

European Higher Education in a Global Setting. An External Dimension Strategy for 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 demands “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, and which has also been an important issue, in a European Union context, in the European Council Conclusions of Lisbon (2000) and Barcelona (2002). In the Bergen Communiqué, Ministers 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 world regions, as described in Professor 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 if “Bologna” could be used to establish convergence at a regional (supranational) level. The Bologna Process has also stimulated a discussion between European and international partners on the recognition of academic qualifications and diplomas. All of this suggests that the Bologna Process is already contributing to enhancing 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 confirms the timeliness of the ministers’ request for the development of an External Dimension Strategy made in Bergen. The present paper is a response to these demands. Its purpose is to propose the key elements for an External Dimension Strategy of the Bologna Process. The proposed strategy identifies **five core policy areas**, as well as a corresponding **set of concrete measures** to underpin them, for all actors at the European, the national and the institutional level to pursue together. These policy areas (information on the EHEA; promotion of European higher education to enhance its worldwide attractiveness and competitiveness; cooperation based on partnership; policy dialogue; and recognition) and their corresponding implementation measures are further described in section 3 of this document.

2. Guiding Principles: the Context of the External Dimension of the Bologna Process

The External Dimension Strategy, as an integral part of the Bologna Process, shares the latter's key principles and its wider political and cultural context. This *acquis* should be observed in the implementation of the External Dimension Strategy. It is encapsulated in the following guiding principles.

2.1 European Heritage and Values

The Bologna Process includes the goal of sustainable innovation of 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, its external dimension should build on Europe's heritage, values and achievements, while adapting to changing circumstances.

In response to the developmental challenges of societies in Europe and elsewhere in the world, the External Dimension Strategy 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 tolerance and mutual respect of all religious and other creeds, and international cooperation.

2.2. Stakeholder Participation

One of the success factors of the Bologna Process so far has been the close cooperation of all higher education stakeholders in an atmosphere of trust. It is the strength of the Bologna Process that governments joined forces with higher education institutions and their national and European associations, and with students and staff. A successful External Dimension Strategy must rely on this model, too.

2.3. Geographical and Thematic Scope

The External Dimension Strategy of the Bologna Process does not exclude any region or country of the world. At the same time, individual European countries have strong links with specific regions or countries outside of Europe, on which they might want to build. The diversity of individual nations' and higher education institutions' international cooperation activities across the world should be perceived as the strength and as an added value of the European Higher Education Area, and not as a disadvantage.

Likewise, a one-size-fits-all approach is not advisable for the thematic focus of the external dimension, either. Every country in the European Higher Education Area should endorse the policy goals and list of concrete measures contained later in this document. Yet, 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 for all partner countries and regions.

2.4 Completing the European Higher Education Area

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. In order for the External Dimension Strategy of the Bologna Process to succeed, and for Europe's attractiveness and competitiveness to be increased, it is of the utmost importance that all the objectives and instruments of the EHEA, such as the new degree structure, quality assurance, credit point systems or the Diploma Supplement, be implemented across all Bologna countries in a coherent and compatible way. This is a prerequisite for an adequate perception of the European reform process elsewhere in the world.

3. Policy Areas

The External Dimension Strategy of the Bologna Process proposes action in five policy areas, which are the following:

1. Information on the EHEA;
2. Promotion of European higher education in order to enhance its worldwide attractiveness and competitiveness;
3. Cooperation based on partnership;
4. Policy dialogue;
5. Recognition.

3.1 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 possess an adequate degree of knowledge on the key elements of the Bologna Process. In many cases, there are even important misperceptions ("Bologna myths"), which an External Dimension Strategy must seek to rectify. Therefore, measures to monitor the perception and assessment of the Bologna Process in the world should be developed, and correct information about the EHEA should be provided.

Action to be taken should include

- a **concise description** (short brochure) of the key points of the Bologna Process in widely spoken languages;
- an extension of the **official Bologna website** for a non-European audience;
- a set of **Bologna information points** in major partner regions and countries;

3.2 Promotion of European Higher Education to Enhance its Worldwide Attractiveness and Competitiveness

To increase the attractiveness and competitiveness of the EHEA, the provision of information on the Bologna Process is necessary, but not sufficient. Europe must also seek to increase its international attractiveness to students, teachers and researchers by means of promotional activities, in order to live up to the demands of the Bologna Declaration and successive ministerial communiqués. Such promotional activity must be accompanied by measures, to be taken by the EHEA member countries, to jointly reduce barriers for study and research in Europe, and to improve the legal and social framework conditions for international scholars and students before, during and after their stay in Europe, and to respond to their specific information needs.

Action should consist of a European promotion campaign, with the following elements

- *a **European higher education portal**, linking national websites and building on existing websites, including an **inventory of European ‘flagship products’**, such as joint and double degree programmes, programmes taught in widely spoken languages, as well as major European and national scholarship programmes;*
- ***comprehensive information and promotion tools** at the institutional and national level, in internationally widely spoken languages, making use of already existing instruments, such as the European Researchers’ Mobility Portal;*
- ***European higher education fairs** in major non-EHEA countries, accompanied by media campaigns for European higher education, preferably based on a ‘European higher education brand’, which is to be developed;*
- *a network of ‘**external Bologna promoters**’;*
- *compatible and transparent **European standards and guidelines regarding the legal, social and academic framework conditions** (also including visa and employment questions) for international students, scholars and academic personnel, to be developed in close cooperation with all stakeholders – based on instruments such as the European Quality Charter for Mobility.*

3.3 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-Bologna countries in a spirit of partnership and solidarity, aiming at a mutual benefit at all levels and covering the whole spectrum of higher education offers including life-long 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 higher education institutions in developing countries has been and must remain an especially important task of the EHEA countries, in order to build capacity in higher education as a major condition for socio-economic development. Individual EHEA countries are already highly committed to and engaged in this task. European higher education institutions should also contribute to their countries’

development strategies, for example in the context of the Millennium Development Goals. All actors should join forces to provide framework conditions, such as balanced exchanges or capacity building measures, to counter-act brain drain.

Action to be taken should include

- *the **strengthening of established and the creation of new consortia of universities and higher education stakeholder organisations in the EHEA and non-EHEA countries** for systematic and integrated cooperation activity;*
- ***joint study programmes, with integrated mobility phases** in the partner countries;*
- *measures aiming at **institutional development and capacity building** including **human resource development and curriculum development**, especially in development cooperation;*
- ***mobility programmes between the EHEA and non-EHEA countries** aiming at balanced exchanges based on a review of existing programmes and on best practice, including a possible pooling of present EU programmes or national funding mechanisms (for example, similar to the joint calls in the ERA-NET scheme of the EU RTD Framework Programme);*
- ***joint research activities**, including the possibility of joint research-based degree programmes;*
- *incentives for **structured partnerships with the world of employment**;*
- *Enhancing international partnerships by **opening up national programmes**.*

3.4 Policy Dialogue

It will be useful to systematize and broaden the policy dialogue already started with non-Bologna-country governments and stakeholders on the introduction of higher education reform and innovation, in order to exchange novel ideas and share good practice. The participation of non-Bologna-country stakeholders in Bologna seminars is one approach in this respect. Joint conferences and seminars, in different languages and on issues of mutual interest, 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 also take due account of relevant European Union policy.

Action to be taken should include

- *the creation of a **higher education policy forum**, with joint workshops and seminars involving representatives of Bologna and non-Bologna-country governments as well as higher education stakeholders; and, building on this;*
- *the creation of a **“Bologna Visitor Programme”** – to fund participation in selected Bologna-related conferences and seminars in Europe and in non-EHEA countries;*

- *the creation of a **fund for concrete projects** evolving out of the above policy forum, including also contributions from the private sector;*
- ***consultation and support for non-Bologna countries which introduce Bologna (-like) measures.***

3.5 Recognition

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 External Dimension Strategy of the Bologna Process.

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 by the ENIC and NARIC Networks.

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, developing a better common understanding of the concept of "substantial differences", i.e. differences between qualifications that may lead to partial recognition and non-recognition.

Action should include¹

- *the **promotion, by UNESCO and the Council of Europe, of cooperation between the ENIC and NARIC Networks and networks from other regions - and between individual centres from Europe and other regions - in particular concerning the development of a common understanding of recognition criteria, procedures and practice;***
- *the encouragement of **UNESCO to pursue its revision of other regional recognition conventions, in cooperation with the Council of Europe;***
- *the **continuation of the development of electronic and other information provision** by the ENIC and NARIC Networks;*
- *the **promotion of the use of tools** such as credit transfer systems (ECTS) and the Diploma Supplement in order to increase the transparency of qualifications world-wide;*
- *the **enhancement of the readability of national quality assessment documents and decisions** by translating them into globally widely spoken languages;*
- *cooperation of the ENIC and NARIC Networks with other regions with regard to qualifications issued **under borderless higher education arrangements** on the basis of the UNESCO/OECD Guidelines on Quality Provision of Cross-Border*

¹ Changes might occur based on the recommendations from the Bologna Seminar in Riga in 2007

4. Follow-up

In order to be successful, an External Dimension Strategy of the Bologna Process must be accompanied and underpinned by parallel 'external strategies' at the national level, as well as at the level of individual higher education institutions and higher education stakeholder organisations.

Based on the consolidation of the present Bologna reforms and in view of the further development and the positioning of the EHEA after 2010, the external dimension will play a crucial role. Progress should be ensured as follows:

1. The BFUG work programme 2007 – 2009 shall include **a working group with the aim to promote and monitor the implementation of the External Dimension Strategy**, to develop standards and guidelines for the social, legal and academic framework conditions and to define best practice regarding programmes and tools for internationalisation.
2. The activities of the above group shall be supported and informed by the production of an '**External Dimension Progress Report**' report, which would create an overview of external activities undertaken and progress made at the level of the Bologna Process as a whole, as well as the national and institutional level, and which would make recommendations for future action.
3. The external dimension shall also be part of the **overall Bologna stocktaking process** (Trends Report and national reports), which is to include reporting on the external strategies and their improvement at the level of the Bologna Process as a whole, as well as the national and institutional level.