

The Bologna Process: Bridge or Fortress?

A Review of the Debate from a North American Perspective



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The Bologna Process is an intergovernmental initiative that aims to create a European Higher Education Area (EHEA) by 2010. The broad objectives of the Bologna Process are to remove the obstacles to student mobility across Europe, to enhance the attractiveness of European higher education worldwide, to establish a common structure of higher education systems across Europe, and for this common structure to be based on two cycles, undergraduate and graduate. Forty-five nations, all but one of the Council of Europe, have now signed the Bologna Declaration. There are also supra-national political bodies involved, the most significant being the European Commission. The Commission has seen the Bologna Process as an essential part of the Lisbon Strategy, sparking debates over conflicting agendas; should Bologna emphasize its international competitiveness or social inclusiveness? Part of this debate concerns how much these reforms are responding to global trends or to specific political agents, but it also calls into question what is meant by a 'European dimension' to higher education, and the influence of 'Anglo-American' educational values. Ultimately, the significance of the Bologna Process reaches well beyond the borders of Europe, and not only because of competition for international students. Higher education institutions (HEIs) in North America must also come to grips with the technical aspects of the EHEA, including issues of degree recognition and quality assurance. Yet the lack of dialogue between competing groups within Europe, and between educational experts in Europe and North America, has obscured the direction of the Process. From a transatlantic perspective, many North American scholars have complained that the Bologna Process is becoming more of a fortress than a bridge.

Although the Bologna Process takes its name from a declaration signed in 1999, the initial impetus came from a 1998 agreement made at the Sorbonne in Paris, between the Ministers of Education from France, Germany, Italy and the United Kingdom. In this Sorbonne Declaration, the essential principles were established: to create a European space of higher education and research that would recognize the need for Europe to be competitive in a globalized economy, and to add value for students through international experience and mastery of foreign languages. In June of the following year (1999), the Ministers of twenty-nine European countries met in Bologna, Italy, where they signed the Bologna Declaration. Keeping with the spirit of Sorbonne, they adopted six primary objectives, or ‘action lines’: a system of easily readable and comparable degrees (‘Bologna Degrees’, with Diploma Supplements), a system of two cycles of study (Bachelors and Masters), a common system of credit (the European Credit Transfer System, or ECTS), the promotion of student and academic mobility, cooperation in quality assurance, and the promotion of a ‘European dimension’ to higher education.

Subsequent meetings and documents have expanded and clarified the Bologna Process. The 2001 meeting in Prague brought the total to thirty-three countries, and included three more action lines: an emphasis on the role of students, promoting the attractiveness of the EHEA, and lifelong learning (a part of the Lisbon Agenda of 2000). The 2003 Berlin Meeting sought a synergy between the EHEA and a European Research Area, increased the number of signatories to forty, and discussed a framework for doctoral study. No new ‘action lines’ were added at the Bergen Conference in May of 2005, but the number of countries expanded to forty-five. The Bergen Communiqué prioritized three objectives: quality assurance, the establishment of the two-cycle degree

regime across the Bologna region, and the recognition of degrees and accreditation. The next Bologna conference is to be held in London in May of 2007, with the rather ambitious ultimate goal being the consolidation of the EHEA by 2010.¹

The Bologna Process emphasizes comparability, compatibility, competitiveness, and transferability of degrees and credit. The stated purpose of the EHEA is to harmonize higher education across Europe, but not to unify all national higher education systems into a single supranational system. Thus the Bologna Process is intergovernmental and inter-ministerial, although it does receive significant input from supranational and pan-European bodies. The Process is monitored through meetings, websites and stocktaking exercises, and has a rotating secretariat that corresponds with the host country of a major conference held every two years. The main decision-making body at each conference is the Bologna follow-up group (Bfug), which has a voting representative from each member state as well as a voting representative from the European Commission. The Council of Europe plays a significant guiding role in the process, but is not itself a voting member. The other main consultative members for the Bfug are the EUA (European University Association), EURASHE (European Association of Institutions in Higher Education), ESIB (National Unions of Students in the EU), and ENQA (European Network for Quality Assurance). There are also consultants from the Education International (EI) Pan-European Structure, the Union of Industrial and Employers' Confederations of Europe (UNICE), and the European Centre for Higher Education (UNESCO-CEPES). From a North American perspective, it seems that much

¹ The main Bologna Process documents are the 1998 Sorbonne and 1999 Bologna Declarations, Communiqués from Prague (2001), Berlin (2003) and Bergen (2005), and two additional documents added in 2005: the European Quality Assurance Standards and the Framework of Qualifications for the European Higher Education Area.

of the bureaucratic machinery for the EHEA is in place at a European level, if not yet at national levels.

Pan-European mobility was a fundamental underpinning to the Bologna Process, and it has also been a significant aspect to EU educational policy since the inception of the Erasmus programme in 1987. The European Commission has overseen the Erasmus programme (as well as other European mobility programmes like Tempus and Socrates) and deemed mobility a necessary aspect of Europeanizing the EU area. Over one and a half million students have already participated in Erasmus, and the Commission wants to increase participation to three million by 2012. The Commission is working to lift obstacles to mobility, through transferability of ECTS credits, portability of grants, and increased funding.² The vast majority of this funding will be earmarked for European mobility, but Erasmus has an international dimension too.³ Despite this, Uwe Brandenburg has observed that the Bologna Process might actually be a detriment to undergraduate mobility programmes like Erasmus. While likely to increase mobility from one degree cycle to the next (Bachelors to Masters), the Bologna Bachelors Degree is only three years in duration and perceived by many students to be too short to allow a semester abroad. Amidst complaints in Germany that the Diploma Supplement and the

² From 2007-2013 there will be a €3.1 billion budget allocated to Erasmus, which represents an average per-annum funding increase of 75% over 2006.

³ Of the Erasmus programme, the Erasmus Mundus (international) portion will only receive approximately 15% of the overall funds. Of that amount (approximately €68 million/year) only about 6% (€4 million) will go towards exchanges with the USA, and a mere 1% (€0.73 million) will be earmarked for Canada.

ECTS credit system has not been working, undergraduate mobility is likely to stagnate or even decrease.⁴

The Bologna Process is not an official EU project, but there is considerable overlap and the European Commission has a vested interest in it. The Commission officially maintains that “the aim of the European Higher Education Area is to provide citizens with choices from a wide and transparent range of high quality courses and benefit from smooth recognition procedures,”⁵ but there is some concern that they are trying to co-opt the Bologna Process and make it serve the Lisbon Agenda. The Lisbon Agenda, “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,”⁶ was initiated in 2000 and offers a supply-side economic diagnosis of higher education that emphasizes restructuring and flexibility. Its foci include human capital, lifelong learning, research and development, and knowledge industries. The Lisbon Agenda has had a profound impact on the direction of the Bologna Process, and some question whether the Commission wants to overtake the Process, because “the legal basis for EU activities has been substantially extended by intergovernmental agreements.”⁷ Higher education was nowhere explicitly mentioned in the founding treaties of the EEC, so there has been some resistance to any sort of supra-national coordination (especially among countries that have desired little more than a customs union). While there was some support for a European-wide higher education policy in

⁴ Brandenburg, Uwe. “Bologna: Troublesome Impediment or Useful Ingredient for Transatlantic Mobility” (presentation). See also Terry, Laurel S. “Living with the Bologna Process: Recommendations to the German Legal Education Community from a U.S. Perspective”, Pgs. 898-9

⁵ http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/educ/bologna/bologna_en.html

⁶ from Lisbon European Council, http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/knowledge_society/index_en.htm

⁷ Ertl, Hubert. “European Union policies in education and training: the Lisbon agenda as a turning point?”
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the 1980s, Articles 126 and 127 of the treaty of Maastricht (1992) ensured that signatory nations were sovereign in this matter. Even now the treaties make clear that member states maintain strategic control of their education systems.

In the initial stages, national political actors were the agents of change in European higher education. Claude Allègre, French Minister of Education, initiated the Bologna Process by getting key nations to sign the Sorbonne Declaration with the tacit support of university administrators and certain supra-national agencies. Barbara Haskel, a political scientist at McGill University, has observed how this accounted for the incredible *speed* with which sweeping reform took place. By virtue of a ‘coordination imperative’ (analytically different from ‘cooperation’), the desire for many of the members of the Council of Europe to be on the side of the dominant national actors ensured that the critical mass for reformation was quickly achieved. Haskel also contends that the Process was *sustained* after 2001 by the formation of the EUA, an alliance between the Commission and university administrators.⁸ In a Trends III survey, 46% of HEIs felt that national legislation was undermining their autonomy, yet little more than a third of them had a Bologna coordinator. There would seem to be a considerable discrepancy between national/international policies and institutional realities.⁹ Thus there continues to be some confusion – especially amongst non-Europeans – as to whether the driving force behind Bologna is currently intergovernmental or supra-national.

An alternative paradigm to this ‘agency’ approach is the structural perspective of mimetic (or normative) isomorphism. Mimetic isomorphism contends that reforms travel

⁸ Haskel, Barbara. “The Bologna Process for a European Higher Education Area: Implications for Canada?” Pg. 3. See also Charlier and Croché, “The Bologna Process and its Actors” Pgs. 20-1

⁹ Reichart and Tauch “Trends in Learning Structures in European Higher Education III” Pgs. 8-9

between regions, so that higher education systems emulate and borrow from one another. Higher education in post-Soviet Europe is comprised of three main models: the ‘Humboldtian’ tradition (German, diffused northwards and eastwards), the Anglo-Saxon tradition (British, diffused through the English-speaking world) and a southern tradition (a mix of models situated in southern European nations). During the 1980s and 1990s, countries across Europe were arriving at the conclusion that their systems of higher education were no longer appropriate and in need of reform. Responding to localized conditions, HEIs used vocabularies and administrative techniques borrowed from a perceived ‘world model’, yet seeming to emulate the Anglo-Saxon tradition. It looked as if European HEIs had similar targets and the same types of solutions – those that best imitated North America. Yet structuralists maintain that this was not the result of any coordinated action or agency.

There has been more of a convergence of educational models than a simple dominance from the Anglo-Saxon tradition. Whereas there was a freeing-up of state involvement in strongly centralized systems like that of Germany, Austria and Japan, ‘Anglo-Saxon’ institutions saw government control increased by way of performance-based federal funding and performance indicators to improve accountability.¹⁰ These reforms mostly affected institutional design, not course content, so systems of higher education remained distinct and kept strong nationalist characteristics. The convergence of models is also somewhat illusory because in day-to-day practice the systems remain quite different, thereby accounting for some of the observed discrepancies between policy

¹⁰ Musselin, Christine. “Is the Bologna process a move towards a European Higher Education Area?”, Pgs. 3-4 and also Bruneau and Schuetze “Less State, More Market: University Reform in Canada and Abroad”, Pgs 3, 6-9. Perhaps another example of convergence that changed the Anglo-Saxon model is the tradition of ‘applied’ degrees from polytechnical colleges and *Fachhochschulen*, now being awarded by institutions in Ontario and B.C.

and practice. Musselin posits that the distance between the systems of France and England, or Germany and Austria, have actually increased over the last two decades.¹¹ Yet on the whole it seems as if the EHEA promises a convergence of systems of higher education across Europe. It is not yet clear which political actors will dominate the agenda of the Bologna Process, or even to what degree specific actors can exercise control. Certainly the stakes are high, both ideologically and financially.

A stated aim of the Bologna Process is to make the EHEA attractive and competitive in an increasingly expanded and diversified global market for higher education. It is a burgeoning global industry: already by 1999, trade in higher education services amounted to US\$30 billion (3% of total services trade) across OECD countries.¹² The U.S.A. is currently the largest ‘exporter’ of education and half a million foreign students contribute US\$13 billion annually to the American economy. Other major players are the U.K., Canada, New Zealand, and Australia, the last being particularly aggressive in internationalizing its HEIs.¹³ There are even some new competitors in higher education: China, Malaysia, Singapore and Korea have all recently announced that they want to become educational hubs, exporting services rather than importing them. By 2020, the number of international students could reach seven million worldwide, with the majority of demand for education services predicted to come from India and China.¹⁴ The question is who will provide the supply?

¹¹ Musselin, Pgs. 6-7

¹² Uvalić-Trumbić, Stamenka “The External Dimensions of the Bologna Process: Globalisation, Quality Assurance and Qualifications” Pg. 128

¹³ Australia has been accused of seeing internationalization of its student population and the exporting of its educational services as cash cows. For Australia, education is its third largest service export (compared to fifth for the USA), and seventh largest overall export industry. See Reus, Karel “International Post-Secondary Education: the Education Gateway” Pg. 4

¹⁴ Ibid. Pgs. 24 and Pgs. 3 to 5 for information about Asian demand compiled by IDP Education Australia

In principle, promoting the ‘attractiveness’ of the EHEA was a priority to ensure international competitiveness. Yet some European policy makers have had a somewhat schizophrenic reaction to this mandate, partly because they have had to examine systems of higher education in light of a rapidly changing situation across Europe. Over the past decades, there has been the collapse of the Soviet education system, significant technological changes (like distance learning) and an ever-increasing international demand for higher education services. A fundamental dimension of the Bologna Process was dealing with these issues under pressure of a perceived ‘Anglo-Saxon challenge’. The influence of this tradition has been felt in the global trends towards a new ‘managerialism’ and with mixed modes of institutional funding.¹⁵ While advocates of managerialism and private funding justify performance indicators and independent quality assurance as satisfying ‘client’ (i.e. students and academics) demands, there is the perception among skeptics that some university administrators and government agencies conceive of client groups that are outside the higher education system (i.e. industry and economic interests).¹⁶ Skeptical policy-makers criticize this as a marketization (or in some circles, ‘Americanization’) of higher education. Many of the same educational leaders are also emulating the ‘American’ model because of its success, not least of which in attracting foreign students.

In 2001, the debate over whether European higher education was becoming ‘marketized’ was particularly heated. At the Prague Convention that year, representatives of France and French-speaking Belgium feared that the direction the Bologna Process was taking put universities at risk of being beholden to the private

¹⁵ this refers to shifting from input to output controls. In Europe this means from line-item budgets to block grant funding – already a well-established system in Canada. See Bruneau and Schuetze, Pg. 10

¹⁶ Ibid., Pg.11

sector. The French defended higher education as a ‘public good’; their conception of *le service public* demanding a sense of collective responsibility and solidarity that was incompatible with unfettered capitalism (which would serve only elites and reinforce social inequality). As the French were unwilling to acknowledge any corrective force in capitalism, they put themselves in direct opposition to any perceived ‘Americanization’ that would open up the EHEA for private sector intervention, for-profit activities, external quality assurance, and even entry into GATS negotiations.¹⁷ Later that year, there was a pan-European outcry against any overt ‘commercialization’ of the Bologna Process. Initial condemnation came from the EI and ESIB, but by 28 September 2001, a Joint Declaration on Higher Education and GATS was signed by the EUA, the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (AUCC), the American Council on Education (ACE), and the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA). This declaration did not categorically oppose private sector involvement in higher education, but asked that its member institutions not make commitments on higher education services in the context of GATS, nor any trade policy regime.¹⁸

How much of the commercialization of higher education can really be attributed to American influence? Certainly there are fundamental differences between the systems of higher education in continental Europe and the United States. In the U.S.A, many HEIs were founded by private organizations. Tuition fees were deemed necessary because of meager public funding. The institutions developed into free corporations due to lack of other oversight bodies, and this self-governance extended to joint quality

¹⁷ Langan, Elise. “France and the United States: The Competition for University Students – Bologna and Beyond.” (One could also argue, somewhat cynically, that upsetting *le service public* would create fierce competition between EU universities and restrict any French advantage to the EU market, because of the decline of the French language internationally).

¹⁸ Uvalić-Trumbić, Pgs. 127-8 and also Charlier and Croché, Pg. 23

assurance mechanisms independent of the state. The result has been a flexible, decentralized system that some have perceived as overly dependant on the market. Yet perhaps it is somewhat expedient for French elites to have America as a universal bogey man. During an interview on National Public Radio in July of 2001 (the same time as the debates on Americanization of higher education), Henry Kissinger accused European elites of trying to unite Europeans by trumpeting 'European values' as superior to American ones. Edward Fogarty, a political scientist at University of California, Berkeley, observed that European elites were constantly constructing a European sense of identity to deepen the process of Europeanization that the EU and Council of Europe had come to represent. Fogarty suspected that the more they tried to deepen Europe, the less willing they would be to integrate with America.¹⁹ If true, this seems particularly apt in the field of education, where cultural values are disseminated.

American academics have complained that the philosophical differences between American and European education are somewhat manufactured. They feel that as entire education systems and their philosophies have come under attack, the technical problems of accreditation have been overshadowed by rhetorical, political and policy issues. Stephen Hunt, director of policy and planning for the US Network for Education Information (USNEI),²⁰ feels that the system proposed by the Bologna Process is close enough to that of America (structurally and institutionally), so all that is required is a technical dialogue concerning details. He maintains that for both Europeans and

¹⁹ Fogarty, Edward A. "The European Union and North America", Pg. 25

²⁰ This is a section of the U.S. Department of Education, and represents the European Network of Information Centres (ENIC) in the U.S.A. The American branch of ENIC is the USNEI. It should also be noted that the U.S. department of education is not a ministry of education and has no federal authority. As education was not mentioned in the U.S. constitution, HEIs are legally autonomous. See Thompson, "The United States as a Stakeholder in the Bologna Process" Pg. 162

Americans, higher education must serve diverse populations with varying types of preparation, promote lifelong learning, allow a wide variety of study options organized into well recognized qualifications, and that the costs cannot be borne by the state alone. The only essential differences, Hunt argues, are the levels of centralization and flexibility within the systems.²¹

In the late 1990s, this sense of a shared set of educational values seemed to be borne out by parallel courses of action for the U.S. academic community and the Council of Europe, both emphasizing the role of universities in educating for democratic citizenship.²² However, perspectives on the *internationalization* of higher education have long been different. Hans de Wit points out that for the United States, internationalization has been driven by the political rationales of national security and foreign policy, and its role in higher education is more directed to globalization of the curriculum and intercultural awareness in response to the cultural parochialism of American secondary schools. For Europe, internationalization represents academic quality and economic competitiveness, and its role in higher education has been the extension and diversification of academic performance, student mobility, and networking in a specific subject. This disparity is the result of structural and cultural differences in primary, secondary and post-secondary education, as well as essential differences in funding mechanisms and leadership traditions. In their interactions, transatlantic mobility has meant different things for the United States and Europe: the former being more

²¹ Hunt, E. Stephen "The Bologna Process and recognition issues outside the EHEA", Pgs. 126-7

²² pertains to a Council of Europe project entitled *Education for Democratic Citizenship* (1996-2000) and a U.S. Project initiated by the *Wingspread Declaration on Renewing the Civic Mission of the American Research University* (December 1998). For more information, see article by Frank Plantan, "The university as site of citizenship."

professionalized and focused on faculty-supervised group mobility, while the latter being based on more mutual trust and individual orientation.²³

Canada's mobility schemes have been sensitive to both approaches. The Canadian federal government and the European Commission have signed various agreements emphasizing cooperation on issues of transatlantic student mobility, institutional partnerships, and exchange of knowledge and expertise in higher education.²⁴ Canada is also a part of a highly integrated North American mobility system²⁵ and there are close ties between many organizations and institutions in the United States and Canada. Unlike Australia – a country strongly influenced by the 'coordination imperative' and eager to recognize Bologna degrees for mobility purposes²⁶ – Canada cannot so easily risk ostracizing its southern neighbour. Canada's mobility scenario is further complicated by the nature of the decentralized systems in North America. Higher education is coordinated by professional but non-governmental organizations, and different provinces have different inter-institutional relationships.

Canadian HEIs have entered into mobility and research partnerships with institutions on both sides of the Atlantic, even though Canadian policy-makers were worrying about competition in higher education long before the Bologna Process. As a result, Canada has already engaged in many of the discussions over commercialization

²³ de Wit, Hans. Internationalization of Higher Education in the United States of America and Europe: A Historical, Comparative and Conceptual Analysis Pgs 221-3

²⁴ *Agreements establishing a Cooperation Programme in Higher Education and Training* signed in 1995 and then renewed in 2000. This is to be continued and expanded. In a Communication from 13 May 2003, the Commission pledged to "explore ways to broaden exchanges between young people in the EU and Canada [and] work with Canada to establish the future of the co-operation programme in higher education and training after 2005." (Delegation of the European Commission to Canada)

²⁵ CONAHEC (Consortium for North American Higher Education Collaboration) was formed in 1995. This established a student exchange programme (Conasep) intended to develop a North American view on higher education. See Charier and Croché, Pg. 19

²⁶ Haskel, Pg. 7

with which Europe is now embroiled. Traditionally, Canada has been less concerned than Europe about the employability of its graduates, but just as concerned about diversification and research. In the early 1980s, the tendency was to protect universities from industry, as Canada was establishing norms and regulations on faculty ‘consulting’ and commercialization of research results. With the advent of increased international competition, especially proposals for a European Research Area, there is some apprehension about Canada falling behind in research that drives international competitiveness.²⁷ To counter this, there have been provincial and federal projects aimed at increasing R&D and facilitating the transfer of university research results into industrial or social innovation.²⁸ However, many Canadian education experts are still reluctant to emulate the U.S. model for research in higher education, concerned that it might over-commercialize universities.

Early in 2003, the United States was aggressively seeking to include education in GATS negotiations. In response, the European Commission announced that it was ruling out any immediate commitments to liberalize post-secondary education services, because according to EU trade commissioner Pascal Lamy, it could potentially lead to the elimination of public subsidies and grants. David Robinson, the director of policy and communication for the Canadian Association for University Teachers (CAUT) heralded the EU decision as a victory for teachers and other education workers concerned about the impact of trade liberalization. Robinson said “if the EU had backed the same position

²⁷ An indicator being Gross expenditure on R&D vs. GDP ratio (the leaders are Sweden, Finland and Japan, whereas the OECD average is 2.28, USA 2.73, and Canada only 2.05)

²⁸ In 1999 the Québec government established *Valorisation-Recherche Québec*, and in 2002 the federal government announced a *National Innovation Strategy* that promised to double federal R&D funds in order to meet a target ranking of 5th in R&D performance amongst OECD countries by 2010. This move was also supported by the AUCC. See Haskel pgs 5 and 6

[as the United States], the pressures on Canada and other smaller countries to make commitments would have been that much more difficult to push back. Now, we're likely to see more countries lining up to say that education is a public service and should not be covered by commercial trade rules.”²⁹ Post-secondary institutions in Canada are less reliant on tuition fees and private funding than those of the United States. Thus it seems as if Canada has much in common with the United States in terms of structure and institutional ties, yet share many of Europe’s educational values. However, there is still no clear consensus or articulation of these European educational values.

Although a ‘European dimension’ to the EHEA has been an ambition from the very inception of the Bologna Process, the exact meaning of this is still unclear. Adrian Shubert, Associate Vice-President International at York University, has voiced some concern over whether the Bologna Process is the latest form of ‘battering ram’ for European colonialism, as nations are forced to come to terms with the Bologna agenda.³⁰ Barbara Haskel has observed that the Lisbon Agenda has given the Commission ‘permission to herd cats’ (i.e. the difficult task of trying to guide European nations with their own educational agendas). In light of this, she cautions that “what Canada does should be a result of its own situation in a globalizing world, rather than a response to what Europe per se is doing or not doing.”³¹ So until the ‘European dimension’ of higher education can be fully articulated, education leaders on both sides of the Atlantic might do well to focus on technical aspects of the Bologna Process.

²⁹ CAUT Bulletin Vol. 50 (3): “EU excludes education”

³⁰ Shubert, Adrian, from “Bologna and International Mobility: Administrative Roundtable” at a workshop on 11 December 2006, York University (CCGES). See <http://www.ccgges.yorku.ca/Workshop-Transatlantic-Academic>

³¹ Haskel, Pg. 6

Leading up to the 2005 Bergen Conference, there was a shift in emphasis from the ‘Anglo-Saxon challenge’ to issues of accreditation and degree recognition within the proposed EHEA. Stocktaking benchmarks were employed at the Bergen Conference to ensure that the Bologna Process was progressing towards its goals (‘action-lines’). The initial benchmarks for Bergen were the implementation of the Diploma Supplement, the ECTS credit system, and ratification of Lisbon Recognition Convention. Although debate over recognition and accreditation has continued (especially in North America), the initial perception was that these were issues to be decided within the Council of Europe, a Euro-centrism that has marred transatlantic dialogue about Bologna. In 1994, UNESCO-CEPES sponsored a series of meetings between American and European higher education experts that ended inconclusively (politely put, they agreed to disagree). Three years later, the U.S. Department of Education became an observer in the European Network of Information Centres (ENIC). By 2003, the United States had rejoined UNESCO and was given general observer status at the Council of Europe, but there was such a strong focus on internal Bologna issues within UNESCO (European region), that Americans felt that it was difficult to engage in dialogue about the external dimension to the EHEA. Stephen Hunt has complained that “U.S. higher education has witnessed the Bologna Process from the sidelines even though our system has been cited as both a key incentive and one of the models for the reforms.”³²

North Americans have been somewhat ignorant of Bologna too. In 2004, Educational Credential Evaluators conducted a study on knowledge of Bologna among ninety self-selected American and Canadian HEI admissions professionals. Thirty-four percent were familiar with the general goals of Bologna, thirty-five percent had heard of

³² Hunt, Pg. 115

it but knew little about it, and thirty percent were not familiar with the Bologna Process.³³ The cumulative effect of this mutual ignorance and lack of dialogue has been the reinforcement of stereotypes and limited interactions. The tendency among North American university administrators is to believe that European systems of higher education are characterized by complexity, institutionalized stratification, academic and administrative inflexibility, and attitudes towards others that can be contemptuous, ignorant, or protectionist.³⁴

By 2010 the forty-five countries that will make up the EHEA will have a standard Bachelor degree³⁵ harmonized and recognized across Europe to allow for greater student mobility. Although the Salamanca Convention sets the Bologna Bachelor at 180 to 240 ECTS credits, the vast majority of undergrad degrees will likely be awarded at the lower end of the spectrum, corresponding to three years of full-time study. For many parts of the world this will not pose any significant problems. Australia, India (and the U.K.) already have three year first degrees, the first degrees of Australia, China, Japan, Canada, U.K., are all currently recognized in Europe, and all of these countries also recognize first degrees from American universities. The sticking point is whether HEIs in Canada and the United States will recognize three year degrees as sufficient for admission into their Masters programmes. While the official admissions policy of many HEIs in North America has rejected three year degrees, there has been a tradition of accepting them as exceptions. With all of Europe going to three year degrees, this tradition cannot continue. There are many unanswered questions: how do North American graduate

³³ Haskel, Pg. 6

³⁴ Hunt, Pgs. 124-5

³⁵ The two cycle system is still under review, either to be '3+1' or '3+2' model (with the advent of doctoral studies, the model may take a 3-5-8 or 3-5-9 year structure).

schools handle European applicants? Will they turn down European students and lose this pool of talent? Can they admit European students and not North American students who have completed three years of study? Who will decide on applicants: graduate departments or a central admissions office? Will the central admissions office move from a gatekeeper role to that of a consultant?³⁶ Are firm guidelines or even national legislation required, or perhaps just the development of ‘current best practice’?

Andrejs Rauhvargers has observed that part of the recognition debate pertains to the perceptions of the first post-secondary degree in each system of higher education. Some systems (North America in particular) regard a Masters as a genuine post-graduate degree, and thus the Bachelors as a meaningful terminal degree. In continental Europe, this perception has not always been valid; the Bachelors has been seen as preparation for ‘the real degree’ (the Masters).³⁷ Further complications arise when systems of secondary education are assessed. Citing the inferiority of secondary school education in the United States, Europeans have suggested that a four year degree is not necessary because the general studies component of American degrees is covered in European high schools. Therefore adding a fourth year to Bologna Degrees would simply be further micro-specialization in a given field of study. Stephen Hunt admits that there is little doubt that European secondary school leaving standards exceed the stated requirements for American high school diplomas. But he also retorts that American students are not admitted to HEIs on school leaving requirements alone.³⁸ It seems that the only way to

³⁶ On the basis of the current ‘exceptionality’ method used in many universities, individual departments make decisions on those applications that make it past the gatekeeper – the central admissions office. However, with the prognosis of so many more ‘exceptional’ applicants, how will individual departments have time to research each applicant’s qualifications?

³⁷ Rauhvargers, Pg. 44

³⁸ additional assessments are made from academic and personal achievement, oral interviews, entrance essays, SAT scores, etc. Please see Hunt, Pg. 130

correlate the value of Bachelors degrees in North America and Europe is to assess the learning outcomes of each. However, many EHEA countries are still at an early stage in this type of assessment.

A major step in this direction has been the adoption of the Lisbon Recognition Convention (LRC) as the main legal instrument for academic recognition in the European region.³⁹ Within the Council of Europe, all but Spain and Greece have signed the LRC, and thirty-six of the forty-five Bologna countries have signed but not ratified the Convention (Belgium, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, and Turkey are among those that have signed the LRC, but have yet to ratify it in their national legislatures). Canada, the United States and Australia have also signed but not ratified the agreement, so that they agree in principle but are not legally bound to it. The main principles of the LRC are the right to a fair assessment of foreign qualifications, the recognition of those qualifications if no substantial differences are evident (being the host country's duty to demonstrate substantial difference), and the mutual trust and provision of information between HEIs. There is nothing very new or radical about the LRC, as it codifies already established best practice for many institutions. Yet it does shift the focus of credential evaluation from input characteristics (curricular contents, duration, textbooks, etc.) to learning outcomes and competencies. It also increases the importance of quality assurance mechanisms.

In Europe, the idea of quality assurance was based on national organizations (either governmental or non-governmental) which would license and accredit the HEIs within a national system. A big challenge over the next decade will be how to make

³⁹ signed 11 April 1997, the LRC (*Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications Concerning Higher Education* (ETC no.165 [1]) was designed by the Council of Europe and UNESCO. On 4 June 2001, the intergovernmental committee of the LRC adopted a clearer position with the *Recommendation on Criteria and Procedures for the Assessment of Foreign Qualifications*.

these organizations, traditionally oriented towards domestic institutions, transparent to the ‘external dimension’.⁴⁰ Quality Assurance and its ‘external dimension’ have been benchmarked for the 2007 London Conference, so they are a definite priority for the Bologna Process. To this end, the European Network of Quality Assurance (ENQA) has implemented a Joint Quality Initiative that aims to increase transparency of collaboration between QA systems, and clarify the degree structure according to the ‘Dublin descriptors’.⁴¹ At the same time (and to add to the confusion about who is driving the Bologna Process), the European Parliament and Council are preparing a *European Register of Quality Assurance Agencies*. Confusion aside, there has been some resistance to subjecting European universities to external QA, in that this might compromise university autonomy and reduce higher education to packages of ‘qualifications’.⁴² Because ‘what gets measured matters,’ there has been evidence that QA data has been used for purposes other than accreditation, and changes the behaviour of university faculties.⁴³ Furthermore, some American educators see the new QA initiatives as raising new challenges rather than opportunities, interfering with long-established inter-institutional ties and previous mutual recognition of qualifications. Stephen Hunt says, “the U.S. education system is certainly one of those that has come under this firestorm, and our providers and representatives sometimes feel as if international quality assurance

⁴⁰ Knight, Jane. Pg. 143 and also Haskel Pg. 8

⁴¹ Shared generic descriptors for the learning outcomes and competencies required at each level of degree.

⁴² Frank Furedi, professor of social policy, sociology and social research at University of Kent, has this to say: “Unfortunately, global competition is likely to encourage the ‘pile ‘em high, sell ‘em cheap’ orientation towards the peddling of university degrees...It is a pity that the focus of the globalization of higher education is not the exchange of ideas but the objective of turning education institutions into service providers.” From CAUT Bulletin Feb 2005, 52 (2) CBCA education Pg. A3

⁴³ In North America, accreditation data is used for accreditation, but also in non-official contexts like media rankings and federal resource allocation. See Terry, Pgs. 895-6 for a discussion of QA assessments changing university behaviour.

and recognition activities are pursued without regard to, and often deliberately against, the legitimate national interests of our system and our country.”⁴⁴

The confusion and controversy of the Bologna Process has built walls instead of bridges, even within Europe. Thierry Malan of the French Ministry of Education has commented on the competing agendas of ‘Bologna’ and ‘Lisbon.’⁴⁵ As political actors vie for control, the voices of students and professors have seldom been heard. Without a European equivalent to the Canadian Association of University Teachers, European professors lack a unified forum to slow or shape the Bologna Process. James Cemmell, a representative of ESIB (EU National Union of Students) has taken issue with the marginalization of student organizations as Bologna becomes “a heavily politicized process that seeks to integrate the European higher education sector into the EU economic development strategy.”⁴⁶ North American university administrators and educational policy-makers are still coming to terms with all of this. They are asking if the Bologna Process is a bridge, or a fortress. So that the EHEA is not seen solely as a fortress, policy makers in Europe should take the opportunity to consult with North Americans and other non-EHEA education experts; “Europeans must work to ensure that the old barriers of national restrictive practices are truly removed, and not just replaced by a pan-European set of barriers defined by the borders of the EU.”⁴⁷ In light of constant new developments with ramifications yet to be determined,

⁴⁴ Hunt, pg. 118

⁴⁵ The ‘Bologna’ camp emphasizes the autonomy of institutions and improving the added value and quality of each institution, while the ‘Lisbon’ camp emphasizes the development of economic excellence and competitiveness of institutions as a whole. See Malan presentation, “Recent Developments in the Bologna Process”

⁴⁶ Cemmell, James. “European Students in the Periphery of the Bologna Process” Pg. 265

⁴⁷ Hunt, Pg 119

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