# Contribution of the European institutions to the consolidation and progress of the Bologna process

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The Committee on Culture and Education adopted the own-initiative report by Luigi BERLINGUER (S&D, IT) on the contribution of the European institutions to the consolidation and progress of the Bologna Process.

Members begin by recalling that the Bologna Process is intended to enable compatible systems of higher education in Europe and to do away with the barriers which still prevent people from moving to another country in order to study or work. Accordingly, they call for a **strengthening at EU level of support for the Bologna Process**, in particular as regards:

- the mutual recognition of academic qualifications,
- the harmonisation of academic standards;
- the promotion of mobility, the social dimension and employability, and the elimination of administrative obstacles.

The report calls on Member States to reiterate their commitment to the Process, recalling the key role of the latter in European Higher Education Area (EHEA), by strengthening the system of funding in order to achieve the growth targets set in the Europe 2020 Strategy.

**Governance**: Members call for the development of an effective, bottom-up approach, fully involving all key actors such as universities, trade unions, professional organisations, research institutions, the business sector and, first and foremost, teachers, students, student organisations and university staff. They call for a commitment on the part of universities to new teaching and new professional and lifelong training strategies – making optimum use of new technologies and recognising the importance of complementary forms of learning such as non-formal education. Member States and the EU are called upon to **financially support universities** in their efforts to change and develop their education practices.

The report recommends other measures:

- teacher training programmes should be strengthened and expanded;
- **increased public investment in higher education**, especially aimed at countering the economic crisis with growth based on enhanced skills and knowledge;
- improved quality of and access to education and services, particularly scholarships, since budget reductions have a negative impact on attempts to strengthen the social dimension of education;
- the development of new, targeted and flexible funding mechanisms – and to promote European-wide grants – with a view to supporting growth, excellence and the particular and diverse vocations of universities.

**Consolidation:** in general, Members consider that the Bologna Process and the Erasmus programme have boosted student mobility and have the potential to contribute to enhanced labour mobility, but they regret that mobility rates still remain relatively low.

Welcoming a new generation of educational programmes through enhanced funding, based on social criteria, and the opening of the programme to a larger number of students, Members insist, nevertheless, that in no case must mobility create discrimination against students with limited financial resources. They call on Member States to **fulfil the commitment to full portability of loans and grants, and significantly improve financial support for mobile students** that matches the increases in new EU programmes.

In turn, the EU is asked:

- to consider how existing legislation on the rights to freedom of movement can be enhanced through guaranteeing portability of loans and grants;

- to consolidate a system of quality assurance at both European and Member State level in order to **guarantee mutual trust and facilitate recognition of academic qualifications**.

Other, more specific measures, are also suggested, such as the following:

- particular attention to be paid to the specific nature of humanities curricula,

- every programme in every subject should provide cross-cutting key competences such as critical thinking, communication, and entrepreneurial skills;

- further support for national and European measures to guarantee equitable inclusion, fair access to study, successful progression and a sustainable support system for all students;

- the process of creating careers advisory centres offering free services to students should be accelerated;

- the elimination of administrative obstacles ;

- more effective cooperation between universities, Member States and economic and social actors in order to enhance the prospects for future graduates;

- measures to **promote employability**, such as lifelong learning, and the development of a broader range of skills suitable for the labour market must be top priorities;

- ensuring the availability of a sufficient number of traineeships for students.

Members call on national governments and the Commission to develop a system of structured cooperation in order to deliver **joint degrees, within clusters of disciplines, with recognition across the EU** by improving the performance of, and financial support for, Erasmus Mundus and the future education and training programme.

With regard to **research**, Members believe that better cooperation between the EHEA and the European Research Area is a potential source for enhancing Europe's innovativeness and development. They highlight the contribution of the 7th EU Framework Programme for Research, the Competitiveness and

Innovation Framework Programme and the European Research Area to facilitating the mobility of EU researchers and unleashing the innovation and competitiveness potential of the EU.

The report also calls for an effective strategy to be set up to **support lifelong learning programmes,** especially for company-based lifelong learning, so that workers have the opportunity to expand their training and skills. It calls on higher education institutions and universities to offer more flexibility in programs based on learning outcomes, the recognition of non-formal and informal learning, and services to support learning pathways.

**European action**: welcoming the Commission's proposal to increase significantly the funds devoted to European education and training programmes, the committee calls on the Commission to devote a significant proportion of these funds to supporting the modernisation of higher education and the modernisation of university infrastructures. It encourages the Commission to find solutions that enable access to these programmes also for **students experiencing financial difficulties.**

Members also call on Member States and the EU to determine whether courses of study could include a compulsory training period to be completed **at a university in a Member State other than the student's home country.**

With regard to the recognition of qualifications, Members call, as part of the revision of the Professional Qualifications Directive, for a comparison of national minimum training requirements and for more regular exchanges between the Member States, competent authorities and professional bodies. They suggest in particular, hat the recognition of credits obtained under the Erasmus Programme by partner universities should be a compulsory element for **all institutions participating in student exchanges** supported by EU funding in order to strengthen the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System.

More generally, Members call on the Commission, Member States and higher education institutions to develop a comparative table that would indicate the number of ECTS credits awarded for courses. They also call for development of an effective strategy for the **full harmonisation of academic titles throughout the European Union** with possible reverse recognition (including older academic titles) since the establishment of the Bologna Process.

As well as the recognition of qualifications, Members call for the following measures:

- cooperation among universities to be organised more systematically and strengthened;
- universities in the signatory states recognise practical traineeships completed as part of the mobility programmes supported by the European Commission;
- enhanced transparency of the information provided to students before the beginning of a given exchange regarding the number of credits to be awarded;
- the development of common platforms in order to provide a **core of knowledge and skills** defined by professionals and higher education institutions;
- improved networking, coordination and communication between EU universities;
- encouraging cooperation, including through financial incentives, on transnational curricula, joint degrees and mutual recognition;
- increasing the number of ERASMUS placement partnerships in practice;

- providing updated and comparable data on the basis of which to monitor the implementation of the EHEA and, to that end, to remove the obstacles and resolve the problems associated with the implementation of the process, and not to penalise those institutions which have not yet implemented the planned reforms.

Members also propose a series of measures regarding education cooperation with countries outside the EU: (i) strengthen cooperation and research programmes, and to develop new ones, based on mutual interests with **third-country universities**, particularly those in conflict zones; (ii) the establishment of a **Euro-Mediterranean Higher Education Area**; (iii) the creation of unified university brands at regional level in order to strengthen **university prestige at international level.**

Members trust that the stocktaking exercise at the **2012 ministerial meeting in Bucharest** will result in a clear roadmap for establishing a fully functioning European Higher Education Area by the 2020 deadline. They insist that cross-sectoral proposals concerning ICT training, vocational and lifelong learning and work placements must be put forward.