



The Bologna Process 2020 – The European Higher Education Area in the new decade

We, ministers, responsible for higher education in the 46 signatory countries of the Bologna Process convened in Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve, Belgium, on April 28 and 29, 2009 for our bi-annual meeting to take stock of the achievements of the Bologna Process and to establish the priorities for the next decade. We have adopted the following conclusions and policies:

1 Since its inception in 1999, the Bologna Process has led to the creation of a strong and robust European Higher Education Area now covering 46 countries that are party to the European Cultural Convention; it has rendered European higher education more attractive and competitive on a global scale while keeping it firmly rooted in Europe's intellectual, scientific and cultural heritage and ambitions. The change brought about by the Bologna Process has led to greater compatibility and comparability of the systems of higher education and has made it easier for learners to move between them. The structure of higher education has been modernized with the adoption of a three-cycle structure including the possibility of a short cycle within or linked to the first cycle; quality assurance guidelines have been developed, a European register for quality assurance agencies has been created; an agreement has been reached at European level to adopt qualifications frameworks based on learning outcomes and workload to facilitate recognition. Moreover, the Bologna Process has availed itself of the technical instruments of the Diploma Supplement and the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System to further increase transparency and compatibility of programmes.

2 There has been strong adherence to the creation of the European Higher Education Area, especially since the Bologna Process has managed to instil European higher education with a permanent sense of cooperation by encouraging and increasing dialogue between governments, higher education institutions, students, personnel and other stakeholders. The contribution from international institutions and organizations has also been a significant one.

3 The main objectives as set out by the Bologna Declaration and as developed in the subsequent years are as valid today as they were in 1999. The Bologna Process will, in the decade to come, still contribute to creating the Europe of knowledge and to strengthening the world-wide attraction of European higher education. It will still be a key element to promote the citizens' mobility as well as their employability and their European citizenship by providing education of a high quality.

4 The full implementation of these objectives will still require continual momentum after 2010. The European Higher Education Area shall more firmly be based on convergent degree structures and commonly agreed standards and instruments that guarantee the quality and the transparency of provision and qualifications. Progress on agreements for **straightforward and fair recognition procedures and decisions** supported by the development of national qualifications frameworks remains a priority. This will require continued coordination at the level of European Higher Education Area and with the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning.

5 The Bologna Process up to 2020 shall contribute to making Europe a highly creative and innovative region as well as an attractive global partner in the advent of a global knowledge society. The European Higher Education Area in 2020 shall be an area where higher education is a public responsibility and where institutions of higher education are responsive to the needs of society through the diversity of their missions and purposes. The necessary continued reform of higher education systems and policies will continue to

be firmly rooted in the European values of institutional autonomy, academic freedom, and active participation of students and staff. European higher education will continue to be based on the nexus between education and research.

6 Our societies currently face the consequences of the financial crisis with its effects on economic growth. In order to bring about sustainable economic recovery and development, higher education is considered a long term investment preparing our societies to address the challenges of the decade to come and therefore remains a priority for public investment.

7 European higher education will more specifically face the major challenges posed by globalisation and demography. In order for European higher education to respond adequately to those and other challenges and to contribute to their solution, **excellence** must be pursued at all levels of higher education and in fulfilling the diversity of missions of institutions, in teaching and research as well as in innovation and community engagement.

8 The **demographic challenge** of an ageing population in a knowledge society can only be met by fully engaging in **lifelong learning** practices and by reinforcing the **social dimension** of higher education.

9 Indeed, social and human growth are indispensable components for European citizenship; the advent of a Europe of knowledge that is highly creative and innovative rests upon the ability of its citizens to summon the competences that are necessary to address the new challenges. This can only happen if higher education taps into resources that have hitherto been neglected.

10 The design of **lifelong learning strategies** as a tool for widening participation and as a way of empowering the individual to fully seize the opportunities of higher education and fully contribute to a highly creative and innovative society will be the focus of the national and institutional plans for the decade to come. Lifelong learning is conceived of as a multifaceted concept, which may involve climbing higher up the qualifications ladder, extending knowledge, gaining new skills and competences or simply pursuing learning to enrich one's personal growth. The implementation of lifelong learning strategies requires strong partnerships between public authorities, institutions, students and employers. The nature of these partnerships will be laid down in a charter on lifelong learning. Successful strategies of lifelong learning will be supported by adequate organisational structures and funding.

11 Lifelong learning implies that qualifications may be obtained through a variety of routes. Flexible learning paths as well as work based trajectories should lead to a system of validation in which the qualifications are given fair recognition on the basis of learning outcomes, regardless of whether they have been obtained through traditional study programmes or non-traditional learning paths.

12 The **social dimension calls for equitable access into, successful progress through and completion of high quality higher education** for the whole spectrum of the population in their various walks of life and age groups; it requires a learning environment of great quality geared to the needs of a diverse student body. The student body within higher education should reflect the diversity of Europe's populations and significant progress should be made within each participating country over the next decade.

13 The social dimension of higher education is closely connected with the objective of **employability** in a perspective of lifelong learning. Higher education should equip students with the knowledge, skills and competences that individuals need in the workplace whatever their position and status. Employability is also empowering the individuals to renew those skills and competences throughout their working lives. For this to happen, higher education institutions and employers, also involving students and graduates, shall engage in a meaningful dialogue. This will allow institutions to be more

responsive to employers' needs and employers to better understand the institutional perspective, catering not only for the short-term needs of the labour market but training responsible, inventive and entrepreneurial graduates for a sustainable future.

14 Higher education institutions shall improve the provision, accessibility and quality of their careers and employment related services to students and alumni. Work placements can also be an adequate way to offer the students the opportunity to develop and define for themselves the employability skills and competences.

15 In order for the combined objectives of lifelong learning, the social dimension and employability to be achieved, **curricular reform** will be an ongoing process. **Learning outcomes** have been generically defined for each of the cycles in the qualifications framework and have become one of the building blocks of the Bologna Process, with institutions of higher education being at the heart of the underlying paradigm shift from teacher- to student-centred learning more specific descriptors linked to given subject areas should now be developed, with due consideration for programme diversity and institutional autonomy.

16 Higher education is a global phenomenon of which European Higher Education is a part. European higher education institutions will be further encouraged to embed their activities in an institutional culture of internationalisation and global collaboration. The **attractiveness and openness of European higher education** will be highlighted. Competition on a global scale will be complemented by policy dialogue and cooperation based on partnership with other regions of the world most prominently through the organization of Bologna Policy Fora.

17 Mobility of students, early stage researchers and staff will strengthen the internationalization of European higher education. Mobility is important for personal development and employment. In an increasingly multicultural society, it fosters respect for diversity and a capacity to deal with it; it is thus a key ingredient for a more stable and peaceful world. Mobility also underpins the multilingual tradition of the European higher education area and it increases cooperation between institutions.

18 Mobility policies shall bring together political initiatives with a range of practical measures pertaining to the funding of mobility, to recognition and to available infrastructure. These policies should aim at more mobility of a higher quality, at a more balanced flow of incoming and outgoing students and at a better participation rate from the diverse student body.

19 Opportunities for mobility shall be created so that mobility will be considered the rule and no longer the exception. In all degree programmes curricula will allow "mobility windows". Joint degree programmes shall be developed and mobility shall be an important ingredient of research training.

20 As far as mobility of staff and early stage researchers is concerned, framework conditions will be established to simplify the application processes for immigration into the EHEA as well as within and to ensure appropriate access to social security and portable pension rights for mobile staff. Career structures should be adapted to facilitate staff mobility.

21 Improved and enhanced **data collection** will help monitor progress made in the attainment of the objectives set out in the social dimension, employability and mobility agendas, as well in all priority areas where appropriate, and will serve as a basis for benchmarking.

22 The Bologna Process has increased **transparency** through its convergent degree structure, its qualifications frameworks and its compatible quality assurance mechanisms. At the same time, there is **increasing differentiation** in the missions and profiles of higher education institutions. Institutions shall be supported to achieve excellence in those areas where they show their major strengths and which they define as their most

relevant mission. Governments in close cooperation with other stakeholders shall stimulate this development. In the light of this greater **diversification of higher education**, the Bologna Process shall contribute to the monitoring of new instruments developed inter alia by international institutions and designed to point out the strengths of institutions with diverse mission statements.

These instruments should be relevant information tools for students and academic staff alike; moreover, they should help higher education institutions to compare and identify their relative position, and to strive for excellence. All such instruments, which should be developed with full stakeholder involvement, need to relate closely to quality assurance and recognition and should be based on development of corresponding indicators and sound data collection.

23 Higher education institutions have gained greater autonomy along with rapidly growing expectations to be responsive to societal needs and to be accountable. Within a framework of public responsibility recognizing that public funding remains a priority, **multiple funding** is seen as an opportunity to guarantee further sustainable development of institutions and their autonomy. The sharing of good practice in relation to accessing diverse sources of funding will be a priority.

24 For the next decade, the following operational goals will be pursued:

- Internationalisation and mobility:
 - A 25% increase per country of the number of mobile students and staff, including in the third cycle, by 2020.
 - Curricula designed in such a way that “mobility windows” are an integral part.
 - Joint degrees and programmes to become common practice.
 - Portable grants and loans.
 - Fulfilling the internationalisation objectives, including mobility, to be part of both the framework of internal and external quality assessment.
 - Simplified procedures for granting visas and work permits.
- Social dimension/widening participation
 - Common indicators for monitoring access to and completion of higher education.
 - National targets set by each country to increase the overall participation in its higher education system and the participation of underrepresented groups according to the diversity of its population.
- Lifelong learning
 - A Charter of Lifelong Learning based on the work done by the European University Association will be developed at the level of EHEA. It will include basic principles and procedures for recognition of prior learning.
 - On this basis national strategies will be developed which encourage each higher education institution to integrate a lifelong learning perspective in its institutional practice.
- Recognition and qualifications frameworks
 - Recognition of qualifications and of prior learning will be part of regular quality assurance procedures.
 - Coherent recognition practices within a country and between countries will be ensured through cooperation between higher education institutions and the national ENIC/NARIC centres. Institutional guidelines and recommendations for recognition ensuring implementation of the Lisbon Recognition Convention will be established.
 - Adoption of national qualifications frameworks by 2012.

25 The present **organisational structure** of the Bologna Process is endorsed as being fit for purpose. From 2010 onwards, the Bologna Process will be co-chaired by the country holding the EU presidency and a non-EU country.

26 In order to interact with other policy areas, BFUG will set up a number of working groups gathering experts and policy makers from other fields, like immigration, social security and employment.

27 We entrust the Bologna Follow-up Group to prepare a work plan to address the challenges identified in this Communiqué, allowing the future integration of the data collection results and the outcome of the independent assessment of the Bologna Process.

28 We will meet again at the Bologna anniversary conference jointly hosted by Austria and Hungary in Budapest and Vienna on 11-12 March 2010. The next regular ministerial conference will be hosted by Romania in Bucharest in April 2012. The following ministerial conferences will be held in 2015, 2018 and 2020.