

## THE BOLOGNA PROCESS: THE REFORM OF THE EUROPEAN HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEMS

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**Abstract:** *The Bologna process is the comprehensive reform initiative of the European higher education systems, with an unprecedented political support and commitment for changes. In Central and Eastern European countries the Bologna process is not only strongly connected to the overall political transformation, but provides for the higher education policy makers an opportunity for the Europeanization of the sector. The implementation of the three-cycle system (the reform of organizational dimensions) creates a demand for other reforms, and under this agenda have been released a numerous fundamental questions and debates on higher education systems. In a narrow concept, the Bologna process at the present implies systemic (e.g. core functions and role of different higher education institutions, the future of university and non-university sector), programmatic (e.g. at different program levels different curricular emphasis, arrangements and functions; vocationalization of the academic curriculum), procedural (e.g. new modes and arrangements of teaching) changes, and shift from accent on horizontal to vertical differences (e.g. the set up of stratified and hierarchical national systems based on reputation and prestige, especially in research quality), and from input to output oriented higher education. In a broad sense, and on the basis of national implementation experiences, we can also conceptualize the Bologna process as governance or recently finance reform. As the concepts behind these reform initiatives suggests, the original objectives of the Bologna process is reinterpreted and overwrote, by the Lisbon Strategy and several national higher educational policy objectives.*

**Keywords:** *higher education reform, education policy, Bologna Process.*

**JEL classification:** *I2/I21, I23, I28.*

### Introduction

The structural reform becomes the most visible initiative of the Bologna process. However, today the reform serves as an umbrella for *comprehensive reform processes* in national systems of higher education. As Huisman et al. (2009, p.

xiii) argue, the Bologna shortly after the Declaration it transformed into an even more *puzzling, multi-stakeholder process, involving various supranational and national agencies*. The analysis<sup>1</sup> addresses the question of (1) what objectives has the Bologna process, (2) what kind of change initiatives – already in course of

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implementation – it brings together, and (3) how they were changed the European higher education systems.

The Bologna Declaration (1999) has been set up to create the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), where ministers of education affirmed their intention to: (1) Adopt a system of easily readable and comparable degrees; (2) Implement a system based essentially on two main cycles; (3) Establish a system of credits; (4) Support the mobility of students, teachers and researchers; (5) Promote European cooperation in quality assurance; (6) Promote the European dimension in higher education (in terms of curricular development and inter-institutional cooperation). The Bologna Declaration also formulates the objective of increasing the international competitiveness of the European system of higher education and stresses the need to ensure that this system attracts significant attention from around the world (EURYDICE 2009).

On the basis of the above revealed features of Bologna process we will discuss the origins, nature, purpose and dimensions of the reform initiatives. We structured our analysis corresponding to the original schedule of the Bologna, what in the present approach according to Teichler (2007) can be summarized as a (1) structural and curricular, (2) management and steering reform, and (3) internationalizing of the sector. Based on the review of relevant higher education literature there we present - in contrary to the thematic studies - an alternative analysis from holistic perspective, however, with its constraints. There we focus on the above mentioned initiatives of the Bologna, but we leave out of consideration, those aims that were added only in the recent ministerial meetings (e.g. the social dimension, the life long learning), simply because at the moment they are under development by policy makers and experts.

### What is the Bologna process?

As many Bologna commentators suggest, particularly scholars from the political science and European studies perspective, the process is a *by-product of the European integration* or an attempt of Europeanization of higher education systems (Trondal 2002; Corbett 2003, 2005, 2006; Veiga 2005; Croché 2008; Halász 2008; Ravinet 2008; Kozma 2008a; Tomusk 2008; Adelman 2009; Dale 2009; Robertson 2009; Van Damme, 2009). In spite of the fact, that the Bologna was started as an intergovernmental initiative, independent from the European Union, the higher education policy of the latter not only shaped the evolvement of the process, but also guided the reforms. The policy mechanisms and programs of the Community – especially the Erasmus - on recognition of diplomas, credit systems and student mobility, have tuned the Bologna process, and in addition discussions were raised on higher education structures and quality assurance. As Westerheijden et al. (2008, p. 4) suggest in a recent analysis of Erasmus, the impact of the program on policy making is most visible in the Bologna Process, in terms of agenda setting, infrastructure and content (action lines), where five of the objectives are directly drawn from the ERASMUS program: (1) easy readable and comparable degrees, (2) establishment of a credit system (ECTS), (3) promotion of mobility, (4) quality assurance, (5) European dimension (joint and double degrees). While nowadays the program has influenced (1) the debate on rankings and classifications, (2) the policies of the Lisbon Strategy and the curricular reforms of the Bologna, and (3) the credit system serves as a model for other parts of the world (Westerheijden et al. 2008).

Clearly, the Erasmus program turned out the arguments concerning the transparency, readability and comparability problems

of European higher education systems. As Neave (2003, p. 151) explains the *"institutional characteristics that once expressed national identity, genius and preservation were now recast as obstacles to student mobility...differences in such matters as student fees, residentiality, variations in curricular content, and methods of student evaluation...were now viewed less as monuments to diversity than examples of opacity, absence of transparency, and general agents of hindrance and obscurantism"*. However, the existing frameworks (e.g. Community programs) could not be turned into extensive structural reforms and no pan-European organization had the legal authority to impose restructuring (Adelman 2009). The trusted Bologna implementing organizations and the European Union also, struggle with permanent legitimacy crisis, since the education is an affair of the nation states (Neave 2001; Amaral and Magalhaes 2004; Corbett 2003, 2005; Tomusk 2004 2006; Kozma 2008a; Dale 2009; Robertson 2009). The applied solution in order to relieve these problems, are in one hand the soft methods of governance, and in other hand the process where the involved actors legitimate each other (e.g. the policy recommendations of the intermediate organizations are converted into legal frame by the national governments). On the basis of the above revealed facets, we could consider the Bologna as the Europeanization of higher education systems, which represents systemic, programmatic, procedural and regulatory convergence, with its limits.

From the viewpoint of scholars of different disciplinary, cultural and geopolitical background the Bologna process may be interpreted in quite different ways, thus the reform may take diverse meanings: e.g. "structural convergence", "the standardization of European higher education systems", "by-product of the

European integration", "the Europeanization of the higher education systems", "the Americanization of the European higher education", "the introduction of two/three/multi cycle system", "complex political process", "new experiment of the neo-liberal educational policy", "the comprehensive reform of higher education systems", "in CEE the part of the political transformation". Or in the Pusztai and Szabó (2008a) essay on Hungarian implementation -, that also reveal the aspirations to wrap the national goals into the Bologna package - in the academic discourse the reform is: "an attempt of the state to reduce the expenditure on higher education", "re-canalization of the massification", "the vocationalisation of the academic programs", "to reduce the length of the study", "the reduction of student numbers" or "modernization of the curriculum".

The Bologna reforms are accompanied not only by a range of varied goals, but also expectations in respect to the national and European higher education problems, to be solved by it. The overall discourse is dominated by an atmosphere of high hopes and expectations, where the reform rhetoric is both problem- and solution-driven (Olsen and Maassen 2007). The discussion is characterized by "euphoria", "guarded optimism" and "movement" for reforms, which in national implementations at several cases leads to "Bologna-dogmatism", especially in the introduction of the prototypical Bologna structure, where the Bologna-compliance is beautiful, any other solution is old-fashioned, deviant, and dangerous (Alesi et al. 2005, p. 1; Teichler 2007, p. 192). The critics suggest that sometimes the reforms were seen as sacrosanct and thus difficult to oppose (Van Damme 2009, p. 40).

The simplified version of the most popular

assumptions presented by the advocates of the restructuring of European higher education systems is: (1) the universities lagged behind from the US Ivy-League institutions, (2) the institutions from Europe is less attractive for foreign students, (3) the structure of higher education programs and degrees are less comparable, and (4) the universities cannot adapt to the rapidly changing environment and market needs (Amaral and Magalhaes 2004; Barakonyi 2004; Enserink 2004; Askling and Henkel 2006; Bleiklie and Kogan 2006; Neave and Maassen 2007; Olsen and Maassen 2007; Teichler 2007; Van der Wende 2007; Tomusk 2006, 2008; Adelman 2009; Dale 2009; Robertson 2009; Van Damme 2009). However, the international and national arguments presented, that calls for reforms, differ accordingly to the perceived problems. For example, at the national level one is looking for answers to the massification, where slighter emphasis is placed on supranational reasons, such as the competitiveness or attractiveness of EHEA.

The Bologna process - strengthened by other reform proposals - offers remedy for these problems, or are they perceived as the possibility to address domestic challenges, at many times with the rebinding of previously aborted change initiatives. As many observers point out: the background conceptions and goals vary, they are not necessarily compatible, indeed, at several times they are opposed, while the solutions are based upon causal and normative beliefs which are taken for granted, not necessary to argue for them (Olsen and Maassen 2007, p. 4; Teichler 2007, p. 194; Huisman et al. 2009; Van Damme 2009). There exist contradictory assessments on the pace of the implementation and the extent of performance achieved. On one hand the changes are frequently interpreted as unprecedented, rapid and successful,

particularly in the political declarations and stocktaking reports (see Vandenbroucke 2009; Rauhvargers et al. 2009). But other perspectives suggest that there is progress only in the implementation of formal practices, without essential paradigm shift, where changes, especially on the level of the institutions, are perceived ambiguously (Barakonyi 2002; Neave 2002; Crosier et al. 2007; Huisman et al. 2009). As Neave and Amaral (2008, p. 40, 53) point out *"...the progress achieved at system level has now given way to a new sobriety when attention to progress is translated to institutional level"*, there has been revealed the *"advance...at the level of whole national systems, often masks spectacular deviance when re-examined at lower levels"*. Altogether there are visible changes at the level of the individual institutions; particularly those (e.g. national research universities) adjust themselves where the institutional conditions make it possible to define its position internationally, to participate in the international competition for students and resources, and to raise its status in stratified higher education systems (Teichler, 2007). Others, with regional or local functions (e.g. small, non-university institutions) have negligible benefits (e.g. student mobility, internationalizing at home) from the transparency and comparability of programs and degrees, or if after all has, then mainly with institutions of the same status, quality and profile.

### **The Bologna process, as structural and curricular reform**

The structural and programmatic reforms continuously were on the political agenda since the transformations of 1960s and 1970s (e.g. changes in socio-economic conditions, the democratization and expansion of higher education systems across Europe, transformation of the system governance

etc.). These reforms and spontaneous developments were set up at national level – in Western and later in Eastern European countries<sup>2</sup> -, thus at some extent differ from the current reform trends, but at much respect have been moved by similar reasons as the Bologna (e.g. strengthening of the non-university sector, re-canalization of the massification toward the short-cycle programs). As a result, it is strengthened the non-university sector of higher education and created the dual-system (Kyvik 2008), or in the terminology collected by Teichler (2001) “short-cycle”, “alternative”, “vocational”, “professional”, “new”, “college” higher education sectors, with the appearance of new institutional types (e.g. polytechnics, Fachhochschule, Gesamthochschule, IUTs etc.) (Gellert et al. 1991; Davies 1991; Teichler 1988). The sectoral trends from then could be characterized by overlapping phases of fragmented expansion, horizontal integration and vertical integration (Kyvik 2008).

However, spontaneous developments and the purposive restructuring of national higher education systems do not remove the reform aspirations, rather they continuously generates new demands for reforms, already with stronger supranational emphasis. In the turn of millennium the Bologna process renewed again the interest in structural configurations (e.g. there are several subject what in prior debates were prominent, for example, the roles and functions of different institutional types and programs, the importance of vertical differences etc.), and integrates these ambitions under the Bologna umbrella. The Bologna campaign for several years was marked by the question of degree structure, but over time increasingly were discovered its *divergent*

and *multidimensional* nature. The signatory countries of the Bologna Declaration (1999) in the second action line has been agreed to “implement a system based essentially on two main cycles”, where the first cycle of the studies would not exceed three years and must be relevant for the labour market. Most European countries have not structured their degree programs, although, we cannot disregard those countries where the two-cycle configurations at national individual institutions were set up previously (e.g. Great-Britain, or in some respect similar arrangement in France). At the beginning, they become the most important initiators and catalysts of the Bologna model; however, after the starting of translation into practice, some of them formulated strong critique over the model under implementation.

After a period of time the Bologna structure starts to integrate the doctoral degree beside the Bachelor and Master levels, and even some countries (e.g. Hungary, The Netherlands) begin to consider how will be possible to incorporate the short-cycle, upper-secondary or post-secondary, vocationally oriented degrees (ISCED 4 in Europe and similar to the North-American “Associate” degree, offered primarily by the community colleges). Thus the new multi-cycle structure is organized as BA+MA+PhD (3+2+3) labeled after the Anglo-Saxon terminology. It is assumed that in most countries there exist several configurations of study lengths (e.g. 3,5+1,5; 4+1; and 3+3 as very unique arrangement) which differs more or less from the standard model (Alesi et al. 2005; Crosier et al. 2007; EURYDICE 2009).

This adjustment has been implemented in line to increase “...the international competitiveness of the European system of higher education and stresses the need to

<sup>2</sup> Although, we can argue also that the Central and Eastern European higher education systems were relaunched under the impact of the Soviet model, at a supranational level.

ensure that this system attracts significant attention from around the world.” (Bologna Declaration, 1999). In order to promote the external and internal internationalization of higher education there are added several reform instruments – mainly curricular – like the modularization of the curriculum based on competencies and measured in learning outcomes, or others like the credit system, the Diploma Supplement, the Qualification Frameworks. The expectations toward this curricular paradigm shift are that will promote the mobility of students through “*à la carte*”, flexible learning paths and student centered study programs.

*The functions and relevance of the different degree levels.* In the public debate over the Bologna model have been emphasized the professional relevance of the studies, the terminal and transitory function of the bachelor, and the common elements of the first and second degrees, where little attention was paid to the relationship between master and doctoral studies (Teichler 2007). In order to achieve a higher level of comparability and compatibility there is not sufficient to structure the higher education, and to stabilize such parameters as the length of studies, the passing credit number, the type of degrees etc., but to address the question of what functions will have the two or three cycles.

The common framework of these considerations is given by the “old” debate over the extent to which teaching and learning in higher education are academically and professionally-oriented (Teichler 2009b). Under the umbrella of the new structure the traditional long university programs were divided into two stages, and those programs that were offered by the college sector mainly fall into the bachelor level. The implementation of the multi-cycle system starts hot debates (1) on professional relevance of different study stages, (2) what

types of institutions can offer higher degree levels, and whether these programs could be considered as equivalent (e.g. how the college master is equivalent to academic university master programs), (3) how would differ the curricular emphasis between the two levels (e.g. practice oriented vs. academic), (4) what kind of employment and further studying possibilities would offer the bachelor level, (5) the existence of different types - academic and professional - of master programs and the transition between the stages etc. (see contributions from Hrubos 2003; Barakonyi 2003, 2004; Rauhvargers 2006; Dumbrăveanu et al. 2006; Tomasz 2006; Crosier et al. 2007; Bazsa 2008; Pusztai 2007; Pusztai and Szabó 2008b; Szolár 2008; Polónyi 2009; Teichler 2007, 2009b).

As Witte (2006) point out the first degree can be used to offer a quick way into professional life, and lay the basis for further studies, while the second degree to acquire specific professional knowledge and train as a researcher. In Hrubos (2003) interpretation the significance of the first cycle is to offer programs for students with varied content, and practice and academic orientation, what makes equally possible the entry to the labour market and continuing of studies at master level. As Polónyi (2009) argues the BSc in mass higher education need to meet this dual function. In this perspective the first cycle is conceived as a cost-effective pre-qualification: the knowledge of graduates is broad and general, but enough to enter the labour market, where if it is a demand for deeper qualification, this can be obtained at the employment. Thus is not wasted the narrow and deep professional education, financed from the taxes and public budget. Teichler (2009b) at some extent agree with this conception, and suggest that the Bologna Declaration does not call for a stronger professional emphasis, but for some

degree of professional emphasis across all levels of study programs. However, as some Bologna interpreters (see Hrubos 2003; Alesi et al. 2005; Dumbrăveanu et al. 2006; Rauhvargers 2006) suggest if there is an aspiration to satisfy the two functions, thus it may occur that the three year length cannot be complied at bachelor level. This explains the appearance of various study length configurations. In addition, there need to be assumed the difference between the bachelor degrees from the non-university (e.g. colleges, institutions of applied sciences) and university programs, where the former regard this level as an full value qualification, while the latter as preparatory for further studies.

*Recognition and transparency.* The above considerations turn up questions over the recognition and comparability of studies. Some EU policies over the recognition of degrees have been initiated long before the Bologna, and the Lisbon Recognition Convention (see *Convention on the Recognition of Qualification Concerning Higher Education*) passed two year earlier (1997) to the Bologna Declaration. Under the umbrella of Bologna reforms it were integrated this EU legislation, and the member states has been urge at ministerial meetings (e.g. Berlin 2003) to ratify it. As Rauhvargers and Bergan (2006) argue, improving of recognition of qualifications is essential to establishing EHEA, what in fact is unthinkable without widespread mobility of students, staff and holders of qualifications. The translation of the Bologna objectives into practice and development of instruments in essence assists to the creation of common reference points across national higher education systems, facilitating mobility. The recognition of degrees are based on mutual thrust and assured by the comparable degree structures, the qualifications frameworks, the credit system, the Diploma Supplement

and quality assurance frameworks. The improving of transparency and comparability are looking not only for European, but rather for North-American, Asian and African, fee-paying students.

At several cases the recognition works only theoretically, where in the process of recognition of study abroad is considered not only the formal national accreditation of individual institutions and programs, but of the prestige and attributed quality (vertical differences) of them, or in order to fulfill the requirements of national specifications, there must be necessary to complement the studies. In addition, there is a pressure to not deviate from the prototypical Bologna structure (3+2) in order to take part from the advantage of automatically European recognition, provided by the common reference points (see TUNING, p. 4). However, the Trend-reports of the European University Association continuously give an account on constant diversity in higher education. As Rauhvargers (2006) points out, the harmonization of degree structures will lead to greater transparency, but not to automatic recognition. Thus there might be huge differences between degrees bearing the same name, in terms of admission requirements, content, learning objectives and function, as well as in the rights they confer.

The higher education policy experts argues that in order of positioning foreign qualifications in the context of another country's higher education, the focus of credential evaluation should be shifted from input orientation – that vary across countries and institutions – to emphasis on outputs, as learning outcomes and competencies (Rauhvargers 2006). One of the most considerable initiatives that support the greater transparency and helps the interpreters of individual qualifications in recognition processes is the TUNING-

project (there, also exist others like the Dublin Descriptors and Project Polifonia). This project elaborate “reference points” for faculty developing statements of learning outcomes, levels of learning, and desired competences in the disciplines so that those statements are transparent and comparable. In terms of qualifications frameworks, its focus is on the institution and pan-European field, not the national or pan-European degree cycle. It seeks to assist institutions and faculty in describing “cycle degree programs at the level of subject areas.” (Adelman 2009). However, the project in several interpretations (Amaral and Magalhaes 2004; Tomusk 2004; Van Damme 2009) is conceived as the standardization of the curriculum across European higher education systems. As Van Damme (2009) argues the dangers of standardization and uniformity of programs and curricula are visible. The contents and aspired learning outcomes of programs are closely related to scientific research, and hence should be in a constant dynamic of change and innovation. In this perspective, the quality of programs and teaching staff is not only defined by excellent teaching and learning arrangements, but also by the innovativeness and originality of contents and learning outcomes.

*The functional dualism of university and non-university institutions and programs.* In the Bologna process the emphasis from institutional types (e.g. college, university, polytechnics etc.) and institutional configurations (e.g. dual, binary etc.) was replaced by the accent on program levels, and vertical differences between different type of institutions and programs (e.g. in Romania are stronger the reform initiatives related to quality, prestige and performance, than the structural and curricular issues). As some commentators suggest (Pusztai 2007; Szolár 2009a, 2009b), the reform in Hungary starts the gradual transformation of

college sector, and in others (e.g. Romania and Slovakia) under the umbrella of the Bologna there has been formally unified and collectively upgraded the institutions of non-university sector, and created an institutional configuration dominated by universities, universities of applied sciences, polytechnics of university-level and other institutes that confer university-level degrees, where as a consequence the previously existed binary were moved toward unitary and stratified higher education structures.

The former dual and binary structures have been conceived as dysfunctional, and criticized because of the fragmentations of learning opportunities, the proliferation of programs, imbalance between the university and non-university sector, the properly non-existent post-secondary or upper-secondary level, its rigidity, isolation from each other, and weak or absent permeability (Ladányi 2003; Barakonyi 2004; Teichler 2007; Pusztai and Szabó 2008a; Van Damme 2009). There is an expectation that the development of the multi-cycle system will remedy these problems. The functional dualism of university and non-university sectors is threatened in the Bologna process, and strengthened by the academic nature of the quality assurance system and other governmental initiatives. According to Kyvik's (2008) categories these makes interested the non-university institutions in academic upgrading, the gradual addition of higher level programming, extending the role of theory in curricula at the expense of practice-oriented courses, integrating the research in their activities, departing from their local and regional mission, recruiting cosmopolitan staff with high aspirations, what as a result gradually eliminate the original functions, creating the functional overlapping between university and non-university sector (see “academic drift” and “vocational drift”).

In the Bologna process the two-cycle



structure could be assumed as a status-ladder (Witte 2006), since if the non-university institutions have the capacity to introduce higher level of programs – for what the legal basis is elaborated already -, thus could qualify for university status. Based on this argument in higher education literature some authors (Tomasz 2006; Szolár 2009b) suggest that the bachelor-master will strengthen the position of non-university institutions - especially in those countries where the horizontal integration have been not realized -, since they are authorized to organize professional master and doctoral studies. Nevertheless, there exist counter arguments. For example, subsequently to legal reinforcement of non-university institutions, the accreditation and quality assurance remain mainly academic, for which the starting point is the university. Consequently, the academic accreditation hardly can accommodate and react to the features of non-university education (e.g. there are different learning, teaching and research models, curricula, organizational forms and culture, mission, quality-conceptions, as well as the qualification of the staff differ extensively), and creating not only tensions between the institutions and buffer organizations, but pressing the institutions to depart from their original functions. The spontaneous or intended development of a pluralist accreditation and quality assurance system may produce partly solutions for these problems. However, there are counteracting forces (e.g. the policies rooted in Lisbon process that stress on the vertical differences) in favor of academic, performance-based indicators and research-oriented quality assurance.

### **The Bologna process and quality assurance**

The appearance of quality assurance mechanisms in Western systems - mainly

accreditation – can be traced back to the economic crisis from the '70-s, and growing demand for accountability, efficiency and transparency in public administration. There are several causes that contribute to the emergence of a new steering model for higher education: financial problems, the decline of trust in governmental organizations, increasing sense of quality deterioration following the expansion (Van Vught and Westerheijden 1994; Brennan and Shah 2000; Pollitt and Bouckaert 2000; Van Damme 2002). These give rise for emphasizing the evaluation over regulation, the emergence of “evaluative state”, “stakeholder society” and “managerialism” with their mechanisms branded as “remote control”, “new public management”, “soft governance” (Neave 1988; Frazer 1992; Van Vught and Westerheijden 1994; Dill 1998; Amaral et al. 2003; Teichler 2003; Schwarz and Westerheijden 2004; Deem 2007) with resonance in higher education policies. The tools of the evaluative state have included new forms of external quality assurance such as subject assessments, academic audits, and program accreditations, as well as contractual instruments such as performance funding (Dill 2007).

Clearly, the quality-issue also is not produced by the Bologna process. The academic mobility, the recognition of degrees, the joint programs, the construction of European Higher Education Area and the aspiration to increase the competitiveness of higher education systems and institutions has been created rapidly an atmosphere under what umbrella the national and international quality-debates may have been renewed and strengthened. The moment for this was after the progress of the Bologna: the introduction of new degrees and their accreditation elaborates a framework for debates over what will constitute its content; how will the content and quality be evaluated (e.g.

input, output, process etc.); what values (e.g. academic, employment-based etc.) will define the content and quality of new degrees; what roles will have the quality agencies in implementation of reforms; or how will be recognized the joint degrees and the study abroad etc.

In the first phase of the Bologna process the emphasis was placed on the implementation of structural reforms and on mobility of students, since there was an assumption that the harmonization of degree structures will facilitate the student mobility and bring greater transparency in the European context. However, the first experiences were unexpectedly that the mobility to some extent decreases after the introduction of multi-cycle structures. On the basis of close examinations of causes, it turned out that there are complex barriers before the mobility, where a prominent place has the quality of degrees, the content behind it and the vertical differences between individual institutions. For example, one institution will receive students from other if it considers assured the high quality of carried performance, thus is not neutral what institutions and programs stay behind the student, study and degree (Hrubos 2008).

These problems claim for international agreements on quality assurance and the harmonization of quality assurance procedures and methods. The Prague Communiqué (2001) already has as its priority the quality assurance in EHEA, where this has been seen as a key factor in the increasing of attractiveness of systems and institutions. The declaration defines as a future task the elaboration and implementation of unified quality assurance and accreditation mechanisms, since almost in every Bologna country were already functioning one or more quality agencies.

For the half-time evaluation of progress in reform implementation, at the Bergen

Summit (2005), has been launched the “*Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area*” have been launched by European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA 2005), that document defines the most important principles for internal quality assurance and external evaluation, and provides the framework for the functioning of external quality agencies. The ENQA in the evaluation of progress (ENQA 2005) identified the next outcomes: (1) there were launched the European guidelines for the internal and external evaluation, and working of quality assurance agencies, (2) the European quality agencies will be subject to periodical evaluations, (3) will be greater emphasis in international networking, (4) there will be elaborated a European register of quality agencies, and (5) will be established the European advisory forum in higher education quality assurance. The underlying assumption is that this will lead not only to the common practices of quality assurance, but the more simple recognition of degrees.

Under the umbrella of the Bologna process, a new element appears to be the introduction of internal quality assurance mechanisms; although as we noted earlier in higher education institutions there have been quality mechanisms with long tradition, mainly underpinned by the academic values. The principles formulated for institutional quality assurance are: (1) the elaboration of institutional quality assurance policies and procedures, (2) the follow-up evaluation of programs, (3) the evaluation of students, (4) the quality assurance of educational staff, (5) supporting of learning and learning instruments, (6) the development of information databases, and (7) guaranteeing of publicity of information’s (ENQA 2005). The new institutional quality assurance practices are more complex

and based simultaneously on academic, managerial, employment- or consumer-based, and pedagogic values. However, some commentators argue that the change of curricula structures and the need to develop institutional quality assurance systems, both introduced by the Bologna process, may be translated into academic and managerial practices because an institutional quality assurance system assumes the existence of (high quality) academic activities and their (managerial) assurance (Välilmaa 2007, p. 72). The external evaluations also evolved into multidimensional assessment, where besides the above mentioned values; there is greater emphasis on process and output factors. In the Bologna process, beyond the summative (accountability) objectives there is recently a weight on – although at present roughly only in theory – formative (improvement) goals by the national quality agencies.

Recently, there is brought into agenda the evaluation of international education and joint degrees. The lack of international quality agency stays as a strong barrier before the greater internationalization of higher education; though, the establishment of such agency was rejected at several times. As a compromise there have been elaborated the harmonization of principles and methods in quality assurance (Hrubos 2008), and facilitating cooperation between quality agencies and mutual formal recognition agencies (Van Damme 2002). However, the policies and practices vary widely across countries, and in spite of convergence there remain several obstacles before the recognition. The ENQA has a minimal strategy in international quality assurance, promoting the improvement of communication and exchange among national quality agencies with the expectation that this will lead to convergence and international benchmarking of trustworthy

standards and methodologies (Van Damme 2002).

The quality agencies – both national and international - under the umbrella of the Bologna process and the reinforced “Evaluative State” become the most important actors in the steering and directing the reforms (see for example the role of Hungarian Accreditation Committee in the development of framework for learning outcomes, and the supervision and steering of the implementation of multi-cycle structure). The quality agencies in Europe tend to take up the state governing role over higher education. Or, as Neave (2001) revealed the state interventionism has changed from detailed regulatory control to accountability and quality assurance policies.

In several countries there are arguments that the quality mechanisms threaten the institutional autonomy. As Kozma (2008b) points out this institutional autonomy is a barrier for the unfolding of Bologna process in the perspective of functionalist designers. In the introduction of multi-cycle structures the fifth Trend-report (Crosier et al. 2007) also argues that in several countries there is insufficient institutional autonomy, and the governmental intervention is exaggerated in some cases. As Barakonyi (2008) shows the enlarged quality control is necessary because of state withdrawal and the increased institutional autonomy. Though, as some higher education researchers (Amaral and Magalhaes 2004; Crosier et al. 2006; Teichler 2007; Hrubos 2008) argue the quality control and related interventions through limiting of autonomy and creativity threaten the adaptability of institutions, since these mechanisms facilitate the conformity of institutions. In addition, these procedures continually put greater administrative burdens on the institutions. The researchers of the fifth Trend-report (Crosier et al. 2007) conclude that the accreditation processes

at some extent get in the way of curricular innovation, limiting the possibility for curricular experiencing and designing interdisciplinary contents. Additionally, one of the most remarkable outcome of the fourth Trend-report (Reichert and Tauch 2005) was that those institutions closing systematically to the quality dispose larger institutional autonomy.

### **The Bologna process, as the internationalization of higher education**

The third important aspect behind Bologna process is the internationalization, to which again, the process serves as an umbrella, although the unfolding concepts and goals are at some extent different from the formerly known internationalization in European higher education. Teichler (2009b) points out that it is somewhat surprising to claim that higher education is internationalizing, given that the universities have long been considered one of society's most international institutions: e.g. the knowledge stored, generated and transmitted is often universal, they generates innovation in a world scale, the academics hold cosmopolitan values, and the cross-border or international communication and reputation is seen as almost identical with quality.

One of the most prominent underlying incentives behind Bologna reforms is the internationalization of European systems and institutions. The Bologna Declaration (1999) formulates the aim for increasing competitiveness and attractiveness of European higher education in a global setting. In addition, there appear also an inherited objective from the ERASMUS program, namely the promotion of cooperation between European institutions and mobility of students. As one could reveal, there are two different underpinning values related

to internationalization and globalization/ Europeanization of higher education. The first, lie on the competition and evoke the underlying arguments behind Lisbon process, while the second, the cooperation and continental European traditions in internationalization.

Teichler (2009c) argues that the globalization-oriented higher education policies and strategies are conflicting with those of the Bologna process in three respects. First, strategies of gearing international activities in order to generate income collide with those of promoting intra-European and world-wide mobility in equal terms. Second, strategies of commercializing higher education aim to increase import of foreign students or to sell programs internationally; consequently, they have little interest in internationalizing their own students. Third, the competition-oriented international activities of higher education institutions and the initiatives to be visible in rankings of world-class universities contribute toward a growing vertical stratification on national systems. Under the umbrella of Lisbon process the research is the main tool to increase the European competitiveness, what creates the framework for increased vertical differentiation. Consequently, this leads to temporary mobility of students between institutions of the same stratum.

The voluntary engagement prior to the Bologna of institutional leaders in internationalization policies and community programs was a strong advancing force in internationalization of European higher education. However, as Van Damme (2009, p. 40-41) states the institutional leaders increasingly experienced that the pressure of globalization can be met by more structural policies, not by sporadic internationalization, what can explain their willing to support the Bologna reforms. In addition, in order to recognize credentials across borders and

thus to provide mobility for the advanced knowledge workforce, some convergence of education practices and standards was called for, and broad consensus sought at the European level (Adelman 2009).

The Sorbonne Declaration (1998) and Bologna Declaration (1999) mainly discuss the internationalization goals in various instances through intra- and world-wide mobility and cooperation. The internationalization policies of the European Community and subsequently the Bologna process signal a clear shift from the intra-European mobility to world-wide mobility. The European countries became aware to increase the foreign students from outside Europe (e.g. Asia) and to launch policies to facilitate the attractiveness of higher education to these students (Teichler 2009a). Teichler (2009a) presents the patterns and differences of student mobility, comparing the diverse types of mobility. The inward mobility is understood primarily as vertical, whilst the intra-European as horizontal. The degree-mobility is prevalent among student coming from outside Europe, whilst the temporary mobility is widespread within Europe. Therefore the credit transfer system is more important for intra-European mobility, whilst the Diploma Supplement for intercontinental mobility.

However, the expectations toward structural convergence to increase part-time and degree mobility may encounter difficulties since the bachelor-master model is not general outside Europe and the master is conceived mainly as postgraduate study. Even in North-America the new European degrees are waiting for interpretation on exactly what represent these in American terms. The researches on student mobility show that besides the diverse structures, institutions and programs there are complex barriers in front of mobility. Such examples are the language barriers, the lack of well

organized doctoral programs, deficiencies in student services (Teichler 2007, 2009a) or financial constraint for CEE students, what demonstrate that the mobility is not only an issue for organization of higher education. Bürger et al. (2006, cited by Teichler 2009a) on the basis of a survey also shows that a minority of experts are convinced that the Bologna creates new barriers in respect to the mobility: (1) the short duration of the new study programs will lead to an increase in numbers of mobile students, (2) the curriculum is too dense to enable students to go abroad temporarily, and (3) the curricula are not flexible enough to take some of the courses abroad.

The fifth Trends-report (see Crosier et al. 2007) also presents mixed experience in regard to the mobility and recognition issues, since the barriers toward recognition still persist. The experts call for increased efforts to build trust between institutions, which is especially important as the mobility will increase in the next decades (Crosier et al. 2007; Teichler 2009b). It is also expected that this will lead to greater curricular convergence, what will reduce the barriers toward recognition of study abroad and will lead to greater trust. However, wide zones of mutual trust can be expected only in flat institutional hierarchies (Teichler 2009b). In addition the studies on student mobility show that the intra-European mobility is more interesting and valuable for the CEE students. These students are mainly looking for degree mobility and they are an academically more selected group, compared to those from Western Europe; as the ERASMUS results show the experience is enhancing their personality and competences, and has an important professional impact (Teichler 2009b).

Other specific issue discussed in the framework of internationalization and quality is the emergence of rankings,

league tables and international networks. Van Damme (2009) argues that previously the networks were established in order to serve the internationalization of institutions (e.g. contacts of European cooperation and mobility). Whereas contemporary networks are formed in order to bring together institutions with similar profiles and the promotion of their specific interest (e.g. the League of European Research Universities, the European Consortium of Innovative Universities, the Federation of European Catholic Universities).

The rankings are expected to evaluate quality in a global setting; rather they are measuring prestige and partial components of quality, currently in an unreliable and invalid form (Huisman et al. 2009). Huisman (2009) states that they implies a considerable measurement bias in favour of research (e.g. citations, impact scores, prizes won, research grants acquired) and in the detriment of teaching. However, there are now attempts to measure the value added by the teaching and findings from the student satisfaction surveys. In addition, Huisman (ibid) indicates that the governments are pushing their institutions with several initiatives to perform better in the rankings (e.g. German Exzellenzinitiative or the Romanian initiatives to strengthen the research performance of the universities). The consequence of these changes is that the institutions try to imitate the prestigious research universities, what decrease the diversity between institutions. Brennan et al. (2009) illuminates the issue of rankings and league tables from other perspective, in the framework of vertical and horizontal differentiation. There we can experience the emergence of new institutional groupings whose reference points will be the upholding of *global reputation*, rather than to serve *local and national demands*. For the majority of institution the pursuit of the goal to be globally ranked would be a distraction

from more important objectives, since they serve the 'public good' (e.g. economic roles, social equity, social mobility, social cohesion, citizenship, democracy, cultural engagement etc.).

### Conclusion

The Bologna process is the comprehensive reform initiative of the European higher education systems, with an unprecedented political support and commitment for changes. In the political discussion it is argued that Bologna is an answer to the challenges of increasing global competition, the growing penetration of globalization into education and the lagging behind to other world regions (especially North-America). This creates the demand for an overall reform of higher education. However, these arguments are ideas rather from Lisbon Strategy than from Bologna, and are more economic and political than educational. In addition, the Bologna process serves as a platform for the debates over the functions and roles of higher education. For example, there is strengthened again the subordination of higher education to various interests (e.g. economic growth, social mobility, labour market needs, or such contemporary political objectives as the European integration).

One who follows the development of higher education from a comparative and worldwide perspective since the '60s and '70s realizes that the changes (e.g. modularization of the curriculum, growing competition between institutions and programs, the transition to managerial forms of governance, the increasing influence of social stakeholders etc.) collected under the Bologna umbrella are concomitant to the growth of higher education and the problems aroused from the expansion. Thus the Bologna process from an education

perspective is an answer to the challenges created by the transition to mass - and in some Western-European countries to universal – higher education. These facts show us that there exist two parallel, but interconnected processes, which form the framework to European, national and institutional changes. We argue there that the Bologna cannot be conceived as a uniform process, rather one what is reinterpreted and repackaged in the national and institutional -, indeed disciplinary - contexts and under various pretexts. The characteristics of the reform initiative (e.g. continuously expanded agenda, plastic and general objectives etc.) and the method of coordination (e.g. soft methods) open the door for these national and institutional reinterpretations.

Various actors at different governmental levels instrumentalized the Bologna Process in order to legitimize their own political and reform ambitions, policy interests and beliefs, some of which were failed in the past. This process has altered deeply the goals and content of policies, especially through the implementations and re-nationalization of policy ideas. The complex picture makes difficult to answer what is the reform in various actor perspective, stage and level. In our approach the Bologna Process today is the main legitimating platform for the reform- and development-policy agenda-setting and problem-construction at European and national level.

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