

FORMATION OF THE EUROPEAN HIGHER EDUCATION AREA AS A PROCESS OF CONVERGENCE AND HARMONIZATION OF EUROPEAN EDUCATIONAL SYSTEMS

Matveyonok T.V.

Belarussian National Technical University

Currently, Europe feels itself as a single whole: a common economic space is created, a common European labor market is formed, borders between the countries of the European Union are opened, and a single currency is introduced. In these conditions, the availability of various higher education systems, as well as the incompatibility of the qualifications awarded, is seen as a tangible obstacle to the mobility of qualified personnel.

In this regard, Europe is the largest reform of higher education, most often associated with the Bologna process, the beginning of which falls on the 90th. XX century. The Bologna process arose within the framework of the European system of higher education, where cycles (baccalaureate and magistracy) had long existed. The European system of higher education already provided for academic mobility of students and teachers, as well as issuing and receiving academic loans of various types. But even earlier, in 1957, the Roman agreement was signed, based on the idea of betraying the higher school of a European character. This idea was supported at the conference of the European Ministers of Education in 1971 and 1976, the Maastricht Treaty of 1992. In subsequent years, the European Union and the Council of Europe contributed to the creation of a variety of programs aimed at developing common approaches to addressing transnational problems of higher education. Expanded access to higher education, increased academic mobility of students, there was a convergence of educational programs that existed in the framework of numerous programs TEMPUS / TACIS, established lifelong learning systems.

A powerful stimulus to the formation of a single European space of higher education was the integration processes in Europe: the creation of a single political, economic, sociocultural space, the introduction of the Schengen agreement and the single European currency.

All experts agree that 1988 was the starting point, when the rectors of European universities gathered for Bologna to celebrate the 900th anniversary of the oldest university in Europe. In their document "The Great Charter of Universities" [1], the growing role of the university in the coming millennium was emphasized, the fundamental principles of the university's activity - autonomy, unity of teaching and scientific research - were determined. The Great Charter urged European universities to support the mutual exchange of information and documentation, implement joint projects, encourage the mobility of teachers and students, exercise transparent control of knowledge [2, p. 2].

The signing of the Lisbon Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications Relating to Higher Education in the European Region (1997), with the participation of 43 countries, has become a significant step in the process of forming a single space for European education. Taking into account the provisions of the Great Charter, the Convention defined a huge variety of education systems in Europe. Various educational systems undoubtedly reflect cultural, social, political, philosophical, religious and economic diversity, and also expand the rights of universities in recognition of foreign diplomas and qualifications (in the Lisbon Convention, instead of the terms "nostrification" and "equivalence", the single term "confession"). When comparing higher education diplomas, it was important not to recognize the fact of closeness or difference in the plans of educational programs, but the absolute readiness of the applicant to continue his education at a new, higher level [3]. A permanent committee for the recognition of qualifications relating to higher education in Europe was established. For the successful implementation of the Convention, the networks of the national information centers ENIC (European Network of National Information Centers

on Academic Mobility and Recognition) were approved with the support of the Council of Europe and UNESCO.

It was supposed that this would increase the influx of students to the European region and make the system of European higher education as attractive as possible for students and teachers from other countries. The Sorbonne Declaration described the prospective consequences of the formation of a single space for higher education in Europe:

- introduction of the system of continuous education [4].
- adoption of a system of comparable degrees of education;
- Introduction of a two-level system of training - "undergraduate" (undergraduate) and "postgraduate" (postgraduate);
- the introduction of a system of academic loans, their mutual recognition and accumulation;
- promoting the mobility of students and teachers.

The introduction of a unified system of academic credits similar to the ECTS (European Credit Transfer System) system, has become one of the significant prospects in the formation of the European Higher Education Area. This form of lending was important, primarily to support large-scale student mobility; to strengthen cooperation on a European scale to ensure the quality of education and the development for these purposes of comparable criteria and methods of control; for the development in the framework of mobility of joint educational and research programs [5].

In 2001, 32 European education ministers gathered in Prague to sum up the first results of the two-year transformation period. The joint communiqué adopted confirmed earlier commitments to create a unified space for higher education in Europe by 2010. The document focused on the fact that "students are full members of the higher education community and are called" competent, active and constructive partners in the creation of a European space for higher education "[6, p. 1]. If the existing two levels of higher education at the time were not specified

in the Bologna Declaration and passed under common names, then in Prague they received the names: the first level of "bachelor" (in English "bachelor"), and the second - "master" ('master'), which stimulated the positive dynamics of the introduction of a two-tier system of higher education in Europe.

What problems and difficulties did the countries participating in the Bologna process feel? One of the main problems is financing. Reforms in the field of education require large investments. During the transition period, the participating countries of the Bologna Process spend more than half of the budget of the national ministries of education and individual higher education institutions on reform.

It is obvious that mobility will invariably lead to a "brain drain". Students with knowledge of foreign languages, who have got acquainted with working conditions and established good connections with peers in foreign countries, will have a much better chance of finding work abroad than students who do not speak foreign languages. In foreign countries, students can attract a higher level of pay, the opportunity to access the most modern material infrastructure, to the latest equipment, the chance to carry out those experiments that cannot be performed in their country on outdated technology, much more comfortable living conditions. Due to the departure of young specialists, especially qualified university teachers, to prestigious Western universities, the level of teaching of disciplines will drop, and the quality of students' training will decrease. It is unlikely that this will be compensated by the arrival of foreign teachers in exchange programs.

All of the above problems require additional approvals, adjustments and decisions.

As we can see, the Bologna Process has defined far-reaching changes in the structure of higher education in Europe, leading to a rapprochement of European countries, involvement in the process of European integration and the enlargement of the European Union. However, the harmonization of higher education systems

within the EU has proved to be more complex and contradictory than its initiators assumed.

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