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Political Transformations and Higher Education Reforms

Abstract

The expression ‘Bologna Process’ stands for the ongoing reform of the higher education systems throughout Central Europe. The changes of the higher education systems, governments and finances are embedded in the political transformations, and aim to meet the needs of the political processes. The major political objective of the first phase (the 1990s) was to establish and develop new national identities. Higher education reforms in the regions intended to develop national systems that should be independent from the former political structures and should therefore represent the new political identities (independent higher education systems of Slovakia, Slovenia, Croatia, Ukraine, Serbia). The objective of the second phase (from around 2000 onwards) was and still is the integration of the Central European states to the European structures (European Union). Higher education reforms serve as elements of the ‘catching-up- of-Europe’ drives of the Central European governments. The new reforms which aim to internationalise higher education systems are in confrontation with the former reforms which intended to develop autonomous and national systems. Referring to the ‘Bologna Process’ the governments wants to legitimise their new reform directions at home and prove their loyalties to the European structures and agencies.

Introduction

The ‘Bologna process’ is a comprehensive concept for European higher education reforms of the 20th and 21st centuries. ‘Bologna process’ means, however, something else in Central European countries than in the rest of Europe. It has namely interwoven here with a major social change called the ‘system change’ (cf. *Johnson 1996*). Recent higher education reforms can only be understood if they are put into the system changes in Central-Easter-Europe. The ‘Bologna process’ in Central Europe is not only a higher education reform but also a part of the system change.

International literature talks mainly about the extent to which the objectives of the ‘Bologna process’ have been met so far and how much there is still to do for the individual higher education systems (higher education policies of the different states) to fully realize these goals. (see *Trends I-V*) In this essay, however, we are analyzing the ‘Bologna process’ as a chain of political events.

First we are introducing the story itself that is already illuminating on its own since it consists of various – and characteristically very different – narratives. These narratives contain not only a chain of events but also reflect points of view and positions of the speakers. Then we will turn to the actors: international (supranational) organization, ‘national’ governments, institutions (the so-called ‘academic sphere’) and all those who are outside these circles. We are searching their aims and means they apply to get involved into the ‘Bologna process’. We are also adverting to the situation of minority higher education in the ‘Bologna process’ since Central Europe is full of national and ethnic minorities.

The story

Chain of Events. According to relevant international and governmental documents the history of higher education reforms is a history of ministerial conferences. Launching higher education reforms in Central European countries joining the programs is regularly connected to a ministerial conference – usually to that particular one where the competent minister of a given country participated for the first time.

Bologna, Italy, 1988. Rectors of European universities while celebrating the 900th anniversary of the University of Bologna accept a declaration called *Magna Charta Universitatis*.

Austria launches the Central European Exchange Program for University Studies (CEEPUS) (1990–91). It participates in the first Erasmus program in the academic year 1992/93; five universities apply the European credit system. She enters the EU in 1995. A new University Act is adopted in 1997 and a quality assurance system is introduced for universities. Croatia adopts a new Higher Education Act in accordance to which a National Higher Education Council is set up (1994). HAC becomes functional in 1992, first as a temporary and then as a permanent body. A first run of accreditation starts for programs and institutions. Higher education as a whole is set under unified ministerial governance. New Higher Education Act is adopted in Romania in 1996. A Higher Education Act enters force in Slovakia laying down the basis for the creation of an independent Slovak higher education (1990). On this basis a first accreditation committee is set up. The Act is amended in 1996 considering the creation of the independent Slovakia. In the second half of the decade the introduction of the two-cycle study programs starts (in certain institutions) without any governmental coordination. Slovenia adopts her (own) first Higher Education Act (1993) and an act on vocational higher education, as well (1996). Higher Education Council: 1994, Higher Education Quality Assessment Committee: 1996. The first Higher Education Act is adopted in Ukraine (1991).

Paris, France, 1998. Education ministers from France, Great-Britain, Italy and Germany issue the Sorbonne Declaration. It enhances the necessity of higher education mobility and the recognition of degrees.

Austria amends her University Act under the influence of the Sorbonne Declaration (1999) and adopts among others an act on teacher training as well. The European credit system is introduced in Slovenia where the issue of diploma supplements also starts (1998).

Bologna, Italy, 1999. Education ministers from 29 countries sign the *Bologna Declaration*; the creation of a ‘European Higher Education Area’ is foreseen for 2010.

Accreditation becomes compulsory for universities in Austria (2000) and a national ‘Bologna Follow-up Group’ is set up. Hungary joins the Bologna Declaration (1999) and carries out radical institutional integration (2000). Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia also join the Bologna Declaration (1999). Slovenia amends the 1993 Higher Education Act (1999). Diploma supplements are also issued from the academic year 2000/01.

Prague, Czech Republic, 2001. Education ministers of 39 countries issue the *Prague Declaration*. In this document they add new objectives to the recommendations of the Bologna Declaration (the proposal for a unified European quality assurance system, however, was not adopted then).

A new University Act is adopted in Austria and becomes highly discussed in professional and social circles (2002). (This act serves as an example for higher education acts in some neighbouring countries – including Hungary, too.) At the same time the College Act is amended according to the University Act. Croatia signs the Bologna Declaration (2001) and ratifies the Lisbon Agreement (2002). A so-called CsEFT project (for joining the European Higher Education Area) is launched in Hungary, however, the assembling of a higher education round-table conference fails (2002). Acknowledgment of qualifications becomes regularized in Slovakia (act: 2002, amendments: 2004). This act also provides for launching diploma supplements. Slovenia adopts a national higher education development plan (2002). Serbia signs the Bologna Declaration (2001). An education assessment (electronic information) centre is set up in Serbia (2001). Guidelines to the European credit system are issued (ECTS, 2002).

Berlin, Germany, 2003. Education ministers of 42 countries review the progress of the ‘Bologna process’ and a model of a three-cycle system is drafted (doctoral studies become the third cycle of higher education studies).

Issuing diploma supplements becomes compulsory in Austria (2003) and the Quality Assurance Agency of Austria is created (2004). Croatia adopts a new Higher Education Act (2003) and amends it after a year to make it compatible with the ‘Bologna process’. Act on the recognition of foreign diplomas (2004). Hungary joins the EU together with Slovakia and Slovenia (2004). The Higher Education Act is amended in Slovenia (2004).

A new ministry is set up to govern higher education; a national ‘Bologna support team’ is created. Serbia signs the Lisbon Agreement (corresponding diplomas) (2003).

Bergen, Norway, 2005. European quality assurance levels and directives are adopted and a creation of a European network for accreditation and quality assurance agencies are proposed in the closing declaration.

Croatia changes for the two- (three-)cycle study programs and introduces the European credit system (2005–06). The act on the recognition of foreign qualifications is amended (2006). The present Higher Education Act is adopted in Hungary (2005) but the Constitutional Court imposes amendments. Amendments now in force (2008) are drafted by 2006. Basic level (BA, BSc) study programs are launched in Romania in 2005/06. The Higher Education Act is amended again in Slovenia (2006) according to which quality assurance is reorganized. A Higher Education Act is adopted in Serbia (2005). A national strategy on life-long learning is adopted (2006). The accreditation of institutions starts (2006/07). Ukraine joins the Bologna Declaration (2005).

London, United Kingdom, 2007. The closing declaration of 45 education ministers emphasizes equal opportunities and the qualification and knowledge necessary to find a job –

entirely the so-called 'social dimension'. It foresees the completion of the 'Bologna process' and the change for the 'European Higher Education Area' by 2010.

Romania enters the EU (2007). Ukraine starts drafting and accrediting curricula for basic (BA, BSc) programs (2007), and diploma supplements are introduced in 2008.

This chain of events in education diplomacy suggests that individual higher education reforms are directly determined – or at least indirectly influenced – by these events (declarations, closing declarations) on the international stage. Correlations are not that spectacular in the 1990's when, however, similar processes took place in the examined Central European higher education systems (adopting acts on higher education following the 1989–93 system changes) as they were not connected to international diplomacy but to their regained national independence.

Higher education reforms accelerated at the end of the 1990's and became more and more similar to each other. Countries and education ministers signing the Bologna Declaration created a critical mass, the influence of which could not be avoided by other countries either; especially not when they were approaching the EU. It is an obvious explanation for this chain of events just as for the seemingly similar objectives of higher education reforms. The Bologna Declaration did not only give an impetus to higher education reform in Europe but also made it a one-way progress.

Narratives. Professional and social circles in Central Europe tell different stories about the recent higher education reforms. These stories are called the narratives of the 'Bologna process'. They are all about how the 'Bologna process' started in the various Central European countries, what are its moving forces, where it goes and what we have to do to keep the reform on its path. The story always begins with the break-away from an 'empire' (the Soviet sphere of interest, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia). The higher education system of a given country first tries to become independent but then it is always the devotees of integration who prevail. 'Bologna process' is indeed a euphemism in these stories since it means the integration of a relevant Central European country to the European Union. The 'European Higher Education Area' seems to be an 'antechamber' to the European Union. This is the narrative of the 'Bologna process' e.g. in Serbia, Croatia or Ukraine.

According to other explanations European universities always tried to modernize themselves. The 'Bologna process' is another attempt to streamline European universities. This is a must dictated by the globalization challenging worldwide the higher education systems of the various nations. National higher education systems can only address this challenge if they join together. This is the narrative of the 'Bologna process' e.g. in Slovakia or Hungary. Opponents to the 'Bologna process' would rather vote for a cooperation between institutions than a cooperation between governments in Europe. The value of bodies like the European University Association (EUA) is raised in this narrative and institutions like the European Commission in Brussels only seem to be bit players.

We find obvious antagonisms between events and narratives (there are two Bologna declarations and they contradict each other; the documents of the 'Bologna process' do not oblige anyone to anything; the European Commission in Brussels is only an observer in the 'Bologna process'). It was not the 'Bologna process' that started higher education reforms in Central Europe but the changes of the political systems. Real goals for higher education reforms in Central Europe were not set by the 'Bologna process' but by the changes of the

political system still going on. We can talk about a ‘progress’ and a ‘completion’ of the ‘Bologna process’ only in the frame of political communication. In an educational policy analysis, however, we must pay attention to the differences and conflicts of the change of the political system.

Previously we divided system changes into three stages that could be characterized by different educational policies (Kozma, Polonyi 2004). The first stage was a break-away, the second was becoming independent and the third was a period of new integration. Higher education reforms also fitted into these three stages of the system change. ‘Bologna process’ is meant in Central Europe as higher education reforms triggered by system changes. ‘Bologna process’ fits into the system change in each relevant country. ‘Bologna process’ is in its different stages from country to country since the system change differs from country to country, too. All countries in the survey left already the Soviet sphere of interest (1988–91). Some countries still have problems with becoming independent while others are already integrated into the EU, which determines the various positions of the ‘Bologna process’ in Central Europe.

Actors

Educational governments and buffer organisations. The main actors of the ‘Bologna process’ are educational governments. Higher education reform in this region is governmental educational policy; ‘Bologna process’ is a top-down reform. Thus the various groups of interests are mainly to be found in the educational governments.

To foster the ‘Bologna process’ national educational governments set up international buffer organizations (e.g. the European University Association, the European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, etc.). These buffer organizations start an own life and let one think that the ‘Bologna process’ is managed by them. However, the ‘Bologna process’ is a governmental reform policy. Its main actors – as already mentioned – are the educational governments. (E.g. the Ministry for Education and Science of Ukraine set up a so-called national team to follow-up the ‘Bologna process’. A committee called ‘Joining the European Higher Education Area’ was formed in Hungary in 2002. In Slovakia all the buffer organizations were integrated into the Institution of Educational Information and Prognostics in Bratislava.)

‘Bologna process’ is being formed and taking place in the cooperation and conflicts between governments and their buffer organizations. Higher education reforms run in this simulated political arena. It seems as all the objectives of the ‘Bologna process’ were governmental goals (‘European Higher Education Area’, students’ mobility, multi-cycle study programs) that are either accepted or rejected by the higher education institutions. And as if those means were also governmental means to enforce the ‘Bologna process’ on the higher education institutions (diploma supplement, European credit transfer system, higher education quality assurance, etc.).

Institutional Administrators and Managers. The ‘Bologna process’ (a political game) has, however, other actors, too, whose cooperations and aims can draw the ‘Bologna process’ from its original objectives. The more visible among them are the heads of the institutions. Heads of universities and colleges can have a strong influence on higher education reforms because

higher education institutions are represented by them. And the results of the ‘Bologna process’ finally depend on the institutions, indeed.

It is mainly typical of the countries of the former Yugoslavia – Serbia, Croatia and Slovenia. University faculties became independent gradually in former Yugoslavia. Higher Education Acts adopted between 2000–2006 created a ‘corporative model’ (faculties only form an ‘umbrella organization’ over the independent departments). It recalls the political traditions of self-governance that look back to a long history in the region and was made an official ideology by Tito.

Students. Students are among the actors of the ‘Bologna process’, too. They have national associations and are also represented in the managing bodies of the universities in Central Europe. Their international association is the National Unions of Students in Europe (*ESIB 2005, 2007*). Their participation in the management of universities began in the times of the European students movements of the 1960’s. They refer to the tradition of the ‘self-governed university’ in Europe according to which all ‘citizens’ of the university could participate in bringing community decisions (*Ruegg 1993-2004*, see especially Vol II, Ch IV.)

Students also ‘vote by foot’: they either join or stay away from students’ mobility programs. There are several analyses about them (e.g. Teichler 1991) that depict these students’ mobility programs as success stories. Students’ mobility in Central Europe is, however, rather a failure (Kozma 1993).

This failure is explained by two causes. One of them is financial. Neither students nor universities in Central Europe have money for foreign studies (thus Croatia set up a fund for this aim). If more money arrived in higher education – they say – activity of the students may also become more intensive. The other is an educational organisational cause. The credit system does not promote foreign studies but rather makes them even more difficult. Credits acquired abroad are indeed difficult to get accepted. Thus they want to complete the European Credit Transfer System or replace it by the ‘European Qualifications Framework’. Nevertheless we do not explain students’ inactivity with financial and educational organisational causes but with students’ still existing standoff from the ‘Bologna process’. Students have not been touched by the ‘Bologna process’, yet. For the time being they cannot or do not want to involve in these programs how they were planned by the creators of the ‘Bologna process’.

Teachers. Teachers in Central Europe were not involved in the planning of the ‘Bologna process’ almost at all. They only participated in the implementation namely drafting the bachelor and master study programs. (These programs were unknown in the European higher education. They were only applied in Great Britain.) This element of the ‘Bologna process’ is a ‘success story’. Europe-wide it is the most prevalent and accepted momentum of the higher education reforms (Kehm, Teichler 2006). Teachers’ involvement in the ‘Bologna process’ in Central Europe can be estimated on the extent they participated in the elaborating of the multi-cycle study programs. We can say that higher education in Central Europe inherited from the 19th century was restructured with the contribution of teachers.

Nevertheless teachers participate in the ‘Bologna process’ quite critically. Four decades ago it was pedagogues who were kept to be a main barrier to public education reforms (Husén, Boalt 1967). Today it is university teachers who seem to prevent reforms. Mainly those who are more organized and as such can better represent and protect their interests. Opposite them,

‘enlightened managers’ usually stand for the ‘Bologna process’. It is moreover a part of the general politics in Central Europe. The ‘Bologna process’ is (or seems to be) a part of the system change. Who hinders it, hinders the system change, as well.

Employers. Graduates’ opportunities to find a job, employers’ needs and wishes and the labour market are continuously referred to in Central Europe. Finding a job was, however, examined in an organized form only in some countries (e.g. Austria, Hungary, Serbia). For the present actors outside the higher education sphere do not get any role in the ‘Bologna process’ in Central Europe; and they are not involved in the professional and vocational higher education, either.

The ‘Bologna process’ as bureaucratic coordination

Manifest objectives – latent ambitions Higher education decisions in Central Europe can mainly be explained by the different objectives of the various governmental and buffer organizations. These different objectives express themselves in contradictions between manifest objectives and latent ambitions. The official goals of the ‘Bologna process’ are common all over in Europe. While declaring the very same objectives in Central Europe, however, there are other education policy and other policy ambitions, too, that differ from those of the the ‘Bologna process’. For example, there are attempts to limit the autonomy of university faculties in former Yugoslavia, or to limit mass higher education in Slovakia or Hungary, or in many countries to create a national higher education system, or to enhance national identity in Ukraine, or to reinforce the political legitimacy of the education policy in Serbia or Hungary, etc.

Bureaucratic or market coordination? ‘Bologna process’ in Central Europe was initiated and is kept on moving by organizations that mediate between the European Commission in Brussels, the international buffer organizations and the national education governments. Higher education reforms in Central Europe are bureaucratically launched and implemented. It differs from bottom-up initiatives (market coordination).

- ‘Bologna process’ is implemented under simulated ‘market conditions’ all over Europe. In Central Europe, however, governments – as operators – introduce and enact reforms. Milestones of the ‘Bologna process’ in Central Europe are made up of the adoption or amendments of higher education acts. (Serbia: 2005; Hungary: 2005–06; Ukraine: 2002; Slovenia: 1999, 2004; Romania 2006; Slovakia 2002; Croatia 2003–04; Austria 1997–09). The time gap between entering the ‘Bologna process’ and adopting a new higher education act shows how strong the various education governments are or on the contrary how uncertain they became.
- It goes necessarily together with a halt or a restart of the higher education reform. It is typical of the bureaucratically coordinated reforms (stop-go model) as already described by Archer (Archer 1982).
- The influence that can be and is used by the governments in the name of the ‘Bologna process’ differs from system to system. An extremity can be seen in the Serbian ‘Bologna process’ and another in the Ukrainian reform. The ‘Bologna process’ in Austria, Slovakia or Hungary position themselves between these two extremities. It has historical but also political causes, too. Governments that have already joined the

European Union or are waiting for acceptance enforce more or less the conditions of the 'Bologna process'. The contest of the governments and institutions usually work out according to the fact whether governments can be enforced by the 'Bologna process' and referring to it.

Policies. The 'Bologna process' has brought the following results in Europe so far: Certain higher education systems gradually joined the reform. Those systems joined the 'Bologna process' in this way where governments and their experts and buffer organizations were engaged and given enough support by internal politics. Originally the initiators of the 'Bologna process' were thinking in the same way: (higher) education ministers signing the 1999 Bologna Declaration committed themselves to this objective. It is an optimal version of the 'Bologna process'.

It happened, however, in most of the higher education system in Central Europe in another way. The steps of the 'Bologna process' came to reality in other ways and other times than they were planned; newer and expanding Bologna objectives piled on those not yet fulfilled. It causes fluster in the governmental sphere and reinforces the resistance of the institutions. In Central Europe all these get 'politized' under the circumstances of the system change; successes are seen as breakthroughs of the system change while lags are considered to be failures of the system change. This is how the 'Bologna process' typically works out in the region.

Although drifting is the typical higher education policy in Central Europe, we can also easily detect changes in the examined countries. Ukrainian reforms – against their declared 'Bologna objectives' – partly serve enhancing the identity of the nation state, too, by applying the means of higher education, as well. Serbian higher education reform is taking place in an intensively politized arena of the system change that is still going on. In this political field of forces higher education reform is going on according to the changing and shifting balance of the participating forces of the system change. The higher education government is also trapped in this fight of forces. The Slovenian reform is also taking place on a very proportioned political stage: the influence of the higher education government is reinforced by its international integration while the higher education sphere is quite independent. Although it slows down the 'Bologna process', it also helps balancing it in a certain way. We can thus say that the Slovenian reform process shows quite an optimal implementation of the 'Bologna process'.

Minority education and the 'Bologna process'

Minority higher education. Central Europe is full of national minorities. Their problems, however, do not appear in the 'Bologna process'; practically the 'Bologna process' goes on without even saying a word about minority education. It is easy to see that the competent international organizations do not wish to deal with the question. It is just left for the relevant governments as a Member State problem. Thus the issue of minorities does not appear in the 'Bologna process' as a pan-European question but rather as a problem to be solved by the different higher education systems. To understand this, we have to go back again to the system changes.

Usually 'minority education' means all (higher) education forms that are run or required by a minority in a given society. There are two such groups known in Central Europe: national

(minority) communities and the (Christian) churches. Thus in this region ‘minority (higher) education’ means (higher) education that is kept up for, owned by and referring to the needs of certain ethnical communities or church institutions.

Churches and nationalities are often tightly bound to each other in Central Europe. They are split into orthodox national churches; the Ukrainian, Romanian and Serbian orthodox churches are the biggest in the examined region. Consequently Romanian, Ukrainian or Serbian minorities – where they exist – are usually orthodox minorities at the same time. Similarly, protestant churches are also tightly bound to nationalities that are almost exclusively Hungarian national communities. Differently from them, Catholics are international. Some churches, however, interweave more and more with the political entity in which they function – Slovak, Slovenian, Croatian or Hungarian Catholics, Romanian, Ukrainian (Russian) Orthodox Christians.

This particular interweaving between religious and national communities results in the question of minority (higher) education arising once as a national question and at other times as a question connected to the church. Institutions required or run by national communities are often church institutions, as well; the church sets up and runs institutions often for national minorities, moreover in the regions where they live. This interweaving of religious and national minorities to keep up schools is well-known all over Europe and beyond her boundaries, as well. It is, however, a defining factor in the examined regions (cf. *Kozma 2005*); especially since the system changes.

The relationship of minority (religious and national) institutions to the relevant higher education system is complex, burdened with traditions, and changes dynamically. Many experts – mainly in American literature (*Levy, Slantcheva 2007*) – celebrate the creation and spread of these institutions since the system changes as the spread of private higher education in Central Europe. It let us conclude that there is another second sector emerging next to public higher education namely that of the private higher education. It is an empire of freedoms following the system change where students and teachers get rid of the forty-year control under totalitarian governments and open their doors to the national and international higher education markets. We know, however, from other surveys that it is not the case (*Kozma 2004*). Opposite to this idealistic picture, private higher education only exists on the outskirts of the higher education systems in Central Europe; and the golden age for these institutions was the 1990’s decade in the region.

System changes and minority institutions. In the first waves of the system changes – bringing euphony of the breaking-away – previous regulations lost effect or at least loosened. This period can be put between 1988–94 in the Northern-Western part of the region – Hungary, the independent Slovakia –; for the Eastern part of the region, however, it was only shut down by the revolutions (Romania, Ukraine) or the Balkan wars (Croatia, Serbia). Except for Hungary and Romania, the previous states of the region broke up and new political entities were coming to life only very slowly. The political elite of the system changes, revolutions and wars was inherited from the previous systems. They tried to achieve what they had been dreaming about before the system change. We can call these political – both educational political and social political – ideas ‘Third Way’ conceptions. They tried to make ideas a reality that had been known in the political literature of the region since the end of the 19th century and have been called into life again and again throughout the history of the region (self-government, direct democracy, collective freedom rights, self-supplying

communities, a special and distinct development of the region independently from the world systems).

A real ‘explosion’ of higher education (after being kept between relatively tight frames) started in this political vacuum. Under these unregulated circumstances private higher educations appeared in many forms in the region. Peculiar formations were community (local, regional) colleges or ‘universities’ that satisfied needs that had already been latently present in a given region for a long time. Their organizers and operators were leaders who had not wanted or been able to make a public appearance before the system change and who turned their political ambitions to create higher education institutions at a given historical moment. These community (local, regional) colleges or ‘universities’ in Central Europe were mainly organized by the Church or national minorities.

The second stage of the system change was a period of consolidation (more or less from the mid-90’s to the mid-2000’s ending up revolutions and wars, creating new political institutions up until entering the European Union). In this period a new elite entered the political arena representing the international integration of Central Europe. The previous elite considered that their main political tasks were to create independence and identity for the country while this new elite urged new integrations (international organizations and companies). This period brought consolidation for higher education, as well. It is clearly shown by the first generation of higher education acts after the system change (Slovakia 1990, Ukraine 1991, Croatia 1994, Slovenia and Hungary 1993, Romania 1996). Higher education systems were consolidated in these acts – and the relevant accreditation processes.

Consolidation acts also determined the place and role of private higher education in the higher education system of a particular country. Against the expectations mentioned already, the private sector of higher education has not become a leading sector but only played a complementary role – or in certain cases we cannot even talk about a role. Local institutions created under unclear conditions either managed to integrate into the national higher education system while it was taking shape or got near to winding-up. Many of them really fought for life and could only survive the consolidation of higher education if they found financial and (or) political supporters (mainly in the so-called ‘mother countries’). Needs that had been satisfied by the institutions created in the first period could either be legalized by the relevant local or regional communities in the consolidation era or were left again without institutions and representation.

The ‘Bologna process’ and minority institutions. The ‘Bologna process’ in Central Europe started in the middle of the consolidation period. It is the cause of its progress or lagging-behind. We can report about the progress or lagging-behind of the ‘Bologna process’ depending on the actual state of the consolidation period in a given country and higher education system. It also influences minority institutions that have gone through the consolidation period. If they have already integrated into the higher education system, their strengthening can be supported by the ‘Bologna process’. If they have not managed to integrate so far, the ‘Bologna process’ can mean their getting to the periphery once for all.

- Teacher training makes up the main sphere for minority higher education (Romania, Slovakia, Croatia, Serbia). Teacher training is one of the questions that remain unclear in the whole ‘Bologna process’. Restructuring differs from country to country and from system to system in Europe just like the traditions of teacher training. Participants of the ‘Bologna process’, however, tend to make an exemption for the reform of the teacher

training programs (e.g. in Germany) or to restructure the whole teacher training system according to the Anglo-American pattern. It would mean for minority higher education that their most important higher education institutions would be downgraded – except they are able to award master degree in teacher training programs. (Austria created a separate master degree for teacher training programs. In Hungary former kindergarten teachers' and teachers' training colleges organize longer training courses following which candidates only need to complete a shortened master program to get a teacher's degree.)

- Referring to the 'Bologna process' there are ideas in several higher education systems (e.g. Slovakia, Hungary) about narrowing the system of higher education. They mention that mass higher education of the consolidation period cannot be financed by the states, and institutions are unable to provide quality training. While former periods benefited the creation of smaller institutions (reference could be made to local needs and mass education), the foreseen narrowing in higher education has a negative effect on the further development of the system of minority institutions. (It can especially cause problems at places where minority higher education is organized as outplaced faculties of major universities; e.g. the University of Novi Sad in Serbia or the Babes-Boyai University in Cluj, Romania.)
- The implementation of the European credit system as an objective of the 'Bologna process' does not make students' mobility easier but rather means a barrier to it and as such is used as an explanation for low-level students' mobility in some higher education systems (however, making students' mobility easier is another objective of the 'Bologna process'). Collecting and having credits accepted quasi close the doors of the higher education system of a given country since it enhances students to collect credits where it is easier to have them accepted. It hinders cross-border cooperations if it is more difficult for a student belonging to a national community to get credits in the neighbouring (mother) country. It is the case e.g. for Ukraine where the higher education system and governmental buffer organizations primarily work for establishing national identity and only secondly for a European integration. The standoff from integration or the aim to close the national 'market' come into question even in higher education systems like the Austrian one that is a most integrated system in the 'European Higher Education Area'.
- Quality assurance policy and means, which are new focuses in the 'Bologna process' (2005), turn to the opposite direction if applied by higher education governments eager to bring a given system of institutions under stricter control. Today the 'Bologna process' (and not the national sovereignty) can be referred to if a higher education government questions the functioning of a local (regional, community or minority) institution (it is proved by quite a lot of case-studies from Ukraine, Romania or Serbia).

The 'Bologna process' in Central Europe reinforces the bureaucratic coordination of higher education systems. It legitimizes higher education governments that suffer from lack of legitimacy in some cases, and in the name of modernization it offers means – international cooperations – that strengthen the dominance of a given higher education government over the institutional sphere at the same time. Minority institutions can only survive this change – and find their place and role in a unifying 'European Higher Education Area' – if they manage to integrate even if they have to sacrifice their previously acquired rights. Who is left out is left behind.

Conclusions

Higher education reforms going on in Central Europe contradict all proposals from experts in connection with education during the last fifty years and what was commonly agreed in the international professional and scientific community. These reforms

- go classically from top to down (top-down model) instead of addressing problems of the institutions, certain professional groups or a geographic or social community;
- are rather designed to satisfy governmental needs and not to solve the problems of higher education systems;
- are characterized by governmental decisions excluding other potential stakeholders of higher education policy;
- do not consider local or regional needs or the milieu where the institutions are financially and socially embedded;
- increase the centralized character of higher education systems instead of decreasing it;
- exclude economic effects and needs from the development of higher education institutions, which denies all rhetorics;
- highly appreciate experts with international contacts and devalue higher education teachers and students;
- are communicated latently and misleadingly instead of doing it in a clear and plain way; however, they represent these intangible requirements (a 'European Higher Education Area') as if they were tasks to fulfil along indicators;
- are characterized by ever changing and expanding objectives where higher education changes enlarge to whole processes instead of setting a few well-targeted and feasible goals for the foreseeable future;
- their actors use the 'Bologna process' (in Central Europe) to wrap their latent ambitions and changes of the political systems into it instead of letting the 'Bologna process' be about only higher education.

However, and despite all our such and similar scepticism the 'Bologna process' is still perhaps a last major effort of European higher education. An effort to save European higher education – the so-called 'European Higher Education Area' – from those tendencies in world economy that are represented by the World Trade Organization among others. We think of private higher education and the commercialization of higher education here. The 'Bologna process' – just like other similar heroic efforts of the European Union – serves the objective to set protective duties around European higher education and thus to maintain the highly estimated 'European tradition' namely higher education kept in the public sphere. Central Europe's joining the 'Bologna process' means that we try to keep higher education systems in the public sphere in this region, too – albeit that the markets of the region have been open since the system change even for aggressive economic expansions, too.

If we regard the 'Bologna process' this way, several – first seemingly antipathic – characteristics become understandable. First of all governmental predominance in higher education reforms (which was very typical of Central Europe earlier, too). Public sphere is – in some way or other – a governmental sphere; governments represent the public sphere (either in a good or a less fortunate way). Cabinet policies, the so-called exclusion of the 'public' from decision-making and mainly top-down reforms in the form of arriving and congesting waves are all the characteristics of higher education systems functioning in the

public sphere. We have to live with them if we consider basically right to keep higher education in the public sphere.

It does not even contradict the fact that the rhetorics of the 'Bologna process' are full of reactions on the economic sphere. Higher education cannot be opened to the economy by governmental restructuring – except for higher education becoming privatized (which is not among the goals of the 'Bologna process') – but by institutions organized and managed by private investors. Joining vocational institutions to the 'Bologna process', however, means bringing these institutions under the auspices of the public sphere. (In secondary education it was called the French model and was often criticized mainly by German experts.) Gestures taken by the professional groups and international gremien managing the 'Bologna process' (basic courses to prepare students for starting a job) either have not become reality, yet or can still only be reached in a multi-channelled higher education system (universities and colleges). The wish that young people get European identity and can go to universities all over Europe is not what young workmen need (they are sent and paid to study anyway by international companies if their training is needed). It is rather a middle-class want – that of a European middle-class that mainly consists of civil servants and is protected by the public sphere.

It has become reality only partially in Central Europe – expressly because reforms here are not directed by the objectives of the 'Bologna process' but the needs of the late system changes. In this region the doubtless high objectives of the 'Bologna process' are mixed with the likewise fair goals of the creation of a nation state. Moreover, the means of the 'Bologna process' (European credit system, quality assurance) do not only serve the governmental managing of higher education institutions but also the still dubious higher education dominance of the governments in domestic politics and its legitimization in the international arena. We often feel in Central Europe as if the 'Bologna process' turned to an opposite direction and governments wanted to get objectives 'bolognized' that expressly contradict the ethos of the Bologna Declaration.

All of these make it clear that higher education in Central Europe can only remain independent and competitive (among other higher education institutions) if certain protective duties really save it from the international competition created by private higher education. If governments backed out of higher education, it would mean rapid erosion for higher education in the region. Giving up independence, getting subordinated to their governments and evident derogation of their independence is the prize that higher education institutions must pay to remain in a certain protectionist milieu: the 'European Higher Education Area'.

The 'Bologna process' launched with the Bologna Declaration in 1999 goes on until 2010. The Leuven ministerial conference foreseen for 2009 will be the last one to monitor the process itself. Countries joining the 'Bologna process' will become members of the 'European Higher Education Area' from 2010 on. The 'Bologna process' is slowly becoming history – and we still do not know if we shall be proud of it or just step over it insensibly. Its alleged or real effects must be documented in time, among others in Central Europe. This essay was written with this aim.

Note

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