

# The Bologna Process: 15 Years Later

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## Abstract

The article analyzes the basic documents adopted by the ministers of education of the country participants in the Bologna Process at their latest meeting in Yerevan, Armenia. It identifies the problems and challenges facing national education systems during the present stage of development, and explores the priorities and obligations of these countries to promote cooperation and integration in the framework of a common educational space. Particular attention is paid to the analysis of statistical data and national reports on the implementation of the main objectives established by European agreements during the current decade. A key factor in ensuring mutual trust and creating a common space for higher education is establishing a multitiered quality assurance system at the institutional, national, and European levels. The author argues for the need to review and approve the new Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG).

On May 14–15, 2015, the Ninth Conference of Ministers of Education of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and the Fourth Bologna Policy Forum took place in Yerevan, Armenia. The event was attended by more than 100 delegations, including those from 47 countries that participate in the Bologna Process. These meetings are held once every three years. At the conclusion of the meetings documents are signed whose terms must be fulfilled over the next three years (by the time of the next ministerial meeting). These agreements impact the entire global academic community and provide examples of successful regional cooperation (within the European area). How has the integration process developed in the field of European higher education over the past 15 years? What objectives must be met in the near future, and what challenges must be overcome? These issues are reflected in the entire package of documents that have been prepared by the various European organizations and associations specifically for this meeting.

## Problems and expectations, prospects and obligations

The Yerevan Conference acted as a platform for summing up the efforts undertaken to harmonize the higher education systems of 47 countries with each other and to solve the challenges posed at the 2012 conference in Bucharest. The paramount objective of this event was to ensure quality higher education for all social groups in the population, to increase the employability of graduates, and to boost student mobility.

The documents produced by the Forum have continued to stress that the reforms of the higher education systems that were initiated by the signing of the Bologna Declaration aim to strengthen the role and responsibility of society in making decisions about higher education, thereby ensuring the academic freedom and autonomy of educational institutions. The experience of the past 15 years has shown that this objective cannot be achieved without the involvement of all stakeholders. It is not just the government and the administrations of the universities that should benefit from participating in the Bologna Process, but students and teachers as well. This means that you need a clear understanding and to be able to distinguish between the different decision-making levels (European, national, and institutional) where the established objectives must be fulfilled. Structural reforms undertaken to improve the quality of education development strategy at the European level should be reflected at the levels of individual countries. They contribute to the transformation of higher education in each country, and at the institutional level the principles of student-centered education and promoting the mobility of students and teachers should be stressed. An important task is the creation of systems for feedback collection and monitoring information about the development of universities and national systems of higher education. It must be possible to engage in open dialogue and to accept proposals from higher education institutions, students, instructors, and employers.

Discussion of the results of the integration process have clearly demonstrated that such principles as student-centered education, promoting graduate employability, and making higher education socially accessible to all segments of the population are still not understood and accepted by the academic community. The main point is that approaches to the Bologna process vary significantly: some question the purpose of achieving a unified European higher education area, and others simply participate as observers. In other words, some consider integration to be a result, whereas others think of it just as a process. Therefore, expectations are not always met. However, the meeting participants have noted that in the past few years Europe has also been forced to solve new problems: “Political instability can be found in many of our countries. There are high levels of unemployment and migration caused by the economic and social crisis, and higher education remains inaccessible. These are the challenges that we have encountered.” [1]

The conference was able to review a number of documents and adopted the Yerevan Communiqué and the Declaration of the Fourth Policy Forum, which will determine the vector of development of the higher education systems of European countries in the coming years. New guidance documents were also adopted in addition to policy ones: Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG), European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes, and The ECTS User Guide as an Official EHEA Document.

The Yerevan Communiqué [2] stipulates clear and unambiguous commitments for the national ministries, such as, for example:

- —To introduce short cycle qualifications as a level of postsecondary education and to allow them to be assessed for their compliance with the ESG so that such qualifications can be recognized;
- —To ensure that the competency requirements for graduates of undergraduate programs provide them with sufficient employment opportunities, including in the public sector;
- —To ensure society has public access to accurate information about career opportunities for graduates to advance their careers on the labor market;

- —To review national legislation as it relates to full compliance with the Lisbon Recognition Convention and to submit a report to the Bologna Secretariat by the end of 2016;
- —To promote the mobility of teachers while taking into account the recommendations of the Working Group on Mobility and Internationalization;
- —To make higher education more inclusive from the social point of view through the implementation of socially oriented policies in the EHEA;
- —To ensure that the qualifications obtained in other countries in the EHEA are automatically recognized as equivalent to the corresponding national qualifications;
- —To provide an opportunity for higher education institutions to hire an appropriate accreditation agency registered with the EQAR<sup>1</sup> to conduct external quality assurance procedures in compliance with the national mechanisms for making decisions on the basis of the results of quality assurance mechanisms in education.

Future plans that were discussed at the meeting included: improving the quality and relevance of teaching and learning; promoting the employability of graduates throughout their working life in a rapidly changing labor market; creating inclusive systems of higher education that are available to all segments of the population, regardless of their origin, previous education and qualifications; and implementing the agreed structural reforms.

The Declaration of the Fourth Policy Forum includes priorities related to the expansion of regional (European) partnerships with other regions of the world in the field of higher education. Attendees discussed proposals to develop a national qualifications framework, including the creation of procedures to establish a correspondence between national structures in the EHEA that are comparable with the European framework and national structures developed in the Middle East, North Africa, and Asia. The participants declared the development of a quality assurance partnership in order to strengthen the level of mutual trust between national education systems and their qualifications: “We invite the quality assurance agencies of the participant countries to list themselves in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR).” [1] Improvements to mutual recognition processes for qualifications were proposed, including improved notifications and the joint development and dissemination of best practices for recognizing educational documents: “We call upon UNESCO to launch a review of regional agreements with countries in the Mediterranean region and the Arab States to ensure that key principles and provisions of the Council of Europe/Lisbon Conference and UNESCO regional agreements, which have been recently revised, are enshrined in these agreements. We also call upon UNESCO to revitalize the MERIC (Mediterranean Recognition Information Centers).” [1] A partnership has been proposed to develop and deploy credit transfer systems that take into account ECTS and the recently published revised guidelines on how they should be applied.

## **An analysis of practices surrounding the integration and use of transparency tools**

Among the documents presented at the conference the most interesting included The European Higher Education Area in 2015 (Analytical Report) [3], which was prepared for the ministerial conference on the basis of analytical and statistical information. The main source of the analysis was the national reports of 46 countries on the implementation of the main objectives of the Bologna Agreement. A total of 48 reports were received (for obvious reasons Ukraine did not submit a report, but the analysis included two reports from the UK (Scotland submitted its own report) and two from Belgium (one each for the Flemish and French education systems). The

Eurostat, Eurostudent, and Eurydice databases were also being used as of February and March 2014.

The report clearly demonstrates serious efforts to integrate higher education and create a single educational space in all 47 countries. At the same time, it also exhibits serious differences related not only to the size of individual education systems, but also to demographic problems, migration flows, the economic crisis, and state policies regulating the accessibility and quality of higher education. However, the sizes of the individual national systems are important, too: it is impossible to compare Liechtenstein, where there are only 960 students, with Russia, which has nearly 8 million students<sup>2</sup> and represents 21.5 percent of the total number of students enrolled in countries that participate in the Bologna Process. Five countries (Russia, Turkey, Germany, the UK, and Ukraine) represent more than half (54 percent) of the students in the Bologna Agreement countries, and at least 200,000 students are enrolled in the 18 countries. Russia has the largest education system and more than 900 universities. The ratio of public to private universities varies from country to country, but most students still study at public institutions. The exception is Cyprus, where students enrolled at private institutions predominate. The second highest number of private university students is in Poland (30 percent of students).

Over the past 15 years since the beginning of the Bologna Process, the majority of countries have transitioned to offering a tripartite system of bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees. For reference: a total of 37.2 million students are enrolled at institutions in the 47 countries of the Bologna Agreement based on data for the 2011–12 academic year, of which 82 percent are enrolled in first and second cycle (bachelor's and master's) academic programs and 2.7 percent are enrolled in third cycle (doctorate/PhD) academic programs. A total of 31 countries have chosen to keep their five-year professional programs for the so-called regulated professions such as engineering, medicine, law, and education. The total proportion of such programs varies from 2.3 percent in Finland to 28 percent in Sweden. A total of 15.6 percent of the students in European countries are enrolled in these professional programs.

Thus, by 2012, most countries had switched to a three-tier training structure: one-third of countries had transitioned 100 percent of their students to this structure, another third had transitioned over 90 percent, and the rest had transitioned more than 70 percent. Switzerland (63.2 percent), Germany (61.9 percent), Austria (61.5 percent), and Spain (47.9 percent) finish out the list. More than half of students in all countries are enrolled in an undergraduate program, with the exception of France and Spain. More than 95.4 percent of students in Kazakhstan are enrolled in such programs.

Obviously, the higher education structure of European countries in recent years has become more understandable and comparable. But differences still remain. At the first level (bachelor's) in most countries the student course load varies between 180 or 240 credits, but some countries preserve the course load model of 210 credits that is used for vocational (applied bachelor's) training programs. At the second level (master's) students generally take 120 credits, but there are exceptions: in the United Kingdom (Scotland), Ireland, and Cyprus the course load is 90, and in Spain, Montenegro, and Serbia it is 60–75. Therefore, the difference in the course load of training programs, including undergraduate and graduate ones, may differ between individual countries by as much as 120 credits. And this is a serious problem for the international recognition of master's degrees, as the course credit load can vary by between 240 to 360 units.

There are also differences in the trajectory of education: in some countries, less than a quarter of graduates from undergraduate programs continue their education into master's programs, but there are countries where 75–100 percent of bachelor's degree holders go on to master's programs, which is a statistic that is connected, as a rule, with the problem of finding employment.

Serious differences remain with regard to the qualifications obtained at the end of the short-cycle training program. This level of postsecondary education is assigned different labels in different countries, and the course load can also be calculated differently. There are structural differences: in some countries a short-cycle training program is recognized as part of the undergraduate higher education program, whereas in others it represents a separate level of postsecondary vocational training or even a part of secondary education. Russia in its statement noted that it does not implement short-cycle training programs, but it recognizes that this cycle could be covered as part of vocational training programs.

Over the past 15 years of the Bologna Process, transparency mechanisms have been developed, including a credit system, European and national qualifications frameworks, the European Diploma Supplement, and recognition of qualifications and periods of study. Many countries have made significant progress on these questions, but problems still exist. For example, 38 countries have developed and used national qualifications frameworks that have been harmonized with the European framework. But in three countries (Russia, Andorra, and Slovakia) this problem has not been solved. The 2015 Analytical Report indicates that 44 countries use systems that calculate course credits almost completely in terms of ECTS credits. Russia is one of three countries, along with Albania and the United Kingdom, that do not fully comply with this system.

One of the major problems is the understanding and practical application of the principles of student-centered learning, especially in terms of motivating students to actively participate in the organization of the educational process and the assessment of learning outcomes. The academic community does not recognize the benefits of this kind of participation. It is necessary to change the very paradigm of education by departing from the teaching of subjects to student-centered learning.

The Diploma Supplement was introduced as a transparency tool in 1998, even before the signing of the Bologna Declaration. The presence of this supplement has become one of the objectives of the agreement, and during the past 15 years, two-thirds of the countries have begun to issue it to every graduate automatically and free of charge in one of the widely used European languages. Russia is one of the three countries (along with Montenegro and Serbia) that issues the European Diploma Supplement only at the student's request and for a fee.

The recognition of qualifications and periods of study is yet another tool for the integration of the European Higher Education Area. The recognition of academic and professional education as well as formal and informal training should help remove all kinds of barriers that inhibit the mobility of students and graduates. This is a task that must be solved by two networks: the European Network of Information Centres in the European Region (ENIC) and the National Academic Recognition Information Centres in the European Union (NARIC). However, the problem is that the question of recognition must be addressed at the institution level in addition to the European or national levels. The academic community is still convinced that this is a purely technical problem, and instructors have nothing to do with it.

It is no accident that the Bucharest Communiqué of 2012 established, among other objectives, a goal of introducing measures to ensure that the national laws of the country participants in the Bologna Process comply with the Lisbon Convention on the Recognition of Education Documents as well as to incentivize higher education institutions and quality assurance agencies to assess their procedures for recognizing periods of study as part of the system of internal and external quality assurance. This requirement was included in the updated version of the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education adopted by the Yerevan Conference, in particular as it relates to the assessment of institutional practices of recognizing study periods (including non-formal, informal, and prior education), assessment of compliance with the principles of the Lisbon Convention, and cooperation with other universities, quality assurance agencies or national information centers in order to ensure a

uniform approach in each country. In 2012, it set up a special working group to study the possibility of automatic recognition of qualifications and periods of study in the country participants of the Bologna Process. It came to the conclusion that this task is quite feasible provided that: guarantees can be made that qualifications obtained in European countries can be equated with qualifications existing at the national level; the qualifications of specialists graduating from universities will comply with the provisions of the Lisbon Convention; expert methods, such as the assessment of the learning outcomes and qualifications gained, will be used; the recognition procedure shall not take longer than four months; modern technologies will be used; recognition practices in the quality assurance system will be evaluated; and the European Diploma Supplement will be used.

Even now, nearly three-quarters of all the qualifications obtained in European countries have recognized equivalents in each participant country. This fact provides reason for hope that automatic recognition will be introduced, meaning that graduates from institutions in the European educational space can expect a smooth transition as they pursue their next level of education.

### **The problems of accessibility and attainability**

A separate issue is the social accessibility of higher education. The underlying principle is to expand accessibility—the processes of admitting and training students and completing the cycle of higher education (until all groups in the population no longer face any social or economic constraints). Today, almost all countries have a gender imbalance: there are more female students than male ones. Asymmetry can also be observed in different training areas: for example, female students predominate in pedagogical and social fields, but they are a minority in engineering and IT specialist training programs. The question of the accessibility of higher education for immigrants (and the children of immigrants), for example, due to their lack of transcripts and other documents attesting to previous education has not been solved. One possible solution is to expand the practice of recognizing nonformal and informal education.

Studies show that the chances of receiving a higher education is higher for children whose parents themselves have a higher education, and lower for those whose parents do not have any. Access to higher education is also directly connected with the ability to pay tuition. The practice varies from country to country: from full public funding of student tuition and fees to the full payment of all education expenses by all students. The degree of state support for students (in the form of scholarships or grants) also varies. A common practice is for the state to provide funding for first cycle (bachelor's) students but to offer less support for master's students.

In 2009, at the Leuven ministerial meeting the task was to develop target indicators to expand access to higher education, especially for underrepresented groups. Thirty countries have developed such indicators. Most of them agreed with the European Union strategy: by 2020 at least 40 percent of young people between 30 and 34 years of age should have received a higher education.

A total of 90 percent of the participant countries have developed monitoring systems that take into account age, gender, and the level of prior education of students. However, unfortunately, the monitoring indicators do not take into account such student characteristics as healthcare opportunities, immigrant status, and previous experience in industry.

An important task over the entire 15 years of development of the integration process has been the lifelong learning initiative. In most countries, this objective has been addressed by the significant expansion of courses for part-time students as well as remote and eLearning opportunities. The percentage of students aged 30 and above who are enrolled in degree programs or are pursuing continuing education opportunities is indicative. The smallest

percentage of these types of students (less than 2 percent) is found in only three countries: Russia, Georgia, and Azerbaijan. In the Scandinavian countries and the UK, such students make up one-third of the student body.

The demand for education and the employability of graduates (the ease with which they can find jobs) are closely connected with the problem of ensuring that students successfully complete the education cycle. National reports indicate that universities (as well as public policy) pay insufficient attention to the problem of creating support systems for students throughout their training. This issue is particularly relevant for freshmen (the highest dropout rate occurs during the first year). A serious problem with the employment of graduates emerged during the period of economic crisis of 2010 to 2013, when it turned out that graduates with higher education were less likely to find employment than workers with lower skill levels. The problem arose where specialists were “overqualified” for jobs. This problem is connected not only with the economic crisis, but also with the structure of the economy. As researchers note, this situation is leading to a reduction in the size of the higher education sector in the countries of the former Soviet Union and the Balkan countries.

Politicians are paying more and more attention to the problem of the employability of graduates in the public policy sphere. It is not true everywhere, but measures are nevertheless being taken to study the needs of the labor market, to engage employers, to ensure that the educational curriculum covers industry practices, to create offices of employment services at universities, to survey graduates, and to expand student mobility. In some countries, mandatory job quotas are being imposed in order to increase the employment rate of graduates.

With regard to internationalization and student mobility, one of its components, not all countries are able to respond quickly to the changing needs of universities and students. Higher education is actively (in some cases even aggressively) welcoming such new forms of education as joint programs and double degree programs, massive open online courses (MOOCs), and cross-border partnerships in education and scientific research. However, these new kinds of education have yet to be enshrined in legislation and, therefore, in national education development strategies.

Mobility indicators are increasing from year to year, but for many reasons, which are often economic, they remain low. As could be expected, the United Kingdom, France, and Germany are the leading countries in terms of the number of enrolled foreign students. Russia comes in fourth place. But even in these countries, the number of foreign students does not exceed 5 percent of the total number of students. The task that has been set for the current decade is to reach a level of 20 percent student mobility in each country by 2020. However, it is doubtful that this target will be met. In addition, we are still confronted by the problem of one-way mobility: the number of incoming students in individual countries is much greater than the number of students leaving to study abroad. The problem of mobility within the university staffing structure due to the uncertainty and heterogeneity of the very concept of staffing, which includes administrators, faculty members, and educational support staff, has also not yet been solved. One task for the future is to study this issue in more detail. In addition, the problem of the quality of student and teacher mobility is no less important. This issue is impacted by such factors as the availability of information support, monitoring studies of existing evaluation practices, recognizing learning outcomes in mobility programs, as well as monitoring changes in connection with received experience. This will enhance its effectiveness.

## **Quality assurance as a guarantee of uniform practice**

A key focus of integration in the European educational space is the formation of quality assurance and quality architecture mechanisms. As far back as 2003, ministers noted that quality higher education is a prerequisite for a common educational space. At the previous

meeting, ministers reiterated the important role of quality assurance systems to solving the objectives of the Bologna Process, reflected in the slogan: "Quality higher education for everyone."

Universities are responsible for the quality of education, and this is the basis for real accountability. To date, almost all countries require their institutions of higher education to create internal quality assurance systems (most often as stipulated by law). However, some countries point out that the external quality assurance system seriously hampers university autonomy in matters of internal quality assurance.

Every country today has its own external quality assurance system. This represents clear progress since the beginning of the Bologna Process. Over the past 15 years, accreditation agencies have been established in 22 countries. Accreditation agencies use various approaches in relation to the object that is being assessed. Twenty-six countries to date have used mixed forms of evaluation: they both evaluate the university as a whole and evaluate its individual programs. Belgium, the Czech Republic, and Sweden carry out expert examinations of individual educational programs; Bosnia and Herzegovina, Finland, and the United Kingdom only carry out an institutional assessment in the form of a quality audit.

In building an external quality assurance system, most of the countries are focused on improving the quality of education by emphasizing evaluation of the internal control system, the process of teaching, and the student support structure. But there are also examples where the external quality assurance system conducts expert reviews like a "factory assembly line" according to social mandate, either in response to the internationalization of the educational program or to its "professionalization."

An important indicator of the development of the quality assurance system is whether all stakeholders, and especially students, are involved in the expert review process. Thirty-one countries have mandated that students must participate in all stages of the assessment: in self-study procedures, external expert reviews (as equal members of the expert committee), in the accreditation decision-making procedure, and in subsequent corrective actions. Russia in this case is an exception to the rules that mandate student involvement in the body that makes accreditation decisions. It does not involve students in the expert reviews of all the preceding and subsequent stages of assessment during state accreditation procedures. Over the past three years, there has been a trend to actively involve employers as well as representatives of the labor market and professional associations to act as experts during expert reviews or to sit on bodies that make decisions.

However, as was previously the case, the question of the extent to which national accreditation agencies (organizations that oversee procedures for the external evaluation of the quality of educational programs and universities) comply with the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ESG) remains unanswered. The Guidelines represent a fundamental document, which was developed by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), and it was approved by the ministerial conference in 2005 as a condition for establishing a European quality architecture. It is based on four basic principles (levels), including: emphasis on the university itself as the institution responsible for the quality of education; the creation of external quality assurance systems at the national level to allow universities the opportunity to demonstrate the quality of their activities; the independence and responsibility of accreditation agencies to ensure an objective assessment; and the inclusion of these latter provisions in the European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR). The institution must have the right to choose from among the accreditation agencies included in the EQAR when undergoing accreditation, and the conclusion of such an agency (regardless of whether it is domestic or foreign) should be recognized by the national system of higher education.



As of September 2014, thirty-two agencies from 15 countries were included in the EQAR. However, an analysis of the national reports on countries that participate in the Bologna Process shows that not all countries are ready to open their borders to foreign agencies. Among the reasons cited for denying agencies access are the fact that these foreign agencies lack complete information about the higher education system of the country, including its national standards and requirements, but the main concern is in fact fear that the government will lose control over its subordinate educational institutions. In addition, the laws of many countries still lack any mandatory requirements specifying that their national accreditation agencies must obtain full membership in ENQA and be listed in EQAR, which, of course, retards the process of standardization and harmonizing differences between countries.

As for Russia, the Analytical Report indicates: "Russia is the largest system in the EHEA. It is different from all other European countries in how it develops its quality assurance processes. In particular, it is distinguished by the fact that it is the only country with a state accreditation system" [3]. In all other countries educational programs at higher education institutions are accredited by accreditation agencies that are independent of the state supervisory agencies and whose decisions are communicated to a large section of society and are recognized by the state. The independence of the accreditation agencies (in terms of their organization, functionality, and decision-making authority) from public authorities, universities, and professional and student organizations is a prerequisite for the objective evaluation of the quality of higher education. However, the analytical report noted the presence in Russia of independent accreditation agencies that are full members of ENQA (National Center for Professional Public Accreditation and Agency for Quality Assurance and Career Development). This organization in particular involves students, employers, and foreign experts in its expert reviews [4].

## **Quality assurance standards: 2.0**

Of the guidelines adopted at the Yerevan Conference, the new Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area [5] deserve special comment, although they should be regarded more as a "second generation" of standards insofar as they have preserved the ideology and structure of the document that was developed by ENQA and adopted by the Conference of Ministers of Education in Bergen in 2005.

The Standards were due for revision in particular in light of the new challenges to the Bologna Process that were already determined at the 2009 ministerial conference. It became apparent that the transformation of national systems of higher education in the first decade of the Bologna Process had become a massive and irreversible phenomenon. But it had also become equally obvious that the launched reforms to create a common European Higher Education Area were incomplete. New directions in European integration that emphasized certain aspects of the process and ranked specific priorities were identified. These priorities of the Bologna Process must be reflected in the Quality Assurance Standards.

The decade of the 2000s saw by the growth of national education systems and the increased diversity of curricular content, structures, forms and technologies for providing educational services not only in Europe and Russia, but around the world. The need for more flexible approaches was manifested not only in the implementation of educational programs, but also in the evaluation of their quality [6; 7]. The globalization and internationalization of education, which has been accompanied by the increasing mobility of students, represent another trend in recent years. This means that the need for greater openness and transparency in the collection of information on higher education institutions and programs that seek credibility, and the need to publish full reports about external expert examinations, must also be reflected in the new European Quality Assurance Model.

Internationalization trends have also impacted the practices of accreditation agencies. In addition, with the emergence of new national and pan-European organizations involved in the education quality assessment, for example, of individual training areas (e.g., engineering, medicine), as well as agencies that seek to distinguish themselves through quality labels of excellence, the issue of evaluating and recognizing the quality of the activities of evaluators (accreditation agencies and the experts they hire) has come to the fore. Respect for the diversity of these organizations and adherence to a ban on commercial “accreditation mills” are important priorities for fostering trust in the European educational space.

The quality assessment technologies and procedures used by the national accreditation agencies have weathered the changes. Despite the need for harmonized rules and common approaches, the practices of agencies reflect the growing variety of quality assurance procedures (institutional accreditation, program accreditation, cluster accreditation, system accreditation) and quality assurance tools, including accreditation, auditing, evaluation, benchmarking, and excellence [8].

In addition, the problem of accounting for basic transparency tools in the European quality assurance standards, namely the EQF (European Qualifications Framework), ECTS (European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System), and LO (Learning Outcomes), has also been emphasized. If the first version of the Standards failed to take account of transparency tools insofar as they are considered as separate activities within the framework of the Bologna Process, then the next stage of development poses the problem not only of the integration of national systems of higher education into a single educational space, but also the integration of integration tools themselves.

The second-generation standards required two years of active work by all stakeholders, including European associations of accreditation agencies, student organizations, higher education institutions, and professional and academic communities. The document underwent widespread and repeated discussion at forums and conferences. It was first approved by the Bologna Follow-Up Group (BFUG) and signed off on by the Conference of Ministers of Higher Education in Yerevan. In contrast to the old version, the document's new version contains ten standards (rather than seven) that more clearly and unequivocally prescribe the vectors of required efforts that universities must undertake to create a culture of quality and an internal quality assurance system that meets all the new challenges and the problems of integration of national systems of higher education within a single educational space.

Another document, The European Approach to the Quality Assurance of Joint Programs, may be viewed as a special case for the evaluation and recognition of programs that were developed and implemented on the basis of cross-border cooperation between universities. But the most important advantage of this document is that it provides for the possibility of joint accreditation of joint programs, that is, close cooperation and joint efforts by accrediting agencies from all countries that participate in the Bologna Agreement in the procedures for the assessment and recognition of the quality of educational programs.

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National self-identification (or isolation), integration (with European or Asian countries), and globalization (active or passive) are issues that must be defined by the state strategy for the country's development (including in the area of education). Despite all the ambiguity surrounding how the Bologna Process has been interpreted, time has shown that it is not constructive to ignore it or even actively oppose what is happening, because, as stated in one official document of the Yerevan Conference, “together we are stronger.”

In addition, the ability to compare different approaches and practices makes it possible to identify our own problems and adjust education policy to address them as well as to harmonize

it with the original purpose and mission of higher education. Latvia's Minister of Education and Science, speaking at the forum, rightly said: "Universities not only teach skills and transmit knowledge. They also generate it in order to create a society based on knowledge. We should not talk about higher education serving the economy, but rather about higher education creating it."

## Notes

English translation © 2016 Taylor & Francis Group, LLC, from the Russian text © 2015 "Vysshee obrazovanie segodnia." "Bolonskii protsess: 15 let spustia," *Vysshee obrazovanie segodnia*, 2015, no. 11, pp. 53–65. Galina N. Motova, Doctor of Pedagogical Sciences, is Deputy Director of the National Center for Professional Public Accreditation; E-mail: [gn.motova@ncpa.ru](mailto:gn.motova@ncpa.ru). Translated by Kenneth Cargill.

<sup>1</sup> The European Quality Assurance Register.

<sup>2</sup> Students in postsecondary education number 6.5 million in the first cycle (bachelor's) and over 160,000 in the second cycle (master's). There are just over 1.3 million students enrolled in vocational education programs (5B according to the International System of Qualifications).

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