

The main objectives of the Bologna Process

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Per Nyborg participated in the 1999 Bologna Ministerial Conference as a university delegate and afterwards joined the Bologna Follow-up Group as a Council of Europe representative. He was Head of the Bologna Secretariat from Berlin (2003) until his retirement after Bergen (2005).

After his retirement, Per Nyborg has followed the Bologna Process at a distance. However, he has on several occasions commented on developments in his home country, Norway. In this presentation, he reminds us that Bologna was a joint initiative by ministers and university leaders and he goes through the succession of communiqués from the ministerial conferences from Prague (2001) to Yerevan (2015) to see what came out of the original 1999 Bologna objectives.

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1. Prelude

The Bologna Process did not come out of the blue. Themes related to institutional autonomy, academic freedom, equal opportunities for students and international cooperation in higher education had been discussed at European conferences of university leaders, ministers of education and administrators since the mid-1950s.¹ Some examples are referred to below:

The 1955 Cambridge conference of university rectors adopted recommendations in fields still relevant fifty years later:

- In all countries universities should have a greater degree of autonomy.
- The freedom of thought of university staffs must be safeguarded and no governmental supervision should be exercised in this sphere.
- Any system for selection of students must always avoid discrimination on grounds of race, religion or political creed.
- In all countries financial assistance should be made available to students whose capacities are sufficient to pursue their studies with diligence and success.
- Universities should adapt their teaching to comply with the increasing needs of the community.
- Students should be encouraged to pursue part of their studies at universities abroad.
- International exchanges between staffs of universities should be encouraged and Governments should be requested to ensure that the necessary funds are available.

The rectors' conferences developed into organisations such as *CRE- European Association of Universities* and *Confederation of EU Rectors' Conferences*. At the 1988 conference celebrating the 900 anniversary of the University of Bologna, university rectors signed the *Magna Charta Universitatum*,² declaring the fundamental principles of university life and governance, such as academic freedom and institutional autonomy. In 2001 the two organisations merged to form the *European University Association, EUA*.³

A first European Conference of Ministers of Education was organised in 1959, this leading to a *Standing Conference of European Ministers of Education*. In their sessions, ministers discussed many topics related to universities and to university problems, such as

- planning and investment in education;
- admission to universities;
- the equivalence of degrees;
- European science policy.

Each conference resulted in a number of resolutions. In a 1964 resolution, the ministers considered that all young people with abilities and school-leaving qualifications should have the possibility of receiving higher education, and that systems of higher education should be progressively expanded to meet the ever-increasing need. Those with the necessary ability should not be deprived of the chance of receiving higher education through lack of funds. Forty years later, we would call this *the social dimension of higher education*.

The Ministers of Education continued to meet under the auspices of the Council of Europe, the 25th session was held in 2016. By then, the Bologna Ministerial Conferences had taken over for discussions on higher education.

¹ See for instance P.Nyborg (2015), http://www.uhr.no/documents/uhr_50_years_of_university_co_operation.pdf

² <http://www.magna-charta.org/magna-charta-universitatum>

³ P.Nyborg (2014), *The roots of the European University Association*, <http://www.eua.be/About.aspx>

The Council of Europe also brought university leaders and top administrators from member countries together in its *Committee for Higher Education and Research*.⁴ The first Council of Europe conventions on the recognition of exams and degrees were ratified in the 1950s. A new Council of Europe / UNESCO Recognition Convention was finalised in Lisbon in 1997:

Each country shall recognise qualifications – whether for access to higher education, for periods of study or for higher education degrees – as similar to the corresponding qualifications in its own system unless it can show that there are substantial differences between its own qualifications and the qualifications for which recognition is sought.⁵

After the introduction of the *Framework Programme for Research and Technology Development* in 1984 and the *ERASMUS* mobility program for higher education in 1987, the EC Commission increasingly influenced the European cooperation in research and higher education. The 1993 *Maastricht treaty* fully included higher education in EC policies. However, internal EC/EU activities will not be covered by this survey.

1.1 The 1998 Sorbonne Conference

At the 800th anniversary of the University of Paris at the Sorbonne in 1998, ministers responsible for higher education in France, Germany, Italy and the United Kingdom signed a *joint declaration on harmonisation of the architecture of the European higher education system*.⁶ Leading ministers both at the previous conference in Lisbon and this one in Paris were university professors in their civil life. They could see the challenges from two sides:

We owe our students, and our society at large, a higher education system in which they are given the best opportunities to seek and find their own area of excellence. An open European area for higher learning carries a wealth of positive perspectives. A system, in which two main cycles, undergraduate and graduate, should be recognised for international comparison and equivalence, seems to emerge.

At both undergraduate and graduate level, students would be encouraged to spend at least one semester in universities outside their own country. More teaching and research staff should be working in European countries other than their own. A convention, recognizing higher education qualifications within Europe, was agreed on last year in Lisbon. Standing by these conclusions, one can build on them and go further.

Progressive harmonization of the overall framework of our degrees and cycles can be achieved through strengthening of already existing experience, joint diplomas, pilot initiatives, and dialogue with all concerned.

The four ministers present at Sorbonne saw the need for a wider action:

We call on other Member States of the Union and other European countries to join us in this objective and on all European Universities to consolidate Europe's standing in the world. through continuously improved and updated education for its citizens.

⁴ See reference 1

⁵ For the full text, see <http://conventions.coe.int> ; ETS165

⁶ <https://www.ehea.info/cid100203/sorbonne-declaration-1998.html>

1.2 The 1999 Bologna Conference

To realise the ideas from Sorbonne and to invite a wider group of countries and university organisations to join the process, the Italian Minister of Education proposed a follow-up conference to be held in Bologna in June 1999. Representatives of CRE and the Confederation were asked to participate in the steering group for the conference on behalf of the European universities. The idea was that the first day should be an “academic day”; the second day would have a separate session for the ministers to finalise their declaration from the conference and a plenary session to conclude. Ministerial delegations from 29 European countries participated in the Bologna Conference, together with representatives from the national university rectors’ conferences. The university sector was broadly represented in Bologna: of a total of 250 participants, some 150 came from the higher education sector. In Bologna, ministers and rectors - ministries and universities - joined forces.

The footprints of university representatives in the Bologna Declaration⁷ can easily be seen:

European higher education institutions, for their part, have accepted the challenge and taken up a main role in constructing the European area of higher education, also in the wake of the fundamental principles laid down in the Bologna Magna Charta Universitatum of 1988. This is of the highest importance, given that Universities' independence and autonomy ensure that higher education and research systems continuously adapt to changing needs, society's demands and advances in scientific knowledge.

However, there was also an obligation for the universities:

Ministers expected Universities to respond promptly and positively and to contribute actively to the success of the endeavour.

It was decided to meet again within two years in order to assess the progress achieved and the new steps to be taken. This started a process, later known as the Bologna Process. When a follow-up group was established by the ministers, the European university organizations were invited to participate. At their first chance, also the students found their way into the follow-up group. The Ministerial Declaration from the Bologna Conference and the Communiqués from the Ministerial Conferences that followed, are the formal documents steering the Bologna Process. However, without the active participation and backing from university representatives and students as partners, the impacts of the process would not have been the same.

2 The main objectives of the Bologna Process

The Bologna Declaration formulated six objectives, considered by the ministers and university representatives present *to be of primary relevance in order to establish the European area of higher education and to promote the European system of higher education world-wide:*

Adoption of a system of easily readable and comparable degrees, also through the implementation of the Diploma Supplement, in order to promote European citizens employability and the international competitiveness of the European higher education system.

⁷ <http://www.ehea.info/pid34363/ministerial-declarations-and-communiqués.html>

Adoption of a system essentially based on two main cycles, undergraduate and graduate. Access to the second cycle shall require successful completion of first cycle studies, lasting a minimum of three years. The degree awarded after the first cycle shall also be relevant to the European labour market as an appropriate level of qualification. The second cycle should lead to the master and/or doctorate degree as in many European countries.

Establishment of a system of credits - such as in the ECTS system - as a proper means of promoting the most widespread student mobility. Credits could also be acquired in non-higher education contexts, including lifelong learning, provided they are recognised by receiving universities concerned.

Promotion of mobility by overcoming obstacles to the effective exercise of free movement with particular attention to:

- for students, access to study and training opportunities and to related services
- for teachers, researchers and administrative staff, recognition and valorisation of periods spent in a European context researching, teaching and training, without prejudicing their statutory rights.

Promotion of European cooperation in quality assurance with a view to developing comparable criteria and methodologies

Promotion of the necessary European dimensions in higher education, particularly with regards to curricular development, inter-institutional co-operation, mobility schemes and integrated programmes of study, training and research.

These six objectives were clearly not independent. Furthermore, the objective of *recognition* was not explicit in the Bologna Declaration. A more operational way to formulate the main objectives from Bologna may be:

- Adoption of a common degree system;
- Recognition of qualifications;
- Promotion of student and staff mobility;
- Promotion of European cooperation in quality assurance;
- Promotion of European dimensions of higher education.

Promotion of institutional independence and autonomy – a central theme in the Bologna Declaration – would also be an object for follow-up.

The hope was that in ten years' time, the European Area of Higher Education (EAHE) should be a reality. However, over the years to come, the scope of the process was widening: A third main cycle and also short cycle qualifications were included in the degree system. Additional objective were added, such as:

- The social dimension of higher education;
- Employability;
- EHEA in a global context.

The ten year process was expanded to twenty years. As this is being written, the next ministerial conference is being planned for May 2018 in Paris – twenty years after the 1988 Sorbonne meeting. How far have we come since Bologna (1999)?

Much material related to the Bologna Process is available: The Follow-up Group, its secretariat and a number of working groups have produced a large number of documents in

preparation for the ministerial meetings. The European University Association (EUA) and the European Student Organisation (ESO) have contributed numerous documents in connection with Bologna thematic conferences and ministerial meetings. A large number of articles and books have been written about the Bologna Process; its development, consequences for national developments in participating countries and for international cooperation in higher education. This survey has a restricted scope; it will focus on the development of the main themes from the 1999 Bologna Conference through the communiqués⁸ of the eight ministerial meetings driving the Bologna Process towards the 2018 Paris Conference and a possibly final one in 2020: Prague (2001), Berlin (2003), Bergen (2005), London (2007), Leuven and Louvain-la-Neuve (2009), Budapest and Vienna (2010), Bucharest (2012), Yerevan (2015).

3 Universities, students and institutional governance

The 1998 Sorbonne Declaration stressed the universities' central role in developing European cultural dimensions. In their 1999 Bologna Declaration, Ministers acknowledged that European higher education institutions, for their part, had accepted the challenge and taken up a main role in constructing the European area of higher education.

The full text from Bologna on university participation was taken into the Prague Communiqué (2001), thus underlining the importance of universities' independence and autonomy. Ministers appreciated the active involvement of the European University Association (EUA) and the National Unions of Students in Europe (ESIB) in the Bologna process. The involvement of universities and of students as competent, active and constructive partners is needed and welcomed. Ministers expressed their appreciation of the contributions toward developing study programmes combining academic quality with relevance to lasting employability and called for a continued proactive role of higher education institutions.

In Prague Ministers affirmed that students should participate in and influence the organisation and content of education at universities and other higher education institutions. Ministers also reaffirmed the need, recalled by students, to take account of the social dimension in the Bologna process.

In Berlin (2003), Ministers welcomed the commitment of higher education institutions and students to the Bologna Process and recognised that it is ultimately the active participation of all partners in the process that will ensure its long-term success.

Aware of the contribution strong institutions can make to economic and societal development, Ministers accepted that institutions need to be empowered to take decisions on their internal organisation and administration. Ministers further called upon institutions to ensure that the reforms become fully integrated into core institutional functions and processes.

Ministers noted the constructive participation of student organisations in the Bologna Process and underlined the necessity to include the students continuously and at an early stage in further activities. Students are also full partners in higher education governance. Ministers noted that national legal measures for ensuring student participation were largely in place throughout the European Higher Education Area.

In Bergen (2005), Ministers underlined once more the central role of higher education institutions, their staff and students as partners in the Bologna Process.

⁸ <http://www.ehea.info/pid34363/ministerial-declarations-and-communicues.html>

Ministers would ensure that higher education institutions enjoy the necessary autonomy to implement the agreed reforms, and they recognised the need for sustainable funding of institutions.

In London (2007), Ministers recognised the important influence higher education institutions exert on developing our societies, based on their traditions as centres of learning, research, creativity and knowledge transfer as well as their key role in defining and transmitting the values on which our societies are built. The institutions must have the necessary resources to continue to fulfil their full range of purposes. Those purposes include: preparing students for life as active citizens in a democratic society; preparing students for their future careers and enabling their personal development; creating and maintaining a broad, advanced knowledge base; and stimulating research and innovation. Ministers underlined the importance of strong institutions, which are diverse, adequately funded, autonomous and accountable.

In Budapest and Vienna (2010), Ministers recommitted to academic freedom as well as autonomy and accountability of higher education institutions as principles of the European Higher Education Area and underlined the role the higher education institutions play in fostering peaceful democratic societies and strengthening social cohesion.

Ministers acknowledged the key role of the academic community - institutional leaders, teachers, researchers, administrative staff and students - in making the EHEA a reality, providing the learners with the opportunity to acquire knowledge, skills and competences furthering their careers and lives as democratic citizens as well as their personal development. They recognised that a more supportive environment for the staff to fulfil their tasks is needed. Ministers committed themselves to working towards a more effective inclusion of higher education staff and students in the implementation and further development of the EHEA. They fully supported staff and student participation in decision-making structures at European, national and institutional levels.

In Bucharest (2012), Ministers pointed out that strong and accountable higher education systems provide the foundations for thriving knowledge societies. With this in mind, Ministers committed to securing the highest possible level of public funding for higher education and drawing on other appropriate sources, as an investment in our future.

In Yerevan (2015) Ministers promised to support and protect students and staff in exercising their right to academic freedom and ensure their representation as full partners in the governance of autonomous higher education institutions. Ministers would support higher education institutions in enhancing their efforts to promote intercultural understanding, critical thinking, political and religious tolerance, gender equality, and democratic and civic values, in order to strengthen European and global citizenship and lay the foundations for inclusive societies.

4 Adoption of a common degree system

4.1 Two main cycles

At Sorbonne (1998), Ministers observed that a degree system, with two main cycles, undergraduate and graduate, seemed to emerge. Undergraduates should have access to a diversity of programmes, including opportunities for multidisciplinary studies, development of a proficiency in languages and the ability to use new information technologies. In the graduate cycle there would be a choice between a shorter master's degree and a longer

doctor's degree, with possibilities to transfer from one to the other. In both graduate degrees, appropriate emphasis would be placed on research and autonomous work.

This was followed up in Bologna (1999), where ministers set the objective to adopt a system essentially based on two main cycles, undergraduate and graduate. Access to the second cycle should require successful completion of first cycle studies, lasting a minimum of three years. The degree awarded after the first cycle should also be relevant to the European labour market as an appropriate level of qualification. The second cycle should lead to the master and/or doctorate degree.

In Prague (2001), ministers noted with satisfaction that the objective of a degree structure based on two main cycles, articulating higher education in undergraduate and graduate studies, had been tackled and discussed. Some countries had already adopted this structure and several others were considering it with great interest. Ministers noted that in many countries bachelor's and master's degrees could be obtained at universities as well as at other higher education institutions. Programmes leading to a degree should have different orientations and profiles in order to accommodate a diversity of individual, academic and labour market needs.

In Berlin (2003), Ministers committed themselves to having started the implementation of the two cycle system by 2005. They encouraged the member States to elaborate a framework of comparable and compatible qualifications for their higher education systems, which should seek to describe qualifications in terms of workload, level, learning outcomes, competences and profile. They also undertook to elaborate an overarching framework of qualifications for the European Higher Education Area. Within such framework, degrees should have different defined outcomes. First and second cycle degrees should have different orientations and various profiles in order to accommodate a diversity of individual, academic and labour market needs. First cycle degrees should give access, in the sense of the Lisbon Recognition Convention, to second cycle programmes. Second cycle degrees should give access to doctoral studies.

In Bergen (2005), Ministers noted with satisfaction that the two-cycle degree system was being implemented on a large scale. However, there were still some obstacles to access between cycles. Furthermore, there was a need for greater dialogue, involving Governments, institutions and social partners, to increase the employability of graduates with bachelor qualifications, including in appropriate posts within the public service.

In London (2007) Ministers noted that the number of students enrolled on courses in the first two cycles had increased significantly and there had been a reduction in structural barriers between cycles. Ministers underlined the importance of curricula reform leading to qualifications better suited both to the needs of the labour market and to further study.

4.2 The third cycle and the relation between higher education and research

In Berlin (2003), Ministers saw the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and the European Research Area (ERA) as two pillars of the knowledge based society. Conscious of the need to promote closer links between the EHEA and the ERA, and of the importance of research as an integral part of higher education across Europe, Ministers considered it necessary to go beyond the present focus on two main cycles of higher education to include the doctoral level as the third cycle in the Bologna Process. They emphasised the importance of research and research training and the promotion of interdisciplinarity in

maintaining and improving the quality of higher education. Ministers called for increased mobility at the doctoral and postdoctoral levels and encouraged the institutions concerned to increase their cooperation in doctoral studies and the training of young researchers.

Ministers understood that there were obstacles inhibiting the achievement of these goals and these cannot be resolved by higher education institutions alone. It requires strong support, including financial and appropriate decisions from national Governments and European Bodies. Also networks at doctoral level should be given support to stimulate the development of excellence and to become one of the hallmarks of the European Higher Education Area.

In Bergen (2005), Ministers underlined the importance of higher education in further enhancing research and the importance of research in underpinning higher education for the economic and cultural development of our societies and for social cohesion. They noted that the efforts to introduce structural change and improve the quality of teaching should not detract from the effort to strengthen research and innovation. Ministers therefore emphasised the importance of research and research training in maintaining and improving the quality of and enhancing the competitiveness and attractiveness of the EHEA. With a view to achieving better results Ministers recognised the need to improve the synergy between the higher education sector and other research sectors throughout our respective countries and between the EHEA and the European Research Area.

To achieve these objectives, doctoral level qualifications need to be fully aligned with the EHEA overarching framework for qualifications using the outcomes-based approach. The core component of doctoral training is the advancement of knowledge through original research. Considering the need for structured doctoral programmes and the need for transparent supervision and assessment, Ministers noted that the normal workload of the third cycle in most countries would correspond to 3-4 years full time. Ministers urged universities to ensure that their doctoral programmes promote interdisciplinary training and the development of transferable skills, thus meeting the needs of the wider employment market.

In Bergen, Ministers also adopted the overarching framework for qualifications in the EHEA, comprising three cycles, with structured doctoral programmes as the third cycle. Ministers considered participants in third cycle programmes both as students and as early stage researchers.

In London (2007), Ministers noted that good progress was being made at national and institutional levels towards the goal of an EHEA based on a three-cycle degree system. Ministers also noted that there was an increase in the number of structured doctoral programmes.

Ministers saw closer alignment of the EHEA with the European Research Area (ERA) as an important objective. They recognised the value of developing and maintaining a wide variety of doctoral programmes linked to the overarching qualifications framework for the EHEA. Enhancing provision in the third cycle and improving the status, career prospects and funding for early stage researchers are essential preconditions for meeting Europe's objectives of strengthening research capacity and improving the quality and competitiveness of European higher education. Ministers invited HEIs to reinforce their efforts to embed doctoral programmes in institutional strategies and policies, and to develop appropriate career paths and opportunities for doctoral candidates and early stage researchers.

Ministers invited EUA to continue to support the sharing of experience among HEIs on the range of innovative doctoral programmes that are emerging across Europe as well as on other crucial issues such as transparent access arrangements, supervision and assessment

procedures, the development of transferable skills and ways of enhancing employability. Ministers would encourage greater exchange of information on funding and other issues between our Governments as well as with other research funding bodies.

Leuven and Louvain-la-Neuve (2009): The number of people with research competences should increase. Doctoral programmes should provide high quality disciplinary research and increasingly be complemented by inter-disciplinary and inter-sectoral programmes. Moreover, public authorities and institutions of higher education should make the career development of early stage researchers more attractive.

Bucharest (2012): Higher education must ensure a stronger link between research, teaching and learning at all levels. Study programmes must reflect changing research priorities and emerging disciplines, and research should underpin teaching and learning. In this respect, Ministers would sustain a diversity of doctoral programmes. They would explore how to promote quality, transparency, employability and mobility in the third cycle, as the education and training of doctoral candidates has a particular role in bridging the EHEA and the European Research Area.

4.3 Short cycle qualifications

In Berlin (2003), Ministers invited the Follow-up Group to explore whether and how shorter higher education might be linked to the first cycle of a qualifications framework for the European Higher Education Area.

In Bergen (2005), Ministers adopted the overarching framework for qualifications in the EHEA, including, within national contexts, the possibility of intermediate qualifications.

In Leuven and Louvain-la-Neuve (2009), Ministers noted that higher education was being modernized with the adoption of a degree structure including, within national contexts, the possibility of intermediate qualifications linked to the first cycle. This could be a means of widening access to higher education.

In Bucharest (2012), Ministers expressed a will to explore how the European Qualifications Framework could take account of short cycle qualifications (EQF level 5) and encouraged countries to use the overarching framework of qualifications for EHEA (QF-EHEA) for referencing these qualifications in national contexts where they exist. One of the priorities set out for 2012-2015 was to coordinate the work of ensuring that qualifications frameworks work in practice, emphasising their link to learning outcomes and explore how the QF-EHEA could take account of short cycle qualifications in national contexts.

One of the commitments from Yerevan (2015) was to include short cycle qualifications in the QF-EHEA, based on the Dublin descriptors for short cycle qualifications, so as to make provision for the recognition of short cycle qualifications in their own systems, also where these do not comprise such qualifications.

5 Recognition of qualifications

5.1 The Lisbon Recognition Convention

Recognition of foreign qualifications had been a theme discussed by rectors' conferences and within the framework of Council of Europe since the 1950s. A new Council of Europe /

UNESCO Recognition Convention was finalised in Lisbon in 1997, the central message being that:

Each country shall recognize qualifications – whether for access to higher education, for periods of study or for higher education degrees – as similar to the corresponding qualifications in its own system unless it can show that there are substantial differences between its own qualifications and the qualifications for which recognition is sought.

The bureaucratic language used in the lengthy document did not appeal to practical use by university professors. However, it found its way into the 1998 Sorbonne Declaration:

A convention, recognizing higher education qualifications in the academic field within Europe, was agreed on last year in Lisbon. The convention set a number of basic requirements and acknowledged that individual countries could engage in an even more constructive scheme. Standing by these conclusions, one can build on them and go further.

As ministers meeting in Bologna the following year affirmed their support to the general principles laid down in the Sorbonne declaration, it could be assumed that the Lisbon Recognition Convention was part of the basis for the Bologna Declaration, even though recognition was not explicitly mentioned.

Referring to the Bologna objective *Adoption of a system of easily readable and comparable degrees*, the 2001 follow-up conference in Prague introduced *recognition* as a concept in the Bologna Process: Ministers strongly encouraged universities and other higher education institutions to take full advantage of existing national legislation and European tools aimed at facilitating academic and professional recognition of course units, degrees and other awards, so that citizens could effectively use their qualifications, competencies and skills throughout the European Higher Education Area. Ministers called upon existing organizations and networks such as NARIC and ENIC to promote, at institutional, national and European level, simple, efficient and fair recognition reflecting the underlying diversity of qualifications.

In Berlin (2003), Ministers underlined the importance of the Lisbon Recognition Convention, which should be ratified by all countries participating in the Bologna Process. In Bergen (2005), Ministers noted that 36 of the 45 participating countries already had ratified the Lisbon Recognition Convention. Ministers urged those that have not already done so to ratify the Convention without delay. Ministers committed themselves to ensuring the full implementation of its principles, and to incorporating them in national legislation as appropriate. They called on all participating countries to address recognition problems identified by the ENIC/NARIC networks. Ministers promised to draw up national action plans to improve the quality of the process associated with the recognition of foreign qualifications.. Ministers expressed support for the subsidiary texts to the Lisbon Recognition Convention and called upon all national authorities and other stakeholders to recognize joint degrees awarded in two or more countries in the EHEA.

This was followed up in London in 2007: Fair recognition of higher education qualifications, periods of study and prior learning, including the recognition of non-formal and informal learning, were seen as essential components of the EHEA, both internally and in a global context. Easily readable and comparable degrees and accessible information on educational systems and qualifications frameworks are prerequisites for citizens' mobility and ensuring the continuing attractiveness and competitiveness of the EHEA.

Thus, in theory, recognition should then be a fully integrated element of the Bologna Process. However, both in Bucharest (2012) and in Yerevan (2015) Ministers asked for national legislation to be reviewed to fully comply with the Lisbon Recognition Convention. (Comment: This should have been done when the convention was ratified.)

In Bucharest (2012), Ministers were determined to remove outstanding obstacles hindering effective and proper recognition and were willing to work together towards the automatic recognition of comparable academic degrees, building on the tools of the Bologna framework, as a long-term goal of the EHEA.

In Yerevan (2015) Ministers promised to develop more effective policies for the recognition of credits gained abroad, of qualifications for academic and professional purposes, and of prior learning, making a commitment to ensure that qualifications from other EHEA countries were automatically recognised at the same level as relevant domestic qualifications.

5.2 Diploma supplement and transfer of credits

The Diploma Supplement was in use before Bologna and it had also been referred to in the 1997 Lisbon Recognition Convention:

All countries shall encourage their higher education institutions to issue the Diploma Supplement to their students in order to facilitate recognition. The Diploma Supplement is an instrument developed jointly by the European Commission, the Council of Europe and UNESCO that aims to describe the qualification in an easily understandable way and relating it to the higher education system where it was issued.

In the 1998 Sorbonne Declaration, the European Credit Transfer System (designed by the EU Commission) was referred to:

Much of the originality and flexibility in this system will be achieved through the use of credits (such as in the ECTS scheme) and semesters. This will allow for validation of these acquired credits for those who choose initial or continued education in different European universities ---

The Diploma Supplement and the ECTS system came together in the 1999 Bologna Declaration:

Adoption of a system of easily readable and comparable degrees, also through the implementation of the Diploma Supplement, in order to promote European citizens employability and the international competitiveness of the European higher education system. Establishment of a system of credits - such as in the ECTS system - as a proper means of promoting the most widespread student mobility. Credits could also be acquired in non-higher education contexts, including lifelong learning, provided they are recognised by receiving Universities concerned.

In Prague (2001), Ministers wanted to widen the use of the ECTS to include *accumulation of credits*: Ministers emphasised that for greater flexibility in learning and qualification processes the adoption of common cornerstones of qualifications, supported by a credit system such as the ECTS, providing both transferability and accumulation functions, was necessary.

This was followed up in Berlin (2003), where Ministers stressed the important role played by the European Credit Transfer System in facilitating student mobility and international

curriculum development. They noted that ECTS was increasingly becoming a generalised basis for the national credit systems. They encouraged further progress with the goal that the ECTS becomes not only a transfer but also an accumulation system, to be applied consistently as it develops within the emerging European Higher Education Area.

In Berlin, Ministers also appealed to institutions and employers to make full use of the Diploma Supplement, so as to take advantage of the improved transparency and flexibility of the higher education degree systems, for fostering employability and facilitating academic recognition for further studies. Ministers set the objective that every student graduating as from 2005 should receive the Diploma Supplement automatically and free of charge. It should be issued in a widely spoken European language. They appealed to institutions and employers to make full use of the Diploma Supplement, so as to take advantage of the improved transparency and flexibility of the higher education degree systems, for fostering employability and facilitating academic recognition for further studies.

In London (2007) Ministers expressed concern about recognition practices; not so much the practical tools (ECTS and the Diploma Supplement) as the lack of respect for the Lisbon Recognition Convention: The range of national and institutional approaches to recognition needs to be more coherent. To improve recognition practices, the BFUG was asked to arrange for the ENIC/NARIC networks to analyse national action plans and spread good practice.

In Leuven and Louvain-la-Neuve (2009) it was said that the Bologna Process has promoted the Diploma Supplement and the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System to further increase transparency and recognition.

Among the priorities for action in Bucharest (2012) were these:

- to ensure that qualifications frameworks, ECTS and Diploma Supplement implementation is based on learning outcomes,
- to work to ensure that the ECTS Users' Guide fully reflects the state of on-going work on learning outcomes and recognition of prior learning.

Finally, in Yerevan (2015) the revised ECTS Users' Guide was adopted as an official EHEA document.

5.3 The European Qualifications Framework

In Berlin (2003), Ministers encouraged the member States to elaborate a framework of comparable and compatible qualifications for their higher education systems, which should seek to describe qualifications in terms of workload, level, learning outcomes, competences and profile. They would also undertake to elaborate an overarching framework of qualifications for the European Higher Education Area. Within such frameworks, degrees should have different defined outcomes. First and second cycle degrees should have different orientations and various profiles in order to accommodate a diversity of individual, academic and labour market needs. First cycle degrees should give access, in the sense of the Lisbon Recognition Convention, to second cycle programmes. Second cycle degrees should give access to doctoral studies. Ministers also invited the Follow-up Group to explore whether and how shorter higher education may be linked to the first cycle of a qualifications framework for the European Higher Education Area.

In Bergen,(2005), Ministers adopted the overarching framework for qualifications in the EHEA, comprising three cycles (including, within national contexts, the possibility of

intermediate qualifications), generic descriptors for each cycle based on learning outcomes and competences, and credit ranges in the first and second cycles. Ministers committed themselves to elaborating national frameworks for qualifications compatible with the overarching framework for qualifications in the EHEA by 2010, and to having started work on this by 2007.

Ministers underlined the importance of ensuring complementarity between the overarching framework for the EHEA and the proposed broader framework for qualifications for lifelong learning then being developed within the European Union as well as among participating countries. They asked the European Commission fully to consult all parties to the Bologna Process as work progressed.

This was followed up in London (2007): Qualifications frameworks will be important instruments in achieving comparability and transparency within the EHEA and facilitating the movement of learners within, as well as between, higher education systems. Such frameworks should also help higher education institutions to develop modules and study programmes based on learning outcomes and credits, and improve the recognition of qualifications as well as all forms of prior learning.

Ministers noted that some initial progress had been made towards the implementation of national qualifications frameworks, but that much more effort was required. They committed themselves to fully implementing such national qualifications frameworks, certified against the overarching Framework for Qualifications of the EHEA, by 2010. Ministers emphasised that qualification frameworks should be designed so as to encourage greater mobility of students and teachers and improve employability.

Ministers were satisfied that the overarching Framework for Qualifications of the EHEA would be compatible with the proposal from the European Commission on a European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning. The Framework for Qualifications of the EHEA would also be a central element of the promotion of European higher education in a global context.

In Leuven and Louvain-la-Neuve (2009), Ministers aimed at having national qualifications frameworks implemented and prepared for self-certification against the overarching Framework for Qualifications for the EHEA by 2012.

In Bucharest (2012), Ministers called on institutions to further link study credits with both learning outcomes and student workload, and to include the attainment of learning outcomes in assessment procedures. Ministers wanted to ensure that the ECTS Users' Guide would fully reflect the state of on-going work on learning outcomes and recognition of prior learning.

Ministers welcomed the progress in developing qualifications frameworks; such frameworks would improve transparency and enable higher education systems to be more open and flexible. Ministers acknowledged that realising the full benefits of qualifications frameworks could in practice be more challenging than developing the structures. The development of qualifications frameworks must continue so that they become an everyday reality for students, staff and employers.

A common understanding of the levels of qualifications frameworks would be essential to recognition for both academic and professional purposes. School leaving qualifications giving access to higher education should be considered as being of EQF level 4. Ministers further committed to referencing first, second and third cycle qualifications against EQF levels 6, 7

and 8 respectively. Ministers would explore how the QF-EHEA could take account of short cycle qualifications (EQF level 5) and encourage countries to use the QF-EHEA for referencing these qualifications in national contexts where they exist. Ministers asked the Council of Europe and the European Commission to continue to coordinate efforts to make the respective qualifications frameworks work well in practice.

Yerevan Commitments (2015):

- to include short cycle qualifications in the overarching framework of qualifications for the European Higher Education Area (QF-EHEA), based on the Dublin descriptors for short cycle qualifications and quality assured according to the ESG, so as to make provision for the recognition of short cycle qualifications in their own systems, also where these do not comprise such qualifications;
- to review national qualifications frameworks, with a view to ensuring that learning paths within the framework provide adequately for the recognition of prior learning;

6 Promotion of student and staff mobility

Mobility may have started in Bologna nine hundred years before our Bologna Declaration: Mobile students and scholars have been with universities from the start. The most famous example is Erasmus Roterodamus (1466-1536). In 1506 Erasmus, then forty, studied at the University of Bologna for a year. Later on, as an independent scholar, he moved from city to city tutoring, lecturing and corresponding with some of the most brilliant thinkers of Europe. A few years before, Nicolaus Copernicus (1473-1543) had left the University of Krakow after four years of study, to spend three years at the University of Bologna, before returning to Poland. But he went back to Italy for further studies, this time to the University of Padua and the University of Ferrara where he received his doctorate in canon law in 1503. By then, his studies had also included the humanities, medicine, mathematics and astronomy.

In our present-day Bologna (1999), Ministers saw the necessity to overcome obstacles to the free movement of students and staff,

- for students; with particular attention to access to study and training opportunities and to related services;
- for teachers, researchers and administrative staff; with particular attention to recognition and valorisation of periods spent in a European context researching, teaching and training, without prejudicing their statutory rights

In Prague (2001), Ministers reaffirmed that improving the mobility of students, teachers, researchers and administrative staff, as set out in the Bologna Declaration, is of the utmost importance. Therefore, they confirmed their commitment to pursue the removal of all obstacles to the free movement of students, teachers, researchers and administrative staff and emphasised the social dimension of mobility. They took note of the possibilities for mobility offered by the European Community programmes and the progress achieved in this field.

Berlin (2003): Mobility of students and academic and administrative staff is the basis for establishing a European Higher Education Area. Ministers emphasised its importance for academic and cultural as well as political, social and economic spheres. They noted with satisfaction that since their last meeting, mobility figures had increased, thanks also to the substantial support of the European Union programmes, and they agreed to undertake the necessary steps to improve the quality and coverage of statistical data on student mobility.

Ministers reaffirmed their intention to make every effort to remove all obstacles to mobility within the European Higher Education Area. With a view to promoting student mobility, Ministers would take the necessary steps to enable the portability of national loans and grants.

London (2007): Mobility of staff, students and graduates is one of the core elements of the Bologna Process, creating opportunities for personal growth, developing international cooperation between individuals and institutions, enhancing the quality of higher education and research, and giving substance to the European dimension.

Some progress had been made since 1999, but many challenges remained. Among the obstacles to mobility, issues relating to immigration, insufficient financial incentives and inflexible pension arrangements featured prominently. Ministers recognised the responsibility of individual Governments to facilitate the delivery of visas, residence and work permits, as appropriate. Ministers would work within their respective Governments for decisive progress in this area. At national level, they would also consider ways of further incentivising mobility for both staff and students. This would include encouraging a significant increase in the number of joint programmes and the creation of flexible curricula, as well as urging institutions to take greater responsibility for staff and student mobility, more equitably balanced between countries across the EHEA.

Leuven and Louvain-la-Neuve (2009): Mobility of students, early stage researchers and staff enhances the quality of programmes and excellence in research; it strengthens the academic and cultural internationalization of European higher education. Mobility is important for personal development and employability, it fosters respect for diversity and a capacity to deal with other cultures. It encourages linguistic pluralism, thus underpinning the multilingual tradition of the European Higher Education Area and it increases cooperation and competition between higher education institutions. Therefore, mobility shall be the hallmark of the European Higher Education Area.

Ministers called upon each country to increase mobility, to ensure its high quality and to diversify its types and scope. In 2020, at least 20% of those graduating in the European Higher Education Area should have had a study or training period abroad. Ministers also aimed for an improved participation rate from diverse student groups.

Within each of the three cycles, opportunities for mobility should be created in the structure of degree programmes. Joint degrees and programmes as well as mobility windows should become more common practice. Moreover, mobility policies should be based on a range of practical measures pertaining to the funding of mobility, available infrastructure, visa and work permit regulations. Flexible study paths and active information policies, full recognition of study achievements, study support and the full portability of grants and loans would be necessary requirements. Mobility should also lead to a more balanced flow of incoming and outgoing students across the European Higher Education Area.

Attractive working conditions and career paths as well as open international recruitment would be necessary to attract highly qualified teachers and researchers to higher education institutions. Considering that teachers are key players, career structures should be adapted to facilitate mobility of teachers, early stage researchers and other staff; framework conditions should be established to ensure appropriate access to social security and to facilitate the portability of pensions and supplementary pension rights for mobile staff, making the best use of existing legal frameworks.

Bucharest (2012): Learning mobility is essential to ensure the quality of higher education, enhance students' employability and expand cross-border collaboration within the EHEA and beyond. Ministers adopted the strategy "Mobility for Better Learning", as an integral part of their efforts to promote an element of internationalisation in all of higher education.

Sufficient financial support to students is essential in ensuring equal access and mobility opportunities. Ministers reiterated their commitment to full portability of national grants and loans across the EHEA and called on the European Union to underpin this endeavour through its policies.

7 Promotion of European cooperation in quality assurance

The 1999 Bologna objective of promoting European cooperation in quality assurance was taken up in Prague (2001). Ministers recognised the vital role that quality assurance systems play in ensuring high quality standards and in facilitating the comparability of qualifications throughout Europe. They also encouraged closer cooperation between recognition and quality assurance networks. Ministers emphasised the necessity of close European cooperation and mutual trust in and acceptance of national quality assurance systems. Further they encouraged universities to disseminate examples of best practice and to design scenarios for mutual acceptance of evaluation and accreditation/certification mechanisms. Ministers called upon universities, national agencies and the European Network of Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), to collaborate in establishing a common framework of reference and to disseminate best practice.

Berlin (2003): Quality of higher education has proven to be at the heart of the setting up of a European Higher Education Area. Ministers committed themselves to supporting further development of quality assurance at institutional, national and European level. They stressed the need to develop mutually shared criteria and methodologies on quality assurance.

Ministers also stressed that, consistent with the principle of institutional autonomy, the primary responsibility for quality assurance in higher education lies with each institution itself. This provides the basis for real accountability of the academic system within the national quality framework.

Ministers agreed 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, cooperation and networking.

At the European level, Ministers called upon ENQA through its members, in cooperation with the EUA, EURASHE and ESIB, to develop an agreed set of standards, procedures and guidelines on quality assurance, to explore ways of ensuring an adequate peer review system for quality assurance and/or accreditation agencies or bodies. Due account should be taken of the expertise of other quality assurance associations and networks.

Bergen (2005): Almost all countries had now made provision for a quality assurance system based on the criteria set out in the Berlin Communiqué and with a high degree of cooperation and networking. However, there was still progress to be made, in particular as regards student involvement and international cooperation. Ministers urged higher education institutions to continue their efforts to enhance the quality of their activities through the systematic introduction of internal mechanisms and their direct correlation to external quality assurance.

Ministers adopted the standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area as proposed by ENQA. They committed themselves to introducing the proposed model for peer review of quality assurance agencies on a national basis, while respecting the commonly accepted guidelines and criteria. Ministers welcomed the principle of a European register of quality assurance agencies based on national review, and they asked that the practicalities of implementation be further developed by ENQA in cooperation with EUA, EURASHE and ESIB. Ministers underlined the importance of cooperation between nationally recognised agencies with a view to enhancing the mutual recognition of accreditation or quality assurance decisions.

London (2007): The Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the EHEA adopted in Bergen (ESG) had been a powerful driver of change in relation to quality assurance. All countries had started to implement them and some had made substantial progress. External quality assurance in particular was now much better developed than before. The extent of student involvement at all levels had increased since 2005. Since the main responsibility for quality lies with the higher education institutions, they should continue to develop their systems of quality assurance. Ministers acknowledged the progress made with regard to mutual recognition of accreditation and quality assurance decisions, and encourage continued international cooperation amongst quality assurance agencies.

The first European Quality Assurance Forum, jointly organised by EUA, ENQA, EURASHE and ESIB (the E4 Group) in 2006 had provided an opportunity to discuss European developments in quality assurance. Ministers encouraged the four organisations to continue to organise European Quality Assurance Fora on an annual basis, to facilitate the sharing of good practice and ensure that quality in the EHEA continues to improve.

Ministers thanked the E4 Group for responding to the request to further develop the practicalities of setting up a Register of European Higher Education Quality Assurance Agencies. The purpose of the register should be to allow open access to objective information about quality assurance agencies that are working in line with the ESG. The register should be voluntary, self-financing, independent and transparent. After two years of operation, the register should be evaluated externally, taking account of the views of all stakeholders.

In Leuven and Louvain-la-Neuve (2009), Ministers asked the E4 group (ENQA-EUA-EURASHE-ESU) to continue its cooperation in further developing the European dimension of quality assurance and in particular to ensure that the European Quality Assurance Register was evaluated externally, taking into account the views of the stakeholders.

Bucharest (2012): Quality assurance is essential for building trust, also in the provision of cross-border education. Ministers committed to maintaining the public responsibility for quality assurance, but also to involve a wide range of stakeholders. Ministers acknowledged the ENQA, ESU, EUA and EURASHE (the E4 group) report on the implementation and application of the “European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance” (ESG).

Policy measures adopted in Yerevan (2015):

- The revised Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG);
- The European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes.

Commitments:

- to enable higher education institutions to use a QAR registered agency assurance process, respecting the national arrangements for decision making on QA outcomes.

8 Promotion of European dimensions of higher education

Bologna objective (1999): Promotion of the necessary European dimensions in higher education, particularly with regards to curricular development, inter-institutional co-operation, mobility schemes and integrated programmes of study, training and research.

Prague (2001): In order to further strengthen the important European dimensions of higher education and graduate employability Ministers called upon the higher education sector to increase the development of modules, courses and curricula at all levels with "European" content, orientation or organisation. This would particularly concern modules, courses and degree curricula offered in partnership by institutions from different countries and leading to a recognised joint degree.

In Berlin (2003), Ministers noted that, following their call in Prague, additional modules, courses and curricula with European content, orientation or organisation were being developed. They noted that initiatives have been taken by higher education institutions in various European countries to pool their academic resources and cultural traditions in order to develop integrated study programmes and joint degrees at first, second and third level.

Moreover, Ministers stressed the necessity of ensuring a substantial period of study abroad in joint degree programmes as well as provision for linguistic diversity and language learning, so that students may achieve their full potential for European identity, and employability.

Ministers agreed to engage at the national level to remove legal obstacles to the establishment and recognition of such degrees and to actively support the development and adequate quality assurance of integrated curricula leading to joint degrees.

In Bucharest (2012), Ministers encouraged higher education institutions to further develop joint programmes and degrees as part of a wider EHEA approach. Ministers promised to examine national rules and practices relating to joint programmes and degrees as a way to dismantle obstacles to cooperation and mobility embedded in national contexts.

In Yerevan (2015), *The European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes* was adopted as a policy measure.

9 The social dimension

In Prague (2001), Ministers affirmed the need, recalled by students, to take account of the social dimension in the Bologna process.

Two years later, in Berlin (2003), Ministers reaffirmed the importance of the social dimension of the Bologna Process. The need to increase competitiveness must be balanced with the objective of improving the social characteristics of the European Higher Education Area, aiming at strengthening social cohesion and reducing social and gender inequalities both at national and at European level. In that context, Ministers reaffirmed their position that higher education is a public good and a public responsibility.

Bergen (2005): The social dimension of the Bologna Process is a constituent part of the EHEA and a necessary condition for the attractiveness and competitiveness of the EHEA. Ministers renewed their commitment to making quality higher education equally accessible to all, and stressed the need for appropriate conditions for students so that they can complete their studies without obstacles related to their social and economic background. The social

dimension includes measures taken by governments to help students, especially from socially disadvantaged groups, in financial and economic aspects and to provide them with guidance and counselling services with a view to widening access.

London (2007): Higher education should play a strong role in fostering social cohesion, reducing inequalities and raising the level of knowledge, skills and competences in society. Policy should therefore aim to maximise the potential of individuals in terms of their personal development and their contribution to a sustainable and democratic knowledge-based society. Ministers shared the societal aspiration that the student body entering, participating in and completing higher education at all levels should reflect the diversity of populations. They reaffirmed the importance of students being able to complete their studies without obstacles related to their social and economic background. Ministers would continue their efforts to provide adequate student services, create more flexible learning pathways into and within higher education, and to widen participation at all levels on the basis of equal opportunity.

Leuven and Louvain-la-Neuve (2009): The student body within higher education should reflect the diversity of Europe's populations. Ministers emphasised the social characteristics of higher education and aimed to provide equal opportunities to quality education. Access into higher education should be widened by fostering the potential of students from underrepresented groups and by providing adequate conditions for the completion of their studies. This involves improving the learning environment, removing all barriers to study, and creating the appropriate economic conditions for students to be able to benefit from the study opportunities at all levels. Each participating country should set measurable targets for widening overall participation and increasing participation of underrepresented groups in higher education, to be reached by the end of the next decade. Efforts to achieve equity in higher education should be complemented by actions in other parts of the educational system.

In Budapest and Vienna (2010), Ministers reaffirmed that higher education is a public responsibility. They committed themselves to ensuring that higher education institutions have the necessary resources within a framework established and overseen by public authorities. Ministers were convinced that higher education is a major driver for social and economic development and for innovation in an increasingly knowledge-driven world. Ministers promised to increase their efforts on the social dimension in order to provide equal opportunities to quality education, paying particular attention to underrepresented groups.

Bucharest (2012): Widening access to higher education is a precondition for societal progress and economic development. Ministers agreed to adopt national measures for widening overall access to quality higher education. Ministers would work to raise completion rates and ensure timely progression in higher education in all EHEA countries.

The student body entering and graduating from higher education institutions should reflect the diversity of Europe's populations. Ministers would step up their efforts towards underrepresented groups to develop the social dimension of higher education, reduce inequalities and provide adequate student support services, counselling and guidance, flexible learning paths and alternative access routes, including recognition of prior learning.

Ministers confirmed their commitment to maintaining public responsibility for higher education and acknowledged the need to open a dialogue on funding and governance of higher education. Ministers recognised the importance of further developing appropriate funding instruments to pursue our common goals.

Yerevan (2015): Making our systems more inclusive is an essential aim for the EHEA as populations become more and more diversified, also due to immigration and demographic changes. Ministers would undertake to widen participation in higher education and support institutions that provide relevant learning activities in appropriate contexts for different types of learners, including lifelong learning. Ministers would improve permeability and articulation between different education sectors. They would enhance the social dimension of higher education, improve gender balance and widen opportunities for access and completion, including international mobility, for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Ministers would provide mobility opportunities for students and staff from conflict areas, while working to make it possible for them to return home once conditions allow. Ministers also wished to promote the mobility of teacher education students in view of the important role they will play in educating future generations of Europeans.

10 Employability

Prague (2001): Programmes leading to a bachelor level degree may, and indeed should, have different orientations and various profiles in order to accommodate a diversity of individual, academic and labour market needs.

Berlin (2003): Within the new frameworks of qualifications, degrees should have different defined outcomes. First and second cycle degrees should have different orientations and various profiles in order to accommodate a diversity of individual, academic and labour market needs.

London (2007): Following up on the introduction of the three-cycle degree system, Ministers would work, as appropriate, within governments to ensure that employment and career structures within the public service are fully compatible with the new degree system. Ministers urged institutions to further develop partnerships and cooperation with employers in the ongoing process of curriculum innovation based on learning outcomes.

Leuven and Louvain-la-Neuve (2009): With labour markets increasingly relying on higher skill levels and transversal competences, higher education should equip students with the advanced knowledge, skills and competences they need throughout their professional lives. Employability empowers the individual to fully seize the opportunities in changing labour markets. Ministers would aim at raising initial qualifications as well as maintaining and renewing a skilled workforce through close cooperation between governments, higher education institutions, social partners and students. Higher education institutions shall improve the provision, accessibility and quality of their careers and employment related guidance services to students and alumni. Ministers encouraged work placements embedded in study programmes as well as on-the-job learning.

Bucharest (2012): Today's graduates need to combine transversal, multidisciplinary and innovation skills and competences with up-to-date subject-specific knowledge so as to be able to contribute to the wider needs of society and the labour market. Ministers would aim to enhance the employability and personal and professional development of graduates throughout their careers. They would achieve this by improving cooperation between employers, students and higher education institutions, especially in the development of study programmes that help increase the innovation, entrepreneurial and research potential of graduates.

Yerevan (2015): Fostering the employability of graduates throughout their working lives in rapidly changing labour markets - characterized by technological developments, the emergence of new job profiles, and increasing opportunities for employment and self-employment - is a major goal of the EHEA. Ministers should ensure that, at the end of each study cycle, graduates possess competences suitable for entry into the labour market which also enable them to develop the new competences they may need later for their employability. Ministers should support higher education institutions in exploring diverse measures to reach these goals, e.g. by strengthening their dialogue with employers, implementing programmes with a good balance between theoretical and practical components, fostering entrepreneurship and innovation skills of students and following graduates' career developments. Ministers would promote international mobility for study and placement as a powerful means to expand the range of competences and work options for students.

Commitments :

- to ensure that competence requirements for public employment allow for fair access to holders of first cycle degrees, and encourage employers to make appropriate use of all higher education qualifications, including those of the first cycle;
- to ensure, in collaboration with institutions, reliable and meaningful information on graduates' career patterns and progression in the labour market.

11 The EHEA in a global context

Bologna (1999): We must look at the objective of increasing the international competitiveness of the European system of higher education. We need to ensure that the European higher education system acquires a world-wide degree of attraction equal to our extraordinary cultural and scientific traditions.

Berlin (2003): Ministers agreed that the attractiveness and openness of the European higher education should be reinforced. They confirmed their readiness to further develop scholarship programmes for students from third countries. They encouraged the cooperation with regions in other parts of the world by opening Bologna seminars and conferences to representatives of these regions.

Bergen (2005): The European Higher Education Area must be open and should be attractive to other parts of the world. Our contribution to achieving education for all should be based on the principle of sustainable development and be in accordance with the ongoing international work on developing guidelines for quality provision of cross-border higher education. In international academic cooperation, academic values should prevail.

Ministers saw the European Higher Education Area as a partner of higher education systems in other regions of the world, stimulating balanced student and staff exchange and cooperation between higher education institutions. They underlined the importance of intercultural understanding and respect. They looked forward to enhancing the understanding of the Bologna Process in other continents by sharing experiences of reform processes with neighbouring regions. They stressed the need for dialogue on issues of mutual interest. They saw the need to identify partner regions and intensify the exchange of ideas and experiences with those regions.

London (2007): Ministers were pleased that in many parts of the world, the Bologna reforms had created considerable interest and stimulated discussion between European and international partners on a range of issues. These included the recognition of qualifications, the benefits of cooperation based upon partnership, mutual trust and understanding, and the

underlying values of the Bologna Process. Moreover, Ministers acknowledged that efforts had been made in some countries in other parts of the world to bring their higher education systems more closely into line with the Bologna framework.

Ministers adopted the strategy "The European Higher Education Area in a Global Setting" and would take forward work in the core policy areas: promoting the attractiveness and competitiveness of the EHEA; strengthening cooperation based on partnership; intensifying policy dialogue; and improving recognition. This work ought to be seen in relation to the OECD/UNESCO *Guidelines for Quality Provision in Cross-border Higher Education*.

In Leuven and Louvain-la-Neuve (2009), Ministers called upon European higher education institutions to further internationalise their activities and to engage in global collaboration for sustainable development. The attractiveness and openness of European higher education should be highlighted by joint European actions. Competition on a global scale should be complemented by cooperation based on partnership with other regions of the world.

Budapest and Vienna (2010): The Bologna Process and the resulting European Higher Education Area, being unprecedented examples of regional, cross-border cooperation in higher education, have raised considerable interest in other parts of the world and made European higher education more visible on the global map. Ministers welcomed this interest and looked forward to intensifying their policy dialogue and cooperation with partners across the world.

Bucharest (2012): Cooperation with other regions of the world and international openness are key factors to the development of the EHEA. Ministers committed to further exploring the global understanding of the EHEA goals and principles in line with the strategic priorities set by the 2007 strategy for "the EHEA in a Global Setting". Ministers would evaluate the strategy's implementation by 2015 with the aim to provide guidelines for further internationalization developments. The Bologna Policy Forum will continue as an opportunity for dialogue and its format will be further developed with our global partners.

12. The European Higher Education Area by 2018

Going through the statements from Prague (2001) to Yerevan (2015) relating to the various objectives from Bologna (1999), we may get an idea about the development and possible results for each objective. Not surprisingly, results are most clearly seen for structures and regulations for which the ministers responsible for higher education have a direct influence.

12.1 Universities in the EHEA

The most important statement by Ministers regarding universities was made already in Bologna (1999): Universities have accepted the challenge and taken up a main role in constructing the European Area of Higher Education. Their independence and autonomy ensure that higher education and research systems continuously adapt to changing needs, society's demands and advances in scientific knowledge.

Higher education institutions should be empowered to take decisions on their internal organisation and administration (Berlin 2003). Ministers would ensure that higher education institutions enjoy the necessary autonomy to implement the agreed reforms, and they recognise the need for sustainable funding of institutions (Bergen 2005).

Higher education institutions must have the necessary resources to continue to fulfil their full range of purposes. Those purposes include: preparing students for life as active citizens in a democratic society; preparing students for their future careers and enabling their personal development; creating and maintaining a broad, advanced knowledge base; and stimulating research and innovation (London 2007).

Academic freedom, autonomy and accountability of higher education institutions are principles of the European Higher Education Area (Budapest and Vienna 2010).

Students should participate in and influence the organisation and content of education at higher education institutions (Prague 2001), they are full partners in higher education governance (Berlin 2003). Students and staff are seen as full partners in higher education governance (Bergen 2005). There should be student and staff participation in decision-making structures at institutional, national and European levels (Budapest and Vienna 2010).

12.2 The EHEA degree system

At Sorbonne (1998), Ministers observed that a degree system, with two main cycles, undergraduate and graduate, seemed to emerge. This was followed up in Bologna (1999), where ministers set the objective to adopt a system essentially based on two main cycles.

In Berlin (2003), Ministers considered it necessary to include the doctoral level as the third cycle in the Bologna Process. In Bergen (2005), they pointed out that doctoral level qualifications need to be fully aligned with the EHEA overarching framework for qualifications. The core component of doctoral training should be the advancement of knowledge through original research. Ministers noted that the normal workload of the third cycle in most countries would correspond to 3-4 years full time. Ministers urged universities to ensure that their doctoral programmes promote interdisciplinary training and the development of transferable skills, thus meeting the needs of the wider employment market.

Doctoral programmes were further commented upon in London (2007), Leuven and Louvain-la-Neuve (2009) and Bucharest (2012).

Short cycle qualifications

In Bergen (2005), Ministers adopted the overarching framework for qualifications in the EHEA, including, within national contexts, the possibility of intermediate qualifications.

One of the commitments from Yerevan (2015) was to include short cycle qualifications in the Qualifications Framework for EHEA, based on the Dublin descriptors for short cycle qualifications, so as to make provision for the recognition of short cycle qualifications in their own systems, also where these do not comprise such qualifications.

12.3 Recognition of qualifications

The Lisbon Recognition Convention

In Berlin (2003), Ministers underlined the importance of the Lisbon Recognition Convention, which should be ratified by all countries participating in the Bologna Process. In Bergen (2005), Ministers noted that 36 of the 45 participating countries already had ratified the Convention. Thus, in theory, recognition should then be a fully integrated element of the Bologna Process. However, both in Bucharest (2012) and in Yerevan (2015) Ministers asked for national legislation to be reviewed to fully comply with the Lisbon Convention.

The Diploma Supplement and the ECTS system

The Diploma Supplement and the ECTS system came together in the 1999 Bologna Declaration. In Prague (2001), Ministers widened the use of the ECTS to include *accumulation of credits*. This was followed up in Berlin (2003), where Ministers stressed the important role played by the ECTS system in facilitating student mobility and international curriculum development. The Bologna Process has promoted the Diploma Supplement and the ECTS to increase transparency and recognition (Leuven and Louvain-la-Neuve, 2009).

In Yerevan (2015), a revised ECTS Users' Guide was adopted as an official EHEA document.

The European Qualifications Framework (EQF)

In Bergen (2005), Ministers adopted the overarching framework for qualifications in the EHEA, comprising three cycles (including, within national contexts, the possibility of intermediate qualifications), generic descriptors for each cycle based on learning outcomes and competences, and credit ranges in the first and second cycles. Ministers underlined the importance of ensuring complementarity between the overarching framework for the EHEA and the proposed broader EU framework for qualifications for lifelong learning. This was followed up in London (2007), Leuven and Louvain-la-Neuve (2009) and Bucharest (2012).

In Budapest, Ministers committed to referencing first, second and third cycle qualifications against EQF levels 6, 7 and 8 respectively. In Yerevan (2015), they included short cycle qualifications (EQF level 5) in the overarching framework of qualifications for the EHEA.

12.4 Student and staff mobility in the EHEA

In Prague (2001), Ministers confirmed their commitment to pursue the removal of all obstacles to the free movement of students, teachers, researchers and administrative staff. They took note of the possibilities for mobility offered by the European Community programmes and the progress achieved in this field.

In London (2007), Ministers saw that some progress had been made since 1999, but many challenges remained. Among the obstacles to mobility, issues relating to immigration, recognition, insufficient financial incentives and inflexible pension arrangements featured prominently.

In Leuven and Louvain-la-Neuve (2009), mobility was a central theme: Mobility shall be the hallmark of the European Higher Education Area. Ministers called upon each country to increase mobility, to ensure its high quality and to diversify its types and scope. In 2020, at least 20% of those graduating in the EHEA should have had a study or training period abroad. Attractive working conditions and career paths as well as open international recruitment are necessary to attract highly qualified teachers and researchers to higher education institutions. Career structures should be adapted to facilitate mobility of teachers, early stage researchers and other staff; framework conditions will be established to ensure appropriate access to social security and to facilitate the portability of pensions and supplementary pension rights for mobile staff, making the best use of existing legal frameworks.

Ministers also paid much attention to mobility in Bucharest (2012), but no results from previous initiatives to increase mobility were reported either from Bucharest or from Yerevan (2015). However, the focussing on mobility in the Bologna Process may have contributed to the success of EU mobility programmes, such as Erasmus.

12.5 European cooperation in quality assurance

In Prague (2001), Ministers called upon universities, national agencies and the European Network of Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), to collaborate in establishing a common framework of reference and to disseminate best practice.

Consistent with the principle of institutional autonomy, the primary responsibility for quality assurance in higher education lies with each institution itself (Berlin 2003). Ministers agreed 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, cooperation and networking.

In Bergen (2005), Ministers adopted the standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area as proposed by ENQA. They committed themselves to introducing the proposed model for peer review of quality assurance agencies on a national basis, while respecting the commonly accepted guidelines and criteria. Ministers welcomed the principle of a European register of quality assurance agencies based on national review, and they asked that the practicalities of implementation be further developed by ENQA in cooperation with EUA, EURASHE and ESIB. This was followed up in London, (2007).

In Bucharest (2012), Ministers acknowledged the report from the E4 group on the implementation and application of the “European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance”. In Yerevan (2015), the revised Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area were adopted.

12.6 European dimensions of higher education

In order to strengthen the European dimensions of higher education, Ministers meeting in Prague (2001) called upon the higher education sector to increase the development of courses and curricula at all levels with “European” content, orientation or organisation. Ministers asked particularly for courses and degrees offered in partnership by institutions from different countries and leading to a recognised joint degree.

In Berlin (2003), Ministers agreed to engage at the national level to remove legal obstacles to the establishment and recognition of such degrees and to actively support the development and adequate quality assurance of integrated curricula leading to joint degrees. Also in Bucharest (2012), Ministers promised to examine national rules and practices relating to joint programmes and degrees as a way to dismantle obstacles to cooperation and mobility embedded in national contexts. Finally, in Yerevan (2015), the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes was adopted.

12.7 The social dimension of the EHEA

In Prague (2001), Ministers affirmed the need, recalled by students, to take account of the social dimension in the Bologna process. Two years later, in Berlin (2003), they reaffirmed the importance of the social dimension. The need to increase competitiveness must be balanced with improving the social characteristics of the EHEA, aiming at strengthening social cohesion and reducing social and gender inequalities. Ministers reaffirmed their position that higher education is a public good and a public responsibility.

Bergen (2005): The social dimension of the Bologna Process is a constituent part of the EHEA and a necessary condition for the attractiveness and competitiveness of the EHEA. Ministers renewed their commitment to making quality higher education equally accessible to all, and stressed the need for appropriate conditions for students so that they can complete their studies without obstacles related to their social and economic background. The social dimension includes measures taken by governments to help students, especially from socially disadvantaged groups, in financial and economic aspects and to provide them with guidance and counselling services with a view to widening access.

In London (2007), Ministers shared the societal aspiration that the student body entering, participating in and completing higher education at all levels should reflect the diversity of our populations. They reaffirmed the importance of students being able to complete their studies without obstacles related to their social and economic background. Ministers would continue their efforts to widen participation at all levels on the basis of equal opportunity.

Similar statements were made also in Leuven and Louvain-la-Neuve (2009), Budapest and Vienna (2010), Bucharest (2012), and Yerevan (2015).

12.8 Employability

Berlin (2003): Within the new frameworks of qualifications, degrees should have different defined outcomes. First and second cycle degrees should have different orientations and various profiles in order to accommodate a diversity of individual, academic and labour market needs.

London (2007): Ministers would work, as appropriate, within their governments to ensure that employment and career structures within the public service are fully compatible with the new degree system. Ministers urged institutions to further develop partnerships and cooperation with employers in the ongoing process of curriculum innovation based on learning outcomes.

Similar statements were also given in Leuven and Louvain-la-Neuve (2009), Bucharest (2012) Yerevan (2015).

12.9 The EHEA in a global context

In Berlin (2003), Ministers agreed that the attractiveness and openness of the European higher education should be reinforced. They confirmed their readiness to further develop scholarship programmes for students from third countries. They encouraged the cooperation with regions in other parts of the world by opening Bologna seminars and conferences to representatives of these regions.

In Bergen (2005), Ministers saw the European Higher Education Area as a partner of higher education systems in other regions of the world, stimulating balanced student and staff exchange and cooperation between higher education institutions. They underlined the importance of intercultural understanding and respect. They looked forward to enhancing the understanding of the Bologna Process in other continents by sharing experiences of reform processes with neighbouring regions. They stressed the need for dialogue on issues of mutual interest. They saw the need to identify partner regions and intensify the exchange of ideas and experiences with those regions.

In London (2007), Ministers adopted the strategy "The European Higher Education Area in a Global Setting" and would take forward work in the core policy areas: improving information on, and promoting the attractiveness and competitiveness of the EHEA; strengthening cooperation based on partnership; intensifying policy dialogue; and improving recognition. This work ought to be seen in relation to the OECD/UNESCO *Guidelines for Quality Provision in Cross-border Higher Education*.

Enthusiastic comments in Leuven and Louvain-la-Neuve (2009), Budapest and Vienna (2010) and Bucharest (2012) did not contribute much to further development of the global dimension of the Bologna Process. However, since 2009 Erasmus Mundus and subsequent EU programmes have been active in cooperation with international partners.

13 The timeline of the Bologna Process

In Bologna (1999), Ministers declared they would engage in coordinating their policies *to reach in the short term, and in any case within the first decade of the third millennium*, the objectives of primary relevance in order to establish the European Area of Higher Education. On this basis, the Bologna Process set out to establish the EAHE by 2010.

By the time of Bergen (2005), important Bologna objectives were already reached:

- A common degree system with three cycles;
- An overarching framework for qualifications;
- Recognition of degrees and periods of studies (36 of the 45 participating countries had ratified the Lisbon Recognition Convention);
- An agreed set of European standards and guidelines for quality assurance.

These were all essential for the mobility of students. The social dimension of the Bologna Process had been introduced and Ministers saw the EHEA as a partner of higher education systems in other regions of the world.

Thus, halfway in the Bologna Process towards 2010, Ministers saw the contours of a European Higher Education Area, not as a single, unified higher education system, but as a group of more than forty national systems developing according to jointly agreed principles. However, to fully realise their aspirations concerning mobility, the social dimension and the global challenges, Ministers responsible for higher education would need support from other ministers in their own governments and also increased funds. This would – at best – take longer time than improving the structure of national higher education systems.

At their next meeting in London (2007), Ministers were looking forward to 2010 *and beyond*: As the EHEA continued to develop and respond to the challenges of globalisation, Ministers anticipated that the need for collaboration would continue beyond 2010:

We are determined to seize 2010, which will mark the passage from the Bologna Process to the EHEA, as an opportunity to reaffirm our commitment to higher education as a key element in making our societies sustainable, at national as well as at European level. We will take 2010 as an opportunity to reformulate the vision that motivated us in setting the Bologna Process in motion in 1999 and to make the case for an EHEA underpinned by values and visions that go beyond issues of structures and tools. We undertake to make 2010 an opportunity to reset our higher education systems on a course that looks beyond the immediate issues and makes them fit to take up the challenges that will determine our future.

In Leuven and Louvain-la-Neuve (2009), Ministers listed priorities *for the decade to come*:

- The social dimension: equitable access and completion;
- Lifelong learning;
- Employability;
- Student-centred learning and the teaching mission of higher education;
- Education, research and innovation;
- International openness;
- Mobility;
- Data collection;
- Multidimensional transparency tools;
- Funding.

Ministers also made a list of operational developments to be carried out by the follow-up group and by participating organizations. New ministerial conferences would be held in 2010, 2012, 2015, 2018 and 2020. The Bologna Process became a twenty-year process.

In Budapest and Vienna (2010), Ministers launched the European Higher Education Area as envisaged in the Bologna Declaration of 1999. For the continuing Bologna Process, Ministers declared their commitment to the full implementation of the agreed objectives and the agenda for the next decade set in Leuven and Louvain-la-Neuve.

Five years later, in Yerevan (2015), there was not much reference to the Leuven and Louvain-la-Neuve objectives. Ministers once more declared that the Bologna Process is based on public responsibility for higher education, academic freedom, institutional autonomy, and commitment to integrity. It relies on strong public funding, and is implemented through a common degree structure, a shared understanding of principles and processes for quality assurance and recognition, and a number of common tools.

However, Ministers observed that implementation of the structural reforms was uneven and tools were sometimes used incorrectly or in bureaucratic and superficial ways. Continuing improvement of national higher education systems and greater involvement of academic communities would be necessary to achieve the full potential of the EHEA.

Awaiting the next ministerial meeting in May 2018, the following description of the European Higher Education Area from the official website of EHEA⁹ sums up the realities:

The European Higher Education Area (EHEA) is the result of the political will of 48 countries which, step by step during the last eighteen years, built an area using common tools. These 48 countries implement reforms on higher education on the basis of common key values – such as freedom of expression, autonomy for institutions, independent students unions, academic freedom, free movement of students and staff. Through this process, countries, institutions and stakeholders of the European area continuously adapt their higher education systems making them more compatible and strengthening their quality assurance mechanisms. For all these countries, the main goal is to increase staff and students' mobility and to facilitate employability.

What further progress will we see towards 2020?

⁹ www.ehea.info