The Bologna Process
Europe's Journey to the European Higher Education Area (EHEA)

Ligia Deca

State Advisor on Education and Research, Romania

EHEA – a political reality

European Higher Education Area
Eligible countries

- 48 member countries
- 16 years of existence for the Bologna Process
- 5 years since the launch of the European Higher Education Area

EHEA Characteristics

- Inter-governmental, voluntary, without a permanent Secretariat

- "Process of voluntary convergence and coordinated reform "of national HE systems

- Includes another political space – the European Union, while engaging in a complex interaction with it

- Inclusive – involves European stakeholder organisations (HEIs, academic faculty, students, QA agencies, business representatives etc.)

- Grounded on European values: public responsibility for HE, institutional autonomy, academic freedom, commitment to integrity and stakeholder participation

EHEA evolution

- Launching: Paris/Sorbonne 1998, Bologna 1999, Prague 2001

- Development: Berlin 2003, Bergen 2005

- Consolidation: London 2007, Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve 2009, Budapest/Wien 2010

- Establishment: Budapest/Wien 2010, Bucharest 2012

- Prioritisation and reaffirmation of key values: Yerevan 2015

- Paris 2018: A new EHEA consolidation decade or a new begininng?

What should it achieve?

- More coherent and readable national HE systems

- Enhance the competitiveness and attractiveness of Europe

- Engage in dialogue with other HE areas (Bologna Policy Forum)

- Build a European dimension to HE across the continent and enhance mobility of students and staff

The Bologna Process

EHEA Achievements

- A space for policy dialogue, a common vocabulary and a sizeable group of Bologna Process experts

- Three cycle system and ECTS implemented almost fully across the EHEA

- 38 countries have functional qualification frameworks, compatible with the QF-EHEA

- Almost all countries have ratified the Lisbon Recognition Convention

- QA = European Standards and Guidelines for QA (2nd edition – includes Student Centered Learning and attention to recognition practices) and EQAR

- EHEA Mobility target: 20% by 2020 (EHEA Strategy to support it)

- Increased stakeholder participation in decision-making

- It is still an ongoing process, with political commitment

Challenges

- Reform fatigue & search for an identity in line with the new European context (impact of migration, financial crisis, demographic downturn, Euroscepticism, extremism and terrorism etc.)

- Uneven implementation and difficult translation of the Bologna Process goals at the level of academic communities

- The move from structural to in-depth reforms (social dimension, student centered learning, linking EHEA with the European Research Area etc.)

Yerevan 2015 – a renewed vision

- Enhance the quality and relevance of learning and teaching

- Foster the employability of graduates throughout their working lives

- Make the EHEA HE systems more inclusive

- Implementing agreed structural reforms

+ a renewed governance system for the EHEA to support these goals

New EHEA policy documents

- The revised Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)

- The European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes

- The revised ECTS Users' Guide, as an official EHEA document

Beyond technical reforms…

"The Bologna Process has created a space for dialogue and cooperation which reaches far beyond Europe. Dialogue not just about the technicalities of credit systems and quality assurance, but about the fundamental principles – freedom of expression, tolerance, freedom of research, free movement of students and staff, student involvement and the co-creation of learning – that reflect the basic values on which European society is based."

Tibor Navracsics, Commissioner responsible for Education, Culture, Youth and Sport - Preface to the 2015 Bologna Process implementation report

Lessons learned

- Formal implementation is different from results achieved
  - *E.g. national qualification frameworks (NQF) are in place, but few national cases that managed real involvement of employers, in order for NQF to be recognised and used*
- Reaching mutual understanding of policy priorities and instruments is perhaps the most underestimated feature of an educational space. No overarching cooperation in HE can be achieved only with governmental commitment
- Policy instruments need to be fit for purpose and in line with the current realities (QA and QF are clear examples in this regard)

Lessons learned (2)

- Public support from the wider public for the HE policy space is essential

- No progress without real political commitment (no double discourse) and joint effort of stakeholders towards common goals (with ownership feeling)

- For more effective policies, reliable research based on sound data is needed - enhance the role of HE research and the dialogue with policy makers (see the Bologna Process Researchers Conferences in 2011 and 2014)

- Coherence with other policy areas: primary and secondary education, LLL, research, employment, foreign policy, immigration etc.

- National or regional 'recipes' for reform cannot be exported

Thank you for your attention!

ligia.deca@presidency.ro