

BOLOGNA POLICY FORUM

LOUVAIN-LA-NEUVE, APRIL 29, 2009

Summary of the contribution to the discussion by the Council of Europe

Sjur Bergan

Ministers, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure to participate in the first Bologna Policy Forum, which gather Ministers and other high level participants from all regions of the world as well as from members and consultative members of the Bologna Process.

The European Higher Education Area is a success story, as witnessed also by the great interest shown from all parts of the world. As you know, the Council of Europe was involved, with the Magna Charta Observatory, in organizing a conference on the Bologna Process in Almaty in February 2009, and it is a great pleasure to see our host, Minister Tuymebaev, here today.

For our discussions, it is important to consider both functions of the Bologna Process. On the one hand, it is a structure – not a very formalized one, but a structure nonetheless – open to States Party to the European Cultural Convention that also commit in writing to the principles and goals of the European Higher Education Area.

On the other hand, “Bologna” is a community of practice, and a community of practice is limited only by our own minds when we sometimes abstain from considering new ideas. As a community of practice, “Bologna” is open to all those who identify with its principles and goals and who seek to implement them in their structures, legislation and practice. It is as a community of practice that we are gathered here today for this first Policy Forum.

The structural reforms of the Bologna Process, notably qualifications frameworks, quality assurance and the recognition of qualifications, illustrate very well what is meant by a community of practice. Please bear with me if, as Chair of the Coordination Group on Qualifications Frameworks, I focus on this topic in the limited time at my disposal.

Qualifications frameworks are a core issue of the European Higher Education Area but they are not a European invention. We were inspired by the examples of Australia, New Zealand and South Africa, and we took due note of the fact that in South Africa, in addition to arguments of international competitiveness, concerns of social cohesion were a strong argument in the development of qualifications frameworks. Today, many countries from different parts of the world are developing their national frameworks, and the Gulf Cooperation Council is considering whether a regional framework could be

developed, inspired by the overarching qualifications framework of the European Higher Education Area (QF-EHEA) as well as the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning (EQF).

There is no reason why the Bologna Process should not cooperate with countries in other regions of the world in the development of qualifications frameworks if they so desire. There is in fact every reason why we should. This cooperation could extend to every aspect of the development of qualifications frameworks, including participation by “Bologna experts” in the self certification of national frameworks of countries outside of the Bologna Process if these countries wish to publish a self certification report in relation to the QF-EHEA and in line with the guidelines of the Bologna Process. Similar cooperation arrangements could certainly be found for other topics of the European Higher Education Area, including those that concern core values like academic freedom, institutional autonomy and student participation.

A further possibility for cooperation has been pointed to by the working group on the Bologna Process in a global context. Participation in Bologna conferences and other events are not contingent on membership in the EHEA, and it is also possible for the Bologna Follow Up Group, which is now responsible for developing the work programme until 2012, to invite representatives of countries that are not members of the Process to participate in working and coordination groups. We will of course need to keep a reasonable balance between members and consultative members of the Bologna Process and other countries in each group, but the possibility exists. Countries wishing to establish closer cooperation with the EHEA could also make the task easier by appointing their own “Bologna contacts”.

Today’s Policy Forum is therefore an important first step, and we hope that by the time we gather for the second Policy Forum at ministerial level, in Wien next year, we will have made progress in cooperation on the key issues of the Bologna Process. To end with the words of the American poet Robert Frost: “we have promises to keep and miles to go before we sleep”.