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## **MACEDONIAN STUDENTS: THEIR AWARENESS OF EU STUDIES AND A SENSE OF BELONGING TO EHEA**

### **Abstract**

The academic students as future citizens of Europe are the key energy and strength upon which the democratic and civic oriented Europe is based and built, united and enriched through its cultural diversity. The one of the key factors in achieving the idea of "Europe without borders" is fulfilling a joint European Higher Education Area (EHEA), which involves implementing the principles of the Bologna Declaration. That process is unachievable without active student participation and contribution, which implies consistency in their awareness, also it implies the current trends and reforms in higher education and the opportunities for mobility and exchange of ideas and opinions.

By preparing a questionnaire, this paper aims to investigate sense of belonging of the Macedonian students to the European Higher Education Area.

Students who are still not part of the European Union Member States, are feeling unequal and less aware about the possibilities of studying in other countries. Even though this fact can be an obstacle in the integration process, the research proved that students in the Republic of Macedonia, although not considered to be European citizens, are sharing the European values.

**Keywords:** European Higher Education Area, mobility, equality, awareness, European citizens

### **Placing the issue in the context**

European citizenship is an important element for strengthening and protecting the European integration process. In this direction the European Commission continues to encourage European citizens to have engaged attitude in all segments of the life in their communities. The purpose of such measures is maintaining the active participation in contribution in creating more familiar Europe, a Europe that is democratic and world-oriented, Europe that is united and enriched through its cultural diversity, Europe where its citizenry can evolve.

In this respect, the process of accomplishing of the idea of a "Europe without borders" means active involvement of citizens in the debates and considerations of European values as a basis for the process of developing sense of common European identity and that is of crucial importance. At the same time it implies development of civil engagement in all spheres of social and political life and a support to citizens who are participating in various initiatives in the development of the democracy in the EU. In this regard, the educational system is an important segment in achieving the common objectives.

The Strategy "Europe 2020" as an assignment of the EU sets requirements for finding measures and conditions that will ensure equal rights, prosperity and solidarity among all European citizens. The strategy emphasizes that overcoming differences between the reality of European integration and people's perceptions of that integration presumes the European policies to be directed more towards the needs of citizens. The key strengths of these processes in the strategy are identified: creating value by providing knowledge-based growth; building inclusive societies with increased opportunities for people and creating an economy that is competitive, connected and environmental.

In order to build awareness of European citizenship on the importance of these goals the measures are suggested for approaching the results that are derived from the European policies and actions.

Now, Europe in order to get closer to its citizens, is undertaking measures in the direction of providing for the citizens an equal opportunities to acquire knowledge. Starting from the idea of a knowledge-based society as one of the important conditions for growth and development, special attention is paid to the segment of higher education.

The adoption of the Bologna Declaration intends to achieve a common European Higher Education Area where the academic community will be encouraged to have mutual meetings in order to exchange knowledge and experiences thus creating the circumstances where achieved results could be assessed and a capacity for developing relevant opinions and positions will be built regarding those achievements.

On the other hand, a significant section in achieving the established priorities of the European Union is certainly the youth. The Macedonian students are the future citizens of the European Union and they will have to contribute in building their own future with their creativity, initiative and energy. They see their future in the civil oriented and united Europe. Hence, referring to "Europe without borders" we believe that students and their attitudes are one of the important indicators for the access of the Republic of Macedonia in the European Union, and the higher education is a place where you can measure the level of accomplished reforms. The extent of the reforms undertaken in order to bring Republic of Macedonia in the European Union is measured also under the conquest of common European higher education range.

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