

Date of a training: 02.04.2014

Venue: Belarus State Economic University

Lecturer: 1) Natalia Popok, dean of the School of International Business Communications

Topic: "Institutional freedom and academic performance in European Universities".

The training was held with teachers and students of higher educational establishments of the Republic of Belarus within the framework of the annual conference "Cross-cultural communication in the modern world".

In her lecture, Natalia Popok concentrated on constitutional and legislative protection for academic freedom, along with legal regulations concerning institutional governance, the appointment of the Rector and the existence of academic tenure, in order to create a composite picture of the health of academic freedom in the universities within the EU nations.

The main ideas expressed during the lecture are as follows:

- 1) Academic freedom is the belief that the freedom of inquiry by faculty members is essential to the mission of the academy as well as the principles of academia, and that scholars should have freedom to teach or communicate ideas or facts (including those that are inconvenient to external political groups or to authorities) without being targeted for repression, job loss, or imprisonment.
- 2) Academic freedom is considered important to the implementation of the Bologna Process.
- 3) When academic freedom varies between nation states, the likelihood of mobility is reduced — staff and students are unlikely to desire to work in or study at another university in which the academic freedom afforded to them is significantly lower than in their home institution.
- 4) Academic freedom is under threat from the growth in the use of new information and communication technologies to deliver open and distance learning through cross-national collaboration.
- 5) In attempting to measure the parameters of academic freedom, there are three preliminary questions to be addressed. First, what parameters should be used? Second, how can the relative importance of these parameters be assessed? Third, how can these parameters be measured?
- 6) Measurement is important in order to determine in which countries academic freedom is the strongest (in order to identify best practice) and weakest (in order to introduce measures so that an acceptable level of academic freedom is enjoyed in all universities in the EU).
- 7) In those nations where the constitution mentions both freedom of speech and academic freedom (and explicitly details the freedom for teaching and research and institutional autonomy), protection for the principle of academic freedom is likely to be stronger than in those states where limitations are imposed or where only freedom of speech is mentioned, and in which protection for academic freedom may lie by reference to the interpretation of constitutional freedom of speech protection.

To prepare the public lecture, Natalia Popok had used the materials provided during the lectures and training held in Braganca in October, 2013, as well as the materials on academic freedom available on the Internet.