The Black Book of the Bologna Process

The National Unions of Students in Europe

May 2005

Socrates

The publication is part of the *ESIB's evaluation, follow-up and training project* supported by the European Commission in the Framework of the Socrates Programme.

This publication reflects the views only of the authors and the European Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

This book has been made possible with the help of:

nSu

Studentparlamentet
HØGSKOLEN I BERGEN

LSVb
Landelijke Studenten Vakbond

Bergen

Editing: ESIB's Bologna Process Committee

Contents: Information and the materials for this black book are submitted by the National Unions of Students from Austria (ÖH), Belgium (FEF and VVS), Bosnia and Herzegovina (SURS and SaSFBIH) Bulgaria (UBS and ASC), Croatia (CSU and CSC), Czech Republic (SK RVŠ), Denmark (DSF), Estonia (FESU), Finland (SYL and SAMOK), France (UNEF), Germany (fzs), Hungary (HÖOK), Iceland (SHÍ and BÍSN), Italy (UDU), Latvia (LSA), Lithuania (LSS), Luxembourg (UNEL), Macedonia (NSUM), Malta (KSU),The Netherlands (LSVb), Norway (StL and NSU), Poland (PSRP and ZSP), Portugal (FAIRe), Romania (ANOSR), Serbia (SUS), Slovakia (ŠRVŠ), Slovenia (SSU), Sweden (SFS), Switzerland (VSS-UNES-USU), United Kingdom (NUS)

Illustrations: Mladen Oljaca

Layout: Thomas Nilsson

Printed in Bergen, Norway, May 2005

Dear reader,

The Bologna Process is approaching its mid-term and therefore it's time to sum up the results of this Higher Education reform. This is important since the Bologna reforms were very extensive and can be considered as probably the widest geographically and the most comprehensive in European Higher Education history.

Although the principles and the spirit of the Bologna process reforms is generally welcomed by ESIB - The National Unions of Students in Europe, the national and institutional interpretations of the Bologna action lines can be divergent and are therefore causing numerous bad practices in various higher education institutions (HEIs) and countries. We do believe that such bad practices- of which examples we tried to collect in this booklet - cannot be productive in any way: on the contrary, they risk to endanger the process itself by causing understandable resistance towards reforms.

The black book of the Bologna process is not only aiming at pointing the finger towards bad examples and to protest against them. The main aim of the Black book should be seen as learning from your own mistakes and avoiding the mistakes other countries did in the process of reforms. Therefore we hope that this book, although its black- although it's using a negative approach, can be helpful in the future of the Bologna process.

Hereby we also want to thank all (and especially the representatives of the National Unions of Students from around Europe) who helped us in preparing this book by sending their articles as well as for their support, patience and understanding.

ESIB – The National Unions of Students in Europe

Bologna Process Committee 2004-05.

OLJAČA '04.

Contents

The Bologna Process and ESIB's positions towards the objectives 7

1. ECTS a champion of bad practices and wrong implementation 8

ECTS chaos in the French speaking community of **Belgium** – courses equivalent to 0 ECTS!!! 9

ECTS and Modularisation – Spreading Darkness or Brightening up the HE system in **Germany**? 9

ECTS and Diploma Supplement – still a challenge for the faculties in **Poland**.....10

Learning 24 hours per day in **Macedonia**!!! 10

No student involvement in the implementation of ECTS in **Slovenia**.....13

Living in denial – student workload in **Croatia** 13

Credits in **Hungary** 14

Arbitrary assigning of ECTS in **Denmark** 14

In the **Finnish** polytechnics the decisions concerning ECTS are made in a hurry 15

ECTS in **Norway** – a different story?.....16

2. Quality assurance – for some obviously a too problematic issue.....17

Student participation in QA in **Poland**???.....18

QA in **Romania** – the missing debate.....19

Where is the internal evaluation in **Hungary**?.....19

Bulgaria - important elements of QA system still missing.....20

3. Degree structure – bad practices on the way towards the two cycle study system.....21

What does access really mean? 22

Degree structures in **Italy** – a risky adventure 23

Four cycle degree system in **Macedonia**?! 24

Bologna à la **française** – le LMD.....24

Promised interdisciplinary and flexibility – the **Slovenian** challenge 25

"Small doctorates" in the **Czech Republic** 26

"Specialised" masters in **Switzerland** and many other problems 27

The new degree structure at **Finnish** universities and individual study plans 28

Introduction of the two-cycle system in the **Netherlands** 28
The structure of the two cycles isn't working like it's supposed to in **Estonia** 29
The new degree structure – a **Hungarian** tale....29
Is the national legal framework in **Croatia** enough?....30
The "hidden agenda" in **Portugal** 31

4. Diploma supplement 32

Diploma Supplement in **Finland** still under construction 33
Diploma Supplement in the single-university country 33

5. The social dimension – the story of neglect....35

Social dimension of HE in **Estonia**....35
Tuition fees rise, grants and other services decrease – The **Netherlands** 36
Dental care for students in **Sweden** is still a luxurious expenditure....37
Risk of increasing some tuition fees in **Belgium** (the French Community)....38
Equal Access and the so-called full time student in **Norway** in a social dimension perspective 38
Social dimension in **Switzerland** - grants/ loans and even tuition fees… 39

6. Students – partners or consumers? 40

Student representation is still a dream in **Romania**....42
Fast-food student participation in **Portugal** 43
Democracy at the **Italian** universities?....44
Constant struggle for a minimum of student participation in **Switzerland** 45

7. Attractiveness of the European Higher Education Area and mobility of students 47

Financial burden of the incoming students to **Norway**....47
Non EEA students: attractive milk cows for the universities in the Flemish Community of **Belgium**?....48
Danish tuition fee policy - Is the high tuition a sign of excellence? 48

General situation regarding the Bologna process in some countries 50

The University Law 2002 –implementation in **Austria**: from the beginning up till now 50
Legislation to back up Bologna reforms in **Serbia**?....51
Bologna, the **Icelandic** way 51

The Bologna Process and ESIB's positions towards the objectives

ESIB generally welcomes the increasing co-operation in Higher Education in Europe and supports the idea of establishing a European Higher Education Area (EHEA). When it comes to the general rationale behind the process, ESIB would like to stress that it sees co-operation in Europe and beyond, based on core academic values as the main driving factors of the creation of the EHEA and its relation to other regions of the world. The strong focus on the competitiveness of Europe in the world is a two-edged sword. It can on the one hand lead to an increase in quality and transparency, on the other hand it can further the privatisation agenda and brain drain, which are trends which ESIB clearly and heavily opposes. On the other hand, the inclusion of the concept of attractiveness in the Prague communiqué and the shift towards a more co-operative approach is very much welcomed by ESIB. ESIB would also like to stress that a clear pursuit of the objectives of the Bologna process is essential for reaching its aims and that the Bologna process must not be abused to carry out other reforms which are only on the national agenda in the name of the Bologna process. A number of countries seem to be abusing the Bologna Process for these kinds of reforms and ESIB strongly condemns attempts of governments to hijack the process. Such hijacking jeopardises the creation of the European Higher Education Area, because stakeholders will oppose the process and the implementation will become increasingly difficult.

The strong focus on economic goals in the Bologna process has been counterbalanced by the inclusion of the social dimension and the reaffirming of HE as a public good in the Prague and Berlin communiqués. However, more work will need to be done to ensure that these objectives do not remain empty formulas but are met to ensure social inclusion and equity in the EHEA.

However, ESIB strongly believes in the potential for positive change in the Bologna Process and welcomes the process as an opportunity to reform the higher education systems as to make them more responsive to students and society, including the labour market.

1. ECTS a champion of bad practices and wrong implementation

ECTS has been used for more than 15 years for the purposes of credit transfer of mobile students. With the Bologna Process it started to become more widely known and was extended. It is now known as the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System. The Bologna Process called for using a credit system that is (at least) compatible with ECTS. In the last years it became clear that most countries opted for the implementation of ECTS. All countries that did not use a national credit system chose to use ECTS right away. Countries that had been using a national system for the purposes of credit transfer and/or accumulation are making their systems compatible with ECTS (like the Nordic and Baltic countries). A slightly different system remains in Greek universities (for accumulation) and Ireland and the UK. Only in Bosnia-Herzegovina (both entities), Croatia, Macedonia, Serbia and Spain ECTS still hardly exists or is just being implemented.

With regards to the introduction of a credit system on the first view it mostly seems as if the implementation is already very advanced. However, as soon as one looks at the implementation a bit more closely, grave mistakes start to appear. ECTS as the predominant credit point system in Europe is not implemented properly and there is hardly any willingness to implement it properly. Too many deficits of the educational system would become visible. However, this is a challenge that needs to be faced. The correct use of ECTS is not only necessary to do justice to students. All benefits associated with a credit system are in danger. If there is no possibility to rely on that one ECTS credit equals one ECTS credit, both the use of ECTS as a transfer and as an accumulation system cannot be guaranteed. The most eminent problems are:

- Not all countries have ECTS or a compatible credit system in place
- Not all HEIs implemented ECTS consistently and throughout the institution
- Connections are made between ECTS and contact hours
- The student workload is not measured appropriately
- Credits are not allocated properly
- Not all learning activities are taken into account for the workload
- There is no willingness to move from a teaching based system to one based on learning

ECTS chaos in the French speaking community of Belgium – courses equivalent to 0 ECTS!!!

A black aspect of the Bologna reforms in the French speaking Community of Belgium is the chaotic and anarchic way of the introduction of ECTS in the majority of institutions since they had only 6 months to express all their educational activities in ECTS. In a particular institution, the Fédération des Etudiant(e)s Francophones (FEF- the Federation of French speaking students in Belgium) has noticed a course that was equivalent to…0 ECTS!

ECTS and Modularisation – Spreading Darkness or Brightening up the HE system in Germany?

A system of credits and modularisation has been perceived on European level as well as among some stakeholders in Higher Education in Germany as ultimate tools to ensure transparency, comparability and compatibility of degrees and last not least to trigger a paradigm shift concerning the focus of study programmes – from contact hours to individual student workload.

Looking at the data one might be misled to believe all our wishes have nearly come true already: 85 percent of all Bachelor and Master programmes in Germany are based on modules and 88 percent use ECTS as credit point system. But as usual a closer look changes the perspective on these progresses quite distinctly. In fact both the implementation of ECTS and Modularisation are stories not of success, but of questionable progress.

Only 44 percent of the programmes in Germany based on modules do actually have a clear definition of their outcomes. In half of the cases therefore merely a number of courses have been formally combined to create a „bigger package". This is the same concept as is laid down in many cases in building Bachelor and Master programmes from existing Magister and Diploma studies. Only that in these cases the existing programmes are split and relabelled. How this will enhance the comparability and compatibility or will lead to a qualitative reform of study programmes one can only wonder.

Although agreed in the Berlin Communiqué credit points in Germany and even those claiming to use ECTS are not always awarded based on the workload connected with a certain course or to achieving a learning outcome. In fact only 46 percent of all implemented credit point systems are based on workload. So obviously there is a wide variety of ways to calculate the credits awarded for courses. On one hand one again wonders how comparability and compatibility of the different credit systems even within the country might be

ensured. On the other hand one wonders about the ways of calculation and awarding of credits itself. In the most absurd and evident cases of lack of any coherent means of calculation of credits, for the completion of a whole module not a single credit point is awarded. Not only does one wonder how a learning outcome can be achieved without any workload whatsoever, but also why modules are offered or even obligatory, which are in the literary sense not „worth" any credit at all.

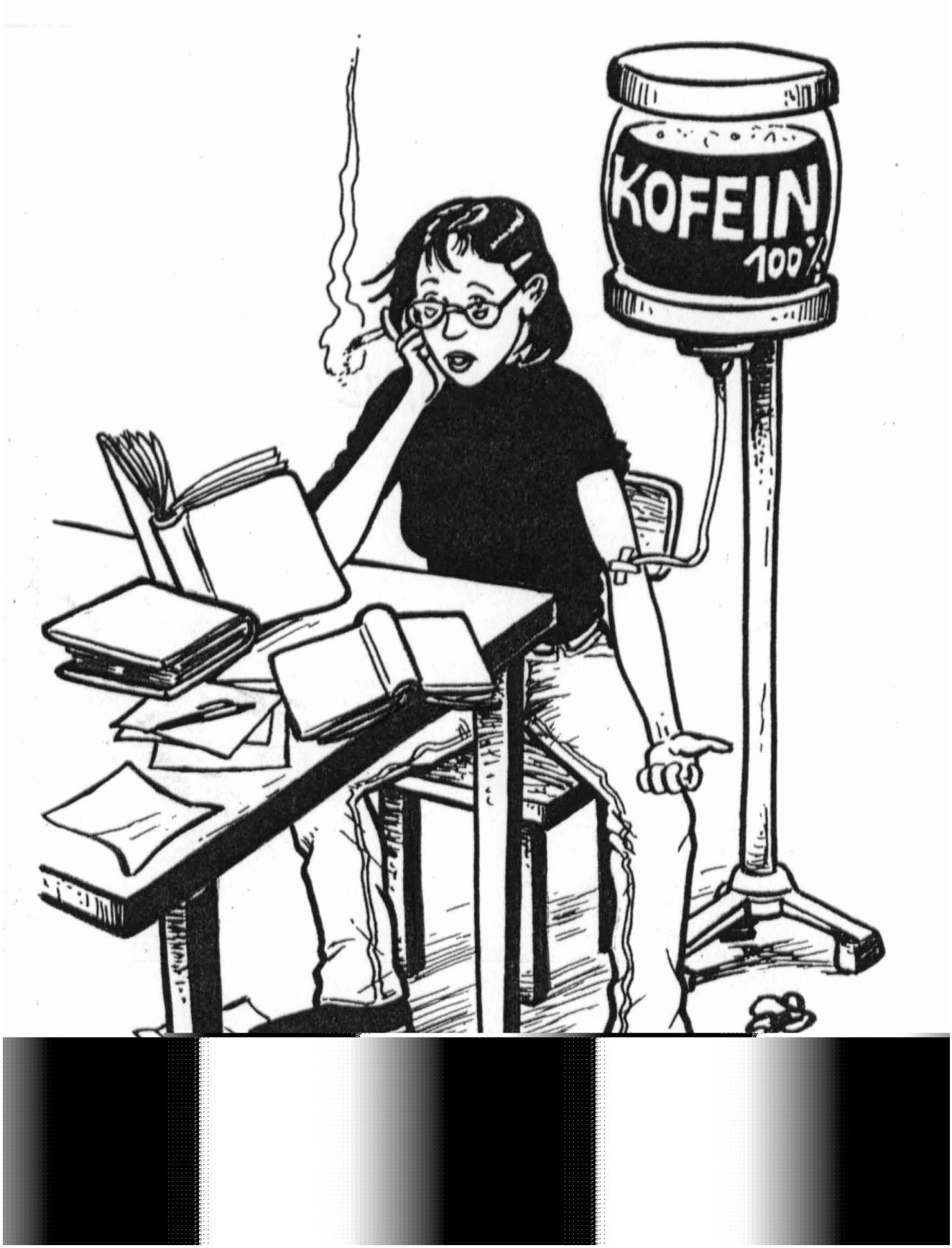
ECTS and Diploma Supplement – still a challenge for the faculties in Poland

The implementation of ECTS is not always clear and still is one of the biggest problems that faculties in Poland face. Not all HEI understand what is the purpose of ECTS and that it is a tool, which measures student workload. Often curricula reform has nothing to do with implementing ECTS, especially when academic staff teaches the same content for ages. Often the curricula don't let the students choose what they want to study. The programmes oblige them to pass some exams in the right time without any possibility to finish studies earlier. The HEIs still have problems how to deal with the ECTS credits that student obtain at another university in Poland or abroad. This year is the first with the obligatory diploma supplement and already some technical problems appear because administrative staff have absolutely no idea how to print it what to put in it etc.

Learning 24 hours per day in Macedonia!!!

The calculation and implementation of ECTS was and still is one of the biggest problems that faculties in Macedonia face. Some thought that ECTS is a sort of a European loan system, since the term "credit" refers to "loan" in the Macedonian legislative. Others thought that the ECTS will introduce a new "European" grading system. And there were those who when asked said that the ECTS has already been introduced at their faculties, referring to the requests from students for more frequent attendance of lectures, verified by professor's signature or more frequent use of tests for checking of knowledge throughout the year, where the student would get parts of the grade that at the end of the year as "credit" would give the final grade.

For those faculties who actually realised that the ECTS is a tool, which measures actual student workload, such as the *Electrical engineering faculty at the "St. Cyril and Metody"-Skopje*, when applying the method to express the real student workload, it was discovered that a student in the first year of his/her studies has to spend more than 24 hours a day in lectures and studying in order to achieve the result which is asked from him/her. This was one of the reasons why after so many years of existence of the faculty a possible reason was discovered for the high repetition of a year and dropping-out rates. Curricular reform remains to be quite a challenge for all the faculties, which started or are planning to start implementing ECTS, especially since academic staff shows reluctance to "give up" parts of the learning material from their course, considering them essential and irreplaceable. How the faculties plan to solve the problem with student overload, as the example shows, still remains a mystery!!!


KOFEIN
100%

No student involvement in the implementation of ECTS in Slovenia

The introduction of ECTS is also defined with the new Slovene HE law, however the HEIs understands it in its' own way. So the students' workload is not considered at all. The amount of ECTS credits per course reflects the professors' workload. That means more hours of lectures – more ECTS.

ECTS is not implemented in the cooperation with students. That means students are not actively involved in that process.

The other malpractice of ECTS implementation is the case of equal formal distribution of ECTS credits to all study courses within one study program or faculty. That means that every subjects is worth 5 credits regardless the workload that students have.

Living in denial – student workload in Croatia

Similar problems occurred in the implementation of ECTS which has happened some time ago. This becomes clear from the story of an expert on ECTS in Croatia who gave an example of what has happened in his own faculty. They did a real evaluation of student workload for the first year students and came up with results that clearly showed that an average student can not pass the first year within a year, that she/he needs at least 6 additional months to be able to study and pass all the exams. When the results were presented within the faculty the decision was not to do the workload evaluation for the other 3 years and to divide the 60 credits to the current subjects. While this was happening at the faculty where the responsibles knew and understood the concept of student workload, at most of the other faculties professors were fighting about who would get most of the credits, since, again, the one who gets most credits obviously has the most important course, and the professor himself is thus the most valuable expert at the faculty.

Credits in Hungary

Credit systems in Hungary functions everywhere since Sept. 2003 (in some institutions even since before). In terms of legislation it works properly; there are problems in application of the legislation on the local level. Workload was not measured when credits were assigned to it; credits were assigned to curricula.

The Hungarian credit system, as it has happened in a lot of European countries, was built up from the top, meaning that credits were assigned very freely interpreted to certain curriculum and not counted by workload. That means that the credit system in Hungary did not effect in a real change in curricula and did not create the freedom for students to choose between certain classes; credits in general have no real relation to workload.

It should also be mentioned that the study structure is still rigid; credits were allocated to the former study and curricula framework; e.g. in most cases, classes can be enrolled for only in one semester of a term, and students can take those exams only in that semester.

Arbitrary assigning of ECTS in Denmark

In Denmark ECTS was implemented quite some time ago, and since 2001 it has been used by almost all higher education institutions.

Although there is a broad understanding of ECTS as a credit system that measures student workload, in practice it is not used as such. The implementation of ECTS at the universities was quite easy, and maybe too easy. Before ECTS, one year of studies equalled 1 point. When ECTS was introduced almost all universities just said that one study year know equalled 60 points instead of 1.

If a course in the old system equalled 0.33 points, in ECTS it was now 20 points. This meant that very few programmes actually started considering the student workload for each course – primarily because they didn't have to, they just changed the number of points. The number of credits for each course is still more a matter of political priorities within the programme than of the actual student workload. When assigning credits to a course it is very common that the study board (which is responsible for the programme) looks at how many courses there are within the programme and how important they each are for the programme's profile, and then the ECTS points are distributed between the courses.

Therefore, the assignment of ECTS points to a course is often not in coherence with the actual student workload. However, this is improving, but only very slowly.

In the Finnish polytechnics the decisions concerning ECTS are made in a hurry

Finnish polytechnics started planning the shift from the old "study weeks" to the credit based system reasonably late, much later than the universities. The general opinion in the beginning was that the change would be nothing else but a mechanical one, not a big deal.

Luckily at most of the polytechnics there is finally going on some restructuring of the curricula work. However the shift into the ECTS will be done before these restructurings have been finished. In general students are involved in the restructuring of the curricula, but not in all units as they should be. At some polytechnics students are very much involved, in some not at all. In many units there have not been any calculations about how much one course of studies requires work from the students although many courses are either overloaded or underloaded. There has been a very little cross-institutional cooperation in the curricula development.

About half of the polytechnics have decided to lengthen the academic year with one month from nine to ten months. This decision has been made based on the recommendation of the working group Rectors' Conference of Finnish Polytechnics. Ministry of education hasn't formed any opinion on the matter. The students and staff were not consulted about the change in most of the polytechnics and they were usually informed about the change after the decision. Teachers' union is against the change, since now they should work in June which has traditionally been a vacation month for them. No calculations have been made about how the studying during the first summer month will affect on the students trying to find a summer job to finance their studies. Also the student financial aid taken during the extra summer month will cut down the total amount of the support.

The qualification framework was prepared before the new structure of higher education was completed. Finnish qualifications framework was done in a situation when the restructuring of the curricula in the polytechnics was not finished and when the status of the second cycle polytechnic degree was not confirmed. This leads to the situation where the qualifications framework

must be changed almost immediately after its publishing. Also the term "qualification" was understood only to mean degrees within the formal higher education system and thus the broader meaning of qualification (e.g. Qualifications gained through non-formal or informal learning) was ignored. Therefore the connection to lifelong learning remained to be mainly superficial in the framework

ECTS in Norway – a different story?

As most of you are aware, Norway has dutifully and quickly implemented the Bologna action lines as soon as they were adopted. One might say that some things have happened so fast that no one really understood what was happening or the reasons behind. I would say that this is clearly the case when it comes to implementing ECTS in Norway.

There might have been reasons to change the credit and grading systems in Norwegian higher education. Some professors were differentiating students down to the last hundredths with our old system ranging from 6 to 0, 4 being the level were you passed and 0 perfect - and unreachable. What was really the difference between a student getting 3.0 and one getting 2.98? A new grading scale was thus in order, but it was maybe introduced to soon for our teachers to follow. They created their own tables to convert grades while many students felt that their grades went down the drain with the new average C.

Our credit system however was functioning fairly well. Most courses where consisting of balanced modules, and there was a clear connection between the size of you class and the examination at the end.

Introducing both a new grading scale and a credit system at the same time has, maybe not surprisingly, created chaos. Professors and teachers are confused, students are confused, and it is not proven that it makes mobility and recognition any easier either.

Considering that ECTS was created as a transfer system, a means to translate the amount of work a student had done so that it could be compared in different systems by stating that an academic year's worth of work equals 60 units, it seems quite unnecessary to have abandoned the Norwegian system of 20 credits…

2. Quality assurance – for some obviously a too problematic issue

Although it is clear that in none of the Bologna countries the whole system of internal and external QA functions perfectly, some countries seem to be on the right track. Student organisations in the Nordic countries, Belgium (fl) and the UK are rather satisfied with their national QA systems, while in Austria, Belgium (fr), Bulgaria and Slovenia currently QA systems are being developed that seem promising. Despite the fact that these countries show a lot of diversity with regards to their systems of quality assurance and the level of autonomy of the HEIs, the binding factor of these countries is that the level of student involvement within QA is higher than in most other countries although it is still a weak point that needs to be improved.

At the same time, in all the other countries students are unsatisfied with the way QA is functioning, or in many cases not functioning at all. Most obstacles for a genuine system of QA that exist can be summarised to the following list of elements students repeatedly mention they want to have changed:

- Lack of QA system
- Actual student involvement in all levels and all steps of Quality Assurance
- Publication of all results
- International participation within QA
- More financial and human resources for the national QA agency and for external reviews.
- More transparency concerning procedures
- Clearer consequences connected to evaluations.
- Public justification of follow up of both internal as external QA what is really happening and to justify why something is nothing happening.
- More attention for study conditions, student workload and teaching in the QA processes
- Quality assessments on all levels within the HEI

Student participation in QA in Poland???

In Poland, students are still looking for an efficient way of verifying the Quality Assurance. There is a national system and a National Agency responsible for implementing this part of the Bologna Process but this system doesn't always work well. The standards are more concentrated on the administrative side of HEIs than on the real benefit of students. The National Agency verifies mostly the academic staff and administrative staff than the relations and the way of teaching and learning. There is no student representative in the National Agency, none on the national level, none on the institutional level and also none in the expert panel for the external reviews.

Student representatives are now trying to persuade the Ministry and the National Agency that the students are the best source of information about the quality of education and about the way this education is transmitted to them. So if they want to have objective results of this verification, they have to ask students. There is no better way to know the students' opinion than when the students talk to each other and feel free to tell what they really want. The students' participation in this process depends on the activity of the student union at the university, but even if they are active, the results rarely appear.

The transparency and comparability of studies at different universities in different academic centers is still a great problem to solve. The standards of education at some faculties just come into effect and the unification of education process is still on its way in the country. There are also big numbers of small, private HEIs that offer low quality studies (especially the curricula of these institutions are poor) and award- unfortunately- a degree comparable to those of the good HEIs. The student representatives tend to oblige the private HEIs to sign contracts with students which will insure high quality of education during all the studies even if for instance the national authorities do not regulate it.

QA in Romania – the missing debate

In Romania QA would be a new issue if it would be an issue at all. Though the Berlin Communiqué stated that by 2005 a national quality assurance system must be created, very little has been discussed on this topic and yet fewer things have been done. For Romania the quality of higher education is a big problem, and the QA is a chance to bring this issue to front.

The former Government proposed a questionable Law of QA in Education (among other things the Romanian Agency for QA would have been under the authority of the ministry of education). There were only 2 reactions: a comment from the Romanian Foundation for Quality Promotion and a conference organised by ANOSR – The National Union of Student in Romania.

The minister's order that asks the Universities to establish a Quality management system was issued only a month before the Bergen Summit and these systems must be ready this academic year. The Romanian Agency for QA still doesn't exist. The big loss in all this process is the debate that should involve all the academic community. By skipping the debate, Romania is risking to make the steps towards Quality only on paper. If the changes are not discussed, understood and accepted, the QA system will take such a form that it will not change the current state of the educational system. And that change is extremely necessary.

Where is the internal evaluation in Hungary?

Although the Hungarian Quality Assurance system itself is a promising one and it was evaluated in certain elements as a good system even on European level, certain elements are still missing. For example there is no practice of the internal evaluation in HEIs. The so-called 'Students' evaluation of the academic staff's work' (internal evaluation done by students, ran at the moment mostly by local student unions and not as an integral HEI procedure) existing in the most cases only on paper and the results are rarely published and have almost no effects on the quality of higher education. Note that the new law proposal on HE makes the process itself and the publication of results obligatory, therefore a positive change is expected after the law hopefully would come into effect (final voting in the Parliament will take place at the 17th May). Apart from these internal student evaluations, internal evaluations of any other kind in HEIs unfortunately do not exist.

Bulgaria- important elements of QA system still missing

In Bulgarian Universities certain elements of QA are still missing: students evaluation of the academic staff's work is not so well developed, is not as an integral QA procedure at all Universities. In most cases it is just a formal issue on paper. In case that the procedure isn't an integral part of QA, it is impossible the results to have an effect on quality and rarely we can talk about publication of the evaluation results.

3. Degree structure – bad practices on the way towards the two cycle study system

Although the reform of the degree structure is taking rapidly place in almost all countries and there are every year more students who start their studies in the new study structure, some problems and bad practices regarding the practical implementation of this action line are alarming and deserve attention and commitment of all stakeholders in solving them. The most evident and frequent problems with regards to the reform of the degree structure are:

- Practice of simple relabelling and not substantial reconstruction of the old study programmes
- Creation of new study programmes which are overloaded in terms of work students have to do
- Difficulties in setting up really student oriented study programmes
- Low student participation and disrespect of the student opinions in the process of the design and reconstruction of the curricula
- No awareness of the labour market about the new degree structure as well as no acceptance of the graduates with new degrees on the labour market
- Introduction of a glass ceiling effect for female students

Creation or increase of transitional problems for students between different cycles and in general the creation of a more rigid instead of more flexible study structure what is maybe the most alarming problem regarding implementation of new degree structures

The introduction of the two-cycle degree structure according to the Bologna Process led in the majority of countries to the creation or increase of transitional problems for students between different cycles. Knowing that one of the key goals of the Bologna Process and for the introduction of the two-cycle degree system was more flexibility within studies, we have to conclude that the present general situation in the Bologna process countries shows that the current result of the degree structure reform is not an increase in flexibility. On the contrary, due to all abovementioned problems regarding access to higher cycles, such as: Numerus Clausus, entrance exams,

selection, tuition fees, limitations in the choice of the study field and the type of institution etc., we are witnessing more barriers between cycles than free and flexible study paths. The majority of countries used the introduction of the two-cycle structure to implement restriction mechanisms at the same time. In some countries there are also first cycle programmes, which do not give access to any second, cycle programmes or give it only combined with rigorous selection procedures and difficulties.

What does access really mean?

According to many analyses about the Bologna process e.g. the stocktaking exercise, the definition of access to different cycles is limited to the understanding of the term access in the sense of the Lisbon Recognition Convention, i.e. "The right of qualified candidates to apply and to be considered for admission to higher education." Also the term access is often limited to the understanding of access to the second cycle and third cycle as access to the relevant second and third cycle studies in the same field.

Having the right to apply and to be considered for admission to any cycle of higher education, in the same study field, is certainly an incomplete definition of the term access to studies. Hiding behind such formal definitions can be understood more as a sign of lack of political courage and responsibility to face the reality of access problems and to cope with them. A situation, in which the number of second cycle study places is 5 % of the number of first cycle students, cannot be understood as giving access although all students would be granted the right to apply and be considered for admission. The formal aspects of access and potential transitional problems related to them are a small part of the problems students are experiencing. Regardless of the right to apply and to be considered for admission to higher education, for the majority of students in Europe the transition between different cycles unfortunately means new obstacles on their way towards obtaining higher education qualifications. These obstacles usually are entrance exams, selection procedures, tuition fees etc. In the future the term access to a certain cycle of higher education and related transitional problems must be defined in a broader sense: as admission to higher education without any kind of discrimination, which – as we hope – covers all aspects of this problematic issue.

Degree structures in Italy – a risky adventure

The Italian degree structure system has been changed by ministerial decree (n°509) in 1999, passing from a structure where it took 4 or 5 year to graduate and where the average students took at least 7 years to finish with very high drop outs to a two tier structure (3 years I level and 2 years II level).

In 2004, the new Ministry for Education implemented a further new ministerial decree (n°270). The new changes would have been good if they were the result of an attentive evaluation of the Ministerial Decree 509 with the universities and the students, but this hasn't been properly done. Therefore the new decree contributed to the confusion already present in the universities because of the coexistence of two systems, the pre-1999 one and the one created with the Ministerial Decree 509.

In summary, the weaknesses and drawbacks evidenced by the students before the Ministerial Decree 270 were:

- lack of coherence between study programmes created in different universities, harming internal mobility both vertical and horizontal;
- increase of the amount of universities without proper funding with the risk of creating first and second class universities, and only the first ones will be able to establish II level degrees and will be recognised as universities educating employable students;
- introduction of numerus clausus for the II level;
- misuse of the credit system;
- lack of critical learning.

The Ministerial Decree 270 doesn't bring improvements. It is based on a 1+2+2 structure, where after the first year students have to choose between a study programme more professional oriented or more academic oriented. The first group of students will have to study only two more years and will not have access to the II level. The second one will have the opportunity to continue.

Lastly, this new Ministerial Decree is not compulsory but feely to be implemented. As a matter of fact, the interpretation given of autonomy is that the universities can decide if they want to implement it or not. This will lead to a situation in the countries where 3 different systems will co-exist in the universities and it's not clear how much mobility and recognition will be among the three.

Four cycle degree system in Macedonia?!

Having to implement the changes that were recommended in the Berlin Communiqué into the Macedonian Higher Education system, the faculties faced real difficulties at first to accept the fact that a reform is inevitable. Subsequently, they also had a hard time finding the right method to apply. Taking into account that Higher Education in Macedonia traditionally was organised in 2 cycles (undergraduate and postgraduate), the main focus of the debate was on the formula that should be applied, or more concretely, the number of years that each cycle would take.

Having in mind that there is a need to adapt to change (or at least it appears so formally), the Scientific Council of the *Law Faculty of University "St. Cyril and Metody"-Skopje* adopted after long discussions and many sessions in the spring of 2005 the new degree system. According to the changes the 4 year first cycle, awarding a Diploma, is replaced by 3 years Bachelor studies. This is followed by the second cycle which is 1 year Master studies, followed by 1 year so called "Master of Science" for people willing to pursue an academic career. Only this "Master of Science" offers access to the third cycle, the PhD studies. Furthermore, the completion of the Bachelor limits the access to the labour market, since only a holder of the "Master" will be allowed to take the "State or Bar" exam and be allowed to practice law. So one can only wonder what sort of profile is created after finishing the Bachelor studies, or if there was also a plan to create 2 types of Master, 1 for ordinary "mortals" and a second for academics!? And how this new system should contribute to greater transparency and comparability and enhance mobility is up to the Faculty representatives to clarify.

Bologna à la française – le LMD

The French government used the application of the Bologna Process to make important reforms of the Higher Education system that have not much to do with the Bologna process.

A very big autonomy has been given to the Institutions to implement the LMD reform (as Bologna is known in France). This has led to a vast diversification of HEIs and programmes. The main problem that was caused is the introduction of inequalities between university degrees and between students.

Before the degree structure reform, national degrees were accredited ex-ante by the ministry, which meant a formal equality. Now, universities can propose their own degrees, without any national framework of degrees and qualifications that would guarantee the quality of diplomas. For example, 2 students enrolled in a bachelor of mathematics in two different universities don't have the same courses anymore, the same degree's name, the same qualification, etc. Since there's no more national regulation of degrees, there is no coherence between the degrees proposed by the universities. The main consequences are that student's mobility between two universities is now more difficult that it used to be and that the formal equality between these 2 degrees is broken.

At the same time, the LMD reform doesn't guarantee national rights for students anymore in term of exams, completion of studies, etc… Another controversial issue is the lack of integration of the short (2 years) and professional degrees (DUT, BTS…) in the new LMD schemes. It's getting harder for the students that are following those courses to continue their studies in the third year of licence (corresponding to the Bachelor).

France can be seen as an example where the Bologna Process was a pretext to introduce a national reform that has not much to do with mobility, European dimension, quality assurance, etc…

Promised interdisciplinary and flexibility – the Slovenian challenge

With the new Higher education law in Slovenia it is stated that students can access to the second cycle of a programme which is significantly different to the one that they have finished within the first cycle. (e.g. after completion of the first cycle of chemistry one can access to the second cycle of economy) In order to enable greater flexibility one of the options to access to the different second cycle is to gain competences already during the first cycle through the optional external courses. The study programme of that second cycle can define those obligations in the amount of minimum 10 up to maximum 60 ECTS.

There are several major problems that jeopardize above mentioned flexible study paths:

In general universities introduced new statutes only to satisfy law obligations and not in a way to enable HEIs proper implementation of bologna reforms.

Faculties are many times confused and are lacking the support with advices, further sub-regulations and clear strategies of Universities when implementing reforms.

Universities are referring to autonomy of faculties as an excuse to make any real improvement. There are some differences between universities, but it can be said that in average HEIs strongly oppose the concept of interdisciplinary. Thus in the University in Ljubljana they adopted statutes where the minimum percentage of both external (courses different to the major study programme) and internal (courses similar to the study programme) optional courses is only 10% of the major study programme. The University is also not willing to solve the problems with the faculties that do not want to introduce them at all. There are some faculties with only internal optional courses. Having in mind the opportunism of introducing real possibilities for creation of flexible and individual study paths, faculties will most probably meet the need of optional courses at minimum level.

Those faculties who are in the process of reconstructing the curricula tend to offer only minimum level of external optional courses (10% which is equal to 18 ECTS in 3 years) and at the same time tend to demand for the access to the second cycle of different study program to obtain beside the completed first cycle also maximum ECTS possible (60 ECTS). This foreseen that the students will have to gain additional 42 ECTS through some other way (bridging courses after completion of first cycle, losing time and might also money) and won't be able to take the opportunity that is given by the law.

At Ljubljana University the allocation of finances among faculties/ especially courses are made in a way that directly harm faculties to arrange any kind of exchange of students and possibilities for the external optional courses.

"Small doctorates" in the Czech Republic

Even though the B-M-D system has been enacted and implemented in the Czech Republic since 2001, we still have so-called "small doctorate" which actually does not represent any particular qualification. This degree (which is not a Ph.D.) is awarded to a person holding a Master's degree after passing a special exam. (But graduates in Master programmes in technical, agricultural and similar disciplines who are awarded the "Engineer's" degree - equal to a Master's - may not obtain this "small doctorate".) Those who prepare for the "small doctorate" exam are not considered students and they usually have to

pay fees to the higher education institution for "related services", despite the fact there is no lawful regulation for such payments.

The Higher Education Law as amended in 2001 has defined the Bachelor's degree as granting qualification mostly to exercise a profession, but also to continue the studies at Master level, while the Master programme should mainly have a theoretical focus. Still there is not enough recognition of the Bachelor as a sufficient qualification under special laws. For instance, the Law on Teachers' qualification requires a candidate for a teacher's position to hold a Master's degree and making the value of the bachelors degree questionable.

"Specialised" masters in Switzerland and many other problems

In Switzerland, when it comes to the access to the master-programmes, according to the law on HE free access should be guaranteed for successful graduates of a bachelor degree in at least one master programme in the same field of studies. Exceptions are the so called "specialised" master programmes. The exact definition and how many of the offered master-programmes will be "specialized" is still subject of negotiations. About final access arrangements there is no definitive decision at the moment. Generally there is a lot of pressure to create "excellence" programmes (and even institutions), where students have to apply for or at least have a certain grade average to be enrolled. Universities are very reluctant to grant access to their second cycle courses for HE of applied sciences (Fachhochschulen) graduates. There is no definitive regulation yet. Between universities and the two federal polytechnic institutions the access should be easy (according to the directive, but the discussions are still going on).

ECTS is still not correctly implemented in a lot of institutions. The struggle of the institutions with study workload, learning agreement, diploma supplement, and basics of the curriculum design goes on. The fruit of the work is coloured wild, like bonus- and malus - points, several different systems at one HEI etc. There is not "ECTS à la carte", but more "ECTS - bring your own wine".

Furthermore, the rector's conference proposed certain criteria of critical mass for BA and MA courses, including a certain quota of professors that invest more than 50% of their working time for the programme and, concerning

students, a minimum number of entrances per year for BA/MA courses, including a minimum percentage of foreign students in a programme.

The new degree structure at Finnish universities and individual study plans

In Finland the new degree structure makes it obligatory to create an individual study plan. One university has made a proposal that students should not be allowed to make individual study plans wider than the normative duration of studies (5+2 years). In general, students are encouraged to make individual study plans by including course registration into the study plan: if the course is mentioned in the study plan it functions as a registration, a sort of a guarantee of not having to queue to the course. However, if the student changes the content of the individual study plan too often or does not follow the plan, s/he gets sanctions, such as losing the registration to courses s/he has mentioned in the study plan.

Introduction of the two-cycle system in the Netherlands

Already in 2001, the Bachelor and Master structure has been introduced in the Netherlands. Right now, almost all programs have been made ready for the new structure. Although the structure itself was intended to sustain the inflow from first to second cycle, this has been violated by a number of measures since the introduction of the two cycled system:

Selection at the gate of certain "top"-master programs

Increase of tuition fees of certain "top"-master programs

A relatively high ECTS-barrier to access a master program (up to 180 ECTS in some programs, while the bachelor is only 180 ECTS in the Netherlands)

There is also a serious problem for students in higher professional education that want to gain access to a second cycle. Not in the last place because there are almost no second cycle programs in higher professional education itself. Students have to follow a bridging programme, where high fees are asked and tuition fees are differentiated. This results in only ten percent of the students in higher professional students actually following a program in the second cycle.

The structure of the two cycles isn't working like it's supposed to in Estonia

In Estonia, there is an idea that not all students should be able to continue studies in the second cycle after the completion of the first cycle. There are entrance exams between the cycles and only 2/3 of the state commissioned places are provided for the second cycle. This is especially problematic since studies have shown that first cycle study programmes are not labour market relevant and often the new bachelor is not considered to be a complete university education. Due to the problems related to the bachelor degree, decreasing the number of state commissioned study places just puts an extra financial burden on students who will probably continue studies anyway but have to pay for their education.

It should be possible for everyone who is studying at a university to complete two cycles of studies, as long as they fulfil the requirements placed upon them.

The new degree structure – a Hungarian tale

In Hungary there is a big lack in the curriculum structure and content in terms of the second cycle (MSc/MA). The enrolment to the master cycle is not elaborated. The present university college (polytechnic) degree is expected to get accepted as a BA/BSc degree, thus those who get this degree during the transitional time (until the two-cycle-system will be fully introduced, from September 2006) should have the possibility to enrol in the master cycle. Another problem with the reforms of the degrees structure in Hungary is that there's no real dialogue between the labour market and the other stakeholders such as the state, the political sector, the academic sector and the student representation. Therefore the implementation of the two-cycle system was not carried out by consideration of the labour market's expectations and ideas what can cause potential damages to the graduates... On the other hand the labour market also sustains a lack of information in terms of degrees and their real value in the two-cycle system.

Is the national legal framework in Croatia enough?

Early in 2003 Croatia adopted a law on higher education, which was seen as a first step to the implementation of the Bologna Process. The law gave the necessary legal framework to implement the tools and action lines envisaged within the Bologna Process. Until January 2005, no changes or discussions could be seen at the faculty or university level. Suddenly, in the beginning of this year, since the law proscribes a deadline for implementation of the two cycle system by the beginning of the academic year 2005/6, all the universities and faculties are starting to change their statutes and their programmes. Is it realistic to expect that well thought programmes, able to respond to the needs of a country in a need of economic growth and development are to be created, evaluated and accredited properly in less than 6 months? What is currently happening in Croatia is -mildly put- an incoherent rush in implementing a reform that a very small amount of those in charge of the reform even understand; more realistically its just chaos.

Within the same faculty, and we still need to think of the faculties as the main actors of the reform since the universities are still not integrated, which offers two programmes and thus two degrees in a similar field, one programme will be changed into a 3+2 and the other in 4+1. Why? Because the programme that is changing into a three year degree is easier than the one that will stay a 4 year programme, and thus it can be squeezed into just three years. There is no discussion of rethinking the aims of the programmes, learning outcomes, methods of teaching and true redesigning of the courses and the programmes as a whole. Why? Because the majority of the professors sees the decision of whether their degree can be given in 3 years as a matter of prestige. In a country where the quality of a professor is measured by the number of students not able to pass his/her exam (based on the principle that the less students pass the exam the more important and a better expert the professor is), this approach is quite understandable, however it still remains unacceptable.

The "hidden agenda" in Portugal

The Bologna Process has been several times accused of just being a justification to support financial cuts in the educational budgets of several countries. True or false, in Portugal this hidden agenda has clearly distorted the reflection and implementation of the Bologna Process. We could say that the main discussion in Portugal for the last two years has been centred in the duration of the first and second cycle and what designation they should have. The first public statements, namely the one presented by the national rectors conference and endorsed by the polytechnics association advocated for a 4 years first degree that should be named "licenciatura" extinguishing the present day 3 years "bacharelato". And why were some of the stakeholders defending such a position when the majority of other countries were going to the 3+2 structure? Our opinion is that at the time they were concerned that the second cycle would not be financed by the government, so the logical way to go would be extending to the maximum the financed first cycle. After some months of discussion this is no longer the unanimous opinion of some of the stakeholders. The former and the present Ministers of Higher Education made in the last months declarations supporting the idea that all the "necessary" education would be financed by the government, and that in these cases student financial contribution should be at the same level of the 1st cycle.

Well, this concept of "necessary" education makes us scratch our heads and place some questions. Who will decide what will be the necessary education? Will all the institutions be able to provide this education at the level of the second cycle? How much will students attending a "non-necessary" 2nd cycle be asked to pay for their choice? These are all questions that prove that the "hidden factor" is not yet out of the discussion.

Due to these distortions we are severely concerned that the bologna reforms will bring additional barriers for student in terms of their progress in higher education. We also believe that the Portuguese government is overlooking the necessary social dimension of the bologna reforms. And failing to cope with this can easily marginalize the country in the future European Area of Higher Education, excluding the Portuguese students and the Portuguese higher education system of the full enjoyment of the Bologna Process benefits.

4. Diploma supplement

Most students are currently experiencing problems in relation to the Diploma Supplement apart from the Nordic countries. Many of the problems are caused by the lack of procedures and non-standardised use. Therefore the issuing of Diploma Supplements very much depends on the individual institutions and it is hard to give a concrete answer by countries. In a wide range of countries it was also impossible to map the problems in relation to the Diploma Supplement, as many countries only start some time in 2005 or later with issuing them..

The most eminent problems with the diploma supplement are:

- The Diploma Supplement is not being issued
- The Diploma Supplement – if issued – is either not issued to all graduates, not automatically, not free of charge or not in a widely spoken European language
- The Diploma Supplement is not used in the standardised format

Diploma Supplement in Finland still under construction

According to the Finnish legislation, higher education institutions are required on request to provide their students with a diploma supplement intended for international use. The Ministry of Education has recommended the use of the standardised Diploma Supplement for this purpose. The Finnish government has given a decree (794/2004) stipulating that the provision of Diploma Supplement (DS) shall become automatic from 1.8.2005 onwards in all universities: "The University shall issue a Diploma Supplement intended for international use to a person who has completed a degree or studies at the university. The Diploma Supplement shall provide sufficient information about the university and about the studies or study attainments recorded in the diploma or certificate, and about their level and status in the education system."

The Finnish National Union of University Students (SYL) ordered a national survey from the Students Research Foundation and the results were published in the end of April 2005. It seems that there are still major differences in the way universities provide the DS even though legislation soon enters into force. In only seven of the twenty universities the students are provided a DS automatically upon graduation. Gladly, the situation will soon change as the legislation enters into force. It is good to note that the DS is widely used in higher education institutions, even though its provision is not automatic. Most universities provide the DS upon request.

Diploma Supplement in the single-university country

As stated in the Berlin Communiqué, ministers have "set the objective that every student graduating as from 2005 should receive the Diploma Supplement automatically and free of charge." This is echoed in Malta's National Report (2005) where is written: "The University will also start issuing students with the Diploma supplement as from next year."

The current situation at the University of Malta is quite different, however. Presently, a proper Diploma Supplement is not available, but a Detailed Transcript is, albeit only upon request and against payment of a fee (Lm10, equivalent to approx 24Euro). "This transcript shows the course, main areas of study, date of entry, all the study-units followed during the course and their results as well as the final classification and date of graduation… This

transcript may take up to one month for completion, although every effort will be made to prepare the transcript earlier." (Office of the Registrar – Website). It therefore lacks any of the study-unit descriptions required in a diploma supplement, and appears to take quite some time to produce as well…

It is all very well to agree and sign that the University of Malta will issue Diploma Supplements by 2005, but if currently graduates have to request and pay for even the simple transcript available, one wonders how they are going to be issued with Diploma Supplements "automatically and free of charge", not to mention the funding required to actually convert the current transcript into a proper Diploma Supplement, and create an efficient system whereby these supplements can be issued within a reasonable time frame after graduation, especially considering a single transcript currently "may take up to one month for completion". In fact, the university, already in deficit due to funding restrictions, has already stated that without additional funding it will not be able to accomplish these obligations.

In conclusion, countries like Malta where Higher Education is primarily state-funded, whilst implementation of the Bologna process remains of utmost priority to Higher Education Institutions, unless the institution is provided with adequate funds for such implementation by the same ministers signing the treaties, this would only be further starving the institution and possibly compromising quality in other areas.

5. The social dimension – the story of neglect

The social dimension became part of the Bologna process in 2001. Now it is understood as a transversal action line that has impacts on all other action lines. Additionally ministers stressed that students need adequate studying and living conditions in order to successfully complete their studies within reasonable time. This survey therefore looked into the question whether the reforms that took place in the most recent years (2001-2005) took into account the commitment of the Prague and Berlin communiqués that the social dimension is an important element of the Bologna process and that it should be considered when implementing these reforms.

As a conclusion, the major issues that remain unsolved regarding the social dimension (notwithstanding the Prague and Berlin communiqués) around Europe can be summarised as follows:

- Lack of decent and affordable accommodation for students
- Democratic access to Higher Education
- The amount and availability of grants / loans especially in connection with the living costs
- Very bureaucratic procedures for applying for student social support
- The inadequacy of the healthcare system
- Lack of sufficient data on the study and living conditions
- Age limits as an obstacle for getting student benefits

Social dimension of HE in Estonia

One of the biggest problems in Estonian higher education are the social benefit systems for students. The system is clearly incomplete and does not guarantee access to higher education. As a result, many students have to work which in turn affects the quality of their studies. The following problems exist (based on the "Study Allowances and Study Loans Act", passed on the 7th of august 2003 in the national parliament, Riigikogu).

The study allowance is actually a scholarship

According to § 6 a student who wants to apply for study allowance has to present "outstanding results of the pupil or student in a field of study" which means that granting study allowances is based on merit. Thus the Estonian study allowance system is actually a scholarship system and there are no study allowances

- *Students can't apply for study allowance on the first semester*

According to § 6 to apply for study allowance the student has to present results of his or her studies. As students don't have study results in the first semester they cannot get the allowance (this also applies for second cycle students). This means that beginning studies can be very difficult for students from lower socio-economic backgrounds.

- *The structure of study allowances*

Currently there are two kinds of allowances a person can apply for: study allowance and additional allowance. The idea of the additional allowance is to help those students who are studying and living in a different city than their parents to cover living expenses. At the moment the study allowance is around 53 € and additional allowance is around 26 €. Research has shown, that students mainly spend this on rent, food, transportation etc. The costs of studying themselves aren't usually as big. Therefore the structure of the allowances isn't logical.

- *Very few students get allowances*

According to the original plan, 1/3 of the students studying on state commissioned places should get study allowances. This year, we have around 67 000 students in Estonia and only around 15% of them get the allowance. Therefore the number of students getting study allowances is marginal.

Tuition fees rise, grants and other services decrease – The Netherlands

Since the beginning of the eighties, investments in Dutch higher education have decreased down to eighty percent of the original investments. To compensate for this decrease in investments, tuition fees have been raised annually raised from around two-hundred euros up to fifteen hundred euros. This shift in investors has met with an extra decrease of student grants of relatively fifty percent. Since the signing of the Bologna Declaration in 1999, these developments have found continuation in the government policy. In

recently proposed government plans, tuition fees will be doubled, when students study longer than six years during their entire life. The developments concerning financing of higher education seriously jeopardizes the accessibility of Dutch higher education, both for regular students and life long learners.

Also portability of student loans and grants is still not possible for Dutch students, wanting to study abroad.

Another serious harm of the social dimension of students is the abolishment of financing of students outside the EU. From September 1st, 2005, tuition fees for these students have increased up to € 7.000 or more annually. This also seriously jeopardizes the accessibility of Dutch higher education from the European higher education area. No exceptions have been made from students studying within this area, but outside the European Union.

Not only has the Bologna Process been violated in financing, there are also serious problems in student housing. At this moment, 30.000 students are waiting for a private room in the main university cities. The problems in student housing has increased with more than fifty percent over the last five years.

The social dimension of studying in the Netherlands has rather decreased than increased since the signing of the Bologna Declaration.

Dental care for students in Sweden is still a luxurious expenditure

Swedish students have in general good access to healthcare, both regarding costs and general accessibility. The healthcare system is for example not organized in a way that causes problems for students if they move around a lot. Unfortunately the general situation is not true for all areas of the Swedish healthcare system. Dental care is a part of the healthcare system where the situation for students is very difficult. The dental care is both very expensive and inaccessible.

All Swedish citizens are covered by the dental care insurance from the year they turn twenty, before that all dental care is free. The normal healthcare insurance is constructed in such a way that there is a limit for how much the patient have to pay for the care, no matter what care or how much it costs. When it comes to dental care the insurance is constructed in such a way that there is no limit for how expensive the dental care can become and thus how

much the patient have to pay. Depending on what kind of care the student needs, the cost can become very high. There is no state cost reduction for dental care and there are very few HEI that offers dental care for the students.

Students in Sweden mostly finance themselves via the student loans and grants system. The amount of loans and grants that the students receive is set at the lowest possible level. This has the effect that most students cannot afford any extra costs at all. Seeing a dentist is an extra cost that most students therefore have problems affording. This has the effect that students in Sweden have big problems keeping their oral health at the same level as the rest of the society.

Risk of increasing some tuition fees in Belgium (the French Community)

In general, university students in the French-speaking Community of Belgium pay a tuition fee of 730 EUR per year. However, students from les well-off social and economical backgrounds used to have a tuition fee of "only" 270 EUR.

The "Bologna law" legalised the existence of this "intermediary" tuition fee but quoting the sum of…430 EUR, almost doubling the amount! The rectors' conference used this opportunity to claim these amounts from those students even if the minister has repeatedly and publicly said that it was a maximum amount and that it was up to the universities not no raise the former tuition fee, since they received some more money in the same law. As good news, the Free University of Brussels has decided recently not to claim more than the former 270 EUR. Let's hope that this trend will be followed by the other universities.

Equal Access and the so-called full time student in Norway in a social dimension perspective

Norwegian authorities often brag about the "generous" loan and grant system. Students are eligible for loans of 80,000 NOK (approx.9,500 EUR) a year. 40% of this is turned into grants if the students pass all of her/his exams. Although it might seem like a lot, this sum is not enough to live a modest life in Norway. 2/3 of all students in Norway have part-time jobs and

half of these work more than 30 hours a week. One can assume that the vast majority of the remaining 1/3 receive financial assistance from friends and/or family. This contradicts the government's outspoken dedication to make it possible for all students to devote themselves to their studies full time.

Social dimension in Switzerland - grants/ loans and even tuition fees…

The core of the problem in Switzerland is that every single one of the 26 States that form the Swiss federal State -the Cantons- have an own grant system. More than that, a complicated mechanism of money flows from the central State to the Cantons, from cantons to HEI, from HEI to HEI and back…making it almost impossible to improve the system. Furthermore, there is a basic fear of the Cantons of a shift of competences to the central State.

Nevertheless, the main tendency is to introduce loans instead of grants (in opposite to loans as an additional help). For example in the canton Bern there are already grants for the bachelor but a mixed grant/loan system after the first 3 years of study-time (=Master). Even if this is against the Swiss "Bologna-Framework" (and the idea of Bologna in general), based on a nationwide consensus, that bachelor/master *together* should be treated like the former licenciat, also regarding grants/loan issues. It is also very difficult to act against that parliamentary decision of the Canton of Berne. A big problem is that the "Bologna-Richtlinien" are the result of a contract between Cantons and the Federal State where the democratic control/possibilities to act are very limited.

Again, the federal nature of Switzerland leads to a broad variety of systems. Generally, it is the case that the students have to organise the information and the application for a grant totally by themselves. To get information can be quite difficult (because of the fact that students have to apply in their "home-Canton", meaning the place where the student has finished high-school and not in the Canton the student is studying.

A difficult situation also exists for foreigners and for "not mainstream" educational programs, where normally people just don't know that they have a right for support. The situation with the loans is totally unregulated. Mostly there are only private banks giving loans for normal conditions. The accessibility is very low. In addition to that, there are tuition fees (about 500 Euros per Semester, with –of course- variations) and no social services or even only discounts for such services for students (health insurance, public transport, housing, insurances, etc).

This leads to the fact, that at least 50% of the students have to work to (partly) finance their studies. Some studies say up to 80% of students work more then 20% of their time. It has to be said that the data available are already 10 years old. On the pressure of VSS-UNES The Swiss Student Union, there will be made a new

survey on the social situation of students this year by the federal office of statistics (about 20% of the student population will be questioned), and only hope remains that there will be better and new data.

6. Students – partners or consumers?

One of the unique elements in the policy making in the Bologna process is the underlying partnership attitude. Establishing the EHEA by 2010 is a joint endeavour of governments, institutions and students. Students do play an active role and can contribute significantly to changes in higher education. Therefore ministers in Berlin emphasised that students are full partners in higher education governance. The participation of students is seen as essential for the Bologna process and higher education in general.

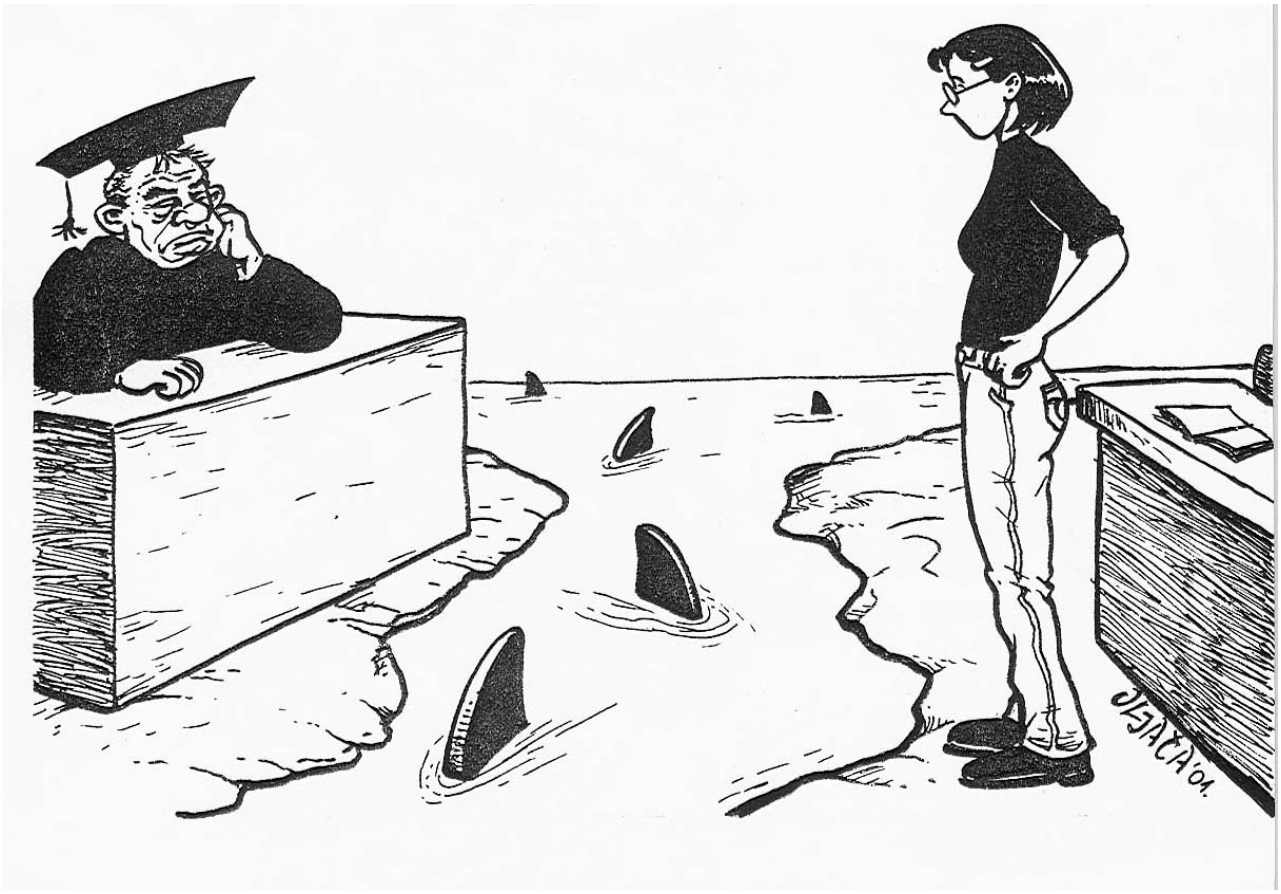
In the Prague Communiqué, in 2001, for the first time it was acknowledged that students should participate in and influence the organisation and content of education at universities and other higher education institutions. This has been confirmed and even strengthened by ministers in the Berlin Communiqué. Many students and their representatives had the hope that these commitments would lead to genuine improvements of student involvement. Now, in 2005, it is very disappointing to notice that in the vast majority of countries the situation of student involvement has not changed and in countries like Denmark, Austria, Germany and Switzerland even got worse. Only in a few countries the last few years have shown an improvement of student involvement, namely in the Baltic countries, the polytechnic sector of Finland, Belgium, Slovenia and Macedonia.

Although the level of student involvement and influence varies widely across Europe, all respondents of the survey notice that there are areas where their influence is too limited or non-existent.

This is due to several reasons, all of which are to some extent present within each country and within almost all HEIs:

- Lack of legal regulations for actual student involvement, not only consultative roles
- Lack of student involvement in informal bodies that prepare decisions
- Students are not or less involved in topics related to finances, hiring of staff and their working conditions, follow up of evaluation results, issues related to the study environment, etc.

- Mentality of other stakeholders who are not used or willing to consider students as equal partners but rather as mere users whose opinions hardly count or even as troublemakers.
- Unwillingness of governments and/or HEIs to value the opinion of students if they are different from their own.
- Lack of financial and human resources of student unions and representatives.



Student representation is still a dream in Romania

There is a tradition in Romania to have great things on paper and not implement them into reality. This is the case of student participation in the decision-making process. Even though the Law of Education states that 25% of every Faculty Council or University Senate places must be filled by students, they actually are not participating.

Using various means (accustomed during the communist period), the faculty leaderships takes care to maintain the representation mechanisms as obscure as possible by making regulations interpretable and restrictive and systematically minimising the role of students in the decision-making process. Sometimes the student places are filled with "convenient" students.

A recent case at the University of Bucharest at the Electrical Engineering Faculty, where the local student organisation organised elections for the student places in the Faculty Council. The Council refused to validate the elections although students respected all the regulations and there were no complains from students. Students suspect that the faculty preferred to pass its reform plans without students opposing the lack of flexibility in the new programmes.

This is one of the fortunate situations when the students are informed and have a position. The general situation is that students are not even aware of the planned changes.

The same thing happens at the ministry level. The ministry asked a rector to nominate a student to be part of Romania's official delegation for the Bergen Summit.

The main cause is that in Romania the idea that students can and must play a role in the Higher Education design at all levels is not yet accepted and unfortunately the Bologna Process didn't help. We look forward to the day when students in Romania will not hear from other stakeholders "Leave it to us, we know better".

Fast-food student participation in Portugal

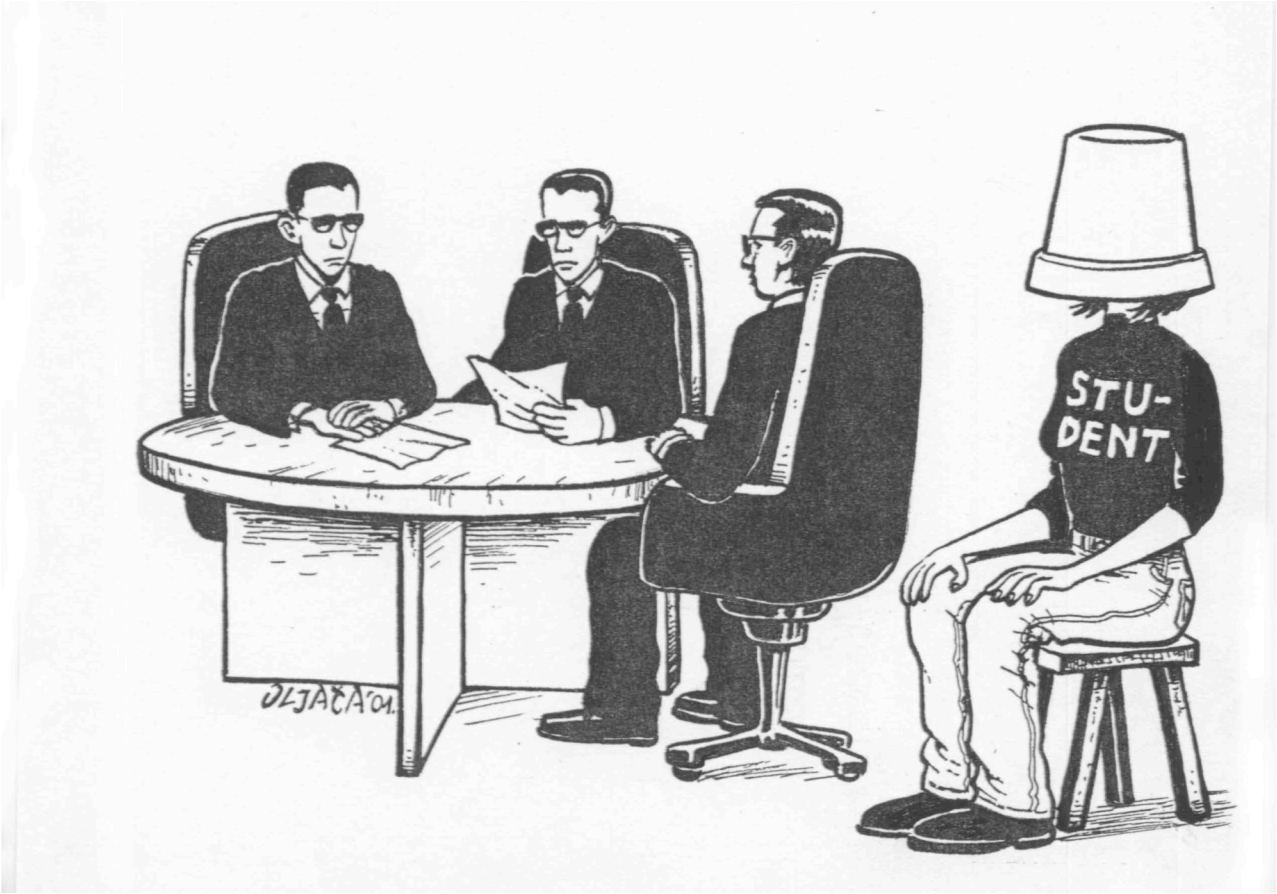
In Portugal there is a saying that goes like this "It is not enough to look like it! You need to be it!"

The Portuguese Student Movement looks like it is quite well established within the Portuguese Higher Education Community. In Portugal there are more than 300 active student organisations, from National Federations to small local unions. Throughout history, student organisations have played a significant role in the establishment of democracy not only within the institutions but also as important players in the national dimension.

But what is really happening? The truth is that almost at the same time that the Portuguese Ministry was endorsing the Berlin Communiqué, in Portugal a new autonomy law was being presented that marginalised student participation. The new elected Government has not yet given any signals of wanting to change this policy.

Unfortunately in Portugal Bologna is being served to students as a fast-food dish. What does this mean? It means that students are not really having the possibility to participate in the cooking of the Bologna dish, and this is happening at al the levels, from the department level till the national level. There are a few exceptions to this scenario, but they are only that… exceptions! In the best cases student are presented with the cooked Bologna dish and are being asked if they like it!

It has been written several times that in the heart of the Bologna Process there is the change in the paradigm of an education centred in teaching towards a learning process focused on the student outcomes. This change of paradigm will only happen if the students' and their representatives are included in the slow-food process of cooking the bologna dish. Otherwise, Bologna will only be a minor operation aimed to change a little the taste of the dish students in Portugal are being served for several decades.



Democracy at the Italian universities?

In a system as the Italian one, where university autonomy is very wide, the internal democratisation of the institutions is fundamental to ensure true participation of the students as full partners.

The two MD (ministerial decrees) introduced didn't affect the decision making structure of the universities, which stayed the same since the '70ies, where in the decision making bodies, excluding the departments, around 15% of the seats were left to students. Furthermore, students' initiatives are made difficult by several bureaucratic procedures, leading to the result that open discussion and view sharing is often substituted by mere lobbying.

The only improvement was brought by the MD 509, which introduced a commission at the Faculty level to deliberate on academic issues composed 50% by students and 50% by teachers. Unfortunately, its implementation has never been monitored and where it exists, its decision needs further approval by the Faculty Council where professors are again the majority.

Constant struggle for a minimum of student participation in Switzerland

On a national level in Switzerland, students are (marginally) involved in the decision *preparing* organs, but have not much decision power. The national decision making structures date back to 1999, when a new law on the aid of universities on the national level was implemented. Students are not represented in one of the major decision making bodies, the SUK (Swiss University Council, mainly composed by the education ministers of the cantons that have a university and representatives of the central state). In fact VSS-UNES (The National union of Students in Switzerland) was always very critical towards these new structures, because the democratic control and possibilities for the cantonal and national parliament to intervene are very small, so that these structures of decision-making can be considered as non-democratic.

The grade of official involvement of students depends still very much on the goodwill of the other actors. The most influence ever reached was at a unique action where students showed up as uninvited guests at a meeting of the SUK in 2002. Student representatives demanded greater transparency and a wider discussion on Bologna themes inside and outside the HEI. This was interpreted as a blocking of the meeting. After that, the grade of involvement also raised. Students entered for example the Bologna-steering group of the Swiss Rectors Conference (CRUS). This body has *de jure* only consultative power to the deciding body of the SUK.

As the time of application of the abovementioned law on the aid of Universities is limited until 2008, we hope for a better future. There is a group that prepares a new constitutional basis and new legislation on the national level with a student representative in the 12 seats body.

On institutional level, the involvement differs very much. In some universities students are officially involved on all levels even with some decision power – after the very new law of the University of Lausanne, students are represented in all bodies with the same number of participants as the professors, or even more. In other institutions students can only give "counselling remarks" etc. It can be said, that in some institutions even basic participation has to be implemented, a big need is especially in the area of polytechnics (Fachhochschulen).

When it comes to QAA, students are not involved on the national level, neither in the governing structures of the national agency, nor as part of the external review teams. The institutional level shows a picture not much less sad: Students are considered important for QA when it comes to evaluation questionnaires, but not inside of the structures (especially on the faculty and programme level).

7. Attractiveness of the European Higher Education Area and mobility of students

Financial burden of the incoming students to Norway

The HE sector in Norway has done a lot to make its system compatible with those in the rest of Europe.

However, the Ministry for Local Government and Regional Development (KRD) and the Norwegian Directorate for Immigration (UDI) who share the responsibility for foreigners in Norway have apparently never heard Norway's commitment to this specific action line. For students coming from outside the European Economic Area, getting into and staying in Norway has never been more difficult. It now costs 800NOK (approx.95EUR) to apply for a residential permit. This permit has to be renewed at the same cost once a year. It also costs 800NOK to apply for a one-year work permit. Considering that these students usually have a hard time finding a well paid job, it is hardly worth the effort. As a student from outside EEA, one also has to document that one disposes 80,000NOK (approx. 9,500EUR) a year. This is meant as a means to ensure that a student can finance the high cost of living in Norway. However, many of these students get by on a much lower budget. Many students are forced to work illegally or take high interest loans to provide this documentation.

It is common that the HEI or the local student welfare organisation provide housing for international students. More often than not, these students are put into the dorms that Norwegian students don't want. This results in ghettos of international students with a low standard of living. They also have a hard time getting integrated into the Norwegian student environment.

Non EEA students: attractive milk cows for the universities in the Flemish Community of Belgium?

One of the main goals of the EHEA (European Higher Education Area) is to promote mobility of students between the member countries. The former government in Flanders recognised this goal as essential and decided that all students, regardless whether they come from the EEA or the EHEA (European Higher Education Area) deserve the same treatment considering the tuition fees to be paid in Flanders.

The new minister, under severe pressure from the universities, is proposing now to change the law and to discriminate between students of the EEA (European Economical Area) and the EHEA. Students from for example Croatia that want to study in Flanders will have to pay very high tuition fees. These students will become attractive milk cows for the universities to spice up their tight budgets. This can hardly be the goal of building an EHEA. Ministers committed themselves in Berlin to the portability of grants and spending your whole grant to pay the tuition fee in the country where you want to study, will destroy this social measure. High tuition fees are a considerable burden for access to higher education in general and student mobility in particular. Excessive tuition fees are popping up everywhere in Europe and opening the door for them in Flanders is not only discriminating for non-EEA students, but also a real danger for the students in Flanders.

Therefore VVS (the Flemish Student union) calls upon the Flemish government to reconsider its policy towards tuition fee discrimination and to actively lobby in favour of non-discrimination everywhere in the EHEA. All students are equal and should be treated equally. Building the EHEA will only be possible when there is a real social dimension to the whole process.

Danish tuition fee policy - Is the high tuition a sign of excellence?

The Danish government decided in March 2005 to implement obligatory tuition fees for non-EU students attending full study programmes as well as parts of study programmes in Denmark.

The main reason for this is to promote the attractiveness of Danish study programmes as a part of the EHEA and in accordance with the "Action Line" presented in the Berlin communiqué. As an explanation of this contradiction in terms, the government stressed that to attract the best possible students from outside Europe, Denmark needs programmes that aren't only excellent but also known to the world as excellent. Tuition fees should, according to the ministry, promote the status of Danish education in countries where free education automatically means bad education.

The minister suggested that good education includes a high "level of services", and that the universities should be able to earn money - selling education.

A lot of these arguments also apply for national students, which makes the students in Denmark consider whether this "attractiveness" policy will be a reality for all, also Danish, students within a few years.

General situation regarding the Bologna process in some countries

The University Law 2002 –implementation in Austria: from the beginning up till now

In the year 2002 a new University Law, the "Universitätsgesetz 2002" (UG02), redefined the legal status of Austrian universities. They should become autonomous. The law regulated a three-cycle-system for new created studies in order to pave the way for the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). The prevailing opinion is that HEIs need more flexibility and efficiency to persist the future of the EHEA. The UG02 restricted the participation rights of students and assistant professors and centred up the power of decision to a new constituted University Council (funded by the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture and the Professors Curia) and the rectors collegium. Bologna-criteria can be and are often used in Austria to legitimate the economisation of universities, knowledge and science. The reforms are mainly focusing on its benefits on economy and are therefore losing the sight of its essential influences on society, culture and individual development.

The implementation of the Bologna Process in Austria has beneath its ideological interpretation practical problems too. ECTS is introduced, but not in student-centred units – measure methods differ from university to university and therefore do not correspond with each other. New first-cycle curricula are overloaded, and the discussion whether the doctorate (which is shorter than the PHD study) should remain parallel to the PHD system as a specific grade of the German-speaking Higher Education Area or whether the PHD should replace the shorter third-cycle-grade are not decided yet. In general, Austria is seen as one of the model countries concerning Bologna Implementation. This lies in the top-down strategy of the Project: there is a National Follow Up Group which consists of relevant stakeholders in HE (but excluding until now social partners) that discusses implementation problems. But European-wide feedback is hard to manage and there are several malfunctions at the moment.

Legislation to back up Bologna reforms in Serbia?

Even prior to the accession of Serbia to the Bologna Process in 2003, a lot of work was done on the new Law on Higher Education. As Serbian higher education institutions are working within the framework of the Law passed in 2002, which does not give enough room for Bologna based study structures, Serbian higher education is in dire need of a legislation framework which will introduce three-cycle system, ECTS, quality assurance and accreditation and ensure student participation in the governance of Higher Education.

However, even tough the first draft Law on higher education was designed in late 2003, and several, quite similar drafts were designed afterwards by the new government and in cooperation with the University of Belgrade, it does not seem likely that Serbia will have a new higher education legislation by the Ministerial Summit in Bergen. The draft is at the moment stuck somewhere in the parliamentary procedure and, primarily due to the lack of coordination on the side of the Ministry of Education and Sports, there has been much confusion as to the final version of the draft Law on higher education (universities claim that the version submitted to the Parliament is not the one agreed upon) and there is no solid prediction as to when the Law will be passed, if at all. It might seem that the legislation is not as crucial to the Bologna reforms – however, the higher education institutions which are more reform oriented claim that they have stretched the existing legislation as much as possible and that, for further reforms, new legislation is essential.

Bologna, the Icelandic way

In Iceland there are nine Higher Education Institutions in total. Only three of these nine HEIs have defined the learning outcomes for all courses of their curricula. The other six are planning on defining the learning outcomes, but the standards set for defining learning outcomes do not seem to be clear to the stakeholders. As an example, most of the time spent on learning outcomes in the National Bologna Follow up Group was spent on discussing how to translate the words learning outcomes into Icelandic. In fact, the translation of the word is yet the biggest step taken towards defining learning outcomes.

Only two of the nine HEIs have a formal internal quality assurance system. The other seven have no rules about controlling or monitoring the quality of the studies they provide.

What seems to be the biggest problem of the Bologna Process in Iceland though, is the actual promotion of the process. The ministry of education has introduced the Bologna process to some parties involved but to a very limited extent to the students in Iceland. Their main focus seems to be professors, teachers and other HEI staff. Of the Bologna promoters in Iceland there is only one student.