

**FUTURE OF HIGHER EDUCATION - BOLOGNA PROCESS RESEARCHERS' CONFERENCE  
(FOHE-BPRC), FORTH EDITION**

**29-31 January 2020, Bucharest, Romania**

**Session 4: The future of the EHEA – principles, challenges and ways forward**

- 1. Taking Stock of the Bologna Process at 20. The Possibilities and Limits of Soft Law Governance, *Ligia Deca (New Europe College, Romania) and Robert Harmsen (University of Luxembourg)***

The Bologna Process stands as both an exemplar of regional cooperation in the higher education policy sector and as a comparatively successful instance of the use of so-called 'soft law governance' policy instruments. While the formal launch of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) in 2010 represents a significant milestone in the process, it nevertheless left many politically sensitive questions unanswered. Today, as this pan-European process now marks two decades of existence, many of those questions concerned with the direction and purpose of the process are being posed with an increasing urgency. Against this background, the present paper specifically focuses on recent debates surrounding the (non-)implementation of key commitments; on the functioning of the EHEA as a policy forum in relation to both its own membership and the wider international higher education policy landscape; and on the manner in which the EHEA may respond to increasingly serious challenges to the fundamental values that underpin the process. The authors will draw on both the substantial body of scholarship that has emerged on the process and practitioner insights to examine its past achievements and current challenges, while having in mind the specificity of the EHEA as a policy process in a complex European context. Finally, the paper will underline the need for a more nuanced understanding of the EHEA governance model, based on an overall balance sheet that suggests the likely direction(s) of the process going forward.

- 2. A Possible Conceptual Basis for the Future Higher Education World, *Ann Katherine Isaacs (University of Pisa, Italy)***

The Bologna Follow Up Group (BFUG) is currently charged with discussing new priorities for the future of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), and to this end has organized national consultations as well as internal reflection. In addition to defining new priorities, it appears essential to strengthen the awareness of the principles underlying higher education beyond national or even macro-regional borders. In addition to lists of priorities and principles, however important and valid each in itself, it seems opportune to elaborate a convincing holistic concept or vision of the future higher education ambience to be achieved. Such a concept or vision can give direction to the continuing reform process and inspire countries and higher education institutions to work creatively together. To this end, the EHEA may need to transform itself from a 'loose intergovernmental framework' to a more cohesive space where, supported by the necessary normative reforms, higher education institutions and their stakeholders can freely and effectively pursue their collaborative mission. The paper explores whether the goal of creating a 'European Higher Education Community' by 2030 can help to give direction to this complex process.

**3. Toward a Permanent Bologna Secretariat? *Sjur Bergan (Council of Europe) and Irina Geantă (Executive Agency for Higher Education, Research, Development and Innovation Funding, Romania)***

The question of a permanent Bologna Secretariat has been raised both within and outside of the Bologna Follow Up Group (BFUG), mostly after the 2015 Ministerial conference. The BFUG discussed this as one of several options in December 2016 (Bologna Process 2016) and decided to “go on with a rotating Secretariat and not to open the discussion again” (Bologna Process 2017: 8). Outside of the BFUG, the question of a Permanent Secretariat was considered at the 2014 Bologna Process Researchers’ Conference (Bergan 2015). Nevertheless, the question of setting up a permanent Bologna Secretariat has been kept alive in informal discussions but has, to our knowledge, never been explored in any detail.

**4. Re-thinking a new educational model suitable for 21st Century needs, *Tim Birtwistle (Leeds Beckett University, UK) and Robert Wagenaar (University of Groningen, The Netherlands)***

How should learning in higher education best meet the challenges posed by the many changes in society and employment? If graduates are knowledgeable in a particular field of studies, and are trained in key generic competences/transferable skills to allow for autonomy and responsibility, is that enough? Is it being achieved? Or are new and diverse sets of learning models (Lifelong Learning or the 60 Year Curriculum) needed? Learners must be empowered to operate as responsible and active citizens in their society and be successful participants in a dynamic labour market.

Society will require continuous (re-)training to handle rapid technological and societal changes. To stay relevant as autonomous educational providers higher education institutions will have to change their formats of learning and teaching.

A revised higher education model demands a highly flexible format to cater for individualised learning pathways, based on three key components: (1) a particular field of studies (thematic or disciplinary) – the core - (2) a fully integrated set of transferable skills and (3) a large set of learning units of various sizes covering a flexible curriculum. Can it respond to five societal challenges in each component: interculturalism; processes of information and communication; processes of governance and decision making; ethics, norms, values and professional standards and the impact of climate change?

Measuring and Comparing Achievements of Learning Outcomes in Higher Education in Europe (CALOHEE), an EU funded project envisages a new model. The paper will partly be based on the (initial) findings of this project. International cooperation in the context of the EHEA is essential to engage all, and make change.

**5. The future of EHEA – New challenges for quality assurance in higher education, *Oana Sârbu (University of Bucharest, Romania)***

The public authorities responsible for higher education should ensure the existence of a sustainable legislative framework that supports the efforts of higher education institutions to meet the ongoing challenges in an environment that equally promotes cooperation and competitiveness within the EHEA. In this context, the external quality assurance system should be based on the principle of institutional diversity, and the role of internal quality assurance systems should reach a central status. It is absolutely normal to have generally valid and acceptable rules throughout the system, but the existing legislation and procedures should grant the university enough autonomy that enables it to

build the internal system as close to its own needs, mission and projected results. Quality assurance is not a goal in itself, it is actually a tool that enables the responsible authorities to try to protect the students while providing support for the universities in their desire to continuously develop and improve. A comparative study on quality assurance systems, commissioned by the European Parliament in 2015, mentions that the development of quality assurance can be described as a curve that evolves from a greater control during the first phases of its development to a lesser control and more confidence granted to internal quality assurance systems as the system matures. What is the position of the quality assurance policies in higher education in Romania after almost 15 years of implementation? Are they reflecting the new development challenges and priorities within the EHEA? Are they respecting the autonomy of higher education institutions and their development strategies?

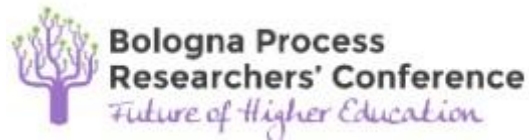
**6. Quo vadis EHEA: balancing structural continuation and political variety, *Peter Maassen (University of Oslo, Norway), Jens Jungblut (University of Oslo, Norway) and Mari Elken (Nordic Institute for Studies on Innovation, Norway)***

The EHEA has in many respects realised its main goal of making European higher education more compatible and coherent. Building on the achievements of the Bologna Process, the 48 countries involved have committed themselves to emphasise common key values in their higher education policies, including institutional autonomy, academic freedom, and the free movement of students and staff. At the same time, the positive EHEA developments are not matched by the overall dynamics of European integration. For example, Brexit, the rise of anti-EU political parties and movements, growing disagreement among the member states on the key ideas and principles underlying European integration, are posing serious challenges for Europe's way forward. These challenges might also threaten the further development of the EHEA. Of relevance is that various studies have suggested a decreasing level of political commitment to Europeanisation of higher education in a growing number of countries. In this paper, we will analyse a number of the challenges facing, directly or indirectly, the EHEA. We will start with a discussion of the importance of the rise of science diplomacy for the EHEA, being a consequence of the growing connection between foreign affairs and the higher education & science policy areas. Next, we will analyse the growing intra-European political tensions, with a number of member states having moved away from basic European values and principles concerning liberal democracy and open societies. Further, we will discuss the impact of the European University Initiative and European research funding patterns on the further development of the EHEA. Finally, we will discuss the consequences of growing global higher education competition. What does the 'European' in EHEA stand for in this competition, and will the EHEA represent one coherent, strong voice and position that will allow Europe to remain a global key actor in higher education?

**7. Autonomy, efficiency and effectiveness - opportunities for higher education: a pilot study, *Veronika Kupriyanova, Enora Bennetot Pruvot and Thomas Estermann (European University Association)***

Autonomy and efficiency are among the key topics that dominate the current higher education agenda and will shape the future of the European higher education landscape in the next decade. The capacity of higher education institutions and systems at large to respond to the rapidly changing needs of the society and economy will largely depend on what they can deliver and how autonomous, effective and efficient they are.

The paper presents an analytical framework that connects the concepts of institutional autonomy, efficiency and effectiveness and explores the links between efficiency in university management, autonomy and accountability. It builds on (i) EUA's work on institutional autonomy and the University



Autonomy Scorecard, assessing the main components of institutional autonomy, and (ii) the higher education efficiency framework developed by EUA in the framework of the USTREAM project.

This paper explores the following questions: (i) What mechanisms connect regulatory frameworks to efficiency in university management? (ii) How can autonomy be converted into efficiency and effectiveness at universities? (iii) How can efficiency support accountability? Methodologically, this paper will follow the four-pillar structure of the Autonomy Scorecard (organisational, financial, staffing and academic autonomy) and support its argumentation with several case studies.