

# Committee on Prague 2001 Newsletter #1

Why is there a Bologna Declaration? Why is there a Bologna Process? What does the Bologna Declaration actually say and what doesn't it say? How is the Process evolving? What is the calendar of the Process? How are countries already working on implementing some parts of the Bologna Declaration?

The Committee on Prague 2001 invites you to read CoP2001 NEWSLETTER #1 :  
<http://www.esib.org/prague/newsletter>

**About the CoP2001 newsletter:** The Committee on Prague 2001 (CoP2001) was established by ESIB- the National Unions of Students in Europe to get an overview on what was happening in Europe, to become a part of the Bologna Process, to try and influence the different actors and, last but not least, to inform the members of ESIB of the ongoing Process. CoP2001 will therefore distribute a six-weekly newsletter to inform the European National Unions of Students about the Process in Europe and about the activities of the Committee on Prague 2001.

# COMMITTEE ON PRAGUE 2001

## Introduction to the Bologna Process

*Document prepared by the Committee on Prague 2001,  
Board Meeting 38, Vilnius, Lithuania*

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### ANNEX: THE BOLOGNA DECLARATION

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In Bologna the countries that signed the Bologna Declaration announced there would be a new meeting in Prague 2001. This new meeting would be at least two years after the Bologna meeting. In September 1999 an informal meeting of ministers decided that 29 countries would form a working group that would do the follow-up of the Bologna declaration. This group is now called the 'consultative group'.

The first 'consultative group' meeting was in November 1999 in Helsinki. Here the practical side of the follow-up was decided upon. Because the group was too large a smaller group was formed. This group consists of Finland, Portugal, France and Sweden; extended with the Czech Republic, the European Commission, the Confederation of EU Rectors' Conferences and the Association of European Universities (CRE). The chair will change in accordance with the chairing of the European Union. Finland will do secretariat.

These groups are also stimulating the countries that signed to have (a series of) conferences on the topic while some countries are actually already implementing parts of the Bologna Declaration.

The meetings of the two groups, the series of conferences and the implementation of certain measures in accordance with the Bologna Declaration are called the Bologna Process.

This document has been prepared by CoP2001 to inform the members of ESIB about the Bologna Process. First we will deal with the rationale behind the process. Not just the process in itself but the 'why of the process'. Second the Declaration in itself will be explained. What is the goal of the Declaration and what are the means put forward? Important is also to remark what is not included in the Declaration but is actually generally seen as being an integrated part of it. The third topic is the Bologna Process. The total approach will be laid out and the now already known calendar of the Process will be given.

## **2. WHY A BOLOGNA PROCESS?**

### **2.1. INTRODUCTION**

There are several indications that the ministries and the higher education institutions in Europe felt they had to work on establishing a European area of Higher Education. Different actors stress of course different causes. When we ask the question to the why of the process we will have to find these different causes. Apparently a number of major changes in the global environment of Higher Education in Europe are cited as the real cause of the Bologna Process. Here we will try to list those. These are not the causes as the Committee on Prague 2001 views them but causes gathered from secondary sources.

### **2.2. THE EMERGENCE OF A REAL EUROPEAN LABOUR MARKET**

The first cause seems to be clear. The European labour market has been promoted very actively over the last decades. This development is shaping the universities' offering and functioning. Unemployment of graduates combined with a shortage of highly educated young people is putting the European governments under pressure to act.

### **2.3. THE END OF THE STRONG NUMERICAL EXPANSION AT UNIVERSITIES**

This development has already happened or is happening in the European countries. This brings along a lot of consequences. Universities will have to focus on things they are not at all accustomed to. The European universities will for instance have to compete for students, especially since public funding in most countries is in one way or another dependent on student enrolment.

### **2.4. THE CONSIDERABLE GROWTH OF NEW PROVIDERS**

Many of these new providers are coming from abroad. They add to the choice available to students. The students can choose from a larger spectrum of different types of education from inland and abroad. This of course raises fundamental questions: why would students choose a foreign provider, who may be rather expensive, rather than staying within their own national system? As long as there was no choice, there was no question. So there was no need to question the national system or the quality of the education it provided.

### **2.5. THE EMERGENCE OF MORE ACCOUNTABILITY OF UNIVERSITIES FOR THE USE OF PUBLIC FUNDS**

The level of accountability is likely to increase in the future. The emergence of more market-driven, market-orientated thinking already caused several governments to question the amount of public funding the higher education institutions are getting. This brings along the danger of seeing higher education institutions as producers and the students as clients who have to pay the whole price for the product they require.

## **2.6. LACK OF COMPETITIVENESS OF THE EUROPEAN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS**

Last but not least is the so-called lack of competitiveness of European Higher European institutions. Europe notices that foreign/overseas universities increasingly recruit paying students in Europe. Apparently the fact that in the early 1990s for the first time ever more European students were studying in the USA than there were Americans studying in Europe caused great concern in Europe. At the same time the American universities even started to increase their marketing efforts in Europe in response to the Asian and Latin American crises. The Bologna Declaration explicitly mentions the lack of competitiveness of European Higher Education institutions. The signatory countries actually explicitly express their goal to “ensure that the European higher education system acquires a world-wide degree of attractiveness equal to [Europe’s] extraordinary cultural and scientific traditions”. The Bologna Students Declaration already stressed the doubt the European students had concerning this cause. The quality of European Higher Education is still perceived as being very high.

## **2.7. CONCLUSION**

The list is even longer than presented here but the causes listed here seem to be the ones we found most often in the documents of institutions and organisations. The Bologna Declaration can in this sense be seen as a reaction to the change sweeping through Europe but also as a means of making higher education more responsive to societies demands.

### **3. THE BOLOGNA DECLARATION**

#### **3.1. INTRODUCTION**

The content of the Bologna Declaration remains rather vague. The goal is set but the means to reach this goal are not clearly defined. The suggestions are therefore interpreted very broadly. In this sense the approach to reach the goal seems even more important than the declaration itself. Clearly all the major decisions will already be made before the meeting in Prague in June 2001.

#### **3.2. GOAL**

The Bologna Declaration has the gradual setting up of a European space for Higher education as a goal.

#### **3.3. THE MEANS TO ACHIEVE THIS GOAL AS PUT FORWARD BY THE BOLOGNA DECLARATION**

1. Easily readable and comparable degrees, also through the implementation of the Diploma Supplement;
2. Adoption of a system essentially based on two main cycles: undergraduate and graduate levels in all countries;

The Declaration does not mention the 3-5-8 years pattern of degrees a lot of critics seem to focus on. What it actually says is the following:

The first degree should be no shorter than 3 years and clearly relevant to the labour market. Access to the second cycle requires the successful completion of the first cycle.

This second cycle should lead to the master and/or doctorate.

3. Establishment of a system of credits – such as in the ECTS system – as a proper means of promoting the most widespread student mobility;
4. A European dimension in quality assurance (by developing comparable criteria and methodologies); and
5. Improvement of the free movement of students and teachers through structural reforms (basically, by taking away the remaining obstacles)

#### **3.4. WHAT THE DECLARATION DOES NOT SAY**

The Bologna Declaration focuses on “qualifications” and not on content or academic degrees. The Bologna process aims at creating convergence and, thus, is not a path towards the “standardisation” or “harmonisation” of European higher education. We would like to call it ‘making the structures somewhat alike’.

This also means we are not talking about the creation of a new category of “European” degrees/qualifications but of the setting up of a common reference for existing degrees/qualifications.

Although the discussion focuses mainly on the Bachelor – Master system these names are not even mentioned in the Bologna Declaration. Not even the pattern of undergraduate programmes of 3 years, a Master degree after five year of studies and a Doctorate degree after 8 years of studies is included. There are fears that the Bologna Declaration will influence the manner in which higher education institutions in Europe function. This fear comes probably from the far-reaching consequences the implementation will have on the decision-making involved on the institutional level. This has been acknowledged in the Bologna Declaration by stating that the fundamental principles of autonomy and diversity should in all manners be respected.

### **3.5. CONCLUSION**

The Bologna Declaration remains open for interpretation. It is however necessary that discussions focus on what is actually proposed and not on topics people fear are part of the Declaration.

## **4. THE BOLOGNA PROCESS**

### **4.1. INTRODUCTION**

The Bologna Process in itself will be presented here. This is not just the mechanics of the process but the approach taken by the signatories and the calendar the 'consultative group' put forward.

### **4.2. APPROACH**

The approach is based on a joint effort between ministers and higher education representatives. The Bologna Declaration is not an international treaty. It is a pledge by 29 countries to reform their own system in such a way that all systems converge. So it is a commitment freely taken by each signatory country to reform its own higher education system or systems in order to create overall convergence at the European level. The Bologna Declaration is not a reform imposed upon national governments or higher education institutions in any official way by a supranational body.

That is why the Declaration is actually very vague: it is a political statement that actually sets out an action plan: there is a goal and there is a calendar. According to the calendar the European space of Higher Education should be completed within the first decade of the new millennium.

There is of course a program of activities, already dubbed the Bologna Process.

In Bologna the countries that signed the declaration announced there would be a new meeting. This new meeting would be at least two years after the Bologna meeting. In September 1999 an informal meeting of ministers decided that 29 countries would form a working group, the consultative group, that would do the follow-up of the Bologna declaration.

The follow-up structure is based on:

- an "enlarged group" consisting of representatives of all signatory countries, the follow-up group and observers from ESIB – The National Unions of Students in Europe, EURASHE and Council of Europe;
- a smaller "follow-up group" comprising the countries successively holding the EU Presidency in the 2 years from Bologna to Prague (Finland, Portugal, France, Sweden), the Czech Republic, the European Commission, the Confederation of EU Rectors' Conferences and the Association of European Universities (CRE);
- the countries that signed the Bologna Declaration are stimulated to have (a series of) national conferences on the Bologna Declaration and the implementation process in the country;
- there will also be international seminars dealing with the process in a more European perspective;
- in addition, since new political decisions may need to be taken in the process, the follow-up to the Bologna Declaration will be on the agenda of meetings of EU education ministers.

### **4.3. CALENDAR**

The first follow-up meeting was in November 1999 in Helsinki. Here the practical side of the follow-up was decided upon. Because the group was too large a smaller group was formed, the 'follow-up

group'. The chair of the group will change in accordance with the chairing of the European Union. This group already met in January 2000, in June 2000 in Portugal and in December 2000 in Paris. There will certainly be a meeting in Sweden again six weeks before the Prague meeting in May 2001.

In January an explanatory note by the follow-up group, prepared by the Confederation of EU Rectors' Conferences and the Association of European Universities was made public. (You can find '*The Bologna Declaration on the European space for higher education: an explanation*' on: <http://www.esib.org/prague/documents>)

The whole calendar of events is constantly updated on the website:

[http://www.esib.org/prague/calendar\\_of\\_events](http://www.esib.org/prague/calendar_of_events)

#### **4.4. CONCLUSION**

The calendar seems very clear and the approach has the potential to be visible. This is of course only on paper. The Bologna Process does not really fit in a timeframe or a timetable. The follow-up of the Bologna Declaration takes place in the countries themselves and not really on the European level. The countries are informing and will inform each other on their progress, their intentions and best practices. This is actually what is happening by the means of the Bologna Process and is therefore not that clear.

## 5. THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE BOLOGNA DECLARATION

### 5.1. INTRODUCTION

European Higher Education is very versatile. Some would say it's a jungle, some would say it resembles chaos. This chapter will deal with the reality of the implementation. Is there a degree of convergence in Europe, what are the main problems and how is the implementation process evolving?

### 5.2. THE DEGREE OF CONVERGENCE BETWEEN CURRENT REALITY AND THE BOLOGNA DECLARATION

Several reforms have recently been introduced in several European countries. The Confederation of EU Rectors' Conferences and the Association of European Universities (CRE) undertook a project to analyse the trends in Higher Education structures in the member states of the European Union and the European Economic Area. The report on the project, *Trends in Learning Structures in Higher Education*, offers an overview of the degree of convergence between current reality and the Bologna Declaration. (You can find this report on: <http://www.esib.org/prague/documents>)

- There is a move towards shorter studies. This means a reduction of actual length of studies to their theoretical duration and/or the introduction of first degrees in systems where they were unknown.
- Two-tier structures are also being introduced. The long, tunnel-type curricula which offer no real exit point before 5, 6 or 7 years of study are being replaced by bachelor-type and masters degrees.
- The credit systems are widely spread.
- External evaluation is being introduced.
- More autonomy of Higher Education institutions seems to be coupled with more accountability.
- Another trend is towards the blurring of boundaries between university and non-university systems. In some countries non-university institutions got a near-university status, while in other countries more bridges between the two sectors are established.

### 5.3. THE DEGREE OF POLARISATION BETWEEN CURRENT REALITY AND THE BOLOGNA DECLARATION

There is no convergence towards a 3-5-8 pattern of degrees. This pattern was presented in the Attali-report on the future of French Higher Education, presented to the French Ministry of Education in 1998, as the emerging European model. Because the Sorbonne Declaration was signed in the same year the Attali-report it was often included in the discussions about the Declaration.

The report *Trends in Learning Structures in Higher Education* did a survey of the structures and the results make clear that this model is actually not the European model. Many countries have sub-degree programmes of 1 or 2 years while the first degrees (whether traditional or newly introduced) take between 3 and 4 years. There is no 8-year standard duration for a doctorate but there seems to be a convergence around a total duration of about 5 years for a master degree.

#### **5.4. CURRENT CURRENTS IN THE IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS**

Higher Education institutions are introducing “meaningful” first (undergraduate) degrees in systems where they didn’t exist yet. The courses of these first degrees are said to be shorter, more flexible, more relevant to professional life and more multidisciplinary.

Higher Education institutions are also creating new master's courses where there were no short or separate programmes.

#### **5.5. CONCLUSION**

The different countries that signed the Bologna Declaration are all dealing with the implementation in a different way. This chapter tried to explain why. Apparently all the signatories have different issues to tackle in working towards convergence with the Bologna Declaration. There still seems a long way to go in the implementation process.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

The Bologna Process is not a static process. It is moving in different directions in different countries. The Committee on Prague 2001 has in this document tried to give an overview of the reasons of the process, an introduction to the Bologna Declaration, an explication of the Bologna Process and an insight into the implementation. We hope that the different National Unions of Students will be able to use this document to their own advantage.

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**THE EUROPEAN HIGHER EDUCATION AREA**  
**Joint declaration of the European Ministers of Education**  
**Convened in Bologna on the 19th of June 1999**

The European process, thanks to the extraordinary achievements of the last few years, has become an increasingly concrete and relevant reality for the Union and its citizens. Enlargement prospects together with deepening relations with other European countries, provide even wider dimensions to that reality. Meanwhile, we are witnessing a growing awareness in large parts of the political and academic world and in public opinion of the need to establish a more complete and far-reaching Europe, in particular building upon and strengthening its intellectual, cultural, social and scientific and technological dimensions.

A Europe of Knowledge is now widely recognised as an irreplaceable factor for social and human growth and as an indispensable component to consolidate and enrich the European citizenship, capable of giving its citizens the necessary competences to face the challenges of the new millennium, together with an awareness of shared values and belonging to a common social and cultural space.

The importance of education and educational co-operation in the development and strengthening of stable, peaceful and democratic societies is universally acknowledged as paramount, the more so in view of the situation in South East Europe.

The Sorbonne declaration of 25th of May 1998, which was underpinned by these considerations, stressed the Universities' central role in developing European cultural dimensions. It emphasised the creation of the European area of higher education as a key way to promote citizens' mobility and employability and the Continent's overall development.

Several European countries have accepted the invitation to commit themselves to achieving the objectives set out in the declaration, by signing it or expressing their agreement in principle. The direction taken by several higher education reforms launched in the meantime in Europe has proved many Governments' determination to act.

European higher education institutions, for their part, have accepted the challenge and taken up a main role in constructing the European area of higher education, also in the wake of the fundamental principles laid down in the Bologna Magna Charta Universitatum of 1988. This is of the highest importance, given that Universities' independence and autonomy ensure that higher education and research systems continuously adapt to changing needs, society's demands and advances in scientific knowledge.

The course has been set in the right direction and with meaningful purpose. The achievement of greater compatibility and comparability of the systems of higher education nevertheless requires continual momentum in order to be fully accomplished. We need to support it through promoting concrete measures to achieve tangible forward steps. The 18th June meeting saw participation by authoritative experts and scholars from all our countries and provides us with very useful suggestions on the initiatives to be taken.

We must in particular look at the objective of increasing the international competitiveness of the European system of higher education. The vitality and efficiency of any civilisation can be measured by the appeal that its culture has for other countries. We need to ensure that the European higher education system acquires a world-wide degree of attraction equal to our extraordinary cultural and scientific traditions.

While affirming our support to the general principles laid down in the Sorbonne declaration, we engage in co-ordinating our policies to reach in the short term, and in any case within the first decade of the third millennium, the following objectives, which we consider to be of primary relevance in order to establish the European area of higher education and to promote the European system of higher education world-wide:

Adoption of a system of easily readable and comparable degrees, also through the implementation of the Diploma Supplement, in order to promote European citizens employability and the international competitiveness of the European higher education system

Adoption of a system essentially based on two main cycles, undergraduate and graduate. Access to the second cycle shall require successful completion of first cycle studies, lasting a minimum of three years. The degree awarded after the first cycle shall also be relevant to the European labour market as an appropriate level of qualification. The second cycle should lead to the master and/or doctorate degree as in many European countries.

Establishment of a system of credits - such as in the ECTS system - as a proper means of promoting the most widespread student mobility. Credits could also be acquired in non-higher education contexts, including lifelong learning, provided they are recognised by receiving Universities concerned.

Promotion of mobility by overcoming obstacles to the effective exercise of free movement with particular attention to:

- for students, access to study and training opportunities and to related services

- for teachers, researchers and administrative staff, recognition and valorisation of periods spent in a European context researching, teaching and training, without prejudicing their statutory rights.

- Promotion of European co-operation in quality assurance with a view to developing comparable criteria and methodologies
- Promotion of the necessary European dimensions in higher education, particularly with regards to curricular development, inter-institutional co-operation, mobility schemes and integrated programmes of study, training and research.

We hereby undertake to attain these objectives - within the framework of our institutional competences and taking full respect of the diversity of cultures, languages, national education systems and of University autonomy - to consolidate the European area of higher education. To that end, we will pursue the ways of intergovernmental co-operation, together with those of non governmental European organisations with competence on higher education. We expect Universities again to respond promptly and positively and to contribute actively to the success of our endeavour.

Convinced that the establishment of the European area of higher education requires constant support, supervision and adaptation to the continuously evolving needs, we decide to meet again within two years in order to assess the progress achieved and the new steps to be taken.

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