

Athens seminar (Athens, 24-26 June 2006)
Putting European Higher Education Area on the Map:
Developing Strategies for Attractiveness

From Pavel Zgaga's Report from this seminar;
 Athens, 26 June 2006

Conclusions and Recommendations of the Seminar

On bases of reach plenary discussions and reports from working groups (these reports include an even more extended list of proposals and recommendations), the following conclusions and recommendations were synthesized:

A) The possible contents of the *external dimension strategy* (in 7 points), drafted by the Working Group on the External Dimension of the Bologna Process and presented to participants of the Seminar, is seen as a very good basis for elaboration of "the external strategy for the EHEA".

B) Further on, BFUG and the Working Group on the External Dimension of the Bologna Process are asked to consider the following recommendations and to include them into working documents for the London ministerial conference in 2007:

1. *At the competitiveness and attractiveness horizon*, actions should be taken to improve the performance of European higher education. Competitiveness in higher education aims at developing diverse, quality, efficient and well performing universities; only such universities can really attract European and international students. Competition should not be necessarily seen in opposition to cooperation: a firm academic cooperation, e.g. through quality networks and projects that strengthen critical mass of higher education institutions, can importantly increase the competitiveness of European higher education as a whole. On the other side, competition in a global context should be also seen as an incentive to strengthen institutional cooperation further.

Concrete measures should be taken to attract international students as for example to organise European higher education fairs and media campaigns on one side as well as to create European study centres and centres of excellence on the other. Good practice from some countries suggests that extra budget provided for international students' scholarships as well as for accommodation of international students and researchers could slightly improve the existing situation. On the systemic side, a European standard of acceptance for international students should be developed and a code of good conduct for dealing with visa problems. Europe also needs to strengthen its alumni-networks worldwide. Last but not least, a network of ambassadors of European higher education or »Europe promoters« in major third countries could be established.

2. *At the partnership and cooperation horizon*, different aspects and approaches – also the regional ones – have to be developed and supported because Europe is not a homogenous whole and it can't be understood as such in other world regions. Approaches with the developed world have to differ from approaches to the developing countries. Cooperation with the developing world regions should be based on partnership and solidarity and be considered in particular with the goal of sustainability.

European universities have a long tradition of partnership and cooperation with universities in other parts of the world; today, the European Commission's programmes (e.g. Erasmus Mundus, Jean Monnet etc.) along the existing national schemes enable universities to open new pages in the history of their international cooperation. Existing networks should be used to connect European Higher education Area and higher education areas in other parts of the world. The creation of consortia of universities and higher education stakeholder organizations in the EHEA and third countries for systematic and integrated cooperation activity would be an important improvement of existing practices. Activity to take place inside such consortia could be the joint delivery of graduate-level study programmes with integrated mobility phases of study in the other continent (joint and double degrees, etc.), measures aiming at institutional development and capacity building, human resource development, and curriculum development. Joint research activities should be an integral part of this agenda. Last but not least: the complex area of mutual recognition of higher education qualifications within a global context should be also addressed within this horizon.

3. *At the dialogue horizon*, countries of the Bologna Process can share their practice and experiences with other regions of the world which encounter similar challenges and tendencies in the development of higher education systems. Interested countries and/or organizations from abroad should have possibility to join Bologna events and to use European good practices as well as to share their comments as well as their own good practices in a common global forum. Enhanced cooperation with other world regions can be a new stimulus for a greater integration.

Wherever possible, the policy dialogue should be based on existing fora, such as the EU-LAC Follow-up Committee or the EU-China Policy Dialogue. Policies should be tailor-made for each region and take due account of relevant EU policy (for example the EU Neighbourhood Policy). In addition, new concrete measures can be taken to open further possibilities, e.g. to create a "Bologna Visitor Programme" (to fund participation in selected Bologna-related conferences and seminars in Europe) or a higher education policy forum, involving representatives of European and third-country governments and higher education stakeholders; etc.

4. Last but not least, *at the information horizon*, the establishment of a comprehensive EHEA portal is unanimously recommended, under certain rules and conditions which should be carefully considered and developed. The content should be general and easy to understand. Different target groups (students, academics, policy makers, other higher education stakeholders) should be addressed in different ways. Working Group on the External Dimension could make a first investigation on this issue. Greece, through the Minister of Education, has already expressed its willingness to host such a portal. In addition, a concise description of the Bologna Process for other parts of the world is needed (prepared by the BFUG) as well as a set of Bologna information points could be established worldwide.

Oslo seminar (Oslo, 28-29 September 2006)

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