

## **Bologna – Zurück zum Start?**

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### **Intentionen und Ziele des Bologna Prozesses**

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This document provides a view on the Bologna Process at the age of ten and on its perspectives for the period beyond the decade of its inception. It is based on personal reflections in the light of the main worldwide and European trends and processes and their likely developments. It should be clear from the outset that its purpose is to provide a perspective, but neither a prophecy seeking to describe a future reality that no one can predict nor a prescription to those who are now in charge of the Bologna Process. Its main thrust consists in drawing up a list of some of the main factors that are likely to bear on the future of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and to sketch a number of priorities for the years after 2010 that seem in tune with them.

#### **1. Bologna expectations and developments**

In the wake of the Sorbonne Declaration that preceded it by one year, the Bologna Declaration emerged ten years ago with the ambition to set-up a coherent and attractive European Higher Education Area (EHEA) within a decade. Its initial impetus came from the acknowledgment of the need to address the negative consequences of the fragmentation of European higher education into largely incompatible and illegible national systems, in particular with reference to the worrying mismatch with the changing needs of Europe's labour market and the diminishing competitiveness of European higher education and research in the world.

#### **\* Objectives and tools of the Bologna call for structural convergence**

The main thrust of the Bologna Process was put on **structural** reforms converging towards a set of common features: a degree structure based on a common framework of reference for the first (bachelor-type), second (master-type) and third (doctoral-type) level of qualifications, ECTS-compatible systems for the accumulation and transfer of credits, generalisation of the Diploma Supplement and more numerous joint/double degree courses. Although the background report to the Bologna meeting already proposed a fully articulated system for quality assurance, Minister's shied away from this in 1999 and it took 4 more years before they acknowledged – in Berlin – quality assurance as a keystone of an effective EHEA.

These structural changes were nonetheless expected to achieve more profound political goals:

- to foster more and easier mobility: lessons learnt from over 10 years of experience with the Erasmus programme showed simultaneously the power of large scale mobility as a lever for change and the huge obstacles to mobility related to the fundamental incompatibility of the various national systems; the much higher level of academic and labour mobility required in the new Europe called for a greater compatibility, or at least transparency, of the higher education systems and qualifications.

- to achieve greater relevance to labour markets, in view of the concern about the “employability” of graduates in their own country as well as on the (single) European labour market; this concern was shared by all Bologna signatories; the right of citizens to work anywhere in the EU – which is one of the pillars of European integration – can only become a reality if their qualifications are easily recognised; this calls for more transparency which can only be achieved through more compatible quality seals and more legible degrees.

- to increase the efficiency of HE in view of social and economic needs: a decade of large scale mobility and cooperation also created new opportunities to look at each country’s higher education in a comparative way; authorities became more aware of the pockets of inefficiency in their national systems (e.g. in the form of over-long studies, high dropout and failure rates, high graduate unemployment or negative incentives to institutional effectiveness) and at the same time they could find out about better practice in other countries; these lessons from mobility and comparability provided renewed impetus for change/improvement in legislation and in system and institutional management.

- to re-establish the attractiveness of European higher education in the world: Bologna has contributed to spreading the awareness that European higher education was not easily legible – neither in Europe nor *a fortiori* elsewhere in the world – and had lost to the US its former privilege of being the preferred destination of internationally mobile students and scholars/researchers; this provided a strong impetus for remedial measures in many countries.

The initial expectation was therefore that most – if not all – universities in Europe would bring their existing degree structure in line with the 3 levels of reference that were conceived as a sequence and defined in terms of a range of ECTS credits. It was of course also expected that many universities would seize the opportunity to revisit the content and methodology of their programmes, with a view of enhancing such aspects as employability, internationality, flexibility, attractiveness, access to lifelong learners, etc.

#### \* Bologna’s extension, expansion and eventual blurring

- Many other priorities were added to the Bologna objectives at subsequent ministerial meetings; they concern in particular the “social dimension” of the reforms, the lifelong learning approach and the re-definition of courses in terms of skills/competencies that students need to acquire (an emphasis that was imported largely from the EU-funded Tuning project). Some of these additions pushed up the hurdles of the Bologna race beyond the immediate reach of a number of participants: while restructuring the architecture of degrees was a difficult enough exercise, it was made hugely more complicated with the spreading of the perception that everything ought henceforward to be expressed in terms of skills/competencies and in the light of lifelong learning. . This complication of the process also opened the door to uncertainty and to many different interpretations of the Process’ actual aims and priorities.

- The geographical expansion of the process was dramatic and very quick and occurred in some cases more for political than educational reasons. Entrance requirements for new countries were in general low, as it seemed difficult to close the door to any country willing to improve its higher education. Several waves of new adhesions gave entrance to late-runners usually not really prepared for it. This increased the disparity between Bologna countries and decreased the feasibility of some of the agreed objectives within the agreed timeframe. A good example of this concerns the cross-recognition of degrees, which might have been a challenging but feasible objective for the initial group of relatively near and comparable higher education systems, but became over-ambitious with so many and diverse players. Also, in spite of its pan-European dimension, the main engines of the process have always been some EU countries, NGOs and international organisations that endorsed the Bologna Process from its earliest stages. These developments have opened the way to a multi-speed Bologna process with higher hurdles for some countries and has led to a duality between an inner circle of relatively “integrated” HE systems and an outer circle of countries that

generally came later, had fewer reasons to converge (for example, because they are not part of the European single labour market or are not involved in Erasmus), started from a more divergent position or had fewer resources to invest in the change process.

- Yet the most important development affecting the Bologna process was due to its interface with the EU's "Lisbon Strategy" launched in 2000 in order to allow the Union to transform itself into "the world leading knowledge-based economy and society". Within this context the Barcelona European Council of 2002 set ambitious goals for education/training and for research/innovation; from then on the Bologna call for structural change has been intertwined with the Lisbon Strategy calls for in-depth change in higher education policy and strong investment in university-based research. As part of the overall Education & Training strand of the Lisbon Strategy, the EU developed a European agenda for the "modernisation" of EU universities reaching well beyond its traditional role, i.e. the running of mobility and cooperation programmes; while education is a national prerogative in the EU, the Union developed an agenda aimed at encouraging higher education policies to converge towards the main EU goals for 2010, "in a lifelong learning and a worldwide perspective", on such aspects as system and institutional governance and funding, institutional and programme diversification, quality assurance, the recognition of prior learning and the attractiveness of Europe as a destination for students, scholars and researchers from the rest of the world. The Barcelona Council also called for the simultaneous creation of the European Research Area and agreed to increase the total investment in R&D and Innovation to at least 3% of GDP by 2010. With increased resources made available through the Sixth and now the Seventh Framework Programme (including the new European Research Council and the Marie-Curie scheme for the mobility of researchers within the EU and worldwide) the research and innovation function of universities has received ever growing attention – and in a number of cases growing financial support – from policy makers at national and EU level. Hence, some of the hopes of Bologna – that the teaching function of universities would at long last receive due attention and that adequate resources would be available for the necessary in-depth renovation of curricula – had to be played down or vanished altogether.

The duality and intertwining of the Bologna and Lisbon agendas for change in higher education has resulted in their cross-fertilisation and mutual reinforcement. Bologna has drawn extensively on instruments that were first introduced as part of EU initiatives, such as ECTS or the ENQA network. In the opposite direction, the EU has supported the Bologna Process from the beginning and even more after 2002, as the Bologna structural reforms came to be seen as a necessary precondition for the successful "modernisation" of higher education policies in the EU in terms of funding, differentiation, governance, etc. It is beyond doubt that the combined effect of the two processes has enhanced their impact. Both address the same universities (who have to implement all the reforms) and the same governments (who have to support them through legislative change and to pay the financial and political price for the reforms). Hence, maybe the main achievement of the twin processes is that they have nurtured a fresh dialogue about the interaction between higher education and society, which has pushed the question of change and investment in higher education to the top end of political agendas.

Yet at the same time, the co-existence of a policy agenda and a structural one, and of two types of actions (some based on the EU/EEA machinery and others on a looser, ad hoc pan-European intergovernmental agreement) has contributed to the "blurring" of Bologna's own objectives and priorities, from a dual point of view. One is that it has become increasingly difficult to disentangle what is Bologna from what is Lisbon. The other concerns the search for the right balance between the European and the national level as shapers of the emerging EHEA; this question is not unique to higher education (it concerns more or less the whole process of European integration), but it may well be exacerbated in the Bologna process, where cooperation between EU Member States is based mainly on the "Open Method of Coordination" and a large number of non-EU countries are also involved. This open question about the balance of responsibilities and the adequate source and format of "European" leadership (or at least coordination) will have to be carried over into the next stages of the Bologna Process and the Lisbon Strategy.

#### \* Take-up and implementation at national and institutional level

Implementing the Bologna agenda is the responsibility of countries and HEIs. As the sequence of “Trends” reports has shown, broad legislative change has taken place in many countries. In the majority of them measures were taken to set in place the 3-level degree structure, ECTS-compatible credits and the Diploma Supplement. Nearly all countries have also created quality assurance agencies of different types and scope. Work on the renovation of curricula has taken place at the majority of HEIs throughout Europe, with more or less attention paid to “learning outcomes”, opportunities for mobility, lifelong learning, flexibility or employability. The depth, quality and spread of these reforms varies between countries, institutions and disciplines, but few systems and universities have not at least attempted to move in the directions sign-posted by Bologna.

Thus, Bologna has made a real difference. The Declaration and subsequent ministerial Communiqués have provided an impetus for reforms and set in place some fundamental instruments for the structural convergence of systems and qualifications. Most of the reforms introduced by governments and by universities tend to go in the right directions, but this does not mean that everything has been smooth, easy and well done. The main difficulty has come from the sometimes hugely diverging interpretations given to the Bologna agenda in different countries, in particular as a growing number of priorities were added to the initial change agenda and ministerial Communiqués became more “political” and vague over time. The constant intake of new “Bologna” countries faced with problems that others had already resolved and the very different calendars, pace and depth of reforms have further complicated the interpretation of Bologna principles. Hence, what was conceived in Bologna as an invitation to think was in a number of national contexts transformed into an obligation to comply – either because of a lack of information and sometimes as a result of new legislation or quality assurance mechanisms.

While the EHEA ought to become more compatible in terms of its structure, it ought at the same time to become more differentiated in terms of course orientation, content, learning methods, etc. Yet, the call for basic structural convergence was more than once mistaken for a push towards conformity in terms of content (e.g. the perceived obligation to formulate everything in terms of skills/competencies) and methodology (e.g. the perceived obligation to move to purely student-centred approach), forgetting that these changes could only reap benefits under certain conditions. Several countries have removed in their national legislation the flexibility that was deliberately built into the Bologna instruments at European level. Principles were often changed into administrative rules applied across the board, while rather lenient periodic reviews have tolerated undue divergences from the few but clear agreed principles: the definition and allocation of ECTS credits has not been consistent, certain institutions created or kept degrees diverging from the agreed pattern, quality assurance agencies were set-up in small regional or national higher education communities in disregard of the need to achieve trust outside their borders, etc.

In many countries, Bologna was also used – and sometimes distorted – as an opportunity to legislate packages including measures that are not at all related to it but were presented or perceived as being Bologna-driven. Examples include: the introduction of new or increased tuition fee (in particular at the master’s level), the substitution of grants by loans, wrong expectations that shorter and hence cheaper bachelor courses would result in overall savings in higher education budgets, the freezing of academic staff positions, the elimination of certain disciplines, the overloading of institutions and individuals with a new form of evaluative bureaucracy, etc.

These developments have tended to dilute the credibility of the Bologna process, not only in the countries where they took place but also in the others. This ought to be taken very seriously, since the implementation of Bologna cannot be “enforced” as if it were a treaty, but depends on the voluntary introduction of change at national and institutional level – and hence on its acceptance and credibility. Over time, in some countries, nearly all problems in higher education have come to be blamed by actors, stakeholders or media on the “Bologna

Plan". This raises also the question of whether or not, in a loosely coordinated process like Bologna, such a chaotic transition could have been avoided at all before the promised benefits of a coherent EHEA become visible.

#### \* Bologna in a crisis?

Overall, Bologna has achieved a lot: creation of a unique dialogue between governments and universities at European level, together with a strong involvement of stakeholders, in particular students. This has allowed addressing issues and challenges that were sometimes "taboo" in their local context. European higher education has entered a new phase of transformation and is on the move again – sometimes after decades of immobility since the 1960'. The role of universities in societies has been better acknowledged and several countries and a large number of universities have seized the opportunity to enhance university autonomy and governance, to improve their curricula and to foster their competitiveness. Interestingly, the change pattern seems to have been more profound and faster in more advanced higher education systems already widely open to world trends, and slower in countries where universities remain more "protected" by legislative or linguistic barriers.

Nonetheless, Bologna seems to have entered a critical phase, where in spite of its positive achievements, its purpose is not seen or understood clearly and its legitimacy is being questioned. It has been mixed up with about every aspect of higher education, sometimes unintentionally and sometimes willingly. Many universities have missed the opportunity to rethink their course offering as well as their overall role and organisation in an open and fast changing world – sometimes because legislation has prevented them from this, but also in many cases because the *status quo* seemed the easier solution, at least in the short term. The voices of opponents, that were initially relatively few and mainly guided by political or corporatist reasons, have grown stronger, more vociferous and more numerous.

There are therefore reasons not to share fully the optimistic views expressed in the recent Ministerial Communiqué issued in Louvain at the end of April 2009. If Bologna is to be successful in the years ahead, it needs – and deserves – a deeper questioning and re-thinking of its future priorities, governance and implementation.

## **2. Main forces likely to shape the future of European universities in the years ahead**

#### \* Further development of the knowledge society

The knowledge society will continue to place new demands on education systems in general, and on higher education and universities in particular – even though many of these needs have been identified a decade ago, they remain "new" because they require a profound change in higher education culture, governance and practice. They have to do with the acceleration of knowledge production, the multiplication and diversification of the sources of new knowledge, its dissemination through diverse learning channels and its application through various innovation processes. While not all innovation is research-driven, the development, quality and organisation of university-based research will be a major determinant of the future of universities in Europe, as well as (maybe less directly) of the place of Europe in the world. The knowledge society is not based only on hard science, but these sciences, as well as engineering/technology and innovation management are likely to be of particular importance, including in trans-disciplinary activities where they are combined with sociology, psychology, economics, humanities, etc. The premium going to talent in science and technology generally, and to highly educated people with advanced knowledge or expertise in all areas, is unlikely to diminish: the demand for highly educated labour will increase in Europe according to a recent survey by the CEDEFOP and the competition for such talent is almost certain to further increase around the world. The advent of the knowledge society will underline the need to develop a widely-shared "science culture"; to advance curricular reform in these areas; to increase lifelong learning opportunities in science and technology-related areas; to encourage more women and citizens from

minorities to take an active interest in these areas; and to imagine new formulas to encourage, fund and utilise interface platforms with industry. It is also likely to boost networking activities which bring together research teams (both within universities and around them, for example in science parks, as well as at a distance) and persons or institutions with a complementary role, such as coordination or management. All this ought to happen while at the same time protecting the role of universities as centres for humanistic, social and democratic critical thinking, which means above all that solutions pushing higher education towards uniformity ought to be avoided. While it is impossible that each higher education institution (HEI) in any system can combine all these requirements in an ideal way, the stimulation of their greater diversification in terms of mission and priorities may be the only effective protection against systemic errors and uniformisation.

\* Globalisation in an increasingly competitive environment

The rising curve of demand for talent (human resources), money (access to information and technology), outreach (or “markets”) and prestige is very likely to continue in the world in the years ahead. Internationalisation and globalisation may well lead to a reduction in the extent to which universities are insulated in their national context by borders and regulations. Competition from other parts of the EU and from the rest of the world will be brought right into universities’ courtyards, in the form of imported formal or non-formal education and training, often delivered by distance means, either in the local language or in English, as well as in the form of greater access to mobility for the brightest and best of talents. This will happen irrespective of the GATS debate on the liberalisation of “educational services”, which is likely to influence only marginally the speed and direction of the impact of globalisation on higher education. Competition is likely to affect some segments of higher education more than others, with engineering and technology, postgraduate and doctoral studies, advanced management and quality assurance bodies (including accreditation agencies) among those most directly exposed to it. It is also foreseeable that rankings will continue to flourish at the global as well as regional level. With an increasing number of rankings based on a greater diversity of criteria, the competitive pressure is likely to increase not only internationally, but also regionally and nationally – even though the impact of the publication of each particular ranking may well diminish in future as a result of their increasing number and frequency.

These transformations will mean a profound change at universities, especially in those countries, regions and institutions still enjoying a high level of protection due to national regulations, linguistic reasons or restrictive quota systems which ensure artificial over-subscription. In such systems, the awareness of competition may remain lower for a longer period of time, with undue levels of self-confidence and deferred incentives to adapt to the knowledge society, to the diversity of learners’ needs and to governments’ and societal demands for accountability. Competition will not be restricted to the inter-institutional level: it is likely to take increasingly the form of a competition between national systems and approaches, first and foremost within the EU but also with main overseas providers (primarily the USA, but possibly increasingly also a number of Asian systems in certain key areas). A complex picture of competition in some areas and cooperation with diverse partners in others is likely to emerge from this process.

\* Higher education demography in Europe and the world

The general and lasting trend in Europe has been towards declining birth rates. This entails an inevitable decrease in the intake of post-secondary students into initial university education, even though it may temporarily coexist in some countries with a growth in the rate of access to higher education and a strong trend towards the extension of studies beyond the bachelor level, with the effect of reducing or deferring the overall impact of demography. Similarly, in some (but far from all) countries, it is partly offset by an increase in the number of adult learners enrolled at universities. The likely consequence of these trends is increased competition between universities for students. While this may be more acute for students with some kind of special talent or knowledge (e.g. in science and technology, or at the postgraduate level), the diminishing size of cohorts of new entrants is such in several

countries that it will affect whole institutions, which will need to fight to keep certain departments and research laboratories. The only temporary exceptions are likely to be some countries that do not offer enough student places and are therefore not yet noticing the impact of the diminishing demand for initial university education.

Another important factor will be the ability of universities and systems to offer second-chance and continuing education opportunities to adult learners, by creating conditions suitable for their access and success in higher education; in spite of two decades of open debate, the awareness of decision-makers in higher education about the implications of lifelong learning remains low and the actual transformation of institutions and systems in order to facilitate (or at least accommodate) this transformation has hardly started in large parts of Europe.

Yet another likely consequence of demographic change on higher education will be an increase in mobility and transfer between institutions and countries, both within the enlarged EU and between Europe and the rest of the world. Marketing European higher education abroad will be an absolute necessity for some countries with diminishing domestic enrolments, if they want to safeguard their higher education, science and research potential. Already today, the survival of a large number of European university programmes hinges on the enrolment of foreign students, especially (but not exclusively) at the master and doctoral level.

The most important factor related to these changes is that they will entail new “consumer power” for students/learners (both domestic and foreign) and hence new demands from them. Students will no longer be trapped in their national system, however good or less good it may be. With increased physical mobility and competition for talent, the development of courses taught in English in more and more countries, and the availability of imported education in many disciplines, students/learners will have more possibilities than ever before to choose the higher education they want – either as a substitute or as a complement to what is available from local universities. Those universities able to attract these students and to award them degrees they can use all over Europe (and beyond) are likely to benefit from this trend. The others are likely to lose some of their best students, who will be increasingly aware of what is available elsewhere and will seek to take maximum advantage of it.

#### \* The further advancement of European integration in education and research

The intertwining between the intergovernmental and pan-European Bologna Process and the university strand of the EU’s Lisbon Strategy was already mentioned in the previous chapter. Their agendas are complementary and their implementation is interdependent and mutually reinforcing. They have been at work together for nearly a decade and their combined impact on universities has been growing over time – while at the same time it became increasingly difficult to distinguish between their respective responsibilities. This has not only contributed to “blurring” Bologna’s identity, but also increased the dependency of Bologna action on EU support and initiatives.

A very good example of this can be seen in the development of quality assurance. The first step was taken by the EU in 1998 – before Bologna – through a Recommendation calling on the creation of quality assurance agencies and their linkage within a European association that became ENQA. When Ministers acknowledged the key role of quality assurance in the EHEA in Berlin in 2005, they turned towards ENQA to draw up (together with partners in the “E4 group”) the European Standards and Guidelines that were adopted in Bergen in 2005. The next step was again at the initiative of the EU: while ENQA was uncertain about the creation of a European Register of (trustworthy) quality assurance agencies, the EU’s new Recommendation on QA of 2006 called for such a Register and outlined its main features. At their London meeting in 2007, the Bologna Ministers in turn called for the Register and this opened the door to the creation of the EQAR – which is broadly (although not entirely) in line with the EU Recommendation. In the opposite direction, the first references to the need for coherent qualifications frameworks and for efforts aimed at enhancing the legibility of European higher education in the world can be traced back to the Bologna or even the Sorbonne Declaration, even though they were later on developed mainly or partly through

work carried out in the framework of the European Union. The Diploma Supplement has its origin in the work of UNESCO-CEPES and was later introduced in EU programmes and generalised as a Bologna instruments.

This intertwining of Bologna and EU initiatives is likely to continue and possibly even to grow because of the need to seek synergies between them. The inclination of the Bologna Follow-up Group to include more policy aspects into the remit of the Bologna Process has been noticeable for a few years and can easily be seen in the Louvain Communiqué – even though it admits that the first future priority should be to finish-up the work in progress with respect to such aspects as the degree structure and the renovation of curricula. Simultaneously, it is obvious that the impact of Bologna will to a significant extent depend on whether or not supportive initiatives will be taken at EU level in the framework of the Lisbon Strategy; this is the case for measures bearing on the structure of the qualifications in the EHEA, but above all with respect to higher education policies, including funding. Hence, there is ample room for synergies; whether they are activated or not will be an important factor for the future.

#### \* The progress of investment policies in the EHEA and ERA

An important aspect of the Lisbon strategy is related to the EU's repeated call for more and better investment in higher education, in particular as a response to the substantial gap in university funding between Europe and the USA. European universities have indeed suffered for a long time from a dual funding deficit in comparison to their US counterparts. They are at the crossroads of two comparatively under-funded areas: higher education (on which Europe spends on average<sup>1</sup> one half less than the USA in terms of GDP: 1.1 % compared to 2.3 %) and research (1.9 % compared with 2.7 %). In both cases, the gap is due overwhelmingly to weaker private investment in Europe, while public spending on universities and on research is of a comparable magnitude (at least in terms of % of GDP). Over time, it has become ever clearer that closing these gaps will only happen when and where universities address the current inefficiencies in the use of existing financial resources (e.g. overlong study durations, high dropout and failure rates, high graduate unemployment which suggest a strong mismatch between student output and labour markets needs, etc.). However, the relative underfunding of European universities may become more asymmetric in the coming years, since calls for higher investment have been louder and stronger on the research side (with increased budgets for the 7th Framework Programme and many countries referring to the official European target of 3% of GDP) than on the education side (where the 2% of GDP called for in a Commission Communication<sup>2</sup> seems to have received less attention).

### **3. Foreseeable course of the Bologna Process beyond 2010**

The Bologna Process is at the threshold of its second decade, but the main issues and the key factors that are likely to shape the future of the EHEA are not substantially different from those that were identified 10 years ago when the Bologna agenda was first designed and put on tracks. The issues and strategic goals of the agenda for change and modernisation of European higher education remain fundamentally the same. Hence, the main change for the second decade should consist in better implementation, including remedying the errors and incomplete reforms that have taken place in the past. The creation of the EHEA requires a stabilised framework and set of rules, which means that it should henceforward be avoided adding new priorities and new partners at every ministerial meeting.

#### \* The fundamental priority should remain to set in place the structures of the EHEA

One of the most obvious and most fundamental needs for action in Europe is to make certain that the initial objectives of the Bologna Process are actually achieved. Since it is obvious

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<sup>1</sup> This average hides in reality a huge variation in the actual amount of spending on higher education, since countries not only invest different shares of their GDP but the GDP per capita remains much lower in some countries than in others, even within the EU.

<sup>2</sup> Commission Communication "Mobilising the brainpower of Europe", 2005.

that this will not be achieved by 2010 in several areas and countries, a few more years will be necessary, but the need to act in these directions will not vanish. The articulation of degrees at Bachelor, master and doctorate level, the compatibility of ECTS credits and trustworthy quality assurance remain fundamental conditions for the existence and proper functioning of the EHEA.

Yet, it was already mentioned that a number of the reforms that have been introduced in the wake of the Bologna Process are either weak, incomplete or not in line with the agreed common features of the EHEA (sometimes marginally, but sometimes also fundamentally):

- While the use of ECTS credits is nearly generalised, there are still question marks or discussions concerning basic issues (e.g. how many credits does a 12-month programme carry?) or deviant applications (e.g. credits awarded on the basis of attendance without examinations; denial of credit transfer for competencies already acquired; obligation to repeat a whole year when a few credits were not passed; theses, language courses or internships not included in the credit count for a degree);

- There is still much confusion in the degree structure, e.g. “undergraduate” master degrees, straight “masters” with only 240 credits, “post-master” masters, master programmes of only 60 credits, when the European agreement is for a minimal of 90 except in special cases (i.e. the exception has been used as the rule in some countries or at some universities);

- In several countries in Eastern Europe, the former tradition of 2 consecutive levels of doctorates inherited from the Soviet system remains in place (in direct contradiction to the Bologna framework where the doctorate is but a single level – either though several types of doctoral degrees and PhDs may coexist at that level);

- There are large numbers of seemingly renovated curricula where the re-orientation towards student-centred learning (and hence skills/competencies that students need to acquire) has not been adequately designed and implemented; this means that the curricular and methodological change needed at European universities has happened only to a limited extent – in particular in countries and universities that were furthest from the proposed model and therefore have to undergo a deeper transformation process touching upon academic culture and social traditions;

- A rather large number of quality assurance agencies have been set up within very small (national or regional) systems where endogamy is nearly unavoidable and external trust is therefore very difficult to generate;

- The remaining obstacles to mobility have not disappeared, even not in the form of grant/loan denial for study abroad or failure to recognise credits acquired abroad – i.e. long standing requirements of the ERASMUS programme.

Overall, the picture given by the so-called “stocktaking exercises” before each bi-annual meetings of Ministers of the Bologna countries since 2005 have been far too “rosy”: they are giving a *satisfecit* to countries and universities that would not really deserve it if one were to look beneath the surface. Hence, the main and first priority of the post-2010 stage of the Bologna Process should be to review what has really been achieved and to bravely draw up a list of incomplete or deviant reforms in each country, with a view to addressing these as priorities for the years to come: the EHEA will not exist as long as the new chaos of reforms carried out without sufficient coordination comes in addition to the former chaos of degrees – which the Bologna Process wanted to eliminate but still continues. Bologna will not achieve its aims and the EHEA will not exist if the current level of divergence in degrees, credits or QA is not clearly acknowledged and addressed. This conclusion is valid with respect to the internal coherence of European HE, but even more for its external projection and credibility.

The same applies with respect to some of the key reforms advocated in the EU’s Lisbon Strategy. In spite of clear progress, much remains to be done in the years beyond 2010, both

with respect to the agenda for the modernisation of universities and for the creation of the European Research Area. In a significant number of countries, the overall level of funding of higher education remains far too low, student support has worsened, dropout/failure rates and study duration remain unduly high, the differentiation of curricula and institutions remains limited and the Lifelong Learning agenda is still a distant reality. The total level of investment in R&D is well below the 3% target, in particular with respect to private investments, and research geared towards innovation is still far from being generally acknowledged and rewarded. Hence, all main objectives for university modernisation identified as part of the EU's Lisbon Strategy remain valid and should continue to guide the change agenda. As has been the case until now, change is in all likelihood going to be more effective if universities are really empowered to introduce it and if they do not have to bear the full cost of the transformation process.

#### \* Universities as factors for social and economic development

Another key feature of the Europe of universities over the next decade is likely to be the full acknowledgement of their role in the success of each country in Europe and of Europe as a whole in the world in the era of knowledge and globalisation. Bologna and Lisbon have signalled the first steps in these directions, but the actual translation of the new paradigms into policies for change and improvement will most likely happen only over the next decade. This means that the need for countries to adopt comprehensive policies and action plans for the transformation of their higher education in view of the needs of society ought to become a major driver of reforms after 2010. Such policies for higher education at the service of the public good will have to prevail over the traditional vision of higher education as a "public good" in the more restrictive meaning (i.e. universities as public institutions funded only from public sources).

Three movements are likely to leave their footprints:

- the development of a more substantial sector of private higher education as a complement or an alternative to public universities: this may well be concentrated in some disciplines, professional areas or specific segments of the education and training continuum, and may also happen at the initiative of public universities themselves, who will seek (perhaps for reasons of financial or administrative flexibility), or be obliged (perhaps for reasons of declining public expenditure), to farm out certain activities, such as professional development courses, where they are in direct competition with commercial providers;
- the diversification of financial resources, i.e. the growing importance of contributions from enterprises (in the form of contracts for research and other services) and donors, and possibly in some countries from students/families (perhaps more in some areas than in others, perhaps less at bachelor than at master level);
- the move in the direction of more professional management of available financial resources, as a response to the growing demand for accountability and efficiency.

On the basis of higher education serving better the interests of society as a whole, it is foreseeable that in 10 years from now lifelong learning activities at universities will have become a more tangible reality, although unevenly across Europe. General access for all may still not be achieved, but the recognition of prior learning acquired in all types of education as well as at work is likely to be much more widely applied than today - as a result of demography and growing competition for learners rather than as a spontaneous shift of university curricula in these directions.

#### \* More diversified, differentiated institutions

Another major foreseeable change resulting from the many combinations of factors shaping European higher education is that the degree of diversification, or differentiation, between

“universities” and programmes is likely to increase significantly. While the basic articulation of degrees into bachelor-level, master-level and doctoral-level qualifications should be completed in all countries and at all universities, it is likely that their profile will be varied, depending on the type of institutions (more or less research-intensive, different approaches to research and learning), the regional and cultural differences within Europe, the profile of renovated curricula, with more or less possibilities open to learners to customise their pathways (multiple entry and exit points). At the same time, there will certainly be more “bridges” between courses, institutions and countries, again mainly because students will be acknowledged as universities’ main resource, and the competition to attract them (and therefore to demonstrate the transferability of qualifications) will be increasing.

The overall picture is likely to be one of a stratified, multi-layered system, where universities may belong simultaneously to various “layers” depending on the subject area or the approach considered. As a result of the need to encourage the emergence of “poles of excellence”, one main line of divide may well turn out to be between a relatively small number of highly research-intensive universities of world or European class and other institutions; but if this does happen, it may be as part of 3 broadly different scenarios:

- an “ivy league” combined with a relative academic desert around it. This could be the ultimate effect of over-concentrating financial and human resources on “excellence”, because it would reinforce the concentration of the best teachers, researchers and (postgraduate) students in a small number of institutions;
- a plateau with peaks of excellence. In this scenario, the Europe of universities would be marked mainly by the development of high quality across the countries and regions of Europe, with a relatively high number of institutions featuring specific “areas of excellence”, and of course a small number of them being recognised as generally “excellent” in Europe and the world. The main factor that could push the European system in this direction might be a strong effort in favour of regional policies, drawing on the interaction between universities, industry, regional authorities and society in general. Innovation has many sources and can spring up at all types of institutions, provided that: a) it is valued there; and b) it is made available to, and acknowledged by the broader university community via appropriate networking;
- a seamless European system. This would consist of a continuum of more or less research-intensive universities, where broad-based or specialised knowledge, applied or fundamental research and diversified innovation activities would co-exist and complement each other. In such a system, institutional and curricular diversification would not be based on clear-cut boundaries between closed categories, and multiple networks would link HEIs – or departments of such HEIs – because of their similarity or their complementarity. This hypothesis appears to be more dependent on substantial public funding than the previous two.

\* Higher, more diversified and better funding

The need for fresh and more diversified funding has already been pointed out, and the sources of university finance are likely to become much more diverse over ten years to come. There are also clear signals pointing towards more targeted research funding in the coming years. Tuition fees may have been introduced in more systems, but they are unlikely to have become a major new source of funding for universities: it seems more probable that they will function as a secondary financial resource, whose chief benefit might be a more efficient use of the system by students and their families. The principle of generalised access will most probably remain a strong one in a European system permeated by the values of democracy, equity and lifelong learning, and tuition fees will probably only be used in conjunction with fresh, more ambitious grant/loan schemes. It is also foreseeable that the role of universities in regional development will grow stronger, which should entail an increase in regional funding. Finally, the role of universities in the Europe of knowledge is likely to be acknowledged more concretely, with a more significant financial contribution from

European sources such as the European Social and Regional Funds, the European Investment Bank and maybe new types of EU education/training/research programmes.

Overall, the development of funding policies is likely to become an ever more crucial determinant of the future of universities (and indeed of whole national higher education systems) in Europe and in the world. Where public resources are not sufficient to provide universities with enough resources for them to play their full role in an increasingly competitive context, there are in essence only two ways forward:

- one is to accept (overtly or not) that under-funded institutions and systems (and their students and staff) are to be at a structural disadvantage and will inevitably find it increasingly difficult to sustain their position; this scenario is likely to happen when for political (and perhaps societal) reasons there is no alternative to accepting it, even with its implications on the relative decline of universities in that country;
- the other is to diversify universities' sources of income, and to look for higher contributions from students/families, enterprises and/or private donors.

It is hard to doubt that, in the longer term, in a more open European and international context, a correlation will exist between the resources available (total level and sustainability of resources, efficiency of spending) and the outcome and reputation of individual universities and national higher education systems.

#### \* A modernised version of university autonomy

The picture sketched above can only become realistic if there is also a shift towards more professional governing bodies and decision-making procedures at universities. By and large, the importance of the management function is likely to be recognised much more as an essential part of the quality of educational as well as research systems. Higher education and research are complex systems whose management must become more professional if quality is to be maintained and developed. With respect to their US counterparts, European universities overall may well not suffer from an adverse "quality gap", but the issue is whether they will be able to close the current "management gap" (designing and streamlining institutional strategies with priorities and efficient management of human and financial resources) and "marketing gap" (delivering what society and users expect and getting better recognition for the quality actually delivered).

This will entail major changes in the internal governance of universities, which in most countries requires changes in the law. Many countries have introduced legislation in this direction over the past few years, stressing universities' responsibility in deciding their own curricular and research priorities and their administrative autonomy, in exchange for more transparent accountability. This pattern is likely to be more widespread in the years beyond 2010.

At the same time, governments will have to recognise that universities must also have the appropriate degree of financial autonomy. Universities can only be expected to engage in strategic planning if the public support available to them is guaranteed over a sufficient time-scale. This means a system of multi-annual financing, probably over a minimum period of 4 to 5 years, in exchange for the setting of strategic teaching and research priorities and the adoption of plans for structural change indispensable for the efficient provision of services to society. The paramount importance of this approach for autonomous and accountable higher education institutions has not yet been fully acknowledged across Europe.

#### \* Europe as a worldwide reference and a hub for higher education

Making European higher education more attractive to both European and international students has been an explicit aim of the Bologna process as well as of the Lisbon Strategy. In 2002 in Barcelona, the European Council set the goal that by 2010 Europe should be the

primary destination of internationally mobile students, scholars and researchers from other world regions. This is not really new: Europe enjoyed this position up until the late Eighties or early Nineties, before losing it quickly and clearly to the USA. Whether Europe will be able to resume its leading role in this area will depend directly on the success of all other policies and reforms referred to in this article: it could in effect be seen as an overall indicator of whether or not the agenda for change and reform pushed by the various processes at work are delivering as they should. Promoting a more coherent image of Europe, launching new courses in tune with international demand, developing the impact of the EU's programmes with Asia or Latin America, or more generally with third countries thanks to Erasmus Mundus or Marie-Curie: all these activities have helped making the 'external dimension' of the EHEA a more prominent priority in the more recent years, and this is certain to continue in the years ahead in the framework of both Bologna and Lisbon.

Positive results have been achieved since 2002, both in several Member States and at European level, but it should not be forgotten that progress was made easier by the lesser appeal and accessibility of the USA under the Bush administration. This has started to change from 2009, and success will of course also depend on other factors: will the number of internationally mobile students have reached a peak by then, after doubling or tripling since 2000, as more nations (maybe in particular in Asia) enter the knowledge society and build up their own capacities in higher education and research? Will the trend towards more courses taught in English continue or even accelerate, or will fears of losing linguistic diversity push in the opposite direction? Will Europe be able to exploit its unique opportunity, offering courses in English to those who need/want it, as well as in a variety of other languages to those who are specifically sensitive to cultural/linguistic diversity? The scenario of Europe as a worldwide reference and a hub for higher education also implies the development of campuses abroad run by consortia of European universities to offer accredited courses to students and high-level training/retraining to professionals.

All in all, this should make Europe a better partner for universities and students of the world, and should foster increased solidarity with the development of academic and research communities in developing countries.

\* A second wave of reforms in many countries

As a consequence of the preceding paragraphs, it is desirable and foreseeable that a number of countries where the Bologna reforms were taken up, but not in full and with insufficient coherence between the various actors, will introduce a second wave of reforms in their higher education systems and institutions, in view of the ongoing challenges facing them at home, in Europe and in the broader worldwide context.

This second round of reforms is unlikely to affect all countries in the same way; it can be expected to include mainly complementary measures in those countries where serious reforms have taken place but need refinement. This is the case, among others, in Austria, where in spite of the sometimes negative image of the change agenda important reforms have already taken place, but need to be streamlined and supplemented by others (e.g. in the labour market). The proposal to set in motion a dialogue and action agenda to make the Bologna reforms work satisfactorily in Austria should be commended and receive serious attention from higher education institutions and should be explained better to students and their families, the media, the economy and society at large.

The second wave of reforms will of course only be fully successful if they are:

- conceived in a more strategic and less formal way;
- better prepared and explained;
- supported by likewise-minded sets of reforms in other Bologna countries and at European level;
- seen as essential to, and supported by the closer agenda for the completion of the EHEA; this might nonetheless be a more difficult exercise in the 2010' than in the past decade, since the mobilisation of public and private resources may be even more difficult than before the "crisis" and the overall process of European integration seems to have slowed down; on the

other hand, governments may also find, at least in some countries, a terrain more receptive to change, as the awareness of the threats on Europe welfare and place in the world is growing.

The second round of reforms is also likely to be more effective if there is a stronger synergy between the Bologna agenda and the EU's proposals for the modernisation of higher education as part of its overall "Europe 2020" Strategy (which is the successor to the Lisbon Strategy). Keeping the two agendas as separate as they are now would on the contrary entail ongoing inefficiencies and a blurring of responsibilities and priorities that would harm each of the 2 strands.

Finally, it may be useful to strengthen the coordination of the reform agendas between the 30 core countries of the EHEA – not between all 48 current participants. This would re-launch the change process in these countries, enhance the credibility of the process' goals and show the way to the other countries, who have less reasons and more difficulties to introduce the reforms for the EHEA, but may benefit from a clarification of the priorities and the emergence of a few "success models" in the new landscape of higher education and research in Europe.

#### \* Steering and organisation of the Bologna Process

The steering and the internal organisation of the Bologna process in its second stage will no doubt be in itself a crucial factor for what it will be able to deliver in the years beyond 2010. While subsidiarity with an ever thicker layer of cooperation has provided the basis for progress in Bologna – as well as in Lisbon – all over the decade of the 2000s, it is far from certain that the same balance between convergence and diversity and between steering and stakeholders involvement will be adequate for the next stages.

The fundamental strength of the process, which has resided in the cooperation between governments, international organisations, universities and students, should be kept; the role of society as a whole, including the economy, should be better represented. But there is no doubt that the Bologna bureaucracy has grown over recent years while at the same time proactive efforts towards convergence seem to have slowed down. Next to the avoidance of more bureaucratisation and hence paralysis, a major priority for the second stage of the Bologna process should therefore consist in avoiding its dilution because of too many and too vague priorities.

This will only be possible if its governance structure is reviewed in the direction of:

- a stronger focus on the core structural aspects, that should be much better explained, with stronger and quicker remedial action in case they are not being applied;
- more explicit attention to the diversification of responses within these agreed structures;
- specific support provided to those countries and HEIs that are lagging behind; new instruments and European funds may need to be mobilised to support EU countries and programmes like TEMPUS may be more clearly oriented in this direction for the others;
- a much stronger synergy between Bologna and Lisbon.

#### **Conclusions**

As mentioned at the beginning, the above scenarios are not meant as forecasts of a reality that belongs to the future and cannot - by definition - be predicted. Sketching the key factors at play, and a possible outcome of their interaction, shows that well beyond 2010 the future of European universities needs to be shaped and built-up by means of proactive policies decided at institutional and national level, but in view of the overall EU context. This is a key difference of the Europe of universities in the decade of the 2010s as compared to that of the

decade of the 2000s: Bologna beyond 2010 will therefore, in all likelihood, have to take on a much stronger European dimension in many ways. Investments, mobility, networking, cooperation and reforms in higher education will need to be designed and implemented in view of that broader European picture if they are to be effective and efficient. Seen from this angle, the second stage of the Bologna Process will probably be as big a challenge than before, both from the viewpoint of its organisation and its content. The future of the Europe of universities may not be predictable, but it will depend in good part on the renewal of efforts to make up for missed reforms and accelerate the pace of supporting reforms in related areas (in particular in the labour market) and in the funding of the change process and higher education in general. This applies also to Austria.

Another key condition for the ultimate success of Bologna is that the second round of reforms should be firmer on some key features and softer on the rest. The flexibility and diversity that is being sought at the European level ought to be passed on to university leadership and staff, together with the responsibility to develop their own curricula and strategies. Diversity and autonomy should be better stressed and guaranteed: not all universities should be enticed or compelled to do the same reforms at the same time. The Process needs forerunners and followers and should make certain that strategic directions, rather than minute regulations, preside to its future. Skills and competencies are important, but so is also the acquisition of knowledge and values. Curriculum in a given area ought not all to be geared towards the same mix of skills/competencies, but they ought all to be in line with the European reference for first-degrees, masters or doctorate. This is the key for emulation, academic competition for quality and possibly excellence, and before all for meaningful change. Legislation and administrative bodies, including quality assurance agencies, ought to protect and reward innovation instead of enforcing compliance. This is an essential condition for the long term success of Bologna, and the EHEA as a whole, both at national and at European level.

Finally, it seems appropriate to stress here that what the EU and the broader Europe would really need is a European Fund for the Modernisation of Universities. It could gather funding from European, national and private sources (e.g. foundations and companies). It could create more equal conditions for the implementation of Bologna and Lisbon reforms in higher education. It could fulfil for higher education some of the functions the Framework Programme fulfils for research. Gathering support for the creation of such a European UniFund could be, and maybe should be, a top priority for those in charge of Bologna – as well as of the Lisbon Strategy strand for higher education. It could re-mobilise attention and energies and if properly put at use it could add to Bologna's wishes for improvement a much stronger capacity to act and to support actors in the field.

*\* Guy HAUG was centrally involved in designing and initiating the Bologna Process (as principal Advisor to the association of European Universities from 1998 to 2001) as well as the university strand of the EU's Lisbon Strategy (as Principal Administrator of the European Commission from 2001 to 2006). He is currently Advisor to the Valencia University of Technology, Spain.*