



LIETUVOS STUDENTŲ SAJUNGA

LITHUANIAN NATIONAL UNION OF STUDENTS

*Adopted by Council
on January 13, 2012*

To:
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Minister of Education and Science
of the Republic of Lithuania

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Ministry of Education and Science
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OFFICIAL STATEMENT

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Vilnius

ON BELARUS' APPLICATION TO EUROPEAN HIGHER EDUCATION AREA

*Lithuanian National Union of Students (LSS), being an active participant of European higher education policy, expresses an official statement on Belarus' application to European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and stresses the importance of fundamental values of EHEA. LSS **opposes** Belarus joining EHEA, **till fundamental values of EHEA, i.e. academic freedom, institutional autonomy, student participation, are violated in the country.***

Academic freedom is regarded as one of fundamental values of EHEA. European Students' Union (ESU) Belarus Working Group, coordinated by LSS, believes Belarus higher education system should review the way EHEA values are implemented in order to achieve a sustainable and democratic society. Still in 2011, students in Belarus were detained, prosecuted and imprisoned, among them were students of running in Lithuania European Humanities University (hereinafter - EHU), which Students' Union is a member of LSS. Concerning following actions eight European ministers of education, including Lithuania, demanded academic freedom to be present in Belarus when appealing minister of education of Belarus.

Institutional autonomy is the freedom of institutions to act without strict external control. This is another value, on which EHEA is based on. We believe that public participation in higher education governance should be real. Partially agreeing with the alternative report, we see that higher education in Belarus is still politicized and stress the need for change. University rectors, who play a key role in higher education institutions, are appointed by the Ministry and the President. The rector is not accountable to any internal bodies, the public or the academic community.

Student participation is stressed in the 2001 Prague communiqué:

“Ministers affirmed that students should participate in and influence the organization and content of education at universities and other higher education institutions”. LSS sees student expulsion from higher education institutions (HEI) for voicing their opinion on the 19th of December, 2010 as a clear violation of human rights and free speech. Therefore, together with ESU, we express our fear that Belarusian students are not treated any better today. Furthermore, we have reasons to believe that students and their partners have no influence in the higher education system, it's evaluation or higher education institutions in Belarus.

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Together with ESU, we support expansion of the EHEA, but we stress that such expansion is only possible while ensuring academic, human rights and fundamental values, which are currently ignored in Belarus. Letting this country access EHEA today would grant an argument and basis for Belarus to legitimize its current regime and stop seeking further changes towards true academic freedom, institutional autonomy and student participation. Granting access now would also interfere with the ability the EU or other stakeholders to sanction Belarus in case of future infringements.

We call for Lithuanian representatives, who will be participating in the Bologna Follow-Up Group (BFUG) meeting in Copenhagen on the 18th of January 2012 to support the position of LSS and prevent Belarus from accessing EHEA, until the fundamental values are ensured.

President

Dainius Dikšaitis