

MACEDONIAN EXPERIENCE OF RECEIVING EXTERNAL SUPPORT TO IMPLEMENT BOLOGNA REFORMS:

If I understood this topic properly it could be divided to four groups:

- 1. Where was input particularly needed;**
- 2. How did it fit in,**
- 3. Future external assistance;**
- 4. Inputs least needed.**

1. Starting from the beginning it would be necessary to enhance that the Council of Europe experts have presented to the Macedonian higher education community all new opportunities opened up by the creation of the European Higher Education Area. Several seminars and workshops have been organized by the Ministry of Education and Science supported by the Council of Europe with a view to the possibilities of implementing the key Bologna Action Lines into the Macedonian academic community. More than that, directions of changes at the legislative level were conveyed with the valuable assistance of the Council of Europe experts. The main legislative changes regarding the implementation of the Bologna Process were implemented:

- The institutional framework - universities to become fully autonomous and students to become full members of the higher education community;**
- Establishment of public and private HEI and necessary conditions for their registration;**
- The degree structure - essentially based on two main cycles, with the doctoral level representing a third cycle;**
- Developing an independent national quality assurance system;**
- Development, financing and property of the HEI;**
- Scientific/research, teaching and cooperation titles**
- Transferring to ECTS principles;**
- Issuing the Diploma Supplement;**
- Ratifying and fully implementing the Lisbon Convention;**
- Defining the public responsibility for higher education;**

The first update of the **legal framework** was introduced with the Law for Changes and Amendments to the Law on HE entered into force on August 3, 2003.

*Further updates of the Law on Higher Education, aiming at adjustments of the legal basis for the reforms foreseen with the Bologna process will be prepared by the Ministry of Education and Science along with the experts from the Council of Europe that will be directly involved in the activities of the group working on amendments to the Law.

Priority areas for legal intervention are:

- **Creating flexible learning paths in higher education and addressing the recognition and accreditation of prior learning;**
- **More precisely regulating the joint studies and degrees and the learning outcomes;**
- **Introducing the national framework of qualifications;**
- **Including the provision of adult education and education as lifetime process.**
- **Enhancing quality management principles on an institutional level along with the better comparability of standards, criteria and procedures for quality assurance;**
- **Establishment of a legal basis for national loans and grants.**

It is also worth to mention that elaboration of a comprehensive analysis of the Bologna Process results in different European countries presented by the Council of Europe experts was certainly served as input for further development of the Bologna reforms at both levels, governmental and institutional.

The Ministry of Education and Science provided the information gathering and dissemination activities and several informative guidebooks based on these events containing information, results and conclusions were issued or are going to be issued which will serve as input too.

2. **Globalization has in some extent positively affected the general quality and innovativeness of smaller higher education system such as Macedonian is. When comparing the Macedonian system with wider European systems, we may conclude that particular attention should be placed on **quality of education**, research and teaching in higher education.**

As a developing country, Macedonia certainly risks being marginalized because its education system is not equipping learners with the skills they need for coping with a competitive global knowledge economy. In order to respond to the problem, Macedonian governmental authorities and the policymakers in Macedonia will have to make some essential changes. To this end engaging

national but international policymakers in a dialogue on helping the Government of Macedonia to clearly formulate concrete future action plans for an innovation framework appropriate to the country context would be a beneficial external input.

Macedonian HE should, in particular to reach the following goals:

- To replace the information-based, teacher-directed learning provided within a formal education system with a new type of learning that emphasizes creativity, applying, analyzing and synthesizing knowledge and engaging in collaborative learning throughout the lifetime;**
- To offer more flexible learning opportunities within the Macedonian higher education system.**
- To increase the successes and effectiveness of undergraduate and postgraduate studies through appropriate investment in personnel, equipment and structure of higher education institutions**

***These endeavors can be assisted by enabling visits by guest lecturers from Europe but this can be improved considerably by the exchange of students and professors, joint design and implementation of study programs. This is the question of cooperation between the Macedonian universities with the European universities and experience exchange issues and events.**

The Ministry of Education and Science pays special attention to development of the European dimensions in HE. The Ministry encourages the on-going process of development and establishment of modules, courses and curricula with European content, orientation and organization. Higher education institutions are encouraged to work on development of integrated study programs and joint degrees at first, second and third level. Support to development of modules, courses and curricula with European content, orientation and organization are provided by: the European Commission, the Council of Europe, as well as some EU Member States through bilateral projects.

The eligibility of the country for the new European Union cooperation program Erasmus Mundus will be a new challenge for the HE sector. The HEI are encouraged to continue participation in the European Union and other international programs aiming at promotion of the European dimension.

- 3. Reforming the current organization of universities, most of which function as weak associations of legally autonomous higher education institutions, will be crucial in the coming years. This refers both to changing the national legislation and to its implementation by changing the structures and governance & management of the institutions.**

Strategic **management** and institutional development planning will have to become essential in future reforms.

***In the recent period, this issue has come into the focus of discussions for reforms of the Macedonian HE system. The intensive cooperation with the European Commission, the Council of Europe, the European University Association, UNESCO-CEPES, as well as bilateral cooperation with countries signatories of the Bologna declaration (the countries of South-East Europe in particular), contribute to awareness raising on the necessity for this reform.**

As a result of this cooperation the HEI and the Ministry of Education and Science are going to develop training programs for management structures and to establish mechanisms for efficient university management.

Initial results demonstrated that the **student** population does not have sufficient information on what is happening in higher education. To this end, in the past period students organized several seminars, roundtable discussions and meetings, at which student issues, the Bologna Process and its influence on the students, and the place and role of the students in the reform interventions were discussed. Participation of the ESIB is remarkable in this field.

***What **mobility** concerns the Republic of Macedonia recognizes the importance of the EU programs (Tempus, the Sixth Framework Program), COST and the bilateral cooperation, as instruments for boosting student and staff mobility. Equally important to mobility to EU Member States is student and staff mobility in the CARDS region. Intensive East-West and West-East mobility is immanent to Tempus activities. The Ministry of Education and Science will continue supporting all possibilities for intensifying mobility in higher education and portability of loans and grants.**

External assistance would be: including Macedonia in wider range mobility schemes, such as Socrates, which includes a series of actions dedicated to specific types of teaching, such as Erasmus for higher education or Grundtvig for adult education.

A growing concern of governments around Europe to ensure that education providers meet accreditation standards, deliver quality services and award reputable qualifications requires strengthening of Macedonia's **quality assurance processes**.

The major achievement of higher education sector in the field of quality assurance would be introducing and practicing national and European standards to all HE providers delivering education and issuing national qualifications. Legislation to support the national approach has been implemented by the Ministry of Education and Science but further work is required before the consistent approach across

country is to be achieved. Additional clarification and refinement of the standards are to be required too.

Both accreditation and evaluation bodies are members of the network of Central and Eastern European Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education still:

***Linking the emerging national quality assurance system into a regional and European and applying comparable methodologies in evaluations across Europe, based on the methodological experiences of the ENQA network members, would be useful for the internal quality mechanisms within the institution concerned and for external quality evaluation in general.**

New technologies and new information come everywhere so, the fullest participation of adult people in the process of continuously acquiring new knowledge and skills will help counteract social marginalization in Macedonia.

It is obvious that the new policy option for addressing these challenges and developing system of **lifelong learning** is necessary.

Analysis of the adult and continuing education system in Macedonia reveals the absence of a vision for the training and retraining of adults, limited opportunities for access to continuing and further education and lack of attention to certification and accreditation issues.

***The ETF project planned to provide assistance for the development of adult learning strategies, as building support to one component of the CARDS 2005 Lifelong learning project which will start implementation in the second half of 2006.**

The Ministry of Education and Science established a Working Group at the end of 2004 in order to prepare a legal framework for adult education. This Group, however, needs to be relaunched in the wider perspective of developing a strategy first before drafting a Law. It is also not clear yet, whether a separate Law is needed on Adult Education, or whether main issues could be addressed by different amendments or by-laws to existing legislation. However, The Ministry of Education and Science will use the ETF policy recommendations as an input for the national working group and developing the strategy for adult learning.

There is one issue that is becoming increasingly important as one of the major challenges of the Bologna Process: creation of **a qualification framework** where the specific profile of qualifications should be transparently described and where the subject specific competences and the whole context of learning should be clearly described.

***In that way The European Training Foundation representatives and the EU Experts from Ireland have proposed to the Ministry of Education and Science three year development program and cooperation. The Working Group is already established by the Ministry. The Framework document will include Secondary, Secondary Vocational and Higher Education Qualifications. The Macedonian**

Qualification Framework will also make provisions for recognition of prior learning and credit transfer.

Useful external assistance would be including Macedonian representatives at the European working Groups on the European Qualification Framework, participation at the experience exchange meetings and networking.

How did we make good use of external inputs and connection between the external inputs and our work (Ministry)?

The Ministry of Education and Science, as the main actor in the higher education reform at the national level, has established the National Team of Bologna Promoters, where the university members, professors, the Ministries professionals and students are participating. At the institutional level, each university and faculty is supposed to be an individual actor in the Higher Education Reform. By promoting the widest participation in the Bologna Process of all actors in Higher Education in Macedonia we expect valuable results.

4. Inputs last needed:

The Ministry of Education and Science will put all its efforts to:

- **Spread information regarding Bologna Process to wider public;**
- **Further supporting internationalization of higher education by proposing creation programs and modules with European dimension and in internationally spoken languages;**
- **Intensifies academic exchange among students and academic staff but also making Macedonian HE more attractive by offering quality higher education experience;**
- **Transformation to ECTS and issues the Diploma Supplement;**
- **Improving the procedure for recognizing qualifications;**
- **Reconsidering studies on Ph.D level;**

