

BFUG4 10  
15 February 2005

## POSSIBLE BOLOGNA PARTNERSHIP WITH OTHER REGIONS

### 1. BACKGROUND

Other regions in the world show a growing interest in the Bologna Process. At the Berlin Conference, observers from South America participated. Since Berlin, BFUG representatives have been in contact with organisations and ministry representatives in other countries and regions, including Central Asia, North America, South America, Australia. The Republic of Kazakhstan has applied for membership in the Bologna Process, cf. item 9 on the agenda.

Information regarding the Bologna Process is spreading through a number of channels: The EU Commission and the Council of Europe have contacts to countries surrounding the "Bologna Area", the EUA has Transatlantic organisational links, CEPES is an element in a world-wide organisation. There are bilateral and multilateral links between countries and between universities.

In the Berlin Communiqué, Ministers encouraged the co-operation with regions in other parts of the world by opening Bologna seminars and conferences to representatives of these regions. Thus, all organisers of Bologna Follow-up Seminars and related activities should feel free to invite participants from other regions of the world, and to a certain extent this has already been done when interest from non-member countries or organisations has been indicated.

The ACA Conference 17-19 October 2004 "*Opening up to the Wider World: The External dimension of the Bologna Process*" recommended that Ministers should encourage the provision of better and more comprehensive information about the Bologna Process to the relevant academic stakeholders outside Europe.

### 2. A FIRST DISCUSSION IN THE BOARD

In the Board meeting on 9 December 2004, the Secretariat was asked to consider how states outside the European region could form links with the Bologna Process. The EU Commission has indicated that this might include elements such as mobility from third countries, the perception of the Process in other continents, Bologna type reforms in neighbouring regions (Mediterranean, former Soviet Union) and Bologna type activities in other continents (cf. Tuning Latin America). The Secretariat has pointed out that as of today, there are no means for such follow-up on the external dimension. This will need to be changed if the contact with other regions is to be anything more than arbitrary.

In its discussion document to the Board meeting on 25 January 2005, the Secretariat pointed out that it is reasonable to assume that the interest from other regions will increase as the

EHEA is getting closer to becoming a reality. It is also in the interest of the Process that cooperation with other regions is ensured, in line with the Berlin Communiqué.

One way in which states and regions outside Europe could be formally linked to the Process could be to establish partnerships with representative regional organisations. There is presently no case where such a partnership has been called for, but it may be useful to have a readiness if the BFUG is addressed with an initiative from another region. Representatives from partner regions could be invited as observers to the Ministerial Conferences and to Bologna Follow-up Seminars. The Secretariat underlining the need to define a strategy for the relationship between the Bologna Process and other regions, not individual countries (which may have relations to individual “Bologna” countries).

The European Commission noted that it has contacts with all the countries bordering the Bologna area, which all want to implement Bologna-inspired reforms. The Commission supports them through the Tempus programme. Both the Commission and the Council of Europe pointed to existing networks that might serve as a platform for contact. EURASHE noted that it had been asked to organise a meeting between European and Central Asian states, possibly in 2006.

Several possibilities were discussed in the Board meeting. One would be to use the UNESCO framework and have the Bologna Board meet with representatives from the regions. Another would be to apply the principle of subsidiarity; for instance, some of the new member countries might play a role. University associations also have formal agreements and networks with regional partners. It was emphasised that a response should be given to the countries which had approached the Bologna Process. It was also pointed out that higher education and research offer a means of opening channels of contact that might otherwise not be available.

In conclusion it was agreed that as an element in a future strategy for relations with countries outside the European region, the Board may advise the BFUG to consider the possibility of establishing partnerships with relevant organisations in other regions.

### **3. ELEMENTS OF A STRATEGY FOR INTERACTION WITH OTHER REGIONS**

In the Draft Bergen Communiqué dated 08.02.05 a paragraph relating to the external dimension of the Bologna Process has been included (para 35):

“We want the European Higher Education Area to be a partner to higher education systems in other regions of the world, stimulating student and staff exchange and cooperation between higher education institutions. We underline the importance of mutual understanding and respect. We declare our willingness to contribute to the perception of the Bologna Process in other continents and to share our experiences with reform processes in neighbouring regions.”

First of all, this is a declaration of openness, following up the Berlin Communiqué. All organisers of Bologna Follow-up Seminars and related activities should feel free to invite participants from other countries and regions of the world. Organisers of Ministerial Conferences should invite relevant observers from other regions of the world to these Conferences. The BFUG should be prepared to establish partnerships with relevant organisations in other regions. This does not imply that the BFUG actively should seek

partners in all parts of the world, but it should be open for cooperation when approached from outside. Similar links may later be formed at Ministerial level.

To contribute to the perception of the Bologna Process in other continents, a broadly accepted general description of the Bologna Process will be needed. One first step may be to ask the Secretariat to prepare a concise description of the Bologna Process based on the outcome of the Bergen Ministerial Conference, to be placed on the web site for the Bologna Process. (This would also be in line with the recommendation from the ACA Conference.)

The Draft Communiqué indicate a willingness “to share our experiences with reform processes in neighbouring regions”. This would imply a certain responsibility for the Secretariat and for BFUG members to participate in seminars and missions to neighbouring countries, for instance organised by the Council of Europe, the EU Commission or UNESCO. It should not be seen as a responsibility for the Bologna Process to launch separate projects, as there is no financial or organisational basis for such projects.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

The Draft Bergen Communiqué should be adjusted in its statement on the external dimension in accordance to the outcome of the deliberations of the BFUG.