



EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

2014 - 2019

Committee on Culture and Education

2015/0000(INI)

4.2.2015

DRAFT REPORT

on Follow-up on the implementation of the Bologna Process
(2015/0000(INI))

Committee on Culture and Education

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PR\1049173EN.doc

PE546.870v02-00

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United in diversity

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MOTION FOR A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION

on Follow-up on the implementation of the Bologna Process (2015/0000(INI))

The European Parliament,

- having regard to Article 165 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU),
- having regard to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and in particular Article 26 thereof,
- having regard to the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, and in particular Article 14 thereof,
- having regard to the Sorbonne Joint Declaration on harmonisation of the architecture of the European higher education system by the four Ministers in charge for France, Germany, Italy and the United Kingdom, signed in Paris on 25 May 1998 (Sorbonne Declaration)¹,
- having regard to the Joint Declaration signed in Bologna on 19 June 1999 by the ministers of education from 29 European countries (Bologna Declaration)²,
- having regard to the Communiqué issued by the Conference of European Ministers responsible for Higher Education held in Leuven and Louvain-la-Neuve, 28-29 April 2009³,
- having regard to the Budapest-Vienna Declaration of 12 March 2010 adopted by the Education Ministers from 47 countries, which officially launched the European Higher Education Area (EHEA)⁴,
- having regard to the Communiqué issued by the Ministerial Conference and Third Bologna Policy Forum held in Bucharest, 26-27 April 2012⁵,
- having regard to the Mobility strategy 2020 for the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) adopted by the EHEA Ministerial Conference held in Bucharest, 26-27 April 2012⁶,
- having regard to Directive 2013/55/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 November 2013 amending Directive 2005/36/EC on the recognition of professional

¹ http://www.ehea.info/Uploads/Declarations/SORBONNE_DECLARATION1.pdf

² http://www.ehea.info/Uploads/Declarations/BOLOGNA_DECLARATION1.pdf

³ http://www.ehea.info/Uploads/Declarations/Leuven_Louvain-la-Neuve_Communique%C3%A9_April_2009.pdf

⁴ http://www.ehea.info/Uploads/Declarations/Budapest-Vienna_Declaration.pdf

⁵ [http://www.ehea.info/Uploads/\(1\)/Bucharest%20Communique%202012\(1\).pdf](http://www.ehea.info/Uploads/(1)/Bucharest%20Communique%202012(1).pdf)

⁶ <http://www.ehea.info/Uploads/%281%29/2012%20EHEA%20Mobility%20Strategy.pdf>

qualifications and Regulation (EU) No 1024/2012 on administrative cooperation through the Internal Market Information System ('the IMI Regulation')¹,

- having regard to the recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 28 September 2005 to facilitate the issue by the Member States of uniform short-stay visas for researchers from third countries travelling within the Community for the purpose of carrying out scientific research²,
- having regard to the recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 February 2006 on further European cooperation in quality assurance in higher education³,
- having regard to the recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 April 2008 on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning⁴ (EQF-LLL),
- having regard to the Council conclusions of 12 May 2009 on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training ('ET 2020')⁵,
- having regard to the conclusions of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, meeting within the Council, of 26 November 2009 on developing the role of education in a fully-functioning knowledge triangle⁶,
- having regard to the Council conclusions of 11 May 2010 on the internationalisation of higher education⁷,
- having regard to the Council recommendation of 28 June 2011 on policies to reduce early school leaving⁸,
- having regard to the Council recommendation of 28 June 2011 entitled 'Youth on the Move – Promoting the learning mobility of young people'⁹,
- having regard to the Commission communication of 10 May 2006 entitled 'Delivering on the modernisation agenda for universities: education, research and innovation' (COM(2006)0208),
- having regard to the Commission communication of 3 March 2010 entitled 'EUROPE 2020 – A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth' (COM(2010)2020),
- having regard to the Commission communication of 26 August 2010 on a Digital Agenda for Europe (COM(2010)0245/2),

¹ OJ L 354, 28.12.2013, p. 132.

² OJ L 289, 3.11.2005, p. 23.

³ OJ L 64, 4.3.2006, p. 60.

⁴ OJ C 111, 6.5.2008, p. 1.

⁵ OJ C 119, 28.5.2009, p. 2.

⁶ OJ C 302, 12.12.2009, p. 3.

⁷ OJ C 135, 26.5.2010, p. 12.

⁸ OJ C 191, 1.7.2011, p. 1.

⁹ OJ C 199, 7.7.2011, p. 1.

- having regard to the Commission communication of 20 September 2011 entitled ‘Supporting growth and jobs – an agenda for the modernisation of Europe’s higher education systems’ (COM(2011)0567),
 - having regard to the report entitled ‘Higher Education in Europe 2009: Developments in the Bologna Process’ (Eurydice, European Commission, 2009)¹,
 - having regard to the report entitled ‘Focus on Higher Education in Europe 2010: The Impact of the Bologna Process’ (Eurydice, European Commission, 2010)²,
 - having regard to the report entitled ‘The European Higher Education Area in 2012: Bologna Process Implementation Report’ (Eurydice, European Commission, 2012)³,
 - having regard to the 2007 Eurobarometer survey on higher education reform among teaching professionals⁴,
 - having regard to the 2009 Eurobarometer survey on higher education reform among students⁵,
 - having regard to the Eurostat publication of 16 April 2009 entitled ‘The Bologna Process in Higher Education in Europe – Key indicators on the social dimension and mobility’⁶,
 - having regard to the Final report of the International Conference on Funding of Higher Education held in Yerevan, Armenia, 8-9 September 2011⁷,
 - having regard to its resolution of 23 September 2008 on the Bologna Process and student mobility⁸,
 - having regard to its resolution of 13 March 2012 on the contribution of the European institutions to the consolidation and progress of the Bologna Process⁹,
 - having regard to Rule 52 of its Rules of Procedure,
 - having regard to the report of the Committee on Culture and Education (A8-0000/2015),
- A. whereas the importance of the Bologna Process in the current economic situation should lie in pursuing the goals of growth based on knowledge and innovation, and whereas this should be reflected in the revision of the Europe 2020 strategy, and in the implementation of the Juncker Investment Plan for Europe;

¹ http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/documents/thematic_reports/099EN.pdf

² http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/documents/thematic_reports/122EN.pdf

³ [http://www.ehea.info/Uploads/\(1\)/Bologna%20Process%20Implementation%20Report.pdf](http://www.ehea.info/Uploads/(1)/Bologna%20Process%20Implementation%20Report.pdf)

⁴ http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/flash/fl198_en.pdf

⁵ http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/flash/fl_260_en.pdf

⁶ <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/3217494/5713011/KS-78-09-653-EN.PDF/3eb9f4ec-dc39-4e51-a18b-b61eb7c2518b?version=1.0>

⁷ <http://www.ehea.info/news-details.aspx?ArticleId=253>

⁸ OJ C 8 E, 14.1.2010, p. 18.

⁹ OJ C 251 E, 31.8.2013, p. 24.

- B. whereas valuable efforts of this intergovernmental initiative, carried out in close cooperation with academia, have been made to provide a common European response to serious problems in many countries;
- C. whereas the real purpose of the Bologna Process is to ensure compatibility and comparability in standards and quality of different higher educational systems while respecting the autonomy of universities;
- D. whereas an assessment is needed of the progress made over the past 15 years that takes into account both the success story, in terms of intra-regional cooperation, and the persistent problems encountered and the uneven achievements of the stated goals;
- E. whereas the Bologna Process, owing to miscommunication and a lack of understanding of its true vision, is sometimes perceived as a bureaucratic burden which hampers necessary national reforms;
- F. whereas it is important to acknowledge the pan-European character of the Bologna Process, as well as the involvement of all its actors, including students, teachers, researchers and staff;
- G. whereas continuous and increased financial support for education and training is crucial;

Role of the Bologna Process

1. Notes that education is one of the main pillars of our society when it comes to promoting growth and jobs, and that greater investment in education is crucial to tackling youth unemployment;
2. Stresses the important role of the Bologna Process in the creation of a Europe of Knowledge;
3. Notes that the Bologna reforms resulted in the launching of a European Higher Education Area (EHEA), and have allowed significant achievements in the past 15 years in making higher education structures more comparable, increasing mobility, adjusting educational systems to labour market needs, and improving overall employability and competitiveness as well as the attractiveness of higher education in Europe;
4. Notes the goals for the coming years, and the national priorities for actions to be taken by 2015, outlined by the 2012 EHEA Ministerial Conference Bucharest, as well as its recommendations for the 2020 EHEA mobility strategy;

Priorities and challenges

5. Calls on the EHEA countries to implement the commonly agreed reforms aimed at hastening the achievement of the Bologna Process goals, and to support those countries encountering difficulties in implementing these reforms; supports, in this regard, the creation of broad partnerships between countries;
6. Points out the need to make further efforts to develop the EHEA, and to build on the progress made in pursuing its objectives and in coordination with the European Area of

Education and Training, the European Area of Lifelong Learning (LLL) and the European Research Area;

7. Calls on the Member States, and on the EU as a whole, to foster public understanding of, and support for, the Bologna Process, including action at grass-roots level to achieve more effective and dynamic involvement in reaching the Process goals;
8. Notes the support of the Commission as member of the Bologna Process, and calls on it to further its role in reinvigorating the Process and in accelerating the efforts to achieve the stated goals;
9. Calls for a dialogue to be pursued between governments and higher education institutions (HEIs) in order to target and maximise the use of available funds and to seek new models for funding;
10. Encourages both top-down and bottom-up approaches, involving the whole academic community, and calls for the political engagement and cooperation of EHEA ministers in developing a common strategy for the achievement of the Bologna reforms;
11. Calls for the further development of study programmes with clearly defined objectives, providing the knowledge and mix of skills needed to prepare graduates for the requirements of the labour market and to build their capacity for LLL;
12. Calls for the correct implementation of the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) and the Diploma Supplement, key tools linked to student workload and learning outcomes, in order to facilitate mobility and help students compile their academic achievements;
13. Stresses the importance of guaranteeing the mutual recognition and compatibility of academic degrees for strengthening the system of quality assurance at European level, in line with the revised version of standards and guidelines for quality assurance;
14. Stresses the value of Qualifications Frameworks (QFs) to improve transparency, and calls on all the Bologna countries to make their national QFs compatible with those of the EHEA and with European QFs;
15. Notes that the mobility of students, teachers, researchers and staff is one of the main priorities of the Bologna Process, and highlights in this regard the crucial role of the Erasmus+ Programme;
16. Calls on the Member States, and on the EU as a whole, to strengthen mobility by removing administrative obstacles, providing adequate financial support mechanism and guaranteeing the transferability of grants and credits;
17. Emphasises the shift of the educational paradigm towards a more student-centred approach that includes the personal development of students;
18. Stresses the need to provide broad opportunities for LLL, and for complementary forms of learning such as non-formal and informal education;

19. Calls for efforts to strengthen the link between higher education and research, including through the promotion of research-based education, and highlights the Horizon 2020 Programme as a key funding mechanism for boosting research; calls for better synchronisation of actions supporting the Bologna Process such as the Horizon 2020 and Erasmus+ programmes;
20. Calls for more flexible learning paths that promote joint degree programmes and interdisciplinary studies, and that support innovation, creativity, vocational education and training (VET), dual education, and entrepreneurship in higher education, and calls for the potential offered by new technologies and digitalisation to be explored;
21. Calls on HEIs, public administrations, social partners and enterprises to lead an on-going dialogue facilitating and enhancing employability;
22. Stresses that the Member States, the Union and the HEIs are responsible for providing quality education that responds to social challenges;
23. Calls for efforts to improve social inclusion by providing fair and open access to quality education for all, by facilitating recognition of academic and professional qualifications, as well as study periods abroad and prior learning, and by providing relevant education to a diversified student population through LLL;
24. Calls for efforts to develop a strategy for the external dimension of the EHEA, through cooperation with other regions of the world, in order to increase its competitiveness in a global setting;
25. Stresses the importance of the next EHEA Ministerial Conference, to be held in Yerevan in May 2015, to review the progress made in achieving the priorities set out for 2012-2015, with a view of boosting and further consolidating the EHEA with the full support of the Union;

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26. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission and the governments and parliaments of the Member States.

EXPLANATORY STATEMENT

In June 1999, 29 European countries signed the Bologna Declaration, the purpose of which was to create a European Higher Education Area (EHEA) by 2010. The aim was and remains to provide students with a wider and more transparent choice of high-quality educational opportunities as well as create a simplified process of recognition both internally and externally throughout the participating national higher education systems. Meanwhile all 47 current members of the Bologna Process have introduced major reforms to their higher education systems.

Although changes effected by the Bologna Process are taking place primarily at the university level, the idea of the creation of the EHEA has to a certain extent a political character. This intergovernmental initiative inspired by the European Commission, and supported by academic circles attempted to find a common response to problems existing in participating countries. These responses include e.g. the creation of conditions for greater mobility, the adjustment of educational systems to labour market needs to improve overall employability, and the improved competitiveness and attractiveness of higher education in Europe to make a relevant contribution to the growth of civilisation. Currently, the Bologna Process countries are facing new challenges such as youth unemployment, economic constraints, and demographic changes.

In view of pursuing the EU goals of growth and a knowledge-based economy, the Bologna Process can play an important role in the revision of the Europe 2020 strategy, and in the implementation of the Juncker Investment Plan for Europe.

Over the past 15 years, the Bologna Process has accomplished a great deal in terms of the quality of education, mobility, and academic recognition. Overall, the Bologna Process has achieved a greater transparency and made information about European higher education easily accessible, using benchmarking national performance against common objectives.

While these accomplishments are commendable, some areas still need further development, and it is crucial to revitalise the Bologna Process to meet new challenges as well as to ensure the quality and transparency of the EHEA.

Process evaluation and new challenges

In order to properly identify the direction Bologna reforms must take, we should start with an objective assessment of the Process, and identify areas to be improved. Therefore we need to consider its broader context, including the establishment of the European Area of Education and Training, the European Area of Lifelong Learning (LLL) and the European Research Area, which, together with the EHEA, are crucial elements leading to the realisation of the Europe of Knowledge.

In this regard, it is also crucial to stress that the purpose of the Bologna Process is not to standardise higher educational systems, but to converge them by developing common rules of cooperation, while taking into account the diversity and autonomy of individual countries and universities.

First of all, the achievements of the Bologna Process objectives have been uneven in the participating countries. Thus, the implementation of the commonly agreed reforms in EHEA countries, and the strengthening of its ‘bottom-up’ approach is a priority. To achieve this goal, political commitment and cooperation of the EHEA is needed. Moreover, additional tools and new working methods could be developed, such as clusters which could help those countries facing challenges to achieve greater progress while encouraging others to attain even higher goals. Further tools include the exchange of best practices, a more extensive use of the Bologna expert network, and greater involvement of the academic community. Moreover, new technologies and Open Educational Resources (OERs), in particular Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), enable knowledge to travel easily across borders, which increases the potential for international cooperation and helps to promote European educational institutions as centres for innovation. These potentials should also be further explored.

Secondly, there is also a need for more student-centred learning, which was not always acknowledged as an important part of the European degree structure, and not adequately incorporated into university programmes. The educational paradigm should be shifted from what is being taught to what needs to be learnt by students. The social aspects of the Process are considered to be one of the most neglected features of the EHEA.

Furthermore, the original ideal of the Bologna Process was not always clearly presented, and was sometimes misunderstood or misinterpreted in the participating countries. In some cases the Process was used to assist national reforms or was viewed as a government obligation to be fulfilled. Therefore, clear communication about the Process is needed to increase public awareness and support for the Bologna reforms in order to achieve more effective and dynamic involvement in attaining the Process goals.

In addition, due to the fact that European higher education institutions (HEIs) receive the majority of their funding from public sources, recent severe budget cuts have had repercussions on higher education. Continuous investment and more effective use of available funds are thus necessary, as well as the development of new models of funding are recommended.

Bologna structure and tools

Overall, a majority of students in EHEA countries are enrolled in programmes following the Bologna three-cycle structure. It is worth underlining that establishing a three-cycle degree structure was not an end in itself but, together with other important changes in the study programme, has been a means to better prepare graduates for the needs of the labour market, and social challenges.

Additionally, to reach the Bologna goals, the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) must be properly implemented. While some progress in implementing ECTS has been achieved in the accumulation and transfer of credits in all EHEA countries, a greater link between credits/programme components and learning outcomes is still needed.

Regarding the Diploma Supplement (DS), it should be noted that although some progress has been made, approximately 70 % of the EHEA countries have not fulfilled all requirements, including the automatic and free issue of the DS to all graduates in a widely spoken European language.

The development and implementation of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) also continues to pose challenges including the fact that majority of countries still need to include non-formal qualifications in the NQF. The recognition of short cycle qualifications in the QF-EHEA for countries which include them in the NQF, without such an obligation for other countries, should be addressed to increase their comprehensibility and international comparability.

No doubt, the recognition of foreign qualifications, study periods abroad, and prior learning (including non-formal and informal) need to be strengthened to more directly benefit students. Considering that in more than two thirds of the EHEA countries HEIs make the final decision on the recognition of foreign qualifications, and that recognition of credits gained abroad is in the hands of HEIs, it is important for these institutions to improve their performance of this role. Crucial to the EHEA is the development of policies and practices which further foster the recognition of qualifications.

The development of the EHEA also requires the further development and integration of flexible learning paths in order to promote mobility and LLL.

Joint programmes are another important aspect of the EHEA and a key part of the internationalisation of higher education; their accreditation must be facilitated.

Mobility and quality of higher education

Mobility concerns not only structure, but also proper organisation and quality assurance. In order to foster mobility, the Bologna tools should be correctly implemented. In addition, recognition procedures should be enhanced, quality of student services in host universities improved, financial support mechanism established, transfer of grants and credits guaranteed, learning foreign languages promoted, and participation in European programmes such as Erasmus+ encouraged. Furthermore, grants pertaining to Erasmus+ should be exempt from taxation and social levies.

It is also crucial to build a more supportive environment for staff and teachers mobility which can contribute to the development of research, teaching and learning practices, as well as the modernisation of management and administration.

A high priority for many countries is the improvement of the quality of higher education as well as the establishment of quality assurance (QA) systems. The European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (ESG), a key goal of EHEA, have been revised and are subject to approval by the Ministerial Conference in May 2015, Yerevan. The next step will be their proper implementation and the strengthening of the cooperation in QA across the EHEA.

Social dimension

Despite the commitment to set measurable goals for expanding overall participation in higher education and increasing the access of underrepresented groups, less than 20 % of educational systems have defined quantitative objectives with regards to underrepresented groups. Improving social inclusion and enhancing equal opportunities for access, as well as international mobility for under-represented and disadvantaged groups remains a challenge

for the Bologna Process. While working on raising the number of students in higher education, improving completion rates must be addressed.

Employability is another important aspect of the social dimension and also a great concern. Within the Bologna Process, employability is defined as ‘the ability to gain initial meaningful employment, or to become self-employed, to maintain employment, and to be able to move around within the labour market’¹. In this context, the role of higher education is to equip students with the knowledge, skills, and competences that they need in the workplace, and provide them with the possibility to develop these skills throughout their professional careers.

Efforts should be focused on enhancing employability through a continuous dialogue with employers, implementation of competence-based programs, and monitoring of career development of graduates.

External dimension

The external dimension of EHEA will be of ever-increasing importance in the future. The focus should be on the promotion of EHEA in order to increase its world-wide attractiveness and competitiveness, the support of networking and cooperation among HEIs (in particular in the neighbouring countries of EHEA), the further recognition of qualifications as well as the development of joint and collaborative programs at all levels.

Priorities for the near future

A coherent, transparent, and high-quality higher education sector is essential for cultural, economic, and social development. The Bologna objectives provide the essential means for European higher education to face current challenges. However, there is still much to be accomplished in fulfilling the goals of the Bologna Process. While it is clear that many achievements and significant structural convergence have been realised, new challenges have arisen. In order to face them and to reinvigorate the Process, it is crucial to focus on the correct implementation of the current structure and tools, correct their shortcomings, and shift the educational approach to a more student-, outcome-oriented one. It is also important to strengthen the links between higher education and research via the facilitation of dialogue between science and society and the promotion of the beneficial uses of technological innovations in teaching and learning. In addition, there is a need to focus on better synchronisation of actions supporting the Bologna Process such as the Horizon 2020 and Erasmus+ programmes.

¹ Working group on employability, Bologna Conference, Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve 28-29 April 2009.