

Educational Area of the Central Asian Region: Problems and Prospects of Integration

Zhumakhan Myhalykov and Kulyanda Nurasheva

Zhumakhan Myhalykov M. Auezov South Kazakhstan State University

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Abstract: With the globalization of the world economy and labor migration the competitive benefits of any country are provided by the advanced system of education and science. However, the ever-increasing in volume and versatile in content, the inter-countries links form the demand in universal professionals who can easily adapt to the conditions of one or another country. In this situation the content of the national education must meet international standards, generated by the world science. The integration of universities into the world educational area plays a key role in this.

Key words: Eurasian integration • Education • Competitive advantages

INTRODUCTION

Does Education Need Integration?: History has successful examples of integration of various spheres of life. The initiative of combining efforts in the education system is the basis of the European Union success. It has allowed synchronizing maximally the educational systems of different countries, to make the cooperation of universities part of the interstate integration policy [1]. The integration project in the field of education, known as the Bologna Process, includes a number of countries inside the European Union and composing a powerful economic and political block of the international community. In addition, cooperation with the states from the surrounding regions develops.

Similar attempts to integrate are undertaken in other regions of the world such as Latin America, West Africa, the countries of the Arab East, for this conferences and exhibitions on education issues are held, contacts with international and regional organizations are established, educational and scientific-research programs are developed and implemented.

It is remarkable that the EU has started integration in the field of higher education only after the successfully implemented economic programs (Customs union, common currency, trade and financial spheres). At the same time effective economic component of integration alone is not an absolute guarantee of success in other directions.

For example, being one of vivid examples of regional economic integration, the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) has not yet achieved the desired results in the implementation of integration initiatives in the field of higher education. Although the fact of readiness of regional countries to work together is an important step in the integration processes of the education system.

The fact is that in the modern world, new trends caused by climate change, environmental degradation, mass migration of population from individual points of the planet. Therefore, alongside with integrity and unity the modern world economy is characterized by distortions of the basic priorities formation.

For example the operation of closed economic system within the framework of the leading Western countries has led to an uneven and unfair distribution of wealth and resources of the planet. Over 75% of worldwide turnover, 60 % of global foreign direct investment, 90 % of all registered patents in the world account for mutual trade between these countries.

Therefore, developing cooperation and integration, it is necessary to strive for equal development of all countries so as to avoid future regional conflicts.

As is known, the main directions of cooperation in the sphere of education are quite independent, they are isolated from political differing points of view and therefore contribute to the creation of such an

environment that smoothest political and economic contradictions between countries, lead them to new levels of cooperation.

Higher education is already perceived not as a «public good or service», but is considered the most important economic resource of the state. This is a sort of response to the transformation of the world system under the influence of globalization into the so-called «knowledgebased society "[2].

The economic crisis particularly acutely stressed the importance of combining the efforts of countries in the name of renewal and development. An impulse for a more modern, thorough approach into integration is given. In this regard, the Eurasian idea finds active support. Belonging to Eurasian civilization is the factor of the synergistic development of some post-Soviet countries, which determines the perspective of formation of a new influential geopolitical center in the modern world.

In 1994 presidents of Azerbaijan, Armenia, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Russia, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Ukraine signed an Agreement on free trade zone (FTZ). Free trade is introduced; tariff and nontariff restrictions in mutual trade in order to expand economic relations and crisis-free development of the economy are abolished [3]. However, multilateral free trade regime has not been fully introduced because the list of exemptions from the free trade regime has not been agreed on.

Only in 2011, following the results of the meeting of the Council of Commonwealth countries Government Heads a new on the FTA was signed. Free trade zone between Belarus, Ukraine and Russia started on September 20, 2012. In Armenia, the Treaty came into force on October 17, 2012, in Kazakhstan and Moldova- from December 2012. Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan have not carried out the procedure of the Treaty ratification [4].

Today one can say that the stages of integration in the post-Soviet area-free trade area, customs union, common economic area and the Eurasian Union are complex both in economic and organizational terms, but can be entirely implemented. This requires the political will of countries leaders, active participation of the population in the reforms and support of integration initiatives by the countries of the Commonwealth. Currently, a draft of a new Agreement on free trade zone based on WTO rules and regulations, which is intended to give an additional impetus to the development of mutual trade and free competition, the growth of countries 'production capacity and the potential of

the Commonwealth as a whole has been developed. The possibility of forming a further Payments Union is being discussed.

However, there are unsolved issues of social nature, namely in this plane are the causes of many conflicts, that is why the social well-being of people is now brought to the fore.

Eurasian Integration as a Basis for Entry into the World

Educational Area: States-members of the Eurasian Economic Community (EurAsEC)-Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan work hard the last years to restore what has been lost in the field of education in the course of various reforms. They have reached substantial progress in economic integration, harmonization of tax and customs procedures; now content filling in part of integration of education, science, introduction of innovations, use of cultural and historical values of the peoples is ahead.

Content filling of integration in the part of transition to the European credit -hours, module educational programs, introduction of the Bologna process principles started. A special role is given to the continuity of educational standards, improvement of the system of licensing, certification and accreditation of institutions of education and science.

Overview of integration initiatives in the CIS showed that three pillars of the Eurasian idea-the Eurasian Economic Community, the Conference on Interaction and Confidence- building Measures in Asia (CICMA) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) have been successfully implemented. Although their activity is assessed primarily as a success in the field of economic cooperation their work covers also other directions of integration processes.

In particular, the search for rapprochement and integration have led to the conclusion of a number of agreements in the field of education, science, introduction of innovations, use of cultural and historical values of the peoples. Alongside with that at this time the formation of a common educational area remains quite a complicated process, but in the long term this is inevitable and cooperation is mutually profitable for all participants.

It should be noted that higher education did not create problems at unifying these countries into the Customs Union (CU) and the Common Economic Area (CEA), which indicates its internationality and integration into the world community. At present, Russia joined the WTO and the forthcoming entry of other post-Soviet countries in this organization will create favorable opportunities for the development of science and education.

The establishment of the Eurasian Economic Community contributed to effective promotion of integration processes in education. In accordance with Article 102 of the UN Charter in 2003 it was recorded as an international organization and has an observer status at the UN General Assembly. One should note the most important initiatives of the Eurasian Economic Community, from the implementation of which all members of the community have got benefits:

- Adoption of the documents on the harmonization of foreign trade, tax, currency and customs legislation;
- Adoption of the order of the development and implementation of Inter-state target programs;
- Adoption of the Agreement on the establishment of a Transport Union;
- Development of Principles of energy policy and formation of a common energy market;
- Transition to the principle of indirect taxes collection on the "country of destination";
- Ensuring the right of individuals in free crossing of the borders of the states-members and free movement of goods and currency by them;
- Facilitation of mailing procedures and provision of free subscription, delivery of periodicals;
- Provision of equal rights to citizens to enter the educational institutions, the adoption of an agreement on mutual recognition and equivalence of documents on education.

Active implementation of reforms and constitutive modernization of education systems are a characteristic feature of all post-Soviet countries [5]. It is necessary to point out the common characteristics:

- Common past;
- Use of the Russian language for international communication;
- The emergence of non-state commercial HEIs;
- Similar problems, associated with the transition to a three-level system (Bachelor-Master-Doctor PhD);
- Legislative support of education differentiation;
- Actuality of the development and improvement of forms of international and inter HEIs cooperation.

Central Asian countries have entered the path of market reforms at the same time, but today one can see the differentiation in the level of development, market methods of regulating the economy have not yet found a proper application. This can be explained by unequal

starting conditions, available economic potential, culture of management, national characteristics, the accepted model of governance.

Therefore, there are differences between countries in the level of education and the pace of reforms, investments into this sector. For example, in some CIS countries the old system of research training (PhD) remained, other countries (Kazakhstan) have completely passed to the multilevel system of Bachelor-Master-Doctorate PhD. It is possible to say that the economic reforms have had a marked impact on the level of education; this explains a significant gap in the level of training. Thus, the number of students per 10 thousand populations in Kyrgyzstan is 409 people, in Turkmenistan only 64 people [6].

Here one problem characteristic of all Central Asian countries should be accentuated—the gap in the level of education of urban and rural school students. The following trends have place:

- Widening disparities between urban and rural areas in quality of education;
- Increase of barriers for the rural population entry into the middle class and hence reducing the access decrease of good education for country people;
- The youth, having graduated from high school in rural areas, due to poor education will fall out of the system of higher and postgraduate education that will lead to the society marginalization.

As a result the subsequent industrial-innovative development of the society and, most important—the regional development, will not be staffed. So already today measures to radically change the structure of specialists training and employment of graduates are undertaken. For example in Kazakhstan the program "With diploma into village" exists already the third year. Young professionals according to job placement are provided jobs, favorable conditions are created for them for living in rural areas, soft loans are given, livestock purchase is subsidized for their farms.

It is sometimes suggested that the integration processes in education are too slow. In our opinion, there are reasons as follows: contradictory position of national elites and big business, the interests of external forces on the disintegration of the former Soviet Union, the desire of the leaders of the EurAsEC member states to multi-vector policy, uneven distribution of resources between the countries of the Commonwealth, etc. This somewhat complicates the integration processes.



Fig. 1: Trends in the education system of CIS countries

The process of internationalization and international cooperation in education is considered by the experts as the most effective way to improve the competitiveness of their higher education systems. If previously CIS was some mechanism of consultation, exchange of opinions, decision-making, which was often not practically realized, now in education progress appeared, pragmatism has won (Fig. 1).

We must not forget that at the same time there are very important competitive advantages:

- Huge potential market with a population of over 200 million people;
- Availability of natural resources in some countries that are vital for others;
- To the present time remained links between economic entities of our countries;
- Interstate communication capabilities in Russian, etc.

In the Declaration of the Fifth International Conference on Education of UNESCO (1997) it was stressed that modern conditions require such an educational policy, the implementation of which will in the XXI century enable to learn to know the world and make it better, to learn to be together [7]. Namely at this the educational reforms of the countries should be focused, to consider the future needs of society. And here in the first place it is necessary to rely on the effective use of its own resources, the capacity of the education system itself.

Macroeconomic Indices of the Countries Present the Possibilities of Education Integration: Central Asian countries today are not in the best conditions in terms of basic development indicators. For example, GDP per capita in Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan is 20 times and more lower than in developed countries (Table 1) [8]. Most prosperous picture is in Kazakhstan, although this figure is 4-5 times lower than in developed countries. As seen from Table 1, the CIS countries have different growth rates, leading to differences in living standards and, accordingly to access and mass higher education. At the same time in any of these countries education is not a priority for investment.

Countries of this region have a low competitiveness of the economy: Tajikistan is at the 116th place, Kyrgyzstan is at the 121-st place among 148 recorded countries (Table 2). As one can see, the gap between industrially developed countries and the states of our region is very high [10].

In some countries market reforms are realized weakly, a number of social problems remain unsolved. This is due to the low level of economic potential, the small size of the domestic market, the level of technological development, as well as with the geopolitical situation (landlocked).

The human development index in several countries over the years of the economic crisis has decreased; the situation in the education and health systems is complicated. This situation is reflected by the index KEI-the application of knowledge in economy. The countries of Central Asia are on the lower stage of ranking, only Kazakhstan is in the middle: the highest

Table 1: Key indicators of the CIS countries development,2012.

no	Countries of the world	Population.mln. of people.	GDP per capita, \$	Economic growth, % (softening -)	Preferences in investing
1	Russia	141,9	16161	3,5	Construction
2	Ukraine	46,0	7634	-1,1	metallurgy
3	Belarus	9,8	12400	4,2	Gas industry
4	Kazakhstan	17,7	11773	4,6	Fuel sector
5	Azerbaijan	8,9	11000	3,1	Petroleum industry
6	Armenia	3,2	5437	6,5	Agrarian sector
7	Georgia	4,7	5001	3,3	Transport
8	Uzbekistan	28,7	2606	8,0	Fuel-and-powersector
9	Kyrgyzstan	5,6	2174	5,6	metallurgy
10	Turkmenistan	5,2	5765	9,2	infrastructure
11	Tajikistan	7,9	1984	7,3	trade and Services

Source: Online version IMF 2012 and [6,8,9].

Table 2: Place of the CIS countries in global competitiveness according to the World Economic Forum version (as of October 15, 2013)

no	CIS countries	2011	2012	2013
1	Estonia	33	34	32
2	Latvia	44	45	52
3	Azerbaijan	55	46	39
4	Kazakhstan	72	51	50
5	Lithuania	64	55	48
6	Russia	66	67	64
7	Ukraine	82	73	84
8	Georgia	88	77	72
9	Armenia	92	82	79
10	Moldova	93	87	89
11	Tajikistan	105	100	114
12	Kyrgyzstan	126	127	121

Source: data of the World Economic Forum[10].

Table 3: Foreign direct investment in some CIS countries, million USD

no	Country	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	% of total volume, 2012
1	Kazakhstan	41982	6360	11096	15775	12649	14130	20.2
2	Kyrgyzstan	43	182	208	265	660	446	0.6
3	Uzbekistan	192	174	705	711	750	930	1.3
4	Turkmenistan	295	339	856	1277	3867	2083	3.0
5	Tajikistan	54	385	703	760	383	82	1.2

Note :the table is compiled by the author on the basis of analytical reviews of international agencies, as well as according to the data of the Statistical Committee of the EurAsEC [12,13].

index is in Norway-9.11; U.S.-8.77 ; Russia-5.78; Kazakhstan-5.04; Turkmenistan-4.26; Kyrgyzstan-3.82; Uzbekistan-3.14; Tajikistan-3.13 [11].

As a positive point one should note is that the countries in question are showing growth performance in attracting foreign direct investment, especially in the extractive industries (Table 3) [12, 13]. Kazakhstan (5076 dollars), Turkmenistan (1624 dollars) are leaders in terms of accumulated FDI per capita. In FDI volume received for new projects per capita, these countries are ahead of the world average value closer already to the countries of NAFTA (USA, Canada, Mexico).

The leaders of the Central Asian region are ready to enter an open and constructive dialogue with investors for the development of scientific-educational sectors. Conducted large-scale programs and innovative projects are aimed at the development of specific industries that will lead to the development of science, technology and education. For example, the implementation of the State program of forced industrial-development for 2010-2014 in Kazakhstan led to the need for training specialists for new productions.

National governments understand that they participate in the competition for investments with other countries that is why they take steps to improve



Fig. 2: Location of the Central Asian countries on the Silk Road

the investment climate, terms of business conduct, improve government regulation on specific issues (e.g., tax, currency and customs regulations). Foreign investors consider Central Asia to be the most attractive region in terms of investments due to the presence of unused capabilities. They border with China and this allows the potential investors to supply natural resources into this country.

For investors in the manufacturing sector the closeness to China may be more of a threat than a benefit, taking into account the current level of productivity and cost-efficiency in this country. However, for many investors in the sector of industry and financial services the closeness of quickly growing markets of Russia, China and several Asian countries offer great opportunities.

Thus one can state that the markets of Central Asian countries are attractive for investors and this enables to forecast the strengthening of CIS positions in whole on the global economic arena.

Economic Integration as a Starting Point for Uniting the Efforts of the Central-Asian Countries in the Field of Education: With the object of the prospects of Eurasian integration of the education system, it is necessary to consider in details the trends of development of the Central Asian region, located on the route of the ancient Silk Road. Territory, occupying about 4 million square kilometers with a population of about 74.5 million people, including: Uzbekistan-28.7; Kazakhstan-17.7; Tajikistan-7.9; Kyrgyzstan-5.5; Turkmenistan-5.1; is sufficiently large and promising market (Fig. 2) [9].

Analysis of economics of the Central Asian region allows of several periods of its transformation. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, each country of Central Asia went its own way, as a result the level of socio-economic development and the pace of reforms differ [14, 15]. Significant changes in the monetary and exchange rate policy, the liberalization of economic relations were accompanied by increased dependence on the global processes of globalization.

In 1991-1994 there was orientation on the political independence, mass privatization of enterprises and the transition to market relations. In the next 5 years (1995 to 1999) has developed the concept of reform, has begun the transition to a socially oriented economy, and has accelerated human capital.

During 2000-2005 has begun significant changes in all spheres of life, a sense of the results of market reforms. Governments have actively implemented social programs: education reform, health care, pensions, social security and employment.

The decisive factors, determining the success of reforms in the next five years, were protection of property rights, rule of law, predictability of economic conditions and the "rules of the game", formation of trust in the authorities. However, GDP growth in some countries, for example in Kazakhstan, was achieved through exports of energy resources, in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan was due to the growth of agricultural production.

Economic crisis has led to frustration of developing system of finance and banking sector. Unemployment has contributed to labor migration in Russia, partly in Kazakhstan and other affluent countries.

Table 4: Comparative indicators of the higher education system of the CIS countries

no	Countries	Number of HEIs	Number of students, thousand	Number of students per 10 thousand population
1	Russia	1156	7.100	424
2	Belorussia	55	446	453
3	Ukraine	350	2.200	401
4	Kazakhstan	132	571,7	323
5	Kyrgyzstan	52	230	409
6	Uzbekistan	58	297.9	110
7	Tajikistan *	30	118.4	152
8	Turkmenistan *	21	22.7	64

Note: * some data need to be clarified.

Since 2012, the crisis in the Central Asian countries gained protracted nature and it affected the national economies, GDP growth declined, innovation and investment activity has weakened. However, this did not strongly influence the education system.

Commonwealth countries have a relatively high level of education. In general, in 2011/2012 academic year over 11 million of people have studied in the higher education institutions of the CIS countries. Per 10 thousand of people there are: in Kazakhstan-323 students, in Kyrgyzstan-409; in Tajikistan-152; in Uzbekistan-110; in Turkmenistan-64 [6] (Table 4).

Current state of education systems in the countries of Central Asia, rates and direction of their development vary. There is a different training level of graduates of schools and secondary vocational and higher education in terms of teaching and educational standards. This is a completely understandable explanation.

In determining the country's national interests they are oriented at the same time on the priorities of educational systems of other communities (in the framework of the Bologna process, CIS, SCO, etc.). For example, in Kazakhstan higher education was transformed in the direction of the three-stage model (Bachelor, Master and Doctorate PhD) on the analogy with the European one.

In order to ensure international recognition of Kazakhstan diplomas “a ladder of qualifications” was created, which will be the basis for a national system of qualifications. Close relationships with employers and their active participation in the formation of educational programs are one of the criteria for accreditation of universities.

Kyrgyzstan exports educational services in the form of higher education, language training programs and schooling. Due to the relative cheapness of education here citizens of Uzbekistan, India, Pakistan, Turkey, the countries of Central Asia study [16].

In Turkmenistan education and science system suffers from the state domination and directive planning, but here also new educational programs are being developed, subjects and courses are reviewed [17].

In Uzbekistan funds came for new projects in the automotive industry, chemical industry, construction materials and consumer electronics. Because of this, reforming the system of secondary and vocational education was started, is reform of higher education is being continued [18].

Tajikistan is characterized as a low-income country: approximately \$ 310 per capita. Civil War threw back for a few years the country development. It is known from media that approximately 30 % of men of working age are employed abroad. At the same time, the country carries out some reforms in education in order to keep up with the neighbors [19].

Russia is also guided by the Bologna process, but does not depart from the traditional training of candidates and doctors of sciences. It is expected changes in the legislation on qualification as procedure, remote in time from an academic degree. Probably the right to award qualifications will move from educational institutions to the tenants or public organizations. These reforms will certainly affect the education of other Commonwealth countries. [20].

There are significant changes in the field of science. If the mid-90s significantly has reduced the cost of research, as well as number of specialists then since 2000 there has been growth of: volume of research work was on average 1.4% of countries GDP. Also, stopped the outflow of young professionals from science that had a positive effect on the age structure of scientific personnel.

All the states-members of EurAsEC reform educational system for good reason: there is the indisputable fact of predominant influence the quality of education on the quality of life of the population. Therefore, the rate of changes in the education systems of the partner countries is high.

Prospects of Forming a Common Educational Space in Central Asia: Community of historical roots, culture and traditions, geographical proximity to the Great Silk Road contribute to the integration of scientific and educational space: joint research projects are developed, advanced training on exchange is organized, strategic partnership in the field of science and technology was reached, successfully implemented language training and intercultural communication, introducing international quality standards.

The most significant results have been achieved in the field of academic mobility of students and teachers. Young people gain valuable experience, learn to live in a multicultural environment, master several languages. This increases their efficiency and competitive position in the labor market, increases the contribution to the internationalization of education.

Many people have lived here for years, so the question of inter-ethnic harmony, tolerance, cultural interaction occurs naturally, regardless of regime change and rulers. For example, in Kazakhstan with a population of 17.7 million of people, live 140 ethnic groups, all have equal rights and citizenship; participate in socio-economic transformation of the country [6].

Prospects for the education system of the Central Asian countries are largely associated with the processes of economic integration. There is discussion about implementation of scientific and technological achievements in production, development of innovative cooperation between the countries, optimization of

humanitarian component of partnership. Daily exchange of information on these issues is called “soft power”, as it helps to remove barriers in the dialogue of civilizations, uniting countries and peoples on the basis of the values of justice and tolerance, solidarity and mutual respect. All this opens up opportunities for people's diplomacy and joint programs in science, education, health, arts, which are the most sensitive and close to the spiritual needs of people.

I would like to draw some conclusions and predictions about the future of education in the region. The main area of cooperation may be creation of a common educational space on the basis of a harmonized system of education recognition (from primary to tertiary and postgraduate), allowing unimpeded access to education in the schools of the partners. In this situation, the further development of the education system includes:

- Creating conditions for equal access to education;
- Alignment and increased spending on education by national economies;
- Ensuring legislative and regulatory framework to operate efficiently the educational system;
- Formation of the economic mechanism of the education system development, its material and technical base;
- Development of new educational standards oriented on double diplomas and academic mobility (Fig. 3);
- Improvement of education content, taking into account national and world science, culture and art.

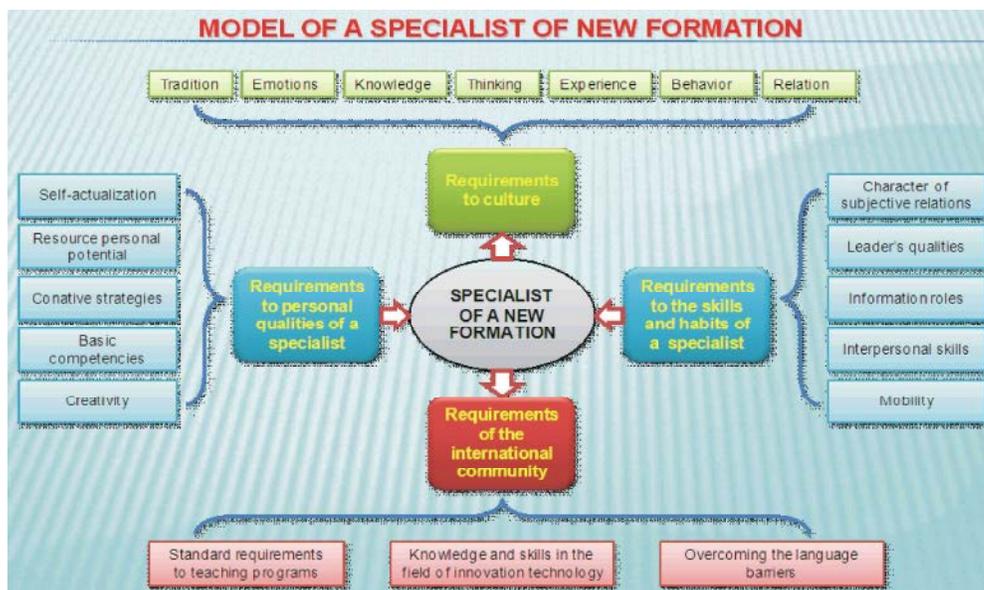


Fig. 3: Model of specialist of new formation

Solving these problems requires development of strategies and mechanisms for the development of education in the Community, corresponding to world standards. It is necessary formation and development of a common labor market in order to effectively use labor migration [21]. The main parameters of a common educational space of Central Asia are:

- Elaboration of joint strategy for reforming the national education system;
- Establishment of an effective system to coordinate activities of state authorities of the Commonwealth;
- Justification of the ways of increasing the education and educational programs quality;
- Development of interstate information exchange in the field of education and science;
- Determination of mechanisms for the implementation of international instruments in this field.

In higher education institutions of Community it is recommended to implement a policy of institutional responsibility, which includes the development of new mechanisms of self-esteem, academic freedom and competence approach, oriented on learning outcomes achievement.

Program for the formation of a common educational area of EurAsEC member states includes the following stages: the first stage is the development and adoption of educational standard of EurAsEC member states; the second stage is the harmonization of national legislation in the field of education, the definition of coordinating centers, responsible for implementing the program; the third stage is the formation mechanisms of international cooperation in the field of education [22].

Thus, the general educational space includes agreed educational standards, criteria for training, retraining and certification of teaching and research staff, equal opportunities and free exercise of citizens' rights to receive education in all countries of the Eurasian Economic Community. Therefore, integration of the educational systems of Central Asia countries will be held in this format.

Universities of different countries should establish close contacts in the academic field, in order to align the worldwide level of education, to accumulate intellectual potential of the Earth citizens, which will prevent the outbreak of war, mass migration. Ultimately, it will create the conditions for sustainable development of national economies, improving the welfare of citizens and the interpenetration of cultures.

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