

**EXTERNAL REVIEW REPORT  
ON THE IMPACT  
OF EUROPEAN HUMANITARIAN UNIVERSITY  
ON THE COUNTRY AND THE REGION OF ORIGIN**

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## I. SUMMARY

1. The purpose of the external evaluation is to determine the impact of the European Humanities University (hereinafter referred to as the "EHU") on the development of the country and region of origin based on the conclusions of the external evaluation, to create preconditions for strengthening the influence of the EHU on Belarusian society, and to predict the perspective of improving the activities in the area of the evaluation.
2. Evaluation conclusions are based on the data and annexes presented in the self-evaluation report (hereinafter referred to as "SER") of the EHU.
3. The evaluation was carried out by Aušra Gečaitė-Verksnienė, First Secretary of the Development Cooperation and Democracy Promotion Division.
4. The EHU has received a positive external evaluation in the area of impact on the country and region of origin.

### 5. Decision by area:

Evaluation Area	Evaluation with points
IMPACT ON THE COUNTRY AND REGION OF ORIGIN	3

6. Three examples of good practice and six recommendations for improvement were made.

## II. INTRODUCTION

7. The external evaluation of the EHU was organised by the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education (hereinafter referred to as the "SKVC") in accordance with Article 49 (3) of the Law of the Republic of Lithuania on Higher Education and Research, and the Description of the Procedure for the External Evaluation of Higher Education Institutions Operating in Exile Conditions (hereinafter referred to as the "Description"), approved by the Government of the Republic of Lithuania on March 1, 2017, by Resolution No. 149 "On the Implementation of the Law on Higher Education and Research of the Republic of Lithuania", Point 3. The Minister of Education, Science, and Sport initiated the external evaluation of the EHU by Order No. V-650 of April 27, 2022.

8. In July 2023, the evaluation was carried out by Aušra Gečaitė-Verksnienė, First Secretary of the Development Cooperation and Democracy Promotion Division. It was carried out in accordance with the Description and the Order of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of July 3, 2023 (hereinafter referred to as the "Order") No. V-224 "On the Approval of the List of Data and Information Analyzed in the Evaluation Area of the Impact of the Higher Education Institution in Exile on the Country and Region of Origin".

9. The conclusions and recommendations of the evaluation have been prepared and submitted to the SKVC and the EHU.

10. In evaluating the activities of the higher education institution (hereinafter referred to as the "HEI") in exile, the area under evaluation must be given one of five evaluations: excellent - 5 points - the area is exceptionally good; very good - 4 points - the area is very good, without any shortcomings; good - 3 points - the area is developed in a systematic manner, without major shortcomings; satisfactory - 2 points - the area meets the minimum requirements, but there are substantial shortcomings that need to be addressed; unsatisfactory - 1 point - the area does not meet the minimum requirements.

### III. ANALYSIS OF THE EVALUATION AREA

The report of the impact of the HEI in exile on the country and region of origin shall be based on the following analysis data and information approved by the Order:

- 1. Analysis of the scope of the impact on the development of the country or region of origin foreseen in the HEI in exile strategic documents.*
- 2. An examination of what distinguishes the HEI in exile from other HEIs in the country of origin and how this distinctiveness is important for the development of the country of origin.*
- 3. Assessment of how the HEI in exile contributes to the dissemination of democratic European values in the country of origin (and region).*
- 4. Data on the number of alumni (students) who return to their country of origin after graduating from the HEI in exile.*
- 5. Examination of the contributions made by students and alumni of the HEI in exile to political, social, economic, and cultural transformations in the country of origin.*
- 6. Assessment of how the HEI in exile contributes to the promotion of equal opportunities and diversity in the country of origin.*
- 7. Information on whether and to what extent the inclusion of topics of relevance to the country of origin in the descriptions of final theses is foreseen (according to study programmes).*
- 8. Analysis of the diversity and dynamics of expression of social (civic) activity by the academic and administrative staff of the HEI in exile.*
- 9. Description of the ways in which the HEI in exile cooperates with social partners in the country of origin (or related to the country of origin).*
- 10. Information on how international donors and civil society organisations in the country of origin perceive the HEI in exile.*
- 11. Assessment of the role of the HEI in exile in ensuring that nationals of the country of origin (students and lecturers) have access to common European higher education programmes.*

*Analysis of the scope of the impact on the development of the country or region of origin foreseen in the EHU strategic documents.*

11. The SER submitted by the EHU indicates that the country of origin and regional impact objectives are reflected in the EHU Strategy 2019-2024 and the revised EHU Strategy 2021-2026. The strategic guidelines define the EHU's mission as a student-oriented university promoting the development of civil society. The Vision for 2024 and 2026 emphasises the aim of attracting civically minded students from Belarus and the region. It should be noted that the strategic documents define the EHU's values as European values: to encourage students' comprehensive improvement and democratic attitudes towards personal and civil development by means of liberal teaching and learning and critical thinking.

12. The inclusion of "Third Mission Activities" in the EHU Strategy 2021-2026 is considered positive. As an integrated part of the university's activities, "Third Mission Activities" will not only complement EHU's teaching and research functions but will also broaden their impact by involving external stakeholders and audiences. The SER submitted by the EHU indicates that the establishment of the EHU Distance Learning Centre and the EHU Resource Centre for Belarus and the surrounding region are planned, but it does not provide a more detailed description of the establishment of the EHU Hub as foreseen in the EHU Strategy 2021-2026 and the EHU Action Plan 2021-2026.

*Examination of what distinguishes the EHU from other HEIs in the country of origin and how this distinctiveness is important for the development of the country of origin.*

13. Compared to Belarusian higher education institutions, the EHU distinguishes itself by providing access to education and research free from political or ideological constraints and by promoting democratic relations between teachers and students.

14. A distinctive feature of the EHU is its focus on Belarusian roots and heritage, which is reflected in its language policy. Study subjects are taught not only in Russian but also in Belarusian. It is **recommended** to expand the use of the Belarusian language at the EHU to strengthen the Belarusian identity of students. At the beginning of the EHU bachelor's degree, lectures are given in Russian and/or Belarusian, and at the end of the degree, in English. This language policy is positive, as Russian-speaking graduates have the opportunity to learn English well. The SER provided by the EHU states that students can learn Lithuanian. It is **recommended** to strengthen Lithuanian language learning at the EHU to facilitate the integration of students in Lithuania, especially since some students do not return to Belarus after their studies due to political circumstances.

15. The SER states that the study programmes in Law, Communication, Political Science, Philosophy, History, Design, and Information Technology are important for developing students' creative, independent, critical, and democratic thinking, while the educational paradigm based on the concept of the Liberal Arts fosters creative thinking not only in the arts but also in other fields of study. The evaluator finds it difficult to assess the validity of these statements.

16. It agreed on the digitisation of studies as one of the key factors for greater impact on Belarusian society and **recommended** launching the project "Establishment of the EHU Distance Learning Centre and the Creation of a Network of Belarusian Independent Distance Learning Service Providers" as soon as possible.

17. The active participation of the EHU in the Bologna process is well appreciated, but there are doubts about the university's possibilities to share its experience and provide support to other Belarusian higher education institutions interested in the process. In the SER, in response to the recommendations made by experts in the previous external evaluation (2017) on the impact on the development of the region and the country, the EHU commented that after the events in Belarus in 2020, the links with Belarusian HEIs have almost ceased.

*Assessment of how the EHU contributes to the dissemination of democratic European values in the country of origin (and region).*

18. The limited direct influence of the EHU on Belarus is acknowledged in the SER. According to the Survey of Impact on the Country of Origin by the EHU 2021 (hereinafter referred to as the "Survey"), initiated by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania, even though EHU students and alumni have been actively involved in the protests against the current government, they do not see themselves as a direct force that could significantly change the political process in Belarus.

19. The SER indicates that the EHU has a clear concept and vision of how it can contribute to the development of Belarusian society and the education sector in case political conditions in Belarus change and the country moves towards democratisation, but no deeper and broader insights are provided.

20. A positive evaluation is given to the international projects that the EHU carried out for Belarusian citizens and the diaspora between 2020 and 2023. It is **recommended** to continue to participate in international projects and initiatives to attract more support from international donors.

*Data on the number of alumni (students) who return to their country of origin after graduating from the EHU.*

21. According to the Survey, around 75% of EHU alumni return to Belarus after graduation and are actively involved in NGOs that support social change, the promotion of Belarusian culture, and the development of civil society. It should be mentioned that the Survey covered the years 2019-2021 and was carried out in 2021. It is challenging to estimate the current percentage of EHU graduates that are returning to Belarus due to the country's political situation.

22. In addition, the Survey revealed that 90% of EHU students and graduates supported and participated in the 2020 anti-Belarusian government protests, compared to only 40% of non-EHU graduates who responded to the Survey. Dozens of EHU students and alumni have been detained and/or imprisoned. The evaluator considers that the events in Belarus in 2020 showed how important EHU's actions were in fostering the growth of the civil society there.

*Examination of the contributions made by EHU students and alumni to political, social, economic, and cultural transformations in the country of origin.*

23. It is a positive fact that the EHU has established a network of alumni and partners in Belarus, which enables it to collect information on the EHU students and alumni who are political prisoners, provide support to the EHU alumni, and invite them to the EHU for presentations of their projects and activities. It helps the EHU maintain close links with the country of origin and establish contacts with civil society actors, academics, and activists and is seen as ***an example of good practice***.

24. In the SER submitted by the EHU, the following key areas are identified in which the EHU alumni are actively involved: (a) *advocacy, law, and NGOs* (working for organisations that defend human rights); (b) *media, trademarks, and public relations* (working for independent media outlets covering Belarusian issues, providing free media literacy training); (c) *art and heritage* (working as art curators, art critics, and journalists specialising in the art sector, managing public and private museums and recreation centres); (d) *business, IT, and entrepreneurship* (working in various business areas such as IT, tourism, self-employment, and developing start-ups).

25. It should be acknowledged that EHU students and alumni play an important role in the efforts to democratise Belarus and develop civil society. Many EHU alumni contribute to the creation of market value by promoting economic growth, job creation, and innovation. The EHU alumni are involved in various organizations and media platforms and contribute to the promotion of social transformation in Belarus.

*Assessment of how the EHU contributes to the promotion of equal opportunities and diversity in the country of origin.*

26. It is assessed positively that the provisions on equal opportunities and diversity are regulated by the EHU Rector's Orders: "EHU Code of Conduct", approved on November 14, 2013, and "EHU Equal Opportunities and Gender Equality Policy and its Implementation Plan", approved on June 7, 2021.

27. The activities of the EHU Centre for Gender Studies in promoting gender equality policies, seminars, and open discussions should also be noted. The EHU cited as an example the regular seminars "Фемчетверг: Своя комната", where students are given the opportunity to learn about issues related to gender equality and discrimination, express their views, and participate in discussions. The evaluator considers that the activities of the Centre for Gender Studies are relevant for changing stereotypical images of women and men and for the development of gender democracy and should therefore be seen as ***an example of good practice***. The launch of a new Master's degree programme in Gender Studies in 2022 is also positive.

28. The EHU's efforts to create a more inclusive community and provide study and employment opportunities for people with disabilities or socially vulnerable people were also appreciated.

*Information on whether and to what extent the inclusion of topics of relevance to the country of origin in the descriptions of final theses is foreseen (according to study programmes).*

29. The EHU SER states that the inclusion of country-of-origin topics in final theses is not obligatory but points out that students often choose to analyse such topics themselves. According to data published by the EHU for final theses from 2018 to 2022, 32.29% of the final theses of the Academic Department of Social Sciences and 39.82% of the Academic Department of Humanities and Arts both included Belarusian-related topics.

*Analysis of the diversity and dynamics of expression of social (civic) activity by the academic and administrative staff of the EHU.*

30. The SER provided by the EHU indicates a wide range of academic activities of the lecturers: articles and scientific publications on Belarus-related topics; artistic activities (organisation of exhibitions and performances in Belarus and abroad); participation in conferences, forums, roundtables, and various projects (Science Shop, Women in Tech). It is also worth noting the advisory and expert work of the EHU lecturers on the drafting of amendments to the new Belarusian Constitution and the preparatory work for the planning of the transfer of power to the opposition Coordination Council.

31. The 2020 presidential election in Belarus and the political events that followed have not only given a boost to the academic activities of the EHU lecturers, encouraging them to engage in research on Belarusian politics and other topical issues but also to take part in public and civic activities. EHU lecturers and staff participated in protests and rallies in Belarus and other countries.

32. The establishment of the Centre for Belarusian and Regional Studies in 2022 as part of the reorganisation of the Belarusian Institute for Historical Studies, established in 2007, is welcomed. In the long term, the Centre is likely to strengthen the profile of the EHU as a regional centre focusing on impartial research on Belarusian history, culture, and politics.

*Description of the ways in which the EHU cooperates with social partners in the country of origin (or related to the country of origin).*

33. According to the SER, the EHU maintains links with civil society organisations and social partners in Belarus in a variety of ways, including cooperation with Belarusian civil media, community outreach, research, and science promotion. The EHU says that during its years in exile, it has established strong partnerships with civil society organisations in Belarus. The SER identifies 34 social partners of the EHU located in or linked to the country of origin (367, Annex IX).

34. After the political events of 2020, independent media, international cultural diplomacy organisations, and civil society organisations were forced to cease their activities in Belarus, some of them relocating to other countries (Lithuania, Poland). It is **recommended** that the EHU community become more involved in joint activities (events, meetings, and projects) with Belarusian civil society organisations based in Lithuania.

*Information on how international donors and civil society organisations in the country of origin perceive the EHU.*

35. It is noteworthy that after the events of 2020, some donor countries (Norway, Estonia, Denmark, and Finland) renewed their support for the EHU. As a result of the repression by the Belarusian authorities against protesting students and lecturers, the EHU, in the eyes of donors, was seen as a potential institution where students and lecturers affected by the repression could continue their studies and careers. Some donors themselves offered targeted donations to support repressed students and academics.

36. The EHU says it cooperates with international donors in its educational activities. The EHU's partnership with the Konrad Adenauer Fund's Belarus office, which includes cooperation in the field of political science, is seen as *an example of good practice*.

37. The EHU Trust Fund, administered by the Central Project Management Agency, was established in 2022 at the initiative of the European Commission. In order to provide feedback to donors, the EHU Trust Fund organises an annual Donors' Assembly, which not only discusses the current year's budget but also provides information on the implementation of the EHU's annual action plan, discusses the EHU's operational strategy, and thus ensures the transparency of the Fund. It is *recommended* that the EHU itself be more active in establishing and maintaining contacts with international donors (embassies of democratic countries, various foundations, especially US foundations).

*Assessment of the EHU's role in ensuring that nationals of the country of origin (students and lecturers) have access to common European higher education programmes*

38. The EHU participates in various EU higher education initiatives, projects, and programmes, such as Horizon 2020, Jean Monnet, Erasmus+, Lithuanian Science Council projects, etc. The EHU has established over 70 partnerships under the ERASMUS+ programme. Between 2018 and 2022, 135 EHU students went to study for one academic year or one semester under the programme.

39. It is positive that the EHU, as a member of OSUN (Open Society University Network), has the opportunity to involve students in activities and both private and public civic engagement projects that benefit not only the EHU community but also the wider society at the local, regional, and international levels.

40. **In conclusion**, the EHU has an indirect positive impact on Belarus. Compared to Belarusian higher education institutions, the EHU stands out by offering the opportunity to study and teach without any political or ideological constraints. The EHU focuses on the Belarusian language and heritage. However, the EHU graduates do not see themselves as a direct force capable of significantly changing the political process in Belarus. According to the 2021 Survey, around 75% of the EHU graduates return to Belarus, but for objective reasons, it is difficult to say what percentage of the EHU's graduates are currently returning to Belarus. The events in Belarus in 2020 highlighted the importance of the EHU's contribution to the development of Belarusian civil society. EHU students and alumni have supported and participated in protests, and dozens have been detained and/or imprisoned or are still imprisoned. Lecturers and staff of the EHU have also taken part in protests and rallies in Belarus and other countries. The events of 2020 have given a boost to the academic activities of the EHU's lecturers and have encouraged them to become more involved in research on Belarusian politics and other topical issues. The EHU says it maintains contacts with Belarusian civil society organisations, social partners, and the Belarusian civil media. It is noteworthy that after the events of 2020, some donor countries renewed their support for the EHU. The EHU Trust Fund was established in 2022 at the initiative of the European Commission. In addition, the European Commission has taken a decision to fund the EHU through European programmes (EU4Belarus), which will ensure the financial stability of the university.

41. **Decision:** The area is being developed in a systematic manner with no major shortcomings and is awarded 3 points.

#### IV. EXAMPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE

The evaluator identified the following examples of good practice:

- The network of alumni and partners set up by the EHU in Belarus to collect information on EHU students and alumni political prisoners and provide support to the EHU alumni by

inviting them to the EHU for presentations of their projects and activities is seen as *an example of good practice*.

- The activities of the Centre for Gender Studies are relevant for changing stereotypical images of women and men and for promoting the principles of gender democracy and should therefore be seen as *an example of good practice*.
- The EHU's partnership with the Konrad Adenauer Fund's Belarus office, which includes cooperation in the field of political science, is seen as *an example of good practice*.

## V. RECOMMENDATIONS

The evaluator's recommendations for further potential improvements:

- It is *recommended* to expand the use of the Belarusian language at the EHU to strengthen the Belarusian identity of students.
- It is *recommended* to strengthen Lithuanian language learning at the EHU to facilitate the integration of students in Lithuania, especially since some students do not return to Belarus after their studies due to political circumstances.
- It is *recommended* to launch the project "Establishment of the EHU Distance Learning Centre and the Creation of a Network of Belarusian Independent Distance Learning Service Providers" as soon as possible.
- It is *recommended* to continue to participate in international projects and initiatives to attract more support from international donors. It is also *recommended* that the EHU itself be more active in establishing and maintaining contacts with international donors (embassies of democratic countries, various foundations, especially US foundations).
- It is *recommended* that the EHU community become more involved in joint activities (events, meetings, and projects) with Belarusian civil society organisations based in Lithuania.
- It is *recommended* that the Belarusian dimension of the EHU be maintained, and the prospects and ambition of the university as a regional educational centre should be pursued in light of the new geopolitical realities.