HIGHER EDUCATION AS A PROMISING SPHERE OF COOPERATION IN THE EURASIAN ECONOMIC UNION

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Abstract

The article is devoted to the research of the crucial sector of integration in the humanitarian sphere of the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU). It is the common space of higher education being established since 2015. The article seeks several tasks. They are: substantiation the significance of the development of EAEU-countries integration in the field of education as one of the drivers for future economic integration; revealing and explanation the reasons for the refusal to include education as the subject of the EAEU Treaty in 2014; research of the content of Russian initiatives on the establishment of the Eurasian Network University and the Advisory Council in Higher education as mechanisms for educational cooperation of the EAEU countries outside the framework of the EAEU Treaty; the last but not the least - forming assessments and recommendations regarding possible steps on the Russian side to develop cooperation in higher education in the framework of the EAEU. Each economic integrative organization implies a common service market. Understanding that education is also a service, the urgent issue is the formation of a common market for educational services with common standards and equal competition, ultimately also aimed at improving the quality of human capital and the competitiveness of participating countries. A special case and request for higher education and advanced training systems is the training of personnel (specialists in customs, technical regulation, etc .; managers, consultants, analysts, experts) necessary for the work of economic union institutions and authorities of member countries, and to assist businesses in using development opportunities in the new legal and economic framework of integration. The positive experience of the European Union (EU) shows how significant the agreed policies and investments from the EU's common budget in the formation of a common educational space are considered to be to strengthen the economic competitiveness of this integration association. For the EAEU, as a project for deep economic integration, the education sector is cross-cutting, covering the most diverse aspects of interaction. In some cases, the general norms and mechanisms related to education are the basic condition, in other cases it is the driver of integration of the countries participating in the association.

Keywords: EAEU, education, common space, cooperation, unification, Eurasian Network University.

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1 INTRODUCTION

Higher education is one of the key areas which determine the effectiveness of the modernization processes carried out in the country, the training of qualified personnel for innovative sectors of the economy, and the education of conscious citizens of the country. The importance of this area is growing even more in connection with the need to respond to the modern challenges that all states face in the 21st century. Since the criterion of innovativeness is now becoming the slogan for the development of any sphere of society, it is fully applicable to higher education. Innovation is necessary for every modern university, which is focused on contributing to the development of a "knowledge society" and training the necessary qualified specialists for an innovative economy (in the future - "Industry 4.0").

In the 21st century, affordable quality education is important for individuals, for the state, and for humanity as a whole. Highly qualified specialists in different fields can not only ensure their own well-being. It is they who raise the general level of development of the country, raise industry, science, medicine and much more. When it comes to interstate cooperation, the joint construction of the future, the issue of education becomes especially important. This also applies to the Eurasian Economic Union (hereinafter - the EAEU).

2 INTEGRATION IN THE SPHERE OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE EAEU FIELD: POLITICAL ASPECT

Article 1 of the Treaty on the Eurasian Economic Union of May 29, 2014 provides for the creation of common markets for goods, services, capital and labor, as well as the implementation of common policies in various sectors of the economy [2]. For projects of deep economic integration of this kind, the sphere of education is cross-cutting, covering the most diverse aspects of interaction. In some cases, general norms and mechanisms related to education are a basic condition, in other cases - a driver of integration of the member countries of the association.

In particular, the creation of a common labor market requires solving the issues of convergence (comparability) of educational and professional standards, mutual recognition of educational diplomas, academic degrees and titles. Effective planning and development of the common labor market as a factor of economic growth is impossible without scientific, technological and production foresight, based on it, a long-term vision of the needs of the common market in personnel and mechanisms to support the appropriate personnel renewal of economies.

Development of the ideology of Eurasian integration, based not only on economic pragmatics, but also on the common spiritual and cultural historical roots of the states participating in it. It is necessary to develop, together with colleagues in the EAEU, a program of scientific research, cultural and educational activities to update the common spiritual heritage, aimed at the formation and content filling of the ideology of Eurasian integration. In addition to that, it is necessary to form the ideology of the Greater Eurasian Partnership.

2.1 The legal basis for integration of higher education in EAEU

Back in the 2000s. within the framework of the CIS, a number of framework agreements were signed aimed at creating a unified educational system, among them: an agreement on cooperation in the field of education in order to implement a coordinated policy in the educational sphere, a Concept and an Agreement were signed on cooperation in the formation of a unified educational space of the Commonwealth of Independent States, the model law "On Education" and some other legislative acts. In addition, on May 31, 2001, at a meeting of the Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the CIS, standard draft agreements were approved: on the coordination of efforts in the field of licensing of educational activities, certification and accreditation of educational institutions and on the procedure for the creation and operation of branches of higher educational institutions on the territory of the CIS member states [2].

Further integration processes within the EurAsEC and the Customs Union laid the foundation for signing a number of intergovernmental agreements in the field of education within the framework of these organizations. An important stage in the formation of a common educational space within the EurAsEC was the "Treaty between the Republics of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Belarus and the Russian Federation on the deepening of integration in the economic and humanitarian fields", ratified by the Federal Law of the Russian Federation of 05.21. No. 44-FZ [3].

A significant milestone was the signing on November 24, 1998 by the governments of Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan "Agreement on Mutual Recognition and Equivalence of Education Documents, Academic Degrees and Titles". In 2002, Tajikistan joined the Agreement on the basis of a protocol on amendments and additions to this Agreement.

However, according to the Russian politologist S.V. Manakhov, the above mentioned normative acts and intergovernmental agreements within the EAEU can be applied only fragmentary, since they were created within the framework of other integration associations, in other geopolitical realities. In addition, four out of five EAEU countries (Russia, Kazakhstan, Armenia and Belarus) are participants in the Bologna Process [5]. At the moment, only Kyrgyzstan is not included in the Bologna process from the EAEU countries. Russia joined it in 2003, Armenia - in 2005, Kazakhstan joined in 2010, Belarus - in 2015 (on special conditions), and for the most part they carried out or began to implement the corresponding reforms in the field of education, amended legislative foundations for integration with the European educational space. All this dictates the need to adjust some previously concluded agreements, create and further develop a regulatory legal framework that ensures the formation of a single educational space precisely within the framework of a new association - the Eurasian Economic Union.

2.2 Bureaucratic obstacles to practical realization of the project

The Treaty on the Eurasian Economic Union leaves some issues unsettled. In particular, the mechanisms for coordinating scientific and educational policy are not defined. The lack of a common regulatory framework creates serious obstacles to building a unified educational space. Education was not included in the list of service sectors for which the common EAEU market is being formed. Only in relation to the common labor market, the EAEU countries have agreed on the mutual recognition of education documents without going through the diploma recognition procedure (with the exception of documents on education in pedagogical, legal, medical and pharmaceutical profiles), as well as on the right to education by children of workers in the country of employment of parents (Articles 97 and 98 of the EAEU Treaty). At the same time, documents on academic degrees and titles, according to the terms of the Agreement, require a recognition procedure in accordance with the legislation of the state of employment. In practice, this means that the norm on mutual recognition of documents on academic degrees and titles is valid only between Russia and Belarus. So, as we can see on the examples of these two countries, a fairly solid legal basis for further integration in education already exists.

On the other hand, still often the lack of political will breaks the process of integration in the sphere of higher education. As soon as the EAEU Treaty entered into force, Russia initiated the creation of a mechanism for cooperation between the EAEU countries in the field of education outside the framework of the Treaty. With the support of Russian universities and national-Slavic universities, the Ministry of Education and Science of Russia developed the concept of the EAEU Network University (later called “Eurasian Network University”), which goals were to form a training system in educational areas relevant to Eurasian integration, and to promote the development and implementation of advanced research and development work. Its activities were supposed to be carried out on the basis of monitoring the needs of the EAEU in training specialists and in close connection with the institutes of the EAEU, business and the academic community.

However, this initiative as a project of intergovernmental cooperation did not find the support of all members of the EAEU. As a result, the Network-project as a framework initiative was approved only at the university level: on April 12, 2016, in Moscow, member universities of the Eurasian Association of Universities signed a memorandum of understanding on the establishment of the Eurasian Network University. In turn, the Russian ministry initiated the first meeting of the ministers of education and science of the EAEU countries in Education as an area of cooperation in Moscow on April 13, 2016, at which all EAEU countries, except Kazakhstan, signed a Memorandum of Cooperation on educational, scientific and technological cooperation in the Eurasian space [8]. The document envisages the formation of advisory councils in the fields of higher education and science, which, due to various circumstances, including the protracted change of leadership in the Russian Ministry of Education and Science, has not yet been completed.

The second barrier is of administrative nature. All EAEU countries, except Kyrgyzstan (as we mentioned above), have joined the Bologna Process at different times. The Kyrgyz authorities, not being an official participant, are carrying out reforms in accordance with the Bologna process. For example, in 2012, the country introduced a two-level training for bachelors and masters. It would seem that, given the history-related proximity of education and science systems in the EAEU countries and their participation, direct or indirect, in the Bologna process, the need to harmonize the educational systems of the EAEU countries is not obvious [6]. However, there are significant differences in national reform strategies. As for the three leading economies of the EAEU, in Russia, instead of the specialty, only the levels ("cycles" in Bologna terminology) of bachelor's and master's degrees were introduced, while in Kazakhstan all three levels, including doctoral (PhD), were introduced, and candidate and doctoral degrees, and in Belarus only a massive transition to a two-tier system of bachelor's and master's degrees is planned. There are other differences in approach. For example, in Russia, the Master of Business Administration programs of business education refer to additional postgraduate education, and in Kazakhstan they are considered professional postgraduate study programs with the award of an MBA [1].

Thus, despite the obvious need for a common policy in the field of education to achieve the basic goals of economic integration within the EAEU, due to the lack of support from Kazakhstan, this area is the competence of the EAEU only to the extent that it concerns workers' rights within the common labor market. As far as can be judged, integration into the global English-speaking educational space remains a priority for the educational policy of the current authorities of Kazakhstan, which in the short and medium term makes it unlikely that the EAEU will make a decision to introduce education as a sphere of general policy or a common market for services.

An important direction of integration activities remains the development of common educational standards of the EAEU countries, leveling their significant differences. This applies to both the principles of the establishment and organization of the work of educational institutions and the content of education. For the successful development of integration, unified state educational standards and programs are needed, appropriate regulatory legal support in order to harmonize legislation both between the EAEU countries and with international standards. This strategy will make it possible to effectively use the economic and intellectual potential of the EAEU states and raise their competitiveness. However, in practice, many unresolved issues remain, including the coordination of the number of levels of education, the need to adopt the concept of the Eurasian Network University, the creation of general advisory councils in the areas of higher education and scientific and innovative research in the EAEU, expert and analytical support for the integration of education, ensuring a coordinated educational policy and investments from the budget of the EAEU member-states.

3 INTEGRATION IN THE SPHERE OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE EAEU FIELD: PRACTICAL ASPECTS

Purposeful educational integration within the EAEU can potentially be the most promising for the countries of the region, since it is built on the basis of existing agreements on international cooperation within the EAEU and takes into account the specifics of countries. The development of this direction is a regularity of the course of educational integration processes in the post-Soviet space. Therefore, a long-term strategy for the educational integration of these countries can consist in nominating as the leading direction for the development of integration between the EAEU countries. Here are some arguments in support of this integration vector.

3.1 Historical basis

First. The EAEU countries have a common Soviet heritage, including the language of interethnic communication, thanks to which students of these countries can be included in the educational processes of educational institutions of any country of the commonwealth without additional preparation.

Second. These countries have common development goals due to the common post-Soviet past of the region. The presence of common development goals potentially contributes to the organization of joint targeted training of specialists in the most demanded profiles of education, taking into account the level of technological development of these countries and their orientation towards modernizing the economy and society.

Third. The visa-free space within the EAEU makes it possible to carry out integration without unnecessary bureaucratic delays.

Finally, the existing agreements between these countries provide for the mutual recognition and equivalence of education documents, academic degrees and titles, which greatly facilitates the inclusion of future specialists in the common regional labor markets. The development of educational integration of the EAEU countries will contribute to the growth of the region's competitiveness and status in the world market of educational services. Within this area of integration, the priorities should be broad academic exchanges of students, teachers, managers, and educational technologies in order to create a single professional space for specialists engaged in higher education, and for students - future employment opportunities in the common labor market of the EAEU.

In the process of implementing this integration philosophy, important steps have already been taken: a Memorandum was signed on personnel and scientific and innovative support for economic integration, aimed at creating a common market for educational services by 2025. However, many problems await their solution. So, according to European standards for the development of the educational services market, academic exchanges should bring economic dividends to the state, associated with an increase in the number of foreign students studying. It is considered optimal if 10-15% of the total number of students are foreigners. However, even in Russia in the 2018/2019 academic year, their share was 7.2% [4].

Analyzing all the above problems, we can come to the conclusion that there is only one step left from the creation of a truly unified educational space. However, in reality, there are still quite a few problems. Integration in the field of education is impossible without close and effective economic, political and social partnership of all participating countries. Only through common efforts and the willingness of the EAEU member states to compromise can the task of creating a single educational

space be solved and, as a result, one more step closer to the goal set - the creation of the Greater Eurasian partnership.

3.2 What should be done?

As we see, one of the crucial problems in the EAEU is that the Eurasian Economic Commission (the highest authoritative body) does not have a body responsible for cooperation in the field of education, scientific and technical activities. A breakthrough direction in the framework of the educational integration of the EAEU should be the study and consideration of the best experience of countries and universities, which are ahead of their colleagues in terms of the introduction of educational technologies, the introduction of new specialties, and the organization of ties with science and industry. In Russia, the experience of the Higher School of Economics is known, which has become a model of a new type of institution for combining higher education and science, in which citizens of many countries of the post-Soviet region study. The creation of the HSE was associated with the construction of a new structure of the higher education system: the allocation of the highest level (national research universities, combining science and education, elite in essence), universities of the national level (with higher funding, increased requirements for applicants and teaching staff), and traditional regional universities. This structure has a stimulating effect on the educational process.

Targeting at the best examples within the framework of institutional reforms of the EAEU higher education systems should be carried out taking into account national traditions, mentality, and culture of one's own country. At the same time, conditions must be created that will lead to qualitative changes through the mechanism of self-improvement of universities, growth of their rating, because a diploma from an elite university, recognized in the world, helps its graduates to get the most prestigious jobs in the labor market. The Soviet Union had the experience of creating elite scientific and technical universities (for example, Moscow Physical and Technological Institute), which developed one of the world's best training system in their industry. Modern Russia has also taken a landmark in the creation of elite universities,

Leading scientists of the world are invited there for temporary work, which gives visible results. Integration and cooperation of the EAEU education systems will make it possible to collectively use the potential of elite universities, especially those partner countries that do not have enough funds to create at least one elite university of their own.

Another important area is the joint development of lifelong learning institutions within the EAEU. The main function of such institutions is to become a tool for ensuring continuous education of specialists from all participating countries. The activities of these institutions should be aimed at "bringing labor resources in line with the needs of the labor market, since it allows you to timely overcome the gap in professional skills and abilities of workers and helps to prevent the growth of structural unemployment". In the context of an aging population, the emphasis placed on optimizing the capabilities of education systems will allow, even with a decrease in the total number of employees, to ensure effective development of the economy, a more complete disclosure of the creative potential of specialists. The development of lifelong education on the basis of specially selected (or created) in the areas of basic universities and other educational institutions in different countries of the commonwealth will help create a system of continuous professional development, exchange of experience, teachers, joint certification, etc. Ideally, a single a system similar to Bologna, only for postgraduate education in the EAEU. As part of the system of lifelong education, it is also necessary to develop forms of distance education, an example of which are well-known foreign educational institutions - Open University in London, SUNY in the USA, etc [7]. With the continuing contradictory assessment of distance learning methods, their qualified use can also give good results.

It is necessary to develop the exchange of experience between universities with the highest innovative potential within the framework of Eurasian integration, including the experience of organizing joint scientific and technical developments, integrating the university and business, developing relations between universities and production, organizing joint training of specialists for "Industry 4.0" at EAEU universities. The search for new mechanisms for the development of links between innovative universities within the EAEU should be constantly carried out by financing common research projects, joint training of specialists in certain specialties at the bachelor's and master's degrees, internships for masters and young scientists, and organizing general postgraduate studies in unique areas.

4 CONCLUSION

The EAEU is a successful and promising integration mechanism in the post-Soviet space. Conceived as an economic integration education, the organization today retains a number of "biases" towards the economy, which has a positive effect on integration in the field of education and science. The way out of this impasse lies in expanding the functions and powers of the EEC, which should become a full-fledged supranational body and receive the rights not only of formal adoption, but also of preparation of decisions, as well as control over their implementation on the territory of the EAEU states. I have repeatedly submitted the relevant proposals, but have not been accepted by government agencies, which see the transfer of powers as a threat to undermine their power and economic position. This reveals the contradiction, typical for all EAEU states, between the political will of the leaders and the interests of national bureaucracies. Overcoming this contradiction requires the development of an ideology of Eurasian integration, justifying its objective necessity by the national interests of the participating states.

Until now, the EAEU ideology has been limited exclusively to pragmatic considerations of the mutual benefit of eliminating cross-border barriers between the states of the post-Soviet space, whose economy was created as a single national economic complex. However, under conditions of a protracted economic crisis, this argumentation loses its credibility. It loses to the nationalist and religious values of self-identification of states, the spiritual elite of which clings to their own exclusivity and treats integration as a threat to sovereignty. And here the need to form a common educational space comes to the fore. Today, in fact, the efforts of the Scientific Center for Eurasian Integration are focused on this as a key conductor for developing a model of cooperation between the EAEU states in this sphere.

Thus, the most efficient solution seems to be the expansion of the EAEU functionality by pursuing a common scientific, technical, industrial, currency policy, harmonizing labor legislation, and creating a common educational space. The latter is especially true in such a dynamically changing world. The general educational and, more broadly, the humanitarian space is also a way to establish an effective dialogue between representatives of different cultures. Achieving consensus between states on the basis of effective conjugation of educational and scientific and technical policies is the key to the successful functioning of common markets for goods, services and capital.

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