



# **TWENTY YEARS OF BOLOGNA AND A DECADE OF EHEA: WHAT IS NEXT? OVERVIEW PAPER**

**Sjur Bergan & Ligia Deca**

Bologna Process Researchers' Conference – 27-29 November 2017

București, Intercontinental Hotel



# **A brief history of considering the future**



# Pre - 2010 EHEA

- ▶ Looking at the EHEA future was a **constant endeavor**, since the 2007 Ministerial Conference;
- ▶ Role of the **Ghent Conference** - “Bologna 2020: Unlocking Europe’s Potential - Contributing to a Better World” (2008), organized by the Flemish Community of Belgium and Luxembourg;
- ▶ **Sarajevo BFUG meeting** – first structured and official debate on the EHEA future, which already anticipated some changes (initial idea of the co-chairing system) and put forward quite longstanding debates:
  - ▶ focusing on implementation of goals already defined vs. developing new policies,
  - ▶ concerns about a “two speed Bologna Process”
  - ▶ the search for viable governance system that reconciles all these elements.

# Post-EHEA launch

- ▶ Yerevan Ministerial Conference (2015) – first real discussion about the EHEA losing steam;
- ▶ A clear indicator of this trend is the evolution of political representation :
  - ▶ Representation of delegations at political level remained overall at over two thirds - from highs of 92.5% in 2003 to lows of 72.3% in 2012 and 66.7% in 2015;
  - ▶ The percentage of countries represented by their (full) Ministers evolved differently – from 69% in Bologna in 1999 to 82.5 in 2007 and then showed two marked drops: 2009/2010 – 63% & 2012/ 2015 – 38%/ 31%;
- ▶ FOHE-BPRC 2014 included a session looking at the Future of the EHEA, which prepared the debates at the Yerevan Ministerial Conference itself.



# Losing steam?

- ▶ “the spirit of Yerevan” – perhaps the most lively political discussion, witnessing the largest number of amendments to the communiqué;
- ▶ However, the follow-up is less enthusiastic:
  - ▶ The 2015-2018 work plan: 3 WG and 4 Advisory Groups (which partly overlap);
  - ▶ AG on the Belarus roadmap - no BFUG consensus on the way forward, in a clear-cut case of not delivering on agreed policy measures;
  - ▶ AG on internationalization – no commonly agreed purpose and format for the Bologna Policy Forum;
  - ▶ the EHEA new goals WG faced difficulties in finding the most politically appealing future EHEA priorities.



# Challenges post 2020



# Reforming education systems

- ▶ Structural reform has been the hallmark of the Bologna Process/ EHEA;
  - ▶ The three tier degree system, QF, the recognition of qualifications, and QA have been key topics either since beginning;
  - ▶ Structural reforms lend themselves to the loose organization of the EHEA, in which overall policies are decided by Ministers at European level and implemented nationally and within HEIs;
  - ▶ In spite of this, implementation is uneven and some countries are far from fulfilling their commitments in one or more areas of structural reforms.
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# Reforming education systems

- **Vukasovic et al** – understanding the complexity of EHEA governance with the ‘three multi-s’ framework (multi-level, multi-actor and multi-issue);
- **Strand Viðarsdóttir** - the history and challenges of the BFUG Advisory Group on non-implementation;
- **Dang** - “façade conformity” or the comparison of challenges of implementation in the contexts of the EHEA and the ASEAN Common Space for Higher Education;
- **Nyircsák** - evolution of the ESG to so-called ‘normative status’ through a comparative analysis of their presence and influence in the national legal frameworks of the 28 EU member states.



# Teaching and learning

- Student centered learning (SCL) – a concept emphasizing the learners' need for autonomy and empowerment, as defined by the 2009 Ministerial Communiqué;
- SCL developed primarily by staff and students' organizations (ESU and EI);
- Emphasizing innovative teaching methods, digital technologies, and pedagogical innovation, which are still aspirational for many HEIs; needs to blend various modes of delivery;
- It would make sense for the EHEA to make teaching and learning the focus of its further development ( see the report of the 2014 Bologna Process Researchers' Conference).



# Technical reforms or commitment to fundamental values?

- ▶ EHEA was successful at promoting structural reforms, but less so at explaining the rationale and the principles behind them;
- ▶ The EHEA fundamental values – academic freedom, institutional autonomy, student participation, and public responsibility for higher education – have not received the attention they would deserve;
- ▶ 2 main reasons:
  - ▶ The political need to show accomplishment;
  - ▶ Fundamental values are closely linked to the overall situation of democracy and human rights in EHEA countries.



# Case studies regarding fundamental EHEA values

- ▶ The Belarus case – rejection in 2012 with clear reference to non-compliance with the EHEA values in the wake of the 2010 election;
- ▶ Turkey and Hungary are less clear cut cases of the EHEA putting an emphasis on its fundamental values;
- ▶ **Matei and Iwinska** introduce the notion that institutional autonomy is understood conceptually, while academic freedom has been less prominent in EHEA discussions (with Hungary and Myanmar as a case studies);
- ▶ More broadly, as discussed by **Gallagher**, the civic and democratic role of higher education could and should be one of the main challenges of the EHEA.



# Commitments and governance

- ▶ The discussion of non-implementation has always been difficult and it resurfaced more explicitly through the Yerevan Communiqué;
- ▶ Garben (2011) –the need for a legally binding format for the EHEA commitments as a possible way to enhance accountability and bring the Bologna Process closer to EU instruments;
- ▶ Whether and how non-implementation need to be addressed is linked to how the EHEA is viewed:
  - ▶ Harmsen (2015) - the EHEA as an area of peer learning, where countries develop good practice by learning from each other, **but where it is either not desirable or not possible (or both) to take measures to address cases where countries do not implement commitments.**
  - ▶ Bergan (2015) - importance of peer learning in developing the EHEA but emphasizes that to be credible in terms of structures and common fundamental values, **the EHEA needs a mechanism for addressing serious cases of non-implementation;**



# Commitments and governance

- ▶ The AG on non-implementation in the 2015 – 2018 work program put forward a proposal for a system of cyclic reviews – not a consensual proposal yet for the Paris Communiqué (**Strand Viðarsdóttir**);
- ▶ The discussions on changing the EHEA governance arrangements and the Secretariat format and function have been going on for some time, but in the absence of a clear-cut decision on the scope of the EHEA in the future, these decisions have been continuously postponed since the Bucharest Communiqué (2012).



## Two speeds or development adapted to local circumstances?

- ▶ “Two speed Bologna” is not solely due to different accession times or different starting points;
- ▶ Differences include: centralized versus decentralized systems, the differences between larger and smaller systems, and the degree to which systems differentiate between different kinds and profiles of higher education institutions (Deca 2016);
- ▶ 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 recognize that EHEA members have different traditions as well as recent pasts.**
- ▶ Different traditions may offer explanations but should not be provide reasons why EHEA members would not launch the reforms they have committed to when joining the Bologna Process.



# An EHEA gazing inward or looking out?

- ▶ Mixed signals when talking about the success of the Bologna Policy Forum, due to difficulties with dealing with its “external dimension”; however, successful cooperation at the level of EHEA consultative members;
  - ▶ Challenges in the further development of the EHEA include:
    - ▶ finding an attractive format for organized cooperation between the EHEA as a whole and other parts of the world;
    - ▶ defining attractive priorities for that cooperation;
    - ▶ The internal development of the EHEA;
  - ▶ A gazing inward EHEA would be neither an attractive cooperation partner nor a model for emulation; neither would an EHEA that were unable to identify credible goals, ensure credible implementation, or develop credible governance;
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# Professional HE and demographics

- ▶ Two key factors that will likely influence the development of the EHEA post 2020;
- ▶ **Galán Palomares et al** – a case for a greater focus from the EHEA on the Professional Higher Education (PHE) sector, despite the ministerial reluctance to accept the short cycle as an EHEA feature;
- ▶ **Santa** - the importance of demographic developments to higher education through a case study of Poland, Russia, and Romania; curiously, demographics was never treated as a significant factor in the EHEA development, despite its obvious importance.



# **THE EHEA: A FRAMEWORK FIT FOR PURPOSE?**



# Conclusion

- ▶ The EHEA *has* been successful;
- ▶ The EHEA was a structure and a cooperation fit for the challenges facing Education Ministers and the higher education community some 20 years ago;
- ▶ “future of Bologna”: identifying challenges that are of political importance and that can be addressed within the loose and extensive structure that is the EHEA. Or failing that, to redefine those structures so that a different EHEA can meet new challenges;
- ▶ A European Higher Education Area that considered itself “fully implemented”, on the other hand, would not only be increasingly irrelevant. It would be dead.



Thank you! (for your  
attention and patience)