
Three Bolognas and a Pizza Pie: notes on institutionalization of the European higher education system

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ABSTRACT Quietly, without attracting too much attention from educational sociologists in Europe, a massive process has been underway for five years that is expected to revolutionize European higher education to an unprecedented extent. Launched by a number of European governments and subsequently taken over by the European Commission, the so-called Bologna Process is expected to boost European higher education to the top of the world higher education markets by 2010. This article looks at the history of the Process and its connections to the process of constructing the federal Europe, and analyses its three agendas: cultural, political and economic. In the final section the issue of institutionalizing the European higher education system is discussed and problematized. It concludes that the contribution European intellectuals have made to the project is both sociologically naïve and intellectually irresponsible.

Introduction

The conviction of the historian is the undemonstrable conviction of the juryman, who has heard the witnesses, listened attentively to the case, and prayed Heaven to inspire him. (Benedetto Croce)

'Bologna cannot be implemented à la carte', declares Vivienne Reding (Reding, 2003a), the European Commissioner responsible for Education and Culture, in her address to the meeting of European Ministers in charge of Higher Education, who on 17-19 September 2003 gathered in Berlin to discuss the progress made in implementing the so-called Bologna Process. This process was launched by 29 national Ministers of Education, who on 19 June 1999 signed the Joint Declaration of the European Ministers of Education (Bologna, 1999) in Bologna with the aim of creating the European Higher Education Area.

Obviously, Reding is not using such cryptic language either for explaining pizza standards in the European Union or describing any difficulties experienced in fast-food restaurants in Brussels or Strasbourg. Instead, she is trying to convey a message that all signatory countries of the Bologna Declaration, numbering 39 after three more countries joined the

Declaration during the first follow-up meeting in Prague in 2001, and seven more (including Russia and Albania) at the meeting in Berlin, have no choice but to fully implement the nine objectives of the process. She continues: 'it has to be done across the board and wholeheartedly. If not, the process will leave European higher education even less strong and united than before' (Reding, 2003a). This position is, however, contested by Zgaga (2003), who at the same meeting, in a report commissioned by the office of Reding, argued: 'Nobody pushes them [countries] to that direction administratively; it is more and more the national need and the national priority.' Solving this apparent contradiction is only possible by applying one of those dialectical tricks which non-democratic regimes always seem to have at hand when there is a need to explain how people in fact enjoy certain freedoms which they have been denied (Tomusk, 2004).

The nine-course menu, which European higher education is expected to freely accept as a perceived necessity, consists of six initial objectives established by the Bologna Declaration:

- adoption of a system of easily readable and comparable degrees
- adoption of a system based on two main cycles
- establishment of a system of credits
- promotion of mobility
- promotion of European cooperation in quality assurance
- promotion of the European dimension in higher education

and three additional ones included at the first high-level follow-up meeting in Prague on 18-19 May 2001:

- introduction of lifelong learning
- involving higher education institutions and students in the process, and
- promoting the attractiveness of the European Higher Education Area.

Growing amounts of promotional materials and reports and follow-up declarations related to the Bologna Process, which one commentator, inspired by Franz Kafka and what happened to Joseph K., has called *der Bologna Prozeß* (Tomusk, 2002), convey a mixed message. Even if it fails to fully support the thesis on exponentially growing amounts of information circulating in post-industrial society, it certainly stands as a monument for irresponsible use of material and intellectual resources in recycling the same primitive discourse over and over again as a part of the growing and apparently lucrative Bologna expert and consulting industry. It is also interesting to notice the speed with which, out of the initial declaration, an orthodoxy of six unquestionable bullet-points was crystallized by 2001 (see, e.g., Prague, 2001). But even more than that, one may marvel over the way in which the process was transformed by adding the ninth point to the orthodoxy – 'promoting the attractiveness of the European Higher Education Area' – at the meeting in Prague in 2001, which allowed the focus of the Process to shift from cultural to economic ends. In its operation, the Bologna

Process is coming to resemble more a religious order than an inter-governmental process or a universities' joint initiative.

Initially, the Process focused largely on European higher education traditions and referred to the 1988 Magna Charta of the European Universities (CRE, 1988) and the 1998 Sorbonne Declaration (Sorbonne, 1998), both stressing European university traditions, European values and European culture. Somewhere on the way, however, a whole new dimension was added as a result of a sudden recognition that those great treasures could be shared for money with people from other parts of the world, and that the economic standing of European universities could be significantly improved. As a reflection of high-level mobilization of the more entrepreneurial approach, one hears now politicians like the Deputy Prime Minister of Kyrgyzstan, a post-Soviet republic in Central Asia whose higher education is notorious for its corruption and whose academic capacity does not seem to reach significantly beyond producing large numbers of degree certificates, explaining the country's entering the ranks of international providers of higher education services (Otorbaev, 2004).

From the way the stated goals of the Process were re-interpreted soon after signing the Bologna Declaration, one may suspect that somebody had another agenda up their sleeves even during the ceremony. While the Declaration mentions the international competitiveness of European higher education only once, in the same sentence as promoting the employability of European citizens, a few months later, in December 1999, Guy Haug – Delegate-at-Large [*sic*] of the Association of European Universities (now the European University Association) – made the agenda of those standing behind the Process abundantly clear by lamenting that 'The majority of universities still lack the mindset and the experience required in the growing competition for students and the related revenues' (Haug, 1999). He also made it clear that the cause of this complaint is not of European origin, by saying:

It seems to me essential that we should close the competitive gap at home; this would mean in particular that higher education institutions in Europe should endeavour to put together and publicise the kind of educational opportunities students from the rest of the world would like to find on offer in Europe.

and a few lines further on:

I do not think that the problem is that there are so many US campuses in Europe or Asia, but rather that there are so few European campuses in the US, Latin America or other regions of the world. This is an area of paramount importance and it seems to me essential that European universities should mobilise their energies and resources to compete on the world market. (Haug, 1999)

One of the most interesting issues related to the Bologna Process is the role of the European Union (EU) in it. While Reding (2003a), by saying 'Although the Bologna Process is not part of European Union activity, it is

very close in its make-up and inspiration', agrees that as a matter of EU legislation the principle of subsidiarity prevents its involvement in higher education policy (Henry et al, 2001), that does not prevent her from threatening national governments with exclusion from a process that does not belong to the EU in the first place, but rather to a group of countries, including fifteen that are not in the EU even after the 2004 expansion of the Union. Neither does the European Commission hesitate to redefine the Process, to the extent that the most important issue the Commissioner recognizes is 'how to achieve adequate and sustainable incomes for universities' (Reding, 2003a). Zgaga, trying to justify the manner in which the European Union is increasingly taking over the Bologna Process as its own higher education policy, argues: "The Bologna process and its action lines are explicitly mentioned as important for the implementation of the objective of 'strengthening European cooperation', that is, the objective 3.5 of the so-called 'Objectives Report'" (Zgaga, 2003). This statement, more than anything else, demonstrates how the European Union by using a variety of available pretexts – strengthening European cooperation, fostering common cultural identity, vocational training, etc. – is trying to get a grip on higher education policy, for which it does not have the member states' mandate.

An individual of sufficiently simple mind may conclude from the above that European culture and values have been compromised in a particularly sinister manner and that the true purpose of the Process is to make some quick bucks out of our history and culture; that the European Commission is compromising the limits of its mandate by intervening in higher education policies of the member states, and that it is in a manner that could be best described as scandalous, compromising the sovereignty of fourteen non-EU countries by dictating structure and funding schemes for their higher education systems. While these issues constitute a part of the story, they certainly do not reveal the entire picture. The way the Process unfolds in the context of European integration, economic globalization and European higher education traditions demands a more complex explanation. Unfortunately, in the midst of more or less noble, but still far-reaching goals, the very institution of higher learning with its own inner dynamics is being ignored. While, for Brussels, nothing but progress made in constructing a federal Europe seems to have any value, and activists of various breeds appreciate the multiple earning opportunities which this opens, universities are still nostalgic for the Bologna of 1088. In the midst of all this, political capital also becomes easily available. But what will happen to higher education and the institutions it maintains in society remains a moot point. The following offers a humble attempt to raise and discuss some of the related issues.

Cultural Bologna

For a long time cooperation among European universities was perceived and promoted as a part of the European cultural project, both in broader terms among the forty-five signatory countries of the European Cultural Convention that together constitute the membership of the Council of Europe, as well as in its narrow meaning among the member states of the European Union. One could possibly suggest that the beginning of what is now known as the Bologna Process was an event which took place eleven years before the Bologna Declaration was signed. In 1988 the university rectors who gathered in Bologna to celebrate the 900th anniversary of the University of Bologna signed the Magna Charta of European Universities (CRE, 1988) on 18 September. This document, drafted by a small group of representatives of European universities, representatives of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and the President of the European Rectors Conference, was by no means shy about the values they were to stand for, listing the following on the first place among the ‘fundamental principles, which must, now and always, support the vocation of universities’ (CRE, 1988):

The university is an autonomous institution at the heart of societies differently organized because of geography and historical heritage; it produces, examines, appraises and hands down *culture* [my emphasis] by means of research and teaching. To meet the needs of the world around it, its research and teaching must be morally and intellectually independent of all political authority and economic power. (CRE, 1988)

Needless to say, this document, mentioning neither the international attractiveness of European higher education nor possible funding issues, addresses the cultural values and freedom of intellectual inquiry as the cornerstones of European universities.

The story continues ten years later, when the ministers in charge of higher education in four countries – France, Germany, Italy and the United Kingdom – sign the ‘Joint Declaration on harmonization of the architecture of the European higher education system’, at a similarly organized occasion in Sorbonne. This time, however, higher education is seen in the context of progress made in European integration in the 1990s, particularly the introduction of the Euro, and nostalgia for the early days of medieval Sorbonne, where ‘students and academics would freely circulate and rapidly disseminate knowledge throughout the continent. Nowadays, too many of our students still graduate without having had a benefit outside of national boundaries’ (Sorbonne, 1998). The main stress in this document is on the creation of a common cultural Europe by means of student mobility, and a few technical instruments such as recognition of degrees and credit transfer to make student mobility meaningful in times when – as Dore told us more than a quarter of a century ago – diplomas, not learning, have become the main goal for most of the students (Dore, 1976/2000). Even here, though,

dividing university programmes into easily purchasable chunks measured in terms of the credits of the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) still serves the aim of increasing student mobility to foster common European cultural identity.

Signing the Bologna Declaration a year later was the next step. From that point on, the European Commission gradually increased its role by skilful use of its economic resources, one may assume, as a substitute for the lacking political mandate. While the Bologna Declaration refers to the Magna Charta of European Universities as well as the Sorbonne Declaration, it leaves the door open for new agendas:

The vitality and efficiency of any civilization can be measured by the appeal that its culture has for other countries. We need to ensure that the European higher education system acquires a world-wide degree of attraction equal to our extraordinary cultural and scientific traditions.
(Bologna, 1999)

During the five years since the signing of the Bologna Declaration, a surprisingly precise meaning has been attributed to the word *attraction* in the context of European higher education. The way the goals of the Process have been reinterpreted requires the degree of attraction of European higher education to be expressed in Euros: attraction is measured in terms of money collected from the customers. Such an interpretation of the Bologna Declaration is well in line with the tone of another document adopted just a few months later: the Presidency Conclusions of the Lisbon European Council meeting on 23-24 March 2000, which declares:

The Union has today set itself a new strategic goal for the next decade: to become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion. (Council, 2000)

The agendas expressed in these two documents merged shortly after the Lisbon meeting, and the Bologna Process has to a large extent come to be understood as an element of making Europe within a decade 'the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world'. The rest of that sentence is often not cited, perhaps in the interests of brevity. Before moving on with further implications of the economic agenda, the political dimension of the process should be explained. An attempt should be made to explain why the documents quoted above have been written in the singular: the Bologna Declaration does not refer to European *systems* of higher education, as one would normally expect it to do, but the European higher education *system*, in the same manner as the Lisbon European Council talks about the European economy. While there is some justification for the latter, the former expression remains problematic and begs further analysis.

Political Bologna

In 1943 Count Richard N. Coudenhove-Kalergi, the father of European federalism and initiator of the pan-European movement, and already an émigré in New York, summarized his thoughts and efforts to avoid what was inevitable even in early 1920 unless the entire political organization of Europe was fundamentally revised. Having seen all his efforts fail to prevent another devastating war in Europe, twenty years after beginning the movement, he wrote:

Between these four gigantic parts of the world lay Europe, divided into thirty sovereign states, following, in their international and economic policy, the laws of the jungle, arming against one another, invading one another, blackmailing one another, ruining one another, and arousing national hatreds against one another. (Coudenhove-Kalergi, 1943, p. 69)

For Coudenhove-Kalergi the solution to the problem was almost trivial:

The solution of the puzzle seemed obvious: war, revolution and misery could only be avoided by a federation of all continental states of Europe, including their colonies, in close association with the British Commonwealth of Nations and with the American republics. (Coudenhove-Kalergi, 1943, p. 70)

The only alternative he saw to the United States of Europe was the United States of the World, a preferred solution which, however, was rendered impossible by the results of the Paris peace conference in 1918 (Coudenhove-Kalergi, 1943, pp. 5-6).

Bringing Europe even close to the federalist idea has taken considerably more efforts than Coudenhove-Kalergi imagined. Having experienced another 'hot' war as well as the cold one that followed it, eighty years after the beginning of the movement, Europe once again stands at a juncture where it has to judge the federal option. Although support seems somewhat larger than it was in 1930s, debates over the European Constitution demonstrate ambiguous attitudes towards the federal model of the United States of Europe. Since the signing of the Single European Act in 1987 by the twelve members of the European Community and its expansion to the European Union of fifteen countries in 1995, although development towards a federal structure has been evident, the word *federal* has been consciously avoided in order to reduce controversy about the project among the peoples of Europe, who seem to have chosen to ignore both the old-fashioned European federalists and the globalization prophets in favour of maintaining their traditional national identities. Results of European integration since World War II may look impressive in comparison with European realities of 1930s, but perhaps not that much in other contexts. Coudenhove-Kalergi describes a story from his childhood:

One day my father showed me the passport he had needed for a trip to Russia and explained that such uncivilized countries like Russia and Turkey had introduced these papers to control aliens. We never would

have believed that one day we should need similar documents to cross the frontiers of Germany, Italy, England, France and all other Western nations. (Coudenhove-Kalergi, 1943, p. 21)

Commentators seem to be in a difficult position explaining what kind of an entity the new, more civilized Europe is going to be. Martin Albrow, for example, asks 'So when we talk about Europe in the Global Age to what do we refer? Is it a state, a nation, a territory, a culture, a common experience, a trading organization, a society?' (Albrow, 1998), and answers himself: 'Well, there are bits of all of these to which we allude when we refer to Europe'. Elsewhere in the same text he explains his position more clearly:

The European Union is a kind of state, but a new kind, such as we have never before experienced. It is not sovereign, it is not based on a nation, its territory has no continuous land boundary, and it has no single centre of authority. (Albrow, 1998)

This, frankly speaking, is not convincing. The interests and fears of the nation-states participating in designing the new political configuration of Europe are far too traditional for one to accept Albrow's argument. We may feel more confident comparing current European processes with those in other empires in history, all the way back to Rome, and their relevance for our own age, as discussed for example by Shmuel Eisenstadt (Eisenstadt, 2003).

Leaving aside the largely exaggerated claims regarding the role of information and communication technologies in facilitating this new political configuration - something that better serves the aims of shareholders of Microsoft, IBM and the like, through making available debilitating entertainment for the masses, than the promotion of participatory democracy - the novelty of the European project does not stem so much from the final goal, which seems to be quite obvious, at least to German and French elites, than from the extremely complex process through which Europe is being driven towards it. Arguments like the following one by Rumford belong to a particular type of utopian thinking that has for the past 160 years seen various channels of electric communication as a source of unprecedented growth of human solidarity and democracy, remaining mostly unjustified:

The information society is pivotal in this regard, creating new economic and communication networks which will stimulate growth, ameliorate the problems of exclusion and cohesion, and facilitate enlargement. (Rumford, 2002, p. 92)

Nation-states still constitute the basis on which federal Europe is being constructed and delegation of power from the national to supra-national level is its main problem. To allow delegating functions to the European level, EU has adopted the so-called subsidiarity principle, according to which functions are exercised at the lowest effective level, allowing delegation of certain responsibilities to the European level to be balanced by devolving other function to regional level. While the latter has been presented as a step

towards more participatory democracy, it may also be seen as yet another attempt to weaken the nation-state, particularly as such policy is accompanied by support for trans-border regions. This does not prevent more skeptical commentators such as Johann Galtung from explaining European integration in terms of the interests of the most powerful of the nation-states. In this context, EU eastward expansion is seen as nothing but a German reward for 'good behaviour' since World War II:

Imagine this [EU expansion] happens. What are the next steps? The Meyer-Muellerisierung der Kowalski in Schlesien-Pommern, claiming a German-born grandmother? Well-targeted investments for the old territories? A referendum? A border move within an EU that could be seen as administrative convenience? And then? Polish history is a function of the strength of Germany and Russia: both weak, Poland expands; Germany weak and Russia strong, Poland moves west; both strong, Poland disappears. And with Germany strong and Russia weak, Poland moves east. (Galtung, 1999)

While Galtung's position is but one of many possible interpretations of European integration which one does not necessarily need to agree with, burying the European nation-state seems to be premature, despite the fact that the European Commission, through its support for 'social partners' – for example, non-governmental organizations like the European University Association – keeps large numbers of gravediggers on its payroll. The process is particularly difficult because so far at any given moment there has never been sufficient political support for the constitutional method, as promoted by Italian federalist Altiero Spinelli,

whereby an elected European assembly would act as the embryonic constituent voice of the European peoples and serve to mobilize a dynamic European public opinion in the quest to establish a popular European federation. (Burgess, 2004, p. 32)

What has been adopted instead is the pragmatic approach of Jean Monnet, leading Europe towards a federal order step by step by 'bringing together men and practical matters' (Monnet, 1978, p. 367). At the beginning of this process stands the establishment of the European Coal and Steel Community. Gradually, 'this novel form of sectoral supranational organization would be the foundation of the European federation that would evolve slowly to engage national elites in a process of mutual interest' (Burgess, 2004, p. 36). Moving in such a manner, as Monnet put it, 'federation would be a culmination of an existing economic and political reality' (Monnet, 1978, p. 367).

Richardson, trying to find a solution to that apparent paradox that 'Identifying just where a policy started in the EU is extremely difficult – hence the common response that "policies seem to come from nowhere"' (Richardson, 2001, p. 19), concludes that EU decision-making processes can be seen in terms of the 'garbage can model' borrowed from Cohen et al (1972):

From this point of view, an organization is a collection of choices looking for problems, issues and feelings looking for decision situations in which they might be aired, solutions looking for issues to which they might be the answer, and decision makers looking for work. (p. 2)

This conclusion is a correct one; however, there is nothing intriguing or curious about it. EU decision-making is a garbage can by design. This is the only systematic approach Monnet's method of building federal Europe without a blueprint allows. However, this does not mean that it is entirely random or even to a significant extent arbitrary. The case of higher education policy discussed in this paper, which does not even belong to the EU competence, demonstrates its capacity to identify recyclable pieces of rubbish and use them creatively for achieving the final goal.

Turning the Bologna Process into the EU sectoral project in higher education is, however, a highly controversial step. The European Commission has correctly identified that further integration of Europe without more vigorous higher education policy is hardly possible. If nothing else, then free movement of labour would require better coordination between national systems, or at least mutual recognition of higher education degrees and qualifications. Without the member states' mandate, a joint higher education policy is being fostered under a variety of disguises. Intriguingly, representatives of the European Commission demonstrate increasing frustration that universities in major EU member states show very little interest in their initiative, and that short-circuiting university autonomy is apparently not an easy task.

For example, Germany's signature stands among those of the four countries that signed the Sorbonne Joint Declaration in 1998, but as higher education is a prerogative of the states and not the Federal Ministry of Education and Sciences, Research and Technology, its universities enjoy independence from any commitment a Federal Minister may make in Sorbonne, Bologna or Brussels. Concerning one of the main goals of the Process – introduction of the short Bachelor degree, according to the report prepared for the follow-up meeting in Berlin in September 2003 (Reichert & Tauch, 2003) – only 9 percent of the universities questioned in the member countries of the Bologna Process “can imagine their graduates leaving with ‘only’ a Bachelor [degree]” (p. 72). Given that among the respondents are British and Irish universities, as well as those of some Eastern European countries that have been introducing Anglo-Saxon degree structures since the early 1990s, one can easily conclude that for continental (Western) Europe the entire process remains largely irrelevant.

The picture is significantly different when one moves eastward. Leaving aside the United Kingdom, which in many respects represents the kind of higher education the European Commission expects other countries to establish – having distinct Bachelor's and Master's degrees, charging students significant tuition fees, receiving large numbers of fee-paying overseas students, etc. – the best Bologna member countries belong to the former

states of socialist Eastern-Europe. Slovenia is perhaps the first continental European country that would be able to honestly report full compliance with the goals of the Bologna Process, although one may suspect that its deeply rooted socialist traditions would still reject the ultimate economic agenda. This small, well-organized and relatively prosperous country, which once constituted part of Yugoslavia, is making major efforts to adjust its national higher education legislation to the requirements of the Bologna declaration as interpreted by the European Commission, as well as making sure that its higher education system of three universities fully complies with it.

Countries such as the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Albania, the Russian Federation and so on, some with distant and others with no prospects for EU membership, already present statements to the effect of full compliance with the goals of the Process or significant progress. These reports, however, belong to a different genre of writing, the origins of which Burgess (2004) reveals:

The sight of twelve or thirteen countries *en masse* beating a path to the EU's door in what has sometimes seemed to be an undignified scramble for membership posed unprecedented problems for the European project. (p. 39)

First-hand experience in these countries often contrasts starkly with the official reports. Carter, (forthcoming) for example, reports on a Bologna Process implementation project in FYR Macedonia:

Within the middle level project, the first two workshops took this time to center the process around definition of learning outcomes, and teaching and learning methods, but in a number of cases the participants showed resistance to this. Suggested reasons for this include the pressures from within the largely autonomous faculties to evidence compliance within an unrealistic timescale – the ‘box-ticking’ mentality – which was naturally a major influence on the teaching staff involved. When this was raised at higher levels in the institutions, or when the matters were addressed in wider forums, the tendency was to portray matters in an overly favorable, and implausible, light, which nevertheless served to hinder further moves forward.

While the Bologna Process has been hijacked and misused by the European Commission as a substitute for the higher education policy it cannot have, it is even more being abused by governments that perceive it either as another ‘membership’ to be collected to pave the way to full EU membership, as in Romania and Macedonia, or as a step to be taken to secure legitimacy for a particular political regime, as in the Russia Federation. It may well be that Monnet’s method of building a federal Europe has been exhausted, and no further integration is possible without reaching agreement among the member states concerning the final configuration and full mandate for building the necessary institutions. While one should be sympathetic to the idea of an inclusive cultural Europe, using it for the purposes of political opportunism promotes neither cultural understanding nor democracy on the

continent, becoming a mere tool for half-democratic nationalistic regimes to bolster their political legitimacy. According to Zgaga (2003), involving a wider group of countries than the EU membership in what he calls the 'Bologna Club' 'can only give additional dynamism to the Process'. One may wonder if the Process would be able to absorb all the agendas without dissolving itself first.

Bringing universities from such a diverse range of countries together as 'the European system of higher education' is a challenging enough task. Still, this is not a sufficient goal for the European Commission. In addition to cultural and political goals, it expects European higher education to fulfil a significant economic task.

Economic Bologna

In the introductory section of this article a few examples were given of how two individuals – a representative of the Association of European Universities, and another of the organization that lives in a symbiotic (funding) relationship with it, the European Commission – had taken the freedom to revise the goals of the Bologna Process to the extent of loading it with the massive task of generating income for the universities. Through such a revision, the cultural mission of European higher education has been moved to the background, while the primary goal of the Process is being presented in terms of serving economic ends. The European Commission sees higher education in terms of a knowledge industry, whose products should compete against similar products in the global marketplace. In particular, European universities are expected to become more competitive with American universities, competing for overseas consumers, who are obviously expected to pay full price for the service. Haug (2000), for example, complains:

Market-driven strategies putting student demand in the center are still completely unknown to the vast majority of the (continental) European universities; some of the main issues in this area have to do with: communication policies aimed at building or using a 'brand name' [and] recruiting abroad through permanent presence. (p. 5)

The position of the European Commission is easily understandable. One does not need to be a professional economist to identify the massive difficulties Europe faces funding its expanding higher education systems. Teaching and learning conditions are deteriorating, academic staff are being proletarianized and faculty members, who not too long ago were perceived as intellectuals, are increasingly being reduced to mere knowledge workers. 'Diploma disease' is no longer an issue primarily related to the late development effect, as Ronald Dore (1976/2000) thought in the 1970s. Instead, it has become an issue for contemporary Europe, where growing number of jobs require university degrees but not necessarily education, and not having a degree may soon mean exclusion from the modern sectors of the

economy, as Dore described in Kenya in the 1970s. Tomusk (2003) has made a similar argument for Estonia in the 1990s. Kivinen & Ahola (1999) summarize this situation succinctly: 'the educational level of the population rises irrespective of changes in occupational structures and skills demands.' Increasingly the only way to define the educational level is by the time spent in an educational institution.

Higher education has been loaded with a multiplicity of tasks: filtering and socializing young individuals into different tracks of life, offering 'parking places' to some for a few years, and entertaining others. Meaningful teaching and learning may not necessarily find its place among the top three on this list. While the difficulties are obvious, Europe is trying to solve its problems not so much by taking a serious look at what and why the universities do, as by manufacturing and exploiting the hopes of Third World students for social mobility and/or emigration. However, as Kivinen & Ahola remind us, higher education is increasingly becoming human risk capital:

The use of credentials as a proxy for occupational status, rewards, security and career prospects is increasingly untenable; the ticket obtained on leaving university is no longer for a life journey. Instead, the acquisition of educational credentials has become an important form of insurance policy, minimizing likelihood of unemployment and downward social mobility. (Kivinen & Ahola, 1999)

In this context students' resistance to the introduction of tuition fees is perfectly rational; equal, in fact, to forcing people to spend their money in a casino. The introduction of massive tuition fees in continental European higher education (other than in post-socialist Eastern Europe, which in many respects more resembles countries like Brazil rather than Germany or France) is such a political minefield that few politicians find enough courage to walk on it, as Reding (2003b) rightly recognizes:

Disant cela, je suis consciente des obstacles : les réformes de l'enseignement supérieur sont de potentielles 'bombes politiques' et il est clair qu'aucun ministre de l'Education n'a envie de voir ses étudiants manifester et occuper rues.

The approach the European Commission has thus taken is about launching entirely new degree programmes that operate on different principles. Through its ERASMUS programme, the European Union has been funding the development of European Master's programmes: Master's degree programmes developed jointly by universities from two or more countries. These allow the introduction in continental Europe of Master's-level degrees, as well as charging student fees, which would not be acceptable in the case of traditional programmes and students. However, the Trojan horse of European Master's programmes has further surprises inside it. In 2004 the European Commission is expected to launch Erasmus Mundus, through which students worldwide can receive support to attend these programmes. According to Zgaga (2003), by 2008 the number of such programmes is

expected to reach 250. Commissioner Reding, in her blatant statement, though, reveals what the true issue is:

Erasmus Mundus will also support a marketing strategy for European Higher Education, bringing European quality and distinctiveness higher up the attention scale of the best partners, students and scholars world-wide. (Reding, 2003a)

This does not sound too different from the language toothpaste or detergent manufacturers use in their competition for shelf space in supermarkets. Although the funds which the EU expects to release for this purpose – 200-250 million Euros – constitutes only a fraction of the budget of any major research university in the USA, it certainly helps to socialize another generation of Bologna enthusiasts.

Bologna documents are full of hyperbole and imperatives worthy of quoting. Unfortunately not everything can be fitted into the limited space of this article. Still, reading Reding's dictum that 'only Knowledge can guarantee our future' (2003a), two connections come to mind. The first one is from Kivinen & Ahola (1999): 'High-powered executive and political experts – often backed up by statutory privileges – create needs which they alone have the authority to fulfil.' The second one, from a different period of the 'utopian mind' (Kolnai, 1995) which perhaps belongs to Goebbels, puts it even more succinctly than Reding: *Arbeit macht frei*. Perhaps it is high time to start discussing the possible consequences of a regime that forces knowledge consumption upon the members of society, threatening to exclude the non-complying. 'Cognitive fascism' might be a way to refer to such a regime (see also de Sousa Santos [2002] for contemporary social fascism).

Various reports and documents related to the Bologna Process systematically use the same language as marketing consultants. Zgaga (2003), for example, is trying to boost solidarity among the members of the process by stressing the binding force of the brand: "*Bologna*" binds up all partners sharing this brand.' Various agencies see the Process as a lucrative business opportunity in itself, trying to monopolize related certifying functions. Certifying, for example, the 'label' of the European Credit Transfer System compatibility is one such area, where again the European Commission has made attempts to set standards and perhaps claim the authority to choose the 'service provider'. The issue of quality assurance, particularly if it eventually takes the form of supra-national accreditation of universities, is going to be a multi-million Euro business, well worth fighting for by 'non-governmental organizations' already gravitating towards the European Commission.

On the other side, 'product developers' are working on transforming European higher education into marketable products and packaging. The basis for this has been the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS), initially developed for EU student mobility programmes in order to allow students to receive credits for their study experience abroad. More recently, however, ECTS has also been introduced as a system of credit accumulation, meaning that in an ideal case a student would be able to collect credits

necessary for a degree in all participating countries. The report of the Tuning project – a project aiming at harmonizing higher education studies across Europe – for example, mentions ‘the necessity of setting up a pan-European credit accumulation framework’ (González & Wagenaar, 2003). This reveals another technocratic utopia, of transforming higher education into a credit accumulation system. From a sociological point of view, this would not count for less than sinking the existing institutionalized symbols and creating the new qualifications of European Master, European Doctor, etc. This, one may argue, is a highly problematic agenda, despite the fact that the level at which the issue is currently addressed – inter-governmental and supra-national – does not leave too many chances for successful implementation at the level of individual universities.

The perception in Europe is that, in order to be able to compete for international students as different from the USA, it has to build a unified, equally high reputation for its entire higher education sector. While it is obvious that none of the countries participating in the Process can afford to be openly identified as having substandard or corrupt higher education, it is hard to see what benefit anybody would gain, other than discrediting the entire intellectual tradition of the continent, from joint marketing attempts by, say, University College London, the University of Tirana in Albania and the Taganrog State Pedagogical Institute of Russia. One could choose an infinite number of equally nonsensical alliances. However, even from a merely theoretical perspective, institutionalizing *European* higher education is an extremely tall order. As a counterbalance to such a politically conditioned wholesale approach, a number of the most prestigious universities have established their own exclusive consortia. One such, named Europeum, comprises eight universities, including Sorbonne, Bologna and Oxford. Another group, the League of European Research Universities, includes twelve universities from nine countries, starting with Oxford and Cambridge.

Institutionalizing European Higher Education

So far in this article we have looked at the process of creating the European Higher Education Area and its three main constituting agendas. First, the cultural programme of European Higher Education, since the Single European Act was signed in 1987, has focused on building a common cultural identity, particularly through various (student) mobility programmes. In the wake of the collapse of state socialism this cultural mission was also expanded to East European countries, some of which were expected to join the European Community, as it was then called, some time in the future. Gradually the cultural mission gave way to the second programme: the political one containing two conflicting agendas. On the one hand, there was the obvious need, dictated by the *deepening* of the European Union, to foster integration, include new sectors and strengthen the European institutions, all in the name of the (often unspoken) building of federal Europe, or the

United States of Europe as Coudenhove-Kalergi called it in his pan-European programme. On the other hand there was also the *widening* agenda, where particularly the former state-socialist countries, but also some other non-EU members that had been participating in the cultural programme, played out their own political goals of reaching out to additional economic resources as well as the fountains of political legitimacy located in Brussels, by indiscriminately fighting for participation in every EU programme and scheme.

The geographical scope of the Process is seriously threatening to erode the possibility of a common higher education policy within the EU. By the time the Bologna Declaration was signed in 1999, while the cultural agenda still dominated its text, the competing political agendas were already written on the wall. Finally, the content of the Bologna Process as the Joint Higher Education Policy of the European Union is by no means a secret; the Commission's position is very clear that European higher education should become more entrepreneurial, particularly in selling its products on the global marketplace in competition against American universities.

The approach Europe has taken, in the wake of the Bologna Process entering the global marketplace of 'knowledge products', has been determined by the top-down nature of the Process, combined with the interests of universities that might benefit from such a move. It seems obvious that the world-class universities of Europe have little interest in paddling the boats of the Brussels bureaucrats, or of the second- and third-rank universities of the European periphery. Institutionalizing the European higher education system is therefore an issue for the European Commission, national governments that represent the entire sectors at the level of the lowest common denominator, and the mass universities. This is the basis on which the most ambitious goal of European higher education – making 'Europe's education and training systems a world quality reference by 2010' (Zgaga, 2003) – is to be reached. One can hardly expect universities like Oxford or Heidelberg to participate in such a programme, as they maintain that this goal already equals their current position. Even the Moscow State University declares that its role in the Bologna Process is less receiving a boost for its own reputation than providing the Process with a proper quality standard. In such a context, particularly given the variety of countries and universities involved, institutionalizing the European system of higher education is an extremely ambitious, perhaps even insurmountable task. It is being challenged, not only by the universities that see themselves as institutionalized symbols of high-quality scholarship, to whom possible de-institutionalization related to the need to sink the existing institutions before launching the new ones is not acceptable. Particular governments, too, may foster policies that challenge the unity of the European higher education system, for example the undeclared policy in Britain of establishing a small number of 'world-class universities', as opposed to the mass of 'teaching-only' universities (Brown, 2004). While a group of universities that gathered

under the auspices of the EUA in Graz in the summer of 2003 made strong demands for the unity of teaching and research in European higher education (EUA, 2003), it is increasingly unrealistic that Europe would be in a position to boost thousands of its universities, particularly those in the peripheral regions, to the level of a research university, representing the world-quality reference. At the same time, it is interesting to note that the parallel process – creation of the European Research Area – covers only the EU countries and from the outset made almost no reference to universities (Kwiek, forthcoming).

In order to reach its ambitious goals, Europe needs to launch and legitimate new institutions in its higher education, in particular new degrees and qualifications, which do not draw their mystical powers as institutions – ‘cultural capital institutionalized in certificates, diplomas and degrees’ (Kivinen & Ahola, 1999) – from the names of universities like Cambridge or Sorbonne, but from *Europe*. Europe needs to introduce new ‘myths’ and ‘ceremonies’ (Meyer & Rowan, 1991) that draw their legitimacy from the supra-national European sources. Such legitimacy can be gained either through EU funding, or a Europe-wide quality assurance mechanism which is currently intensely discussed. Launching the European Master’s programmes was the first such attempt. Eventually the new institutions should, however, cover the entire great Eurasian landmass between the English Channel and the Bering Strait, plus the British Isles. Like every revolution, this one is to start by leveling the playing field, which in this case means reducing the existing institutions to their underlying technical rationale. This has been exactly the purpose of the Tuning project, funded again by the European Commission.

The project, Tuning Educational Structures in Europe (González & Wagenaar, 2003), included more than a hundred universities working in seven disciplinary areas – business, chemistry, education sciences, geology, history, mathematics and physics – in an attempt to define general and subject-specific competences that result from higher education studies. The authors of the final report seem to have experienced major difficulties defining their position and the purpose of the project. For example, it is explained that:

The name Tuning has been chosen, not to look for harmonization of their degree programmes or any sort of unified, prescriptive or definitive European curricula, but simply for points of convergence and common understanding. (p. 22)

On the very same page, however, the authors state:

As a result of the Bologna Declaration, the educational systems in most European countries are in the process of reforming. This is the direct effect of the political decision of education ministers to converge.

While it is obvious that ‘tuning’ will begin with current teaching practices, it is hard to see the final outcome of such a project other than creating a

prescriptive framework for European higher education, which would, by combining 'credit points' and 'competencies', transform European higher education into a continent-wide credit production industry. In this context, the following statement, perhaps meant to quiet the nation-state-based opposition to 'tuning', may be easily interpreted to the opposite effect:

The Tuning project does not pay attention to educational systems, but to educational structures and content of studies. (p. 22)

This may mean that in developing a common European higher education system, both national specifics as well as differences between universities will be ignored and the new system will be based on the technocratic rationale only. The problem which this approach ignores is that sociologists of education and knowledge, perhaps starting with Randall Collins (1979), have had major difficulties defining such a rationale. A degree from an institution of higher education is more than a proxy for a laundry list of competencies. It is therefore not obvious how much Europe would gain from sinking the existing institutions of higher education, which quite often live lives of their own. Neither is it obvious what the cost of raising and legitimating the new institutions would be. Further controversy stems from the fact that, while competencies are discussed in the context of jobs available in Europe and the European citizenship, the long-term aim of the project lies clearly outside Europe, as the process is largely about making European higher education attractive on the global scale. What institutions most need for this purpose is a reputation that graduates can rely on to help them climb the ladder of social mobility, rather than lists of competencies, which may not be relevant in China or India.

Oxford is a myth and Heidelberg is one. Even Warwick, if not a myth, at least has a saga, as Burton Clark would say. But what the peripheral universities have to offer - that currently spend an equivalent of 200 pounds sterling per student per annum, and would be happy to issue a degree for an up-front payment of 500 pounds in cash - is not at all that obvious. It is hard to see how Europe could increase the attractiveness of its higher education without creating sites of the highest possible quality, despite the fact that many participants in the Bologna Process would reject this as extreme Americanization of European higher education. However, it is not obvious how much we would have left after leaving aside the selection function of universities, and sinking the existing myths and ceremonies. Perhaps not much, and this may be the case for every university of high reputation. We in Europe love being equal, but that costs a lot of money, which poor Third World students may not have, leaving aside the utter immorality of ripping them off in universities, hundreds of which belong among the worst ones to be found on this planet.

Conclusion: carrots and sticks

In 1971 Immanuel Wallerstein wrote:

It is the traditional moral dilemma of the radical intellectual in a liberal society – how does he reconcile participation in a movement for a political change with an ongoing involvement in the occupational networks of the existing society, especially in a society that seeks to mute his radicalism with a carrot rather than a stick, or at least with the carrot first?

Hardly anybody involved in the Bologna Process does not consider her- or himself an intellectual, perhaps even of the highest calibre. Still, it is hard to see these individuals experiencing any moral dilemma about what they are doing, although there seem to be more than enough reasons for them to be afraid for their reputation. It suffices to mention the European Commission aggressively hijacking a sector without a mandate for doing so, academic activists writing political reports filled with contradictions, and knowledge workers contracted by the Commission producing knowledge for which they themselves have created a need and which they themselves consume in order to create more such knowledge. While funds the Commission has made available for higher education remain small in comparison with the overall budget of the EU, the juicy carrot on offer has been quite sufficient to mute the critical intellectual community. Olsen (2001) has noted:

As a part of the transformation process, struggles over the European mind combine with struggles over institutional structures. ... It may be necessary to recognize that the relationship among political action, institutions, and the flow of history involves a complicated interplay among several logics of action, institutional roles, and processes of change. (p. 196)

It is unfortunate that one particular logic has gained near-complete dominance over the European higher education project, and those whose calling is normally to problematize such issues and expose them to public scrutiny have either found this particular topic irrelevant for them, perhaps for the reason that no funding has been made available for critical studies, or have assumed the role of messengers of a particular agency. The result of this is that the complexity Olsen is discussing is about to disappear. Where that will lead is hard to say, but one has to be an extreme optimist to see high-quality teaching and learning resulting from such a *Prozeß*, not to mention restoring the broader intellectual mission of the European university.

One possible and reasonably likely outcome of the Bologna Process would be its dissolution in the conflict of contradictory agendas. This, however, cannot be seen as significant progress. Whether academia finds inner strength to stand up for its values or whether it submits to demands to assume the role of a service provider, to this or other powers, remains to be seen. It is perhaps appropriate to close this paper with the words of Jacques Derrida (2001, p. 20): *'Il y faut alors non seulement un principe de résistance, mais une force de résistance – et de dissidence.'*

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