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THE BOLOGNA PROCESS AND ITS ROLE FOR TRANSITION COUNTRIES

Pavel Zgaga*

Introduction

There is a need for an introductory remark to one of key words of this paper. In the 1990s, a term "transition countries" or "countries in transition" entered political vocabularies to describe a number of countries on European East, mainly former socialist countries. It is rather obvious that this term is vague. Perhaps, it was originally invented for use in "diplomatic discourses": it looked like a neutral (and polite) technical term but in essence it was connected to fundamental social, political and economic changes in a very large and diverse part of Europe. A term "transition countries" can be understood as a rather content-less term until we add more precise data on where are they "transiting", i.e. where are they "coming from" and "going to". Yet, the term is now widely in use, and we use it here as well, but with certain precaution. In this paper, it will be used to contextualise "higher education transition" of the last twenty years in former socialist countries in Central and East Europe.

The "transition": setting the scene

Yet, the higher education "transition" seems to be something quite different from what was this term invented for. After a fall of the Berlin wall, the political "transition" was a process which affected more than one European region; its effects were global. As higher education is always in one or another way deeply affected by political contexts it is important to remind the extent and volume of these changes. On the other hand, we should remind that internationalisation of higher education has a long history (e.g. Wit, 2002); it was not invented in recent decades only. However, geopolitical changes of the 1990s put it under a totally new light. Just imagine a map of Europe from the late 1980s and compare it with a map of today (Chart 1).

It cannot be an exaggeration to say that Europe, on the threshold from the 1980s to the 1990s, experienced a "transition" period as has been rarely seen before: borders, alliances and balances of power were changed in an epochal way. In such circumstances social subsystems (and higher

* Profesor de la Universidad de Ljubljana, Facultad de educación, Slovenia. Especialidad en sistemas de educación, legislación de la educación, capacitación a profesores, educación superior y filosofía de la educación. Correo e: pavel.zgaga@guest.arnes.si, http://pavel.zgaga@guest.arnes.si
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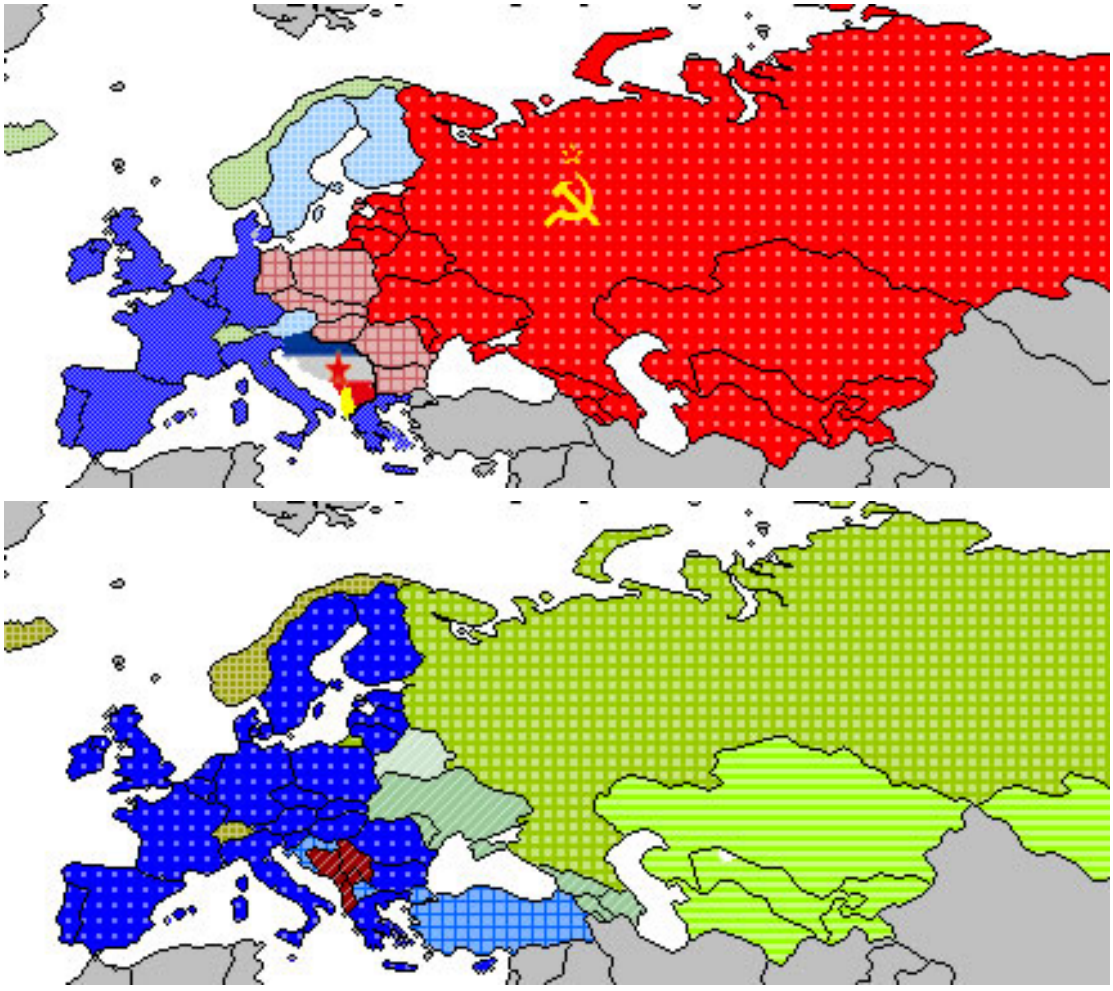
education is one of most important ones; for emerging knowledge societies in particular important) encounter huge challenges and need to change accordingly.

Chart 1
Europe "in transition" – 1989 vs. 2008



Note: maps are symbolic.

Higher education systems and institutions in East Europe were profoundly challenged by political turmoil of the late 1980s and early 1990s, but not only. As it has been argued at another place (Zgaga, 2007: 63), it is possible to differentiate between a political transition as the challenge of an open and pluralistic society, and a global transition as the challenge of the "emerging knowledge society" (here we do not enter in detailed definition). The former was mainly a characteristic of the former socialist countries in Europe while the latter is much more complex. Both are interlinked. If the deep changes seen in the educational systems of the former socialist countries in the 1990s are only understood as 'something' linked to a political transition (i.e. as a necessary adaptation

of education to the new political order) then they are being misinterpreted and not understood in their true complexity.

Therefore, the "transition" is not a magic word which could explain everything, regardless details and backgrounds. (For this and other reasons we will put this term sometimes in inverted commas.) On the other hand, "East Europe" is not a compact "region" – neither in geopolitical nor in cultural, religious etc. aspects. When details and backgrounds are important to proceed with a serious analysis, the popular term "East Europe" is useless. Diversities and colourfulness, distinctions and discrepancies, latent and open conflicts, traditions and modes of co-operation should be taken into account. For example, everyone knows today that the vague and popular term "East Europe" comprises both, Russia and Georgia. Similarly, today's independent countries from the territory of the former Soviet Union or the former Yugoslavia are often classified as the "former East European communist countries"; yet, their political histories and traditions of their political systems are very far from uniformity.

All this should be applied also to understanding of higher education in "transition countries". There is no "one size fits all" explanation of the "higher education transition". In continuation, an attempt will be made to clarify some modalities of higher education transition. Yet, it seems that a brief history on transition countries which joined the Bologna Process should be outlined first.

Transition countries joining the Bologna Process

It is a simple matter of fact that the so-called transition countries joined the Bologna Process at its various stages. Only ten of them were present at the Bologna summit in 1999: Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovak Republic and Slovenia. There was rather a simple (basic) reason that they sit at the round table consisted of 15 EU member states (of that time) as well as four other countries (Island, Norway and Switzerland as well as Malta)[1]: these ten countries applied for EU membership and reached a status of candidate countries. As each of them was already involved in the accession negotiation process (i.e., harmonising national higher educational legislation in order to meet standards of the EU *acquis communotaire*[2]) it is simply not a surprise that all of them were eager to participate in the new project. For them, accession to the European Union was the main motive of joining other "founding Bologna countries".

However, an invitation to join the "founding club" and help establishing the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) until 2010 (i.e., the main goal of the Bologna process) on equal footing had, in principle, not much in common with formal EU forums where the pre-accession negotiations were taking place at that time. On the contrary, the Bologna Process was set up as an inter-ministerial initiative (i.e., an initiative of ministers responsible for national higher education systems) and not as a priority issue on the agenda of EU bodies. It was set up (at least at its first step) to counterpoint the challenge of EU "harmonisation of education" and similar areas. This issue again had not much

[1] Island, Norway and Switzerland are not EU member states. Malta joined EU in 2004 together with eight of ten above listed "transition countries"; Bulgaria and Romania joined in 2007.

[2] The French term acquis communautaire is used in European Union law to refer to the total body of EU law accumulated so far. See http://www.nationmaster.com/encyclopedia/Acquis, all websites referred to in this paper were accessed in October 2008.

in common with expectations of ten "countries in transition". Despite perhaps wrong expectations, a decission to joining the club proved as the right one. It offers a splendid lesson in Europeanisation and internationalisation of (higher) education.

As regards European "coming together" of the last decades, there have been intensive and long lasting debates on "national" and "European" not only during the period after 1990 but also before. For a long period of time, "soft" areas like higher education were excluded from the Community regulations.[3] In the 1980s, a political decission was taken to launch Erasmus programme to promote university cooperation and strengthen mobility among EU countries which soon proved as an extremely far-reaching one. On a top political level, even more far-reaching decission was agreed in the text of *Maastricht Treaty* (1992). Its famous Article 126 brought national education systems out of previous "national isolation" and put them into a "European perspective":

> "The Community shall contribute to the development of quality education by encouraging co-operation between Member States and, if necessary, by supporting and supplementing their action, while fully respecting the responsibility of the Member States for the content of teaching and the organization of education systems and their cultural and linguistic diversity."[4]

One could argue today that this stipulation on (higher) education is rather vague and does not guarantee effective implementation[5] but, in practice, an intensive discussion on pro and (mainly) contra "harmonisation in education" and on the subsidiarity principle followed throughout the 1990s. An important part of this discussion was characterised by

> "the traditional resistance of the eu Member States to any harmonisation policy in education and to increased Community [i.e. eu] competences. The exclusion of education from harmonisation policies was underlined again some months after the adoption of the Bologna Declaration, in March 2000." (Hackl, 2001: 2)

This issue has always provoked a question of national identity (identities) in Europe and has been a particularly vulnerable issue in smaller countries. The first initiative towards "harmonisation of the architecture of the European higher education system" was given by Ministers of Education of four large European countries: France, Germany, Italy and UK who "call[ed] on other Member States of the Union and other European countries to join us in this objective" (Sorbonne Declaration, 1998).[6] There were a lot of hesitation from other EU countries and the term "harmonisation of the architecture" was seriously disputed. It would be rather a long story to analyse this discussion in details. The fact is that 29 countries joined the Bologna conference in 1999 as well as that the Eu-

[3] For a detailed analysis see e.g. Corbett, 2005.

[4] See http://www.europa.eu.int/abc/treaties/index_en.htm, from a higher education point of view, the following detail is in particularly important: Community action shall be aimed at "encouraging mobility of students and teachers, inter alia by encouraging the academic recognition of diplomas and periods of study".

[5] At this point, no changes or amendments have occurred until the last variant of the EU Treaty which is in power today. Nevertheless, the "European dimension" in education and cooperation in education among EU Member States as well as among them and the so-called third countries has increased enormously.

6 The Sorbonne Declaration and other Bologna documents can be accessed at the Bologna Secretariat website http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/hogeronderwijs/bologna

ropean Commission remained outside the "founding club" and didn't sign the Bologna Declaration at all. For purposes of this paper, we can simply quote from an excellent study on "universities and the Europe of Knowledge":

> "At first the Commission was out of policy-making range. […] Both the education directorate and the Commissioner's office were divided as to whether there is 'anything in Bologna for them' knowing that member states were suspicious". The Commission's role "had been constrained by the Treaty of Maastricht." (Corbett, 2005: 199)

On the other side, it is also true that the Bologna Process is often understood from today's point of view as a case of successful "Europeanisation". And the European Commission is very much involved in it: already at the second ministerial Bologna summit in Prague[7] (2001) when Ministers discussed "a structure for the follow-up work" (i.e., the Bologna Follow, Up Group, BFUG) they decided that it "should be composed of representatives of all signatories, new participants *and the European Commission*, and should be chaired by the EU Presidency at the time" (Prague Communiqué, 2001; *italics* by us). The "harmonisation" dispute and "jealousness" disappeared soon after countries started to work seriously on building the EHEA.

In Prague, Ministers also decided about eligibility to the Bologna Process: applications can be approved from "countries for which the European Community programmes Socrates and Leonardo da Vinci or Tempus-Cards are open".[8] Again, there was a clear sign that Bologna membership is linked to the EU agenda, or with other words (to the "Community contribution to the development of quality education". On the other hand, it was clear from the beginning that the Bologna Process has also an "external dimension") i.e., that it has to consider certain relation(s) also to ("transition") countries which for objective or subjective reasons were not EU candidate countries at the time and/or did not expect to join soon or did not intend to join at all.

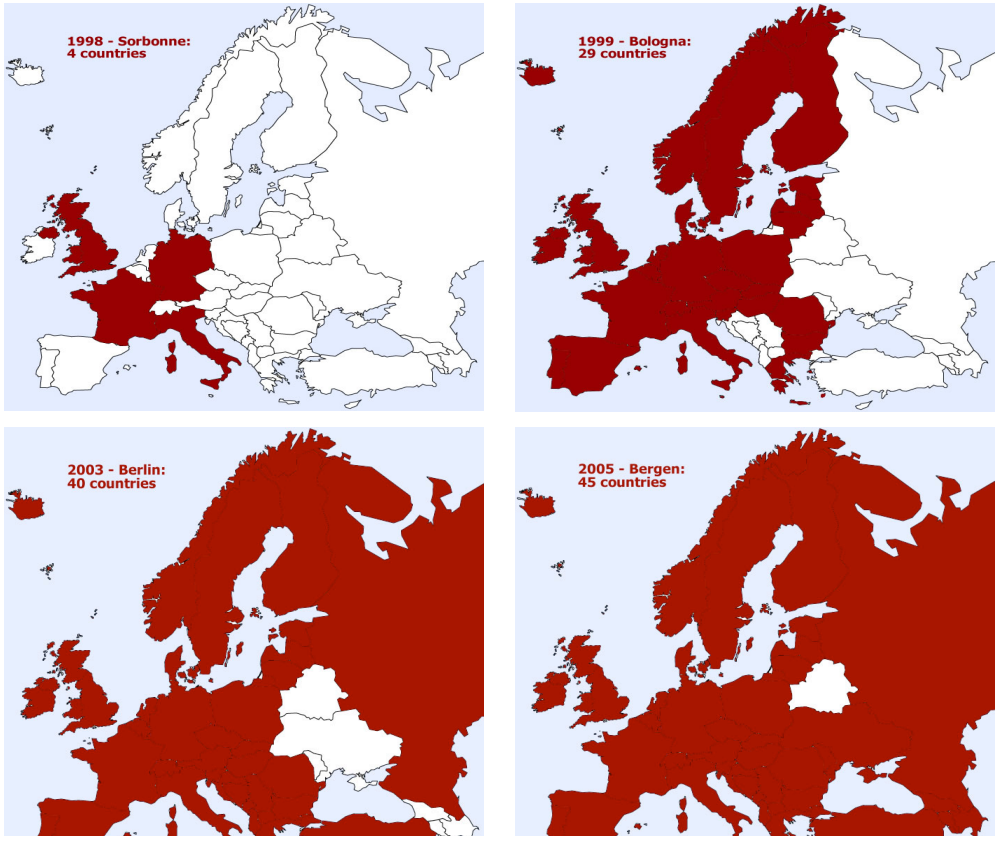
European cooperation in (higher) education has been often stressed among the first ten candidate countries from Central and South East Europe (which accessed the European Union in 2004 and 2007) as the best way not only to achieve "grater compatibility and comparability of the systems of higher education" and to adopt the emerging European "system of easily readable and comparable degrees" (*Bologna Declaration*, 1999) but also to get a firm reference point to help reforming and improving their own national higher education systems. It was a convincing argument also with countries outside of this group. Thus, Croatia (together with Cyprus and Turkey – certainly not former socialist countries but, perhaps, for some other reasons "countries in transition"?) sent an application at an early stage. All three of them joined the Process already in Prague (2001).[9] Thus, the "Bologna geography" expanded beyond EU (and EFTA) countries as well as beyond (formal) candidate countries (Chart 2). This was very important for further developments.

[7] Not to be forgotten that Prague is the capital city of one of "countries in transition", the Czech Republic.

[8] Socrates and Leonardo da Vinci have been the essence of "encouraging mobility of students and teachers, inter alia by encouraging the academic recognition of diplomas and periods of study" between EU Member States. On the other hand, the Tempus programme was set up at the beginning of the 1990s to broaden cooperation and mobility to "new democracies" of Central Europe; it has achieved great success and today there are almost 30 non- EU countries from East Europe, Central Asia and Mediterranean involved in Tempus (Tempus-Cards, Tempus-Tacis and Tempus-Meda). See http://www.ec.europa.eu/tempus.

[9] Today, Cyprus is one of new EU Members States while Croatia and Turkey are candidate countries.

Chart 2
The Bologna Process expanding (1998-2005)



Note: maps are symbolic.

Work within the Bologna Process was very much intensified after Prague and first concrete results were presented at the third summit in Berlin (2003). Countries agreed on common elements of the national quality assurance systems, committed again to "a system essentially based on two main cycles" and decided to "elaborate a framework of comparable and compatible qualifications for their higher education systems", "to remove all obstacles to mobility within the European Higher Education Area", "to include the doctoral level as the third cycle in the Bologna Process", etc. (*Berlin Communiqué*, 2003)

In addition, the eligibility criteria for membership in the Process were, after being set for the first time at the Prague meeting, importantly redefined:

> "Countries party to the European Cultural Convention shall be eligible for membership of the European Higher Education Area provided that they at the same time declare their willingness to pursue and implement the objectives of the Bologna Process in their own systems of higher education." (*Berlin Communiqué*, 2003)

This was again a far-reaching decission. The European Cultural Convention[10] should not be mixed with the European Union *acquis*; it has nothing to do with the EU enlargement or with accession of new ("transition") countries to the European Union. The Convention has a long history (1954) but it is even more important that (in geopolitical terms) it covers European continent in the broadest sense. This shift in the Bologna "rules" made possible that a much wider range of the so-called transition countries will join the Process. It also raised new ambitions.

At the Berlin summit, seven new countries joined the "Bologna Club": Albania, Andorra, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Holy See, Russia, Serbia and Montenegro and "the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia". Five of them belong to the so-called countries in transition (four of them from South East Europe). What media, reporting from Berlin, noticed particularly well, it was that Russian Federation is deliberately and voluntary entering the group countries which aim at developing a common EHEA until 2010. The Bologna Process and the European Union obviously have certain connecting points, but it has been clear from now on that they are definitely not simply "overlapping entities". Two years later, the Bologna membership was raised up to 45 members[11] as five more East European countries joined: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. Thus, since Bergen summit in 2005, only one European country with a fully-fledged higher education system has remained outside the "Bologna Club", Belarus.

In its first six years, the "Bologna Club" was growing; it was growing towards the so-called transition countries. We can assume that their role in the Bologna Process has been quite diverse. It has been far from passive following the established trends; it has been constitutive. Yet, we have to turn the scope now and focus to the role of the Bologna Process for them.

Transition countries: reforming national higher education systems and implementing the Bologna Process

A question what has been the role of the Bologna Process for transition countries should be précised: which transition countries, what role? It should be stressed again that we deal with vague definitions and that it is not possible to expect short and exact answers. On one hand, the term "transition countries" is fuzzy; on the other it is a fact that all transition countries are not members of the Bologna Process and that all Bologna countries are not EU Members States either.

To make answering a bit easier and perhaps a bit more transparent, it could be helpful to distinguish between three groups (or four: if we add a group of "other countries"):[12]

a) 10 countries of (mainly) Central Europe which accessed eu in 2004 and 2007;
b) East European countries (the "European" territory of the former Soviet Union);
c) South East European countries ("Western Balkans").

[10] http://conventions.coe.int/Treaty/Commun/QueVoulezVous.asp?NT=018&CM=8&DF=10/3/2006&CL=ENG
[11] Since 2005, no new members have been registered. Indeed, today there are 46 (and not 45) countries of the Bologna Process but it is a result of declaration of Montenegro as independent State (and dissolution of former federation of Serbia and Montenegro).
[12] It seems to be necessary but it exceeds the focus of this paper. We will briefly turn to this issue in the conclusion.

There have certainly been some common features in higher education across all these diverse countries and regions. Everywhere, for example, numbers of students started to grow immensely in the early 1990s and, since then, access to higher education has been a constant issue of policy and public debates. Very soon, private institutions started to appear: it was a totally new phenomenon almost everywhere. State budgets were decreasing very fast and public universities entered serious troubles; they started to charge student fees what was also unimaginable before. Almost all countries encountered problems with brain drain while a balanced, two-way European and/or international mobility of students and staff looked like a dim promise for undefined future.

Expanding higher education systems, a downfall of previous and a lack of new standards put issues of accreditation and quality assurance very high on policy agendas. However, first answers to these challenges were rather ineffective. In such circumstances, national qualification systems as well as recognition of national degrees abroad made a strong headache practically everywhere. All these issues were closely connected to obsolete higher education governance structures and strategies which have had to be urgently modernised. An important aspect of higher education governance was institutional autonomy: it was, and still is, a hot topic in discussions everywhere in Europe but the specific context of transition countries made these discussions specific, particularly in the first years after political changes of 1990.

It would be very difficult, if not impossible, to link all these issues directly to the Bologna agenda and its main goals (i.e., adoption of a system of easily readable and comparable degrees, two main cycles, system of credits, etc.). These issues, very urgent at that time, were not so much about "Europeanisation" but about specific national problems; they requested effective answers on how to stabilize national instabilities. They required a thorough reforming of national higher education systems. A lot of work was accomplished during the 1990s in many transition countries; the Bologna Process came only at the end of this period. What was their motivation to join the Process? Did the Process contributed to their success? There are three groups and three rather different types of answers.

In the first group, the decisive factor was the accession process to the European Union which started earlier. It was clear to countries of this group from the beginning that "harmonisation" of their higher education and research systems belongs among crucial points for their future life in a new "family". This group was partly discussed already above. Here, joining to the Process has had most visible effects.

Countries of the second group joined the Bologna Process four (2003) to six years (2005) after its start. Certainly it was not the EU accession what encouraged them; it was rather strong "getting together" in (West) European higher education and an awareness that keeping outside this movement can't contribute to the progress of a national system. Higher education systems from these group of countries had the same (and one) "forefather"; transformation of the former Soviet empire into independent states brought new challenges also to their higher education systems. Not only in these countries but everywhere, national systems of higher education, an idea and a reality which emerged in Europe in late 18 and early 19 century (but did not exist before), confronted with the requirements of the emerging knowledge society and globalisation trends at the end of 20 century. Even the biggest national systems understood that, for their own sake, they have to open and to co-operate with others, to search for "comparability and compatibility". Of course, for obvious reasons, smaller countries understood this necessity much easier.

This was also clear to the countries of the third group. There are certain similarities with the former group but also substantial differences.[13] During the 1990s, almost all countries of Western

Balkans were involved in wars and open conflicts and all of them were hit by economic and social crises. For many of them, a sound reconstruction of national higher education seemed very far and "Europeanisation" got here quite different accent than in the countries of the first group. Yet, already in the Bologna Declaration (1999) they were not forgotten but the role of the Process got a bit different accent here: "The importance of education and educational co-operation in the development and strengthening of stable, peaceful and democratic societies is universally acknowledged as paramount, the more so in view of the situation in South East Europe."

Wars were stopped at the end of the 1990s, their systems were partly reconstructed with international support rather soon and until the Berlin ministerial summit (2003), all of them already joined the Process. In this group of countries, a perspective of the EU accession is mainly perceived as one of the strongest motivation to foster political, social and economic recovery;[14] today, two of them are already candidate countries.

Let us turn back to national higher education reforms. Not only the so-called countries in transition but all countries which joined the Bologna Process find a clear connection between their reforms and implementation of policy goals agreed within the Bologna Process. From this point of view, all of them should be treated as "transition countries", at least regarding to higher education: their systems have been in a move. On the threshold of a new millennium, strengthening, modernisation or reconstruction (different terms fit better to different countries' contexts) of national systems of higher education was not possible any more within a closed national context. The Bologna Process has offered a forum, not experienced before, where countries can learn each from another and make their systems more comparable and compatible in a voluntary way ("open method of co-ordination"). It has also brought a unique opportunity to understand a changed role of internationalisation in higher education at the beginning of the third millennium and to enhance their systems with new internationalisation strategies.

However, challenges and opportunities of building EHEA have had specific echoes in various (groups of) countries. In the so-called transition countries, for various reasons, these specific echoes have been accompanied by a specific semantics. In political and public discourses terms like "European standards" or "European requirements" contain a specific "value code". It can be positive and stimulative, but not always and everywhere. Thus, the Bologna Process has been sometimes transformed into a tool of convincing, motivating and pushing forward various actors in higher education as well as broad public. After such translation, "Bologna" sounds as something what "they expect from us", as a sort of "directive from above": "We must do it because it is European".

If we had a space for a thorough analysis (yet, it exceeds dimensions of this paper) it would not be difficult to show that these national translations of the Bologna "philosophy" into "directives"

[13] With Albania as an exception, the remaining Western Balkans countries shared a considerable part of 20th century political history and heritage of a common state, Yugoslavia. Its roots grew already after World War I. Until the 20th century, the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman Empires had affected most parts of the region with divisions, (re-)unifications, shifting allegiances and diversity. After World War II, the Federal Socialist Yugoslavia, as "neither an Eastern, nor a Western" country, was decentralised and diverse in itself. Since the mid-1960s it was more connected with the West (with one million workers abroad) than the East. Albania to the south-west side of the peninsula was isolated up until the late 1980s. Looking at the Balkans in a broader framework, Bulgaria and Romania belonged to the "Eastern bloc" while Moldova was an integral part of the Soviet Union. To the south of the Balkans, Greece was the next frontier to the West, politically speaking. (Zgaga, 2005: 25-26).

[14] "For the new independent states that emerged from former Yugoslavia, the Bologna process has been perceived as a key driver for rebuilding and reinvigorating higher education systems that all share a common heritage from their Yugoslav past." (Crosier, et al., 2007: 74)

sometimes have just nothing to do with the true Bologna expert reports and policy documents. Yet, referring to them in public seems to be convincing, to push stronger towards realisation of often purely national reform goals. In fact, this is not a pattern which one could find only in transition countries; it is a wider practice that recommendations agreed in international forums are subjected to national interests, national interpretations and national goals when they are discussed at the national level. Specific dimension of this phenomenon in transition countries is that this kind of "convincing" the public can melt with the "old mentality", and as a result there could be hesitation and polemics. It is more productive when there are polemics.

Polemics about "Europe" are necessary in transition countries to experience a dichotomy of national and European, that is, to learn a lesson which was taken in the "old" EU member states earlier: there is no (ideal) "Europe" apart of (real) European countries, apart of European diversities. On the other hand, polemics at the national level are quite often connected to (re)interpretations of what was agreed before at the European level.[15] It does not necessarily mean that such interpretations deliberately aim at dropping that or another key point of the Bologna Process; they are much more based on specific political and/or academic traditions, cultures, understandings etc. It has been stressed many times within the Bologna Process that its final goal (i.e., EHEA) does not and should not press to uniform different features of national higher education systems in Europe. On the contrary, diversity is taken as "the European richness". What is really necessary it is to make diverse systems and institutions "comparable" and "compatible", "easy readable" etc. to allow mutual benefits. The "new", transition countries contributed to even broader diversity and to the enrichment of the existing "European treasury" of the "old" member states. However, a splendid rainbow of diversity often brings further questions.

Trends V Report noted that "there is not only diversity between new member states but also within them" (Crosier, *et al.*, 2007: 72) and illustrates this case with the Russian Federation. Division in Russian higher education encompass "ideological differences, but it is also linked to geographic regions" of this large country. It seems that universities from North West Russia found the closest links to the aims of the Bologna Process while universities from e.g. Central Asia part of the country look these issues sometimes in a different light. Anyway, this should be taken as normal.

However, despite diversities between as well as within countries, the Bologna Process has had enormous impact to new member countries as well as broader. A recent survey on the so-called structural measures projects[16] within the EU Tempus programme has shown that "the more [transition] countries are involved in the Bologna Process, the more they distribute their interest among diverse structural issues" (Zgaga, 2008: 38). In last few years, a large number of cooperation projects with "old" and "new" members of the Bologna Process (as well as some other, i.e. "non-Bologna" countries) have been running within this framework addressing key topics e.g. developing quality assurance in higher education, implementing new degree structures and ECTS, strengthening mobility of students and staff, etc. Such projects have a real impact: projects' consortia formed of

[15] Already in 2005, the Trends IV Report (biannual survey on Bologna implementation performed by the European University Association) noticed that "[s]ince 1999, however, the experience of introducing two or three cycles to Europe's national higher education systems has demonstrated that there is […] ample room for different and at times conflicting interpretations regarding the duration and orientation of programmes". (Reichert and Tauch, 2005: 11).

[16] Structural measures have been defined as "short-term policy advice interventions, aimed at supporting reform processes in higher education, and developing higher education strategic frameworks". http://ec.europa.eu/education/programmes/tempus/projects_en.html#2,

members from diverse institutions and different countries are learning and working together. They are also getting closer to understanding specific national and cultural contexts thus contributing to improve comparability and compatibility of systems they belong and to strengthen mobility, the ultimate goal of the EHEA.

A hint was already made above that the "colourful rainbow" of varieties within European higher education incorporates segments which can prove as quite unpleasant barriers to faster and more efficient implementation of new higher education philosophy. Among such "oddities" it can be mentioned a resistant tradition of the so-called "independent faculties" (resulting in weak central bodies of university and weak university identity)[17] in countries of South East Europe. The Bologna Process provokes this tradition and today it is the main challenge in the process of modernisation of university governance.

The phenomenon of "independent faculties"(particularly in combination with specific "European" semantics discussed above) does not only strengthen factors which hinder coherent reforms but can also contribute that reforms are implemented in a purely formal way. Typical cases of formal changes can be found in curricular reform. The motivating effect of a "directive from above" is loosing its strength as deeper into institutional structures we go. Minister may be convincing when promoting in public the "Bologna requirements" at general level; it is already more difficult job for Rectors (weak but also far away from the faculty hell); yet it could be a nightmare for Deans if they really intend to implement novelties at their faculties. *Trends V Report* dealt a bit with this phenomenon; authors say that universities (those which replied a questionnaire) almost always say, for example, that they had introduced the ECTS system (one of the key Bologna goals); "[y]et when asked if this means that students are able to study a degree programme by selecting some modules from different faculties within their institution, the reply was that this would be very exceptional" (Crosier *et al.*, 2007: 74). If it is exceptional within their institution, how could be international mobility promoted?

In recent years, there have been several legislative projects coping with this problem which were supported by international partners; yet the success has been moderate or even less. It seems impossible to command a reintegration of universities from above but at a micro level rather effective projects have been launched and accomplished. An interesting case is the Tempus Structural Measures project Establishing Central University Services located at the University of Arts in Belgrade (Serbia) with partners from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Portugal and UK. The direct aim of the project was to establish Central University Services (CUS) through upgrading the strategic and reform capacities of administrative staff working at the university central administration and at the constituent faculties in order to prepare the staff for the functional integration of administration and services. Disintegrated universities of the region encounter a number of problems and barriers to their development and one of them, rather crucial one, is expensive and dysfunctional organisation. Therefore, the project demanded a lot of internal lobbying; it addressed the problem successfully and introduced CUS in the University of Arts. The CUS model can be now adapted and implemented at other institutions in the region. (Zgaga, 2008: 44)

[17] Authors of the Trends IV Report explain the problem as follows: "As faculties rather than institutions still enjoy high levels of legal, functional and academic autonomy, it is extremely difficult to introduce coherent reforms even in one university, let alone across a national system." (Reichert and Tauch, 2005: 74)

Governance issues should be approached from other aspects as well. The main reason that the Bologna Process grew its roots at universities (and not only in Ministers' cabinets) is a firm statement on University autonomy and on principles and values of University. The Bologna Declaration already referred to "fundamental principles laid down in the Bologna *Magna Charta Universitatum* of 1988" stressing "that Universities' independence and autonomy ensure that higher education and research systems continuously adapt to changing needs, society's demands and advances in scientific knowledge". Similar statements have been repeated several times, also at the last summit in London: "We therefore underline the importance of strong institutions, which are diverse, adequately funded, autonomous and accountable" (*London Communiqué*, 2007). This particular point of the "Bologna philosophy" proved extremely important in transition countries which have been often competing with bitter heritage regarding university autonomy.

At this final point, it should be repeated once again that there is no "one size fits all" answer to the question on the role of the Bologna Process for the so-called transition countries: specific national circumstances should be always taken into account to answer this question properly. However, in summing up it could be said (at a rather general level) that the Bologna Process as an "external push" to strengthen national reform processes has proved in productive ways. It has been pushing its members towards co-operation in international higher education policy debate and towards international policy development. This is a point which goes beyond "Bologna borders".

Conclusion

The so-called transition countries can't be limited to Europe only. Besides, it is not so easy to delineate between Europe and some other world regions, e.g. Asia. Why Vladivostok belongs to a European country and Astana to a Central Asian country?[18] Actually, this (rhetoric) question exceeds the scope of this paper. Anyway, the Bologna Process has had immense echoes around the globe (Zgaga, 2006) and it has influenced, directly or indirectly, higher education developments in many other countries (either in "transition" or not). It should not be forgotten as well that trends in global higher education of the 1990s influenced origins of the Bologna Process; it has been also an answer to these trends, challenging Europe, "the cradle of University".[19]

When a decision was taken (as we saw, already at early steps of the Process) on extending the Bologna membership beyond the "exclusive EU club", first to the so-called transition countries, it was tacitly recognized that answers to contemporary questions of further development of higher education and research should be discovered in a global context. The Bologna Process is something what wasn't experienced before. It is a specific European answer to European historic troubles, but it is also an answer within a global context. This fact was politically recognised at London ministerial summit in 2007 where Ministers adopted "the strategy 'The European Higher Education Area in a Global Setting'". A new story begins at this point.

[18] Kazakhstan expressed interest to join the Bologna Process; yet, it is not party of the European Cultural Convention and according to a decision taken at the Berlin summit (see above) it is formally not eligible.

[19] "We must in particular look at the objective of increasing the international competitiveness of the European systems of higher education. The vitality and efficiency of any civilisation 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 Declaration, 1999)

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