

**Oslo seminar (Oslo, 28-29 September 2006)**  
***“Looking out! Bologna in a global setting”***  
**The external dimension of the Bologna Process**

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Presentations and discussions at the seminar in general, but in particular at a panel discussion with speakers from two European and seven countries from various parts of the world, followed by intensive discussions in six parallel working groups, resulted in a number of statements, conclusions and recommendations related, in a direct or indirect way, to the foreseen strategy on the “external dimension”. Presentations, discussions and conclusions from working groups have been presented in greater detail in the reports by rapporteurs (available at the seminar website <http://www.bolognaoslo.com>). On this basis, the next paragraphs aim at presenting a recapitulation of the seminar in a form of synthesized conclusions and recommendations.

1. Discussing a range of issues on a possible strategy for EHEA international cooperation, the elementary but fundamental fact that *cooperation presupposes at least two willing partners* was stressed several times. The “external dimension” cannot be carried out by Europeans alone, and this requires consultations with partners from all other parts of the world. However, there are still a vast number of issues which should be agreed, elaborated and solved within the Bologna Process.

1.2 The seminar dealt at length with the questions *by whom* and *toward whom* a strategy should be developed. On the one hand, there was a consensus that strategies may be elaborated for several actors, from institutions through national public authorities to the European level. Yet, it was also made clear that institutions are not all alike and countries are not all in the same position. A differentiation of their needs is a fact and any strategy should strictly avoid a one-size-fits-all approach. Discussing a strategy at European level opens also the question of “what Europe”? It is not always easy to delineate between “EU-25” and “EU-45”, but to make EHEA cooperation strategy really work, it is necessary to ensure that there will be no “A group” and “B group” within the Bologna Process.

1.2 Regarding the question *toward whom* a strategy should be developed, it was agreed that stimulating “Bologna-like” developments in other areas seems to be the most realistic scenario. It could improve compatibility of higher education systems and policies and could also be a valuable exercise in capacity-building.

1.3 A further question was also raised at the seminar about whether the *organisational model of the Bologna Process* is fit to *promote* the EHEA after 2010 and to *stimulate* broad cooperation with other parts of the world. A warning against institutionalising an informal process so far was opposed by advocating the necessity of a firmer, more permanent organisational structure. While this structure should be as light as possible, some kind of funding and organisational structure would be necessary. Therefore, the organisation of the EHEA after 2010 must be placed on the agenda as a matter of urgency – also from the “external dimension” point of view.

1.4 The EHEA must provide *a framework that facilitates inter-institutional cooperation*. For that purpose *information* on the EHEA, linked to information on national systems and

institutors, is necessary. There is a growing consensus on the need to establish an EHEA portal, providing clear information on the EHEA and providing links to sites of both national public authorities and individual institutions. However, there are a number of details which still remain to be settled.

1.5 Global cooperation in higher education, partnership agreements between higher education institutions from different part of the world and mobility of students and staff depend to a large degree on recognition matters. For that reason, UNESCO should be encouraged to continue its work on revising its *regional conventions on the recognition of qualifications*. These issues are also closely related to quality assurance provision in various countries and to transnational higher education provision. It is a vital interest of the EHEA that these issues are openly discussed between partners in higher education cooperation worldwide.

1.6 As a particularly good case of international cooperation, the seminar pointed out *Lusophone* cooperation and *Francophonie*, encompassing both members and non-members of the Bologna Process and illustrating the great potential for cooperation between groups of countries. In higher education, this cooperation should be placed within the overall *acquis* and strategy of the EHEA.

2. Considerations on *conditions for inter-institutional cooperation* between the EHEA and other parts of the world – in particular with regard to complex relations between *mobility, transparency and recognition* – as a particularly necessary element of an “external dimension” strategy have demonstrated that improving the quality of mobility and reducing barriers is what is most required. Looking either from an institutional or national point of view, cooperation with the outside world in higher education and research is, first of all, linked to enhancing quality development: mobility, internationalisation and the “external dimension” are means; quality education and research are ends in all systems. This position presumes the following focuses, actions and measures:

2.1 All EHEA partners at all levels need to *improve information flows and dissemination*. The proper involvement and consultation of the stakeholders in order to be able to cope with mobility and internationalisation (e.g. student unions that need to deal with management and support of mobile students) should be ensured. Visibility of national assessments regarding the quality of higher education as well as general decisions regarding recognition are needed, as are their availability in more than one language. There is also a need to be clear concerning the terminology used. The lack of appropriate informational, linguistic and cultural preparation for mobile students and staff should also be addressed.

2.2 It is also necessary to promote further and better *understanding and use of existing recognition and transparency tools* within the EHEA as well as in relation to the rest of the world, as it will also benefit international exchange and mobility (e.g., the use of frameworks improving compatibility of higher education systems and regulating recognition; exchange of good and bad practices; working towards the recognition of each others’ recognition decisions, etc.). On the other hand, multilateral and bilateral agreements should stimulate the growth of inter-institutional frameworks and partnership agreements that make institutions committed to recognising periods of study abroad for mobile students as well as degrees awarded abroad.

2.3 Strengthening mobility and removing obstacles should not be regarded as “purely higher education issues” but efforts should be increased so that *all relevant national ministries and other responsible authorities* (especially immigration authorities) are cooperating in

solving them. Increased efforts are particularly necessary to solve visa issues and work permits for students and staff.

2.4 In developing international exchanges, the EHEA institutions as well as authorities in regions and countries might also consider having *special policies for developing countries* and projects for developing regions, in addition to special information campaigns. Institutional capacity-building activities are a particularly important area of international cooperation within such networks.

2.5 In most of these issues, there is no clear divide between the EHEA and non-EHEA countries and institutions. Hence, conditions for international cooperation should be improved outside as well as within the EHEA.

3. Considerations on the envisaged strategy for EHEA international cooperation may open partly differing perspectives depending on general (systemic) or institutional points of view, but it is clear that cooperation should be among its key elements. However, discussions at two previous as well as at the present “external dimension” seminar have proved that *cooperation* should be carefully considered together with two other important “key elements” – namely *attractiveness* and *competitiveness*.

3.1 The seminar confirmed and underlined that there is no inherent contradiction between *cooperation and competition*: they coexist in the academic world, where institutions must cooperate to be competitive, but they must also be attractive to find cooperation partners. *Attractiveness* is a broader concept than *competitiveness*, since it extends to non-economic aspects as well.

3.2 *The value of higher education* and *values in higher education* are an important aspect of the “external dimension”; technical cooperation totally divorced from values could easily lead the EHEA astray. A technically perfect solution might be counterproductive if the solution does not enhance genuine higher education values and purposes. There is broad consensus within the Bologna Process that cooperation aims and strategies should be adapted to prospective partners. Nevertheless, there should be a minimum of core values – like academic freedom and institutional autonomy – that should be maintained to make cooperation “Bologna-compatible”. Of course, other modes of (technical) cooperation are also possible, but “external” to the Bologna Process in terms of objectives and values and not in terms of geography.

3.3 The member countries of the Bologna Process need to agree upon a set of *principles and concrete actions to enhance the EHEA’s attractiveness and competitiveness* as well as to strengthen mutual cooperation, e.g.:

- existing national and European schemes for students and staff mobility should be further developed;
- more educational programmes are needed in international languages;
- the awareness of the importance of investment in higher education and the social dimension through improved access and participation should be increased; the use of development funds (0.8%) for broad educational reforms, including capacity-building in HEIs, is strongly recommended;
- capacity-building through the education of teachers can be particularly effective;
- different policies are needed for different regions and sectors and all types of higher education should be included in the planned activities (diversity);
- measures to stimulate continuous partnerships and networks in research and education as well as in capacity-building should be prepared at national and European level;
- special attention should be given to countries with one-way (either predominantly incoming or predominantly outgoing) mobility and measures should be agreed to minimise

the risk of brain-drain (internally within the EHEA as well as externally - in particular in relation to developing countries) and to maximise sustainability.

3.4 The discussion on *what makes the EHEA attractive* has only started; it is necessary for this discussion to continue, also in the period after the London conference. A proper response to the question of what makes the EHEA attractive depends to a large extent on a common and clear picture of what the Bologna aims really mean to its actors. On the other hand, attractiveness requires making substantial progress in quality assurance and recognition issues. It also requires communicating on the Bologna “philosophy” and content and making it clear that its aims are not limited to formal changes of structures. Yet, it is very important that this message matches with what is being done in all Bologna countries.

4. Finally, it is necessary to mention the topic – at first sight only marginal – that was also discussed at the Nordic seminar on the “external dimension”. It is about terminology and, as always in such cases, about meaning and understanding. As the discussion on the “external dimension” is advancing, it seems that the Bologna Process is in need of a better term to describe relations between attractiveness, competitiveness and cooperation.

In one of the working groups it was stressed that the “external dimensions” is certainly about how European higher education is perceived by the rest of the world, but it is in equal measure about how we, as Europeans, perceive the rest of the world. Only if we include how we view the Other as an element of the “external dimension” of the Bologna Process as well as how the Other views us, can we move beyond the “external dimension” of interaction between “them” and “us” to the global dimension – to how we can work together in a healthy interaction of cooperation and competition.

There was no final agreement on this issue at the seminar but some concrete proposals which need more time to be considered were formulated, e.g. to move from the “external” to the “global dimension” or to the “dimension of global cooperation”.