

The Bologna Process and the ALBAN Programme - State of the Art of the Bologna Process Implementation

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In this talk I shall give my personal perspective and understanding of the aims of the Bologna Process, of the current situation of its implementation in Europe and of the prospects of its development in the near future,

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 45 by May 2005, occasion of the Bergen ministerial conference. 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.

- 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 (EHEA): 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.

Europe, where are we in this Process?

The Bologna Process is not a Treaty. It is a movement made step by step with agreements voluntarily signed by the different countries and put in place in each country.

The pace of progress differs from country to country, but the latest indicators (BFUG report on stocktaking give reasonably optimistic signals of progress.

Three main issues were at stake for 2005, as set in the Berlin conference of 2003: (i) the implementation of a qualifications framework comprising three formal cycles of study, of which the first and second cycle were the key questions; (ii) The setting of a quality assurance system, with a high degree of co-operation among the different national systems with a view of enhancing the mutual recognition of accreditation or quality assurance decisions; (iii) The recognition of degrees and periods of studies.

Rating in five classes (full compliance; reasonable compliance; minimally compliant; below level and no compliance at all) the state of development of different items for those three main issues, the picture as of early 2005 is presented in Table 1 below, expressed in percent of countries in each class.

Table 1 - Percent distribution of countries in each class of implementation of the Bologna Process (as of early 2005, for 43 countries)*					
	Full compliance	Reasonable compliance	Minimally compliant	Below level	No compliant at all
The two-cycle system	37	33	9	16	5
Quality assurance	34	28	19	19	0
Recognition of degrees and period of studies	33	46	21	0	0
* Results from the stocktaking report presented to the BFUG by the Stocktaking Working Group on April 8, 2005					

Priorities for the next future

The Bologna Process will for sure progress for achieving the goals set out in Berlin, 2003.

(i) Concerning the qualifications framework:

- Adopt a framework for qualifications in the EHEA, comprising:
 - Three cycles, including the possibility of shorter higher education linked to the first cycle
 - Generic descriptors for each cycle based on learning outcomes and competences, and
 - Credit ranges in the first and second cycles.
- Ensure complementarity between this framework and the broader framework for lifelong learning, encompassing general education as well as vocational education and training
- Promote the increase of employability of graduates with bachelor qualifications, including in appropriate posts in the public service

(ii) Concerning quality assurance

- Introduce a model for peer review of quality assurance agencies on a national basis;
- Welcome the principle of a European register of quality assurance agencies based on national review;
- Promote co-operation between nationally recognised agencies with a view to enhancing the mutual recognition of accreditation or quality assurance decisions.

(iii) Concerning recognition of degrees and periods of studies

- Promote the ratification of the Lisbon Recognition Convention by all countries;
- Improve at national level the quality of the process associated with the recognition of foreign qualifications;
- Push forward the recognition of joint degrees;
- Improve the recognition of prior learning including non-formal and informal learning for access to, and as elements in, higher education programmes.

Further challenges for 2010

Further to the priority issues just stated, other challenges lie ahead for the signatory countries, for full implementation of the Process.

These other issues are:

- (i) those linking higher education and the research area, including the structuring of the third cycle related to doctoral studies - the qualifications and programmes
- (ii) those related to mobility, in particular aiming at overcoming current difficulties of visa and work permits;
- (iii) those related to the social dimension of the Bologna Process, a necessary condition for the attractiveness and competitiveness of the EHEA, that has as main directions the commitment to making quality higher education equally accessible to all and the guarantying of appropriate conditions for studies to be completed without obstacles related to social and economic background.
- (iv) finally the issues concerning the attractiveness of the EHEA and the co-operation with other countries, from other regions, neighbouring and distant alike.

A word about this last point:

We speak about creating a framework for qualifications that is flexible, leading to different competencies, including more theoretically oriented or more practically oriented profiles, with short and long cycles.

We speak of an EHEA open and attractive to other parts of the world.

We speak of Education for All:

- Based on the principle of sustainable development;
- Within a framework of quality provision of cross-border education;
- With academic values prevailing in international co-operation;

- With balanced student and staff exchange;
- With intercultural understanding and respect;
- With dialogue in subjects of mutual interest.

Some concluding thoughts

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.