

Dear ministers,
Dear Commissioner,
Dear rectors,
Dear fellow students,

This is the time of reflection. A moment in which our eyes turn to the vision of the Bologna Process and we ask ourselves where should we go from here.

Any transformation needs a solid dose of hope, vision and idealism, attributes that are characteristic to students and their representatives. Students all across Europe still believe in the process and their cry for more involvement is fully justified by the significant contribution they had in the paradigm shift.

The Bologna Process has brought such vision and idealism to higher education in Europe and a number of remarkable achievements. But there is also another list: a list of delays, failures and missed opportunities caused by an à la carte approach to the reforms. Each missed opportunity brings an immediate negative effect that students experience first-hand, while listening to statements about how bright the future can become.

This is perhaps why a student perspective on the future of the European Higher Education Area is fundamental for keeping an ambitious vision for the future that is based on the reality on the ground. If we are to accomplish the essential goals of the Bologna Process, our priority must be finishing the work on implementing its main action lines before moving into a new agenda. There is no shortcut to the set up of the European Higher Education Area and we must all continue the journey down the road to implementation.

This is a time for hope. 11 million students dream of breaking down educational borders and creating a European Higher Education Area where learning is encouraged and enabled in an integrated way across the continent. They dream of an area that is distinctive by the high quality of its higher education; they expect that it will cater for the diverse student and societal needs and that it will ensure equal opportunities for all, free from discrimination and obstacles. They ask that such vision is supported by a system of values that comprise student participation and academic freedom within a framework of education as both a public good and a public responsibility.

Higher education follows the roar of societal waves, while providing the safe shore for universal values. Hence, any redefinition of our systems has to integrate the respect for all the basic missions of higher education, while attempting to generate true change, not only within academic communities, but also in the societal context.

This is a time for action and realism. Students have a voice, a powerful tool for conscience awakening. Bologna With Student Eyes is now a tradition but the new edition remains a freshly updated student's perspective of the reality of national implementation. The essential student experience of the academic process makes their views unique, even though student participation is set aside as a second class action line in several countries. The time available makes it impossible to portray the richness of the conclusions put forward by the report, the blue book standing quietly in the conference tables. The silence of its pages hides the powerful voice of students all across Europe that can be heard quite loudly in many demonstrations across our continent. So, before we all go to congratulating ourselves for the success of the past 10 years, maybe we should open this book, as the window to the student reality and hear their concerns.

In order to become truly student centred, the future of the Bologna Process should be based on:

1. Academically meaningful mobility – ensuring that every fifth student has a chance to be mobile

Mobility is an objective in itself and a tool; it impacts all policy areas of the Bologna Process and helps overcoming insufficiencies in their implementation. Balanced student and staff flows across all 46 Bologna countries will ensure openness of higher education institutions, academic and social advancement and the cultural networking of students and staff. It will be testimony of a true European Higher Education Area. And because the situation differs between countries, setting a common target will define a long term aspiration and incentivise sustainable progress. This can never be done without creating national strategies to increase mobility numbers and providing the appropriate support to foster an inclusive and diverse student and staff mobile body. The European Students' Union, together with Education International, has actively promoted mobility, by investing its time and resources in coordinating the European "Let's Go!" mobility campaign. The large support the campaign received from several governments and the continuation of the work of the so-called student and staff mobility coalitions have proven the success that concrete action can have in crucial Bologna Process areas such as mobility,

1. Social dimension and lifelong learning

Social dimension and lifelong learning are not the top student priorities: they are essential elements of the European higher education, strategic for the completion of the Bologna Process and the development of our societies. And yet they took the backseat in its implementation. Our hope for progress – the national action plans for social dimension – were written as if they were commercial adds, with poor or non-existent student participation in the process. They have not been shaped in a discussion with higher education institutions, staff and students and with the wider public. And lifelong learning, which should continue to sustain a widening participation agenda, is many times restricted to professional reconversion.

Increasing the participation of underrepresented groups is rarely regarded as a priority in the governments' agendas, lacking the supporting resources. Students across the continent are facing the introduction or increase of tuition fees, an overall raise of study costs and the burden of economic troubled times. Youngsters are as socially unprotected as older generations. Many of our systems rely on the assumption that students will be able to repay a low interest loan, to work part time or during the summer or to receive financial help from their parents. We are likely to see the flaws of all these assumptions as banking systems fall, companies have to fire their employees or entire families have to rely on unemployment support schemes.

The true challenge is however to create sustainable social conditions, fulfilling the promises made continuously in past communiqués of the Bologna Process and finally move to concrete action, by developing national strategies for widening participation and diversifying the student body, underpinned by national measurable targets. These aspirations must be recognised as benefits to society and not just to the individual and therefore must be publicly financed.

3. Quality assurance has been the emblematic success story of the Bologna Process. Significant progress has been witnessed at all levels, from the creation and adoption of the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) to the creation of the European Register for Quality Assurance in Higher Education. However, quality assurance needs a continuous development whilst retaining ownership by stakeholders, with a special concern for the students' engagement in all levels.

The build up of institutional quality culture is one of the most important developments, which underpins the fulfilment of the entire Bologna agenda. However, resorting to simplified tools for reputation building is a threat to the much-needed natural development of sound quality systems

in the European Higher Education Area and diverts the public attention, the higher education institutions priorities and significant resources away from the core issues within the Bologna Process.

Building quality cultures is an unfinished process that needs full commitment from the leadership of institutions and academic communities. Quality assurance must remain the priority and to develop towards enhancing objectivity and comparison between HEI and programmes, while increasing the communication about its results to the wider public. This work must be undertaken by the relevant stakeholders; the assessment of HEI and study programmes must be made against their mission statements and not external priorities.

When looking forward, it is sometimes necessary that we know where we are coming from and bear in mind the strategic goal we aim to achieve. In Bologna, the cathedral of S. Petronius in the city centre can rest as a symbol of a Bologna Process planned as a magnificent building, but waiting still for accomplishing its final shape. May we be successful in creating a real student-centred European Higher Education Area.

Thank you.