

**REPORTING THE RESULTS ACHIEVED UNDER THE PROJECT “SETTING  
PEER REVIEW INSTRUMENTS AND GOALS FOR MEDICAL (HEALTH)  
EDUCATION”, FUNDED BY ERASMUS+**

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**Abstract:** *Most former Soviet countries face major and similar challenges in the quality assurance process in higher medical (health) education. Implementation of specific tools of the peer-review process is needed and would lead to quality enhancement in medical education. The aim of the article is to present and discuss the main activities implemented within the project so far.*

*The project has been funded by the Erasmus+. Fourteen universities from 7 former Soviet countries have been involved in the project. We analyzed: 1) annual reports of Multinational Peer Review Board (MPRB); 2) self-evaluation reports (SER) of HEIs; 3) peer review expert group reports; 4) follow-up mission in 12 HEIs and reports following; 5) annual financial reviews; 6) video recordings of meetings of Peer Review Experts with the Focus Groups; 7) seminar materials; 8) minutes of meetings held; 9) media activities materials.*

*The project aims to enhance the quality of medical education in the targeted universities. The MPRB, PRIMED-EECA journal and PRAMED-EECA Association have been established. Within the project, many other different activities have been held: over 12 MPRB meetings, 5 online seminars on peer review process in partner country institutions, 12 SERs written by the self-assessment working groups (SAW group), 12 meetings of Peer Review Experts with the Focus Groups of HEIs, 12 peer review expert group reports on HEIs prepared, 12 Follow-up Missions and reports following. All the activities implemented within the project have been announced by social media.*

*Most planned activities within the project have been completed. Creative and fruitful collaboration among the programme country institutions and PCIs was established.*

**Key words:** quality assurance process, peer review, Multinational Peer Review Board (MPRB), programme country institutions (PrCIs), partner country institutions (PCIs)

## **1. Introduction**

Most former Soviet countries face major and similar challenges in the quality assurance process in higher medical (health) education. Issues are mostly due to their common historical roots and are still experienced in the higher education institutions (HEIs) of the targeted partner countries. Changes in the political, economic, and socio-cultural environment, and globalization, lead to transformation in educational systems in post-Soviet states: efforts to

overcome Soviet ideological legacies, reforms of admissions to HEIs, implementation of the bachelor-master system, establishment of a non-state sector, introduction of tuition fees in the public sector, etc. However, these countries face several big challenges in higher education such as: cuts in public funding, further decline of academic profession, brain drain from HEIs to other sectors of the economy or overseas, inequality of access to higher education, inadequacy of academic process with a focus on teaching (neglect of learning), obstacles to the internationalization of higher education, low employability graduates [1, 2].

On the other hand, adoption of the new policies in higher education (for example, quality assurance bodies for accreditation programmes, a system of credit or ECTS, student and teaching staff mobility) has been associated with many uncertainty and tensions in former Soviet countries due to complexities and idiosyncrasies of each country's higher educational system. Countries differ according to the timelines and degrees of the Bologna acceptance. The Baltic states (Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania) have joined firstly (1999) the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) compared to Russia (2003), Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine (2005), and Kazakhstan (2010). Four central Asian states (Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan) remain officially outside of the EHEA [2-4].

All mentioned above does not meet needs of the society and community and the high student expectations for quality higher education nowadays making these HEIs less competitive. Modern system of higher education shall be focused on access, quality, and efficiency. Adopting the standards and guidelines for quality assurance in EHEA means embracing the student-centered approach to learning and teaching, increasing the level of internalization of higher education, introduction of new modern teaching methods and development of different types of digital learning [5]. Therefore, we think the implementation of peer review instruments and goals within the project will really contribute to enhancing the quality of higher education in the targeted HEIs.

## 2. Aim, objectives and methods of the study

The aim of the article is to present and discuss the main activities implemented within the project so far.

**Table 1.** HEIs involved in the project funded by the Erasmus+

No	University	Abbreviation	City	Country
Program countries				
1.	Medical University – Sofia	MU-Sofia	Sofia	Bulgaria
2.	Lithuanian University of Health Sciences	LUHS	Kaunas	Lithuania
Partner countries				
3.	BAU International University	BAU IUB	Batumi	Georgia
4.	Tbilisi State Medical University	TSMU	Tbilisi	Georgia
5.	Petre Shotadze Tbilisi Medical Academy	TMA	Tbilisi	Georgia
6.	Georgian National University	SEU	Tbilisi	Georgia
7.	"Nicolae Testemitanu" State University of Medicine and Pharmacy	SUMPh	Chisinau	Moldova
8.	Technical University of Moldova	TUM	Chisinau	Moldova
9.	International Sakharov Environmental Institute of Belarusian State University	ISEI BSU	Minsk	Belarus
10.	Grodno State Medical University	GrSMU	Grodno	Belarus
11.	Asfendiyarov Kazakh National Medical University	NMU	Almaty	Kazakhstan
12.	Karaganda State Medical University	KSMU	Karaganda	Kazakhstan

13.	Avicenna Tajik State Medical University	ATSMU	Dushanbe	Tajikistan
14.	Khatlon State Medical University	KhSMU	Dangara	Tajikistan

The project has been funded under the Erasmus+ programme. Fourteen universities from 7 countries have been involved in the project. Information in detail on the program and targeted HEIs is presented on Table 1.

Bulgaria and Lithuania are program countries. Partner countries are represented from 2 regions: Eastern Partnership (Georgia, Belarus, Moldova) and Central Asia (Kazakhstan and Tajikistan).

Targeted PCIs are both public and private. The target groups and their needs have been identified preliminary. Direct beneficiaries are administrative and academic staff of the targeted HEIs; respectively, the students, rest of personnel and public are determined as direct beneficiaries.

Analysis has been performed on 1) annual reports of Multinational Peer Review Board (MPRB); 2) self-evaluation reports (SER) of HEIs; 3) peer review expert group reports; 4) follow-up mission in 12 HEIs and reports following; 5) annual financial reviews; 6) video recordings of meetings of Peer Review Experts with the Focus Groups; 7) seminar materials; 8) minutes of meetings held; 9) media activities materials.

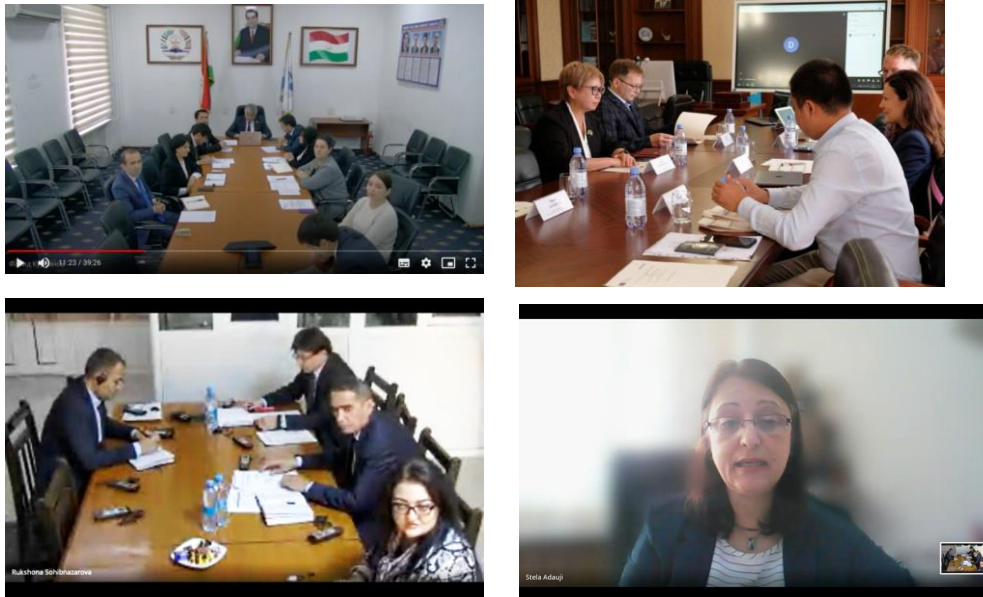
### 3. Results and Discussion

The project aimed to enhance the quality of medical education in the targeted HEIs. We consider the training conducted and implementation of specific tools of the peer-review process would help the HEIs preparation for international and national accreditation procedures. Peer-review missions held revealed the level achieved by each of the twelve PCIs to adhere to the standards for quality assurance in the EHEA. All other activities planned (project institutionalization, PRIMED-EECA journal and PRAMED-EECA Association establishment, dissemination project results) helped to achieve the overall goal.

Establishment of the MPRB was one of the first activities fulfilled in 2019. The Board plays an important role providing a successful implementation of all project components and long-term sustainability after the project is gone. The MPRB consists of 9 members (one from the HEIs except for Georgia that 2 members have been nominated). Since the beginning of the project, a total of over 12 online meetings of the Board members have been held. Bulgaria will be the host of the annual conference upcoming (Oct 12-14, 2022). The MPRB has been responsible for the online training conducted by 4 field experts from the PrCIs (MU-Sofia and LUHS). During the first year of the project, 5 seminars were conducted online in partner countries (Tbilisi, Chisinau, Grodno, Almaty, Dushanbe). Training and seminars helped develop staff skills and knowledge necessary for the peer review process and international accreditation.

One of the most important project activities were the peer review missions conducted and follow-up reviews in all PCIs. For a 3-year period (2019-2022), 12 peer review missions – online and on-site - have been conducted by Peer Review Crews (PRCs) and finished successfully. The PRC consists of 4 experts who have an experience and competencies obtained in accreditation and different areas of medicine and public health. As a part of external evaluation of HEIs [6], 12 meetings of Peer Review Experts with the focus groups (representatives of the governing body of the HEI, Self-evaluation report (SER) committee, teaching staff, students, alumni, etc.) held online or on-site in targeted HEIs (Fig. 1). Peer Review Report has been prepared considering SER and additional information obtained during the meetings. The Peer Review Experts assessed how well the targeted HEI met 12 standards for accreditation. The PCIs prepared a corrective plan based on recommendations of the Peer Review Experts. Four follow-up reviews have been held online or on-site and completed successfully; the rest of reviews will be held up to the end of September. All above

activities performed have an essential role in the preparation of HEIs for upcoming accreditation and external audits in the PCIs. The external evaluation of MPRB as a process encompasses different domains (vision and mission of institution, governance, and management of the internal quality assurance system) as well as the infrastructure and facilities of the HEI assessing the current status and describing the perspectives of development [7].



**Fig. 1.** Peer Review Mission and Follow-up Mission: Meetings held in Avicenna Tajik State Medical University, Dushanbe, Tajikistan (top left), Karaganda Medical University, Kazakhstan (top right), Khatlon State Medical University, Tajikistan (both pictures below)

All the five partner countries, involved in the project, have been a part of the former Soviet Union. However, they are highly differentiated nowadays by their political, economic, sociocultural, and demographic background. Several factors outside of the HEIs have a great impact on the quality of higher education in these countries. At the same time, higher education in each country, particularly in the targeted universities, has specific features (governmental policies, mission, priorities, infrastructure, human capacity, equipment, facilities, infrastructure, management) [1, 2]. The areas of concern in higher education identified in the targeted HEIs are: lack of integrated information system and distance learning system; information published on the web-site cannot reach to different stakeholders; a state curriculum and limited academic freedom to teaching and research; missing student and academic staff mobility abroad, needs of technology modernization and easier access to the best academic research databases. We found similar facts in the other sources [8, 9].

One of the project objectives achieved is to establish an annual journal of Medical and Health Sciences Education for Eastern Europe and Central Asia. This journal will contribute for dissemination of project-achieved benefits (project-related reports, case-studies, original articles submitted from PCIs) with the intention of expanding the scope of published materials from all countries of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union.

Establishment of the MPRB off-springs (Peer Review Association for Medical/Health Education of Eastern Europe and Central Asia, briefly PRAMED-EECA) and Editorial Board of PRIMED-EECA) in July 2022 has a crucial role in ensuring the project sustainability and consistency.

Information on project's events (MPRB members and meetings) has been disseminated timely using local and Internet media as well as the websites of PrCIs [10] and PCIs [11-15].

#### 4. Conclusions

This paper reported all the activities implemented within the project “Setting peer review instruments and goals for medical (health) education”. Most of them have been completed so far. Creative and fruitful collaboration among the PrCIs and PCIs was established. Further project activities will provide its sustainability and consistency. This will be guaranteed through PRAMED-EECA ([pramed-eeeca.eu](http://pramed-eeeca.eu)) and PRIMED-EECA which future activities will assist HEIs in Eastern Europe and Central Asia in preparing for international accreditation and will facilitate further collaboration.

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