

Informal Summary
2011 High-level Segment of the Economic and Social Council
Annual Ministerial Review
Belarus National Voluntary Presentation
4:30 pm – 5:30 pm
7 July 2011, Geneva

The National Voluntary Presentation session was chaired by **H.E. Mr. Lazarous Kapambwe**, President of the Economic and Social Council. The moderator for the session was **Mr. Kevin Watkins**, Director of the Education for All Global Monitoring Report (2011), UNESCO.

Mr. Sergey Maskevich, Minister of Education of Belarus delivered the national voluntary presentation for Belarus, underscoring that the government is a consistent supporter of fulfilling the internationally agreed goals and commitments in the field of education. The Constitution of Belarus, adopted after the country declared independence in 1991, bestowed upon all citizens the right to education.

Development of the human potential, by raising the educational level and functional literacy, is a top policy priority: education policies focus on building a “strong, socially oriented, market and law-based state”. Currently, high-quality education at all levels is equally available and guaranteed for all sections of society.

In terms of lessons learned an important theoretical and practical element was codifying educational law. Belarus has successfully drafted and adopted a Code of Education which serves to improve legislation in the field of education. This experience is unique and could be interesting and useful for other Member States.

Educational institutions have stable sources of funding. The main source is the state budget. In 2011, education spending will amount to not less than 6% and it is planned that by 2015 the volume of financing will increase to 8.5% of GDP which is in line with the recommendations of UNESCO. The national education system is based on a new generation of educational standards, textbooks and instruction materials, instruction and curriculum documentation. Conditions for widespread use of IT technologies in the instruction process have been created.

Challenges remain in getting higher education graduates to be a productive part of the “open informative” society. Therefore, attention is paid to studying the basics of economics and business, and mastering computer technologies. One key priority is the training of specialists for employment in enterprises engaged in machine-building, energy, architecture and construction, health care, agriculture, and information technology. Hence, higher education institutions are important centers of the scientific and innovation activities as they ensure integration of the training process and advance innovation. Furthermore, higher education institutions in Belarus benefit from scientific cooperation with foreign partners from 58 countries of the world within the framework of more than 700 agreements.

The development of “education quality management systems” (based on the international standard ISO 9001) has helped improve educational quality, as well as strengthen capacity at all levels and stages of training workers and various specialists. Thus, Belarus expects that the national system of

higher education now meets the main requirements of the Bologna process and Belarus will initiate joining this process at the next international conference (in 2012 in Bucharest).

The Minister noted that institutions for continued education for adults play an important role in ensuring the principle of “education throughout life” (i.e. lifelong education). Each year, “professional education, qualification upgrading, internships and retraining in all fields of the economy” cover roughly 15 % of all employees. Higher education institutions offer youth a “substantial social package”, including: educational allowances, “soft” loans and subsidies for certain living expenses. Special attention is also paid to “qualification upgrading of managers and specialists”, employed in the field of foreign economic activities, business planning, supervision and auditing activities, information security, and foreign languages.

Belarus reaffirmed its conviction that the role of education (led by teachers) in development of the world community will grow. Belarus proposed that the United Nations should establish an international contest to draw attention to the place and role of the teacher in the modern world, to “pay respect and appreciation to the best of them”. Belarus also proposed the start of the “UN International Programme of Support of Pedagogical Education Development”.

In its capacity as an NVP friend, **China** commented that Belarus has achieved considerable progress towards reaching the education related development goals, and is also on schedule to achieve the other MDGs. China invited Belarus to participate in the third International UNESCO Congress on Technical and Vocational Education in China (April 2012), which will highlight the importance of Technical and Vocational Education and Training in driving economic and social development.

Russia began its statement by acknowledging the success that Belarus has demonstrated in advancing education. The Russian Federation also remarked that the role of ICT in education has the potential to bridge gaps in the education systems between rural and urban areas. The Russian Federation called for better integration of children with special needs into education systems. Russia concluded by emphasizing that the main challenges ahead are the improvement of higher education and adult education.

Kazakhstan congratulated Belarus on its informative presentation and pointed out that Belarus has a practical and comprehensive education system, which has been able to generate significant results. Kazakhstan also requested more detailed information about the code for education.

The Minister thanked the NVP friends for their encouragement and productive feedback. He stressed that the education code is important for the country since it shows that it is possible to establish a “stable and regulated education” system. Through codifying education law, Belarus has settled questions of education and improved the quality of education without any major reforms.

In response to Russia’s comments, Belarus reported that current trends in higher education suggest the spread of new technological developments, including the importance of ICT, nano-technology and engineering. In these areas, research capacities have been built and high level training delivered by “qualified professionals”, including those from Russia and Kazakhstan. A central problem that persists, however, is funding for training professionals since

large amounts need to be taken from the regular education budget. A possible solution might lie in new, innovative ways of funding for education.

In response to China, Belarus affirmed its desire to take part in the UNESCO training session, adding that it is always aspiring to go beyond the achievement of universal primary education, and provide the best education conditions for children, young people and adults.