

A Vision of the Bologna Process and its Implementation in Portugal

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In this talk I shall give my personal perspective and understanding of the aims of the Bologna Process and how it is influencing the re-structuring of the Portuguese System of Higher Education.

The dimension of the Bologna Process

On 19 June 1999 Ministers responsible for higher education from 29 countries signed the Bologna agreement. In this Declaration we can identify not the genesis, but rather the irreversible turning point of a European movement of immense cultural, social and economical dimension. Mainly for this, and independently of the very many milestones, from the *Magna Carta* in 1988, also in Bologna, to the all relevant Berlin Declaration of 2003, this movement is today identified as the Bologna Process.

Together with this other movement of mainly economical nature that led to the birth of the EURO, as well as together with the social objectives decided in the Lisbon 2000 European Council and re-affirmed by this Council both in Barcelona 2002 and Brussels 2003, the Bologna Process represents a decisive vector for attaining the set targets of building the 'most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion'.

The Bologna Process has so far attracted the commitment and been signed by 40 countries, a number that will grow to 42 by May 2005, occasion of the Bergen meeting. The Bologna universe is well above the EU-25 universe.

Formal objectives of the Bologna Process

The formal objectives of the Bologna movement are stated in detail in the communiqué of the conference of ministers responsible for higher education that took place on the 19th of September, 2003. It is worth reviewing them once more. They cover and address the following main issues:

- a. Quality assurance: creating at institutional, national and European level bodies that guarantee and certificate quality.
- b. Degree structure: adoption of an easily readable, comparable and compatible system essentially based on two main cycles, by 2005.
- c. Promotion of mobility: at all levels, i.e. students, teaching and non-teaching staff.
- d. Establishment of a system of credits: the European Credit Transfer System, that should further be regarded as an accumulation system to be applied consistently in the qualification framework.

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- e. Recognition of degrees and qualifications: through the automatic and free of charge issuing of a Diploma Supplement, for improving transparency and system flexibility, fostering employability and facilitating academic recognition for further studies.
- f. Process development with close participation of institutions and students: recognising that full participation of all actors is the only way to ensure the appropriate conditions for teaching, research and studying.
- g. Promotion of the European dimension in higher education: mainly by promoting the development of integrated study programmes and joint degrees at first, second and third levels.
- h. Promotion of the attractiveness of the European Higher Education Area: opening the European space to other regions of the World.
- i. Lifelong learning, including the recognition of prior learning: improving opportunities for all citizens, in accordance with their aspirations and abilities, to follow lifelong learning paths within the higher education system.

A citizenship perspective of the Bologna Process

My personal views are that a perspective of citizenship should be necessarily added to the objectives listed above. From this point of view one should state that the Bologna Process aims at promoting:

- A. The building of new European awareness and dimension in higher education, research and innovation: for what cultural interchange through the mobility of young people plays a major role.
- B. The increase of European cohesion: again through mobility and always through knowledge, this being considered as the only way for strengthening the role of Europe in the World.
- C. The re-structuring of the higher education system: in order to bring higher education nearer to the needs of Society and simultaneously to offer a wider choice to youngsters that may bring them more individual satisfaction.
- D. An evolution of the teaching and learning paradigms: adapting this learning process to the prevailing views and concepts of modern societies and to the available pedagogical means, projecting in particular the education for the adult stages of life, in this way adapting to the evolution of knowledge and to the evolution of individual and collective interests.

Going one step further in putting together formal objectives and those just stated, I would add that the latter should prevail as the real objectives, the former being essentially the means for attaining them.

Portugal, where are we in this Process?

The re-structuring of the Portuguese System of Higher Education within the national commitments as signatories of the Bologna Process is reaching 'boiling point'.

The Minister for Science, Innovation and Higher Education is promoting a nationwide discussion involving institutions, students and the Society in general through the professional associations. This discussion is subject to an agenda that will lead shortly to guidelines and legislation addressing the different issues of this process.

It is adequate to remind this large set of issues by checking the objectives a. to i. listed above.

We should note that the cycle structure is just one, though very relevant, of those issues. The criteria for preparing new curricula, the need of new pedagogical methods addressing mainly learning procedures and outcomes in terms of competences and skills, represent other major matters. Criteria for new forms of system evaluation and accreditation, together with new forms of managing education and research are also themes under scrutiny.

What must be understood in all this discussion is that though all subjects are linked, still clusters of objectives can be identified where the main role for changes may be seen as being on government side and clusters can be identified where changes are essentially dependent on institutions and within institutions changes are dependent on the knowledge, views and capacity action of the individuals.

This simply means that we all have to work together.

Following the procedures of the Portuguese legislative system, the government has already proposed to the responsible bodies of the institutions of higher education, legislation concerning all matters closely related to mobility issues, namely legislation on the ECTS system, Diploma Supplement and related matters. The legislative process is now following the required steps till publication.

At present a group of 23 personalities, covering in *lactus sensus* all areas of our education system (and sub-systems) are leading this national discussion in all sectors. The role of the Minister in this procedure is mainly to ensure harmonization of the discussion horizontally and to ensure that strategic interests related to the Portuguese commitments of European co-operation are guaranteed.

The strategic relevance of co-operation includes mobility and working together in joint degrees. For this purpose our internal structures must be a factor of competitiveness, not a factor hindering co-operation.

It is well known that for a wide number of scientific areas (not to say most of) the prevailing structures of education are a first cycle of 3 years, that may be complemented by a second cycle leading to a Master degree, not necessarily in vertical terms, that is exactly on the same area of the first degree.

From my point of view Portugal must (and hopefully will) take this 'state of the art' in serious and full consideration. Apart the obvious situations where European directives indicate other structures, for sure a few exceptions will have to be accommodated,

essentially only in 'transient regime', but the pattern should necessarily be the one just described.

In parallel with this formal line of degree cycle, Portugal has to develop (and is developing) a structure of modular education leading to recognised diplomas at all levels pre-doctorate, i.e. including post-secondary education, post-first cycle and post-second cycle formation. Typically such diplomas should be awarded after 18 months of equivalent full-time work for post-secondary diplomas and 12 months for the other levels.

The question of how deeply and how fast changes will take place in each single institution will of course be dependent on other type of factors at institutional level. This is clearly a problem of utmost importance that is being discussed throughout basically every European institution of higher education.

The pace for reaching changes will be for sure much influenced by the management capacity of each institution of setting goals and of enforcing the measures for reaching such goals. True it is that such management sharpness can be strongly influenced and 'catalysed' by national policies of monitoring and rewarding quality.

The time is of changes, both material changes and changes of attitude and mentality.

No less hard task is of course that of changing mentality. I mean of staff and students.

For students it is clear that the type of changes required in attitude, particularly never forgetting the evolution of concepts and ideals from generation to generation, can only be achieved by having them participating and influencing the discussion of the issues that matter.

So, these are matters to be addressed in my talk.

The Portuguese system of higher education is set for changes and changes will occur.