

May 14, 2020

Coordination Committee
Belarusian National Platform
Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum

Dear Coordination Committee,

Thank you for your letter to President Malpass of April 30, 2020.

The World Bank provides support to the Republic of Belarus in a range of areas, including sustainable forestry, biomass energy and energy efficiency, healthcare, micro-, small and medium enterprises, budgetary transparency and education. Our investment lending in Belarus currently comprises nine projects totaling \$942.71 million, all of which aim to help improve the lives of ordinary Belarusians.

At present, we are preparing a new project to help address the immediate needs of the country's health system for medical equipment, supplies and training to treat severe cases of COVID-19. Equally important, this project will finance public information campaigns that promote social distancing and hygiene best-practices, based on WHO guidelines and recommendations, which are critical to preventing the spread of coronavirus infections among the population.

Following the important milestone of Belarus' accession to the Bologna Process in 2015, the World Bank has provided advice on the country's higher education system since 2016. The Bologna Process connects 48 participating European countries and provides the framework for a pan-European reform agenda. The full implementation of the Bologna Process in Belarus is expected to lead to a modernized, well-connected higher education system, increased cooperation with universities across Europe, and labor-market relevant Bachelor and Masters programs. All of this played an important role in shaping the design of the Belarus Higher Education Modernization Project (BHEMP, P167992).

The BHEMP aims to "improve the teaching and learning environment, and the information on labor market relevance of higher education". Improved quality and relevance of education programs are seen as important outcomes. The project also pursues other goals. For example, the project will improve access, working and learning conditions of staff and students with disabilities, by supporting an inclusive learning and working environment. The project further sets out to modernize higher education programs in line with the Bologna Process, enhance the capacity of the sector and support quality assurance at the university level. The resources for infrastructure improvements will be procured following the rules and procedures of the World Bank's Procurement Regulations, ensuring a transparent and competitive process. The project has also been designed to include citizen engagement and beneficiary feedback.

Regarding capacity building measures planned under the project, we believe that support to academics for the implementation of the Bologna Process, and more broadly, modernization of academic teaching, should be expanded as soon as possible, under any scenario. Any investment in capacity building will in fact make future reforms more effective.

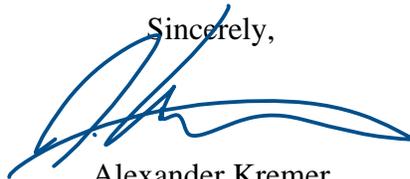
Regarding the establishment of the National Quality Assurance Agency: given Belarus' commitment to the Bologna Process, the project will support the organization of external quality assurance in a way that is aligned with the Bologna action lines and, in this case, the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG-2015).

The World Bank views civil society as a key partner in ensuring strong development outcomes. Consultations on the Country Partnership Framework for Belarus, which lays the foundation for the BHEMP, were conducted in 2018 and included consultations on education issues with CSOs and the private sector. During preparation of the project, a World Bank team visited various universities in Belarus (including Kuleshov University in Mogilev, BSUIR, BNTU, BSU, etc.) where meetings were held with management, professors and students. In September 2019, the Ministry of Education carried out consultations on the design of the BHEMP, with an emphasis on social and environmental requirements. The relevant information was also disclosed via the World Bank's website on October 30, 2019.

While the BHEMP sets out to make a significant contribution to the modernization of the higher education sector in Belarus, we agree that there are additional areas that will also need attention over the coming years. As such, we look forward to continued engagement and constructive dialogue with Civil Society Organizations going forward to ensure strong development outcomes for all Belarusians.

We will also convey your suggestions and concerns to the Ministry of Education, which is the implementing agency for the project. We would like to thank you once more for sharing your views and look forward to engaging with BNP and other CSOs throughout the implementation of the project.

Sincerely,



Alexander Kremer
Country Manager for Belarus