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**THE DIRECTIONS OF THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE POLISH  
SYSTEM OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE  
BOLOGNAN STRATEGY**

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The aim of the present discussion is to show the main resolutions of the Bologna Process and their implementation in Poland. The Polish system of higher education has seen a few vital restructuring processes related to the realization of the resolutions of the Bologna Declaration such as: running two-level courses and doctoral studies, standardization of diplomas and issuance of supplements to the diplomas, introduction of a point-based system of crediting students' progress (ECTS), mobility of students – program MOST, evaluation of the quality of education. The implemented resolutions are meant to bring the education system closer to the real needs, provide suitable means for comparison, raise its competitive character, as well as influence students' mobility.

*Key words:* Bologna Process; main resolutions of the Bologna Declaration; realization of the Bologna Process in Poland.

The Bologna Declaration of June 1999 initiated a series of reforms indispensable for bringing the European system of higher education closer to the present needs, rendering it possible to compare, making it more competitive and attractive to all citizens of Europe. The Bologna Process is a unique phenomenon in the European conditions since it extends over 45 countries, not limiting itself solely to the states-members of the European Union, and aims at introducing harmonized systems which will decide about its pro-developmental power, with the autonomy of individual colleges being fully preserved and respected.

The Bologna Declaration (1999) indicates only overall ways of carrying out the main resolutions such as: introduction of a two-tier system of education on Bachelor's degree and Master's degree levels, access to the other one being dependent on completing the former course that is supposed to last at least three years. The degree granted to graduates of the first level will be recognized as a proof of obtaining suitable qualifications demanded by the European work market; the course of the second level (lasting two years) should end with the degree of Master and (or) Doctor (lasting four years) being conferred on the graduate, in the same way as it is accepted in most European countries; introduction of a system of clear and externally comparable degrees, also through adding a supplement to the

diploma of studies in order to increase the chance of employment of citizens of Europe and the international competitiveness of the European system of higher education; implementation of the system of credit points (European Credit Transfer System) serving the purpose of popularization of broadly-spread mobility of students (the credit points should be available not only within the system of higher education, but also – for instance – within the system of life education on condition that the points are recognized by the respective host university); making real the idea of students' and research workers' mobility on the European scale; promotion of European cooperation in the sphere of securing quality, with the inclusion of working out criteria of comparability as well as methodologies; strengthening the European dimension of the higher education system [7].

The significance of the resolutions accepted in the Bologna Declaration being confirmed, three additional resolutions were introduced in Prague Communiqué (2001): implementation of systems of life long learning, cooperation between colleges and students in carrying out of the Bolognan Process, propagation of attractiveness of the European Area of Higher Education outside Europe [1].

In turn, Berlin Communiqué (2003), apart from evaluation of realization of resolutions formulated in the Bologna Declaration and Prague Communiqué, indicates two new aspects, that is extension of the two-level structure by another degree – doctoral studies, and development of interdisciplinary education [3].

Finally, the Communiqué of Bergen (2005), beside general information on the state of implementation of the Bolognan Process in the participating countries, also points to priorities within the process for a few years to come, that is development of Doctor's degree courses and linking higher education system to the sphere of research; the social dimension of the Bolognan Process, that is securing availability of studying to populations of lower social status; removing barriers in students' and teaching personnel's mobility. One ought to mention the approval of two documents that found the basis of forming national systems of higher education, that is *Standards and Indications Referring to Quality of Education* and *A Framework Structure of Qualifications and Skills of Graduates Within the European Area of Higher Education* [2].

The states which are engaged in the Bolognan Process, more precisely – their ministers of education – by determining the specific targets, aim at forming the European Area of Higher Education, in which the mobility of students and academic teaching personnel will be greatly facilitated and in which colleges of higher education will offer to students full development of their personalities and accomplishment of skills properly adjusted to the needs of the labor market [5].

Poland has, for a few years now, seen very vital restructuring processes relating to the implementation of the Bologna Declaration. The main coordinator of this undertaking is the Ministry of National Education and Sport as well as appointed units and organizations acting for the Bolognan Process, such as:

Conference of Rectors of Academic Schools of Poland (KRASP), State Accreditation Commission (PKA), Chief Board of Higher Education System (RGSzW), Bureau for Recognition of Education and International Exchange (the Polish equivalent of ENIQ/NARIC), Foundation for Development of the Educational System (National Agency for SOCRATES/ERASMUS Program), Parliament of Students of the Republic of Poland. There has also been a group of promoters active in Poland for a few years now, who provide advice to universities and colleges of higher education as regards implementation of certain resolutions of the Bologna Declaration. It is worth mentioning, too, that last year Bolognan Team was established by KRASP, whose aim is to monitor the changes going on in the European higher education systems and to propagate the idea of the Bolognan Process [8].

On the level of universities and colleges, on the other hand, there are numerous solutions applied in relation to organization of activities connected with the Bolognan Process. Most often it concerns rectors' plenipotentiaries in charge of the Bolognan Process, or vice-rectors responsible for students affairs or didactics.

One can list a series of specific arguments in favor of intensifying the actions directed towards implementation of the Bolognan Process.

### **1. Introduction of a two-level system of education**

The two-level cycle of education was started in some colleges of higher education (including Opole University) in the nineties of the former century, that is before the formal launching of the Bolognan Process. It was introduced under the influence of certain university circles, yet was later changed as the opinion was that the durability of a full Master's course ought to span at least five years. The two-level system allows the graduate to end education after obtaining the first degree (Bachelor's degree or equivalent) and to undertake employment; it also offers a chance of continuing education after a certain lapse of time in order to complete the second cycle of education (Master's degree), and afterwards taking up Doctor's degree studies (the third cycle of education).

It should be added that the newly issued act – *Act on the higher education system* of 30 August this year (*Laws Gazette No. 164*, item 1365) – includes an entry that resolves that “the Minister in charge of the higher education system determines, by means of a disposition, the names for courses run as courses of the first level or the first and the second level, or as uniform Master's course, taking into account the existing majors [...]” (Art. 9). Majors such as: pharmacy, law, psychology, veterinary medicine, medical and dentistry-medical studies still have the status of uniform Master's degree courses.

Polish colleges of higher education popularly run the third cycle of education, *i.e.* doctoral studies.

### **2. Introduction of a system of ‘clear’ and comparable diplomas of higher education, providing supplements to diplomas**

It is the first time this year that universities and colleges of higher education in Poland have issued supplements to diplomas of graduation, which contain wide information about the college, completed courses and achievements. The supplements make it possible to establish the level of education of graduates from Polish colleges in the case of their taking up employment or continuing studies abroad.

The diplomas and supplements to the former will be issued in five languages: English, French, Spanish, German and Russian. Because of the necessity of securing comparability of diplomas, the patterns of the diplomas and supplements were unified. The question of comparability of the diplomas is related to the one of recognizability of educational standards: Poland endorsed the Convention of Lisbon on 17 March, 2004, accordingly. Similarly, documentation of the course of studies has also been standardized (*Laws Gazette No. 149*, entry 1233).

### **3. A point system of crediting students' performance (ECTS)**

Like in the case of introducing a two-tier course of studies, a point-based system of assessment of students' progress had been introduced – in some colleges of higher education in Poland – long before signing the Bologna Declaration. The experience gained has led to a situation that introducing a point-based system of crediting students' progress is quite a different undertaking today and to the conclusion that the very system itself has to be more perfect. Soon we will be able to make use of standards of education which will be defined not only through program contents and the number of hours taught, but also by means of effects of education and ECTS points (Proposal for Disposition of the Ministry of National Education and Sport of ..., 2005, which changes the instructions on determining standards of teaching for individual courses of studies and levels of educating).

According to the description being prepared by Follow-Up Group, studies – in the first cycle – require collecting 180-240 points ECTS, in the second one – 90-120, but not less than 60 points. ECTS points are accompanied by descriptors of qualifications based on effects of educating, including competences [5].

### **4. Mobility of students and research workers**

The share of Polish colleges of higher education in international exchange of students and research workers has been growing systematically for a few years. Evidently, this rise has resulted from the colleges participation in Socrates/Erasmus programs. However, despite the visible progress in the area of international exchange, the state of things is still far from being satisfactory in this respect.

As statistics show, every year there are over 120,000 students in Europe who realize part of the program of their studies at a university center abroad, including merely over 5,400 Polish students doing so. One can suppose that the reason for this low participation is the nature of the offer of subjects and the fact that the programs are to be realized in foreign languages [1].

For a few years now there has been developed a program of students' mobility called MOST [6] which is an agreement of the Polish universities based on principles worked out within Socrates/Erasmus programs. It enables students to join any university in Poland chosen by them with the aim to develop their scientific interests.

#### **5. Evaluation of quality of educating**

For many years, in Poland, there has been functioning a system of evaluation of quality of providing education that includes state and local accreditation (evaluation) procedures. The state accreditation has been executed by PKA since 2002 [1]. The main tasks of the commission include: evaluation of quality of educating provided within individual majors in all of the Polish colleges of higher education, assessment of abiding by the legal conditions of running higher education courses, issuing opinions concerning applications for founding new colleges, granting rights to run higher education courses in given disciplines of studies and levels of providing education, as well as granting permission to open new courses of studying that have not been entered on the list of courses of studies approved by the Ministry of National Education and Sport. Submission to the accreditation procedures carried out by PKA is obligatory and concerns all the majors run within Poland's higher education system. As far as the local accreditation is concerned, it is similar in its character to evaluation and successful accomplishment of it is treated as a proof of high quality of education provided in the field of studies that is subject to the evaluation. The local accreditation procedures are carried out by accreditation commissions which are appointed by University Accreditation Commission of KRASP [8]. Undergoing the procedure is not obligatory.

#### **6. Promotion of the European dimension in the higher education system**

In recent time the actions aimed at promoting the idea of creating the European Area of Higher Education have been intensified in the environment of the Polish university centers. The actions are undertaken through organizing national and international conferences, information-training meetings, thematic sessions, publications, participation in projects and networks of commonwealth programs, introduction of interdisciplinary studies, providing educational offer in foreign languages in selected courses of studies, etc. It is worth mentioning that mobility of students and research workers is one of the elements which contribute to the promotion of the European dimension of the higher education system.

Summing up, independent of the undertakings initiated and coordinated by the Ministry and other central institutions for realization of the postulates of the Bologna Process, the basic task that any college of higher education that has ambition to participate in creating the European Area of Higher Education System has to face ought to be working out own initiatives such as: introduction of educational offer in foreign languages, introduction of programs of studies realized

jointly with colleges in other countries, extension of the offer of interdisciplinary and life education, taking part in *Erasmus Mundus* program [4], undertaking actions towards obtaining *ECTS Label* [4], as well as other honors and recognitions of this type.

One must also point to apprehensions that can be connected with creating the European Area of Higher Education: realization of some of the above-mentioned propositions can be difficult due to limitations resulting from binding legal regulations, financial mechanisms (both on the national scale and with reference to particular colleges), and an effective information flow among all the participants in the process.

It is to be worried not the least, though, that the true alternative for graduates from secondary schools in Poland are offers provided by Western universities which include a number of social benefits that lower the costs of studying abroad. Representatives of these universities have already been present in Poland, working hard to promote their centers and attract prospective students.

On the other hand, despite these apprehensions, it must be concluded that the directions of the transformation within the Polish higher education system that are linked to the realization of the Bologna Declaration, greatly contribute to formation of a citizen-based society which is responsible and conscious of its rights, and actively participates in the life of its own communities. It has to be remembered, however, that citizen-related attitudes are still being shaped in Poland, encountering various barriers like longing for a citizen-caring welfare state, dissatisfaction with democracy, pauperization and leaving young people outside social life, which causes serious problems. Still it is hoped that education directed towards the new horizons will definitely bring good effects and – slowly, but progressively – will create new structures of thinking, rich in greater citizen's consciousness that influences the development of our country.

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1. [www.menis.gov.pl/proces\\_bolonski](http://www.menis.gov.pl/proces_bolonski)
  2. [www.bologna-bergen2005.no](http://www.bologna-bergen2005.no)
  3. [www.bologna-berlin2003.de](http://www.bologna-berlin2003.de)
  4. <http://www.socrates.org.pl/mundus> Erasmus Mundus – Program Unii Europejskiej, 2004
  5. *Kraśniewski A.*, Proces Boloński: dokąd zmierza europejskie szkolnictwo wyższe? Warszawa, 2004.
  6. <http://www.uka.amu.edu.pl/most.html>
  7. <http://www.socrates.org.pl> The Bologna Declaration of 19 June 1999.
  8. [www.krasp.org.pl/indexb.html](http://www.krasp.org.pl/indexb.html)

## НАПРЯМИ ТРАНСФОРМАЦІЇ СИСТЕМИ ВИЩОЇ ОСВІТИ В ПОЛЬЩІ В КОНТЕКСТІ БОЛОНСЬКОЇ СТРАТЕГІЇ

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Розкрито головні завдання Болонського процесу та їхнє вирішення в Польщі. Розглянуто суттєві реформаційні процеси в контексті ідей Болонської декларації: двоступеневе навчання й докторантські студії, стандартизація дипломів і доповнень до них, введення бальної системи акредитації навчальних успіхів студентів (ECTS), забезпечення мобільності студентів (програма MOST), оцінювання якості навчання. Зазначено, що виконання визначених завдань передбачає наблизити освіту до реальних потреб суспільства й молоді, зробити її конкурентоспроможною, а також вплинути на мобільність студентів.

*Ключові слова:* Болонський процес; головні рішення Болонської декларації, реалізація Болонського процесу в Польщі.

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