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STATE OF PLAY OF THE EUROPEAN AREA OF HIGHER EDUCATION: 20 YEARS AFTER THE LAUNCH OF THE BOLOGNA PROCESS

Anne-Coralie Bonnaire - Christophe Lips*

Introduction

On June 19th, 1999, 29 European countries signed the Bologna Declaration, paving the way to a long period of changes and raising thereby for the signatory countries the awareness of a fundamental need to reshape the European academic institutions in every aspect and in depths. As a result of a long tradition of university rapprochement within Europe, the Bologna Process has "undeniably become the most important and transformative process of higher education reform in history" (Crosier & Parveva, 2014, 21). It is an essential step in the European construction, strengthening (and even building) the attractiveness of higher education (HE) institutions, as well as increasing external, but also internal mobility (within the scope of the Bologna Process, and in particular thanks to a harmonisation of training). Ultimately, the aim is to make the university a major player in the construction of a "more complete and ambitious Europe based in particular on the strengthening of its intercultural, social, scientific and technological dimensions" (Declaration of Bologna, 1999).

For the European HE institutions, the gradual implementation of the Bologna Process is a synonym of essential and fundamental developments, especially in terms of governance and management, not without conveying a feeling of vagueness and a lack of clarity. This might lead to harming the necessary

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appropriation of the Process by the actors in charge of its implementation, e.g. the stakeholders of the university (Lips, 2016). Forty-eight member countries, thousands of HE institutions in the current European Higher Education Area (EHEA), so many organisational responses to the projects inherent to the changes in the university «world», so many strategies, so many ways to appropriate or criticise the process yet remain visible. 20 years after the initiation of the Bologna Process, the moment gives an opportunity to review its implementation.

In this frame, a conference was organised in partnership with the management research centre LAREQUOI of the University of Versailles St-Quentin-en-Yvelines (UVSQ - France) and the Department of International Relations and Diplomacy of the Faculty of Political Sciences and International Relations, Matej Bel University of Banská Bystrica (UMB - Slovakia), the French-Slovak Institute for Higher Education (IUFS) and the French Embassy in Slovakia. The aim of this conference was principally to present a complementary point of view on the construction of the European Higher Education Area, stem from managerial reflections (still too few in this field) but also, as the study of the Bologna Process cannot be exclusively based on management, from political as well as intercultural and social-based contributions. Indeed, its initial objective is to make European HE institutions the instruments for strengthening European integration, that could take shape a Euro-generation.

1 Importance of the EHEA for the Construction of Europe

The opening sessions of the conference emphasized the importance of the construction of the EHEA to support and assist the construction of the European Union, and on a wider scale Europe, thanks to the example of Slovakia and its relationships with France, in particular through that of the hosting University Matej Bel of Banská Bystrica. In that sense, **Radovan Gura** (UMB) framed the conference by reminding the fruitful cooperation between France and Slovakia, exchanging good practices within European research and teaching. One example to be mentioned is the "intercultural seminar" organised by the LAREQUOI in Banská Bystrica in 2018 (Gura, 2019; Rošteková 2018, Gura - Rošteková, 2018).

His Excellence **Christophe Léonzi**, the French Ambassador to Slovakia, underlined that the Bologna Process is a major instrument to develop common

values amongst Europeans and to strengthen the European citizenship. According to him, the efforts of mobility and of rapprochement should be extended and intensified. His Excellency asserted the French ambition to go beyond Bologna to create European Universities, a more welcoming and including University model focused on excellence, using European diversity to build a more creative and competitive environment.

The construction of a European Higher Education Area is a long process. In this regard, **Vladimír Úradníček**, Vice-President of the UMB, traced the construction of University Matej Bel in the context of the construction of the Slovak Universities through the historical approach. He underlined the opportunity to pursue the dialogue between members and non-members of the EHEA to the horizon of 2020 and opened the perspective to the next interministerial conference in Rome. Providing a concrete example of the processual construction of the EHEA, **Branislav Kováčik**, Dean of the Faculty of Political Sciences and International Relations of the UMB, set the light on the students, their diversity and their challenges, and as well as on the importance of building new legislative frames for Universities through exchanges and discussions between all the stakeholders of HE institutions, including students.

As keynote speaker, **Dominique Wolton**, a highly reputed communication anthropologist, director of research at the CNRS (France), highlighted the prominent role of the European Universities to build Europe. The guest-speaker reminded how Europe was built on incomprehension and in-communication(s), yet to reach a common space of values and freedom dedicated to democracy and research. Thanks to a short overview over the history of the European Union and Europeanisation, Wolton emphasised how the EU is the only entity in the world that allowed the whole continent, always a place of wars and tensions in the past, to remain (with exception of the Balkans in the 90s) in peace for 70 years (Wolton, 2003). He explained how this in-communication processes allowed an always deeper cohabitation, a political model that could be extended to Latin America or the countries South of the Mediterranean Sea. Castigating the American or Anglo-Saxon standards for being too merchandised and the Chinese for being barely democratic yet turned towards profits, Wolton showed how the Bologna process and the EHEA are a model of integration and of diversity. He asserted the need to recognise and cherish the differences inherent to the European Union and developed 10 points that must be discussed along the day, enhancing European awareness within the European area of Higher Education: 1. Exit standardisation to assert the differences and

exert globalisation. 2. Return to the contents of the curriculum. 3. Value the European strengths in exercising critical thinking and idealism. 4. Be an avant-garde for ecology, green thinking and sustainable development, because this allows the reduction of inequalities. 5. Exit the world rankings because, alike GAFA¹, this system equals an economic tyranny. 6. Value diversity. 7. Take responsibility for the linguistic diversity in supporting the translation industry. 8. Enhance the knowledge about European history and geography, because otherwise neonationalists will take (have already taken) those topics over to make those their own. 9. Create more grants to enhance mobility within Europe, in order to favour European awareness and identity. 10. Value erudition by saving Latin and Greek as well as "useless" topics contributing to scholarship. Last, **Wolton** spoke in favour of an idealistic, philosophical and knowledge-oriented Higher Education instead of a market-oriented one.

2 Influence of Rankings on the Development of European Universities

Every year for their release, the World University Rankings attract all eyes. Three of them especially drag all attention: the ARWU (Academic Ranking of World Universities, from the Shanghai Jiao Tong University, also known as Shanghai Ranking), the THE (Times Higher Education World University Rankings) and the QS World University Rankings (from the educational and careers advice company Quacquarelli Symonds). The herewith presented conference provided the opportunity to raise many questions of the influence of these rankings on the management and the setting up of strategies in European Universities. Prof. Gilles Rouet, Prof. Thierry Côme and Hervé Chomienne, all three from UVSQ, focused their reflections on the French case in particular. An historical point of view from Rouet and Côme brought out that, at their beginning: 1/ rankings were meant to play an orienting role within the HE system - de facto, those were quickly used in order to allocate funds -, 2/ the national logic of the first rankings left their place to a globalised one. Chomienne asserted following this that these rankings, originally meant to be reflection tools, gradually became standard, creating a model of organisation: the world-class university (Salmi, 2009).

Indeed, rankings are taken more and more into consideration. Chomienne

GAFA, acronym for Google, Appel, Facebook and Amazon, nowadays GAFAM (with Microsoft), used to design the most influencing internet enterprises.

made the assumption that 2003 marked a major break in France, he named it "the Sputnik moment" in French HE history: as the ARWU was released for the first time, the first French university held the 65th position. Since then, French Universities and in peculiar the French Ministry of Higher Education and Research use the rankings as a strategic tool. The French State closely looks at them to design public politics and aims, but not to allocate budgets to the French Universities (Rouet & Côme). For their part, French HE institutions take also rankings into account, insofar as rankings could serve as an instrument of power in case of fusion (the most "powerful" HE institution should have, after the fusion, more responsibilities and more decisional control on the new institution), and/or as a strategic (and political) communication tool to attract staff, students, funds. On the other side, these communication tools could play, through the media for example, an opposite role: they might bring Universities in disrepute. Indeed, Côme noted the disaffection of the students for French Universities since then, because of the alarmist discourse of the press which is denunciating the low ranks of French "Universities" instead of "Higher Education Institutions", whilst in those rankings not only Universities are included but also diverse structures. However, it is also not clear if the researchers realising those rankings know about the diverse academic systems and the values and organisations of the considered structures in each country. In fact, Hervé **Chomienne** prompted that 50% of the French Research is made in the frame of Research Institutes (alike the CNRS) or at elitist Institutions which are most of the time missing from the rankings' radars (because relatively small or named "engineering schools" instead of, for instance, "University of Applied Science", hence not appearing as a University).

Although it seems attractive to remain among the "best" Universities, that model that tends to establish a World-class University is difficult to contest but also to implement. In fact, Rouet, Côme & Chomienne suggest having a critical view of these rankings. These are supposed to represent excellence, performance, and reality of World Universities. But Gilles Rouet challenged these keywords: which excellence is being assessed? Which performance? And which reality is thus covered? Clearly, rankings show lacks and weaknesses in their structural and technical assessment. Rouet castigated also the process hidden behind many rankings, particularly the Shanghai one, because they consider only publications in English language. He also demonstrated the important efforts put into merging the French universities willing to achieve those rankings. The fact that those University rankings are an economic and

classifying construct was also readable out of **Thierry Côme**'s contribution, in which the author asserted the controlling role of rankings meant to do a cartography of the Universities, neglecting also Social Sciences and Humanities, introducing a value chain within the disciplines themselves. Unanswered in this case remains the assessment regarding the universal (hence University) role of HE to achieve an open, inclusive and unique teaching and research institution, sacrificed to the altar of rankings as the "frame of action itself" (Gilles Rouet), the mean itself instead of a theoretical evaluation tool.

Chomienne pointed out how a University can achieve visibility in the rankings, especially in the Times one, in which the scope for manoeuvre remains ample. He showed how rankings are marketing and management instrument to pertain to a (certain) reputation. Rankings belong to prestige and soft power instruments: behind a good place in the rankings lies a serious issue of power. Chomienne thus compared the best indexed Universities to aircraftcarrier: an instrument of power. In 2008 indeed, the French Ministry of Higher Education and Research aimed to create 15 university poles: the bigger the Universities are, the more visible they should be. One of these poles is "Paris-Saclay", gathering 14 Parisian and suburban Universities and research Institutes, with the clear ambition to achieve the first places of the international rankings. This goal ought to be achieved next year. However, a new tendency is to observe at a national level: Universities merged, in France for example, in order to be "visible from the moon" (Rouet). To conclude, Rouet asked the question of the future of all the countries and of their Universities, members of the Bologna Process, which cannot compete with this ranking logic.

3 International, Intercultural, Bologna?

If we consider the Bologna Process not from the point of view of politics and governance any more, but of exchanges and mobility, we must ask ourselves to what extent this process really played a role in integrating and strengthening European relations? In fact, the Commission announced "more than one million European babies" since the program was created in 1987, or rather Erasmus programmes were once launched. What impact does this have on the daily lives of the inhabitants of the European Union? Does this imply a form of European elitism here, between those who are involved and those who are not, between inhabitants of the EU and others from a third country outside Europe? Does the

image of others, of "European others", influence the media discourse on Europe and the Bologna Process or vice versa? This seems to have helped to change the image of Europe, thanks to extended intercultural competences, for example acquired during an Erasmus⁽⁺⁾ stay in a neighbouring country.

The conference was an opportunity to question the interculturality within the European mobility programmes resulting or eased thanks to the Bologna Process. **Stela Raytcheva** (UVSQ) questioned the links between interculturality, enterprises and citizenship, stating that enterprises simplify and tend to instrument interculturality in order to sell a certain image to the public. Alike enterprises, Universities tend to industrialise the flux Erasmus+ without specific knowledge-sharing about it. Falsely, Universities believe that, because knowledge is universal, there is no need of a specific training to pertain to interculturality, although one of the "official" aim of Erasmus+ is to develop intercultural competences amongst Europeans. However, the approach towards Erasmus+ is different according to the country: as **Stela Raytcheva** stated, in France students need to be motivated to join the Erasmus+ programme whereas in Bulgaria, students consider being selected for Erasmus+ as a victory and a privilege.

Therefore, the question if exchanges are enough to integrate students and enhance intercultural tolerance is not solved thanks to Erasmus+; on the contrary, stereotypes about the host country and also students from different Erasmus+ participating countries are reinforced during Erasmus+. With a similar idea, Anne-Coralie Bonnaire (Chemnitz University of Technology) presented the challenges and difficulties of international learners studying abroad beyond the most obvious one (language). Analysing the idea of "academic cultures", the researcher showed that "communication" problems result from different expectations and habitus which vary from one academic culture² to another. For example, French students expect a frontal way of lecturing with no interaction between teaching staff and students whereas German students expect to be able to ask questions and interrupt the lecturer if a remark needs to be made. In order to create an intercultural campus, it is not enough to bring together students from different nationalities, it is also necessary to integrate (as opposite to assimilate) the students amongst each other and the local students and teaching staff. For that, intercultural awareness needs to be enhanced

Sometimes within HE academic system, e.g. from discipline to discipline – like Informatics and Literature.

thanks to trainings and workshops included in the curricula (Rebane & Bonnaire 2018).

Enlarging the debate to a wider geographical scale, **Chi Wang** (UMB) reflected on the differences between the Slovak and the Chinese academic systems by showing his work as a recruiter and coach for young Chinese students willing to study in Slovakia. According to him, the Bologna Process reinforced the equality between all students, because one can follow the same curriculum with the same chances and recognition in the whole participating countries.

The EHEA is in a way a model of openness and convergence, and the question of the roles of languages, and in particular English one, should be asked: the ability to think and write in several languages, but also the quasi obligation to write or communicate in English, changes the way scientists and students work, but also the evaluation and the results, because once more, theoretical texts apply new methods or hybrid methods. In this respect, Janka Kubeková (UMB) addressed the question of the plurilingualism in Europe. Quoting Umberto Ecco, she showed how the research for a perfect European common language has been occupying the European institutions since the beginning. Indeed, the EURATOM treaty (1953) was signed in both Dutch, English, Italian and German. The contributor asserted that linguistic pluralism is a strategic issue at every level of Europe. However, in light of her study, based on Eurobarometer, Kubeková observed that the plurilingualism in Europe is actually closer to a uniform bilingualism. The language map of Europe seems to be limited to only five most used languages: English, French, German, Spanish and Russian. To avoid that the plurilingualism shrinks more and more, Kubeková proposed to develop inter-comprehension as a method to respect every language and also diversity in Europe.

4 Practices of the EHEA at a Local Level

The conference represented an opportunity to question the local level of the EHEA and the practices. **Mourad Attarça** (UVSQ) showed that the number of apprentices augmented since 2000 following the Bologna Process (for France: nowadays 180,000 in HE and 45,000 at Universities). By interviewing students, he showed that 40% of the apprentices studied at least 4 years a vocational curriculum, revealing a peculiar approach and choice of those students, between theory and practice, many of which wouldn't have had the opportunity

otherwise to study – often for financial reasons whereas apprenticeship is paid – but this also made the revelation of atypical students' profiles possible, for instance, students that feel more motivated in a professional environment than in a lone theory-based learning one. However, the vocational dual trainings in Universities are not open to an international mobility programme such as Erasmus⁺, which is a paradox in regard to the fact that the HE convergence was meant to simplify European mobilities. It is interesting to note that vocational studies don't exist in Slovakia, only in secondary schools.

As **Mária Rošteková** (UMB) showed, even with a centenary tradition and new Law reforming those styles of teaching (2015), the Slovak high schools are missing the opportunity to recruit pupils willing to prepare a high school degree with a professional teaching, probably because of a widespread bad press of this style of learning. **Radovan Gura** (UMB) reflected on the evolution of the Slovak HE system 30 years after the Velvet Revolution. After a restructuration in 1990, the HE system became more and more fluid between different study levels. New institutions were created to reach 35 nowadays; yet the number of students fell from 140,000 in 2002 to 100,000 in 2019 (at Slovak public institutions of HE). The demographic challenges may be counterbalanced thanks to nine Franco-Slovak double-degree programmes, which have the capacity to compete with foreign Universities, especially Czech ones. For **Gura**, the digitalisation of the curricula may be a new opportunity to sum up the equation between "will" and "power".

Christophe Lips (University of Augsburg) emphasised the importance of the local level in the strategic organisation of the EHEA. This level, which means Universities and their actors, is an essential element in the implementation of the guidelines stemmed from the inter-ministerial conferences through a logic of instrumentation. For that reason, the question of the appropriation of the EHEA must be raised. Without appropriation, there will not be any effective implementation of the Bologna Process aims. In this respect, Lips proposed to consider the Bologna Process across the spectrum of innovation. Considering the Process as an innovation, the significant role of, particularly, the teaching staff should be highlighted. Based on a study conducted at two French and Slovak Universities, Lips observed the strategies developed by the teaching staff to appropriate the Bologna Process' tools and objectives, such as mimicry practices or the ability for some actors to legitimate the Process by evolving in the spaces of liberty, allowed despite (or thanks to) the prescriptive logic of the Process. Analysing how actors readjust the implementation of the EHEA's instruments at

the local level through the Actor-Network Theory of Akrich, Callon & Latour, **Lips** demonstrated the importance of networks in the EHEA. According to him, networks give a sense to the implementation of the instruments of the Bologna Process by promoting the emergence of networks. Those ecosystems could have a really positive impact on the effective setting up of the initial aims of the EHEA.

Lastly, Carole Chapin (Adoc Métis), Alexandre Arlin (Paris Est) and Martin Léo (Sorbonne Nouvelle) analysed how the recruitment label HRS4S implemented the (European) mobilities as an instrument to enhance the researchers' access and stability in recruitment into the European HE landscape. The trio demonstrated that this label obliges the participating Universities to commit to their HR management but also that many used this label as an opportunity to self-marketing. Marie Stadge (Strasbourg University) analysed the University Social Responsibility (USR) in the frame of the Bologna Process, showing thanks to a content analysis that through the Bologna Process, many European institutions tend to achieve New Public Management to the detriment of their social responsibility. Arezki Cherfaoui (UVSQ) based on his personal experience to explore the evaluation of Erasmus+ mobilities, either the student ones (two to twelve months) or teaching staff (five days to two months) within Erasmus mundus (21 million €). Cherfaoui demonstrated that most of the evaluated programmes loose evaluating points because of a certain lack of strategic use of the impact of the mobilities at the host institution (instead of only at the sending institution). The researcher showed how the long process implicated many participants and could be simplified to better match the needs.

Conclusive Thoughts

Pierre Bauby (Reconstruire l'Action Publique) concluded the conference with an assessment of the "alchemy" needed to (in secret) delegate jurisprudences to a higher instance. For him, the Europeanisation process was a way, in the past 70 years, to appoint more powers to a higher instance without calling this process as such. In the case of HE however, this process seems to work because the European Member States see an interest in it: the Bologna Process obliges HE institutions to a higher competitiveness and to modernise the teaching and learning environment; the enterprises recruiting newly qualified students win a qualify and multilingual personnel; the students are able to emphasise their degree and Erasmus+ experiences, as those are recognised in the whole participating countries.

The Bologna Process is a process of convergence and mobility within the European Union, pertaining to achieve European identity by reinforcing intercultural competence. The approaches used in Banská Bystrica went from management studies to political and diplomatic studies to cultural and social studies. The diversity of Europeans and European University can be read out of the variety of the approaches necessary to understand and analyse the Bologna Process, whilst this Process itself is meant to enhance European social, intercultural, as well as technological and scientific dimensions. However, as shown during the conference "20 years after the launch of the Bologna Process" held at the Faculty of Political Sciences and International Relations, Matej Bel University in Banská Bystrica, there are mostly strategic and networking bounds at stake, especially due to a HE "rankingomania". More transparent and welcoming Universities can be reached thanks to more exchanges made possible thanks to the Bologna Process, but those need to be made visible instead of falling under the necessity of governance and obligation - a further appropriation of the Bologna Process will be necessary.

Globally, this conference and its participants defended the ideas that a humanist, and non-utilitarian neither purely instrumentalist, vision of the Bologna Process should guide the rapprochement within the EHEA. European Universities, as major actors, should continue as well to support and develop the European construction and the European citizenship. A possible drift should absolutely be avoided: the drift to standardise instead of harmonising. To use the wording of **Dominique Wolton**: the aim is now to put humanist contents in the mechanics of Bologna.

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