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FROM BERGEN TO LONDON: CONTRIBUTION OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE TO THE BOLOGNA PROCESS

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(Directorate of School, Out-of-School and Higher Education/Higher Education and Research Division)

The present document provides an overview of the Council of Europe's contribution to the Bologna Process following the Ministerial conference held in Bergen in May 2005 and the one to be held in London in May 2007.

The document is divided into the following parts:

1. The Council of Europe contribution to the Bologna Process: an Overview
2. "Unresolved Issues in the Bologna Process": Discussion document submitted to the plenary session of the Steering Committee for Higher Education and Research (CDESR), held in Strasbourg on September 21 – 22, 2006.
3. Council of Europe Forum on the Responsibility of Higher Education for Democratic Culture: Declaration adopted by the Forum
4. Council of Europe Forum on the Responsibility of Higher Education for Democratic Culture: Report by the General Rapporteur
5. Council of Europe Forum on the Legitimacy of Quality Assurance in Higher Education: the Role of Public Authorities and Institutions: recommendations adopted by the Forum
6. Council of Europe Forum on the Legitimacy of Quality Assurance in Higher Education: the Role of Public Authorities and Institutions: Report by the General Rapporteur
7. Steering Committee on Higher Education and Research: main outcomes
8. Conference on "Making the European Higher Education Area a Reality: the Role of Students" (Moskva, November 2006): conclusions and recommendations
9. Conference on "Making the European Higher Education Area a Reality: the Role of Students" (Moskva, November 2006): report by the General Rapporteur
10. Informal conference of Ministers of Education of the Western Balkans: Conclusions
11. Informal conference of Ministers of Education of the countries that joined the Bologna Process in 2005: Conclusions
12. Bologna seminar on "New Challenges in Recognition" (Rīga, January 2007): Conclusions and Recommendations
13. Council of Europe Higher Education Series: on overview of publications

Additional information may be found at the Council of Europe's higher education web site http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/highereducation/default_EN.asp? and its section on the Bologna Process http://www.coe.int/T/DG4/HigherEducation/EHEA2010/BolognaPedestrians_en.asp#P109_1 2249.

1.   THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE CONTRIBUTION TO THE BOLOGNA PROCESS: AN OVERVIEW

The year 2005 marked the half-way point in the process of establishing a European Higher Education Area (EHEA) by 2010. The Council of Europe continued to contribute expertise and policy advice to the Bologna Process, and also participated in the Conference of European Education Ministers in Bergen on May 19 - 20. The European Higher Education Area was also referred to in key Council of Europe events such as the Third Summit of Heads of State and Government in Warsaw, the 50th anniversary of the European Cultural Convention and the European Year of Citizenship through Education.

The Higher Education and Research Division specifically continued its work with the steering bodies of the Bologna Process and more generally in the areas of the recognition of qualifications, support and advice to new member countries, and specific dimensions of the Process including governance, public responsibility, democratic citizenship and culture and the social dimension of higher education.

The Bologna Process in the Council of Europe's programme

> *The Council of Europe shall build on its work on language learning and recognition of diplomas and qualifications. It shall continue to play an important role in the Bologna process aimed at creation of European Higher Education Area by 2010.*
> - Action Plan, Third Summit of Heads of State and Government (Warsaw, May 2005)

Governing Bodies

In May 2005, the Ministers responsible for higher education in the participating countries of the Bologna Process met in Bergen where they confirmed in the conference Communiqué their dedication to the EHEA. In looking forward to the next Ministerial conference in 2007, and beyond 2010, there was commitment to emphasize practical implementation, begin working on the elaboration of national qualifications frameworks, a renewed stress on the importance of the social dimension of higher education and quality assurance, a desire to improve the "external dimension" by increasing contact with other parts of the world, and to enlarge the circle of consultative members.

The Council of Europe continues to contribute to policy development within the Bologna Process as a consultative member. The Council of Europe contributed to the Bergen Ministerial Conference, and is an active participant in the Bologna Follow-up Group (BFUG) and Board. The work of the Council is guided by the Steering Committee for Higher Education and Research (CDESR), which has a unique double representation of policy makers from both higher

education institutions and governments. The Committee meets once a year, while the Bureau oversees its work between plenary sessions.

Recognition and Quality Assurance

> *We call on all participating countries to address recognition problems identified by the ENIC/NARIC networks. We will draw up national action plans to improve the quality of the process associated with the recognition of foreign qualifications. These plans will form part of each country's national report for the next Ministerial Conference.*
> - Bergen Communiqué, Conference of European Ministers Responsible for Higher Education (Bergen, May 2005)

With increased attention being paid to the implementation of the principles of the Council of Europe/UNESCO Convention and its subsidiary texts, one of the next big challenges will be the development of national action plans on recognition in time for the Ministerial meeting in London 2007. Through the ENIC and NARIC Advisory Networks, the Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee and other related bodies, the Council of Europe will continue to support the fostering of improvements to the quality of the process associated with the recognition of foreign qualifications. In early 2006, the ENIC Bureau, the NARIC Advisory Board and the Bureau of the Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee elaborated draft guidelines for national action plans and submitted them to the BFUG for consideration. The BFUG adopted the Guidelines at its meeting in Wien in April 2006.

The Council of Europe is also engaged in quality assurance through   the ENIC Network. The recognition of qualifications, as defined by the Council of Europe/UNESCO Lisbon Recognition Convention (1997), is a significant factor in the EHEA and promotes the development of recognition practices, disseminates examples of good practices, addresses new recognition issues, such as trans-national education, and promotes mobility and international cooperation. Transparent quality assurance systems and provisions are fundamental to the recognition of qualifications internationally as well as nationally. Working in close cooperation with the NARIC Network of the European Union, in addition to aiding with the implementation of the Convention, the ENIC Network works through national authorities to provide information on:

- the recognition of foreign diplomas, degrees and other qualifications;
- education systems at home and abroad;
- opportunities for studying abroad, including information pertaining to mobility and equivalence.

In September 2006, the Council of Europe organized a conference on quality assurance, see below.

On 25 – 26 January 2007, the Latvian authorities and the Council of Europe coorganized an official Bologna seminar on "New Challenges in Recognition" in Rīga. The conference, which gathered some 120 participants, in particular considered two important but difficult topics: the

recognition of prior learning (including qualifications obtained under lifelong learning arrangements) and recognition between the European Higher Education Area and other parts of the world[1].

The public responsibility for higehr education and research

On 16 May 2007, the Committee of Ministers adopted Recommendation CM/Rec(2007)6 by the Committee of Ministers to member states on the public responsibility for higher education and research[2] and authorized publication of its Explanatory memorandum. This recommendation is one of the outcomes of the Higher Education Forum on the public responsibility in September 2007, see below.

New Members of the Bologna Process

From its original membership of 29 countries, the accession of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine in 2005 and Montenegro in 2007, in addition to those which joined in 2001 and 2003, means that the Bologna Process now encompasses 46 countries united around the European Cultural Convention, the principles and objectives of the Bologna Declaration, and a pan-European vision of the EHEA. Officially welcomed into the Process at the Bologna Summit in Bergen, these five countries join the long list of those who have benefited from the guidance of the Council of Europe in the creation of new legislation, the development of higher education policy, and the sharing of examples of good practice. Throughout the year, experts and members of the Secretariat offered their guidance and direction through visits, consultations, conferences and played an advisory role in the sphere of national legislation.

Highlights in 2005 included:

- a seminar on Curriculum Reform in Albanian Higher Education (Tirana, 16-17 March)
- a conference on European Higher Education Policies and Reform and a seminar on the Recognition of Qualifications (Baku, 20 – 22 April)
- a conference on European Higher Education Policies and Reform and a seminar on the Recognition of Qualifications (Yerevan, 2 – 4 November)
- a conference on the implementation of the Bologna Process in Georgia (Tbilisi, 8-9 November)
- an advisory mission on higher education reform and the Bologna Process in "the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia" (Skopje, 9-10 November)
- an advisory mission, Ministry of Education of Albania (Tirana, 6-7 December)

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[1] See http://www.aic.lv/bologna2007/

[2] http://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?id=1135191&BackColorInternet=9999CC&BackColorIntranet=FFBB55&BackColorLogged=FFAC75 . The French version will be found at http://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?Ref=CM/Rec(2007)6&Sector=secCM&Language=lanFrench&Ver=original&BackColorInternet=9999CC&BackColorIntranet=FFBB55&BackColorLogged=FFAC75

- a conference on "The Dynamics of the Bologna Process in the Republic of Moldova" (Chişinău, 8 – 9 December)

In 2006, activities included:

- an advisory mission on the reform of higher education legislation in "the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia" (Ohrid, 13 – 14 January)
- an advisory mission on the reform of specific aspects of higher education legislation in Albania (Tirana, 16 – 17 January)
- co organization, with the Austrian Presidency of the Bologna Process, a meeting of the countries that acceded to the Bologna Process in 2005 as well as Albania on the activities of the Process in the period 2005 – 2007 and the functioning of the BFUG and the working groups;
- the launching conference for work on a new Master Plan for higher education in Albania (Tirana, 22 – 23 March)
- a national conference on qualifications frameworks in Albania (Tirana, 19 – 20 July);
- informal conference of Ministers of Education of the Western Balkans (Strasbourg, 27 – 28 November);
- informal conference of Ministers of Education of the countries tat acceded to the Bologna Process in 2005 (Strasbourg, 12 – 13 December)
- a national conference on qualifications frameworks in Moldova (Chişinău, 7 – 8 December)
- a national conference on quality assurance in Albania (Tirana, 7 – 8 December)

Council of Europe Higher Education Forum

September 2005 marked the first annual Council of Europe Higher Education Forum: *Higher Education Governance between Democratic Culture, Academic Aspirations and Market Forces* (Strasbourg, 23 – 24 September) which presented the results of two years of work on the question of "higher education governance." As a contribution to the Bologna Process as well as to the European Year of Citizenship through Education, questions of how to define and understand governance, how to promote good governance policy, and recommendations for good governance were all prominent topics of discussion. The results of this Forum were published in spring 2006 (Jürgen Kohler and Josef Huber, eds.).

On 22 – 23 June 2006 a Forum on Democratic Culture in Higher Education was organized at Council of Europe headquarters in Strasbourg in cooperation with American partners as well as the EUA. The Forum gave institutions and organizations the opportunity to commit their support for promoting democratic culture and citizenship through higher education. The Forum adopted a Declaration which, among other things, calls on higher education institutions and actors to organize activities in and around their own institutions and associations to promote the development and maintenance of a democratic culture and to coordinate these activities through the web site established as a follow up to the Forum: http://dc.ecml.at/.

On 19 - 20 September, the Third Council of Europe Forum on Higher Education took place in Strasbourg and focused on "Legitimacy of Quality Assurance in Higher Education: The Role of Public Authorities and Institutions". The EUA and ENQA contributed to the preparation of this Forum.

Publications

The *Council of Europe Higher Education Series*, launched in 2004 to explore higher education issues of concern to policy makers in Ministries, higher education institutions, non-governmental organizations, and student representatives, published its 2nd and 3rd volumes.

In April 2005, *The Public Responsibility for Higher Education and Research* (Luc Weber and Sjur Bergan, eds.) was published to highlight the results of a Council of Europe conference that explored the meaning of public responsibility in complex societies in the 21st century. This work examines both overall policies on higher education and specific aspects such as higher education for a democratic culture, access to research results, financing, equal opportunities, the approach to regulation, and new trends in higher education.

The publication in November 2005 of *Standards for Recognition: the Lisbon Recognition Convention and its Subsidiary Texts* (Andrejs Rauhvargers and Sjur Bergan, eds.) brought together for the first time in one volume the Council of Europe/UNESCO legal standards for the recognition of qualifications with all subsidiary texts and an introductory article which provides background, context and an accessible explanation of their significance.

Spring 2006 saw the publication of *Recognition in the Bologna Process: Policy Development and the Road to Good Practice* (Andrejs Rauhvargers and Sjur Bergan, eds.) which presents the proceedings, outcomes and recommendations from the conference on improving the recognition system of degrees and study credit points in the European Higher Education Area held in Riga, December 2004.

Also in spring 2006, the fifth volume of the series appeared. *Higher Education Governance between Democratic Culture, Academic Aspirations and Market Forces* (Jürgen Kohler and Josef Huber, eds.) presents the outcomes of the Higher Education Forum held in September 2005 and describes governance issues in higher education and links them to basic issues debated in society at large. It also links governance issues to the Bologna Process.

Other Council of Europe Initiatives

In addition to the statement of the Third Summit Action Plan for the Bologna Process, 2005 also saw the inclusion of higher education in two other important Council of Europe initiatives. To mark the 50th anniversary of the European Cultural Convention, the Ministers responsible for Cultural Affairs met in October 2005 and concluded their meeting with the signing of the Faro Declaration on the Council of Europe's Strategy for Developing Intercultural Dialogue. In this

document the vision of intercultural dialogue both within Europe and with the rest of the world is developed with particular mention of the role that the Bologna Process can play. At its 2006 plenary session, the CDESR adopted a Statement on the contribution of higher education to intercultural dialogue.

2005 was also the European Year of Citizenship through Education. In its message to the Bergen meeting of the Ministers of the EHEA, the Council of Europe stressed that in keeping with its commitment to democracy, human rights and the rule of law, contributions to the Bologna Process "emphasiz[ed] higher education governance built on the participation of all groups, the development and maintenance of the basic values of Europe's university heritage and the recognition that higher education and research are vital to the sustainable development of European societies." This was followed-up at the Plenary session of the CDESR in September where the key role higher education plays in the development of modern societies based on democracy, human rights, and the rule of law, and how the issue of good governance is crucial for the promotion of democratic culture both within the higher education community and society at large, was confirmed.

In June 2006, the Parliamentary Assembly adopted Recommendation 1762 (2006) on academic freedom and university autonomy[3].

As part of the Russian Chairmanship of the Council of Europe, on 2 – 3 November, the Council of Europe and the Russian University of People's Friendship organized a conference on the role of students in making the European Higher Education Area a reality.

In late 2006 the Council of Europe organized two informal Ministerial conferences focusing on the Bologna Process: one on 27 – 28 November for the countries of South East Europe and one on 12 – 13 December for the five countries that acceded to the Bologna Process in 2005. Both conferences were held at Council of Europe Headquarters in Strasbourg. They outlined key issues in the Bologna Process and aimed to assist participating countries in their preparation for the Ministerial conference in London in May 2007.

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[3] http://assembly.coe.int/main.asp?Link=/documents/adoptedtext/ta06/erec1762.htm. French version at http://assembly.coe.int/mainf.asp?Link=/documents/adoptedtext/ta06/frec1762.htm.

2.   UNRESOLVED ISSUES IN THE BOLOGNA PROCESS. DISCUSSION DOCUMENT SUBMITTED TO THE 2006 PLENARY SESSION OF THE STEERING COMMITTEE FOR HIGHER EDUCATION AND RESEARCH (CDESR), STRASBOURG, 21 – 22 SEPTEMBER 2006)

INTRODUCTION

The Bologna Process aims to establish a European Higher Education Area by 2010. While substantial progress has been made in reaching this goal, a number of issues still remain to be addressed. Some of these are of great importance to the further development of the European Higher Education Area beyond 2010, and a debate on these issues should be launched without delay.

The purpose of the present document is precisely to launch such a debate at the CDESR plenary session, drawing on the unique position of the CDESR as a pan-European forum of policy makers in government and at higher education institutions. It is hoped that this debate will make suggestions as well as stimulate further debate within the Bologna Process as well as at national level.

In outlining and addressing unresolved issues, it may be useful briefly to recall the main achievements and developments so far of the Bologna Process.

SOME KEY CHARACTERISTICS

The Bologna Process was launched in 1999 as a framework encompassing 29 countries that were either members of the European Union, applicants for EU membership or part of the European Economic Area[4]. It was, however, foreseen that new members could accede to the Process, and in the first period, the criteria for membership were linked to eligibility for specific EU programmes. In 2003, however, membership was opened to countries that are not part of these EU programmes but that have ratified the European Cultural Convention and whose Ministers in writing confirm the country's commitments to the goals of the European Higher Education Area. With the most recent accessions in 2005, the Bologna Process is now pan-European and encompasses 45 members. Of the parties to the European Cultural Convention, only Belarus, Monaco, Montenegro[5] and San Marino are not members of the Bologna Process.

While the Bologna Process was initiated by Ministers of Education, and while the meetings of Ministers every two years remain the top decision making mechanism of the Bologna Process, it relies on cooperation between public authorities, higher education institutions and students and staff, with the active contribution of international institutions and organizations.   This

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[4] With the exception of Switzerland which does, however, have strong links to EU members in many areas, including higher education.
[5] At its meeting on 12 – 13 October 2006, the Bologna Follow Up Group is likely to consider the relationship of Montenegro to the Bologna Process following Montenegro's declaration of independence on 3 June 2006.

partnership, for which the CDESR is in many ways a pioneer, is crucial to the success of the European Higher Education Area.

The Bologna Process is characterized by implementation at national level, and under the competence of national authorities[6], of policies and objectives agreed at European level.

Much of the focus of the Bologna Process has been on structural reform, and here member countries have carried out − or are in the process of carrying out − extensive reforms of their systems. They include:

- the introduction of three tier degree systems;
- introduction of the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS), or of systems compatible with the ECTS;
- by 2010, setting up of national qualifications frameworks compatible with the overarching qualifications framework for the European Higher Education Area, adopted in 2005;
- introduction of national quality assurance mechanisms compatible with the standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area adopted in 2005;
- based on the commitment to ratification of the Council of Europe/UNESCO Recognition Convention, to a review of national legislation to ensure that this is compatible with the Convention, and to the elaboration of national action plans for recognition.

The European Higher Education Area is founded on a number of key principles and values, including:

- International mobility of students and staff;
- Autonomous universities;
- Student participation in the governance of higher education;
- Public responsibility for higher education;
- The social dimension of the Bologna Process[7].

However, the principles and values of the Bologna Process have only partially been made explicit, which leads us to a consideration of unresolved issues.

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[6] Without prejudice to the constitutional arrangements of some members of the Bologna Process, where the competent authorities in higher education are at a level other than national, such as canton, Community, or *Land*.
[7] From "Requirements and Procedures for Joining the Bologna Process", elaborated by the Bologna Secretariat and dated 6 July 2004, http://www.bologna-bergen2005.no/Docs/01BFUG/040614-B/BFUGB3_7_Accessions.pdf.

UNRESOLVED ISSUES

The vision and values of the European Higher Education Area

The Bologna Process represents the most extensive reform of European higher education since at least the immediate aftermath of 1968. The policy goals of the European Higher Education Area enjoy the support of 45 governments and a majority of higher education institutions, students and staff, even if there is also some scepticism to some of the policies of the Process as well as a feeling of lack of information. They have also attracted considerable attention and interest from other regions of the world.

Yet, a clearly articulated vision of the European Higher Education Area, subscribed to by the Ministers of the Bologna Process and by the consultative members, has so far not been put forward. There is certainly an underlying, tacit vision of the Bologna Process as leading towards a European Higher Education Area characterized by increased mobility of students, staff and holders of qualifications, and improving the quality and attractiveness of European higher education for European students as well as for students from other areas of the world. There is also an underlying assumption that reforming higher education will help make Europe a more competitive region in economic terms, and in this respect, the links to the EU Lisbon Agenda are clear, with its often quoted and commented goal of making Europe (here meaning the European Union) the world's most competitive economy by 2010.

There is, however, little in the way of a clearly and coherently articulated view of the purposes and role of higher education in modern society nor of the link between the reforms of the Bologna Process and the history, heritage and specificity of higher education in Europe. An exception to the latter point is the Bologna conference on "The Cultural Heritage and Academic Values of the European University and the Attractiveness of the European Higher Education Area", organized by the Holy See on 30 March – 1 April 2006 in association with the Council of Europe and UNESCO/CEPES.

If we look at the political documents of the Bologna Process, there seems to be development from a strong emphasis on the economic and labour market aspects of higher education in the Bologna Declaration through an increased emphasis on the social and citizenship dimension in the Prague Communiqué to the inclusion of research and research training in the Berlin Communiqué. However, this does not amount to a clearly enunciated view of the purposes of higher education, such as the one articulated by the Council of Europe in its considerations on the public responsibility for higher education and research, which defines four overriding purposes of higher education:

1.   preparation for the labour market;
2.   preparation for life as active citizens in democratic societies;
3.   personal development;
4.   development of a broad advanced knowledge base.

As has been underlined by the Council of Europe on many occasions, these four main goals are integrated and complementary rather than contradictory. They should therefore be considered as integrated rather than segregated, and higher education policies should aim at furthering all four purposes.

An important issue is therefore how we could contribute to a debate of the overall vision, goals and purposes of the European Higher Education Area. The economic aspect of higher education is fundamental, and it was one of the main motives for launching the Bologna Process. However, a discussion limited to the economic importance of higher education would miss other aspects that are also of fundamental importance. Not least, such a lop-sided debate would miss an important opportunity to promote a holistic development of higher education in Europe.

An important challenge in this respect is how a focus on the values of higher education and on democratic citizenship can be (re)introduced into the discussion of the European Higher Education Area.

Actors and responsibilities

As mentioned, the Bologna Process has succeeded in bringing together public authorities, higher education institutions, students and staff and international organizations in working for higher education reform. As of 2005, the Bologna Process has also included social partners as consultative members of the BFUG, following working contacts established earlier. In this sense, the Bologna Process has successfully established a broad platform of cooperation and debate between many of the main actors that need to be involved in the development of higher education in Europe.

At another level, however, the Bologna Process has so far been less successful, possibly because it has not focused enough on the issues. The Ministers have twice stated that higher education is "a public good and a public responsibility". This issue has been taken up by the Council of Europe in the CDESR conference on the Public Responsibility for Higher Education and Research, which led to a publication and also a draft Recommendation. The Bureau and the Secretariat believe this is a very valuable contribution to the European policy debate, but this debate needs to be continued. Essentially, the question is not whether higher education should or should not be a public responsibility, but what measures need to be taken if continued public responsibility for higher education – and also research – are to characterize European higher education in the future.

Most observers would agree that the traditional model of dominant to exclusive public funding and public provision, depending on the context and the country, will most likely not be sufficient to ensure top quality higher education and research in the future. The draft recommendation currently under consideration spells out some basic principles, but more debate is needed on the proper balance between and roles of public and private funding and actors in the European Higher Education Area. A positive vision needs to be developed on the possible contributions of different actors to the common goal of strengthening higher education in Europe. It might also

be useful to analyze factors and circumstances that could prevent the continued development of higher education in Europe as well as possible remedies or countermeasures.

While university autonomy[8] is a key principle of the Bologna Process, this principle also needs to be considered in the light of developments in society. Traditionally, emphasis has been on legal autonomy, which remains important. However, legal autonomy is a necessary but not sufficient condition for university autonomy to become or remain a reality. Traditionally, autonomy has also been defined in relation to public authorities (commonly expressed as "the state"). This remains an important aspect of university autonomy, but the relationship of universities to other actors who influence the environment in which universities operate must also be considered. One obvious example is the relationship of universities to bodies or companies that finance important parts of an institution's activities, e.g. through major research projects. Lack of *de jure* autonomy in relation to public authorities due to legal provisions are relatively easy to identify, whereas lack of *de facto* autonomy in relation to a variety of actors for economic reasons, informal pressure, the influence of public opinion or of interest groups or because institutions adapt their behaviour to what the expect will be future political priorities is far more subtle and hence more difficult to define.

Many of these issues boil down to a consideration of the relationship between higher education and the state, and this again is a plurifaceted issue. On the one hand, it has to do with the relationship between higher education and political authorities or - if one prefers – the political process. Traditionally, most European countries have seen higher education as an important part of their national policies. There has been an assumption that the political process sets the national agenda and that political decisions to a significant degree determine the development of higher education. Over the past decade or more, the predominant position of the political process and of political decisions has, however, been diminished, as many other actors have come to occupy positions of influence. To some, this is a source of regret, as they see the development as one away from democratic control and decision making towards influent linked to control over resources or special interests. To others, this development is a source of satisfaction, as they see it as one away from undue political influence over decisions that are better made by economic actors, the market or those with particular stakes in the decisions. Whatever view one takes of these developments, the reality of the developments is fairly widely recognized, yet the impact of these developments on higher education policy is very far from being adequately explored. A fundamental question is how far the political process guides the development of our societies, and what impact the answer to this question has on the development of higher education.

This also raises the questions of policy measures. To what extent can and should policy be implemented through legislation, and to what extent are other measures needed, such as financial incentives or punishment, development of attitudes and consciousness, voluntary agreement and association, and other "soft" policy measures? The often quoted concept of mutual trusts is also relevant here: there is broad agreement that mutual trust is needed, yet mutual trust needs to be developed through practice and cooperation, and it cannot easily be established by decree.

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[8] See also Recommendation 1762 (2006) by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe on Academic Freedom and University Autonomy, available at
http://assembly.coe.int/Main.asp?link=/Documents/AdoptedText/ta06/ERec1762.htm.

On the other hand, the issue also touches on the relationship between the national level and other levels of actors. Traditionally, higher education has largely been linked to the development of national institutions, policies and cultures, as witnessed by institutions bearing names such as "national" or "state" universities. We also refer to national higher education systems, national qualifications frameworks, national quality assurance systems and the like. In some countries, one also finds Ministries of National Education. Yet, at the same time, there is much discussion of the internationalization of higher education, of transnational or borderless education, of global education markets and of global trends.

The Bologna Process is itself a pan-European process which is clearly influenced by developments elsewhere (in particular in North America) and which in its turn has stimulated great interest in other parts of the world, including in North America, but also in regions such as Latin America and Asia and the Pacific. At the same time, however, the Bologna Process may be described as a process in which policies are developed and agreed at European level but implemented within national frameworks. Leaving aside the question of the relationship between higher education and regional and local authorities, the issue of higher education in relation to national and international levels need to be explored further. The proposal for a register of quality assurance agencies and the "portability of quality assurance" enabling higher education institutions to chose to undergo quality assurance with an agency from a country other than the one(s) in which the institution operates has several aspects, but the issues of national vs. international competence over higher education is one of the key issues. Are we going towards a (re)nationalization or a (re)internationalization of higher education, where should we be going, and what can we do to go where we want to go?

Quality development and roles of institutions

This leads us to a consideration of quality assurance, which is one of the key elements of the Bologna Process (and the subject of the Council of Europe Higher Education Forum to be held immediately before the CDESR plenary session, on 19 – 20 September 2006). On the positive side, this focus includes not only external quality control, but also a strong emphasis on the role of institutions in enhancing the quality of their own activities. The double emphasis on quality development (quality culture) as well as quality assurance, and on the role of higher education institutions as well as of public authorities, is positive and valuable. Governance issues are important also in this context, as is the issue of university autonomy, both of which were referred to in the preceding paragraphs.

Yet there is another aspect of the quality debate that has been less present, although it was raised at the conference on the use of credits organized by the EUA and the Swiss authorities in Zürich in October 2002 and it also has to do with the issue of public responsibility and the contributions of different actors.

This issue has to do with the mission and responsibilities, not of higher education as a whole, but of individual institutions. Should higher education institutions broadly have the same mission, or should they differentiate their role according to aspirations, resources and past performance? If so, what role should public authorities play in ensuring a diversified higher education system,

and to what extent should it be left to individual institutions to determine their own profile and ambitions? Again, this is not a question that can easily be answered in absolute terms, by a simple yes/no, and it raises a set of very difficult questions to institutions, staff and students and public authorities. These include:

- If higher education in Europe is research based, does this mean that all institutions and staff should be actively engaged in research, or does it mean that all staff should have some personal experience of research, e.g. through their own training, but not necessarily be active researchers?
- Should all institutions aim to carry out research?
- If yes, how should public authorities fund research?
- If no, what should be the criteria for funding of higher education, as this could imply relying on a broader set of criteria than today?
- If no, what are the implications for criteria for academic advancement? Should there be alternative career tracks emphasizing research and teaching differently? In this case, how could the "higher education teaching career track" be made attractive?
- Perhaps the most difficult and painful set of questions of all: can all countries and higher education systems realistically aim at having at least one high class research university? If not, at least high class research in at least a limited number of area? If national ambition – or *de facto* achievement – is less than one top class research university, how can transfer and use of high quality and level competence be ensured?

Higher education governance

The traditional model of higher education governance in Europe may, perhaps somewhat simplified, be summarized as "governance by the academic community, of the academic community, and for the academic community". In the course of the past 30 – 40 years, in particular, the definition of what constitutes the academic community has been considerably enlarged, with a substantial role in institutional governance for students and a somewhat less significant role for technical and administrative staff. Yet, until relatively recently, the predominant model was one in which tenured staff had a majority on institutional governance bodies, and the underlying reasoning was that tenured staff held the highest competence in the core mission of higher education: teaching and research.

Recently, however, there has been a tendency towards a significant departure from this model. Representatives of external stakeholders have, in many but far from all countries, been included as members of university governance bodies. In some cases, institutional leaders have also been sought from outside of the institution and hired on fixed term contracts rather than been elected by and among the academic community for fixed terms. This is a significant, if far from universal shift, also because the inclusion of external representatives tend to imply that tenured academic staff no longer have a majority on institutional governance bodies, which also seem, in many cases, to have been reduced in size. The consequences of this change – in effect a change in the definition of the key competencies required for higher education governance from competence in teaching and research toward stakeholder competence and/or competence in

broader societal issues, including the relationship between higher education and the broader society – have so far been insufficiently explored.

At the same time, higher education institutions are also affected by the "managerial society" or the "audit society". This is in many ways a double edged sword. On the one hand, efficient management has many benefits for higher education institutions, and both the academic community, public authorities, various stakeholders and the public at large have a legitimate interest in higher education institutions being accountable for their use of resources. On the other hand, there is a feeling among many members of the academic community that developments may go too far, or that they have already done so. Partly, this may be a reluctance to change old ways, but there is also a very legitimate concert that the methods of private business management are not immediately applicable to higher education, and that a sensible alternative has yet to be found. Accountability is a sound principle, but the methods and measure of accountability should be adapted to the reality of higher education. In particular, there is legitimate concern that the time perspective allowed in accountability exercises is insufficient to meet the reality of research.

The Council of Europe's Forum and publication on higher education governance are important contributions to this debate,. However, like the debate on public responsibility, the debate on higher education governance also needs to be continued.

The first degree in the labour market

As mentioned, the economic function of higher education was one of the main concerns in launching the Bologna Process, and the emphasis on the three tier qualifications framework must be seen in this context. The Bologna Declaration states:

> The degree awarded after the first cycle shall also be relevant to the
> European labour market as an appropriate level of qualification.

Yet, this aspect of the reform of the degree structure has so far received far less attention than the workload associated with the different cycles.

The experience with what is often referred to as the employability of the first degree varies. In countries where the three tier degree system is well established, such as Ireland and the United Kingdom, the first degree also seems to be well established in the labour market. In countries where the degree system has traditionally been one of a long university degree and where the three tier system has been introduced only recently – ort where it is still being introduced, there seems to be much less acceptance of the first degree in the labour market.

There may be several reasons for this, and this paper does not pretend to offer a full analysis. However, one important reason may be lack of understanding among employers of the potential value of the first degree, paired with a failing to define and understand the learning outcomes and functions of the different degrees. It is obvious that the first degree is not an adequate preparation for all kinds of employment for which academic qualifications are required. That,

however, is not an argument for saying that the first degree is inadequate for all kinds of employment, and it may be symptomatic that the examples often used to argue that a first degree is insufficient are taken from regulated profession. While a first degree is clearly insufficient for exercising regulated professions like medicine, civil engineering or architecture[9], that is not an argument in relation to many other jobs, most of which belong to the non-regulated part of the labour market.

Higher education authorities and institutions must therefore define the learning outcomes of first degrees, engage with employers and their organization and seek to overcome traditional assumptions that equate quality with length of studies without considering the purpsoe for which a qualification will be put to use. It is important to define both learning outcomes and quality in relation to purpose, and this should be a key element in elaborating national qualifications frameworks.

Mobility

Increased mobility of students and staff is one of the main goals of the Bologna Process, perhaps even the ultimate goal. Mobility is also furthered by large scale organized mobility programmes, in particular the EU programmes, but also regional programmes like CEEPUS and NORDPLUS. Many countries also have their own mobility programmes and goals, in particular for attracting students from outside of Europe (whether Europe is defined as the EHEA or, in particular for the purpose of charging study fees, as the European Union[10]).

Yet the "Bologna vision" of mobility is incomplete and inconsistently articulated. In part, this has to do with the interaction between higher education policies and other areas of public policy (see below) in part it has to do with inadequate consideration of objectives, means and policies, and in part it may have to do with difficulties in reconciling pan-European goals for mobility with national goals, in particular where possibilities for charging substantial study fees are involved. What kind of mobility do we want to encourage, and what means will help achieve these goals, once defined?

Higher education for sustainable societies

Contributing to developing and maintaining sustainable societies should be considered one of the main roles of higher education, and should therefore also be an important consideration in establishing the European Higher Education Area. Sustainability is most commonly considered in the context of environmental issues and policies, but such considerations equally well apply to a whole range of issues of modern society. Environmental sustainability is a *sine qua non*, and developing the knowledge and understanding required to make life on Earth sustainable is one of

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[9] These are professions covered by specific legislation at national levels as well as by EU Directives on professional recognition. Very often, regulations specify the educational qualifications needed as well as supplementary requirements, such as a practice period under supervision.

[10] According to EU legislation, EU members cannot charge higher fees of students from other EU countries than of students from their own country.

the main missions of higher education. This requires advanced research but also broad understanding of the major issues among the population at large as well as among societal actors and decision makers.

However, sustainable societies also require sustainable social and economic policies that provide for meaningful and gainful employment and afford members of society the opportunity to make good use of their talents. Members of society must feel they have a real stake in the development and well being of their local, regional, national, European and international society. This touches on the Council of Europe's core missions of democracy, human rights and the rule of law, in which education plays an important role. It also touches on the role of education in developing understanding and values in addition to instrumental knowledge and skills.

How can these fundamental aspects of the mission of higher education be incorporated into the European Higher Education Area?

Interaction between higher education policies and other areas of public policies

The Bologna Process aims to create a European Higher Education Area. The goal has been formulated by Ministers responsible for higher education, it is supported by the higher education community and it relies primarily on higher education policies to reach its goal. However, it will not be possible to establish a European Higher Education Area without also considering measures from other areas of public policy, in the same way as stakeholders from other areas – in particular, the social partners, who have an important function in higher education, but whose concerns are not limited to higher education – have been brought into the process.

This is most starkly illustrated by the goal of increasing academic mobility, which includes the mobility for teachers (hence of employees) and of holders of qualifications (hence of both current and prospective employees). This goal of increasing academic mobility is formulated at the same time that many European governments seek to limit immigration, in other words, general mobility for work and residence purposes. In some countries, there is also a debate about "selective mobility". It is not immediately obvious that the simultaneous goals of increasing academic mobility and limiting immigration are readily compatible, nor is it obvious that governments are prepared to consider specific rules for academic mobility as opposed to other forms of mobility. The case in favour of mobility therefore needs to be made to political decision makers as well as to the general public.

Similarly, the issues of social security and pension rights are of fundamental importance to academic mobility, in particular staff mobility. Labour law, for example regulations limiting working hours, issues of civil responsibility and liability, for example in cases of malpractice, and provisions for child care are other areas where general regulations may affect academic mobility and ultimately the functioning of the European Higher Education Area if provisions are radically different among countries within the Area.

The financing of higher education – of institutions as well as of projects and of individuals such as students – is also an area in which higher education policies interact with other areas of public

policy. Few institutions today can fully achieve their ambitions with traditional public funding alone, and tend to supplement their traditional funding with project funds from other public sources or from private sources. This raises a number of issues, including the ones invoked earlier about the role of the political process in setting the agenda but also of whether general public policies on finance are well adapted to the needs of higher education. To what extent does general legislation concerning taxes on investment or the acquisition of major equipment reduce the possibilities of higher education institutions to acquire "heavy" research equipment? Conversely, what would be the effect of financial provisions specifically targeted at higher education? What are the effects of rigid or less rigid systems of remuneration of academic staff or of regulations governing the transfer of public funds from one budget year or one type of expenditure to another.

General labour legislation can also have an impact on higher education, e.g. as concerns regulations concerning hiring and firing of staff, permanent and temporary contracts, and not least maximum working hours. What, for example, is the effect of regulations concerning maximum working hours in a given period (day, week, month, year) on experimental science that require intensive efforts over a limited period of time or on the general tendency of higher education staff to put in very long hours?

While these paragraphs on financing and labour legislation raise more questions than they answer, they do seek to make the case that higher education needs to define its specific needs in these areas and then to put this case to the relevant public authorities, which include but are not limited to those responsible for higher education policies.

However, as the discussion around the Bergen Communiqué showed, there is considerable reluctance, at least among many member states, towards bringing other areas of public policy into the Bologna Process, even if there seems to be a very general and rather abstract acknowledgement that doing so would increase the prospects of successfully implementation the European Higher Education Area. One major challenge is therefore to define the most pertinent areas and issues of broader public policy that need to be addressed to successfully establish the EHEA and then find a way to bring them into the Bologna Process. This again will probably require addressing the broader vision for the EHEA which was one of the starting points for this document.

CONCLUSION

This document is intended to launch a debate at the CDESR plenary session on outstanding issues in the Bologna Process. It does not pretend to be exhaustive, but the Secretariat hopes the document may have identified at least most of the most pertinent outstanding issues. While the list of potential issues may be quite long, it is also important that further discussion focus on a manageable number of issues. This discussion should aim to offer guidance for further work on these issues, leading up to the 2007 Ministerial meeting in London but also considerably beyond this. Partly, this discussion should be about finalizing the establishment of the Europe Higher Education Area, but to a large extent, it will also be about setting the agenda for the EHEA once it has been established.

3. **COUNCIL OF EUROPE FORUM ON THE RESPONSIBILITY OF HIGHER EDUCATION FOR DEMOCRATIC CULTURE: DECLARATION ADOPTED BY THE FORUM**

The Responsibility of Higher Education for a Democratic Culture:
Citizenship, Human Rights and Sustainability

Context and Challenge

Issues of democracy define the political debates of our societies and underpin their sustainable development. We, as representatives of higher education institutions and associations, students, faculty and other interested parties from various parts of the world welcome this focus on democracy in public debates, through which humane and just societies thrive and develop.

Yet, along with the global spread of democratic ideas and societies, a crisis of confidence persists. An increased emphasis on the rhetoric as opposed to the practice of democracy, low and decreasing levels of participation in politics and civic activities, a decline of trust in public authority as well as social institutions, and a decrease in student participation give rise to concern for a democratic future of our multicultural and diverse societies. As higher education leaders, we cannot remain indifferent to these challenges.

Education and schooling are decisive forces shaping the democratic development of societies. Therefore, the role of education for democratic culture is emphasized in the Action Plan adopted by the Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe at their Third Summit in Warsaw in May 2005 as well as in the Declaration adopted on the Council's 50th anniversary (May 1999). The latter proclaimed the centrality of education in democratic development: "to make education for democratic citizenship based on all the rights and responsibilities of citizens, an essential component of all educational, training, cultural and youth policies and practices." That commitment was reaffirmed in the Council's 2005 Year of Citizenship Through Education.

As was recognized by 536 college and university presidents in the United States in a Presidents' Declaration on the Civic Responsibility of Higher Education to educate citizens, universities are strategic institutions for the democratic development of societies.

Citizenship, Human Rights and Sustainability

Democracy can only flourish with strong supportive institutions and laws, and a pervasive democratic culture, which encompasses democratic values, ways of knowing and acting, ethical judgments, analytical competencies, and skills of engagement. It includes concern for the sustainable well being of fellow human beings as well as of the environment in which we live. It includes awareness of and concern for human rights as well as openness to the cultural diversity of human experience and willingness to give due consideration to the views of others.

The use of the Earth's resources raises issues of sustainable development and the very future of life on our planet. Even if public and political awareness of ecological issues and their

importance for economic development is increasing, it is insufficient. Democratic culture interlinks with sustainable development as a conduit for economic and development concerns, and as a precondition for social cohesion and viable societies. Education is a condition *sine qua non* for sustainable development.

The Commitment of Higher Education

As higher education leaders and policy makers we affirm our commitment to democratic principles and practice; our conviction that higher education has an essential role in furthering democratic culture; and our responsibility to educate each successive generation to renew and develop the attitudes, values and skills needed for this to become a reality. We recognize that the contribution of students as well as academic and non-academic staff to this effort is essential.

We further affirm our conviction that complex environmental, economic and societal issues can only be solved at the local, national and global levels if citizens can combine basic democratic values with a knowledge and understanding of the relationship of these challenges.

We subscribe to the responsibility of higher education to foster citizen commitment to sustainable public policies and actions that go beyond considerations of individual benefits.

We accept our responsibility to safeguard democracy, and promote a democratic culture, by supporting and advancing within higher education as well as society at large, the principles of:

- Democratic and accountable structures, processes and practice;
- Active democratic citizenship
- Human rights, mutual respect and social justice
- Environmental and societal sustainability
- Dialogue and the peaceful resolution of conflicts

A Call for Action

We pledge to undertake efforts in our respective institutions and associations to launch a debate about this declaration, to have it endorsed by our appropriate governance bodies, and to work for programmes, policies and practices that encourage academic, administrative and technical staff, students and other interested parties to:

- become aware of their responsibilities as educated citizens, for the development of their societies, the values of democracy, human rights and social, environmental and economic sustainability; and,
- take action in their local as well as in the national and global communities to put these principles into practice.
- encourage education for democracy in the curriculum and all aspects of institutional life.
- assume responsibility for the future of their universities and colleges;

To give visibility to these shared commitments, we will seek opportunities to organize activities within our own institutions and associations as well as in and with the communities of which we are a part. We call on the Council of Europe to coordinate a web site through which institutions and associations can highlight and advance their activities throughout the year, and we suggest that our efforts be publicized on or around December 10 - the International Day of Human Rights and the day on which the Nobel Prizes are announced.

We call on all higher education leaders and policy makers who commit to democracy, citizenship, human rights and sustainability to join us in our undertaking.

4. COUNCIL OF EUROPE FORUM ON THE RESPONSIBILITY OF HIGHER EDUCATION FOR DEMOCRATIC CULTURE: REPORT BY THE GENERAL RAPPORTEUR

David Crosier, European University Association

PREAMBLE

On June 22 – 23, 2006 the Council of Europe held its second Higher Education Forum, on the topic of *Higher Education and Democratic Culture: Citizenship, Human Rights and Civic Responsibility*. This short report of the event will disappoint anyone who expects to find a neatly digestible summary and highlights. To attempt to summarise or pick out highlights, however, would be to do an injustice to the debate, to the range and depth of contributions, and to the rationale for action set out in the Declaration adopted at the Forum. Moreover, as this report is published alongside the main presentations from the Forum, there is no need to take such an approach: the impressive presentations merit being read and reflected upon in their entirety, and the questions that they raise need to be considered in context.

Instead this General Report attempts to convey a sense of the critical importance of the issues dealt with, as well as to reflect on and describe the comprehensive approach taken to link the notions of democratic culture, human rights, citizenship and sustainability. Hopefully the report will also give some sense of the extraordinary atmosphere created at the event by bringing together participants with such diverse and extraordinary experience. Indeed, what united the participants, who included leaders of higher education institutions, student representatives, civil society organisation figureheads, and heads of public authorities, was their commitment to shared values, and to taking action in a spirit of public engagement through higher education to sustain and develop democratic culture. While no-one will have left Strasbourg with a sense of unqualified optimism, there is little doubt that most will have left with a strengthened resolve to continue to act with conviction to advance the democratic fabric of society.

A particular paradox concerning the participants at the event should also be highlighted: those who attended are likely to be among the group whose need to be there was least critical. By responding positively to the invitation, participants indicated their sensitivity to the importance of working together to sustain democratic culture. The problem in our societies is that there are so many who neglect the importance of these issues, and fail to act appropriately in the interest of both today's and tomorrow's society.

The Council of Europe's Steering Committee for Higher Education and Research (CDESR) should therefore be applauded for its initiative in organising this Forum and bringing these crucial issues to the forefront of international attention. Moreover the event would not have been so positive without the committed and enthusiastic involvement of the US Steering Committee of the International Consortium for Higher Education, Civic Responsibility and Democracy, comprised of the American Council on Education, the Association of American Colleges and Universities, and Campus Compact. While the Forum was built on strong foundations laid in previous, related activities, including the Council of Europe project on the University as a Site of

Citizenship, and initiative for the European Year of Citizenship through Education in 2005, this event clearly moved the discussion beyond previous outcomes. Indeed one of the overarching conclusions from the Forum is very simple and stark: that as the speed of change in our world increases, none of us is in a position to be complacent about the future of human society, and how we act today may therefore have dramatic consequences for the future.

DEMOCRACY AND HIGHER EDUCATION

A Chinese saying blesses those with the good fortune to live in interesting times. While it is a moot point whether in our post-modern societies we are currently more blessed and fortunate than our predecessor generations, there is no doubt that we are living in interesting times – times that provide ample evidence that democracy is not a state of being that can be taken for granted and sustained without effort. Yet many who have grown up in democratic societies think little about the notion of democratic culture nor of the processes required to sustain and develop society. Higher education institutions often reflect this negligent attitude, and yet they have an important responsibility, of which they may be more or less conscious, for the quality of democratic society. This is a responsibility which needs to be thought about and acted upon, and there was general agreement at the Forum that higher education institutions both can and should do much more to fulfill this imperative societal responsibility.

That the Council of Europe took the initiative to organise a major international Forum for higher education institutions and public authorities on the topic of higher education and democratic culture can be regarded simultaneously as an extremely welcome initiative and a cause for concern. All who were present in Strasbourg will testify that it was extremely welcome for representatives of higher education institutions, public authorities, student leaders and civil society organisations across the world to have the opportunity to discuss their role in developing and sustaining democratic societies, and that this was a rare and important opportunity to share diverse experience and engage in a fruitful process of mutual learning. However, the fact that it was so acutely necessary in 2006 to pay serious attention to how societies can sustain and develop democracy for the future should be of major concern to us all.

For many higher education institutions in so-called advanced democratic societies the values of democratic society can too easily be taken for granted. Indeed, while many higher education institutions may spontaneously define their work and mission in terms of teaching and research, very likely acknowledging the growing demands of a changing labour market, few would immediately state the role of promoting democratic culture among their primary functions. This is not to say that they do not promote democratic culture, but rather that they do not do it explicitly, rarely have any considered strategy or institutional policy on the matter, and may often fail to identify their social role in educating for democratic citizenship as a primary task.

As democratic culture will always be transmitted through the form as much as the content of the education process, this can be regarded as a perfectly normal state of affairs. However, the inevitability of democracy cannot be taken for granted, and there are many concerns for tomorrow's society if insufficient effort is made to sustain and develop democratic culture and behaviour within our higher education institutions. Indeed a recurring comment at the Forum was

that higher education institutions are very often under so much pressure to respond to short-term demands that their attention to long-term sustainable development is far from adequate.

Examples discussed at the Forum from the new democratic nations in Central and Eastern Europe were particularly enlightening in this respect. Josef Jařab, a leading intellectual dissident in the former Czechoslovakia before becoming a major Czech political figure in the democratic era, commented that his personal experience had taught him how it was much easier to criticise and analyse the failings of a country lacking democracy than to take decisions on policy and practice within a democratic nation. Doing the right thing to sustain and develop democracy is far from being a simple matter. The Forum discussed how western support to the fledgling European nations in the early nineties following the euphoria of political change tended to focus on the functioning of democratic institutions, combined with support to radical economic transformation. A process towards democratic governance which had taken centuries to evolve in many western countries was thus concentrated into a few years as new institutions were developed and new laws put in place. Yet important though it is to have well functioning democratic institutions, transparent electoral procedures and the other paraphernalia of democratic society, attention also needs to paid to developing a genuine culture of democracy. For a holistic notion of democracy to be integrated into all aspects of life requires radical change in attitudes and behaviour, and this can be neither imported nor developed overnight. There is indeed a critical role to be played through both formal and informal education, but not for the first or the last time, the importance of such matters was undoubtedly under-estimated.

Recent experience in the Middle East offers similar lessons. Events in Iraq have demonstrated that it is unrealistic to expect democracy to develop and prosper through a combination of military intervention and subsequent support to economic change without seeking to develop democratic culture and a high sense of civic responsibility, especially if short term financial benefits and improvement of living conditions tend to accrue only to a minority within the country. People and nations are all affected by their history and experience, and hence although we are all traveling along paths which may appear to be convergent and have the same destination, we depart from different starting points and do not proceed at the same pace. While affirming the universality of ideas, principles and aspirations, including human rights and sustainable democracy, it is therefore also essential to acknowledge and appreciate the reality and diversity of individual and national experience.

If the forms of democracy are to be reinvented and reshaped to meet demands of changing societies, it is also important to consider the forces that may enhance or threaten their development. There is indeed no doubt that the world is changing fast, and is already very different from a few years ago. Post industrial societies are becoming increasingly complex, and globalisation now affects all aspects of our lives. This can have great positive benefits, many of which were discussed during the Forum. The educational opportunities offered by the extraordinary evolution in information and communication technologies, for example, are limited only by our imagination. Brenda Gourley demonstrated this point with examples from the UK's Open University, illustrating the major impact that these technologies are already having on widening participation in higher education, and creating new opportunities for communities of learners and scholars around the world to communicate and explore ideas.

However, as the American science fiction writer William Gibson observed, "the future is already here: it's just unevenly distributed", and a number of contributors, notably Goolam Mohammedbai, drew attention to the barriers to education caused by social inequity and faced most dramatically by those in the developing world. While technology may offer many solutions to bridge societal differences and to broaden educational opportunities, if globalisation continues to be driven wholly or primarily by an economic rationale, its benefits may fail to extend to all, and indeed a new set of problems may be created.

At this stage, many primary needs are not being met in developing nations. Many in the developing world are therefore simply not in a position to consider questions of democracy and higher education as a priority while there is insufficient food for the population, and access to primary and secondary education remains greatly restricted. Indeed, unless we do more to ensure that basic needs in society are met we may create the conditions where interest gaps between groups in our global society will widen, and where far from offering opportunities to develop democratic societies where they are yet to exist, we will instead create the conditions which undermine democracy both at home and abroad. One of the key messages of the Forum was thus to recognise that a concern for democracy must aim to improve conditions at local and national level, but this must also be done by taking into account and addressing the situations of people and countries in other parts of our common world.

CONDITIONS FOR SUSTAINING DEMOCRACY

The Forum made important connections between different spheres of life that are often considered separately. Issues such as a concern for sustainable development, the global environment and human rights are an integral aspect of democratic life in a global age, and their links need to be explored and better understood.

Whatever the merits of democracy, there is no doubt that if it is to prosper it requires citizens who are active and engaged. In our fast-moving, media driven western societies, much attention has been focused in recent years on the act of voting, and a crisis of democracy is often announced by reference to declining voter statistics in parliamentary elections. While voting is indeed important - and it should be of concern that large swathes of the population in western democracies are now more likely to vote for a candidate in a TV reality show than for one in a political election – the act of voting is but one manifestation of democratic behaviour.

The attitudes and behaviour of democratic governments also affect citizen voting patterns, and many may see such developments as the increased influence on legislation through the lobbying of business and industry rather than through the exercise of open democratic debate as one reason to lose faith in the act of voting. The rise of local and global social movements, assisted by technological developments, has also provided new ways in which individuals may act and engage politically, and such developments, which are a vital aspect of civic society engagement in the modern world, should therefore not be ignored in discussion on the decline in participation in traditional political processes.

Participants also drew attention to the crucial point that a fair distribution of societal opportunities remains critical to the sustainability of democracy. At a global level, it is clear that

the gap between the developed and the developing world is not closing fast enough, and in some ways not yet closing at all. Attention to urgent and pressing needs, such as food and healthcare, is of course essential but such humanitarian action should not deflect from a focus also on sustainable development, and in particular through increasing and widening access to educational opportunities - the key to long-term, sustainable democratic development in all parts of the globe. The Forum agreed that democracy cannot flourish alongside poverty and illiteracy, and that if we want to promote democracy it is therefore a categorical imperative to address the issues of social inequity at a global level.

Moreover, within even the most advanced democratic states, educational opportunities are a function of social reality. Nowhere can it be claimed that equal access to opportunities exists not only in law but in societal reality. Some societies do better than others, and there is evidence that countries which pay attention to extending educational opportunities equitably tend to benefit both economically and socially. Hence a strong case can be made that social justice and equal opportunities provide a rational strategy for economic progress and development. Beyond the economic case, there is also an immense danger that the democratic fabric of our societies risks being torn apart if these issues of inequality and social justice are not tackled.

THE RESPONSIBILITY OF HIGHER EDUCATION

The Forum explored the role and responsibilities of higher education in a fast-changing global world. Higher education institutions need to ask themselves where their role in local and global affairs begins and ends. As institutions dealing with universal knowledge, they are by definition global actors. At the same time their main sphere of influence and engagement may be at a very local level. Hence higher education institutions are ideally placed, through their panoply of actions – teaching, research and societal involvement – to facilitate the organic development of democratic culture.

Democracy is only able to thrive if an appropriate educational environment is created and sustained. Even in advanced democratic societies, higher education often fails to meet the democratic principles advocated by participants, and outlined in the Declaration adopted at the Forum. For example, do institutions offer the space to express minority opinions – and in a way that they will not only be expressed, but also listened to and considered? Are students regarded as the subject of their individual learning process, or are they too often treated as the object and receivers of an educational experience devised by teachers? Do institutions care appropriately for students as individuals, enabling them to be valued and to participate fully in the life of their institution and wider society? Are all members of our communities equally valued and accepted? Is the environment able to adapt to accommodate the needs of those who may not conform to a dominant societal norm, including those with disabilities? Are our institutions capable of adapting to meet the needs of different individuals and societal groups? Do all our institutions actually think about how they may need to change to fulfill their societal obligations? If we are genuinely concerned about the sustainable future of democracy it is essential that our institutions are asking and addressing such questions.

Higher education institutions are not only instrumental in shaping societal forces but are also subject to the societal forces at large. Just as universities may be a bastion of democratic values,

they may also become an instrument of anti-democratic forces. This was clearly illustrated at the Forum through a living example from Belarus. Taciana Khoma, a student at the Belarus State Economic University (BSEU), was expelled in 2005 immediately after being elected to the Executive Committee of ESIB, the umbrella organization of National Unions of Students in Europe. The official reason given for her expulsion was that she had violated university regulations by not informing the university of her intention to travel to the ESIB meeting. For the Belarus government and the BSEU, the intention in this case as in many others in non democratic regimes, was clearly to repress critical and free thinking. However, their action backfired as an international campaign for Taciana to be reinstated gathered enormous support and media attention. This has undoubtedly inspired many of those committed to democratic change to pursue their actions, and Taciana herself has continued to demonstrate the courage of her convictions and her commitment to democracy in pursuing her work on behalf of all students in Europe. Yet although the forces of free thinking may have partially triumphed in this instance, Belarus, along with many other non-democratic regimes will continue to consider higher education as an important instrument for societal control and repression.

It is often difficult to assess when and how higher education institutions may be failing to act to protect democratic values, and often only with historical hindsight can the danger be analysed and understood. For example, it is possible now to point to European universities that were complicit in the rise of Nazism, failing to protect student and staff members of the Jewish community in the 1930s. The role of higher education institutions in sustaining the regimes of the former communist states of Central and Eastern Europe is also a subject of important historical attention now. More recently, some academics in former Yugoslavia played a significant role in writing and promoting nationalistic material that ultimately contributed to years of conflict in the break-up of the country. Counter-examples should of course also be noted, such as the development during the Milošević period of the Alternative Academic Education Network, which did so much to maintain academic values when the conditions did not allow public higher education institutions to fulfill their societal duties, but the point remains that higher education institutions can become a force not only for positive societal change but also for negative developments. Thinking of today's challenges in the international arena, many questions should therefore be asked of, and by, higher education institutions. What, for example, is an appropriate role for universities with regard to the Middle East? What role should higher education institutions play in addressing responses to terrorism? Undoubtedly, there will be a range of answers to such questions in democratic society, but the questions should not be put aside if an appropriate role for an engaged university in democratic society is to be forged.

THE APPLICATION OF DEMOCRACY IN HIGHER EDUCATION GOVERNANCE

Even if there are worries about both the nature and the decline of citizenship participation in democratic society, democracy as a framework for local, national, regional and international government is widely accepted. Relatively little attention, however, is given to its application within governance of higher education. What does a democratic higher education institution look like, and how does it differ from a non democratic counterpart? The first point of consideration for many would be the structures and mechanisms of institutional governance. Some would answer that as long as staff have the opportunity to elect their peers to various positions – such as Deans and Senate – the conditions for democratic functioning are ensured. However, in many

parts of the world such procedures are increasingly considered as insufficient so long as students, who are the primary beneficiaries and stakeholders in higher education, are given little or no say in how institutions are run. Hence adequate student representation in governance structures has become a major point of consideration, raising the much-debated question of "what is adequate?"

Yet even admitting that the question of student participation is satisfactorily resolved, is this sufficient to ensure the public responsibility of the institution in a democratic society, or should other societal representatives also have their say in the running of the institution? Addressing this question has led to an increasing trend in Europe, (much later than in the United States) in the rise in Governing Boards with strong stakeholder representation. One question which will inevitably emerge as a consequence of this development is which societal representatives are perceived as having a legitimate stake in higher education institutions? Very often it is the institutional role in supplying the labour market with suitably skilled and qualified graduates that is privileged, and leading figures from local industry and business are predominantly elected or selected as Board members. One striking aspect about such structures is that all involved tend to have benefited personally from the experience of higher education. Yet in many of our societies, a majority or significant minority of the population has no experience of higher education. If this section of the public is absent from governance structures, is it not likely that its interests will also be neglected? The absence of representatives of a significant constituency raises concerns about democratic legitimacy, and if the notion of democracy in higher education is taken seriously, the question of how to ensure that society is adequately represented therefore needs to move centre stage.

Just as the question of democratic governance structures for parliaments and legislature is a necessary but not sufficient condition for democratic society to prosper, so too is this the case for higher education institutions. Even if governance structures are agreed and accepted, there is no guarantee that practice and behaviour within the institution will meet democratic expectations. Again the concepts of democratic culture, or living democracy in practice, are central to this discussion. The Forum noted that higher education institutions often fail to reflect the diversity of populations both in their staff and student profile, may remain complacent about taking action to change the situation, and in the worst examples behave with a combination of arrogance and indifference towards their students. A striking example was given by Frank Rhodes in answer to a question following his keynote speech. He told how his daughter had described the difference between two US higher education institutions where she had studied – the first a highly reputed university, and the second a smaller, lesser known liberal arts college. Explaining that her experience had been far happier and more productive at the liberal arts college, she commented that her time there had been characterised by the feeling that "everyone is on your side".

This of course begs the question that if an institution is not on the side of its students, or is not perceived by its students to be on their side, then whose side is it on? The example also raises the difficulty for institutions to be on the side of many students especially when they will be drawn from increasingly diverse backgrounds, and will have very different needs. However enlightened staff in different institutions may be, this issue is likely to pose challenges. Particular attention needs to be paid to those students from traditionally under-represented groups – who may include socio-economically disadvantaged students, students with disabilities, adult returners, students from particular ethnic groups, or students from an under-represented gender group in

particular discipline areas. While all students may need support, it is likely that those from such under-represented groups will need more support than others.

In considering this aspect of expanding opportunities for higher education, participants were also reminded that there is much work to be done in all institutions and countries. There is very clear evidence that opportunities for higher education are unequally distributed, and that this is reflected not only in terms of entry to all cycles of higher education, but also with regard to successful completion of studies, entry into the labour market, as well as in academic career progression. While meritocracy is commonly proclaimed as a basis for access, reality consistently fails to live up to this ideal. Addressing these questions will require major societal attention which extends beyond the realm of higher education, and should be a major item of social policy. Nevertheless all higher education institutions have important responsibilities to address these issues within the framework of an overall social policy agenda.

AN AGENDA FOR CHANGE

Participants left the Forum with a strong sense of affirmed common commitment, and the feeling that, although these are ongoing and never-ending issues, a significant step had been taken in Strasbourg. The Forum adopted a clear and comprehensive Declaration, and the debate around this document signified the participants' intent to ensure that there is both meaningful output from the Forum, and significant follow-up action. Indeed the Declaration signals not the end of an event, but the launch of a process calling for action from higher education institutions across the globe, and underpinned by a set of common values and principles. This commitment is embodied by the launch of a website which will offer higher education institutions a space to illustrate initiatives and practice in favour of sustainable development of democratic culture, and which will thus be developed as a common resource for institutions. A particular focus of the website will take place on or around the 10 December, International Human Rights Day.

There was a strong agreement that higher education institutions have a responsibility for ensuring social justice throughout their work. Although higher education institutions should not shoulder the responsibility for all of society's problems, they can and should take their particular responsibilities for developing democracy seriously. It should not be a matter of lip service to promote the values of human rights, social justice and democracy in higher education, but rather a matter of fundamental principle that has to be thought through and acted upon, and which should thus have an impact on all aspects of higher education.

The Forum concluded that this process can be helped by recognising that we can no longer afford to sit back and allow the course of democracy to find its own path, but rather that we all have a responsibility to continue to work together as a responsive and responsible network of actors engaged in higher education. While individual actions may have a limited impact on the development of higher education systems, each of us has a responsibility not only to the current generation, but also to the future that our actions prepare. Our contributions are therefore significant, and will become even more so if opportunities to bring together our diverse experience are seized. This was the sense in which the participants of the Higher Education Forum adopted the Declaration which affirms the responsibility of higher education to safeguard

democracy, and to promote a democratic culture by supporting and advancing the key principles and values which are outlined in the text.

The question of how higher education develops cannot be separated from the issue of how we envisage the development of the society in which we live. This process therefore does not start from zero, and will not end at any particular point. Instead it will require continual energy and commitment to develop higher education as a fundamental pillar of democratic society. This commitment to democratic culture should also be a fundamental aspect of the European Higher Education Area that we are constructing together, and an important element of its interaction with other parts of the world. The Forum has played an important role in initiating this global dialogue, and providing the opportunity for it to be taken forward, identifying not only common concerns to address, but also many areas of common ground to build upon.

5.

COUNCIL OF EUROPE HIGHER EDUCATION FORUM

The Legitimacy of Quality Assurance in Higher Education: The Role of Public Authorities and Institutions

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Council of Europe Higher Education Forum on *The Legitimacy of Quality Assurance in Higher Education: the Role of Public Authorities and Institutions*, held in Strasbourg on 19 – 20 September 2006 with the cooperation of ENQA and the EUA, focused on the relationship between quality assurance, the public responsibility for higher education and research and higher education governance.

The Forum took as its starting point the premise that striving to achieve high quality underlies higher education and research, and that achievement of quality is a joint responsibility of all partners in higher education. Institutions, staff and students as well as public authorities should continue to see quality improvement as an essential goal of their learning, teaching and research.

Quality in higher education should be considered in the light of the requirements of the academic community and disciplines as well as the broader needs and expectations of society, of which higher education and research are a part. This should include considerations of ethics and opportunities for personal development as well as of the extent to which institutions provide equal opportunities for learners and the extent to which they stimulate innovation.

Public authorities should, in cooperation and consultation with higher education institutions, staff, students and other stakeholders, develop visions and goals for the higher education systems for which they are responsible and provide the framework for their implementation. They should seek to develop mutual trust within the European Higher Education Area.

Higher education institutions should make explicit their mission and aims, which should then form the basis for the development and assessment of the quality of the institution.

The definition, development and assessment of quality are complementary aspects of the quest for quality in higher education and research. Quality assurance, therefore, is linked to an ongoing debate on the goals of higher education and research as well as continuous work to improve the ability of institutions, staff and students to meet those goals.

Public authorities as well as institutions and quality assurance agencies should recognize that different stages of development of institutions and higher education systems may require different approaches and methodologies. These may include the use of quantitative and qualitative indicators and criteria, which may vary according to the stage of development of the system. The balance between methodologies may change over time and will tend to shift from quantitative towards qualitative approaches in line with the increasing maturity of the systems.

The development and maintenance of good quality higher education and research are contingent on attractive working conditions for staff and students as well as on the framework laid down by public authorities

The Forum expressed support for the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area adopted by Ministers in Bergen in May 2005.

Since, as stated by Ministers in their Berlin Communiqué, the main responsibility for quality development and quality assurance in higher education rests with the institutions, higher education governance and management must have the continuous development of quality as one of its main goals. Public authorities should encourage and ensure monitoring of quality assurance and quality enhancement activities.

Quality enhancement should be a continuous concern of, and mobilize, higher education institutions and all their members individually. Institutions should also seek input from and cooperation with external stakeholders.

External quality assurance, carried out through mandates given by competent public authorities, constitutes an important complement to the quality culture of higher education institutions. The resources and efforts spent on external quality assurance should be commensurate with the benefits derived from it and should be no more than necessary to achieve these benefits. This is particularly important when considering the range and scope of quality assurance and accreditation activities.

While reports from internal and external quality assessment exercise play an important role in maintaining and improving the quality of higher education, the most critical phase in this work is the follow-up given to these reports, which should be seen as a main responsibility of the higher education institutions themselves. Quality assurance and enhancement exercises should therefore be focused on the future, should include leadership and management, and should in particular concentrate on the capacity of institutions for effective change, supported by quality culture and adequate resources.

All European countries should be seeking to place their systems in a broader European and international context. In particular in the case of smaller higher education systems, regional cooperation could be sought in quality assurance.

Adequate and understandable information in respect of the outcomes of quality reviews should be made widely accessible.

Quality assurance should contribute to enhancing fair recognition of qualifications across the European Higher Education Area, which requires adequate information on the quality of education provision and outcomes as well as closer cooperation between recognition and quality assurance agencies.

The Council of Europe and its Steering Committee for Higher Education and Research (CDESR) should use its position as a pan-European platform anchored in an organization of values to ensure that the core values of universities are embedded in the European Higher Education Area and help find adequate ways to nurture these as our societies change.

6. COUNCIL OF EUROPE FORUM ON THE LEGITIMACY OF QUALITY ASSURANCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION: THE ROLE OF PUBLIC AUTHORITIES AND INSTITUTIONS: REPORT BY THE GENERAL RAPPORTEUR, MR. LEWIS PURSER

1. Introduction

Enhancing the quality of European higher education at institutional, national and European levels has been among the key issues of the Bologna process from the very beginning. In the rapidly changing environment of higher education, the provision and maintenance of high quality and standards in higher education institutions have likewise become a major concern for higher education institutions themselves and for public authorities.

The Council of Europe's Steering Committee for Higher Education and Research therefore organised a Higher Education Forum on the theme: The Legitimacy of Quality Assurance in Higher Education: the Role of Public Authorities and Institutions. This Forum was held at the Council of Europe's headquarters in Strasbourg on 19-20 September 2006, in cooperation with the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) and the European University Association (EUA). The Forum brought together approximately ninety senior decision makers from higher education ministries, quality assurance agencies, higher education institutions, and representative bodies across Europe. It was specifically designed to coordinate with the Quality Forum being organised in Munich in November 2006 by EUA in cooperation with ENQA, ESIB (the National Unions of Students in Europe) and EURASHE (the European Association of Higher Education Institutions).

The Higher Education Forum was dedicated to the memory of Stephanie Hofmann, vice-president of ENQA and who had been a member of the Forum planning committee, and of Roland Vermeesch, secretary general of EURASHE. Both were central figures in European higher education and passed away in most untimely circumstances earlier in 2006.

Rather than discuss the general principles of quality assurance, the Forum focused on the relationship between quality assurance, the public responsibility for higher education and research, and higher education governance. Through the exploration of different understandings and practices of quality assurance in a variety of European countries and settings, the Forum was able to examine the roles and responsibilities of the public authorities in quality assurance, and to consider elements important for the legitimacy and acceptance of quality assurance methods and results by higher education institutions, students and staff, as well as by broader society.

The following report is based on the presentations made during the Forum and the rich discussion and debate which accompanied these. The full texts of the different individual presentations are available elsewhere in this publication. This report attempts to bring together the most pertinent ideas of each element of the Forum into a reasonably coherent whole.

2. Public responsibility

The responsibility for well-functioning and productive higher education and research systems in most European countries has traditionally been a public one, at least since the middle of the 20th century. This has been based on the notion that there are major collective returns on public investment in these areas. These returns extend also to those who do not benefit directly from participation in higher education, but who derive secondary benefits from living in a highly educated society.

However, the ever-increasing economic competition between countries and regions resulting from globalisation means that quality assurance in higher education now assumes higher levels of importance than was previously the case. One implication of this has been the necessity for European societies continuously to renovate their systems of higher education and research in order to surmount new economic and social challenges. The quality of these services provided by higher education institutions is therefore central.

The traditional European concept of equal opportunity has likewise contributed to a sense of public responsibility for higher education. This is linked to the contribution of higher education to social and cultural enrichment, cohesion and sustainability. This historical commitment is matched by a renewed commitment to this public responsibility, made collectively by European Ministers in 2001 at their Bologna process summit in Prague.

2.1 Quality assurance

Given this public responsibility for higher education, it therefore follows that there should also be some overall level of public responsibility for quality assurance in higher education. There are a number of reasons for this:

The first is that there are high levels of public investment in higher education and research in European countries. Although academics, students and higher education institutions, and in some cases broader society also, often complain that this public investment is insufficient, it is nevertheless substantial in both relative and real terms. It is therefore necessary to ensure the relevance and effectiveness of this investment, particularly if it is desirable to increase the overall scale of this investment.

The second is that, unlike the private sector, there is no automatic and effective system of sanctions and rewards in the public sector. This means that the mechanisms which rule in the private sector are not as relevant in public higher education, and points to the legitimacy of State intervention to regulate markets.

A third reason is that higher education is not a typical commercial good. It has a number of unusual features which reinforce the need for some form of public responsibility to protect the interests of learners. The problem of ensuring adequate "market" information for potential "buyers" is acute, since with higher education you only know what you have bought once you have started to "consume" it. Higher education is likewise considered a "rare purchase", in many

cases only made once during a lifetime, so the consumer is unable to adjust his/her behaviour accordingly, based on previous experience, in order to buy a different product next time, since there may be no "next time". Furthermore there are high opt-out costs to higher education, meaning that it is difficult to change choices once these have been made. Added to these, the majority of higher education students could be considered as immature consumers, in economic terms, whose choices are not always rational. In such cases, it may be more effective for the State, or an agent of the State, rather than the individual consumer, to deal directly with the provider in terms of negotiating and ensuring satisfactory levels of service. It is usually the case that the State can get a better bargain on behalf of collective consumer needs than any one individual.

A fourth reason in favour of public responsibility for quality assurance is that the collective effort to establish the European higher education and research area demands trust across different higher education systems. This trust must be grounded in robust and transparent quality assurance procedures, and the importance of each national quality assurance system for other European countries therefore becomes greater. Some level of public responsibility for these is needed to ensure that this trust is not misplaced.

History has consistently shown that autonomous higher education institutions are more likely to be successful in working towards their own multi-faceted and complex missions than those institutions which are managed in an interventionist fashion by the public authorities. Without this autonomy institutions are unable to respond flexibly and in innovative ways to the needs of society and to new opportunities. And without such autonomy, institutions will not be able to compete. However, when they do compete, it is not guaranteed that they will consistently pursue the public good. In difficult economic circumstances, non-profit organisations – including universities - tend to behave like for-profit ones. The State therefore still needs to maintain a certain level of oversight to ensure the fulfilment of policy objectives.

2.2 Different approaches

The public responsibility for quality assurance in Europe is currently manifest in a number of different ways. These differences reflect to a certain extent different cultural approaches to higher education and quality assurance, and also the relative maturity and experience of these systems. The approaches taken to quality assurance by individual higher education systems and the public authorities will also change over time, and there are many instances across Europe of such change over the last ten years.

One first such difference is the extent to which this responsibility reaches into all areas of the higher education system. In some countries, the State restricts its oversight to public institutions only, while in others this oversight is explicitly extended to private higher education institutions also. In both cases, the State needs to ensure that each institution's internal quality assurance systems are periodically evaluated, and has a duty to provide information to students and families about the quality of institutions and programmes. However, some traditionally-minded actors still regard such State intervention in quality assurance as symptomatic of a lack of trust,

and leading to concepts such as New Public Management. In their perspective, quality assurance risks being reduced to the concept of responding to client needs and ensuring client satisfaction.

A second set of differences surround the definition of public responsibility for quality assurance as a choice between formative or summative methodologies. Either of these choices will greatly influence behaviour by the higher education institutions affected, since the outcomes in either case are rather different. A formative approach offers the perspective of providing encouragement and support for improvement and enhancement, whereas a summative approach is primarily concerned with a yes/no answer concerning a set of minimum requirements, to which sanctions can be added as appropriate.

These choices could also be summarised as being qualitative or quantitative approaches. However, a quantitative approach requires that we have objective indicators which are valid (and have the same values and meanings) for all institutions, which is often difficult to achieve even within the same higher education system, let alone across a number of European countries. A softer qualitative approach demands that institutions should open up and be transparent in the same spirit as the formative approach mentioned above. However, the effectiveness of this approach depends to a great deal on the professionalism and independence of evaluators.

A further set of possible variations in how public responsibility operates concerns the focus of quality assurance mechanisms. There have traditionally been many varied approaches across Europe concerning standards, programmes, institutions or a combination of these. This variety of focus is based on different perspectives of how to ensure that each individual student's qualification is of sufficient quality to be recognised across Europe. This has in many cases provided the rationale for programme accreditation. However, with the massive expansion of higher education in recent decades and the increasing variety and flexibility of study programmes, many now consider it unrealistic to certify all programmes across Europe – a process which would take decades and which cannot, in most cases, respond rapidly to the need for regular changes in these programmes. Indeed many national quality assurance systems have been moving from a programme-based approach to an institutional approach to quality. As part of this re-focusing, the responsibility of institutions for quality assurance is emphasised, including taking responsibility for the quality of individual students' qualifications so that these can be used both at home and abroad by graduates.

2.3 Impact

Given all these factors, it is also relevant and interesting to look at the impact of these quality assurance exercises so far. However, from what can be observed across the different approaches to quality assurance, there has only been a limited impact so far in any one field. This can partly be explained by the fact that, whatever the approaches currently in use, quality assurance systems in many parts of Europe could still be said to be in a state of adolescence. Only a handful of national quality assurance agencies are more than twenty years old, and most are considerably younger.

The impact of accreditation is mitigated by the fact that the numbers of programmes and institutions which have been through an accreditation process but which have not been accredited are very low. Given the huge efforts undertaken by all involved in such processes, and the on-going policy discourse regarding the need for more effective and efficient higher education, this is somewhat disappointing. Does this imply that the standards have been set too low, or that the process has not been robust enough to identify programmes which are in fact weak? The question should also be asked whether we want to create a European higher education area where every institution and/or programme simply achieves minimum standards, or whether these levels of acceptable quality should suit the profiles of each institution and/or programme, with rigorous mechanisms in place to assure this.

Conversely however, the impact of improvement-led evaluations is lessened in many cases by the lack of suitable follow-up mechanisms. This follow-up phase has typically been the weakest link in this approach, and indeed has sometimes been completely forgotten. Such follow-up mechanisms require the development of enhancement plans, with concrete steps to ensure these measures are financed and that monitoring arrangements are put in place. However, in recent years, a number of the more established quality assurance systems, for example in Finland, have now explicitly become improvement oriented, where follow-up is an essential part of the quality enhancement process.

A third area where the impact of quality assurance needs to be examined is its capacity to promote strategic behaviour and change. Are the essential issues which ought to be covered in fact being addressed during the evaluation process? Or are they conveniently being ignored? How have the outcomes of quality assurance activities influenced broader strategic management and planning issues for the higher education institution in question?

A further area where the potential impact of quality assurance is as yet unclear is when the entire evaluation process begins to operate more as a well-oiled administrative machine, where the key motivations of learning and improvement are in danger of being replaced by that of minimal impact and – for those acting as "expert" peers in the process, the attraction of financial reward is greater than the learning opportunities afforded by the unique privilege of being invited to observe and comment on the core activities of an institution for higher education and research. Such shifts change fundamentally the experiences of all involved, and the prime objective of enhancing quality at the institution in question can no longer be said to be valid.

One area of potential impact which is often ignored is whether the increase in quality assurance activity has improved the capacity of students to make rational choices when deciding about their own learning pathways. Evidence for this is patchy across Europe, and experience related during the Forum from Portugal and the Netherlands would suggest that many undergraduate students, at least in their early years in higher education, rely on unofficial sources of information from family and friends when making choices, rather than on more formal sources from government, the media, higher education institutions themselves, etc. Such information is then linked to other criteria such as distance from home, an attractive environment, and other relevant personal preferences. The real influence of quality assurance on these student choices is therefore at best limited.

2.4 European dimension

There is a rapidly growing European dimension to the public responsibility for quality assurance. Apart from the ongoing developments in this area as part of the Bologna process, the opening of the European labour market and the daily social, economic and cultural realities for citizens in today's Europe all mean that the relevance of this enhanced European dimension is becoming increasingly important.

One central element of this European dimension is being able to coordinate national quality assurance systems across borders, in order to maximise the benefits for students, graduates, institutions and broader society alike. However, as noted earlier, the diversity of institutions and systems across Europe and also within individual countries leaves ambiguities regarding quality assurance methodologies and terminology across different cultural and national boundaries, and even between universities within the same system. There is therefore a critical responsibility to work with other systems and institutions to overcome such differences.

The development of ENQA and its sub-networks in recent years goes a long way to addressing many aspects of this European dimension for national quality assurance agencies. For example, the collective development of the "standards and guidelines for quality assurance"[11] by ENQA member agencies across Europe, in partnership with EUA, EURASHE and ESIB, and the acceptance of these by Ministers in 2005, means that for the first time, agencies and institutions can now reference themselves explicitly to a set of shared quality assurance methodological principles, for both internal and external purposes.

This same drive to identify common ground on which further developments can be built in the area of quality assurance and quality improvement is also evident among higher education institutions, in the context of their various institutional or disciplinary networks. The recent projects and publications of EUA and other bodies such as Tuning are evidence of this. The same is true in the crucial area of recognition, through the ENIC/NARIC network, where the European dimension of this work has long been the central tenet.

Such initiatives can empower agencies and institutions effectively to take a wider European perspective to their own quality assurance procedures, whether through the use of common documentation, standards, guidelines, etc, through the sharing of experts and key personnel, and simply through better understanding of each other's systems and concepts. Agencies, institutions, and other bodies such as ENIC/NARICs also assume the critical responsibility of ensuring that accurate and reliable information is provided to students and their families regarding the quality of institutions and programmes, both at home and across the European higher education area.

The Nordic quality assurance network NOQA recently published a joint analysis on the ENQA standards and guidelines from a Nordic perspective[12], taking the European dimension one stage further. One of the points noted in this analysis is that all agencies and higher education

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[11] ENQA (2005), *Standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area*, Helsinki.
[12] Tue Vinther-Jørgensen, Signe Ploug Hansen (eds.) (2007), *European Standards and Guidelines in a Nordic Perspective: Joint Nordic Project 2005–2006*; ENQA Occasional papers no. 11,
 http://www.enqa.eu/files/nordic_v02.pdf

institutions operate in national contexts of system, culture and traditions, and that more precise threshold values regarding standards will be needed if we are to arrive at European consistency. The NOQA analysis points out that, as already noted, the complex terminology in such procedures means it is difficult to understand and to use in all countries and cultures. If this is true in the Nordic context, then it must be doubly true in a pan-European context.

At institutional level, leadership and governance is essential in ensuring an effective European dimension. There is considerable scope for learning in these fields across institutional and national boundaries, and many such opportunities are indeed offered by European networks and interest groups. In such ways, good practice can be spread horizontally, thus helping a coherent European higher education system to emerge, based on the development of successful and competitive individual institutions.

High levels of quality in institutions presuppose high quality working conditions for staff, in order to attract and retain the right people. In many cases, this will depend to a large extent on improved financial resources in universities. There remains however an open question in many countries regarding how this can be achieved without the introduction of student fees.

One aim of improving quality is to reduce drop-out and improve efficiency in terms of students passing their exams on time. This creates a certain pressure on students, and the introduction of student fees will further increase this. In such circumstances, the pressure on academic staff has also steadily increased to ensure that students pass exams, even if they may not be fully ready to do so. Such pressure can be seen as acting counter to other fundamental issues of quality assurance. This is one of the risks of increased marketisation of higher education, and Forum participants were not aware of evidence of a quality assurance system being able to cope adequately with such a situation.

3. Evolving national quality assurance systems

Case studies from Bulgaria, Ireland and Poland were presented during the Forum, illustrating the evolving nature of quality assurance systems at national level. These three cases shared a number of key features, which can be outlined as follows:

The higher education systems in these three countries have grown rapidly in recent decades, although in different ways and at slightly different times, linked to the respective social, political and economic reforms taking place in each country. An immediate and direct consequence of the rapid growth in demand for higher education has been a corresponding expansion in the number and diversity of higher education institutions. This has meant that it has also been necessary to put in place suitable quality assurance processes and practices, in order to correspond to this new reality.

The Bulgarian case showed how the State quality assurance and accreditation agency has been able, by re-focusing its work on the strategic priorities for higher education in that country, to encourage a new understanding of the importance of quality assurance in the successful implementation of those priorities. In more specific terms, some of the major successes so far

have been improved student achievement rates, improved research productivity in many institutions, the sustainable development of improved curriculum and a growing internal quality culture within a wide range of institutions.

In Ireland, the expansion in higher education in the 1980s and 1990s was followed by the creation of a number of quality assurance bodies, which in recent years have begun to work closely together and to share core principles and methodologies. This closer cooperation has been helped by recent external evaluations of all the universities and of many other higher education institutions and quality assurance agencies, thus providing a series of recommendations from which the entire higher education sector can benefit. These various evaluations point to the continued importance of higher education to national development, and to the successful start that has been made by institutions and agencies in putting quality assurance systems in place, both internally and externally. However, work is still needed to ensure that the full potential of these systems is exploited to improve higher education in the coming years, notably by linking the outcomes of the quality assurance activities with broader strategic planning and reform processes at both institutional and sectoral levels. It was reported that work also remained to be done in terms of raising awareness among external stakeholders of the extent and value of the quality assurance activities already undertaken.

The Polish case demonstrated the massive expansion of the higher education system during the 1990s. According to the presentation, this expansion was not however accompanied by the introduction of the necessary systems to ensure satisfactory quality assurance standards or procedures. Reliable data were difficult to obtain, and there was no clear definition regarding the division of respective competences and responsibilities between higher education institutions, the Ministries and other bodies. Driven by their conviction that the State Accrediting Committee was not in a position to take on the pro-active role needed to tackle this situation, a small group of universities created the University Accreditation Council, in an attempt to refocus efforts on the key issues at stake. This has resulted in a double set of procedures for the universities in question, which are still obliged to respect the programme-focused approach of the State Accrediting Committee, while in parallel developing the new institutional-focused approach. Despite this extra workload, the universities feel that their efforts will pay dividends in terms of putting in place sustainable processes based on institutional responsibility and which respect different strategic orientations and developments.

As part of these broader changes, it is interesting to note in all three cases that the main focus of the quality assurance systems being put in place, or being planned, has shifted or is expected to shift from a programme-based approach to an institutional approach. Following this methodological change, the role of the quality assurance agencies in each case has also changed, or is changing. This change in focus has been further encouraged since 2005 by the ENQA standards and guidelines document.

In each case, there has been growing awareness and acceptance of the principle that the primary responsibility for quality assurance lies within each institution, rather than in the quality assurance agency, Ministry or embedded in a legislative document. This principle fits well with

the need for extensive institutional autonomy, and the findings of the EUA Trends IV study[13] which showed an emerging correlation between the level of effective institutional autonomy and the existence of an internal quality culture. This is also consistent with elements from the Forum case studies, which showed that a key aspect of promoting such an approach is the necessity of internal institutional integrity if an improvement-oriented quality assurance exercise is to have any lasting impact.

However, the increase in this internal institutional responsibility shown through the case studies should also be backed up by more effective external quality assurance processes, aimed at supporting internal efforts. The new dimensions to this external quality assurance process were likewise clear in the three case studies, although to different degrees. Awareness of the public responsibility for this external approach was also seen to be increasing steadily. The clearer distinction between internal and external quality assurance processes allows for greater awareness of the relative responsibilities for each of these two approaches.

A number of issues remain the subject of ongoing discussion in several of the case study countries. One of these is the question of who should pay for the various components of this quality assurance framework. Experience across many European countries has shown that putting in place and operating effective quality assurance procedures costs money, even before counting the considerable investment required if the recommendations regarding quality improvement are properly acted upon. The costs associated with operating quality assurance procedures – internal and external – can in fact become rather large, especially in systems which have a predominant focus on programme accreditation, given the large numbers of such programmes. The question therefore of who should pay – or how the costs should be shared - is a vital one.

A second such issue which has not yet been fully resolved in the countries in question is how to integrate more effectively the views of both employers and students into internal and external quality assurance activities. The roles of these stakeholders are crucial to the entire process, given current policy debates on the need for increased relevance of higher education, employability, links with society, and transparency. Although these are explicitly addressed in the ENQA standards and guidelines document, considerable efforts are required in order to ensure the effective long-term engagement of these stakeholders, at both institutional, agency and national levels. Regarding students, this includes fostering their representation at all levels, together with training and support so as they can assume fully their own responsibilities in this field.

4. Responsibilities of institutions

Based on the presentations and discussions in the Forum, the following were identified as areas of particular responsibility for higher education institutions in the field of quality assurance.

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[13] Reichert, Sybille and Tauch, Christian: *Trends IV: European Universities Implementing Bologna*, EUA 2005
http://www.eua.be/eua/en/publications.jspx

Since the primary responsibility for quality development and quality assurance in higher education rests with the institutions themselves, as stated by Ministers in their Berlin Communiqué in 2003, one of the main goals of higher education governance and management should be this continuous concern for quality.

As part of this responsibility, each higher education institution needs to make explicit its mission and strategic objectives, so that these can form the starting point for developing and assessing the quality of the institution. Different missions and objectives will require suitably relevant internal quality assurance systems. Indeed, different stages of institutional development may require different approaches and methodologies. These may change over time and will tend to shift from quantitative towards qualitative approaches as both internal and external quality assurance systems become more mature.

Since the enhancement of quality is the goal of these various approaches, an internal quality culture is needed to ensure that this is shared across the institution by all actors. Such an approach will require input and cooperation with a variety of key stakeholders, including students and external partners. The formalisation and implementation of such a quality assurance and enhancement system represents a challenge for any higher education institution, since it touches on all key aspects of the work of the institution: teaching and learning, student assessment, research, information systems, services, etc.

This approach therefore also has important implications for the governance of institutions, since it calls for open systems with core quality assurance elements which different institutional players can use. Leadership, management and transparency are thus key elements of good systems, in which individual and collective efforts can develop and bear fruit, and in which the ownership of this quality culture remains embedded at grassroots levels. This quality culture should also be able to satisfy external information needs, without compromising internal integrity.

External quality assurance, carried out through mandates given by the competent public authorities, constitutes an important complement to the quality culture of higher education institutions. It is therefore also an institutional responsibility to cooperate with the agency or other body conducting the external process, so that the quality improvement benefits for the institution can be maximised. These external evaluations can have a wide variety of focuses, and the fresh perspectives which they bring need to be internalised in order to ensure that full benefits are obtained.

In working towards these general responsibilities for quality assurance, the importance of cooperation with stakeholders and partners cannot be overemphasised.

One of the purposes of quality assurance is to facilitate academic recognition for incoming and outgoing students, enhance internationalisation and promote institutional partnerships. Improved quality assurance across Europe will lead to improved recognition. Transparent quality assurance mechanisms will allow external partners, including other higher education institutions and recognition agencies, to understand and have confidence in the quality of education provision

and outcomes at the institution and its respective parts. Such understanding and confidence is also contingent on adequate and understandable information in respect of the outcomes of quality reviews, which should therefore be made widely accessible.

While reports from internal and external quality assessment exercises play an important role in maintaining and improving the quality of higher education, the most critical phase in this work is the follow-up given to these reports. This follow-up should be seen as a main responsibility of the higher education institutions themselves. Quality assurance and enhancement exercises should therefore be focused on the future, should include leadership and management, and should in particular concentrate on the capacity of institutions for effective change, supported by quality culture and adequate resources.

5. Responsibilities of agencies

There has been rapid growth in the number and variety of quality assurance agencies across Europe over the last ten years. However, recent evidence, including that presented at this Forum, points to the possibility that the roles of many of these agencies are converging, although this process will take a few years to complete. This search for common ground is a natural consequence of the work in progress towards establishing a coherent and effective European Higher Education Area, and has been encouraged by the agreement in 2005 of European-wide standards and guidelines for external quality assurance and the reviews of agencies. Indeed the aims of these standards and guidelines are to encourage the development of higher education institutions which themselves foster vibrant intellectual and educational achievement.

One of the most important areas of convergence is that many agencies now share the explicit objective of supporting higher education institutions in this quality enhancement processes. Indeed achieving this objective is a primary responsibility of the agencies, since without this their work will not leave lasting benefits for learners.

A second responsibility of agencies is to ensure that external quality assurance systems are fit for purpose. This follows from the need to support institutions in their own efforts, and the fact that each institution is different in terms of mission, objectives, learners, stakeholders and methods. Quality assurance agencies likewise need to recognise that different stages of institutional development may require different approaches and methodologies. The balance between methodologies may change over time and will tend to shift from quantitative towards qualitative approaches in line with the increasing maturity of the systems.

The organisation of these external quality assurance systems is a third responsibility of agencies, and an important complement to the quality culture of higher education institutions. The resources and efforts spent on external quality assurance should be commensurate with the benefits derived from it, and should be no more than necessary in order to achieve these benefits. This is particularly important when considering the range and scope of quality assurance and accreditation activities.

A number of agencies include a training and capacity building element among their responsibilities. Since quality assurance is really about people, not systems, this aspect is important in ensuring that both the institutional actors and the external panel members are well aware of their roles, and of how they can optimise their contributions to the wider goals of quality improvement.

Monitoring, analysis and research are likewise responsibilities of many quality assurance agencies. These activities can help ensure that systems are fit for purpose, and that they evolve to follow changes in the institution and broader environment. They are also important for communicating the rationale, outcomes and long-term benefits of quality assurance to a wide variety of stakeholders, including the public authorities.

Agencies have a responsibility to ensure the responsible use of data relating to quality assurance activities. Much information is gathered during these processes, and if the process is to be honest and improvement-led, it requires that the less positive aspects of whatever is under evaluation should also be examined and discussed between internal and external experts. If this cannot take place in a climate of confidence and mutual trust, then the entire process loses its main aim. The responsible use of data is therefore an essential element, but which should not obscure the broader goals of transparency and public information.

This provision of public information is a major responsibility for agencies. Adequate and understandable information in respect of the outcomes of quality reviews should be made widely accessible. This also implies the need to develop non-specialist terminology, and to consider language issues so that important documentation is available to local actors. Given the strong links between quality assurance and the recognition of qualifications, closer cooperation between recognition and quality assurance agencies is a vital element in this field. Quality assurance is likewise an essential element for underpinning national qualifications frameworks as these are developed. Agencies need to foster broad understanding of the role of quality assurance in such frameworks.

Agencies face a growing responsibility in the area of European cooperation. Given that European countries should be seeking to place their quality assurance systems in a broader European and international context, as called for by Ministers at various stages in the Bologna process, this implies increased cooperation with neighbouring systems, through regional networks, and at European level. In particular in the case of smaller higher education systems, regional cooperation could be sought in quality assurance, to ensure that available expertise and resources are put to best use.

One special area of responsibility is that of access to quality assurance for cross-border qualifications. In some cases, higher education institutions cannot currently gain access to quality assurance in the host country in which they are delivering the education. This anomaly needs to be solved in the interests of learners and wider society, and agencies have the responsibility to ensure that higher education delivered in their countries meets whatever quality assurance criteria have been set in that country.

6. Responsibilities of public authorities

The public authorities are, in the European tradition, responsible for the broad higher education framework of their country. This includes, among other essential functions, ensuring relevant and operational legislative and financing systems.

As an essential precursor to quality assurance, public authorities should also, in cooperation and consultation with higher education institutions, staff, students and other stakeholders, develop visions and goals for the higher education systems for which they are responsible, and provide the framework for their implementation.

There will inevitably be a certain diversity of implementation across European countries of the European standards and guidelines for quality assurance; this is not of concern as long as all countries are developing compatible visions and goals and are using the same reference points when putting in place internal and external quality assurance mechanisms. These common reference points are essential if we are to avoid the consequences of multiple local interpretations of these standards and guidelines. Public authorities therefore also have a responsibility to ensure that mutual trust develops across the European Higher Education Area.

Given that quality in higher education should be considered in the light of the requirements of the academic community and disciplines, as well as the broader needs and expectations of society, the public authorities also have their role to play in ensuring that due consideration is given to ethics and to opportunities for personal development. They should be in a position to satisfy themselves that higher education institutions provide equal opportunities for learners and the extent to which they stimulate innovation.

In today's context where roles in higher education are often shared between the State and its relevant agencies, the public authorities have the responsibility to ensure that these agencies fulfil their roles, and that the judgement of an independent agency prevails over local political decisions. This responsibility also extends to ensuring that there is policy coherence across all relevant agencies and other public bodies, and that over-regulation is avoided.

Public authorities should likewise ensure that higher education institutions are fulfilling their roles in the field of quality assurance. This implies that they encourage the monitoring of quality assurance and quality enhancement activities within institutions. Such encouragement can be offered in many ways, notably through the use of financial and other incentives. Rewarding quality enhancement has become a key mechanism of public authorities in a number of European countries in their efforts to promote quality assurance.

As custodians of the public good, authorities should ensure that adequate, understandable and pertinent public information in respect of the outcomes of quality reviews is made widely accessible, particularly to key stakeholders. This information should relate not only to the providers of higher education but also to the quality assurance agencies and their activities. The proposed European Register of quality assurance agencies therefore takes on extra importance in terms of ensuring broad understanding and acceptance of the work of these agencies.

Given that the development and maintenance of good quality higher education and research are contingent on attractive working conditions for staff and students, and that quality assurance activities cost money, a major responsibility of the public authorities is to ensure that sufficient funding is available for these. Of particular importance is the need to ensure funding is available for follow-up activities and working towards improvements identified during the evaluation process. The tradition in Europe has been that the costs of quality assurance have been covered by national systems of higher education.

7. Legitimacy

The definition, development and assessment of quality are complementary aspects of the quest for quality in higher education and research. Quality assurance is therefore linked to an ongoing debate on the goals of higher education and research, as well as to continuous work to improve the ability of institutions, staff and students to meet these goals.

The legitimacy of quality assurance in higher education therefore depends not only on the legal status of institutions or procedures, but on the transparency and coherence of this debate and ongoing work throughout Europe. These are essential elements in ensuring the credibility of both the providers and the external agencies.

The basic credibility for this broader European quality assurance context now rests on the Bologna process, and on the commitment of Ministers, higher education institutions, staff, students and stakeholders to work towards the Bologna goals.

This European dimension has added an extra layer of legitimacy to quality assurance processes. Since they are now based on Bologna process principles, building on trust between institutions, agencies, and public authorities, it is hoped that all key actors and stakeholders should now be in a position to feel ownership of both the methods and results.

This legitimacy depends on a number of concepts which are key to the success of the broader Bologna process. These include transparency, participation and communication. The new and growing awareness across Europe of the importance of seeing quality assurance as an improvement oriented process, not as a control mechanism, is certainly helping add to this sense of legitimacy.

Quality assurance is continuously moving, and great strides have been made in many respects since the start of the Bologna process. The time element in this work is important, since not all can be achieved at once, and balanced approaches, grounded in the core values of higher education and research, are needed to ensure that the legitimacy of quality assurance continues to grow among all actors and stakeholders. This added sense of legitimacy will also add to the real value of the work itself, not just to its effectiveness but also to the degree of ownership and responsibility by each of the key actors in the process – institutions, agencies and public authorities.

7. STEERING COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION AND RESEARCH: MAIN OUTCOMES

The 2006 plenary session of the Steering Committee on Higher Education and Research (CDESR) was held in Strasbourg on September 21 – 22, 2006. Among other things, the plenary session:

- approved a draft Recommendation on the Public Responsibility for Higher Education and Research and decided to submit it to the Committee of Ministers for adoption;
- adopted a Statement on the contribution of higher education to intercultural dialogue;
- expressed its support for a university network on intercultural dialogue and mandated its Bureau to follow up the issue on the basis of the discussion in the plenary session
- considered its contribution to the follow up of the Third Summit and in particular underlined the importance of its new project on "The University Between Humanism and Market: Redefining its Values and Functions for the 21st Century", which will address a number of issues that are a fundamental part of this contribution ;
- considered and adopted the project description for this project;
- took note of and welcomed the contributions of the Council of Europe to the European Higher Education Area, through intergovernmental, bi-lateral and regional activities including the recognition of qualifications, the public responsibility for higher education and research and higher education governance and through participation in the steering bodies of the Bologna Process
- held an extensive debate on unresolved issues in the Bologna Process (see document 2);
- took note of the outcomes of the Forum on the Responsibility of Higher Education for Democratic Culture, held in Strasbourg on 22 – 23 June 2006, and in particular of the Declaration adopted by the Forum, welcomed its contribution to the implementation of the fundamental aims of the Action Plan and underlined the importance of the close cooperation established with key actors in United States higher education on this topic and thanked the US partners for their contributions to the Forum;
- asked all delegations to undertake the necessary efforts to ensure adherence to the Declaration by higher education institutions in their respective countries and for this purpose to widely disseminate the information on the global network for higher education and democratic culture and its online platform
- took note of the conclusions and recommendations of the Forum on "The Legitimacy of Quality Assurance in Higher Education", held in Strasbourg on 19 – 20 September 2006 and asked delegations to disseminate these in their respective countries;
- took note of the Council of Europe's activities aiming to facilitate the recognition of qualifications and in particular encouraged the ENIC Network to continue to

provide guidance for the elaboration and implementation of national action plans for recognition in the framework of the Bologna Process;

- took note of Parliamentary Assembly Recommendation 1762 (2006) on Academic Freedom and University Autonomy, underlined the importance of a political statement by an international parliamentary body on this issue and mandated the Bureau to consider possible follow up to this Recommendation on the basis of the discussion in the plenary session.
- took note of the outcomes of the European Year of Citizenship through Education as well as its own contributions to the Year and underlined the importance of the Forum on the Responsibility of Higher Education for Democratic Culture and the follow up to the Declaration adopted at this Forum in the follow up to the Year.
- Decided to hold its 2007 plenary session in Strasbourg on September 20 – 21, 2007.

The CDESR also elected its Bureau as follows:

Chair:	Mr. Luc Weber (academic member, Switzerland, 2006 – 2007)
Vice Chair:	Mr. Radu Damian (government member, Romania, 2006 – 2007)
Other members:	Mr. Andrejs Rauhvargers (academic member, Latvia, 2006 – 2008)
	Mr. Giuseppe Ronsisvalle (academic member, Italy, 2006 – 2008)
	Mr. Keith Andrews (government member, United Kingdom, 2006 – 2008)
	Ms. Gro Beate Vige (government member, Norway, 2006 – 2008)

and noted that the terms of Bureau members Mr. Germain Dondelinger (government member, Luxembourg) and Mr. Virgílio Meira Soares (academic member, Portugal) continue until the plenary session of 2007.

8. **CONFERENCE ON "MAKING THE EUROPEAN HIGHER EDUCATION AREA A REALITY: THE ROLE OF STUDENTS" (MOSKVA, NOVEMBER 2006): CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

International Seminar co-organized by the Council of Europe and the People's Friendship University of Russia
under the Russian Chairmanship of the Council of Europe

"Making the European Higher Education Area a Reality: the Role of Students"
Moscow, 2 - 3 November 2006

Summary

The Bologna Process launched in June 1999 has since evolved into a broad cluster of important activities carried out by the Signatories at the international, national and institutional levels with the aim of establishing the European Higher Education Area by 2010. The cooperation and participation of public authorities, higher education institutions, students and staff at all levels is one of the keys to the success of the Bologna Process.

There is now broad agreement that one of the most desired and efficient tools of reaching this goal is the direct and active involvement of students in the process of decision making, particularly in Higher Education governance and international cooperation, as well as in all aspects of the life of higher education institutions. This involvement should not only be legally possible but actively encouraged by providing appropriate means and facilities. Students must rightfully be considered as equal members of the academic community and not only as clients.

Participants note with satisfaction that over the past few years Bologna objectives and ideas have been enriched by adding a few more prerequisites of making the European Higher Education Area a reality. These are an added emphasis on life-long learning; student participation in HE governance; increasing the attraction of the European higher education; establishing a European Research Area; and emphasizing the social dimension of higher education, including financial support for students.

At the same time, on the practical side new programs and initiatives assisting in furthering the European Higher Education Area have come into being at all levels, including initiatives of the Council of Europe, the European Commission, the European University Association, the National Union of Students in Europe (ESIB), European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE) and individual higher education institutions throughout the "Bologna area", such as joint degrees; the project on "Tuning educational structures in Europe"; the development of quality culture; tendencies of the development of European educational structures ("Trends IV"); "Bologna with student eyes", etc. Likewise, two important documents adopted by Ministers in Bergen in 2005 contribute to shaping the European Higher Education Area: the overarching framework of qualifications and the European Quality Assurance Standards. Most of parties to the Bologna Process, among which we find higher education institutions and organizations in Russia, that is kindly hosting the present Seminar, have

substantially contributed to this positive process. This is evident from the papers and reports presented at the Seminar.

However, the effective establishment of the European Higher Education Area will also depend on finding solutions to some issues identified in the Communiqué of the Bergen Ministerial Conference (2005). These issues include student mobility; the removal of obstacles to mobility at all levels (international, national and institutional); effective possibilities for participation in international projects and programs along all the directions and levels of training; closer collaboration between inter-institutional programs and European labour markets; the elaboration of international components of curricula; intercultural communication and life-long learning.

In particular, participants would like to draw the attention of Ministers and the Bologna Follow Up group to the fact that the goal of a European Higher Education Area characterized by broad student and staff mobility cannot be reached without measures making it possible for participants from all countries of the Bologna Process to obtain visas, social security protection and, where required, work permits. This is a challenge to all members of the Bologna Process, and one that it is urgent to meet.

Conclusions and proposals

On this background, participants in the Seminar adopted the following conclusions and recommendations

Addressed to Ministers of Education meeting in London in May 2007:

- Ministers in London should underline the student contribution to making the European Higher Education Area a reality and commit to fully involving students and their organizations in the elaboration and implementation of higher education policy at national and international level;
- Ministers in London should commit to raising in a broader political context the need to facilitate the granting of obtain visas, social security protection and, where required, work permits for the purpose of student and staff mobility and exchange;
- Ministers in London should commit to making and maintaining the participation of duly elected student representatives in higher education governance a cornerstone of higher education legislation and practice of their respective countries;

Addressed to international institutions and organizations

- International institutions and organizations should consider ways to disseminate good practice as concerns student participation in and contribution to the elaboration and implementation of higher education reforms and policies at international, national and institutional level;

Addressed to networks, organizations and bodies active in the recognition of qualifications:

- the European Network of Information Centres on academic recognition and mobility (ENIC) and National Academic Recognition Information Centres (NARIC) Network and their member centres should develop international activities to provide favourable conditions for the recognition of qualifications obtained through life-long learning paths, applying, wherever possible, stipulations and principles of the Lisbon Recognition Convention.

At national level

Public authorities responsible for higher education should:

- support and develop projects that promote the integration of life-long learning paths in national qualifications frameworks, in order to improve the possibilities for learners of all ages to obtain higher education qualifications;
- encourage the student body to establish representative and politically independent national student unions in countries where these do not yet exist;
- recognize the contribution of student organizations in defining higher education policies at all levels;
- support student organizations in obtaining financial, logistical and human resources necessary for creating a situation of equality in participation;
- provide incentives to institutions that demonstrate innovation in seeking to improve student participation in institutional governance and life;
- provide incentives for institutions that include student evaluation of courses and programs in their internal quality development work.

Higher education institutions should:

- encourage broad student participation in and contribution to all aspects of institutional life, including governance and the institution's social and cultural life;
- seek to develop and maintain a learning environment built on active student participation and taking due account of student evaluation and views;
- encourage the creation of local student groups supporting academic mobility and helping integrate incoming exchange students and other mobile students.

Public authorities and higher education institutions should:

- consider measures to facilitate and recognize work in student organizations and activities, including measures compensating slower study progress for student representatives without financial and academic loss.

Student organizations should:

- represent all students, including those that are internationally mobile or following lifelong learning paths;
- raise awareness of democratic higher education governance;
- encourage student organizations to make every effort to broaden participation in student elections.

9.   CONFERENCE ON "MAKING THE EUROPEAN HIGHER EDUCATION AREA A REALITY: THE ROLE OF STUDENTS" (MOSKVA, NOVEMBER 2006): REPORT BY THE GENERAL RAPPORTEUR, MS. ATHANASSIA SPYROPOULOU

Introduction

The seminar on "Making the European Higher Education Area a Reality: the role of students" was co-organized by the Council of Europe, the Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation, and the Peoples' Friendship University of Russia within the framework of the Russian Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe. The conference took place at the premises of the Peoples' Friendship University of Russian on November 2-3, 2006. Participants included academics and Ministry officials from Russia and from a number of other countries, representatives of ESIB and other national and international student organizations, representatives of national and international organizations active in higher education and a team of international experts.

Alexander Efremov, Acting Rector of the University, welcomed the participants and placed the seminar in the wider context of the current emphasis in national policies aimed at strengthening human rights, improving democracy, fostering cultural cooperation and youth exchange, in Russia's effort to contribute to a Europe without dividing lines. The Peoples' Friendship University is a real-life example of building an international educational process and a leading university in implementing the Bologna reforms in Russia also by involving its students in this effort.

In his opening speech, Sjur Bergan, Head of the Department of Higher Education and History Teaching of the Council of Europe, underlined the significance of the seminar being held in Russia, and even more so as the initiative came from a university. He also pointed to the fact that the Peoples' Friendship University is a most appropriate venue for such a seminar due to its being a truly international university with a strong multicultural identity. It was also the venue for a conference on student participation in higher education governance in July 2004, again co-organized with the Council of Europe. Tatsiana Khoma, member of the Executive Committee of ESIB, also pointed to the fact that the conference itself, as well as the high participation of student representatives, is a good sign and a good example of open discussion on the role of students. The Bologna Process should be solid and the fact that the conference is held in Russia is encouraging.

The theme of the seminar is most timely: since we are at the implementation phase of the Bologna Process, and, as Sjur Bergan pointed out, it is inconceivable to imagine the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) becoming a reality without the active contribution of the students. The acknowledgement of the role of students in the realization of the EHEA increased together with their actual participation in its shaping. However, as Lars Ekholm, former Secretary General of the Association of Swedish Higher Education representing the European University Association (EUA), remarked in his opening speech, as the student influence has increased over the years, so have their responsibilities. The success of the Bologna Process now depends on the constructive and efficient cooperation among the three partners of a triangular relationship: governments, universities and students. Larisa Efremova, from the Department of

International Relations of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation, emphasized the importance of integration of the Russian higher education into the international landscape, by keeping at the same time its traditional values. However, this integration cannot be achieved without building of a broad consensus between the academic community and the government. Perceptions of the Bologna Process among the government, the academics and the students often differ. It is very important that governments, higher education institutions and students reach an agreement first as to what are the important issues to be addressed through the Bologna reforms and then to attempt to find commonly accepted solutions.

The Role of Students in Making the European Higher Education a Reality: a historical perspective

As is widely known, the Bologna Process leading to the creation of the EHEA took its name from the University of Bologna where the Ministerial Conference of 1999 took place and where the Magna Charta Universitatum was signed in 1988. However, what could be very significant to the Bologna Process at the stage it is now and to the particular conference is the history of its establishment, which Germain Dondelinger reminded us of. The university as an institution, including its name, is the ultimate outcome of a student initiative in the 12th century. The students of Law in Bologna organized themselves in guilds (*universitates)* to better protect their rights in the face of civic impositions and in order to better organise their studies. The university was originally created by the students for the students, and in essence, this is how things still are. The Bologna Process, by its name, in fact carries a much more powerful and comprehensive symbolism than what we usually associate it with, also as regards the role of students, who are equal partners of the academic community and need to be treated as such.

However, as Sjur Bergan reminded us, in Bologna in 1999 the students were not present and in the Bologna Declaration there was no mentioning of student participation. At the Prague Ministerial Conference in 2001 though, the students through the ESIB were there, and in the Communiqué there are important statements about the students being "full members of the Higher Education community" and "competent, active and constructive partners in the establishment and shaping of a European Higher Education Area". There is also the statement "Ministers affirmed that students should participate in and influence the organisation and content of education at universities and other Higher Education institutions".

Since Prague, the students' presence in the Bologna Process has been formal and their influence ever increasing. In the Berlin Communiqué there is an even more clear and straightforward reference to the role of students in Higher Education governance specifically, with strong statements: "Students are full partners in Higher Education governance". It is also stated that "Ministers note that national legal measures for ensuring student participation are largely in place throughout Europe". At the same time though, attention is called to the discrepancy between legal provisions for participation and actual involvement. Consequently, Ministers "also call on institutions and student organisations to identify ways of increasing actual student involvement in Higher Education governance". It is true that effectively promoting and achieving actual student involvement is one of the biggest challenges to all countries, for a number of reasons that will be analyzed further below in this report.

Student Participation in Higher Education Governance: the rationale

Sjur Bergan, as well as Jerzy Woznicki, president of the Foundation of Polish Rectors, recalled that it is generally acknowledged that the main purposes of higher education are at least the following four, as have been defined in CoE documents and as have been adopted by the Ministers in Bergen:

- preparation for the labour market

- preparation for life as active citizens in democratic societies:

- personal development

- development and maintenance of a broad, advanced knowledge base

These four purposes are complementary. None of these goals can be attained to the fullest possible degree without the active involvement and participation of the students. Student participation is important for higher education but also for the larger society. It is worth exploring the role of students in promoting all major purposes of higher education, as the spectrum, degree and quality of student participation is seen by many as a good indicator of the state of the affairs as far as democracy and citizenship in society at large are concerned. In that sense, the role of Higher Education institutions goes far beyond the provision and generation of knowledge, as they are considered appropriate places to educate young people in democratic values and practices as well.

The research project "Universities as Sites of Citizenship and Civic Responsibility"[14] of the Council of Europe reflects this concern. In his *Foreword,* the author of the general report, Dr Frank Plantan of the University of Pennsylvania, writes:

> "This study postulates the notion that universities can become key institutions for the transmission of democratic values through direct engagement in democratic activities, democratic education on campus. […] It is focused on institutions of Higher Education as strategic institutions in democratic political development" And he quotes Dr Ivar Bleiklie, one of the participating researchers, who expressed this argument as follows: "First, students need to learn how democracy works – through participation in student organisations and university decision-making bodies, and by developing a conceptual understanding of democracy. Second, they need to learn that democracy works by experiencing that they can influence events and their own living conditions through participation".

But beyond ideology and politics in the broader sense, there are very good practical reasons that make student participation a necessity: First of all, it is one of the major requirements in the effort to achieve a broad consensus within the academic community on whatever new directions

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[14] Frank Plantan, *Universities as Sites of Citizenship and Civic Responsibility* : CD-ESR (2002) 2
http://www.coe.int/T/E/Cultural_Co-operation/education/Higher_education/Activities/Universities_as_sites_of_citizenship

higher education pursues at institutional or national level. This consensus is particularly needed in periods of wide and radical reforms such as the ones often brought about in the framework of the Bologna Process.

Second, students have proven to be competent partners. The student perspective is invaluable. The students have a particular view on higher education, which is extremely important when making decisions on higher education matters. Nobody knows better than the students themselves what the actual workload is, how the learning processes take place and what the learning outcomes are. The quality of education is something they experience first hand. A priori evaluation activities of measures to be taken, assessment and feedback are much more comprehensive and broad if students have taken part in the process, especially since their experience in areas such as mobility –and obstacles to it- or allocation of credits is extremely important. Curriculum development becomes more output oriented when there is student involvement, as students are very sensitive to employability matters. Stocktaking activities and surveys among the students are a very valuable instrument in monitoring what actually happens when implementing reforms.

Their constructive and positive role in Higher Education governance and matters in general is acknowledged and their participation is sought for nowadays by all major players in Higher Education and by all competent authorities and organisations at European level; by the European Union, the Council of Europe, the EUA, EURASHE and ENQA

Finally, student participation is above all a pedagogical issue. It is in line with the reciprocal character of the educational process and enhances quality in education, being one of its constituents. Real quality education without student participation is extremely difficult to conceive nowadays.

Student Participation in Higher Education Governance: from theory to practice

The session, chaired by Viktor Chistokhvalov, Head of the Center for Comparative and International Education of the Peoples' Friendship University of Russia and member of the Bologna Follow-Up Group, focused on the reality of student participation in higher education governance. Student participation in higher education governance is formally realized through the representation of the student body at departmental, institutional, national and international levels. However, as Annika Persson-Pontén, Deputy Director at the Swedish Ministry of Education and Science and Chair of the Bologna Working Group on the Social Dimension pointed out in her presentation, student influence should not be only formal but also informal, both collective and individual, at the formal meetings and on an informal, day-to-day basis. This abides with one of the fundamental principles of democracy, the ability of a person to influence his/her own situation: Students can –and should- influence higher education by having an active stance and a saying on all matters concerning and affecting their studies, directly or indirectly. This influence is optimized not through conflict but through on-going co-operation with the academic staff and the university authorities.

The legislation concerning democratic student representation in higher education governance is largely in place throughout Europe. Largely, but not completely: as was pointed out by Tatsiana Khoma, there are still cases where the necessary legal provisions for the establishment and operation of student organizations at all levels are missing. In addition, the existence of student representatives by itself does not guarantee genuine student participation as will be discussed further below.

An important consideration is whether student participation is influential on all issues and levels. As the evidence from the two Council of Europe surveys[15] on Student Participation in the Governance of Higher Education Annika Persson-Pontén carried out suggests, students usually have voting rights in the governance bodies but not in all countries, or not at all levels and sometimes not on all issues. Student influence is often stronger on social and environmental issues and weaker on issues related to budget and student admission. As for participation in quality assurance, students evaluate courses and programmes in about half the countries. Regarding the level, student influence seems to be strong at institutional level, weaker at department and national levels. Regular contact of students with the government and the parliament was found in a narrow majority of the countries. In the majority of the countries there are regulations about how student representatives should be elected, and usually this is through direct elections. Political student organisations are illegal in about half the countries. Although it is possible to find candidates to fill positions, participation in student elections is generally low and the division of power between student organisations at national and institutional level is not always clear.

From the surveys it appears that special consideration is needed as regards student participation at the highest and the lowest levels (national, department); the relation between formal provisions and actual practice; the role of student organisations (division of power); the low participation in student elections and the dissemination of information on student rights. Many of these issues and some further considerations were discussed also by the rest of the speakers and the audience.

An important factor influencing student involvement is meaningfulness: Students need to feel that their opinions are actually heard and acted upon. If they feel that their presence is only a formality they will be de-motivated from contributing their views. This is a very real problem, also reflected in the Berlin Communiqué, which raises the issue of **actual** student involvement.

What is more, beyond the official student representation and the formal and informal exercise of influence, and even beyond the student participation in the elections once a year, lies the issue of the real participation of the general student population in the various functions of the student organisations and in the life of the institution. Here we are faced with a paradox: The Bologna Process needs quality input from the students, which can only be generated through their active involvement. However, the more higher education studies are intensified, the more competitive they become, the more students tend to disengage themselves from the collective, focus exclusively on their studies and turn to the individual sphere.

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[15] http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/highereducation/CompletedActivities/CoE_student_survey_EN.asp#TopOfPage

This phenomenon is not limited to higher education as was evident in the survey *Universities as Sites of Citizenship and Civic Responsibility* mentioned earlier in this report. Students are not less active in student organizations and student life because they are more active in civic activities outside of the institutions. Rather, many students – as well as other citizens – seem less interested in and committed to the public sphere and concentrate on the private sphere. They do things for themselves but not necessarily for a broader societal purpose. Except the loss for the Bologna Process, and for higher education in general, this stance has detrimental effects mostly for two of the four main purposes of higher education: preparation for life as active citizens in democratic societies and personal development, which, as was demonstrated by Ewa Krzaklewska, is considerably enhanced through the students' active participation in the various student organisations and activities.

A conscious effort needs to be made to encourage students in turning their interest to the public sphere. At a very practical level, the organisation of studies should allow for the time needed for such activities for all students, and there should be special provisions for student representatives so that they do not suffer academic or financial loss because of their involvement in student organisations.

The Role of Student Organisations in Making the European Higher Education Area a Reality.

During the session on the role of student organisations, Tatsiana Khoma presented ESIB –the National Unions of Students in Europe- its function and objectives and spoke about the role of the student organisations in general; Jerzy Woznicki provided an example of how student organizations can contribute to the creation of EHEA at national level, and Sergey Georgievsky, vice-president of the Russian branch of European Youth Parliament talked about the role of student organisations in Russia.

ESIB currently has 45 organizations from 34 countries, representing over 10 million students. There is wide diversity across Europe as to the structure and form of national student organisations. However, some basic criteria for membership in ESIB include the following: national student unions need to be controlled and run by the students on a democratic basis (i.e. with participation of various student groups in the decision making process; student representatives have to be elected through democratic elections); they have to be representative of the student population in their countries and open to all students; they need to be autonomous and independent in their decision-making from the institution authorities, from the government and from political parties[16], and accountable to the students they represent.

Through ESIB, students are represented at European level, but what happens at national and local level is very important. To this end, ESIB is preparing a European Students Rights Charter. For student organisations to be effective, as pointed out by Jerzy Woznicki and Tatsiana Khoma, they need to be fully autonomous, properly financed, well organised, well rooted in their respective student communities. Above all, they need to be legal entities, because otherwise they are limited in their activities, decision making and often face problems. This point was also made

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[16] ESIB members can be politically sensitive and engaged but not aligned with a particular party.

by Sergey Georgievsky, since in Russia the legal framework for the operation of student organisations is missing and student representation is largely based on older structures which are largely outdated. Sergey Georgievsky gave an overview of the situation in Russia as regards the role of student organisations. The accession of Russia to the Bologna Process in 2003 was a landmark, as since then the students for the first time have a right to participate in governance, and have the right to transparency and publicity. However, a lot needs to be done in this area as well, as currently there are two kinds of student organisations competing for power, with minimal rights and duties and without protection from interference.

Once student organisations have the rights, a major challenge is the exercise of these rights on behalf of student organisations for true influence on the learning environment and on higher education matters. A point raised by seminar participants was that sometimes student organisations limit themselves to "light" activities, overlooking the truly big issues. The role of student organisations is a crucial one not only in representing the students and defending their rights but also in effective dissemination of information on student rights and on all other matters concerning the students, including the Bologna Process.

Jerzy Woznicki argued that the role of student organisations, now that we are in the final stage of the Bologna Process, should be stronger than ever before, especially at institution and faculty levels, because these are the levels that will eventually determine the success of the Process. Student organisations need to exercise true influence by pushing for the necessary reforms in areas such as genuine first and second cycle degree structures, increased mobility, scholarships, flexible and updated programs of study, quality assurance. Student organisations should work in close cooperation with the academic staff at institutional level and with the rector's conference and the government at national level, as is the case now in Poland. In analogy, at international level, as was pointed out by Nina Gustafsson Åberg, ESIB has chosen to help students by being inside the Bologna Process, contributing the students' point of view, fighting for it, and disseminating information. And Ewa Krzaklewska pointed to the need to also take account of the input of a broad range of student organisations or networks.

Especially as regards the Bologna Process, efficient dissemination of information to the student body is essential if students are to play the constructive role described by Jerzy Woznicki: Is the student body properly informed about the Bologna Process and the creation of the European Higher Education Area and are they convinced about the benefits this will have for them? This issue was raised by one of the participants. In some countries maybe the answer is yes, but in others the answer is no, or certainly not enough. Students cannot push for something they don't know much about, they are not convinced about, or – even worse- for something they are misinformed about, considering it suspicious and threatening. It has happened that governments have been using the Bologna Process as a pretext to pass unpopular measures or major reforms without having achieved first the necessary consensus in the academic community and sometimes even without these reforms being truly related to the Bologna Process. ESIB has contributed to proper information with publications such as Bologna with Student Eyes (2005) and the Black Book of the Bologna Process (2005) to name but a few. But the real challenge is dissemination of information at national and local level.

The Social Dimension of Higher Education

In the session on the Social Dimension, chaired by Katia Dolgova-Dreyer from the Council of Europe, Germain Dondelinger, from the Ministry of Culture, Higher Education and Research of Luxembourg, member of the CDESR Bureau of the Council of Europe and Viktor Chistokhvalov analysed the various aspects of the Social Dimension. However, the discussion of the issue was not limited to the particular session, as Annika Persson-Pontén in her presentation on student participation also referred to the social dimension, as did a number of other speakers and participants throughout the seminar.

As summarized by Annika Persson-Pontén, the basic principle of the social dimension is that everyone who has the possibility to profit from higher education should be able to enter and complete higher education. The social dimension aims at reducing social gaps and at strengthening social cohesion. The rationale for upholding the social dimension is multiple: the promotion of equal opportunities, the increased prospects for the development of our society, the enhancement of quality of higher education. Tatsiana Khoma pointed to the fact that the social dimension is important not only for the individual students but for the society as a whole, as it ensures the highest possible contribution of students to the society.

This vision of higher education as contributing to social cohesion is part of the welfare state model of social cohesion. Education acts as a public instrument for the re-distribution of wealth, investing in social mobility and in the younger generation. In the not-so-distant past there was increased demand for secondary education. In response, governments took measures to improve access to it. In analogy, the current increased demand for higher education should lead to increased attention to the social dimension of higher education; in other words, the adoption of all provisions and measures needed in order to have conditions of equal access, progress and completion of higher education studies. Has this been the case? Not necessarily. The reasons are many and well beyond the scope of this report. A first plausible explanation might be that the cost of higher education is higher than that of primary and secondary education and at the same time the competing claims for funding by other areas of public policy are more intense than in the past. It is costly to uphold the social dimension, and this presupposes that, as in all matters concerning education, the money spent need to be seen as an investment of society that will yield a very significant future return.

The role of students in upholding and promoting the social dimension is indicated by what both Germain Dondelinger and Annika Persson-Pontén remarked: at the outset of the Bologna Process the emphasis was on competitiveness, transparency and attractiveness, with no reference to the social dimension. The social dimension surfaced in the Bologna Process from Prague on, together with the students and mostly due to them. However, this is not indicative only of the role of students, but also of the fact that there is a dichotomy, as Germain Dondelinger pointed out, between the social and the economic dimension of the Bologna Process. And although in subsequent seminars and Ministerial conferences[17] the concept was further defined to encompass a number of elements, it still tends to be somehow elusive and vague.

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[17] For official Bologna seminars on the issue, see http://www.bologna-berlin2003.de/en/bologna_seminars/index.htm .
"Exploring the Social Dimensions of the European Higher Education Area", Athens. 19-20 February 2003. For a CD-ROM

Broadly speaking, this can be attributed to two reasons: the social dimension is not vertical and is not as straightforward as are the rest of the priorities of the Bologna Process. Rather it is horizontal and transversal, as it touches upon all aspects of higher education. It is most evident and tangible in issues such as public responsibility for higher education[18], public support to higher education institutions, fostering of free education, equal and fair access, social support schemes for students beginning from entry to progression and completion of their studies in due time, removal of obstacles to disadvantaged groups currently under-represented in higher education[19], removal of obstacles to mobility of students[20] and academic staff and promotion of lifelong learning and flexible learning paths. It is also connected to the role of higher education in promoting democratic values and citizenship.

A second reason is that, as was demonstrated by Germain Dondelinger, there is wide diversity across Europe as to the actual policies and practices related to the social dimension. What is more, policies closely related to the social dimension such as access, including access to mobility (e.g. visa regulations, work permits, health insurance and social security, portability of grants and loans, recognition of foreign qualifications) and financial support to students, do not depend exclusively on the higher education institutions or the Ministries of Education but affect and are affected by other areas of public policy. The scope of such public policies though, is determined by how the nation state defines itself and how much integration it seeks.

An example of this diversity in national policies and of the inter-dependence of public policies at national level was provided by Viktor Chistokhvalov, who gave an overview of the situation as regards the various aspects of the Social Dimension in the Russian Federation. The landscape of higher education in the country is changing rapidly, with a spectacular increase in the number of institutions, both public and private, and in the number of students, but also with a dramatic increase in the number of fee-paying students. Positive steps have been taken, such as ratification of the Lisbon Recognition Convention, certain legislative provisions for student participation, but in areas such as mobility for instance, a lot remains to be done: the adoption of ECTS and the diploma supplement, the improvement of recognition procedures, more efficient dissemination of information to students as regards the new degree structure, better financial support schemes for students, quality assurance, social security and health insurance of mobile students, reduction of red tape for visas, etc.

The Social Dimension: beyond the policy documents

Germain Dondelinger raised a number of issues as regards the social dimension that go beyond what has been expressed in the policy documents of the Bologna Process so far. He suggested that the term "equitable" instead of "equal" for access may be more appropriate, as it reflects fairness, levelling out inequalities, so that people can move up the social ladder. Ideally, higher education should reflect the diversity in the population of a country. To this end, out-reach strategies, anti-discrimination legislation and positive discrimination measures are taken. These

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publication with the contents of the seminar contact: a.spyrop@uop.gr Re: Athens Bologna Seminar and http://www.aic.lv/ace/ace_disk/Bologna/Bol_semin/Sorbonne/index.HTM "The Social Dimension of the European Higher Education Area and World-Wide Competition, Sorbonne, Paris, France, 27-28 January 2005
[18] For a thorough analysis of the issue, see: http://www.coe.int/T/DG4/HigherEducation/PublicResponsibility/Documentation_EN.asp#TopOfPage
[19] See http://www.staffs.ac.uk/institutes/access/ean/ean3.html
[20] See http://www.esib.org/5convention/index.html

policies echo the U.N. Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and the overarching concept of "equal opportunity" as it was defined in Europe in the 60's and 70's, and challenge the principle of student selection on the basis of merit. But who should have the responsibility for such support systems, the state or the institutions? And should quality assurance also take into account social policy objectives, or should it function only on the basis of academic standards?

Besides, as was also pointed out by Martina Vukasović and Lars Ekholm, it is not enough to take such measures at the level of entrance to higher education. Participation in higher education is very much a matter of socio-economic and cultural background, and pro-active measures need to be taken at the level of primary and secondary education, if we are to effectively widen access.

As mentioned already, policies related to the social dimension in general and to the socio-economic conditions of students are diverse across Europe. This diversity came to the surface through the Bologna Process and so did the need for comparable data on this issue. This is reflected in the establishment of the Bologna working group on the social dimension. There have already been some efforts to gather such data, and an example is the Eurostudent Project.[21]

However, since the social dimension is multi-faceted, special attention needs to be paid to the collection and interpretation of appropriate data. For instance, some preliminary findings from research seem to point to a tendency for students from Southern Europe to live at home. A reading of these findings may be that the students freely choose to stay at home due to certain cultural traits of the particular society and that the need for subsidized student accommodation is less in these countries. However, did the particular survey also investigate if the students had a choice as to the place of studies to begin with? Living at home while studying may simply mean that there is neither sufficient financial support by the state nor by the family (simply put, families often cannot afford to send their children to study in another city, let alone country). This may go as far as influencing the choice of the field of studies - which is often based on what is available locally- and resulting in loss of potential and talent, not only to the individual student but to the whole society, if we talk in terms of human capital.

Closely related to the socio-economic conditions of students is the issue of fees. The United Nations Covenant on Human Rights states that higher education should become free for all.[22] ESIB has a clear position against fees[23], some European countries have no fees at all, others have them only in some of the second and third cycle studies, others have them in all cycles. When there are fees, the proportion of fees to the total cost of studies also differs from country to country, although the tendency is to keep them relatively low.

An argument for fees is that studies free of charge is actually more unjust than charging reasonable fees, since the lower classes pay taxes for a good they rarely benefit from (as access rates are much lower among them), thus in essence supporting the studies of the wealthier, and that public support should be used to ensure participation in higher education of those qualified but unable to support themselves during their studies, and not benefit those whose participation

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[21] http://www.his.de/Abt2/Auslandsstudium/Eurostudent/index_html
[22] For the full text of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and in particular for higher education (Article 12,c), see. http://www.ohchr.org/english/law/cescr.htm
[23] For ESIB's argumentation against fees see http://www.esib.org (Documents►Policies and Statements)

would not be affected by their economic background. According to this view, it is better to have fees and set up an effective grant and loan system to avoid the financial barrier to access. However, there is always the possibility that, because of the existence of fees, the state may eventually withdraw part of its own funding, so that institutions end up with the same total amount of funding, and families, especially of the middle class, face a greater burden. In addition, this line of argumentation seems to be taking for granted that students coming from a more privileged economic background should remain fully dependent on their families during their studies, and that their relationship with their parents is a good one (the parents will accept the student's choice of field of studies and will fully support him/her throughout his/her studies).

The social dimension also encompasses the social relations that exist among people. This includes the participation of students in the decision making processes and the sense of belonging to and sharing the values of the academic community. As to the second, Germain Dondelinger pointed to the fact that over the last few years there has been a shift from the so far prevailing ideal of the community of scholars to a more corporate profile, both on the part of the institutions and on the part of students. The university is no longer as strongly oriented to the functions of the nation state and as distant from the market as it was in the previous two centuries; the economic dimension has entered higher education more than ever before. This does not make higher education less central to the society -on the contrary, the emphasis on the knowledge economy gives the university a most strategic role-; nevertheless it does affect the character of higher education and differentiates the notion of public good.

Germain Dondelinger finally argued that the social dimension of higher education needs re-definition. A possible model is one suggested by Frank Newman in the framework of the Futures Project (est. 1999)[24], according to which higher education serves the needs of society in three ways: socializing students to their role in society (which includes socializing to the community through civic engagement and democratic citizenship, socializing to the life of mind as in critical thinking, socializing to the profession), providing all citizens with social mobility, and upholding the university as the home of disinterested scholarship and unfettered debate. The latter is important for the definition of the social dimension of research in general and of research universities. "Pasteur's Quadrant" (1997), designed by Donald E. Stokes, dismantles the false dichotomy between basic and applied research and supports the argumentation that the research function of a university is a public good and has a social dimension. Consequently, the social dimension needs to infuse the three main missions of the university: teaching, research and innovation, and the Bologna Process needs to go beyond the dilemma of social vs economic dimension, look beyond the instruments it has created and set these tools in the context of clearly defined purposes.

International Student Experience: Mobility

As Evgeny Martynenko pointed out when introducing the session on mobility, achieving the goals of the Bologna Process largely depends on how well we organise and support mobility. During the session, Bernd Wächter, director of the Academic Cooperation Association (ACA),

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[24] http://www.futuresproject.org/index.html

presented an overview of common perceptions of and claims about mobility –the "promises" made -, pointing to the fact that more evidence is needed to substantiate these claims. Ewa Krzaklewska, vice-president of the Erasmus Student Network (ESN), described the function of the Erasmus Student Network, the findings from surveys about student mobility, the areas where steps need to be taken to improve the conditions for mobile students and the students' role in fostering mobility. Gennady Lukichev, Head of the National Information Center for Academic Recognition and Mobility (ENIC), presented us with data on student mobility at global, European and national level and Russia's policies as regards both incoming and outgoing students. The issue of mobility and the related national policies was also extensively addressed by Larisa Efremova in her presentation on the first day of the seminar.

According to the data provided by Gennady Lukichev, especially since 2003 when Russia joined the Bologna Process, there has been an increase in the number of institutional agreements and in the number of both incoming and outgoing students from and to "Bologna countries". Russia is trying to make its higher education attractive to foreign students also through a number of intergovernmental agreements. Universities participate in programmes and partnerships more and more actively. Currently 604 Russian universities receive foreign students, and the target is to raise the ratio of foreign students to 1,6% of the student population. As a result of these policies, there has been a 50% increase in the number of foreign students in a few years, but still the number is comparatively low, and the number of outgoing students is still much higher than the number of incoming students.

The imbalance was explained by Evgeny Martynenko: On the one hand, great emphasis is placed on education by Russian families; Russians value the intercultural added value of mobility, and can now afford to pay for it more than they did in the past. On the other hand, the system still has weaknesses creating obstacles to incoming mobility such as the still under-developed infrastructure, the language barrier, poor accommodation, differences in curricula, problems with visas and health insurance. A new Law which will come to force next year, is expected to alleviate problems with visas. Viktor Chistokhvalov emphasized the need for increased funding of mobility, especially for students from a poor socio-economic background, and Larisa Efremova pointed to another important factor: It is not enough to have policies on mobility; these policies need to be transparent, properly supported at all levels, and clearly communicated to all; students, institutions and employers.

The need for data on mobility

Mobility is a "mantra" of our times, as Bernd Wächter humorously put it, and to such a degree that we rarely pause to think about it. He reminded us that international mobility is not the rule; rather it is the exception, as a very small percentage of the world population voluntarily lives outside of their country of origin. The tendency is rather for people to "stay put", so we clearly need to justify our claims when advocating it.

As far as academic mobility is concerned, although the numbers increase, the percentage of mobile students tends to remain the same. And a paradox brought up by Martina Vukasović is that mobility is often more difficult within the same country than outside of the country.

In any case, mobility is costly. According to the data provided by Gennady Lukichev, currently about $ 40 billion income is generated by mobility for countries, which of course means that – at least - $ 40 billion is spent on it. Consequently, when advocating international mobility, one should give good reasons for it, stating clearly the expected benefits and demonstrating that these benefits actually occur. However, this is rarely the case, as mobility is seen as a good in itself, not in need for further justification. As a result, there is very little evidence on the actual impacts of mobility.

Academic mobility does not exist in a pure form. Its nature depends on a number of factors, such as duration, purpose of studies, direction, etc. and the reasons and the benefits from it may not be what we assume they are. Reasons and benefits may also be quite different for individuals than for institutions, higher education systems or governments. So there is a need for longitudinal studies on mobile students.

The "promises" of mobility

A common claim in the rationales for mobility schemes is that mobility enhances quality of education. However, as Bernd Wächter pointed out, this quality is usually not adequately defined, or not defined at all. If by quality is meant "quality of higher education" in purely academic terms, then this claim holds true only in cases where a student goes to an institution and a department of higher academic quality than the one he/she originates from (as has been the case with organised mobility from developing to developed countries for capacity building of human resources in the home country). Another such case is joint degrees, where two or more institutions bring their resources together to achieve a level of overall quality which none of them would achieve alone. In all other cases, the claim is not very plausible. Mobility will enhance quality of education of the person involved, but in the broader sense of *Bildung,* in that he/she will become more mature, gain better knowledge of the world, of another language, of another culture.

A political "promise" is that mobility contributes to international understanding and consequently to world peace. In addition, education cooperation is seen by many countries as part of their foreign policy. Mobility probably does contribute to better understanding and hopefully more empathy, but not necessarily to liking a country and its people more than before. The outcomes of mobility in this sense are probably more complex than just reduced or increased liking.

Another set of "promises" for students, institutions and countries is economic. The mobile student is assumed to have better prospects of employment in both home and host countries, of finding a more interesting and better paid job. There is some indication from the limited research conducted so far that indeed, mobile students are more likely to end up working in jobs with international character, more job satisfaction, but not a higher pay. Institutions may gain income from fees, and may secure their research base where there is shortage. But what is brain-gain for one country is brain-drain for another. At national level mobility is often seen as a means to increase knowledge of foreign markets and even to increase exports to the countries of the ex-incoming students. At European level, mobility is seen as an aid in promoting European integration, the single market, growth, employment. However, none of these claims has been

verified through research, and some of them are so vague that they cannot be either verified or falsified.

Bernd Wächter concluded by giving us a "word of warning" based on his personal observations: mobility is highly addictive: once a person starts, (s)he is unlikely to stay put afterwards. Contrary to what is commonly thought, mobility is not a harmless activity: it is unpredictable. At personal level it has the potential to disrupt peoples' lives. At system level, large-scale mobility can challenge the *status quo*, since system differences eventually become mobility obstacles, creating pressures for system change and harmonizaton. This has actually been the case with the Erasmus Programme, which, in the way described above, contributed to the emergence of the Bologna Process.

The student perspective

The effect of mobility on higher education systems was emphasized also by Ewa Krzaklewska, who gave us the student perspective on the reality of mobility through participation in the Erasmus Programme: Students in mobility act as agents of change, questioning existing practices and demanding solutions, setting forward issues of recognition and other issues not previously viewed as important, resulting in changing structures.

Ewa Krzaklewska presented the findings of two Erasmus Student Network surveys in 2005 and 2006 in which the cultural, social and academic impact of a wide range of mobility experiences was investigated. In the findings of the surveys, this impact appears to be largely positive, especially as regards mobility as a life experience, and in the areas of language learning, building of cultural competence and social networks abroad. Satisfaction with studies ranks quite high as well. There is a large degree of overall satisfaction among the students who experienced mobility. It is indicative that almost all would recommend mobility to a friend.

However, there is noticeable dissatisfaction with the practical dimension of mobility due to problems such as lack of information or limited access to information prior and during one's stay, inadequate funding resulting in mostly economically privileged students having access to mobility, problems with accommodation and with the local language, problems with recognition of studies or study periods abroad, often also due to incompatibility of curricula, lack of representation of foreign students at the host institution and a general lack of equal rights among foreign and local students, visa problems, etc.

Of these problems, some need to be dealt with at national / institutional level. Financial, visa and work permit problems and lack of recognition fall in this category. For problems of a more practical nature, voluntary work under the principle of "students helping students", such as the one done through the Erasmus Student Network, is one of the most effective means to support mobile students. Help can be offered in a variety of ways: "buddy" programmes, orientation weeks, social events, help-desks, student representation. Help is needed before, during and after the exchange.

The benefits from such volunteer activity and from mobility are many for all: incoming students, who find trustworthy helpers, volunteer students, who become more positive towards becoming mobile themselves and gain a considerable non-formal learning experience, the local student

community, which takes on a more international character, and the institution, whose image is enhanced through the increase of satisfaction of foreign students, and whose international connections are promoted. Consequently, institutions should encourage the establishment of local student groups supporting mobility and student unions should consider exchange and international students in their policies.

The learning environment

Regardless of the perspective one may take as to the underlying motives behind the Bologna Process, the ultimate pre-requisite for the realisation of the European Higher Education Area is common: improvement of quality, and increase of the visibility of that quality to the outside world. A dimension of quality of paramount importance is the one related to student learning and the learning environment. Accordingly, within the Bologna Process there has been a shift of emphasis from teaching to learning. It is not accidental that the emphasis on the learning environment increased as students became more active in the process, setting forward issues of quality in this respect. However, it should be noted here that whereas increased emphasis on learning presupposes the students taking responsibility for their own learning, this by no means diminishes the governments' and the institutions' responsibilities for the quality of the learning environment, as will be discussed further below.

What is a good learning environment?

Learning in terms of internal processes falls into the realm of psychology and takes place everywhere, in formal, non-formal and informal settings. Seen from the perspective of higher education studies, the formal setting can be referred to as the internal learning environment, whereas the other two settings as the external learning environment.

As a general initial statement, a good formal learning environment is one that is aware of and takes account of the fact that different people learn in different ways different things, accordingly providing for a variety of access criteria, teaching approaches, learning tools and facilities and student evaluation. It is also one that helps students develop not just subject-specific knowledge and skills but generic, transferable knowledge and skills for life.

Through the three speakers presentations in this session which was chaired by Stephan Neetens, we had a well rounded overview of the main issues related to the learning environment. Lars Ekholm discussed learning environment in a broader context by following an ideal student from secondary education to Lifelong Learning (LLL), i.e. before admission, during her studies and after graduation, in what could be the ideal higher education setting. Martina Vukasović, director of the Centre for Education Policy of the Alternative Academic Educational Network of Serbia and a former President of ESIB, took a practical approach, presenting mostly an analysis of the internal learning environment, i.e. of the various features of the formal learning setting of a higher education institution. Lars Lynge Nielsen, acting president of EURASHE, focused more on the learning process itself and how it can be enhanced by constantly pursuing the optimal learning environment. In the 40 minute lively discussion that followed many of the issues were further explored and commented upon.

Establishing the Perfect Learning Environment: Mission Impossible?

According to Lars Lynge Nielsen *establishing* the Perfect Learning Environment is indeed "Mission Impossible" since the learning environment is not finite and therefore can never be *established*. On the contrary, the learning environment should be understood as a never ending performance where the actors are the teachers and the students interacting with each other, and the students also interacting among themselves; the stage is the combined physical, psychological and social factors surrounding this process; as for the play, it is rewritten every time the actors and/or the stage change. We know that we are very close to the perfect learning environment, the one that will best stimulate and enhance the learning process, when we come to realise that we in fact cannot establish it, but we constantly have to pursue it.

Access to higher education

Both Lars Elkholm and Martina Vukasović pointed to the fact that, so far, whereas there has been plenty of emphasis on the relationship between higher education and the labour market, the relationship between higher education and secondary education has been largely neglected with negative effects on both. The higher education learning environment should become more flexible and open so as to acknowledge cultural traits, knowledge and skills students from usually underrepresented social groups may have. Student admission procedures and in particular interviews as a means of admitting students were also discussed extensively during the session. There was consensus that interviews are a very valuable tool but that a variety of criteria need to be employed in order to ensure fair access. In order to help with successful choice of studies, the higher education institutions need to provide accurate information on the programs of study and the employment rates of previous graduates.

Inside higher education

Once a student is inside higher education, he/she is likely to encounter a mixture of good and bad features: good teachers in poor buildings and the opposite, a rich learning experience in certain aspects but a poor one in others, etc. However, if we are to define standards, some of the more tangible features a good learning environment should have would be along these lines: Well-organised studies with known demands on the learner, content of studies defined according to learning outcomes, good organisation of timetables and class schedules, balanced distribution of student workload and authentic implementation of ECTS, improvement of student-teacher ratio, efficient use of ICT and library facilities, accessibility of the various facilities by students with physical disabilities, to name but a few.

Quite often, problems in the above mentioned areas are attributed to poor financing, especially in this era of massification of higher education. In the face of this reality, Martina Vukasović focused on things that still can be done to alleviate problems, mainly in the direction of better allocation of existing resources and better cooperation and sharing of these resources among the various departments/faculties of an institution.

A less palpable but essential element of the learning environment is the teaching methodology. Speakers and seminar participants referred extensively to the quality of teaching per se and the ways to enhance it, both at the level of recruitment of teaching staff and at the level of in-service

training and evaluation. Academic teachers are not necessarily adequately trained for academic teaching or PhD supervising in a pedagogical sense and excellence in research does not automatically ensure excellence in teaching, since the two functions (teaching –research) are separate, interrelated but not necessary conditions for quality teaching. In its turn, excellence in teaching does not ensure excellence in learning, since learning styles differ and teaching techniques should be inclusive, in other words diverse, to address the needs of a heterogeneous student population.

The learning environment: a matter of attitudes?

As Lars Lynge Nielsen explained, four very common fallacies are often at work in terms of the learning process and the learning environment: One is ideological: education is usually made to meet the needs of institutions and teachers according to certain set standards. As a result, individual learner differences and needs are usually not taken into account. The so-called technological fallacy will lead to a tendency to act upon certain general pedagogical norms, again not taking into account individual differences. A common psychological fallacy is that what is being taught is actually identical to what is being learnt. And there is also the utopian fallacy that education can cure all that is wrong, in other words to believe that we can overcome environmental, socio-economic and political obstacles through education alone.

The teachers' attitude to their role as regards teaching and learning also largely determines the students' attitude to their own learning and in this way the general quality of the learning experience. It so happens that the teachers' (and, consequently, the students') attitudes depend on a mixture of biographical, disciplinary, institutional and wider social conditions, suggesting that this is an area more difficult to affect with direct measures than, say, ICT or library facilities. This also implies that whatever changes are sought in this area, they will probably take considerably more effort and time than in other, more tangible and less multi-dimensional areas. Nevertheless, it would be worth starting any efforts to reform from this very point, since the learning environment is much more than just a well equipped building; above all, it is the people involved in the teaching-learning process.

A good example of how attitudes affect the learning environment is the case of infrastructures: As Lars Lynge Nielsen remarked, what we really need to enhance is the learning process, not the teaching one. Ideally, the requirements for the physical environment depend on the kind of learning we want to take place there, so there should be a variety of rooms and spaces to allow for a variety of learning experiences. However, when designing a building, more often than not it is the teachers' and the institutions' needs that are taken into account and not the learners' needs, so we often end up having the perfect teaching environment, not the perfect learning environment. But even when we make one such, again, there are barriers to overcome such as the mental barrier of tradition, which may very quickly alter the function of even the most well-designed classroom (e.g. a circular seating arrangement allowing for peer interaction and a consultative role for the teacher) to the traditional rows of seats, a blackboard and a totally teacher-centered process.

Teaching and research, learning and work

The relationship between teaching and research and its impact on the learning environment is generally seen as a positive one. Ideally all academic staff should be PhD holders and the academic teacher should - ideally again - combine teaching and research in the right proportions; however, students often criticize teachers for openly showing that research is their first priority; teaching comes second, thus degrading the learning environment. The important question here is: How much and what kind of research is useful for students' learning in the particular subjects and profiles? A proper balance needs to be sought between too much academism (i.e. too much research) and too little (poor academic background) in order to ensure an optimal learning environment. A lot depends on the type of higher education institution (Research vs. Teaching oriented), on the study program, on the level of studies and the individual student needs. Above all, it is important that choices for the students do exist.

A similar question needs to be answered when it comes to the learning-work link. How much work-related experience needs to be included in the learning environment? Again, the answer should be the result of careful consideration within each field, profile and institution.

Beyond formal learning

The non-learning elements of the learning environment may not be as much focused on, but it is a fact that having a balanced mix of diverse activities improves the overall well-being of students and their performance in various aspects of life, including the ability to learn. What is more, learning and development of various transversal skills and competencies do take place through participation in such activities. Institutions should provide for a **rich student experience**, and allow students space and time for participation in sports, cultural activities, student unions, etc. In addition, much valuable learning takes place outside of the formal higher education setting. Again, students should be allowed the time for such learning. It was also discussed that, if we are to promote flexible learning paths, procedures for recognition of prior and experiential learning, extra-curricular competences, (informal and non-formal learning) should be developed, and the possibility of linking ECTS credits to such learning experiences could be examined. In the ensuing discussion, the latter was a particularly hotly debated points, with strong views being expressed both in favour of and in opposition to this suggestion.

What happens next?

Lars Ekholm emphasized the vital importance of the reciprocal relationship of a higher education institution with its former students for both. It is important that higher education institutions follow their graduates' on to the labor market, and collect data on their employment on a longitudinal basis and that feedback is sought from graduates on the content of studies so that institutions can better prepare their current students for their future careers. The opinion of graduates is a valuable tool also when designing lifelong learning programs. In general, higher education institutions will benefit from including alumni in their program boards, since this is one more way of linking the university to society at large and the professional world. And the former graduates should feel that their bond with their Alma Mater is strong and vivid, and that they can always return to update their knowledge and skills. This, unfortunately, is not so often the case. Although life-long learning as a concept has been around for more than 20 years, very little has been done in this direction, especially as regards higher education.

Who is responsible for improving the learning environment?

The answer given by Martina Vukasović is "all": The public authorities need to provide a good legislative framework for the work of higher education institutions, which will strike a good balance between autonomy and accountability and provide incentives and possibilities for institutions to crate good learning environments themselves. They also need to provide sustainable solutions for the adequate financing of higher education so that institutions have sufficient means to maintain and improve quality of the learning environment. Quality assurance needs to take account of the quality of learning environment according to criteria and standards agreed upon by the various stakeholders. Institutions, as explained further above, need to focus on efficient use and allocation of resources and, to that end, even sometimes concede to politically challenging solutions such as integration of institutions or faculties. As for the role of students, once more it is crucial: Student unions need to cooperate with the public authorities and higher institutions on issues related to the improvement of student learning and to the enhancement of the quality of learning environment, and if necessary initiate and even demand changes in this direction. They can also directly improve the learning environment themselves, by providing a variety of activities on campus, organising study groups, etc.

An important question arises: Do we really have a choice as to making or not a most sincere effort to improve the learning environment if a genuine European Higher Education Area is to be? Not really. As Martina Vukasović concluded, "not improving the learning environment may very well lead to a European Higher Education Area existing only on mission statements, communiqués and speeches of irresponsible politicians, rectors or student representatives".

Panel Debate: "Bringing the Bologna Process to its Goal: a Student Contribution"

The debate was chaired by Germain Dondelinger and panel members were Aleksey Shumakov, Vice Rector for Academic Work of Chelyabinsk State University, Nina Gustafsson Åberg, member of the Bologna Process Committee of ESIB, Victor Chistokhvalov, and Sjur Bergan. The debate also benefited from the audience's active participation, with questions to the panel members and comments. It mostly explored actual student involvement and attitudes towards it in areas related to the Bologna action lines such as curriculum development and evaluation, quality assurance, including evaluation of academic staff by the students, and student participation in higher education governance, both in Russia and the rest of Europe.

Victor Chistokhvalov brought up the issue of inadequate funding as a detrimental factor both for the quality of studies and for student involvement. The percentage of students who have to work during their studies is extremely high in many European countries, with grave consequences. Lack of adequate funding (low salaries), together with lack of information also affects the implementation of Bologna reforms by the academic staff.

In Russia the role of students in curriculum development is limited since, for the time being, 85% of the content in all disciplines is defined by the federal government. Within the next two years this percentage will fall to 45%, allowing for greater student involvement. So far, and to the extent students have participated, they have been rather conservative in their approach as to the

content of studies and influenced by perceptions as to what jobs are "in fashion". Sjur Bergan commented that students are sensitive to fast changes in the labour market but they should not be unduly influenced by fads. It is important to choose a broad field of studies, since the labor market is only one of the considerations to be taken into account and one needs both subject specific but also transferable skills.

An issue brought up by seminar participants was the willingness of institutions and academic staff to accept student expectations and satisfaction as criteria for evaluation, as well as their willingness to share some of the powers they now have with the students. As Aleksey Shumakov remarked, in Russia the tendency on behalf of the academic staff seems to be more favourable towards participation of only the senior students in quality assurance, in the development of study programs, etc., since they are considered to be more motivated and mature to express valid views on higher education matters than freshmen. Nina Gustafsson Åberg offered the counter-argument that such practice deprives the institutions of the valuable fresh look of a new-comer, and Sjur Bergan noticed that full student participation and on all issues, including evaluation, is a very important exercise in citizenship as it is related to taking responsibility. This was confirmed by Nina Gustafsson Åberg, who said that, as a student representative, she is ready to take individual responsibility and liability for her participation in higher education governace, and on all issues, including in bodies deciding for promotions of academic staff.

The debate closed with each of the participants focusing on a core issue. Sjur Bergan remarked that it is striking how everyone agrees that student participation is a necessary ingredient of higher education. The challenge is how to translate this into practice. Victor Chistokhvalov would like to see a law where the role of students and the provisions for it would become very specific. Aleksey Shumakov would also like to see very clear legal provisions and mechanisms for student involvement, but he would also like to see the proportion of active students maximized. Nina Gustafsson Åberg noticed that problems of this nature are met everywhere in Europe. The way to functional student participation is still very long and this makes such discussions extremely important.

Concluding remarks

The Bologna Process and the creation of the European Higher Education Area is much more than action lines and priorities. It is a vision of Europe, that the present and future generations of students will have wider and more fair access to higher education, better quality of studies, better prospects of employment Europe-wide, and that this better quality higher education, the enhanced academic cooperation and exchange of students, academics, knowledge and ideas across the continent will contribute towards a more socially cohesive, democratic, inclusive and prosperous Europe.

As all visions, it needs to be clearly articulated, so that it can be shared by as many as possible, by the vast majority of the interested parties, not just the Ministers of Education, the Governments and the leaders of the higher education community. Higher education is an area most heavily loaded with individual and collective interests and expectations; with powerful traditions, well-established practices and institutions that are centuries old. Any attempted

reforms require wide consensus and commitment by all stakeholders. The student body is the biggest stakeholder in higher education and the role of students in establishing the European Higher Education Area is a vital one.

So far the contribution of students in making the EHEA a reality has been quite significant. This has been acknowledged by the Ministers in their Communiqués and was emphasized by a number of speakers. Within the Bologna Process, in its official documents and procedures, the consideration of students as equal partners in higher education. on all issues is given, as was pointed out by Sjur Bergan. The issue at hand now is the role of students in the remaining years until 2010 and further than that, at national, institutional and department level. The seminar sought to explore how far we have gone in enabling students to play this vital role; how student involvement can be encouraged and how the impact of such involvement in higher education matters can be maximized.

However, the consideration of the student role in the implementation of the European Higher Education Area is only part of the bigger issue: As was repeatedly emphasized during the seminar, the students are not just the individual students, and their best interest is not just their own personal interest. The quality of education they get will directly affect not only them but the whole society they will live and work in. As Larisa Efremova succinctly put it, the future is found in the classrooms, not in the bureaucrats' offices. And the true question is "What future society do we want to make?" It is vital to ensure that the whole spectrum of purposes of higher education is addressed when planning and implementing educational policy. The role students are allowed to have is indicative of the role our society keeps for its future citizens. The extent that students are active in higher education governance and in the learning process is a good indication not only of the success of the institution and of the educational system as a whole, but also a good indication of how democratic we really want our societies to be.

10. **INFORMAL CONFERENCE OF MINISTERS OF EDUCATION OF THE WESTERN BALKANS (STRASBOURG, COUNCIL OF EUROPE HEADQUARTERS, 27 – 28 NOVEMBER 2006)**

CONCLUSIONS

Ministers of Education of the Western Balkans met at Council of Europe Headquarters in Strasbourg on 27 – 28 November 2006 to take stock of higher education reforms in their respective countries and to prepare jointly for the Ministerial conference of the Bologna Process, to be held in London on 17 – 18 May 2007. The Ministers reaffirmed their commitment to the Bologna Process and its goal of establishing a European Higher Education Area by 2010.

Acknowledging that higher education is an area where co-operation could be fostered on a regional level the Ministers agreed:

1) to support co-operation between the ENIC's (National Information Centres on recognition and mobility) with a view to **facilitating recognition of qualifications** of both students and academic staff in the region. They reaffirmed the Council of Europe/UNESCO Recognition Convention as the basis for this work, and underlined the importance of assessing qualifications on the basis of their learning outcomes and merits. They further underlined their intention to use the National Action Plans on Recognition, to be completed by 15 December 2006, as a basis for co-operation.

2) to promote quality development within higher education institutions as well as external quality assurance in line with the European Quality Assurance Standards adopted by Ministers of the Bologna Process in Bergen in 2005. They will seek to further stimulate regional cooperation in order to ensure the highest possible quality standards, including regular meetings of the heads of quality assurance bodies and through the setting up of networks of experts.

3) in view of fulfilling their obligation, undertaken in the Bergen Communiqué of 2005, to establish **national qualifications frameworks** by 2010 and to make these compatible with the overarching framework of qualifications of the European Higher Education Area, Ministers undertake to have an ongoing co-operation and sharing of experiences in the development of their national frameworks, possibly through a regional forum on qualifications frameworks.

4) to stimulate the development of joint degrees involving two or more higher education institutions from the region, in particular with a view to drawing on the particular strengths of each institution;

5) to give regional higher education cooperation impetus through the organisation of meetings at expert level.

Ministers further recognise the importance of this work in order to **ensure maximum mobility of students and academic staff**. At the same time, they call upon their fellow Ministers of Education in all countries party to the Bologna Process to raise the issue **facilitating the granting of visas**, work and residence permits and social security protection for students and staff engaged in academic mobility, and they undertake to do the same with their respective governments. The Ministers underline that the European Higher Education Area cannot be fully implemented unless unnecessary obstacles to mobility are removed.

11.   INFORMAL CONFERENCE OF MINISTERS OF EDUCATION OF THE COUNTRIES THAT JOINED THE BOLOGNA PROCESS IN 2005 (STRASBOURG, COUNCIL OF EUROPE HEADQUARTERS, 12 – 13 DECEMBER 2006)

CONCLUSIONS

Ministers of Education from Armenia, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine* met at Council of Europe Headquarters in Strasbourg on 12 – 13 December 2006 to take stock of higher education reforms in their respective countries and to prepare jointly for the Ministerial conference of the Bologna Process, to be held in London on 17 – 18 May 2007. The Ministers reaffirmed their commitment to the Bologna Process and its goal of establishing a European Higher Education Area by 2010.

With a view of stimulating the reform process in higher education in their countries, the Ministers agreed:

1. to further promote **quality development** within higher education institutions as well as external quality assurance in line with the European Quality Assurance Standards adopted by Ministers of the Bologna Process in Bergen in 2005. They underlined the need to further strengthen the capacity of their quality assurance bodies;

2. to establish **national qualifications frameworks** by 2010, in view of fulfilling their obligation, undertaken in the Bergen Communiqué of 2005, to make these compatible with the overarching framework of qualifications of the European Higher Education Area and to exchange experiences and cooperation for mutual support as needed and feasible;

3. to further develop and implement **curriculum reform** in higher education based on learning outcomes and taking account of the needs of the labour market, and to build on their mutual experience as well as that of other countries in addressing this important issue.

4. to pay special attention to the **social dimension** of higher education, look for ways of ensuring equality in access to, progress in and completion of higher education.

Ministers further recognise the importance of this work in order to **ensure maximum mobility of students and academic staff**. At the same time, they call upon their fellow Ministers of Education in all countries party to the Bologna Process to raise the issue **facilitating the granting of visas**, work and residence permits and social security protection for students and staff engaged in academic mobility. Ministers point to the simplification of visa procedures already undertaken in their countries and will follow regulations and practice in this area with a view to further facilitating academic mobility. Ministers also call for the simplification of the procedures and regulations concerning the recognition of foreign qualifications, and underline the need to fully implement the Lisbon Recognition Convention across the European Higher

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* Azerbaijan was prevented from attending the meeting because a new draft Law on Education was being considered by the Cabinet at the same time.

Education Area. The Ministers underline that the European Higher Education Area cannot be fully implemented unless unnecessary obstacles to mobility are removed.

The work of students and staff to foster the development and dissemination of knowledge and the right of students to education should not suffer because of political disagreements.

While reaffirming their commitment to being full partners in the European Higher Education Area, and to contribute to this pan-European effort, they also recognise the need for cooperation and the exchange of experience among themselves as well as with countries whose experience is particularly relevant for their own situation.

Ministers will encourage the promotion and implementation of the Bologna principles in the framework of the Black Sea countries' cooperation underlining the following areas of importance:

- Recognition of qualifications;
- Joint degrees;
- Mobility of students and staff;
- Quality assurance.

12. BOLOGNA SEMINAR ON "NEW CHALLENGES IN RECOGNITION", ORGNANIZED BY THE LATVIAN AUTHORITIES AND THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE, RĪGA, JANUARY 25 – 26, 2007

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Bologna Process Follow-Up Seminar

New Challenges in Recognition:
recognition of prior learning and recognition of European degrees outside

Riga, 25 – 26 January 2007

Conclusions and Recommendations

The Bologna Seminar *New Challenges in Recognition: recognition of prior learning and recognition between Europe and other parts of the world* (Riga, Latvia; 25 – 26 January 2007) was a well organised *European/international forum* as well as another opportunity to *share good practices* and deepen *understanding of new paradigms* in higher education.

The following conclusions and recommendations were summarized:

1. First of all, the seminar reaffirmed that *recognition of higher education qualifications, of periods of studies acquired abroad or of prior (experiential) learning are an integral part of the right to education and the promotion of the freedom of movement.*

Seminar also reaffirmed the *value aspects of higher education*. Recognition should not be understood in a narrow instrumental sense but *in relation to all fundamental objectives of the higher education*:

- *preparation for the labour market;*
- *preparation for life as active citizens in democratic society;*
- *personal development;*
- *development and maintenance an advanced knowledge base.*

2. Participants encourage all European HEIs, ENIC/NARIC centres and other competent recognition authorities *to assess qualifications from other areas of the world with the same open mind with which they would like European qualifications to be approached elsewhere*, and to assess qualifications from outside Europe according to the criteria and procedures outlined in the Council of Europe/UNESCO Recognition Convention and its subsidiary texts.

In view of the great variety of higher education systems and approaches worldwide this should include shifting the emphasis further *from input characteristics* of the qualifications *to the learning outcomes* achieved.

The Convention and its principles should be observed in a spirit of openness to all potential partners and a revision of regional conventions in a mutual dialogue should be encouraged as well.

3. *Reliable, easily understandable and easily accessible information on education systems and qualifications frameworks is essential to promoting the fair recognition of qualifications from the EHEA in other parts of the world.*

To a large extent information on educational systems is already provided. Yet, there is a need to adapt this information for easier understanding by those from outside the EHEA who are not familiar with the specific terminology created through the Bologna Process. The information should be made available on the web together with other information on the Bologna Process.

4. Participants firmly support *the proposal to establish policy fora with partners from other areas of the world*, as a part of the Bologna Process in a global context.

They encourage the BFUG to make recognition the topic of one of these fora, building on the work undertaken in this area by ENIC/NARIC Networks and involving them closely in this work.

A promotion of cooperation between the ENIC/NARIC Networks and similar networks from other world regions, in particular with a view to the development of a common understanding of recognition criteria, procedures and practices as well as transnational higher education provision is highly recommended.

5. European HEIs rely today on a number of useful tools developed through the Bologna Process and these tools are often well accepted in other areas of the world. These tools should be kept update and efficient. Participants realize that the *Diploma Supplement was designed already in 1998* and that *afterwards European higher education systems have undergone substantial reforms*. The Diploma Supplement is still well suited but it is *recommended to amend and renew its Explanatory Report* (e.g. joint degrees, workload and credits, quality assurance systems, transnational higher education etc.). Since the Diploma Supplement is a joint instrument, amendments have to be adopted both in the framework of the Lisbon Convention Intergovernmental Committee and the European Commission.

6. Participants realize that *recognition of prior learning* and *credit allocation for competences acquired outside formal higher education* (APL/APEL) is well developed only in a relatively small part of the emerging EHEA. Therefore, it is essential that progress be made in this area in the next period and ministers in London should make a specific commitment in this regard. Existing and planned developments to create national lifelong learning systems, including the "new style" qualification frameworks, should include systems to facilitate APL/APEL and recognition of prior learning should be used also for access to higher education. This will, *inter alia*, require that study programmes and individual courses of formal higher education be linked to *learning outcomes* and *competences*. ENIC/NARIC Networks can give information also about

APL/APEL and similar strategies in various countries – in Europe and worldwide – and their educational systems.

7. The seminar proved that *recognition issues are substantially interlinked with quality assurance issues.* Therefore, participants encourage ENQA, in conjunction with E-4 partners and other appropriate bodies, to *explore the creation and implementation of good practice* (models, procedures and guidelines) *for recognition procedures in general*, including *APL/APEL*, consistent with their 'Standards and Guidelines' and in the context of lifelong learning.

8. National higher education authorities are encouraged to include *elements to facilitate APL/APEL in the national lifelong learning systems*, including the development of 'new style' qualifications frameworks. National authorities are also expected to introduce operational *guidelines and principles for APL/APEL fully integrated with national quality assurance processes* and to promote the widespread implementation and acceptance of APL/APEL and lifelong learning by academics, employers and students.

9. Similarly as in quality enhancement issues, main responsibility for improvement of recognition lies with institutions. All European HEIs are encouraged to *put in place clear processes and practices that transparently detail their internal APL/APEL systems and procedures for staff, students and employers*. They are also expected to adopt appropriate staff development strategies to overcome barriers to broader implementation of APL/APEL and to ensure that all processes are transparent, fair, rigorous and efficient.

Rīga, 26 January 2007

13. COUNCIL OF EUROPE HIGHER EDUCATION SERIES: AN OVERVIEW OF PUBLICATIONS

1. *The university as* res publica. *Higher education governance, student participation and the university as a site of citizenship* (Sjur Bergan, ed.) (Strasbourg 2004: Council of Europe Publishing)

2. *The public responsibility for higher education and research* (Luc Weber and Sjur Bergan, eds.) (Strasbourg 2005: Council of Europe Publishing)

3. *Standards for recognition: the Lisbon Recognition Convention and its subsidiary texts* (Sjur Bergan and Andrejs Rauhvargers, eds.) (Strasbourg 2005: Council of Europe Publishing)

4. *Recognition in the Bologna Process: policy development and the road to good practice* (Andrejs Rauhvargers and Sjur Bergan, eds.) (Strasbourg 2005: Council of Europe Publishing)

5. *Higher education governance between democratic culture, academic aspirations and market forces* (Jürgen Kohler and Josef Huber, eds.) (Strasbourg 2005: Council of Europe Publishing)