



# EU PROGRAMMES AND THE MODERNIZATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN UZBEKISTAN: THE CASE OF BENELUX COLLABORATION

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## **Abstract**

This article analyzes the role of EU programmes (Erasmus+, Horizon Europe, Jean Monnet) in modernizing the system of higher education in the Republic of Uzbekistan through the lens of cooperation with Benelux countries. Based on the analysis of official documents and implemented projects, the article demonstrates how various European instruments facilitate the introduction of international educational standards, promote academic mobility, strengthen scientific linkages, and prepare human resources for priority economic sectors. The research reveals that EU programmes serve not only as a source of financing but also as a mechanism for knowledge transfer, ensuring the integration of Uzbek science and education into the European space.

**Keywords:** Uzbekistan, EU programmes, Erasmus+, Horizon Europe, Jean Monnet, higher education, modernization, Benelux.

## **Аннотация**

В статье анализируется роль программ ЕС (Erasmus+, Horizon Europe, Jean Monnet) в модернизации системы высшего образования Республики Узбекистан на примере сотрудничества со странами Бенилюкс. На основе анализа официальных документов и реализованных проектов показано, как различные европейские инструменты способствуют внедрению международных образовательных стандартов, развитию академической мобильности, укреплению научных связей и подготовке кадров для



приоритетных отраслей экономики. Установлено, что программы ЕС выступают не только источником финансирования, но и механизмом трансфера знаний, обеспечивая интеграцию узбекской науки и образования в европейское пространство.

**Ключевые слова:** Узбекистан, программы ЕС, Erasmus+, Horizon Europe, Jean Monnet, высшее образование, модернизация, Бенилюкс.

**Introduction.** The modernization of higher education and science systems in Uzbekistan is inseparable from integration into the European educational space. The key instrument of this process is the European Union programmes, which provide not only financial resources but also methodological foundations for implementing international quality standards in education and scientific research.

Uzbekistan's cooperation with Benelux countries (the Kingdom of Belgium, the Kingdom of the Netherlands, and the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg) within the framework of European programmes demonstrates the effectiveness of a combined approach that integrates bilateral partnerships with participation in multilateral initiatives.

The relevance of this article stems from the fact that EU programmes do not merely provide grants for projects in education and science; they serve as a powerful instrument for transforming academic systems, facilitating the transition from traditional educational models to competency-based education, the introduction of practice-oriented learning, and the development of research culture.

The purpose of this article is to analyze how EU programmes (Erasmus+, Horizon Europe, Jean Monnet) function as a mechanism for modernizing higher education in Uzbekistan and what results are achieved through cooperation with Benelux countries.

This research is based on the analysis of official documents, materials on implemented and ongoing projects within the framework of Erasmus+, Horizon



Europe, and Jean Monnet programmes, as well as data on inter-university agreements between Uzbek and European institutions.

Methodological Approaches:

- Comparative analysis of various EU programmes and their impact on the education system
- Analysis of specific case studies (projects implemented in Uzbekistan)
- Content analysis of documents and project implementation reports
- Expert assessment of results and development prospects

**Results.** The Erasmus+ programme has become one of the most effective instruments contributing to the modernization of higher education in Uzbekistan. Uzbekistan actively participates in the programme, implementing projects jointly with universities from Benelux countries.

The UzMedEn project (2022–2025), involving Ghent University and the Free University of Brussels (Belgium), demonstrates the effectiveness of this approach. The project aims at developing innovative master's programmes in medical engineering, adapted to the needs of the Uzbek labour market. The Tashkent University of Information Technologies serves as the grant holder, with leading Uzbek and European universities as partners.

The Erasmus+ programme has enabled:

- Development of academic mobility for faculty members: Annual two-week language courses at the Catholic University of Leuven for French language instructors from Uzbek universities
- Joint development of curricula: Uzbek university instructors collaborate with Belgian partners in creating modular courses that integrate European quality standards
- Student exchange: Direct agreements between Uzbek and Dutch universities provide for one-year study at European universities followed by internships



- Professional development: Participation in specialized seminars and training on educational quality, scientific publications, and project management

Horizon Europe, the flagship EU research programme with a budget of €95.5 billion, has opened Uzbek scientists access to competitive grants and global research networks. Uzbekistan participates in the programme with priority focus on climate, energy, mobility, and water resource management research.

The Water Resources Project is implemented jointly with the Netherlands. Partners include the Institute for Water Education IHE Delft, Corvinus University of Budapest, the Tashkent Institute of Irrigation and Agricultural Mechanization, and the University of World Economy and Diplomacy. The project contributes to:

- Implementation of European standards in training water resource management specialists
- Development of joint research on sustainable water resource utilization
- Strengthening Uzbekistan's position in the global water policy dialogue

The SECCA Initiative (Sustainable Energy Connectivity in Central Asia), implemented within Horizon Europe, facilitates the development of a green energy transition strategy by Uzbek and European partners, aligned with Uzbekistan's national priorities.

Participation in Horizon Europe has enabled:

- Attraction of external funding: Uzbek research organizations gain access to substantial competitive grants
- Strengthening of scientific linkages: Creation of consortia with leading European universities and research centers
- Enhancement of research quality: Compliance with international standards, mandatory publication of results in peer-reviewed journals
- Development of early-career researchers: Project participation ensures professional development of research staff



Uzbekistan implements 17 Jean Monnet projects aimed at studying European integration and disseminating knowledge about the EU among students and the scientific community. Centres of Excellence operate at the University of World Economy and Diplomacy and the Tashkent State Economic University. These centres:

- Develop specialized courses on European policy, law, economics, and EU history
- Conduct seminars and conferences with the involvement of European experts
- Prepare a generation of leaders who understand the logic of European integration and are capable of building dialogue with the EU
- Contribute to the formation of an expert community that comments on and supports the expansion of Uzbekistan–EU cooperation

Thus, Jean Monnet performs not only an educational but also a political function—it forms in Uzbekistan a community that supports deepening partnership with the EU.

**Discussion.** Maximum impact from EU programme participation is achieved through the combination of three approaches:

1. Participation in pan-European programmes (Erasmus+, Horizon Europe, Jean Monnet) provides access to common resources and standards and promotes integration into the European space.

2. Bilateral partnerships with Benelux countries personalize this cooperation, allowing focus on specific priorities and creating long-term linkages at the level of universities and research centers.

3. Multi-level interaction—from inter-governmental (political consultations) to institutional (university projects) to individual (academic mobility of students and scholars)—ensures the sustainability of partnerships.

Participation in EU programmes stimulates:



- Implementation of competency-based approaches: Transition from a theoretical educational model to the development of practical skills and competencies in demand on the labour market
- Internationalization of education: Attraction of foreign faculty members, participation in networks, utilization of English-language educational materials
- Infrastructure modernization: Improvement of the material and technical base of universities through project-based financing
- Development of research culture: Increased requirements for scientific activity, publications, and conference participation

Despite achieved results, several challenges exist:

- Language barrier: The need to enhance English language proficiency to participate in international projects
- Administrative burden: The complexity of project management in compliance with EU requirements demands specialized competencies in universities
- Sustainability of results: After project completion, difficulties often arise in maintaining achieved results and continuing established partnerships

Promising directions include:

- Increasing the number of consortia submitting proposals to Horizon Europe
- Development of joint research centers
- Broader integration of EU programmes into the strategic development plans of Uzbek universities
- Use of experience accumulated through Erasmus+ and Jean Monnet to improve the quality of Horizon Europe projects

**Conclusion.** European Union programmes (Erasmus+, Horizon Europe, Jean Monnet) function as a powerful mechanism for modernizing the system of higher education and science in Uzbekistan. Cooperation with Benelux countries demonstrates the effectiveness of a combined approach that integrates access to pan-





European resources and programmes with the development of specialized bilateral partnerships.

Erasmus+ ensures academic mobility and joint curriculum development; Horizon Europe provides access to large-scale research funding in priority areas; Jean Monnet develops a generation of leaders who understand European integration and are capable of building sustained dialogue with the EU.

Further deepening of participation in these programmes requires investments in human capital development, improvement of administrative and project management competencies in universities, and strategic integration of EU programmes into long-term development plans of the national education and science systems.

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