

Annex 2: Action Fiche - Special Measure for Belarus 2013

1. IDENTIFICATION

Title/Number	Special Measure: Contribution to the European Humanities University Trust Fund (<i>ENPI/2013/024-448</i>)		
Total cost	EUR 1 million from the 2013 budget		
Aid method / Management mode	Project approach – joint management with the Nordic Council of Ministers (NCM)		
DAC-code	11420	Sector	Higher Education

2. RATIONALE

2.1. Sector context

This action is designed to further support the European Humanities University (EHU) in 2013 as part of the special actions to support the Belarusian population announced at the international donors conference "Solidarity with Belarus" (Warsaw 2011), organised in the aftermath of the Belarusian presidential 2010 elections.

Socio-political environment: Education is one of the most important areas in laying the foundations for democracy. The European Union (EU) fully acknowledges the key role of Belarusian young people in the democratisation process in Belarus. Since 2005, the EU has given sustained support to Belarusian civil society in general and to the higher education sector in particular. The European Humanities University (EHU) in exile, which has about 1800 students¹, plays an essential role in this regard, in particular given the political context prevailing since the Presidential elections in December 2010. It is currently the only independent Belarusian university that allows Belarusian students to study such disciplines as political science and European studies, etc. without political interference (see also section 3.2 "Activities"). The political value of the EHU is therefore evident so long as the current situation in Belarus prevails.

Funding: In coordination with other donors, the EU has agreed to provide support to the EHU through a multi-donor Trust Fund, which was set up and is managed by the Nordic Council of Ministers (NCM). Its aim is to help the EHU to fulfil its educational and democratisation mission through financial support with a view to the university becoming self-sustainable in the future. The Trust Fund, which covers about 60% of EHU's annual costs of about EUR 5 million, has become the main mechanism for channelling the financial contributions of the international donor community to the EHU. In addition to the EU and 14 EU Member States, also the NCM, the United States, Norway, MacArthur Foundation, Open Society Foundation and Carnegie

¹ Two thirds of them are distance-learning students, and 90% are from Belarus.

Foundation give donations through the Trust Fund. Tuition fees paid by students contribute around EUR 2 million to the overall budget per year.

EHU's structure: The EHU Governing Board, consisting of committed higher education experts, was set up at the initiative of the Nordic Council of Ministers (NCM) and the McArthur Foundation in 2007. Its main task is to provide strategic guidance and fiduciary oversight for the EHU. The Board supports EHU's management and administration and works towards maximizing fundraising efforts. An EHU Trust Fund Advisory Committee advises the EHU Trust Fund Manager on donor coordination and fundraising. The Annual Donors' Assembly is convened once per year in Vilnius, and is complemented by bi-annual higher education meetings. Recently, the EHU has developed a strategic plan that will guide its development in the period 2013-2019. It has begun actively targeting the private sector with the aim to supplement the university's budget to become less dependent on donor contributions. In the long-term (10-15 years) it plans to found an endowment, which would make it entirely independent.

2.2. Lessons learnt

In the difficult economic and social situation the Belarusian population is facing, more and more young people are recognising the need for obtaining quality education in order to be able to get a job and thereby sustain their livelihoods.

Despite the feeling of fear amongst the politically interested population due to the regular crack-downs on any perceived protest against the authorities, EHU students continue to engage in political activities. The Belarusian government continues to harass EHU students; several were contacted for questioning during their summer holiday - an indication that the government sees EHU as a threat and remains opposed to academic freedom and liberal humanities and social sciences education for young people.

The EU Delegation has launched an overall evaluation of the EHU and EU funding in 2012 with a view to establish an exit strategy.

2.3. Complementary actions

EU Programmes

- EU language courses for young Belarusians (EUR 2 million): the specific objectives of this 2-year project are the enhancement of cross-cultural competences of young Belarusians through learning of EU languages in EU Member States, raising the awareness on the EU and European societies and values among representatives of Belarusian society, and the establishment of professional and personal contacts of young Belarusians with counterparts in the EU. Implementation period: 2013-2014;
- Open Europe Scholarship Scheme I (OESS I - EUR 4 million) for young Belarusians to study Bachelor (BA) and Master (MA) degrees in European universities (implemented by the Nordic Council of Ministers in 2011-2016);
- Open Europe Scholarship Scheme II (OESS II - EUR 8 million) for young Belarusians to study BA and MA in European universities. OESS II is the

continuation of OESS I and will be implemented by the Nordic Council of Ministers in 2013-2018);

- Mobility Scheme for Targeted People-to-People Contacts (MOST - EUR 5 million): this action is a mobility scheme designed to facilitate direct people-to-people contacts between representatives of three broad sectors such as culture, education and youth, and science and technology in Belarus and their counterparts in Member States of the European Union. First activities should start in mid-2013;
- Erasmus Mundus Action 1: joint programmes (masters and doctoral programmes) of outstanding academic quality, including a scholarships scheme. Since the launch of the programme in 2004, about 6-7 Belarusian students per year receive a scholarship for Erasmus Mundus Masters Courses. The 2012 selection included 11 Belarusian nationals, seven out of which were selected under a special regional window for six countries in Eastern Europe; neighbouring the EU. As a result, 56 Belarusian nationals (50 Master Course, 2 PhD students and 4 academic staff) have benefited from Erasmus Mundus action 1 so far;
- Erasmus Mundus Action 2 (previously Erasmus Mundus External Cooperation Window): partnerships between European and third-country higher education institutions as a basis for structured cooperation, exchange and mobility at all levels. Around 50-60 Belarusian nationals (students and academic staff) take part in this mobility scheme annually. Belarusian participation has increased due to the additional budget allocation to 180 scholarships in 2011 and 198 in 2012. 643 Belarusian nationals (students and academic staff) have benefited from Erasmus Mundus action 2 so far;
- Tempus: programme which supports the modernisation of higher education in the EU's surrounding area. Belarus is currently involved in 21 Tempus projects. Tempus supports Belarusian universities to improve their administrative and organisational structures / study programs, promote teacher trainings, student mobility, consultation with entrepreneurial world, cooperation with stakeholders. Through Tempus projects, Belarusian universities develop with the assistance of European experts a number of new Master's degree programs in several fields of study;
- The regional Eastern Partnership Youth Programme (EUR 14 million in 2012 and EUR 15 million in 2013) supports cooperation between young people and youth organisations from the EU and its Neighbouring Partner countries by providing non-formal learning opportunities such as youth exchanges, transnational voluntary service and training and networking activities through the Eastern Partnership Youth Window of the Youth in Action Programme. Each year, several hundred Belarusians are involved in these activities;
- The EU-Nordic Council of Ministers scholarship programme at universities in Ukraine.

Other donors

- The Polish 'Konstanty Kalinowski Scholarship Programme' at 17 universities in Poland in mainly social sciences (53 Belarusians students, all victims of repression measures by the Belarusian government, were admitted in 2010);

- The Visegrad Group Scholarship Programme funded by the International Visegrad Fund, enabling studies in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia;
- Scholarships offered by individual EU Member States (mainly Sweden, Germany, Great Britain, France and the Netherlands).

2.4. Donor coordination

Donor coordination is carried out by the Trust Fund, which ensures consistent support for the EHU by bringing donors' primarily non-earmarked contributions together and which is thus able to identify gaps and avoid overlaps in donors' financing. The Trust Fund is open for financial contributions from all kinds of donors.

The EU Delegation in Minsk organises on regular basis donor coordination meetings with EU Member States, as well as with all other major donors active in Belarus, in order to coordinate actions in the priority areas of assistance. Such coordination is organised in compliance with principles of the Paris Declaration and Accra Agenda for Action and is aimed to ensure maximum aid effectiveness.

In addition, the European Commission and the European External Action Service organise regular implementers and donors meetings both in Brussels (about twice a year). EU Member States, IFIs and other donors such as the United States, Canada and Norway take part.

3. DESCRIPTION

3.1. Objectives

The overall objective of EU support to the EHU Trust Fund is

- To boost democratic development in Belarus by giving young Belarusians access to independent higher education.

The specific objectives of the project are as follows:

- To give access to higher education to young Belarusians in an environment of academic and political freedom through the EHU;
- To provide education geared specifically to enabling the target group to develop democratic values in Belarus;
- To contribute to the education, housing and subsistence of Belarusian students throughout their studies (max. 4 years);
- To provide sustainable financial support to the EHU by pooling the contributions of the EU and other international donors via a Trust Fund mechanism.

3.2. Expected results and main activities

The project is expected to have the following results:

- Enable the EHU to provide education and subsistence to Belarusian students deprived of a chance to acquire relevant higher education;
- Guarantee the long-term sustainability of EHU by pooling the EU funding and the contributions of other donors and encouraging new financial initiatives from the international donor community.

The main activities of the project include running a range of BA and MA degree programmes (spring and autumn semesters in each calendar year) focused on the skills and knowledge necessary for developing democratic institutions, civil society and human rights in Belarus. BA programmes include the following disciplines: cultural heritage and tourism, international law, media and communication, media and visual design, political science and European studies, sociology, as well as contemporary art. MA programmes include the following disciplines: business administration, cultural studies (critical urban studies, gender studies, visual and cultural studies), psychology, historic and cultural heritage, international law and European law, and public policy.

3.3. Risks and assumptions

3.3.1. Risks

- The Belarusian authorities do not officially object to Belarusian students studying abroad, although they do discourage Belarusian students from studying at the EHU. There is a risk that the Belarusian authorities may apply repressive measures or try to influence the selection of both the students and the Belarusian teaching staff, which consists mainly of Belarusian citizens, but this risk has not yet materialised. The EHU has put in place a strict selection procedure methodology which assures that students and staff are able to perform their duties without major obstructions.
- The degrees awarded by the EHU are unlikely to be recognised in Belarus in the current political situation. Therefore, students might face difficulties finding a job related to their qualifications upon their return to Belarus. This risk applies essentially to State-run and institutional organisations; other entities might on the contrary be keen on employing students with up-to-date knowledge and skills. The issue of recognition is mainly linked to political considerations and the fact that Belarus is lagging behind in terms of adapting to the Bologna process standards. It is expected that this gap will be bridged as Belarus moves towards more democratic openness and towards European standards in the long-term. It is to be noted however that the distance learning section of the EHU allows for several EHU students to study in parallel at Belarusian state universities. Other students take a second degree with the EHU, following a degree with a state university and vice versa. The degrees from state universities can serve as the official degrees when these students apply for work in Belarusian state-run entities.
- The risk of project-funded students not coming back to their home country after they finish their studies is reduced by the fact that they will study in countries neighbouring Belarus, with teaching specific to the Belarusian context and in an expatriate, but Belarusian, environment (staff, academics, etc.). This will enable them to stay in close contact with the home and social networks that they have

left. The majority of resident EHU graduates return to Belarus² and the EHU remains aware of their whereabouts through Alumni and other network systems put in place. The EHU is also able to provide administrative and legal services to (former) students.

- The main challenge in selecting grant-aided students will remain as sometimes Belarusian students are penalised for political reasons. This challenge is addressed by combining sound political and academic judgment in assessing each applicant and by close cooperation of experts with first-hand knowledge of Belarusian affairs. This will ensure maximum efficiency in selecting the most appropriate applicants.
- Information does not reach the potential participants, in particular outside the capital. To mitigate the risk, additional efforts will be done to reach students in the regions.
- Although a degree of overlapping exists with the existing EU programmes, i.e. 30-40 Erasmus Students at EHU per annum, the Special Measures €1 million contribution to the Trust fund is a politically motivated decision to support/maintain a Belarusian University 'in exile'; this includes support to scholars who have suffered persecution. Alongside the support to students, it should be noted that donor support of EHU also, by extension, has the very significant impact of allowing the university to maintain a community of academics and students from Belarus. This activity goes beyond the capacity of DG EAC programmes.

3.3.2. Assumptions

- Good co-operation within the donor community;
- Appropriate financial contributions from EU Member States, international organisations, other countries and NGOs, politically supporting the EHU;
- Sound and transparent management of donors' funds and transparent flow of information on each donor's contribution;
- Sound and transparent accounts of the EHU.

3.4. Crosscutting Issues

The project will contribute to the development of good governance, human rights and gender equality.

² About one third of the students are residing in Vilnius during their studies, the rest are distance learning students. Approximately 50% of the resident bachelor graduates return to Belarus immediately after the end of their studies, and one fourth of the resident students continue studying at the EHU to obtain a masters degree, out of which again 50% return to Belarus after finishing their studies. This means an average of 250 students (out of a total of 1800) do not return to their home country per year.

3.5. Stakeholders

The beneficiary of the project is the EHU. The main stakeholders are about 1800 Belarusian students, the EHU donor community (EU Member States and other countries, international foundations and NGOs), EHU teaching staff (about 260 teachers mainly from Belarus commuting to Vilnius when lecturing) and the Belarusian civil society as a whole.

4. IMPLEMENTATION ISSUES

4.1. Implementation method

Joint management through the signature of a standard contribution agreement with an international organisation, the Nordic Council of Ministers (NCM), for a contribution to the European Humanities University Trust Fund managed by NCM, in accordance with Article 53d of the Financial Regulation. The international organisation complies with the criteria provided for in the applicable Financial Regulation.

The change of management mode constitutes a substantial change except where the Commission "re-centralises" or reduces the level of tasks previously delegated to the beneficiary country, international organisation or delegated body under, respectively, decentralised, joint or indirect centralised management.

4.2. Procurement and grant award procedures

All contracts implementing the action are awarded and implemented in accordance with the procedures and standard documents laid down and published by the relevant International Organisation.

4.3. Budget and calendar

The indicative budget available to implement the action is detailed in the Appendix.

The project will contribute to EHU for an indicative duration of 12 months starting in September 2013 and covering the academic year 2013/2014.

4.4. Performance monitoring

The project will be monitored according to standard procedures. Project monitoring will be based on periodic assessments of progress on delivery of specified project results and towards the achievement of project objectives.

4.5. Evaluation and audit

Evaluations will be based primarily on the full annual report on completion of each academic year, the interim report, and the two audited reports prepared by the Trust Fund for the donors, as stipulated in Article 4.9 of the EHU Trust Fund Terms of Reference.

Audits may also be conducted on the systems and procedures used if need be. Audit and evaluation contracts will be concluded by the Commission and will be funded from other budget source.

4.6. Communication and visibility

Communication and visibility will be ensured by dissemination activities. A specific communication and visibility plan will be submitted by the international organisation. Where appropriate, communication and visibility activities will be carried out according to the Communication and Visibility Manual for EU external actions. They should also be fully in line with the developments in the overall EU-Belarus relations and the particular politically sensitive context.