

# International student mobility as a factor of the European integration of Ukrainian youth

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The article is focused on the role of international mobility of Ukrainian students in the process of shaping their worldview values and the gradual inclusion into the European educational and cultural context. The participation of Ukrainian students in the internationalization of higher education is analyzed on the example of the National Mining University. Author examines the impact of the learning experience of the Ukrainian students abroad to inculcate a more active approach to life in them, intercultural skills and European values, awareness of themselves as part of a common European cultural space.

**Keywords:** Ukrainian students, student mobility, National Mining University, forming of values, European integration

## Introduction

One of the most enduring trends in the modern world is dynamic multilevel integration processes in many areas of society life, including such important for the future area of mankind as education. The internationalization of higher education and one of its main components - student mobility - has a special role in this process as a vivid example of socio-cultural convergence and fruitful interaction between different regions, countries and societies. Students with experience in education abroad perceive innovations in all spheres of life the most actively; acquire new topical qualities and attitude towards the world. Thanks to student mobility, young people obtain not only professional skills, improving their chances in the labor market, but also take an active intercultural dialogue, learn to interact with other countries, form the broad human values, become more organized and tolerant. And these today's students will mainly determine the development of their countries, contributing to a deeper international cooperation in the future.

In the last decade, student mobility develops more rapidly, which corresponds to the dynamics of general globalization process in the world. According to the Institute of International Education of UNESCO, higher education abroad receive more than 2.5 million young people recently, and their number will increase to 8,000,000 up to 2025. Infrastructure for student mobility also actively expands - international funds, non-governmental organizations, information centers, networks of partner universities from different countries, etc. Students get really a lot of opportunities to implement their educational ambitions abroad.

For Ukraine, which considers the integration into a common European space as its main foreign policy priority, student mobility is extra important matter. It is known that Ukraine has some legislative, political, and economic problems on the way to Europe. But gifted and ambitious Ukrainian youth, as the most dynamic and receptive to the new part of the society, despite the existence of some barriers, at its level actively and successfully integrate already into Europe - both in the educational area and life values and approaches. According to statistics by UNESCO in 2011, 37 000 Ukrainian students were educated abroad - the main

part of them in the European Union (Poland, Germany, France, Czech Republic), the Russian Federation and the USA. They represent only 1.2 % of the total number of students in Ukraine and it is quite low figure, but there is a stable and positive trend in this area. For comparison - it was 25,000 students in 2006, or 1 % of the total. Each year, the international student mobility more deeply permeates in the Ukrainian system of higher education, gradually including more and more Ukrainians in the process of European integration in practice, not only in the political declarations of our state leadership.

## **International student mobility in Ukraine**

According to Ukrainian law, student mobility is defined as the process of obtaining by student knowledge and skills in higher education of the country in which he does not have the status of a citizen. This component of internationalization of higher education is regulated by the Law of Ukraine “About Higher Education” (2002) and Resolution of Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine № 411 “Regulations about education of undergraduate and graduate students, training of scientific and pedagogical staff at leading universities and research institutions abroad” (2011). In addition, there is public discussion about project of “Regulations on academic mobility of students in higher educational institutions of Ukraine” presented by the Ministry of Education and Science in December 2012. An important role in ensuring the Ukrainian student mobility also has our country's participation in the Bologna process since 2005.

It should be noted that there have been some positive developments in the understanding of the objectives of student academic mobility in the Ukrainian legislation during last years. The Resolution of Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine № 411 (2011) limited it just by educational and scientific aspects, while the developed project “Regulations on academic mobility of students in higher educational institutions of Ukraine” (2012) supplements the aims of mobility by the following paragraphs:

- a. Establishment of internal and external integration relations
- b. Support for social, economic, cultural and political relations with other countries
- c. Increasing integration of education and science, providing further impetus to research, increasing knowledge about national cultures of other countries and spreading knowledge about language, culture, education and science of Ukraine.

Thus, the idea of international student mobility as an important tool of the course of European integration is gradually taking root in the Ukrainian context. Student mobility in Ukraine is represented at two levels by means of organization: 1) organized (implemented within the framework of political, economic and inter-university academic partnership), 2) the individual (student's own initiative). The first level is represented by intergovernmental agreements between Ukraine and other countries on academic exchange in the framework of the Bologna process, as well as agreements on cooperation between Ukrainian and foreign (mainly European) universities. A positive trend was the foundation of special departments of student mobility, which perform primarily an information and coordination function, in many leading universities of the country (Kyiv, Lviv, Dnipropetrovsk, Odessa, Kharkiv).

For the first time in 20 years, Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine held a competitive selection of the best students and young scientists to study and internships in leading foreign universities in 2011. 106 Ukrainian students accessed foreign higher education through public funding of this government program (€ 3.5 million). The amount of funding has been increased to 4.3 million euro in

2012, which enlarged the number of students too. Important role in supporting the international mobility of Ukrainian youth belongs to the establishment of The National Information Center of Academic Mobility by the government (August 2011). It is included in the Network of national information centers of academic recognition and mobility (ENIC Network) and works in close cooperation with the network of national recognition information centers of the European Union (NARIC Network) whose operation is supported by the European Commission in the person of the Director General for Education and Culture. The main tasks of the Center are to:

- a. ensure free access of concerned bodies and the countries-signatories of the Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region to information regarding the specifics of the national system of education integration into the European academic environment
- b. provide citizens and concerned bodies with information and explanations as regards to academic mobility and recognition of documents confirming education
- c. verify the authenticity of documents confirming education issued by educational institutions in Ukraine and other countries;
- d. organize expert examinations to establish equivalency of qualifications awarded in accordance with education confirming documents issued by educational institutions in other countries
- e. take part in the preparation of drafts of bilateral and/or multilateral inter-governmental qualification recognition agreements
- f. carry out measures to promote on foreign markets the academic services provided by Ukrainian educational institutions, specifically to persuade foreign citizens to come to Ukraine for high education
- g. take part in international exchange programs for pupils, students, and postgraduates
- h. provide organizational support for study, internship, or professional advancement of the Ukrainian citizens in the educational institutions of other countries.

At the individual level, students find the opportunity to study abroad, referring to the help of many international educational foundations and organizations operating in Ukraine: Au-Pair, British Council Ukraine, Fulbright Ukraine, Erasmus Mundus, European Agency for Research Cooperation (EUREKA), International Association (INTAS), International Soros Science Education Program (ISSEP), German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD). In this case, success depends on the student – his awareness, organization, commitment, communication skills, and of course financial viability. It should be noted, that the number of active students in Ukraine who applies to study abroad is growing every year.

Despite these positive developments in the field of student mobility in Ukraine, the overall situation remains far from satisfactory, and the percentage of Ukrainian students abroad is very low yet. It is caused by a number of different problems:

- a. insufficient financial possibilities of the Ukrainian state, universities and the students themselves
- b. lack of awareness of students about opportunities for higher education abroad
- c. bureaucratic difficulties with the necessary documents and, in particular, to obtain a Schengen Visa
- d. linguistic barrier.

The main forms of learning Ukrainian students abroad are the long-term educational program for qualification of Bachelor and Master (from one to several years), training and practice (up to six months) and short-term summer schools, workshops, trainings, etc.

### **Situation at the National Mining University (NMU)**

National Mining University is one of the leading technical universities in Ukraine and Prydniprovya region with more than a hundred years history. An important place in the activities of the NMU belongs to international cooperation with partner universities and organizations, participation in international educational and research projects, as well as providing its students with opportunities for student mobility (this is the focus of the current program of development of the National Mining University up to 2020). Among European partners of NMU – Cracow Mining and Metallurgical Academy, Wroclaw Higher School of Banking (Poland), Brandenburg University of Technology, University of Koblenz-Landau, Reutlingen University of Technology and Economics, Technical University “Freiburg Mining Academy” (Germany), University of West (Trollhattan, Sweden), International Society for Engineering Education (IGIP, Austria), etc.

There is the Department of international educational projects in NMU and the University Center for International Cooperation, one of the main their functions is to provide practical assistance to university students in the access to existing opportunities of student academic mobility. As part of the student government in NMU is the Association of European Students (2008), which unites students with experience of studying abroad. Also a big role in preparing students for education abroad has activity of a network of international cultural and educational centers in National Mining University:

- Center for Language Training
- Ukrainian-American Language Center
- Ukrainian-German Cultural Center
- Ukrainian-Spanish-Latin American Centre
- Center of the Ukrainian-Polish cooperation
- Ukrainian-Swedish Center for educational and cultural relations

Through the activities of these centers NMU students have a good opportunity to study foreign languages, learn the history, traditions and culture of European countries, obtain necessary communicative training before studying abroad.

During last few years at least 50 students of National Mining University regularly take part in the internationalization of higher education in the long term studying, as well as about 200 students get experience of student mobility in the various summer schools, internships and trainings abroad (mainly in the universities of Germany and Poland). The university administration and student government make efforts to gradually increase the participation of NMU students in various forms of international academic mobility.

### **Impact of European integration**

Student mobility in Ukraine significantly affects the outlook of young people, shaping their sustainable awareness of belonging to common European space, in spite of political obstacles and economic differences. As a consequence, there is European integration of Ukrainian students at the “personal level”. As conclusive

proof of this fact can be the results of one of the blocks of the survey “The educational goals, motives, and planning for the future” among students of NMU, which was conducted by the Sociological service of the University (Department of History and Political Theory) in the autumn of 2012. The survey covered 540 students of 3-5 courses, 185 of which have experience of studying in Europe in various forms (group A), 195 - are scheduled to participate in a student academic mobility (group B), the remaining 160 - have no such intentions (Group C). So, we give student answers to the most interesting questions for us.

To the question “What was the reason of your wish to study abroad?” among the first two groups of students the following answers were received:

1. to know new countries and their culture (26%)
2. to get experience learning in foreign universities (23%)
3. to make new acquaintances and friends among the foreign students (20%)
4. to get a diploma (certificate) of foreign university to be more in demand at the labor market in Ukraine (17%)
5. to have a chance to stay abroad and find a job (14%).

Thus, the motivation of students is due not only to pragmatic purposes (education, professional skills, job search), but also cognitive interests and motives of the developing their personality and worldview.

To the question “What does student need to participate in international academic exchange?” answers among the three groups were the following:

- 1) Group A: personal qualities and business intelligence (33%), commitment (24%), foreign language (20%), financial viability (15%), useful links (8%)
- 2) Group B: personal qualities and business intelligence (30%), foreign language (26%), financial viability (19%), commitment (14%), useful links (11%)
- 3) Group C: foreign language (29%), financial viability (27%), personal qualities and business intelligence (21%), useful links (15%), commitment (8%).

Analysis of the results leads us to rather important conclusions. Students who have the experience of study abroad or with the intent to get it attached much more importance to personality characteristics of a person, believing that the major part of the success - is a well-trained and self-belief. Thus, Ukrainian students, acquainted with the realities of studying in the European Union, are more proactive and organized, which will undoubtedly contribute to the success of their professional fulfillment in the future. At the same time, the students of the group that are not directly confronted with student mobility, are more pessimistic and important consider the external aspects - financial viability and availability of the necessary links. In our opinion, it is necessary to conduct a more complete and detailed information to the students of this group in order to eliminate their existing negative stereotypes.

Finally, the third question for group A was: “What did you get with participation in student mobility in professional and personal sphere?” The results of the responses are also quite typical:

1. independence and the ability to achieve their goals (26%)
2. wider and more developed view of the world: respect for the rights and freedoms of the people, law-abiding, tolerance, a sense of their belonging to the European socio-cultural community (24%)
3. professional knowledge and skills which are difficult to obtain in Ukraine (19%)
4. increased competitiveness in the Ukrainian labor market (16%)
5. interesting trips, new friends, a pleasant experience as a whole (15%)

We see that there is a certain evolution in the views of students before studying abroad and after this experience. If prior to participating in academic mobility students were focused on obtaining practical benefits and satisfaction of curiosity, travel and new experiences, after returning home they do not stress so much on their professional development but on the expansion of ideological horizons, more active way of life, optimism and a wish to see Ukraine as an integral part of Europe in all fields - political, economic, cultural, environmental, etc.

However, for a small number of students of group A (13% of 185 respondents), there came such a negative aspect, as the emergence of depression after returning to Ukraine, frustrating about the quality of life in their country, the steady intention to emigrate to a country in the European Union. This, in turn, destructively affects the psychological harmony of students and faces the loss of young active citizens in Ukraine.

Nevertheless, the overall experience of international student mobility has a positive and constructive influence on modern Ukrainian youth. Its representatives become more active, responsible, executive, communicative, acquire professional and personal contacts, see the world more familiar and understandable. In addition, in the process of studying abroad Ukrainian students have the opportunity to realize their belonging to European Community on the one hand, and the more consciously express their national identity, to submit to foreign colleagues and friends a positive image of Ukraine, inform them about the advantages and potential of our country.

## **Conclusion**

Student mobility is one of the most important components of the internationalization of higher education in the world today. The European Union has already formed an effective system of academic exchange of students and researchers. Other countries in Europe, which still do not have a membership in EU, seek for integration into the European system of student mobility. Among these countries, Ukraine is also looking for its niche and, in particular, by using possibilities of the Bologna process.

There is already more than a decade of student mobility in Ukraine, but it is still in the under-developed state, which is caused by certain economic difficulties, language barriers and a variety of bureaucratic obstacles. However, over the past few years, the government has to pay much more attention to student mobility of our students, considering it as one of the instruments of European integration of Ukraine. Higher educational institutions try to step up their activities in the field of academic exchanges, making the necessary organizational and information conditions. The National Mining University deals in the similar way, its main vectors of student mobility are in Germany and Poland.

The experience of student mobility, in practice, is a very important factor in a real, not declarative inclusion of Ukraine and Ukrainians into European community. Most of students returned home as convinced euro-optimists and disseminate initiative, lead active life position, share European civil and cultural values in a non-uniform Ukrainian society by their example. That is why the government, higher education institutions and elements of civil society in Ukraine should coordinate their efforts to create favorable legal, organizational, informational and material conditions for meaningful and dynamic development of student mobility, which gives already results, and in fact integrates us into the European Community.

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