

REPORT ON

BELARUS STATE UNIVERSITY

MINSK, BELARUS
June 24 to 29, 2008

SALZBURG GLOBAL SEMINAR

VISITING ADVISORS PROGRAM



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Team Members:

Professor Dr. Ramadhikari Kumar, Rector, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, India (Team Leader)

Ms. Eva Egron-Polak, Secretary General and Executive Director, International Association of Universities (IAU), Paris, France

Dr. Jürgen Schreiber, Area Manager for Ecology, Geology and Life Science Business Unit, Fraunhofer Institute for Non-Destructive Evaluation for Quality and Safety, Dresden, Germany

Dr. Helene Kamensky, Program Director, Salzburg Global Seminar, Austria

I. Introduction

This report provides a summary of the observations and recommendations of the Visiting Advisors Team on the follow-up visit to the Belarus State University (hereafter referred to as BSU or the University) conducted under the auspices of the Visiting Advisors Program (VAP) of the Salzburg Global Seminar. During the first visit that took place on June 17-21, 2002, the University sought the VAP team's advice primarily on issues related to the university strategic planning process, organizational structure, efficient implementation of the Bologna Process reform agenda, and technology transfer. The purpose of the follow-up meetings was not to revisit the issues of strategy that were discussed with the Advisors Team of 2002. Rather, the goal was to discuss approaches to another set of three major issues that BSU senior administration saw as pertinent to the further BSU development, i.e. ways for students to become more involved in university activities, fostering efficient use of technology, and enhancing the role of BSU in the development of civil society.

Founded in 1921, BSU is the leading educational and research center in the Republic of Belarus. The BSU complex is currently comprising sixteen faculties, four centers, seven scientific and production enterprises, the lyceum, the law college, the Institute of Higher Education that re-trains specialists for HE system and institutions, the Institute of Continuous Education, 41 research institutes as well as 25 students research

laboratories. More than 30,000 students are currently enrolled in the BSU complex. The curriculum offers teaching in 55 specialties and 246 specializations.

BSU cooperates with several major international organizations including UNO and UNESCO. BSU is one of the founders of the Eurasian University Association and it is coordinating member of the CEI network, i.e. Central European Initiative University Network.

Prior to the team's arrival in Minsk on 24th June 2008, the BSU had dispatched useful materials relating to the system of higher education (HE) in Belarus as well as to the activities and the role of BSU in strengthening HE in the country. These background materials helped the advisors familiarize themselves with the opportunities and challenges on which BSU sought advice. They also provided information on the broad spectrum of reforms in the field of higher education in Belarus.

Over a period of three days the team members had meetings and practical discussions with the rector, vice-rectors, deans of various faculties, departmental heads, professors and students, to examine the issues of concern and ways to tackle them. These discussions offered wealth information and perspectives in addition to the provided documentation.

The members of the team wish to express their gratitude to the Rector, Professor Dr. Vasily I. Strazhev, vice-rectors, and the entire staff for their warm welcome and hospitality. The BSU administration and staff were gracious hosts and did a remarkable job of making the visit a productive and pleasant experience. The team members wish to thank all colleagues who took care of the team during its stay in Minsk and worked on the organization of this visit, particularly, Dr. Vladimir Yu. Tikhonov, Head of the BSU International Department. We would also like to express our appreciation and satisfaction with the discussions and exchange of views on issues and concerns regarding BSU with the leadership, faculty and students.

II. Visiting Advisors: Purpose of the Visit

This Advisor's visit to BSU was the 83rd successful visit carried out under the Visiting Advisors Program (VAP). Launched in 1998, the VAP provides on-site consultations to senior university leadership in the Russian Federation and Eurasia on pertinent issues of institutional self-assessment and change.

As mentioned above, the three-day discussions covered broadly three areas:

1. The role of students in institutional affairs
2. Technology in higher education
3. Role of BSU in the development of civil society.

The purpose of the visit was to put the international expertise to the service of BSU and not to perform a formal evaluation of the University. Although the short duration of the visit imposed considerable limitations to become fully acquainted with BSU, we do hope that our recommendations and advice will be useful for the University.

At the end of the visit, the team presented an oral report to the Rector and his team with the outline of preliminary observations and recommendations. The report below elaborates on these observations and offers suggestions and advice on a set of issues that the Visiting Advisors Team finds particularly relevant and timely.

III. Students as Engaged Partners

At the first meeting with the rector, vice-rectors and other members of the University leadership, the Visiting Team was provided with a brief overview of the main topics selected for the discussion. As indicated by the rector, one of the key institutional goals at this point is to foster active participation of students in the university affairs. From this perspective, the Visiting Team had a wide-ranging discussion on a variety of student issues with university leadership, student representatives, faculty and staff. The main issues under discussion included:

- i) Student's self-management;
- ii) Students' participation in quality assurance of education;
- iii) Students' participation in university management;
- iv) Students' participation in scientific research work, joint projects with teachers;
- v) Cultural initiatives of the students;
- vi) Patriotic education of young people;
- vii) Students' voluntary movements.

The current efforts of the university leadership to involve students in the governance and management of the university seem extensive. Rector Vasily Strazhev's close interaction with the students in motivating them to play greater role in strengthening the system of higher learning and the growth of the economy of the country is praiseworthy. The Visiting Team was impressed with the extent of reported participation by students and their associations in the Faculty Academic councils and the Academic Council of BSU and their participation in such committees as health improvement, hostel management, tuition fee regulation etc. In order to make students active participants in the educational process, the University established a Student Council. The Council plays the crucial role in evaluating the quality of teaching and learning process. The Chair of the Student Council has the same status as Deputy Dean. Thus, the Visiting Team recognized that much has been already done to foster students' involvement in various activities of the University. Below we offer suggestions on further enhancement of the role of students at BSU.

Recommendations:

- Consider developing efficient reward system for students participating in university affairs; as an example, President of the Students Association of the Carleton University, Canada, receives two credits in Public Administration.
- Students sitting on committees should be informed about the core issues under discussion, projects, etc. well in advance, so that they could participate fully in the meetings.
- It would be useful to set aside an office for all student representatives regardless of the level and area of representation.
- To ensure transparency and diverse participation of students in university governance, regular meetings of student representatives at all levels and representation areas should be conducted, minutes of the meetings should be widely distributed, reports published, etc., so that all students are aware of student contributions to university governance.
- Taking into consideration that a “one-size-fits-all” approach will not work, i.e. students with different backgrounds and specific needs look for different forms of involvement with the university, special interest groups might be established to engage a variety of students in different ways.

IV. Technology in Higher Education

Working Group II explored various issues concerning technologies in Higher Education, pertinent topics of advancing teaching and learning and process at BSU including quality assurance, assessment and evaluation. The most important among them were as follows:

- i) Questions relating to university electronic libraries: principles of formation of copyrights to electronic books, organization of access, etc;
- ii) Transformation of traditional forms of educational process into electronic form: creation of lectures, textbooks, dialogue network of teachers and students etc;
- iii) Introduction of technologies and organization of computer testing of students;
- iv) Introduction of video-relay in educational process: university, TV, video-relay in computer network – IP, TV, video-conferencing;
- v) Software for educational process;
- vi) Efficient implementation of advanced teaching and learning methodology including competency-based learning models.

The team was appreciative of the efforts made by BSU to modernize and computerize the education process. The team observed the inadequacy of the servers to cope with this task. To translate into action the above mentioned ideas, a strong network of servers to provide a desirable speed to internet services appears to be the primary and urgent challenge to be solved as soon as possible. In fact, during the discussion it was

revealed that the BSU was actively involved in developing new technologies of imparting education with the help of modern electronic scientific devices.

V. BSU and Civil Society

Working Group III extensively discussed the “role of Belarus State University in the Development of the Civil Society” and noted the various ways in which the university contributed to the wider community and to strengthening civil society in Belarus. The most important ways cited by the BSU representatives included:

- i) Public associations and their participation in the BSU governing bodies;
- ii) BSU journalism education and its own mass media instruments as factors for development of civil society;
- iii) Youth initiatives and training for leadership quality;
- iv) Monitoring of public opinion;
- v) Role of BSU in legislative reform and youth law education; and
- vi) Cultural initiatives and the promotion of healthy lifestyles at BSU.

The Visiting Team recognized that students, in particular, were currently actively involved in cultural life of the University and engaged with the community. The Team were also appreciative of publication of students’ newspapers, organization of students’ video festivals, journalism, faculty journalism, BSU Press service, etc. However, the Team felt that all these events appeared to be highly centralized and controlled. They felt the need to provide greater autonomy to the students to bring out talent from across the board and to provide them with a larger space for their independent creative development. As critical thinking is an essential aspect of the learning experience in higher education, honing such skills in students through topical discussions and debates with the wider community might be considered as a measure to strengthen civil society. As well, these linkages ought to be broadened to include faculty members as well as the staff of the university, not only students, as BSU is a major source of expertise in all fields for the local and national community in areas such as health, environmental protection, cultural development, social work and others.

Organization of activities such as “The Best Youth Project,” “The Best Student Contest,” and “The Best Graduating students,” can be characterized as steps in the right direction. The Visiting Team noted with satisfaction the role played by the BSU in the process of working out educational reform legislations, in the innovation of educational methods and also health improvement programs for the university community.

The Team recognizes the efforts of BSU to contribute to sustaining and enriching the civil society in Belarus through its various activities. It is expected that the BSU would continue to pursue its policies and make further efforts even more vigorously in this area.

VI. Further Issues for Consideration

Internationalization

Being aware of the fact that BSU is the largest and strongest university of Belarus and that the University has a broad educational responsibility on its shoulders, the team members had extensive discussions on extending boundaries of the BSU in the globalised world of 21st century. The Team feels strongly that BSU needs to pay greater attention to internationalization of all of its functions – teaching, research and community outreach and become more proactive internationally. The need to become familiar with the most recent developments and best practices of the European, Asian and South-East Asian as well as North American universities, and adapting some of these wherever appropriate and without compromising national values and culture was stressed. Encouraging faculty and offering increased opportunities to students to have an international experience is an essential aspect of promoting overall quality of higher education and needs to be strengthened at BSU. Overall, in order to position BSU in the global arena, a comprehensive and long term institutional internationalization strategy is required.

Recommendations:

- Make internationalization a strategic priority of the University
- Develop a coherent and comprehensive internationalization strategy as part of the overall University strategic plan
- Foster strategic international collaborations to open opportunities for faculty, researchers and students while promoting the diversification of international activities
- Develop efficient internationalization management system using international best practices and models, for instance, that of Tokyo Institute of Technology in Japan
- Consult the recent OECD Report on “Tertiary Education for the Knowledge Society” (September 2008): the Report addressed several important aspects of internationalization of higher education systems and institutions.
- Encourage student leaders to interact with their peers in other countries to share their experience from BSU and learn about others’ ways of student organization.

Educational process

The Visiting Team recognized that the University pays much attention to the enhancement of teaching and learning. The establishment of the Education Center at BSU that conducts research in the field and organizes up to twelve workshops for faculty members per year is an important undertaking to advance the educational process. Nonetheless, the Team members were of the view that the strength of the faculty and their number and quality should not be linked only with the number of teaching hours but with the extent of their involvement in the process of upgrading the quality of instruction and education. More needs to be done to encourage the self-study programs for the students as well as to ensure the diversification of education programs and modes of delivery.

Recommendations:

- Reduce the number of class hours
- Explore the best pedagogical models to make a shift from teacher-centered to a learner-centered approach
- Make students partners in the learning process
- Involve stakeholders in the curriculum development to make relevant links to industry skills requirements
- Explore the TUNING-project (Tuning Educational Structures in Europe) experience – the “Tuning” website has much information on teaching, learning and assessment in the framework of the Bologna Process reform agenda and the Lisbon Strategy of the European Union, <http://tuning.unideusto.org/tuningeu/>
- Integrate the focus on learning outcomes and student-centered learning approach into the quality assurance processes in place or those to be developed.

VII. Conclusion

The Visiting Team greatly appreciated the opportunity to conduct the follow-up visit to the Belarus State University for further explorations and discussions as BSU moves forward to achieve its strategic goals. The team was impressed by the achievements of BSU over the last couple of years. Despite inadequate funding in certain sectors the university has been successful in placing itself at the top, thanks to its inventive and entrepreneurial spirit.

The Visiting Team would like to conclude this report by emphasizing the importance of the Belarus State University for the Republic of Belarus. Good educational institutions are an important pre-requisite for the development of every modern state. Belarus State University has successfully discharged its duties as a leader institution of higher learning in Belarus and has set exemplary standards for other institution of higher learning in the country.

We would like to acknowledge that this short visit was an excellent learning experience and helped us broaden our perspectives both professionally and culturally. For this we would like to express once more our heartfelt thanks to the Rector and the entire staff of the BSU and would like to offer our assistance and support for the development and growth of the BSU in the years ahead. We wish the leadership, faculty, staff and students of the Belarus State University the very best for the future development of their comprehensive University.

Visiting Advisors:

<p>Ramadhikari KUMAR (Team Leader) India</p> <p>Ramadhikari Kumar is the rector of Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) in New Delhi and a professor at the Center of Russian Studies, School of Language, Literature, and Cultural Studies. He has held several positions within the JNU Teachers Association including serving as proctor, warden, provost, president, and general secretary. He also served as first advisor to the vice chancellor on academic issues and advisor to the Equal Opportunity Office. Professor Kumar is a member of the Panel of Interpreters of the Ministry of External Affairs of the Federal Government of India. He is the author of several books, most currently on verbs of motion in Russian and an English-Russian Phraseological Glossary. Dr. Kumar participated in the Salzburg Global Seminar's Session 451 entitled, <i>Innovation in Knowledge-based Economies: Accelerating the Benefits</i>, in April of 2008.</p>	
<p>Eva EGRON-POLAK Canada</p> <p>Eva Egron-Polak is the secretary general and executive director of the International Association of Universities in Paris, France, a global association of higher education institutions and associations from all regions of the world. Her responsibilities include organizing conferences and meetings with host institutions, developing policy positions and advocating for academic freedom and excellence, and liaising with associations and organizations including UNESCO, and the OECD. From 1998 to 2002, she served as vice president of International and Canadian Programs with the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada in Ottawa. She is currently a member and rapporteur of the External Advisory Group of Research Mobility Programs at the European Commission and has been involved with a variety of UNESCO committees focused on higher education. Ms. Egron-Polak's recent research and publications focus on issues related to internationalization in higher education. She received a B.A. in French and political science and an M.A. in international affairs from the Norman Paterson School of International Affairs at Carleton University in Ottawa.</p>	

Schedule:

June 24, Tuesday, Arrival Day			
10:35 - 16:25	Team arrives	Dr. R. Kumar Ms. E. Egron-Polak Dr. J. Schreiber Dr. H. Kamensky	Accommodation in "Planeta" hotel
19:00 - 21:00	Welcome Dinner	Rector, University Administration	Rest. "Planeta"
June 25, Wednesday, 1st Day of Program			
07:45 – 8:30	Breakfast		Rest. "Planeta"
09:00 – 10:30	Meeting with the Rector, presentation of the program	Rector, University Administration, VAP Team	Rector's office
10:30 – 11:00	Coffee break		
11:00 – 13:00	Working group 1: The role of students in the University's activity	University Administration, VAP Team	
13:00 – 14:30	Lunch		
14:30 – 16:00	Working group 1: The role of students in the University's activity	University Administration, VAP Team	
16:00 – 16:30	Coffee break		
16:30 – 18:00	Working group 2: Technology in higher education	VAP Team	Hotel
June 26, Thursday, 2nd Day of Program			
7:45 – 8:30	Breakfast		Rest. "Planeta"
09:00 – 10:30	Working group 2: Technology in higher	University Administration, VAP	

	education	Team	
10:30 – 11:00	Coffee break		
11:00 – 12:30	Working group 3: The role of the Belarusian State University in a civil society development	University Administration, VAP Team	
12:30 – 13:30	Lunch		
13:30 – 15:00	Working group 3: The role of the Belarusian State University in a civil society development	University Administration, VAP Team	
15:00 – 15:30	Coffee break		
15:30 – 17:00	Meeting with students	VAP Team	
17:00 – 18:00	Team Debriefing Meeting	VAP Team	Hotel
19:00	Dinner or Cultural Program (to be confirmed later)		(to be confirmed later)
June 27, Friday, 3rd Day of Program			
7:45 – 8:30	Breakfast		Rest. “Planeta”
09:00 – 13:00	Preparation of the final Report.	VAP Team	
13:00 – 14:30	Lunch		
14:30 – 16:30	Presentation of the Oral Report to the Rector and the University Team	Rector, VAP Team	
16:30 – 16:45	Coffee break		
16:45 – 17:00	Press Conference of the	Rector, University	

	VAP Team	Administration, VAP Team, Members of the Working Groups	
17:00 -19:00	Free time		
19:00	Dinner		
June 28, Saturday, Day off			
8:00 – 9:00	Breakfast		Rest. “Planeta”
09:00 – 17:00	Cultural program		
18:00 – 20:00	Farewell Dinner	Rector, University Administration, VAP Team	
June 29, Sunday, Departure Day			
8:00 – 9:00	Breakfast		Rest. “Planeta”
09:00 – 18:00	VAP Team departs		

THE UNIVERSITIES PROJECT OF THE SALZBURG GLOBAL SEMINAR

Universities throughout the world are undergoing systemic changes in their governance, academic design, structure, and mission. From 1998 to 2003, the Salzburg Seminar's Universities Project focused on higher education reform in Central and East Europe, Russia, and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) as universities in these regions redefined their relationships with governments and try to become more integrated into the global intellectual community.

The Universities Project was a multi-year series of conferences and symposia convening senior representatives of higher education from the designated regions with their counterparts from North America and West Europe. Discussion in the Project's programs focused on the following themes:

- University Administration and Finance
- Academic Structure and Governance within the University
- Meeting Students' Needs, and the Role of Students in Institutional Affairs
- Technology in Higher Education
- The University and Civil Society

THE VISITING ADVISORS PROGRAM (VAP)

The Salzburg Global Seminar launched this enhanced aspect of the Universities Project in the autumn of 1998. Under the VAP, teams of university presidents and higher education experts visit universities in Central and East Europe and Russia at the host institutions' request to assist in the process of institutional self-assessment and change. To date, eighty-four visits have been held at universities in Central and East Europe, Russia and CIS countries.

THE RUSSIAN HIGHER EDUCATION PROGRAM (RHEP)

In 2003, in response to the need for continued engagement, the Salzburg Global Seminar and the Ministry of Education of the Russian Federation initiated a five-year partnership (2003-2008) designed to promote the exchange of knowledge and best practices between the higher education leadership of the Russian Federation and their counterparts from North America, Western Europe and Central-Eastern Europe, Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and Eurasia. The Russian Higher Education Program consisted of two symposia per year, which took place in Salzburg and in the Russian Federation. Each symposium convened senior representatives of universities, higher education organizations, service organizations, governmental

structures, and stakeholders. The Russian Higher Education Program centered around five main topics:

- Russian Program of Modernization in the Context of Global Education Reform
- Higher Education Governance Reform: Issues and Challenges
- Strengthening the Role of Russian Universities in Service to Society
- Quality Assurance in Higher Education: Sharing International Experience
- Higher Education and Research (Networks, Linkages, Best Practices)

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FOR MORE INFORMATION

For more information regarding Salzburg Global Seminar programs, please contact one of the Seminar's offices below.

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