

Tamas Kozma
Magdolna Rébay

Introduction

The present issue of the European Education concentrates on the 'Bologna Process'. The 'Bologna Process' is a label for the on-going reform in higher education in Europe; a label that serves as an umbrella for the various government reform initiations in the realm of higher education and higher education policies. The naming comes from the Italian city Bologna, one of the sites of the European higher education back in the late middle age, and at the same time a symbol for the common roots and (possibly) the common future of the higher education in Europe.

Higher education—as we know it—and especially the higher education in Europe is full of symbols and symbolic expressions. An entire field of study has been developed to interpret those symbolic speeches and expressions (called the 'hermeneutics of higher education'). The need to interpret the symbolic vocabulary of higher education comes from the hidden nature of higher education. Institutions of higher education belonged to the secrecy of churches and religions; the knowledge they forwarded and the messages they represented were kept within the closed circles of the clergy. All these were gone—however the breath of secrecy is still around higher education. Why? Because it represents values in the society while it is—as every organizations—driven by social (and individual) interests. The symbolic language of higher education covers the fact that transnatural values are represented by human organizations (like churches or universities) but value-oriented organizations are also driven by human interests.

The 'Bologna Process' is one of the modern examples of the symbolic speech in higher education and higher education policy. It refers to the great historic traditions of the higher learning in Europe—while it is a movement aimed at the modernization of the European universities. In fact it seems to be the last try-out to protect the great European university values from the modern challenges of massification and commercialization. The 'Bologna Process' is a joint struggle against the non-European movements in tertiary education; a struggle fought by the national governments of Europe with the leadership of the European Union.

This statement would probably need more argumentation. The 'Bologna Process' is not a struggle but a modernization movement; there are no real differences between European and non-European traditions (in higher education); reforms are usually bottom-up movements, especially in higher education where the institutions have the right and autonomy to modernize themselves; and the reform is by no means led by the European Union (which would not have any say in national education systems).

And yet, all actors of the 'Bologna Process' know that this process is essentially a European venture which could not come into existence without the recent unifying drives in Europe. All the significant reforms of the former centuries (the Napoleonic reform as well as the reform of Newton, Humboldt etc.) were started at national levels, even if the most advanced nations of Europe at the time. The 'Bologna Process' is the first higher education reform which has been initiated at international level, and by organizations that declared themselves 'transnational'.

This modernisation effort is an international--or at least trans-European—one to modernize the higher education on the basis of the European traditions and values. The very name 'Bologna Process' stands for it as a symbol for this double effort (traditions and modernisations).

The new member states of the European Union have a special role in the process—and they play their special games. The reason for this is their on-going transformation in the economy, polity and culture after the turn of 1989/90. The senior member states of the European Union take the 'Bologna Process' as an experiment in higher education and higher education policy. The new member states take it as a new fase of their transformation from the post-soviet model to the European one.

The transformation of higher education in Central Europe--eight from the ten new member states—went through two fases. The first fase lasted from 1989 to the end of the 1990s. It started with the turn--or even before it--with the aim of escaping from the Soviet influence. Most of those states did not even existed (politically); they fought against their former regimes (with weapons too); they created their new regimes in civil wars and / or military struggles. Therefore a new (national) identity became the their leading priority for which higher education turned to be one of the important means. In the course of the transformation, therefore, separated national systems of higher education emerged that expressed the new national identities and formed the new political elites. 'Catching up with Europe'—an expression regularly used in the mid-1990s—meant to create systems of higher education which represents the new national independence. These 'national' reforms have been led by key figures of higher education who became known--sometimes even at a world level--during the former dictatorships. 'Catching up with Europe' became a label for their survival—again an example for the need of symbolic communication in the realm of higher education.

The first fase of the transformation closed with the end of the 1990s. Separated national systems emerged from the unifying Soviet influences. The new millenium came with a new challenge for Central Europe: the promise of the membership of the European Union. This promise (literally speaking) came with the new challenge of the 'Bologna Process'. The 'Bologna Process', right from the beginning (Sorbonne Declaration, 1998) aimed at creating a 'European higher education area'. A 'European higher education area'—a new example of the symbolic speach—needs compatible national systems. To be compatible, instead of being separated became the new slogan of the higher education in Central Europe. Governments who worked hard to build up separated national systems suddenly faced the new challenge to make their separated national systems compatible with each other.

It causes the tensions in the 'Bologna Process' in Central Europe. The 'Bologna Process' is meant today as a turn-over in the higher education policies with many confusions. Governments, experts and institutions are forced to struggle against their own creatures (independent national systems). A quest for 'third ways' between Soviet influenced universities and transnational for-profit educational ventures is dominating the scene. The 'Bologna Process' in Central Europe is not simply an official task of higher education policies. Rather, it is an element of the long transformaton of the post-socialist countries from their past fifty years in Soviet separation (the iron curtain) to a unified Europe.

The articles of the present issue reflect those interpretations of the 'Bologna Process' in the new member countries. Voldemar Tomusk points out that the 'Bologna Process' is the descendent of the 'Enlightenment Project', The expression means the ambitions of the

European nations (the leading ones) to civilise the World. This ambition ended up in two extremities. One was Capitalism and the other is Communism. The latter fell down and the Enlightenment seemed to come to an end. Yet the ambition to convey 'civilisation' to the 'uncivilised' parts of the World is still vivid. The 'Bologna Process'--according to this view--is an element of the civilisation project. The ambition to say right words (in higher education) is not supported by real facts. Those parts of Europe—including Russia—which looks like 'uncivilised' and backward in the view of the 'most advanced nations' have their own values and traditions in higher education. We may be impressed by the ambitious program of the 'European higher education area'. But we should keep in mind that both unity and divergence are necessary for the future developments of higher education. Those university cultures which seemed to be in the periphery from the view of the 'European higher education area' may in the future be the next centers of the higher education of the World.

Tamas Kozma argues that a social science analysis would be necessary not understand the 'Bologna Process'. The existing literature on the 'Bologna Process' includes mostly semi-official documents (gray literature) or expressions (sometimes enthusiastic ones) of the goodness or failures of the process. A social science analysis would leave this realm of literature and instead, it would turn to the real actors of the 'Bologna Process'. The main actors seem to be the national governments. This gives the impression that the process would be initiated at the national level. The biannual declarations and communiqués of the 'Bologna process', however, show that the guidelines for the national reforms are prepared and agreed at a transnational level. They are prepared and proposed to the national governments by transnational organisations; those organisations, however, remain invisible. They, not the national governments are the main actors in the process. But they--these organisations--are semi-legitimate actors in the reform process, since the European Union (European Commission) has no right to intervene to the educational policies of the member states. Their initiations became legitimate only if the national parliaments and governments incorporate them into their national laws and policies.

Bela Laszlo presents a case study of the Bologna Process in Slovakia. Slovakia as an independent state came into existence after the political transition only. The major aim of her higher education policy—as in her neighbouring states (the Czech Republic or Ukraine) was to develop a new system of higher education independent from her earlier one. Some of the elements of this 'independent' higher education system went back to the pre-WWII period of Czechoslovakia or even the pre-WWI period of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Those elements of the independent system of Slovakia had already similarities with others in the 'European higher education area' yet they were designed (as others in the region) to represent independency and to develop the new national identity. This policy coincides with the minority higher education issue. Slovakia has an impressive amount of ethnic ('national') communities other than Slovak. They also struggle for their own higher education institutions and study programs in their own mother tongues. It causes tensions in the higher education policy of the new Slovakia. The 'Bologna Process' with its intention to make the European higher education studies and policies compatible does not support ethnic alternatives in the national higher education policies. The common hope is that the Process may still ease those tensions by making the separated national systems more open.

The 'Bologna Process' is a top-down reform movement, since it has been initiated at the transnational level. Shadow organisations at the transnational level communicate with national governments (rather than institutions), while the latter conveys the reform ideas and initiations to the individual institutions. Gabriella Pusztai and Peter Cs Szabo show how the

institutions in a Central European country (Hungary) behave themselves in a top-down reform process. The authors analyse the media in Hungary describing the echo of the 'Bologna Process' among higher education actors (mainly the teachers). The authors found controversial opinions, lack of information and misinterpretations. Two lines of interpretations emerged on the 'Bologna Process'. According to the first one, the 'Bologna Process' is a 'modernisation' movement which is necessary to fit the Hungarian higher education into the world higher education structures and tendencies. According to the second interpretation, the 'Bologna Process' is part of the 'catching-up' effort in order to be compatible with 'Europe'. Most of the opinions oppose, however, the 'Bologna Process' and think that it is 'forced' to the institutions by the European Union (or some of its organisations). These statements and opinions are strengthened by government representatives who usually point to the European Union as the main vehicle of the entire reform. This debate between the 'top' and the 'bottom' is symptomatic for a bureaucratic reform. The 'Bologna Process' clearly show the signs of a reform conducted by a transnational bureaucracy of a European kind.

The Balkan response to the 'Bologna Process' is represented by the case study of Anna Orosz on Croatia. The Balkan model of the transition, including the transformation of the higher education systems has a special character. Croatia, like other new Balkan states has emerged from the ruins of the former Yugoslavia. But the unique character of this transformation is rooted not only of the war but also of the ideological heritage of the Tito-regime. This regime was different from the Soviet-type dictatorships in its ideology on self-governance. Yugoslavia was not only a communist country but also a state of a federal type. It was an unusual communist regime relied on the networks of self-governed institutions and organisations. Centralisation, therefore, has never been as rigid as in other soviet-controlled countries. The idea and the practice of self-governance was rooted deeply into the Balkan traditions back in the earlier centuries. They include guerilla type self-defence as well as constant quests for possible 'third ways' between 'the West' (Austria-Hungary) and 'the East' (the Ottomans). The idea and the mentality of self-governance is vivid even today. It is one of the obstacles to merge the specialised higher education institutions into multi-department universities. Universities in Croatia are therefore more federalistic than other institutions in Europe. To make these universities compatible with others in the 'European higher education area' the national higher education policy has to weaken the federalistic steering. It is, however, against the tradition of self-governance, self-defence and the quests of the third possibilities. The 'Bologna Process', therefore goes against national and historical reminiscences. Future may only show if and how globalisation--in the form of the 'Bologna Process'—may overcome the power of national histories in the Balkan as well as in the entire region of Central Europe.