

14.3.2026

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**Title**

Beyond the limits of the European higher education area : the case of Belarus / Olga Gille-Belova

**Publication year**

2015

**Source/Footnote**

In: European journal of higher education. - 5 (2015) 1, S. 83 - 95

**Inventory number**

37697

**Keywords**

Ausland : Weißrußland : Hochschulwesen allgemein ; Bologna-Prozess ; Internationalität

**Abstract**

All European Union (EU) member states and many former post-Soviet countries joined the Bologna Process without major obstacles during the 2000s and today belong to the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). The only European country which was refused membership in the EHEA was Belarus, whose demand was rejected in 2012. The case study of this failed accession provides a unique opportunity to analyse the interaction between European and national levels in the process of higher education (HE) transformations. This paper examines various strategic uses of the Bologna Process by different national and European actors. If the Belarusian officials perceived Bologna mainly as an opportunity to improve their relations with the EU by cooperating on a politically neutral issue, other domestic actors such as the Public Bologna Committee saw EHEA accession as an instrument for radically reforming the existing HE system. The refusal of the Belarusian application also reveals a complex interplay between the increasing importance of 'technical' criteria inside the EHEA and EU external policy considerations.(HRK / Abstract übernommen)