



HELLENIC REPUBLIC  
MINISTRY OF NATIONAL EDUCATION  
AND RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS

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## GREECE

### NATIONAL REPORT IMPLEMENTATION OF THE BOLOGNA PROCESS

#### THE GREEK HIGHER EDUCATION IN BRIEF

After the recent structural reform of 2001, the Greek higher education system consists of two sectors: The university sector, which comprises twenty two (22) Universities (including the Higher School of Fine Arts and the Hellenic Open University), and the technological sector, which comprises fifteen (15) Technological Educational Institutions (TEI) and the Higher School of Pedagogical Technological Education. The institutions of the technological sector are considered as equivalent to the fachhochschulen and the polytechnics. All higher education institutions in Greece are state run. According to the Greek Constitution, higher education is offered exclusively by the state and, hence, it is prohibited for higher education services to be offered on a private basis.

Three of the above Universities and one of the TEIs have been founded during the last three years in the context of the regional development policy followed in higher education by the Greek Government. According to this policy, each Region of the Greek Territory should in general contain a dipole composing of one University and one TEI with complementary functions at the regional level.

There is significant variety with regards to the features of the Greek Universities. There are multi-disciplinary as well as uni-disciplinary or specialised Universities. There are Universities located at one site, but there are also multi-site Universities. There are Universities with huge numbers of active students (e.g. the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki with 30.000 active students), but there are also very small Universities as well (e.g. the Harokopion University and the Higher School of Fine Arts in Athens with

500 active students each). The technological sector is however much more homogeneous than the university one.

The population in Greece is 10.940.000 habitants. Therefore, the density of Universities in Greece (not including the Hellenic Open University) per one million habitants is about 1,9 and the respective density of the overall higher education institutions is about 3,4. These figures are still somehow lower than the current EU average.

The total number of active students in Greece is estimated to 360.000 (200.000 in the Universities and 160.000 in the TEIs). The number of students in Greece has almost doubled since 1996, as a result of a policy which combined on the one hand the increase of the number of the new entrants in higher education every academic year until 2001, and on the other hand the establishment of new higher education institutions, mostly on a regional basis, and new Faculties in the already existing institutions. As a result of this policy, Greece has now one of the highest participation ratios in higher education throughout Europe. Indeed, the percentage of young people in the age cohort between 18 and 21 years registered in higher education institutions in Greece now exceeds 58%.

## **CURRENT SITUATION IN GREECE WITH RELEVANCE TO THE OBJECTIVES OF THE BOLOGNA PROCESS**

### ***Recognition of degrees: Adoption of a system of easily readable and comparable degrees***

Greece is one of the countries which have not ratified or signed the Lisbon Recognition Convention yet. Furthermore, the Diploma Supplement is not issued in the Greek higher education institutions yet, while the existing system of the recognition of foreign degrees, primarily of the university sector, faces significant problems with regards mainly to its complexity and its efficiency. Therefore, the establishment of a new legislative framework is under consideration by the Greek Government, aiming on the one hand at improving the rationalisation and the efficiency of the procedures for the recognition of degrees and on the other hand at issuing the Diploma Supplement in a standardised and integrated way in both sectors of higher education. Obviously, the ratification of the Lisbon Recognition Convention will be a substantial part of this policy.

### ***Degree structure: Adoption of a system essentially based on two main cycles***

The degree structure in Greece is already based on two main cycles since the beginning of the eighties. The first cycle leads to the first degree, called "ptychio" or "diploma", obtained in principle after four years of studies in both sectors of higher education. The second cycle leads to the second degree, which is called "postgraduate specialisation diploma", and to the third degree, which is called "doctorate diploma". The "post-

graduate specialisation diploma" is equivalent to the master's degree and is obtained after one or two years of studies, while the "doctorate diploma" is obtained after at least three years of original research work, including the preparation and writing of the consequent thesis. Second cycle programmes are carried out only at the university sector. However, there is legal provision for the TEIs to cooperate with Universities in the realisation of postgraduate programmes leading to the second degree.

The first cycle degree is relevant to specific employment areas, depending on the discipline, the content of the respective study programme and the corresponding qualifications of the graduates. The first cycle degree gives also the right for access to the second cycle irrespective of the sector (university or technological). However, access to the second cycle is not free, since it depends on the number of places available in each postgraduate programme.

Holding a "postgraduate specialisation diploma" (i.e. a degree equivalent to master's) is not in general a prerequisite for someone to be accepted for a doctorate, except in the cases where this is stipulated by the regulations ruling postgraduate studies in a University or even in a Faculty. This means that in general the first cycle degree may give the right for access directly to the doctorate level.

As in most European countries, different degree structures exist for specific study fields in the university sector, like medicine (where the first degree is obtained after six years of studies) and engineering, agricultural sciences, dentistry, veterinary medicine and arts (where the first degree is obtained after five years of studies).

However, as everywhere in Europe, there is an on going debate in Greece too, concerning the degree structure in the specific study fields of engineering and agricultural sciences in the university sector. The Greek Universities and the students claim the recognition of the degrees in the above fields obtained after five years of studies as equivalent to master's degrees. At the same time, the above five-year studies are considered as unified, integrated and inseparable, this consideration leading to a structure which does not contain a first cycle degree. The Greek Government has in general a positive stance on this point, being however cautious in realising it, as the question of equivalence will emerge as a consequence when related to the first cycle degrees which are already or will be offered in other European countries in the study fields of engineering and agricultural sciences.

As a matter of fact, the above debate is part of the general debate in Greece with regards to the Bologna degree structure. There is a wide consensus in Greece on the currently existing degree structure. This consensus comprises the Government, all the political parties and the higher education institutions, as well as the students of both sectors. According to this consensus, the first cycle degrees should continue to be obtained in Greece after at least four years of studies, and any ideas for first cycle degrees obtained after three years of studies are totally rejected. The basic argument is the same as in other European countries: Restricting the duration of first cycle studies to three years will have a negative impact on the academic nature and content of the

first cycle studies. The requisite restructuring of the curricula will result to the restriction of the academically oriented courses and to the preservation of those courses which have a more or less direct relevance to the employment needs. This development will lead to the "professionalisation" and "de-academisation" of the first cycle studies. This argumentation refers mainly to the university sector of higher education, but it also covers the technological sector, since the minimum duration of studies in the TEIs now keeps up with the one of the Universities.

The degree structure currently existing in Greece is considered as consistent with the Bologna structure. So, the Greek Government is not going to change it. However, the Greek Government realises that a satisfactory solution has to be found for the problem which will arise in the near future relating to the equivalence between the Greek first cycle degrees and those obtained after three years of studies in other European countries. There will inevitably appear problems of recognition which the Greek Government will have to handle in a satisfactory way, which has to be consistent to the Bologna approach.

An issue related to the degree structure is the one concerning the reform of the existing legislative framework for the postgraduate studies in Greece, covering both the master's level and the doctorate level. This reform aims on the one hand at the rationalisation of the master's courses and the conceptualisation of the master's degrees and on the other hand at the introduction of structured advanced courses at the doctorate level, thus introducing the concept of "doctoral studies". There is an on going debate with the Greek Universities on these issues lasting for more than three years, but the Government has not yet introduced the related Bill before the Parliament.

### ***Establishment of a system of credits***

In Greece, a system of credits exists in both sectors of higher education since the beginning of the eighties. This is actually an accumulation system which however does not have any common characteristics with ECTS as concerns the university sector. In fact, it is a rather simplistic system, where the credits are directly equivalent to the weekly hours of instruction. However, the ECTS is applied in the Greek higher education institutions of both sectors as a transfer system with regards to the European mobility programmes (Erasmus and Socrates), but even in that case this occurs in a non systematic way and it is left in the discretion of the institutions to define its characteristics. On the other hand, in the technological sector an accumulation system of credits is in use, based on the "workload" approach, which means that it may prove to be compatible to the ECTS. In order to clear up the landscape, the Greek Government intends to start a debate with the higher education institutions aiming at the development of ECTS as an accumulation system as well in both sectors.

### ***Promotion of mobility***

The figures concerning the participation of Greek students and teaching staff in European mobility programmes have improved during the last three years. The enhancement of mobility by removing the obstacles and creating the proper conditions for it to reach its full potential constitutes one of the objectives set by the Greek Government. In that context, the Greek Government intends to introduce an efficient policy aiming at further improvement of the related mobility figures, by exploring the ways to increasing the available funding and by introducing the necessary legislative provisions and taking the appropriate measures in order to help overcome the obstacles to mobility for incoming and out-going students and staff. However, any kind of policy like this needs to be based on the active involvement of the higher education institutions themselves, which will be invited to take the appropriate initiatives to that end.

### ***Quality Assurance***

Greece is one of the few European countries without a national system for quality assurance and assessment in higher education. However, during this summer, the Greek Government is introducing before the Parliament a Bill concerning the establishment of the National Council for Quality Assurance and Assessment (NCQAA) in higher education. This Bill is the result of a debate with the higher education institutions which lasted for more than two years. The National Council is founded as an authority which is independent of both the Government and the higher education institutions and covers both sectors of higher education. According to the Bill, the Council comprises the President and twelve members. The President and ten of the members of the Council will be elected through the Parliamentary processes stipulated in the Greek Constitution which require a consensus or an increased majority among the representatives of the political parties in the Parliament. The election of the President and the ten members will be based on nominations proposed on the basis of competence by the higher education institutions. The remaining two members of the Council are student representatives (one from each sector of higher education).

The system of quality assurance and assessment which is to be established in Greece aims at supporting higher education institutions in their efforts to continuously improve their quality and at advising the Government on the necessary actions and policies to be taken to that end. At the same time, it aims at improving transparency, comparability and accountability of the Greek higher education system. Therefore, the Greek system of quality assurance and assessment does not contain accreditation characteristics, nor does it aim at ranking or grading the Greek higher education institutions. At the same time, it does not have either any penal or reward characteristics.

The system of quality assurance and assessment in Greece will apply the main types and methods used in most European countries, except accreditation. This means that in principle four main evaluation types are to be used in Greece: Institutional evaluation, programme evaluation, subject evaluation and audit.

Apart from the establishment of the National Council, the Greek system of quality assurance and assessment is integrated through the development of the internal quality assurance and assessment mechanisms and procedures inside each higher education institution. Fostering quality culture throughout the higher education system is one of the major objectives of the national system of quality assurance and assessment in Greece.

The development of this kind of quality culture is under way for the last five years in Greece. It is important to note that since the academic year 1996-97, six Greek Universities have participated in the Institutional Evaluation Programme of EUA and two more are going to participate in the new round of the Programme during the academic year 2003-04. This means that eight out of the eighteen Greek Universities (without including the Hellenic Open University and the three Universities founded during the last three years) will have participated in the EUA Programme until the end of the coming academic year 2003-04. In other words, almost half of the Greek Universities will have been involved in quality assurance and assessment procedures when the national system will get into function in Greece.

### ***Promotion of the European dimension in higher education***

For the Greek Government, the development of joint programmes between Greek and other European Universities leading to joint or double degrees is one of the most important steps on the way towards the construction of the European Higher Education Area. Immediately after Prague in 2001, the Greek Government intensified its efforts, encouraging the Greek Universities to undertake initiatives to that end and promoting such co-operations.

The first step was the Greek-French inter-university cooperation, undertaken between the Greek and the French Ministries of Education and between the Greek and the French Rectors' Conferences. The result of this cooperation was the establishment of three joint master's programmes between Greek and French Universities which are going to get into function from the academic year 2003-04 on. The Greek Government has already provided for the extra funding of these joint programmes. Apart from the cooperation between Greek and French Universities, the Greek Rectors' Conference has already started discussions with the German Rectors' Conference in order to promote analogous cooperation with the German Universities as well.

At the same time, the Greek Government is introducing during this summer before the Parliament the Bill with the necessary legislative provisions to cover all the details related to the establishment and the operation of joint master's programmes. The same Bill will provide for the co-supervision of doctorates by academics from Greek Universities and from other European Universities.

The general concern in Europe is to explore in a first phase the legal and organisational requirements in order to develop the joint programmes at the master's level. It is clear that the first cycle level will follow, but everybody realises that things are more com-

plicated at that level. In this context, Greece is going to follow the general European trends as regards the extension of the joint programmes to the first cycle level.

### *Lifelong learning*

The only substantial policy in Greece concerning lifelong learning at the higher education level so far is implemented by the Hellenic Open University which now runs both first cycle (undergraduate) and second cycle (postgraduate) programmes addressed to people aged 25 years and above. Being only in its fourth year of operation, the Hellenic Open University cannot respond to the existing demand in a satisfactory way. Indeed, the demand for the next academic year exceeded 50.000 applications, while the available places are only 5.000.

The Greek Government has included the establishment of lifelong learning processes in higher education in the Bill which is to be introduced before the Parliament during this summer. According to the provisions of this Bill, one Lifelong Learning Institute will be founded in every University and TEI and will develop and carry out study programmes of lifelong learning type. These programmes will be developed either through conventional learning methods or through distance learning methods, analogous to those used by the Hellenic Open University.

However, this legislative initiative of the Greek Government contains a weak point as compared to the situation existing in other European countries. The above mentioned Lifelong Learning Institutes will not provide study programmes leading also to formal degrees. They will only offer programmes aiming either at training adult people through short study programmes in order to improve their skills or at refreshing, updating and upgrading the knowledge, the competences and the skills of adults who already hold a degree from a higher education institution. The reason for this weakness of the system is due to the opposition raised by the Greek Universities and students against the development of such programmes leading to formal degrees.

### *Higher education institutions and students*

#### Higher Education Institutions

Upgrading and strengthening the role of higher education institutions on the way towards the establishment of the European Higher Education Area is one of the major concerns of the Greek Government. According to the Greek Constitution, Universities and TEIs are autonomous institutions within a system of "input-based" state funding. The Greek Government intends to launch a dialogue with the higher education institutions in the coming academic year, aiming at the establishment of a system of state funding "by objectives", which will consequently result at the increase of the autonomy and the degrees of freedom of the institutions.

This new system will be based, as in many European countries) on a consultation procedure between the Government and each institution, which will result in a four-year agreement comprising mutual commitments. The Government's commitment will refer mainly to the resources, while the institution's commitment will refer to the achievements of the agreed objectives. This development, in combination with the establishment of the national quality assurance and assessment system, is expected to improve the overall accountability of the Greek higher education institutions as well.

### Students

The higher education system in Greece is considered as one of the most participatory systems in Europe, especially as regards student participation. Students in the Greek Universities participate at a percentage which varies between 35% and 40% in the Senates of the Universities, and reaches almost 30% in the Assemblies of the Faculties, while it exceeds 40% in the bodies which elect the Rector and the Vice Rectors of the University and the Head of each Faculty. In the TEIs, the respective percentages are somehow lower than in the Universities. However, the actual involvement of students in higher education governance is much weaker than what it could be expected taking these high participation percentages into consideration.

The Greek Government has a constant policy as regards the students, considering them as full partners in higher education governance. In that context, the participation of students is stipulated by the Greek Laws not only at the institutional level but also at the national level. Therefore, official representation of students is provided for the scheduled National Council for Quality Assurance and Assessment in higher education as well as for the National Council for Education and the separate Councils for the university and the technological sectors of higher education, which are consultative bodies to the Government for issues concerning the development of policies in education in general and in higher education more specifically.

### ***Promoting the attractiveness of the European Higher Education Area***

The Greek Government encourages the higher education institutions to establish cooperative relations with institutions from third countries, but this policy has not led to substantial results so far. Greece happens to be in a preferential geographical position as regards the establishment of relations with third countries, especially within the wider Mediterranean area. The Greek Government has now realised the need for a specific policy addressing that aim, and this policy has to contain elements which will make the Greek higher education system attractive for the students and the academics from that region.

However, and apart from the geographical area in its vicinity, Greece is in close contact with the EULAC (European Union, Latin America and the Caribbean) Initiative, aiming at the active involvement of Greek higher education institutions in the projects in development.



Finally, the Greek Government intends to start a dialogue with the Greek Universities focusing on their readiness to develop joint master's programmes with Universities of other European countries, so that they will be in a position to submit strong joint applications in the framework of the "Erasmus Mundus" Programme when being initiated.

### ***Social dimension of the European Higher Education Area***

From the very first steps of the Bologna Process, Greece was among the countries that underlined the importance of the Social Dimension of the Bologna Process. Consequently, one of the priorities of the EU Greek Presidency during the first half of 2003 was to bring the "Social Dimension" issue high in the agenda of the debate towards the construction of the European Higher Education Area. And it is in that context that Greece was entrusted with the organisation of the official Bologna Seminar on the Social Dimension of the European Higher Education Area (February 2003) on the way from Prague to Berlin.

The sensitivity and awareness of Greece regarding the issues of the "Social Dimension" is also reflected in the higher education policy in Greece, one of the objectives of which is to reduce the "social gap". The main characteristics of this policy may be described as follows:

1. Free and fair access to higher education, irrespective of social and economic background of the people, is a major component of the Social Dimension of the Bologna Process. As mentioned already, Greece has one of the highest ratios in Europe (58%) as regards the participation in higher education of the age cohort between 18 and 21 years.
2. According to the Greek Constitution, higher education is provided free of charge. In consequence there are no tuition fees in Greece, with the only exception of a small number of postgraduate programmes, mainly leading to second cycle degrees equivalent to MBAs.
3. Apart from access, appropriate studying and living conditions are provided for those already studying in higher education, so that they can finalise successfully their studies in time without being prevented by obstacles related to their social and economic background. In that context, the Greek Government has developed a concrete policy for student support directed to all students, but primarily to those with a weaker social and economic background, making thus a further contribution to reducing the social gap. The main characteristics of this policy are as follows:
  - Provision of a system of grants which is performance based.
  - A system of loans exists currently only for the second cycle studies. Its extension to the first cycle studies is under consideration by the Greek Government.
  - Provision of health insurance and free medical care (all students).

- Provision for lower transportation fares in all means of public transportation except airplanes (all students).
- Provision for lower entrance fees for cinemas, theatres, cultural events and institutions (all students).
- Provision of free board in student canteens and restaurants. This measure covers almost 50% of the student population.
- Provision of free lodging in student dormitories and in rooms rent by the higher education institutions. This measure covers about 6% - 7% of the student population. At the same time, there is provision for subsidies to students renting rooms themselves, which further covers about 5% - 6% of the student population.
- Every student is supplied free of charge with two textbooks for each course of the study programme that he or she has registered in.

However, reconsidering the existing policy for student support is among the short/medium-term plans of the Greek Government. This reconsideration will be directed to two major aims: To the establishment of a generalised and efficient policy for student loans and to the considerable raise in the percentage of students offered lodging either completely free of charge or at a very low price.

4. The already existing possibility for vertical mobility inside the Greek higher education system, although in rather restricted rates, makes some contribution to reducing the social gap. Students with weaker social and economic background can move to institutions located close to their family residence, thus avoiding the costly student life away from home which sometimes results in drop-outs.

5. Widening the geographical base of the higher education system. As mentioned in the beginning, according to the developmental plans of the Greek Government, each one of the Regions which constitute the Greek territory will eventually have a dipole consisted of at least two higher education institutions, one of the university sector and one of the technological sector. This means that the higher education system in Greece is being developed on a more or less regional basis. The harmonious distribution of higher education institutions throughout the Regions will help the institutions to establish closer links with the surrounding area, this proximity being particularly beneficial for the weaker socio-economic groups of local population in terms of access.

6. In the emerging European environment, removing the obstacles to the free movement of students and staff should be considered as a prerequisite for provision of equal mobility opportunities, i.e. irrespective of the economic or social background of the students or of the staff.

7. Developing lifelong learning processes through flexible learning paths in the Greek higher education system is expected to make one of the strongest contributions to reducing the social gap, as it widens the target group of higher education to non-traditional students and to adults as well. As mentioned already, the respective new legislation, as mentioned before, is scheduled to pass this summer from the Parliament and

it will complement the only lifelong learning option existing today in Greece, which is the Hellenic Open University.

8. The issue of the "Social Dimension" can be considered also as referring in general to the relationship between higher education and society. In that context, the issues of accountability and quality assurance concerning the autonomous higher education institutions should be two further prerequisites guaranteeing the enhancement of the "Social Dimension". Therefore, the establishment during this summer of the national system for quality assurance and assessment will further improve the relationship between higher education and society at large.

9. The issue of the graduates' employability is another aspect of the relationship between higher education and society. The Greek Government cannot of course adapt the number of the higher education students to the employment places available in the labour market. Nevertheless, it tries to take into consideration the real needs of the labour market, either by increasing the number of students in specific disciplines (as for example in disciplines related to information technology and computer science), or by encouraging the establishment of new disciplines addressing the needs of the labour market. The higher education institutions on their side offer their students employment services through their career offices and the organisation of activities such as career weeks and seminars, industrial experience opportunities and various practice programmes in general.

10. The need for closer links between higher education policies, society needs and expectations and employment opportunities is expected to be met in Greece through the establishment of the National Council for Education, which will be a forum for a continuous debate between representatives of the world of education and the various social partners, including the world of work and employment.

11. A last but not least parameter, according to Greece, has to do with the role of students. As mentioned in the Prague Communiqué, the need to take account of the "Social Dimension" in the Bologna Process was "recalled by the students". This was not an accidental wording. Students are the primary link between higher education and society. Their role is therefore to assure for the "Social Dimension" of higher education. In this context, students have to play an actively participatory role in higher education institutions, concerning decision-making, governance, strategic planning and quality assessment. As was mentioned already, the existing Greek University Law (No. 1268/1982) provides for one of the strongest participatory roles of the students as compared to the other European countries, while the new Bill for quality assurance takes this need into account as well.

