing joint programs is the absence of legal basis to award joint degrees upon graduation. They are issued in all EHEA countries except Croatia, Azerbaijan and Belarus.



Legal possibility for HEIs to award joint degrees, 2016/17. (IR 2018, 246)

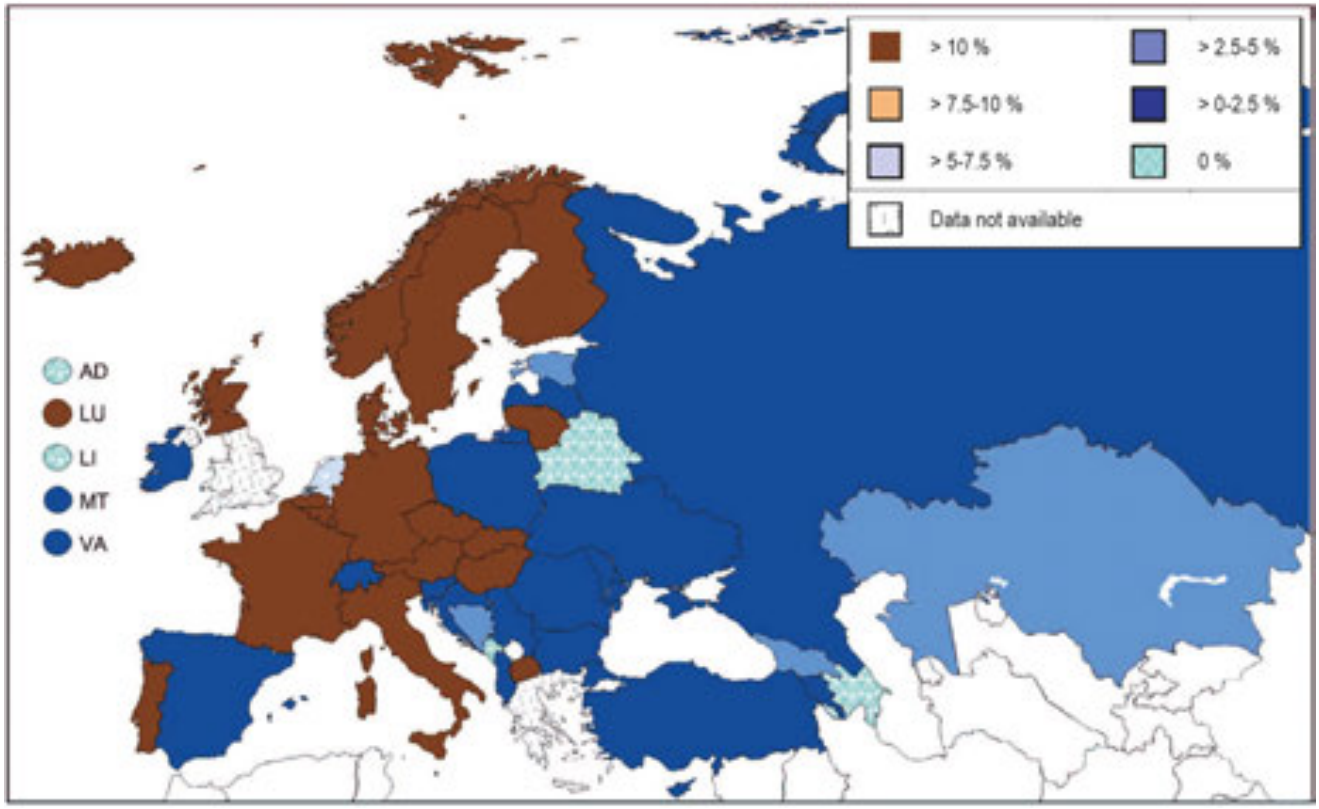
It is also equally related to real practice of issuing such degrees.

At the same time Report-2018 included Belarus into the group of EHEA countries in which joint programs' development and delivery are supported centrally, i.e. at the state level. This can hardly be related to the academic year 2016/2017 since the obligation to develop a legal framework for issuing joint degrees wasn't approved earlier than spring 2018 [12].

Central level actions to support the development of joint degree programs, 2016/17. (IR 2018, 248)

According to O. Kungurtseva, "within the framework of educational policy related to the diversification of educational services export, currently the Yerevan branch of BSU International State Ecology University named after A.D. Sakharov (ISEU) in Armenia and joint

engineering and technical faculty of Belarusian National technical University (BNTU) and Tajikistan Technical University named after academic M.S. Osimi (TTU) in Dushanbe have been opened and operating" [18, c. 50].



Estimated percentage of institutions that award joint degrees, 2016/17.
(IR 2018, 247)

In 2015, 72 students were enrolled at the Yerevan campus of BSU ISEU in the program "Medical Ecology" [21]. Joint engineering and technical faculty of BNTU and TTU in Dushanbe could hardly be considered as overseas campus. In practical terms, this is simply a joint program launched in 2012. It envisages a 3-year study of Tajik students in Dushanbe and finishing their education cycle in Minsk where a Belarusian diploma is awarded. In 2017/2018 academic year, 472 students were enrolled in this program including 176 students at BNTU. In 2017 the first cohort of 24 students graduated [22].

Both establishments do not meet overseas campus criteria. There is no information about them in international statistics; thus, they could be classified as joint programs. At the same time, two universities operating in Belarus are included into the international statistics: Russian State Social University in Minsk and the overseas campus of Plekhanov Russian University of Economics in the Republic of Belarus [5].

8.3.2. Online education

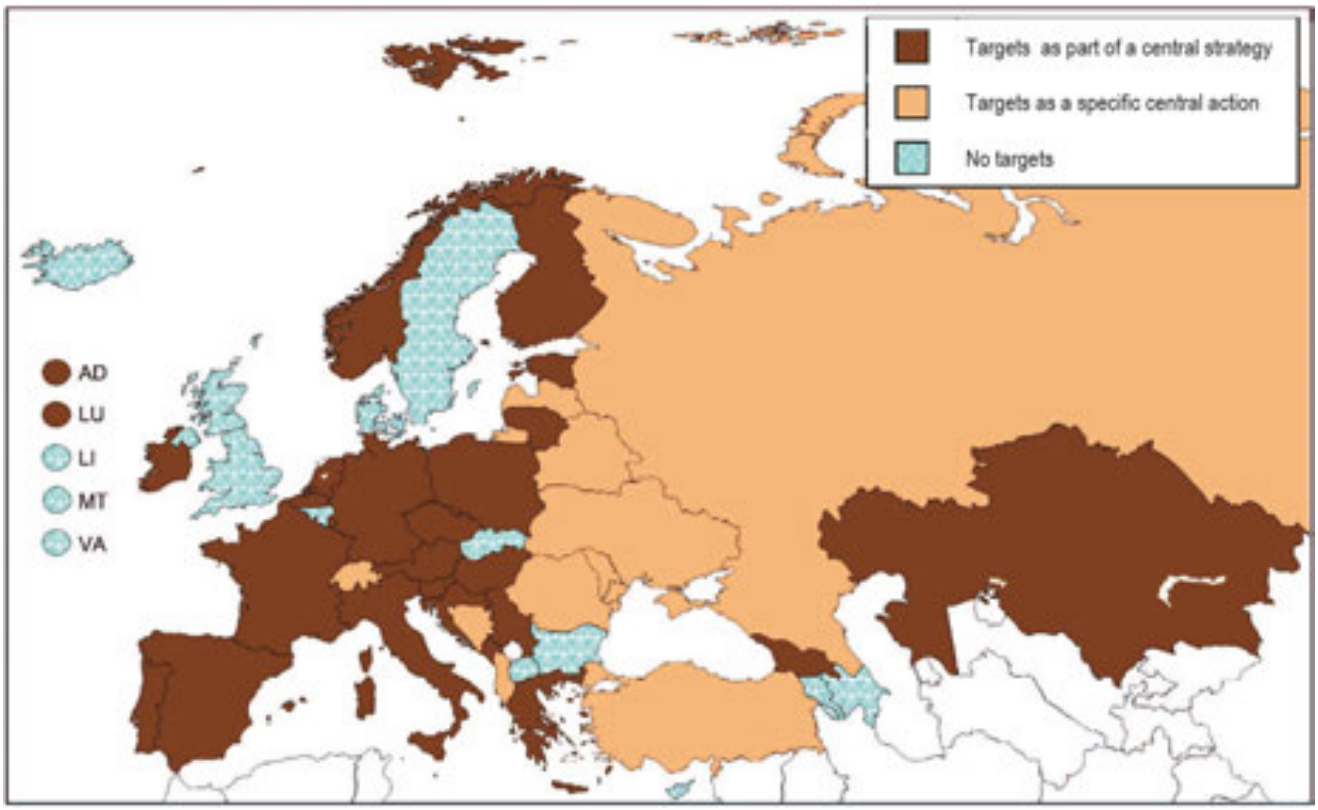
Online education has been developing in Belarus since the 2000s. At present, 10-12 higher education institutions offer online courses. BNTU and BSUIR are taking the leading

role in this and have enrolled 1,000 and 6,000 students respectively. At the same time, it is difficult to evaluate these universities' online courses as they are not available publicly. It is even more difficult to speak about Massive Open Online Courses (MOOC) as an instrument of internationalization. The example of cooperation between BSUIR and American Computer Systems Institute could fall into this pool but it hardly can be called mass education.

The problems of distance learning education have been actively discussed by the academic community lately [23]. In December 2015, the Presidium of the Council of Rectors adopted a special decision related to distance learning; however. the use of online education as an internationalization instrument was left out [24].

8.3.3. Academic mobility

Incoming student mobility being understood as 'educational services export' was the focus of Belarusian higher education internationalization in practice, and has remained so in spite of the changes in understanding its meaning and role. The evidence of this is the launch of a special publication "Export of Education" in 2017 [25]. The availability of the analytical review of the Republic of Belarus' international cooperation in higher education serves as another example of viewing mobility as an 'educational services export' [18, c. 47-52]. The fact that Belarus has special and centrally defined goals for incoming student mobility was confirmed by Report -2018. It is needless to say that the majority EHEA countries have the same.

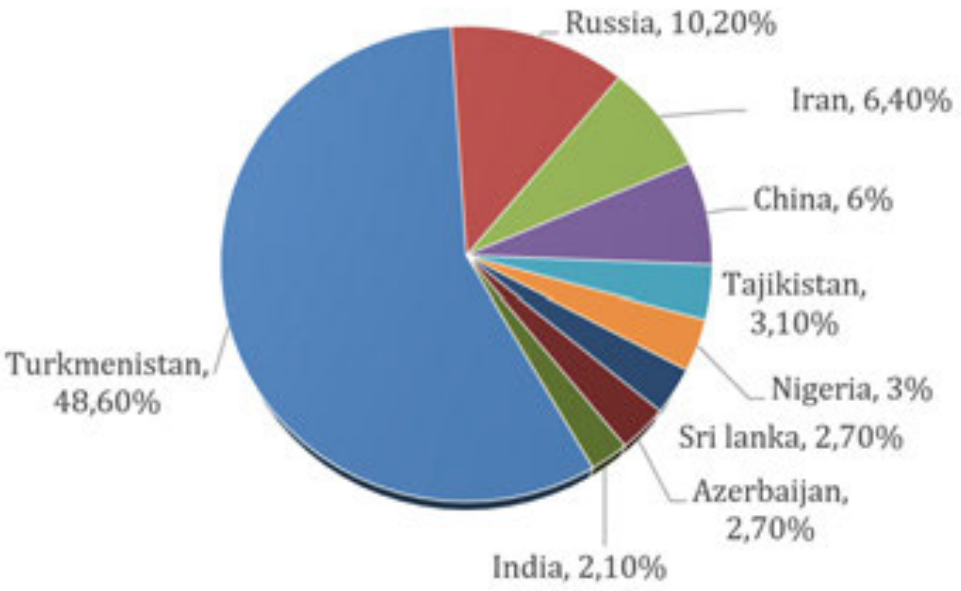


Mobility targets for incoming students, 2016/17. (IR 2018, 250)

From 2010 to 2017 the total number of foreign students increased from 9, 357 to 14, 635 students or represents 56.4% of the total number of students. The share of foreign students also grew up more than 2.5 times: from 2.1 to 5.1 % [26]. This is significant growth. However, the goal of increasing the number of foreign students in more than 3 times in accordance with the Program has not been achieved. It should also be considered that this indicator's increase is not only related to the growth of the number of foreign students but also to significant decrease (35%) of the total number of students in Belarus. Despite showing the increase, Belarus's indicators in the context of EHEA statistics remain below average.

The largest groups of students in the academic year 2017/2018 coming to study in Belarusian HEIs were from Turkmenistan (48.6%), Russia (10.2%), Iran (6.4%), China (6%), Tajikistan (3.1%), Nigeria (3%), Sri Lanka (2.7%), Azerbaijan (2.7%) and India (2.1%).

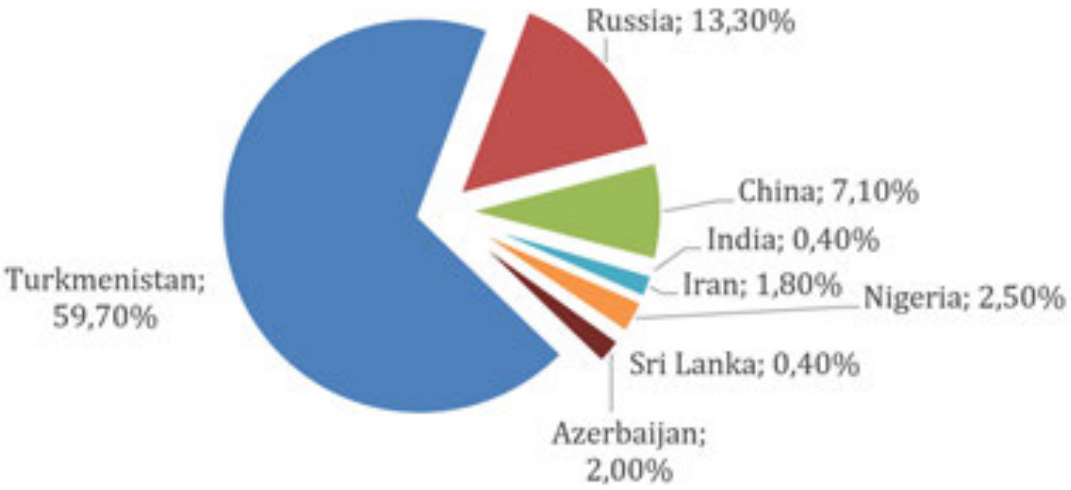
A special role in incoming student mobility is played by cooperation between Belarus and Turkmenistan. We will not exaggerate by saying that every second student in Belarus is a Tajik citizen. In the academic year 2013-2014, the share of Tajik students reached 59-60% of the total number of foreign students in Belarus. The "Turkmen phenomenon" is purely a political coincidence: after A. Lukashenko's visit to Ashgabat in 2010, Belarus was allotted a large quote for admitting Turkmen students. In 2013-2017, between 16 and 20% of the total number of Turkmen students studying abroad had been studying in Belarusian universities. Due to the lamentable state of Turkmen education system, in general, the level of university's applicants is not sufficient to continue their education at higher education institutions. In practice, this leads to dual standards: requirements for assessing Turkmen students' academic performance are lowered, and cases of Turkmen students drop out are rare. According to many faculty views, a similar situation is applicable to Chinese students.



The share of incoming foreign students by country of origin, 2017/2018.

It is noteworthy that the number of students from countries, which are thought to be traditional educational services markets for Belarus, is steadily decreasing. For instance, the number of Russian students decreased by 31.7% from 2010 to 2017, Chinese students – by

28.7%, and Turkmen students – by 14.8%. At the same time, the number of students from non-traditional regions for Belarusian higher education grew up: Iraq (3 times), India (4,5 times), Iran (6 times), and Nigeria (6.7 times) [26].



The share of incoming foreign students by country of origin, 2013/2014.

These facts confirm that Belarusian higher education "export potential" is relatively stable and the education system itself is able to expand and achieve market diversification. At the same time, we should not overstate Belarus' success in this area. Against the background of student mobility boom in 2010 – 2017, we can see a huge increase in the number of foreign students in Lithuania – by 83.1%, in Estonia – by 99%, in Poland – by 164%, and in Georgia – by 294% [2].

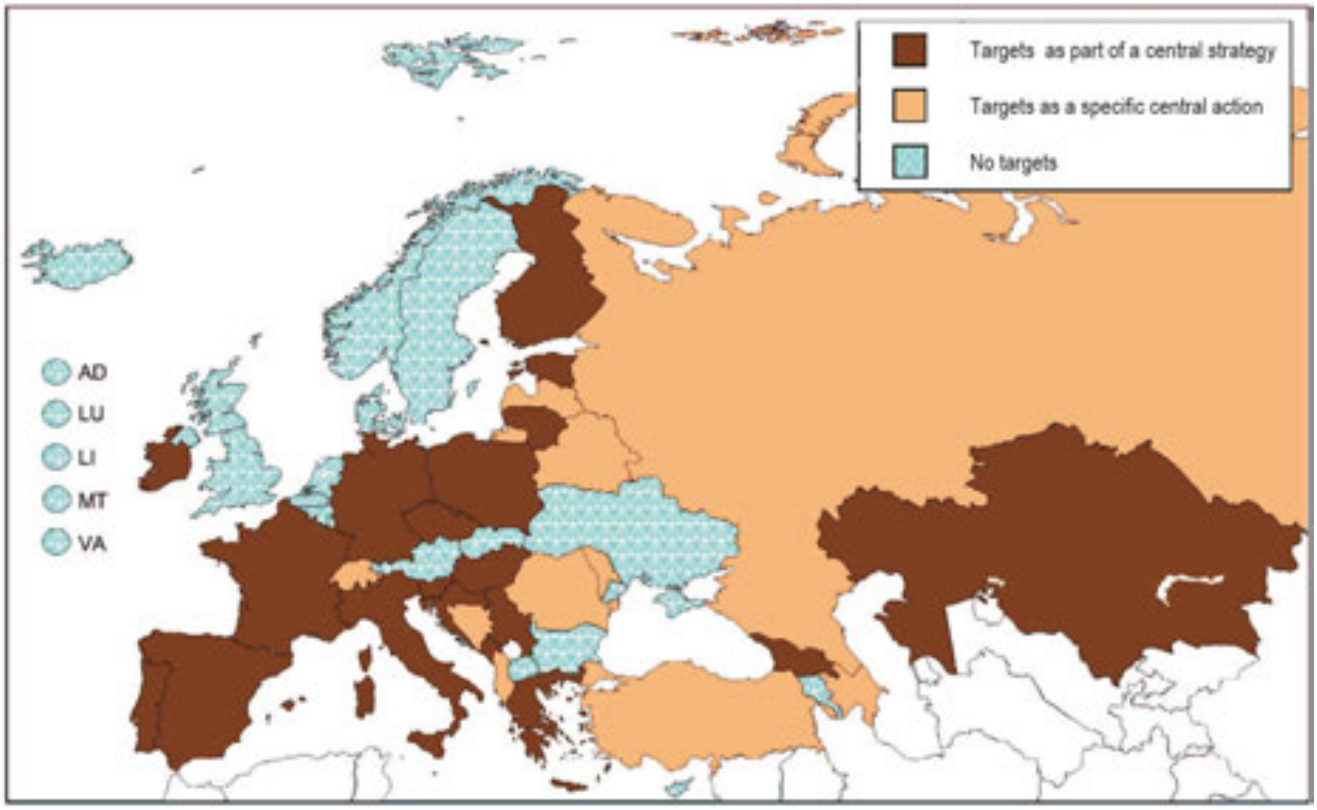
The accuracy of statistics related to incoming student mobility is a different story. One cannot but notice the fact that the data presented in Report - 2018 (15 864 students) doesn't match the data of Belarus State Statistics Committee (Goskomstat) (14,144 students) in the academic year 2014-2015. Another example is the official data on student mobility for the academic year 2016-2017: Goskomstat showed the number of 15,126 foreign students in Belarus, the Ministry of Education Statistics digest indicated the number of 16, 018, O. Kungurtseva's article gave us 19,059, and the Ministry of Education report had the number of 20, 170 [18, c.50: 27, 29]. The difference is up to 26%!

8.3.4. Outward student mobility

According to Report – 2018, Belarus presented its special activities for outward student mobility as well as the majority of EHEA countries. But we should bear in mind that Belarus doesn't plan 'credit' (shot-term) mobility, which is typical of many Bologna countries.

Quantitative criteria and directions of Belarusian student flows within the framework of outward mobility have significantly changed. During 2010-2017 the total number of Belarusian students abroad decreased from 40, 523 students to 25, 701 students, which amounts to 36.5% decrease. The significant drop in outward mobility in Belarus is quite visible in

light of sharp increase in outward mobility in other post-Soviet countries: in Russia – by 9.1%, in Kazakhstan and Ukraine – more than twice (by 106.7% and 104.4% respectively) [2].



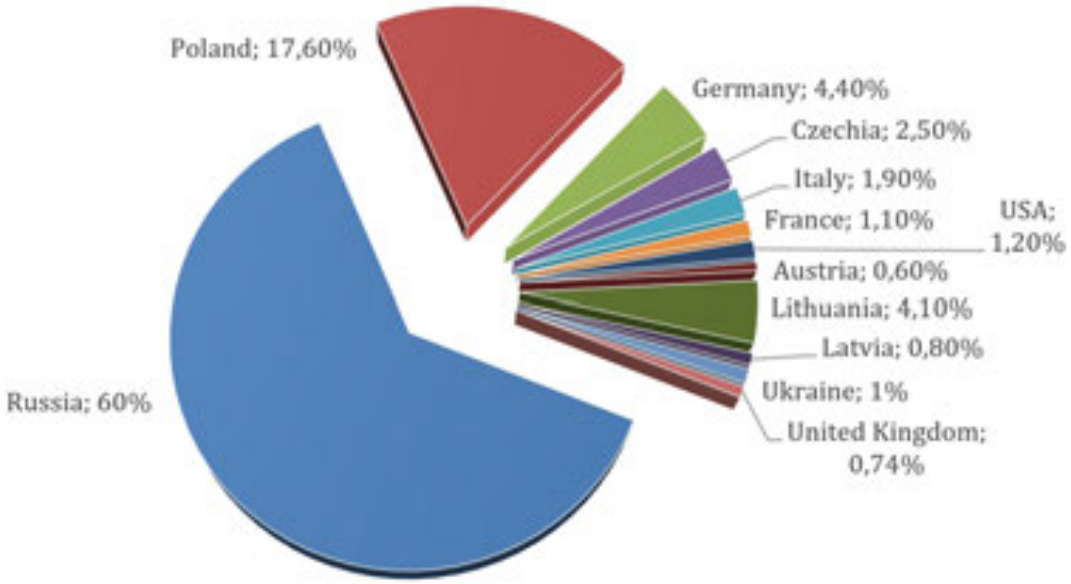
Mobility targets for outgoing students, 2016/17. (IR 2018, 250)

Decrease in the number of students from Belarus occurred mainly because of the sharp decrease of students in Russian universities: from 31, 199 to 15, 488 students. To be exact, the share of students studying in Russia decreased from 77% to 60%. A similar decrease of the number of students occurred in Lithuania: from 2,087 to 1, 068 students. Lithuania, which consistently ranks third on the list of popular destinations among Belarusian students, lost to Germany while Poland increased its presence at the Belarusian educational market: the number of Belarusian students in Poland increased from 2, 641 to 4, 536, and its share tripled – from 6.5% to 17.6% [2].

A significant reduction in the number of Belarusians studying abroad could be explained by demographic changes: aging population and decline in the proportion of children and youth. As an indicator, the number of students in Belarus has decreased by 35.8% in 2010-2017. Surely, the economic stagnation of 2014-2017 played its role in this as well as the decline of households' income. Concerning the preferences of countries of study, we would like to point out that despite Russian dominance among education destinations, its attractiveness has steadily decreased since 2015.

Similar to incoming mobility statistic, a problem occurs while reviewing outward mobility statistics, which is the accuracy of presented data. According to UNESCO, in 2014 the total number of Belarusians studying abroad was 35, 098 students while in accordance with

Report-2018 (the figures for the Report, perhaps, were submitted by the Belarusian Ministry of Education), the total number was 28, 704, i.e. 18% less.



The share of Belarusian students abroad by host countries, 2017.

Based on Report-2018, in the academic year 2014/2015, the share of Belarusian students studying abroad was 5.6% of the total number of students. This figure is significantly lower compared to 8.8 % shown in the UNESCO report.

A distinctive feature of Belarusian students' outward mobility is that it is more independent than the organized one. The share of organized mobility is approximately 2%, and the number of participants is up to 500 students. Here, we are talking about the State Mobility Program initiated in 2012, which envisages sending from 50 to 150 Belarusian students to study abroad. The dominant destination for sending Belarusian students to study abroad is China (30-43% of students), while Russia has 10-14% of students, and leaders of the world educational market – Germany, Japan and Finland have 7-19% of students. Information about students studying in UK and the US within the framework of this program is not available.

The selected areas of study for which the public funds were made available through the Ministry of Education, attract special attention. In the academic year 2013-2014, 96 Belarusian students, i.e. 40.6% of the total number of students to be sent to study abroad within the framework of the above-mentioned program, were sent to study foreign languages and only 3 of them to study innovation in the field of radioelectronics, telecommunication systems and information resources management (respectively to China, Lithuania and Russia). The list of specialties that Belarus is short of doesn't include any medical specialties at all although it has listed the specialty "Expertise and Real Estate Management" in Hungary. Cooperation with Hungarian universities is mainly associated with inter-countries special cooperation program for 2014-2016 and was signed in 2009. This program defined the following priorities for study: agriculture, natural science, mathematics, technics and technol-

ogies, biotechnologies, international relations, music, and has nothing to do with real estate management specialty.

Perhaps, the biggest problem in implementing the State Program for student mobility is non-transparency of its administration, candidates' selections, identifying the study areas priority and selecting foreign universities. It is absolutely impossible to find any information about this program on any publicly available resources including the Ministry of Education's website under the section "Study abroad". According to insiders, this program is available only through the departmental newsletter. It is a paradox - having a high demand for education abroad programs it is hard to fill the places made available by this State Program. It is also difficult to find any information on the program efficiency. Basically, there is no information disclosed except the number of participants and list of countries of study.

8.3.5. Mobility balance

Mobility balance is the ratio of the number of students outgoing and incoming, and is one of the most important indicators of internationalization and higher education system effectiveness. There is no strict definition of "balanced mobility" at EHEA level [28]. At the same time, one can guess that the number of students outgoing and incoming should be equal, i.e. aliquot to 1. However, in reality, there are sharp differences among EHEA countries. For example, the number of incoming students to UK, the Netherlands, and Belgium exceeds the number of outward students many times while the situation in Moldova, Albania and Croatia is completely opposite. Belarus has a negative ranking in this – 0.55. This figure is significantly below EHEA average of 2.8 [12].

As it has already been mentioned above, we should take into account the fact that statistics on Belarus presented in Report – 2018 doesn't match the one of Belarusian Goskomstat and UNESCO. Based on the latter data, this figure was 0.4 and not 0.55. Added to this, due to the decrease in the number of students studying abroad and increase in the number of foreign students studying in Belarus, the mobility balance index in Belarus tends to improve in general: in the academic year 2010/2011 this figure was 0.23 and in 2017/2018 it came to 0.56.

As a rule, positive mobility index is an indicator of national education system attractiveness in the international context. However, it is also influenced by other factors including population, geographical location, national higher education system prestige as well as individual institutions' ranking. It is indicative that formally Belarus' attractiveness rating put it in one group with such countries as Island, Norway, Bulgaria, Armenia and Macedonia.

Mobility balance is directly related to its diversification level. There are certain relations between positive balance index and the share of three largest countries in incoming and outward mobility flows. As a rule, the higher it is, the lower mobility balance. In this context, Belarus is in the group of countries with the lowest level of diversification: in the academic year 2014/2015, 3 largest 'net importing countries' accounted to 75% while 3 largest 'net exporting countries' accounted to 84%. On the other hand, there is also positive dynamic in

it: in the academic year 2010/2011, 3 largest 'net importing countries' accounted to 73% of students and in 2017 – 65.2% while 3 largest 'net exporting countries' accounted to 88.6% and 82.3% respectively.

8.3.6. Short-term academic mobility

There are no specifically developed standards for short-term faculty and students' academic mobility; thus, it is difficult to present the overall picture of this form of mobility. According to official statistical information, in 2012 the number of students who left to study abroad was 3,554 (0.9% of the total number of students) while the number of faculty and teaching staff was 3, 700 (16% of the total number of faculty and teaching staff). These figures are far from EHEA goals, especially in relation to student mobility. Moreover, even they are subject to reliability: what do the Ministry of education employees understand by 'leave to study abroad'? It looks like any travel abroad including participation in conferences and seminars is considered as 'study abroad'. The possibilities to study abroad and have internships at foreign institutions are very limited even in the most advanced higher education institutions (in terms of international relations) such as BSU and BNTU. BSU offers to its 2,455 faculty and staff members between 18 and 25 internships a year while 34,000 students are offered 170-200 study abroad places. BNTU where the number of faculty, staff and student population is higher than in BSU offers to its faculty and staff 6 places for internships and 21 places for study abroad. According to "Erasmus+" data, the number of faculty and students who took part in this program tends to grow: in 2015 the total number was 260 people, in 2017 it already was 430. A number of incoming mobility grew from 63 to 220 [30].

There is no publicly available information about the number of incoming mobility, in particular, about the number of visiting foreign faculty. Despite the Council of Ministers decree #236 "On the issues of attracting foreign specialists for delivering higher education programs", which has created acceptable conditions for inviting foreign specialists to teach at Belarusian higher education institutions, the demand for these specialists at the university level has been very low.

Thus, during 2010-2017 a number of changes had occurred in the implementation of academic mobility. Despite maintaining negative mobility index, its indicators tend to improve due to the decrease in the number of those who study abroad and to the increase in the number of foreign students in Belarusian institutions. There is some progress in diversification of both external and internal mobility markets. At the same time, against the background of internationalization development in some Eastern European countries, Belarusian positive changes look quite modest. A significant problem that hampers the process's evaluation in this area is the inaccuracy of statistical information.

8.4. Conclusion

In the last decade, there have been significant changes in the understanding of and approaches to internationalization of higher education in the Republic of Belarus at the state policy level. There has been a certain convergence with EHEA standards and categories.

At the same time, the single-sided understanding of internationalization as "educational services export" dominates its implementation process.

In spite of a slight increase in the volume of incoming academic mobility, educational services markets diversification and mobility balance improvement, Belarus is losing to Russia's academic expansion in general both in outward mobility and at the internal market even if it is to a lesser extent.

There is an obvious lack of understanding of the most important trends in internationalization of higher education development in modern environment both at the decision-making level in project management and its implementation. There is also inadequate understanding of the scope and directions of individual academic mobility in Belarus.

The "consumer" approach to internationalization as mainly an 'educational services export' instrument significantly limited its capabilities of being a driver of university modernization but also of the education system at large. The desire to increase "marketability of educational services" at any means didn't significantly improve the quality of educational programs or push to redesigning them in accordance with international standards. This also equally concerns the introduction and implementation of new models of higher education management.

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Conclusion

The 2018 communique of the EHEA summit in Paris articulated a number of urgent technical challenges, which the European higher education systems face to accomplish the principal political ends of the Bologna Process. The commitments of the EHEA member states for the upcoming two years include overcoming obstacles to implementing the provisions of the ESG and other tools of quality assurance of educational programmes in the national laws, complete implementation of the European Credits Transfer System for the purposes of academic mobility, recognition of qualifications and access to the labour market as well as use of other European tools, including recognition of qualifications of refugees as well as previous periods of studies and learning outcomes.

The EHEA member states face other challenges related to improvement and digitalisation of the European Diploma Supplement, its extended and safe use according to the Lisbon Convention, simplification and encouragement of student exchanges using such tools as the Europass Mobility and the European Student Card.

In case of Belarus, unlike other EHEA member states, which have made progress in achieving these goals, implementation of the Bologna tools is a systemic challenge requiring not only a technical but, firstly, a value-based political response. During the three years, which have passed since Belarus' accession to the EHEA, our education system was unable even to begin the reforms promised in Yerevan. As international monitoring and our study demonstrate, it has not been possible to enshrine the new Bologna architecture of the higher education system in law. The commitments to reform the quality assurance system, to create the National Framework of Qualifications, to assimilate the ECTS, to modernise the recognition procedures, to introduce the European Diploma Supplement, to diversify the regulatory framework of academic mobility and higher education internationalisation are far from completion. The 2018 EHEA Implementation Report demonstrates lack of progress concerning the overwhelming majority of the parameters. In the EHEA map, the Belarusian higher education system either consistently occupies a place among the outsiders or is the only one, which has not made even the first step to implement most of the Bologna tools.

Even when attempts to modernise the higher education system are made, the process is so slow because of the lack of political willpower and interdepartmental tensions that it is impossible to close the gap between Belarus and the EHEA leaders.

If the Belarusian authorities were able to explain the low quality of training in the higher education system and decline of academic standards with one of the highest levels of accessibility of tertiary education in the world eight to ten years ago, today this achievement has become history. Higher education accessibility and inclusivity keep decreasing. One of the most important tasks of the EHEA – to ensure fair representation of social diversity of the society among the prospective students and graduates of higher education institutions – becomes an increasingly delicate challenge for the Belarusian educational policy. Accessibility of higher education to underrepresented groups not only fails to increase but even decreases because of dismantling of some old preferential tools and insensitivity of the system to the new European inclusivity mechanisms.

The situation is even less encouraging with the adoption of the European academic values. The Paris communique emphasises that academic freedom and integrity, institutional autonomy and involvement of students in university governance, responsibility of society for higher education and accountability of higher education institutions to society form the basis of the EHEA. However, continuing academic repressions and statutory restriction of academic freedom, an extremely low level of autonomy of the Belarusian universities, and non-democratic governance methods have the potential of depreciating the possible future progress in implementation of the Bologna tools. On the other hand, suspicion of the European academic imperatives and fear of losing control prevent the Belarusian authorities from deciding to implement them.

Nevertheless, hope to modernise the Belarusian higher education system remains. During the 2018 EHEA summit in Paris, Belarus presented the Draft Strategic Action Plan on Implementation of the Major Objectives of the Education System Development in Line with the EHEA Principles and Tools actually developing the Belarus Roadmap for Higher Education Reform passed in Yerevan in 2015. With this document, Belarus undertakes to introduce the National Framework of Qualifications BelQF until 2019, to improve the internal quality assurance procedures at higher education institutions until 2020, to prepare the regulatory framework and to organise full-scale operation of an independent quality assurance agency until 2022. Besides, the document contains commitments to improve the qualifications recognition system according to the Lisbon Convention. In particular, it is planned to prepare the regulatory framework for the procedure of recognising previous studies and qualifications of refugees.

The Belarusian side undertakes to implement the European Diploma Supplement in the digital format and the ECTS among the Bologna transparency tools until 2020. To develop internationalisation and to encourage academic mobility, a new regulatory framework will be prepared to create joint educational programmes. Some actions to support employment of the graduates of higher education institutions are planned. However, the wording of the Strategic Action Plan does not allow to expect effective diversification of the current system of students' mandatory work assignment found inconsistent with the EHEA values in the AG2's report. The commitments to include the fundamental academic values of the EHEA in the national education system are even less specific.

Inclusion of the Strategic Action Plan among the final documents of the EHEA summit and the Belarusian Ministry of Education's plans to continue reforms of the higher education system offer some hope of modernisation of the higher education system under European supervision. However, it is impossible to ignore the fact that the new Roadmap has numerous vulnerable spots.

The status of the Strategic Plan is lower if compared with the 2015 Roadmap because these are the commitments of the Ministry of Education and not of the Belarusian government now. However, the powers of a single ministry limit the implementation capacity. The tasks of the Strategic Plan are reduced mostly to preparing the regulatory framework for implementing the EHEA tools, but not the values. The commitments are stated very vaguely and provide ample opportunities for their interpretation.

However, the vector of modernising the higher education system is not completely lost. With decisive public support, the Strategic Action Plan can facilitate not only overcoming the crisis of higher education but also reforming the social and economic sectors in general.