



knowledge without boundaries

# EIFL-OA: Open Access

Removing barriers to knowledge sharing

## **Belarusian national open access website ([www.openaccess.by](http://www.openaccess.by)) as a focal point for advocacy campaigns to reach out to research communities**

Leonid Vaitsekhovich, Diatech

February 2013

Results of the EIFL-funded Open Access Project

**“Open academic environment is one of the main factors for successful scholarly communication in Belarus. It is very important for all of us involved in research and education to remove existing barriers and let knowledge become a real power.”**

Vladimir Krasovski, Vice-rector, International State Ecological University named after Andrew Saharov

## INTRODUCTION

Belarus is one of the late entrants into the open access (OA) movement for a variety of reasons, including the lack of widespread information about OA available to researchers. Only a few library professionals were informed about OA, mainly from the central libraries of Belarus (Fundamental Library of the Belarusian State University, Presidential Library of the Republic of Belarus, Central Scientific Library of the National Academy of Sciences and Republican Scientific Medical Library) thanks to the initiatives of the National Library of Belarus (NLB) and the Belarus Council of Libraries on Information Cooperation (BelCoLib).

The EIFL General Assembly held in Minsk at the National Library of Belarus in 2011 became an important step towards an OA movement in the country; it triggered a series of OA advocacy events including the VII International Conference "Libraries and the policy of OA to information and knowledge". Discussions during this conference and follow-up actions has shown that there is a lack of comprehensive and consistent information on OA necessary for building national communities of OA practitioners and decision-makers in Belarus. Furthermore, the administrators of universities and research institutions have little interest in OA because they lack general information about OA and its benefits for the research community. The meeting of Belarusian Council of the University Provosts devoted to the development and usage of open educational resources (OERs) at the end 2011 confirmed this fact.

Republican Research-and-Production Unitary Enterprise «Diatech» in partnership with the National Library of Belarus and the Belarus Council of Libraries on Information Cooperation (BelCoLib) took the initiative and proposed a project on building national communities of OA practitioners and decision-makers.

BelCoLib (includes over 45 universities, public and special libraries from the different sectors representing the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Information, the State Committee of Science and Technology of Belarus, and the National Academy of the Sciences of Belarus) has an OA Working Group aimed at promoting and advocating for OA and at strengthening cooperation with all national OA stakeholders.

Diatech as one of the leaders in the country in OA publishing (one of the [two Belarusian journals indexed in DOAJ](#) (Directory of Open Access Journals) is published by Diatech ([Nerazrušaŭšij Kontrol' i Diagnostika](#)) has brought a technical expertise to the project. And the National Library provided a platform for the meetings and experienced staff for new developments.

The main objectives of the project included:

- create a nationwide community website to showcase and support communication and collaboration across universities and scholarly societies involved in the OA movement;
- promote sharing information and expertise on OA; and
- support cross-institutional linking between researchers and projects with shared interests.

## KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

- The Belarusian national OA website, [www.openaccess.by](http://www.openaccess.by), launched. The website brings together a wide variety of OA information sources into one website thereby making it easier to find relevant resources and to promote OA activities across Belarus. A core group of proactive users has already formed around the OA website; they regularly update the website with news and events and advocate for OA in the country.
- Over 350 researchers, research administrators, journal editors and publishers and librarians attended the project workshops and seminars. They had the opportunity to get practical experience on different aspects of OA initiatives, participate in the discussions and have started working as OA advocates in their institutions.
- Important collaborations across national stakeholders involved in OA activities were formed, including a successful partnership with the largest and most popular Belarusian portal, tut.by, and a strategic cooperation with the National Commission of UNESCO in Belarus.
- A national Open Journal Systems (OJS) platform was set up and one journal ([Неразрушаюцый кантроль і дыягностыка](#)) has already moved to this platform. Several other scholarly journals expressed an interest to join. In addition, some of the libraries that have periodicals in their collections are planning to host them on the OJS platform in order to improve discoverability.
- Belarusian State University of Informatics and Radioelectronics and International State Ecological University named after Andrew Saharov have started setting up an OA repository (using DSpace FOSS platform, to be launched in 2013) and are currently working on the repository policies and regulations.
- A national harvester (metadata indexing system to expand and improve access to research in OA journals and OA repositories) was set up at the Analytical Centre of the Ministry of Education of Belarus (<http://metaport.unibel.by/>).

## STRATEGIES, TACTICS AND TOOLS

Successful partnerships and strategic cooperation were established with the National Commission of UNESCO in Belarus and with the largest and most popular Belarusian portal tut.by. In August 2012 an interview on OA in Belarus with representatives of BelCoLib aired on tut.by TV, more information is here (in Russian) <http://news.tut.by/tv/305686.html>.

The majority of the project efforts were targeted at early OA adopters and volunteers who can advance OA initiatives in Belarus. To support these efforts promotional materials about OA as well as practical information on how to run OA advocacy campaigns were required. With the launch of the OA portal, [www.openaccess.by](http://www.openaccess.by), these materials became widely available and served as a starting point for further training seminars.

It was also very important to tailor and contextualize the information about OA for researchers and point them to specific resources of relevance. A special searchable catalogue of useful resources was implemented on the site [www.openaccess.by](http://www.openaccess.by) based on requirements from the researcher and librarian communities, the primary target audience of the project.

Two other target groups identified by the project included research administrators and publishing houses. However, from the first meetings with these stakeholders it was clear that they were still not ready to become involved in the project activities. Therefore it was decided to promote a “bottom-up” approach; that is, support researchers and librarians to become the driving forces for the OA movement and creating “a critical mass” for the future activities.

## ACTIVITIES

In addition to the librarians OA Working Group led by BelCoLib, two other OA Working Groups were created: OJS Group led by Belarusian State University of Informatics and Radioelectronics and Researchers Group led by Diatech. Working Groups meetings took place on a regular basis in the National Library of Belarus to coordinate the project implementation, plan events, discuss communication strategies with the universities, research institutes and scholarly publishers, and to plan the website content and development.

On **September 5-7, 2012**, UNESCO, jointly with the National Library of Belarus, organized a “Regional Consultation on OA to Scientific Information” in Minsk. The main objective of the Consultation was to communicate the basic benefits of OA; i.e., free and unrestricted access to scientific information can increase the impact of research and benefit research institutions, authors, and the society as a whole. The consultation examined how OA can add to the productivity, visibility and accessibility of research and research outputs. More than 40 participants from 20 countries in Eastern and Central Europe attended the Consultation, many of them from the EIFL network. The consultation drafted a set of recommendations to advance the OA agenda in the region (read the Recommendations in [English](#) and in [Russian](#)).

Some highlights from the Recommendations:

- The government and research funding organizations should adopt and promote OA policies and mandates for the dissemination of scientific publications resulting from publicly funded research.
- Universities and research institutions should also be encouraged to adopt OA mandates.
- Scientific institutions and other stakeholders should consider sustainable new publication models, cooperate nationally, regionally and internationally and play a role in the capacity building in the region.

- Existing evaluation systems and reward structures are obstacles for the broad implementation of OA. This system must be changed in order to create a level playing field. Promising developments for more comprehensive measures of impact are taking place and these should be improved and implemented.
- Support interoperability of OA infrastructure using open technology standards and ensuring that it meets current best practices for metadata harvesting, accessibility, and digital preservation.

In **October 2012** a seminar on using OJS was attended by 15 journal editors and publishers from the National Academy of Science. They received practical training on using OJS and were introduced to OA publishing. Diatech together with Belarusian State University of Informatics and Radioelectronics piloted OJS software and provided hands-on support to researchers who are planning to use the portal [www.openaccess.by](http://www.openaccess.by) for OA publishing in the future.

During **OA Week 2012** several workshops were organized for different target groups at the Belarusian State University of Informatics and Radioelectronics, Institute of Applied Physics, Institute of Information Technology, Analytical Centre of the Ministry of Education of Belarus, International State Ecological University named after Andrew Saharov, and the National Library of Belarus. As a result of these workshops:

- The Belarusian State University of Informatics and Radioelectronics started setting up an OA repository (using DSpace FOSS platform, to be launched in 2013) and is currently working on the repository policies and regulations.
- The Institute of Applied Physics plans to launch a new OA journal on nanotechnology.
- The Institute of Information Technology is exploring opportunities to create OER for their students.
- The Analytical Centre of the Ministry of Education of Belarus launched a national portal to integrate national and international OA resources: <http://metaport.unibel.by/>. They also plan to launch a shared OA repository (using DSpace FOSS) for the universities which do not have appropriate infrastructure and skilled staff to support their own OA institutional repositories. There are also plans to host OERs (mainly textbooks) on this portal after obtaining copyright permissions from the authors.
- The International State Ecological University named after Andrew Saharov is setting up an OA institutional repository for postprints (final peer-reviewed versions) of papers written by faculty members who participate in international research projects.

In **November 2012**, a paper on the integration of OA resources was delivered at the International Scientific Conference RINTI-2012, held in the National Academy of Science.

On **December 6, 2012**, a round table discussion "OA and scholarly communication" was held at the National Library of Belarus. At the round table, attended by over 50 participants including researchers from the National Academy of Sciences of Belarus and from the universities, students and librarians, the results of the project were discussed and the following decisions were made:

- To develop a Toolkit on OA implementation in research institutes and universities. The first draft of this Toolkit will be released by BelCoLib in the first half of 2013 on [openaccess.by](http://openaccess.by) for comments and feedback from the community.
- To submit a proposal to the Higher Attestation Commission of the Republic of Belarus to recognize national OA journals as appropriate journals for publishing research results and therefore added to the national accreditation list of journals qualified for publishing articles in the process of PhD writing and defence.

- To recommend to the Ministry of Education of Belarus and the State Committee on Science and Technology that they sign the Berlin Declaration on OA to Knowledge in Sciences and Humanities.
- To develop a sustainability plan for openaccess.by (by the end of the first quarter of 2013).

## LESSONS LEARNED

- It is very difficult to reach out to research community when the time frame of the project includes a summer period. It is preferable to start short-time projects (less than 8 months) at least in September.
- Customization of OJS during implementation phase requires a lot of time and effort, and it should be taken into account when planning such projects.
- It is important to work on advocacy projects step by step, in an appropriate order. For example, starting work on an OA policy before the major stakeholders are aware of the importance of OA is not advised.

## THE FUTURE

The project partners will ensure that the website is kept up-to-date, new content is added on a regular basis by the members of BelCoLib and the website is promoted to the target audiences.

The project partners and OA advocates who have been trained by the project will continue their OA advocacy work coordinated by BelCoLib to reach out to other educational and research institutions in the country.

The Belarusian State University of Culture and Arts plans to develop curriculum on OA for researchers, publishers, educators and students.

Three new OA repositories will be launched (at Belarusian State University of Informatics and Radioelectronics, the Analytical Centre of the Ministry of Education of Belarus, and at the International State Ecological University named after Andrew Saharov). We are planning a proposal to the Ministry of Education to support the implementation of OA repositories at the five leading Belarusian universities.

The Institute of Applied Physics plans to launch a new OA journal on nanotechnology and the Institute of Information Technology is exploring opportunities to create OERs for their students.

We also plan to continue working on localization of OJS and we are ready to work with anyone in Belarus who is interested in using this system.

We hope that a new Toolkit on OA implementation in research institutes and universities will generate interest and result in increased engagement in OA project developments at educational and research institutions across the country. We also hope that the proposal to the Higher Attestation Commission of the Republic of Belarus to recognize national OA journals as appropriate journals for publishing research results will increase OA journal publishing in Belarus. And when the Ministry of Education of Belarus and the State Committee on Science and Technology have signed Berlin declaration on OA to Knowledge in Sciences and Humanities, a national OA strategy will then be developed.

*EIFL-OA supported this project with a grant of US\$4000 in June 2012. For further information, please contact project manager Mr Leonid Vaitsekhovich, at [diatech\[at\]jtut.by](mailto:diatech[at]jtut.by).*