

<https://doi.org/10.31891/2307-5740-2026-354-64>

УДК 378:339.923

JEL classification: I23, I28, F15, O19

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PECULIARITIES OF UKRAINE'S INTEGRATION INTO THE INSTITUTIONAL ENVIRONMENT OF THE EU EDUCATIONAL SPACE

The article examines the institutional mechanisms of higher education (HE) regulation in the EU and the peculiarities of Ukraine's integration into the institutional environment of the EU educational space. The role of key European institutions in policy-making, ensuring HE quality and supporting academic mobility is shown. The main directions of reforms in the Ukrainian HE system, including participation in the Bologna Process (BP), academic mobility, digitalisation and internationalisation of HE, are outlined. The challenges and strategic priorities for Ukraine's further integration into the institutional environment of the EU educational space are identified. It is demonstrated that the EU HE regulation system is decentralised and focused on harmonising standards and ensuring HE quality through cooperation at various levels.

Keywords: integration, institutional environment, educational space, higher education, quality of higher education, digitalisation, internationalisation.

СВИНАРЕНКО Дмитро

Університет митної справи та фінансів

ОСОБЛИВОСТІ ІНТЕГРАЦІЇ УКРАЇНИ В ІНСТИТУЦІЙНЕ СЕРЕДОВИЩЕ ОСВІТНЬОГО ПРОСТОРУ ЄС

У статті досліджено інституційні механізми регулювання вищої освіти (ВО) ЄС та особливості інтеграції України у середовище освітнього простору ЄС. Розкрито роль ключових європейських інституцій у формуванні політики, забезпеченні якості ВО та підтримці академічної мобільності. Окреслено основні напрями реформ в українській системі ВО, включаючи участь у Болонському процесі (БП), академічну мобільність, цифровізацію та інтернаціоналізацію ВО. Визначено виклики та стратегічні пріоритети подальшої інтеграції України в інституційне середовище освітнього простору ЄС. Показано, що система регулювання ВО ЄС є децентралізованою та орієнтованою на гармонізацію стандартів та забезпечення якості ВО через співпрацю на різних рівнях.

Ключові слова: інтеграція, інституційне середовище, освітній простір, вища освіта, якість вищої освіти, цифровізація, інтернаціоналізація.

Стаття надійшла до редакції / Received 11.03.2026

Прийнята до друку / Accepted 08.05.2026

Опубліковано / Published 28.05.2026



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PROBLEM STATEMENT

In the current context of globalisation and European integration transformations, HE is acquiring new strategic importance as a driving force for the intellectual, social and economic development of the state. In an effort to ensure that the national HE system complies with European standards, Ukraine is actively involved in implementing the provisions of the BP, adapting its own education policy to the requirements of the European education environment (EEE). Institutional integration into the EEE encompasses not only the harmonisation of educational standards and qualifications, but also the active participation of Ukrainian higher education institutions (HEIs) in European academic mobility programmes, scientific research and management initiatives. Of particular importance is the development of the autonomy of HEIs, the HE quality assurance system, digitalisation and the internationalisation of the educational process.

The relevance of the study is determined by the need to assess the effectiveness of the integration steps already implemented, as well as to identify barriers and prospects for further cooperation between Ukraine and European educational structures. In this context, it is important to assess the role of international institutions in creating favourable conditions for the transformation of Ukrainian HE in line with European approaches.

AN ANALYSIS OF RECENT STUDIES AND PUBLICATIONS

The following scholars have studied the peculiarities of Ukraine's integration into the institutional environment of the EU educational space: N. Vilchynska [4], V. Zinchenko and co-authors [1], O. Krasovska [3], V. Kruhlov [5], D. Tereshchenko [5], O. Totska [2] and others. N. Vilchynska [4] examined the peculiarities of the formation and implementation of EU education policy. V. Zinchenko and co-authors [1] and O. Krasovska [3] analysed the processes of internationalisation of HE in Ukraine. V. Kruhlov [5] and D. Tereshchenko [5] examined the current state of integration of Ukraine's HE system and further prospects for the development of relevant

cooperation. O. Totska [2] focused on managing the development of Ukraine's HE in the European educational space. The researchers provided a deep understanding of the processes and challenges associated with Ukraine's integration into the EEE, covering various aspects from institutional changes to the digitalisation and internationalisation of HE. However, some aspects remain not fully researched so far.

FORMULATING THE ARTICLE'S OBJECTIVES

The goal of the article is to highlight the peculiarities of Ukraine's integration into the institutional environment of the EU educational space, analyse the institutional architecture of the EU educational space, challenges and strategic priorities in the context of improving the quality, competitiveness and global recognisability of national HE in modern conditions.

PRESENTATION OF THE MAIN RESULTS OF THE STUDY

Key aspects of Ukraine's institutional integration into the EEE are related to the adaptation of the national HE system to EU standards and pan-European practices, some of which have already been implemented, in particular:

1. Participation in the BP: introduction of a three-tier HE structure; the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS), which ensures the mobility of HE students and mutual recognition of learning outcomes; a national qualifications framework is harmonised with the European Qualifications Framework (EQF).

2. Academic mobility (Erasmus+ programmes and other EU initiatives (support for exchanges of HE students, scientific and pedagogical staff (SPS), etc.)); bilateral agreements between HEIs.

3. HE quality assurance (the National Agency for Higher Education Quality Assurance (NAQA) was established in accordance with the European ESG standards); accreditation of programmes according to international standards (increase in the number of HEIs undergoing international accreditation).

4. Harmonisation of education policy and legislation (the Law on Education and the Law on Higher Education have been adapted to European principles of HEIs' autonomy, academic freedom and transparency); institutional autonomy (expansion of HEIs' rights in matters of management, funding and personnel policy).

5. Internationalisation of HE (attracting foreign HE students and SPS; improving the competitiveness of Ukrainian HEIs in international rankings; publishing, teaching and conducting research in foreign languages).

6. Digitalisation of HE (integration of digital platforms and learning tools compatible with European educational services, electronic certificates, diplomas, etc.).

7. Development of key competences and lifelong learning (focus on a competence-based approach to learning; creation of conditions for continuous professional development throughout life).

Ukraine's institutional integration into the EEE represents a comprehensive transformation of the education system, involving not only structural changes but also the introduction of EEE values (quality, mobility, accessibility and transparency).

The institutional environment of the EU educational space plays an important role in HE quality assurance, its accessibility and competitiveness at the global level. Due to the interaction of various organisations, educational policy is coordinated, mobility programmes are funded, academic integrity is ensured and qualifications are recognised. This system promotes the harmonisation of educational standards, the development of innovative educational programmes and the integration of HEIs into the global academic space. In the context of rapid technological change and the growing role of intercultural cooperation, the effective functioning of these institutions ensures the adaptation of education systems to contemporary challenges and contributes to the training of highly qualified specialists for the European labour market. The institutional environment of the EU educational space is presented in Table 1.

The European level includes institutions that develop general education policy, provide funding for educational programmes and monitor their implementation. The main regulatory body is the European Commission, which coordinates educational initiatives (Erasmus+, Horizon Europe, etc.) and monitors the BP. The Education, Youth, Culture and Sport Council brings together EU countries' ministers to make strategic decisions on reforming the education system. The Bologna Group and the Bologna Secretariat work to harmonise educational programmes in the EU, promoting academic mobility for HE students and SPS. The EUA plays an important role in developing education quality standards, supporting scientific research and international cooperation between HEIs. Compliance with quality standards is monitored by the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education, which regulates the activities of accreditation agencies.

The national level includes institutions that directly influence the HE system within a specific country. The main body responsible for quality assurance in education is the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education. It coordinates the activities of national accreditation agencies that verify the compliance of HEIs' programmes with the European ESG standards. Each country has its own national accreditation agency, which issues accreditations to HEIs and their educational programmes. These agencies play an important role in maintaining a high level of educational process and ensuring that it meets the current requirements of the labour market. An important aspect of this level of activity is also the introduction of mechanisms for the recognition of qualifications, which facilitates the process of studying and finding employment in different EU countries for HE students.

Table 1

Institutional environment of the EU educational space		
Level	Institute	Main functions
The European level	The European Commission	Development of EU education policy, funding for Erasmus+ and Horizon Europe programmes and monitoring of the implementation of the BP.
	The Education, Youth, Culture and Sport Council of the EU	Coordination of strategic decisions on HE at the EU level, definition of educational priorities.
	The Bologna Group and the Bologna Secretariat	Monitoring and implementation of Bologna reforms, ensuring compatibility of HE systems, supporting mobility of HE students and SPS.
	The European University Association (EUA)	Supporting the quality of HE, developing the ESG standards, international cooperation and the development of scientific research.
	The European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR)	Supervision of the activity of accreditation agencies, ensuring compliance with the ESG standards and promoting mutual recognition of accreditations.
The national level	The European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA)	Monitoring the activities of national agencies for quality assurance in HE, implementation of the ESG standards.
	National accreditation agencies	Issuing accreditations to educational programmes, verifying compliance with national and European requirements.
The local level	The European Students' Union (ESU)	Protection of academic rights, promotion of accessibility to HE.
	The European Network of National Information Centres – The National Academic Recognition Information Centres Network (ENIC-NARIC)	Recognition of foreign diplomas, assistance in confirming qualifications in EU countries.
	European university alliances	Creation of joint educational programmes, double degrees, exchange of SPS and HE students, joint research projects.

Source: systematised by the author based on [1, 2, 3, 4, 5].

At the local level, there are organisations that represent the interests of HE students, support cooperation between HEIs and promote the development of educational programmes (see Table 1).

Each level of HE regulation in the EU plays its own unique role in HE quality assurance, mobility and the development of the educational space. Cooperation between various organisations makes it possible to create an effective system that responds to current challenges and global trends in the field of HE.

The EU HE regulation system is deconcentrated and coordinated, meaning that responsibility for education remains largely a national prerogative of member states, but it is coordinated within the common European framework, programmes and strategies. The main general principles of regulation are subsidiarity and the autonomy of HEIs (institutions have a high degree of academic, administrative and financial autonomy, but are accountable to the state and society for quality and efficiency).

Overall, the EU HE regulation system is a form of integration based on harmonised standards, mutual recognition and shared values, rather than direct management. The main objective is to create a space where HE students, SPS and knowledge can move freely, ensuring high quality and competitiveness of HE.

An effective management system for the EU HE is an important element in ensuring its quality, accessibility and competitiveness at the international level. Due to a clearly defined institutional structure, which includes European, national and local (internal) bodies, educational policy is coordinated, its implementation is monitored and educational programmes are constantly improved. EU institutions, quality assurance agencies, the BP, as well as business organisations and student associations play an important role in this process, helping to adapt the education system to modern challenges. This multi-level management system allows European HEIs to meet the demands of the labour market, develop scientific research, maintain an adequate level of academic mobility and integrate HE into the global academic space. The EU HE regulation system is presented in Fig. 1.

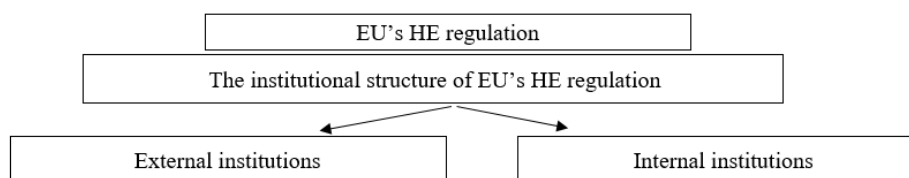


Fig. 1. The HE regulation system in the EU

Source: [6].

HE in the EU is regulated through a complex institutional system that includes various bodies, agencies and international organisations. The main role is played by EU institutions, which shape overall education policy and coordinate its implementation in member states. EU bodies and agencies responsible for funding academic mobility and HE development programmes, as well as for monitoring HE quality, have a significant impact on the education sector. The BP structures play an important role in harmonising HE systems and implementing quality standards, promoting the mobility of HE students and SPS within the EU educational space. In addition, international policy organisations involved in the management process ensure the integration of European education into the global educational space, while HE associations promote the development of HE institutions and their competitiveness.

Organisations that promote the alignment of educational programmes with labour market needs and the implementation of dual education have an additional impact on the educational process. Student associations are important participants in educational governance, representing the interests of HE students at the European level and influencing policy decisions regarding the accessibility and quality of HE. HEIs are directly managed by both external and internal institutions. External institutions include ministries of education, national HE quality assurance agencies, and international rectors' councils, which oversee, strategically plan and regulate HEIs' programmes. Internal institutions, such as the rector's office, academic council, decision-making bodies and supervisory bodies, ensure the management of HEIs at the local level, the implementation of educational strategies and support for innovation. Taken together, this system forms an effective and flexible model of HE management that responds to contemporary challenges and contributes to the sustainable development of the EU's educational environment.

State HE institutions play a fundamental role in shaping an effective and high-quality education system, ensuring that it meets the current requirements of society and the economy. They determine the strategic directions for HE development, monitor the quality of educational programmes, accredit HE institutions and fund scientific research. Such institutions ensure the stability of the education system, as well as its flexibility and ability to adapt to global challenges, in particular technological development and integration into the international academic space. Cooperation between state bodies within the EEE contributes to the unification of educational standards, the mobility of HE students and SPS and the development of innovation.

CONCLUSIONS FROM THIS STUDY AND PROSPECTS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH IN THIS AREA

The institutional environment of the EU educational space plays an important role in quality assurance, accessibility and competitiveness of HE at the global level.

The European vector of development of HE of Ukraine is a strategic priority, which necessitates a profound transformation of the educational system in line with European standards and values. Accession to the BP was the starting point for structural reforms in HE. Increasing the autonomy of HEIs, academic mobility and international cooperation play a key role in improving the quality of HE and the competitiveness of Ukrainian HEIs. The HE quality assurance system is gradually being harmonised with the ESG. The digitalisation and internationalisation of HE open up new opportunities for integration into the global educational space, while requiring appropriate training of SPS, modernisation of infrastructure and support for digital competences.

The EU's institutional architecture in the field of HE provides a basis for coordination, quality control and strategic development of the educational space, in which Ukraine is gradually taking a more active position. Despite the positive dynamics, Ukraine faces a number of challenges that slow down reforms. That is why further integration into the institutional environment of the EU educational space requires a systematic approach, consistent state policy, inter-level interaction and a focus on qualitative, not just formal, changes. Ukraine's institutional integration into the EEE is not only a desire for quality HE, but also an integral part of national security, cultural identity and European solidarity.

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