



Beyond the Bologna Process: Creating and connecting national, regional and global higher education areas

Statement of the Third Bologna Policy Forum

Bucharest, April 27th, 2012

We, the Ministers responsible for Higher Education and heads of delegation of the authorities, institutions and organisations present at the Third Bologna Policy Forum, reaffirm the aims of increased cooperation and policy dialogue between our countries and different higher education areas and acknowledge the relevance of this event in achieving them.

International cooperation in the field of higher education has a vital role to play in developing and maintaining cohesive, sustainable and open societies. This includes a strong commitment to higher education as a key contributor to the development of democracy, human rights protection and sustainable growth necessary for global recovery from the economic crisis.

The third edition of the Bologna Policy Forum focused on creating and connecting national, regional and global higher education spaces, while deepening the discussions on the following four topics reflecting on future approaches for dialogue in this context.

Public responsibility for and of higher education within national and regional context. This refers, *inter alia*, to providing appropriate investment and public funding to sustain equitable higher education, as well as to setting in place the regulatory framework and policy environment for autonomous higher education institutions to fulfil their diverse missions.

We acknowledge the importance of active participation of the academic community – students, faculty, staff and institutional leadership - in the governance and development of higher education responsive to societal change and economic needs. Similarly, we stress the importance of creating open and flexible pathways so that citizens with varied educational and social backgrounds can access and successfully complete higher education.

Global academic mobility: Incentives and barriers, balances and imbalances. Academic mobility has become increasingly meaningful in providing global perspectives, fostering active citizenship and equipping graduates with the right mix of knowledge, skills and competences which enable them to better respond to national, regional and global challenges.

We continue to strive for open and transparent education systems and better balanced mobility within and between our higher education areas and systems. We want to intensify the academic exchange of ideas and people in our regions, and to create innovative networks.

In this context, we aim to continue working towards reducing the diverse obstacles for mobility between our education areas, such as the lack of transparency of qualifications, financial barriers for students, problems with academic and professional recognition, as well as administrative hurdles.

In the framework of Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM), we acknowledge the work aimed at exploring how the regional recognition conventions in Europe (“Council of Europe/ UNESCO Lisbon Convention”)¹ and Asia and the Pacific (“Tokyo Convention”)² may be used to further recognition between the two regions.

We will further strive for the implementation of the UNESCO/ OECD Guidelines for Quality Provision in Cross-Border Higher Education³ and the meaningful role they give to all actors in higher education for quality assurance.

¹ [Council](#) of Europe, UNESCO (1997): The Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region (Lisbon Recognition Convention)

² UNESCO (2011): Regional Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education (Tokyo Convention)

³ [UNESCO](#). OECD (2005): Guidelines for Quality Provision in Cross-Border Higher Education”

We will continue to support, fund and promote academic mobility, which helps the sustainable development of our societies. We will encourage higher education institutions to further develop joint programmes and joint degrees. Where appropriate, higher education institutions are also encouraged to make the best use of mobility and cooperation opportunities provided by the European Union programmes.

Global and regional approaches to quality enhancement of higher education. In the current international context, we particularly underline the importance of quality assurance. We consider it both a tool to strengthen the capacity of higher education institutions to enhance the quality of provision and an instrument to promote transparency and trust.

We support the conclusion of the international conference on quality assurance co-organised by the Flemish Government and the European Commission in December 2011. Despite the fact that different regions and countries have developed different approaches to quality assurance, we have similar challenges and interests. We can therefore benefit by working towards solutions which, although they have to be adapted to our own contexts, can share a common basis.

We aim to further develop robust and functional quality assurance systems and to promote cooperation between them. We also stress the important role of qualification frameworks and quality assurance in facilitating the recognition of qualifications and international mobility.

The contribution of HE reforms to enhancing graduate employability. One of the essential missions of higher education systems is to foster long term employability of graduates. Increasing the fair recognition of studies and qualifications, based on the various existing international conventions, will support a better link between higher education and the global economy. We stress the importance of the learning outcomes approach as a common base for mainstreaming lifelong learning, implementing the recognition and validation of prior learning and increasing the readability of qualifications.

Different regions of the world can learn from each other's experience of enhancing employability of graduates by, inter alia, exchanging the results of data collection in the field of employability and by sharing examples of good practice.

Way forward

The Bologna Policy Forum concept should be further enriched and taken forward, in order to maximise its potential for policy dialogue. In this sense, an evaluation of the Bologna Policy Forum will be organised immediately after the event with all participant delegations. Our aim is to enhance the common understanding of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) goals and principles, as well as to encourage active exchanges between the EHEA and other parts of the world, and thus underpin and complement the on-going internationalisation initiatives and efforts at institutional and national levels.

Regional exchanges and peer learning should strengthen the political commitments agreed at the Bologna Policy Fora, while also involving practitioners and representatives of the academic communities in a long term policy exchange. We agree that this policy cooperation should focus on specific topics and that it may in particular involve countries or regions which have expressed a particular interest in the topic at hand. We also reiterate our support for global student and academic staff dialogue.

We therefore ask the Bologna Follow Up Group, in partnership with the national contact persons identified by all countries participating in the Policy Forum, to explore this possibility further. The national contact persons will act as liaisons between our countries and bring our contribution to the follow-up of the Bologna Policy Forum.

To this aim, we strongly support and encourage events to take place in the frame of the policy dialogue for further cooperation initiated by the Bologna Policy Fora⁴.

The next Bologna Policy Forum will be convened in 2015 in Armenia.

⁴ A tentative and non-exhaustive list of these events is enclosed as Annex 1.

Annex 1

List of events to take place in the frame of the Bologna Policy Forum dialogue

2012 – Policy dialogue between the European Union and the Southern Mediterranean region on higher education, organised by the European Commission (dates TBC)

24-25 May, 2012: The Value of the PhD: Building Capacity and Refining Purpose, 3rd International CODOC Project workshop organized by the European University Association (EUA) and the Inter-American Organisation for Higher Education (OUI), University of Sao Paulo, Brazil

21-22 June, 2012: Europe-Africa Quality Connect: A bi-regional approach to Strengthening University Capacity for Change: Dissemination Conference organized by the European University Association (EUA) and the Association of African Universities (AAU), Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

4-7 July, 2012: Transatlantic Dialogue: Leading the Globally Engaged Institution – New Directions, choice and Dilemmas, organized by EUA, the American Council for Education (ACE) and the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (AUCC), Salzburg, Austria.

Autumn 2012: Seminar for Bologna Policy Forum national contact points, organised by the European Commission

Autumn 2012/ Spring 2013 – International conference on the ‘Interaction between HE researchers and policy makers in the field of trust, recognition and quality assurance’, organised by the Flemish Community of Belgium

17-21 September 2012: Global Student Leaders Summit, hosted in partnership by the European Students’ Union (ESU) and National Union of Students in the UK, London (TBC)

24-25 September, 2012: Final Dissemination Conference: CODOC- Cooperation on Doctoral Education between Latin America, Southern Africa, Asia and Europe, organized by the European University Association, the ASEAN University Network, the Southern African Regional University Association, the Inter-American Organisation for Higher Education and Karolinska Institute, Stockholm, Sweden.

11-12 October 2012: 4th ASEM Secretariat Seminar on Quality Assurance in Higher education in Paris (Sèvres) organised by the French ministry for Higher education and Research in collaboration with the ASEM.

12-14 November, 2012: Innovative Strategies for Higher Education in Latin America and Europe: International Collaboration and Regional Development, First bi-regional University Association Conference of the Alfa-Puentes project, hosted in partnership with the European University Association, the Association of Universities ‘Grupo Montevideo’ and 22 national and regional university association in Latin America and Europe, Sao Paulo, Brazil.

14 -15 March 2013, AHELO Project Results Conference, Utrecht, the Netherlands.