
REFORMING THE CURRICULA IN THE UNIVERSITIES OF SOUTH EAST EUROPE IN VIEW OF THE BOLOGNA PROCESS

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Basing himself on nine case studies of representative universities in South East Europe, the author presents some of the pitfalls and the successes registered by these universities in their efforts to adhere to the guidelines of the Bologna Process. Some of these institutions have come further than others in achieving the objectives of the process. All of them recognize that these objectives offer them a valuable reform blueprint.

PREMISES

This article is based on two basic premises:

- i.* the common wisdom that the Bologna Declaration is not only a political statement, but also a binding commitment to a plan of action;
- ii.* that a series of *case studies* about the implementation of the Bologna Declaration supports the conclusions of the author, despite the possibility that these same case studies might have been influenced by the perspectives of their rapporteurs.

The input information concerns the following universities:

- The University of Tirana (Albania);
- The University of Banja Luka (Bosnia-Herzegovina);
- The University of Split (Croatia);
- The University of Zagreb (Croatia);
- The University of Priština (Kosovo/ Serbia);
- The University of Montenegro (Montenegro);
- The Cyril and Methodius University of Skopje (Macedonia);
- The University of Novi Sad (Serbia)
- The University of Niš (Serbia).

According to the first premise, the action programme set out in the Declaration is based on a clearly defined common goal, a deadline, and a set of specific objectives:

- *a clearly-defined common goal:* to create a European area for Higher Education in order to enhance the employability and mobility of citizens and in order to increase the international competitiveness of European higher education;
- *a deadline* calling for the complete setting up of the Higher Education Area by 2010;
- *a set of specific objectives:*

- the adoption of a common framework of readable and comparable degrees, including two-tier levels and implementation of the Diploma Supplement;
- ECTS-compatible credit systems, also covering lifelong learning activities;
- a European dimension in quality assurance, with comparable criteria and methods;
- the elimination of the remaining obstacles to the free mobility of students (including trainees and graduates) and teachers (as well as researchers and higher education administrators).

The case studies providing the data for this analysis are about key universities in South-East Europe both in terms of their impact upon the national higher education systems in question and the numbers of enrolled students, the immediate beneficiaries of the reforms being undertaken (Table 1).

Table 1. Number of enrolled students in the case study universities

University of Tirana (Albania)	30,000 students	(1 percent of the entire population of the country)
University of Banja Luka (Bosnia-Herzegovina)	14,427 students	
University of Split (Croatia)	16,000 students	36 percent of the entire student population of Croatia
University of Zagreb (Croatia)	20,000 students	
Cyril and Methodius University of Skopje (Macedonia)	36,000 students	
University of Montenegro (Montenegro)	10,500 students	
University of Priština (Kosovo/UNMIK)	19,060 students	(15 faculties)
University of Novi Sad (Serbia)	36,266 students	Out of 145,045 student population of Serbia
University of Niš (Serbia)	26,000 students	
Total number of universities in South East Europe being studied :	9	Total number of enrolled students: 208,253

Moreover, owing to the traditional dependence of universities in this region on the state, the case study institutions read like holograms. One can, more or less, understand the main characteristics of the whole national system of higher education by looking inside a single university.

DESCRIPTORS OF THE BOLOGNA PROCESS IMPLEMENTATION

Given the two premises stated above, the starting point of our analysis was to study the information provided by single case study reports (second premise) through the eyes of the Bologna Declaration (first premise). The first outcome was a *classification*, in four tables, of the most relevant information, according to the main objectives of the Bologna Process (see Tables 2-5).

Table 2. The common framework of readable and comparable degrees, two-tier degrees, and diploma supplements

University of Tirana (Albania)	University of Banja Luka (Bosnia & Herzegovina)	University of Split (Croatia)	University of Zagreb (Croatia)	University of Priština (Kosovo/ UNMIK)	University of Montenegro (Serbia & Montenegro)	Cyril and Methodius University of Skopje (Republic of Macedonia)	University of Novi Sad (Serbia & Montenegro)	University of Niš (Serbia & Montenegro)
<p><i>Existing System:</i> 4(5) years for diploma + 5 years doctoral training <i>Official initiation of Bologna Process</i> Oct. 2001 (Minister of Education ordered preparations for the Bologna Process) System adopted: 3(BA)+2(MA)+5(PhD) for teacher training: 3+1+2(MA)+5(PhD) -in [pilot phase at several Faculties] <i>Deadline:</i> 2003 - depressed labour market <i>Curricular transformation</i> - existing curricula not attractive or adequate for the labour market in Albania and the European Union -discussions about programme restructuring -Diploma Supplement in use as of 2001</p>	<p><i>-Letter of intention</i> to finally sign the Bologna Declaration in Berlin, 2003 <i>-Elaboration of Institutional Development Plan</i> (2000-2010) consonant to Bologna Declaration. Once passed the new legislation, seems easy to implement Bologna <i>Real challenge:</i> PhD programme (courses to be introduced). <i>Curricular Transformation</i> Initial steps toward: -joint degrees -analysis of student workload (28-30 classes/week) <i>Deadline:</i> 2004- curricula at the European level. “shoulds” and “musts”</p>	<p>-Bologna process in early stages -a draft of the Scientific Research and Higher Education Law <i>Curricular Transformation</i> -no policy document, related to the reform of curricula - resistance of the staff - heavy students workload for: 28-35 classes/week - of apprehension and uncertainty - reforming curricula <i>should</i> become a priority</p>	<p>-presence of exotic academic titles <i>Existing system:</i> 4-6 years (Diploma)+3 (4) Master+4 years PhD -a <i>draft</i> of a new H. E. Act (to be adopted 2003) Bologna degrees 3+2+3 should be introduced <i>Deadline:</i> October 2003</p>	<p>-crucial role of international key-players -elaboration of: Law of H.E. of Kosovo Statute of the University 2000 June: <i>-Model of Reforming the Faculties at the University of Priština, based on the Bologna Declaration</i> -Bologna provisions completely adopted (2001-2002)</p>	<p>-in 2002, the Senate adopted a policy document: <i>New Legal Framework for Higher Education in Montenegro</i> <i>-Curricula transformation</i> a “mission impossible” for the time being -rather modest achievements, if any -no timetable for the reforms -leaders are “lone rangers” -Government has decided to stay out -curricula reform has been sidelined as the drafting of the new legislation was given precedence -high resistance of the academic staff -BA in newly established undergraduate courses (Faculty of Philosophy).</p>	<p><i>Existing System:</i> 4(6) years for Diploma <i>New trends</i> (Bologna) have commenced (Senior dentist technicians/ nurses: 3+2) -PhD- not yet organized in the Bologna spirit; mentors load up the candidates <i>Curricular Transformation:</i> -in progress -needs to develop studies in English -Diploma Supplement adopted -initiation of interdisciplinary postgraduate studies</p>	<p><i>New Law of Higher Education</i> (May, 2002) -Drafting a New Law for higher education based on Bologna Declaration <i>-Curricular Transformation:</i> -in early stages; -no interdisciplinary undergraduate courses -90 percent of the courses are obligatory -departments and faculties are encouraged to reform and to modernize curricula - still only a suggestion, not an obligation (Statute of the University of Novi Sad) <i>Existing system:</i> 4(6) years for Diploma</p>	<p><i>Existing System:</i> 4-6 years for Diploma <i>Curricular Transformation:</i> -reducing teaching content up to 30 percent -there are no optional courses yet -no free-elective courses -traditional manner of teaching -Diploma Supplement is not yet in use, even though it is viewed as a major instrument to facilitate readability and comparability <i>-Deadline:</i> 2004-2005 Academic year, to implement 3+2 or 4+1 degrees -elaboration of a Questionnaire, aiming to measure teaching willingness to change; -lifelong learning does not exist</p>

Table 3. Adoption of the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS)

University of Tirana (Albania)	University of Banja Luka (Bosnia & Herzegovina)	University of Split (Croatia)	University of Zagreb (Croatia)	University of Priština (Kosovo/ UNMIK)	University of Montenegro (Serbia & Montenegro)	University of Skopje (Macedonia)	University of Novi Sad (Serbia & Montenegro)	University of Niš (Serbia & Montenegro)
-ECTS adopted (2002); -optional after the adaptation of the new degree-system will be not in final form (2003) -information package distributed at faculties, in English and in Albanian -the work is unfinished because the curricula and syllabi will be periodically revised -model: Italian Universities (about 5,000 Albanian students continue their studies in Italy) -“shoulds” and “musts”	-ECTS not in use -“shoulds” and “musts”	-plan to appoint an ECTS coordinator -plan to set up a Board for international Relations and ECTS Time Frame: a) ECTS to be introduced for PhD studies as of 2004-2005 b) ECTS to be introduced for undergraduate and Master’s Degree programmes starting in the 2005-2006 academic year -ECTS already introduced in a programme of Joint Master’s Degree (with Romanian and Italian Universities)	-ECTS in partial use at 2/3 of the Faculties of the University -credit transfer inside the University is not possible owing to the rigid study programmes and legal entity of every single faculty that makes up the university	-ECTS introduced since the 2001-2002 academic year	-ECTS planned to be introduced next year - no timetable - reform: a series of attempts rather than a process	- introduction of ECTS has commenced -“shoulds” and “musts” -November 2001 <i>Senate approved The Book of Rules for the Uniform Bases of the Credit System</i> Deadline: ECTS fully implemented during the Academic Year 2004-2005	-ECTS not in use	- ECTS not in use but planned to be introduced from the 2004-2005 academic year - seen as a tool to reduce the size of courses - “negative credits” (?) (= the difference between the total number of credits and the completed number of credits)

Table 4. Quality assurance in the case study universities

University of Tirana (Albania)	University of Banja Luka (Bosnia- Herzegovina)	University of Split (Croatia)	University of Zagreb (Croatia)	University of Priština (Kosovo/Serbia)	University of Montenegro (Montenegro)	University of Skopje (Macedonia)	University of Novi Sad (Serbia)	University of Niš (Serbia)
-National Center for Accreditation (1998) -Each Faculty has proposed guidelines for internal evaluation -co-operation with the Open University of London	-Quality assurance mechanisms at five pilot faculties, planned to be extended as of the 2004-2005 academic year - analysis of student workload	- no special mechanism for quality assurance, but expected to be introduced according to the new Law on Higher Education -only one faculty in which students are involved in quality control (Faculty of Medicine)	- self-evaluation carried out in 1999 -Universities should have in place quality assurance mechanisms	-special mechanisms for quality assurance not specified in the report	-accreditation is not relevant as there is only one university in Montenegro -Joint Accreditation Office for countries in the region still in the project phase -self-evaluation and external evaluation will be designed via a TEMPUS project	-early stage of working-out quality assurance mechanisms	-no special measures in the framework of the Bologna Declaration reported	-no special measures in the framework of the Bologna Declaration reported -strong tendency to introduce quality assurance mechanisms

Table 5. Mobilities in the case study universities

University of Tirana (Albania)	University of Banja Luka (Bosnia & Herzegovina)	University of Split (Croatia)	University of Zagreb (Croatia)	University of Priština (Kosovo/ UNMIK)	University of Montenegro (Serbia & Montenegro)	University of Skopje (Republic of Macedonia)	University of Novi Sad (Serbia & Montenegro)	University of Niš (Serbia & Montenegro)
-5,000 Albanian students continue their studies in Italy -difficulties related to visa procedures (for incoming and outgoing students)	-initial steps for joint degrees	-horizontal mobility - unusual -main problem: no English language course taught at undergraduate level -Joint Master's Degree University of Walachia and Molisse University) (2003) -Joint PhD Degree in Environmental Physiology (with the University of Trondheim)	-horizontal mobility very low -underdeveloped teachers mobility	-EUA and international key-players- -substantial funds for visits abroad -more than one-third of the activity of the Rectorate is focused on international co-operation -32 bilateral agreements -system of double lecturing -the largest Summer School in Europe (2002)	-no international students	-70 inter-university agreements -special programme for attracting students -a special fund to stimulate foreign students attendance of Macedonian studies	-Summer Schools, the first step toward internationalization	-European dimension still in infancy -no specific mention of the Bologna Declaration

WHAT CAN WE LEARN?

Even a simple examination of the information and data systematized in Tables 2-5 is sufficient for one to infer that the universities in the area are fully aware of the *importance* of the Bologna Declaration, the *opportunities* it offers, and the *challenges* it poses. The Declaration has produced a whole scale of emotional reactions ranging from enthusiasm to apprehension and fear. Nevertheless, a serious reflection upon the mission and functioning of the higher education institutions is by far one of the most important responses elicited by the universities from the region. Following the signature of the Bologna Declaration, talks about curricular reform, ECTS, quality assurance, and two-tier degrees became common currency in the academic life of South East Europe.

Beyond the specific, context-bound, even idiosyncratic reactions of the universities in question, it is possible to identify several commonalities that enable the learning of more general and useful lessons. The Bologna Declaration not only represents a political commitment on the part of the governments of the signatory countries, but at the same time, it is an immense opportunity for the universities to play a crucial role in reshaping the European Higher Education Area. Before winning over the systems of higher education, the spirit of Bologna must first be accepted at institutional level. It is the clear responsibility of individual universities to reform those inner aspects of the academic life that can promote the implementation of the Declaration. Based on the above-mentioned case studies, our analysis attempts to identify the most important actions the universities of South East Europe must undertake in order to implement the Bologna Declaration in their curricula:

Analysis of Student Workloads and the Substantial Reduction of the Number of Classes per Week

In most of the universities being studied, the curricula require an average of twenty-eight to thirty-two classes per week, far too heavy a load compared to the prescriptions in place in Western European or American universities.

On the one hand, such a workload leaves little “room” for active learning on the part of students. They become passive receivers of information rather than active constructors of knowledge. On the other hand, the more courses one has to take, the smaller the number of credits one can allocate to one discipline. According to the logic of ECTS, a total number of thirty credits per semester requires substantial work on the part of the student; therefore, a difficult discipline will be devalued by being assigned a reduced number of credits simply because the same number, *i.e.*, thirty credits per semester, must be distributed among a large number of disciplines.

Most of the universities that are being analyzed have expressed clear dissatisfaction with their existing curricula, which they find unattractive and inadequate for the local and the European labour market (*e.g.*, the University of Tirana, the University of Novi Sad, and the University of Montenegro). Reducing the teaching content by up to 30 percent has become a central objective of the University of Niš, for example. To sum up, reducing the teaching contents and the number of classes not only promotes active learning and makes curricula more attractive for the students, but also makes the process of introducing the two-tier system much smoother.

Revising the Teaching Style and the Ratios of Different Kinds of Courses (Compulsory Courses *versus* Optional Courses *versus* Free Elective Courses)

Many universities in the area under scrutiny recognize that the teaching methods employed and the methods whereby professors evaluate students are seriously outdated. Both issues are linked to reducing the difficulties in introducing the Bachelor’s and the Master’s Degrees. If a Bachelor’s Degree is to be relevant to the labour market, then an active learner is needed, an

active citizen, who is familiar with the requirements of critical thinking. But, such a learner can only be prepared by interactive, problem-focused methods of teaching. In other words, the upgrading of teaching methods would constitute a strong antidote to the anxiety and worries expressed by receivers of the Bachelor Degree that they are less prepared for competition in the labour market, than traditional students are after four or five years of training. Reforming the teaching style is, therefore, an important prerequisite for the successful introduction of undergraduate and postgraduate levels (3+2), according to the system of the Bologna Declaration. Retaining the traditional teaching style and introducing, at the same time, the two degree levels, the BA and the MA, are mutually incompatible.

In addition, the development of distance learning requires special methods for the elaboration and the presentation of courses that cannot be found in traditional pedagogy. For example, a friendly course interface presented on a Website, the existence of rapid Internet interaction between the user and the person who proposed the course, the segmenting of the course into modules proper for distance learning, the existence of dynamic methods of self-evaluation during the learning process etc., are some of the basic characteristics of web-designed courses. One needs a serious upgrading of the knowledge and tools involved in course construction in order to assure quality in distance learning. Eventually, the development of distance education will bring about a deepening of the division of labour, within universities. Some people will provide teaching content, others, friendly interfaces; even others will market the distance learning courses; and finally, others will pursue advanced research. It is hard to believe that the same person will be able to do everything.

On the other hand, several universities have reported an imbalance in their curricula between the numbers of compulsory courses and the optional or free elective ones. In some cases, there are no optional courses or free elective courses at all (*e.g.*, the University of Niš), or the proportion of compulsory courses rises up to 90 percent (the University of Novi Sad). Such rigidity implies that the horizontal mobility of students, which is already complicated by the fact that many of the universities in the area are loose associations of legally independent faculties, is almost nonexistent (see the University of Montenegro, the University of Split, the University of Zagreb, the University of Novi Sad, and the University of Niš). Students must take what they are given and have very little freedom in establishing their own study means.

One can conclude that maintaining the traditional style of teaching constitutes a serious danger for the labour market relevance of the degrees awarded by the Universities. The disproportion between compulsory courses, on the one hand, and the optional and free elective courses, on the other, hinders the development of active learners and constitutes a danger for student mobility, especially horizontal mobility. Neither the upgrading of the teaching methods, nor the optimization of the ratio of different kinds of courses, one to the others, can be legally imposed by ministers or governments. But both can be implemented by firm and responsible action from within the respective universities.

Development of Courses Taught in Foreign Languages, Especially English

One of the frequently mentioned obstacles, faced by students and staff in attempting mobility, is their poor command of foreign languages, especially of English. The existence of undergraduate and postgraduate courses taught in English or other internationally used foreign languages, is almost non-existent (*e.g.*, at the University of Split). In this respect, the Universities of South East Europe could learn from Western universities where, in the last decade, the number of programmes taught in English has increased dramatically. For example, in the last decades, universities in the Netherlands launched 500 programmes taught in English. The figures are 300 in Finland; 150 in Germany; and 80 in France (Feder, 2001). Academic programmes in English seem to be an important prerequisite to play the game of brain-gain or, at least, to reduce the brain-drain (Waechter, 2001).

The implementation of course programmes in English not only improves the competitiveness of home students on the European and international labour market, but also constitutes a strong argument in favour of increasing the numbers of incoming students. Again, the promotion of course programmes in foreign languages (especially English) is exclusively the prerogative and the responsibility of each university. It cannot be delegated to the management level of the higher education system as a whole. The systematic pursuance of this path by a higher education institution can have a huge impact upon the mobility of staff and students – one of the main objectives expressed by the Bologna Declaration.

Introducing Quality-Assurance Mechanisms

As one can be seen in Table 3, most of the universities in the area are in the early stages of developing mechanisms of quality assurance. Two aspects of this process deserve special attention:

- i.* In addition to the important action of setting up national accreditation agencies, quality assurance is a matter that is best related to the *institutional* level of a given higher education system. As examples of good practice, one can cite the University of Tirana, where each faculty has prepared guidelines for internal evaluation, the introduction of quality assurance mechanisms in five pilot faculties at the University of Banja Luka, and the involvement of students in the assessment of teaching (the University of Split). Without constant preoccupation with quality assurance, one can never have a *culture* of quality inside a university. Without the strong commitment of the institution and the academic community to promote and evaluate quality in all aspects of their activities, neither *legislative initiatives* nor mechanisms of external evaluation can produce the required institutional culture. If the academic community will realize that the main purpose of evaluation is to improve that aspect which is evaluated (formative evaluation), not to penalize or to set up rankings (informative evaluation), its resistance to change, underlined by many reports, will be clearly diminished.
- ii.* The *second* aspect considered as being of special interest is the proposal, made by Professor D. Jovanović (2003) of the University of Montenegro, to set up a Joint Accreditation Office for all the countries in the region. Although the question has been discussed by academic and political leaders, any Joint Accreditation Office is still in the project phase.

The author strongly supports this proposal and marshals several arguments:

- i.* The countries in the area have many things in common (*e.g.*, institutional structure, academic tradition, culture, long-lasting co-operation in various fields, etc.);
- ii.* A Regional Accreditation Office will set up common standards for all universities, therefore promoting student and staff mobility and the introduction of joint degrees;
- iii.* The regional labour market offers more opportunities and seems to be more attractive than the local (national) market. The Regional Accreditation Office could reduce bureaucracy and increase the mobility of the labour force.

Overall, the *institutional* and *regional* levels are the most relevant levels for quality assurance within the universities belonging to the area under investigation.

Reforming Higher Education Management and Governance – Setting Up a Timetable for the Reform

Progress in implementing the Bologna Declaration seems to be very closely related to the commitment of universities to strategic management. Almost everywhere, documents concerning strategic development have served as milestones in the implementation of the Declaration. To give only a few examples, the University of Banja Luka elaborated an Institutional Development Plan (2000-2010), compatible with the Bologna Declaration. The University of Priština published: *The Model of Reforming of the Faculties at the University of Priština Based on the Bologna Declaration* (June, 2000). The Senate of the University of Montenegro adopted a policy document, *New Legal Framework for Higher Education in Montenegro* (2002). The University of Novi Sad has changed the *Statute of the University of Novi Sad* (2002), to conform to the New Law on Higher Education of Serbia. Finally, the Croatian universities are deeply involved in preparing the draft of a *Scientific Research and Higher Education Law*.

This strong tendency in favour of strategic and proactive management leads to more favourable conditions for the implementation of the Declaration than reactive management, that would be focused on daily problems and crisis management. On the other hand, in many of the universities of former Yugoslavia, the traditional institutional organization as loose associations of legally independent entities is still in place. This dispersal of the universities in many entities and locations creates supplementary difficulties for the reform process and should be modified in the foreseeable future. Otherwise, curricular reform will continue to be, as D. Jovanović (2003), suggestively notes "... a mission impossible for the time being" and university leaders will be perceived "rather as lone [rangers] than [as] agents of change".

Another lesson to be learned from the case studies, which evoke aspects of strategic management, concerns the importance of setting up timetables for the Reform process. Universities that are more advanced in terms of implementing the Bologna Declaration have clearer time frames than those which are less advanced. To quote again from the University of Montenegro case study report (Jovanović, 2003), the "reform process has been going on for a long time now. However, it has been brought to a halt so many times, that it cannot be called a process, but a series of attempts instead, if you do not assign deadlines, the things will surely take too long".

INTRODUCING DOUBLE DEGREES: LEGISLATION AND THE LABOUR MARKET RECONSIDERED

The picture regarding the introduction of the degrees specified in the Bologna Declaration (3 BA+ 2 MA+ 3 PhD) in the universities of the region is very heterogeneous. Summarizing the data from Table 2, one can mention that:

- The University of Tirana has introduced a variant of the Bologna Degrees in a pilot phase in several Faculties:
 - 3 BA+ 2 MA+ 5 PhD for Sciences;
 - 3+1 (for teacher training) +2 MA+ 5 PhD for Pedagogical Sciences.
- The University of Banja Luka has maintained the traditional system, but considers that once new legislation had been passed, the two-tier degree system will be easy to implement.
- The Croatian Universities of Split and Zagreb have placed great hopes on the new Law on Scientific Research and Higher Education that is going to be adopted in

2003 and consider the deadline for introducing the 3+2+3 system, in October 2003 as being realistic.

- The University of Montenegro opened a Bachelor's Degree programme only for the newly established undergraduate course programme in the Faculty of Philosophy.
- The Cyril and Methodius University of Skopje still retains the traditional system, but the introduction of two-tier degrees has begun for senior dental technicians and senior nurses.
- The University of Novi Sad still maintains the traditional cycle of four to six years for a Diploma, but encourages the departments and the faculties to modernize the curricula.
- The University of Niš continues to keep in place the traditional system of four to six years per cycle for a Diploma, but strongly underlines that the 2004-2005 academic year will be the year for implementing the 3+2 or 4+1 system of degrees.
- The University of Priština is the only university in the area in which the Bologna provision was completely adopted, beginning with the 2001-2002 academic year.

Most of the universities in South East Europe are in the early stages of introducing courses and credit systems at PhD level where, traditionally, PhD candidates were directed by their thesis supervisors, without having to take courses or research seminars.

In addition, beside these descriptive statements, a few other points must be underlined.

First, the legislative provisions concerning the introduction of the two main cycles, the undergraduate and the graduate cycles, are, without any doubt, very important. As stated above, universities have great expectations regarding the legislative reform. However, the importance of legislative innovations *must not* be overemphasized. Owing to the fact that drafting new legislation was given precedence, curricular reform has often been sidelined. It is, therefore, necessary to avoid the danger of window dressing changes, *i.e.*, upgrading legislation but postponing curricular reform.

If a Government wishes to facilitate the implementation of two-tier degrees, it can do so by playing a crucial role in the labour market and by upgrading its employment legislation. The State may be the most important employer. If clear governmental actions and legislative reforms are undertaken in order to facilitate the employment of holders of Bachelor's Degree, then the resistance or apprehension of the academic staff will diminish substantially and the willingness of students and other stakeholders to back up the Bologna Declaration will dramatically increase.

Finding Easier Ways to Promote Change

One of the lessons worth learning from the case studies under scrutiny refers to the ability to find the best or the easiest ways to promote the implementation of the provisions of the Bologna Declaration (despite the resistance of staff members, the lack of appropriate legislation, etc.).

An effort has been made to identify these ways from the practices of some universities in order to recommend them to all the Universities, as follows:

- the launching of new programmes;
- the introduction of joint degrees;
- the organization of summer schools;

- the exploiting of the opportunities offered by European Programmes.

The Launching of New Programmes

The experiences of the University of Montenegro and of Cyril and Methodius University of Skopje show that it is sometimes easier to introduce change when starting from scratch than when trying to build upon a pre-existing foundation. The Cyril and Methodius University of Skopje started to introduce double degrees and ECTS by launching new programmes (for senior dental technicians and senior nurses). Similarly, at the University of Montenegro, it was easier to introduce ECTS and the Bachelor's Degree by launching two new programmes: a Bachelor's Degree Programme in French Language and Literature and a Bachelor's Degree Programme in German Language and Literature.

Summing up, new programmes elicit less resistance, do not awaken the inhibitory role of tradition, and seem to be a good channel for introducing reforms.

Introducing Joint Degrees

The introduction of joint degrees not only activates the international network of a university, but, at the same time, can be used as a bridge to transfer reforms from one university to another. For example, the University of Split, owing to its specific conditions, set deadlines for the introduction of ECTS as of the 2004-2005 academic year for PhD studies, and beginning with the 2005-2006 academic year, for undergraduate and Master's Degree programmes. However, the same University had already succeeded in introducing ECTS by launching a Joint Masters' Degree (in Science and Technology of the Environment and Territory), with the University of Walachia (Romania) and Molisse University (Italy).

The University of Split also plans to launch a Joint Doctoral Programme in Environmental Physiology along with the University of Trondheim (Norway). Many other universities have intensified their efforts to sign mutual agreements with partner universities (for example, the University of Skopje mentioned seventy agreements), and the University of Priština reported that one-third of the activity of the rectorate is focused on international co-operation.

Organizing Summer Schools

Summer Schools proved to be an important way to increase student mobility and to modernize the curricula. The University of Novi Sad, for example, considers Summer Schools to be "... the first step toward internationalization ...", and the University of Priština, according to the report, organized the largest Summer School in Europe, in 2002. Participation in its programmes was credited by the use of ECTS.

Exploiting the Opportunities Offered by European Programmes

One of the soundest conclusions that could be drawn from case studies was that international programmes made all the difference in the functioning of the universities in the area. The University of Tirana has introduced the first mechanisms of quality assurance as an outcome of its co-operation with the Open University of the United Kingdom. The University of Montenegro reports that self-evaluation and external evaluation procedures will be designed via a TEMPUS project.

But the largest impact international programmes are taking place in Kosovo, at the University of Priština. Key international partners, from the European University Association to the Fulbright Programme and the Soros Foundation, have set up a consortium, in which they share the tasks modernizing the University, and they have indeed succeeded in making a difference in the implementation of all aspects of the Bologna Declaration.

To sum up, the launching of new programmes and joint degrees, the organization of summer schools, and the exploitation of opportunities offered by international programmes seem to be successful ways to pierce the inertia within academe and to induce change.

CONCLUSIONS

With reference to the data provided by the case studies, several recommendations are made that could facilitate curricular reform in the universities of the region. These recommendations refer to the following aspects:

- i.* the analysis of student workload and the substantial reduction of the number of classes per week;
- ii.* the revision of the teaching style and the ratio, one to the others, of different kinds of courses (compulsory courses *versus* optional courses *versus* free elective courses);
- iii.* the development of courses taught in foreign languages, especially in English;
- iv.* the introduction of quality-assurance mechanisms, especially at institutional and regional levels;
- v.* the reform of the management and governance of higher education and the setting up of a timetable for the reforms;
- vi.* the introduction of double degrees and the reconsideration of labour market and employment legislation;
- vii.* the identification of easy ways to promote change:
 - by the launching of new programs;
 - by the introduction of joint degrees;
 - by the organization of summer schools;
 - by the exploitation of the opportunities offered by European programmes.

Finally, three general theses derived from the above are stressed:

- i.* The main players in curricular reform are the institutions of higher education. After many decades, under the strict control of socialist governments, the universities of South-East Europe now have the unique chance to prove their willingness to shape the future of higher education in the region and in Europe. They have to use all their autonomy to contribute to the construction of the European Higher Education Area and to meet the expectations of stakeholders.
- ii.* Any state in the region can facilitate the implementation of the Bologna Process, especially *by intervening on the labour market and in employment legislation*. The governments must send clear messages that curricular reform is welcomed by the labour market and is compatible with employment legislation as well.
- iii.* Setting up quality assurance mechanisms at institutional and regional levels seems to be more suitable for promoting the Bologna process than setting up national accreditation agencies or bodies, traditionally centered on input evaluation.

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