

EHU Fights Allegations of Financial Misconduct, Needs New Leadership

On May 20, Acting Chair of the European Humanities University (EHU) Anne Lonsdale announced that the current EHU rector Prof. Garry Pollick will soon be concluding his term.

The announcement put EHU in the Belarusian headlines. The unexpected news followed a scandal caused by the leak of a confidential audit report prepared by international auditing company Deloitte for EHU donors.

The report exposed alleged violations of tax law and internal financial regulations, purported to be at the hands of a group of American EHU governing board members and Professor Garry David Pollick, a [controversial EHU rector](#).

According to the official announcement, Dr Pollick 'has graciously agreed' to serve EHU until late summer 2016 and "it has always been clear to us on the [EHU Governing] Board that Prof. Pollick had intended to be with us for two years only". However, it has been just about one year since David Pollick took up the rector position. What's going on?

Leak of confidential EHU materials on administrative misconduct

The announcement of Pollick's resignation appeared a few days after an undisclosed group of members of the current EHU staff [leaked a report](#) on EHU conducted by Deloitte at the request of

the Nordic Council, an inter-parliamentary forum and one of EHU's main donors.

Soon after the leak, two major online media outlets from Belarus, kyky.org and bel.biz, almost simultaneously published extensive analysis of the alleged misconduct by those who run the university. This resulted in a public outcry and calls for the current EHU leadership to be removed immediately.

A few days later, it became known that the Nordic Council discontinued its financial support to the university. Nordic Council insiders privately confirmed that the funding was halted due to the allegations exposed in the leaked Deloitte report.

On 25 May, the EHU Senate, the university's body of academic self-governance, issued a statement calling for immediate action to restore the reputation of the university. The statement also called for the reconstruction of institutional stability that it claims has been let down by EHU executives in the past two years.

The Senate also urged to remove the university's top executives, including the rector. It further called for broader engagement of the academic community in decision-making and budgeting as well as the launch of internal crisis management procedures.

This is the second time that the Senate has openly opposed the EHU administration in the last five years. The last time, the Senate [was subsequently dissolved](#). EHU alumni also produced a video calling for reform of management of the European Human University and including Belarusians into decision-making at the university.

We reached out to Anne Lonsdale, asking her to explain why people allegedly responsible for financial misconduct and the violation of EHU internal rules (and, potentially, tax laws of two countries) have not been removed from their positions and

are instead being praised through public announcements.

Lonsdale's responded that she had little to add and claimed that these were '*damaging statements which are untrue and for which one has no proof*'.

[Andrej Laūruchin](#) was removed from the EHU in 2013 during the [administration's crackdown](#) on 'unqualified' dissident staff members. He is currently an Associate Professor at the Higher School of Economics in Russia (a top 100 university in the QS University Ranking) and was willing to share his view:

Dismissal of those responsible would mean accepting the facts. Hence, the accused shall instead be awarded. Then the suspicion will remain 'suspended in the air'. It's an old political trick that some political opponents of authoritarian regimes call 'Byzantine cunning'. The questions are rather: a) whether there's proof of guilt and b) whether anybody will deal with the case. As my experience of legal disputes in academia shows, this is a very tricky and fraught business that involves huge moral costs since the violators inevitably have influential friends in academic and semi-academic (political) circles.

Protection of donor's interest: revision of EHU ownership structure

The alleged misconduct exposed by Deloitte, if true, would only have become possible as a result of a lack of effective accountability mechanisms. EHU must introduce a new governance model that reflects the existing ownership structure. Such a move requires fundamental revision of the nominal ownership of the EHU – the General Assembly of Part-Owners (GAPO).

The EHU is a non-profit liberal arts university founded in Minsk in 1992. In 2004 it was forcibly shut down by the Belarusian authorities and relocated to neighbouring Vilnius (Lithuania) where it exists as a Belarusian university in exile, supported by a wide range of European and North American governments and philanthropists.

In 2013, the university entered a period of turbulence and since then its management has been widely criticised for authoritarian governance, even resulting in a [call for the creation of an alternative institution](#).

When the EHU was re-established in Vilnius a decade ago, three organisations (the Institute for International Education, the Open Society Foundation (OSF), and the Eurasia Foundation) formed the GAP0 and became the supreme decision-making body of the university.

EHU alumni recently produced a video calling for reform of the current EHU governance system and letting Belarusians run the Belarusian University in exile.

As of 2016, no GAP0 member organisation (except for OSF) provides significant funding to the EHU, but they are in charge of all internal decisions on EHU spending. Meanwhile, the largest EHU donors have no control over the funds they allocate to the EHU.

The university ownership structure has changed, and it must be reviewed to correspond with actual ownership, with primary focus on the protection of donors' and stakeholders' rights. EHU alumni recently produced a video calling for reform of the current EHU governance system and letting Belarusians run the Belarusian university in exile.

Protection of the public interest

Under Lithuanian law the university is a "public institution". Legally speaking, the EHU is a not-for-profit organisation that enjoys certain tax and regulatory benefits because it pursues a public good. But in reality the EHU has been taken over by a group of top managers under the leadership of current EHU President [Anatol Michajlaŭ](#), who as a matter of fact 'owns' the university.

As of June 2016, the university urgently needs to revise the GAPO membership, and conduct an all-encompassing, comprehensive reassessment of its corporate governance policies and disclosure standards.

In May 2016, Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) replaced the Nordic Council in oversight of the EHU Trust Fund, and is expected to make changes to remove the deadlock of the existing crisis.

SIDA should request full compensation for losses incurred by the university as a result of managerial misconduct and introduce a governance model that reflects the existing ownership structure – one that provides administrative representation based on current ownership.

This means that the university must immediately review its corporate governance policies in the light of the existing ownership structure that has changed significantly since 2005. EHU shall let major donors have control over spending and must prevent nominal owners from decision-making outside the 'actual' representation quota weighted on the 'ownership' stake.

EHU remains a public academic organisation. It is not a private institution, but a public university run in the public

interest, and it must remain as such. This means that the 'part-owners' and the 'board' , its rector and president are not EHU's masters, but its servants. All members of the EHU community must remind the EHU administration about it.

Serge Kharytonau

Serge is the former President of EHU Alumni Association (2014-15).

The Belarusian National University – the Path Forward

Two months ago dozens of prominent Belarusian intellectuals and civil society leaders called for the establishment of a Belarusian national university. This push followed realisation by leaders of Belarusian civil society that they were powerless to influence the election of the rector of the European Humanities University – the largest donor-sponsored independent educational project associated with Belarus.

Supporters of the Belarusian national university say that an independent university run by Belarusians and with Belarus at the core of its focus is not just a dream. It may well become a reality if they succeed in bringing together existing informal education providers in Belarus with centres of Belarusian studies at reputable Western institutions.

The Long Road to a National

University

Although an independent Belarus has existed for nearly 25 years, Soviet-style pedagogical practises still [heavily influence Belarusian higher education](#). The system remains largely unreformed – state ideology is taught as part of the higher education curriculum in Belarus.

Belarusian educational system focuses on preserving the status quo rather than preparing reformers

Although this year Belarus officially [joined the Bologna process](#), few believe that this will bring significant change. History, political science, and human rights related coursework focus primarily on preserving the status quo rather than preparing successive generations to implement reforms and push along the country's development.

Ten years ago, many hoped that the [European Humanities University](#) in Vilnius would become the true intellectual centre of Belarusian academic life. In its early years in exile the university managed to attract a group of respectable scholars, particularly in the fields of history and political science. However, within a few years most of them left either disillusioned or [dismissed by the administration](#).

Deprived of its strongest academics in areas such as history and political science, the research output and visibility of EHU among the general public in Belarus has [remained very low](#). The university developed a reputation as [a trampoline for Russian-speakers to emigrate from Belarus](#) rather than an incubator of new ideas and initiatives related to the place whence they came.

In May 2015, nearly 60 prominent civil society figures of Belarus [signed an appeal](#) calling for the creation of a national university. Although the vast majority of students and lecturers at the European Humanities University still come from Belarus, the signatories of the May appeal believe that EHU "has finally departed the field of [Belaurisan] interests

and influence on Belarusian democratic society" and is no longer a Belarusian project.

This address honed in its criticism at the EHU administration for its "[non-transparent election process](#) and unpredictable changes to the rules of the game" which left the university in the hands of the new rector David Pollick, "who has not only never dealt with Belarus-related issues, but also is not even familiar with the situation in the country or the region".

The Limited Promise of Informal Education

With Belarusian state universities captive to the state's control and the donor-funded European Humanities University shedding its Belarusian identity in nearly every aspect save the citizenship of its students and teaching staff several informal education projects emerged in Belarus. Many of those who had to leave the European Humanities University or various Belarusian state universities have wound up teaching for informal education initiatives.

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Some of these projects, such as the Flying University, the Belarusian Collegium or the European College of Liberal Arts, run long-term programmes, public lectures, workshops and summer schools with hundreds of Belarusians "graduating" from them or attending their courses. These initiatives provide a [unique environment for free-thinking](#) inside Belarus, a limited but important movement that has so far been tolerated by the authorities.

But despite the benefits and flexibility of an informal education, these projects lack crucial components offered by

proper institutions of higher education. For one, students do not receive an internationally recognised degree for completing coursework lack international and interdisciplinary learning environment. Moreover, conducting serious academic research and bidding for research funding is very difficult without official affiliation with a recognised university. This led to the idea of Belarusian National University.

Belarusian National University – a Network University

One of those pushing to establish the Belarusian National University is [Aliaksandr Milinkievič](#), leader of the opposition movement For Freedom and a former candidate for the EHU rector position. Milinkievič told Belarus Digest that an important function of the National University should be to counterbalance the spread of the aggressive ideals of the "Russian World" doctrine in Belarus.

two-thirds of Belarusian students who study abroad go to Russia

According to Milinkievič, two-thirds of Belarusian students who study abroad go to Russia where they have the same rights as Russian citizens, while in the European Union Belarusians often have to pay much more than EU nationals to attend a university, to say nothing of the additional expenses they face with visas and other bureaucratic obstacles.

Milinkievič is calling for the new university to strike a balance between heavily focusing on Belarus and remaining an open international institution. The Belarusian National University should, he argues, come up with its own ideas about reforming the political system, economy and society in Belarus, and help the strengthen national and civic identity of its students.

The director of the Political Sphere Institute Andrej Kazakievič, who is also affiliated with the Belarusian Collegium, believes that building partnerships between informal education institutions in Belarus with foreign universities is currently the best means by which the Belarusian National University could be established.

Courses taken in an informal education setting could help students to proceed with formal master and doctoral level studies abroad

Kazakievič proposes establishing Master's and Doctoral programmes at reputable European universities that would be designed for Belarusians, though still remain open to anyone interested in order to make them more international in nature. The teaching staff should also comprise of a mix of Belarusian and foreign scholars. The programmes should focus not only on Belarus but on the region in general in order to make them more attractive.

According to Kazakievič's vision, informal education initiatives would also become an integral part of this network. Courses taken in an informal education setting could help students to proceed with formal master and doctoral level studies abroad. An international PhD programme for Belarusians, coordinated by the Political Sphere Institute is just one potential option for establishing the necessary infrastructure, as it based in Belarus, but also cooperates with universities in Lithuania and Poland.

A Western Standard for Belarusian Studies

The experience of Harvard Ukrainian Research Institute, Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies at the University of Alberta and other centres focused on Ukraine all demonstrate how regional expertise within established universities can be

utilised.

The success of informal education initiatives in Belarus shows that, in terms of research and teaching, a great deal can be done inside Belarus itself. Combining the strengths and reach of informal education in Belarus with quality control and formal qualifications afforded by EU institutions of higher learning seems like a promising way forward.

This combination would also allow for greater engagement with Belarusian academics from the diaspora. Several initiatives, such as the Belarusian Francis Skaryna Library in London or the Ostrogorski Centre, which, among other projects, runs Belarus Digest and [the Journal of Belarusian Studies](#), could also find ways to cooperate with the National University. And these are just some of the organisations working in the West and in Belarus that are interested in supporting a truly independent Belarusian university.

The university could also act as an incubator for academics and higher education managers working on Belarus-related topics. Being based both in Belarus and abroad would help it strengthen working ties between students and faculty members and Belarusian civil society organisations, think tanks and independent media.

Whatever format this education project takes, the main indicator of success of this new initiative should be the volume and quality of its Belarus-related research and teaching as well as its real impact on developments in Belarus.

Yarik Kryvoi and Vadzim Smok

Yarik Kryvoi is the editor-in-chef of Belarus Digest and director of the Ostrogorski Centre.

Vadzim Smok is a researcher at the Institute of Political Studies 'Political Sphere' based in Minsk and Vilnius and an

alumnus of the European Humanities University.

The EHU Saga: Building A Future for Belarus, Not Just Selecting a Rector

As a member of the Board of Governors of the European Humanities University and a member of the current search committee, I read with interest but also distinct concern Mr. Kharytonau's recent article "[EHU Rector Selection: Time to Fix Mistakes and Improve Credibility.](#)"

I reacted with interest because an alumnus of the University cared enough to write the article and because it is always time to "fix mistakes and improve credibility." I read the article with concern because the level of critical thinking and analysis his essay displayed did not rise to the level I have come to expect from my exposure over the years to hundreds of EHU graduates.

Mr. Kharytonau's main concern about EHU's future is primarily that EHU is weakening or abandoning its Belarusian mission – a position for which he provides no evidence, a position that ignores that every major change Anatoli Mikhailov, as EHU's founding Rector, has enacted over the past four years, was designed explicitly to strengthen EHU's capacity to pursue its Belarusian mission for the long term and a position that ignores the founding Rector's role as an observer and advisor in the search process.

Having access as a member of the EHU Board to "primary"

material on which to base my judgments, I certainly have an advantage over Mr. Kharytonau. On the other hand, a commitment to critical thinking involves pro-active, open-minded inquiry informed by evidence. I am not aware of any effort on the part of Mr. Kharytonau's to seek such evidence from those directly involved. On the other hand, his article is prima facia evidence that the Board has failed to communicate clearly with one of its most important constituencies. It is for that warning that I am most grateful to Mr. Kharytonau. While I disagree with his conclusions, I hope this response will help close that communication gap.

the "Belarusian focus" or mission has been and remains rooted in the vision and leadership of Anatoli Mikhailov

After pro-forma criticism of process and motive, Mr. Kharytonau asserts that "the critical point in this whole discussion is how the Belarusian focus of the institution has lately become somewhat of a marginal idea." As evidence of this marginalization, he notes only that the concern about such a lost focus has been discussed widely in Belarus. He ignores actual events and actions that point strongly to a greater, not lesser focus on the Belarusian mission.

First and foremost, the "Belarusian focus " or mission has been and remains rooted in the vision and leadership of Anatoli Mikhailov, in his willingness to see the shortcomings of his own work and his insistence that the Board and he had to correct those shortcomings if the Belarusian mission was to be fulfilled. Mr. Kharytonau and many others simply concluded that such self-criticism and change must mean an abandonment of the Belarusian mission. They have completely overlooked the very rare quality Professor Mikhailov has demonstrated as a founding entrepreneur and rector to be self-critical and to insist on change in order to keep faith with the original mission.

Professor Mikhailov began making the case over four years ago that EHU was approaching a critical juncture. It had survived the traumatic process of closing and re-establishing itself in exile but had not yet created a university with a curriculum and level of research of the quality needed to fulfill the longer term task of establishing a democratic society in Belarus, let alone to meet Lithuanian and European accreditation standards. He argued that nurturing and restoring the historic capacity of Belarus to be open to and to absorb the best of many cultures while forging its own cultural identity was a task of decades not just years. To serve the long-term goal of building a healthy, vibrant Belarusian state and culture required the existence of an independent, quality university that could hold its own at the highest levels in a European as well as global context. EHU had to become more than a safe haven and loose collection of scholars fleeing a closed-minded, autocratic ruler who viscerally feared any institution that promoted academic freedom and critical thinking.

The Board, whose members come from a seven countries including Belarus, have led large universities and strong liberal arts colleges, have experience with large and small not-for-profit institutions, have business and government experience. All serve as volunteers without any remuneration and all concurred fully with Professor Mikhailov' assessment.

At that time, Professor Mikhailov also insisted that, given his age and the demands necessary to effect such change, he would need help in leading such transformation. The Board agreed and still agrees. This process of transformation has been massive. It began with changes to the Rector's office and the leadership structure and expanded to a full restructuring of the faculty, bringing the institution into full compliance with Lithuanian labor laws. Faculty governance was reorganized, so that faculty appropriately could play a leading role in restructuring the curriculum and aligning it

with the needs of Belarus and 21st century institutions. Financial sustainability to preserve independence and recruitment are other critical issues that must be addressed in realistic and rigorous ways.

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Central to every step in this process has been an evaluation of what the changes will do to support EHU's Belarusian mission. Some critics judge EHU's commitment to a Belarusian mission by the percentage of our faculty who are Belarusian (88%), or even by some absolute percentage of Belarusian students enrolled (96%) or by the amount of research its faculty produce. But serious, lasting success must also be measured by whether Belarusian students have access to an education that is comparable to that available to the best of their peers globally and that will give them the courage and means to transform their society. That standard requires that we must find a way to make EHU financially accessible while also preserving the institution's independence. The challenge is immense.

The Board and the Founding Rector know well the pain, conflict, and difficulty of carrying out the changes needed to build a quality university that could be independent from state control, compete globally, and represent the best of Belarusian culture. Many in the EHU community now recognize that to fulfill its mission while remaining fiscally responsible, EHU could no longer be primarily a refuge for scholars seeking academic freedom as vital, necessary, and noble as that phase was for the university. I wish both the pain and the private and public anger could have been avoided

Certainly, there have been both missteps and mistakes in this transformation process. The most poignant for me has been our

inability to find a means to recognize and to express adequately our thanks for all of those scholars who stood for academic freedom and joined the first EHU faculty in exile. They modeled for the citizens of their country what it means to live in an open society. There was no way all could be included in the restructuring of EHU or to have their academic careers supported to the extent they deserved to be. The Board's gratitude to them is genuine even, if at this point, inadequately expressed. Our goal is to create a future that will justify the sacrifices the founding faculty have made and recognize what they have given to EHU and to Belarus.

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In this process, the Board has made extraordinary demands on the administration, faculty and students and, in so doing, contributed to occasional missed deadlines for payrolls, inadequate training, and lack of timely information on student services and admissions. While I regret that pressure, I remain incredibly impressed and grateful that the dedication and commitment in the community to the vision of the university has prevailed as all have worked under this pressure.

We on the Board also failed to recognize in a timely way that we had failed to explain adequately and thereby persuade representatives of the donor nations that the "front-end" investment in budgetary resources we were recommending to carry out this major transition was the wisest way to proceed. I for one thought we had made the case that incurring budgetary deficits now offered less long-term risk than maintaining a balanced budget during the transition, but in the end we failed. The situation is a microcosm of the larger debate taking place in the European Union, and, as with that situation, the cost-cutting will be painful but it will be done.

The passionate involvement of students, faculty, and other members of Belarusian society demonstrate the importance of EHU to Belarus and to the Belarusian mission. For the Board, the critical issue is to set EHU on the shortest possible path to resume full operations in Belarus and to EHU's long-term survival as an institution that is strong, innovative, fiscally responsible, and capable of helping to shape Belarus's future as a democratic country that can take its rightful place within Europe.

Gregory Prince

Member, EHU Governing Board, President Emeritus of Hampshire College, Amherst, MA, USA, and author of Teach Them to Challenge Authority, Educating for Healthy Societies, a book that in part celebrates EHU and its mission and argues its importance for the United States as well as for Belarus.

EHU Rector Selection: Time to Fix Mistakes and Improve Credibility

The “Rector Selection Saga” at the European Humanities University (EHU) in Vilnius, the Belarusian university in exile, has been going on for more than half a year. It enters its third season with the Governing Board's Rector Selection Committee making every mistake in the book – again.

It appears that the current Selection Committee (with no Belarusians on it) has no capacity to legitimise any candidate it would raise, especially after many criticised the process of pushing a hand-picked candidate, Dr. Garry David Pollick.

By 1 March 2015 the Governing Board was expected to recommend a final candidate for the rectorship position to the General Assembly of the Part-Owners (GAPO). This, however, has not happened.

Postponing the process further significantly increases the damage to EHU's credibility just as prime time for student recruitment descends upon the institution. This decision also pushes GAPO to take the initiative into its own hands and act without consent of the Board, for first time in the history of EHU.

Laying Eggs, Executive Style

The current acting rector Dr. Garry David Pollick has incomprehensibly made his way through on to the final rounds of the selection process. He was introduced as a provost and COO of the European Humanities University slightly over a year ago and became EHU Acting Rector in October 2014.

Pollick's engagement at EHU has been marked by an astonishing rise to the top. But what did this candidate achieve in the year that he has lead EHU? And why does the Selection Committee keep pushing him to the top with such sustained vigour?

The critical point in this whole discussion is how the [Belarusian focus of the institution](#) has lately become somewhat of a marginal idea. This problem – probably for the first time in the last 10 years – has finally engaged Belarusian civil society in a discussion of what the role of EHU is in developing the national project for democratic Belarus. Three months ago, 40 leading minds from Belarus and abroad signed in January 2015 [an open letter calling to keep the 'Belarusian heart'](#) of EHU and not abandon its legacy.

Under Pollick's leadership, EHU has suffered from the disastrous losses of reputation as well as increased financial

losses

Under Pollick's leadership, EHU has suffered from the disastrous losses of reputation which, among other things, include unnecessary legal disputes over dismissals of former employees and breaches of the EHU Statute by particular administrative bodies of the university.

Dr. Pollick oversaw a hiring process that gave rise to a budget deficit of nearly €1 million (there was no comparable budget deficit before). This caused major donors like the European Commission and Norway to suspend funding, pending a plan to reduce this deficit to a manageable size – a plan they have been waiting to receive from Pollick since last summer.

One of his few accomplishments – a rather [self-serving redraft of EHU's Statute](#), created a University Council that Dr. Pollick boasted would help make EHU more democratic. According to the Statute, it is supposed to meet every two months. Dr. Pollick has not called a meeting of the Council in months. This is, very likely due to the fact that he decided that he can no longer work there with EHU's CFO, who was asking uncomfortable questions about a number of financial matters that involve Dr. Pollick.

Lithuania's Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education gave EHU poor marks for strategic management

Not surprisingly, a report released by Lithuania's Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education in early February gives EHU [poor marks for strategic management](#) – the area that Dr. Pollick, probably the most expensive education consultant in the whole region, currently supervises. The university spent well over a hundred thousand euros on his compensation rather than on the development of academic programmes or campus renovations over the span of a single year.

Losing the Battle, saving Face

Presumably, the Board will no longer support Pollick, since few Board members are willing to take personal responsibility for choosing a candidate who has almost no support outside the Selection Committee. Unfortunately for EHU, a small group of influential and desperate Board members continue to push Pollick further along the selection process for the university's top post.

According to some sources, last month, in an almost comically desperate effort to shore up their candidate, two individuals from the current EHU governance structures made their way to New York in the hopes of enlisting George Soros in their dubious adventure. Since George Soros is the founder and chairman of Open Society Foundation (one of three Part-Owners of EHU), his opinion on who becomes rector is of crucial importance. No surprise, however, that George Soros refused to support the legitimisation of a shady candidate and insisted on a fair selection process before it is too late.

What else could select members of the Governing Board do further to discredit the current selection process? Arrange a "members only" Board meeting without the presence of student representatives and the EHU Trust Fund Manager (who are usually invited as observers) at Frankfurt Airport to further delay the final decision and keep Pollick on board as the most highly-compensated temporary rector in the history of Lithuania and Belarus for another month or two for the sake of an "exchange of opinions"? Fantastical as it may sound, this is precisely what they did. The airport meeting will take place at the end of March.

The Rule of Law, the Rule of GAPO

If the EHU Board is so misguided as to nominate a candidate who has failed to perform the work for which he was hired, and GAPO to approve this, it will most likely mean a terminal loss of credibility for the European Humanities University as a whole. However, the current degree of dissatisfaction with the

selection process may well warrant a negative decision by GAPO, should the Board decide to nominate Pollick.

GAPO, not the Board, officially appoints and dismisses EHU's Rector and can even dismiss the existing Governing Board

According to the EHU Statute, it is GAPO, not the Board, which officially appoints and dismisses EHU's Rector and makes all fundamental decisions in the life of the university. GAPO could even dismiss the existing Governing Board, if it so chooses. If they were to reject a Board nominee or fully reboot the selection process, a new page of democratic governance would be opened in the history of EHU. GAPO has never voted against a Board decision before and is likely to act independently for the time in its history.

Such a scenario would become a clear signal to alumni, students, faculty, donors and other stakeholders that GAPO takes seriously their obligation to properly govern and manage a Belarusian academic institution. If GAPO starts anew the search for a rector and dissolves the existing Selection Committee, Belarusians will achieve their first institutional success on the way to real engagement for change and this, in turn, will restore hope for a European future for Belarusian higher education, starting with EHU.

That said, no matter who becomes a finalist at this point, given the existing selection process, without a new, reliable procedure, his or her legitimacy would be very low in many people's eyes. So now the question is not just who and how will actually become the next rector, but also whether the current Governing Board will continue to exist in its present form.

Serge Kharytonau

President of the Alumni Association of the European Humanities University

European Humanities University: To Be Belarusian or Not To Be

The European Humanities University (EHU), the only truly independent Belarusian university in existence, has struggled to live up to its great promise.

After being closed by the Belarusian authorities in 2004, the need for a vibrant and innovative university tailored primarily to Belarusians, resonated with many international donors and received their support to re-open in Vilnius in 2005.

Years of conflicts between the university management and academics, mismanagement and an administration adverse to reforming the institution has been widely covered in Belarusian media recently.

As EHU's Board moves to select a new rector in the coming days, they will either reaffirm its Belarusian identity – or bury it once and for all.

The Case for Change

It is easy for an outsider to get lost in all of the details surrounding the current dilemma facing EHU.

The university is located in Lithuania, an EU member state, but institutionally exhibits very little desire to become more "European".

Recently, EHU professor Maksym Zhbakov [wrote an op-ed](#) on the

Nashe Mnenie web site about this paradox. He explained that the institution's exile nature isolates it simultaneously from both the EU and from Belarus, making it somewhat immune to internal and external criticism:

Internally, [EHU's exile status- ed.] means that it needs to maintain its [established] vertical of power (including suppressing any private attempts to get involved in what we consider to be external/repressive attempts to influence 'our' understanding [of EHU- ed.]).

Externally – the periodic attempt to garner compassion and empathy, the regular public articulation of our special sacrifice affirms the status of our institution.

Under these conditions remaining foreign is favourable in both senses: as a victim of totalitarianism, [we] have special privileges and are not obliged to live by your rules, but as refugees [we] are able to safely construct [our] own brand of democracy at a safe distance.

In a way, EHU became a miniature version of Belarus over the years. Its founder and former Rector [Anatoli Mikhailov](#), 75, was criticised for being authoritarian and increasingly treating the university like his own personal institution.

Recognising the need for change, the EHU Board encouraged Mikhailov to retire from his post as Rector and consequently created the special honorary post of President just for him. Yet, judging by the recent actions of the Board and its current administration, their idea of change is at odds with the institution's original mission.

Members of the [faculty](#), student body and [alumni](#) have been publicly complaining that EHU is losing its distinctive identity since the new administration took over. The university's latest version of its Charter, for example, (updated in September 2014) [has removed the term "Belarus"](#)

[from its mission statement](#) (a document approved by EHU's Board) – just one of many signs that a gradual shift away from its Belarusian roots is well underway.

Candidates and Considerations

After granting Mikhailov his new honorary role, the Board launched its call for a new Rector in October 2014. While EHU has decided to not publicly announce the names of the [7 finalists for the Rectorship](#). Several undisclosed internal sources have reported to Belarusian media outlets that there are between 3-5 top contenders. They include:

- David Pollick (Current Acting Rector at EHU)
- [Alaksandar Milinkievič](#) (Former opposition presidential candidate, Sakharov Prize Winner)
- Tatyana Schittsova (Professor of philosophy at EHU)
- Ales Krautsevich (Former Vice Rector of Hrodna State University, Belarus)
- Darius Udris (Vice Rector for development and communication at EHU)

Almost all of the candidates have some background in university administration, though their backgrounds vary. Krautsevich was the former Vice Rector of a Belarusian university but was subsequently forced out of his position by the authorities in the 1990s due to a difference of opinion. Milinkievič, a Sakharov Prize winner and a well-known opposition figure in Belarus and abroad, headed the Faculty of Physics at the University of Sétif in Algiers between 1980 and 1984.

Shchytsova is also very familiar with EHU, having worked at the university since 1994. Darius Udris, who became Vice Rector for Development and Communications in 2011, has over a

decade in program management experience and communications combined. He has been at the centre of the university's development the past several years.

David Pollick, however, is rumoured to be both the Board and Anatoli Mikhailov leading candidate.

Cause for Concern?

Originally, Pollick was brought in as a managing consultant by two members of the Board, Gregory S. Prince, Jr. and Dan E. Davidson, whom he is on friendly terms with. In December 2013, the university's Board hired him to serve as its provost and CEO (now Acting Rector). The position would appear to have been created just for him as no such position exists in EHU's Charter.

His track record raises questions whether this move was warranted. While serving as President of Birmingham-Southern College, the small school's deficit rose for several years in a row and he was personally embroiled in a scandal that led to a [\\$5 million budget shortfall](#).

His current remuneration, which [according to the New York Times](#) is \$150,000 and is rumoured to be twice as much, is an absolutely exorbitant sum by local standards. He does not speak Belarusian or Russian and his ability to understand the needs of a Belarusian university in exile [have also been questioned in the past](#).

EHU is currently looking at roughly a €1 million gap in its 2014 budget – and according to Belarus Digest's sources familiar with the situation there is still no official budget ready for 2015. Pollick's official salary not been made public. For a donor-supported institution, this disturbing lack of transparency and poor planning is a real reason for concern.

A Nation's Elite Appeals

On 14 December 2014, 40 well-known individuals from Belarusian civil society, arts and culture – including independent Belarus's first Head of State Stanislau Shushkevich, prominent human rights activist Aliaksandr Bialiacki, leading writers and academics – [published an open letter](#) with a simple appeal:

The European Humanities University is the educational institution that Belarusian society has always pinned their hopes on for the preparation of a national elite. EHU today faces a very important choice – a new rector, on whom the university's development will depend. We call for the preservation of EHU's "Belarusian heart". We call for EHU's Rector to be a Belarusian citizen.

A number of publications in the Belarusian media all focus on the same message – the ideals and spirit with which EHU was created should not be abandoned at this crucial juncture in Belarus's history. As is their duty, the Board must step up to reaffirm its Belarusian identity and demand complete openness and transparency in all matters concerning the university, especially when it comes to financial matters.

Financially, a move away from its Belarusian identity would be disastrous. Several donors already indicated to Belarus Digest that they would support EHU only if it remains Belarusian and were ready to pull out funding otherwise.

As an institution almost entirely dependent on donor funding that is *directly* tied to its Belarusian identity, abandoning it will likely lead to a majority of donors withdrawing from the project altogether – something that EHU is unlikely to survive.

The Belarusian University in Exile Needs More Than a New Rector

On 30 September, Professor Anatoli Mikhailov left his post as rector and became the president of the European Humanities University (EHU) – a Belarusian university in exile.

Rather than resigning from working for the university, Professor Mikhailov switched over to working full-time as the new president of EHU, a position created especially for him.

Now the [EHU is looking](#) for a replacement for Professor [Anatoli Mikhailov](#) who has been running the institution since it was founded in 1992.

The next rector will largely determine whether the institution will retain its mission as a Belarus-focused institution or will completely transform and become an regular higher education institution in Lithuania which differs only for targeting Russian-speakers. Some say that it will even determine whether EHU will survive or not.

The new rector will also need to repair EHU's reputation and make it more transparent not in the least because most of its funding comes from EU taxpayers. The institution has recently dismissed several [opposition-minded lecturers](#), closed a number of Belarus-related programmes, faces a downturn in applications and its finances are looking a little hazy.

Belarusian Mission Lost in Transition?

The new rector will need to work closely with its founding rector [Anatoli Mikhailov](#). He explained the establishment of the new position of President at EHU as a means of supporting the gradual transition of the university's leadership.

The new post appeared only after the EHU approved a new charter earlier this year. One novelty of this new charter was that it dropped the university's mission statement. The very first sentence of the [2011 charter](#) provided that the university was

a non-state institution of higher education based on European values, where university studies prevail, research is performed and the activity of applied science and art is developed for the benefit of Belarusian society and its relationship to the global community. (emphasis added)

The [2014 version](#) simply states that EHU "is a non-state Lithuanian institution of higher education". The revised 2011 charter which mentions the word "Belarus" only three times, a notable reduction when compared to the 11 times of its previous incarnation.

As a [special report of Belarus Digest](#) demonstrated, over the last several years EHU has either closed, suspended or downgraded its Belarus-focused or human rights programmes while simultaneously presenting the institution as important for Belarus and the development of human rights within the country. Although [EHU representatives have claimed](#) that more than one-third of EHU courses focus on Belarus, it is difficult to verify this information.

New Provost: Hired from Overseas to Oversee Transition

On 1 October, Anatoli Mikhailov, in an interview with Radio Liberty, said that the arrival of David Pollick from North America sped up his own resignation. Some sources interviewed by Belarus Digest who wished to remain anonymous believe that the current management of the university wants him to become the next rector.

Pollick's grandparents hail from Belarus, but he does not speak either Belarusian or Russian. He appears to have the

support of the Governing Board, but many fear that should he be appointed, the university would drift even further from its original Belarus-centred mission.

Since March 2014, Pollick has served as EHU's provost. Previously he ran several small universities in the United States. According to Forbes, he was among the best paid rectors in the United States in 2010. The New York Times wrote that his current salary at EHU is [\\$150,000 per year](#). Sources close to the EHU administration suggest that Pollick's total compensation package is double this sum.

When asked about the provost's salary by Lithuanian journalists from [15min.lt](#) the university's refusal to give any details about remuneration puzzled them:

This kind of answer from the institution is puzzling because EHU lives almost solely on donor funding and it should therefore not be such a secretive post. Not only can the university, that moved to Vilnius in 2004, use its premises free of charge, but it has up until now been almost totally propped up on funds from different Western countries.

The EHU already has a significant gap in its budget, which begs the question of whether or not the university can really afford it. In the least, this puts the provost under a considerable amount of pressure to deliver results, in particular to bring in new funding.

Belarus Digest asked David Pollick whether he was proud of any of particular achievements as provost at EHU, whether he managed to bring in new funding and why EHU's budget and why his own salary were not transparent. Pollick explained that he has spent over half a year at EHU primarily becoming acquainted with the university. He added that:

The salaries paid to senior administrators must be competitive, and the committee recruited from a pool of

leaders who have worked at similar institutions in other parts of the world. EHU's faculty salaries are also competitive now for the region from which they are drawn.

Pool of Candidates

After Mikhailov's resignation, discussions about alternative candidates began to circulate.

A community of EHU students on the VK.com, a Russian-language analogue of Facebook, organised a poll on who should become the next rector of EHU. 160 people took part in the poll. Andrej Laŭruchin, one of the leaders of the opposition-minded EHU Senate, came first with 15.6% of the votes, followed by Grigory Minenkov, an associate of Anatoli Mikhailov, who received 13.1%. Finally, David Pollick and EHU Vice-Rector for Academic Affairs Aliaksandr Kaŭbaska both received 9.4% of the votes, placing them both in the top 5.

Who should be the next rector of EHU?

A. Kaubaska

A. Kazulin

A. Lauruhin

U. Mackievich

A. Milinkevich

G. Minenkov

D. Pollick

Other (please add in comments)

Vote

View

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Conceivable candidates from outside EHU could include [Aliaksadr Milinkevich](#) and [Aliaksandr Kazulin](#) – former presidential candidates with backgrounds in higher education. Both are known in Europe which could help them raise funds.

Belarusians also have a large number of academics who teach at leading Western universities. Several people in Belarus run smaller educational initiatives, like Uladzimir Mackievich from the Flying University or [Paviel Daniejka](#) of the IPM Business School.

The Selection Process

The real selection process will be far less transparent than an online vote.

According to EHU's charter the body that will actually select the rector is the General Assembly of the Part-Owners. It includes the Institute for International Education (Lithuania), the Open Society Foundations (United States), and the Eurasia Foundation (United States). Insiders say that the EHU Governing Board, which consists primarily of Western academics, unofficially has a major stake in making a decision on who will be the next rector.

To clarify the selection process, Belarus Digest asked the EHU administration several questions: does the General Assembly of the Part-Owners include only these three organisations; what is the Institute for International Education; and how will the assembly take into account the interests of civil society organisations and donors?

EHU's communications manager Gintare Kavaliunaite-Amelyushkina responded to these questions without really responding

directly to them:

The EHU Governing Board has set up a Search Committee to be responsible for the open competition for the position of Rector. Very shortly, a description of the post and requisite qualifications will be published internationally and on the university's website together with details of the process and timetable for the open competition. Interviews will be held in Vilnius in mid-December 2014. The Governing Board hopes to be in a position to recommend selected candidates to the General Assembly of the Part-Owners for a final decision by March 1, 2015.

Who Could Secure the Future of EHU?

An ideal candidate should have a good understanding of Belarus, be an experienced manager and someone whom academics, students and the university's supporters would respect. He would need to motivate EHU's staff to be more diligent and responsible in their work.

Most urgently, they will need to deal with the serious financial problems facing the university. Even today sources close to the EHU administration say that the EHU's budget gap is almost a million EUR this year – that is around 15% of the current budget.

According to its founding rector Anatoli Mikhailov, student fees cover only 14% of EHU's expenses, which speaks to the fact that the university badly needs Western support. It appears to be rather obvious that if EHU continues to move away from its Belarus-focused mission, donors will be less willing to support it. They would rather fund a Belarusian university in exile than simply an ordinary private Lithuanian university.

From the time that its exile in Lithuania began, EHU has been an important symbol, concrete evidence that the West can

support and sustain an institution which provides a liberal education tailored to Belarusian students – something which is difficult, if not impossible, for them to gain at home.

All engaged stakeholders should realise that this symbol may soon disappear if the current issues continue and a major donor pulls out. As a first step, for the university to survive and prosper, it needs to have an open and transparent process for selecting its rector.

The decision-makers should seriously take into account not only the views of EHU's private owners but also of its donors, most of whom are funded by EU taxpayers.

Finally, the selection process needs to take into consideration the interests of Belarusian civil society, which, at least in the previous version of EHU's charter, was supposed to be the main beneficiary of the Belarusian university in exile.

Lecturers Exiled from the Belarusian University in Exile?

A number of Belarusian lecturers who were particularly vocal in criticising the administration of the European Humanities University – a Belarusian university in exile – will no longer teach there after this summer.

Their departure is the result of a previously announced round of faculty hiring that wrapped up at the end of July.

Commenting on the administration's decisions, representatives

of the EHU Senate and its union argued that they were not offered employment because of their vocal disagreements with the university's management.

EHU's administration has stressed that agreement or disagreement with its policies was not a criterion. The administration explained that the criteria considered during its hiring process included the quality of applicant's teaching and research, but also the workload requirements of departments.

Financial considerations also figured into the hiring process. The university needed to lower the overall number of academics the university could afford to hire.

Belarus Digest interviewed David Pollick, EHU Provost, and Andrei Lavruhin, a former EHU lecturer and Secretary of the Senate.

Senate vs Administration

EHU administration and faculty relations were strained a few years ago when a group of Belarusian lecturers left the university after a disagreement with its administration. While things had been relatively calm in the interceding years, [the conflict flared up once again](#) in February 2014.

At that time, the administration had recently dismissed Paval Tereshkovich, the head of the democratically elected Senate – the university's self-governing body. He was one of the authors of a pro-reform platform championed by EHU academics called “For a New EHU”.

Tereshkovich and his colleagues rallied for a series of specific changes such as improved employment conditions for the faculty and a shift towards having research and teaching focus more on Belarus.

Following his firing, Tereshkovich told Belarus Digest in an

interview that his dismissal was unlawful and an act of revenge for his criticism of the university's administration. His colleagues supported him and another lecturer, Maksim Zhbankou, even predicted at the time that there would be further dismissals of other academics that made the administration uncomfortable.

At the end of July, EHU officially announced that it was offering one-year employment contracts to 61 lecturers. The leaders of the "For a New EHU" platform were not among those offered employment.

The list of faculty offered contracts after the hiring process did not also include the management of "EHUnion" Aliaksei Kryvalap, his deputy Kanstancin Tkachou or Andrei Ralionak, a member of the "Council" union and the Senate.

Other EHU Senate representatives, including Volha Shparaha, deputy head of the Senate, Andrei Lavruhin, the Secretary of the Senate and member of the "Council" union and Maksim Zhbankau, a Senator, also lost their jobs.

Lavruhin: Political Dismissals

Andrei Lavruhin told Belarus Digest that the administration's decisions were politically motivated and they proved academic repression against the lecturers.

In his view, the decision not to hire back members of the faculty was due to their criticisms of the EHU administration. "All of the dismissed lecturers enjoyed a high level of admiration among the student body (as seen in their annual student evaluations) and had significant academic potential", he explained.

The former lecturer does not yet know what he will do personally. "It is hard to say at the moment, because we found ourselves in this position only a week ago", he told Belarus Digest. The fact that he taught at EHU will also probably make

it very difficult, if not impossible, to find a job at any other state-run Belarusian university.

He and other lecturers are planning to sue EHU in Lithuanian court, and also seek the help of human rights organisations and other European agencies.

EHU Administration: Quality of Teaching and Research Above All

David Pollick, EHU's Provost, explained to Belarus Digest that the "Hiring Commission's recommendations to the Rector were based on criteria such as the quality of a faculty member's teaching and research, and the workload requirements of departments (...) Whether someone called for changes or disagreed with the Administration's policies was not a deciding factor", he said.

Pollick explained the decision-making process: "Following on internal departmental consultation, the heads of academic departments provided recommendations as members of the Commission".

According to the Provost, members of the Senate were aware that there would be additional costs associated with moving core teaching staff from service contracts to employment contracts. "Because of the additional costs, a reduction in the overall number of faculty was inevitable", he stated.

Towards a More Transparent EHU?

The prior dismissal of Pavel Tereshkovich and recent decisions made by the administration may raise a few questions regarding the transparency and fairness of the university's hiring process.

According to an EHU media release, the Internal Faculty Hiring Commission consisted of the heads of EHU's four academic departments, the Vice-Rector for Academic Affairs and the newly-appointed Provost.

However, it is unclear – from either the press release or EHU's web site – who the heads of the departments are and how they were appointed.

At the same time, it seems quite logical that if EHU were to improve the employment conditions (i.e. raise the salaries) of its academics, it would have to cut the number of those employed.

The administration began switching members of its staff from service contracts to employment contracts earlier this year and, as part of this process, had already appointed the university's core faculty by the end of the July.

These new improved working conditions will definitely give the university's faculty more financial security and stability than they had with service contracts, which had been the standard form of employment for years.

Who is Concerned About EHU's Image?

The university's donors would appear to still be its most important constituency. As donors that help fund it, they help ensure that EHU is functioning in accordance with its stated mission of being a truly democratic university working for the future of Belarus.

The administration, for its part, believes that it is fulfilling its obligations to its donors. "We have kept donors informed of our plans and actions and we are confident that they understand and support us", David Pollick told Belarus Digest.

Pollick also believes that the changes "will improve the quality of education and research at EHU, and, thereby improve our image in a very real way", he added.

Belarusian media, on the other hand, have been very critical of the conflict.

Nearly all of the headlines surrounding the recent events at the university have carried a bitter tone: "What is EHU Mutating Into?" (EuroBelarus), "Rebel Professors Driven Out of EHU" (RFE/RL). Other headlines include "The Students of EHU Collect Signatures in Support of Lecturer-Rebels" (Charter'97) and "Everyone Who Thinks Critically at EHU – at Risk" (EuroBelarus).

The state-run Belarus newspaper Belarus' Segodnya published an article entitled "Study in the Shadow of Scandals", a piece that commented upon the conflict at the university with particular satisfaction.

The administration argues that its decisions were not dictated by the lecturers' critical attitudes. However, the fact remains that all of the leaders of the Senate and EHU's union will no longer be employed at EHU come this fall.

Naturally this raises questions about whether the hiring decisions made by the university's administration were based solely on their academic credentials.

Because EHU exists to serve Belarusian students, it needs to do more to build a positive image in Belarusian society, including being tolerant of internal dissent.

A tolerant, pluralistic environment would demonstrate that EHU is a place that encourages genuine and open discussion, without the threat of reprisals – something which is sorely missing in Belarus.

Conflict between EHU Senate and Administration: How to Find a Peaceful Solution

Belarusian lecturers from the European Humanities University are getting ready to strike soon.

This was the message coming out of the University's labour union shortly after the EHU administration dismissed professor Pavel Tereshkovich, the head of the EHU Senate, who was elected last November.

Prior to these elections a group of lecturers launched an electoral platform criticising the conditions of their employment contracts and the upcoming hiring campaign.

They proposed to include Belarusian academics into the governance of the University and to strengthen the role of the EHU Senate, a self-governing body that ensures the quality of education and research.

Despite resistance from the Senate the University administration thinks that it is important to proceed with a competition for a set of soon-to-be-established permanent faculty positions.

Both EHU academics and its administration recognise the need to reform. As the conflict inside the university escalates, both sides need to sit together at the negotiating table sooner rather than later, perhaps with a respected mediator who could guide the reconciliatory talks.

History of Disagreements

In November 2013, the Belarusian media widely covered the vibrant electoral [campaign of Belarusian academics](#) entering

into the EHU Senate. The Senate itself is a self-governing body, which consists of 21 members, representing both academics and students.

Back in those days, a group of Belarusian academics, including Pavel Tereshkovich and Volha Shparaha, launched an electoral platform under the slogan "For a New EHU".

They criticised the university's administration for its authoritarian and non-transparent decision-making practises and the absence of any meaningful involvement of EHU academics in decision-making. Lecturers proposed a stronger role for the Senate and a rotation in the EHU management, including the post of rector.

They also advocated making Belarus-related research and teaching a priority for the University. As a result of their campaign candidates from "For a New EHU" won a majority of the seats in the Senate. Pavel Tereshkovich became chairman of this democratically elected body.

Tereshkovich Dismissal

When EHU dismissed Tereshkovich a few months later, it provoked outrage from both the Senate and the EHU trade union, which announced its plan to strike in protest.

Colleagues of Tereshkovich launched a campaign in support of him. Some of the EHU Senate members, including Ala Sokolova, Volha Shparaha and Maksim Zhbankou, initiated a petition on the web site change.org. The petition has already collected over 1,000 signatures.

Maksim Zhbankou, another EHU lecturer, told Radio Svaboda that the administration would also dismiss other Belarusian academics. In his opinion, the University presented those who remained critical of the administration as a small group of people, but in reality the majority of the teaching staff disagreed with the current

policies of the administration.

Tereshkovich thinks that his dismissal was unlawful and an affront to the EHU Senate which elected him

Tereshkovich thinks that his dismissal was unlawful and an affront to the EHU Senate which elected him. According to Tereshkovich he did not receive any official explanation for his dismissal. He tells Belarus Digest that the EHU trade union is planning to sue the EHU administration on his behalf.

He argues that his recent criticism of the changes in the system of governance, the newly created position of provost and other new governing structures cannot to be found anywhere in the Statute of EHU. He also believes that the university wants to put pressure on those who question the transparency and fairness of the recently announced international competition for EHU positions.

EHU's Response: We Are Ready to Talk

Darius Udryś, a vice-rector for Development and Communications, refrained from discussing the reasons behind Tereshkovich dismissal. However, in response to Belarus Digest's questions he did state that, "examples of faculty who are critical of the administration and continue to work at EHU are plentiful."

According to him, the administration is ready to meet and discuss any concerns of the teaching staff. He also commented that to resolve the conflict, the administration has made an effort to "restore dialogue with those who are critical to our plans."

Udryś is confident of the donors and stakeholders, "continued commitment to the university as well as support for our efforts to introduce standard academic practises like open

competitions for full-time faculty positions."

All Agree – EHU Needs to Reform

In January an independent evaluation service of the European University Association, published a [report](#) which indicated areas for improvement of the strategic management of the University. With regards to the provost and executive council, the report recommended to define these positions in the EHU's Statute, which should be amended accordingly.

The report suggests that the management should ensure that all internal constituencies will be able to participate in the decision-making process: "The distribution of competencies in the decision-making processes is unclear and uncertain."

As concerns the mission of EHU, the European University Association report states that "given the composition of the staff and student bodies, the team found broad agreement amongst them that the Belarusian mission should not be abandoned." The report's authors recommend "to reaffirm the institutional mission and develop an appropriate strategy."

the university administration and its academics agree that the University needs to undergo serious structural changes

Both the University administration and its academics agree that the institution needs to undergo serious structural changes, while remaining faithful to its original mission as a Belarusian university in exile.

For its part, the EHU wants to be competitive with other universities. Today when education institutions are becoming increasingly internationalised, the EHU is afraid of falling behind.

The introduction of open competitions for full-time positions, widely practised elsewhere, represents an effort to bring one of the basic international standards in higher education to

the EHU. The administration also understands the need for increasing the quality of the university's teaching and research.

Still, the EHU has [a complex identity issue](#). For one, it has an explicitly [Belarus-related mission](#). EHU is supposed to be a safe haven for embattled Belarusian intellectuals – not a business arrangement. Yet it is based in Lithuania and wants to be internationally competitive and financially sustainable. Combining both of these issues into a cohesive plan has proven to be a difficult task.

Need for a Peaceful Solution

The EHU badly needs good press coverage to maintain its positive reputation both abroad and in Belarus. In Belarus, it is important to attract prospective students and academics. Abroad it needs to main its image for donors who support the institution. For this reason, these disputes should be resolved peacefully without resorting to extreme measures.

Most observers agree that EHU is no longer just a private university run by a single person but has an important mission to serve Belarusian society. EHU existence depends upon the financial support from the international donor community. But shifting the burden of conflict-resolution and micro-management to EHU alone is hardly realistic.

It may be advisable to engage a mediator come in who could facilitate a resolution to the dispute

However, as tensions at the University are rising and both sides are unable to work out a solution, it may be advisable to engage a mediator to facilitate a resolution to the dispute.

Ideally, such a person could be respected internationally, but at the same time, intimately familiar with Belarusian society

and situation inside the country. The mediator would be able to speak the same language both with the university administration and Belarusian academics.

Such an effort might help restore trust between both sides of this conflict and help strengthen EHU by finding a long-term workable solution. Someone like Stefan Eriksson, a former Swedish ambassador to Belarus, who speaks perfect Belarusian and lived in Belarus for years might be a good candidate.

European Humanities University Elects Its Senate and Debates its Future

On 19 November the European Humanities University (EHU), also known as Belarusian university in exile, held elections for its Senate. Although the Senate is just one of several bodies which govern EHU, the result may affect the direction of EHU's reforms.

Unlike previous elections, which often went unnoticed by the Belarusian press, this time a group of EHU academics united under a platform called 'For a New EHU' which conducted a vibrant electoral campaign. The vast majority of the newly elected Senate members supported the platform. The election campaign provoked discussions in Belarusian media about the direction EHU is taking under its current administration.

The main topics raised during the Senate election campaign included the role of academics in the governance of the university in exile and whether the Belarusian university in

exile could do more for Belarusian society.

The Rector of the University responded to criticism by explaining that the university needs changes to improve the quality of its scholarship and teaching and also to remain competitive.

Academics Want More Involvement

A public debate started after a group of lecturers adopted a manifesto criticising the management style of the EHU administration as being not democratic enough.

The group 'For a new EHU' consisted of the Chairman of the EHU Senate Pavel Cierashkovich and a number of lecturers including Volha Shparaha, Andrej Laurukhin and Maxim Zhbankou.

According to the manifesto, the university often made important decisions without meaningful consultations with EHU academics. The academics argued that the management excluded representatives of the Senate and labour unions from the decision making process related to the future of the university.

The lecturers also claimed that most Belarusian academics have to work for the university without employment contracts. They called for strengthening the role of the Senate and EHU academics and the introduction of regular rotations for key administrators, including the rector.

In their view, the university is losing its humanities identity, as well as its ties to Belarusian society. Therefore, the EHU should also develop Belarus-oriented programmes for students and encourage teaching in the Belarusian language and learning the language.

According to the manifesto, co-operation not only with Belarusian NGOs and think tanks, but also prominent Belarusian political and cultural figures, might help to bring the

university closer to civil society in Belarus. It also states that the teaching programmes should keep Belarus as a point of focus and involve successful Belarusian academics from around the world.

The EHU administration promises reforms

On 14 November Professor Anatoli Mikhailov, who has been leading the university since its establishment in 1992 responded and shared his vision of the future of the university.

Professor Mikhailov explained that the university planned to hire a core faculty consisting of permanent lecturers after holding an open competition. The budget for salaries will be doubled. The permanent staff is supposed to reside in Vilnius and could claim all social benefits and will have proper employment contracts, in compliance with Lithuanian law.

This change would signify a shift from the previous practise of EHU lecturers regularly commuting from Belarus to teach.

Commenting on whether Belarusian academics will be replaced by other nationals, Mikhailov emphasised that Belarus was and would continue to be at the centre of EHU's focus. He emphasised that the university has always been on the look out for qualified candidates from Belarus.□

The rector also explained that to strengthen its focus on Belarus, the EHU is developing a programme of transformation studies. The EHU also wants to revive its Belarusian studies programme which was closed not that long ago. According to Professor Mikhailov, thanks to generous and consistent donor support, the EHU's financial situation has never been better.

The rector commented also on the accusations that the administration had excluded the Senate and representatives of the University's faculty from the decision making process. In his view, the governing structure of the EHU is a hybrid one

and consists of international educational experts, foreign donors, the Senate, which is understood to consist of representatives of the EHU administration, staff and students.

He described this model as being one of “stakeholder involvement, separation of powers, and accountable democratic leadership”. In his view, it allows for the efficient, but also democratic management of the university.

Competing or complementary visions of the EHU?

Will the newly selected Senate with majority of supporters of reforms, find a compromise with the university management? In fact, much will depend on the position of the administration of the university. Although the Senate is an important body, its powers, when it comes to real strategic decisions and appointments, is rather limited.

Both the majority of the EHU Senate and the university management think that EHU needs change. On most issues, the positions of the Platform 'For a New EHU' and Rector Mikhailov are not mutually exclusive.

All agree that the University needs to maintain its focus on Belarus, hire Belarusian academics and act as an important platform for debate, research and teaching relevant to Belarus. They also agree that the voice of academics at the EHU should be heard and respected.

Rector Mikhailov already announced that he would discuss with the Senate and try to get its approval of his reforms. One hopes that EHU's management and the Senate will be able to agree on a viable reform plan.

The debate on the future reform of the university, widely covered in Belarusian press, shows diverse opinions among those who work for EHU. The university could benefit from the healthy debates if it makes sure that they lead not to

divisions but to improvements and progress.

This will help EHU to balance its Belarusian identity with the challenges of making the university more internationally competitive and strengthening its relevance to Belarus at the same time.

The European Humanities University Responds

The European Humanities University ([EHU](#)) certainly welcomes the attention of the Belarus Digest team (including the Centre for Transition Studies) and any and all constructive discussions about EHU's ongoing mission.

Regrettably, the recent Belarus Digest article [EHU: How Belarusian is the Belarusian University in Exile?](#) rehashes a number of myths and stereotypes that persist despite clear evidence to the contrary. It's also unfortunate that the author declined our invitation to visit EHU campus while in Vilnius. We think it would have helped her to better assess how Belarusian EHU really is.

Even more disappointing "[EHU: Optimising Impact on Belarus](#)"—a paper by *Belarus Digest* Editor-in-Chief Yaraslau Krivoi and Alastair Rabagliati that promises to "look at the impact of the European Humanities University (EHU)...on Belarus-related studies, teaching and public discourse". Instead, the authors deliver a superficial analysis that disregards information provided to them upon request on a range of issues (e.g., research, recruitment, labour contracts, communications, and others). This results in recommendations many of which are

either already in progress or miss the mark in terms of the university's character and mission. Even worse, the paper creates the erroneous impression that EHU does not consider educating Belarusian students its top priority (it does), that the university somehow lacks proper oversight (it has an international Governing Board *and* an independent Trust Fund administered by the Nordic Council of Ministers), and that Belarus-focused research and teaching is not the rule but the exception (more on this below).

Perhaps it's best to begin with the general claim by the author of the first article that EHU "is struggling to find its identity" and is "torn apart between being the Belarusian university in exile and a 'normal' European university based in Lithuania". There is absolutely no question at EHU that our university exists for the sake of Belarus and Belarusians. It is by no means a "normal" Lithuanian university and it never will be. It is Belarusian, belongs in Belarus, and only operates in exile because it refused to put up with violations of its academic freedom. These included the Belarusian government's demand to allow it to determine who may or may not lead EHU.

EHU is always striving to improve its offerings to students. Naturally, this entails regular reviews and evaluation of faculty and department performance as well as the changes necessary for improvement. Change is never easy, and not everyone is happy about every change. But the changes at EHU have nothing to do with any intent to "shift focus from Belarus towards becoming an ordinary Lithuanian university" (to quote the article). The notion that EHU is "torn apart" by a "struggle to find its identity" is hyperbole.

The claim that EHU has "started to replace dismissed Belarusians with Lithuanian academics" is unsubstantiated. There are, in fact, no such cases. Some fact-checking of a claim like this by the author (or the editors) would have been appropriate. In reality, **over 90% of EHU's full-time faculty**

is Belarusian, as is the majority of non-academic staff. Of the more than 200 faculty, only 12 are Lithuanians. There is only one department that is led by a non-Belarusian: the newly-created department of social and political science. All others are led by Belarusians. That said, it has never been the policy of EHU to employ only Belarusian nationals. Faculty and staff are chosen for the contributions each of them makes to an enriching experience for students.

As for EHU's recruitment priorities, currently **95% of EHU students are Belarusian**. Belarus is and will remain the focus of EHU's recruitment efforts. At the same time, EHU's leadership has decided that students and the university would benefit from a somewhat more diverse student body. So a decision has been made to increase recruitment of non-Belarusian students, with an upper limit set at 20%. Since non-Belarusian students would not be eligible for the financial support provided by most current donors, they would be full-fee-paying students who would help the university sustain itself financially, particularly when the number of high school graduates is falling dramatically throughout the region (due to the drop in birth rates following the fall of the Soviet Union). Non-Belarusian EHU students are subject to the same academic requirements as Belarusians. Attending EHU is an opportunity for all of our students to learn about Belarus and meet Belarusians while receiving a European education.

Being an international and a European university while maintaining a focus on Belarus are not mutually exclusive goals, and EHU has always done both. When it was in Minsk, EHU cultivated copious international connections and provided an education to Belarusians that was truly international in scope. This, in fact, was one of the reasons the university fell into the regime's disfavor. At the same time, a Belarusian spirit permeates EHU. Programs are taught in a way that closely relates theory and general knowledge to the

Belarusian experience. So it should be no surprise that:

- More than half of all student theses are Belarus-focused
- More than one-third of EHU's scholarly events either focus on Belarus or take place in Belarus
- More than one-third of EHU courses focus on Belarus
- 44% of EHU publications are published in Belarus (16% in the Belarusian language), and academic journals like EHU's *Belarusian Historical Review* focus primarily on Belarus
- EHU regularly hosts and participates in Belarus-related cultural events, including [Belarus Freedom Day celebrations](#), [concerts](#), [workshops](#), excursions, and the like
- Students, alumni, and faculty participate in Belarus-focused events, including [photo exhibitions](#), [guest lectures in Belarus](#), [competitions](#), and others
- EHU's student newspaper, the [EHU Times](#), is published entirely in Belarusian
- EHU's new core curriculum includes a course called the History of Belarus in the Context of European Civilization that is required for all students entering undergraduate programs (starting this year)

Thus, the observation that "it appears that [students] cannot learn much about Belarus at EHU" because "only one specialisation appears to have the word 'Belarus' in its title" is superficial, to say the least. And the idea that students at universities in Belarus can study such subjects as international law in the same way they learn it at EHU (with our strong focus on human rights and their ongoing abuse in Belarus) simply beggars belief.

As for the observations about EHU's Founding Rector Anatoli Mikhailov, he is currently serving his second and final five-year term. It will end in 2016, in accordance with the university's statute. EHU was registered in Lithuania in 2006, following its forced closure in Minsk in 2004, and Professor

Mikhailov was asked to continue to lead it in exile. He was elected by the university's Governing Board, as required by the statute, and governs in accordance with its regulations.

We are, of course, pleased that the authors of both pieces agree on the importance of supporting EHU. We agree that EHU is unique in what it offers to students and scholars from Belarus and is a vital alternative that is worthy of the support it has been fortunate enough to receive from an [international community of donors](#). We take very seriously their trust and expectations and are continually striving towards excellence.

European Humanities University

Analytical Paper: Optimising EHU's Impact on Belarus

The European Humanities University (EHU) was forced into exile in 2004 when the Belarusian authorities withdrew its licence. This followed the EHU's refusal to acquiesce to government pressure to change its leadership. The exiled University found its new home in Vilnius, which is less three-hours by train from Minsk.

The current rector of the EHU should step down soon in line with the requirements of Lithuanian law, having served two terms. The Centre for Transition Studies publishes a [paper](#) authored by Yaraslau Kryvoi and Alastair Rabagliati which aims to launch a constructive public discussion on the direction of the EHU under the new leadership, to deal with the challenges facing both the EHU and Belarusian society.

The authors interviewed by e-mail and by telephone over 20 individuals related to the EHU, including its alumni, lecturers, administration, donors and well as representatives of Belarusian civil society who worked with the University in the past. Many agreed that an open discussion would benefit the university.

The EHU is an important and valuable institution for the future of Belarus. However, public information and debate about the direction of the university has been limited. Most media coverage has focused on the story of the university going into exile rather than its effectiveness. This paper intends to fill this gap.

The EHU is at a Crossroads

With no change in Belarus on the horizon, the university needs to prepare itself for continued exile. Ten years after the EHU established itself in Vilnius, many donors continue to support the EHU as they have taken natural sympathy for their struggle. However, they are now paying increasing attention to the impact of the funding, and considering in more detail whether the University could increase its self-funding.

Most media coverage has focused on the story of the university going into exile rather than its effectiveness.

As this paper demonstrates, the university has recently shifted its focus from Belarus-related courses, publications, staff and the Belarusian language towards an institution aiming to cater a broader group of students from the countries of the former Soviet Union. The Belarusian component was more prominent during its early years in exile. Now the vision of the University mentions Belarus primarily as a source of students, among other students from the region rather than as the main target of its activities.

The internationalisation of the University, which features prominently in the description of the University's vision for

the future, is likely to lead to a decrease in Belarus-focused studies, staff and students. The EHU risks losing its distinction from other regional private universities, which raises the question about why it should continue to be eligible for donor's support.

For example, Polish universities (especially private ones, like Lazarski University) have neither specific donor support, nor a special focus on Belarus. However, their prices are affordable and Belarusians are ready to pay for the benefits of an EU education. Perhaps ironically it is Lazarski University that has organised a series of conferences on historical and political perspectives on Belarus that observers argue should be the EHU's trademark.

Another concern is that joint programmes with other  universities are liable in reality only to amount to subsidising Belarusian students to study at regular regional universities rather than creating a specific Belarus focused environment.

Therefore to fulfil its role as a university in exile and centre of academic development for a new generation of Belarusians, the University should retain its Belarusian character and focus on areas of "added value" for Belarus. Rather than becoming an ordinary "internationalised" university, the EHU should learn from other successful émigré universities, notably the Ukrainian Free University in Munich, which educated generations of Ukrainians.

Towards Greater Sustainability through Focusing on Belarus

With its location away from the restrictive political climate of Belarus, areas where the EHU is well positioned to provide "added value" include political science, Belarusian history, human rights, Belarusian language and literature as well as journalism.

The EHU with its new concept of internationalisation risks

losing its distinction from other regional private universities, which raises the question about why it should continue to be eligible for donor's support.

The EHU has the potential to become the main scientific hub for Belarus, both for research and academic studies. In this way it would be ideally placed to obtain further funding (such as through EU university research programmes) or donor support (linked to democratisation in Belarus).

✘ The EHU could work on meeting the need for high quality research on Belarus, especially linked to developing concrete plans for reforms in Belarus. Currently there is a lack of organisations that are able to perform this role.

To increase interest among young Belarusians in programmes such as political science, history or Belarusian studies the university should not only offer scholarships but also recruit and retain high calibre academics working in these areas providing them with job security guarantees typical for EU universities.

The paper suggests establishing a robust disclosure mechanism of research, teaching and policy impact based on measurable indicators. This mechanism could take the form of expanding existing oversight bodies to ensure that relevant donors, implementers, Belarusian civil society, Belarusian diaspora and the Lithuanian government all have a chance to review reports and be consulted on the most important decisions.

While the aim of a sustainable EHU, less dependent on donors' funding, is supported, this paper argues that donors should continue to firmly back the EHU as a valuable institution, which could play a unique role in the future of Belarus. External support, however, should be targeted at the "added value" areas while other EHU programmes could be paving the way for self-funding.

- Read [EHU: Optimising Impact on Belarus](#)
 - Чытаць [ЕГУ: Аптымізацыя уздзеяння на Беларусь](#)
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EHU: How Belarusian is the Belarusian University in Exile?

The European Humanities University, also known as Belarus's university in exile, is struggling to find its identity. It is torn apart between being the Belarusian university in exile and a "normal" European university based in Lithuania. Some say, it has lost its Belarusian character and gave up on its original mission. Others say that moving away from the Belarusian language and Belarus-focused curriculum is a sign of a truly international university, which the EHU should be.

If the EHU is to remain loyal to its original mission as a Belarusian university, it should seriously think about offering what is not available in Belarus or at Western universities. In addition to greater academic freedom (which some say [exists in Belarus too](#)), it should keep Belarus-focused courses and language at the forefront of its activities.

A Lost Belarusian Component?

The European Humanities University had a promising start. Professor Anatoli Mikhailov established the university in Minsk 1992. The university had very good connections with Western academics and foundations and enjoyed a reputation as a more liberal university compared to state-run institutions. In 2004, Belarusian authorities put pressure on the EHU

management and demanded that its rector Professor Mikhailov steps down. He refused and the Belarusian authorities closed down the university.

The university began a new chapter in Vilnius, 180 km from Minsk. One EHU political science graduate has identified two periods in the history of the EHU in Vilnius: Belarusian and Lithuanian. The Belarusian period of the EHU lasted until the group of Belarusian political scientists, which included Andrei Kazakievich and Dzianis Melyantsou left the university accusing its management of authoritarianism. The Lithuanian period began when the EHU started to replace dismissed Belarusians with Lithuanian academics, who often had little knowledge of Belarus and "did not know the tradition of the programme".

The same EHU graduate told Belarus Digest that the political science department was very important and symbolic to them – Belarusian students could freely discuss the political mechanisms of Belarus with their lecturers. To him, other student activities, which the EHU is so proud of, were an added value to the whole political science and history programme. But without quality Belarusian academics in "sensitive" areas, the task of the EHU to retain its identity has become more difficult to accomplish.

without quality Belarusian academics in "sensitive" areas the task of the EHU to retain its identity becomes more difficult to accomplish

The Belarusian or International University in Exile?

Today the EHU seems to be looking for its own place. Darius Udrys, the Vice-Rector for Development and Communications, explained to Belarus Digest that "the EHU exists for the sake of Belarusian students". He adds that they would like to maintain the main focus on Belarusian identity, but not to isolate EHU. The question is whether making the university

truly international conflicts with its mission, which according to Udryś is, "to provide Belarusian students with that which they cannot obtain in Belarus".

Vadzim Smok, another EHU graduate in political science and a Belarus Digest author says that in his experience the university stimulated the critical thinking of the students and remained open and supportive to students' initiatives. In the words of another EHU graduate, "the EHU remains an alternative for many young Belarusians". The Soviet educational system persists in Belarus and does little to encourage the critical and creative thinking of students.

Many young Belarusians choose to study in Vilnius because of [its proximity to Minsk](#). The newly introduced frequent express trains between Minsk-Vilnius and affordable ticket prices, makes commuting to Vilnius even more attractive. The students also like the idea of getting EU-recognised diplomas at a cost lower than at the Western universities.

Darius Udryś underlines that "we are always trying to balance national identity against what is necessary for us to be an international university". However, the university appears to be switching its focus from Belarus-oriented programmes to a more universal curriculum. Although around 95 per cent of the student body are Belarusian nationals, it appears that they cannot learn much about Belarus at EHU. Only one specialisation appears to have the word "Belarus" in its title – "Belarusian Studies" within the Cultural Heritage programme. In the past, Belarusian Studies was a separate programme.

This may not fit well with the university's original mission of offering what is not accessible in Belarus. This year the EHU closed its Social Science and Political Philosophy programme altogether. The new program will be called World Politics and Economy Studies and will be conducted jointly with Vytautas Magnus University, a Lithuanian university. Young Belarusians can study visual design, international law

and many other EHU courses free of propaganda also at Belarusian universities, closer to home and at a lower cost.

The university's attitude towards the Belarusian language has recently received press coverage in Belarus. Today only a handful of courses are taught in the Belarusian language and a number of Belarusian-speaking lecturers left the university over the last couple of years. Former EHU faculty member Aleś Smalianchuk in his interview for Radio Liberty, argued that the EHU demonstrated [contempt for the Belarusian language and history](#) with its current policies.

Others, like both the EHU graduates whom Belarus Digest interviewed, argued that the Belarusian language did not suffer discrimination at the university. Another question is whether the university is taking seriously the task of supporting the language which faces serious discrimination back home.

The EHU Future: More Belarusian and More Democratic?

Transparency and democratic governance within the EHU itself is another area where the EHU could improve. According to Vadzim Smok, there is plenty of room for improvement here. When asked what he would like to change at the EHU, he says "the management system – to make the EHU more democratic, in a way, to have more social consensus there between the administration and the academics".

Others are concerned that its founder and rector, Professor Anatoli Mikhailov, has been ruling the university for over twenty years. This seems like a long time. Perhaps the EHU management could follow examples of other European universities which require rotation of management to improve efficiency.

Instead of shifting focus from Belarus towards becoming an

ordinary Lithuanian university, it should try to find a balance between being Belarusian and internationally competitive

With all its problems and struggles, it is important to preserve and support EHU. It has infrastructure and a potential to offer a unique environment to Belarusian students. Perhaps the biggest challenge the EHU faces today is how to remain faithful to its original mission. Instead of shifting focus from Belarus towards becoming an ordinary Lithuanian university, it should try to find a balance between being Belarusian and internationally competitive.

Preservation and introduction of courses related to Belarus or at least taught in Belarusian language should be a priority for the university.

Making the university more democratic and Belarusian may also make it more attractive to Belarusian students and those who want to support the university.

Belarusian Historians Struggle to Find Their Place

On 10 April, in an interview for Radio Svaboda Belarusian historian and a former lecturer at the European Humanities University Aleś Smalianchuk stated that Belarus did not have its own historical policy.

His interview followed several politically-motivated dismissals at Hrodna State University. The dismissals prove that the authorities are afraid of alternative initiatives and thus, exclude them from the public sphere.

But the policy of the Belarusian authorities is far from consistent. On the one hand they ban the white-red-white flag of the 1918 Belarusian National Republic (BNR), while at the same time they permit a BNR public rally in the centre of Minsk. State media even organised a roundtable acknowledging the role of the BNR in Belarusian history. At the same time they dropped charges against Arche magazine where many Belarusian historians have published their work.

One thing is certain – the Belarusian authorities are aware of the power of pulling "cultural-historical" strings to reach their short-term political goals. Belarusian historians know it only too well.

Book on History of Hrodna Sparks Dismissals

The local authorities in Hrodna have a problem tolerating a different historical narrative, like the one published in a recent book on the history of Hrodna, a regional centre in the West of Belarus. The book called 'Hrodnaznaustva' came out in Poland in 2012 and immediately raised lots of controversy. As a result several contributors to this book could not continue their work and left the university. The authorities gradually, and efficiently, appear to have gotten rid of the authors – historians who no longer are permitted to teach at the university, or any other state university.

In September 2012, Andrej Czarniakevich, a historian who co-authored the book lost his job at Hrodna State University. It became clear that the region's governor, Siamon Shapiro, personally decided to dismiss the historian. The reason given was that the publication was published abroad using an 'unclear' source of financing.

Viachaslau Shved, another contributor to the book is a well-recognised professor who has been working at Hrodna State University for many years. At the end of March he lost his position as the dean of the Department of Belarusian Culture

and Regional Tourism. Later on, Shved failed to win a new round of competition for his position as professor and as a result lost his job. He has since suggested that the procedure was politically motivated.

Another historian, Igor Kuzmin, left the same university in protest of the politics of the local officials who are clearly interested in maintaining control and censorship in the field of education.

A Roundtable with the Academics: the BNR Recognised

However, Belarusian authorities are not always tough on different interpretations of history. Proclamations made about the first Belarusian state founded on 25 March 1918 remain a bone of contention for those who adhere to the Soviet version of the history and those who oppose it. The authorities do not recognise 25th of March as a national holiday, while the opposition does.

Usually the authorities allow public rallies on that day. This year, while giving permission to hold the annual event, they stipulated that the organisers were not to bring white-red-white flags of the BNR to the event. Over a thousand people participated in the rally. Police arrested only seven people – a rather modest number by Belarusian standards.

A major Belarusian state newspaper used the anniversary of the BNR as an occasion to discuss its historical importance. The state newspaper 'Zviazda' organised a roundtable with the participation of scholars from the National Academy of Sciences. Historians and philosophers discussed the Belarusian National Republic and the role of intellectuals in the process of forming national awareness amongst Belarusians. For Belarus, this was a very unusual event.

One of the participants, Mikalaj Smiakhovich from the National Academy of Sciences, highlighted the role of

the Belarusian intelligentsia. In his opinion, historians perceive the BNR today as a national form of the Belarusian state: '95 years ago the Belarusian nation obtained the right to have its own state'. Aliaksandr Kavalenia, director of the Institute of History of the National Academy of Sciences, talked about the mission intellectuals for the further development of the Belarusian state.

Any Hope for Belarusian Historians?

Aleś Smalanchuk's interview for Radio Svaboda, mentioned above, gives a rather sad picture of the situation with Belarusian historians and historiography. The state suppresses alternative historical narratives, though occasionally it tolerates and allows some challenging initiatives. At the same time, no educational institutions in the country can seriously take responsibility for the promotion and support for the independent teaching of Belarusian history.

Commenting on the recent dismissals of historians in Hrodna, Smalanchuk also criticised the European Humanities University (EHU), a Belarusian university in exile. He noted that even at this university, which is supposed to support independent teaching and studies of Belarusian history, a number of prominent Belarusian historians such as Zakhar Shybieka and Valiantsin Holubeu have had to leave.

According to Smalanchuk, the university no longer admits new people to study history and political science and the administration is on the verge of demonstrating contempt for the Belarusian language and history with its current policies.

In short, Belarusian historians are struggling to find a favourable working environment not only in their home country, but abroad as well.

Kalinowski Scholarship: When Hopes Meet Reality

The Kalinowski scholarship for young Belarusians wishing to study in Poland is six years old but not without controversy. While those who run it underline its success, the post-graduation reality sometimes raises serious questions.

In 2006 the Polish government launched the Kalinowski Fund to help the repressed youth who challenged the presidential elections results in 2005. It gives a chance to students who cannot enter universities in Belarus or continue their studies because of their pro-democracy activity.

Despite the good cause, the programme alumni face difficulties finding jobs in Belarus. The organisers should think not only about placing young Belarusians at Polish universities but also about helping them return to Belarus.

146 new participants joined the programme in 2011. The programme participants do not need to speak Polish and receive a grant of 1240 Polish zloty (around €300) per month and a one-time allowance. This is enough to cover living expenses in Poland. The programme covers a period of up to five years until students complete their studies.

Who are the Kalinowski Scholars?

The scholarship targets ambitious Belarusian activists with pro-democracy attitudes.

Apart from receiving education at Polish universities, these young Belarusians are also supposed to acquaint themselves

with with European values and to gain knowledge of the state institutions within the democratic framework. Inna Kulej, coordinator of the scholarship, hopes that it can create new political elites for the future Belarus. At the same time, obtaining a diploma in Poland can be the first stepping stone to other European universities.

Each year the number of applicants varies. In the first round, after the repressions which followed the 2005 presidential elections, its number were at their highest. In 2006, 244 participants began their studies at Polish universities. In 2007, 71 Belarusians received the scholarship. In the aftermath of the repressions following the 2010 elections, the organisers increased the number of participants by 60. In 2011, 146 Belarusians joined the scholarship programme.

The KGB Keeps an Eye on the Scholars

From the beginning, the Polish initiative appeared controversial to the Belarusian regime. Jan Malicki, director of the programme, recalls the increased attention which the participants may face in Belarus. Some have been questioned by the KGB or had their laptops searched.

Pro-regime media in Belarus has attempted to undermine the programme in the eyes of the Belarusian public. According to Narodnaya Gazeta, the scholarship organisers abandon the students and do not support them during their studies. Moreover, the newspaper reported on the alleged preparation of the students for extremist activity in Belarus. From a long-term perspective, according to the newspaper, participants of the programme were to be used for spying and influencing Belarus.

On the other hand, the quality and honesty of some candidates is sometimes questionable. Allegations against them include buying the required documents to prove that they are pro-democracy activists. Furthermore, some of the successful

candidates did not fulfil their academic obligations, including attending the obligatory classes. Certainly, such cases might have put a shadow on the whole community of 'kalinoucy'.

Reasons for Departure

So far the Kalinowski scholarship and studying abroad experience appears to be popular among young Belarusians. The portal Generation.by reports on the Gallup survey' results. According to the research, 32 per cent of Belarusians would like to study abroad or participate in a work-study programme.

Unfortunately, the Kalinowski programme shares [similar drawbacks](#) with the European Humanities University in Vilnius. Namely, neither provides support after graduation. Graduates have little opportunities to work in Belarus, despite having a diploma recognised in the European Union (but not in Belarus). The Kalinowski programme does not have mechanisms to encourage them to go back to Belarus and utilise their knowledge and skills there. Arguably this should be the main *raison d'être* of such programmes.

... and Return?

Certainly, it might be interesting for graduates to return to Belarus and take part in the future reforms. Nevertheless, today opportunities in Belarus do not look promising. Under the current regime those young people often face difficulties finding a job.

The economic situation in Belarus and [high level of unemployment](#) in addition to their anti-regime attitudes are not appealing. It is difficult to estimate how many Belarusians will decide to go back. According to Inna Kulej, the vast majority of the graduates return to Belarus. However, it is hard to find any data proving that.

The graduates have already reported on the problems with

finding jobs in Belarus after their studies. The Euroradio presented a few stories about recent graduates who could not find employment in Belarus. Their Polish diplomas are not recognised in Belarus. The easiest way seems to be to stay in Poland or go further West.

More Solidarity in Support?

Good will to create opportunities to obtain a higher education degree in Poland does not seem enough to help Belarusian student activists. The organisers of the scholarship should think about widening the framework of the programme, rather than just increasing the number of recruits.

The organisers have already made one serious step in that direction. In 2011 the programme opened up to the PhD researchers and academic teachers. Its number may increase with time. It is important to target more academics who can then reach young Belarusians with new ideas and share their experience.

The Kalinowski Scholarship Fund could also become a joint initiative of more European universities. It could certainly benefit from financial support of other EU countries.

More can be done to help organise internship programmes for graduates in Belarus. The goal is to widen the range of involved institutions and thus the number of possible opportunities for young Belarusians.

Creating in advance employment opportunities and fellowships with Belarusian private companies, NGOs and academic institutions might be another option. This could help Kalinowski scholars to enter the job market and ease their return to Belarus.

Belarus-Lithuania Relations: Pragmatism Despite Politics

Belarusians and Lithuanians have a long common history which started long before the Grand Duchy of Lithuania 500 years ago. Two nations followed clearly divergent paths only after the collapse of the Soviet Union. When Lukashenka came to power, he recognised the state border of Lithuania and thus prevented the main source of possible tension between two countries.

Lithuania hosts many Belarusian exile organisations including the European Humanities University but remains cautious about economic sanctions. It supports the liberalisation of the visa regime for Belarusians but was guilty of leaking information to Belarusian authorities which led to the imprisonment of human rights activist Ales' Bialiatski. Two countries cannot agree on several issues, including Belarusian nuclear power plants, but overall their relations remain remarkably pragmatic.

History of Peaceful Coexistence

For more than a half of millennium, Belarusian and Lithuanian people have peacefully lived together in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. This experience of coexistence continued after the Russian Empire had annexed their lands, with many Belarusians studying at the Vilnius University.

After the 1917 revolution the Bolsheviks united the Lithuanian SSR and Belarusian SSR into a short-lived single state called Litbel that collapsed due to the Polish-Soviet war. In 1940

Soviet troops occupied Lithuania in compliance with the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact and transferred Vilnius to a newly established Lithuanian SSR.

After the 1917 revolution the Bolsheviks united the Lithuanian SSR and Belarusian SSR into a short-lived single state called Litbel.

Only at the end of the 20th century did these countries go their different ways. Lithuania decided to become a member of the European Union and NATO. At the same time Lukashenka as a leader of Belarus stated that he would not lead his country to a civilised world and built a Soviet-style authoritarian "market socialism".

But it was probably a good choice for Lithuania, because Lukashenka agreed on the existing border between the two countries and did not make any claims to the disputed Vilnius region. In 2007 Belarus and Lithuania finished demarcation of the common border. This year they should allow people living in territories adjacent to the state border to travel without visas a distance of no farther than 50 km.

Why Lithuania Resists EU Sanctions Against Belarus

In 2005 former Lithuanian president Valdas Adamkus made a controversial statement that Lukashenka "might attack Lithuania" whereas Belarusian state TV channels broadcasted anti-Lithuanian propaganda. Bilateral relations significantly improved when Dalia Grybauskaitė came to power in 2009. At that time the EU started an engagement policy towards Belarus and Grybauskaitė invited Lukashenka to visit Vilnius for the first time since 1997.

The trade turnover between two nations increased by 162% in 2011.

Lithuania advocates for Belarus in the EU, because it has

substantial economic interests in this country. The trade turnover between two nations increased by 162% and exceeded \$1bn in 2011. Moreover, Belarusian companies, especially Belkali and GrodnoAzot, are responsible for more than 30% of the cargo at Lithuanian Klaipeda port on the Baltic sea that wants to be their main partner instead of the Latvian Ventspils port.

Earlier Minsk stimulated their competition when it was choosing which port should become a dock for tankers carrying oil from Venezuela to Belarusian oil refineries. This was a part of the ambitious project on the creation of [the Eurasian oil transport corridor](#) between the Caspian Sea and the Baltic Sea. However, when Russia promised to Lukashenka [extremely beneficial prices for oil and gas](#), he stopped his attempts to diversify hydrocarbon supplies.

Lithuania's need for economic cooperation with its bigger Eastern neighbour explains why it opposes comprehensive EU sanctions against Minsk. On 5 March Grybauskaitė said in an interview for Agence France-Presse that economic sanctions would only further push Belarus into Russia's sphere of influence.

Lithuania as Second Home for Belarusian Civil Society

Strategic interests do not impede Lithuania to stay one of the most active supporters of Belarusian civil society. Since 2004 Vilnius has become second home for the European Humanities University that Belarusian authorities expelled from Minsk. Nearly 1500 Belarusian students study full-time in the arts and social sciences at the university and the overwhelming majority of them are against the Belarusian regime. Besides, the Belarusian Human Rights House has existed there for several years and the Belarusian opposition will likely open the United Belarus House in Vilnius soon.

Only 170 km separate Minsk and Vilnius thus making it the

closest EU capital to Belarus. The 2 million residents of the Belarusian capital need only three hours and \$10 to see how Europeans live, work and relax. Belarus has nearly three times more consumers than Lithuania, that is why local businesses are truly interested in their visits. Many large Lithuanian shopping malls depend on Belarusian customers. Unfortunately, there is a big obstacle for Belarusians – [the Schengen visa regime](#).

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In November 2007 Lithuania had to increase the visa application from €5 to €60 on the demand of EU institutions and the number of Belarusians tourists significantly dropped. Only recently the cross-border movement has intensified again. In 2011 Lithuania issued approximately 150,000 Schengen visas for Belarusians which is higher by 59% in comparison with the previous year.

Lithuania refuses only 0.17% of Belarusian applications and actively supports the idea of reducing the visa fee for Belarusians. The Lithuanian Foreign Minister Audronius Ažubalis declared this March that Lithuania plans to issue no-fee long-term national visas for citizens of Belarus.

Bialiatski Case and EU Conflict

The imprisonment of Ales' Bialiatski, a prominent Belarusian human rights activist, reduced Lithuanian officials' trust in Belarusian authorities. The then Lithuanian Department of Justice provided information about his bank accounts to their Belarusian counterparts within the framework of the official procedures established for the combat against organised crime.

Only months later did they understand that Belarusian

intelligence services would use the received information for repressing Bialiatski. As a result, the Belarusian court sentenced him to 4.5 years in prison. Consequently, it undermined Lithuania's image as a country that defends human rights.

Another point of tension is competition between Lithuania, Belarus and Russia on the construction of nuclear power plants in the region. Lithuania opposes the plans of Belarusian authorities to build [nuclear power plant in Ostrovets](#) situated very close to the Lithuanian capital. At the same time Belarus considers the Lithuanian project for the construction of a power plant in Visaginas as ineffective. Moreover, Belarus does not want to extradite former general Vladimir Uskhopchik who allegedly participated in the Soviet troops' bloody assault on the Vilnius' TV tower in 1991.

Successful cooperation between Belarus and Lithuania depends on the future of the EU-Belarus dialogue. More than a month ago Head of the EU External Action Catherine Ashton [recalled all EU ambassadors from Minsk](#) in a sign of solidarity against the deterioration of the human rights situation in the country. This move will definitely not foster common projects and puts prospects of political dialogue between Minsk and Vilnius in doubt.

But despite the diplomatic conflict and the Schengen visa wall Belarusians and Lithuanians manage to maintain healthy economic cooperation and historically close ties.