Achim Hopbach, ENQA

I) The main challenges the EHEA is facing taking into account the major political, economical, social and technological developments

1) One challenge has nothing to do wth current politcal, social, economical or financial developments but rather wth the election-term related logic of politics: The Bologna Process loses momentum partly because it is becoming more difficult to attract political decion makers‘ interest. The reason ist the lack of new and appealing goals. Most term goals are not appealing sand political success is to be demonstrated in short term perspective.

This challenge creates diectly a second challenge: The creation/invention of new goals for the Bologna Process which, since the area of the original goals (study structure, understandable degrees, transparency, recognition and mobility) is exploited, go beyond this area and are located in political fields that are not controlled solely by higher education ministers. This paves the way for failure in reaching these goals.

A consequence might be insufficient efforts in sustainable development of the EHEA and its existing tools and structures.

2) In current times of economical and financal crisis HE is likely to move out of focus of the political agenda. Competition with other areas of public spending (social welfare, unemployment insurence, police, schooling) gets tougher. Also because contribution of HE to solving the major problems of civilisation s not visible or not acknowledged, and because the lobby power of HE is traditionally very weak. Hence, financial constraints are likely to become worse. Resulting challenges for EHEA: Reaching recently set goals in the area of social dimension (i.e. social inclusiveness of HE, equal access) become very difficult to reach.

-Partly because reaching a non-segregative but social inclusive HE system needs long term and comprehensive political programmes in the field of primary and secondary education and general social welfare.

-Partly because HE related policies are even more expensive than HE reforms in the narrow sense.

3) One effect of the financial crisis and budget constraints is the ‚accountability drift‘ in HE in conjunction with a modified definition of quality of HE which applies a strong utilitarian approach and uses rankings as one of the major tools.

4) A commodification of HE is untoubtedly visible. This is partly related to the financal issue. The less HE is considered as public good, the more dfficult it wll be to drive change in HE based on common values and common political aims.

5) Two biggest challenges for the EHEA results from most of the other challenges:

Declining consensus in particular in those areas which go beyond the original goals (esp. Funding issues, social dimension). This results in political minimun consensus or agreements that are too general to really give momentum to implement new policies. The broader the aims get the more difficult it will be to demonstrate success.

A widening gap seems to develop concerning the ability (due to financial reasons)/the political will of implementing the political agreements. At least the problem of different implementation speed might become a serious issue in the future. In a longer terms perspective this might have an impact on the cohesion within EHEA.

6) A challenge resulting from the technological development is the growing market of online education which is sometimes only insufficiently regulated at national level.

II) The extent to which the  EHEA Structural Reforms are suitable to address those challenges and the way those reforms can be reinforced as well as

A provocative question is appropriate: Can the structural reforms address these challenges at all? Should we expect them to address these challenges? What expectations are appropriate? There is a tendency to take the Bologna tools as means to solve many if not all problems in HE. A realistic view on the potential of these tools is necessary.

However, the structural reforms can make a significant contribution to addressing the challenges:

-QFs (based on the learning outcomes approach), together with transparency tools esp. like DS and together with quality assurance provide prospective students, employers and broader public with much better information about content, profile and quality of programmes and institutions, knowledge, skills and competencies of graduates. By this they support students and employers in decision making in enrolement and recruitment processes. As a consequence better information about the quality of European HE and abilities of European graduates is available.

-The structural reforms, in particular the ‚Bologna Triangle‘ QF-QA-Recognition foster, if implemented appropriately, mobility as one oft he primary goals oft he Bologna Process.

-QF and QA support recognition which ist he precondition for developing a   
‚European Brand‘ in HE.

III) The main political goals of the Bologna Process of yesterday, today and tomorrow.

Yesterday:

* transparent, understandable degrees in a two(three) tear structure
* mobility
* recognition

Today:

In addition:

* Social inclusiveness
* Student centred learning
* HE as a (to what extent?) public good based on public funding

Future:

* Student centred learning
* Student centred learning
* Student centred learning
* transparent, understandable degrees in a two(three) cycle structure incl. short cycles
* Internationalisation of HE
* Recognition of qualifications and credentials
* Better comunication with VET sector