BOLOGNA POLICY FORUM
Austria 2010

The Bologna Process: actions taken and lessons learnt

Introduction

Pavel Zgaga

University of Ljubljana

C E
P S

CENTRE FOR
EDUCATIONAL POLICY STUDIES

1. Phases of the Bologna Process

Conception ($\rightarrow$ 1999):

► developing a vision of "a common European higher education space".

Policy development (2000-2005):

► drafting a framework for the EHEA: "a devil is in details".

Implementation

► 2006-2010: implementation of the agreed principles and guidelines at national levels.

2. The context of "the Bologna conception"

The context of "the Bologna conception":

□ *"Europeanisation" of higher education*, in particularly:

→ Erasmus programme (since 1987);

→ Maastricht Treaty (1992), article 126 & 127

□ *"Global competition", also in higher education*:

→ "European universities lagging behind" USA and some countries of the Pacific rim.

□ *A fall of the Berlin wall*; its material & symbolic effects:

→ "higher education in transition"; Tempus (1990);

→ "explosion" of the CEE higher education sector.

□ *Increasing co-operation and mobility* in higher education.

3. "An open area of higher learning" (1998)

"The European process has very recently moved some extremely important steps ahead. Relevant as they are, they should not make one forget that Europe is not only that of the Euro, of the banks and the economy: it must be a Europe of knowledge as well. We must strengthen and build upon the intellectual, cultural, social and technical dimensions of our continent. These have to a large extent been shaped by its universities".
[…]

"An open European area for higher learning carries a wealth of positive perspectives, of course respecting our diversities, but requires on the other hand continuous efforts to remove barriers and to develop a framework for teaching and learning, which would enhance mobility and an ever closer cooperation."

Sorbonne Declaration (25 May 1998)

4. Areas of European convergence/divergence

A background survey *Trends and issues in European higher education* (June 1999), by G. Haug and J. Kirstein.
Key findings:

→ *extreme diversity*, to such a degree that it may well be called confusion, or even chaos; the dense jungle of degrees, institutions and systems is *the single biggest obstacle to more mobility in higher education in Europe*;

→ no ready-to-use external model (e.g. in the USA) that would be replicable; *Europe needs to develop its own model* to suit its unique cultural and educational needs;

→ a convergent set of reforms recently introduced or in progress in several European countries: they signal *a move towards shorter studies*.

5. A birth of the Bologna Process

"We are witnessing a growing awareness in large parts of the political and academic world and in public opinion of the need to establish a more complete and far-reaching Europe, in particular building upon and strengthening its intellectual, cultural, social and scientific and technological dimensions." […] "We engage in co-ordinating our policies to reach in the short term, and in any case within the first decade of the first millennium, the following objectives":

(1) adoption of a system of easily readable and comparable degrees;
(2) adoption of a system essentially based on two main cycles;
(3) establishment of the system of credits;
(4) promotion of mobility […] to the effective exercise of free movement;
(5) promotion of European co-operation in quality assurance;
(6) promotion of the necessary European dimensions in higher education.

Bologna Declaration, 19 June 1999

6. Developing a framework for the EHEA

1999: an ***action plan*** was set up with *goals* (EHEA), *time frame* (2010) and *activities* (working groups; "Bologna follow-up seminars"; surveys and reports, etc.).

Four further objectives put on the action plan (2001-2003).

The role of "*Bologna partners*" (national ministries, EUA, EURASHE, ESIB/ESU, Council of Europe, EC, etc.).

Gradual development of "a framework for the EHEA":

□ *Framework for qualifications in the EHEA* (2005);

□ *Standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the EHEA* (2005);

□ *The European Higher Education Area in a Global Setting* (2007)

□ *Lisbon Recognition Convention* recognized as a legal instrument

7. Implementation

After 2005, the Process was redirected from a track of *conceptualising* to a track of *implementation*.

It is in particular difficult task if it involves *46 countries* – each of them responsible for its national HE system.

The strongest and the weakest point of the Bologna Process: it is a *voluntary* process.

A warning of the *Trends Report* of 2005: introduction of new cycles leaves "ample room for different and at times conflicting interpretations".

There is "Bologna" – but there are "bolognas" as well.

Today, there are concerns regarding implementation; yet, they are not really new.

8. The "concerns for the post-Bologna" of 1999

G. Haug and his five "main areas of concern for the post-Bologna developments" (already in December 1999):

□ *the risk of non-concerted reforms* ("if some countries were to introduce superficial, window-dressing reforms, e.g. taking a long curriculum and just cutting it in bits and pieces");

□ *the risk "to focus on very small differences rather than looking at the big common issues"* (e.g. tracking the minor differences in content and organisation between degree in chemistry in two countries) ;

□ *the risk that the challenge from abroad remains under-estimated* (e.g. transnational education, etc.);

□ *the risk if "not all countries in Europe be included in the process* of setting up the European space for higher education";

□ *"the most important risk* […] is *that HE institutions themselves under-estimate the level of change* […] and wake up a little bit too late".

9. Looking beyond 2010

The fact that there are *strengths* and *weaknesses* in the newly born EHEA should not be taken as a bad forecast for its early years. They should only be recognised and openly addressed.

My opinion is that the real success can't be measured in terms of "proper", "full" and "final implementation" but in *searching for a new momentum* for European higher education as well as in *re-conceptualisation of the Process*.

We are entering a new decade with a mixture of *old and new problems* on our table – but also *empowered by the new mode of European co-operation* in higher education to *address them efficiently*.