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PRECARPATHIAN NATIONAL UNIVERSITY IN THE EUROPEAN EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

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Abstract. The article looks at the problem of the development of Vasyl Stefanyk Precarpathian National University and the Europeanization of its education policy. The ways to improve the efficiency of research, through participation in international grant projects in particular, are in the focus of this paper. The fact that the papers by the University's scientists are published in various SCOPUS indexed journals is evidence of the high quality and impact of their research outputs. It is an important factor in improving the University's academic performance; it has allowed Precarpathian National University to rise to the level of the leading higher education institutions of Ukraine. The University has significantly increased its participation in various joint Ukrainian-European research projects; distinguished European scientists are invited to make presentations at the international conferences and symposiums held by the University. An ambitious project of reconstructing the astronomy observatory on Pip Ivan, a peak in the Carpathians, is being carried out in cooperation with the University of Warsaw. The Precarpathian National University has successfully implemented the double degree programme; now its students can receive the degree from Precarpathian National University and a European university. There has been developed a comprehensive programme of further Europeanization of the University's policies.

Keywords: European university, international / European grants, educational projects, European integration, a modern student.

In order to become a truly European university, an institution has to satisfy certain requirements; apart from having advanced technologies and providing efficient access to e-resources, the world's top universities have developed a new education philosophy and a new policy. The key feature of a university that is European in its essence is employing a range of forms, methods, and means of education, which would meet the world's best standards and would ensure successful management, research, and education.

In today's social and political context, the primary task of Vasyl Stefanyk Precarpathian National University is to actively search for inner reserves and to develop its own potential, which would enhance its competitiveness and the efficiency of education. Another promising direction is obtaining international grants and, even more importantly, introducing innovations developed by the world's major universities; this is how we can enter the world's educational process.

An important factor in the educational philosophy of today is the Ukrainian educational tradition established and cherished by the old Kyiv Mohyla Academy, the Universities of Lviv, Kharkiv, Kyiv, Ostroh Academy.

The University of Lviv, for instance, has always been a European higher education institution; we can only benefit from studying its traditions, which spread far and wide beyond the boundaries of Galicia. Similarly, the experience of Shevchenko Scientific Society, the achievements of Yuriy Kondratyuk, Ivan Puliui, Igor Sikorsky, Volodymyr Vernadsky, and other Ukrainian scientists of world caliber are something to be proud of and to be studied most carefully.

Ukrainian national culture is a contributing factor to the development of European science and education; I can also claim that Ukraine, as well as other nations, has contributed to the world's civilization. Without the ethnocultural component, the development of higher education would have been a purely academic process disassociated from real life and those who want to share their knowledge with their people, to use their talent for the benefit of their nation. For example, Vasyl Stefanyk Precarpathian National University was raised to its present status of higher education institution thanks to the will of the newly independent Ukrainian state. The University graduates are mainly the representatives of the ethnic groups of Galicia – the Boikos, the Hutsuls, the Pokuttians, the Opillians, the Naddnistrians, the Lemkos [1; 3]. It is but natural that the works of Ivan Franko, Vasyl Stefanyk, Markiyan Shashkevych, Ivan Vahylevych, Yakiv Holovatsky, the key figures in Western Ukrainian culture, provide a basis for their education.

Apart from the subjects of their curricula, our students have to know the history of both Eastern and Western Ukraine, to be able to analyze historical events, to be aware of the tragedies and the victories of their nation. This ethnopolitical component is an indispensable part of the processes of education; armed with such knowledge, young people can better comprehend the rich history of the Ukrainian people, a territorially European nation with European historical and cultural traditions.

A question arises: What part of European university experience is relevant to us? In other words, what concrete efforts should we make in order to achieve European standards in education? First and foremost, we have to be consistent in adopting and cultivating the spirit of responsibility of a high class university for the scientific, technical, and cultural progress of the country and the world's civilization on the whole. Inadequate level of research and education, the lack of interest in advanced technologies can have disastrous consequences for the country's scientific, technical, economic, social, and cultural development. Lagging behind in any sphere of the University's activity may result in the losses for the society and the state.

In present situation, when Ukraine is behind the advanced countries of the world in many social and economic areas, it is difficult for us to compete with the leading universities of Europe, for example, with Tadeusz Kościuszko University of Technology, Kraków, Poland or with the Polytechnic University of Prague, the Czech Republic. So we focus on particular problems relevant to Ukrainian science.

For instance, the achievements of our scientists in the fields of physics of thin films, nanotechnology, biochemistry have won international scientific acclaim; they are used to update technology and are implemented in industries. These are just the first steps, and we have to go a long way to catch up with the universities of Europe with their already existing system of cooperation between scientific schools and technological parks. In the collective monograph *Vyshcha pedahohichna osvita i nauka Ukrayiny: istoriia, sohodennia ta perspektyvy rozvytku. Ivano-Frankivska oblast (Higher Pedagogical Education and Science in Ukraine: History, Present, and Development Prospects. Ivano-Frankivsk Oblast)* published in 2010, it is stated that 'Precarpathian University, with its today's goals, aspirations, and priorities, has good prospects for growth and development' [2, p. 314]. The recent social and political changes in Ukraine, the country's new orientation towards European social values have determined the University's tasks, its paradigm of long-term development.

Some major directions that we have taken are as follows.

Focusing on the areas in which researches are supported by international/European grants is one of the principles of the University's current research management policy. Such a pragmatic approach is quite justified. Currently, it is not only the matter of highly limited government funding for research in Ukraine, the situation being caused by the economic crisis and the hostilities in the Donbas region. The

main reason is that such grants presuppose carrying out research projects in cooperation with European scientific institutions or projects that would satisfy the clients, high-tech research schools.

Thus the awareness of responsibility for the results of research work increases significantly. Moreover, joint international projects determine the main directions of scientific research and ensure researchers' involvement in the world's science. For the University, such grants are a good chance to get advanced technical equipment, from the Ministry of Education and Science in particular. The obtaining of such a grant is a great honour for a team of researchers; it gives them a sense of belonging to the world's scientific community.

It is essential that a young generation of researchers, those working on their PhD, MA, and – no less important – BA degrees should be involved in carrying out grant projects. The University's ambition is to gain a well-deserved reputation as a research centre capable of competing with the leading universities of Ukraine and cooperating with the universities of Europe.

The University gets grants in various fields; for some of them, the funding is relatively small. Our most important projects are *Thermoelectric Materials and Devices for Energy Saving and Security Increase* supported by the NATO Science for Peace and Security Programme, *Thermal and Electronic Dynamics in Low-Dimensional Systems for Thermoelectric High Power Micro-Generators*, the Ukrainian–German grant *The Cellular Mechanisms of Healthy Aging when Restricting Calorie Intake*, *Corporate Law of the Visegrad Countries*, *The Vlachs in the European and Polish Cultural Environment: Migrations – Settlement – Cultural Heritage*, and others. I have to admit that not all the University's Departments and not all the scientists are ready to apply for grants; still, the key decisions have been made, the prospects have been discussed, and the relevant documents have been adopted. Another priority in this regard is increasing the number of papers published in various SCI/SCOPUS journals and improving the University's rating on these indicators. We are currently experiencing gradual increase in papers accepted by SCOPUS indexed English-speaking journals.

These papers, though, are mainly in the fields of physics, computer science, mathematics, biochemistry, chemistry, biology; some works of the researchers in the humanities have also been published recently. We understand that these are just the initial steps; yet, thanks to them, now the University is known as an institution with growing international reputation for its research.

These facts are evidence of international recognition of our scientific achievements; and for our researchers, such activity is an opportunity to join the world's science. It is very important that the University's young researchers, graduate and doctoral students actively participate in international projects and submit their papers to international journals.

Another sphere of scientific activity is publishing fundamental works, individual and collective monographs, collections of academic works. We keep track of papers by our researchers published in Kyiv and other major scientific centres as well as those published in the journals of Precarpathian National University. Today, the university research system is a complex structure, all its elements being interconnected and interdependent; for instance, interdisciplinary studies are conducted in the fields of philosophy and psychology, physics and computer science, biology and chemistry. Since research funding is insufficient, it is the dedication and determination of the researchers that helps them to carry on with their work. The University has started a technology park, and this is where we especially need the support from industry, business, international organizations.

The most notable examples of the cooperation in the humanities between our scholars and their European counterparts are as follows.

The philologists of Precarpathian National University and their counterparts of the Department of Ukrainian Studies, the University of Warsaw set up a publishing series entitled *У колі мови, літератури і культури – W kręgu języka, literatury i kultury (In the Circle of Language, Literature, and Culture)*. Within this project, 14 major scientific works appeared in 2013. The series features a broad range of topics, from studying the tendencies in modern English vocabulary and grammar to an innovative approach to our understanding of Taras Shevchenko, his place and worth in Ukrainian culture and in the social and political life of the nation [4; 5].

Joint scientific conferences on Ukrainian–Polish social, political, economic, cultural relations are a good tradition at Precarpathian National University, the University of Warsaw, the Jagiellonian University, the University of Rzeszów. It is natural that discussing some contentious issues, the Ukrainian and Polish scholars express their views on a particular event in our common history; at the same time, they try to seek points of rapprochement, to objectively analyze the processes that are approached from different perspectives in Ukrainian and Polish historiography.

Together with our Czech colleagues we have outlined the issues that are relevant to promoting research cooperation in the humanities.

In my opinion, widening the circle of European and Ukrainian universities and institutions involved in the social sciences and humanities is an effective academic cooperation strategy. For instance, the Institutes of National Memory in Ukraine and Poland are very active in this respect; but in their current activity, in publishing in particular, it is not always that they take into account the results obtained by Western Ukrainian universities. Working out a joint research strategy in order to clear up knotty scientific problems would benefit both sides.

One should not forget that Western Ukrainian researchers and educators as well as those in the Ukrainian diaspora had regular and fruitful contacts with their Polish counterparts because they lived on the lands that used to belong to Austria-Hungary and later to Poland and shared the same cultural and educational environment. The names of prominent Ukrainians such as Ivan Franko, Vasyl Stefanyk, Bohdan Lepky, Vasyl Simovych; those of outstanding Polish cultural leaders such as Stanisław Vincenz, Jerzy Kuryłowicz as well as many others, whose contribution to the common cause of science and culture cannot be overestimated, are well known in Precarpathian National University and in the universities of Poland, the Czech Republic, and other countries of Eastern Europe. So scholars from different universities research into the relations of our great predecessors, their cultural legacy that could be of use in today's academic context. We plan to create the Ethnographic Centre named after Stanisław Vincenz in the Hutsul land. The project has been set up, there has already been allotted a site for the construction of the Centre in a picturesque mountainous area. Many Ukrainian and Polish cultural leaders lived and worked in the Hutsul land. So the Centre would investigate and preserve our common cultural heritage; currently, the archival search is being conducted.

Another ambitious joint project of Precarpathian National University and the University of Warsaw is the restoration of the astronomy observatory on Pip Ivan, the third highest peak (2,028 metres above sea level) of the Chornohora range, the Carpathian mountains. The observatory had been functioning as a division of the University of Warsaw since 1938; it was destroyed during World War 2. Since that time it has been lying in ruins. The current project presupposes its use as a research and education centre for students and scientists of different countries, and as a tourist centre, a campsite for young people. The building of the observatory has been partly reconstructed. The rebuilt observatory will help us to stimulate the process of education and research in astronomy, meteorology, seismology, plant science, ecology, archeology; more importantly, the project will help the two Universities to promote the European principles of higher education and to develop their scientific potential. A considerable part of Ivano-Frankivsk oblast is mountainous, and the region requires special forms of management; the same applies to the highland regions of the Republic of Poland. Thus both states could benefit from joining their efforts in order to enhance the development of the regions.

We are aware of the fact that the university community of today cannot be kept within a restricted circle of their colleges or their region; both students and professors try to prove their worth at the international level. A university graduate has to make a decision about where to work, how to improve their knowledge and skills, how to find their place in the globalized world. This is why the University has to expand its range of activities, to assist young people in their search for new professional prospects in various fields, both in Ukraine and in Europe.

Taking into account these considerations and the new challenges of the globalized world, we have set ourselves an ambitious task – we encourage our professors, postgraduates, and undergraduates to master the English language, the global language of science, culture, and communication.

Each person has a certain level of proficiency in English, and these levels may differ from person to person. It is our long-term goal to take as many learners as possible from a lower-intermediate level to an upper-intermediate/advanced levels of proficiency. We provide English classes for those who want to be able to read in English and to use English-speaking resources, including the Internet, to boost their career prospects or to increase their knowledge and expertise in a particular area. The fact that the country has irrevocably set the European course of development provides an incentive for both professors and students to improve their English skills. The University's academic staff have discussed and approved of the decision according to which the professors and lecturers, at least those under 40, have to have a good command of English. The decision is quite rational as English is the language of modern science and advanced technology, it helps to investigate new methods of research; after all, it is the knowledge of English that gives us a new vision of the world civilizational process.

As to students, the knowledge of English has become a 'brand'; for young people, it is something that inspires respect; it encourages them to join in with those who can speak the language. Active Internet users cannot do without English. The University has developed a system that allows both professors and students to master the language. The Institute, the remedial courses in English, classes conducted in English, academic essays written in English, meetings with English-speaking guests, all these help the academic community to improve their skills.

No less attention is paid to the Ukrainian language. The professors and students are encouraged to upgrade their Ukrainian language skills. In the Western Ukrainian social context, the issue of using the state language is not a debatable one – the lectures and practical classes are conducted in Ukrainian; thus our students have every opportunity to broaden their language skills. Even the international students of Precarpathian National University understand and use the Ukrainian language. Yet our ambition is to present at least certain topics of the subjects and courses we offer in English.

One of our innovations is introducing the system of double degrees; it allows the students to simultaneously obtain degrees at two universities, Vasyl Stefanyk Precarpathian National University and one of the European universities, with which an appropriate agreement has been signed. In this regard, our most active partner is the University of Warsaw. For instance, a few years ago, Precarpathian National University started the specialty of International Relations; at the same time, it was agreed that our students would do *The History of Central and Eastern Europe* M.A. programme in Warsaw. The terms of the agreement specify the number of academic hours provided for studying each subject of the educational programme, kinds of additional learning tasks set for the Ukrainian students, the educational resources, the examination requirements for the subjects, etc. The students have an excellent opportunity to test their knowledge and to acquire professional skills working as trainees at the Embassies of the Republic of Poland, Spain, Italy, the USA, and other countries in Ukraine. Thus the double degree offers diplomatic career prospects to the graduates of the Faculty of International Relations, Precarpathian National University. All the students of the Faculty speak English as it is the language of classroom discourse.

The practice of simultaneously receiving education at two universities is becoming quite popular; the number of faculties that sign such agreements with European universities increases annually. The advantages of this form of education are evident. First, a student, who wants to obtain another degree, extends their knowledge investigating the achievements of European science. Second, a Ukrainian student does not have to go abroad in search of new knowledge; they have a chance to receive European quality education in Ukraine. Third, our young people receive high-quality education at home and do not lose their national identity. Ukrainian students, true patriots, a driving force in the dramatic social changes of the recent years, feel themselves Europeans and feel they can live in Ukraine according to the norms of European society.

Taking training courses at European universities has become part of the University's academic life, common practice for the professors and graduate students. Now the Deans of the Faculties and the Chairpersons of the Departments include this kind of academic activity in the annual work plans of their divisions and encourage the staff to seek for new forms of international cooperation. Of course, there remains the problem of implementing the experience gained at European universities; there is still

much to be done in this respect. But the University keeps working on it, and the first improvements are obvious.

Relying on the experience of European and American universities, we have introduced the online form of education. I must admit, though, that the task was a challenging one.

It was challenging in two respects, the first one being the technical side of the problem –it was difficult to meet technical requirements to ensure sufficient productivity of the system for a large number of remote users (students, professors, lecturers) connected via the Internet. The other challenge was the human factor – we had to convince them of the expediency, the prospects, the effectiveness of such a mode of teaching. Now the on-line resource has become an important part of the University's life; yet we still have room for improvement, mostly because so far we cannot effectively monitor the students' independent work. But the way is paved. Moreover, some other universities have offered us access to their on-line resources.

Another project the University is currently working on is the creation of an International Student Meeting Centre. One of the University's facilities is the Sport and Health Camp *Smerichka* in the Carpathians. Young people, school students spend their holidays there; it is a teaching practice venue for the students of the University, both Ukrainians and the international students. A plot of land next to the Camp has been allocated to the International Student Meeting Centre. It is a joint project carried out by Precarpathian National University, the University of Warsaw and the Ivano-Frankivsk Oblast Council; the project is included into the intergovernmental *Road Map of Ukrainian-Polish Cooperation*. The aim of the project is to create a centre for students from different countries to meet and hold discussions, to organize seminars, conferences, sport competitions, to carry out joint projects of youth international exchange, including the exchange between Ukraine and the EU countries. The University's strategic goal in this project is to give our students an opportunity to become part of the international student community.

Scientists and educators, political and cultural leaders of European, American, Asian countries are welcome at Precarpathian National University. We have regular contacts with our international counterparts, hold joint conferences and round tables; many leading European scientists are elected Honorary Doctors of the University; international professors give lectures to our students and supervise PhD researches.

The University has signed cooperation agreements with many European, American, Asian (Chinese, Turkish) Universities; but signing an agreement is just the first step, and we are interested in obtaining concrete results. Such agreements open possibilities for launching academic exchange programmes, entering the information systems of other education and research institutions, carrying out joint scientific projects. Though not all clauses of these agreements have been fulfilled. The reason for this is twofold: there are some objective factors (insufficient funding in particular) and the subjective ones – it is not always that the Chairpersons of the University's Departments and the members of the staff fully understand that international cooperation is mainly their responsibility; sometimes they do not have a clear idea of what results they would like to achieve.

It is my strong conviction that the Consortium of Ukrainian Universities and the University of Warsaw as a form of international cooperation is particularly effective. The members of the Consortium are the Universities of Kyiv, Kharkiv, Sumy, Lviv, Lutsk, Chernivtsi, Ivan-Frankivsk, Ostroh, and the University of Warsaw. Their representatives meet to exchange their views, to share their experience, to debate important issues, which is crucial for the development of higher education in the context of the currently strained international situation.

Not all the plans that would help us to rise to the level of the leading Universities of Europe have been implemented so far. But we have chosen our way, and our goal is to meet the standards of the European system of education.

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Цепенда Ігор. Прикарпатський національний університет у європейському освітньому просторі. *Журнал Прикарпатського університету імені Василя Стефаника*, 4 (2) (2017), 19-25.

У статті розглянута проблематика розвитку Прикарпатського національного університету імені Василя Стефаника на засадах європейського вибору. Проаналізовано шляхи забезпечення ефективності наукових досліджень. Визначена участь учених університету у виконанні досліджень за міжнародними грантами. Вхідження в базу даних "SCOPUS" дало можливість підвищити престиж наукових розробок, опублікувати серію статей у міжнародних журналах, підняти рейтинг вищу до рівня провідних університетів країни. Значно розширилось виконання спільних із європейськими університетами наукових проєктів, до проведення міжнародних конференцій і симпозіумів залучаються відомі українські вчені. Спільно з Варшавським університетом виконується амбітний проєкт – поновлення роботи астрономічної обсерваторії на горі Піп Іван у Карпатах. Нові напрацювання окреслились у підготовці студентів за подвійними дипломами – Прикарпатського й європейського університетів. Опрацьована комплексна програма подальшої європеїзації усіх сфер університетського життя.

Ключові слова: європейський університет, міжнародні європейські гранти, наукові проєкти, європейська інтеграція, сучасний студент.