



European University Association

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EUA Statement on the Bologna Process

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The European University Association (EUA) stands firmly behind the Bologna Process and, through its 34 Rectors Conferences and 650 individual members, is fully committed to supporting its implementation in universities throughout Europe. Over the last two years since the Salamanca and Prague meetings **Europe's universities and their students have demonstrated their commitment to the Bologna Process reforms**. Although much remains to be done, the results of the TRENDS III Report show the major progress that has been made in implementing Bologna not only in terms of legislative change but also inside higher education institutions.

This third TRENDS report is a major step forward as it measures for the first time how the process is perceived not only by governments and Rectors' Conferences, but also by higher education institutions, students and employers' associations, and maps out the progress of its implementation in each country. It shows both progress made and what needs to be done in the future.

The main challenge for higher education institutions in the future will be to turn the different reforms into an everyday reality for their teachers and students. There has to be enough time to translate legislative changes into meaningful academic aims and institutional realities. It also means dealing with the Bologna process as a 'package of reforms' that has to be integrated into other core functions and institutional development processes. The report shows that it is not helpful for the sustainability of the process if it is dealt with in a piecemeal fashion or pushed forward at the expense of other urgent reforms. Last but not least, Bologna reforms have also to be reflected in funding and funding mechanisms to have their desired impact.

In addition to commissioning the TRENDS III Report (written by Sybille Reichert and Christian Tauch), EUA participated actively in all the Bologna seminars and promoted the process across Europe, in particular through bringing forward the use of ECTS and the Diploma Supplement through its network of European counsellors, and by involving hundreds of higher education institutions in major Socrates supported pilot projects on quality culture in universities and the development of Joint Master programmes. The results of the latter will be presented in one of this afternoon's seminars. Finally, in May 2003, we organised the second Convention of Higher Education Institutions in Graz.

The **Graz Declaration** you received is not the result of just one conference but the outcome of fifteen months of discussions and meetings of universities leaders throughout Europe ending with a convention that gathered 600 participants (including students, stakeholders and governments).

The Convention report, prepared by Prof. Christina Ullenius, has been discussed and amended by the EUA Council to become the Graz declaration. **Thus, the Graz Declaration expresses the views of 34 national conferences of Rectors of Europe concerning the Bologna process and their priorities.**

Since the Prague inter-ministerial meeting, we focused on five topics that reflect our main concerns:

1. We, of course, focused on bringing forward the Bologna Action Lines, and especially on our priority action lines, namely European Quality Assurance and the development and piloting of joint degrees. That is why we launched, with the support of the European Commission, projects in precisely these two areas. However, we also believe that the working together on qualification frameworks, consolidating ECTS, as well as involving stakeholders in curricula development and ensuring that first cycle degrees become generally accepted as giving access to the labour market, will be major challenges.
2. We also discussed how to articulate the Bologna process with wider developments that are increasingly relevant, namely:
 - ⇒ Globalisation and the question of how to create or differentiate a European space for education and research in a global context. We concluded that cultural and linguistic diversity constitutes one of Europe's main assets which can be optimised through increased networking and partnerships in research and teaching. The development of a European dimension to Quality Assurance will also play a major role in this context.
 - ⇒ The creation of the European Research Area and how to link this space with the European Higher Education Area. We stressed the importance of research for strengthening the competitive position of European universities in the global arena. The integral link between higher education and research is central to European higher education and a defining feature of Europe's universities, and we firmly believe that governments need to build on this interaction if they want to strengthen Europe's research capacity. Universities have a *unique contribution* to make to improve Europe's research capacity. I mention here only their role in research training and their quasi monopoly in awarding PhD degrees, and thus in producing future generations of the young scientists Europe badly needs. EUA thus strongly supports the link between these two processes in the draft Berlin Communiqué.
3. We further underlined the universities' commitment to developing the social dimension of the EHEA, and in particular, tackling the current obstacles to mobility for students, young researchers, professors and administrative staff.
4. We affirmed our willingness to cultivate European values and cultures and insisted on the necessity for preserving the existing linguistic diversity.
5. We focused on governance and internal quality in HE institutions as a condition for making the EHEA a complete success.

Throughout our discussions we considered **the respective role of governments and of universities and students in the process**. It is clear to the university community that the framework and principles of the process have to stay in the hands of governments. This is why in the Graz Declaration we insist that universities must remain a public responsibility and must therefore also consolidate the social dimension of the process.

However, the process will not be successful if the responsibility of universities and their students in its implementation, and in ensuring its long term sustainability, is not recognised. As Trends III has shown, once the framework is in place, institutions need time to implement it:

- Professors and students need to be convinced in order to make the process a reality. This means not only internal discussions within each university but also a dialogue with other institutions and other stakeholders, such as employers.
- These preconditions will not be met without strong institutions, autonomous and accountable, and without progress on the quality assurance front. In terms of promoting a European dimension to Quality Assurance, EUA proposes a coherent policy approach for Europe, involving all partners, and based on the belief:

- that institutional autonomy creates and requires responsibility and particularly that universities are responsible for developing internal quality cultures;
- that national QA procedures will vary to reflect different national priorities;
- that progress at European level should be geared at increasing trust and transparency and that this would be achieved through greater involvement and discussions of all stakeholders to agree a set of principles at European level, the principal goal of which would be to improve quality rather than simply control it.

We welcome the opportunity that this conference gives us to underline that the **role of universities in Europe is not linked just to the goals of the Bologna process. It is also linked to the will of European governments to build a competitive Europe of knowledge** and to accept that universities are essential to reach this ambition.

Universities are ready and want to play a greater role in building Europe.

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