



STUDIJŲ KOKYBĖS VERTINIMO CENTRAS

Vilniaus universiteto
**STUDIJŲ PROGRAMOS RYTŲ EUROPOS IR RUSIJOS
STUDIJOS** (*valstybinis kodas - 621L20013*)
VERTINIMO IŠVADOS

**EVALUATION REPORT
OF EASTERN EUROPEAN AND RUSSIAN STUDIES** (*state code -
621L20013*)
STUDY PROGRAMME
at Vilnius University

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Išvados parengtos anglų kalba
Report language – English

DUOMENYS APIE ĮVERTINTĄ PROGRAMĄ

Studijų programos pavadinimas	<i>Rytų Europos ir Rusijos studijos</i>
Valstybinis kodas	621L20013
Studijų sritis	Socialiniai mokslai
Studijų kryptis	Politikos mokslai
Studijų programos rūšis	Universitetinės studijos
Studijų pakopa	Antroji
Studijų forma (trukmė metais)	Nuolatinė (1,5)
Studijų programos apimtis kreditais	90
Suteikiamas laipsnis ir (ar) profesinė kvalifikacija	Politikos mokslų magistras
Studijų programos įregistravimo data	2014-01-08

INFORMATION ON EVALUATED STUDY PROGRAMME

Title of the study programme	<i>Eastern European and Russian Studies</i>
State code	621L20013
Study area	Social Sciences
Study field	Political Science
Type of the study programme	University studies
Study cycle	Second
Study mode (length in years)	Full-time (1,5)
Volume of the study programme in credits	90
Degree and (or) professional qualifications awarded	Master of Political Science
Date of registration of the study programme	2014-01-08

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The Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education

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I. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of the evaluation process

The evaluation of on-going study programmes is based on the **Methodology for evaluation of Higher Education study programmes**, approved by Order No 1-01-162 of 20 December 2010 of the Director of the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education (hereafter – SKVC).

The evaluation is intended to help higher education institutions to constantly improve their study programmes and to inform the public about the quality of studies.

The evaluation process consists of the main following stages: 1) *self-evaluation and self-evaluation report prepared by Higher Education Institution (hereafter – HEI)*; 2) *visit of the review team at the higher education institution*; 3) *production of the evaluation report by the review team and its publication*; 4) *follow-up activities*.

On the basis of external evaluation report of the study programme SKVC takes a decision to accredit study programme either for 6 years or for 3 years. If the programme evaluation is negative such a programme is not accredited.

The programme is **accredited for 6 years** if all evaluation areas are evaluated as “very good” (4 points) or “good” (3 points).

The programme is **accredited for 3 years** if none of the areas was evaluated as “unsatisfactory” (1 point) and at least one evaluation area was evaluated as “satisfactory” (2 points).

The programme is **not accredited** if at least one of evaluation areas was evaluated as “unsatisfactory” (1 point).

1.2. General

The Application documentation submitted by the HEI follows the outline recommended by the SKVC. Along with the self-evaluation report and annexes, the following additional documents have been provided by the HEI before, during and/or after the site-visit:

No.	Name of the document
1.	Selection of research publications of the academic staff
2.	Development plan of Vilnius university 2015-2017
3.	Methodological requirements for written assignments and final theses of the Institute of International Relations and Political Science, VU

1.3. Background of the HEI/Faculty/Study field/ Additional information

Vilnius University (hereinafter also University or VU), founded in 1579, is the oldest and largest institution of higher education in Lithuania. Presently, the University has about 3670 employees and 21 000 students. The University implements study programmes of three study cycles in the areas of the humanities, social, physical, biomedical and technological sciences; students may enrol in more than 70 bachelor study programmes, 110 master and integrated study programmes and almost 30 doctoral study programmes.

The Institute of International Relations and Political Science (hereinafter also IIRPS or Institute) is a core academic unit of Vilnius University that implements 1 first cycle (*Political Science*), 6 second cycle (*International Relations and Diplomacy, European Studies, Contemporary Politics, Public Policy Analysis, and Eastern European and Russian Studies*) and 1 third cycle (*Political Science*) study programmes. The Institute has about 60 staff members and about 660 students.

The master programme *Eastern European and Russian Studies* (hereinafter also EERS/SP or Programme) replaced the *Central and Eastern European Studies*, which has been taught since 2006, went through registration procedure in 2014 and is accredited until July 1st, 2016. EERS/SP has 23 students taught by 10 academic staff members (2015). The language of the study programme is English.

1.4. The Review Team

The review team was completed according *Description of experts' recruitment*, approved by order No. 1-01-151 of Acting Director of the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education. The Review Visit to HEI was conducted by the team on 20th September, 2016.

1. **Prof. Anu Toots (team leader)**, *Professor of Social Policy, School of Governance, Law and Society, Tallinn University, Estonia;*
2. **Dr. Stefan Ganzle**, *Associate Professor, Department of Political Science and Management, University of Agder, Norway;*
3. **Prof. Geoffrey Swain**, *Honorary Professor, Emeritus, University of Glasgow, Professor of European History, University of the West of England (until 2006), United Kingdom;*
4. **Ms. Judita Akromienė**, *director of public organization "Eurohouse", Lithuania;*
5. **Ms. Julija Stanaitytė**, *student of Kaunas University of Technology study programme Human Resource Management, Lithuania.*

Evaluation coordinator – Ms. Dovilė Žeimienė

II. PROGRAMME ANALYSIS

2.1. Programme aims and learning outcomes

According to the SER, the Master programme *Eastern European and Russian Studies* has been developed “to prepare highly qualified experts equipped with an advanced inter-disciplinary understanding of the Eastern Europe (including Russia) and skills necessary for an independent analysis of its political, economic and cultural aspects”. The programme therefore “aims at building professional expertise and providing first-hand experience of particular characteristics of Eastern Europe and Russia” as well as “developing the analytical skills necessary for critical reflection, explanation and evaluation of processes taking place in the region, and provision of sound and professional recommendations on region related issues” (SER, p.7).

A conscious effort has been made to link the learning outcomes and competences of the programme with the *Description of Study Cycles* (approved by the Minister of Education and Science of the Republic of Lithuania, 2011 November 21, No. V-2212) which include comprehensive theoretical knowledge of the discipline and the region, and ability to apply this knowledge (study outcomes No. 4.1-7.2), advanced research skills and ability to synthesize and assess research data (study outcomes

No. 1.3, 2.1, 2.2, 7.2), special abilities such as to provide sound, professional recommendations to different audiences and ability to creatively solve specific practical issues (study outcome No.3.1, 3.2, 5.2,.6.1), social abilities (study outcome No. 1.2, 1,3), ability to work independently and take responsibility for one's actions (study outcomes No. 1.1.).

The learning outcomes were also developed in accordance with the *Descriptor of the Study Field of Political Science* approved by Order No V-828 of the Minister of Education and Science of the Republic of Lithuania (23rd of July 2015). The descriptor specifies that upon completion of the second cycle studies of the study field of Political Science, among other skills, students should have a specific knowledge of the ongoing scientific discussion in the selected Political science specialisation (study outcomes No. 1.3, 2.1, 7.1,7.2), to be able to implement research projects of political phenomena, using methodological approaches and means available in the chosen field of specialisation (study outcome No. 7.2); to communicate correctly in writing and orally both with the experts in the field and with the persons who are not professional experts in that field (study outcome No. 3.2).

The programme aims and learning outcomes are well defined, clear and publicly accessible. The generic and subject-specific competences and learning outcomes are set out clearly in the SER, Table 1 and broken down to course level in the Study Plan Matrix on pp. 14-15. Within the SER, then, every effort has been made to ensure that the programme's aims and learning outcomes are consciously developed throughout the programme. The SER (chapter 1.2) outlines how the study programmes and their learning outcomes are made available on the university and institute websites, as well as through recruitment initiatives. During the visit, no student raised the invisibility of the programme as an issue.

The programme aims and learning outcomes are based on the academic requirements, public needs and the needs of the labour market. As the SER makes clear, the programme has been developed to meet a perceived gap in academic provision, English language regional studies with a clear focus on political developments. The public need for this – especially in the current international climate – is self-evident, and the close relationship which has been established with social partners suggests that there is a clear labour market need. This was reinforced by meetings during the visit with extremely well qualified alumni, and social partners who had played an active role in this review process and had established close and regular contacts with such organisations as the Eastern European Study Centre.

The programme aims and learning outcomes are consistent with the type and level of studies and the level of qualifications offered. The programme offers a combination of courses which are all of Master level in terms of the reading and participation expected, and in the way that they provide training in terms of methodology and research techniques for the final master's thesis. It is clear from the CVs that tutors are teaching according to their research expertise. The list of dissertations written and the quality of the final dissertations themselves show clearly that students are expected to work at Master's quality and are doing so. This impression was reinforced by the visit. The students could appreciate the difference between masters and bachelors study, noting that their current courses were "detailed and deep". They were particularly aware of the need for critical thinking. Comments from alumni were similarly positive, noting how the course "helped me every day in my job".

The name of the programme, its learning outcomes, content and qualifications offered are compatible with each other. The recent amendments, which put stronger emphasis on political, social and economic processes that shaped contemporary situation in countries of Eastern Europe (SER, p.11) clearly strengthened the program. In overall, the programme offers what it promises, with no mismatch between the learning outcomes, content and qualifications.

2.2. Curriculum design

The curriculum design meets legal requirements in terms of volume of the programme, credits, allocated to the MA thesis and focus on the study field. This is a 90 ECTS programme taught in three semesters. 40 ECTS is assigned to the compulsory subjects and 20 ECTS to electives. The previous two track design has been transformed into single track, which can be seen as a positive development facilitating academic progress and securing sustainability of the programme. As result of the 2014 reform the list of electives of all MA programmes at the IIRPS is identical, which allows students choosing from a wider pool of subjects. MA students are thus granted greater flexibility in the sharpening their individual study profile or, alternatively in broadening their disciplinary perspective. Students met by the Review Team (RT) expressed their support to the new programme design. There are 27 electives in listed in total, out of which 8 are provided in English and 3 more are under consideration. The Review Team is to some extent concerned with the limited availability of electives for English speaking students and strongly recommends continuing working on expansion of suitable for EERS/SP options (as promised in SER, p.6). Credits, allocated to the preparation and writing the MA thesis are divided into MA seminars (10 credits) and thesis (25 credits). This is sufficient and in accordance with national requirements.

The share of individual work significantly exceeds the legal standard (no less than 30%). According to the SER (p.18, table 3) in EERS/SP the individual work composes for compulsory courses 81% at average. This kind of curriculum design presumes that: a) students are well familiarised with self-guided leaning and possess relevant skills from the very beginning of their studies; b) teaching staff is well skilled in guiding extensive amount of individual work. During the site visit the Review Team made sure that staff feels confident in delivering self-guided learning. Students did not demonstrate that level of confidence. They come from various countries and the share of graduates with non-political science background at this particular programme is higher than in other programmes at the Institute. This issue is mentioned also in the SER, which demonstrates some awareness about the potential problems. The RT suggests monitoring carefully how the students manage such high portion of individual work.

Integration of students with various backgrounds asks for more complex approach than mastery of individual work only. The SER (p.16) spells it as “one of the biggest concerns”. Based on the interviews it can be concluded that currently the problem is addressed via individual consultations which was highly appreciated by the students. However, more systematic and standardised approach to explaining the availability of bridging courses is recommended. Presently, nor the SP neither the study plan specify, whether and which bridging courses are available.

Study subjects are spread evenly, the first and the second semesters have 4 or 5 subjects respectively, and the third semester is devoted to the final thesis. The total workload is equally 30 credits per semester allowing studying full time. Yet, the balance of hours to ECTS varies two times in case of different subject and it is difficult to understand the argument behind such choice. The proportion of compulsory and elective subjects varies across the semesters: the first semester includes compulsory courses, the second – compulsory and elective courses evenly. Such kind of arrangement seems reasonable. The content of compulsory subjects is logical, not repetitive.

The content of the subjects is adequate to the second cycle programmes; there are no introductory or broad scope basic courses. The title of the study programme adequately describes the content of the study field. A course on methodology prepares students to undertake their own research project (MA thesis) that will be elaborated through MA seminars (10 credits in total, during two semesters). In result of the 2016 curriculum reform some electives have been

upgraded to the status of compulsory subjects and almost all others were kept in the list of electives. Overall, the RT is positive about recent changes in the SP.

Compulsory courses are perfectly fit to the study area and provide substantial amount of knowledge. However, the theoretical and analytical level is not especially challenging. The students met by the Review Team explained that compared to the previous undergraduate studies the current ones are “more detailed and deep”, but there is “no difference in difficulty level”. According to them the first semester tends to be “more like adjusting levels of those with previous knowledge in the field and those without”. Although such an approach could be justified to some extent due to mixed background of admitted students, the RT strongly suggests to implement more individual, tailor made approach in order to maintain and support the study motivation of all and every student.

The content and learning methods are appropriate to achieve generic and area-specific learning outcomes. Besides lectures, oriented mainly towards theoretical knowledge, strong emphasis is put on seminars and individual work. The emphasis on active learning and seminar classes found strong and emotional support among students (“lectures are useless, you don’t learn anything”). As evidenced by the SER, course descriptions and interviews, the dominant learning tool is critical reading. Students estimate the reading workload (25-50 pp per seminar class) as challenging, but interesting and enriching. Group work, presentations and writing tasks are also often practiced as became clear in interviews with students and employers. Intensive enhancement of critical thinking was mentioned by students as one of the main positive things of the SP.

Besides classroom teaching field trips to various transition countries in Eastern Europe are provided to the students. It may be a good substitute to the formal internship, which is not established yet. However, the RT did not find clear evidence, to what extent and how the field trip experiences are integrated into theoretical courses and research work. Thus, field trips seem to serve so far rather as marketing tool and their potential in advancing knowledge and skills remains not fully used.

The scope of the programme is sufficient to ensure learning outcomes. The programme provides opportunities to gain good knowledge on political, economic and cultural development in Eastern Europe and Russia. Moreover, generic skills are developed within various subject specific subjects. Yet, as the SER (p.7) describes the programme aim via interdisciplinary focus (“experts equipped with an advanced inter-disciplinary understanding of the Eastern Europe (including Russia”), further efforts may be needed to ensure interdisciplinary approach and understandings. The students met by the RT were not aware of concept and advantages of interdisciplinarity. Mixed previous educational background of students at EERS/SP generates a promising premise to advance interdisciplinary knowledge and skills, which have not gained proper attention so far.

Course descriptions of compulsory subjects include large number of literature (mainly books and working papers). Certainly there is an advantage in critical reading of publications of 1990-s and 2000s. However, given the high political and economic dynamics of the region under study, it is of paramount importance to include also more recent research, including the latest academic articles in top ranked international journals. For example, the description of the compulsory course *State and Society in Eastern Europe and Russia: from Autocracy to Democracy*, contains only one book published later than 2010, the course *Economic Transformation: from Command Economy to the New System*”, has only one article from 2012, whereas all others are older.

2.3. Teaching staff

The staff meets national legal requirements in terms of percent of lecturers with a doctoral degree (80%), and exceeds the requirements in congruence of teaching and research profiles (90% against 60%), ECTS taught by professors (30,5% against 20%), share of experts with practical work experience (10% against 40% as upper limit allowed).

The qualifications of the teaching staff are adequate to ensure learning outcomes. Teaching staff is delivering lectures and seminars in the area that corresponds to their qualification and research area. The SER (p.6) lists among the main research areas of the Institute “democracy in post communist world and political transformations in Eastern Europe” that builds solid premise to link research and teaching activities of the staff members. Staff members are involved in research what ensures their competence in supervising students’ research work.

The number of the teaching staff is large enough to ensure learning outcomes. EERS/SP is implemented by 10 academic staff, including 2 full professors, 3 associate professors, 3 lecturers with PhD degree and 2 assistants. This allows individual approach to students and efficient supervision of seminars, course works and final theses.

The proportion of students to teaching staff is very low - around 3 students per lecturer annually in that SP, but somewhat higher if other IIRPS MA programmes are taken into account. In 2015 there were fewer students than staff members (9 to10). Such a ratio has certainly several advantages, but bears also the risk of staff cuts due to low number of students. Thus, some strategic plan is needed in order to increase the number of students and possible to widen the international study options. The period of self-evaluation has been very short (2015-16) and in this period study programme didn’t experience any academic staff turnover. The age distribution of staff is quite equitable across age groups.

The VU and IIRPS create adequate conditions for the professional development of the teaching staff. Standard requirements for academic positions are firmly kept, but personal preferences and carrier plans are also taken into account. Every staff member can annually negotiate his/her work plan and chose to orient himself/herself whether more towards research or towards teaching. Such a personal approach has been highly appreciated by the academic staff. Since 2004 IIRPS applies the System of Motivation Promotion, which is intended to encourage teachers to increase their qualification. Each high rank scientific publication results in financial premium for the employee. Staff members, met by the panel were well aware of the system and found it being transparent, fair and efficient.

To enhance teaching skills of the academic staff, the IIRPS organises methodical and didactical seminars (Moodle, problem based learning, agent based learning, flipped classroom). As SER (p.23) describes, previously the professional development depended to a significant extent on individual initiative, but since 2016 IIRPS organises regular training seminars (two to four times during the semester) for the employees. This is clearly a positive development. For this particular SP some special training (e.g. diversity management) may be needed. As SER (p. 26) states, „some lecturers expressed a lack of experience about the particularities of work with multicultural groups“.

The professional development is enhanced also via conference participation and academic mobility. There is no tradition of a regular sabbatical at the Institute, but both administration and staff members appreciated the current tailor made approach which allows to go abroad whenever it is sensible for a staff member. No complains on limitations or restrictions of academic mobility or conference participation have been heard during the site visit. However, the intensity and extensity indicators are quite low. Very few lecturers have been in academic exchange (5

persons during 3 years) and only 1 staff member has participated at the conference with the paper during 2013-15 (SER, p.24, table 11).

The teaching staff of the programme is to some extent involved in research directly related to the study programme under review. According to SER, table 10, during 2013-2015 the academic staff of study programme published 18 articles and book chapters, and 9 books. This makes about one publication per person annually, which is quite modest. Moreover, as the SER (p.23, table 9) demonstrates, the trend is downward (in 2015 there was 7 publications compared to 13 and 9 in 2014 and 2013 respectively).

The quality of research articles (such as the share of publications in indexed journals, share of international peer-reviewed articles, level of citations in Google Scholar, etc.) cannot be comprehensively evaluated on the bases of available information. Overview of staff members CVs revealed that there are no publications in the high ranked international journals of the field, except one in *International Review of Administrative Sciences* by R. Vilpišauskas. Majority of staff members (besides Vilpišauskas and Andrijauskas) have small number of publications in national edited volumes or journals. The Review Team is seriously concerned about the current level of research and urges the IIRPS and VU to ensure that all necessary support structures, incentive mechanisms and proper work and carrier arrangements are in place in order to boost publication activities.

The situation with research projects is no better. 2 national and 1 international R&D project have been implemented by the EERS/SP academic staff in 2013-15. All of them have been rather short term (1-2 years). Thus, more efforts need to be put in developing fundraising and project writing capacities. The current situation may well be the by-product of low level of conference and exchange activities.

2.4. Facilities and Learning Resources

All of the lectures and workshops of the program are arranged in the premises of the Institute. The building and study facilities have been recently renovated and have basic equipment, i.e. the computer and multimedia projector. There is a sufficient number of different types (auditoriums and classrooms) and size of rooms available for the programme students. Since the student groups are small (8 to 14), all of the rooms seem to be suitable for learning. As pointed out in SER, until now the issue of a fewer number of classrooms suitable for seminars and group discussions seems to be resolved by the administration by approaching the needs of individual lecturers. However, as stated by the Institute administration, the general availability of classes might be more problematic in the coming years with the need to prolong classes for BA students due to an increase in their admission.

The teaching and learning equipment meets basic requirements, but improvements are needed. There are two computer halls containing 50 computers located in the Institute's premises and permanently available to students. Wireless internet is not available in the premises of the Institute (Eduroam is accessible only in the library) which is a clear drawback, as pointed out also in the self-evaluation report. However, no tangible improvement measures are foreseen to install it. The Review Team urges the University to address this issue at an earliest convenience.

The location and the capacity of the library, including the reading room appear to meet the needs of the students. However, the working hours of the library (from 9 to 18 hrs on workdays and closed on weekends) are not friendly to students' schedules. Nevertheless, there are several other resources of teaching and learning materials made available to the students, in particular, the Library of the Lithuanian Open Society Fund (which boasts the riches social sciences library in

the region and contains 40 000 publications in English, Lithuanian, French, German and Russian languages), Vilnius University Library (which subscribes to major international digital academic databases such as JSTOR, Sage, Willey Online Library), National Open Access Centre of Academic Communication and Information (Vilnius University). However, the latter, being open 24 hours a day, is located in the outskirts of the city and the public transport communication is unavailable in late/early hours. There is a yearly budget foreseen to update the materials to satisfy the needs of course conveners. The teachers confirmed that the yearly budget allocated (appr. 360 to 440 EUR) to update the materials satisfies their needs (materials are updated twice a year). Additionally, materials are acquired from ongoing research projects. Usually, the reading materials are provided to students electronically by lecturers via email, Moodle, or student by representatives. Although the academic personnel is encouraged to use Moodle (last spring a training was organised for them), it is not widely used yet, instead Dropbox and Facebook are more common.

The programme does not include a professional internship into the formal study plan of the two main reasons: the majority of students being already employed during their studies, and the duration of the programme is three semesters. Probably for these particular reasons, none of the programme students has applied for Erasmus+ traineeship/short term work placements until now. The students in demand of professional experience are offered a possibility to take part in ongoing research projects. Additionally, on individual basis the administrative staff helps students to save placement with Vilnius based think tanks or international organisations.

Bearing in mind, that one of the competences to be developed by the programme is the ability to apply theoretical knowledge in practice and to cope with complex problems, the Review Team advises to develop a regular network of relevant organisations, especially international ones, and more actively promote Erasmus+ internship possibilities. The need of broadening the international partnerships was also emphasized by a social partner in view of growing international competition of the graduates.

2.5. Study process and student performance assessment

Admission requirements for the candidates are clear and well-founded on the main IIRPS webpage and on the Rules of Admission to the Second – cycle Study Programmes of Vilnius University. Since the programme is conducted in English and accepts foreigners, it is positive that admission requirements are well defined and specified in Lithuanian and English languages. On the other hand, the data provided in SER (p.31) reveals the need to further improve international marketing of the Programme in order to attract more foreign students. As became evident from SER and interview panels, the numbers of international and domestic students are decreasing what urges to develop a strategy for attracting more international students. Furthermore, the format of entrance exam should be reconsidered in order to measure adequately motivation and capabilities of applicants with highly diverse backgrounds.

The organisation of study process ensures an adequate provision of the programme and the achievement of the learning outcomes. Overall, the organisation of the study process is clear and effective. The information about the study process and university life is first presented at the introductory lecture and after that by the SP administrator. The programme has its own administrator of studies, who, as affirmed by the students, helps to solve their problems related to the study process, individual plans, timetables, etc. All the relevant information, such as timetables, study plans, staff contacts are easy to find on the IIRPS webpage which is updated regularly. On the other hand, more effective integration of foreign students should be taken for consideration as interviews revealed lack of feeling of belonging amongst non-native students.

During seminars foreign and domestic students usually work in separate groups what does not facilitate integration.

At the beginning of semester lecturers introduce students the aims of the course, learning outcomes, study methods, assessment criteria and recommended literature for individual study. Students and alumni mentioned that even though the workload is challenging and they have a lot of individual preparation for seminars (about 4 h per seminar), it is manageable. Even though students get all the information from lecturers and programme administration, using Moodle platform as a single entry point to all study materials will be a positive improvement. Generally, the Review Team was convinced that students are positive about the manner the SP is managed and feel that their opinion and feedback is always heard.

Two issues appeared as concern for the Review Team. First, EERS/SP has quite substantial portion of electives (4 courses out of 9). Therefore it is extremely important how consciously students plan and execute their choices. The interviews with the student panel revealed that recently admitted students do not know what their options are. Second, EERS/SP is a three semester programme, which means that thesis writing falls into somewhat “untraditional” period for administrative and academic staff. Students voiced the feeling that during 3rd semester they “are left pretty alone” and do not get supervision to the extent they expect to. The RT strongly suggest to pay closer attention to the strategic and well-adjusted counselling of students in order to secure that key learning outcomes are possible to achieve.

Student engagement into research has not gained substantial results so far. SER (p.34) highlights that IIRPS aim is to encourage student participation in research activities, but there was only two examples of students’ involvement in research activities. The students met by the Review Team have been not introduced with the possibilities to do research, although the second year students were familiar with the research works of their professors. It can be concluded that that majority of programme students are focusing just on their master thesis and involvement into research needs better coordination and motivation from both teachers’ and students’ side.

Students have multiple opportunities to use mobility programmes for one semester or one academic year for studies or internship abroad. VU has Erasmus co-operation with large number of universities in different countries. Unfortunately, the SER and students responses demonstrate that these opportunities are not taken up. Students of EERS did not use Erasmus exchange scheme in the last 3 years. The reasons of non-participation are related to the shorter duration (1,5 year) of the programme and work and family obligations of the students. Based on these evidences the Review Team advises to enhance internationalisation of studies by bringing more international teaching staff and exchange students in.

Students have adequate academic and social support from the university staff. Teaching staff is available for consultations, their schedules are clear and could be easily found at the website. Besides that, students can get all relevant information from the study programme administrator. Administration support is well-organised and implemented through intense and regular communication. Students confirmed that they are familiar with all the information about academic support, by contacting with teachers during their consultation time. Furthermore, students have mentors (a senior student), who help first- year students with all questions and problems, and a group representative who meets the administration once per semester. Besides social support students are also eligible for university and state scholarships.

The assessment system of students’ performance is clear, adequate and publicly available. Assessment criteria are presented by lecturers during the first class and also states in the course descriptions, which are publicly available on IIRS webpage. Assessment criteria are oriented towards subject specific and general learning outcomes, which support achievement of SP

learning outcomes. Interviewed students told that lecturers involve them in discussing the assessment process and sharing their thoughts about assessment components. Different assessment methods are being used in seminars such as active participation, essays, group or individual projects; the final form of assessment is usually exam. Around 50 % of the grade is composed of seminars participation, which students defined as positive thing, because in seminars students can get better understanding about the topics and material they have read. In conclusion, the assessment system and principles are adequate, clear and positively evaluated by the students.

Professional activities of the majority of graduates meet the programme providers' expectations. As alumni and social partners stated, majority of students are working in public sector, NGO's and some in private sector. The alumni feedback survey supports this statement. Vilnius University coordinates the National Career Management System, which is an important tool to monitor the graduates' career. Unfortunately, the information and data are not collected effectively from foreign graduates and there is no formal evidence about their career paths.

2.6. Programme management

The responsibilities for decisions and monitoring of the implementation of the Eastern European and Russian Studies (EERS) programme are clearly allocated. The bodies governing the study programme management are in place and operate in line with the VU mission statement and other university documents dealing with issues of quality insurance, such as the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area* and the *Vilnius University Quality Manual*. These documents are publicly available at <http://www.kvc.cr.vu.lt/site/?q=node/90>.

According to the SER, the Vilnius University (VU) is active in the professional development of its academic staff. Despite the efforts in ensuring the professional development of its academic staff, however, discussions with faculty have revealed that faculty development courses are only offered on an *ad-hoc* basis and lack an overall strategic and long-term perspective.

The Study Programme Committee (SPC) and the Faculty Council are responsible for the management of the study programme. The SPC is the key body at the institute-level and is accountable to the FC. The SPC brings together representatives from academic staff, students and social partners. The university highly values input from stakeholders – practitioners from the public sector – for the development of the programmes.

The SPC is also central in providing the self-evaluation of programme. According to SPC members the meetings are held regularly complemented by “ad-hoc arrangements” and rely on communication inside the members of the SPC. In its work, the SPC can rely on a highly efficient study department and strong involvement of social partners. The EERS social partner, Terry Clark (University of Creighton), has been identified by the self-evaluation report as a core contributor of ideas which ultimately resulted in refocusing the programme from Central and Eastern Europe to Eastern Europe and, in particularly, Russia.

The information and data on the implementation of the programme are regularly collected and analysed both centrally by the Administration of Studies as well as by individual study programmes. The administration relies on the VU information system of studies, which also collects information about the implementation of the study programme. Two feedback systems are in place: one managed by the VU, and another, by the IIRPS.

The outcomes of internal and external evaluation of the programme are used for the improvement of the programme. Stakeholders, such as social partners, students and alumni,

reported satisfaction with the 2016/17 curriculum reforms allowing students to opt from an institute-wide pool of electives. Students have perceived this change as a consequence of their input and feedback.

The evaluation and improvement processes involve various stakeholders, including, in particular, social partners. At VU, social partners are members of the board of trustees and are involved in the Study Programme Committee and the Commission of Final Thesis Defence. Social partners have not only been instrumental in providing high-quality traineeships to the students, they often serve as employers of currently involved MA students and future graduates.

Overall, the internal quality assurance measures are effective and efficient. The SPC and the Administration work continuously on improving the measurement instrument and on encouraging students' participation in surveys. The study programme has already started to address the low response rate among students by distributing and collecting questionnaires during a class toward the end of a semester. By this change it is emphasised that regular feedback is an integral element of quality management in the study programme.

III. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The Review Team advises to update and streamline the content of core subjects in line of recent developments in the Eastern Europe and Russia. This recommendation is especially strong regarding the selection of the literature for study courses.
2. The Review Team strongly urges paying close attention to the low level of staff's publications and conference participation. The IIRPS and VU must ensure that all necessary support structures, incentive mechanisms and proper work and carrier arrangements are in place in order to boost research activities.
3. The Institute is recommended to ensure strategic and long-term outlook of academic staff development, e.g. provide training on academic writing in English and grant writing; promote and recognise effective participation of faculty in professional development courses.
4. The Review Team suggests bearing in mind the specificity of EERS/SP (shorter duration, highly mixed studentship) when planning and implementing staff professional training and students' counselling. It is recommended to have staff training on diversity management and more students' guidance in selecting options and writing the final thesis.
5. The Review Team advises to ensure that regular meetings of the SPC guided by the strategic and long term goals become the backbone of study programme management.
6. The Institute is recommended to streamline the student evaluation system and work towards making the evaluation process a truly interactive and ongoing communication between the lecturers and students as part of the programme's quality assurance.
7. The Review Team suggests the IIRPS and SPC to move out of the current comfort zone and to expand network of social partners beyond the circle of those who currently employ VU students and graduates.

IV. SUMMARY

The Institute of International Relations and Political Science (IIRPS) is responsible for six MA-level study programmes covering areas of Contemporary Politics, Eastern European and Russian Studies, International Relations and Diplomacy, Public Policy Analysis, European Studies and Politics and Media. The *Eastern European and Russian Studies* (EERS/SP) has been one out of five currently under review.

EERS/SP has been implemented for three years although it takes its roots from a predecessor programme *Central and Eastern European Studies*, taught in 2006-12. This heritage has clearly contributed to the several strengths, such as well focused curriculum, qualified staff, good literature resources, well established study guidelines and standards. Whilst preserving traditions, the study programme is kept up to date in terms of content and design. Having closer focus on Eastern Europe and Russia is a clear advantage at highly competitive international university landscape. Moreover, important changes of the study programme implemented in 2016, including, in particular, the dissolution of modular structure have further strengthened the SP. One of the central objectives of the reform is to allow students choosing from a wider pool of electives. MA students are thus granted greater flexibility in the sharpening their individual study profile or, alternatively to broaden their disciplinary perspective. So far, the reform enjoys strong

support by all parties involved – students, teachers, alumni and employers. However, clearly, the effects of these reforms need to be closely monitored and evaluated over the next few years.

The key objective of the *Eastern European and Russian Studies* programme is “to prepare highly qualified experts equipped with an advanced inter-disciplinary understanding of the Eastern Europe (including Russia) and skills necessary for an independent analysis of its political, economic and cultural aspects”. The core and option structure is formed so as to secure good balance between theory and practice and develop the competences relevant to the understanding the contemporary Eastern Europe and Russia.

The review panel is positive about the ‘learning outcomes’ approach underlying the programme. Programme aims and learning outcomes are based on the academic and professional requirements, public needs and the needs of the labour market. The programme has been developed to meet a perceived gap in academic provision of English language regional studies with a clear focus on political developments. The public need for this – especially in the current international climate – is self-evident. The programme offers what it promises, with no mismatch between the learning outcomes, content and qualifications.

The content of the study subjects is consistent with the type and level of the studies and are appropriate for the achievement of the learning outcomes. Keeping in mind the high political and social dynamics of the region, it is advised putting special emphasis on regular updates of the titles of the lecture courses and literature resources in use.

The qualifications of the teaching staff are adequate to ensure learning outcomes. The staff composition encompasses both theoretical and practical expertise and covers all major topics of the programme.

A real concern for the Review Team is low research performance of academic staff both in terms of quantity and quality. The number of research publications is modest and top ranked international articles are absent. The publishing activity is unequally distributed across staff members. Based on these observations, the review panel advises the management to continue developing further relevant incentives, set up with the System of Motivation Promotion in early 2016. Besides these incentive structures, it is recommended to pay more attention to the comprehensive and long-term outlook of academic staff development, which includes regular in service training, guidance in project writing, planning of academic exchange. For this particular programme, it is also important to pay more attention to prepare academic and administrative staff for work in culturally and academically diverse classrooms. In sum, current ad hoc arrangement, driven by individual initiatives needs to be replaced by a coordinated system driven by organisational developmental goals.

Low research activity of staff has negative effect also on promoting students’ interest in being involved into research. Currently students are not involved and do not feel to be guided in selecting electives and MA theses topics.

Classrooms, computer facilities, software and media equipment of IIRPS are sufficient both in their size and quality. The library is not large, but handy. Moreover - electronic scientific databases are widely accessible and regularly used in the study process. Absence of the Wi-Fi in the Institute’s building poses some limitations to the internet based learning. The review panel believes that new social media (such as Facebook) and data sharing tools (such as Dropbox) cannot entirely compensate limited access to the Internet. The Review Panel advises the IIRPS to further promote use of web-based learning platforms (such as Moodle).

Infrastructure for group work is somewhat limited. It is necessary to extend the number of small classrooms, computer labs and team-work spaces.

The Review Team advises the management to invest in facilities and digital learning resources, in particular infrastructure for group work and one-stop-shop learning platforms.

The admission requirements are well-specified. The university has implemented quality assurance procedures, including student feedback through regularly held surveys. The general assessment system of students' performance is clear, adequate and publicly available. Regarding the assessment of seminar sessions there are discrepancies across the subjects in terms of balance between the assignments and rewards. The assessment of seminars was felt by students as not always fair across subject. Based on these observations the Review Team advises to professionalise the assessment procedures including some formal rules about allocating hours and rewards for typical work tasks.

The study programme committee is the key actor in ensuring development and quality of the programme. Currently its activities and meetings are rather *ad hoc* that allows flexibility and agility in addressing the issues. However, the Review Panel believes, that some regularity and strategic planning of the SPC activities will facilitate the development of the EERS/SP.

The willingness of the social partners to contribute to the programme is impressive. They are involved in programme development, final theses defence, and to a lesser extent in teaching and mentoring. In order to successfully meet future challenges (such as the increasing competition in higher education and at the labour market) the review panel recommends the IIRPS stepping out of the "conformity zone" where the EERS/SP is currently positioned, and to find novel collaboration partners both at domestic, regional and international arena.

V. GENERAL ASSESSMENT

The study programme *Eastern European and Russian Studies* (state code – 621L20013) at Vilnius University is given **positive** evaluation.

Study programme assessment in points by evaluation areas.

No.	Evaluation Area	Evaluation of an area in points*
1.	Programme aims and learning outcomes	4
2.	Curriculum design	3
3.	Teaching staff	3
4.	Facilities and learning resources	3
5.	Study process and students' performance assessment	3
6.	Programme management	3
	Total:	19

*1 (unsatisfactory) - there are essential shortcomings that must be eliminated;

2 (satisfactory) - meets the established minimum requirements, needs improvement;

3 (good) - the field develops systematically, has distinctive features;

4 (very good) - the field is exceptionally good.

Grupės vadovas: Team leader:	Prof. Anu Toots
Grupės nariai: Team members:	Dr. Stefan Ganzle
	Prof. Geoffrey Swain
	Ms. Judita Akromienė
	Ms. Julija Stanaitytė

**VILNIAUS UNIVERSITETO ANTROSIOS PAKOPOS STUDIJŲ PROGRAMOS RYTŲ
EUROPOS IR RUSIJOS STUDIJOS (VALSTYBINIS KODAS – 621L20013) 2016-11-10
EKSPERTINIO VERTINIMO IŠVADŲ NR. SV4-223 IŠRAŠAS**

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V. APIBENDRINAMASIS ĮVERTINIMAS

Vilniaus universiteto studijų programa *Rytų Europos ir Rusijos studijos* (valstybinis kodas – 621L20013) vertinama **teigiamai**.

Eil. Nr.	Vertinimo sritis	Srities įvertinimas, balais*
1.	Programos tikslai ir numatomi studijų rezultatai	4
2.	Programos sandara	3
3.	Personalas	3
4.	Materialieji ištekliai	3
5.	Studijų eiga ir jos vertinimas	3
6.	Programos vadyba	3
	Iš viso:	19

* 1 – Nepatenkinamai (yra esminių trūkumų, kuriuos būtina pašalinti)

2 – Patenkinamai (tenkina minimalius reikalavimus, reikia tobulinti)

3 – Gerai (sistemiškai plėtojama sritis, turi savitų bruožų)

4 – Labai gerai (sritis yra išskirtinė)

<...>

IV. SANTRAUKA

Tarptautinių santykių ir politikos mokslų institutas yra atsakingas už šešias magistrantūros studijų programas, apimančias šias sritis: *šiuolaikinės politikos studijos, rytų Europos ir Rusijos studijos, tarptautiniai santykiai ir diplomatija, viešosios politikos analizė, Europos studijos ir politika ir medijos*. Studijų programa *Rytų ir Europos ir Rusijos studijos* yra viena iš penkių programų, kurios buvo vertinamos.

Ši studijų programa vykdoma trejus metus, nors yra kilusi iš ankstesnės studijų programos *Vidurio ir Rytų ir Europos studijos*, dėstytos 2006–2012 m. Šis paveldas akivaizdžiai prisidėjo prie kelių programos stiprybių: tikslingas studijų turinys, kvalifikuoti dėstytojai, geri literatūros šaltiniai, tvirtos studijų gairės ir standartai. Programos turinys ir sandara nuolat atnaujinami kartu išsaugant vertingas tradicijas. Dėmesys Rytų Europai ir Rusijai yra akivaizdus pranašumas labai konkurencingoje tarptautinių universitetų aplinkoje. Be to, šią studijų programą dar labiau sustiprino 2016 m. atlikti svarbūs jos pakeitimai, įskaitant visų pirma tai, kad atsisakyta modulinės struktūros. Vienas iš pagrindinių šios pertvarkos tikslų – leisti studentams rinktis iš didesnio pasirenkamųjų dalykų bloko. Taigi magistrantūros studentams suteikiama daugiau lankstumo stiprinant individualų studijų profilį arba, kitaip tariant, išplečiant disciplinų prizmę. Šią reformą iki šiol tvirtai palaiko visos dalyvaujančios šalys – studentai, dėstytojai, absolventai ir darbdaviai. Tačiau akivaizdu, kad dar kelis metus reikia atidžiai stebėti ir vertinti jos poveikį.

Pagrindinis studijų programos *Rytų Europos ir Rusijos studijos tikslas* yra „parengti aukštos kvalifikacijos, pažangiai mąstančius specialistus, turinčius tarpdalykinių žinių apie Rytų Europą (įskaitant Rusiją) ir gebėjimus, būtinus savarankiškai jos politinei, ekonominei ir kultūrinei analizei atlikti“. Programa (pagrindiniai ir pasirenkamieji dalykai) sudaroma taip, kad būtų užtikrinta tinkama teorijos ir praktikos pusiausvyra ir ugdomi gebėjimai, kurie yra svarbūs norint suprasti šiuolaikinę Rytų Europą ir Rusiją.

Ekspertų grupė teigiamai vertina požiūrį į studijų rezultatus, kuriuo grindžiama ši programa. Programos tikslai ir numatomi studijų rezultatai pagrįsti akademiniais ir profesiniais reikalavimais, visuomenės ir darbo rinkos poreikiais. Programa sukurta siekiant užpildyti suvoktą spragą užtikrinant regionines studijas anglų kalba, aiškiai orientuotas į politikos pokyčius. Visuomenės poreikis šiuo atžvilgiu, ypač dabartinėmis tarptautinėmis aplinkybėmis, yra akivaizdus. Ši programa suteikia tai, ką žada, ir neatitikimų tarp numatomų studijų rezultatų, turinio ir kvalifikacijų nėra.

Studijų dalykų turinys atitinka studijų rūšį ir pakopą, jis padeda pasiekti numatomus studijų rezultatus. Atsižvelgiant į didelę politinę ir socialinę regiono dinamiką, rekomenduojama ypač daug dėmesio skirti nuolatiniam paskaitų *kursų* pavadinimų ir naudojamų literatūros šaltinių atnaujinimui.

Dėstytojų kvalifikacija yra tinkama numatomiems studijų rezultatams pasiekti. Dėstytojų sudėtis yra tokia, kuri užtikrina teorines žinias, praktinę patirtį ir visas svarbiausias šios programos temas.

Realų rūpestį ekspertų grupei kelia dėstytojų atliekamų mokslinių tyrimų kiekis ir kokybė. Mokslinių tyrimų publikacijų nedaug, straipsnių aukščiausio lygio tarptautiniuose žurnaluose nėra paskelbta. Įvairių dėstytojų leidybinė veikla labai nevienodo lygio. Remdamasi šiais pastebėjimais, ekspertų grupė rekomenduoja vadovybei toliau kurti paskatos priemones, kuriomis siekiama padidinti aukšto lygio tarptautinių publikacijų skaičių. Be šių priemonių, rekomenduojama daugiau dėmesio skirti visapusiško ir ilgalaikio dėstytojų tobulinimo, apimančio nuolatinį mokymą neatsitraukiant nuo darbo, konsultavimą dėl projektų rašymo, akademinį mainų planavimą, perspektyvai. Kalbant apie šią konkrečią programą, dar svarbu daugiau dėmesio skirti akademinio ir administracinio personalo rengimui darbui su skirtingų kultūrų ir išsilavinimo studentais. Apibendrinant reikia pasakyti, kad dabartinę sistemą, kai dėstytojų profesinis tobulėjimas grindžiamas individualiais poreikiais, reikia pakeisti koordinuota sistema, kuri būtų orientuota į organizacijos plėtros tikslus.

Nedidelis darbuotojų aktyvumas mokslo tiriamojoje veikloje neskatina ir studentų noro dalyvauti moksliniuose tyrimuose. Šiuo metu studentai juose nedalyvauja, be to, jie nesijaučia konsultuojami dėl pasirenkamųjų dalykų bei magistrantūros baigiamųjų darbų temų pasirinkimo.

TSPMI auditorijos, kompiuterinė technika, programinė įranga ir medijų įranga yra tinkama ir pakankama. Biblioteka nėra didelė, bet patogi. Be to, plačiai prieinamos elektroninės mokslinės bazės, kuriomis nuolat naudojamosi studijų procese. Tai, kad Instituto pastate nėra belaidžio interneto (*Wi-Fi*), gali kažkiek trukdyti mokymuisi naudojantis internetu. Ekspertų grupė mano, kad naujos socialinių medijų priemonės (pavyzdžiui, *Facebook*) ir dalijimosi duomenimis priemonės (pavyzdžiui, *Dropbox*) negali visiškai kompensuoti ribotos prieigos prie interneto ir nepakankamo naudojimosi internetinėmis mokymosi programomis (pvz., *Moodle*).

Grupiniam darbui skirtos infrastruktūros mažoka. Būtina didinti mažų klasių, kompiuterių laboratorijų skaičių ir grupiniam darbui skirtą plotą.

Ekspertų grupė rekomenduoja vadovybei investuoti į priemones (įrangą) ir skaitmeninius mokymosi išteklius, ypač į grupiniam darbui skirtą infrastruktūrą bei vieno langelio principu veikiančias mokymosi platformas.

Priėmimo reikalavimai yra aiškūs. Universitetas įdiegė kokybės užtikrinimo procedūras, įskaitant studentų grįžtamąjį ryšį nuolat organizuojant apklausas. Bendroji studijų rezultatų vertinimo sistema yra aiški, tinkama ir viešai skelbiama. Kalbant apie seminarų vertinimą, pastebima, kad tarp atskirų dalykų nėra bendros sistemos skiriant užduotis ir jas vertinant. Studentai mano, kad ne visų dalykų seminarų įvertinamai yra teisingi ir suprantami. Remdamasi šiais pastebėjimais, ekspertų grupė rekomenduoja profesionaliai parengti vertinimo procedūras, nustatant kai kurias formalias taisykles dėl užduočių valandų paskirstymo ir užduočių vertinimo.

Studijų programos komitetas yra pagrindinis veikėjas, užtikrinantis programos tobulinimą ir kokybę. Šiuo metu jo veikla ir posėdžiai yra daugiau *ad hoc*, o tai leidžia lanksčiai ir greitai spręsti klausimus. Tačiau ekspertų grupė mano, kad tam tikras šio komiteto veiklos reguliarumas ir jos strateginis planavimas palengvintų studijų programos *Rytų Europos ir Rusijos studijos* tobulinimo procesą.

Socialinių partnerių noras prisidėti prie šios programos daro įspūdį. Socialiniai partneriai dalyvauja tobulinant programą, ginant baigiamuosius darbus, mažiau mokymo bei mentorystės srityje. Kad Institutas galėtų sėkmingai priimti būsimus iššūkius (pvz., didėjančią konkurenciją aukštojo mokslo srityje ir darbo rinkoje), ekspertų grupė rekomenduoja jam išeiti iš „komforto zonos“, kurioje dabar studijų programa *Rytų Europos ir Rusijos studijos* yra, ir rasti naujų bendradarbiavimo partnerių vietas, regiono ir tarptautinėje arenoje.

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III. REKOMENDACIJOS

1. Ekspertų grupė pataria atnaujinti ir supaprastinti pagrindinių dalykų turinį atsižvelgiant į naujausius pokyčius Rytų Europoje ir Rusijoje. Ši rekomendacija yra ypač sietina su studijų dalykų literatūros parinkimu.
2. Ekspertų grupė primygtinai ragina atkreipti dėmesį į mažą dėstytojų publikacijų skaičių ir negausų dalyvavimą konferencijose. Tarptautinių santykių ir politikos mokslų institutas (toliau – TSPMI arba Institutas) ir Vilniaus universitetas (toliau – VU) turi užtikrinti, kad, siekiant paskatinti mokslinių tyrimų veiklą, būtų įdiegtos visos būtinos pagalbos struktūros, paskatų mechanizmai ir sudaryti tinkami susitarimai dėl darbo ir karjeros.
3. Institutui rekomenduojama užtikrinti strateginę ir ilgalaikę dėstytojų tobulinimo perspektyvą, t. y. mokyti akademinio rašymo anglų kalba ir paraiškų stipendijoms gauti rašymo, skatinti dėstytojus dalyvauti profesinio tobulinimo kursuose ir pripažinti jų dalyvavimą.
4. Ekspertų grupė siūlo, kad planuojant ir įgyvendinant darbuotojų profesinį mokymą bei studentų konsultavimą būtų atsižvelgta į studijų programos *Rytų Europos ir Rusijos studijos* specifiką (mažesnę trukmę, labai įvairų studentų išsilavinimą). Rekomenduojama mokyti dėstytojus įvairovės valdymo ir daugiau konsultuoti studentus apie dalykų pasirinkimą ir baigiamųjų darbų rašymą.

5. Ekspertų grupė rekomenduoja užtikrinti, kad studijų programos vadybos pagrindu taptų reguliariai rengiami Studijų programos komiteto posėdžiai, numatantys strateginius ir ilgalaikius tikslus.
6. Institutui rekomenduojama supaprastinti studentų vertinimo sistemą ir stengtis, kad vertinimo procesas taptų tikrai interaktyviu ir nuolatiniu dėstytojų ir studentų bendravimu, kuris yra šios studijų programos kokybės užtikrinimo dalis.
7. Ekspertų grupė siūlo TSPMI ir Studijų programos komitetui išeiti iš dabartinės komforto zonos ir plėsti socialinių partnerių tinklą dabartinių VU studentų ir absolventų darbdavių gretas papildant naujais partneriais.

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Paslaugos teikėjas patvirtina, jog yra susipažinęs su Lietuvos Respublikos baudžiamojo kodekso 235 straipsnio, numatančio atsakomybę už melagingą ar žinomai neteisingai atliktą vertimą, reikalavimais.

Vertėjos rekvizitai (vardas, pavardė, parašas)