

TEACHING EUROPEAN STUDIES AT TBILISI STATE UNIVERSITY: ACHIEVEMENTS AND CHALLENGES

Introduction

One of the numerous positive results of Georgia's intensified cooperation with the EU¹ is enhanced Europeanization on various spheres including Higher Education². It is almost a decade since the EU Commission supported³ establishment of the interfaculty Institute for European Studies⁴ at Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University⁵, one of the oldest and largest higher education institutions in South Caucasus region⁶. A ten-year timeline gave an opportunity to evaluate progress as well as examine setbacks of this very bold experiment undertaken by the EU and its Georgian counterparts. Beyond providing purely empirical analyses this research has also a practical significance by making a contribution to the scholarship related to educational challenges facing European Studies field. Presented in three parts, initially it illustrates the local experience as a case study, which subsequently in the second part outlines and somehow connects to the best practices of three Western higher education institutions; the last section draws on key challenges and standing needs necessary for ensuring moving further.

1. State of Art

TSU model of European Studies envisages the institute to be conceptually based on four faculties of University: the faculty of law, the faculty of business & economics, the faculty of social & political sciences and the faculty of humanities; however the IES maintains substantial level of autonomy in decision-making as well as in the field of formulation of the policies relevant to its gradual development into the center of excellence. In order to meet requirements of the law on higher education of Georgia⁷, in 2013 the IES was attached to the faculty of law of the TSU⁸; however this was solely a 'technical decision' aimed at fitting into the novel model as proposed by legislative amendments and this fact did affect neither its autonomy, nor its interdisciplinary nature. Institute owes completely refurbished office with three fully equipped classrooms and library up to 2000 editions⁹. The vision-mission statement stands as follows:

IES vision "Embrace Europe in Georgia" combines twofold understanding: On the one hand, it stands for

¹ EU recognized independence of Georgia in 1992 and it was only after four years when Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) had been signed; Further information can be retrieved at <http://www.eu-nato.gov.ge/en/eu/cooperation>.

² Georgia is a member of the Bologna process since 2005.

³ Service Contract #TACIS/2006/119115 FOR, European Community External Actions, European Commission, B-1-49 Brussels, Belgium.

⁴ Hereinafter IES or the institute will be used interchangeably together with the Institute for European Studies.

⁵ Hereinafter TSU or the University will be used interchangeably together with Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University.

⁶ Further refer to the University website at <https://www.tsu.ge/en/about/history/>.

⁷ Law of Georgia on Higher Education, adopted on 21 December 2004, N688-rs.

⁸ Both the Faculty of Law and the IES are in the same building of TSU campus that substantially eases bureaucratic procedures; Furthermore, the number of EU-law related subjects taught at IES are proportionally higher in overall quantity of offered courses which prompts needs-based extensive collaboration with faculty's quality assurance unit.

⁹ The library was purchased and upgraded with generous support from European Commission through different projects including TACIS, ENPI, and TEMPUS. Occasionally IES gets book donations from various stakeholders. One of the most remarkable donator of books was the University of Maastricht in 2015.

underlying the continuous dissemination of European values in Georgian society at large and emphasizes IES' dedication and responsibility for contributing to intellectual development of the country by proposing high quality education corresponding to European standards on spot; On the other, it supports the efforts of the Government of Georgia to build human capacity qualified to enhance integration into EU.

The mission statement much determined by the vision outlined above serves as a global objective of the institute's eventual ambitious development plan into the Centre of Excellence in South Caucasus region – acting as an evident and reliable partner of Western academic circles and universities capable to prove itself as an expert in conducting research in the field and standing as effective portal accumulating information. The IES as an academic institute developing in line with Bologna process should direct its efforts to come up to the EU standards in order to support the idea of becoming regional center with continuous flow of qualified experts, which will make valuable the initiation of public dialogue with Georgian society and contribute to the transformation of the EU-Georgian discourse into efficient policy-making process.

The Memorandum of Understanding between the Parliamentary Committee on European and Euro-Atlantic Integration and the TSU Institute for European Studies was initiated and signed by the author of this paper, the Rector of TSU and Head of the Parliamentary Committee on the 1st of February, 2011. As a result, the IES experts pro-actively contributed to analyses on the draft laws on competition, as well as on food safety, being prepared to meet the requirements of upcoming EU-Georgia Association Agreement.¹⁰

The IES administers interdisciplinary and completely English taught MA and PhD programmes in the European Studies, as well as co-hosts Regional MA programme in Human Rights and Democratization¹¹. While I shall make a brief overview of the first two, my intention is not to refer to the latter.

A. Interdisciplinary MA programme in European Studies

Interdisciplinary MA programme in European Studies was created in 2007 and the same year the first cohort of students were admitted. The experts from University Pierre Mendes France (Grenoble), Centre of Public Reforms of Innsbruck (Austria), and the Panteion University of Social and Political Sciences of Athens (Greece) were extensively involved in elaboration of the MA programme's structure. The EU experts, as well as representatives of the Georgian academic circles made strong emphasis on interdisciplinary, instead of multidisciplinary concept of European Studies curriculum, as well as ensured that the syllabi had been prepared by the local academic staff selected on competitive basis from the faculties of the TSU and beyond. During the first two years the local teachers had been assisted by the EU experts via the collaborative teaching model (i.e. teaching in tandem basis), where courses had been provided to students jointly by one local and one international academic staff. Because the collaborative teaching model was project-based, with its conclusion the local academic staff proceeded to teach independently.

In 2011 MA programme undergone its second accreditation¹², while the process of commencing the third is already due¹³; all of these resulted in reflection of positive upgrades on the curriculum structure without amending the original interdisciplinary concept.

The MA programme is two-year taught degree, where a student has to complete eighteen courses for 5 ECTS each (i.e. 90 ECTS in total) and write a research thesis for 30 ECTS¹⁴. The first three semesters are taught semesters while the fourth one is dedicated to individual research accompanied with expert supervision¹⁵. Inclusion of research thesis in the fourth semester of MA curriculum supports elimination of the Soviet style dichotomy of teaching and research, however it does not commence without any preparation: during the first three semesters of

¹⁰ Further information can be retrieved at http://ies.tsu.edu.ge/data/file_db/nino%20lapiasvili/eurounion.pdf.

¹¹ Eastern partnership regional programme, see further at http://www.regionalmaster.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=4.

¹² The accreditation was granted by the Legal Entity of Public Law (LEPL) – National Center for Educational Quality Enhancement (EQE). EQE was founded on 1.09.2010 as per Georgian Law on Educational Quality Enhancement. See further at <http://eqe.gov.ge/eng>.

¹³ Apparently it will be postponed until late 2017 or beginning of 2018.

¹⁴ MA student has to accumulate 120 ECTS in two years terms in order to qualify for a degree of Master of Arts in European Studies.

¹⁵ Supervisor can be either TSU academic personnel or invited staff/expert of the field.

teaching, the small scale researches on MA level is facilitated by using various methods including via integrating into classroom activities requirements on writing article reviews and case analyses, or preparing essays on pre-provided topics, etc.

History of Europe, EU Law, Economics of EU Integration and EU Governance & Policy Making Process are the four core courses within the MA programme structure, where each outlines the links and conceptual attachment to the four ‘founding’ faculties¹⁶ of TSU. Under compulsory electives (the so-called specialization courses) and electives the Master’s programme offers vast amount of courses (for 5 ECTS each), where student is expected to accumulate 60 ECTS in total. These courses include but are not limited to European Cultural Mosaic, Theories of European Integration, European Law of Human Rights, Population and EU Development, Political Systems of European States, EU Justice-Liberty-Security Policy, EU Competition Law, Negotiation Skills, EU Investment Law, History of Diplomacy, British Politics, International Commercial Arbitration, Public International Law, Europeanization of Central and East Europe, Academic Writing, EU Energy and Transport Policy, etc. Proportionally, amount of elective courses that link to faculties of Law or Social & Political Sciences outnumbers the courses linked to faculties of Business & Economics or Humanities. This *modus operandi* can change from year to year, however the current landscape is mostly a result of available Professors, as well as particular interests and expectations expressed by prospective and enrolled students.

The academic staff of the Institute is composed of the TSU Professors, invited lecturers and the ‘flying faculty’ from partner universities of TSU: this scheme opens possibility to amend and enrich the list of specialization courses and electives with new modules¹⁷ per academic year.

During the second accreditation of the MA programme, the so-called ‘methodological module’ was integrated into the core curriculum: Research Design, Qualitative & Quantitative Data Analyses, Public Policy Analyses as well as Introduction to the Theory of Law are the courses that facilitated bringing the cohort of the students of interdisciplinary MA to some relatively common cognitive platform: Majority of them, while underling their various educational backgrounds, unlike previous knowledge and range of degrees from different faculties - would frequently demand for ‘preparatory instructive courses’ *as per* the surveys undertaken by institute’s administration.¹⁸ The ‘methodological module’ was designed solely to ameliorate the students’ needs and requirements. While a minor on MA level is not allowed under the Georgian legislation, the IES offered two different tracks of modules: EU law and EU Economic integration modules. Still, absolute majority of enrolled students would tend to mix the courses from those two lists as per their own preferences.

It is common for MA students in Georgia to combine their studies with job. Hence, the IES offers flexible timeline for classroom activities: face-to-face meetings during the week days start in the evening hours while on week-end it might commence on early morning hours. European Studies MA has an excellent employability records. It is not an exaggeration to underline that almost hundred per cent of the students pursue various career paths before¹⁹ or right after graduation. Majority of them become staff of the different government structures (46%), some work for the foreign embassies or international NGOs (31%), some join public or private media or enter local non-for-profit sector (18%). Very few run their own private business (4%)²⁰. In surveys the students and graduates attribute their high employability rates mostly to the fact of completion of completely English-taught Masters programme, as well as to the specific skills and competencies they acquired during the studies. Within the frames of Memorandum of Understanding between the TSU Institute for European Studies and the Office of the State Minister of Georgia on Europe-

¹⁶ The term ‘founding’ is put in inverted commas mostly due to the fact that actual involvement of four faculties during establishment of IES was nominal; rather it can be characterized as a consensual participation that supported developing the institute as conceptually interdisciplinary and autonomous unit within the TSU structure.

¹⁷ The term ‘module’ has a meaning of a combination of two or more courses that are thematically interconnected and have a particular sequence, as per Article 2.ch of Georgian Law on Higher Education, see *Supra* 7.

¹⁸ The survey is undertaken regularly by the IES administration; the questionnaire changes and might be focused on various matters related to educations.

¹⁹ It is common in Georgia for MA students to be the full-time or part-time employed. Due to this ‘local particularity’, all classes usually start at 19h00 pm and last for three academic hours with one 10 minutes break. The classes might be less and last for two hours.

²⁰ See *Supra* note 18. The results are based on annual surveys undertaken by the IES staff.

an and Euro-Atlantic Integration, students of MA in European Studies are offered 'guaranteed internship placements' at the Ministry²¹, however only very few local students (citizens of Georgia) are using this opportunity as compared to international students (i.e. full-time enrolled students with foreign citizenship), visiting or exchange students (i.e. students visiting TSU for a semester or more within the frames of Erasmus+ or other international projects and bilateral inter-university agreements). Instead of opting for government-provided internship, the IES MA students with Georgian citizenship are more inclined to participate in Erasmus+ schemes and stay at European Higher Education Institutions for a semester or more. Usually, absolute majority of students who applied for Erasmus+ or other schemes, succeeded to get a scholarship²². Apparently, full time education in English language at IES MA programme makes them better prepared to win Erasmus+ or other scholarships as compared to students coming from other programmes administered at TSU in Georgian, the native language. However, because particular research had not been developed to this direction, therefore this empirical observation by author of this paper can only be accepted as an assumption or a hypothesis.

B. Interdisciplinary PhD Programme in European Studies

Elaboration of structured doctoral programme in European Studies²³ became possible only after MA programme proved to be successful. European Union supported involvement of the field experts from Trinity College Dublin, Central European University and University of Ljubljana for outlining the composition of PhD programme. The selection committee made sure that the principle of interdisciplinary studies at the Institute was well-upheld and maintained so that the experts had been invited from the faculty of law, faculty of social sciences and faculty of business & economics respectively, i.e. each field expert per faculty. The Georgian legislation regulating doctoral programmes did not leave much leeway for building the concept from scratch because the allocation of credits per component is defined in an excessively detailed manner²⁴. Still the project experts together with the IES team (i.e. Institute's administration and academic staff) undertook tremendous work in order to outline, analyze and implement into the new curriculum some of the best practices of structured PhD programmes in European Studies field that already existed in Western Universities. The interdisciplinary research area relevant for the TSU Institute for European Studies had been also identified where the key challenges relevant to the Europeanization process of Georgia as well as the rest of EaP region was taken into consideration. The programme was successfully accredited²⁵ and admitted its first intake of PhD candidates in 2014.

The doctoral programme is administered completely in English language. Students are expected to graduate in six semesters or extend research to additional four semesters which makes programme to last up to five academic years in total (ten semesters). Curriculum of PhD in European Studies is split into taught component for 60 ECTS and research part for 120 ECTS. In order to accumulate credits necessary for accomplishment of taught component, PhD researchers have to enroll in mandatory and elective courses. The mandatory modules include but are not limited to Academic writing, Teaching methods, Qualitative data analyses and Research design in European Studies, Idea of Europe, Advanced European economics, Advanced EU law. The PhD candidates are offered electives such as Comparative Course on EU as supranational versus EU as Universal international organization, Electoral politics in Europe, Quantitative methods/Applied statistics with SPSS, etc. Furthermore, students have to accumulate credits for assistantship to Professor as well as are expected to prepare two short scale research papers (seminar works) which is not related to the substance of dissertation.

The PhD candidates are not necessarily graduates of Master's programme of the European Studies. Interdisci-

²¹ The Memorandum of Understanding between the Office of the State Ministry on European and Euro-Atlantic Integration and the TSU Institute for European Studies was initiated by the author of this paper, and signed by the Rector of TSU and the State Minister on the 27th of October, 2014.

²² Students fill in the application form for Erasmus+ scheme provided the consent of the Director of the TSU Institute for European Studies is ensured. This gave an opportunity to author of this paper to track the application success dynamic. No rejection rates of applicant students from the IES MA programme had been observed so far.

²³ EU project no. ENPI/2012/306-124, title of the action: 'Establishing an Interdisciplinary PhD Programme in European Studies at Tbilisi State University', date of the action: 15.11.2012 – 15.01.2014.

²⁴ Resolution No.250, Instruction on elaboration of doctoral programmes, admitted by TSU Academic Council on 16 July of 2009.

²⁵ *Supra* 12.

plinary nature of research welcomes upcoming students with different backgrounds and they usually have expertise in different fields; still the elaborated program assists each cohort of new intakes to come to the common platform on European affairs. After completing the taught component, PhD students design the individual action plan of research in collaboration with their scientific supervisor (or several supervisors) if they are assigned with more than one depending on the substance of research. Dissertation is split into two colloquiums for 20 ECTS each and the main body for 80 ECTS. The dissertation is to be graded by external evaluators. The final step is a public defense with specially assigned committee.

After successful implementation of the MA and PhD programmes in European Studies, the next step is launching Bachelor's (BA) programme, which unlike previous two is decided to be administered in Georgian language as per IES strategic plan.²⁶ The language shift from English as *lingua franca*²⁷ to native Georgian was determined with the need to domesticize the area studies and to manage to engage more stakeholders. Still knowledge of English language on B2 level will be one of the pre-conditions for admission on BA. This is due to the fact that the core textbooks and other reading material is not available in Georgian language. One additional novelty on BA level will be intensive training in French as a foreign language during the four academic years of education. The IES administration adheres to the idea that mastering of several European languages is beneficial in the terms of career prospects for the students of European Studies programme; moreover the statements that "European Studies should be 'European' also in their forms"²⁸ as well as that "cultural and linguistic diversity of the EU is a value which is well respected by the Union in the field of education..."²⁹ is likewise considered to be relevant in the local TSU context. The language choice for BA curriculum, in this case of French language, was much determined by the requests of students as per regular surveys organized by the IES administration³⁰ as well as availability of teachers.³¹

Successful establishment of doctoral programme is directly linked to elaboration of Bachelor's programme. In particular, it will ensure increase in numbers of local academic staff which is critical for first level education that lasts for four academic years which means significant increase in workload. Eventually some of the most successful doctoral researchers will be given an opportunity to join the cohort of teachers as well as to assist in preparation of core textbooks in native language. The curriculum and syllabi of BA programme in European studies is already well-prepared and the accreditation procedure is planned to be launched in a short time.

2. State of art reconsidered

In 2007, the process of establishment of the interfaculty Institute for European Studies with its interdisciplinary MA programme is to be characterized as a top-down action where the model proposed by EU experts had been accepted as granted by the local staff. Mostly this was a result of introducing and imposing absolutely novel field of studies in the non EU member country with a very limited experience in the given sphere. After six years when it came to the point of building a structured PhD programme, the IES undertook the new challenge with an ease: it was due to the accumulated expertise and proved experience by that time on how to arrange the curriculum and learning/research process. Obviously, almost a decade of existence of the IES with its constant international academic inflow is an impressive record for the non-EU member country; still it is not that much when considered from the prism of the tradition of teaching this field in the Higher Education Institutions³² of the European Union. Irrespective of the vast amount of EU experts' involvement in the establishment of the IES in 2007 and 2013, it could not be assumed

²⁶ The IES elaborated two Action Plans (APs) for 2010-2016 and 2017-2022. APs are not publicly available documents.

²⁷ Stefania Baroncelli, *Linguistic Pluralism in European Studies*, chapter 9, in Stefania Baroncelli, Roberto Farneti, Ioan Horga and Sophie Vanhoonacker (Eds.), *Teaching and Learning European Union, Traditional and Innovative Methods*, Springer, p. 134, p. 139, p.150.

²⁸ *Ibid.* See Rita Franceschini and Daniela Veronesi, *Multilingual Universities: Policies and Practices*, Chapter 5, p.55.

²⁹ *Supra* 27, p. 141.

³⁰ The second most desirable as per IES Administration surveys was the German language among the IES MA students.

³¹ The survey organized by IES administration further revealed that the second most desirable foreign language after English for the students of International law is French, justified mostly due to its official language status at Council of Europe. While students who study local legislation on TSU Faculty of Law are traditionally more interested to study German language: the common justification was the existing similarities between civil codes of Germany and Georgia. The IES administration does not have data from other TSU faculties regarding this issue.

³² Hereinafter the term 'Higher Education Institutions' and its abbreviation 'HEIs' will be used interchangeably.

as gapless system. However, the actual opportunity to see and compare how it is organized at the Higher Education Institutions of the EU was very limited unless institute's involvement in the EU funded Tempus project on 'Innovating Teaching and Learning of European Studies' (INOTLES) in 2014. Indeed, the INOTLES project, - aimed at identifying problems as well as common and specific needs in European Studies fields with an end goal of supporting development of innovative pedagogical strategies and curricular reform, - provided a unique opportunity to explore, review and compare the existing approaches and long-standing experiences on EU studies education - as retrieved from authoritative Western Universities involved in the project. Within the frames of the project, the author of this paper was given a decent opportunity to organize survey (so called 'survey C'), which resulted in comparing, reconsidering and reevaluation of the the philosophy of administration of the European Studies at Tbilisi State University through highlighting the best examples of Western Higher Education Institutions, which *per se* had been accepted as standing success stories.

TSU/IES sent the questionnaire to the representatives of the University of Surrey, Maastricht University and Vrije University Brussels, the partners to the INOTLES project.³³ Thematically, the survey was split into four parts and was aiming to understand the composition of the program and its staff at the EU studies programs of Western HEIs partners to the project (part 1), their available resources (part 2), arrangement of their body of students (part 3) and the desired outcomes for cooperation with HEIs of Eastern Partnership region³⁴ partners to INOTLES project (part 4). Even though the questionnaire was composed so that it implied that the representative of EU HEI who fills it in has experience both in administration of EU studies program as well as in teaching, in one case out of three, in the answers to the questionnaire the interviewee submitted that she was not in charge of administration of program and hence the questionnaire in that part was left unanswered. Still, the incomplete survey was a valuable source of information that visualized the perspective of EU studies purely from the viewpoint of academic staff, which is also very important in terms of understanding the levels up to which teachers are involved in the whole process of the EU Studies' education management. Below are highlighted some of the results of this survey that already played an important role in upgrading the overall management philosophy of the TSU Institute for European Studies.

Under part 1 of the questionnaire the University of Surrey³⁵ responded that it operates BA in EU studies along with MA and PhD programs; While only BA has a minor. Programs are administered by the School of Politics and a School of Law. Even though University of Surrey does not have experience of cooperation with EaP HEIs, the interviewee showed the interest to collaborate mainly through Erasmus agreements and also via visiting for 'crash' courses. During teaching at US, the Professors use various methodologies such as simulation games, blended learning and collaborative projects. During supervising MA thesis in European Studies, the Professors begin with preparatory work (identification of research topic, supervisor allocation) in autumn semester; they have regular meetings through to submission in September; research methods modules provide relevant support; Still most work apparently is done after exams period in May.

Three main problems that academic staff face in teaching European Studies was outlined to be related to student motivation and engagement, keeping content up-to-date as well as getting students to connect learning from different modules. Three methodological courses indicated as part of the MA program are: Qualitative methods; Quantitative data analyses; and Research design. Three core mandatory courses on MA level had been indicated to be EU politics, Introduction to research and Research in practice.

Under part 2 of the survey, the US suggested that most widely used databases and e-resources to which University's faculty, students and staff refer to in the process of teaching/learning European Studies might be considered as: Europa.eu, Online journal packages and Lexis-Nexis newspaper archive. Besides, the US confirmed to have the capacity to offer an affiliation to visiting students/researchers/scholars of partner Universities from EaP countries for a limited period of time. Apart from this, it was revealed that access to the library resources for the guests from a partner university is free of charge.

Under part 3, US responded that the number of students enrolled in MA programmes in European Studies were fewer than 20 students per academic year. The number of students enrolled in BA programmes in European

³³ Other partners to the INOTLES project are Ivane Javakishvili Tbilisi State University, Batumi Shota Rustaveli State University, Free International University of Moldova, Cahul State University, National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy, Yuriy Fedkovych Chernivtsi National University, available at <http://inotles.eu/partners>.

³⁴ Hereinafter abbreviation of EaP will be used interchangeably together with Eastern Partnership region.

³⁵ Hereinafter the abbreviation US will be used interchangeably together with the University of Surrey.

Studies was stated to range between 20 and 50 per year; While on Graduate (e.g. PhD) programmes in European Studies, it was mentioned to be fewer than 20 students per academic year. The students' prior educational background before they enroll to BA, MA or PhD programs come mostly from social sciences degrees. Besides, only few students combine MA studies with work at US. While University allows students to have internships both at national and international institutions, still finding an internship placement was reported to be the student's responsibility.

Under part 4, the US expressed willingness to cooperate with INOTLES partners in the future after the project is over in the fields of joint training courses for teachers, joint certification of innovative courses/program, joint application for other projects in the future, research collaboration as well as joint publications.

Under part 1, the Vrije University Brussels³⁶ responded that they do not operate BA program in European Studies, but only Research Master programme, Graduate programme (PhD) and Postgraduate Certificate programme in European Policy –making (through blended learning); apart from this, VUB has online modules on the European policy-making as well as a Summer School on European policy-making. Besides, the MA programs do not have minors. The programs are interdisciplinary and are administered by an independent autonomous unit - Institute for European Studies, but in cooperation with Faculties of Law and Political Science.

The academic and administrative staff has apparent interest in cooperation with the colleagues of EaP region, mostly with scholars from South Caucasus (Georgia, Azerbaijan, Armenia). Furthermore, willingness was expressed to enhance this cooperation through bilateral cooperation agreements/bilateral Memoranda of Understanding and also via visiting EaP HEIs mostly for providing short term crash courses.

Academic staff of VUB use both traditional methods of teaching, such as lectures and seminars, as well as interactive methods like simulation games, e-learning and blended learning. During supervising MA thesis in European Studies, VUB academic staff have limitation on maximum number of students they can supervise (up to 7 MAs). Three main problems during teaching EU studies as identified by academic staff of VUB were related to workload (teaching versus research), administration and need to constantly update the content of the courses. The methodological courses taught on MA level are as follows: Qualitative methods, Quantitative data analyses and Research design. VUB provided whole list of compulsory courses as well as two separate streams of electives where from the students can make their choices. The list of compulsory courses (for 6 ECTS each) is as follows: The History and Law of EU integration, The Economics of European integration, The political aspects of European integration, The EU and the stakeholders of the economy, Research methods (3 ECTS). The first elective stream is on 'economic integration' and the second one is the 'European Politics and Social Integration' stream.

Under part 2, VUB indicates that access to the library resources for the guests from a partner university is free of charge.

Under part 3, VUB answered that the number of students enrolled in MA programs in European Studies are between 50 and 100 students, while on PhD level they have less than 20 students per academic year. Students come with diverse academic background but mostly with degrees in social sciences. On MA level almost half of the students combine work and study but VUB is flexible in those terms because it offers classes during the evening time. Finding internship placement is the sole responsibility of the student.

In 'desired outcomes' under part 4, VUB saw cooperation opportunity with INOTLES partners in promoting jointly administered program without giving its own degree after graduation (e.g. program called as "MA program in European Studies in cooperation with... X University") as well as in teachers' yearly participation in 'crash' courses, in the fields of organizing joint training courses for academic staff, application for other projects in the future, collaboration in research, or joint publications.

Under Part 1, University of Maastricht³⁷ responded that they operate undergraduate (BA), Research MA, Professional MA as well as Graduate (PhD) programs. UM have minor European studies for which exchange students, students from other faculties or other programmes and pre-Master students can enroll. The programmes are structured in an interdisciplinary manner with staff (more than 200) teaching from different departments but they are administered by one faculty. There is no information available whether academic staff has experience of interaction with EaP HEIs but staff members confirmed their interested to travel there; Still, the hindrance is their dense aca-

³⁶ Hereinafter the abbreviation VUB will be used interchangeably together with Vrije University Brussels.

³⁷ Hereinafter the abbreviation UM will be used interchangeably together with the University of Maastricht.

demic year and practical obstacles related to the different timeframes.

Problem Based Learning was nominated as the main teaching method at European Studies at UM. Supervision of the MA thesis is ensured in a structured manner and the director of studies has to provide the timeline. Each Professor can supervise from 3 to 5 students maximum. Three main problems during teaching the EU studies had been identified to be the workload, long academic year with short breaks as well as the administration.

Qualitative and quantitative data analyses together with the Research design form part of the curriculum at UM EU studies programmes. MA offers three different tracks for students to choose from; these are: 1. European Politics and International Relations, 2. European Public Policy and Administration, 3. Europe in a Globalizing World. The European Law School is functioning separately.

Under part 3, it was responded that UM has between 50 and 100 students on MA, more than 100 students on BA and fewer than 20 students on PhD programs per academic year. Finding an internship was considered to be the student's responsibility.

Under part 4, UM academic staff saw an opportunity for cooperation between INOTLES consortium members after project is over in the spheres of joint organization of training courses for teachers, research collaboration, publications or application for other projects in the future.

The offshoot of this survey for the Institute for European Studies of Tbilisi State University rests in amalgamation of the authentic voices from administrative and academic experiences of INOTLES project partner Universities. It is a fact that no one can repudiate inexistence of the coherent rules or formula for success in a ready-made manner in EU studies field; still the portrayal of rational approaches are to be appraised duly. The edifice of practices outlined under survey provided the samples of the flexibility in options for the Institute for European Studies of Tbilisi State University that can be referred upon necessity. For example, MA thesis supervision in a structured manner as well as restrictions on the number of students to be supervised on MA thesis writing - was implemented immediately, certification courses are being prepared, summer school concept was elaborated, the new course on Research in practice is being considered to be integrated into the core curriculum, or the administration of MA and PhD programs in autonomous manner had been strengthened; besides, TSU students used opportunity to visit partner Universities' libraries for their research purposes which was one of the best example of synergy between the different EU funded projects. At the same time, it was obvious that some other best choices need either legislative amendments (e.g. establishment of minor on MA level) or time, finances and special momentum for full implementation (innovative teaching methods). With regard to the last point, it is to be admitted that the application of innovative methods of teaching/learning EU studies only in a gradual manner is to be accepted leniently, because the determinant cause is not the fetishism of traditional methods, but the lack of available human and financial resources, which is a standing arrangement in third countries; This issue will be referred to and expanded in the next sub-chapter.

3. Challenges to European Studies at TSU

Ten years ago bringing completely new field of interdisciplinary European Studies at Tbilisi State University was an innovation. It brought new subjects, new competences and new methodologies of teaching and learning. When looking back, the key challenges constantly faced by the TSU Institute for European Studies during the past decade had been related to difficulty in society at large to understand properly the concept of interdisciplinary studies and its importance, as well as existing legislative restrictions on fully-fledged implementation of innovative teaching methods important for moving forward. Both of these factors would eventually cause financial hardships and occasional lack of resilience.

1. Difficulties related to comprehension of the concept interdisciplinary studies

Establishment of interdisciplinary MA and PhD programmes at TSU was supported by the EU Commission. Since finalization of the projects, the IES administration had to independently ensure self-sustainability which in this case could be solely tuition fees paid by students. Obviously, launching interdisciplinary studies almost ten years ago was a risk for the purposes of ensuring huge step forward not only in Higher Education area of Georgia but of the entire South Caucasus region. However, because the concept of interdisciplinary studies is still difficult to understand for

many in Georgia and the role of Government is extremely limited in its promotion not say that the law on Higher Education says nothing about this notion,³⁸ usually the average enrollment number is low as it ranges between 10-15 students on MA and between 5-7 students on Doctoral programmes per academic year.

Obviously, the small group size at IES contributes much towards high quality education: the number of Professors per student is impressively high as compared to other programs of various faculties which admit hundreds and even thousands of students³⁹. But because the tuition fee is modest and the Institute has to remunerate its academic staff based on calculations of total hours taught on both programmes – IES encounters financial hardships to cover all of its expenditures.

Some blurred understanding of the concept of interdisciplinary studies is a source of further difficulties when it comes to supervision of MA theses or PhD dissertations. Several of IES academic staff are inclined to refuse supervision if the topic covers areas from more than one faculty. This means that in such cases researchers are to be assigned with several supervisors which substantially increase the overall expenditures of the institute. Sadly, research is not supported neither by government, nor by University.

On the bright side, special appreciation deserves the tendency that when it comes to hosting foreign and exchange students coming at TSU from various schemes including Erasmus+ or through bilateral inter-university cooperation agreements, the Institute for European Studies is the most visited place due to its interdisciplinary programmes offering courses from various fields that are taught in English. The reason of attraction of international students and of researchers lies in fact that there are few programmes at TSU providing education in English language-which is the *lingua franca*⁴⁰ in contemporary world. Accordingly, the IES contributed much to internalization of the University during past years. Still, it is to be mentioned the commitment is not effortless: on the one hand, this positive tendency substantially increased the workload, while on the other, the limited budget eventually causes restraints for enlarging the numbers of core academic and administrative staff. The policy on subsidizing and assisting IES is to be reconsidered on central level. The retraining of academic staff on interdisciplinary matters would have been an asset not to say about the need of intensifying the role of the specialized government structures in raising awareness on importance of interdisciplinary studies.

2. Hindrances on implementing innovative teaching methods at the TSU Institute for European Studies.

Under the EU Tempus INOTLES project four IES academic staff had been trained on Problem based learning, Simulations, E-Learning and Blended learning as a result of which regular reference to these pedagogic tools became extensive, they had been integrated into both MA and PhD programmes as well as in the respective syllabi. Several surveys revealed that Simulations became one of the most highly desirable learning methods among the institute's students;⁴¹ they strongly agree that it promotes effective learning and facilitates knowledge construction in a better manner than traditional teaching. Furthermore, the Centre of Innovative Teaching and Learning of European Studies had been established inside the structure of IES⁴² aiming at enhancing these four innovative teaching methods further among the institute's academic staff and researchers⁴³ as well as beyond. Besides, centre aims at delivering certification courses in the lifelong learning format where the academic staff will be teaching using innovative pedagogic tools.

The low number in training engagement by IES core academic staff was largely determined by their extremely tough schedule on their teaching commitments where sacrifices in numbers of hours taught would have been

³⁸ Annex 3 to the National Qualification Framework adopted on December 10 of 2010 under Order No.120/N by the Minister of Education and Science of Georgia refers to term 'Inter-sectoral fields' as to the title under which the European Studies (Code number 110405) is grouped as "Regional Studies" together with other programmes.

³⁹ TSU faculty of Law as well as the faculty of Business and Economics are at the top of the intra-university rankings considering the actual numbers of enrolled students.

⁴⁰ *Supra* 27.

⁴¹ These positive results have been revealed under IES administration regular surveys. See *Supra* note 18. See also Simon Usherwood, *Teaching simulation game design: A model, tested in the field*, INOTLES Working Paper Series, No.1, February 2016, pp. 12-14.

⁴² Academic Council Resolution no 94/2016 adopted on 2 September of 2016; Decision of high representative organ of TSU dated as 30 September of 2016.

⁴³ Five PhD candidates have already been trained on all four innovative teaching methods.

directly translated into their financial losses. Apart from this, they found somehow unusual the distance learning method of training offered by INOTLES project format. As a result, the courses that are currently taught using innovative pedagogic tools are EU governance and policy making process, EU law, EU investment law, EU competition law, Introduction to the theories of law, JFS (Justice, Liberty, Security) policy of EU.

However, the Doctoral programme opened incredible opportunity to transfer these skills to the new generation of academic staff. This was accomplished by integrating the training in innovative teaching methods in their core curriculum⁴⁴. The researchers found such training extremely motivating and expressed the opinion that it gives them favorable conditions for experimenting in the future as prospective teachers. The first group of trained doctoral candidates will be provided with opportunity to offer their joint course on EU institutions to BA students where they will be using solely innovative pedagogic tools. This is planned for 2018-2019 academic year when BA programme is accredited and admits its first intake of students as per IES Strategic Plan.

It is worth to be mentioned that the Institute for European Studies is a standing success story in terms of bringing innovations to the University. From the moment of its establishment, it entered the scene as an innovator not only for introducing completely new area studies in an interdisciplinary manner, but also for the variety of pedagogical methods its academic staff would experiment during the teaching process. Fully equipped classrooms and resource center with personal computers and projectors assisted IES academic staff to meet their learning objectives by encouraging students to prepare electronic presentations, to participate in mock courts, to ensure lively discussions and reviews after screening of historical or documentary movies, to prepare joint projects by using visual highlights, etc. With the support of Commission in 2015, first time ever IES ensured organization of study visit to EU institutions and Brussels based think tanks where the group from IES was composed of student researchers and academic staff.⁴⁵ The same year IES launched recording of courses taught on MA and Doctoral level that have been uploaded on the institute's website.⁴⁶ Later on INOTLES project played an important role in outlining practical examples and tools of integrating those recorded lectures into the academic staff's syllabi and actual teaching.

Fully equipped office of IES encouraged institute's administration in 2012 to open negotiations on launching a double degree EU Studies distance learning programme in collaboration with one of the partner Universities abroad; however, the process was halted from Georgian side due to legislative concerns as well as general hesitations on assumed difficulty to find procedural ways for proper quality assurance.⁴⁷ After engaging into INOTLES project, the IES gave a new life to this project proposal, as it moved forward and advocated justification supporting that a Blended learning pedagogy, where e-learning and distance learning elements are well integrated into traditional teaching methods,- could be a possible solution to this dilemma.

Looking from the perspective of existing Georgian regulations, it is obvious that Law on Higher Education does not make any reference to the notion of distance learning. Instead, under Article 47.4.1 it defines e-learning as "directing learning process via using the learning management system". Herewith, the learning management system is prescribed as "internet-based program which is necessary for organizing and conducting learning process based on information-communication technologies."

Georgian law on Higher Education does not refer to the E-learning as a pedagogic tool. In general, reference to teaching methods is rather limited in this piece of legislation. For instance, under Article 2.h.23 law only says that course programme (syllabus) is a document that gives information on teaching and learning methods⁴⁸ together with data on course objectives, learning outcomes, credits, and content as well as on

⁴⁴ The training is provided from various textbooks as well as from the *Training the Trainers Handbook* elaborated within the frames of INOTLES project. The handbook is available at <http://inotles.eu/training-handbook>.

⁴⁵ On impact of study visits to EU institutions refer to Eduard M. Lavalle and Alexandre Berlin, *Thinking Europe: A Canadian Academic Immersion Inside the European Institutions-EU Study Tour and Internship Programme*, in Stefania Baroncelli, et al., Springer, 2014, pp.73-88.

⁴⁶ Preparation of video-lectures was supported by EU under ENPI project. The list of the electronic courses can be retrieved at the institute's website. Being a password protected they can only be accessed by the IES students.

⁴⁷ Before launching new programmes usually, the IES undertakes consultations with University leadership, experts of the Ministry of Science and Education of Georgia, EQE center or other relevant stakeholders.

⁴⁸ The similar reference to teaching methods is given in definition of Syllabus as provided under Article 11.1.t of Education Quality Enhancement Director's Order no.188, admitted on 07.04.2011. Article 4.5.t of the same Order says that education programme content must include methods for achieving learning objectives. See also Article 1.1.t and Article 7 of decree no.128/2011 of the TSU Academic Council adopted on 28.12.2011.

evaluation criteria. Article 63.2.b likewise envisages a very general statement that teaching methodology is one among other accreditation standards. More in-detailed definitions on teaching/learning methods are given under Order no.3 of the Minister of Education and Science of Georgia as adopted on January 5 of 2007. In particular, under Article 1.t of order no.3 – “teaching and learning method is the means of transmitting knowledge and these might be: lecture, teamwork, practical assignment, seminar, teaching via using electronic resources, e-learning, etc. Teaching and learning method might include activities such as discussion, debates, demonstrations, presentations, seminars, etc.”

Under Article 47.4.2 “E-learning is conducted in the forms of asynchronous or/and synchronous communication. Asynchronous communication implies the type of communication when transmitter and receiver of data do not act simultaneously, while synchronous communication presupposes such coordination in time.” Next section of the same Article (47.4.3) brings in the notion of “e-learning programme” that is said to be built “for the purposes of higher education institution in accordance to the norms prescribed by this law. After its completion a person will be granted with corresponding qualification as well as with document certifying this qualification.” Finally section 4 of article 47.4 says that enrollment on e-learning programme is allowed only on the first and second level of education, i.e. on BA and MA programmes respectively. This article goes together the group of articles named as Article 47.1. on Medical/Stomatology Education, Article 47.2. Educational programme on Teacher’s Preparation, Article 47.3 Programme on Preparation in Georgian language, 47.4 E-Learning and finally Article 47.5 on Orthodox Theologian Higher Education Programmes. The fact that E-learning goes under this group of articles should mean that unlike distance learning programmes the fully fledged programme based on E-learning is permitted to be elaborated.

Conclusions

The EU’s commitment to launch interdisciplinary European Studies at Tbilisi State University is the encouraging example of a success story. Obviously, it is premature to measure fully its impact; still the dynamic, speed and scale of its development as well as set of practices during past ten years proves that not only it fits well into the process of approximation of Georgia with EU (with content and values shared through its programmes), but also contributes to the overall progress of higher education area within the region (by implementing innovative teaching methods) and promotes internationalization of the University (providing education in English language).

Despite these plain advancements, there are also limitations and drawbacks. Lack of awareness on importance of interdisciplinary studies in local society as well as some blurred legislative prescriptions, intrinsically generate financial hardships. However, these factors are beyond control of solely one institute. The well-coordinated efforts of several key stakeholders apparently can open a new space for enrichment of the IES capacity to take part into bringing in the new competencies and excellence for the purposes of advancing the overall progress agenda.

The TSU model of European Studies is not that radically different from those three models of Western higher education institutions outlined in this paper. Still the IES has already compiled its own unique experiences from the past or out of the lessons learnt. It is hoped that the IES will find a correct solutions to the existing challenges; it will continue building new bridges with its European counterparts as well as will fetch new and distinctive insights to the European Studies discourse.