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## MODERNISATION OF THE HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM IN THE CONTEXT OF EUROPEAN INTEGRATION

**Problem statement.** In the current conditions of European integration, modernising Ukraine's HE system is one of the most important tasks of state education policy. The need to bring the national education system in line with European standards is driven both by internal transformations related to socio-economic development and by external challenges, in particular the need to ensure academic mobility, transparency of educational programmes, recognition of qualifications and strengthening the competitiveness of Ukrainian HEIs in the European area. In this context, there is an important need to adapt education management mechanisms to European practices, develop an education quality assurance system and strengthen the internationalisation of the educational environment.

The process of HE modernisation in Ukraine faces a number of regulatory and institutional barriers, including fragmented educational reforms, insufficient funding and also uneven access to quality education, in particular because of Russia's military aggression against Ukraine. Issues such as the harmonisation of curricula, the creation of an effective system for monitoring the quality of education, increasing the participation of universities in European research programmes and the formation of a single educational area remain relevant.

### **Analysis of recent studies and publications.**

V. Antoniuk substantiates the need to integrate Ukraine's HE into the European area as a factor in human capital development [1], while V. Barvinok and co-authors analyse the relationship between the education system and the labour market in the context of knowledge transfer [2]. A lot of attention is paid to issues of education quality [8], the ecosystem approach [9] and institutional cooperation [7]. The works of N. Machynska [10], K. Istomina [6], M. Skydan [11] and other researchers confirm the relevance of strategic reform of Ukraine's HE system according to European standards. In this context, comparative studies of educational models [13] and interdisciplinary approaches to sustainable development through internationalisation [12] are important. However, issues such as the formation of a scientific-methodological approach to the modernisation of the HE system based on the alignment of existing education development strategies with European sustainable development priorities, the integration of scientific research

results into the educational process and the analysis of ways to comprehensively modernise HE as a tool for strengthening Ukraine's integration processes with the EU remain insufficiently addressed.

**Formulation of the article's goals.** The goal of the article is to provide a theoretical substantiation and identify priority areas for modernising Ukraine's HE system in the context of European integration, paying attention to current challenges, the strategic guidelines of the Bologna Process and European practices for quality education assurance, based on an analysis of transformational trends in HE in the European educational area, the identification of institutional barriers that hinder the effective modernisation of HE.

**Presentation of the main research material.** In the context of modern integration processes and globalisation, the HE system plays a key role in the development of highly qualified human capital, the formation of the innovative potential of society and the provision of sustainable socio-economic growth of countries. In the context of the transition to a knowledge economy, where knowledge, professional competencies and intellectual resources dominate, the modernisation of HE is a strategic necessity [1]. In this context, state education policies and national education development strategies act as mechanisms for implementing structural changes aimed at ensuring the quality of educational services, forming a flexible educational environment and adapting education systems to new challenges.

In EU countries, the modernisation of HE is implemented through multi-level strategic documents that combine pan-European goals with the national specifics of each member state [3, 10]. Such strategic planning ensures the targeted transformation of the educational area in accordance with European standards, contributing to the formation of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). The typology of modernisation strategies allows to identify the main areas of reform: institutional autonomy, academic mobility, internationalisation, quality assurance and digital transformation of education. The main types of strategies used in EU countries and approaches to the transformation of education systems are presented in Table 1.

In the process of the modernisation of HE systems in EU countries, a wide range of strategic approaches



**Table 1. Types of strategies for the development and modernisation of HE in EU countries**

Type of strategy	Main approaches	Examples of countries and strategic documents
Internationalisation strategies	Academic mobility, involvement of foreign HE students, international partnerships, joint programmes	Ireland (International Education Strategy 2021-2025); The Netherlands (Strategic Agenda for Higher Education and Research 2015-2025).
Digital strategies	Development of digital skills, e-learning, open educational resources, digital infrastructure of HEIs	Estonia (Digital Education Strategy 2021); Germany (Hochschul forum Digitalisierung); The EU (Digital Education Action Plan 2021-2027)
Inclusive strategies	Accessibility of education, support for socially vulnerable groups, gender equality	Sweden (Strategy for Gender Equality in Higher Education); Spain (Plan for Inclusion in Universities).
Communication strategies	University branding, external communication, public relations, promotion of educational services	Poland (Strategy for the Promotion of Polish Higher Education Abroad); Italy (University Communication Guidelines).
Innovative and scientific strategies	Support for research, creation of innovation centres, technology transfer, participation in Horizon Europe	Germany (Pact for Research and Innovation); Finland (Vision for Higher Education and Research 2030).
Regional strategies	Taking regional needs into account, local educational initiatives, cluster development	France (Regional Development and Higher Education Plan); Poland (Smart Specialisation Strategies)
Sustainable development strategies	Integration of sustainable development goals, environmental education, green infrastructure of HEIs	Denmark (Green Campus Strategy); Austria (Sustainability Strategy for Universities)

Source: compiled by the author based on [2, 4, 5, 7, 13, 14].

has emerged that take into account both common European values and national priorities. The typology of strategies identified indicates the complex and multidimensional nature of the transformation of the educational area in the context of European integration [7]. Each type of strategy covers an individual area of change that responds to the current challenges and needs of educational systems development. Internationalisation strategies focus on developing academic mobility, involvement of foreign HE students and lecturers, expanding international partnerships and implementing joint programmes [13, 14]. Such measures contribute to the integration of national education systems into the EHEA, the strengthening of knowledge exchange and the formation of a global academic culture [4]. Examples of such strategies can be seen in Ireland and the Netherlands. Digital strategies are focused on developing the digital competences of HE students and lecturers, introducing e-learning, open educational resources and digital infrastructure of HEIs [2]. Successful examples, particularly in Estonia, Germany and at the EU level in general, demonstrate a commitment to a flexible

and innovative educational process that meets the requirements of the digital age.

Inclusive strategies emphasise the importance of ensuring equal access to education for individuals with disabilities, representatives of socially vulnerable groups and promoting gender equality. They form the basis of social justice in education and contribute to expanding educational opportunities for all categories of the population, as implemented, in particular, in Sweden and Spain. Communication strategies aim to increase the public value of HE, shape a positive image of institutions and develop a system of university branding and external communication [7]. The efforts of Poland and Italy in this direction demonstrate the importance of transparency and openness in interaction with society. Innovation and science strategies cover issues such as research support, the creation of innovation clusters and technology transfer. Such strategies contribute to the development of research infrastructure and strengthen the link between HE and the knowledge economy [5]. Examples of such strategies include the policies of Germany and Finland.

Regional strategies reflect the desire to harmonise the activities of HEIs with the needs of particular territories, activating local initiatives and forming educational clusters focused on regional development. The experience of France and Poland demonstrates the effectiveness of spatially adapted approaches to educational policy. Sustainable development strategies ensure the integration of environmental components into the functioning of HEIs, promoting the formation of a responsible attitude towards the environment [9]. This approach, implemented in Denmark and Austria, is part of global processes of sustainable development and greening of the educational area. Thus, the strategic guidelines of EU countries illustrate an effective model of integrated HE management, which serves as a benchmark for reforms at the international level. Internationalisation is seen as a tool for increasing the quality of educational services, stimulating innovative activities of universities and developing the global competencies that graduates need to succeed professionally in an international environment. An analysis of existing models and practices of strategising within the European educational area makes it possible to identify effective mechanisms for involving HEIs in international scientific and educational exchange, expanding partnership networks, stimulating academic mobility and integration into global research platforms. Such experience is extremely valuable for countries in the process of adapting to European educational standards, in particular for Ukraine, which is actively transforming own HE system in line with integration guidelines [11]. In the current context of globalisation and the development of the knowledge economy, the internationalisation of HE is becoming one of the important factors in increasing the quality of educational services, academic mobility and the integration of national education systems into the EHEA.

Approaches to strategising the internationalisation of HE in EU countries are summarised in Table 2.

**Table 2. Approaches to strategising internationalisation of HE in EU countries**

Content of the approach	Examples of EU countries
Strengthening the quality and competitiveness of the national HE system by expanding its international dimension, enhancing academic mobility and developing among HE students the competencies necessary for successful integration into a globalised society and labour market. The main role in implementing the strategy is entrusted to the academic community of HEIs, which ensures the practical implementation of its goals through the educational process, international partnerships and scientific cooperation.	Netherlands, Finland, Germany, Sweden, Ireland
Active involvement of foreign scientists in joint research projects, introduction of integrated educational programmes and double degrees.	Belgium, Czechia
Lack of national strategies of HE internationalisation. Instead, there are academic mobility programmes and bilateral agreements on international cooperation that promote the integration of HEIs into the global educational area.	Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary, Slovakia

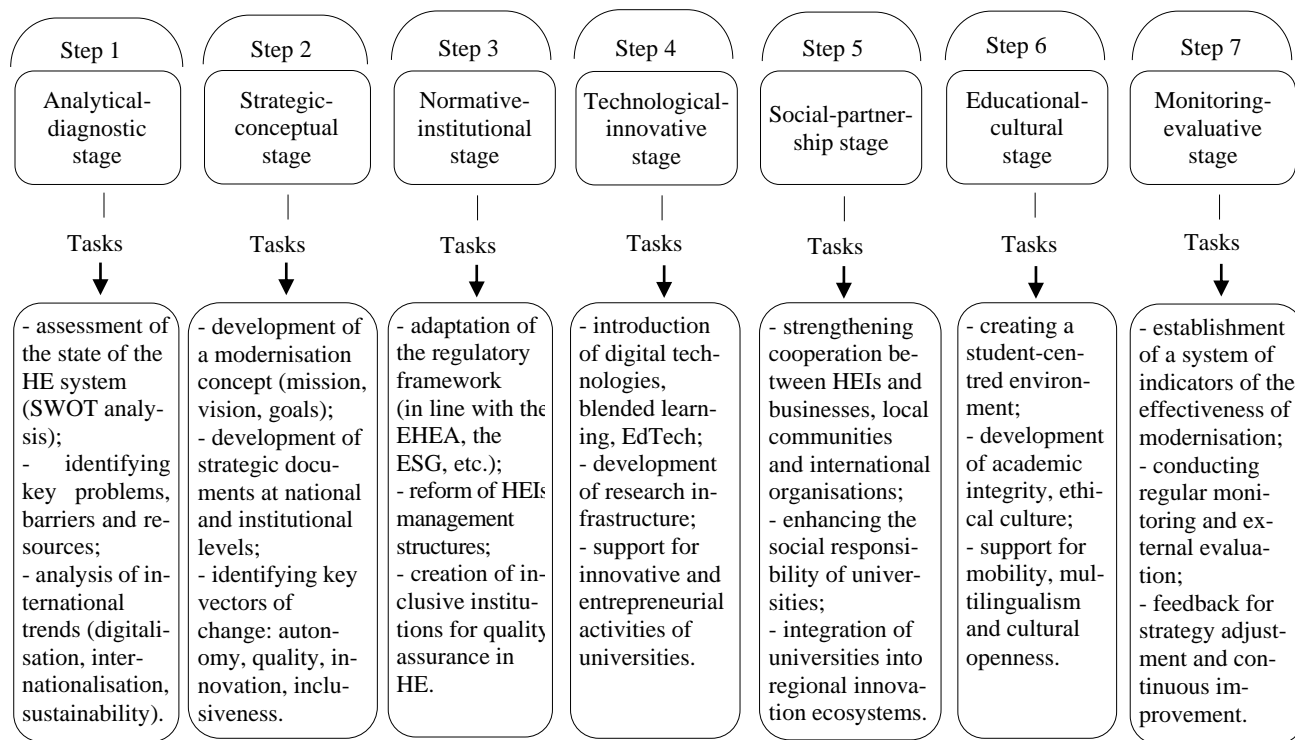
Source: compiled by the author based on [6, 8, 12].

The internationalisation of HE systems in EU countries is implemented based on various strategic approaches that reflect both common European guidelines and national characteristics of education policy. Analysis of these approaches reveals general patterns of mo-

dernisation processes and specific tools for increasing the international attractiveness and educational services quality. The EU widely applies systematic improvements of the quality and competitiveness of the national HE system by integrating it into the global educational area [12]. This approach is implemented through the enhancement of academic mobility, the formation of global competencies of HE students and the active participation of university communities in international cooperation. The main role in implementing such strategies belongs to the HEIs themselves, which ensure the achievement of goals through study programmes, research activities and partnership initiatives. This approach is being actively implemented in the Netherlands, Finland, Germany, Sweden and Ireland, where internationalisation is seen as an integral part of educational development.

Focusing on the involvement of foreign lecturers and researchers in joint research projects and the implementation of integrated educational programmes and double degree programmes is also a common practice for the EU [6]. This strategy is built on supporting international cooperation through a system of incentive mechanisms: targeted funding, favourable conditions for the accreditation of programmes, effective information support and the promotion of educational products on the global market. This approach is effectively applied in Belgium and Czechia, demonstrating an interest in the implementation of scientific and educational diplomacy [8].

The scientific-methodological approach to modernising the HE system is presented in Fig. 1.



**Fig. 1. The scientific-methodological approach to modernising the HE system**

Source: developed by the author

The proposed approach to modernising the HE system, developed on the basis of adapting the ideas of M. Hansen [15], which in this research is interpreted as the logic of phased cultural and institutional assimilation of new models, concepts and practices, reflects the complex dynamics of transformational processes in HE. This approach allows to understand modernisation processes in HE as complex, multi-level dynamics that occur through the logic of phased integration of changes. A distinctive feature of this model is that it takes into account the cyclical nature of educational reforms, within which the initial borrowing of external (primarily European) standards goes through phases of adaptation, critical analysis and rethinking in line with the needs of the local educational area. The proposed approach is not limited to directly copying European experience, but involves rethinking it, taking into account national and regional specifics. Modernisation in this format is an integration process aimed at combining global imperatives with local cultural and educational contexts, enabling the construction of a sustainable, flexible and contextually relevant HE model. Such model responds to the challenges of the modern knowledge economy and promotes effective integration into the European educational area.

**Conclusions.** HE in countries of the EU in the conditions of integration acts as a sphere for training highly

qualified specialists and an important tool for the development of a single European area based on the values of democracy, tolerance and mutual respect. In the current conditions, in particular in the context of Russia's full-scale aggression against Ukraine, HE plays a strategic role in strengthening democratic values, academic freedom. The modernisation of the HE system in the context of European integration is a complex, multi-vector process that encompasses the transformation of educational culture, management practices, technological infrastructure. The study found that effective modernisation requires a combination of global trends (digitalisation, internationalisation, sustainable development) with national characteristics requiring a flexible, structured and phased approach to reform.

The proposed approach is a conceptual model of HE modernisation that takes into account global trends and the national context. Its systematic structure provides a harmonious combination of strategy, policy, innovation and values, i.e. to guarantee the transition to a new quality of HE in the current, predominantly complex conditions of knowledge economy development. This approach enables outlining the logic of HE modernisation and creating a dynamic framework for its implementation in the national and regional contexts, while taking into account the principles of sustainability, flexibility and effectiveness.

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Надійшла до редакції 14.11.2025 р.

Прийнята до друку 12.12.2025 р.

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Received: 14.11.2025

Accepted: 12.12.2025

### **Svynarenko D. Modernisation of the higher education system in the context of European integration**

The article analyses the challenges and priorities of modernising Ukraine's higher education (HE) system in the context of European integration. It provides an overview of educational transformation processes driven by both internal factors and external ones. Strategic approaches to modernisation implemented in countries of the European Union (EU) are identified, including digital, internationalisation, inclusive, innovative, communication-based, regional and sustainable development strategies. A typology of these strategies is provided, along with generalised examples of effective national practices. Special attention is given to approaches to internationalisation strategies, which encompass mechanisms for integrating higher education institutions (HEIs) into the global educational area and transnational research networks.

A conceptual scientific-methodological approach to modernising Ukraine's HE system is proposed, consisting of sequential stages: analytical-diagnostic, strategic-conceptual, normative-institutional, technological-innovative, social-partnership, educational-cultural and monitoring-evaluative. This model ensures the integrity and consistency of transformational changes in accordance with European standards and enables the adaptation of global practices to the local context. It is demonstrated that the modernisation of HE is not a mechanical process of borrowing but requires deep cultural and institutional assimilation of new concepts and practices. The implementation of the proposed approach will contribute to improving the quality of educational services, strengthening the innovative capacity of universities, enhancing their international attractiveness and forming a flexible and resilient educational system capable of functioning effectively under European integration conditions.

*Keywords:* transformational processes, integration of higher education, strategic approaches, sustainable development, institutional tools.

### **Свинаренко Д. М. Модернізація системи вищої освіти в умовах європейської інтеграції**

В статті проаналізовано виклики та пріоритети модернізації системи вищої освіти (ВО) України в контексті європейської інтеграції. Здійснено огляд трансформаційних процесів в освіті, що зумовлені внутрішніми та зовнішніми чинниками. Визначено стратегічні підходи до модернізації, реалізовані у країнах Європейського Союзу (ЄС), включаючи цифрові, інтернаціоналізаційні, інклюзивні, інноваційні, комунікаційні, регіональні стратегії та стратегії сталого розвитку. Доведено, що модернізація ВО потребує глибокого культурно-інституційного освоєння нових концептів і практик. Запропоновано концептуально-науково-методичний підхід до модернізації системи ВО України, впровадження якого сприятиме підвищенню якості освітніх послуг, зміцненню інноваційного потенціалу закладів ВО, розбудові їх міжнародної привабливості, а також формуванню гнучкої та стійкої освітньої системи, здатної до ефективного функціонування в умовах євроінтеграційних змін.

*Ключові слова:* трансформаційні процеси, інтеграція вищої освіти, стратегічні підходи, сталий розвиток, інституційні інструменти.