



European Higher Education in a Global Setting. A Strategy for the External Dimension of the Bologna Process.

1. Introduction

The Bologna Declaration (1999) sets out “the objective of increasing the international competitiveness of the European system of higher education” and points out the need “to ensure that the European higher education system acquires a world-wide degree of attraction”, a goal which has been further pursued in the Ministerial Meetings of Prague, Berlin and, in particular, Bergen. This has also been an important issue in a European Union context, as reflected in the European Council Conclusions of Lisbon (2000) and Barcelona (2002). In the Bergen Communiqué (2005), the Ministers described the *European Higher Education Area (EHEA) as a partner to higher education systems in other regions of the world, stimulating balanced student and staff exchange and cooperation between institutions of higher education. They also asked the Bologna Follow-up Group (BFUG) to elaborate and agree on a strategy for the External Dimension of the Bologna Process.

In many parts of the world, ‘the European reform model’ has created considerable interest. It has a strong – and growing – appeal in other parts of the world, as described in Professor Pavel Zgaga’s report on the External Dimension of the Bologna Process. In some countries, it has even been debated if ‘Bologna’ or Bologna-like reforms should be adopted in the context of domestic higher education reform processes, and whether ‘Bologna’ should be used to establish convergence at a regional (supranational) level. The Bologna Process has also stimulated a discussion between European and international partners about mutual recognition of qualifications. All this suggests that the Bologna Process is already helping to enhance the attractiveness of Europe as a destination for students and scholars from other parts of the world.

It is important for Europe to use this momentum and to respond to the global interest in its reforms by formulating and agreeing on a strategy for the External Dimension of the Bologna Process. This reconfirms the timeliness of the Ministers’ request in Bergen for the development of a Strategy for the External Dimension. The present paper is a response to that request. It proposes key elements for a Strategy which takes both competitiveness and cooperation into account, identifying **guiding principles of the Bologna Process** and **five core policy areas**. The idea is that all actors at the European, national and institutional levels need to pursue the strategy together. These policy areas (Improving Information on the EHEA; Promoting European Higher Education to enhance its world-wide attractiveness and competitiveness; Strengthening Cooperation based on Partnership; Intensifying Policy Dialogue; and Furthering Recognition of Qualifications) are described in Section 3 of this document.

As a prerequisite for being an attractive partner world-wide, the European reform process needs to continue a coherent implementation of the Bologna Process. The Internal and External Dimensions are interlinked. The strength of the Bologna Process rests on the voluntary cooperation of 45 countries to create a European Higher Education Area by converging important structural features of their national systems of higher education. For the External Dimension Strategy of the Bologna Process to succeed, and to enhance Europe's attractiveness and competitiveness, it is of the utmost importance that all the objectives and instruments of the EHEA, e.g. the new degree structure and the development of qualifications frameworks, quality assurance, ECTS or the Diploma Supplement, be implemented across all Bologna countries in a coherent and compatible way.

As the term "External Dimension" has been deemed confusing, the title has been changed to a "Strategy for the European Higher Education Area in a Global Setting", and is referred to simply as 'the Strategy'.

2. Guiding principles

As an integral part of the Bologna Process, the Strategy for the European Higher Education Area in a Global Setting shares its key principles, and broader political and cultural context. As for other aspects of the Bologna Process, this strategy relies on a balanced mix of institutional, national and European policies within a common overall framework. This *acquis* should be observed in the implementation of the Strategy. It is enshrined in the following guiding principles.

2.1 European heritage and values

The Bologna Process includes the goal of sustainable innovation for European higher education and contributes to responding to the developmental challenges of the societies in which we live. Innovation and renewal can, however, only be successful if they build on an awareness of traditions and values. Like the European Higher Education Area as a whole, also in its global setting it should build on Europe's heritage, values and achievements, while adapting to changing circumstances across the world.

The Strategy for the European Higher Education Area in a Global Setting reconfirms the centrality of the principles of institutional autonomy and academic freedom. It endorses the principle that, in all matters related to higher education, academic values should prevail. It is built on a firm belief in democracy, human rights and the rule of law. It is based on the ideas of cultural and religious dialogue and tolerance.

2.2 Stakeholder participation

One of the success factors of the Bologna Process so far has been the close cooperation demonstrated by all higher education stakeholders in an atmosphere of trust. One of the greatest strengths of the Bologna Process is that governments have joined forces with institutions of higher education and their national and European associations, as well as with students and staff and international organizations and institutions. A successful

Strategy must rely on the same model and is therefore contingent on full commitment on the part of all stakeholders.

3. Geographical scope

The Strategy does not exclude any region or country of the world. Meanwhile, individual European countries have strong links with specific regions or countries outside Europe, and they may want to develop those links further. The diversity of the international cooperation activities of individual nations and institutions of higher education across the world should be perceived as strength and an asset for the EHEA, rather than as a disadvantage.

Core policy areas

The Strategy for the European Higher Education Area in a Global Setting encompasses the following five core policy areas:

1. Improving Information on the EHEA;
2. Promoting European Higher Education to enhance its world-wide attractiveness and competitiveness;
3. Strengthening Cooperation based on partnership;
4. Intensifying policy dialogue;
5. Furthering recognition of qualifications.

These five core policy areas provide a common strategic framework to which all stakeholders in the Bologna Process can make their full contribution. Every country in the European Higher Education Area should endorse these policy goals and decide on appropriate measures for their implementation, in the light of national priorities. Therefore, the emphases which a specific country will set might justifiably differ from those of the next. And, evidently, not all measures and initiatives may be suitable and appropriate to implement for all partner countries and regions.

3.1 Improving Information on the EHEA

The Bologna Process has a high degree of visibility outside the EHEA. However, this does not mean that all relevant stakeholders outside of Europe know enough about the key elements of the Bologna Process. In many cases, there are even important misperceptions ('Bologna myths'), which need to be rectified. It is therefore necessary to monitor the global perception and assessment of the Bologna Process and to provide correct information about the EHEA.

3.2 Promoting European Higher Education to enhance its world-wide attractiveness and competitiveness

To increase the attractiveness and competitiveness of the EHEA, providing information on the Bologna Process will not in itself be sufficient. Europe must also make concerted efforts to increase its international attractiveness to students, teachers and researchers

across the world. To this end, all Bologna countries should designate an organization as having the prime responsibility for coordinating efforts for the international promotion of their higher education systems and institutions.

The goal of a European Higher Education Area in which students, staff and holders of qualifications are able to move freely cannot be reached through measures of higher education policy alone. This important goal equally depends on facilitating the granting of visas and on facilitating social security coverage, as well as on the granting of work permits for staff. While these measures are outside the competence of Ministers responsible for higher education, they are within the competence of the governments of the Bologna countries. All Bologna countries commit themselves to work within their respective governments for decisive progress in this area by 2010.

3.3 Strengthening Cooperation based on partnership

Apart from the above information and promotion activities intended to showcase and strengthen Europe's attractiveness, there is a need for enhanced higher education cooperation with non-EHEA countries in a spirit of partnership and solidarity, aiming at mutual benefit on all levels and covering the full range of higher education programmes, including lifelong learning. This need for cooperation and partnership extends to all regions of the world, covering highly developed, emerging and developing countries alike. However, cooperation with institutions of higher education in developing countries has been and must remain an especially important task of the EHEA countries in order to build capacity in higher education, which is a crucial condition for socio-economic development. Individual EHEA countries are already deeply committed to and engaged in this task. European institutions of higher education should also contribute to their national development strategies, for example, in the context of the Millennium Development Goals. All players should join forces to provide the requisite framework conditions, including balanced exchanges or capacity-building measures to counter-act brain drain.

3.4 Intensifying Policy Dialogue

It would be useful to systematize and broaden the policy dialogue already initiated with non-EHEA country governments and stakeholders regarding the introduction of higher education reform and innovation in order to exchange new ideas and share good practice. The participation of non-EHEA country stakeholders in Bologna seminars is one approach in this respect. Joint conferences and seminars on issues of mutual interest and in different languages are another possibility.

Wherever possible, the policy dialogue should be based on already existing and well-functioning fora. Policies should be tailor-made for each region and take due account of relevant European Union policy.

3.5 Furthering recognition of qualifications

The recognition of qualifications is a key element in facilitating mobility to, from and within the EHEA. Developing policies and practice furthering the fair recognition of qualifications

is therefore a key element of the Strategy for the European Higher Education Area in a Global Setting.

Within the EHEA, the recognition of qualifications is based on the Council of Europe/UNESCO Recognition Convention (1997) and its four subsidiary texts. This legal framework is implemented through policy and practice developed at national level including, from 2007 onwards, national action plans in the Bologna Process and in particular for the ENIC and NARIC Networks, coordinated jointly by the Council of Europe, the European Commission and UNESCO-CEPES. In particular, insofar as the recognition of qualifications for the purpose of further study is concerned, institutions of higher education bear a prime responsibility.

Two important features of the current policy developments are, first, a shift of emphasis from the procedures and formalities of higher education to learning outcomes and, second, the developing of a better common understanding of the concept of ‘substantial differences’, i.e. differences between qualifications that may lead to partial recognition and non-recognition. The recognition of prior learning should also be given increased priority.

4. Conclusion

The success of the Strategy for the European Higher Education Area in a Global Setting is contingent on full commitment on the part of all stakeholders.

Institutions of higher education bear a major responsibility for the implementation and further development of the Strategy. The involvement of students and academic and administrative staff is of crucial importance to this process. Governments have the responsibility to provide the framework conditions as appropriate.

In a document entitled “Elements for possible future actions” possible measures for each of the five core policy areas have been listed. Most of the proposed actions are already undertaken to a certain extent by some of the Bologna stakeholders. For each measure, Bologna stakeholders should - depending on their own priorities - decide if and how they will implement it - individually or jointly with other partners in the process.