

12. Future of the Bologna Process

12.1 Introduction

The Bologna Process (BP) was supposed to end 8 years ago, yet, it is still ongoing. With no fixed end, the future is still mapped with ambitious goals, with repetition of goals not yet in place and new areas of work to cover. The following chapter discusses the level of priority that the BP is perceived to be given, implementation of the BP commitments, and the road forward.

12.2 Main findings

8 YEARS PAST THE FIRST EXPIRATION DATE, STILL A PRIORITY

Comparing the BWSE datasets of 2015 and 2018, there is a clear understanding of the Bologna Process being of higher priority for many governments, National Unions of Students' (NUSes), and Higher Education Institutions in 2018 than in 2015.

Fig. 12.1: In your county, the Bologna process is a educational priority for the Government

- The government (2018)
- The government (2015)

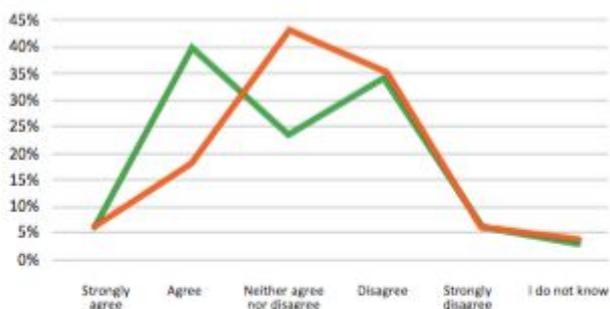


Fig. 12.2: In your county, the Bologna process is a educational priority for the National Union of Students

- The NUS (2018)
- The NUS (2015)

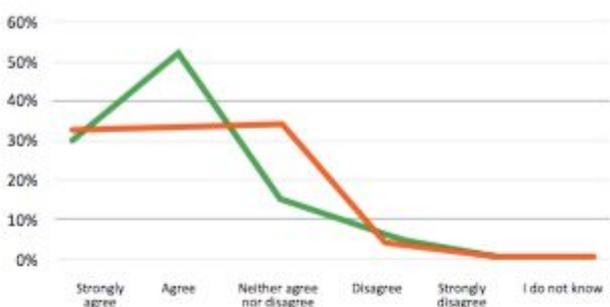
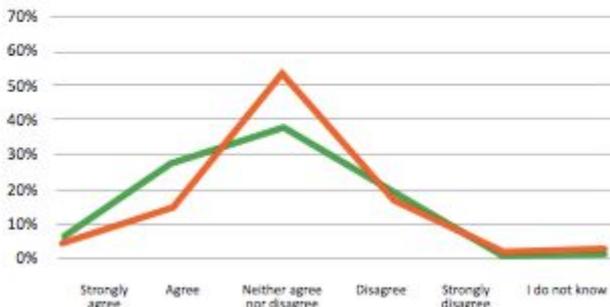


Fig. 12.3: In your county, the Bologna process is a educational priority for the Higher Education Institutions

- Higher Education Institutions (2018)
- Higher Education Institutions (2015)



An increased level of priority can be understood with the background of a greater stress on implementation and the absence of a secure future of the process post-2020. The communique of Yerevan (Yerevan 2015) emphasised the importance of joint effort of implementation and set out the goal-directed to be fulfilled by 2020. Whether the perception of the increased level of priority has any other explanation or possible conclusion cannot be drawn from the datasets of 2015 nor 2018. However, it can be analysed in the context of the European Commission’s strategies in 2017: ‘Towards a European Education Area 2025’. The European Commission aims to build on the best practices from The European Higher Education Area (EHEA) more *solid* structures for the *European Knowledge* area. Analysing the historical and present relationship between the BP and the European Commission, the Commission has gained an increased influence of the national competence; higher education through the Bologna Process (C. Sin et al 2016). With the soft power governance of the EHEA, and the lack of “rights” of the Commission in the field of Higher Education, the support provided from the Commission¹, to proceed even with the lack of strong instruments to implement might be decreasing, thus creating a perception of

¹ financial support and technical expertise

greater interest from the government's, National Unions of Students' and the Higher Education Institutions to proceed with the Bologna Process legitimising its future, post 2020.

IMPLEMENTATION - OF QUALITY?

Fig. 12.4: Implementation of quality?

- All the Bologna reforms have been implemented in my country
- All implemented Bologna reforms in my country have been of high quality

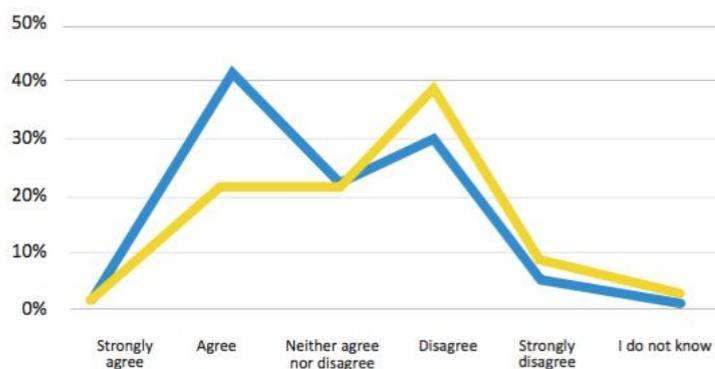


Fig. 12.04: Implementation of quality?

Only in Finland, the NUSes SYL and SAMOK are agreeing strongly on the two given statements of “All the Bologna reforms have been implemented in my country” and “All implemented reforms in my country have been of high quality”. Descending from the Finnish satisfaction the NUSes in: Denmark, the Netherlands, Scotland, Estonia, Norway, the republic of Ireland and Malta, agree on both of the statements. Together the group of NUSes that can be perceived as *satisfied* with the quality of the implementation only makes up 25% (11 out of 43) of all responding NUSes.

According to Dennis Soltys article “Similarities, divergence, and incapacity in the Bologna Process reform implementation by the former-socialist countries: the self-defeat of state Regulations”, former socialist countries face greater difficulties implementing the Bologna process reforms. A statement that can both be seen in the historical context of the countries’ higher education systems and the “late” entrance² in the Process (D. Soltys 2015). Slotys thesis is rather proven wrong by the perception of implementation by the NUSes in former socialist countries. The majority NUSes operation in those countries is rather positive towards implementation but critical towards the quality of the implementation. Deviant, is the Belarusian example. Both NUSes in Belarus (BSA and BOSS) strongly disagree on both of the statements. Understandable since Belarus has only been a member of the Process since 2015 and according to the final report for the Advisory Group supporting the implementation of the Roadmap given in 2015, not much progress has been made since Yerevan (Draft final report: AG2 Support for Belarus roadmap). The Belarusian case does support the thesis of Slotys thesis but it is only one case out of forty-three.

² For more information, see www.ehea.info

The group of 32 NUSes that are *dissatisfied*³, not only operating in former socialist countries, are NUSes both operating in the Sorbonne Declaration signatory countries⁴ and Bologna Process signatories such as Sweden, Spain, and Switzerland. Clearly, the amount of years a country has been part of the Process and its history of being socialist does not naturally correlate.

MAIN CHALLENGES

The same challenges for implementation of Bologna reforms can be found in both the data from 2015 and 2018 though, what is assumed to be the biggest challenge for implementation has changed.

Fig. 12.5: Main challenges for implementing the Bologna Process



Fig. 12.5: Main challenges for implementing the Bologna Process

Throughout the previous chapters, the incoherent implementation of previously agreed commitments has been stated. An incoherency that can be explained from the perspective of a coin. Lack of resources on one side and lack of interest in full implementation on the other. Without interest in full implementation, solid public funding will not be allocated. Even if commitments are jointly agreed upon at the Ministerial Conferences, the implementation remains voluntary. Creating a smorgasbord of commitments, a government can decide what to implement. This cherry picking option slows down coherent implementation and resource allocation.

THE ROAD FORWARD

A clear majority consisting of 41 out of 43 of the National Unions want the Bologna Process to proceed after the Paris Ministerial conference 2018. The two having a deviant opinion would rather see the Bologna Process move into the EU structures. An opinion that is shared by 7 other NUSes. Hence, it can be understood as none of the NUSes hope for the process to fully stop existing. Moving back to the *satisfied* NUSes with the amount and quality of implementation (see Implementation of quality in this chapter) none of them argue for the Processes to end nor that it should move into the EU structures. They rather believe that the

³ NUSes that either disagreed/strongly disagreed on one or both of the statements.

⁴ France, Germany, Italy and The United Kingdom.

BP should continue, but, with countries being forced to leave, or leaving on a voluntary basis due to lack of engagement and implementation.

The NUSes welcome the Bologna Process to proceed after the ministerial meeting in Paris, May 2018 but only 7 out of 43 NUSs would like the BP to continue business as usual. Both structural and policy improvements are needed.

On a structural level, 18 out of 43, would like the BP to proceed as a peer learning forum between governments (knowledge sharing), 14 out of 43 would like a differentiation between the EHEA and BP in the form of a several steps process with an added value, and 15 out of 43 would like countries to leave the process or be forced to leave the process due to lack of implementation or interest for the process. Regardless of the structural form of the process, implementation and knowledge sharing is the most commonly agreed basis on which the BP should proceed after the 2018 ministerial conference according to ESU's members.

Fig. 12.6: Political priorities of the Bologna Process during 2018-2020

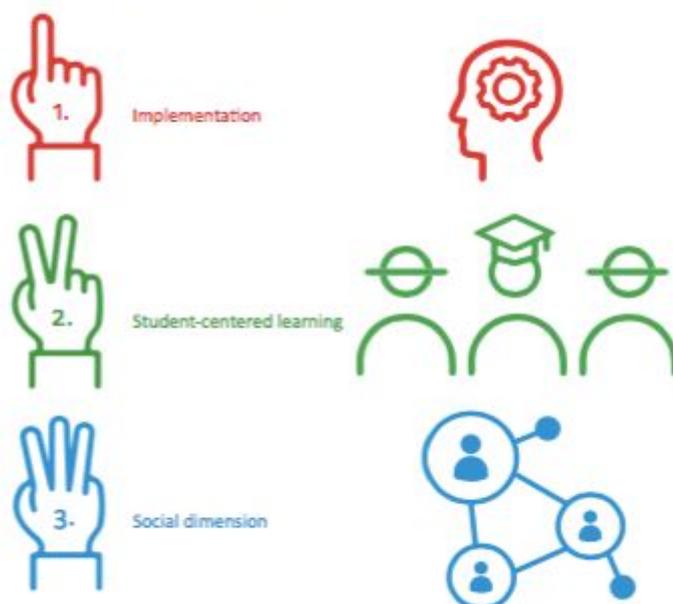


Fig 12.6: Political priorities of the Bologna Process during 2018-2020

Policy improvements or the wish list of priorities in the period of 2018 -2020 is interestingly the same as for the current period (2015-2018); Implementation, Student Centred Learning and the Social Dimension of higher education.

Implementation. Can something ever be fully implemented? Or can something not be implemented at all? The wish of greater implementation can be found in the Yerevan communique (Yerevan 2015), and a conclusion of not all reforms being implemented can be drawn from the Bologna Implementation Report 2018 (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2018) and the answers collected from ESU member unions. ESU calls for full implementation of the adopted measures that should be taken in EHEA according to the Communiques (Introduction ESUs policies in Higher Education).

Implementation is needed to foster trust and recognition that facilitates students to freely move and learn within EHEA. The other two top three priorities follow naturally the pattern of lack of an/or mis-implementation.

Student Centred Learning has been on the agenda of the Bologna Process since 2009. The so-called paradigm shift has not taken place yet, therefore, once more ESU calls for support for it. More about the implementation and developments in the field can be found in the chapter 12. The third priority for the BP Work Program 2018-2020 according to the NUSes should be the Social Dimension of Higher Education (further developed in chapter 5 of this publication). The Social Dimension has been discussed since 2001 and the Prague communique, even if the discussions have been ongoing for more than 15 years, both *EUROSTUDENT VI* and Bologna Implementation report 2018 visualises that there is more to be done. ESU calls for ministers to re-invest in all the fields above mentioned, in order for a sustainable future of the EHEA.

12.3 Conclusions and considerations for the future

In a process craving new goals and commitments rather than implementation of already agreed ones, this chapter has presented the future of the Bologna process where more attention is given to implementation rather than new goals and commitments. The chapter demonstrates an understanding of the Bologna Process given a higher rate of priority for the EHEA members governments, the NUSes and the HEIs. That implementation and the quality of the implementation does not only correlate with the number of years a country has been a member of the EHEA nor if it is a former socialist state. The main challenges remain and more public finances are needed in order for implementation to happen. The implementation needs to be of highest priority for the next period (2018-2020) followed by student centred learning (SCL) and social dimension of higher education.

The National Unions of Students contributing to this part of the publication would like the process to proceed in one form or another after the Ministerial Conference 2018. Proceeding leaves the question of for how long the Bologna Process could or even should continue. No one has openly declared the new expiration date, the only conclusion to be drawn is that the upcoming period of 2018-2020 can be the last.

12.4 Recommendations

- Bologna Process as a priority. In order for the implementation of the reforms to take place, it needs to be a priority both for the government and the Higher Education Institutions. It is not the responsibility of the NUS to push for the Bologna Process, but, the NUS should be involved as an equal partner for greater implementation of quality.

- Implementation of high quality. Review of the implementation and map the dissatisfaction in the national context. Without high satisfaction and implementation, trust cannot grow, endangering the future of the Bologna Process.
- Public funding. Greater funds are needed in order for the implementation to take place. On a governmental level, it cannot be acceptable to sign a communiqué, hence committing to implementation without allocation of the means for the HEI to develop the tools that have been called for.
- The Social Dimension of Higher Education. ESU call on the creation of a structure supporting the implementation of the 2020 Strategy for Lifelong learning and Social Dimension.

12.5 References

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