

Report  
For the Austrian Information Seminar on the Bologna Process  
January 26, 2006

Author: Gayane Harutyunyan/Armenia

Armenia has joined the Bologna Process in May 2005, in Bergen, recognizing the importance of establishment a European Higher Education area by 2010 in which staff and students can move easily and can have fair recognition of their qualifications. Co-operation and confidence between national educational system and between higher education institutions in Europe will facilitate the process of reformation and advancement of Armenian higher education system.

The legal framework required for the Bologna Process has been established by:

- Law on Higher Education and Postgraduate Education (2004)
- Strategy of Higher Education (approved by the Government, 2002)
- Main international légal documents, déclarations, etc.

Today's situation of the Armenian education sector can be described as transfer from the reforms into the implementation stage and the main challenge of the reforms is their inclusion in the developments and activities of HEI thus securing their continuation and constant improvements.

1. The progress was made in adoption of two main cycles undergraduate and graduate. Already three universities introduced the two-tired system and the American University of Armenia is providing only Master' degree. Besides, new professions are being opened such as: Art Studies, Theology, Social Work and humanitarian professions are expanded.

2. The autonomy of universities has been increased in the framework of reforms. The Government of Armenia approved the State Standards for higher professional education, which define:

- minimum required educational content of curriculum;
- maximum workload for the students;

- qualitative requirements for graduates.

For achieving of new quality in higher professional education is also envisaged:

- enhance participation of the employers and other social partners in formulation of state request for specialists in different professions, training of specialists on contract basis;
- optimize the list of professions, implement institutional and structural adjustment of professional education, optimize institutional network, establish university complexes;
- increase the reputation of HEI ;
- improve technical capacity of HEI;
- develop university science; provide state assistance to the leading scientific and innovative schools;
- create conditions for continuity between different levels of professional education.

3. Procedures for licensing and accreditation of private universities approved by the Government provide equal approach to all types of HEI, thus promoting competition between universities.

4. The system of credits is presently used only in the American University of Armenia. Transfer to the credit system is one of the pillars of the Bologna process and it will require certain changes in the Law on Higher Education and Postgraduate Education of Armenia. A Working Group is being created to develop National Diploma Supplement.

5. The situation with mobility of students is weak. There are legal, programmatic and psychological barriers that hinder the process. The existing educational programmes strongly regulate the transfer of students from one profession to another, from a university to another even in Armenia and do not provide possibility to obtain an alternative qualification degree. Transfer of students to foreign universities based on bilateral agreements is limited and not all the European mechanisms promoting the international mobility of students function in Armenia.

6. An important development is the establishment of a Fund of “National Information Center for Academic Recognition and Mobility” (NICArm). The NICArm started to function since January 2006 and it is already connected to European enic-naric network. Presently, NICArm is

recruiting its staff and after it is complete it will be highly advisable to organize training and technical assistance. The works are already carried in the field of recognition foreign qualifications and data collection on national education system and HEIs.

7. An independent Agency for Quality Assurance is planned to establish this year. Key elements of QA system are presently developed in HEI.

8. It's noteworthy to mention that the role of student participation in higher education governance is increased:

- Students are members of HEIs management structures;
- Students participate in evaluation of quality of education, training and services offered by a university;
- Students' organisations are involved in the higher education reform process.

9. One of the key issues underlined in Bergen Communiqué was the importance of higher education in further enhancement of research and its role for the economic and cultural development of the societies. The working group is going to be created to define the new role and need for doctoral programmes (DP), whether they are recognised as the third cycle and a professional experience, elaborate their structure and organisation.

There has been certain achievements in the Bologna process in Armenia. The academic community as well as the state authorities recognise the importance of the changes. Despite the obstacles hindering the implementation of the reforms (scarcity of financial and professional resources, traditional inertness of educational governance, etc) the domination of the reforms is vivid.

