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## The contribution of the Council of Europe in the development of the European Higher Education Area

### Report<sup>1</sup>

Committee on Culture, Science and Education

Rapporteur: Mr Andrew McINTOSH, United Kingdom

### Summary

For 10 years, European governments engaged in the Bologna Process have been developing programmes of enhanced co-operation between their higher education systems. Much progress has been made towards a space in which students and academics can move between national systems knowing that their qualifications will be recognised, that recognised quality standards are assured, and that national systems coexisting in a shared cultural space are compatible and comparable.

The Council of Europe has been deeply involved in this process, and especially in its extension to non-European Union member states: participation in Bologna is now virtually co-terminous with Council of Europe membership. It has always been intended that the next step should be the creation of a European Higher Education Area in 2010, and this intention was confirmed by a meeting of European higher education ministers at Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve in April 2009.

The Parliamentary Assembly reaffirms its support for the Bologna process and the European Higher Education Area. Reformed structures will be needed for the creation of an effective European Higher Education Area, which must address the challenges of a knowledge society and a global economy; continue work on the reforms in progress; ensure that these reforms are implemented fully and transparently in participating countries; continue its fruitful collaboration with the higher education sector and other stakeholders; give full weight in the steering structures to non-European Union member states; and seek more active public and political support from national Parliaments to advance the cause of higher education in Europe.

The ministries of Austria, Hungary and Romania, which will host the future ministerial conferences of the Bologna Process in 2010 and 2012 respectively, are invited to explore with the Council of Europe and with participating governments the possibility of establishing a more stable secretariat at the Council of Europe, for a European Higher Education Area in which the higher education sector joins with participating governments to become the driving force behind raising European standards and practices in higher education.

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1. Reference to committee: [Doc. 11752](#), Reference No. 3511 of 26 January 2009.



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## A. Draft recommendation

1. The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe calls attention to the importance of a European dimension in higher education which will both foster understanding among European peoples and provide better educational results responding more adequately to the demands of our time. In a globalised, knowledge-based and interdependent world, well educated human resources are a key factor for social, economic and democratic stability and welfare. Especially in times of economic crisis, states must also invest in people and their education.
2. The European Cultural Convention of 1954 (ETS No. 18), the Lisbon Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region of 1997 (ETS No. 165, hereinafter Lisbon Recognition Convention) and the fundamental right to education under Article 2 of the first Protocol to the European Convention on Human Rights (ETS No. 9) have set the legal framework for a European dimension in higher education and constitute the basis for the Bologna Process.
3. Recalling its [Recommendation 1620 \(2003\)](#) on the Council of Europe contribution to the higher education area, the Assembly believes that the official launch of the European Higher Education Area in 2010 requires greater support by member states, national parliaments, institutions of higher education and students. It also calls for more Council of Europe involvement in developing the European Higher Education Area by 2020 throughout all of Europe.
4. Recalling its [Recommendation 1762 \(2006\)](#) on academic freedom and university autonomy, the Assembly reaffirms its recommendation to the Committee of Ministers that these principles should be recognised as fundamental freedoms throughout Europe besides, and equal to, the fundamental right to education. Academic freedom and university autonomy have been essential for the foundation of universities in Europe and the admission of students from abroad for many centuries.
5. The Assembly emphasises the power of national legislators to set the standards for higher education in accordance with national traditions, circumstances and requirements. The creation of the European Higher Education Area needs the explicit and ongoing recognition and support of parliaments, not just of potentially changing majority governments and their administrative teams.
6. The Assembly welcomes the progress made over the past decade by the states participating in the Bologna Process in defining common policies for European higher education. All of those states bar the Holy See are member states of the Council of Europe and all are signatories to these above-mentioned conventions, with the exception of Greece which has not yet signed the Lisbon Recognition Convention.
7. The Bologna Process will become the European Higher Education Area in 2010. The Assembly strongly supports this transformation which constitutes a policy objective of highest importance for all states and people in the European Higher Education Area. It requires the consolidation of the existing achievements throughout Europe. Non-member states of the European Union must not be left behind. Quality assurance, the mutual recognition of school leaving and other qualifications leading to admission to higher education institutions as well as the mutual recognition of study periods spent at, and qualifications obtained from, higher education institutions are a necessary condition for the establishment of the European Higher Education Area.
8. The Assembly appreciates the voluntary initiatives by the past and present ministries providing the secretariat to the Bologna Process. It notes with concern that such secretariat structures depend on the availability and resources of particular ministries which have to serve primarily national interests, and that they become the owner of the archive. While the informal Bologna structure has served well during the development decade, a reformed steering process will be needed for the creation of the European Higher Education Area which is not led by European Union presidencies, in which chairmanship changes every six months, and a support process based on volunteer host countries providing a secretariat which changes hands every two years.
9. The Assembly welcomes the participation of the European Commission in the Bologna Process and the provision of large financial contributions by the European Union, for instance under the Erasmus programme, supporting higher education, vocational training and lifelong learning while respecting the principle of subsidiarity and the national powers of its member states.
10. The realisation of the European Higher Education Area depends on higher education institutions and students. Both, students and higher education institutions must become the driving force and owners of European standards in higher education. The Assembly recalls in this context the establishment of the Enlarged Partial Agreement on Sport in 2007, which provides for a unique platform for states and sport associations alike and aims to promote sport through policy and standard setting, monitoring, capacity

building and the exchange of good practice. This enlarged partial agreement can serve as an example to be followed for an effective co-operation between states and non-governmental stakeholders in the field of higher education and as a potential forum supporting the European Higher Education Area.

11. All signatories to the European Cultural Convention are represented in the Council of Europe's Steering Committee for Higher Education and Research by both a governmental representative and a representative from academia. The Assembly welcomes this dual representation which allows states to discuss policies, standards and action among themselves, to decide on common positions and to ensure their implementation at national governmental and institutional levels. The Council of Europe secretariat serves as neutral professional assistance to all members of the Steering Committee who lead the committee work.

12. The creation of the European Higher Education Area must take account of globalisation. Neither a European fortress nor an ivory tower should be created. Therefore, the Assembly believes that international co-operation in higher education must be reinforced. Being open to accession by non-European states, the Lisbon Recognition Convention provides an adequate legal basis for such wider co-operation. Non-European signatories to this convention should also be invited to participate as observers in the Steering Committee for Higher Education and Research.

13. The Assembly calls on its member parliaments to actively contribute to an open political debate and analyse their national requirements and legislation regarding the creation of the European Higher Education Area.

14. The Assembly invites the European University Association, the European Association of Institutions in Higher Education, the European Students' Union, the Observatory of the Magna Charta Universitatum and other non-governmental stakeholders to study further possibilities for their greater involvement in shaping the European Higher Education Area..

15. The Assembly recommends that the Committee of Ministers:

15.1. launch in 2010 with their ministries responsible for higher education and research as well as higher education institutions a European campaign in all member states to promote the development of the European Higher Education Area by 2020;

15.2. call on Greece to sign and ratify the Lisbon Recognition Convention, call on Belgium, Italy and Spain to ratify this convention without delay, and invite interested non-member states to request accession to it;

15.3. analyse whether the European Social Charter (revised) (ETS No. 163) should be amended to ensure social rights including access to higher education for students in their own countries and for students studying abroad as well as social rights for researchers, teachers and other academic staff working abroad;

15.4. analyse whether the European Agreement on continued Payment of Scholarships to Students Studying Abroad (ETS No. 69) as well as the European Agreement on Regulations governing the Movement of Persons between member states of the Council of Europe (ETS No. 25) should be amended to support the development of the European Higher Education Area;

15.5. allocate more resources to the Council of Europe's higher education sector including the Steering Committee for Higher Education and Research, in order to provide greater support to the Bologna Process and the creation of the European Higher Education Area;

15.6. analyse the feasibility of setting up an enlarged partial agreement, which should be open to membership by states, associations of higher education institutions and student associations and have the objective of facilitating policy and standard setting, monitoring, capacity building and the exchange of good practice concerning the European Higher Education Area.

16. The Assembly invites the ministries of Austria and Hungary as well as Romania, which will host the future ministerial conferences of the Bologna Process in 2010 and 2012 respectively, to:

16.1. entrust the Secretariat of the Council of Europe with the task of storing and making available the collective records of the Bologna Process and the European Higher Education Area;

16.2. second temporarily national experts to the Secretariat of the Council of Europe, in order to create synergies with the permanent secretariat of the Steering Committee for Higher Education and Research and other bodies;

16.3. explore, together with the Committee of Ministers and representatives of higher education institutions and students, the possibility of establishing a more stable secretariat of the European Higher Education Area at the Council of Europe;

16.4. discuss and coordinate their work with the other members of the Steering Committee for Higher Education and Research.

## B. Explanatory memorandum by Mr McIntosh, rapporteur

### 1. Foreword

1. The theme of this report has been informed by a hearing held in Paris on 10 March 2009 by the Parliamentary Assembly's Committee on Culture, Science and Education with the participation of Dr Anne Corbett, Visiting Fellow at the European Institute of the London School of Economics and Political Science, Professor Radu Mircea Damian, President of the National Higher Education Funding Council of Romania and Chairman of the Steering Committee on Higher Education and Research of the Council of Europe, Mr Stefan Delplace, Secretary General of the European Association of Institutions in Higher Education, Mr Germain Dondelinger, Director for Higher Education in the Ministry of Culture, Higher Education and Research of Luxembourg and Mr Per Nyborg, former Head of the Bologna secretariat from 2003-2005. I am grateful to those speakers and committee members who took part. This explanatory memorandum has been prepared together with Dr Anne Corbett, to whom I express my deep appreciation.

### 2. Introduction

2. The European Higher Education Area, to be launched in 2010, is envisaged by those constructing it as a space in which students and academics can move between national systems knowing that their qualifications will be recognised, that quality measured by recognised quality assurance practices is guaranteed, and that systems coexisting in a shared cultural space should be compatible and comparable. The systems will still be proudly national, but potentially, at an international level, better understood and more esteemed.

3. The Council of Europe has an important place in the construction of this new area. As an organisation set up to promote human rights, democracy and the rule of law, it has taken on education-related responsibilities, and used education as an instrument for promoting respect for Europe's rich and diverse cultural and democratic identity. Its understanding of higher education in Europe, and the practical use to which it puts this awareness, has long reflected a number of principles, which were highlighted in an Assembly report of 2006 for which the rapporteur was Mr Josef Jařab<sup>2</sup>. These are :

- the fundamental right to education as part of human rights;
- the respect for academic freedom and the autonomy of institutions of higher education<sup>3</sup>;
- the recognition of national or regional legislators as determining education policies and standards<sup>4</sup>;
- the mutual recognition of study periods and qualifications based on coordinated quality standards.

4. The report, which follows in support of the Motion in Assembly Doc. 11752, looks at the role the Council of Europe has played as a pioneer in this area of higher education co-operation, the role it is playing now within the Bologna Process, and whether its contribution might be more fully exploited with the establishment of a European Higher Education Area (EHEA).

5. Reflecting the particular interests of the Assembly in the new EHEA, this report is guided by three questions: What must change in policy terms with the transition to the EHEA? Does the Council of Europe have a further role to play in underpinning the democratic dimension of the EHEA? Can the Council of Europe contribute to the support structures of the EHEA?

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2. Recommendation 1762 (2006) on academic freedom and university autonomy, adopted by the Council of Europe's Parliamentary Assembly, rapporteur Mr Josef Jařab.

3. The Magna Charta Universitatum of 1988 defined the fundamental principles for universities to operate in democratic societies as academic freedom, autonomy and social responsibility. To date, it has been signed by 388 rectors of universities worldwide and led to the creation of the Observatory of the Magna Charta Universitatum in Bologna.

4. The consolidated version of the Treaty establishing the European Community, Articles 149 and 150, accords full respect for national legislative powers (Official Journal 29.12.2006).

### 3. Background

#### 3.1. Sixty years of European co-operation in higher education

6. There is a long history of European co-operation in higher education, starting in the early 1950s. Created in 1949, the Council of Europe's own interest in education was made explicit in 1952 with Article 2 of the first Protocol to the European Convention on Human Rights. This defined a fundamental right to education. In 1953, the Council of Europe's member states created the European Convention on the Equivalence of Diplomas Leading to Admission to Universities. In 1954, the European Cultural Convention defined the objective of "foster[ing] among the nationals of all members, and of such other European states as may accede thereto, the study of the languages, history and civilisation of the others and of the civilisation which is common to them all."

7. Higher education co-operation acquired momentum in the mid 1950s with a European Convention on the Equivalence of Periods of University Study of 1956. In 1959, the European Convention on the Academic Recognition of University Qualifications provided the first framework of mutual recognition of higher education in Europe. This removed an important barrier to study in another country, and gave students the opportunity to widen their personal horizons beyond national frontiers and to participate in practical terms in European co-operation. The European Agreement on Continued Payment of Scholarships to Students Studying Abroad of 1969 made it realistic for many more students to study abroad.

8. By then the Standing Conference of European Ministers of Education had been set up. Established in 1959, it meets regularly to strengthen European co-operation in this field through discussion of common approaches to education policy. The Standing Conference is served by a secretariat provided by the Council of Europe.

9. In education as elsewhere, the work of the Council of Europe is largely determined by its member states in the relevant committees. Nationally appointed representatives of the academic community contribute alongside national officials on the Steering Committee on Higher Education and Research (CDESR). Student associations and other NGOs may have official participatory status with the Council of Europe through its Conference of International NGOs as well as direct observer status on the CDESR, as is the case with e.g. the European University Association, the European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE), the European Students' Union. A distinctive feature of the Council of Europe is that it has a Parliamentary Assembly, i.e., a body containing representatives of the full spectrum of political opinion, as well as governments. Not only can this Assembly contribute to policy. It is described on the Council's own website as "the deliberative body and the driving force of the Council of Europe".

10. A further distinction of the Council of Europe within the field of international organisations with interest in European education is that it should provide flexible and inclusive structures. In the field of education and culture non-European states have been able to accede to Council of Europe conventions, such as the Lisbon Recognition Convention, under certain conditions.

11. Another international organisation to have played an important role in the development of European higher education co-operation is UNESCO. It also has been active in the domain of recognition and transparency. Back in 1976 it stimulated co-operation with countries in the Mediterranean Basin through its International Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees in Higher Education in the Arab and European States bordering on the Mediterranean. This was followed in 1979 by the UNESCO Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees concerning Higher Education in the States belonging to the Europe Region.

12. By the late 1970s the OECD and the European Union (then EEC) were also players. OECD became involved as a spill-over from its core economic interests, setting up analyses of national systems and articulating principles for modernisation. The European Economic Community, proceeding carefully on a Treaty which did not give Community institutions specific competence for education, started to give experimental support for cross-border co-operation between individual universities, and to provide small grants to encourage the mobility of students; an initiative which was to culminate in the Erasmus programme, agreed in 1987. However the bulk of education-related European Community financial support and educational effort has always gone into vocational training-related education, and to industrial research.

13. In 1989, with the fall of the Iron Curtain, much greater opportunities for continent-wide European higher co-operation opened up for the first time for 50 years. The European Union initiated such programmes as Tempus. The Council of Europe again was a central player. Drawing on its long experience in devising ways to recognise academic work, and its potentially pan-European membership, it created in 1990 the European

Convention on the General Equivalence of Periods of University Study. This initiative was to lead in 1997, by which time the Council of Europe had 40 members and the European Union 15, to the much more comprehensive convention elaborated jointly by the Council of Europe and UNESCO. This was the Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region, generally known as the Lisbon Recognition Convention. The convention functions through a joint Council of Europe-UNESCO committee which has secretariat services provided by the Secretary General of the Council of Europe and the Director General of UNESCO.<sup>5</sup>

### **3.2. The Bologna Process: change as well as continuities**

14. In 1998, a political initiative taken by the education ministers of four of the largest European Union states marked a new turning point in European higher education co-operation. Meeting at the Sorbonne University in Paris, they adopted a Joint Declaration which built on the long European tradition of educational co-operation, but added the significant and unprecedented wish to harmonise the 'architecture' or structures of the national higher education systems. They invited others to join them in jointly establishing a common European Higher Education Area (EHEA), and generally boosting the international standing of European universities.

15. The Bologna Declaration followed in 1999. Inspired by, but in some ways modifying, the Sorbonne Declaration, it set out six principles on which co-operation should be based to create an EHEA:

- adoption of a system of easily readable and comparable degrees;
- adoption of a system essentially based on two cycles;
- establishment of a system of credits;
- promotion of mobility;
- promotion of European co-operation in quality assurance;
- promotion of the European dimension in higher education;

16. The Declaration was signed by ministers responsible for higher education in 29 European countries. It became a basic document for each signatory country undertaking national reform. But such reform within a common framework was quickly understood by participants to be an on-going process. The Bologna Process, as it came to be called, has continued to generate voluntary agreement to common policy commitments (a further four principles) and framework instruments for implementation. At a ministerial meeting in Prague (2001) ministers agreed that higher education should be recognised as a public responsibility and agreed to extend their commitments to the promotion of:

- lifelong learning;
- participation of higher education institutions and students;
- the attractiveness of the European Higher Education Area.

17. At a ministerial meeting in Berlin (2003) ministers repeated their commitment to the concept of public responsibility and extended their commitments to:

- doctoral studies and the synergy between the EHEA and ERA (Educational Research Area);
- the social dimension of higher education (access etc) to be seen as an overarching action line.

18. Ministers also began to think of implementation priorities. This 2003 meeting opened up a period of development, which is still on-going, to reorganise national structures on the basis of the three-cycles, to develop and adopt European standards and guidelines for quality assurance, and later a European register for quality assurance agencies; to develop an overarching European Higher Education Area framework for qualifications, based on learning outcomes and workload, and then ask national governments to develop and introduce national qualifications frameworks. Ministers also committed to adopting a universal Diploma Supplement and to using the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) to increase transparency and recognition.

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5. UNESCO announced in February 2009 that it would close its CEPES centre in Bucharest, which has been servicing this committee from UNESCO's side. UNESCO has, however, assured the Council of Europe it will continue to fulfil its obligations as co-secretariat to this Convention.

19. Ministers were also committed to a form of benchmarking monitoring and evaluation known as "Stocktaking". Starting in 2003, the stocktaking exercises have become more constraining as time has gone on, confirming their similarity to the European Union's tool of the Open Method of Coordination. An external evaluation of the systems will be unveiled in 2010 at the Bologna Tenth Anniversary Conference.

20. By 2007, the 29 original government signatories had been joined by 17 others, bringing the total to 46. Nineteen of the signatories are outside the European Union. Their adherence was facilitated by the 2003 ministerial decision that the Process should be open to all those states which satisfy two requirements. They need to be party to the European Cultural Convention of the Council of Europe and to commit to the Bologna Declaration and subsequent ministerial communiqués in writing. Ministers also committed to have incorporated, or to be incorporating, the Lisbon Recognition Convention.<sup>6</sup>

21. The Bologna Process is steered through ministerial conferences and managed by the Bologna Follow-up Group (BFUG). Since 1999 ministerial conferences have taken place every two years. They have been held in Prague (2001), Berlin (2003), Bergen (2005), London (2007) and, from 28 to 29 April 2009, Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve. These ministerial conferences are prepared and managed by the Bologna Follow-up Group consisting of ministerial representatives, the European Commission DG Education and Culture, and a number of stakeholders, including the Council of Europe and UNESCO, the European University Association, the European Students Union and other important interest groups<sup>7</sup>. The BFUG manages a work programme of seminars, meetings and working groups which put into effect ministerial wishes, and which make suggestions as to how the process can be carried forward towards the achievement of an EHEA by 2020. Its chairmanship shadows the European Union Presidency 'trio' process of six-month periods of office working with the preceding and subsequent presidencies.

22. The Bologna Process has no resources of its own. Since the earliest days the European Commission has provided funding for development and data collection. Since 2003, those states which host a ministerial conference also provide secretariat services for the two-year duration of the cycle leading up to the conference.

### **3.3. The Council of Europe's involvement in the Bologna Process**

23. The work of the Council of Europe is largely determined by its member states in the relevant committees. But the Council of Europe structure also provides opportunities for Ministers and the Parliamentary Assembly to contribute to policy. In the field of higher education, representatives of the academic community can do so through the Steering Committee on Higher Education and Research (CDESR), where they sit alongside government officials. Student associations and other NGOs may have official participatory status with the Council of Europe through its Conference of International NGOs. As noted above, individual NGOs with relevant activities may also be granted direct observer status with the CDESR.

24. Its encouragement to non-European states to ratify Council of Europe conventions has led several 'non-Bologna' countries to ratify the Lisbon Recognition Convention. These are: Australia, Israel, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and New Zealand. It has been signed by Canada and the USA.

25. The Council of Europe has in the past run many education projects of its own. But it entered the Bologna Process as part of a team, when invited in 2001 as a stakeholder in European higher education to nominate representatives for the follow up process. It has since been represented by an official and by an academic, the current chair of the CDESR.

26. Within the Bologna Process, and over the decade, it can be fairly said the Council of Europe has played both a traditional and a new role. It has been instrumental in standard setting, a role which arises out of its historical concern with transparency and democratic practice, as exemplified in the two Conventions which underpin the Bologna Process.

27. In addition, its officials have played an important role in Bologna policy development through active participation in the BFUG and Board, and in Bologna working groups. An example is the work associated with the issue of public responsibility for higher education which became a political issue within the Bologna Process in 2001. The Council of Europe through the CDESR has worked intensively on the issue since then, producing a Recommendation on public responsibility for higher education and Research, adopted by the

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6. In the early days membership of the Bologna Process had been open to those participating in specified European Union programmes. When Russia wished to join, it was clear that membership conditions had to be rethought since European Union programmes could not serve as the condition.

7. Participating countries and organisations. See: <http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/hogeronderwijs/bologna/pcao/>

Committee of Ministers<sup>8</sup>. It is about to launch work on the responsibility of public authorities for ensuring institutional autonomy, to parallel to the 1988 universities' Magna Charta developed by a group of university rectors.

28. A third contribution of the Council of Europe arises out of its understanding of how fundamentally the Bologna Process has changed as it has expanded geographically. Examples of work with countries that acceded to the Bologna Process in 2003 and 2005, many of them outside the European Union (but familiar as members of the Council of Europe) are assistance and advice in reforming systems, legislation and practice in Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Serbia, "the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia" and Ukraine.

29. The Council of Europe has also taken on responsibility for coordinating shared experience on the difficult issue of developing national qualifications frameworks and ensuring that they are compatible with the agreed overarching Bologna European framework. We should note that the Council of Europe, by chairing the Coordination Group on qualifications frameworks, is the only organisation among the stakeholders to chair such a group.

30. In summary, the Council of Europe's contributions to the Bologna Process since the previous ministerial meeting in 2007 have focused on:

- recognition policy, including the role of the Lisbon Recognition Convention;
- specific policy areas of relevance to the Bologna Process as well as to the basic values of the Council of Europe, notably the public responsibility for higher education and research, the responsibility of higher education for democratic culture, higher education governance and quality assurance;
- bilateral and regional activities assisting newer member states with the implementation of "Bologna inspired" policies at national level;
- coordinating the sharing of experience on the development of national qualifications frameworks.

31. In addition to this Council of Europe staff contribution, bodies which the Council of Europe hosts, notably the CDESR, the Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee and the ENIC Network<sup>9</sup> make important contributions to the Bologna Process.

#### **4. Current policy: the Bologna Process after the Leuven and Louvain-la-Neuve ministerial meeting**

32. The Ministers responsible for higher education in the 46 countries which participate in the Bologna Process met at Leuven and Louvain-la-Neuve on 28-29 April 2009 with the double objective of taking stock of the achievements of the Bologna Process and establishing the priorities for the EHEA over the next decade. In entitling their communiqué "The Bologna Process 2020: the European Higher Education Area in the New Decade" they acknowledge that the initial Bologna target of 2010 is unrealistic with respect to the full implementation of some policy goals and that another decade is needed for the "full and proper implementation of [their] objectives".<sup>10</sup>

33. Their stocktaking of the decade nevertheless gives them much cause for satisfaction. They believe they have developed a European Higher Education Area "firmly rooted in Europe's intellectual, scientific and cultural heritage and ambitions"; and that it is characterised by permanent co-operation between governments, higher education institutions, students, staff, employers and other stakeholders.

34. More specifically ministers note that the greater compatibility and comparability of the systems of higher education stimulated by the Bologna Process is making it easier for learners to be mobile and for institutions to attract students and scholars from other continents. Higher education is being modernized by the three-cycle structure, the adoption of the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance, the creation of the European Register for Quality Assurance Agencies and the on-going establishment of National Qualifications Frameworks linked to the overarching EHEA framework, based on learning outcomes and workload. The adoption of the Diploma Supplement and the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System further increase transparency and recognition.<sup>11</sup>

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8. Recommendation (2007) 6 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on the public responsibility for higher education and research

9. ENIC – The ENIC-NARIC web site (European Network of Information Centres and National Academic Recognition Information Centres in the European Union) is <http://www.enic-naric.net/>

10. Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve Communiqué paragraph 7 ([http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/hogeronderwijs/bologna/conference/documents/Leuven\\_Louvain-la-Neuve\\_Communiq\\_u\\_e\\_April\\_2009.pdf](http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/hogeronderwijs/bologna/conference/documents/Leuven_Louvain-la-Neuve_Communiq_u_e_April_2009.pdf))

35. Looking to the future, ministers set one new target: that by 2020, 20 % of students should have study experience abroad, though this was contested as unrealistic by some ministers at the Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve conference itself. More profoundly they made the case for diversity of institutions and objectives within a conception of higher education which assumes content to be based on “state-of-the-art research and development”,<sup>12</sup> and that Institutions which reflect the different missions of higher education “ranging from teaching and research to community service and engagement in social cohesion and cultural development” can all be excellent. Ministerial key words for issues which require new developments efforts during the coming decade include access, lifelong learning, learning outcomes, employability, international openness and mobility. The financial crisis lead ministers to agree that higher education institutions should now be seeking new and diversified funding sources and methods. But they also argued for mixed funding *sui generis*: as universities and colleges enjoy greater autonomy, they should have the flexibility which private funding can bring to respond to growing expectations of what they can deliver to society, as well as to students.<sup>13</sup>

36. Organisationally, ministers do not differentiate between the Bologna decade and the EHEA. They endorse present structures as “fit for purpose”: that is, the structure of ministerial meetings, and the follow-up group consisting of governments working with stakeholders - the academic community’s representative organisations and others - and with the European organisations (i.e. the European Commission, the Council of Europe and UNESCO-CEPES).<sup>14</sup>

37. They suggest only two modifications to organisation. Recognising the weight of the non-European Union members within the Bologna process, ministers have agreed to institute co-presidencies of BFUG, consisting of an European Union and a non-European Union member. They have also agreed that ministers do not need to meet so often. After a 2010 conference in Budapest, and a 2012 conference in Bucharest, they will slip into three-year cycles until the next target date to declare an EHEA is reached in 2020. It is implicit that the European Union, not mentioned by name, will continue to fund the development of the EHEA though Commission funds.

## 5. The future of the EHEA

38. The following section of the report takes a parliamentary view of what has been achieved within the Bologna Process and what needs to change with the creation of a EHEA, as a preface to a final section as to why and how the Council of Europe might make a fuller contribution within an EHEA.

39. I have already raised some of the issues when, as authorised by the committee, I went to the Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve conference and I issued a statement.<sup>15</sup>

### 5.1. What has been achieved by the Bologna Process 1999-2009

40. We can all agree that the Bologna Process has created a new and unexpected dynamic of co-operation in higher education across Europe. This co-operation is remarkable for being genuinely Europe-wide and for demonstrating pan-European political assent to some convergence of higher education structures, and indeed values. I noted in my statement to the Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve conference that the Bologna Process has led to:

- the recognition of higher education as a public responsibility;
- the reform of higher education systems in Europe in ways which benefit from intercultural co-operation and meet the challenges of a global knowledge society;
- greater compatibility and comparability of systems through developing three-cycle degree structures;
- the emergence of a quality strategy based on the linkage between qualifications frameworks, quality assurance and curriculum reform, and the wider application of credit transfer and accumulation instruments;
- better support for research and teaching synergies;

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11. Communiqué paragraph 6.

12. Communiqué paragraph 15.

13. Communiqué paragraph 23.

14. Communiqué paragraph 24.

15. Press statement by Andrew McIntosh. Accessible through the Bologna web site at [http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/hogeronderwijs/bologna/conference/documents/Statement\\_Andrew\\_McIntosh.pdf](http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/hogeronderwijs/bologna/conference/documents/Statement_Andrew_McIntosh.pdf)

- improved freedom of cross-border movement for students and staff;
- acceptance of the legal obligations under the European Cultural Convention of 1954 and the Lisbon Recognition Convention of 1997, which has been achieved not just by governments, but by political decisions by national parliaments.

## **5.2. What needs to change 2010-2020+**

41. First, and most important, from the perspective of the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly, the EHEA now needs the explicit and ongoing recognition and support of parliaments and legislatures, not just of potentially changing majority governments and their administrative teams. The EHEA will be different from, and more than, the development process as represented by the Bologna Process. The implementation of key principles and policies which go beyond the higher education community requires broad-based political support.

42. The Bologna Process marks the stage within policy-making at which the different parties come together and agree that they trust each other enough, or they have sufficient incentives, or sufficient fear of being left out, to work together to a common agenda. As we have seen, this has developed into remarkable commitments like the agreement to the common structure of bachelor-master-doctorate degrees. With this structure, the Bologna participants have created instruments which are designed to raise quality and self awareness within higher education, and which will, through new recognition procedures, enable our complex and diverse European systems to co-exist, knowing that through joint action and some common policy objectives, they have become easier to understand both within Europe, and to a wider world of foreign students, foreign institutions and foreign governments. Development work will naturally go on: this is one of the most rewarding aspects of the Bologna Process.

43. National or regional education ministers will continue to be the core decision-makers, and higher education institutions and students the drivers of the process. However they alone will not be able to make a reality of ambitious Bologna principles and policies, such as social cohesion and equity, fair recognition, mobility accessible for all students and academics as well as researchers.

44. Furthermore the Bologna Process/EHEA now has world-wide reach with other countries interpreting the Bologna process in their own way and making assumptions about what an EHEA can deliver. The interest is not just in the USA and other English-speaking countries, but also in Latin America and Asia.

45. The Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly should be in the lead in calling for wider and more secure public support for higher education reform in 2010-2020+ in order to achieve the European Higher Education Area.

46. Secondly, an EHEA needs steering structures which reflect the full European membership of the Bologna Process, which includes 19 non-European Union members. Organisational structure must reflect the work to be done, not past history. The announcement at Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve of a modification to the steering process based on a European Union model of a trio of presidencies, in which chairmanship changes hands every six months, by appointing a non-European Union co-president, may be a step in the right direction in the sense of giving more participating countries a sense of "ownership". But it may well be difficult to implement. It is not clear that these steering processes will bring about the active participation and contribution, on equal terms, of those more recent members who have not been part of the European Union, notably Turkey, Russia, or the countries of the south Caucasus.

47. An EHEA needs steering and support structures which will provide continuity, impartiality and openness. In modifying the rules on the presidency of the BFUG, the Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve communiqué highlights the fact that the volunteer host countries, which provide a secretariat which changes hands with every ministerial conference, become to an even greater extent the element of stability. Objectively it is difficult to support the Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve communiqué view that the existing organisational structure can be "endorsed as fit for purpose" for an EHEA.

48. However the so-called "informal Bologna structure" which has served Europe well during the "development decade" remains attractive to ministers and members of the Bologna Follow Up Group alike. We must take seriously the view of the current chair of BFUG that despite being based mainly on a 'gentleman's agreement' the Bologna process has succeeded in establishing a framework in which key policies are agreed at national level and implemented nationally and within higher education institutions, and that there is a strong feeling that no heavier formal structure should be developed.

49. We can agree that the institution of a formalised EHEA bureaucracy is not necessarily appropriate. But the case for additional or other support mechanisms for the secretariat of the EHEA should be investigated in terms of ensuring effective continuity and accessibility (e.g. the important issue of archives), professionalism and impartiality.

50. The third issue which arises from our initial questions is that of further development work related to higher education concerns. The further development work which the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly should support includes:

- further progress in creating synergies between research and teaching in line with the European concept of a university;
- improvements in the way student body membership, and completion rates, reflect the social and economic diversity of Europe's populations;
- improvements in the contribution of higher education to economic and social development in Europe, and to the employability of graduates;
- widening participation through lifelong learning;
- the recognition of strands of higher education other than those on existing western European models;
- complementing student mobility by teacher mobility. While freedom of movement of persons and recognition of their social security rights is guaranteed within the European Union, other European states may make use of the Council of Europe's European Social Charter with regard to students and teachers in higher education;
- clarification of the role, though not necessarily the exclusive role, of public funding in higher education;
- an open door to the accession to associate status, under appropriate conditions, of countries outside Europe.

## **6. Opportunities for the Council of Europe to further support the transition to an EHEA: combining structure and vision for political, cultural and social sustainability**

51. The Council of Europe and its Parliamentary Assembly have for many years been active in contributing to the achievement of improved transparency, continuity, collective memory, the participation of the higher education sectors' many partners, and wider and more secure political and social support for higher education reform. Its support for academic freedom and the development of university autonomy is on record in the 2006 report of Mr Josef Jařab, as is its support for national decision-making, and the place of national or regional education ministries, institutions of higher education and students as the engines of change.

52. In the knowledge that EHEA membership is virtually coterminous with Council of Europe membership, and in echoing the speech made at the Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve conference by the Council of Europe's representative on BFUG, that "Bologna must combine structure and vision" not just for economic reasons but "for political, cultural, social and environmental sustainability",<sup>16</sup> I make the following observations about different forms of potential Council of Europe support for an EHEA.

53. The Council of Europe is providing secretariat services for related and complementary platforms, such as the committee of the Lisbon Recognition Convention, the Steering Committee on Higher Education and Research and the Standing Conference of European Ministers for Education. Synergies could easily be found with the secretariat of the Bologna Process.

54. Such synergy could take different forms. It does not mean the establishment of a full time EHEA secretariat, which would be contentious. But although budget is limited for the Council of Europe as for all other international organisations, the Council of Europe secretariat could accommodate staff seconded temporarily by national or regional administrations.<sup>17</sup> Such secondments would avoid changing secretariat infrastructures and ensure greater continuity, while maintaining the opportunity for individual states to take a leading role.

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16. Council of Europe: Bologna must combine structure and vision. Sjur Bergan, Head of the Council of Europe delegation and Head of the Council's Department of Higher Education and History Teaching. Press release: see hyperlink.

17. Under the Council of Europe's regulations, member states can second national experts by continuing to cover their salary, while the Council of Europe could for instance cover additional payments to balance higher costs of living in Strasbourg.

55. As a first step, the Council of Europe should invite the Bologna Follow-up Group and Board including the future host countries of the ministerial conferences of the Bologna Process to discuss:

- possibilities of reinforcing technical co-operation, for example by providing secretariat resources and offering office space for seconded national experts;
- the creation of a partial agreement for that purpose which could be open to representatives of governments, institutions of higher education and student organisations from all countries participating in the Bologna Process.

56. Given its composition of national parliamentarians from European Parties to the Lisbon Recognition Convention, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe should consider how to assist in the implementation of the decisions taken at the ministerial conferences of the Bologna Process.

## 7. Conclusions

57. The Parliamentary Assembly in welcoming the creation of a EHEA in and after 2010, which would be designed to face the challenges of a knowledge society and a global economy, resolved on October 2008 to analyse and discuss with other stakeholders the potential contribution of the Council of Europe to the development of a EHEA. This resolution built on the fact that EHEA membership is virtually coterminous with Council of Europe membership, and that the Council of Europe and its Parliamentary Assembly have for many years been active in contributing to the achievement of improved transparency, continuity, collective memory, the participation of the higher education sectors' many partners, and wider and more secure political and social support for higher education reform.

58. This memorandum began by asking three questions: What must change in policy terms with the transition to the EHEA? Does the Council of Europe have a further role to play in underpinning the democratic dimension of the EHEA? Can the Council of Europe contribute to the support structures of the EHEA?

59. We have concluded that an EHEA, as distinct from the Bologna Process, needs:

- more active support from national Parliaments in order to advance the cause of higher education in the nations of Europe, building on the achievements in the decade of the Bologna Process;
- steering structures which better reflect the full European membership of the Bologna Process, which includes 19 non-European Union members;
- support structures which better ensure continuity, impartiality and openness in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA).

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*Reference to committee:* [Doc. 11752](#), Reference No. 3511 of 26 January 2009

*Draft recommendation* adopted by the committee on 20 May 2009 with one abstention

*Members of the committee:* Mrs Anne **Brasseur**, (Chairperson), Mr Detlef Dzembitzki (1st Vice-Chairperson), Mr Mehmet **Tekelioğlu** (2nd Vice-Chairperson), Mrs Miroslava **Němcová**, (3rd Vice-Chairperson) Mr Vicens Alay Ferrer, Mr Florin Serghei Anghel, Mrs Aneliya **Atanasova**, Mr Lokman **Ayva**, Mr Walter Bartoš, Mrs Deborah Bergamini, Mrs Oksana Bilozir, Mrs Guðfinna S. Bjarnadóttir, Mrs Rossana Boldi, Mr Ivan Brajović, Mr Petru Călian, Mr Miklós Csapody, Mr Vlad Cubreacov, Mrs Lena Dąbkowska-Cichocka, Mr Joseph Debono Grech, Mr Ferdinand Devínsky, Mr Daniel Ducarme, Ms Åse Gunhild Woie Duesund, Mrs Anke Eymer, Mr Gianni **Farina**, Mr Relu Fenechiu, Mrs Blanca **Fernández-Capel Baños** (alternate Mr Gabino Puche **Rodriguez-Acosta**), Mr Axel Fischer, Mr Gvozden Srećko **Flego**, Mr Dario Franceschini, Mr José **Freire Antunes**, Mrs Gisèle Gautier, Mr Ioannis Giannellis-Theodosiadis, Mr Martin Graf, Mr Oliver Heald, Mr Rafael Huseynov, Mr Fazail İbrahimli, Mr Mogens **Jensen**, Mr Morgan Johansson, Mrs Francine John-Calame (alternate Ms Doris **Fiala**), Ms Flora Kadriu, Mrs Liana Kanelli, Mr Jan **Kaźmierczak**, Ms Cecilia **Keaveney**, Mrs Svetlana Khorkina, Mr Serhii Kivalov, Mr Anatolij **Korobeynikov**, Ms Elvira Kovács, Mr József Kozma, Mr Jean-Pierre Kucheida, Mr Ertuğrul **Kumcuoğlu**, Ms Dalia Kuodyté, Mr Markku Laukkanen, Mr René van der Linden, Mrs Milica Marković, Mrs Muriel Marland-Militello, Mr Andrew **McIntosh**, Mrs Maria Manuela de Melo, Mrs Assunta Meloni, Mr Paskal Milo, Ms Christine Muttonen, Mr Tomislav Nikolić, Mr Edward O'Hara, Mr Kent Olsson, Mr Andrey Pantev, Mrs Antigoni Papadopoulou, Mrs Zatuhi **Postanjan**, Mrs Adoración Quesada Bravo, Mr Frédéric **Reiss**, Mrs Mailis Reps, Mrs Andreja Rihter, Mr Nicolae Robu, Mr

Paul Rowen, Mrs Anta Rugāte, Mrs Ana Sánchez Hernández, Mr Leander Schädler, Mr Yury Solonin, Mr Christophe Steiner, Mrs Doris **Stump**, Mr Valeriy Sudarenkov, Mr Petro Symonenko, Mr Guiorgui Targamadzé, Mr Hugo Vandenberghe, Mr Klaas De Vries, Mr Piotr Wach, Mr Wolfgang Wodarg.

N.B.: The names of the members who took part in the meeting are printed in **bold**

Secretariat of the committee: Mr Ary, Mr Dossow