



*The Republic of Montenegro*  
**THE GOVERNMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF MONTENEGRO**  
**THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND SCIENCE**

*Higher Education in Montenegro and Bologna Process*  
- *Review of achievements* -

The Ministry of Education and Science has made an unorthodox decision by transferring activities on reforming higher education in Montenegro to the University of Montenegro. The same applies for drafting of the new law on higher education, by nature the job for the Government ministries, which again was entrusted with the University of Montenegro. This has come as no surprise having in mind that this university is the only university in Montenegro and it is fully state-funded. Apart from that, as it is the only university in Montenegro it has become an active partner in all policy discussions about higher education reforms that are going on throughout Europe.

The urge for reforming higher education system has come from within Montenegro but with the same strength from the external, international structures. Firstly, the country had developed strong commitment to joining integration processes at European and Euro-Atlantic levels. Also, a strong urge for change has come from the need to make transition from the remnants of former industrial economy toward services that are putting a heavy demand for educating new profiles of highly educated population for new market. The third set of influences has come from the outside in shape of the Bologna Declaration and other multilateral initiatives that were focused on creating common European area of higher education.

These challenges have come as no surprise for the University of Montenegro as it had been long felt that the rigid structure of university needs to be replaced by a flexible structure that would be responsive not only to the needs of national labor market, but also to European labor market. The need was strongly felt to make a strategic change towards delivering concept of studies that will be focused on applied instead of theoretical concepts and also on acquiring skills other than bare knowledge.

Another need was strongly felt and that is the shift from more or less mono-disciplinary towards multidisciplinary study programs. The need was also felt to make an open structure in which the employers and labor market would have better say in creating concepts and contents of study and research.

The strongest urge, though, came from the need to provide for better mobility of students and academics alike. As a long period of crisis had been over, the international grant and cooperation programs were reinstated and mobility schemes came into the open for all beneficiaries in the University of Montenegro. This urge imposed the need to harmonize concepts, standards and quality with European higher education systems.

Needless to repeat the facts and figures related to our system of higher education, it is necessary, though, to point out some of the aggravating factors related to reforming this segment of education in Montenegro, that is University of Montenegro alone. It has developed as a generic structure starting from 1974. This university developed as an umbrella for 20 study delivering units

(15 faculties, 4 institutes and 1 college). The faculties are located in five towns while the most of them are in Podgorica. This led to fragmentation that posed as a heavy burden on managing university uniformly and consistently. This factor is a strong and noteworthy impediment to the internal mobility of programs and staff. Such as it is, the University is a cost-inefficient structure that can be delivering more courses, particularly at post graduate level with these figures in mind.

It was not until 2000 that the first steps toward adjusting to principles and standards set forth in the Bologna Declaration were taken. The path to pursue was chosen to be legislative one, meaning drafting of new law on higher education and the statute of the University of Montenegro. During the period of 2002-2003 intensive discussions and activities have been conducted throughout academic forums, the document titled Legal Frameworks for the Reform of Higher Education in Montenegro was adopted by the Senate of the University and all of this has produced the mission that the Ministry of Education and Science has accepted to be the backbone of the new legislation and underpin further reform activities. The mission states the following:

*“ To educate young people to be citizens of a democratic society and to be qualified for European labor market and to deliver educational programs in accordance with newly defined European standards. The new legislation should give the blueprint for introduction of new standards and management system in higher education of Montenegro.”*

The most important innovation set forth in the preamble to the draft law was that in relation to management, state university will be managed from a central structure for the sake of enabling strategic and transparent management which will be in balance with strengthening of individual academic freedom. This innovation was aimed towards transforming public, state-funded university into an integral structure, with strong, managerial leadership and faculties that will be parts of university and lose their status of independent legal units. This will integrate fragmented university and create a possibility for internal mobility of studies, programs and staff. Needless to say, the Ministry approved of suggested structure due to the fact that such structure would be cost-efficient and the allocated budget could be better utilized. Having this proclaimed objective in mind, the drafters and leadership have stipulated so in the law and statute.

Another commitment that was articulated in the preamble was to create higher education space that will be open for foundation of new, private institutions of higher education. That was something that the former legislation did not make for. This feature will contribute in future to richer higher education space in Montenegro. So far, the University of Montenegro remained alone in the higher education context and has to cater for all societal needs of a developing society. Furthermore, this is expected to speed up the reforms of higher education with bringing, probably, new players in that field. It is generally accepted thing that competition helps compare, compete and model after. This was not like that so far because of solitary position of the University of Montenegro.

Owing to a successful cooperation with the EUA (CRE at that time) and the Council of Europe, the University of Montenegro hosted seminars and series of other meetings where the experts of these two organization delivered presentations and advised the discussion forums about Bologna process and about all efforts that had been made about creating common European higher education space. Particularly valuable document was the Expert Analysis of the Draft Law on University of Montenegro authored by Mr. Dennis Farrington and professor Jurgen Kohler, which was done under kind auspices of the Council of Europe. After that, Bologna principles were brought into closer consideration of university leadership and new ideas set forth there were integrated into what presently is shaped in the draft of the Law on Higher Education and the draft Statute of the

University of Montenegro. The authors of these drafts also consulted comparative legislation throughout the region as well as pertinent positive practice.

The Council of Europe's recommendation was fully accepted that the law should prescribe general legal framework that should not define in detail all aspects of higher education. Thus, the new law sets forth basic principles but all other elements should be defined by regulations, statutes and instructions.

In respect to the rights and freedoms related to higher education, the new legislation prescribes the obligation of the state to enable access to education to be a general right and that it should provide the standards and infrastructure for this general right to be exercised.

The state should also grant licensing for all institutions for higher education which comply with these standards. Accreditation of the study programs and courses should be done by a separate agency that will be established and funded by the Parliament, but independent in accreditation activities. Recognition will be done in ENIC/NARIC office to be established within the Ministry of Education and Science.

Quality assurance was envisaged as obligatory for all higher education institutions and that is a prerequisite for accreditation. The draft law prescribes QA to become permanent exercise to be conducted through self-evaluation, student-evaluation and external evaluation. Supportive of that, the University of Montenegro has already engaged into the TEMPUS project titled the Introduction of QA Standards in University of Montenegro. The University and international project consortium have already finished the self-evaluation stage of the project. In the third stage this project will suggest remedial activities for improving quality standards and devise a fully-fledged QA system that will be maintained and improved in order to become a permanent quality control system. One ambition that Montenegro has is to join ENQUA network. The activities thereof will soon be discussed with the consortium experts.

ECTS system has been seriously taken and this is the most demanding stage of the reforms. The instructions for introducing credits have already been drafted and approved by the Senate of university and most of the faculties have already reduced modules to one semester and renewed curricula in order to meet demands for introducing credits. Also, a new feature to that is that they have envisaged new structure of study courses in which there will be a large number of elective courses along with the core ones, and this has not been used so far. Still, the most demanding process will start as of 2003/2004 school year and is expected to be improved and streamlined by time.

Diploma supplement has been introduced in provisions of the new law. Also the instructions have been drafted for faculties and colleges to be able to introduce this very important supplement to the diplomas issued. We think that the introduction of Diploma supplement will be of particular relevance as the reforms evolve and the integrated University starts creating and delivering the variety of new, multidisciplinary programs of studies. With the old concept it would not have too big relevance.

The new law envisages two-tier higher education and this is prescribed by the law. However, the Statute prescribes the duration of studies and the degrees conferred by the University. It introduces new scheme of studies i.e. degrees. The new statute distinguishes between applied and academic studies, which is a new feature of the system. Namely, the undergraduate academic studies should last for at least three years but together with postgraduate master's studies they shall

not exceed five years. Applied undergraduate courses will last for three years and master's should last for up to two years. Doctoral degree will be awarded to the candidates who have finished academic undergraduate studies and master studies and after successfully finishing doctoral studies and research, which altogether should not last less than three years.

The draft law has stipulated that students will take part in decision-making through their representatives at managerial board of the university and faculties as well as in evaluation of the programs of university.

The law has envisaged the structure that will enable access to higher education to all those who satisfy the enrollment criteria and will be organized as such to allow for the introduction of life long learning concept. This was all based on the principle of creating inclusive and flexible higher education structure that will meet the societal demand for higher education.

One very important concept that the new legislation will enable is to have joint degree programs with universities throughout Europe and will enable for mobility on the basis of credits, diploma supplement and recognition process that will be harmonized with the principles of the Lisbon Convention.

In essence, the state maintains the competence to set and oversee the standards for higher education, establish higher education institutions by licensing them, enable for accreditation of programs and studies through the agency it will establish, enable recognition process to be conducted according to international standards by setting up ENIC/NARIC office, provide funds and infrastructure necessary for state university, arbitrate in disputes, protects and promote university autonomy, academic freedom and student rights and promote quality of higher education.

Institutions of higher education maintain competence to deliver teaching programs and studies, conduct scientific research, employ academic and administrative staff, enroll students, award degrees and diplomas, conduct commercial services for labor market and cooperate with other institutions of higher education.

In relation to implementing the legislation and endorsed principles, Montenegro needs to launch series of intensive activities in near future. The legislation is not an end but means to all these efforts. A lot of work remains to be done in terms of curricular renewal and introduction of fully-fledged ECTS system. These are pillars of the reforms. This is expected to be a continuous process for which the foundation has already been made and initial activities have already started.

The restructuring process will imply downsizing of administration and, then, the training process should be launched so that the administration learns skills and competences required for putting streamlined structure into operation.

There are many infrastructure adjustments to be made. Since the new system requires workload re-composition and shift to individualization of studies requiring the students to be creators of their own line of study, the first requirement is to build a central university library and to refurbish laboratories. It is a heavy financial burden on the state and university equally. The construction of the new building has already started, but this capital investment cannot be fully funded by the state. In this regard the Ministry of Education and Science has already addressed donors for help at the Donor's Briefing Meeting (April 2003 – Brussels) The Ministry has envisaged to organize a donors' conference in September 2003 in which it will try to fundraise for this ambitious undertaking. Apart from construction, this crucial exercise will require the

“software” for central university library, that is literature, publications and electronic search-bank subscriptions. This will also be a heavy financial demand that needs to be in place for overcoming the gap of almost twelve years of crisis which affected (almost drained) library stock. This is general ailment of all state universities in the region but it might pose impediment the transition to new standards of higher education studies.

Intensive activities will take place in relation to raising awareness and information campaign. The Ministry of Education will invest funds into this campaign and publishing activities that need to be made in relation to informing all beneficiaries of the system.

Once the law and statute of the University of Montenegro are adopted (expected in September 2003), the system will start its transitional operation according to prescribed and proclaimed standards. It will require considerable time before the changes take roots and become standard. However, Montenegrin authorities and academic leaders expect that they will achieve this by year 2007, having in mind the that the reform of the only university in Montenegro will set the standards for entire system to operate.

In order to make sure it has a say in reform activities and in effort to assure quality of the system of higher education, the Ministry of Education and Science will suggest the Government of Montenegro to appoint a Bologna Commission that will have a coordinating, supervisor and monitoring role in implementation of legislation and conduct of all activities focused on reform of the system.

Generally speaking, commitment of Montenegro towards reforming higher education system in compliance with the pledges declared in Bologna Declaration is very strong and it will remain such in future. The state has already endorsed that concept as it fully corresponds to the needs related joining European integration processes.

Needless to say, higher education leaders have already endorsed all ongoing activities focused on creating common European higher education space.

Finally, regarding the society in general and public at large the commitment and expectation towards reforming higher education are high as labor markets will not give any excuse for those who lag behind in acquiring modern knowledge, skills and standards.