Europeanization of Higher Education systems: European Union, Bologna Process and Higher Education in Croatia

by Fran Kauzlarić, University of Warwick, 2007

Mentor: Dr Roger Duclaud-Williams

'Bologna Process in Croatia has only been implemented formally, without any content-based, substantial changes.'
Professor Gvozden Flego, Former Minister for Science and Technology

Introduction:

The success of the implementation of the Bologna Process varied from one country to another. Croatian example may not be the brightest example, as the rush to make apparent reforms undermined the substantial changes. Although it may seem that all of the reforms were introduced, delving below the surface reveals there is much left to do. One of the obvious reasons for the haste is Croatia's accession process to the EU, as reform of Science and Higher Education are now conditions on the road to EU accession.

Methodology

- reading and critically evaluating relevant documents, journal articles and books

- conducting semi-structured interviews with a number of high-ranking government officials and stakeholders, including members of the European University Association (EUA) and the European Students' Union (ESU) in Brussels; Croatian Ministry of Science, Education and Sport, and University of Zagreb

- conducting informal interviews and conversation with a number of students, members of student organisations and initiatives in Croatia

Myself with Koen Geven, Chairperson of the ESU, at the ESU Headquarters in Brussels

Michael Hörig, Project Officer of the EUA, at the EUA Headquarters in Brussels

Dr Zrinka Kovacevic, Assistant Minister for Higher Education, at the Ministry of Science, Education and Sports in Zagreb

Professor Aleksa Bjeliš, Rector of the University of Zagreb

Professor Gvozden Flego, Former Minister for Science and Technology, at an informal meeting in Zagreb

Professor Helena J Mencer, Former Rector of the University of Zagreb

Issues in Croatian Higher Education

- certain deadlines caused the Bologna Process reforms to be conducted only on the formal level → the structural content remains the same; there are no substantial changes

- there is a high rate of dissatisfaction with the implementation of the Bologna Process among both students and academics caused by the lack of information and incomplete reform

- according to ESU's latest report, Croatia has insufficient data on students, low student involvement in Quality Assurance, too few Student Mobility grants/loans, the national system lacks full integration with the ECTS, an unimplemented national qualifications framework and inadequate student involvement concerning implementation of new policies

The European Commission

- the EC's increased involvement in the Bologna Process can be observed from two sides:

  o as one of the main investors an increased involvement will lead to a higher level of funding

  o both financing the Bologna Process and having a seat on the Bologna Follow-up Group allows the EC to stipulate conditions in the field of Science and HE, which Candidate member states must implement, leading to the loss of the voluntary nature of the Bologna Process

- by aspiring to achieve the goals of the Lisbon Agenda, the Bologna Process might be used as means to reach an end, however, such a view of education is very limited

The Bologna Process is a process in its own right, not an EU process.

Koen Geven, Chairperson of the ESU

Conclusion:

The Bologna Process in Croatia is far from over; some may even suggest it is yet to begin. Croatia's haste to join the EU caused a top-down approach leading to physical reforms, at the cost of transforming the substance. One of the possible explanations I came across is the time-constrained conditioning imposed by the EU in the accession negotiation. However, it can not be singled out as the only cause.

'Many things regarding the Bologna are part of a larger picture of Croatia entering the EU. We had certain deadlines to meet...'
Dr Zrinka Kovacevic, Assistant Minister for Higher Education