The Bologna Process for Sustainable Quality in The European Higher Education Area and Harmonisation of Turkey

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The aim of this study is to evaluate the Bologna Process for sustainable quality in the European Higher Education Area and harmonisation of the Turkish higher education. In this study, the Bologna Process have been evaluated in the first section. In the other hand, harmonisation of the Turkish higher education to the Bologna Process have been studied especially from 1999 to 2005 and further years regarding to Turkey’s harmonisation process to the European Union in the second section.

Key Words: Bologna Process, Quality Insurance System, The European Higher Education Area.

The Bologna Process is the establishing process which for sustainable quality system in the European Higher Education Area. The Bologna Process was launched after 29 education ministers signed a declaration in Bologna in June 1999 to reform the structures of their higher education systems.

The Bologna Process is to define and observe Europe-wide quality standards in higher education. A precondition is the elaboration of comparable methods and criteria to assess the quality of research and teaching. Since 1999, the European concept of the quality of higher education has been strongly influenced by the follow-up process of the Bologna declaration in which the EU Ministers of education called for more visitibility, transparency and comparability of quality in higher education. In 1999, 29 European ministers in charge of higher education met in Bologna to lay the basis for establishing a European Higher
Education Area by 2010 and promoting the European system of higher education world-wide. The process originates from the recognition that in spite of their valuable differences, European higher education systems are facing common internal and external challenges related to the growth and diversification of higher education, the employability of graduates, the shortage of skills in key areas, the expansion of private and translational education, etc. The declaration recognises the value of coordinated reforms, compatible systems and common action.

One year before the Bologna declaration, in May 1998, the Ministers in charge of higher education of France, Germany, Italy and the United Kingdom signed the Sorbonne declaration on “harmonisation of the architecture of the European higher education system”. The Sorbonne declaration focused on: A progressive convergence of the overall framework of degrees and cycles in an open European area for higher education; a common degree level system for undergraduates (Bachelor degree) and graduates (Masters and doctoral degree); enhancing and facilitating student and teacher mobility (students should spend at least one semester abroad); removing obstacles for mobility and improving recognition of degrees and academic qualifications. In 1998, the European Council recommended¹ stronger co-operation in this field. With the Bologna declaration in 1999, the 29 signatory countries² committed to attain the declarations objectives will pursue the ways of intergovernmental cooperation, in collaboration with higher education institutions and associations.

According to the Bologna declaration, the following objectives have to be attained by 2010 in order to establish the European Higher Education Area and to promote the European system of higher education world-wide:

**Adoption of a system of easily readable and comparable degrees**, also through the implementanation of the Diploma Supplement, in order to promote European citizens’ employability and the international competitiveness of the European higher education system.

**Adoption of a system essentially based on two main cycles**, undergraduate and graduate. Access to the second cycles shall require successful completion of first cycle studies, lasting a minimum of three years. The degree awarded after the first cycle shall also be relevant to the

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¹ 98/561/EC
² Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Swiss Confederation, United Kingdom
European labour market as an appropriate level of qualification. The second cycle should lead to the master and/or doctorate degree as in many European countries.

**Establishment of the system of credits** – such as ECTS - as a proper means of promoting the most widespread student mobility. Credits could also be acquired in non-higher education contexts, including lifelong learning, provided they are recognised by receiving universities concerned.

**Promoting of mobility by overcoming obstacles** to the effective exercise of free movement with particular attention to: -for students, access to study and training opportunities and to related services; -for teachers, searches and administrative staff, recognition and valorisation of periods spent in the European contest researching, teaching and training, without prejudicing their statutory rights.

**Promotion of European co-operation in quality assurance** with a view to develop comparable criteria and methodologies.

**Promotion of the necessary European dimensions** in higher education, particularly with regards to curricular development, inter-institutional co-operation, mobility schemes and integrated programmes of study, training and research.

Two years after the Bologna declaration, in May 2001, 32 Education ministers met in Prague to sign the Prague declaration in order to review the progress so far and set directions and priorities for the coming years to the objective of establishing the European Higher Education Area by 2010. Prague declaration added three key themes to the Bologna Process:

Reaffirmed their commitment to the objectives of the Bologna declaration; appreciated the active involvement of the European University Association (EUA) and the national Unions of Students in Europe (ESIB); took note of the constructive assistance of the European Commission; made comments on the furthers process with regard to the different objectives of the Bologna declaration; emphasised as important elements of the European Higher Education Area:

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Lifelong learning, involvement of students, enhancing the attractiveness and competiveness of the European Higher education Area to other parts of the world (including the aspect of transnational education).

The Prague Communiqué of 2001 challenged three organizations, the European University Association (EUA), the National Unions of Students in Europa (ESIB), the European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), and the European Commission to collaborate in establishing a common framework of reference and to disseminate best practices\(^4\).

In Berlin, on 19 September 2003, the ministers in charge of higher education defined three intermediate priorities for the next two years:

Set a 2005 deadline for promoting effective quality assurance systems, adopting a system essentially based on two main cycles (bachelor-master) and improving the recognition system of degrees and periods of studies; secure closer links between the European Higher Education Area and the European Research Area by including the doctoral level as the third cycle in the Bologna Process; reaffirm that higher education is a public good and a public responsibility and that the social dimension of the Bologna Process is important; take the necessary steps to enable the portability of national loans and grants; stress the involvement of university and student organisations.

**Quality assurance:** Ministers stressed the need to develop mutually shared criteria and methodologies and agreed that by 2005 national quality assurance systems should include:

A definition of the responsibilities of the bodies and institutions involved; evaluation of programmes or institutions, including internal assessment, external review, participation of students and the publication of results; a system of accreditation, certification or comparable procedures, international participation, co-operation and networking.

**The two-cycle system:** Ministers asked for the development of an overarching framework of qualifications for the European Higher Education Area. Within such frameworks, degrees should have different defined outcomes. First and second cycle degrees should have different

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orientations and various profiles in order to accommodate a diversity of individual, academic and labour market needs.

**Recognition of degrees and periods of studies:** Ministers underlined the importance of the Lisbon Recognition Convention, which should be ratified by all countries in the Bologna Process. Every students graduating as from 2005 should receive the Diploma Supplement (DS) automatically and free of charge.

**The third cycle:** Ministers also considered it necessary to go beyond the present focus on two main cycles of higher education to include the doctoral level as the third cycle in the Bologna Process and to promote closer links between the European Higher Education Area and the European research Area.

Quality is a multi-dimensional, multi-level, and dynamic concept that relates to the contextual settings of an educational model, to the institutional mission and objectives, as well as to specific standards within a given system, institution, programme, or discipline. Quality takes different meanings depending on: The understandings of various interests of different constituencies or stakeholders in higher education (quality requirements set by student/university discipline/labour market/society/government); Its references: inputs, processes, outputs, missions, objectives, etc.; The attributes or characteristics of the academic world which are worth evaluating. The historical period in the development of higher education.

A wide spectrum of definitions of academic quality has been used: quality as excellence, quality as fitness for purpose; quality as fitness of purpose; quality as enhancement or improvement. Each approach has advantages and disadvantages, being more or less suitable for a specific period of time and/or national context. In terms of evaluation, there are permanent movement and oscillations between relative versus absolute, internal versus externally oriented, and basic versus more advanced and sophisticated notions of quality. However, common to all of these quality approaches is the integration of the following elements:

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The guaranteed realization of minimal standards and benchmarks; the capacity to set the objectives in a diversifying context and to achieve them with the given inputs and context variables; the ability to satisfy the demands and expectations of direct and indirect consumers and stakeholders; the drive towards excellence.\(^7\)

In line with its mission of strengthening the role of the universities in the European Higher Education Area the Bologna Process has launched a number of projects to support for the sustainable quality in the HEA.

**Quality assurance** has been gained the most important value for the objective of establishing the European Higher Educational Area by 2010. An all-embracing term referring to an ongoing, continuous *process* of evaluating (assessing, monitoring, guaranteeing, maintaining, and improving) the quality of a higher education system, institutions, or programmes. As a regulatory mechanism, quality assurance focuses on both accountability and improvement, providing information and judgements (not ranking) through an agreed upon and consistent process and well-established criteria. Many systems make a distinction between *internal quality assurance* (i.e., intra-institutional practices in view of monitoring and improving the quality of higher education) and *external quality assurance* (i.e., inter – or supra-institutional schemes of assuring the quality of higher education institutions and programmes). Quality assurance activities depend on the existence of the necessary institutional mechanism preferably sustained by a solid quality culture. Quality management, quality enhancement, quality control, and quality assessment are means through which quality assurance is ensured. The scope of quality assurance is determined by the shape and size of the higher education system. Quality assurance varies from accreditation, in the sense that the former is only a prerequisite for the latter. In practice, the relationship between the two varies a greater deal from one country to another.\(^4\) Both imply various consequences such as the capacity to operate and to provide educational services, the capacity to award officially recognized degrees, and the right to be founded by the state. Quality assurance is often considered as apart of the quality management of higher education, while sometimes the two terms are used synonymously.\(^8\)

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Turkey was accepted as candidate country Helsinki on 10-11 December 1999. As the candidate country of the EU Turkey has gained the right to participate full in the EU’s programmes. Turkey has been included in the decision for Socrates II (2002-2006).

The Turkish National Agency was established in 2002. One year after establishing the Turkish National Agency, Erasmus-European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) has been launched in the 15 higher education institutions and its 45 faculties as pilot project in 2003. The 65 higher education institutions were given Erasmus University Charter (EUC) by the European Commission in 2004. And also the 14 higher education institutions have been given EUC by the European Commission in 2005.

The Council of Higher Education (YOK), the Turkish University Rectors’ Committee (TURC) and the Interuniversity Council (UAK) are involved in the process as stakeholders. Upon the european Commission's restricted call of June 2004, the Turkish National Agency has established a National Team of 12 Bologna promoters in July. A working plan for a six-month period has been prepared. It is supported that in general, the Bologna promoters team will contribute to the implementation and understanding of the Bologna process in Turkey. The activities concerning the European Credit Transfer System and Diploma Supplement implementations in Turkey have been carried out by the universities under the supervision of the Council of Higher Education (YOK). Universities have been participating the mobility schemes within the context of EU education, training and youth programmes with the coordination of the National Agency.

By law, quality assurance is the responsibility of the Council of Higher Education and the Interuniversity Council to see to it that a national system of quality assurance with a structure and function comparable to its transnational counterparts is established and implemented. In their last meeting, both the Council and the Board have expressed their willingness to establish a national quality assurance system and reacknowledged that the establishment of this action line has top priority in their agenda after being briefed about the existing practices by some higher education institutes in Turkey. It is expected that there will not be any need

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for a legislative ahange and, hence, the process will be completed before the 2007 ministeral meeting.\textsuperscript{10}

Turkey has participated the European Network of Information Centres (ENIC), The National Academic Recognition Information Centres (NARIC), The UNESCO Regional Conventions on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas, and Degrees in Higher Education. And also The European University Association (EUA), International Association of Universities (IUA).

There are currently the 79 higher education institutions have been had the right the participation to Erasmus programme. On the other hand two higher education have been given Diploma Supplement label by the European Commission in 2005.

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The Bologna Process is to define and observe Europe-wide quality standards in higher education. In the Bologna Process has been added the key themes and objectives since Sorbon and Bologna declarations:

- A progressive convergence of the overall framework of degrees and cycles in an open European area for higher education; a common degree level system for undergraduates (Bachelor degree) and graduates (Masters and doctoral degree); enhancing and facilitating student and teacher mobility (students should spend at least one semester abroad); removing obstacles for mobility and improving recognition of degrees and academic qualifications;

- Adoption of a system essentially based on two main cycles, undergraduate and graduate. Access to the second cycles shall require successful completion of first cycle studies, lasting a minimum of three years. The degree awarded after the first cycle shall also be relevant to the European labour market as an appropriate level of qualification. The second cycle should lead to the master and/or doctorate degree as in many European countries;

- Establishment of the system of credits –such as ECTS- as a proper means of promoting the most widespread student mobility. Promoting of mobility by overcoming obstacles to the effective exercise of free movement with particular attention to: -for students, access to study and training opportunities and to related servives; -for teachers, searches and administrative staff, recogniton and volarisation of periods spent the European contest researching, teaching

\textsuperscript{10} Ibid, 2004.
and training, without prejudicing their statutory rights. Promotion of European co-operation in quality assurance with a view to develop comparable criteria and methodologies. Promotion of the necessary European dimensions in higher education, particularly with regards to curricular development, inter-institutional co-operation, mobility schemes and integrated programmes of study, training and research;

Appreciated the active involvement of the European University Association (EUA) and the national Unions of Students in Europe (ESIB); took note of the constructive assistance of the European Commission; made comments on the furthers process with regard to the different objectives of the Bologna declaration; emphasised as important elements of the European Higher Education Area: lifelong learning, involvement of students, enhancing the attractiveness and competiveness of the European Higher Education Area to other parts of the world;

Set a 2005 deadline for promoting effective quality assurance systems, adopting a system essentially based on two main cycles (bachelor-master) and improving the recognition system of degrees and periods of studies; Secure closer links between the European Higher Education Area and the European Research Area by including the doctoral level as the third cycle in the Bologna Process; reaffirm that higher education is a public good and a public responsibility and that the social dimension of the Bologna Process is important; take the necessary steps to enable the portability of national loans and grants; stress the involvement of university and student organisations.

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