

# Bologna

with student eyes



***ESIB***

***Bologna Analysis***

***2005***

**ESIB's Bologna Analysis**

# **Bologna**

**with student eyes**

***ESIB***

***The National Unions of Students in Europe***



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## Executive summary

ESIB's Bologna Analysis 2005 is the world of the Bologna Process in the eyes of students in Europe. The Bologna Process has reached half time. This provides a good framework for taking stock of how and how far the implementation of the various action lines has reached the national and the institutional level.

Since the Bologna Process does only provide the framework for reforms, sometimes more and sometimes less detailed, there is no homogenous situation throughout Europe regarding the implementation. But also other factors lead to differences in the implementation. Firstly, the starting point of countries was different. Some countries had already a two-tier structure or a credit system in place while others did not have any of this. Countries also started at different times. Especially the countries that only joined the Bologna Process in 2003 are not really advanced in the implementation. This is however not surprising.

Another factor is that countries have their own priorities. This usually leads to a proper implementation of certain action lines and almost neglecting others. This is especially insofar problematic as the Bologna Process is understood as a package for reforms that will only have their full achievements if implemented as a package. Bologna still is "Bologna a la carte" in many countries. But Bologna still must not be understood as a pick and choose supermarket. Sometimes also everything looks very good on the first sight, but when looking more closely at how practices are, it becomes apparent that there are still many challenges left. But these have to be understood as challenges and countries should not consider a situation as sufficient where only the surface is good. Students also very quickly realise that not all that glitters is gold.

In a generalising way one could conclude from the survey that some countries take the Bologna reforms more serious than others. These countries lead the way both in terms of pace and comprehensiveness. But also this can from time to time cause some problems, as there is the possibility to exaggerate reforms.

Although there is no country that implemented all action lines of the Bologna Process consistently and properly, in general the Nordic and Baltic countries are more advanced with their reforms. These countries usually also view Bologna as a package and try not to focus on only 2 or 3 action lines, as it is often the case with countries in Central Europe. This is only the general impression and conclusion in this analysis. When looking at the individual action lines the picture is getting more diverse again. However, also in these parts it is possible to deduct some more general observations.

At the last meeting of ministers in Berlin in 2003 three priority areas were identified and indeed countries speeded up their reforms in these areas. Nevertheless, this has not always been done very carefully. Some developments are also alarming and deserve further attention and the commitment of all stakeholders to solve the problems that arose.

The implementation of the degree structure is advancing a lot in most countries and every year more students enrol in these courses. However, it is not always clear what courses these are. Sometimes old programmes have only been relabelled and are overloaded in terms of student workload. Not much attention is given to rethinking curricula in order to create student-oriented programmes. Often students did not have the possibility to take part in the reconstruction processes or other actors did not appreciate their opinions. Another factor of

uncertainty is the labour market that often is not aware of the new structures and therefore also has difficulties in accepting them. But not only private companies are reluctant with accepting the new degrees; also the state is often not willing to change their employment and salary practices although they initiated the new structure. One of the major benefits of the two-tier structure was the possibility to have a more flexible system. However, in practice it seems as if this flexibility is not sought, but rather new or more means for restriction and selection are applied. This is especially the case for access to second cycle studies and has been one of the fears of students when the Bologna Process started. More barriers are introduced instead of flexible study paths.

Maybe most striking are the effects the introduction of the two-cycle structure has on gender distribution. From the data that is available it is already noticeable that more female students drop out after the first cycle. In the Berlin Communiqué it was stressed that efforts should be taken to reduce gender inequalities. Now it seems that not only nothing has been done in this regard but also that the Bologna structure itself promotes gender inequalities. The new degree structure apparently introduced a glass ceiling effect for female students. The reasons are manifold, but many of them are of structural nature and need to be tackled systematically.

In the area of quality assurance in some countries no improvement could be reported, as still no system for quality assurance is in place. A general distinction can also be made between countries that have a sufficient level of student involvement on quality assurance procedures and those who do not. In general in countries with sufficient student involvement the whole system works better and in a more satisfactory way. The lack of student participation is also seen as one of the biggest deficits. Student participation is often only to some extent foreseen, in some countries not at all. Only very few countries involve students in all steps and at all levels of quality assurance. Another element that was often mentioned is that the results of quality assurance are not published. This however, has been clearly laid out as necessary in the Berlin Communiqué. The same applies to the student participation. When looking at quality criteria there is often also a lack of addressing issues connected to study conditions, student workload and teaching itself. Quality assurance can also only be sufficient if it takes place at all levels, but this is often not the case.

The third priority for Bergen is the field of recognition. This analysis mainly concentrated on two aspects: the Diploma Supplement and the Lisbon Recognition Convention. With regards to the latter it should be noted positively that only a few countries still reject signing or ratifying it. However, even if countries ratified the Convention, it does not mean that also its principles are applied. Often the burden of proof still lies with the students, which is a clear violation of the principles. It has also been identified that the lack of an appeals body is causing major problems. Bureaucratic procedures are another factor that creates obstacles for recognition and thus mobility, including the amount of time it takes until a decision is made.

The Diploma Supplement should be awarded to every graduate by 2005 automatically and free of charge. But in practice, this is seldom the case. Many institutions still do not award them. In some countries the Diploma Supplements are awarded in different forms that do not follow the existing template. These procedures are jeopardising the main aim of the Diploma Supplement: the readability, which is endangered by the use of different formats. In this way also employers will have a harder time getting used to it.

ECTS has its origin long before the Bologna Process started. One might therefore imagine that in this area the implementation should be very advanced. However, ECTS has mainly been used for transfer purposes for mobile students only. It is only slowly being established as an accumulation system as well. The long tradition of ECTS is to some extent also problematic. It was never really properly introduced and this superficial way of implementation has become accepted by many institutions. Therefore on the first sight it looks as if all countries have introduced ECTS (or a compatible system). When looking just a bit more closely, it becomes at once visible that it is not implemented properly. Especially the student workload is neglected, connected to contact hours or just roughly estimated instead of properly measured and as a result credits are not allocated appropriately. Therefore there is the danger that ECTS cannot be used properly, neither for transfer nor for accumulation purposes, as nobody can rely on what is behind an ECTS credit.

Since the Prague summit in 2001 student involvement is one of the action lines in the Bologna Process. However, current developments may give the impression that it is rather not the case. All countries note that there are areas where student 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. Often it is the case that legal provisions are missing for actual involvement and not only consultative roles. But sometimes student involvement is also limited to the decision-making bodies and not the bodies where issues are prepared. It seems necessary to reiterate that student involvement actually has to take place on all levels and on all issues. Often there are certain subjects where students are not allowed to form opinions about, although they are of course directly or indirectly affected by them. It is also frequently the case that on the national level students are not even consulted. Student involvement often seems to be understood for within HEIs only, but as the Berlin Communiqué stipulates: Students are full partners in higher education governance. Therefore it should clearly also refer to the national level. Lastly, one can note that students are often allowed to talk but they are not listened to. The concept of students as partners needs further emphasis, not only on paper, but also in practice.

In the field of doctoral studies not much progress can be reported, as it only became part of the Bologna reforms in 2003. Nevertheless, the current state of the art picture can also give guidance with regards to future challenges in this area. It should be noted that doctoral studies should be the first time when students have contact with research. Because of this and other reasons it is therefore important that also first and second cycle programmes have already research components integrated in the curricula. Where this is currently the practice, it is mainly reduced to the thesis work. The social situation of PhD students has the greatest deficits in relation to social security. PhD students should be granted the rights of employees in this respect. Another problem that was often mentioned deals with the workload of PhD students. Very often the workload is much higher than it should be so that the studies cannot be completed in the foreseen timeframe. This is causing severe problems, especially in relation to the funding of both the research project and the student. Measures should be taken either to reduce the workload or to adapt the financial support to the actual duration of the studies. Furthermore, it seems advisable that more possibilities for mobility periods are offered.

The European dimension of higher education still seems to be an issue that is not really well understood. The interpretations of what should be done in this respect vary greatly. Only joint degrees seem to have a common ground

of understanding. But especially joint degrees are very selective, both socially through usually much higher fees and academically through heavy selection procedures. Study places for joint degrees are very limited and are mainly also only offered in a limited range of study fields in second cycle programmes. The European dimension of higher education should not only be available to the lucky few. Therefore also other components that contribute to the European dimension should be made use of. Introducing more foreign language elements in curricula that also aim at giving the possibility to obtain intercultural communication skills could be one way of doing this. A stronger European orientation of curricula should be made, including but not limited to a European labour market perspective.

Lifelong learning as an essential element of the European Higher Education Area and indeed the situation in Europe shows that in most of countries covered by this survey there is a noticeable increase of attention for this field. On the other hand, the direction of the process of the development of LLL in certain countries can be considered as false because it goes against the major principle of LLL, which needs to have inclusiveness as its main characteristic. Currently LLL tends to be a very expensive prestige kind of education accessible only to a limited number of people.

With regards to the social dimension two main observations can be made. In almost none of the countries the social dimension is understood as a part of the Bologna Process. Also in almost none of the countries the social aspects are considered when reforms in the area of other action lines take place. But the social dimension is since 2001 an integral element and is now understood as a transversal action line that has impacts on all action lines. Apparently there is big difference between what has been decided at European level and the national and institutional practices. There is a clear need to change the mentality of stakeholders so that the social dimension also becomes a part of the Bologna reforms and the educational systems in practice. The social dimension, which historically has been one of the distinctive elements of higher education in Europe, is actually making higher education and the European Higher Education Area more attractive. However, it is also most often absent in initiatives that aim at promoting the attractiveness.

In general there is still a lack of proper data on the social situation of students. The call for data coming from ministers has not been heard. Nevertheless, it is absolutely indispensable that comparable data in this field are developed in every country. Still, it was possible to identify some areas where improvements are necessary. An outstanding lack is to be found in the area of grants and loans. Often they are not available for all students who are in need of financial support or the amount is not sufficient in relation to the actual living costs. There are great access difficulties for minority groups, which is an obstacle for achieving a democratic higher education system. In the Nordic countries often the healthcare provisions are inadequate. Affordable and available accommodation is also often problematic to find, especially in bigger cities.

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The social dimension alongside with the action line of student participation is the most neglected elements in the Bologna Process and it is necessary that they truly become part of the understanding and actions. In the other action lines often corrective measures are needed in order to counteract improper or wrong implementation.

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## Introduction

In 2003 ESIB for the first time presented a survey on the implementation of the Bologna Process in various European countries. It was the first time that such a survey was made from the perspective of students. At the end of the day it is the students who are experiencing the reforms directly. Now, in 2005, the Bologna Process has reached a point in time where less policy is made and the actual implementation really starts. Therefore we decided to publish this survey for the summit of ministers, responsible for education in Bergen, May 19-20. It has been made possible because of financial support by the European Commission.

Now, words do not count as much as actual practice any more. For the purposes of this survey we therefore look at how the actual practice is in the different countries and at different higher education institutions. We also put these findings in comparisons with what has been decided on paper and analyse to which extent countries are sticking to the compromises that were reached at European level or whether they only have their own educational agenda.

The survey is divided into 10 sections that deal with individual action lines of the Bologna Process. We also analyse how the social dimension is regarded in the different countries. Although the social dimension is clearly part of the Bologna Process it usually does not receive any attention in other surveys.

The main sources of information were the national unions of students that are members of ESIB. They usually had again contacts with local unions for getting information from the institutional level. We conducted a number of interviews with representatives of national unions that were followed by questionnaires. Additional information sources were some of the Bologna promoters, educational websites and publications.

The countries covered by this analysis are: Austria, Belgium, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Macedonia, Malta, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and the UK. Ireland and Turkey are only covered in few areas. In this way 32 (34) countries are covered by the analysis.

We do not consider ourselves as experts in statistics, but as experts in educational issues from a student perspective. The survey is intended to serve as a source of information for both students and other stakeholders. One of the main objectives of the Bologna Process is to put the student in the centre. We hope that this publication can help in achieving this aim. A student centred system can only be achieved if also the opinion of students is a central element in the debates and discussions.

We hope that you will find this survey interesting and inspiring!

ESIB's Bologna Process Committee

Bastian Baumann  
Andrzej Bielecki  
Nikki Heerens  
Predrag Lažetic



### **About the authors**

**Bastian Baumann** is a student of law at Freie Universität Berlin. He has been working as a member of ESIB's Bologna Process Committee from June 2002 until May 2005.

**Andrzej Bielecki** is a student of a Master in European Studies at the Université Libre de Bruxelles. He holds a Bachelor in law and a Master in Political Science from the Université Catholique de Louvain. He has been a member of the Bologna Process Committee of ESIB between January 2004 and May 2005.

**Nikki Heerens** is a student of development economics and educational science at Wageningen University, the Netherlands. He has been working as a member of ESIB's Executive Committee in 2003 and ESIB's Bologna Process Committee from January 2004 until May 2005.

**Predrag Lažetic** is a student of German language and literature at the University in Novi Sad, Serbia. He has been working as a member of ESIB's Bologna Process Committee between January 2004 and May 2005.

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## **A: Degree structure – towards a two-cycle study system**

### **I. General situation regarding the introduction of the two cycle study system**

The introduction of the two-cycle study system has been one of the core action lines of the Bologna Process since the Bologna declaration in 1999. At the moment around two thirds of the Bologna countries established or started establishing the study system based on three cycles. Some countries like Greece, Ireland and the UK had that system long before the Bologna process and in the majority of countries the reform of the degree and study structure is intensively taking place based on newly adopted legislation and a revision of the old study structure. There is an increasing number of students in Europe who are enrolled in the new two-cycle system. On the other hand countries like Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and Macedonia did neither adopt the new study system based on the Bologna process by law nor changed the current study system.

The introduction of the new study system showed that the interpretation on the length of the cycles could be different between countries even in the same study field, depending on different traditions in higher education. In general it can be said that the mostly followed principle in the process of introduction has been the principle of "lowest possible effort and change". This principle means that the introduction of the two cycle system was mostly done with the aim to put – if that was possible and sometimes also if it was not possible – the old types of degrees into the new structure without changing the length or content (therefore we have for instance a lot of first cycle studies containing 240 credits which are the same as the old type of degrees). A greater content and organisational reform of the study system happened mostly in the cases where the difference between the old types of degrees and the degree structure promoted by the Bologna process were substantially different. In some disciplines like medicine, dentistry and, in many countries, law and architecture remain unchanged.

### **II. Reconstruction of curricula**

In the process of changing the programmes in order to fit into the new degree structure in some countries (mostly Central European countries, some Southeast European countries, Portugal, university sector in Estonia and Norway etc.) a significant restructuring of the programmes happened or is planned. In Germany, Switzerland, France, Italy, the Benelux countries and most of the Nordic countries especially in the polytechnic sector the real reconstruction of the study programmes did not happen and the old programmes are in the majority of cases only relabelled. Even in countries, which had a very similar or the same degree structure as the two cycle structure promoted by the Bologna process, there is typically not a Bologna process related redesigning of curricula with the aim to update or reorganise the content.

The reconstruction with updating the content and a modularisation of the programme had the intention to create degrees that will have both an academic and a labour market perspective.<sup>1</sup> The reconstruction of curricula is usually the competence of higher education institutions (HEIs) or their entities (departments and faculties) and sometimes it is very difficult to give one picture of the whole country because the differences in approaches to and developments in different

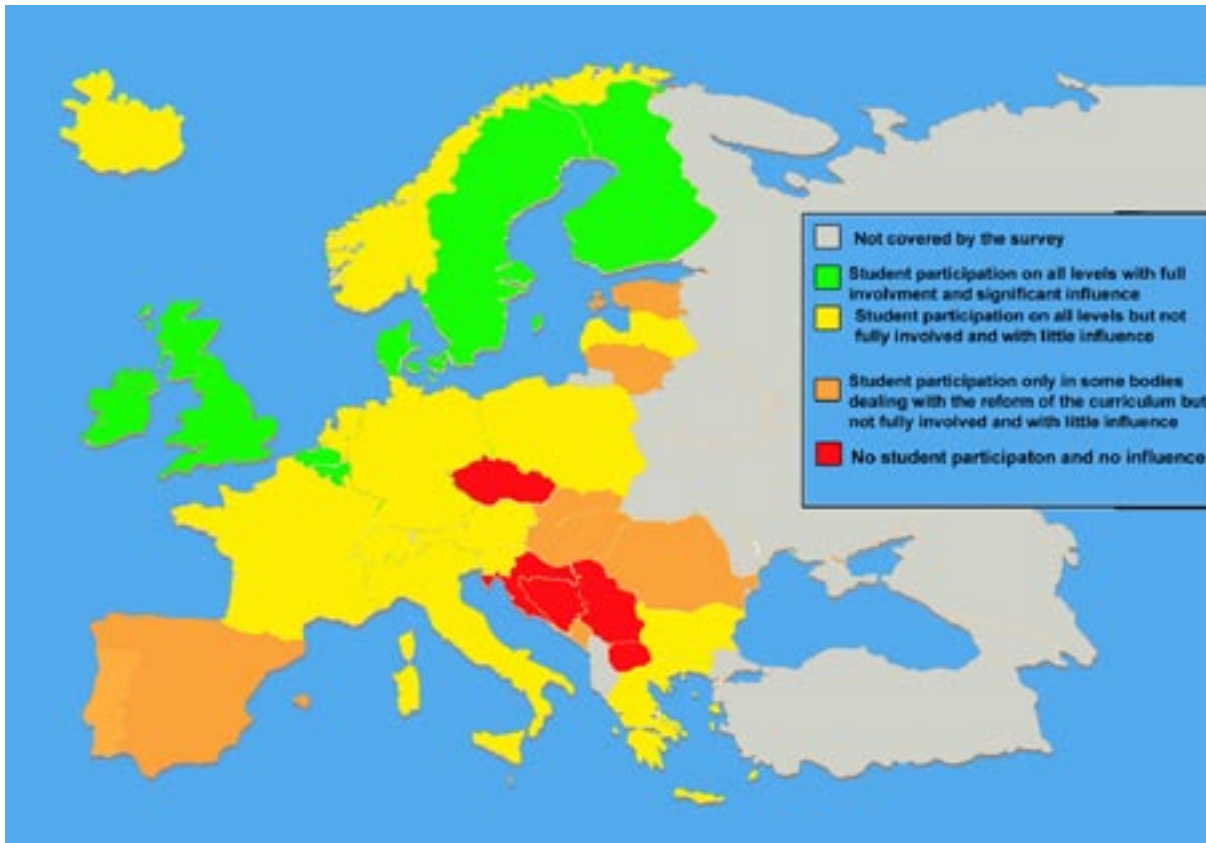
study programmes can lead to successful or less successful cases. In almost all countries, which are undergoing reconstructions of their study programmes, developments can be very chaotic, non-coordinated and lead to big problems. In some countries (especially in some Southeast European countries and in some programmes in the polytechnic sector in the Nordic countries) students report the bad practice of squeezing the old 4 years long first cycle study programmes into 3 years long programmes without any real curricula reform. Such a practice creates overloaded curricula in the first cycle in terms of work students actually have to do.

The survey shows that the problem of overloaded curricula is an old problem in many countries especially in Southeast Europe. Students in these countries expect that the new degree structure, which is usually connected to the introduction of ECTS, will also lead to a general reconstruction of curricula and a decrease of workload. Hopefully that will also contribute to lowering the dropout rates, which are on some programmes higher than 75% at the moment. Students in the UK, the Benelux countries, Denmark, university sector in Norway etc. generally do not complain that their curricula are overloaded. In some countries such as Malta, Finland, Sweden, Poland, Iceland and Bulgaria overloaded curricula are a typical problem only in some programmes, e.g. natural sciences in Bulgaria where the overload is a direct result of bad reforms of the degree structure.

The picture is again different in Italy and Greece where students complain that the study programmes are in general overloaded in both study cycles. In Germany there are in general more obligatory courses than in the old study system and more exams, what leads to even more overload, as already many of the old programmes were overloaded.

Some problems with the reconstruction of curricula and the reform of the degree structure in many countries could probably have been avoided if students had been included in the work of national and institutional bodies dealing with the degree structure reform and the reconstruction of curricula. The formal participation of students in the relevant bodies dealing with these issues is a prerequisite for their full involvement and a chance to influence the reform. Unfortunately, in many countries, even if student representatives formally have seats in the bodies that are dealing with redesigning the curricula and the degree structure reform, their opinion is ignored and their influence on the decision-making is very little. According to the situation regarding student participation in the design / reconstruction of curricula and the restructuring of degrees, countries can be divided into the following categories (see also the following map):

1. (**Green**) Countries where student representatives participate in bodies on all levels, are fully involved and have significant influence
2. (**Yellow**) Countries where student representatives participate in bodies on all levels, but are not fully involved and have little influence
3. (**Orange**) Countries where student representatives participate in only some bodies dealing with the reform of curricula and in these bodies they are not fully involved and have little influence
4. (**Red**) Student representatives do not participate in any body related to the curriculum design and the degree structure reform and have no influence.



Map 1: Student participation in the design and reconstruction of curricula

### III. Access to the different study cycles

#### 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 qualification. These obstacles usually are entrance exams, selection procedures, tuition fees etc. For the purposes of ESIB's Bologna Analysis the term access to a certain cycle of higher education and related transitional problems is 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.

On the basis of such an approach, ESIB's Bologna Analysis identifies the following main transitional problems students experience trying to enter the first cycle of higher education and/or continue their education in the second and third cycle:

#### **1. Numerus Clausus, entrance exams and selection procedures**

A Numerus Clausus for the first and between first and second cycle programmes is one of the core access obstacles, which in a lot of countries came parallel with the reform of the degree system. It has been one of the major fears of students regarding the move to a two-tier structure that now seems to become reality

#### **Selection for first cycle studies:**

The Numerus Clausus can be set by the ministry in order to limit the number of students, which will not have to pay for their education or by the institution on the basis of the limited capacities. No Numerus Clausus for the majority of study programmes is mostly the case in Northern and Central Europe and it usually exists in Mediterranean and South-eastern Europe, where a distinction is made between students who pay tuition fees and students who do not.

Selection for admission to the first cycle of higher education takes mostly place on the basis of merit and the average grade from secondary education<sup>2</sup> (mostly on the basis of the results for the final secondary school exams) and in countries without a general examination at the end of secondary education there is usually

the practice of entrance examinations at HEIs (or both final examinations in secondary education and entrance exams like in some South-eastern European countries and in cases of some very popular universities or study programmes in North-Western Europe, which of course creates a combination of access obstacles). However, it should be noted that entrance exams could be a means of improving access for potential students without the secondary school leaving certificate.

In 50 % of the countries there is no entrance exams for the first cycle, 20 % have enrolment exams only for some of the programmes in the first cycle and in 30 % of the countries there are entrance exams for all first cycle programmes.

In countries with both a large private and public higher education sector it is noticeable that a Numerus Clausus and entrance exams are dominant practice only for the public sector whereas the private sector usually accepts all who are willing and able to pay tuition fees, e.g. in Portugal. Also in countries that charge significant tuition fees for all students like in the Netherlands or Austria the entrance exams and a Numerus Clausus exist only for some exceptional programmes.

### **Selection for second cycle studies:**

The Bologna process and the degree structure reform connected to it brought also a Numerus Clausus for the second cycle in some countries, which is much more selective compared to the one for the first cycle and de facto does not allow for all students who want to continue their studies to do so (typical examples are Estonia and Italy). The Numerus Clausus is usually followed by some kind of selection. (33% of the Bologna countries have some selection mechanisms between cycles). The selection is usually done by entrance examinations (in 50% of the countries with selection mechanisms between cycles an entrance examination is chosen as the way of selection). The selection of candidates for the second cycle is usually done on the basis of the average grade from the first cycle degree or an interview with the applicant (in general, selection criteria differ a lot between institutions and even vary within institutions. Also there is often a lack of clear and transparent information about the actual selection criteria and procedures that are used).

In some countries like Latvia and the Czech Republic only students coming from other institutions have to undergo an entrance examination before entering a second cycle programme.

The general practice of entrance exams for the second cycle is not only a big transitional obstacle for students. It is much more a general problem of institutions and higher education systems. In systems with the regulation that first cycle degrees give access only to related study fields for the second cycle level (majority of Bologna countries), having entrance exams and therefore obviously not trusting the first cycle degree qualifications as such (even if they are from the same institution), means that the institutions do not recognise their own or any other national qualification to its full extent.

In Germany for example, although there is hardly any selection or examination for the movement between study cycles yet, there is the possibility to introduce extra criteria for access to the second cycle because accreditation agencies during the accreditation process quite often insist on regulatory criteria, which leads to their introduction.



## **2. Tuition fees**

Tuition fees<sup>3</sup> are in general one of the main obstacles regarding access to higher education and they have a dangerous impact on society by creating and widening social barriers. Only one third of the countries (Germany, Switzerland, Nordic countries apart from Iceland etc.), which fully or partially implemented the two cycle system, do not charge any tuition fees for the first and second cycle and usually do not charge any tuition fee for the third cycle either. On the other hand in two thirds of all countries students (whether all or only some of them) pay some kind of tuition fees. In some countries (Belgium, Netherlands, Bulgaria, Austria etc.) the amount of the tuition fee for second cycle studies is not different from the amount students pay for the first cycle. UK (without Scotland), and the Netherlands (even more for non-EU students) are typical cases of countries with extremely high tuition fees for all cycles and in terms of financial and social obstacles to access to any cycle of higher education they can serve as a bad example.

There is noticeably also a bad tendency that parallel to the reform of the degree structure, tuition fees for second cycle studies were introduced even if they did not exist in the previous system (for example partially in Slovenia according to the new legislation) or they are higher than for the first cycle (like in Estonia<sup>4</sup>, Latvia, Italy or France for example). In Malta master degree students do not receive any study grants, which is also an obstacle for students. In Germany fees are often charged for so-called non-consecutive second cycle programmes.

There is also a noticeable tendency in the EHEA that countries, which traditionally have not charged any tuition fees for foreign students (mostly Nordic countries) now introduced or plan the introduction of tuition fees for non-EU students. This development certainly contradicts the goals of the Bologna Process and especially the plan to make the EHEA more attractive for the outside world and for foreign students. This development would for sure limit mobility of students in the EHEA between EU and non-EU Bologna countries what again raises the question of the correlation between the student mobility goals and educational policies in Europe.

## **3. Movement between the university and polytechnic<sup>5</sup> sector**

Even if defining the term *access* in such a narrow sense as by the Lisbon Recognition Convention, there are cases across Europe where certain first cycle degrees do not ensure the right to apply and be considered for admission to second cycle studies. This is especially problematic in countries that have a binary structure in higher education with two different types of higher education institutions: polytechnics and universities. On the other hand, the practice of offering masters programmes at polytechnics is often still relatively new, but there are tendencies of an increase in the numbers of such programmes. Countries, which have polytechnic second cycle programmes are for example: Austria, Germany, Belgium (both communities), Latvia, Italy, the Netherlands (however the vast majority are not funded by the government) as well as in Greece and Estonia (only in cooperation with a university).

In general, moving between polytechnic first cycle studies to university second cycle programmes is a highly debated issue in many countries with a binary system and it is in this movement that most of the problems occur. Moving into the other direction (from university first cycle to a polytechnic second cycle) is very rare because of the relatively low number of second cycle programmes

in the polytechnic sector and in these cases it is usual for the polytechnics in questions to set their own criteria (selection or list of additional courses students have to take). But it is in general easier for a student to move from a university bachelor to a polytechnic master than the other way around.

In general, university and polytechnic studies are considered as very different and in some countries, even if the respective laws foresee a smooth transition from a polytechnics first cycle to a university second cycle like in Germany and Austria, there are still evident prejudices between these two types of institutions.

There is a limited number of countries with a binary system (like Iceland) where access from polytechnic first cycle studies to university second cycle programmes is common practice without any particular obstacles, for example, selection procedures or examinations.

In the majority of cases students have to go through some kind of selection procedure (based on average grades from the first cycle, types of courses in previous education or an additional entrance exam) if they want to continue their studies at a university. This is common practice in amongst others France, the Netherlands, Norway and Belgium and the individual institutions decide the actual criteria.

In countries like Finland or Belgium students are usually required to take additional courses/modules at the university and the amount of credits for these courses is usually between 10 up to 60 ECTS credits. In the Netherlands it is often only possible for students to take bridging courses for up to one year that are located outside the actual higher education system. This of course means that students lose their benefits such as financial support.

Usually the prerequisite for admission is that the second cycle programme is in a related field of study (the definition of what is related is in most cases an issue of institutional autonomy). It is also important to notice that a continuation of studies in the very same or in a related field is also encouraged by study/student financing schemes like in for example Belgium or Hungary. Hungarian polytechnic students can pay the same amount of tuition fees or can study for free only if they continue their studies at a university in the related study field.

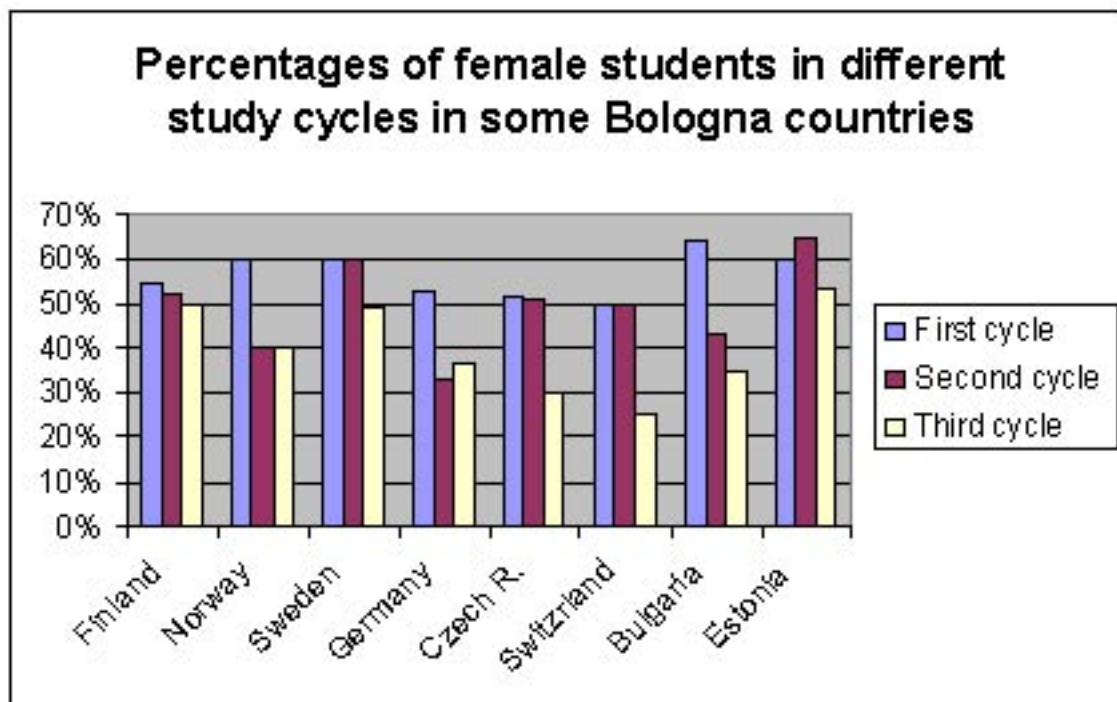
In most other countries the duration for which students receive a grant is limited and makes it very difficult to spend extra time on transitional / bridging courses which is usually necessary when moving to another field.

#### **4. Consequences of the new degree structure on equal access for both genders to higher education**

Statistics about the gender structure of students who are enrolled in the first, the second and the third cycle are not available in the majority of countries that implemented the two-cycle degree structure. But in countries where these statistics are available, it is very obvious that the number of female students is (mostly) decreasing in higher cycles. This analysis is based on the data available from some countries.

Although the percentage of female students in the first cycle is bigger (Finland 54,5%, Estonia 60%, Norway 60%, Germany 53%, Sweden 60%, Czech Republic 52%, Bulgaria 64%), the percentages of the female students are significantly decreasing (except in Sweden, Switzerland and in Czech Republic

where they remain same, or Estonia where they are even higher) in the second cycle (Finland 50%, Norway 40%, Germany 33%, Bulgaria 33%). The third cycle studies seem to be the most unapproachable, with the biggest dropout of female students. That is obvious from the figures of female student in the doctoral studies (Finland 50%, Norway 40 %, Sweden 49%, Czech Republic 30%, Switzerland 25% and Bulgaria 35%). In this area an even higher drop out is to be expected as current statistics are mainly based on students who directly enrolled from the older longer degrees. It should at the same time be noted that the data comes from countries that often score far better in gender issues than other countries.



The reasons of the gradual decline in percentages of female students are various and depend also on the situation in the particular countries, culture, social support systems etc. However, it is much more a structural problem. This problem deserves special attention, analysis and systematic action. For the purposes of this survey the most important issue to notice is that the introduction of the two-cycle degree structure leads to an even higher dropout of female students. A glass ceiling effect is introduced through the introduction of the two-cycle structure. All previously mentioned obstacles between cycles and all transitional problems students in general experience (like higher tuition fees, Numerus Clausus, selection, entrance exams etc.) are even more preventing female students from continuing higher education, which has serious consequences for society in general. Despite the lack of statistics it can be assumed that also other disadvantaged groups are facing similar problems.

**5. Movement within the same field of study in different cycles**

In some countries (amongst others Sweden, university sector in Finland, Czech Republic, the Netherlands) there are first cycle programmes, which are not granting access to any second cycle programme. In most of these cases it concerns disciplines which traditionally only had first cycle studies (some programmes in Finland, many professional programmes in the Netherlands, etc.) or if they are very professionally oriented (like some engineering programmes).

In cases where the institutions in which the student obtained their first cycle degree does not offer any second cycle programme in a related field, it usually means that for the continuation of their studies students have to change the institution or the place of living. Sometimes it is even necessary to leave the country. In these cases students experience additional financial, social and academic transitional problems between the cycles.

## **6. Movement between different fields of study in different cycles**

Students in a lot of cases wish to continue their studies in a higher cycle, but not in the same field of studies and in the majority of countries it is problematic or even impossible to do so. Generally in most countries access to second cycle studies is possible only if the student wants to continue in the same or a related field of study. Such a limitation of access (in some countries even in the legislation) is common in Austria, Germany, Norway, Romania, Malta, Italy, Latvia, Switzerland, and the Netherlands etc.

Some countries like Greece and Sweden do not have such a limitation in the law but in practice a first cycle degree in a related field is strongly preferred. In the UK the principle of continuing studies in related fields is generally the case though it is also possible to make more indirect transitions to other fields in some cases.

In some countries it is possible to continue education in the second cycle in a different field of studies but these students have to go through some kind of selection and/or entrance examination (Iceland, Bulgaria, the Netherlands, Belgium etc.) or they are required to have a certain number of relevant study credits in the first cycle (Estonia - mostly for regulated professions related studies) or must take some bridging courses after entering the second cycle programme (like in Denmark and the Netherlands where these students may be even asked to pay extra/higher tuition fees for these bridging courses).

## **7. Access from the second to the third cycle**

Rules for access to the third cycle are relatively hard to generalise and define because universities have a large autonomy in this respect in the majority of countries. Generally the minimum requirement for access is a relevant second cycle degree. Only in a few countries like Finland, Sweden, and Slovenia and in some cases in the UK and the Netherlands it is possible to proceed directly to the third cycle and this practice is usually linked to the talent and exceptional research results of the students. Even if in theory such transitions are possible in Sweden often the competition about places results in that students with only a first cycle degree do not get admitted to doctoral studies.

The main transitional problems for students are related to the fact that access to third cycle studies usually depends on the agreement with the mentor professor and additional criteria might not be transparent and different from institution to institution (mentioned as a problem in 50% of the countries).

#### **IV. New degrees and the labour market**

Another highly debated issue in connection with the degree structure reform is the relevance and acceptance of new degrees on the labour market. In the majority of countries, which started changing the degree structure it is too early to say how the acceptance of the new degrees is on the labour market, as the number of graduates in these programmes is still very low. Countries, which already have a significant number of graduates with the new type of degrees, have very diverse experiences with regards to the acceptance of the new degrees on the national labour market. In the Czech Republic, Poland and the polytechnic sector in Finland the acceptance does not seem to be a problematic issue while in Italy and Bulgaria employers still prefer master degrees and first cycle degrees are widely unaccepted<sup>6</sup>. On the other hand in many countries for example Denmark, Finland, the Netherlands and Belgium only professional first cycle degrees are well accepted contrary to the academic first cycle degrees, which remain, not appreciated on the labour market. This is mostly because the original plan of the degree structure reforms was not to create academic first cycle degrees which are really employment oriented. In Germany there is a contradiction between official announcements of the employers and their practices. Big companies are more likely to accept newly designed first cycle degrees, but the majority of employers that are small and medium enterprises are very reluctant.

A general awareness of employers about the new degrees in countries, in which the Bologna Process drastically changed or will change the degree system, is obviously lacking in the majority of countries. 80% of the answers from these countries are negative regarding the quality of the employers' awareness on this matter, what indicates a lot of problems for future graduates. The situation regarding this issue seems to be better in some Central European countries (Austria, Czech Republic and Poland) as well as in Norway. The problem in some countries (a typical case is Estonia) is not only the new degrees and their acceptance, but also the lack of knowledge of employers about the accordance of the old and new degrees in terms of qualifications. The confusion is especially problematic if new degrees have the same names as the old ones but the length of studies and qualifications are different, what can cause problems of over- or under-estimation of certain degrees by the employers.

In general, participating countries of the Bologna Process covered in this survey can be divided into 4 main categories regarding the issue of access toward second and third cycle education and related transitional problems (see the following map):

1. **(Green)** Countries with full (or almost full) access for all students to at least one second cycle programme without major transitional problems:

Sweden, Norway<sup>7</sup>, Finland<sup>8</sup>, Belgium<sup>9</sup> Denmark, Switzerland and Germany<sup>10</sup>

2. **(Yellow)** Countries with a relatively smooth access for a majority of students with minor transitional problems:

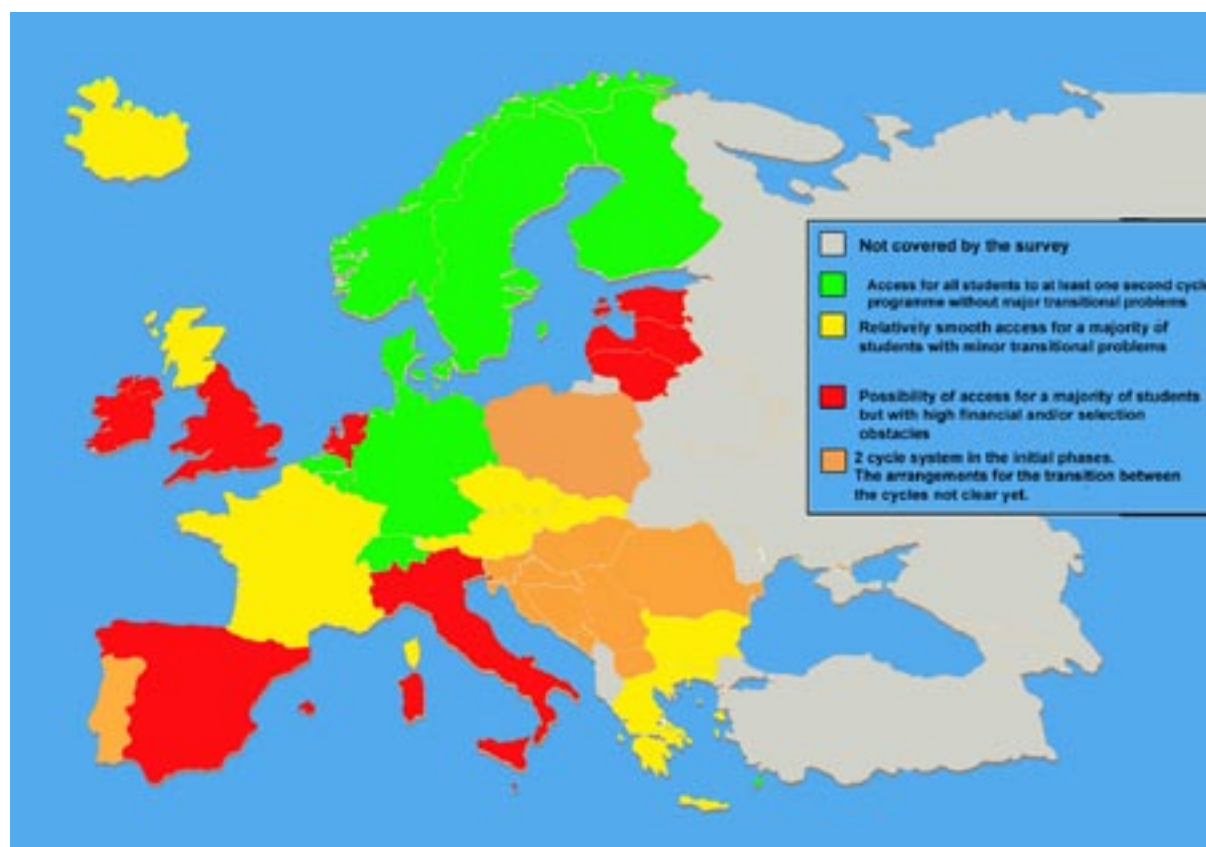
Austria<sup>11</sup>, Iceland, France, Bulgaria, Slovakia, Scotland, Czech Republic and Greece

3. **(Red)** Countries with the possibility of access for a majority of students but with high financial and/or selection obstacles:

Portugal, Spain, UK (without Scotland), Ireland, the Netherlands, Italy, Malta, Estonia, Lithuania and Latvia

4. **(Orange)** Countries where the implementation of the 2-cycle system in line with the Bologna process has not started yet or is in the initial phases and the arrangements for the transition between the 2 cycles are not clear yet.

Hungary, Romania, Serbia and Montenegro, Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Poland<sup>12</sup> Croatia and Slovenia<sup>13</sup>



Map 2: Access to second and third cycle education and related transitional problems

## **V. Conclusion**

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 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 programme or give it only combined with rigorous selection procedures and difficulties.

## **B: Quality assurance – qualitative diversity?**

Many countries and stakeholders see quality assurance (QA) as one of the cornerstones of the Bologna process. It is generally understood as a way not only to ensure quality but also to enhance it. It was never sought to develop one quality assurance system for Europe but rather to increase cooperation in quality assurance. The issue of mutual trust in each other's systems plays a crucial role in this respect. In order to increase the trustworthiness and functioning of quality assurance procedures ministers responsible for higher education agreed at their meeting in Berlin in 2003 that by 2005 national quality assurance systems should include:

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

Quality Assurance is a very broad topic, with many different facets. In policymaking and evaluations a lot of attention is usually given to the technical aspects of QA, whereas the actual practices are often neglected. This survey concentrates mainly on the latter and on parts of the Berlin commitments that are generally seen as vital for students. More concretely the survey concentrates on actual practises of QA on national level as well as within HEIs and the degree of satisfaction of students on QA practices, mainly concerning student involvement and transparency of the systems.



## **I. National QA systems in place**

In the countries that are surveyed, there are no national bodies for Quality Assurance or Accreditation or have only just been established in Greece, Malta, Bosnia-Herzegovina (both entities), Serbia, Macedonia, Bulgaria, Iceland, Slovenia and Croatia. In the rest of the countries a national, independently functioning QA or accreditation body has been established.

### **1. Consequences for the HEIs / programme**

Although the actual practices of external QA vary widely within Europe – with evaluations on a programme and institutional level, with in depth reviews and audits of internal QA and management practices – in almost all countries the reviews generally lead to some changes and improvements within the HEIs. In about half of the countries a negative external evaluation / accreditation report can have consequences for financing of programmes / HEIs or degree awarding power (e.g. UK, the Netherlands, Belgium (fl), Baltic States, Norway and Sweden). However, in practice this seldom happens, it rather works as an incentive for improving quality.

Also in countries where the government does not link any direct consequences to negative results of external evaluations these often lead to improvements. In countries like Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Malta, Portugal and the Czech Republic the impression is that HEIs generally take the results of external reviews into account in further developments of education. But the extent to which it actually leads to clear improvements depends often on the willingness of individual administrators and professors.

### **2. Publication of results**

If the results of external quality assurance or accreditation are to be accepted by all parties concerned, transparency of the process is very important. In line with the Berlin Communiqué, it should lead to a public report, accessible by all stakeholders. In more than half of the Bologna countries this is the case, namely in all Nordic and Baltic States and countries like Hungary, Belgium (fl), Austria and the UK.

Despite the commitments in the Berlin Communiqué in a number of countries, the results of external QA and accreditation are not published. In countries like Germany, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Belgium, the Czech Republic and in the private higher education sector in many other countries a negative result is generally not published since in these cases HEIs can decide to keep it internal and/or withdraw a accreditation request.

## **II. Internal quality assurance**

According to the Berlin Communiqué, the primary responsibility for QA in higher education lies with the institution itself and this provides the basis for real accountability of the academic system within the national quality framework. In line with the Berlin Communiqué, in most countries there is a high degree of autonomy for HEIs on the exact implementation of internal QA processes, with only some recommendations coming from a national level, mostly the national QA agency. This can be seen in most of the Nordic, Western, Southern and Southeastern European countries. Clearer and more detailed regulations on internal QA procedures exist in not more than 25% of the countries, like Austria, Switzerland, Estonia, Bulgaria and Hungary.

### **1. Internal evaluations**

In practice, in most countries there indeed exists a functioning system of internal evaluations within most of the HEIs, mainly in countries where it is a legal obligation like in the Nordic countries, Austria, Switzerland, Estonia, Belgium (FI), the Netherlands, Poland, Croatia, Slovenia, Macedonia, Romania, Bulgaria and the UK as well as on a more voluntary basis in countries like Hungary, Malta (but not in the polytechnics).

Although this seems to be a good score, there are still many HEIs where no functioning internal quality assessment system is in place. Amongst others in Greece, Latvia, French speaking Belgium, Portugal, Czech Republic, Lithuania, Germany, Serbia, Bosnia-Herzegovina. Except for Latvia, Portugal and Belgium (fr), in these countries there are also no legal obligations for HEIs to implement a functioning internal QA system.

### **2. Improvements**

The difference between functioning and not-functioning systems of internal QA lies not only in the existence of internal evaluations but also in the question if results of evaluations generally lead to improvements. According to the survey, in about half of the countries internal quality assessments generally do not lead to substantial improvements. This problem is often due to financial and time restrictions but also caused by the unwillingness of administrators and professors and is clearly noticeable in the abovementioned countries with a lacking evaluation system but also in many cases in Italy, Croatia, Slovenia, Romania, the Netherlands and Denmark.

### **3. Different levels**

The levels within HEIs on which quality assessment usually takes place vary widely within Europe, within individual countries and sometimes even between different parts of an HEI. Generally it can be said that mostly not all levels (institutional, faculty, programme and course) within HEIs are being assessed as part of internal QA procedures. From the countries in which internal evaluations actually take place, all levels within the HEIs get attention in Iceland, Norway, Bulgaria, Sweden, Flanders and the UK. In Finland, Macedonia, Slovakia and Slovenia generally only the institutional and faculty level are being assessed and in Estonia, Romania and Denmark mainly the study programmes and individual courses. In Hungary, the Netherlands, Switzerland and Malta usually only courses are being regularly evaluated within the HEIs.

### III. Involvement of students in Quality Assurance

As can be seen from the Berlin Communiqué, evaluation processes should have a very broad scope, including internal as well as external processes of quality assurance. Following the Berlin Communiqué and existing good practices, also student participation needs to be assessed from these different aspects. For that reason there is the necessity to look at the process of participation of students within the governance of national bodies for quality assurance / accreditation, participation within external evaluations of programmes and/or HEIs and participation in evaluations within HEIs.

#### **1. Participation of students within the governance of national bodies for QA/A**

From the countries that do have a national body for QA, slightly more than half have students represented in the governing board (Norway, Sweden, Finland, Estonia, UK, Belgium (fr), Germany, Austria, Portugal and Italy). In the UK and Hungary students are not full members of the board of the QA agency but only have a role as observers.

Other countries with a functioning national QA agency exclude students from the governing board (Denmark, Latvia, Belgium (fl), the Netherlands, Poland, the Czech republic, Switzerland, Romania and Bulgaria).

#### **2. Participation of students within teams for external review**

An important part of QA processes in most countries is the external review of programmes or HEIs, generally done by teams of external reviewers. Only in a limited number of countries these teams include students as full members (Norway, Sweden, Finland, Latvia, the Netherlands, Flanders, Hungary, Scotland and sometimes in Germany where it differs by QA agency). In other countries where external reviews take place, like the UK (except Scotland), Denmark, Portugal, Italy, Belgium (fr), Latvia, Estonia, Malta, Serbia, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Switzerland there is no student represented in the review team.

It should be noted that external reviews are not always done under the supervision of a national agency. In some countries where a national QA system has not been established yet, like in Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, nation wide external evaluations have been carried out by international organisations as the Council of Europe and the European University Association. The information on student participation in external evaluations in specific countries can thus also relate to those evaluations. No nation wide external reviews have recently taken place in Poland, Croatia, Bulgaria, Macedonia and Romania.

#### **3. Extent of consultation or involvement of students during external reviews**

According to the Bologna Process, external reviews are supposed to be based on internal assessments and other information provided by those actually involved in the programme or HEI under review. This obviously should include students.

The involvement of students is perceived as good (i.e. equal to the involvement of other internal stakeholders) in only a limited number of countries, namely Norway, Sweden, Finland, the UK, Latvia, the Netherlands, Belgium (fl) and

Hungary. In these countries student representatives write their own submission to the team, are involved in the creation of (parts of) the final internal self-study report, or responsible for specific student surveys. Often the external teams have several meetings with students as well.

In other countries students consider their involvement as too limited, mainly because they are only consulted via a survey or short meetings, official student representatives are not involved and they are not part of the actual internal self-assessment. These criticisms have come from Germany, Estonia, Denmark, Latvia, Switzerland, the Czech Republic, Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. Students are not consulted at all in the external reviews that take place in Italy and Malta.

#### **4. Student involvement within internal evaluations**

The processes of internal quality assurance, including the involvement of students in internal evaluations, fall almost always under the autonomy of HEIs. Therefore the existence of evaluations, their extensiveness and the involvement of students not only varies between countries, but often also between HEIs within a country. Nevertheless, some general observations can be made.

Formally it can be said that if internal reviews exist within HEIs, in most cases students are asked about their opinions. But there is a great variety in the comprehensiveness of student evaluations, the levels within the HEI they are undertaken, whether the results lead to improvements or if they just end up in a forgotten desk drawer.

At all levels of internal reviews (institution, faculty, programme and course) students are asked for their opinion in the Nordic countries (except Iceland), UK, Belgium (fl), Hungary and Bulgaria. It is foreseen within the new higher education law in Slovenia, but not yet in practice. Students are in practice mostly only involved in evaluations on the course level in the Netherlands, Iceland, Germany, Switzerland, Estonia and Italy. In the Czech Republic and Macedonia students are only involved in evaluations at the faculty level. Students are rarely asked for their opinion in evaluations in Poland, Latvia and Malta.

Most problematic are countries, where students are never asked for their opinion, even if some mechanisms of internal QA exist on all or only one level. This is the case in Bosnia-Herzegovina (both entities), where students also do their own evaluation, but never get any response, Serbia, Greece and Romania.

#### **5. Overall student participation in Quality Assurance**

It can be concluded that except from a few good examples (Norway, Sweden, Finland) the vast majority of the countries that are part of the Bologna Process have not properly implemented the participation of students in evaluation processes on all relevant levels.

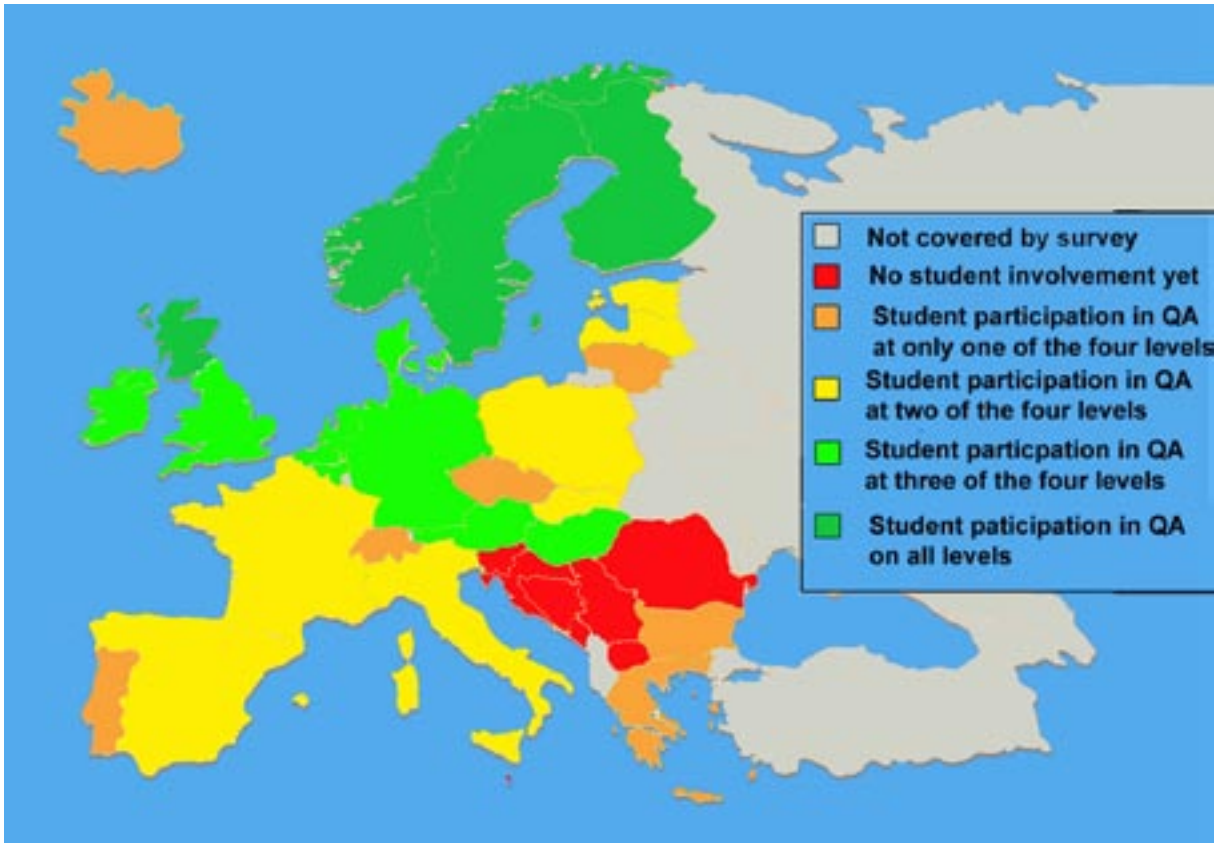
The legislation of internal student evaluation management and the involvement of students in self-assessments as part of external reviews do not exist in the majority of countries but falls usually under the autonomy of HEIs. Therefore, the vast majority of good practices of participation in evaluation processes are made voluntary by individual HEIs. At the same time, of course, the vast majority of bad practices are also the result of decisions of individual HEIs. There are a few countries / HEIs where the opinion and experience of students

is asked for on all levels within the institution. On the other hand usually they evaluate nothing more than their individual courses, neglecting the evaluation of programmes, faculties and the HEI as a whole. In this respect the worst practices exist in the countries of South-eastern Europe (although Bulgaria seems to be a more positive exception), where students are generally not included and/or student evaluations do not exist at all. The good practices with regard to student participation in internal QA seem to be the Nordic countries (except Iceland), UK, Belgium (fl), Hungary and Bulgaria.

Furthermore, students are seldom included in teams of external reviews. Although in half of the countries students have a place in the board of the national QA agency, the majority of countries do not include a student in the external review teams and the consultation of students by these teams is often seen as insufficient. In the majority of cases students were consulted only through surveys or interviews and not on a regular/structural basis. The good practises with regard to student participation in external QA seem to be Norway, Sweden, Finland and Scotland.

Taking the whole system of QA, including its internal and external dimension, student involvement is only adequately implemented in 4 countries that were part of this survey: Norway, Sweden, Finland and Scotland.

1. (**Green**) Countries with student involvement in QA on all levels
2. (**Green**) Countries with student involvement in QA on 2 out of 4 levels
3. (Yellow) Countries with student involvement in QA on 2 out of 4 levels
4. (Orange) Countries with student involvement in QA on 1 out of 4 levels
5. (**Red**) Countries without student involvement in QA



Map 3: Student participation in quality assurance

#### **IV. Conclusion:**

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 still exist have already been mentioned and can be completed towards 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

## **C: Recognition – about equity and equivalence**

One of the hallmarks of the Bologna process is to enable and increase the mobility of students. Despite many other obstacles the main academic obstacle has long been identified as the recognition of degrees and periods of study. Therefore improving recognition practices is a major element in the Bologna process. Ministers in Berlin put emphasis to overcoming problems in relation to recognition. One of the means that were identified is the Lisbon Recognition Convention (LRC), which is a legally binding treaty. Ministers called on all countries to sign and ratify the convention and to ensure its application. In order to ensure the readability of degrees it has also been decided that all graduates should receive a Diploma Supplement. In Berlin ministers decided that every graduate should from 2005 onwards receive a Diploma Supplement automatically, free of charge and issued in a widely spoken European language.

### **I. Lisbon Recognition Convention**

#### **1. Ratification of the LRC**

Generally one can notice that the Lisbon Recognition Convention has been signed and ratified by the few last countries that did not do that before. Nevertheless, some countries are still reluctant to even sign the convention.

However, this was not reflected in the survey since ESIB has no member unions from the countries concerned. Only Spain had to report no signature from its government. As far as the countries are concerned that have signed but not ratified the Convention, it could be reported from Belgium that the recent signature has launched the ratification process. The procedure is about to take some time since it will need cooperation between the federal state and the Communities that are responsible for Education.

Italy, Germany, Malta and the Netherlands were less optimistic. Their countries have signed the convention already years ago but hardly any progress towards ratification is seen.

As a general rule, one can confirm the good trend of the general improvement of recognition since the Lisbon Recognition Convention was signed. This has had a good impact on the practices in the various European countries. However, some difficulties remain.

#### **2. Principles of the LRC**

Of course, what is even more important and interesting to see is whether the principles of the LRC are implemented. The formal ratification can only confirm a practice that is in line with the Convention. At the same time, it might happen that even if the LRC has acquired a legal force, its principles are not respected in practice.

Sadly, it appears that the countries where the Convention has no legal force, the principles are only very rarely applied in practice and depend on the institutions. Which means, for instance, that the students still have to prove that their degrees / periods of study should be recognised, or that there is no substantial difference. The burden of proof still lies with them. Sometimes, even worse, it is insisted that courses or degrees have to be equal, not just equivalent



(Germany, Italy and Greece). Even in countries like Finland, Lithuania or Bosnia-Herzegovina where the ratification of the Convention has taken place (recently in the case of Finland) this is still the case.

In other countries, it seems that the ratification of the convention guarantees some more rights to students seeking recognition. For instance, in most cases (Finland, Denmark, Hungary, Sweden, Slovenia, Bulgaria, Serbia, etc) the student has the right to appeal if the decision is not satisfactory. However, in Austria, the appeal organ is the senate of the faculty/institution. Since the majority of the senate are professors, the senate almost never overrules the negative decision taken by the professor in charge of recognition of foreign degrees. Which means that not only an appeal procedure should exist but it should also be independent and give the student a fair chance to change the first (negative) decision.

In the same spirit, partial recognition is often given whenever possible (but apparently not regularly in Bulgaria and in Estonia). In Germany or in Greece, even if the convention has not been ratified, partial recognition is a principle that is upheld as much as possible.

### **3. ENIC-NARICs**

The vast majority considers ENIC-NARICs as very valuable for the recognition of foreign degrees and periods of study in case they act as the decision making body. In case they are not the decision making body, they are only a useful source of information.

This perception is the same, no matter the way the ENIC-NARIC is organised: as part of the ministry (Belgium, Bulgaria, Serbia, Denmark, Austria, etc), on contract with the ministry (UK), as part an independent agency (Sweden or Greece), as an agency on the regional level (Germany), an independent foundation (Estonia), as hosted by the Rectors Conference (Switzerland), etc.

A general picture that can definitely be drawn from the answers is that students prefer in general that recognition of foreign degrees and periods of study be done on a national level, preferably by the ENIC-NARIC. A too large extent of autonomy of institutions and a too big dispersion of decision-making bodies do not make the rules clear to the students (and especially not to the foreign ones). Moreover, risks of discrepancies (and sometimes inconsistencies) are more often reported from countries where a decentralised system is operating (Germany, Austria).

Sometimes important legal barriers and the necessary autonomy of institutions would be endangered by not having any decision-making power in recognition. However the lack of an effective appeal body needs to be tackled in order to keep inconsistencies as low as possible. This would also give more guarantees/security to the student; in the sense they could more consistently know what decision to expect. Such a system is for example in place in Denmark.

The most quoted problem in the recognition of foreign degrees and periods of study abroad is what can be subsumed under the generic term bureaucracy. Costly translations, non-transparent organisation, various forms to fill in, a lot of red tape are the most common problems quoted by the unions (Bulgaria, Serbia, Sweden, Switzerland, Greece, Austria, France, the Czech Republic, Italy, Malta, etc).

Another obvious complaint from the students around Europe was that it takes too much time until a decision is made. Almost 2/3 of the answers were mentioning this problem. Despite the provisions of the Lisbon Recognition Convention, it seems that the "reasonable time" is interpreted differently throughout Europe. This is certainly an aspect that should be improved in the future.

It also seems that recognition is even more difficult (not to say impossible) for graduates or students with degrees from outside Europe (esp. African degrees or certificates of time of study). This has mainly been reported from Austria, Germany, France and Belgium (fr). The difficulty of recognition is even more surprising since in some of these countries systems are similar to systems in Europe (such as France or Belgium) and sometimes even the language is the same.

Estonia, Slovenia, Iceland and Hungary on the other hand were quite positive about the recognition system in their country that was introduced by the Lisbon/Bologna reforms,

In general, it can be stated that in a number of countries ECTS has contributed to improvements of recognition significantly (Denmark, Bulgaria, Sweden, Iceland, Finland, Estonia, Czech Republic, Malta, Macedonia, Latvia, etc). On the other hand, some countries argue that due to the bad or lacking implementation of ECTS recognition has not been eased (France, Belgium (fr), Serbia, Bosnia-Herzegovina (federation), Slovenia, Greece, Switzerland, etc). Other countries are still waiting for the first experiences (Hungary, Bosnia-Herzegovina (Republika Srpska), etc.).

Lastly, one can say that the lack of trust is identified as the most common problem (Denmark, Austria, France, Finland, etc.) Even the learning agreements between institutions are sometimes not enough to ensure recognition of the period of study taken abroad (the Netherlands, Italy) – if they are used at all. There is also some complaint about the ECTS grading scale in relation to recognition: it is considered as arbitrarily used and applied inconsistently and in a non-transparent way (Denmark, Sweden, Norway, the Netherlands, Belgium (fr), Italy, Greece, etc.).

## II. Diploma Supplement

Questions regarding the Diploma Supplement address various points. They are related to the issue of whether all graduates receive a Diploma Supplement automatically, free of charge and in a widely spoken European language. They are also related to the question of the quality of the Diploma Supplement itself.

In 30% of the countries that were surveyed students in general answered that graduates will receive a Diploma Supplement automatically, free of charge and in a widely spoken European language. It is worth noticing that all Nordic countries are amongst these. Other countries, which do not experience problems in this regard, are Poland, Malta, Bosnia-Herzegovina (Republika Srpska), and Belgium (fl).

### **1. All graduates**

In the majority of countries the Diploma Supplement will be issued to all graduates in 2005. In a number of countries there are differences regarding the type of institutions. In Greece only a limited number of universities offer the Diploma Supplement whereas in Denmark mainly the polytechnic institutions are not offering it. In Germany mainly graduates of programmes in the new two-tier structure receive a Diploma Supplement, but the vast majority is still studying in the old system.

### **2. Automatically**

In 11 countries specific problems exist with respect to the automatic issuing. Especially problematic it seems in Central and South Eastern Europe (Serbia, Slovenia, Croatia, Romania, Hungary, Austria). In these countries it is either not automatic at all or only a small number of faculties issue the Diploma Supplement automatically. In Estonia it differs from institution to institution; sometimes only the graduates of the second cycle receive it automatically whereas first cycle graduates receive it only upon request. In Hungary it is only automatically issued in the national language, the English version has to be requested. In Lithuania students currently still have to request a Diploma Supplement. As from 2006 it should be automatic. In Croatia it is issued upon request. However, students are not even aware of this possibility.

### **3. Free of charge**

In the vast majority of countries the Diploma Supplements are issued free of charge. In Hungary students have to pay for the English version. In Serbia it is not free of charge if it is issued. The requirement of issuing the Diploma Supplement seems therefore on the first sight to be less problematic. However, if the Diploma Supplement is issued free of charge, it does not necessarily imply that students do not have extra costs arising from it. For example in Turkey most institutions issue a Diploma Supplement free of charge. However, when they decided to do this they increased the costs for the actual degree certificate.

#### **4. Widely spoken European language**

Apart from Hungary where the Diploma Supplement is only issued automatically in the national language it is also the case in Romania. Despite the lack of clarity about what is considered a widely spoken European language, it can be assumed that Romanian is not in this category. In the vast majority of countries though, it is issued either both in the national language(s) and a widely spoken European language or only in English.

#### **5. Quality of the Diploma Supplement**

Not all countries follow the recommended format of the Diploma Supplement. Usually there are big differences between individual institutions within a country. Even in countries that adhere to the abovementioned criteria discrepancies in the quality are to be found. There are different reasons for it. Sometimes the institutions decide to use their own format, but sometimes they are even asked to do this by law. For example Swedish institutions have to follow the national format for a Diploma Supplement. This national format implies that the preamble is changed; additional sub-sections are introduced such as the degree name in English language etc. The main weaknesses in the Diploma Supplements are to be found in the sections for admission requirements and the programme details. This lack of incoherence and inconsistency is endangering the usefulness of the Diploma Supplement at European level. These differences and the low quality of many Diploma Supplements are therefore causing problems for students.

### **III. Conclusion**

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. Only 2 of the countries surveyed did not have any problems where also no legislation with regards to the Diploma Supplements exists. 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 mechanisms of the Lisbon Recognition Convention improve recognition significantly. Good progress could be reported from countries where the Lisbon Recognition Convention is also applied and not only signed / ratified. However this is not always sufficient to overcome the problems associated with recognition.

The most eminent problems in the field of recognition 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
- Lack of application of the principles of the Lisbon Recognition Convention (Change of burden of proof)
- Lack of a properly functioning appeal body that operates independently
- Lack of trust in each other's educational system
- Bureaucratic procedures
- Recognition of degrees from outside the EHEA
- Not respecting agreements (Learning agreements)

## D: The social dimension – a transversal action line

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.

### I. Financial resources of students

#### 1. Grants and loans schemes

Grants and loans are the core element of student funding in the majority of countries. Students very often depend on the possibility to receive a grant or a loan.

In a number of countries a reform took place but the changes have been very diverse (Denmark, Estonia, Germany, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, small reform in Austria, Finland, Sweden, Iceland, Italy, France, Belgium (fl) and Switzerland). Only very few of these reforms were in any way linked to the implementation of the Bologna Process. The major exception might be the enabling of portability of grants / loans in some countries where it was not possible before. However, in the majority of countries, the Berlin commitment of making them "fully portable" is not reached yet. Among the many exceptions, one can notice:

- Restrictions of the country of destination (e.g. only to a member state of the EU in Germany)
- Restrictions regarding the HEI / programme of destination (Estonia, Sweden, Iceland, the Netherlands)
- Regarding the HEI of registration: in Hungary, grants / loans are portable only if the student is still registered in a Hungarian HEI
- Regarding the programme: in Latvia, only research grants can be portable
- Regarding time: only 4 out of the 6 years can be taken abroad (Denmark), a maximum of 4 semesters is set in Austria
- Regarding the status of the grant: In Norway, the basic grant cannot be taken abroad, but the additional can.
- Regarding social security restrictions: In Finland, grants/loans are only portable if you belong to the Finnish social security system

Despite the constant commitments and the expressed will to increase the number of mobile students significantly only Belgium (fl), the Czech Republic, Slovakia, France and Lithuania the grants / loans are now fully portable. On the

other hand, in a fair amount of countries, the Berlin commitment has not been followed by any political action; amongst them are Croatia, Serbia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Switzerland, Italy, Malta, Romania, and Poland.

In some countries, no reform of grant and loan systems took place: Romania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Malta, Macedonia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Czech Republic (but new system from 10/05 on), Slovakia, Slovenia, Serbia, Poland.

As far as the availability and average amount of grants/loans is concerned, our survey can only confirm the obvious: the overall social and economical situation of the country plays a very important role. In this sense, one can notice an overall satisfaction in North-western Europe, some problems in Central and South-Western Europe and a major criticism and insufficiencies in Central and Eastern Europe and in South-Eastern Europe.

However, a very broad concern that can be noted coming from all around Europe is the frequent lack of linking the average grant / loan amount to the real living costs. Students do often loose a high part of their purchase power over just a few years, e.g. in Sweden, they lost about 22% in 15 years.

## **2. Students at work**

The overall and mainly insufficient situation regarding grants and loans has obviously an impact on the percentages of students that work while studying<sup>14</sup>. A significant number of students are working next to their studies. However, there is no general development in Europe: in some countries, the percentage of working students has increased (Italy, Sweden, etc.), in others it has remained stable since 2001 (Iceland, Switzerland, etc). However, the situation in some countries is alarming. As much as 68% of the full time student population works in Germany, 75% in Denmark, 30% in Estonia, 46% in France, almost 50% in Latvia, etc. In Finland and in Sweden, it is the gap between the grant and the living costs that forces some 45% of the student population to work during the academic year.

An especially bad practice can be noted in Austria: since the introduction of tuition fees, students have to work more. Before 2001, 50% of the students had to work. Nowadays, more than 66% have to work. The amount of work also increased: 35% have to work under 35 hours a month, 12 % have to work more than 35 hours.

The second important aspect of student work is to look at the relation between the field of studies and the work actually performed. Sadly, almost all countries surveyed answered that in the majority of the working students, there was no link! This was the case in Italy, France, Belgium, Switzerland, Estonia (not at all for 54% of the working students, for 24% it is hardly related!), Germany, Hungary, Lithuania, Austria, Sweden, Iceland, Serbia, Croatia, Romania, Czech Republic and Slovakia. In Denmark, however, it was claimed that the majority of students work in a field related to their studies, which could be an indication that the students are more able to choose their job, due to generous grants and due to a relatively low unemployment rate.

The high number of students who are also working can be explained by the lack of accessibility of the grants / loans systems and because of them being too little. Some students certainly also work for accrued personal financial welfare.

One can also notice that in the countries where the support system is considered as sufficient in general, the students work less during the academic year and more during the holidays.

Moreover, another interesting observation is that in the countries where the State invests directly or indirectly big amounts into the student support schemes (especially Nordic countries but also Belgium, Austria, the budget financed students in Serbia,) some strict rules are set regarding student work (usually, losing part of the grant, of the family allowance, etc.).

On the other hand, where the answers voiced dissatisfaction with the support system in terms of lack of accessibility and/or average amount, hardly any limitations regarding student work exist. One could assume that the State, aware of its lack of support by means of grants / loans, counts on the students to compensate their incomes by working. In France, a recent survey showed that the companies employing students were making more efforts than the universities to make the combination of studies and work less burdensome for the students. In Latvia, students are even allowed to use the title of unemployed.

## **II. Access**

Regarding access of non-traditional groups to Higher Education, our survey shows that urgent action is needed. Almost no country reported any action whatsoever. If they did, it was very marginal and not caused by the commitments of the Bologna Process.

Only five countries replied positively. Good examples can be pointed at: Sweden with its "Equal Treatment of Students at Universities Act" from Spring 2001 or Belgium (fl) that adopted a decree on more flexible curricula in order to make facilitate access, Slovenia and Romania that made special provisions for Roma students and the Czech Republic that made access for disabled students easier.

The availability of statistical data varies among the countries: in Denmark, France, Norway, Austria, Germany, Switzerland (ongoing), Czech Republic it is organised and/or financed by the ministry or a governmental agency. In Estonia, the student survey is the only one existing. No such comprehensive and systematic data is widely available in Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Finland, Sweden, Iceland, Italy, Belgium (fl), Serbia, Malta, Croatia, Slovakia and Poland. Therefore it seems highly desirable that ministers commit themselves to organise such as study as a basis for good future policymaking.



### III. QA

At the same time, Quality Assurance has gained a lot of importance in the Bologna Process. As the social dimension is an overarching action line it should also have an effect in the field of quality assurance. In Estonia, Slovenia, Belgium (fr), as the systems are being created, the plans are to include the social dimension in the process. In Denmark, the responsible bodies considered it as being irrelevant, since the grant scheme is working well and the living and studying conditions of the students are assumed to be sufficient. In Germany and Italy, it is taken into account but only marginally. It is only sporadically taken into account in Hungary, Latvia, Austria, Finland, Sweden, Switzerland (not at all), Serbia, Malta, Croatia, Slovakia, Poland and Belgium (fl). In Lithuania, studying conditions are considered but not the overall living conditions of the students! Positive examples are Norway, Iceland, France and the Czech Republic where it is part of the standard procedure.

### IV. Seriousness of commitments

In the last part of the survey, we asked the respondents if the social dimension was considered and improved while implementing Bologna reforms on the national level. We also asked about an estimation of the seriousness of the ministerial commitment. Almost no country answered positively, no or hardly where by far the most answers ESIB received.

We also asked if in the national debates, the actors saw the social dimension as an integral part of the Bologna reforms? Here again, we received very disappointing answers: it is almost never the case. In Austria and in Slovakia (proposal) tuition fees were introduced, in many other countries they were raised. In Finland, the situation seems blurry: there is a proposal to introduce fees for students coming from outside the EU-EEA (this means for a lot of EHEA countries) but at the same time the minister seems to strive for equality and the public character of Education. In Estonia, the eligibility to the allowance remains merit based, which is not contributing to a democratisation of Higher Education. In Lithuania and Switzerland, the focus is on ECTS, QA and the degree structure whereas the other objectives of the Bologna process seem to be considered as of secondary relevance. The good examples where students saw some improvement of the social dimension due to the Bologna reforms were Norway and the Czech Republic.

## **V. Conclusion**

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 (France, the Netherlands, Hungary, Lithuania, Norway, Romania and to a lesser extent Denmark)
- Democratic access to Higher Education (Estonia, Belgium (fr), Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Slovakia)
- The amount and availability of grants / loans especially in connection with the living costs (Latvia, Hungary, Sweden, Iceland, Serbia, Romania, Poland)
- Very bureaucratic procedures for applying for student social support (France, Lithuania)
- The inadequacy of the healthcare system (Finland, partially Sweden)
- Lack of data
- Age limits

## **E: Credit System – is one ECTS actually one ECTS?**

### **I. General situation regarding the implementation of ECTS**

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.

This survey however intends to look deeper into the subject. It is looking at how the actual situation is. Is ECTS understood and implemented the same way throughout the EHEA? Why is ECTS referred to as a success story and at the same time only very few HEIs receive the ECTS Label from the European Commission that certifies the correct use of it? Is ECTS implemented in theory or in practice and how?

#### **1. Legislation**

In the majority of countries the law requires the use of ECTS. This is usually part of the general national laws for higher education. Some countries like Germany by law require the use of a credit system and HEIs most of the time opt for the use of ECTS. Hence it could be said that ECTS is either formally or informally required. In a number of countries this is however only the case for courses that are newly set up or operate in a new system (Germany, Hungary, etc.).

With the exception of the UK and Ireland the same types of credits are used for different levels of higher education and different types of HEIs. However a larger group of countries reports that one could actually argue that different types of credits are used, as the implementation depends on individual HEIs and their practices differ a lot and make credit transfer even in the same country almost impossible. The lack of coherence leads to a situation where ECTS is formally in place at all HEIs, but what is understood as ECTS differs greatly.

#### **2. Accumulation**

Whilst ECTS is widely used for transfer, the use of ECTS as an accumulation system is not yet so widely developed. The majority of countries however, already define the length of degree programmes by the number of credits; sometimes the length is additionally defined by the number of years. As most countries are only starting to set up systems that allow for accumulation, hardly any experiences could be reported. However, in comparison to the last survey on this topic (2002) more and more countries are trying to use the credit system also for the purposes of accumulation.

### **3. Lifelong Learning**

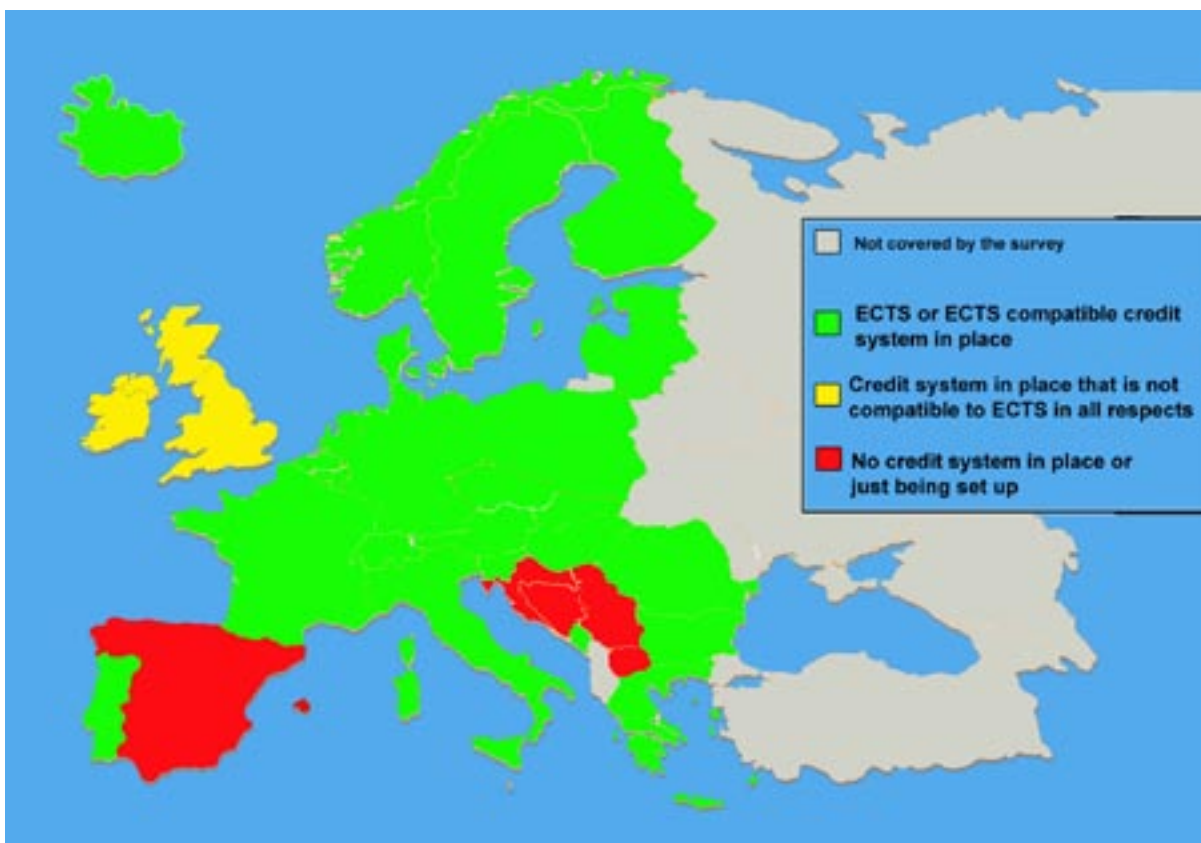
In the area of lifelong learning ECTS is hardly used at all. Exceptions in this area are Romania and the Czech Republic. In Sweden there are no specific LLL courses and therefore credits are used for LLL purposes as well. With regards to prior learning activities almost no country is using ECTS for the recognition of these activities. In France such a system should be in place, but reality differs and ECTS credits are hardly ever awarded in this way.

### **4. Modularisation**

The majority of countries divide their study programmes into modules. Exceptions are amongst others Austrian, Croatia, Greece, Portugal and Romania. However, it could not be reported that there is a coherent approach as to how to organise the modules. This is mostly up to the faculty boards. It is also predominantly the case that modules do have different sizes. They differ usually between 2 and 30 ECTS. The largest module is normally the one comprising a thesis.

The surface therefore indicates apart from the area of lifelong learning and prior learning that ECTS or a compatible system is implemented almost throughout the EHEA (see Map).

1. (**Green**) Countries with ECTS or an ECTS compatible system in place
2. (Yellow) Countries with a credit system in place that is not compatible to ECTS in all respects
3. (**Red**) Countries without a credit system or where it is just being set up



Map 4: ECTS on the surface

## II. ECTS in depth – the issue of workload

It is when looking deeper into how ECTS is applied that the big differences and problems occur. The most outstanding difficulty is the calculation of the student workload. According to the ECTS Users Guide<sup>15</sup> ECTS “is a student-centred system based on the student workload required to achieve the objectives of a programme of study”. The concept of workload is therefore an indispensable part of the use of credits in the Bologna process.

The workload of a typical student should amount to approximately 1600 hours a year. On the assumption that one year should include 40 weeks of studying, one week of studying should entail 40 hours of work for students. The crucial question is how the workload is calculated and whether it is realistic.

The workload of students should include all work that is required to complete all planned learning activities; i.e. attending lectures, seminars, self-study, internships, excursions, preparation for exams etc. It is therefore not to be based on contact hours. However, in a number of countries this is the case (Austria, Czech Republic, Germany, Greece, Romania, Slovenia, etc.). Often contact hours are multiplied by certain factors according to what sort of contact hour it is, e.g. seminar or lecture. In these cases it is obvious that ECTS is not used as a student centred system, as the emphasis is put on the teaching and not on the learning.

Many countries do not make any reference at all to the concept of workload. It is only said that 60 ECTS credits are the equivalent of one year of full-time studies. HEIs then decide themselves on how to apply ECTS, which leads to often differing and contradicting practices. Other countries are stipulating that a certain number of hours resemble one credit. However, it is mainly not the case that this is also checked in any way.

Workload is very often understood as notional workload that does not need to be checked. It even seems as if the workload is not supposed to be realistic. In a number of countries bodies at faculty or institutional level set the number of credits for individual units (Malta, Belgium, Hungary, Latvia etc.). The usual practice is that professors roughly estimate the workload. Students can in some countries give input through the evaluation of courses or through their representatives in the governing bodies. Good practice in getting students input only exists in Estonia, Finland, the Netherlands, Norway and the UK. Most Central and Eastern European countries do not foresee any input from students.

But even in the countries where there is some student input it does not mean that courses or their credits are changed in case there is a bigger difference between the estimated and the actual workload. Only from Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Malta, the Netherlands and Norway it could be reported that the allocated credit ranges are changed in a way that they reflect reality. As however, it is more difficult to change the allocation of credits of one module because of the impacts on other modules, the usual practice is to revise the teaching and learning activities and to adjust these in order to fit to the credit ranges.

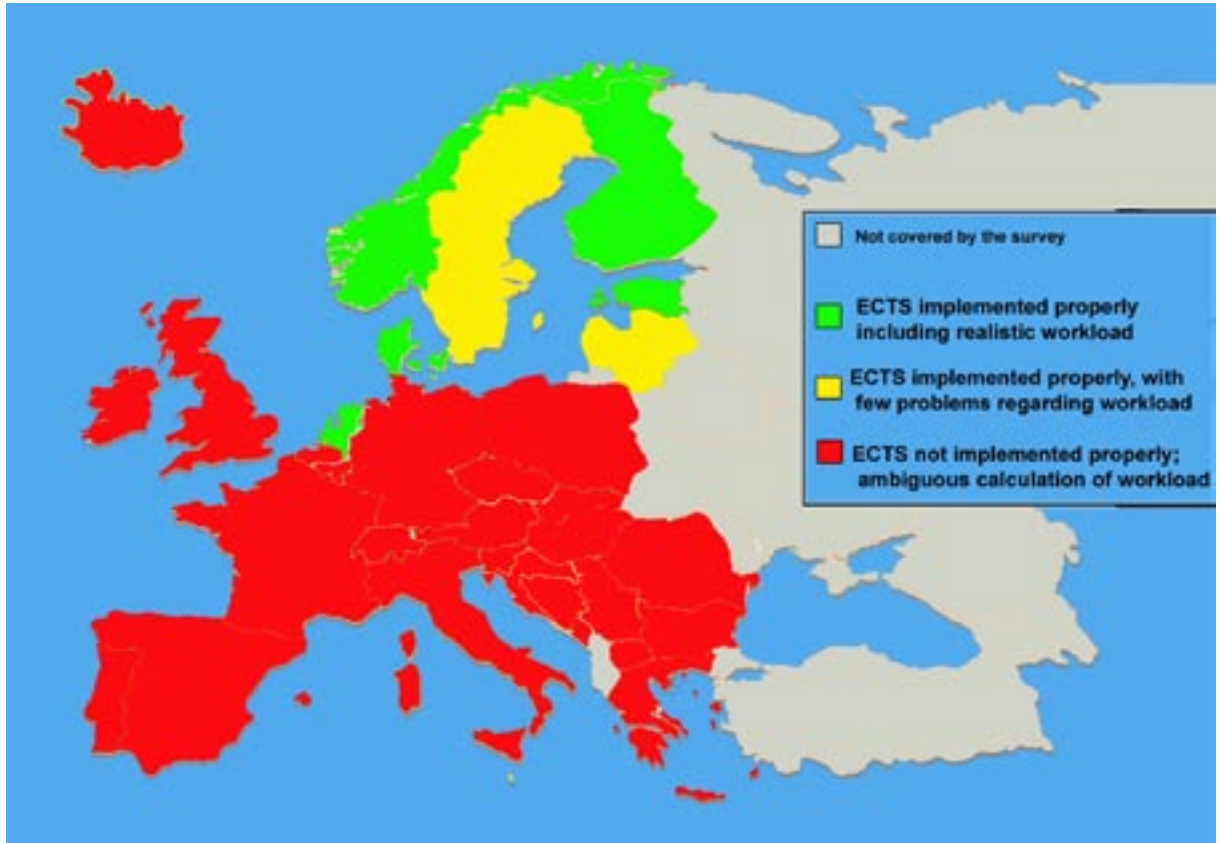
There are various reasons why the workload is not measured appropriately and credits are not allocated correctly. Often courses remain overloaded in terms of work that is expected from students. This is especially the case in first cycle programmes. In some programmes certain courses are obligatory but have 0 ECTS allocated so as that the overall of 30 ECTS per semester can be reached. Some surveys at faculty level show that students often are expected to work

twice as much as they should according to the ECTS credits. From one faculty in Macedonia it was even reported that students had to work for more than 24 hours a day in order to obtain all credits in the suggested timeframe. In Serbia the general understanding seems to be that students should adapt themselves to the programme and not the other way around. It was also mentioned that in some countries the credits for all courses should be about the same so that professors feel equally important rather than it should be based on actual workload. When the salary of professors is linked to contact hours this creates a big obstacle to think in other terms than contact hours.

As laid out in other parts of the survey, one key strategy of countries in the implementation of the Bologna process seems to be the will to reduce study times. Using however the most logical instrument is hardly done. In this way it seems to be more the aim to reduce costs and put pressure on students than actually to reduce study times.

In Ireland, Malta and the UK the annual workload of students seems to be significantly lower than in other countries. In the UK at least this is certainly also a reason for the complete rejection of the workload concept. It could lead to substantial changes that might not allow students to work as much next to their studies in order to finance the high tuition fees. The European average of student workload would in this case have severe consequences for the funding system of higher education.

1. (**Green**) Countries that implemented ECTS properly, including a realistic workload
2. (**Yellow**) Countries that implemented ECTS properly, with a few problems regarding workload
3. (**Red**) Countries that did not implement ECTS properly, with ambiguous workload calculations



Map 5: ECTS on the ground

Green: Countries where ECTS is used reflecting the actual workload of students

Yellow: ECTS is supposed to resemble the workload of students but is not checked

Red: There is no real correlation between allocated credits and the actual student workload

### **III. Grading System**

Most countries reported no experience with the ECTS grading system. Where it had been implemented it is usually only used for mobile students in addition to the national grading system. Almost all countries said they were very much opposing the concept of the ECTS grading and see no need for a unified European system. It should be noted again that the grading system is not part of what has been decided in the framework of the Bologna process. A few countries said that the ECTS grading system could be beneficial, as their current systems are ambiguous and unjust. The only country that basically adopted the ECTS grading is Norway. However, nobody is currently aware about whether it actually is the ECTS grading or not. It is not clear whether the grading system is used as a relative or an absolute system. The old situation where various grading systems were used was replaced by a very chaotic situation.

### **IV. Conclusion**

With regards to the introduction of a credit system on the first view it 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



## **F: Student participation – 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. The survey tries to trace changes in the systems of student participation that stem from the Bologna process and to show to what extent and level students do currently participate in higher education governance.

### **I. Student participation on the national level**

On the national level student unions are usually not full members of the bodies, in which decisions regarding higher education are prepared or taken. An exception can be seen in Finland, Sweden, Norway, Iceland, the Baltic states and France where students are members of almost all committees, boards and working groups that exist on a national level, within the ministry of education and in bodies like the QA agency.

In other parts of Europe it is more usual that student unions are only full members of a few decision making bodies, but still consulted by most other bodies dealing with higher education, like the ministry of education and the parliament. This is amongst others the case in Denmark, Austria, Switzerland, Slovenia, Croatia, Macedonia, Italy and Romania. In almost all of these countries, the student unions explicitly mention the national QA agency as an important body within higher education from which they are excluded.

The same is noticeable in countries where the involvement of students on a national level is limited to a solely consultative role and where students are not full members of any decision making body in higher education, for example in Hungary, Germany, Slovakia, the Netherlands, Belgium (fl), Bulgaria and Serbia. Some national unions have reported that even this consultative role is very limited and that they are only occasionally welcome to give their opinion, e.g. in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

### **II. Student participation within HEIs**

Within HEIs the picture of student involvement is roughly the same as on the national level. Local student unions and representatives are generally not a full member of all the bodies within HEIs where decisions regarding higher education are prepared or taken, except in the Finnish university sector, Sweden, Norway, the Baltic states, France, Hungary and Slovenia. It must be stated that in these countries it happens sometimes that on the lower levels within the HEI, the right of representation becomes a question of interpretation where the students and the institution have different opinions about whether a committee is a real, permanent or standing committee or not and if students thus should be involved.

The situation is also relatively positive in a number of other countries where students are fully represented in most of the decision-making bodies. This is amongst others the case in Austria, Iceland, the Finnish polytechnics, Denmark and Malta.

In many countries students are either fully involved in only a few bodies within the institutions where actual decisions take place and/or have a marginal role in these bodies. This can be noticed in e.g. South-eastern Europe, Italy and Switzerland. These countries also show a wide variety between different HEIs in the same country in terms of student involvement, with several good and bad examples. This is due to the fact that the HEIs can independently decide upon their organisational structure, so especially within the faculties and departments the existing bodies and their composition vary widely. In Switzerland a recent proposal by the national union of students how to increase student participation was harshly rejected by the national rectors' conference.

There are still some countries within the European Higher Education Area where students are not members of any decision making body but only have a consultative role, for example in the Netherlands, Belgium (fl), Slovakia and Bosnia-Herzegovina (Republika Srpska). The consultation is generally not binding for those who take decisions and is in practice often neglected. This survey shows that on the lower levels, within faculties and departments, the actual involvement of students is generally seen as marginal or even non-existent.

### **III. Perception of students by other stakeholders in higher education**

It is probably no coincidence that in the countries where student organisations are involved in most decision making bodies on a national level and within HEIs, students are mostly considered as equal partners within the higher education community. This is the case in the Nordic and Baltic countries and in countries like Hungary, Slovenia and Switzerland. Nevertheless, in these countries it happens from time to time that students are seen as users of higher education or even clients, especially within the HEIs.

The concept of students as users or learners instead of equal partners is very common in a number of other countries. According to the respondents, especially informally other stakeholders in amongst others Iceland, Belgium, Croatia, Bulgaria, Malta and Denmark mostly perceive students as users or learners.

The tendency of seeing students not as partners but as clients or consumers seems to gain ground, despite the notions in the Berlin Communiqué. Especially in Western European countries like Austria, Germany and the Netherlands this is very common, but also in countries like Romania, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Italy and in the private higher education sector in most other countries.

#### **IV. Independence of student unions / representatives**

For genuine student involvement in decision-making processes, it is a prerequisite that student representatives can work independently from the state, political parties, rectors, deans and other policy makers. Regardless the level of actual student involvement, generally student unions and representatives manage to work independently. Nevertheless, this does not always come without complications.

Several student organisations have reported that from time to time the national or regional government puts pressure on them to try to influence their way of working and/or opinions. This pressure is generally done in an informal way, but in some countries the government has stronger instruments for this. A striking example is Austria, where the student unions are part of the law on higher education and where in November 2004 the ministry of education changed the election system of the national union of students without even consulting those concerned and against the will of the students. In more than half of the countries student unions financially depend on the ministry or locally on the HEIs, which often causes tensions between the wishes of those who provide and those who receive the money.

Within HEIs, especially on the lower faculty and department levels, it is not uncommon that student representatives face personal pressure from professors and administrators on whom they still "rely" within their studies. According to some Southeastern European respondents, this even sometimes leads to practises of blackmail.

#### **V. Changes in student participation since the Prague Communiqué**

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 (fl), Slovenia and Macedonia.

## **VI. Conclusion**

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 clients whose opinions do not 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.

## **G: Attractiveness of the EHEA – euphemism or new approach?**

One of the main underlying goals of the Bologna process has been to increase the attractiveness of the EHEA. Most countries have identified various strands how to do this. Almost all countries have exchange programmes in place for students, teachers and researchers. In all countries HEIs usually have cooperation projects with other institutions going on. However, the majority of these foreign HEIs are not located outside the EHEA.

Most countries also provide for scholarship possibilities for foreign students, teachers and researchers. Exceptions are Bosnia-Herzegovina, Iceland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania and Macedonia.

However, not many countries do yet use a systematic approach of marketing campaigns abroad. Norway, Sweden, Finland, the Netherlands, Germany, Slovenia, Switzerland, France and the UK mainly do marketing.

Most activities are not being coordinated but are done by the individual HEIs. However, all countries that are using marketing strategies also have a central body that is responsible for the coordination.

The money for the activities usually comes from the state, either directly or through the regular budget of HEIs. In all countries apart from Bulgaria, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Finland, Malta and Macedonia there has been a significant increase in the funding of activities directed at promoting the attractiveness. Especially countries in Central – Eastern and South-eastern Europe report that a large part of the funding comes from international donors and mainly the European Commission.

Although the objective laid out in the documents in the Bologna process clearly talks about the promotion of the attractiveness of the EHEA, most countries undertake only activities to promote their own national systems. This is even the case if joint initiatives exist (such as between Germany, the Netherlands and France or between the Nordic countries). Only Italy, Romania and Slovenia report that their activities are directed more towards the promotion of the EHEA. Croatia and Germany explicitly also want to increase the attractiveness of their systems in order to get researchers back that once left the country.

It is significant to note that most countries consider English-speaking countries as the main competitors for the recruitment of foreign students. Not a single country sees their competitors only outside the EHEA but most are also competing within the EHEA. It seems obvious that under these circumstances countries rather promote their own system than the EHEA. Only Iceland and Slovenia note that other countries are not seen as competitors because this is not the way the educational system is perceived.

Specific target groups of students are to be found in the areas of technical studies and engineering. Students are also mainly sought for the second and third cycle of studies. A number of countries report that especially rich students are the main targets. For example the Netherlands increased their marketing initiatives significantly and at the same time abolished the state funding for non-EU students.

The link between the attractiveness and the social dimension is made very seldom. Only Norway reports that they clearly advertise that there are no fees in their system and grant a number of full grants to students from poorer countries and regions of the world. However, Europe's history in education and the underlying principles of most educational systems in the EHEA clearly have a link to social issues. This is an almost unique attribute of higher education in Europe. Therefore it does not seem logical to leave it out when promoting the attractiveness of the EHEA.

## **H: Doctoral Studies – the cradle of research?**

Doctoral studies became part of the Bologna process and system in 2003. Since then they received a lot of attention and are already understood as one of the core elements. However, not many developments have happened in this area since. Therefore the analysis is rather aimed at giving a picture about current practices than giving an overview of the changes that occurred.

### **I. Research elements in first and second cycle**

Research is an intrinsic element of higher education that is aimed at maintaining and improving the knowledge base. It is often already part of programmes in the first and second cycle. Only Austria, Germany, Hungary, Macedonia, Romania and Slovakia report that it is not common practice to include research elements in curricula before the third cycle. Usually however, this component is only part of the thesis work and not reflected in other parts of curricula for the first cycle whereas sometimes second cycle programmes already have other research components. In the majority of cases research activities are part of group works. The type of research can be both applied and fundamental research.

Apart from Belgium (fl), Macedonia, Romania and the Scandinavian countries there are also possibilities to finance research activities. However, the sums are usually negelectable in comparison to what is available for PhD students. The main source of financing are public bodies, in few cases also industry offers some financial resources. In Finnish universities it is not uncommon to get research positions before graduation.

### **II. Status of PhD students and teaching activities**

The status of PhD students differs a lot throughout Europe. However, it can be noticed that usually they are neither students nor employees but rather something in between. Only in Bosnia-Herzegovina (federation), Norway and Romania they are considered as employees. Often the status depends on whether they undertake teaching activities. If they do, they often have the status of employees, e.g. in France or Latvia. Sometimes they also have the rights of students and the obligations of employees.

Most PHD students also undertake teaching activities. The extent of it differs from country to country but is on average located at around 25% of the time. In a number of countries they only teach in case they are employed. In a few countries such as Croatia, Germany or Slovakia however, it was reported that difficulties arise, as their time for undertaking research is significantly reduced by the amount of time they have to spend on teaching activities.

As in the majority of countries the main responsibility for research lies with the universities, most PhD students are engaged there. A few countries have independent research institutes that also involve students in their work. It is more often the case that students get involved in joint projects between universities and research institutes, which frequently exist in growing numbers.

### **III. Social conditions**

In many countries tuition fees have to be paid. However, if PhD students get employed the fee is either waved or paid by the HEIs. In the Nordic and Baltic countries they more often receive some grant or other financial support. On average their social situation is either better or similar to the one of students in the first and cycle. In some countries this again depends on whether they are employed or not. In Sweden for example only PhD students who are employed also have social security; if they receive grants the HEIs are responsible for covering costs in case of illness, pregnancy etc. but sometimes refrain from doing so; if they only receive scholarships they have no social security whatsoever and hence their situation is worse than for students in the first and second cycle. In many cases their grants are significantly higher than for other students. It has also been noted that they sometimes are just treated better by the teaching staff. In Norway and Sweden they have so-called duty work, that usually includes teaching activities, but can also include the preparation of coffee and tea.

### **IV. Workload**

A number of countries report that the workload of PhD students is significantly higher than the usual 40 hours (e.g. Hungary, Belgium (fl), France, Austria etc.). This often causes problems and is the main reason why studies take longer than envisaged. When asked whether the use of ECTS for the third cycle would be a way of solving the workload problem, some countries think that it could help in theory. However, if looking at how ECTS is applied in practice, namely not applying the workload concept correctly, it does not seem as the best solution. What seems to be more important is that in general the academic and social support during the studies is increased. Many countries say that it is necessary to grant a prolongation of the financial support mechanisms, as this is the most striking problem. Because of the high workload, PhD students need more time than the time span for which they receive financial support, and then need to work next to their studies and thus require even more time.

### **V. Mobility**

Being mobile as a PhD student is less often the case than within the first and second cycle. This is often due to fewer funding possibilities or exchange schemes. Often PhD students have to take care of everything themselves and depend on the good will of their tutors. It can be noticed in general that mobility is more common in Central-Eastern and Eastern Europe than in the rest. In Iceland a period abroad is obligatory. In Denmark it is also very common to go abroad; this is probably linked to the fact that PhD students can take their salaries with them and might receive scholarships additionally. In Estonia the state covers the costs of stays abroad in case the PhD student agrees to teach in Estonia for a while after their return.



## **VI. Intellectual property rights**

There is no homogenous picture about the regulations regarding the intellectual property rights of research results. Often it depends on the contract or it jointly belongs to the PhD student and the institution or the tutor. If private companies finance the research project, most likely also the intellectual property also belongs to them. In Slovakia the research results belong to the HEIs and the right to get a patent belongs to the team of student and tutor. The problems that are most frequently mentioned in connection to intellectual property rights are connected to the publication. If a company has financed the research and is unhappy about the outcomes, they are very reluctant with the publication. If it belongs to the tutor they often want to wait until a patent has been given before they publish the results. As often the graduation requires the publication this is causing severe problems for students.

## **VII. Conclusion**

As written in the beginning, this analysis should not be seen as an analysis of the developments in the area of doctoral studies as part of the Bologna process. However, it shows where the main challenges are that should be tackled so that the third cycle becomes a successful part of the EHEA. These main challenges are:

- Increase research possibilities in the first and second cycle not only as part of the thesis
- Grant rights of employees in relation to social security
- Adapt the financial support to the actual duration of the studies
- Increase mobility options and their funding
- Tackle problems associated with intellectual property rights

## **I: The European dimension – a still unknown and endemic creature**

The creation and fostering of the European dimension of higher education was present as an action line of the Bologna process since the Bologna declaration (mostly mentioned only in connection with the establishment of joint degrees), but the term European dimension is still very differently understood and interpreted. According to the answers of the student unions to this part of ESIB's Bologna Analysis it is clear to notice that in different countries stakeholders in general have no consensus on the issue and that people sometimes have even quite opposing views on how higher education should become more European.

For example in the Netherlands this term is understood mostly as "attracting more foreign fee paying students and changing the language of as many courses as possible from Dutch into English", in Latvia on the other hand as "unification of learning outcomes, introduction of the diploma supplement " etc. These two cases exemplify the variety of understandings of the term European dimension. In general it can be concluded that in the majority of countries the European dimension of higher education and the Bologna process are understood as synonyms. In these countries changing educational structures, improving recognition and increasing mobility are understood as the way to make higher education European. Only in some countries (Finland, Iceland, Estonia and Denmark for example) the realisation of the European dimension of higher education is understood as fostering international cooperations, especially in curricula development and the creation of joint degrees programmes and/or increasing the European component in some study programmes.

The measures taken in different countries in order to promote the European dimension are rare. If they exist, they vary a lot according to the various understandings of this action line throughout Europe. Increasing the number of programmes/courses taught in English (the Netherlands, Belgium (fl), Norway, Estonia, Denmark, Switzerland) is one of the most frequent measures taken to promote the European dimension. An orientation of higher education towards the need of the new labour market is the predominant measure in the new member countries of the EU. In these countries the programmes leading towards degrees in some regulated professions changed a lot because of the EU directives on professional recognition and the new labour market.

## **I. Foreign language courses as part of curricula**

Knowledge of as many foreign languages as possible and good intercultural communication skills are very often seen as one of the key prerequisites for the creation of a functional EHEA and the free movement of people in Europe. To achieve these goals many states and HEIs introduced foreign languages as an optional or compulsory part of curricula.

But the picture regarding this issue also differs a lot across the EHEA. Compulsory foreign language courses (largely only English) as an integral part of all or the majority of curricula are introduced in Finland, Lithuania, Poland, Italy, France (obligatory according to the law but not really fully implemented) and almost all South-eastern European countries. On the other hand in Malta, Sweden, Norway, Germany, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Belgium (fl) and Croatia foreign languages courses are not included in the curricula of the majority of programmes.

Countries, which incorporate foreign language courses in curricula, started this practice often long before the Bologna process (beginning of 1990s) and usually these courses are mainly oriented towards pure language learning without a parallel orientation also towards acquiring of intercultural communication skills what surely is a problem that needs to be tackled in Europe. If policy makers want higher education to have a European dimension, they must in the future realise that the knowledge of one language should not be seen any more as the only prerequisite for successful communications in an intercultural environment.

## II. Joint<sup>16</sup> and double<sup>17</sup> degrees

The creation of joint and double degrees and intensive cooperation of HEIs are the main actions that are discussed and fostered in connection with the European dimension. After many legislative and practical problems a certain number of joint and double degrees is created across Europe especially after the start of the Erasmus Mundus programme, but also rather double than joint degrees. Still they do not exist because of various reasons (legislative, political, financial or practical problems) in almost none of the Nordic countries (with some exceptions in Finland and Norway), Latvia and Estonia and almost all Southeast European countries (with the exception of Slovenia and Romania) as well as in some Central European countries (Poland, Slovakia, etc.). The currently existing double and joint degree programmes in Europe are mainly found in the Benelux countries, Germany, Switzerland, Austria, Italy, Malta, Lithuania, Hungary, and Slovenia etc. However, also in these countries they are a relatively rare practice and sometimes they are offered although legislation actually is not allowing it. In France and the polytechnic sector in Finland there are only some double degree programmes. In most cases these programmes include some period of student mobility as a compulsory part of the programme. Mobility within joint and double degree programmes does not exist or is not a compulsory part of these programmes in Hungary, Lithuania, Slovenia, and Romania and in Switzerland.

In 80% of the answers to the survey from the countries that have experiences with these kinds of programmes, it is noted that these programme are not equally accessible for students compared to other programmes. The main obstacles for access to these programmes are:

1. **Financial obstacles;** costs for these programmes are often significantly higher of the costs related to mobility within the programme, higher tuition fees than usual, etc.
2. **Selection obstacles;** these programmes are in most cases extremely elitist, open usually for a small number of students and in some cases all partner institutions coordinating the programme do separate and multiple selections
3. **Limited scope of study fields;** these programmes are available mostly as second cycle programmes in a limited number of study fields

## III. Conclusion

At the mid term of the Bologna process one of its initial action lines, the promotion of the European dimension of higher education, still remains not properly tackled nor understood to its full extent and potential in the majority of countries. The problems of and with joint degrees are very often the only issue discussed, neglecting the fact that the European dimension of higher education implies more than just the creation of joint degrees, which are in reality hardly accessible for the majority of students in Europe. Issues such as a European orientation of each curriculum (not only of curricula leading towards joint degrees), an orientation of foreign language courses towards obtaining intercultural communication skills or a European labour market perspective represent only the beginning of a long list of future challenges for the Bologna process and HE in Europe.

## **J: Lifelong learning – for whom?**

### **I. General introduction**

In Prague 2001 ministers responsible for higher education stressed that: “Lifelong learning is an essential element of the European Higher Education Area” and indeed the situation in Europe shows that in most of countries covered by this survey there is a noticeable increase of attention for this field. At the same time it is also noticeable that despite of bigger interests concrete actions of the governments are often missing.

Traditionally very open and relatively developed systems for lifelong learning (LLL) can be found in the Nordic countries. Especially since 2001 the development of these systems got a new push and for instance in Iceland LLL opportunities improved significantly in the recent years. Also in some other countries there has been more political attention in recent years and in most cases actions regarding LLL have been taken, e.g. Germany, Luxembourg, France, Slovakia, Slovenia, Bulgaria, Lithuania Belgium etc.

In some countries (Malta, Austria, the Netherlands, Serbia, Macedonia) some kind of system for LLL existed long before Bologna, but in these countries the Bologna Process did hardly bring any changes in this field. The worst situation regarding this issue seems to be in Hungary, Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina where any kind of the system of/for LLL is still missing.

LLL is the type of learning that in the past was mostly done at some specialised institutions such as adult learners centres and institutes, evening schools, special secondary education programmes, “ people schools”, etc. These institutions are still the main provider of LLL opportunities, but in recent years private companies started to develop their own mechanisms and trainings in order to keep the knowledge of their employees up to date. Of course there is an increasing number of HEIs dealing with LLL what is also the result of the Bologna Process.

The HEIs are a relatively new actor in the sector of LLL and their role in this field was the main focus of the ESIB Bologna Survey alongside with the situation of students attending LLL courses / programmes at HEIs.

## **II. LLL and HEIs**

If HEIs offer possibilities for LLL the courses are organised in two main ways, as specially designed highly charged courses or as usual higher education courses that are open and available to everybody regardless of their age. LLL in Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Poland, France, Italy and Lithuania is organised in the first way and in these countries LLL is predominantly organised through specially designed costly courses and it is usually interpreted as a pure service in order to make more profit.

On the other hand in the Netherlands, Malta, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Belgium (fl), Slovakia and Slovenia both ways of the organisation of LLL at HEIs is existing, while in Sweden, Romania and Bulgaria LLL is mostly offered as usual higher education programmes / courses which are open to everyone. In many countries, in which HEIs are offering LLL possibilities these courses are much more expensive than usual courses. However it is mainly the case in countries where LLL is predominantly organised in the first way. In these cases the courses are hardly affordable for anyone except for the learners who are financed by the companies they work for.

## **III. Rights of LLL students**

In generally the learners attending LLL courses at HEI do not have the same rights as regular students mainly because in many countries the legal status of student is limited to a certain age and usually people who are part time students and working next to their studies (almost all LLL learners) do not have access to any student benefits such as accommodation, travel discounts, grants and loan system, etc. This situation is typical in most countries apart from the Nordics. Nordic countries can again serve as a more positive example because in general their legislation distinguishes only full and part time students regardless of age. So even if people who are beyond the traditional students' age decide to study full time, they can access almost all student social support systems and student benefits. The relatively low levels of public financial support, which in general is the same for everyone, as well as the shortcomings of the social security system are the biggest obstacles for older students because they tend to have different needs than younger students.

#### **IV. Conclusion**

The direction of the process of the development of LLL in certain countries can be considered as false because it goes against the major principle of LLL. LLL needs to have inclusiveness as its main characteristic, but currently LLL tends to be a very expensive prestige kind of education accessible only to a limited number of people. Access of older students and learners to LLL is still the key issue because these students are still coping with a lot of problems as life long learners such as:

- High costs and exclusivity of the LLL courses
- No social and student benefits because they are age-tied or not accessible for students who work
- Incompatibility of the grants and loans systems with the needs of older students who often have families, higher living costs etc.
- Problems in the bad organisation of the courses so that students cannot work and attend courses in the same time
- Availability of the adequate courses in the region
- Programmes which are based on up-to-date courses for which the learners need computer skills and foreign language skills they often do not have
- The mentality at the institutional level which is not open for a different profile of students

In future special attention and action of decision-makers must be put on widening access to LLL as well as to the structural solutions which will make life and studying of students beyond the "traditional student age" easier. The future of LLL must be its democratisations and openness and not the profit gaining exclusiveness of expensive LLL courses ordered by companies and designed by HEI.

## Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> Definitions of that what is academic and what is labour market oriented are really diverse in the different national contexts.

<sup>2</sup> The minimum condition for entering higher education is usually to have finished any or a specific type secondary education. There are also some examples of good practice in Sweden and Norway etc. where people can enter higher education even without the secondary education certificate in case they have gained the necessary competences through working experience.

<sup>3</sup> In some countries tuition fees formally do not exist but instead there are fees with other names such as registration fee, participation fee etc.

<sup>4</sup> For some programmes

<sup>5</sup> Polytechnics include a wide range of non-university HEIs and just for the sake of this survey the term polytechnics is used.

<sup>6</sup> The professional associations in many countries do not accept especially first cycle degrees in regulated professions.

<sup>7</sup> Norway is only regarded as belonging to this category as far as university students are concerned. Polytechnic students would fall under category 3 (Red).

<sup>8</sup> Finland is only regarded as belonging to this category as far as university students are concerned. Polytechnic students would fall under category 3 (Red).

<sup>9</sup> Belgium is only regarded as belonging to this category as far as university students are concerned. Polytechnic students would fall under category 2 (Yellow)

<sup>10</sup> According to the situation at the moment (only 6% of all students are enrolled in such kind of courses), but restrictions and significant obstacles are being planned so that Germany should not be regarded as a country that does not harshly restrict access to higher cycles as for the moment.

<sup>11</sup> According to the situation and legislative at the moment, although the real reform of the degrees has not fully started yet.

<sup>12</sup> A new law is under discussion in the Polish Parliament at the time of writing. Poland would fit in Category 3 (red) if the law was voted in the current state of the text and implemented accordingly.

<sup>13</sup> Slovenia. According to the recently adopted Higher Education Law which is now in the phase of implementation Slovenia would be in the category Yellow (2)

<sup>14</sup> The numbers provided here are notwithstanding the students that work during summer months, holidays, etc.

<sup>15</sup> [http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/programmes/socrates/ects/guide\\_en.pdf](http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/programmes/socrates/ects/guide_en.pdf)

<sup>16</sup> A joint degree is **one** degree given by two or more higher education institutions together, for one study programme jointly developed and implemented by all participating higher education institutions

<sup>17</sup> A double degree is **two** or more degrees given by two or more higher education institutions for the same study programme, in one way or another separately developed by and implemented in every participating higher education institution.





**ESIB – The National Unions of Students in Europe** was founded in 1982 to promote the educational, economic, cultural, social and political interests of students in Europe. ESIB, through its 50 members from 37 countries, currently represents more than 10 million students in Europe.