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 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](http://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
Conceivable candidates from outside EHU could include Aliaksandr 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.