

BFUG8 13c



CDESR (2006) 2
Orig. Eng.
Strasbourg, March 13, 2006

CONTRIBUTION OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE TO THE BOLOGNA PROCESS IN 2005 - 2006

Directorate General IV: Education, Culture and Heritage, Youth and Sport
(Directorate of School, Out-of-School and Higher Education/Higher Education and Research
Division)

Introduction

The year 2005 marked the half-way point in the process of establishing a European Higher Education Area (EHEA) by 2010. The Council of Europe continued to contribute expertise and policy advice to the Bologna Process, and also participated in the Conference of European Education Ministers in Bergen on May 19 - 20. The European Higher Education Area was also referred to in key Council of Europe events such as the Third Summit of Heads of State and Government in Warsaw, the 50th anniversary of the European Cultural Convention and the European Year of Citizenship through Education.

The Higher Education and Research Division specifically continued its work with the steering bodies of the Bologna Process and more generally in the areas of the recognition of qualifications, support and advice to new member countries, and specific dimensions of the Process including governance, public responsibility, democratic citizenship and culture and the social dimension of higher education.

The Bologna Process in the Council of Europe's programme

The Council of Europe shall build on its work on language learning and recognition of diplomas and qualifications. It shall continue to play an important role in the Bologna process aimed at creation of European Higher Education Area by 2010.

- Action Plan, Third Summit of Heads of State and Government (Warsaw, May 2005)

Governing Bodies

In May 2005, the Ministers responsible for higher education in the participating countries of the Bologna Process met in Bergen where they confirmed in the conference Communiqué their dedication to the EHEA. In looking forward to the next Ministerial conference in 2007, and beyond 2010, there was commitment to emphasize practical implementation, begin working on the elaboration of national qualifications frameworks, a renewed stress on the importance of the social dimension of higher education and quality assurance, a desire to improve the “external dimension” by increasing contact with other parts of the world, and to enlarge the circle of consultative members.

The Council of Europe continues to contribute to policy development within the Bologna Process as a consultative member. The Council of Europe contributed to the Bergen Ministerial Conference, and is an active participant in the Bologna Follow-up Group (BFUG) and Board. The work of the Council is guided by the Steering Committee for Higher Education and Research (CDESR), which has a unique double representation of policy makers from both higher education institutions and governments. The Committee meets once a year, while the Bureau oversees its work between plenary sessions.

Recognition and Quality Assurance

We call on all participating countries to address recognition problems identified by the ENIC/NARIC networks. We will draw up national action plans to improve the quality of the process associated with the recognition of foreign qualifications. These plans will form part of each country's national report for the next Ministerial Conference.

- Bergen Communiqué, Conference of European Ministers Responsible for Higher Education (Bergen, May 2005)

With increased attention being paid to the implementation of the principles of the Council of Europe/UNESCO Convention and its subsidiary texts, one of the next big challenges will be the development of national action plans on recognition in time for the Ministerial meeting in London 2007. Through the ENIC and NARIC Advisory Networks, the Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee and other related bodies, the Council of Europe will continue to support the fostering of improvements to the quality of the process associated with the recognition of foreign qualifications. In early 2006, the ENIC Bureau, the NARIC Advisory Board and the Bureau of the Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee elaborated draft guidelines for national action plans and submitted them to the BFUG for consideration.

The Council of Europe is also engaged in quality assurance through the ENIC Network. The recognition of qualifications, as defined by the Council of Europe/UNESCO Lisbon Recognition Convention (1997), is a significant factor in the EHEA and promotes the development of recognition practices, disseminates examples of good practices, addresses new recognition issues, such as trans-national education, and promotes mobility and international cooperation. Transparent quality assurance systems and provisions are fundamental to the recognition of qualifications internationally as well as nationally. Working in close cooperation with the NARIC Network of the European Union, in addition to aiding with the implementation of the Convention, the ENIC Network works through national authorities to provide information on:

- the recognition of foreign diplomas, degrees and other qualifications;
- education systems at home and abroad;
- opportunities for studying abroad, including information pertaining to mobility and equivalence.

In September 2006, the Council of Europe will organize a conference on quality assurance, see below.

New Members of the Bologna Process

From its original membership of 29 countries, the accession of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine, in addition to those who joined in 2001 and 2003, means that the Bologna Process now encompasses 45 countries united around the European Cultural Convention, the principles and objectives of the Bologna Declaration, and a pan-European vision of the EHEA.

Officially welcomed into the Process at the Bologna Summit in Bergen, these five countries join the long list of those who have benefited from the guidance of the Council of Europe in the creation of new legislation, the development of higher education policy, and the sharing of examples of good practice. Throughout the year, experts and members of the Secretariat offered their guidance and direction through visits, consultations, conferences and played an advisory role in the sphere of national legislation.

Highlights in 2005 included:

- a seminar on Curriculum Reform in Albanian Higher Education (Tirana, 16-17 March)
- a conference on European Higher Education Policies and Reform and a seminar on the Recognition of Qualifications (Baku, 20 – 22 April)
- a conference on European Higher Education Policies and Reform and a seminar on the Recognition of Qualifications (Yerevan, 2 – 4 November)
- a conference on the implementation of the Bologna Process in Georgia (Tbilisi, 8-9 November)
- an advisory mission on higher education reform and the Bologna Process in “the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia” (Skopje, 9-10 November)
- an advisory mission, Ministry of Education of Albania (Tirana, 6-7 December)
- a conference on “The Dynamics of the Bologna Process in the Republic of Moldova” (Chişinău, 8 – 9 December)

In 2006, activities have thus far included:

- an advisory mission on the reform of higher education legislation in “the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia” (Ohrid, 13 – 14 January)
- an advisory mission on the reform of specific aspects of higher education legislation in Albania (Tirana, 16 – 17 January)
- co organization, with the Austrian Presidency of the Bologna Process, a meeting of the countries that acceded to the Bologna Process in 2005 as well as Albania on the activities of the Process in the period 2005 – 2007 and the functioning of the BFUG and the working groups;
- the launching conference for work on a new Master Plan for higher education in Albania (Tirana, 22 – 23 March)

Council of Europe Higher Education Forum

September 2005 marked the first annual Council of Europe Higher Education Forum: *Higher Education Governance between Democratic Culture, Academic Aspirations and Market Forces* (Strasbourg, 23 – 24 September) which presented the results of two years of work on the question of “higher education governance.” As a contribution to the Bologna Process as well as to the European Year of Citizenship through Education, questions of how to define and understand governance, how to promote good governance policy, and recommendations for good

governance were all prominent topics of discussion. The results of this Forum will be forthcoming in a publication in spring 2006 (Jürgen Kohler and Josef Huber, eds.).

Two upcoming fora will also provide an opportunity for aspects of the social dimension of Bologna to be explored. On 22 – 23 June 2006 a Forum on Democratic Culture in Higher Education will be held at Council of Europe headquarters in Strasbourg. In cooperation with American partners as well as the EUA, this event will give institutions and organizations the opportunity to commit their support for promoting democratic culture and citizenship through higher education.

On 19 - 20 September, the Third Council of Europe Forum on Higher Education will take place in Strasbourg and will focus on “Legitimacy of Quality Assurance in Higher Education: The Role of Public Authorities and Institutions”. The EUA and ENQA contribute to the preparation of this Forum. Immediately following this event will be the 2006 Plenary session of the CDES (21 – 22 September).

Publications

The *Council of Europe Higher Education Series*, launched in 2004 to explore higher education issues of concern to policy makers in Ministries, higher education institutions, non-governmental organizations, and student representatives, published its 2nd and 3rd volumes.

In April 2005, *The Public Responsibility for Higher Education and Research* (Luc Weber and Sjur Bergan, eds.) was published to highlight the results of a Council of Europe conference that explored the meaning of public responsibility in complex societies in the 21st century. This work examines both overall policies on higher education and specific aspects such as higher education for a democratic culture, access to research results, financing, equal opportunities, the approach to regulation, and new trends in higher education.

The publication in November 2005 of *Standards for Recognition: the Lisbon Recognition Convention and its Subsidiary Texts* (Andrejs Rauhvargars and Sjur Bergan, eds.) brought together for the first time in one volume the Council of Europe/UNESCO legal standards for the recognition of qualifications with all subsidiary texts and an introductory article which provides background, context and an accessible explanation of their significance.

Forthcoming in spring 2006 is the publication *Recognition in the Bologna Process: Policy Development and the Road to Good Practice* (Andrejs Rauhvargars and Sjur Bergan, eds.) which presents the proceedings, outcomes and recommendations from the conference on improving the recognition system of degrees and study credit points in the European Higher Education Area held in Riga, December 2004.

Other Council of Europe Initiatives

In addition to the statement of the Third Summit Action Plan for the Bologna Process, 2005 also saw the inclusion of higher education in two other important Council of Europe initiatives. To mark the 50th anniversary of the European Cultural Convention, the Ministers responsible for Cultural Affairs met in October and concluded their meeting with the signing of the Faro Declaration on the Council of Europe's Strategy for Developing Intercultural Dialogue. In this document the vision of intercultural dialogue both within Europe and with the rest of the world is developed with particular mention of the role that the Bologna Process can play.

2005 was also the European Year of Citizenship through Education. In its message to the Bergen meeting of the Ministers of the EHEA, the Council of Europe stressed that in keeping with its commitment to democracy, human rights and the rule of law, contributions to the Bologna Process "emphasiz[ed] higher education governance built on the participation of all groups, the development and maintenance of the basic values of Europe's university heritage and the recognition that higher education and research are vital to the sustainable development of European societies." This was followed-up at the Plenary session of the CDESR in September where the key role higher education plays in the development of modern societies based on democracy, human rights, and the rule of law, and how the issue of good governance is crucial for the promotion of democratic culture both within the higher education community and society at large, was confirmed.

As part of the Russian Chairmanship of the Council of Europe, on 2 – 3 November, the Council of Europe and the Russian University of People's Friendship will organize a conference on the role of students in making the European Higher Education Area a reality.