

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

Travel Safe, Belarusian Student



Despite having one of the highest student ratios in Europe, a virtually free higher education, and laws making study abroad difficult, the best and brightest young Belarusians continue flocking to or at least dreaming of expensive Western universities. The situation is exacerbated by Minsk's practice of closing down independent-minded

educational institutions and expelling Belarusian students and Western lecturers for refusing to toe the official line.

On February 18, representatives of the Nordic Council of Ministers visited the European Humanities University (EHU) in exile. EHU was founded in Minsk in 1992 "in order to open our minds to those values constituting the basic principles of democracy," according to Professor Anatoli Mikhailov, EHU's rector and one of its founders.

EHU was closed for political reasons in Belarus in 2004. It was then reorganized in Vilnius at the invitation of the Lithuanian government. Since 2006, EHU has enjoyed the status of a private Lithuanian university. Currently, EHU is the only Belarusian university offering western-standard education. EHU is also the only Belarusian university that still retains a degree of autonomy from the authorities.

In 2008, the European Commission established the EHU Trust Fund, inviting support from the EU member states and international donors, and Lithuania's Ministry of Foreign Affairs has supported the maintenance of the EHU premises since 2007.

Students who study in their native Belarus are discriminated against all the same. Some are expelled for active participation in activities disapproved of by the Belarusian authorities. In 2005, the Belarus State Economic University expelled Tatsiana Khoma, a fourth year student, for attending the National Unions of Students in Europe (ESIB) meeting without the university's permission.

In November 2009, Tatsiana Shaputska, press-secretary of the Young Front, was expelled from the Belarusian State University's law department for participating in the Civil Society Forum of the Eastern Partnership in Brussels without asking the dean for a required permission to leave the country.

Shaputska's case caused quite a stir. Even Swedish Foreign Affairs Minister Carl Bildt came to the rescue, saying it would be "absolutely unacceptable" if the expulsion was related to the student's participation in the Forum. Foreign Minister of Belarus Siarhej Martynau said that the main reason for expulsion is "the absence rate." He stressed that "not the government, but the university expels students."

When offered to attend EHU, Shaputska decided not to leave Belarus but continue education as a distance-learning student in the department of political science. At the same time, she is preparing a complaint to the court with the help of the Belarusian Helsinki Committee.

The EHU provides education to over one and a half thousand Belarusians and collaborates with some European and US universities. This collaboration is very important for young Belarusians. However, it is quite a challenge for the university's graduates to find a job in Belarus, especially given the fact that the EHU education certificates are not officially recognized in Belarus. So most continue their careers abroad. Thus, in effect EHU is preparing "Belarusians for export," and the financial support it receives to a large extent supports emigration from Belarus.

Perhaps the University's European supporters could come up with scholarships and grants encouraging students to work in Belarus for at least a short period of time. For instance, Belarusian citizens are not eligible for the Junior Faculty Development Program that program provides university instructors with a semester-long opportunity to study and work with faculty at the US universities and is open to citizens of Moldova, Ukraine, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and many other states. A similar program could be established to encourage EHU graduates to conduct research and publish in Belarus.

You can read more about the EHU at its [web site](#)

Naša Niva: Belarusian Economists from Western Universities Plan to Launch a Masters Programme in Belarus

✘ An interview with Michail Holasaŭ (Mikhail Golosov), a Belarus-born economics professor at Yale University. The initiative of these people is really worth admiration. It is very important for the Belarusian government to really seize this opportunity and to help economists from the Belarusian diaspora to realize their project.

Having Europe's probably most backward and least reformed economy, where real market reforms might only have started a year ago or so, Belarus desperately needs the experience and knowledge of people like [Michail Holasaŭ](#) or [Aleh Cyvinski](#) (Tsyvinski). One should consider the example of Mikheil Saakashvili, the Georgian president and successful reformer, who invited young Georgian-born economists from the West to advise on economic reforms and even take key positions in the country's government.

Economists with a global reputation have come to a [conference in Minsk on December 28-29](#). They are united by Belarusian origin. And the desire to do something for Belarus. Naša Niva has talked to Mikhail Golosov, a professor of economics at Yale University (USA).

NN: Please tell us a little about yourself.

Mikhail Golosov: I was born in Viciebsk and have studied at the Economic University in Minsk. After that I took

postgraduate and doctoral studies in the United States. At first it was hard, because I didn't have a good initial base. I had to learn economics and mathematics virtually from scratch.

NN: Is our education so weak?

MG: No, I wouldn't say so. It's just that the BSEU is more like a business school. It prepares professionals in a very narrow field, for example, the banking business. So, a graduate of the Belarusian Economic University is ready to go and to work at a bank. However, having graduated from there, I was not prepared to deal with economy on a scientific level. I stayed in the U.S. because I wanted to do serious economic research. Even European universities are far behind the U.S. in terms of science and research. I began to teach in Massachusetts then in Harvard. Now I'm at Yale.

NN: Have you met Belarusians among professors there?

MG: Not too many. We have gathered a significant part of them at a conference we hold in Minsk on Monday. Today we have a base of 29 Belarusian economy professors from western universities. However, we currently do not yet have information on the U.K. But overall, the figure is, I think, about 40 people. Some of them I know personally, with some I have been exchanging e-mails, some others I will only meet in Minsk for the first time. This is a lot compared to our previous expectations. However, there are many more professors from, for example, the Czech Republic. I am only talking about economic research. Perhaps, in mathematics there are more Belarusian professors.

NN: Have you ever been invited to work at the Belarusian government? Would you be interested in that?

MG: No, they haven't invited me. Although in principle it would be interesting for me. In addition to teaching, I have also worked at the Fed, so I have experience.

NN: What will there be at the conference on December 28?

MG: We want to organize a proto-university, or rather courses that teach economics at a serious global level. The conference to take place on 28-29 December is the first step to achieving this goal. We want to declare our initiative. Maybe there will be more interested people. This idea arose during a meeting in Rome between me, Aleh Tsyvinski (another Yale University professor of Belarusian descent – NN) and Pavel Daneyko (a Belarusian economist, rector of the Moscow Business School – NN). The already existing BEROC (Belarusian Economic Research and Outreach Center – NN) is the first step toward creating such a program, to create a scientific research center. The programme will be created if we see a list of Belarusian professors who would work there. Not just good teachers, but those who are concerned with the country's future. We plan to launch this programme in 2011 or 2012. Everything will depend on funding and legal status. The National Bank offers the University of Polesia in Pinsk as the platform for the programme.

NN: Will it be a Masters programme? Or will it also give Bachelor degrees?

MG: So far we are planning to launch a Masters programme. In fact, I do not think that we would train bachelors. To make a short and qualitative Masters programme is not so difficult. For that you don't need many teachers, as well as not so many students (a group of 20-30 people).

NN: Do you plan to make financial profit from this idea?

MG: (laughing)

NN: Will the programme prepare professionals for Belarus or for the West?

MG: For Belarus. It is interesting to us as Belarusians.

NN: Do you have any arrangements made?

MG: We are just beginning to talk with various government organizations. So far everybody is expressing interest.

NN: What will be the working language there?

MG: English. Now, English has become the language of economy in the world. Leading Masters programmes in Italy and Spain are in English. Virtually all academic literature is in English.

NN: Why is the programme so important for you personally?

MG: I guess because I'm from here.

NN: Let me also ask some questions on current issues. How, in your opinion, will the crisis change global economy?

MG: I think that in western countries, where there has been a wave of economic liberalization on deregulation, the trend will now go in the opposite direction. The state will play a big role in the economy. Now the national debt has risen in the United States and European countries, so they should either raise taxes or expect inflation. This will lead to a rather slow growth of the economy. This forecast is for the short or medium term. The slow growth in Western countries will also slow down the rise of prices for oil and other raw materials.

NN: And will China be growing as previously?

MG: It is difficult to predict something certain for China. I think that for some time it will be growing in its current volumes. China has enough of their own problems to be solved. China started with from a very low point and grew very quickly. In principle, it is easier to grow from a low starting point than from a higher one. The more China develops, the more it will have problems rich countries are now facing: problems of inequality, social problems.

Read the original story in Belarusian at
nn.by