

## European Higher Education and the Process of Change

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European higher education has experienced substantial changes as a result of the ongoing implementation of the *Bologna Process*. Twenty nine (29) European countries signed the *Bologna Declaration* in 1999 committing themselves to transform, through cooperation, an archaic and separated assortment of higher education institutions. In 2010 the participant countries, which had increased to forty seven (47), evaluated the progress made and set up a new agenda for the next decade. This paper outlines the ambitious objectives of the *Bologna Process*; analyzes the challenges faced; and the significant changes that have taken place in the *European Higher Education Area*. The possible impact on higher education around the world is considered. The analysis is based on a review of the literature and selected documents published by key stakeholders in the process of transformation.

Keywords: Bologna Process; Higher Education; Europe; Quality Assurance.

### Introduction

As an academic interested in quality in higher education, the impact of accreditation processes on higher education institutions not only in this country but abroad, has been part of my research agenda. Almost 15 years ago, while exploring how higher education systems in other countries have resorted to quality assurance processes, I came across the interesting higher education reforms that were simmering throughout Europe. Being aware of how challenging it is to negotiate changes or introduce innovations to organizations in which the traditions are deeply rooted or that have maintained the status quo for long intervals; I wondered to what extent the discussed European reforms were achievable. Furthermore, I thought of the many factors and stakeholders involved; knowing that when intended change is not circumscribed to a particular institution but is envisioned for a number of dissimilar organizations

across national borders, the obstacles are even greater.

Many events have occurred in the interval; the world in which we live now is certainly more globalized and new technologies have influenced the delivery of knowledge. Analyzing what has happened in European higher education in this period of time is the purpose of this paper. Review of the literature demonstrates the widespread interest that the issue has generated. There has been an outburst of publications; and different sub-fields of study on related issues continue to appear. The transformation of European higher education is an unparalleled, major event; with many facets and repercussions, and each aspect deserves an in-depth scholarship.

The scope of my discussion is limited to an overview of the initial objectives of what has been called the *Bologna Process*; and the transformation that has taken place in recent years to higher education in

Europe. In addition, my analysis raises questions about possible consequences, not only in Europe, but for university systems across the Atlantic as well. It is necessary to recognize that I based my discussion on a review of selected documents published by key stakeholders. Due to the length and scope of the paper; I had to set limits on the sources reviewed. Not being a member of the European professoriate, restricts to a certain extent my experience and perspective.

### **Visionary Leadership**

On June 19, 1999, European Ministers of Education from twenty-nine (29) countries signed the *Bologna Declaration*; planning important reforms to higher education in Europe. This meeting in Bologna was not the initial encounter of higher education stakeholders seeking reforms; there had been a previous declaration in Paris, during the celebration of the 800th anniversary of the Sorbonne University, in May, 1998. The Ministers of Education of France, Italy, Great Britain and Germany, attending the celebration, signed the *Joint Declaration on Harmonisation [sic] of the Architecture of the European Higher Education System* which proposed an “open European area for higher learning” (Sorbonne Declaration, 1998, para. 4), and outlined a framework of existing challenges and possible solutions. The *Sorbonne Declaration* is an important document that reflects pride about their higher education institutions and the urgency of radical changes.

The *Sorbonne Declaration* is a proclamation about the imperative necessity of transformation; describes how the world is in a time of transformation; and how universities must respond to the challenges. It states: “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” (Sorbonne Declaration, 1998, para. 3). Another important aspect which the *Sorbonne Declaration* addresses is the necessity of increasing international academic experiences, both for students and faculty members. The document describes that historically, academic exchanges had been part of the tradition of European universities; and suggests that it is essential to re-establish that lost tradition: “Universities were born in Europe, some three-quarters of a millennium ago. ... In those times, students and academics would freely circulate and rapidly disseminate knowledge throughout the continent” (Sorbonne Declaration, 1998, para. 2). The concern about limited opportunities of international academic exchanges was expressed: “Nowadays, too many of our students still graduate without having had the benefit of a study period outside of national boundaries” (Sorbonne Declaration, 1998, para. 2).

The *Sorbonne Declaration* shows that the drafters envisioned a Europe, where students have a range of opportunities to study abroad; and where more faculty and researchers transport their knowledge across national borders: “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” (Sorbonne Declaration, 1998, para. 10).

The ministers concluded the *Sorbonne Declaration* with a call to all universities in Europe and other interested stakeholders to come together and engage in a process of change; to become a recognized higher

education area; and to strengthen the standing of European universities in the view of the world (Sorbonne Declaration, 1998).

The four Ministers of Education signers of the *Sorbonne Declaration* were: Claude Allegre, Minister for National Education, Research and Technology, from France; Luigi Berlinguer, Minister for Public Instruction, University and Research, representing Italy; Tessa Blackstone, Minister for Higher Education, from the United Kingdom; and on behalf of Germany, Jürgen Rüttgers, Minister for Education, Sciences, Research and Technology. The *Sorbonne Declaration* is a brief, but powerful document that deserves further scrutiny as an example of how visionary leaders can foster change.

The concerns that lead to the *Sorbonne Declaration* had been developing for a period of time. A year before the *Sorbonne Declaration*, in April 1997, the *Lisbon Recognition Convention* had discussed and adopted resolutions relative to the recognition of higher education qualifications. Since then, the resolutions taken in Lisbon have been ratified by the majority of the European countries. Recognizing degrees earned across borders and accepting qualifications to have access to universities throughout Europe was an important initial step that has been considered crucial not only to increase mobility, but in the overall transformation process (Lisbon Recognition Convention, 1997).

### **The past and the future meet at Bologna**

In response to the call for action made in Paris, Ministers of Education representing 29 European countries met in June, 1999, with the objective of addressing the challenges and opportunities that

European universities were facing; and to continue to examine the issues that had been raised the previous year in the *Sorbonne Declaration*. The 1999 meeting took place at the University of Bologna in Italy. This university is considered the oldest European university, founded at the end of the eleventh century. You could say that there was some symbolism in the selection of this setting. The meeting was about profound changes, and resulted in a joint agreement, with very specific objectives, detailed in the *Bologna Declaration*. The resolutions taken in Bologna can be considered of historical significance. Universities that had developed for centuries in different ways would become part of “the European area of higher education” (Bologna Declaration 1999, para. 1); and would work together to reach common grounds, overcoming differences in missions, traditions, languages of instruction, cultures, and many other factors.

The numerous challenges that European higher education faced were complex. Given the extraordinary socio-political changes that Europe had experienced in recent years; it was time for higher education to become involved and add the dimension of *Knowledge* to the process of change. The *Bologna Declaration* refers to the *Europe of Knowledge* as a crucial aspect in the overall process of transformation. The creation and distribution of knowledge is certainly the realm of the university; and the document stresses its importance: “we are witnessing a growing awareness ... of the need to establish a more complete and far-reaching Europe, in particular building upon and strengthening its intellectual, cultural, social and scientific and technological dimensions” (Bologna Declaration 1999, para. 1).

European university stakeholders had been concerned about several perceived problems that included: higher education systems across Europe were incompatible; degrees awarded were not equivalent; time to degree completion varied from country to country; there was no common or compatible system of credits; the differences made mobility difficult; quality assurance methods were needed; and there were many other issues that had derived from historical and national factors.

The *Bologna Declaration* set clear and ambitious objectives. A fundamental aim was the creation of a European area of higher education; which had not existed in the past. This was a vital objective necessary to further other important objectives, such as to: facilitate mobility and international exchanges; and become more competitive in the academic world. The document reads: “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” (Bologna Declaration 1999, para. 6). The declaration continues stressing the importance of world-wide recognition and competitiveness: “We must ... ensure that the European higher education system acquires a world-wide degree of attraction equal to our extraordinary cultural and scientific traditions” (Bologna Declaration 1999, para. 8).

Specific objectives included: the adoption of comparable degrees across Europe; establishment of undergraduate and postgraduate degrees in all countries; implementation of a credit system to permit transferability; embracing equivalent methods and criteria for quality assurance; facilitating international mobility for students, faculty, researchers, and university

administrators (EU Rectors & CRE, 2000, p. 4).

The Ministers of Education of the 29 countries who signed the *Bologna Declaration* agreed to collaborate and unify higher education in Europe; and made a voluntary commitment to transform, through cooperation, an archaic and separated assortment of higher education institutions into a European area of higher education. These are the countries originally involved in the *Bologna Declaration*: Austria, Belgium (Flemish and French Communities), Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Swiss Confederation, and the United Kingdom (Bologna Declaration 1999).

### **The Academic Voice: Rectors Speak**

As academics studying the *Bologna Process*, it is natural to wonder if the changes were driven just by Higher Education Ministers, which in some way are representatives of the governments; and to question where in the process is the academic voice.

There was a reaction from the universities to the Bologna Declaration. University Rectors (a Rector is the equivalent of a university president) responded to the *Bologna Declaration* with a document prepared by the *Confederation of European University Rectors Conference* and the *Association of European Universities (CRE)*. The Rectors acknowledged the importance of the *Bologna Declaration* affirming: “The Declaration is a **key document** which marks a **turning point** in the development of

European higher education” [emphasis in the original] (EU Rectors & CRE, 2000, p. 3).

Furthermore, the Rectors asserted their position as direct leaders of the European universities, insisting that universities should have a voice in the matter: “In order to respond to the invitation contained in the Bologna Declaration, the higher education community needs to be able to tell Ministers in a convincing way what kind of European space for higher education it wants and is willing to promote” (EU Rectors & CRE, 2000, p. 6). It is apparent that the Rectors considered that the reform should not be driven solely by the Ministers, but also by university administrators and academics; represented by the Rectors of higher education institutions. The Rectors state: **“Universities and other institutions of higher education can choose to be actors, rather than objects, of this essential process of change”** [emphasis in the original] (EU Rectors & CRE, 2000, p. 6).

As representatives of the academic community, the Rectors insisted that universities would be in charge of decisions about the curricula, program development, and preserve their autonomy. The Rectors affirmed that universities would “profile their own curricula, in accordance with the emerging post-Bologna environment...” (EU Rectors & CRE, 2000, p. 6). The Rectors also stated that the decisions about creation of new courses and programs would be made by the universities “in particular through the introduction of bachelor courses in systems where they have not traditionally existed, and through the creation of master courses meeting the needs of mobile postgraduate students from around the world” (EU Rectors & CRE, 2000, p. 6).

Moreover, the Rectors asserted that the universities were the ones that would: “activate their networks in key areas such as joint curriculum development, joint ventures overseas or worldwide mobility schemes” (EU Rectors & CRE, 2000, p. 6). Finally, the Rectors, as the academic leaders of higher education, offered to “contribute individually and collectively to the next steps in the process” (EU Rectors & CRE, 2000, p. 6). The Rectors and the *Association of European Universities* organized a convention of European universities to be involved in the process and to ensure having the academic voice included. The meeting took place in Salamanca, Spain in March 2001. In the same month, there was a Convention of European Students in Göteborg, Sweden; documents reviewed demonstrate that the different associations of students have been actively involved in the process of change (Prague Communiqué, 2001).

### The Students Reaction

Even before the university Rectors, there was an immediate response from the students to the *Bologna Declaration*. The students’ document is titled *Bologna Students Joint Declaration*, and is dated the same day of the *Bologna Declaration*, June 19, 1999. The *National Unions of Students in Europe*, representing at that point, 37 national unions from 31 countries, issued the response. In addition to regretting having been excluded from the discussions, the students contributed important insights.

The students’ declaration raised the issues of access and equity, which had not been considered in depth by the Ministers; and that later on would become the *Social Dimension*, and an important item in the *Bologna Process*. The students reaffirmed their commitment to “quality education open

to the largest number of students. It is a duty of Europe and European governments to permanently raise the level of knowledge of its entire population” (Bologna ESIB, 1999, para. 2). The students insisted that the *Bologna Process* should not become a way to limit “the access to higher education” (para. 2). The students also indicated that *Mobility* should be a right for every student; and listed some obstacles to its achievement, including lack of scholarship funds (para. 3-5).

The students complained: “we deeply regret that the students were not involved with the drafting of the Sorbonne and Bologna declarations and to the definition of their objectives even though we are one of the most important populations concerned by the potential reforms” (Bologna ESIB, 1999, para. 7). The *Bologna Students Joint Declaration* ends with the assertion that European students expect to be part of future Bologna discussions.

Since their initial declaration European students have been actively involved in the *Bologna Process*. The prompt response of the students, and their interest in contributing to the process of transformation, indicates the vitality of student organizations in Europe. In addition to the *Bologna Students Joint Declaration*, the European Students’ Union (ESU) has issued several formal statements such as the *Student Göteborg Declaration*; the *Brussels Student Declaration*; the *Luxembourg Student Declaration*; the *Berlin Student Declaration*; and several others (Göteborg ESIB, 2001; Brussels ESIB, 2001; Luxembourg ESIB, 2005; Berlin ESIB, 2007).

The umbrella organization of European students was, for many years, named *National Unions of Students in Europe*; previously known as the *European*

*Student Information Bureau (ESIB)*. The organization changed its name to *European Students’ Union (ESU)* in 2007. ESU is an umbrella entity, currently representing 45 National Unions of Students (NUS) in 38 countries (ESU, 2011, p. 1). The organization has produced, since 1999, many Policy Papers. Space does not permit listing all of these Policy Papers, but a few examples are noted: *Student Welfare into the New Millennium*, 1999; *Vertical Mobility*, 2000; *European Structures for Qualifications*, 2001; *Joint Degrees in the context of the Bologna Process*, 2002; *Quality Assurance and Accreditation*, 2003; *Brain Mobility*, 2004; *Financing of Higher Education*, 2005; *Governance in Higher Education*, 2006; *Degree Structures*, 2007; *Towards 2020: A Student-Centered Bologna Process*, 2008; *Equal Opportunities*, 2009; *Lifelong Learning*, 2010; and many others (ESIB Policy Paper, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007; ESU Policy Paper, 2008, 2009, 2010). The Board of the *European Students’ Union* selects the topics, and students’ representatives prepare the documents.

In addition to the Policy Papers the *European Students’ Union* has issued several major research publications, which contain the results of extensive surveys in relation to the Bologna Process implementation. These publications include: *Bologna with Student Eyes*, 2003; *Bologna with Student Eyes*, 2005; *Bologna with Student Eyes*, 2007 (ESIB Bologna Process Committee, 2003, 2005, 2007). The *European Student’s Union* also published *Bologna with Student Eyes*, 2009; and *Bologna at the Finish Line*, 2010. In these late publications, after having worked in the Bologna implementation for ten years, the students evaluate the results and call attention to the many aspects that

still remain to be completed (ESU Bologna Process Committee 2009, 2010).

The broad range and depth of the material published by the European students is impressive; which denotes not only desire to positively contribute to the process of improving their universities; but then again reveals student involvement; and scholarship. An in-depth analysis of these publications is material for further study.

On the other hand, students have also been involved in demonstrations and protests against different aspects of the *Bologna Process*. Concerns about not being included in the decision making process have prompted students complaints. In the recent *Student Budapest Declaration*, issued by the ESU in February 2011, students regret that “the pursuit of international competitiveness ... resulted in changes in governance structures that lead to the dilution of student representation in higher education institutions” (ESU Budapest, 2011, para. 3). There have been apprehensions about alleged impacts that the Bologna changes might produce, such as: increase in the cost of the studies; commercialization of higher education; limitation of programs of study; devaluation of the degrees; negative impact on future employability, etc. *The Black Book of the Bologna Process* (2005) presents the students’ perspective on what in their view are adverse aspects of the *Bologna Process*; and their own experiences on problems encountered during its implementation (ESIB, 2005).

### Implementation

The implementation of the *Bologna Declaration* has been called the *Bologna Process*. From the beginning it included multiple levels of organization and undertakings. Some of the countries had to

resort to legislative reforms or government actions. Many international committees, consultative groups and other groups were formed. Extensive research studies, meetings and discussions were organized by the participant countries; or by universities, academic associations, and other interested entities. It is important to keep in mind the number of stakeholders affected by the proposed reforms, to understand how challenging it was to arrive at a consensus on many of the proposed changes. Data from the European Commission reveals that there are about 4000 higher education institutions in Europe; with approximately 1.5 million faculty members and other staff; serving a population of more than 19 million students (European Commission, 2011, para. 1).

As the implementation of the declared objectives proceeded; the scholarship on many issues derived or related to the *Bologna Process* has proliferated. There are extensive research studies and a substantive body of research data. In addition to the documents containing the Ministerial Declarations and Communiqués, there are important documents produced as the process has evolved. For example the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area* (2005), is the result of the development and adoption of a Europe-wide system for Quality Assurance (EAQA, 2005). Being familiar with regional accreditation criteria in the United States, I found the European multi-level system very creative and carefully designed. Another important document is *A Framework for Qualifications in the European Higher Education Area*, which focuses on “learning achievements rather than procedures when assessing qualifications” (Bologna Working Group on Qualifications Frameworks, 2005, p. 191).

Anyone involved in the assessment of student learning outcomes will find this extensive document valuable. The European Commission followed with *The European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning* (2008), which features a multi-level framework that was adopted in 2008, for implementation across Europe. This framework was produced by an Expert Group and involved extensive consultation with stakeholders. The framework is focused “on learning outcomes aiming to facilitate the transparency and portability of qualifications and to support lifelong learning” (European Commission, 2008, p. 3).

Zgaga (2006) prepared a very comprehensive background report titled: *Looking out: The Bologna Process in a Global Setting*. This report informed the *Bologna External Dimension Working Group* to decide which strategies would be included in their recommendations. The *European Higher Education in a Global Setting: A Strategy for the External Dimension of the Bologna Process*; is a brief five page strategic plan to promote and enhance the attractiveness and competitiveness of European higher education world-wide. The *Strategy* was adopted at the 2007 Bologna Ministerial meeting (Strategy, 2007, p. 3).

There are many other relevant documents, published by different interested entities or scholars. I will mention here just a selection: *National Reports* (2005, 2007 & 2009) from the participant countries; *General Reports* that were meant to inform ministerial conferences; *Stocktaking Reports* (2005, 2007 & 2009), these are evaluative analyses of the data included in the *National Reports* to assess overall progress; a working group was assigned to complete the

stocktaking evaluation. Several working groups produced reports on various topics.

Representing the higher education community, the European University Association (EUA) published the following reports, which include comprehensive field research and data about the establishment of the *Bologna Process* reforms: *Trends I: Trends in Learning Structures in Higher Education* (Haug & Kirstein, 1999); *Trends II: Towards the European Higher Education Area - survey of main reforms from Bologna to Prague* (Haug & Tauch, 2001); *Trends III: Progress towards the European Higher Education Area* (Reichert & Tauch, 2003); *Trends IV: European Universities Implementing Bologna* (Reichert & Tauch, 2005); and *Trends V: Universities shaping the European Higher Education Area* (Crosier, Purser & Smidt, 2007). The last report in the series was *Trends 2010: A decade of change in European Higher Education* (Surssock, A., & Smidt, H. (2010). This last report presents the perspective of the higher education institutions after a decade of change.

The *Bologna Declaration* set up the timeframe of a decade for establishing what they called “the European area of higher education” and included the disposition of meeting biannually for progress evaluation and further planning. The countries involved have rotated leadership; and have kept meeting every two years and tracking progress. In these biannual meetings many other issues and agendas have emerged. There have been several important resolutions and statements about critical issues. Since the signing of the *Bologna Declaration* Europe and the world have changed; new challenges, social, political and economic have emerged.

The biannual meetings have taken place in the following cities: Prague, 2001;



Berlin, 2003; Bergen, 2005; London, 2007; Leuven, 2009; Budapest and Vienna, 2010. The next meeting is scheduled in Romania in 2012.

### **Prague 2001**

The Prague meeting was held in May 2001. Representatives of 32 countries attended the meeting. Croatia, Cyprus and Turkey were added to the initial roster. During the Prague convention it was reported that the development of the quality assurance system was advancing. Higher education institutions were asked to collaborate with the *European Network of Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA)* to determine the indicators and processes of quality and “in establishing a common framework of reference and to disseminate best practice” (Prague Communiqué, 2001, p.2). My own experience and research on accreditation in American higher education has made me aware of how difficult it is to agree on quality criteria for accreditation purposes. Through the years, our regional accrediting bodies have found it impossible to agree on setting national criteria for institutional accreditation.

The recognition of the role of students, both as members of the higher education community and as participants in the *Bologna Process*, was one of the highlights of the Prague meeting. The Ministers asserted “that students should participate in and influence the organisation [sic] and content of education at universities and other higher education institutions” (Prague Communiqué, 2001, p. 3). In response to the students’ request of considering the *social dimension*, the Communiqué “reaffirmed the need, recalled by students, to take account of the social dimension in the Bologna process” (Prague

Communiqué, 2001, p. 3). The *social dimension* had not been denoted in the original *Bologna Declaration*.

The importance of the universities’ contributions to the process was recognized as well: “Ministers stressed that the involvement of universities and other higher education institutions and of students as competent, active and constructive partners in the establishment and shaping of a European Higher Education Area is needed and welcomed” (Prague Communiqué, 2001, pp. 2-3). During the Prague meeting special emphasis was placed on the concept of *lifelong learning*. The Prague Communiqué explains: “Lifelong learning is an essential element of the European Higher Education Area. In the future Europe, built upon a knowledge-based society and economy, lifelong learning strategies are necessary to face the challenges” (p. 2).

The Prague Communiqué reaffirms the objectives established in the *Bologna Declaration*, with the additions mentioned above, which are: the social dimension, lifelong learning, and student involvement. The document also restates the plan of launching the *European Higher Education Area* by 2010.

### **Berlin 2003**

With the purpose of reviewing the progress achieved and to continue advancing the *Bologna Process*; the Ministers of higher education from 33 European countries met in Berlin in September, 2003. During the meeting it was announced that there would be 40 countries involved in the *Bologna Process*; the following new members had been accepted to the organization: Albania, Andorra, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Holy See, Russia, Serbia and Montenegro, and “the former Yugoslav Republic of

Macedonia” (Berlin Communiqué, 2003, p. 8).

In the Berlin Communiqué the Ministers stressed the importance of further linking the *European Research Area* and the *Higher Education Area*; with the purpose of firming up the *Europe of Knowledge*. It emphasized “the importance of research and research training and the promotion of interdisciplinarity in maintaining and improving the quality of higher education and in enhancing the competitiveness of European higher education more generally” (Berlin Communiqué, 2003, p. 7). The document states that the intention “is to preserve Europe’s cultural richness and linguistic diversity, based on its heritage of diversified traditions, and to foster its potential of innovation and social and economic development” (p. 2).

In relation to Quality Assurance, a goal was set that by 2005 there would be quality assurance systems in each participant country. The systems would have in place a “definition of the responsibilities of the bodies and institutions involved; Evaluation of programmes [sic] 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....” (Berlin Communiqué, 2003, p. 3).

A follow-up structure was created to continuously track progress of the *Bologna Process* at the different levels of implementation. The tracking of progress was delegated to a Follow-up Group that would prepare progress reports and could convene special working groups as needed. “Participating countries will, furthermore, be prepared to allow access to the necessary information for research on higher education relating to the objectives of the Bologna

Process. Access to data banks on ongoing research and research results shall be facilitated” (Berlin Communiqué, 2003, p. 7).

Representatives from Latin America and Caribbean higher education were guests to the Berlin meeting. The European Ministers were pleased by the worldwide interest that the *Bologna Process* had generated (Berlin Communiqué, 2003, p. 2).

### **Bergen 2005**

The next meeting took place in Bergen, Norway in May 2005. This was considered a mid-term progress review conference; in the process of achieving the objectives set for 2010. The countries of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine were welcomed as new members. With the addition of these countries the *Bologna Process* reached a membership of 45 countries (Bergen Communiqué, 2005, p. 1).

An important item in the Bergen meeting was the acknowledgement of the partners in the process of transformation. The hard work of higher education institutions and the faculty in revising the curricula and adopting new strategies for improving teaching and learning was recognized. The participation of students and other stakeholders was also praised (Bergen Communiqué, 2005, p. 1).

The progress report submitted by the Follow-up Group described substantial progress in the following three priorities: implementation of the degree system; adoption of a quality assurance system; and recognition of degrees and studies across borders. (Bergen Communiqué, 2005, pp. 2-3).

Challenges and new priorities were discussed; including the importance of advancing research and training future

researchers. The alignment of the qualifications for doctoral programs was considered of the highest importance to advance knowledge. “We urge universities to ensure that their doctoral programmes [sic] promote interdisciplinary training and the development of transferable skills ... We need to achieve an overall increase in the numbers of doctoral candidates taking up research careers” (Bergen Communiqué, 2005, p. 4). Transparency in supervision and assessment was mentioned; and the cautionary statement of avoiding “overregulation” of doctoral studies was included.

In relation to the *Social Dimension* the vow of “making quality higher education equally accessible to all” was reiterated (Bergen Communiqué, 2005, p. 4). Access and equity were considered central to the *Social Dimension* of the *Bologna Process*. The Bergen Communiqué states that “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 [sic] services with a view to widening access” (Bergen Communiqué, 2005, p. 4).

The Ministers emphasized the vision of European higher education in partnerships with different regions of the world; and the desire of sharing the experiences gained in the *Bologna Process* with others, outside the European area. The follow-up Group was requested to look into the issue and plan strategies for what was called the “External Dimension” (Bergen Communiqué, 2005, p. 5).

### London 2007

In 2007 the meeting took place in London. The Republic of Montenegro was introduced as a new member. There were, at

this point, 46 countries working to fulfill the objectives of the *Bologna Process*. The contributions of the different working groups involved in the process were acknowledged; and there was a reaffirmation to the commitments of the *Bologna Process*: “We reaffirm our commitment to increasing the compatibility and comparability of our higher education systems, whilst at the same time respecting their diversity” (London Communiqué, 2007, p. 1).

Reports on the progress achieved in the different aspects of the process were presented and discussed; it was also accepted that there were many difficulties to overcome. Referring to *Mobility* the Ministers stated that: “Some progress has been made since 1999, but many challenges remain. Among the obstacles to mobility, issues relating to immigration, recognition, insufficient financial incentives and inflexible pension arrangements feature prominently” (London Communiqué, 2007, p. 2).

The importance of the adoption of qualifications frameworks was underlined; and the difficulties in implementing the frameworks at the national and system wide levels were mentioned: “some initial progress has been made towards the implementation of national qualifications frameworks, but that much more effort is required” (London Communiqué, 2007, p. 3). It was also reported that all the participant countries were in the process of implementing the adopted *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance* (p. 4).

Among the priorities set for 2009, was the recognition of improving the collection of data to verify progress. The London Communiqué mentions “the need to improve the availability of data on both mobility and the social dimension across all

the countries participating in the Bologna Process” (London Communiqué, 2007, p. 6). It is apparent that the collection of accurate comparable data to measure progress was one of the greatest challenges faced; given the many facets of the transformation; the assortment of the institutions involved; and the disparities across countries.

### **Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve 2009**

In April 2009, the meeting of the Ministers of higher education was held in Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve, Belgium. The 46 countries who were then members of the *Bologna Process* were represented. The purpose of the meeting was to evaluate the progress made. On this occasion, setting priorities for the following decade was part of the agenda.

The challenges that European higher education would face in the next decade were analyzed; and the importance of bringing together research and education was discussed. In reference to the worldwide financial crisis it was stated that to “bring about sustainable economic recovery and development, a dynamic and flexible European higher education will strive for innovation on the basis of the integration between education and research at all levels” (Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve Communiqué, 2009, para. 3).

In the Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve Communiqué (2009), the Ministers reiterated that higher education was a public responsibility; and asserted that higher education institutions serve society “through the diversity of their missions” (para. 4). The Ministers continued with an evaluation of the progress made: “Over the past decade we have developed the European Higher Education Area ensuring that it remains firmly rooted in Europe’s intellectual, scientific and cultural heritage and

ambitions....” (para. 5). It was asserted that to a large extent, system wide compatibility was attained, which has helped mobility. The three-cycle degree structure approved during the *Bologna Process* was a key step in the modernization of the higher education system. The use of the *European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance* across Europe; and the establishment of the *European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR)*, were mentioned as part of the accomplishments.

The Ministers outlined a working agenda for the next decade. The *Social Dimension* was considered a priority: “Each participating country will set measurable targets for widening overall participation and increasing participation of under-represented groups in higher education, to be reached by the end of the next decade” (Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve Communiqué, 2009, para. 9). Several other priorities were discussed, such as: *Lifelong Learning, Mobility, Student Centered Education; Research and Innovation; and Data Collection*. A meeting was scheduled for the Bologna anniversary on March 2010; the next Ministerial conference for April 2012; and in 2015, 2018 and 2020.

### **New Declaration 2010-2020**

For the tenth anniversary of the *Bologna Declaration* a reunion was organized in the cities of Budapest and Vienna. During this assembly, Kazakhstan was introduced as a newly admitted country to the accord. Kazakhstan brought to 47 the number of participating countries. As a decade of implementing the *Bologna Declaration* had concluded; the 47 Ministers responsible for European higher Education issued a new declaration covering the decade 2010-2020. This new declaration is a follow-up to the *Bologna Declaration* and is

titled: *Budapest-Vienna Declaration on the European Higher Education Area*. The name of “The European Higher Education Area (EHEA)” was officially adopted to designate their joined partnership, as envisaged in the *Bologna Declaration of 1999* (Budapest-Vienna Declaration, 2010, para. 1).

The Budapest-Vienna Declaration (2010) denotes the substantial progress achieved since 1999 working as partners in the process of transformation. It is stated that the process has “made European higher education more visible on the global map” (para. 5).

Given that there had been some public protests about aspects of the *Bologna Process*; the Ministers acknowledged that the implementation did not always proceed as expected: “Some of the Bologna aims and reforms have not been properly implemented and explained. We acknowledge and will listen to the critical voices raised among staff and students” (Budapest-Vienna Declaration, 2010, para. 6).

The ministers expressed their commitment to the objectives agreed the previous year (2009), in the *Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve Communiqué* and restated the importance of academic freedom; higher education autonomy; and accountability. In reference to the access and equity, the Ministers pledge to “increase our efforts on the social dimension in order to provide equal opportunities to quality education, paying particular attention to underrepresented groups” (Budapest-Vienna Declaration, 2010, para. 11). The *Budapest-Vienna Declaration* will guide the European transformation until 2020.

## Conclusion

This paper has presented a selective overview of the ambitious endeavor that the stakeholders of European higher education have been pursuing through the *Bologna Process*. As we have discussed, the *Sorbonne Declaration* signed in 1998 by representatives of only four countries became an organized process of transformation. Subsequently, forty-seven (47) countries have joined the accord.

In about 12 years, the implementation of the *Bologna Process* has certainly had an unprecedented impact in European Higher Education. There have been controversial issues as you would expect in a process involving change and many stakeholders.

In reviewing recent reports on the *Bologna Process* accomplishments; and the literature about the changes and challenges that European higher education institutions have experienced as a result of the *Bologna Process*; I have found many interesting issues. Apparently universities have been working hard in the implementation of difficult changes at many levels. From my perspective, the major accomplishments include the realization of the need for change; and the establishment of working connections across international boundaries. As mentioned at the beginning, universities that had been established centuries ago, and that had evolved following different traditions; became partners in the quest for improvement. While the initial objectives set in 1999 were not totally fulfilled; and there were glitches and unexpected results during the initial decade of the *Bologna Process*; there are important results that should be recognized.

Europe has now an established and functioning Quality Assurance system. The negotiation, development, adoption, and implementation of the European standards

and processes for quality assurance; has been a major accomplishment. The establishment of a Register for accrediting agencies was crucial. This is an overarching organization with functions similar to the *Council of Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA)* in the U.S.

For a decade European higher education institutions have gone to a process of continuous curriculum reform. The newly adopted framework of comparable degrees and new system of transferability of credits; must have required difficult decision making and negotiations. The curricula are the realm of the faculty; in other words, the Faculty owns the curricula. As academics we know all the issues involved in modifying the curricula. This paper has not included details of the professoriate experiences during the *Bologna Process*; this is certainly an item for future research.

Regional accrediting agencies and specialized accrediting bodies in the U.S. have required for decades the assessment of learning outcomes. The emphasis on improving learning and teaching; and assessing learning outcomes has been part of the European transformation and has become pervasive. European students through their declarations and publications seem very aware of active pedagogical approaches; requesting student centered education; and demanding to be part of the academic decisions.

European students have maintained their commitment to the *Social Dimension*: seeking access, equity and quality higher education for all. Recent occurrences in Europe demonstrate that there are social inequalities that must be addressed. There is some data about improvement in access and participation rates. However, the *Bologna Process* seems to have caused the collateral effect of increasing the cost of some

programs of study. This should be the topic for another study.

From the beginning of the *Bologna Process* international *Mobility* was considered essential. The benefits of international experiences were widely discussed and agreed. *Mobility* comprises not only the academic exchanges within the European higher education area; but with universities around the world. The objective of attracting students worldwide and becoming more competitive internationally has been part of the *Mobility* agenda from early on. Most universities have established policies on *Mobility*. The goals of these policies are similar for each country; increase the number of international exchanges. However, the implementation of these policies is still uneven (Eurydice Network, 2010, pp. 38-43).

Obstacles to *Mobility* have been identified by different stakeholders. There are many issues related to *Mobility* that deserve further study: financial aspects; portability of grants and loans; language proficiency; brain-drain; and several others (Brus & Scholz, 2007). There is a new *Mobility* benchmark. In the year 2020, it is expected, that 20% of graduates will have had an academic international experience. "In 2020, at least 20% of those graduating in the European Higher Education Area should have had a study or training period abroad" (Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve Communiqué, 2009 para. 18).

European universities continue to seek International competitiveness, with the goal of attracting students world-wide. The creation of the *European Higher Education Area* is part of the marketing and promotion of the many new Master programs. A quick survey of the offerings demonstrates the growth of Masters Programs, delivered in English, in different areas of knowledge.

European universities are recruiting students in Latin America, Asia, Africa, and all over the world. International students have more choices. Will this influence the number of international students coming to the U.S.?

Despite the fact that a decade of the *Bologna Process* has concluded, it is not over; overall, there are many accomplishments but the progress varies from country to country. There are of course issues that have not worked out as planned. This is not surprising in such an enormous endeavor. Many questions about different issues are still in the air including further impact on institutional autonomy, academic freedom, accountability, and increasing struggles for achieving social equity. There is no doubt that in our globalized world the transformation of European higher education will eventually influence other higher education systems. Higher education institutions in the U.S. should be alert, and learn from the European experience.

As Curry (1992) has stated “Change seldom progresses smoothly or without problems in the real world” (p. 60). With the launching of *The European Higher Education Area (EHEA)*, during the celebration of the tenth anniversary of the Bologna Declaration, new objectives for 2020 were set. We could state that it is a process, not an event. Universities, faculty members, students and other stakeholders will continue working in the transformation of European higher education.

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