

# Francisk Scorina Gomel State University in implementation of Tempus project «Eastern partnership in pedagogical innovations in inclusive education (INOVEST)

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**Abstract**—The article deals with the development of integration of Belarussian system of education into European educational space. Implementation of international programs, held by the higher educational establishments of the Republic of Belarus is discussed. The role of universities in European integration is critically analyzed. As the example of a long-scale European project, Tempus-INOVEST (Eastern Partnership in Pedagogical Innovations in Inclusive Education) project is described and analyzed. The role of F. Scorina Gomel State University in developing European integration processes on post-Soviet space is discussed.

**Keywords**—European educational space, European Union, integration, ERASMUS, Higher educational institutions, inclusive education, INOVEST, integration processes, TEMPUS, universities.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Today the most wildly spread and dominating tendencies in the World educational space are globalization, internationalization, commercialization and regionalization. One of the major driving factors of globalization and internationalization in education is the factor of competitiveness in the educational market. Now to be competitive, the education system has to be global, provide all types of educational services demanded by consumers and economy. In turn, institutions of higher education have to be global and international to increase competitiveness.

Most often met definition of internationalization in higher education was given by Altbach and Knight as "The process of integration of higher education institution into the world educational space including training, scientific researches and other functions which are carried out by higher educational institutions in interaction with foreign partners". It is possible to offer another following definition of internationalization in education: Internationalization of higher educational institution is a process of integration of establishments, and also their compound (students, teachers, resources) into global (world) educational space. This definition allows to describe the process of internationalization more precisely [1].

Thus, internationalization of universities assumes activity in various directions (educational, scientific, cultural, innovative, etc.). For example, educational direction is realized through training of foreign students, undergraduate and graduate students at universities, realization of joint educational programs, opening of joint educational institutions, and also an exchange of undergraduate, graduate students and teachers. The scientific direction is realized through joint scientific programs, research, carrying out joint conferences, seminars, functioning of joint scientific laboratories, etc.

## II. FACTORS OF INTERNATIONALIZATION

The factors which increase the process of internationalization of universities are described in scientific literature. In particular, Spring allocates academic (or educational, assuming global influence of education and scientific research), economic (search for new sources of income and development out of the countries). These two groups of factors explain why universities get benefit from internationalization. Internationalization promotes realization the main educational mission by universities. Even especially local or regional universities which serve the local educational market now are compelled to integrate the international component into the training programs, as the world around becomes more and more connected organism that demands knowledge of it and the ability to put the knowledge into practice in various parts of the planet from students [2].

One of the major driving factors of internationalization in the higher education is the factor of competitiveness of universities in the educational market. Now to be competitive, the university has to be global, i.e. provide all types of educational services demanded by students. There are two reasons. The first is the demand of students and employers for the academic courses, programs and subjects of scientific researches having the international value and actual in any country. The second competition against other institutions of higher education [3].

Along with the domestic students, being internationalized, universities have an opportunity to take foreign students that is positively reflected in the general atmosphere of the university (it is supposed that foreign students, paying fees, are mostly motivated to study). Institutions of higher education with well developed international strategy are rather easily capable to catch the best students and the best teachers, having sufficient experience of recruiting, and also are attractive to students and teachers from around the world. Use of English in teaching is important. Internationalization is also an opportunity to diversify activities of the higher educational institution in the geographical plan. The entry into the world educational markets allows universities to carry out programs, which are not popular among local students. However different countries are at the different level of economic and technological development and are characterized by various demographic situation. Level of demand for educational services in various countries respectively depends on influence of these factors. For universities existence of foreign branches is also a good opportunity to use the labor potential flexibly. In the absence of demand for any programs in one country, there is no need to carry out reduction of teachers. In similar cases they are temporarily transferred to branch where these programs are demanded by potential consumers [4].

It is possible to refer high cost of the carried-out international projects, and also high risks for the higher education institutions opening branches abroad to problems of internationalization of economic character.

Internationalization of higher educational institutions is the developing, multipolar process. As a rule, this process originates from internationalization of structure of students and the academic programs, proceeds in internationalization of professorial and research structure. Apogee of internationalization of higher education institution is opening of foreign branch, or the whole network of branches of this university [5].

The most effective instruments of integration in education are the international projects and programs. And, these projects differ on duration (short-term and long-term), the purposes and scales.

The Republic of Belarus, being in the heart of Europe, is actively involved into the European integration processes in education.

Here we can list the objective factors of the national educational system in the world educational space, which determine the main strategic directions of modernization, are:

- geopolitical (being in the center of Europe; interaction with the European Union with the countries of the CIS and Baltic States; the Union of Belarus and Russia; Eurasian economic community; the forthcoming creation of the strengthening of the processes of globalization in the world; the long isolation of Belarus from the world education space in the last century, etc.);
- socio-cultural (the European nature of the social and cultural spheres; one of the best education systems in the world; a powerful scientific and socio-cultural potential; reform of the education system, taking into account the characteristics of the processes of integration, etc.);
- economic (significant economic potential; the transition to market-based forms of educational organization and commercialization of educational services, etc.);
- proper educational (legal security; principles, priorities for the development of the national educational system; the functioning of educational institutions of various types and forms of ownership, structure and duration of education at all levels is approximately the same to duration of education in European countries; the introduction of a two-tier system of training specialists with higher education; the introduction of credits, etc.).

### III. REPUBLIC OF BELARUS AND INTERNATIONAL PROGRAMS

Since the beginning of the 1990 's in the Republic of Belarus, programs that allow citizens of the country with higher education, to study at UK universities developed. To a large number of options-from receiving the certificate – to master's degree.

The large-scale project is a project of VISBY, introduced by Swedish Institute since 2004 year. The objective of this project, funded by a Swedish government was to strengthen cooperation in the field of higher and secondary education and expand the exchange of students between Sweden, Belarus, Ukraine, and the North-Western and Central regions of Russia. The benefits of this program can benefit students, teachers and scientists from these countries and regions. The Institute offers a number of scholarships for long-term (1-2 years) and short-term (1-2 weeks). Long-term visit, in most cases, involves training master at one of the universities in the country. The applicant must possess sufficient Swedish or English and have a basic education. The main advantage of VISBY is that they can make use of whole groups of students and senior high school students of lyceums and gymnasiums. This is the interchange of the students of the two countries [6].

The value of joint educational projects for modernization and improvement of the education system of our country and the further integration of the national high school (which is still considered to be one of the best in the world) in the world education system should not be underestimated.

Highest stage of international educational projects is the opening of the joint educational institutions. The clearest example of such cooperation was the Franco-Belarusian Management Institute, opened September 1, 1995, on the basis of the educational establishment “F. Scorina Gomel State University”, with the cooperation of Belarusian and French sides. Competence of students formed in the educational space of the two countries, and at the end of the training they receive two diplomas-Belarusian and French. Fore just 19 years, more than 500 students received diplomas of different levels [7].

Gomel State University actively supports the trends arising from modern educational paradigm. The consequence of which is the recognition of the institution as one of the best universities of CIS in 2014. A certificate of international rating agency «expert RA» was received by GSU resulting from the analysis of the statistics and surveys of the academic and scientific community, employers, students and graduates. GSU holds the 153-th place in the list of higher education institutions of Russia, Ukraine, Kazakhstan, Belarus, Moldova,

Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan and Kyrgyzstan. In the ranking of universities Ranking web of universities GSU takes 4 place in the Republic of Belarus (February, 2014).

Currently, GSU takes an active part in the international project TEMPUS. TEMPUS-programme, funded by the European Union, aimed at supporting the modernisation of higher education in the partner countries of Eastern Europe, Central Asia, the Western Balkans and the Mediterranean. TEMPUS is part of the European political neighbourhood programs the purpose of which is to contribute to the prosperity, stability and security of countries in the regions of Eastern neighbourhood. The program promotes cooperation in the field of higher education between the EU and partner countries and promoting voluntary integration of the higher education systems of the partner countries in the European processes.

Since 1993 the TEMPUS projects has played a significant role in the integration of the academic community of Belarus into the European network of institutions of higher education. Belarus is involved in projects from 1994. According to the Office of the ERASMUS (TEMPUS) in the Republic of Belarus, all higher education institutions participated in 64 projects.

The 2014 concluded with the selection of projects for funding under the sixth competition of TEMPUS IV projects. 171 projects were selected. Among them are 13 projects involving Belarusian institutions of higher education.

#### **IV. GOMEL STATE UNIVERSITY AND TEMPUS PROGRAM**

Gomel State University is one of the leaders on the number of selected projects among Belarusian universities. It should also be noted that the participation of the GSU in implementation of international projects is possible thanks to the close coordination of work with the National Erasmus (Tempus) Office in Belarus, participation in training seminars, meetings with potential partners.

Only results from the latest competition, the University will participate in the two projects "Centres of excellence for young scientists from Belarus, Russia and Ukraine» and «Ecological education for Belarus, Russia and Ukraine.

Currently, the GSU. takes part in 4 Tempus projects: 1. Preparation and professional development for teachers in the field of tourism (Teacher Education and Training in Tourism in Belarus); 2. Eastern partnership in the field of pedagogical innovations in the framework of inclusive education (Eastern Partnership in Pedagogical Innovations in Inclusive Education); 3. Environmental education for Belarus, Russia and Ukraine (Ecological Education for Belarus, Russia and Ukraine); 4. Centers of excellence for young scientists from Belarus, Russia and Ukraine; and one project IANUS II-Inter-Academic Network mobility under Erasmus Mundus programme (Erasmus Mundus), aimed at strengthening cooperation and international relations in the field of higher education and the universities of Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia with the universities of the countries of the European Union.

INOVEST project (Eastern Partnership in Pedagogical Innovations in Inclusive Education) TEMPUS IV began with in October 2012. The goal of the project is the creation by the end of 2015, the methodological and educational framework for the development and implementation of training programmes for teachers in the field of pedagogical innovations in inclusive education, as well as their further development and sustainability within the University structure; creation and launching of a national network of promoters in the field of pedagogical innovations in the inclusive education included for the support and implementation of innovative education in Belarus, Ukraine and Moldova [8].



Fig. 1 INOVEST logo

The project involves universities-partners from 6 countries (Spain, Germany, Sweden, Belarus, Ukraine and Moldova). The international university consortium is composed of 4 Belarusian partners (Ministry of education, Belarussian State Pedagogical University, Minsk City Institute of Education Development, and F.Scorina Gomel State University). Two laboratories were created in each of the partner universities: the Laboratory of research and development of talents and intelligence and Innovative multimedia didactic laboratory [6].



Fig. 2 INOVEST laboratory at F. Scorina Gomel State University

Within the framework of the project, the partner sides are actively implementing special courses for teachers of institutions of secondary education. Experts develop and adapt training programmes for teachers and school principals in the area of pedagogical innovations in inclusive education, based on the latest assistive technologies.

Belarus joined some major international instruments on human rights (UN Declaration on Human Rights, UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the Convention on the Children Rights) and committed themselves to respect human rights, in particular, to ensure the right to education of children with special educational needs (SEN). In these countries over the past 10 years, reforms have been undertaken in special education, which resulted in a significant number of children with SEN having been transferred into mainstream schools. The

positive public opinion on inclusive education has been created. State regulations aimed at the development of inclusive education have been developed and adopted.

According to operative data, in Belarus there are more than 50.000 children with SEN integrated in secondary schools. However, the organizational and methodological principles of the learning process in secondary schools in Belarus are focused on children with regular development, and does not take into account the peculiarities of the educational-cognitive activity of children with SEN. Non-compliant forms and methods of pedagogical influence on these children can create the preconditions for the formation of their negative attitudes toward school and deviant behavior. Belarus is currently facing several major issues in social protection, which primarily affect children with SEN. Lack of alternative education for children with SEN and lack of adequate support for their families in bringing up such children inevitably reduce the quality of their education. Therefore most of these children graduate from schools without acquiring proper skills and abilities necessary for life and many of them are being deemed “uneducable”.

The successful implementation of inclusive education for children with special needs, requires the solution of many problems at the state level. One of them is the introduction of Pedagogical Innovations in Inclusive Education, based on the latest assistive technologies (AT) and information and communications technologies (ICT).

The concept of innovative education enjoys high priority within international and European policies. The European Council has repeatedly recognized innovation as crucial to Europe’s ability to respond effectively to the challenges and opportunities of globalization. In December 2006, for example, it is noted that “Europe needs a strategic approach aimed at creating an innovation-friendly environment where knowledge is converted into innovative products and services”. In many European countries (including Belarus) innovative education and innovative schools became a reality.

On the other hand, institutions of teachers’ education do not offer training courses for teachers’ re-qualification or retraining teachers in Pedagogical Innovations in Inclusive Education. In consequence, apart from isolated short term or punctual in-service, trainings on individual aspects of innovative education practically do not exist [6].

To tackle these problems the consortium of European universities was created and proposed the project aiming at the development of a holistic concept and a pilot structure for coordinated teachers’ training in Pedagogical Innovations in Inclusive Education by creating correspondent networks and fostering universities' contribution to the development of educational, legal and technological support for the implementation of Pedagogical Innovations in Inclusive Education with a regional-wide impact. The first step in the development of innovative education is training and/or retraining of teachers of pre-university educational institutions to equip them with the knowledge and skills to work with children with SEN and with their parents. As a result, children with SEN will acquire easier skills in: reading, writing, mathematics, ICT and foreign languages in correspondence with EU strategies regarding basic competences.

Therefore the consortium members expressed their will to establish a particular inter-university regional network of promoters for Innovative Education. The consortium members believed that the creation of this network would be an important step towards a knowledge society.

An important role in the project constituted the experience in this field of Germany, Spain and Sweden, where innovative educational systems were created in the frame of the education reform. Another important advantage is the experience of Belarussian HEIs in the provision of professional training for teachers as well as their experience in the initial education of teachers. Thus the project’s idea not only corresponded with the regional development priorities but fit

well into the competencies and development priorities of the partner universities and educational institutes in Belarus and other countries, which have developed a range of activities related to innovative education, including research and studies to various national and international forums.

The previous experience of the consortium members' universities in many national and international projects demonstrated their capacity and expertise to contribute to the project objectives.

The aim of the project was set – to contribute to the development and implementation of Pedagogical Innovations in Inclusive Education policies in Belarus and a better coordination of lifelong learning professional formation in education through the enhancement of the quality and relevance of services of Belorussian universities in the provision of professional teachers' training in Pedagogical Innovations in Inclusive Education.

The project team worked on the basis of 6 work packages: 1. Increased knowledge on Pedagogical Innovations in Inclusive Education through sharing of experiences and visions on the progress of innovative education at national and regional levels (It included following steps: In-depth analysis of the state of implementation of Pedagogical Innovations in Inclusive Education and teachers training needs in Belarus, Ukraine and Moldova; Comparative analysis and benchmarking of best practices in Pedagogical Innovations in Inclusive Education and teachers training in the EU partners' countries; Stakeholders round tables for the discussion and promotion of the methodology of Pedagogical Innovations in Inclusive Education at schools and related teachers training. 2. Publication of resource guides on Pedagogical Innovations in Inclusive Education and professional teachers training (Development and publication of a guide on Pedagogical Innovations in Inclusive Education and requirements for professional teachers training; Development and publication of a road map for the implementation of Pedagogical Innovations in Inclusive Education and lessons learned from the project). 3. Establishment and launch of the new programs on Pedagogical Innovations in Inclusive Education ( Preparation of administrative and technical conditions for the establishment and launch of the INOVEST training programs; Selection of administrative staff and trainers for new training programs; Preparation & implementation of short-term intensive training courses for the staff (training of trainers). 4. New curricula and courses for professional training in Pedagogical Innovations in Inclusive Education developed and implemented (Development and publication of curricula, courses and training materials for professional training of teachers and decision makers in Pedagogical Innovations in Inclusive Education; Development and publication of curricula, courses and training materials for professional training of promoters in Pedagogical Innovations in Inclusive Education; Implementation of continuing training courses in Pedagogical Innovations in Inclusive Education. 5. Creating a regional network of Pedagogical Innovations in Inclusive Education promoters developed (Selection of promoters in Pedagogical Innovations in Inclusive Education and setting up of a regional network; Training of promoters of Pedagogical Innovations in Inclusive Education). 6. Dissemination (Creating and up-date of a dissemination website; Development and publication of dissemination materials; Internal and external seminars and information events; Preparation & Implementation of the final conference).

During the INOVEST project course materials were developed within the following curricula areas: Psychology (3 courses); Pedagogical innovations (6 courses); ICT in inclusive education (5 courses): Introduction to the psychology of human uniqueness. Psychodiagnosics. Psychological tests. Teaching Thinking Skills (training). Innovative pedagogics. Teaching today. Creative and innovative education at school. Pedagogical Innovations in Inclusive Education at School. Pedagogical Innovations in Inclusive Education at HEI. School management of Pedagogical Innovations. ICT for students with SEN. Assistive technologies

in education. Cloud technology in inclusive schools. ICT accessibility features for improvement and disclosure the abilities of students with SEN. (laboratory practice). Digital Laboratory's FourierEdu (laboratory practice).



Fig. 3 INOVEST laboratories and equipment

## V. CONCLUSION

During the project the methodological and educational framework for the development and implementation of professional teachers' training programs in Pedagogical Innovations in Inclusive Education by 2015 was created; national network of Pedagogical Innovations in Inclusive Education promoters for the support and implementation of innovative education in Belarus was created. Partner universities do much in dissemination of the results of the project, including creation of web-pages of the project on the university's web-sites [9].

The project resulted in the following outcomes and outputs:

1. Increased knowledge on Pedagogical Innovations in Inclusive Education through sharing of experiences and visions on the progress of innovative education at national and regional levels;
2. Publication of resource guides on Pedagogical Innovations in Inclusive Education and professional teachers training;
3. Establishment and launch of the new programs on Pedagogical Innovations in Inclusive Education;
4. Development and implementation of new curricula and courses for professional training in Pedagogical Innovations in Inclusive Education;
5. Development of a regional network of promoters in Pedagogical Innovations in Inclusive Education.

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