Official Bologna Process Seminar
"Equality in a Knowledge-based Society - How to Widen Opportunities?"
(Best Practices in National Action Plans)

General Report

by Katalin Tausz and Katalin Gyöngyösi

The Bologna Seminar entitled *Equality in a Knowledge-based Society - How to Widen Opportunities? (Best Practices in National Action Plans)* was organized by the Hungarian Ministry of Education and Culture on 10-11 November **2008** in Budapest, Hungary[1]. **The Seminar's** purpose was to contribute to find the means by which the social diversity of the countries participating in the Bologna Process could be reflected in their higher education. It intended to encourage discussion, research and development in this respect, and to promote the access of a wider community to the main ideas of the Bologna Process. A review of some of the efforts already made to implement the Bologna Process' equal opportunities policy[2] was also on the Seminar's agenda.

Initially, the 2007-2009 Bologna work programme had contained two Seminars on the social dimension of higher education, one in Malta (September 2008) and one in Hungary (November 2008). After the merge of these, the Budapest Seminar had to cover alone a vast range of issues relevant in the field, before the Leuven/Louvain-La-Neuve Ministerial Conference in April 2009.

The organization of the Seminar began in the spring of 2008, its contents and frames were discussed by the international Social Dimension Coordination Group at its meeting in Budapest, on 7 April 2008. Stakeholders from the European Higher Education Area including government officers, representatives of higher education institutions and other organizations active in the field, researchers, students and NGOs had been invited to participate; anyone else interested in the subject was also free to attend the Seminar. 136 people from 20 countries registered on the Seminar's website, with a majority of Hungarian participants. Work at the Seminar was realized within the framework of a plenary session and three parallel working group sessions on the first day, followed by summaries of the first day's proceedings and a discussion of the Seminar's Recommendations on the second day.

The present report strives to outline the ideas put forward by the Seminar's invited speakers as the main thread of the event. The organisers hope that the comments and discussions these ideas and the topics raised have initiated and which have been taken into consideration for the Seminar's Recommendations will be further developed and formulated at various fora, contributing to a common reflection on and the advancement of the Bologna Process.

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The Budapest Seminar began with a plenary session that provided an occasion for representatives of the Hungarian Government, the European Commission, the European Students' Union and a Hungarian MA student in Social Policy to discuss the issue of social dimension from various perspectives.

The Seminar's opening address was given by Prof. **Károly Manherz**, State Secretary for Higher Education and Science at the Hungarian Ministry of Education and Culture.

Professor **Manherz** evoked how the emphasis on the social dimension of the Bologna Process - including issues like the equity of access, living and working environment of students and the employability of graduates - had increased since the Process had been launched. After the formulation of a general objective at the London Ministerial Conference in 2007, the countries participating in the Bologna Process had the task of finding their own ways to enhance the social dimension of the Process, which also required a general awareness-raising that a Bologna Seminar could be the instrument of. A strong social dimension was in the common interest of economy and society at large, and of the sphere of higher education in particular, with higher education institutions playing a key role in this regard. Nevertheless, social dimension issues could not be successfully dealt with within the sole competencies of higher education institutions and higher education systems. In order to give all young people the possibility of realising their individual potentialities, barriers at all levels of education needed to be addressed and obstacles beyond the education system ought to be taken into consideration. The efficiency and success of the efforts undertaken necessitated the involvement of stakeholders from various sectors. Social dimension issues, Professor Manherz concluded, were susceptible of receiving a significant place in the period beyond 2010, beginning with the 2010 Ministerial Meeting jointly organised by Austria and Hungary.

In the following welcome address, **Daniela Billus**, head of the Department for Equal Opportunities at the Hungarian Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour, welcomed and underlined the fact that thanks to the Bologna Process, the question of equal opportunities had been receiving unprecedented attention and emphasis in higher education. She reminded that access to knowledge was a key to the future of European societies, and equal chances of access were essential for successfully fighting against exclusion and social polarization. The creation of anti-discriminatory legal measures was necessary but not sufficient to ensure the *de facto* access of all to higher education: flexible outreach programmes targeted at disadvantaged groups were also required, such as scholarships or the training of experts in equal opportunities policy and management.

Gábor Sárközi, policy advisor at the Directorate for Equal Opportunities at the Hungarian Ministry of Education and Culture, a division responsible for equity issues, the specific education of pupils and students with disadvantaged backgrounds and the representation of Roma culture in Hungary, discussed the topic from the standpoint of his division.

Long term planning, he underlined, was crucial for the enhancement of the social dimension of higher education. Measures taken by higher education institutions were not sufficient in themselves, problem-solving had to start with an acknowledgement of present-day social problems and with actions initiated at lower levels of the education system. The case of Roma children in Hungary with socially disadvantaged backgrounds could be cited as an example requiring long-term action. These children, independently of their individual capacities, had drastically weaker chances of successfully completing secondary education than their peers, their situation being further worsened by segregated education. Higher education institutions could play a key role in changing the situation at different levels of education. By the means of

teacher training, they had the responsibility of equipping tomorrow's educators with objective and stereotype-free knowledge about disadvantaged groups and children, and with teaching skills and experience preferably acquired in practical training, in classes or schools attended by children with disadvantaged backgrounds. As for Roma youth accessing higher education, higher education institutions could support them by creating fora where they had the possibility to meet and exchange experiences. Such community involvement could help them become intellectuals keeping and being proud of their Roma identity. ("Romaversitas", a Hungarian NGO initiative, presented in the Seminar's 3rd working group, was such a forum.)

Julie Fionda, representing the European Commission's Directorate-General for Education and Culture, approached the question of the social dimension of the Bologna Process from a perspective of the European Union.
Promoting equity and active citizenship, she argued, were the aims of the social dimension, along with the widening of participation in and the completion of tertiary education. The means for this were promoting lifelong learning and addressing financial and non-financial barriers for underrepresented groups (educational disadvantage, modest individual aspirations and reduced awareness of opportunities and benefits being considered as non-financial obstacles). The realisation of these objectives required the launch of extended, horizontal and vertical action, with the mobilisation of all actors concerned. From governments it called for the elaboration of strategies to narrow educational disadvantage and to empower higher education institutions to be more inclusive. From higher education institutions it required the establishment of admissions procedures that favoured equity of access and that they consider inclusiveness as a badge of excellence. Finally, from the private sector it demanded playing a stronger role in driving inclusion.

Alma Joensen, executive committee member of the European Students' Union (ESU) expressed the students' views on the social dimension as the most important part of the Bologna Process from their point of view.
ESU appreciated the inclusion of the social dimension in the Bologna Process action lines as a great achievement for the student body and especially ESU representing them. ESU considered higher education as intrinsically linked with human rights insofar as the right to higher education was a human right and higher education was a means for promoting all human rights. Higher education was an important actor in knowledge-based societies, rather than a servant of national economies. ESU was committed to the enhancement of a higher education that was accessible, equitable and free of charge for all. While acknowledging engagements made so far by the countries participating in the Bologna Process, ESU warned of the lack of concrete action based on these engagements. Whereas still many capable students were excluded from higher education due to their background, measures opposing equity of access could be observed in several countries of the European Higher Education Area. Tuition fees had been introduced or increased at many places without proper student support schemes being made available, which seriously affected students with disadvantaged backgrounds. ESU considered erroneous any allusions to the financial engagement of students as a tool for "disciplining" them. Besides individual attitudes, circumstances independent of students could also be a cause of delay or difficulties in the completion of studies, especially in the case of disadvantaged students (often working part-time to finance their studies) who were put in an even more difficult situation by increased financial burdens. In addition, financial measures expected to

"discipline" students would have the weakest probable effect on students from the most favourable backgrounds who could afford the financial consequences of an irresponsible behaviour. Further on, admission procedures merely focusing on excellence were not taking account of the fact that educational attainment was strongly influenced by the cultural and socio-economic background of learners. Such procedures provided opportunities for students with favourable backgrounds while hindering the social mobility of those from less fortunate circumstances. ESU invited Ministers and governments to remember their promises related to the social dimension and to respond to the call from students and society to make higher education accessible and equitable, so that it really reflects "the diversity of our populations".

Szilvia Rézműves, student of Social Policy at Eötvös Loránd University in Budapest, Hungary, completed the plenary session's policy level considerations with a personal account of her path to and across higher education, sharing with participants experiences gained on the way from her home village and rural Roma community living in poverty to the final year of tertiary education that she was completing at one of Hungary's prestigious universities.

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The three simultaneous working group sessions commenced following the plenary session, in the afternoon of the Seminar's first day.

The **first working group**, entitled "**Dimensions**" and chaired by **Dominic Orr**, international coordination group leader of the *Eurostudent* project at Higher Education Information Systems (HIS), addressed the issues of the identification of underrepresented groups in higher education and the main obstacles to participative equity, underpinned by statistical and other research evidence.

Mariann Szemerszki and **Kálmán Gábor**, Hungarian higher education researchers at the Hungarian Institute for Educational Research and Development analysed significant processes in the Hungarian higher education system over the past decade, with regard to the changes of the student body.
On the basis of a detailed corpus of statistical and research data and the trends observed, it could be concluded that the expansion of higher education had not narrowed but further widened the gap between students having safe and unsafe family backgrounds (more or less educated, working or unemployed parents, financially secure or insecure circumstances). Research result also showed that disadvantages in higher education were closely related to inequalities in secondary education, and that disadvantages did not mainly occur at the stage of entrance to higher education but in the phase of institutional differentiation. With the spread of the Bologna Process, selection was postponed until the transition to master and PhD training programmes (entering the labour market being a further possible moment of selection), and traditional social differences could eventually take a different shape in the light of the Process.

Dominic Orr gave a detailed presentation of the *Eurostudent* project[3] and drew some conlusions from the project's results.

Eurostudent was the most important European survey initiative gathering internationally comparable data relatively to the social dimension of higher education, including the social and economic situation of students, student support systems and the conditions and expenses of student life. On the grounds of the results of the project (which was in its third phase in 2005-2008), it could be noted that the great expansion of higher education, as experienced in Europe, did not automatically amount to the opening up of higher education systems, in the sense of being able to receive students with various - "unusual" - needs (e.g. students with disabilities) and to ensure a variety of access routes to higher education. Information about the current situation of students was important for higher education policy making, but while data collection could always be further extended and specified in order to better fit various purposes, it was essential that claims of "more" or "better" data be preceded by a clarification of the real objectives of the actual data collection.

Gilles Verschoore, social affairs and disability officer of the National Union of Students in Flanders, Belgium, brought up concerns about the existing sources of information on the student body in European higher education.
While the lack of data or "data gap" was often used as an argument or excuse for the lack of action concerning the social dimension, there seemed to be little effort undertaken to collect the data yet missing. Not all countries of the European Higher Education Area were participating in the Eurostudent project, and the project itself had a limited scope as it only provided data on the socio-economic background of students. No data was collected on students' parents and family background, which would permit learning more about their educational, ethnic, cultural and linguistic situation. Data about groups underrepresented in higher education, their size, the reasons of their actual situation would also be necessary, as well as regular study cost surveys that would allow to adapt study financing systems to actual, up-to-date costs. Besides seeking to know what problems students and possible students were encountering in the access to, participating in and completing of higher education, research should also focus on what measures governments were taking to support their students in doing so (such as financial support, social services, guidance and counselling). At the brink of the next ten years of the Bologna Process and with two ministerial meetings to come in the following two years, concrete actions could be set at the Leuven/Louvain-La-Neuve Ministerial meeting of 2009, which would allow for the first evaluations as early as the time of the Ministerial Concerence of 2010 in Budapest and Vienna - giving the social dimension the attention and the work it needs and it deserved.

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The **second working group**, entitled "**Ranking**", chaired by **Prof. Tamás Rudas**, dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences at Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest, concentrated on methods of and methodological dilemmas related to higher education rankings and the actual and possible links between rankings and the efficiency of higher education institutions in dealing with social inequalities.

Inge Gielis, representing the Social Affairs Committee of the European Students' Union (ESU), opened the working group session by questioning the relevance of existing higher education rankings and presenting ESU's point of view in this regard.

Rankings, she argued, seemed more to be hit lists than tools helping study choices. The number of Nobel prize winners and bibliometrics as main criteria for ranking institutions had been much criticised, also by European higher education institutions that scored lower than expected on global rankings. Efforts had been made to develop alternative methodologies and European ranking systems, such as the one by the German Centre for Higher Education Development (CHE). ESU considered that rankings (even CHE ranking) did not use a great number of facts, some of these were irrelevant for students while ones that students could value more were missing (such as information on study expenses, study pressure and workload, student/staff ratio, student counselling and student participation). In ESU's view, international rankings that would pay attention to the diversity of values and contexts in different countries, as suggested by the Berlin Principles on Ranking Higher Education Institutions, appeared attractive but were probably impossible to realize because making international comparaison impracticable. Rankings were in fact a byproduct of the application of market laws to education, and ESU warned that the shift from viewing higher education as a public good to it being viewed as a private good was threatening the role of higher education as a means of social development and democratic empowerment. With rankings having an influence on the financing of higher education, resources were susceptible of going to institutions with a good reputation, further widening the gap between "excellent" education for some and "average" education for the masses. This would be contrary to the goal set by the countries participating in the Bologna Process "striving for a high quality education for all". Instead of spending time and money on rankings considered as "student information systems", students themselves should be asked first about the sort of information they needed. In order to build strong knowledge societies, countries should avoid setting "excellence" as the ultimate goal of higher education and should focus on quality education and equal access for all.

Paszkál Kiss, social psychologist at the Faculty of Pedagogy and Psychology of Eötvös Loránd University in Budapest and collaborator of the Hungarian Higher Education Information Centre (OFIK)[4], presented "FELVI" ranking, the most precise Hungarian ranking developed by OFIK.
FELVI ranking[5] was a complex nation-wide ranking system launched in 2002, gradually extended and providing a free "private ranking" software available for public use on the webpage of the Hungarian Higher Education Centre. The reasons for creating FELVI had been similar to those driving the establishment of all rankings (motivating the performance of higher education institutions, ensuring fact-based comparison, organizing perception and interpretation, providing an explicit methodology and a means of communication). FELVI contained rankings of institutions, of subject areas and of study programmes; its target groups, similarly to other international rankings, included students entering and studying in higher education, academic staff, higher education decision-makers, actors of the labour market and the wider public interested in higher education issues. FELVI ranking measured the quality of academic staff and students, the popularity and prestige of higher education institutions and student satisfaction in general, and users of the interactive ranking software could set rankings along any of the particular parameters used in the FELVI ranking. Social indicators were not included in this ranking. On the basis of the data collected for FELVI ranking, only approximative evaluations could be made about the social background of applicants, by the size of the locality they came from. However, analyses had shown that social barriers were visible not only in

stopped educational careers but also in modifications made to educational careers "underway".

Cort-Denis Hachmeister, project manager at the Centre for Higher Education Development (CHE), Germany, addressed the issue of the inclusion of equality issues in higher education rankings in general, and in CHE rankings in particular.
The Centre for Higher Education Development, an independent German "think tank" organization developing concepts, running pilot projects and disseminating research results, had launched its *University Ranking*[6] (mainly for a German-speaking audience) in 1998 and its international *Ranking of Excellent European Graduate Programmes* (abbreviated as *Excellence Ranking*)[7] in 2007. The CHE ranking system covered areas like general information on studies, cities and higher education institutions, detailed information on departments, courses and programs, and "ranked" results such as research indicators and student judgements. Although no "ranked" equality indicators were included, some aspects of the issue were touched upon, like the proportion of women in training programmes and scientific staff. Social status, ethnicity, migration background or disabilities of students were aspects of equality that had not been included, either. The inclusion of equality in ranking appeared to be a complex matter raising serious methodological problems: some sorts of data were unavailable or difficult to access because of privacy issues (like ethnicity); in some cases the number of cases to observe was too small to permit analyses (such as the actual number of disabled students in certain institutions), and the proportions of members of different groups (with high or low socio-economic status, for example) in a given higher education institution were also influenced by the institution's reach-out area, independently of the institution's action (or lack of action) in this respect. Furthermore, in Germany for instance, inequalities existed not so much in the transition to higher education but at lower levels of the school system, thus rankings risked to attribute to higher education institutions inequalities that were influenced by the whole education system. Equality was a truly important political and societal goal and rankings were a powerful means of attracting attention and transporting messages to a wide public. Still, attention could also "backfire" by discrediting rankings if their basis and methodology were not made public and clear to the audience concerned. The relevance of equity issues in study choices was disputable and rankings with equality indicators could also be counter-productive (for example with some people specifically choosing institutions with a low proportion of minorities). A range of measures could still contribute to making social dimension aspects visible in rankings in some way, such as the improvement of assessment of group memberships, the development of "fact-indicators" apart from quotas (how well are certain groups, e.g. handicapped students supported); or the identification and measurement of mechanisms of "hidden discrimination" (e.g. an excluding way of communication) . For the moment, separate "equality reports" by experts and lobby groups seemed better suiting, until methodological problems would be solved and social dimension indicators could be included in higher education rankings.

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The **third working group** entitled '**Strategies**', chaired by **Henry Mifsud**, Bologna expert and lecturer at the Institute of Tourism Studies, Malta, discussed possible measures intended to increase the representation of groups with disadvantages (ethnic minorities, migrants, disabled people, women, people living in poverty etc.) in higher

education and some national practices helping students complete their studies despite obstacles related to their social or economic background.

Efstathios Michael, chair of the international Bologna Social Dimension Coordination Group and director of the Department of Higher and Tertiary Education at the Ministry of Education and Culture, Cyprus, opened the session by an outline of the issue of the social dimension within the framework of the Bologna Process.
The social dimension had been introduced gradually into the action lines of the Process, by several ministerial conferences. Following the conference in Bergen in 2005, disposing of the collection of data on the social and economic situation of students in the participating countries, a newly established Working Group on Social Dimension had prepared a report by May 2007[8]. The report described existing measures and suggested further ones for the widening of access to and participation in higher education. Its recommendation of the development of national strategies for the social dimension was adopted by the following ministerial conference, held in London in 2007.
The aim of the **national action plans on social dimension** were to identify trends and best practices in the countries participating in the Bologna Process (without leading to a stocktaking exercise). On the one hand, national action plans had to consist of a description of the existing situation, recognising underrepresented groups and obstacles to participative equity, measures taken to widen access and to enhance the completion of higher education studies, as well as possible statistical data and research serving as a basis for national planning. On the other hand, national action plans should comprise a strategy for a more inclusive higher education system, with goals to be achieved in the 2008-2010 period, action planned for each underrepresented group, including budget availability and timeline, arrangements to monitor progress and the identification of a national authority responsible for the drafting and implementation of the strategy.
The first reports on national action plans had been included in the 2007-2009 national reports of the countries participating in the Bologna Process (prepared by November 2008) and would be analysed by appointed researchers.

Peter Brown, director of the National Access Office at the Higher Education Authority in Ireland, presented the Irish *National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education 2008-2013*[9], an example of complex national planning for to the social dimension of higher education.
In Ireland, the introduction of free higher education (in 1996), industrial and economic growth demanding an increased number of graduates, along with higher aspirations of individuals linking higher education qualifications with professional advancement and prosperity resulted in an expansion of higher education, while access remained somewhat on the margins of Irish higher education institutions. To face challenges, an overarching national access strategy had been developed, supported by several factors. One of these was the setting up of a central coordinating agency[10] as part of a statutory agency for the funding and development of the country's higher education[11]. Another supporting circumstance had been the fact that higher education access strategy was an integral part of a coherent, long term national economic and social planning[12]. The purposes of developing a national plan for equity of access had been the creation of a strong and wide understanding of the social and economic rationale for equity of access and the integration of the access agenda into decision- and policy-making processes. The plan offered an opportunity

for bringing hitherto uncoordinated, fragmented initiatives within a strategic national framework and for ensuring a minimum consistent level of service for under-represented groups across the higher education sector. It also permitted to articulate emerging challenges (like the gender gap in performance), to set targets for the participation of under-represented groups and to emphasise key messages such as the need for intra-governmental coordination.

The objectives defined in the Irish National Access Plan were multifold. First, it intended to foster institution-wide approaches to access, by the creation of institutional access plans, institutional capacity-building and the promotion of wider equality training. It aimed at promoting access through lifelong learning by expanding part-time and flexible learning provision, introducing financial support for part-time learning, enhancing progression from further education to higher education and providing supplementary admissions routes. It also prompted investment in widening participation in higher education, by awareness raising, rewarding performance on access in recurrent funding allocation, a strategic Innovation Fund and performance funding. The modernisation of student supports, the promotion of student awareness of financial support schemes[13], the reviewing of support needs of low-middle income families and the ensuring of target resources that encourage up-skilling were further goals of the strategy. The objective of widening of participation for people with disabilities would be realized by the appointment of a dedicated disability officer in every higher education institution and by the development of inclusive practice around course materials, teaching and assessment. Various sources of statistical data would provide material for the monitoring and implementation of the National Access Plan. The implementation of access plans at institutional level would also be monitored, with the contribution of an implementation group from the Higher Education Authority/Department of Education.and Science. After a major mid-term evaluation, Ireland was planning to continue enhancing sectoral and national inter-agency coordination in the field.

Alma Joensen, Executive Committee member of the European Students' Union proposed measures to create a higher education community that performs both fairness and quality.

She underlined that social dimension policy-making should be based on detailed information on the actual situation of students in the European Higher Education Area, thus provision of relevant data would be crucial. "Diversity" of the student population should not be regarded as contradictory to "excellence", on the opposite: a community of students and academic staff with various backgrounds were an added value of Europen higher education. Higher education institutions needed to develop their widening access policies and barriers to access had to be tackled (physical as well as and non-physical ones, such as the pre-conditioned perceptions and expectations of students with disadvantaged backgrounds and lacking parental support for tertiary level studies or the difficult access of the disadvantaged to information on higher education and available support). Economic obstacles including tuition fees also had to diminish in order to permit for all students to obtain a higher education degree, independently of their economic background. Supportive student services (housing, counselling, etc.) should be available for all, including students with special needs. Systems of recognition of prior learning and national qualifications frameworks should provide learners with the possibilities to be socially mobile, also allowing for the return to education of drop-out students. High quality education including the use of a variety of appropriate teaching methods could also reduce drop-

out rates of socially disadvantaged students. Student-centred pedagogical approaches with more contact between students and teachers would stimulate creativity which is a driving force of intellectual activity that is so important in higher education.

Barbara Tonté, coordination officer of the Department for Roma Integration at the Hungarian Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour described the Hungarian Romaversitas Programme[14] that she had also participated in as a student.
She reminded that the expansion of higher education had affected Roma youth much less than non-Roma youth: while more than 40% of non-Roma students went on to higher education after completing compulsory education, only about 1-2% of Roma students of the same age entered higher education. Talented Roma youth in higher education had been the target group of the Hungarian Romaversitas Foundation's "Romaversitas Invisible College" initiative launched in 1999. Romaversitas had been founded according to the principle that without Roma graduates, professionals and leaders in a country, deep-rooted problems of Roma poverty and unemployment, isolation and prejudice continued to grow worse. To contribute to the shaping of such a group of Roma intellectuals, Romaversitas aimed at supporting outstanding Roma students in higher education. Highly talented and motivated full-time students having completed at least one year of tertiary education were selected annually on the basis of academic competition (50 students in 2008), from all over Hungary. Romaversitas supported the selected students in financial and non-financial ways. Monthly scholarships helped them pay housing, books and other personal necessities, permitting them - especially the economically disadvantaged - to fully concentrate on their studies. Skills trainings helped them acquire skills necessary for an intellectuals' career (IT-skills, foreign languages and communicational skills) and which they may not had had access to due to a previous substandard education related to their underprivileged background. Students were also offered professional opportunities such as basic and academic tutoring seminars on various topics. Community support was the third element of the long-term, intergrated program offered by Romaversitas. Participating students had the possibility to meet each other and to belong to a community where concerns and challenges of student life and becoming an intellectual could be discussed; where students could learn from Roma professionals on how to succeed at school and in their careers and which contributed to the enhancement of their Roma identity. The results of Romaversitas hitherto confirmed expectations: out of 198 students attending the program during the past 10 years, 95% graduated successfully from higher education, 20% of the graduates went on working in programmes aiming at the development of the situation of Roma in Hungary, and 10% of graduates continued their studies at PhD level.

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In the plenary session of the Seminar's **second day,** Dr. **István Hiller**, Hungarian Minister of Education and Culture delivered a closing speech emphasizing the *challenges of the 21st century for* the social dimension of the Bologna Process.
He recalled that nine years earlier countries including Hungary had joined the Bologna Process in the objective of enhancing comparability and compatibility of higher education systems, thereby improving the competitiveness of the region. After nine years of efforts, the experiences gained also permitted the correction of certain mistakes. At present, an international discussion was needed on topics like the labour market perspectives of BA/BSc graduates or the contribution of the Bologna Process

to innovation and R&D, since higher education was a scene of ongoing international competition for knowledge. Higher education institutions were facing new challenges after a quantitative expansion of higher education, also in Hungary where the number of students in higher education had quadrupled over the previous fifteen-twenty years. At the time of the global financial-economic crisis, after a period of stabilization the alliance of higher education with culture and innovation would ensure a possibility of renewal.

During the same plenary session, the **working groups' results were presented by the chairs of the groups, followed by the closing element of the Seminar's programme, the presentation and discussion of the Recommendations' draft version which had been prepared in the evening of the Seminar's first day by a drafting group[15].**

The participants of the Seminar agreed the main ideas expressed in the outline of the Recommendations, however, they were also asked to post electronically any eventual proposals for modification by the end of November. As a result, the Seminar's Recommendations were completed and finalized as follows:
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RECOMMENDATIONS
of the
Budapest Bologna Seminar

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Higher education is a public good and therefore a public responsibility

The participants of the Budapest Seminar affirm that higher education in not only the strategy of the individual for social advancement but also a means for advancing the development of European societies as well as ensuring effectiveness of higher education..

In this sense, higher education is both a public good and a public responsibility. This justifies the role of the State in setting up the objectives for higher education but also actively participating in their implementation.

The European Higher Education Area is varied with regard to its institutional frameworks, a variety of regulatory environments and the ratio of public to private funding across institutions. of the public and private funding

In that context, it is important for individual higher education institutions to assume responsibility at institutional level for moving forward and prioritising the social agenda objectives. The Budapest Seminar recommends that this should be done systematically by each institution drawing up a comprehensive access plan and closely monitoring its impact.

Countries involved in the Bologna Process are primarily endeavouring to find answers to the challenges of competitiveness and excellence in the globalised higher education market. However, the liberal minimum, respect for equal treatment and for equality of opportunities, is not sufficient in itself to encourage talented young people with disadvantages, like those brought up in poverty, living with a disability or belonging to ethnic minorities, to get to higher education and to facilitate their social mobility. These students need different forms of support to get into higher education institutions, to be successful in their studies and to be integrated in the labour market. Such efforts will also maximise the benefits of students accessing higher education and the efficiency of both public funding and students' private costs.

The social dimension is transversal

The participants of the Budapest Seminar are convinced that the social dimension of the Bologna Process is not an isolated aspect of the Process or a subsequent attribute in the Bologna vocabulary, but it is a transversal dimension which ought to permeate every single component of the Bologna Process. It means that with all actions taken in the Bologna Process, the effect on the social dimension should be kept in mind. Actions that may harm the social dimension should not be taken. Instead, all actions taken should help improve the social dimension of our higher education.
This can however not be used to postpone concrete action in the field of social dimension. Concrete actions need to be taken to bring the social dimension to the next level.
In the new phase of the Bologna Process, beyond 2010, the discourse on and the implementation of the social dimension must receive an increased priority on the agenda of the Bologna countries. The argument for strengthening the social dimension of the Bologna Process is based on the traditional values of European societies, like equality of opportunity and social justice, as well as on the interests of European economy. A good quality human resource is a key prerequisite of every competitive economy and taking into consideration the labour market situation of most European countries, considerable additional labour force capacity can be leveraged by providing learning and upskilling opportunities for those from disadvantaged groups. We believe that competitiveness, excellence and solidarity are not contradictory, but mutually reinforcing. We propose that all of the Bologna countries should develop comprehensive, complex and systematic strategies (including national action plans) to be adopted and coordinated at a governmental level, in order to make the efforts of various stakeholders converge. Such strategies should be focused on every aspect of the Process of higher education, namely, they should promote equal access to higher education, equal chance in international mobility during the studies as the cost barrier of mobility is directly linked to the social-economic background of the students, ensure the successful accomplishment of the studies of all students, especially those from disadvantaged groups, and facilitate their smooth transition into the labour market/employment.

Good quality, equitable higher education requires good, equitable primary and secondary education

Higher education is not a separate element of the education system; the basis of equal access and high performance lies in the successful functioning and quality of primary and secondary education. Moreover, the social dimension of higher education is affected by and effects chances of lifelong learning. For the success of the social dimension of the Bologna Process it is necessary to intensify the coordination between the different levels of the education system, with the involvement of all the relevant stakeholders. This should influence policy development and higher education practice. This however does not mean that higher education has no responsibility to fight existing inequalities. Many barriers to higher education remain, keeping potential students from entering higher education. These barriers should be tackled by governments and higher education institutions.

The impotance of data collection and analysis

There are various good data collection practices both on national levels and European level, based on administrative data sets, surveys and strategic information. Efforts should be continued to participate in the data collection activities with a focus on the *use* of these data having the potential to act as the catalyst for national debates. However, new data collecting efforts facilitate, but are not a prerequisite for social dimension strategies and measures.

The analyses show that the number of students in higher education has increased dramatically in some countries. However, this increase does not automatically result in a growing diversity of the socio-demographic and ethnic composition of the student body; it doesn not reflect yet the diversity of our societies. The changing structure of European societies generates new challenges for higher education institutions. In particular, the changing age composition of the students requires special attention in terms of pedagogical methods, new means of social support and the flexibility of learning pathways.

Measuring progress

University rankings do not provide an accurate view on the quality of the institution or program; they rather seem to address the needs of various user groups. These include prospective students (who need information, but this role seems to be the less developed), higher education institutions (that regard rankings as marketing tools) and decison makers. Social aspects are not taken into account in existing rankings. Rankings essentially measure the reputation or perceived quality of output of higher education, while more indicators are needed reflecting upon the added value of the educational process. The latter would be more closely related to the social effect but relevant indicators are mostly not available and, more importantly, there seems to be no consensus as to how the social aspect of the educational process should be measured in the context of ranking.

The relevant indicators of the social dimension of higher education systems need to be worked out and a monitoring system needs to be implemented to measure the societal effect of the existing practices and of potential policy changes. Furthermore, as the social dimension has a strong link to the quality of education, indicators on the social dimension should be included in quality assurance systems.

Intensifying access to information and dissemination

The stakeholders concerned are probably aware of the shift of European higher education towards the Bologna objectives. However, there is less knowledge about the social dimension of the Bologna Process even among students, teaching staff and higher education managers. It would be advisable to launch an information campaign targeting the social dimension of the Bologna Process including its objectives, significance and implementation, as well as the creation of a broad and clear understanding of the social dimension of the Bologna Process.

Being brought up in a disadvantaged situation results not only in the lack of necessary financial resources, but also in the lack of social and cultural capital, involving the lack of information as well. Taking this fact into consideration, it would be worth strengthening guidance and counselling services and developing a specific internet site or a specific section of the international Bologna homepage with more detailed information on the social dimension of the Bologna Process and, on the national

Bologna homepages, with all the necessary practical information for students (e.g. grants, student loans, mobility, special treatment for disabled students). The link to this homepage should be published on the homepage of every higher education institution.

[1] The webpage of the Seminar is available at: http://www.okm.gov.hu/main.php?folderID=2177&articleID=232059&ctag=articlelist&iid=1

[2] The social dimension of the envisaged European Higher Education Area aims at the equality of opportunities in higher education in multiple terms: those of access, participation and successful completion of studies.

[3] http://www.eurostudent.eu

[4] http://www.felvi.hu/index.ofi?mfa_id=5

[5] http://www.felvi.hu/index.ofi?mfa_id=380&hir_id=8735 (only available in Hungarian)

[6] http://www.daad.de/deutschland/hochschulen/hochschulranking/06543.en.html

[7] http://www.che-ranking.de/cms/?getObject=487&getLang=de

[8] Key issues for the European Higher Education Area - Social Dimension and Mobility. Report from the Bologna Process Working Group on Social Dimension and Data on Mobility of Staff and Students in Participating Countries, May 2007 (http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/hogeronderwijs/bologna/documents/WGR2007/Socialdimensionandmobilityreport.pdf)

[9] http://www.hea.ie/files/files/file/National_Access_Plan_2008-2013_(English).pdf

[10] National Office for Equity of Access to Higher Education (http://drupal.hea.ie/en/node/1125)

[11] Higher Education Authority (http://drupal.hea.ie)

[12] Transforming Ireland - A Better Quality of Life for All - National Development Plan for 2007-2013 (http://www.ndp.ie/docs/NDP_Homepage/1131.htm);
Towards 2016 - Ten-Year Framework Social Partnership Agreement for 2006-2015 (http://www.taoiseach.gov.ie/attached_files/Pdf%20files/Towards2016PartnershipAgreement.pdf);
Tomorrow's Skills: Towards a National Skills Strategy (http://www.skillsstrategy.ie/pdfs/egfsn070306_skills_strategy_report_webopt.pdf)

[13] See www.studentfinance.ie.

[14] www.romaversitas.hu

[15] The group included the chairs of the Seminar's working group sessions, Dominic Orr (working group 1), Tamás Rudas (working group 2) and Henry Mifsud (working group 3), the head of the international Social Dimension Coordination Group (SDCG), Efstathios Michael, the coordinator of the SDCG at the international (Benelux) Bologna Secretariat, Marie-Anne Persoons, a representative of the European Students' Union Executive Committee, Alma Joensen, the secretary of the National Bologna Board from the Hungarian Ministry of Education and Culture, László Csekei and the general rapporteurs Katalin Tausz and Katalin Gyöngyösi.