



Doc. 13009

04 September 2012

The consolidation and international openness of the European Higher Education Area

Report¹

Committee on Culture, Science, Education and Media

Rapporteur: Mr Rafael HUSEYNOV, Azerbaijan, Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe

Summary

The Council of Europe laid the foundations of one of the most important reforms in education in the 20th century, the creation of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). Students, teachers and university staff can get access to the best university programmes Europe-wide. Higher education is gradually becoming borderless and is playing a more important role in bringing European peoples closer on the basis of common values.

Adherence to the fundamental principles of the EHEA, such as academic freedom, autonomy and the participation of students, determines the degree of international openness of the EHEA. Countries wishing to enhance co-operation with EHEA members, or to become a member, must ensure respect for these fundamental values through their policies and practice.

The consolidation of the EHEA would trigger increased opportunities for access to good quality higher education and ensure equality of access. Sustainable funding schemes and improved visa regimes, breaking administrative barriers to academic mobility, are essential to the success of the EHEA.

Member States must ensure that Europe remains attractive as a destination for higher education. They must build a coherent European higher education space in a framework which is developed in common and preserves the richness and the diversity of national systems.

1. Reference to committee: [Doc. 12289](#), Reference 3696 of 25 June 2010.



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A. Draft resolution²

1. The Parliamentary Assembly reaffirms its support for the Bologna Process and the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) as a guarantor of sustainable social development based on knowledge and research. It welcomes the significant role that the Council of Europe plays in this process as well as the continued efforts of member States to set up an effective system of higher education in Europe that meets the challenges of the 21st century.
2. However, the Assembly considers that further action is required to consolidate the EHEA and make it more open and attractive. Europe has a lot to offer, but also a lot to learn from other regions of the world and there is a need to take due account of the global context and the influence it has on higher education in Europe.
3. Higher education should provide students with competencies that enable them to enter sustainable employment, become active citizens in democratic societies and be capable of rising to the challenges they will be faced with in life. Europe should remain a place where talent and knowledge are retained, developed and valued, and where excellence in higher education and research attracts students from diverse origins and backgrounds. Teachers and researchers need to be better prepared for greater international co-operation.
4. Effectiveness of international co-operation depends on academic mobility. Yet many governments have a policy of reducing immigration and seem unwilling to make exceptions for academic mobility. The stated goals of the EHEA and national immigration policy need to be reconciled. This matter is particularly important since almost half of the EHEA member States are not part of the Schengen Area.
5. Greater bilateral and multilateral co-operation between EHEA and non-EHEA countries on a larger policy development level and on the level of individual institutions should be encouraged.
6. The Assembly reiterates its support for the principles that determine EHEA membership, such as commitment to academic freedom, institutional autonomy and student participation, and calls upon the public authorities of countries wishing to enhance co-operation with EHEA members, or wishing to become a member of the EHEA, to ensure respect for these fundamental values through their policies and practice, and to resist any attempt to restrict or control academic freedom through government interference
7. The successful implementation and functioning of the EHEA depends on the active participation and support of all stakeholders in the Bologna Process. Governments, higher education institutions and student associations are represented in the Process, while national parliaments are not yet part of it. The latter must be fully involved in the Process. In addition, the Parliamentary Assembly and the European Parliament should be represented at the Bologna Process ministerial conferences.
8. National parliaments should provide all the necessary political support to ensure implementation of the EHEA. Policy making in this area should be aimed at widening the geographical space of countries sharing the goals of the Bologna Process, and making the EHEA more open and more attractive to global co-operation initiatives. In addition, stronger parliamentary involvement should help gain support from interior and foreign affairs ministers in charge of defining immigration policies both domestically and at European level, to enhance academic mobility.
9. The Assembly therefore asks the member States of the Council of Europe to:
 - 9.1. ensure that the Council of Europe remains an active partner in the Bologna Process and that it contributes, through the External Dimension of the Process, to co-operation with other countries;
 - 9.2. continue to support the development of the EHEA and ensure coherent implementation of the Bologna objectives throughout the EHEA, and in particular:
 - 9.2.1. carry out the structural reforms which are still required (including review of legislation and national regulations, and the completion of the qualifications frameworks), encouraging involvement of all stakeholders;
 - 9.2.2. seek greater co-ordination and provide mutual support to reduce differences in implementation paces;
 - 9.2.3. consider the possibility of providing scholarships or flat rate contributions per student to top up the investment by those students who cannot afford to get access to higher education by their own means, ensuring, at the same time, strict oversight of the distribution of scholarships;

2. Draft resolution adopted unanimously by the committee on 29 May 2012.

- 9.3. foster mobility and exchanges of students, teachers, researchers and university managers, and to this effect:
- 9.3.1. take measures to further reduce administrative barriers to international mobility, such as those which obstruct the granting of visas, of social security coverage and of residence and work permits for staff;
 - 9.3.2. ensure proper recognition of qualifications acquired abroad upon return following a mobility scheme;
 - 9.3.3. provide adequate funding and ensure access to such funding through mobility schemes at European level;
- 9.4. implement the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) and take measures to improve compatibility and comparability of degrees, and in particular:
- 9.4.1. harmonise the ECTS points in substance, including clear and standard credit measurement in terms of student workload and unambiguous linkage to learning outcomes;
 - 9.4.2. implement the Europass Diploma Supplement scheme;
- 9.5. encourage the effective implementation of the principles and provisions of the Council of Europe/UNESCO Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region (ETS No. 165) and intensify co-operation with countries seeking accession;
- 9.6. develop communication and disseminate all relevant information on the EHEA both externally and internally;
- 9.7. strengthen co-operation and partnership with countries outside the EHEA, encouraging the exchange of new ideas and the sharing of good practice.

B. Draft recommendation³

1. The Parliamentary Assembly, referring to its Resolution ... (2012) on the consolidation and international openness of the European Higher Education Area, welcomes the Committee of Ministers' initiatives aimed at strengthening dialogue between public authorities, academia, student representatives and civil society with a view to better defining the Council of Europe's contribution to the Bologna Process. The Assembly also welcomes the representation of the Organisation in the Bologna Follow-Up Group and values the assistance provided for the development of national qualifications frameworks in a number of Council of Europe member States.
2. The Assembly strongly believes that the role of the Council of Europe in the field of higher education is crucial and irreplaceable. Even within the present difficult budgetary context and the constraints it entails, the Council of Europe should continue to support higher education reforms aimed at meeting the goals of the Bologna Process and at consolidating the European Higher Education Area (EHEA).
3. Referring to its Resolution ... (2012) on governance of higher education institutions, the Assembly stresses the importance of preserving and strengthening the independence of higher education institutions and academic freedom as fundamental principles for the EHEA.
4. The Assembly therefore invites the Committee of Ministers to:
 - 4.1. reflect the strategic importance of higher education in its decisions on the Council of Europe programme of activities and continue to ensure active participation of the Council of Europe in the implementation of the EHEA and in the Bologna Process;
 - 4.2. ask its competent steering committee to:
 - 4.2.1. study the relationship and interaction between qualifications frameworks, recognition of qualifications and quality assurance, and identify measures needed to ensure coherence in the implementation of the EHEA instruments;
 - 4.2.2. study the feasibility of devising a pan-European mechanism aimed at facilitating the recognition of qualifications, such as a European qualifications passport;
 - 4.2.3. consider ways and means of fostering the exchange of good practices in higher education reform between EHEA member countries and non-EHEA countries;
 - 4.3. strengthen co-operation with the European Union in this area, in order to provide targeted support for the consolidation of the EHEA in the countries that joined the EHEA recently and to provide assistance in reaching the objectives of the Bologna Process, including in terms of academic mobility.

3. Draft recommendation adopted unanimously by the committee on 29 May 2012.

C. Explanatory memorandum by Mr Huseynov, rapporteur

1. Introduction

1. Following the motion on “The extension of the European Higher Education Area to all countries” (Doc. 12289), tabled by Mr Luca Volontè and others, the Committee on Culture, Science and Education appointed me rapporteur on 10 October 2010.⁴ An outline report was presented to the committee in Zagreb on 13 May 2011 and the title of the report was changed. The committee took its final decision on the title as it appears above at its meeting on 23-26 June 2012. Professor Marina Lebedeva (Moscow) was commissioned to prepare a background report, which was discussed in Paris on 6 December 2011. An introductory memorandum was presented and discussed on 5 March 2012 in Paris at the hearing organised jointly with UNESCO, with the participation of Ambassador Arif Mammadov, Chair of the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers’ Rapporteur Group on Education, Culture, Sport, Youth and Environment (GR-C), Professor Pavel Zgaga, Director of the Centre for Educational Policy Studies, University of Ljubljana, Professor Germain Dondelinger, Co-ordinator for Higher Education, Ministry of Culture, Higher Education and Research, Luxembourg, Dr Annette Pieper de Avila, Senior Consultant, Section for Higher Education, UNESCO, Ms Anna Glass, Secretary General, Magna Charta Observatory, Bologna, Ms Ligia Deca, Co-ordinator, Romanian Bologna Follow-Up Group Secretariat, Bucharest, and Mr Frank Petrikowski, Higher Education Unit, Directorate-General for Education and Culture, European Commission, Brussels.⁵

2. The creation of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA)⁶ is a substantial achievement in international co-operation that involves higher education institutions through the Bologna Process, which was launched in 1999. The establishment of the EHEA put higher education reform strongly on the broader political agenda and identified areas requiring structural reforms not only in the education field as such, but also in many other public policy areas.

3. Some of these reforms have not yet been completed and major differences still exist among EHEA member States. Successful implementation and functioning of the EHEA depends on the active participation and support of all stakeholders in the Bologna Process. An intergovernmental framework is an effective tool for rapid decision making and reform promotion, but the success of the actual implementation lies with its endorsement by national parliaments, higher education institutions and student associations.

4. This report aims to propose specific action that can and should be taken to make sure that the objectives of the EHEA are met. Expanding the higher education reforms requires commitment and engagement by public authorities and higher education institutions. However, this commitment cannot last if political support is lacking. I therefore see a role for the Parliamentary Assembly in ensuring the sustainability of this process.

5. I also believe that the EHEA will not become a fortress excluding non-European countries: it should remain open and enable students, teachers and researchers to maintain international exchange programmes with non-EHEA countries. Therefore, the report proposes opening the processes that led to the establishment of the EHEA to countries outside the geographical area already covered by the Bologna Process in the form of a community of practice that would enable progress and foster international co-operation in a global setting.

6. Prior work of the committee in this field led to Assembly [Recommendation 1892 \(2009\)](#) on the contribution of the Council of Europe in the development of the EHEA, prepared by our distinguished late colleague Andrew McIntosh, preceded by [Recommendation 1620 \(2003\)](#) on the Council of Europe contribution to the higher education area and [Recommendation 1762 \(2006\)](#) on academic freedom and university autonomy.

7. The intergovernmental sector of the Council of Europe has been closely involved in the Bologna Process and the EHEA. Its latest practical contributions are summarised in the document submitted to the Bologna Follow-Up Group (BFUG) meeting in Gödöllő (Hungary) on 17 and 18 March 2011.⁷

4. I take this opportunity to thank Professor Marina Lebedeva and Ms Maria A. Chepurina of the Moscow State Institute for International Relations for their co-operation in the preparation of this report.

5. See document AS/Cult/Inf (2012) 5.

6. www.ehea.info.

7. See www.ehea.info/Uploads/Irina/BFUG_HU_AD_24_13a%20CoE%20update.pdf.

2. From European co-operation in higher education to the EHEA

2.1. Standard-setting in higher education – An historical overview

8. Higher education has long been identified as a key element in creating an environment conducive to European integration. European co-operation in higher education started essentially through three Council of Europe treaties: the European Convention on the Equivalence of Diplomas leading to Admission to Universities (ETS No. 15) (1953), the European Convention on the Equivalence of Periods of University Study (ETS No. 21) (1956) and the European Convention on the Academic Recognition of University Qualifications (ETS No. 32) (1959). Another important step was achieved with the European Agreement on Continued Payment of Scholarships to Students Studying Abroad (ETS No. 69) (1969). The first three conventions were largely updated in 1997 through the Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region (ETS No. 165, “Lisbon Recognition Convention”), elaborated by the Council of Europe with UNESCO.⁸

9. With the entry into force of the European Union Lisbon Treaty in December 2009, the role of the European Union with regard to education policies was clearly defined under Article 165 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union which stipulates that:

“The Union shall contribute to the development of quality education by encouraging cooperation between Member States and, if necessary, by supporting and supplementing their action, while fully respecting the responsibility of the Member States for the content of teaching and the organisation of education systems and their cultural and linguistic diversity. ... Union action shall be aimed at: ... encouraging mobility of students and teachers, by encouraging inter alia, the academic recognition of diplomas and periods of study, promoting cooperation between educational establishments, developing exchanges of information and experience on issues common to the education systems of the Member States, ... encouraging the development of distance education. ... The Union and the Member States shall foster cooperation with third countries and the competent international organisations in the field of education and sport, in particular the Council of Europe.”

10. The European Commission has been a major source of funding for student mobility between universities since the creation of the Erasmus Programme in 1987, which enabled more than 2 million students to participate in exchange programmes during its first two decades. It currently constitutes some 40% of the EU Lifelong Learning Programme 2007-2013, which has a total budget of nearly 7 billion euros. In addition, the European Commission created the Erasmus Mundus Programme in 2004, which funds student exchanges in the framework of one- or two-year masters courses at universities within the European Union and the EEA/EFTA (European Economic Area/European Free Trade Association) for students from abroad.

11. Universities in Europe and beyond co-operate directly also under the Magna Charta Universitatum and its Observatory in Bologna. The Magna Charta Universitatum is a political text opened for signature by universities in Bologna in 1988.⁹ It contains basic principles regarding university autonomy and freedom of academia and research.

2.2. The EHEA today

12. The European Higher Education Area was officially launched at the ministerial conference in Budapest and Vienna in March 2010, celebrating the 10th anniversary of the Bologna Process – a political initiative launched in 1999 by several European education ministers. The EHEA maintains this structure of multilateral political co-operation of education ministers from currently 47 European countries and the Holy See. Participating education ministers regularly produce political declarations under the Bologna Process. New member States have to accede to those declarations which are not, however, legally binding treaties under public international law.

13. The European Union has not signed the Bologna Process declarations. However, Article 165 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union identifies the European Parliament and the European Council as the EU organs in charge of devising EU instruments to support the development of educational policies and the country chairing the European Council also co-chairs the Bologna Follow-Up Group.¹⁰

8. See <http://conventions.coe.int/Treaty/en/Treaties/Html/165.htm>.

9. See www.magna-charta.org/library/userfiles/file/mc_english.pdf.

10. According to a 2009 ministerial decision, the BFUG, which has the overall steerage of the Bologna Process, is chaired by two States, the country holding the EU presidency and a non-EU country. This has helped overcome the system modelled solely on the EU presidency, which basically excluded 20 countries.

14. The Council of Europe participates in the EHEA as a “consultative member” alongside the European Centre for Higher Education of UNESCO (Bucharest), the European University Association (EUA) (Brussels), the European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE) (Brussels), the European Students’ Union (ESU) (Brussels), the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) (Helsinki), Education International (EI) (Brussels) and Business Europe (Brussels).¹¹

15. The EHEA aims to build bridges between national structures and to make them more compatible, but not to harmonise or develop a single European higher education system. The first decade of the Bologna Process focused on structural reforms: qualifications frameworks and degree systems with the adoption of a system of easily readable and comparable degrees, quality assurance and recognition with the establishment of the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS), with increased mobility and attractiveness as transversal goals and, in the course of the period, an increasing focus on the social dimension, as well as on the EHEA in a global context.

16. The major impact of the Bologna Process has been the introduction throughout Europe of bachelor degrees after a study period of generally three years as well as of a system of credits (ECTS) for higher education studies or hours of work per academic year, thus following the credit systems established much earlier by American universities as well as the traditional degree systems of British and American universities. The distinction between universities and other institutions of higher education such as polytechnics was largely abolished by reducing the first academic degree to a bachelor degree after a study period of three years instead of a first university degree after a study period of at least four years which existed typically in continental Europe.

17. In addition, many education ministries and relevant non-governmental organisations (NGOs) participating in the Bologna Process created the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education in Brussels, which builds a network of national quality assurance organisations.¹²

18. The Bologna Process has become an institution in a more sociological sense, acquiring value and legitimacy beyond the performance of concrete tasks. It reflects a common policy vision. In policy-making terms, it has also been a mechanism for developing policies and testing co-operation modes within the larger pan-European community, taking place on equal, benevolent terms, meaning that there is no supranational power to enforce reforms, but that it is the country itself that decides on the measures to be taken.

19. The Council of Europe provides the geographical framework for the Bologna Process through the European Cultural Convention (ETS No. 18). Being a party to the Cultural Convention is not enough, however, to be admitted to the European Higher Education Area, since the competent authorities must also commit to the values and priorities of the Bologna Process, including its fundamental values of academic freedom, institutional autonomy and student participation – all of which are sound Council of Europe values.

3. Challenges for the EHEA

20. Twelve years after the start of the Bologna Process and one year after the launch of the EHEA, the EHEA faces a number of challenges. Higher education systems across the 47 EHEA countries look significantly different: most structural elements of the area, namely those involving legislation and national regulations, have been implemented at least partly and most reformed structures are now in place. However, the extent to which the new structures are actually implemented varies somewhat and some countries have yet to finalise their qualifications frameworks. It should also be taken into consideration that some of the desired outcomes of the key objectives of compatibility, comparability and attractiveness require post-implementation time to bear its fruit.

3.1. Differences in implementation paces

21. Eighteen countries joined the Bologna Process between 2001 and 2010; this led to different paces in national and institutional implementation, with some countries and institutions lagging behind or choosing the “à la carte” approach. As the EHEA is a political commitment taken by each participating country, there are no means of enforcing uniform performance or practices. Indeed, both the Bologna Process and the EHEA were

11. See the organisational chart presented in the appendix to the introductory memorandum (AS/Cult (2012) 10).

12. Quality assurance in the EHEA, while respecting the principle of subsidiarity, is based on a common ground of shared values and principles and is conducted in the specific European way of professionally sound processes with participation of all stakeholders. The primary responsibility for quality lies with the institutions. Involvement of all relevant stakeholders, including students, in quality assurance processes and quality assurance agencies is essential.

conceived as a non-binding framework, a community of practice in which reform implementation is the responsibility of each country. Not all EHEA members started from a similar baseline, as some already had certain elements of their higher education systems similar to those required by Bologna, which made the adjustment process easier.

22. The 2010 Budapest-Vienna Declaration stressed that “EHEA action lines such as degree and curriculum reform, quality assurance, recognition, mobility and the social dimension are implemented to varying degrees”. These conclusions are echoed in the latest stocktaking report (2009) which demonstrated that the original objectives of the Bologna Process, set to be achieved by 2010, had proved to be overly ambitious. In addition, due to the voluntary character of engagement, some countries have not always been able or made enough effort to catch up with the pace of the Bologna Process. Thus, a number of goals still remain to be achieved in order to have a genuine cohesive Europe-wide higher education area.

23. It is important to ensure coherent implementation of the “Bologna policies” throughout the EHEA in order for it to establish itself as a global player reinforcing the attractiveness of European higher education. The question of what to do in the case of countries that are a long way from implementing the main goals remains open. Should these countries be kept in the EHEA with only some limited support through technical advice from other countries of the EHEA or should the membership of these countries be called into question?

3.2. Enhancing mobility

24. Mobility is one of the core goals of the Bologna Process; key issues are to increase the attractiveness of the area for students from non-EHEA countries and boost the level of student and staff circulation within the higher education area itself. The Leuven Communiqué set a concrete 20% target to be achieved by 2020. Student mobility includes credit mobility (relatively short-term placements abroad integrated in the general course of study) and diploma mobility which presupposes a full period of study leading to the award of a diploma. The internal openness of the EHEA is measured by the growth in internal diploma mobility as well as by the increase in the number of students with study experience in another EHEA country.

25. Mobility facilitation, a crucial point for EHEA consolidation, is closely interconnected with better implementation of the Lisbon Recognition Convention, of the Diploma Supplement and of the European Credit Transfer System, together with the qualifications frameworks and quality assurance systems.

26. Unfortunately, imbalance of mobility flows between States continues to make western European countries the major recipients of foreign EHEA students, while eastern Europe and Turkey are the area’s main exporters. The 2012 Bologna implementation report depicts the incoming degree mobility rate¹³ to EHEA countries, showing mobile students from the whole world coming to an EHEA country, but excluding mobile students from other EHEA countries. In four countries, namely Cyprus, the United Kingdom, France and Ireland, the number of these students is more than 5% of the total number of students enrolled. These countries thus seem to be the most attractive countries for students coming from outside the EHEA. At the other end of the spectrum, in 16 countries the ratio is below 1%. The weighted average of all countries is 2.25%. However, the overall volume of incoming students also needs to be considered. Indeed, a different picture emerges when looking at the distribution of incoming mobile students by country of destination.¹⁴ Four countries – the United Kingdom, France, Russia and Germany – attract 76% of all students from outside the EHEA. There is also the specific case of small countries such as Luxembourg, Andorra and Liechtenstein with limited capacity in higher education, in which the proportion of students studying abroad is very high.

27. An exceptional and instructive case is the Czech Republic, which witnessed an almost 400% increase (from 1.2% to 5.8%) in incoming students from the EHEA between 1999 and 2007. The secret of such success is based on the provision of free educational services to foreign students if they are enrolled in Czech-language programmes, in addition to a large variety of State, university and regional scholarships (such as, for example, the Visegrad Fund scholarships). Interested foreign students have the possibility of undertaking a one-year paid language proficiency course after which they are able to continue their studies in the national language (Czech) for a degree at public and State institutions free of charge. This concept has enabled the country both to internationalise (that is, increase the number of foreign students) and to promote its mother tongue.

13. See Figure 7.1, p. 154 (http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/documents/thematic_reports/138EN.pdf).

14. Ibid., Figure 7.2, p. 155.

28. To boost mobility among students coming from all EHEA countries requires overcoming various barriers, such as financial hardship, visa and language barriers, lack of relevant information and differences in academic calendars. Positive aspects of mobility may also be jeopardised by the brain-drain tendency in certain EHEA States, perceived as a result of student exchanges.

29. European governments have signed up to increasing academic mobility, yet many governments have a stated policy of reducing immigration and seem unwilling to make exceptions for academic mobility. There is therefore incoherence between the stated goals for the EHEA, to which all countries have committed through their ministers, and national immigration policy and practice.

30. The incoherence of our domestic policy making, when international co-operation commitments by education ministers are not backed up by interior and foreign affairs ministers in charge of defining immigration policies both domestically and at European level, is a problem that needs parliamentary involvement for it to be solved. This matter is particularly important and must not be overlooked, since almost half of the EHEA member States are not part of the Schengen Area.¹⁵

31. Greater attention is also to be paid to the development of scholar and professor mobility within the EHEA, an issue currently neglected. While higher levels of student mobility are a crucial factor in the creation of the “Europe of knowledge”, the paradox of learning globally while teaching locally should be avoided. Internationalisation of scientific research and publications, conducted within one common programme by several universities from the EHEA, can be one of the first viable steps in this direction. I therefore welcome the Bucharest Communiqué¹⁶ adopted at the EHEA Conference of Ministers responsible for Higher Education at their meeting on 26 and 27 April 2012,¹⁷ which calls on member States to promote quality, transparency, employability and mobility in the third cycle, as the education and training of doctoral candidates has a particular role to play in bridging the EHEA and the European Research Area (ERA).

3.3. Improving the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System

32. The cornerstone of the Bologna Process is the 1997 Lisbon Recognition Convention, which stipulates that each party to the convention shall “recognise the qualifications issued by other Parties meeting the general requirements for access to higher education in those Parties” (Article 4(1)). In 2003, the Berlin Communiqué reiterated the importance of the convention. Today, significant progress has been achieved in terms of compliance of national legislation with it. Nevertheless, current recognition practices, especially those in higher education institutions, show that improvements are still needed.¹⁸

33. Readable and comparable degrees imply a common degree structure (bachelor’s-masters-doctorate), which itself requires the development of common Bologna “tools”, such as the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System and the Diploma Supplement. Today, the ECTS, which enables students to collect credits for courses taken during their study period and to automatically validate the courses taken abroad at their home university on the basis of credits collected, is fully implemented in 36 participating States (Eurydice 2010). The main challenge is the harmonisation of the ECTS points in substance, which implies clear and standard credit measurement in terms of student workload and unambiguous linkage to learning outcomes, whereas today the ECTS points are mostly calculated on the basis of contact hours.

34. In addition, the number of hours required for one ECTS point varies significantly among countries, defined in Norway as 20 hours of study and in Spain as 10. Wider implementation of the ECTS is also a crucial tool in achieving one of the most innovative and prospective aims of the Bologna Process, namely the popularisation of the process of lifelong learning, during which students unable to follow the traditional route in higher education would be able to collect the credits and acquire a degree over a longer period of time. This scheme seems to have significant potential taking into consideration that today’s employer prioritises what the graduate knows and is able to do, rather than the procedure through which the qualification was achieved.¹⁹

35. The second instrument of the Bologna toolkit is the Diploma Supplement, defined as a document attached to a higher education diploma that describes the nature, level, contents and status of the studies completed as well as the competencies and knowledge gained. The Berlin Communiqué stipulates that the Diploma Supplement should be issued to every student at the end of his or her studies automatically, free of

15. Schengen co-operation was incorporated into the European Union framework by the Treaty of Amsterdam of 1997. See http://biblio.ucv.ro/bib_web/bib_pdf/EU_books/0056.pdf.

16. www.ehea.info/Uploads/%281%29/Bucharest%20Communique%202012%281%29.pdf.

17. <http://bologna-bucharest2012.ehea.info>.

18. Stocktaking report 2009.

19. Bergan, in: P. Zgaga, *Looking out: the Bologna Process in a global setting*, 2006.

charge and in a widely spoken European language. While overall progress has been made, only half of the member States have managed to implement it fully, the others either fail to issue it automatically and to all graduates, or do not produce a standardised easily readable document.

36. The EHEA member States must also ensure that the introduction of the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System does not remain a formalistic exercise disconnected from new developments, such as learning outcomes and qualifications frameworks. The recognition of credit transfer, central to the promotion of mobility, must be improved.

37. A pan-European mechanism aimed at facilitating the recognition of qualifications, such as a European qualifications passport, could be developed to enable recognition of both formal and non-formal learning and the development of competencies throughout life.²⁰ Such a document could refer to certified qualifications (diplomas for example), employment history, professional skills and competencies (acquired on the job, non-certified), and other competencies (languages, computer skills, etc.)

3.4. Other issues

38. In order to develop, the EHEA needs to evolve from simply consisting of intergovernmental co-operation and gain wider political support, in particular from national parliaments, higher education institutions, students and academic staff. Higher education institutions need to be better prepared for greater competition with other higher education institutions inside their country and abroad. At the same time, teachers and researchers need to be better prepared for greater international co-operation.

39. An intergovernmental framework is an effective tool for rapid decision making and reform promotion, but the success of the actual implementation lies with its endorsement by national parliaments, higher education institutions and student associations. This is why the members of the Parliamentary Assembly should stand ready to provide all the necessary political support to ensure implementation of “Bologna policies” in their respective countries.

40. At the hearing on education policies, held in Paris on 5 March 2012, Ms Ligia Deca, Co-ordinator of the Romanian Bologna Follow-Up Group Secretariat, confirmed that the main EHEA goals for the coming years can only be achieved by close co-operation between governments, higher education institutions and stakeholders. She also stressed that global dialogue between students and academic staff, as well as the internationalisation of higher education institutions, are essential in creating links which go beyond intergovernmental talks. This dialogue should be intensified in the future and focused on specific topics of interest.²¹

4. Consolidation and international openness of the EHEA

41. Neither a European fortress nor an ivory tower, the EHEA should take account of globalisation, reinforcing international co-operation in higher education. The Lisbon Recognition Convention provides an adequate legal basis for co-operation with non-European States. Non-European signatories to this convention should have the possibility of closer co-operation with higher education institutions in the EHEA. However, although possible geographical enlargement is looked upon favourably, expanding the process within the already existing member States remains a priority.

42. The consolidation of the EHEA is sometimes interpreted as “standardisation”. Even though the aim is to have comparable degree structures, which requires putting a certain system into place, this should not lead to uniformity in European higher education. The major strength of the EHEA is that it is very diverse. As was explained by Anna Glass, each university, while promoting the academic principles and values outlined in the Magna Charta Universitatum, should not aim to be a “generic best”, but to be the best in some discipline, the best for some purpose, the best for someone. Licensing, accreditation and quality assurance should take into account the specific mission and objectives of a given university.²²

20. Proposals for a European qualification passport have been made in the building industry (see BASICON Qualification Passport, <http://cc.basicon.org/index/523>) and in the hospitality sector (by the European Federation of Food, Agriculture and Tourism Trade Unions (EFFAT) and the European Association of Hotels, Restaurants and Cafes in Europe (HOTREC) (www.hotrec.eu/cust/search.aspx?q=European%20Qualification%20passport)).

21. See Document AS/Cult/Inf (2012) 5.

22. Statement by Anna Glass, Secretary General of the Magna Charta Observatory at the hearing of 5 March 2012 in Paris (AS/Cult/Inf (2012) 5).

43. The Bologna Declaration sets itself an objective of ensuring that “the European higher education system acquires a worldwide degree of attraction”. Consolidation of the EHEA through the expansion of reform processes and the widening of the geographical area of countries sharing the goals of the Bologna Process will help make the EHEA more open and more attractive to global co-operation initiatives. The EHEA would thus become stronger from within and also be supported by the outside world thanks to its allies.

44. The strategy for the external dimension of the Bologna Process – “European Higher Education in a Global Setting”²³ – is a solid basis for the proposals put forward in this report. The strategy does not exclude any region or country of the world. However, individual European countries have strong links with specific regions or countries outside Europe, and they may want to develop those links further. The diversity of the international co-operation activities of individual countries and institutions of higher education across the world should be perceived as a strength and an asset for the EHEA.

45. The strategy encompasses the following core policy areas, presented in greater detail below: improving information on the EHEA; promoting European higher education to enhance its worldwide attractiveness and competitiveness; strengthening co-operation based on partnership; intensifying policy dialogue; and furthering recognition of qualifications.

4.1. Improving information on the EHEA

46. The Bologna Process has a high degree of visibility outside the EHEA. It has enhanced the attractiveness of Europe as a destination for students and scholars from other parts of the world. Mobility from other parts of the world towards the EHEA has increased substantially and faster than it has grown worldwide, with the EHEA countries attracting 30% of the overall number of foreign students in 2007.²⁴ However, this does not mean that all relevant stakeholders outside Europe know enough about the key elements of the Bologna Process. In many cases, there are even important misperceptions, which need to be rectified. It is therefore important to monitor global perception and assessment of the Bologna Process, to provide correct information about the EHEA and make the “Bologna label” better known.

47. Although a website devoted to the EHEA has been launched, too little is done by the European higher education systems themselves to enforce the legal “personality” of the process, with most countries preferring to promote their own higher education systems internationally rather than the entire EHEA.²⁵ This situation could change in the near future, with an increasing number of higher education institutions throughout the EHEA proposing programmes in English and creating financially favourable conditions for non-EHEA students to enrol in their programmes. Inter-EHEA joint degrees and mobility programmes between lesser-known institutions can help attract students even to traditionally less popular destinations, provided that they offer good-quality services for moderate prices. Ensuring the comparative quality of educational standards is an essential precondition for rendering the EHEA more open and attractive internationally.

4.2. Promoting European higher education to enhance its worldwide attractiveness and competitiveness

48. Europe must make concerted efforts to increase its international attractiveness to students, teachers and researchers across the world. To this end, all Bologna countries should designate an organisation as having prime responsibility for co-ordinating efforts for the international promotion of their higher education systems and institutions.

49. The goal of an EHEA in which students, staff and holders of qualifications are able to move freely cannot be reached through measures of higher education policy alone. This important goal equally depends on facilitating the granting of visas and on facilitating social security coverage, as well as on granting staff work permits. While these measures are outside the competence of ministers responsible for higher education, they are within the competence of the governments of Bologna Process countries.

50. As Dr Anette Pieper de Avila, senior consultant to UNESCO, stressed at the hearing on education policies held in Paris, international openness means co-operation with universities outside the EHEA and namely in developing countries. An open door is an invitation to come in, but it is also an invitation to go out, at least for a while. Therefore, when one talks about international openness of the EHEA, on the one hand its attractiveness for students and researchers from outside the area comes into play. But, on the other hand, the

23. www.ehea.info/Uploads/Documents/Strategy-for-EHEA-in-global-setting.pdf.

24. *First decade of working on the EHEA*, Vol. 1, 2009.

25. Stocktaking report 2009.

possibilities for students and professors of the European Higher Education Area to go out and co-operate with universities worldwide are just as important. International openness should never be perceived as a one-way street, and UNESCO has strongly encouraged this dual dimension of international openness.²⁶

4.3. Strengthening co-operation based on partnership

51. Apart from the information and promotion activities intended to showcase and strengthen Europe's attractiveness, there is a need for enhanced higher education co-operation with non-EHEA countries in a spirit of partnership and solidarity, aimed at mutual benefit on all levels and covering the full range of higher education programmes, including lifelong learning.

52. This need for co-operation and partnership extends to all regions of the world, covering highly developed, emerging and developing countries alike. However, co-operation with institutions of higher education in developing countries has been and must remain an especially important task for the EHEA countries in order to build capacity in higher education, which is a crucial condition for the socio-economic development of these developing countries.

53. Like the Tempus programme, launched at the beginning of the 1990s to promote the spirit of political change in central and eastern Europe, the Bologna "spirit" of co-operation and partnership can also be shared with other parts of the increasingly interconnected and open world. An important step in this direction was made with the creation of the Bologna Policy Forum, which took place for the first time in 2009, followed by the Second Forum in 2010 (the third is scheduled for 2012).

54. China has been carefully examining the degree structure synchronisation undertaken in Europe as well as mobility enforcement measures, using European experience in its development of a strategic plan for higher education up to 2020. Australia has gone even further, clearly stating that it could not afford to ignore the changes taking place in Europe, unless it wanted to "be left out of the tent".²⁷ Consequently, co-operation projects were launched not only between European and Australian universities, which already have strong ties, but also within the region, leading to the adoption of the 2006 Brisbane Communiqué, which launched the Asia-Pacific Higher Education Area, covering 52 countries.

55. All players should join forces to provide the requisite framework conditions, including balanced exchanges or capacity-building measures to counteract brain drain. Citing one of the recent developments at the Parliamentary Assembly, one could suggest that co-operation with countries that acquired Partner for Democracy status with the Parliamentary Assembly be extended to enable co-operation in the field of higher education.

56. Greater bilateral and multilateral co-operation between EHEA and non-EHEA countries on the larger policy development level and on the level of individual institutions is to be encouraged, especially in cases where historical and cultural links already exist. Thus, further development of the Euro-Mediterranean Higher Education Area project, well complemented by the Euro-Mediterranean University Forum, is desirable. Such co-operation, based on close communication and good practice sharing, proves advantageous not only for the countries directly engaged, but for the entire area, promoting better understanding of its values and potential.

57. Another interesting case is the Russian-speaking area, which transcends the EHEA "borders". Russia has a close relationship and strong co-operation ties with higher education systems in the Central Asian States, such as Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, which are not members of the EHEA. Traditionally, their higher education systems have been closely connected with Russian universities, but the Bologna Process puts them on the "external side". In this sense, it is of crucial importance not to construct artificial borders, but to act as a bridge between these countries and the larger EHEA community, which can also be a wider reform initiator in the field of higher education. Moreover, the pace and quality of reforms in Russia affect other countries in this area. As an example, although the Russian Federation acceded to the Bologna Process in 2003, there is still no direct access to higher education after twelve years of study. This has a direct negative effect on the system in the Transnistrian region of the Republic of Moldova, where universities continue to apply Russian Federation rules. Improving the implementation of the Bologna reform in Russia would, therefore, have a positive impact elsewhere in Europe.

58. Greater EHEA openness and visibility can also be promoted via the Tuning projects implemented today in 60 countries worldwide. They were launched with "Tuning Latin America" in 2003, when Latin American higher education institutions suggested that an intercontinental project, based on the Bologna Process

26. See document AS/Cult/Inf (2012) 5.

27. D. Illing, "European standard poses a challenge", *Australian*, April 2006.

experience, be launched both to “tune up” the region’s higher education institutions, harmonising their qualifications framework, and to make the Latin American programme more compatible with the European framework.

59. This proved to be a successful experience and it paved the way for new Tuning projects, such as “Tuning USA”, “Tuning Australia” and the recently launched “Tuning Africa”. In the United States, three State higher education systems (Indiana, Minnesota and Utah) have formed study groups to examine the applicability of the European experience to American higher education institutions as well as trying out a few of its procedures. Utah went even further, adopting its own version of the Diploma Supplement as an information tool.²⁸

60. Co-operation and partnerships should be built both externally and internally. The EHEA can benefit also from the opening of European higher education institutions to the socio-economic world. Universities have developed important links with social and economic forces in their respective regions. These links are built through the development of professional channels, which provide for the participation of professionals in education and internships in business, through the involvement of universities in continuous training, and the creation of research contracts.

4.4. Intensifying policy dialogue

61. The Bologna Process has had and will continue to have a large impact on the global higher education architecture, not solely in terms of student mobility, but also in terms of policy development. It would be useful to systematise and broaden the policy dialogue already initiated with non-EHEA country governments and stakeholders regarding the introduction of higher education reform and innovation in order to exchange new ideas and share good practice. The participation of non-EHEA country stakeholders in Bologna seminars is one approach in this respect. Joint conferences and seminars on issues of mutual interest and in different languages are another possibility.

62. Policy dialogue should be based on already existing and well-functioning fora, such as Bologna ministerial conferences and Bologna policy fora (which since 2009 have been organised on the margin of the ministerial conferences. A number of non-European countries are invited to this forum). This, however, does not imply a formal recognition in relation to the EHEA.

63. Co-operation with UNESCO should be strengthened to enable policy dialogue with other regions of the world. This requires resources, however. The latest budgetary cuts in higher education exchange programmes due to austerity measures will bring to a halt a series of initiatives, making Europe lose momentum in higher education reform and making it more difficult to respond to challenges in a global setting in the long run.

64. The European Union is already very active in supporting the Bologna Process,²⁹ and therefore should be involved systematically in policy making related to the implementation of the EHEA. A knowledge-based economy – which is one of the major goals of the European Union – can only be built if transfer of knowledge is not restricted by administrative barriers, such as diverging visa regimes, or regulations preventing receipt of residence and work permits.

65. The Assembly should act to ensure that the Council of Europe remains an active counterpart in the Bologna Process, including also through the External Dimension of the Process that defines co-operation with countries that are not Council of Europe member States.

4.5. Furthering recognition of qualifications

66. The recognition of qualifications is a key element in facilitating mobility to, from and within the EHEA. Developing policies and practice furthering the fair recognition of qualifications is therefore a key element of the Strategy for the European Higher Education in a Global Setting.³⁰ Recognition of qualifications should also lead to fair treatment of visiting lecturers, ensuring them the same salaries as nationals of the host country. Difference in income, when significant, could act as a barrier and discourage third-cycle mobility.

28. C. Adelman, “The Bologna Club: what U.S. higher education can learn from a decade of European reconstruction”, IHEP, 2008 (www.ihep.org/assets/files/TheBolognaClub.pdf).

29. See the draft report on modernising Europe’s higher education systems, Mr László Tőkés, Committee on Culture and Education, European Parliament (2011/2294(INI)).

30. www.ehea.info/Uploads/Documents/Strategy-for-EHEA-in-global-setting.pdf.

67. Within the EHEA, the recognition of qualifications is based on the Council of Europe/UNESCO Lisbon Recognition Convention (1997) and its four subsidiary texts. This legal framework is implemented through policy and practice developed at national level, including, from 2007 onwards, national action plans in the Bologna Process, and, in particular, for the ENIC (European Network of Information Centres) and NARIC (National Academic Recognition Information Centres) networks, co-ordinated jointly by the Council of Europe, the European Commission and UNESCO-CEPES (European Centre for Higher Education).

68. Two important features of the current policy developments are, first, a shift of emphasis from the procedures and formalities of higher education to learning outcomes and, second, the development of a better common understanding of the concept of “substantial differences”, that is differences between qualifications that may lead to partial recognition and non-recognition. The recognition of prior learning should also be given increased priority.

5. Concluding remarks

69. Member States should do their utmost to ensure that Europe stays attractive as a destination for higher education. To achieve that, European governments must promote the mobility of students and teachers. They must build a coherent European higher education space in a framework which is developed in common and which preserves the richness and the diversity of national systems.

70. Since the Council of Europe is expressly referred to in the Lisbon Treaty of the European Union with regard to education, Council of Europe bodies should reinforce their action for the benefit of the EHEA. The Committee of Ministers and specialised ministerial conferences, as well as the Parliamentary Assembly, the Conference of International NGOs and the European Youth Forum, should play a more active role.

71. Given the principle of academic freedom and university autonomy,³¹ it is important to consider higher education institutions as key stakeholders of the EHEA. Degree and course requirements should not be imposed top-down. Higher education institutions should determine these requirements to a greater extent, because they know best the systematic problems and students' expectations. Subsidiarity is the keyword.

72. The European Agreement on Continued Payment of Scholarships to Students Studying Abroad should be revitalised and possibly amended, because it could particularly help students from non-EU countries and be enlarged to non-European countries.

73. As the only existing international treaty in this field, the Council of Europe/UNESCO Lisbon Recognition Convention should become a global convention, thus enabling student exchanges beyond Europe. It has already been ratified by Australia, Belarus, the Holy See, Israel, Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, New Zealand and Tajikistan and signed by Canada and the United States. More should therefore be done to encourage further worldwide accession to this convention.

74. International openness of the EHEA would not only stimulate and facilitate contacts and co-operation, but can also serve as a mirror in which the Europeans would better see their own challenges. Moreover, the desire to open up internationally leads to the modernisation of pedagogical approaches at national level.

75. International openness should never be perceived as a one-way street. On the one hand, students and researchers from outside the area are invited to enter, and on the other hand, the possibilities for students and professors of the EHEA to go out and co-operate with universities worldwide are just as important. This dual dimension of international openness should be supported by all stakeholders.

76. Greater engagement of all stakeholders in the functioning and implementation of the EHEA is absolutely essential, as the area can no longer develop through closed intergovernmental co-operation alone. Those affected and engaged in the process should participate not merely as subjects but as empowered actors whose contribution enriches the whole process.

77. The potential of a greater involvement of local and regional authorities should not be overlooked. Higher education and research are at the heart of economic, social and cultural development. They are a factor of attractiveness and development for cities and regions and are crucial for the advancement towards innovation and a knowledge society in 21st-century Europe.

31. See Assembly [Recommendation 1762 \(2006\)](#) on academic freedom and university autonomy.

78. The Council of Europe should play an active role in the development of the EHEA. Already participating and providing expertise in Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kazakhstan and Ukraine, the Council of Europe has the necessary tools and capacities to boost the understanding of the Bologna Process not only at governmental, but also at grass-roots level and can help countries succeed in their reform efforts.