

Future of Higher Education – Bologna Process Researchers' Conference

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Conference report

General Rapporteur: Adrian CURAJ, UEFISCDI

About the conference

The Bologna Process Researchers' Conferences aims primarily at further consolidating the researchers' community in order for it to provide those research-based insights and recommendations, which would best inform discussions and decisions of the Bologna Process Ministerial Conferences. As such, the third edition of the Bologna Process Researchers' Conference was an excellent opportunity to continue the dialogue, initiated during the first (2012) and the second (2015) Ministerial Conferences, between research, policy making and implementation of the Bologna Process.

The results of the previous Researchers Conferences were made available in the form of a two-volume publication at Springer International Publishing House. The 2012 volumes have been included in the top 25% most downloaded publications on the Springer website (<http://www.springer.com/gp/book/9789400739369>). Moreover, to increase the visibility of the policy relevant discussions, the 2014 articles were made available in open-access format again on the Springer website, where the volume reached the top three most downloaded publications on education with over 270.000 downloads (<http://www.springer.com/gp/book/9783319187679>). The volumes were furthermore disseminated to the participants at the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) Ministerial Conferences.

By all accounts, the most recent edition was also a successful one. Of the 104 detailed abstracts received, 48 were selected to be developed as research papers and, after the submission deadlines, 36 papers were considered to be fit for presentation during the conference. The conference hosted 150 participants from over 25 countries, including many young researchers who provided fresh ideas and approaches.

It is worth underlining that, in terms of its participants and interested researchers, the topics of the Bologna Process and the construction of the European Higher Education Area have already reached the stage of building its own research community.

The third conference was focused on the already configured impacts as well as on the future of the Bologna Process. It took stock of existing initiatives and attempted to identify some of the key challenges, needed developments and future trends. Five main topics were addressed in particular: internationalization of higher education, the social dimension within a quality oriented higher education system, transparency tools, financing and governance and the future of the Bologna Process.

This final conference report aims to put forward those conclusions and recommendations which are meant to inform discussions and decisions among the participants in the upcoming Bologna Process Ministerial Conference (Paris, May 24 - 25, 2018).

Main conclusions

Context

The newly emerging contexts of the European higher education developments and Bologna Process implementation are altogether different from those of the launch period. A closer look at recent trends reveals challenges and new configurations, which may hardly be ignored. The external higher education context is marked by accelerating changes, which bear on higher education policies:

Technological: the emerging digital revolution. Technology and digitalisation are becoming a basic necessity for society;

Social: growing inequalities, a shrinking middle class and a growing class of precariat, crisis of the traditional welfare state, population aging, a growing demographic decline, increasing youth unemployment, changes in the life style, refugee crisis: rapidly increasing numbers and a hardening of attitudes in many European countries;

Political: the rising of populist ideologies challenging of established status-quo and democracies, increase in violent extremism, decrease of a broad consensus on basic political and societal principles, and the emergence of "alternative facts" and "post truth politics" (e.g. illiberal vs. liberal democracy, international unilateralism vs global multilateralism);

Economic: slow recovery from the economic recession and financial crisis (2008-2012), emerging protectionism, tensions between old and newly emerging industries, sharply divergent views on globalization;

Culture: following the previous post materialistic cultural developments a sort of cultural backlash is at work, bringing to the fore formerly dominating cultural values;

Regional: European Union is searching for its new future, while growing tensions within the wider Europe and in the shaping of globalization waves are constantly emerging, including Brexit challenges.

Higher education's inner context is also marked by new configurations:

- **A steady decrease in student flows, following on the previous massification or universalisation trends** – student numbers are starting to decline, influenced by the decrease in demography, especially in some parts of Europe (Central and Eastern Europe);
- **A wider range of providers**, serving a more differentiated student cohort, and challenging traditional providers with respect to programmes and credentials;
- **The decreased attractiveness of the Bologna Process**, especially at the political level, due to its perception as a *fait accompli*;
- **Reaching a decade of EHEA with newly accepted members** that did not all show a strong commitment to implementing all the Bologna Process measures;
- **Variable levels of the Bologna Process implementation** in the overall EHEA, which have led to an increased need for dealing with non-implementation;
- **A refocus on academic values and principles** as the political context in some countries has put negative pressure on the autonomy of higher education institutions (HEIs);
- The need to search for alternative ways of institutionally codifying academic freedom and university social responsibility (e.g. a consequentialist approach to autonomous governance of university and respect for academic integrity codes);
- **A growing pressure on higher education to address academic and non-academic new societal challenges** (e.g. integration of refugees, more transparency and assuming new institutional public responsibilities);

- **A re-emphasis on vocational/professional higher education** in a world of rapidly changing occupational landscapes;
- **The view that study programmes diversification has reached a peak** as a result of developments in the academic division of knowledge which are disconnected from the current economic division of labour;
- A growing imbalance between public and private financing of higher education;
- The need for higher education public policies for new data, and the potential of big data and data analytics.

Both these contexts of higher education call for critically oriented research approaches to the Bologna Process and for the exploration of new innovative initiatives. A demand for an increased reflexivity of the Bologna Process is mounting. The researchers' papers and the Conference debates highlighted the relationships between European higher education's changing contexts and new developments in the Bologna Process.

Challenges

There are some **Bologna Process dilemmas and questions** that arise out of the Bologna Process implementation. Research has evaluated that some of the most pressing and complementary ones are the following:

Should the Bologna Process be focused on the implementation of the goals already defined or develop new policies and policy areas to meet changing/developing needs and demands?

Is there a need for envisaging a "two speed Bologna Process" or just rely on a development "à la carte" that is adapted to each country's local circumstances, with hope for eventual 'full' implementation?

How should non-implementation be addressed in the Bologna Process?

Should future Bologna commitments be more concrete in nature?

How and to what extent should the Bologna Process focus on fundamental values?

How should the interaction between supra-national (European), national and institutional levels be shaped in order to ensure a smooth implementation of the Bologna Process commitments and reaffirm the objectives and values of the EHEA?

How will the current socio-economic and political contexts (e.g. Brexit, authoritarianism, populism, migration, etc.) influence the future of higher education on the continent and in its countries?

Conclusions and recommendations

Most articles provided a constructively critical overview of the Bologna Process. On the plus side, this provides legitimacy to the conference, focused on researchers and their analyses regarding the Bologna Process implementation, consequences and future endeavors. At the same time, it highlights the idea that after almost 20 years of Bologna Process and ten years of EHEA, there is sufficient evidence collected to highlight both achievements and shortcomings of implementation.

As anticipated from the first edition of the Conference, organized under the concept of European Higher Education at the Crossroads, the Bologna Process has reached a critical moment. Therefore, two possible scenarios for the Bologna Process / EHEA can be envisaged: either,

through self-evaluation and lessons learnt, the process will be revived, adapted to the new global challenges and major societal transformations, or it will become irrelevant.

Looking at the present situation, one cannot help notice a stratification, or even polarization, of the European higher education systems in two major clusters: countries that fully embraced the Bologna principles and largely implemented the key actions versus countries that joined the Process but have yet a long way to go. This could mean that only the “core Bologna countries” take implementation even further, thus potentially leading to a major schism in the European higher education.

Little time remains until Bologna Process turns 20 and the 2020 EHEA Ministerial Conference seems just around the corner. This is a period aimed at critical self-evaluation and an overall assessment of the Bologna Process, making use of all existing tools, including peer learning. Only by looking at past experiences and grasping the complexity of today can we redesign the Bologna Process as a genuine European driving force, meaningful for the next 20 years, inspiring future transformations and ensuring cohesion of the European higher education.

In spite of the challenges, EHEA has been a successful story. Through the Bologna Process, higher education contributed to building not only EHEA, but Europe itself. This should go on. The key from now on is how to adapt the Bologna Process constantly to its times so as to keep it up with the basic European aims and values of the time.

The Bologna Process Researchers Conference participants predominantly took the view that the future of the European higher education cooperation may be more effectively shaped by relying consistently and imaginatively on specific combinations between key referential values and operational commitments. In what follows crosscutting illustrations, resulting from the conference papers and debates, are put forward.

Bologna Process and the wider world of Higher Education

Bologna Process researchers share certain views with regard to the configuration of the wider world of the European higher education. The key points of this configuration are the following:

Countries all over the world seem to be striving to increase internationalisation and global engagement, yet in many cases the escalating trend towards isolationism and inward-looking nationalism results in a growing disconnection between the local and the global, thus fragmenting and indeed troubling developments in interuniversity cooperation;

While one may see an increase in academic credit and degree mobility around the world, only a small student elite is benefiting from it;

In recent years, there has been a shift from a more collaborative approach to internationalisation towards a more competitive focus. The paradoxical combination between collaboration and competition, as driving motives for internationalization, is more manifest within the Bologna Process;

A misconception of internationalisation in higher education reduces it to a “study abroad” approach. Other misconceptions regarding what internationalisation represents are indicated by a series of perceptions like the following: the means appear to have become the goal; more teaching in English and adding an international subject to the programme would suffice for sustaining a programme of internationalisation; more recruitment of international students, more study abroad, more institutional partnerships would outweigh the constant and exigent assessment of international and intercultural learning outcomes; output and quantitative targets

may run against the focus on impact and outcomes of internationalisation. Such misconceptions run contrary to an effective and valuable academic internationalisation. There is a growing need for rethinking internationalisation in order to focus it on the internationalisation of the curriculum and learning outcomes to enhance quality of education and research.

Social dimension within a quality oriented higher education system

The Bologna Process and the creation of the European Higher Education Area have resulted in a growing emphasis on equity and inclusion from all groups in society. At the same time, some of the research findings illustrate the persisting gaps between policy and practice, intentions and reality, rhetoric and concrete actions.

Looking at some gaps between policy and practice, certain challenges arise:

In their higher education access policies, many European countries have not systematically targeted policies to support clearly identified underrepresented groups, but rather mainstreamed strategies to expand access and success that all groups might benefit equally;

Student background data are not readily available in many countries, which makes it difficult to analyse equity needs and design appropriate targeted policies;

Many of the learning difficulties that students bring with them to higher education institutions result from inadequate secondary education;

Too many European countries are facing major new equity challenges due to the rapid rise in the refugee population and the higher education needs of refugee students should be attended to.

Such challenges generate the need for further research and possible actions:

New positioning of higher education institutions within society. There should be a greater osmosis between higher education and society, particularly with reference to refugees and working students. The current practices in higher education institutions aim to make these groups fit the institutions, without institutions investing efforts to accommodate student needs;

Different definitions of success. Rankings, performance-based funding as well as individual students have different definitions of success. The former two strive to outline, at least to some extent, what achievements higher education institutions have. Student success is anticipated by the learning outcomes institutionally defined. The connections between the two areas of what counts as academic success may hardly meet. Such a conceptual and practical gap should be dealt with as to replace it with a convergent approach;

Peer learning does not currently work. Higher education institutions and policy-makers, countries involved in the Bologna Process themselves tend to act separately instead of exchanging ideas and cooperating for a common good. Collegiate mutual learning happens only randomly. Everyone thinks that their context is unique despite having common referential commitments within the Bologna Process framework. This practice should be substituted with one framed by peer learning. New communities of practice and social networks of knowledge sharing should be built within the Bologna Process framework;

Focussing on new challenges should not lead to a neglect of 'old' ones.

Benefits of technology and digitalisation. Researchers' presentations and debates showed a neglect of the topic of digitalisation. More intensive teaching and learning support and also counselling could be made possible through smart applications of new technology.

No country or institution has found a magic answer to the question of how best to overcome the historical, cultural and psychological barriers faced by underrepresented groups (better counselling, better integration of migrant / working students by flexible curricula etc.). Nevertheless, the components of successful policy approaches outlined throughout researchers'

articles provide a useful blueprint for developing new and innovative responses down the road and orienting much-needed further work in the critical area of equality of opportunities in access and success at the higher education level.

Transparency Tools – impact and future developments

Higher education accountability is strongly enhanced by the wide and convincing transparency of its endeavours. Bologna Process researchers look closely at the current uses of institutional transparency tools and reach certain conclusions.

On the whole, higher education institutions should invest more in dealing with issues of social, academic and financial accountability to students and to society at large. Particular attention should be paid to the ways learning outcomes are set up and achieved, while graduate attributes and life-sustaining skills are closely followed up;

Transparency issues take different forms in each country, but essentially questions are asked about the value and contribution/impact of higher education to individuals, society and the economy, and the appropriate forms of transparency and accountability of both public and private institutions;

Gaining and enhancing public trust in higher education and effective (re)assuring of academic quality are the essential objectives of higher education transparency. More innovative attention should be focused on the diversification of transparency tools, and the best ways (qualitative and quantitative) to assess and measure in an international context.

Financing and Governance

The discussions about governance and funding are particularly intense in times of major changes in the world around higher education, especially as Europe is once again going through such a period. External ruptures in society at-large and changing trends in higher education are influencing the policy discussions and reform initiatives.

Changes outside the higher education system, such as increased migratory fluxes, an escalating refugee crisis in Europe (with huge political, social, and economic implications), the emergence of new or recycled ideologies, such as populism and nationalism have brought new challenges to the higher education governance and funding systems.

A European notion of autonomy has emerged based on some kind of European consensus regarding the need for universities to acquire more institutional freedoms, so that they could be more efficient in delivering the types of services and goods deemed necessary for the advancement of defined European and national policy goals. Many national governments have also promoted reforms in the area of university autonomy and until recently, most of these reforms have been meant to support increased autonomy, at least in certain dimensions, which in turn was expected to support more efficient work of the university, as judged against pre-set criteria defined by the public authorities. At the same time, some governments have begun restricting autonomy and academic freedom. These emerging trends are not happening equally in all parts of Europe. European organizations such as the EU and the Council of Europe remain committed to the knowledge society narrative, democracy and to the European integration - and thus to supporting higher education. Many governments, in different ways, continue to act nationally, based on the conviction that higher education is indeed something to be treasured and nurtured, and that it must remain a key matter for public policy. But even in some of those countries times seem to be changing.

Nevertheless, the “efficiency” concept in higher education, at the core of the developments regarding governance and funding seems to be vaguely defined as there is no European accepted definition. Moreover, its’ operationalization and measurement are not straightforward.

The EHEA, is a space for dialogue and practice in higher education becoming a new, *sui generis* type of entity (or system) that requires and indeed has developed new governance - that is, new concepts, principles, models, tools and practices.

Twenty years of Bologna and a decade of EHEA: what’s next?

Looking at the past policies proposed by the Bologna Process, one can see that structural reforms have been the most successful policy area of the EHEA. Even so, implementation is uneven, and some countries are far from fulfilling their commitments in one or more areas of structural reforms. This puts the credibility of the EHEA in jeopardy as a framework within which national qualifications are compatible, are issued within comparable qualifications structures, are quality assured according to agreed standards and guidelines and are described in easily understandable formats. Nevertheless, EHEA was successful at promoting structural reforms, but less so at explaining the rationale and the principles behind them:

The fundamental values on which the EHEA builds – in particular academic freedom, institutional autonomy, student participation in higher education governance, and public responsibility for higher education – have not received the attention they deserve. This can be explained by the fact that there is a political need to show rapid accomplishment and that defining goals and assessing implementation of fundamental values have proved challenging. Also, fundamental values are closely linked to the overall situation of democracy and human rights, and the EHEA is not an area of democratic perfection.

The discussion of non-implementation has always been difficult. Uneven implementation is not solely a question of a North/South or East/West divide or a divide between countries that joined the Bologna Process in the early years and those that joined later and therefore had less time to implement the reforms since the expectation was – at least officially – that all EHEA members would have met the same goals by 2010.

“Two speed Bologna” is not solely due to different accession times or different starting points. Differences include: centralised versus decentralised systems, differences between larger and smaller systems, and the degree to which systems differentiate between different kinds and profiles of higher education institutions as well as varying levels of commitment between and within EHEA members. One of the challenges in the further development of the EHEA will therefore be to reconcile the need to ensure implementation of common principles and goals with the need to recognise that EHEA members have different traditions as well as recent pasts.

The EHEA was envisaged as a structure and a cooperation fit for the challenges facing Education Ministers and the higher education community some 20 years ago. The future of the Bologna Process depends on the capacity to identify the challenges that are of political importance and that can be addressed within the loose and extensive structure that is the EHEA. This is essential, as there is a widespread feeling that the EHEA is losing steam and political interest as shown by the decreasing participation rates of ministers in the Ministerial Conferences.

Failing that, Europe faces the need to redefine those structures so that a different EHEA can meet new challenges. A European Higher Education Area that considered itself “fully implemented”, however, would not only be increasingly irrelevant. It would be dead.

Recommendations for the Paris Ministerial Conference

The Bologna Process is at a critical stage, approaching a decade from the establishment of the European Higher Education Area and still facing a number of challenges. The lack of homogenous implementation is partially due to the accession of new members that do not have the same timeframe to implement the pre-existing commitments, but also to existing EHEA members that have not managed to implement those commitments. The political interest in the process has decreased as seen by the decreasing number of ministers participating in the Ministerial Conferences. There is a lack of new politically appealing commitments that would make the Bologna Process more attractive within national debates.

These challenges can be overcome by taking the Bologna Process to the next level focusing both on fundamental values relevant for our time (equity in access, ethical integrity etc.), but also on concrete commitments and goals, in connection with developments in other policy agendas (EU, OECD, UNESCO, the Council of Europe etc.).

The fundamental values on which the EHEA builds – in particular academic freedom, institutional autonomy, student and staff participation in higher education governance, and public responsibility for higher education should be at the heart of the Ministerial Communiqué. At the same time, it is necessary to focus on challenges of political importance in order to increase the political interest in the process, while addressing the issue of non-implementation in order to increase the credibility of the EHEA framework. In this sense, the Bologna Process should become primarily a tool for policy learning and contribute to increasing national and institutional debates, rather than restricting them.

Specific issues that the Ministerial Communiqué should address include:

Spanning the gap between the school system and higher education. Many underrepresented groups are losing students prior to the point of entry into higher education and many learning difficulties facing students come from the school systems;

Increasing the interaction between higher education and society (with reference to both refugees and working students, but also taking into account demographic developments);

Higher education needs to provide greater leadership in combating populism, extremism and anti-intellectualism by a greater focus on democratic education and links to local communities;

Sustainable financing and appropriate governance of higher education in the context of the above mentioned values;

The need for a collaborative approach to internationalisation that is focused on the curriculum and learning outcomes in order to enhance quality of education and research. This needs to become a practice rather than a statement;

The need to review the EHEA governance structure in order to support these new ambitions.

Annex I - Conclusions from the thematic sections of the conference

Session 1: Bologna Process and the wider world of Higher Education (Hans de Wit)

A move from more competitive and market approach to a more collaborative approached focused on academic values and academic professionalism;

If we look at the BP and its role in the wider world– this should be an example of harmonization and not copying; and take into account the context and complexity of each region;

EHEA should try to tackle the individual and institutional mechanisms of mal practice and violation of academic integrity in higher education-e.g. favoritism, plagiarism, cheating, bribery, falsifying a candidate's examination paper, nepotism, fake diplomas and certificates, sexual harassment etc.);

The quality assurance mechanisms are part of the BP are contextualized in the higher education systems but there is a need for some common European higher education standards;

In the BP countries there should be more attention on the importance of internationalization for all (stud & staff) as part of the institutional, national and European higher education system;

There should be much more attention on the collaboration of all stakeholders in developing, implementing and assessing internationalization strategies;

There is a need of understanding the students' perception the benefits and risk of internationalization;

Align more the mobility aspect of internationalization with the internationalization of the curriculum and teaching and learning.

Session 2: Social dimension within a quality oriented higher education system (Jamil Salmi, Dominic Orr)

Context issues

Huge expansion of participation in higher education in the recent past;

For some parts of the higher education system there is universal access, but members of academia still think higher education is an elite system;

Decreased demography now and in the future;

Admission systems looking to be differentiated and inclusive;

Students are different to 20 years ago (educational pathway, social background, digital natives etc.) – but HEIs are also different (governance and funding changes);

What roles can be supported by **digital technologies**; and what is already happening between student groups using digital technologies, which could be supported more.

Spanning the gap between the school system and higher education

Should Bologna take more into consideration policies regarding secondary education including: links between higher education and secondary and the fitness for purpose of school exit exams?

Diverse forms of counselling and support (peer counselling and digital tools) for enhancing participation and success (SD);

Information systems should be more about **supporting matching of interests between students and HEIs** and not simply which HEI is best based on aggregated statistics.

New challenge – “Refugees” – but what can we learn from this for further inclusiveness

Institutions trying to make the refugees fit their profile and not the way around;

Still a lot of work needs to be done for refugees' integration as RPL procedures, access criteria, enhancing quality of preparatory courses (language barrier);

Counselling and support is perhaps better, when it is not targeted at specific groups, but a general offer. This avoids stigmas and encourages sharing of experiences. (e.g. social isolation is often an issue).

Promoting excellence in teaching and learning

“striving for excellence, acknowledging the social dimension”;

Lack of attention to the SD in the university rankings and the importance of pushing for SD indicators;

Lack of incentives for teaching means low interest into SD;

SD still not a priority for institutions and national level – the need for new performance data;

Not enough sharing of experiences between HEIs on how they are coping with new challenges such as supporting refugees.

Centrality of studies and lifelong learning in higher education

It is important to offer students the chance to enter higher education later in life and more flexibly – because it is important to offer second chances, but also because it is important to secure reskilling of the workforce;

This is about integration and recognising their ***work-study-life-balance***;

If you have already been working, you are unlikely to stop working during your studies.

Session 3: Twenty years of Bologna and a decade of EHEA: what's next? (Sjur Bergan, Ligia Deca)

Limited research towards a conceptual understanding and a policy map on autonomy and academic freedom;

The need to balance research on university autonomy (dominant topic in Europe) with research work on academic freedom (dominant topic in the US context);

The use of multi-level, multi-actor and multi-issue approaches in studying governance can help map the complexity of European and other regional policy integration processes;

Developments in Europe can be compared with similar contexts in other parts of the globe in order to provide greater clarity on the evolution of higher education policy areas;

Higher education needs to provide greater leadership in combating populism, extremism and anti-intellectualism by a greater focus on democratic education and links to local communities;

Higher education needs to address the `wicked` challenges that have not been successfully tackled before, and communicate their proposed approaches to the wider public;

Across the EHEA, professional higher education has emerged as a distinct form of education with a particularly intense integration with the world of work;

Currently limited research into the wider (non-employability) benefits of professional higher education needs to be expanded in order to better gauge its impact on wider society;

The juridification of the EHEAs is increasingly manifested in the domestic legal effects of Bologna policies and instruments;

The ESG is a prime example due to its prescriptive nature and transposition into national legislation;

- Falling fertility rates have seen student population numbers contract across Central and Eastern Europe. While this has had a significant impact on higher education institutions, policies have not been proactive and have failed to mitigate some of the challenges posed by declining student numbers;

- The governance of the EHEA should be reviewed to support these new challenges and ensure greater participation and commitment by EHEA members.

Session 4: Transparency Tools – impact and future developments (Ellen Hazelkorn)

- The need for transparency in higher education system stems from an increase in private financial contributions to HE, constraints in public funding, a more diverse higher education system and student population, and increased demands for value and contribution of higher education to society and the economy;
- Legitimacy of higher education institutions may be judged by the reliable information on the benefits that higher education institutions (and their subunits) offer to their students, funders and society;
- The appearance of network governance, which is a form of supervisory control model that allows higher education institutions to refine and adapt national policies to reflect different needs;
- Performance contracts may become a transparency tool of the networked governance model;
- Across the world, accreditation agencies and higher education organisations are developing systems for evaluating and comparing institutional performance;
- Issues of ethical and honest data collection should be considered in schemas;
- Emphasis is usually placed on funding as a predictor of better higher education outcomes, but some evidence in Canada suggests the opposite may be true, that funding does not necessarily predict performance and that other factors are also important;
- In different ways, governments are introducing performance systems which seek to tie higher education outcomes directly to the national priority goals. In Ontario, a new system is being developed to measure what matters most to government, i.e. assess the effectiveness and impact of government policies and actions (e.g., tuition, financial aid, funding formulas, institutional differentiation). The pilot revealed it is possible to administer system-wide assessments that provide meaningful data about the learning that takes place in institutions and that it is possible to scale up this type of assessment to a full system;
- There is a proliferation of surveys and different measures of higher education institutional performance and a growing number of university league tables of questionable value and validity. This has led to unnecessary complexity in the system as different transparency instruments are placed on top of one another. The resulting multi-layer of governance arrangements has encouraged HEIs and academics to model and mirror the behaviours of organisations and individuals who appear to do well by these measures;
- The new UK Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) aims to assess the 'teaching mission' of the university using some existing as well as new metrics (i.e. teaching intensity, learning gain, grade inflation, longitudinal educational outcomes). It will grade institutions on a gold, silver and bronze scale challenging previous research-based assessments and rankings. It will be further developed at sub-institutional level, creating subject area rankings based on the teaching excellence framework. Further discussions on the sustainability of the framework will be considered;
- NQFs, and HEIs, are being challenged to recognise the growing arena of non-formal qualifications alongside formal qualifications, as employers may be inclined to bypass national qualifications frameworks. Heretofore, qualifications achieved outside of formal education and training systems have been side-lined from the National Qualification Framework. This is mostly due to the fact that non-formal qualifications are not included in a national systems of certifications and quality assurance. 'Access' and 'recognition' in higher education generally operates on higher education's terms;

- Local context and different legal frameworks have made automatic recognition across EHEA countries, and hence comparability, difficult. For most EHEA countries, three-quarters of qualifications are treated as national qualifications and quality assurance systems are in place in almost all higher education systems although the use of EQAR-registered agencies and the implementation of the ESG are visible in only about half of EHEA-members;
- Uneven implementation may affect trust. It could result in “trust” being concentrated in a those regions and countries with comparable or more compatible systems, instead of the whole EHEA if some countries do not pursue their commitment;
- Rankings create perverse incentives to governments and higher education, and their influence can become impossible to control. Therefore, there is a necessity to shift from focusing on rankings to more appropriate and transparent systems which emphasize on educational and societal outcomes.

Session 5: Financing and Governance (Liviu Matei)

There is no clear understanding of **efficiency** measures in HE. It is primary understood in terms of resource management;

There is no shared pathway to a common **governance** system in Europe, but the role of boards/senates seems to be increasing;

There is no systematic relationship between dimensions of **autonomy**. Some areas can increase while others are decreasing!;

Trust has a central role in institutional management, and it seems to be decreasing between higher education institutions and governments (case of Hungary);

The lack of trust is based on lack of information on what universities are delivering (we need more information on performance);

Increased autonomy does not guarantee increased performance in Higher Education;

Performance contracts seem to increase student achievement (completion rates) in the Netherlands;

Performance contracts can also encourage institutional diversity (profiling);

Internationalization and quality assurance are the most commonly referred concepts in the strategic documents of Romanian higher Education institutions;

Quality assurance and performance monitoring are often interconnected;

Changes (in relation to the Bologna Process) in higher education in the Eastern Partnership countries (Belarus, Azerbaijan, Moldova, Georgia, etc.) vary to a great extent. The amplitude of changes depends on political will/context (typically top-down approach);

There is a lack of impact studies to demonstrate the impact of joining the Bologna process in Eastern Partnership countries.