

The Bologna Process in Germany and in Europe: Current State and Future Prospects

Stefan Hormuth

The current university reforms in Europe, known mainly as the Bologna Process, are a special task that brings us together in discussing developments at our universities, in our countries, and exchanging our experiences.

Russian institutions of higher education are well aware of the goals of the process: establishing compatible cycles of higher education that allow for mobility of students, faculty and staff in Europe, and establishing appropriate systems of quality assurance. These goals have commonly been translated

- into the establishment of a two cycle degree structure, or three cycles, if you include, as is now done, the doctoral cycle,
- into the introduction of the European Credit Transfer System ECTS and the diploma supplement, so that achievements at any European institution of higher education can be measured, transferred and described,
- the establishment of national systems of accreditation and systems of quality assurance, as well as agreement on common standards and criteria.

After the initial signing of the Bologna declaration in 1999, three follow up conferences have taken place, in Prague, Berlin, and in Bergen. Each of these conferences has detailed the goals of the process, and has also included new members. The Bologna Process with its much wider membership is our chance to create a European Higher Education Area that goes far beyond the borders of the EU and it is the first attempt ever to integrate Russian higher education and that of the rest of Europe.

However, Bologna is not only about Europe. If the goals of the Bologna process are achieved, it should have great implications for the international stature of European higher education. First, it is a matter of competition and comparability. By having a clear and recognizable structure across Europe, and having established standards and systems of quality assurance and accountability, we can also measure ourselves against other systems of higher education world wide, and we will be measured by others. Secondly, it is a matter of opening the European Higher Education Area to the world. For students and scholars world wide, Europe more than now has to become a destiny for study, research and scholarship. In very practical terms, the demand and market for higher education will increase very much within the next decade. Europe has to be a competitive participant in this market, and has to have attractive offers for students from all over the world. Increased international attractivity of European higher education has to be a major goal of the process.

However, it is not only a city in Italy, and one of the oldest universities in Europe,

that stands for European reforms and international competitiveness, but a city in Portugal is just as important for the economic and scientific progress in the European Union, namely Lisbon. In the year 2000, leaders of the countries of the European Union decided there that Europe should become the most competitive and dynamic economic region of the world, based on knowledge and research. To achieve this, by 2010 a goal of 3% of the gross domestic product was set to be spent on research and development in each of the countries of the European Union.

If we look at Germany, the German economy would have to invest an additional 7.000 Mill., the federal and state governments and additional 3.000 Mill. in research and development by 2010 – almost unthinkable considering that little has been done in the past five years toward this goal. And in other countries the picture looks alike. But it is not only money that is needed. Money is only a mean for actual research, and researchers are needed to conduct it. To achieve the goals of Lisbon, 500 – 700.000 additional researchers would need to be educated by 2010, in Germany alone about 80.000. Researchers are trained and educated – at universities. Bologna and Lisbon are closely intertwined.

At this time, however, it is unlikely that the goals of Lisbon will be met, neither by 2010 nor ever. In a progress report, Wilm Kok from the Netherlands had to come to this conclusion. If we look at the Bologna process in comparison, we see that European institutions of higher education are much closer to a realistic conclusion of the Bologna process by 2010. I see the main reason in that the Bologna process is a process that lives through the autonomy of the institutions involved. Of course, it needs support from the governments, both legal and financial, but it is a process that is only as successful as the individual reform processes at all universities will be.

At the meeting of the European University Association in Glasgow in April 2005, the most current report on the progress of the implementation of the Bologna reforms at European universities was presented: Trends IV, the fourth of such progress reports. Its findings are interesting and encouraging. Based on visits to 62 European universities actively participating in this reform process, it shows that the reform process all over Europe has taken up speed and changed its quality. For most, it is not a question anymore of whether but of how. In 2003, at the follow up conference in Berlin, the goal for 2005 was a definite sign of the beginning implementation in all countries. It seems to me this goal has been achieved.

In sharp contrast to findings from the progress report only two years before, general acceptance of the process is now widespread in universities. The process of translating the goals of Bologna into internal reform processes has actually begun. Many universities have, through this internalization, learned that it is a reform process that goes far beyond the establishment of new degree structures, ECTS, and diploma supplement. Institutional reforms are „recognized as an

opportunity to address problems which have long been known to exist". The authors of the report, Sybille Reichert and Christian Tauch, note that institutional autonomy and strong and supportive leadership within the university are critically linked to the smoothness and success of the reform processes, but at the same time provide enough space for internal deliberation.

Many countries for which the three cycle structure is new have made progress in its implementation. However, if we look at Germany where the most recent report was published in April 2005, we see that a large number of Bachelor and Master curricula have been established, but the actual number of students enrolled is still relatively small. However, an overwhelming number of institutions of higher education Germany have committed themselves to have the structures in place by 2007. As a matter of fact, the Senate of the University of Giessen has decided a few months ago to use the occasion of the 400 year anniversary of the onset of university teaching in Giessen in the autumn of 1607 to return to the traditional degrees of Baccalaureus and Magister by the autumn of 2007.

The Trends IV report points out that reforms of curricula cannot only consist of structural change, but of a clear re-development and definition of the goals of the respective cycles. The first cycle, usually the bachelor, cannot only compress the content of earlier, longer cycles, and it has to address the employability of first cycle graduates. The definition of employability must involve several of the stakeholders. Employability and its translation into curricula has to redefine academic content, but this in close connection with the needs of the labor market, the definition of professional bodies, and the prerequisites and needs of students in mind. Doing this will show that development of Bologna-compatible curricula involve cultural and social transformations that ultimately will determine the acceptance of the Bologna process in society, by students, by the public, and by employers.

The Bologna process requires a shift in perspective on the teaching process. Teaching must not longer be a teacher-centered activity, but implies a pedagogical shift to student centered learning. The approach to the ECTS is a result of this shift: no longer is input and teacher centered learning the quantity by which teaching and learning are measured. Rather, it is the workload a student has to fulfill including preparation, work at home and everything that goes into the successful mastering of content, and it is the output, that is measured. And finally, for me the most important aspect of „Bologna-defined learning“, is that we can be held accountable for the quality of teaching. If it is output that counts rather than input, the responsibility for the success of teaching and ultimately of higher education rests not only with the student but with all of us that are part of academic teaching and education.

Quality assessment and quality improvement are at the heart of the Bologna process. This requires close cooperation between institutions and quality assurance bodies, but student participation has to be an integral part. A process that is

based on the quality of output can only be assessed and constantly improved through the participation of those who are at the core of the process, which in turn, so the authors of Trend IV, requires institutional and functional autonomy. While Bologna is a process that started top down, that is, from the European ministers of higher education, its implementation and success has to follow a bottom up process.

The governments of the European Union may fail to achieve the goals of Lisbon. However, universities cannot afford not to provide and consistently strengthen the link between education and research. Currently, it is reported by many institutions as well as individuals involved in the implementation of the Bologna process that research activities suffer from the heavy workload required to work on the reforms needed. This we must counteract.

Universities are and have to be in the future the places of education where teaching and research form a unity. Universities are and have to be in the future the places where researchers are trained, educated, and socialized. Universities are and have to be in the future places where the forefront of research and development takes place. Universities have to be attractive places where the best young people aspire to learn and to later work. For this, we all must work, but we have to gain the support of our institutional members, of our governments and of society. Our own work and its outcome will determine whether we rightfully gain this support.

The Bologna Process provides a unique opportunity for higher education institutions from Russia and from Western and Central Europe to learn from each other and to move ahead jointly, united by common objectives and ambitions.