Chapter 11

PIZZA BOLOGNESE Á LA RUSSE

The Promise and Peril of the Bologna Process in Russia

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1. INTRODUCTION

More than once the Bologna Process has inspired culinary metaphors. While creating a European super-state has not proven to be an easy task, predicting the qualities of the common European cuisine is particularly difficult. Evidently, cultures have already influenced each other's eating habits to the point that depicting the truly traditional has become a hopeless task; and more change is in train. It remains to be seen whether the French will ever be able to digest the *freedom fries* so popular in new Europe, and what hidden agenda President Putin may have in making the world respect the original *bœuf stroganoff*, the recipe of which is still perhaps being kept in an undisclosed location somewhere in East Prussia under the close guard of the Federal Security Services, and out of the reach of former colleagues from Lithuania dieting on vegetarian *tseppelins*. *Côtelette á la Kiev* has still to join the equation, once the long term political goal of many Ukrainian academics is finally achieved and the new, *orange* Ukrainian Minister of Education is invited to sign the Declaration and join the Process known for its many meetings and abundant culinary delights:

> Not for nothing did the forging of a "European higher education identity" begin in a city famous throughout the known world for its spaghetti with meat and tomato sauce. Nor that the delights of the fork should continue in the home-place of the potato dumpling (Prague), make obeisance to the Berlin home of the Eisbein (pig's knuckle) and will, next year, assuage political appetite by feasting on Norwegian boiled cod at Bergen. The fusion of the delicious (national gastronomy) with the partially

V. Tomusk (ed.), Creating the European Area of Higher Education: Voices from the Periphery, 227–249.

> digestible (the reconstruction of higher education in Europe) is in a very soothe a radical innovation indeed (Neave 2004a).

How enticing the European menu is we would rather leave open, if for no other reason than the very fact that, since the term *process* amongst other things entails continuous negotiation and re-negotiation of its goals, one will only be able to describe the menu retrospectively, once it is all over, which is no sooner than 2010. What we do know for certain, at least what we have been told by the highest authority available on such matters, the former Commissioner for Cultural and Educational Affairs of the European Commission, is that "Bologna cannot be implemented á la carte…" Once invited to the table, the dear members of the *Bologna Club* (Zgaga 2003) are expected to eat everything, or otherwise be kindly asked to leave. The obvious threat of that is that it may leave hungry both the orthodox lovers of kosher food as well as those whose digestive systems are *tuned* (Gonzales and Wagenaar 2003) to junk. But not only that, sitting at the European table also requires the right attitude:

> It has to be done across the board and wholeheartedly. If not, the process will leave European higher education even less strong and united than before (Reding 2003).

Shame on those whose limited appetite for Bologna or Eisbein threatens the future of the entire continent.

The Europe of the Bologna Process makes a more diverse group of countries than most of its ideologues dare to accept openly. From Scandinavia, through Great Britain, continental Europe, Albania and Russia it perhaps covers as wide a range of quality, as well as issues and problems that one could probably identify anywhere in the world. Making a European system of higher education out of that is an extremely challenging task indeed. While some of the countries are proud of their *haute cuisine and* see little reason for any change, for others opening a *western* fast-food outlet, a MacDonald's or a pizza restaurant, would mark a significant step forward. The country discussed in this chapter, the Russian Federation, belongs to the latter category. Despite its own continued claim to offer the highest level of scholarship available anywhere in the solar system, it has experienced massive difficulties over the past fifteen years in sustaining its higher education, not to mention reforming it in the wake of the disintegration of the state-socialist political régime and the Bolshevik empire.

Despite being but a poor man's repast, *Pizza Bolognese á la Russe* is a complex piece of culinary art. As we have argued elsewhere (Tomusk 2004a) the Bologna Process is being driven by three relatively independent forces: the cultural, political and economic agendas. In Russia, as in many other places, there is consequently more than one chef in the kitchen. Whilst

each of them has his own team of advisers, it does seem to be the case that each of the chefs adds ingredients to the jointly-created dish independently of the others. Following another metaphor, it often happens that the right hand knows not what the left is doing. In the Russian case, Mr. Oleg Smolin, the deputy chairman of the Duma (Lower House of the Russian Parliament) Committee for Education and Research, argues that the right hand does not know what the right hand did just moments earlier (Smolin 2005). There is, therefore, not only little co-ordination between the Political, Cultural and Economic chefs of the Bologna, but even little consistency amongst each of their contributions to the implementation of the Bologna in Russia. Perhaps, it would be best to stop exploiting the culinary metaphor here and turn to more serious matters.

2. POLITICS OF BOLOGNA

Although academics may wish to deny their political interests, perhaps not so much to defend their own position of criticism and melancholy outside of society than that of privilege above it, historical evidence seems to advise against it. Since time immemorial, education has been used to serve the goals of conquering the hearts and minds of the enemies, and of corrupting their youth with foreign gods, goods, idols and values. It is no secret that in its own time, the Soviet Union had used education as one of the main information channels of the first truly global terrorist network—the Communist International, to spread communist ideology world-wide. The 'communist camp', as Coombs explains, experienced a degree of success in doing this, 'especially among the economically less advanced peoples of the world' (Coombs 1964, p. 12). President Eisenhower responded to the *Soviet cultural offensive* (ibid. p. 39) by supporting the cultural presence of the United States world-wide. Education eventually became a dimension of American foreign policy as a response to the view of the Soviet communists that everything was politics and politics always boiled down to war:

> During the years of Soviet rule, the inhabitants of the country of the Soviets were constantly taught the idea that their entire lives were a battle. The vocabulary of those years included phrases like 'the labour front', 'the battle for the harvest', 'triumphant messages', and so on (Prozumenshchikov 2004, p. 65).[1]

[1] This and all other Russian sources used in this chapter have been translated into English by the author.

The American response was fully adequate. As Assistant Secretary of State for Educational and Cultural Affairs under President Kennedy, Phillip H. Coombs explains:

> Literally everything we cherish is at stake, and since America's ability to influence world events is limited, as our resources inevitably are, we can ill afford to waste either strength or opportunity (Coombs 1964, p. 17).

In the years of the Cold War there was hardly an issue of popular interest that was not mobilized to further political goals, from chess to space travel, and symphonies to ice hockey. Prozumenshchikov (2004) explains:

> Since the 1950s sport became one of the critical areas of the great confrontation between socio-economic systems that increasingly took the form of a battle between two superpowers – the USSR and the USA. While in the economic sphere, agriculture and particularly in the living standards of citizens the slogan announced by the Soviet leadership to 'catch-up and outrun the USA' remained an unachievable dream, then sports together with the space program, science and military capacity were the areas in which the Soviet Union not only did not lose to the United States but sometimes even prevailed over it (p. 91).

Whilst in the globalising world education is losing its political importance and gaining prominence as a dimension of the economic domain (Neave 2004b), and as the great battle at Armageddon fought between 'the kings of the whole world' (Rev. 16:14) may well take place by other, although by no means less lethal means — those of global economic competition — the old-fashioned geo-political thinking is far too close to those accustomed to measuring their influence in terms of geographical territories controlled by political and military means. In his recent introduction to the Bologna Process, Mr. Gennady Lukichev of the Russian Ministry of Education does not hesitate to explain to the Russian reader the political stakes of Russia's joining the process:

> Participation of the European Union and the Russian Federation in the process of creating a common educational space stretching from Lisbon to Vladivostok should be seen as a move by the two main partners of the contemporary European political landscape towards each other (Lukichev 2004, p. 18).

And:

> This project, in the event that it succeeds, can serve as a source of experience for Europe-wide co-operation in other areas. This reveals another important meaning of our participation in the Bologna Process:

> Europe-wide educational space can become a bridge for further European integration (ibid).

This reveals quite a lot of what the author, and perhaps the institution he represents think the Bologna Process is about, and who the *superpowers* playing the game are. One may argue that the above statement does not tell us as much about the willingness to build what Mr. Gorbachev called *our common European home*, as it represents an attempt to consolidate itself internally against the presence of a massive external force, be it friend or foe. For such a purpose, being one of forty signatories to a political declaration is quite a different issue from that of being one of two superpowers, at times dividing and at times uniting the great Eurasian landmass stretching from Lisbon to Vladivostok. A message concerning world-domination, or at least co-domination should be perceived as one manufactured for primarily internal consumption in a country that has not experienced much success since the launch of the Sputnik in 1957, and has historically known only one type of mobilisation—military mobilisation (Pain 2005). Whether or not that represents a successful knowledge society strategy we would rather leave open at this point.

With the exception of a small number of critical intellectuals, there does seem to be a broad consensus in Russia concerning the country's level of importance in world affairs, its cultural achievements, as well as its level of general and higher education. Less popular with either the academic community or the general public are the views expressed by a minority arguing, for example, that some of the messages Russia is spreading regarding its role as the primary vehicle of continuity in the identity of Indo-European civilisation may not only come across as racist but also as fascist; that its modernisation was achieved through massive use of slave labour imprisoned in the camps run by the *Glavnoe Upravlenie Lagerov* (the Ministry of Camps) better known through the works of Solzhenitsyn for its acronym GULag; and that contrary to the positions of many current theoreticians, educational achievement in Russia was never reflected in its economic development. It therefore comes as little surprise that, to paraphrase Neave (2003), both *bolognaphobes* and *bolognaphiliacs* share the position that Russian higher education represents a high level of academic excellence. They also agree that Russian higher education does not need far-reaching reform, and to the extent there are any problems at all, these are related to chronic funding difficulties caused by neo-liberal economic reformers taking their orders from the International Monetary Fund.

However, as the conservative circles in Russian higher education that gravitate around the Russian Union of Rectors also argue, despite all the discomfort that lack of funding has caused to higher education institutions and academics, it has not damaged the quality of education. That, as Chekmarev

and Subetto (2003) argue, is as high as ever. As we have discussed elsewhere (Tomusk 2004b, 2004c), no attention has been paid to the fact that, having experienced major decline in the level of public funding in early 1990s, even in 2004 total spending on education stood at 75 per cent of the 1991 level (MINOBR 2004), having lost at least 70,000 academics through emigration, and having increased the total number of higher education students by a factor of 2.5 over a decade, the only logical conclusion left is that today the level of training that Russian higher education is in a position to deliver must fall significantly below the standards of the Soviet era, and in that it does not really matter how high one thinks that standard actually was. Clearly, it is much worse today. A recent education white paper offers unheard of insights into the realities underlying the traditional political propaganda:

> In the World, massification of higher education relates primarily to the transition from industrial economics to the 'economics of knowledge.' In Russia, to this is added the lack of broad institutionalized opportunities for professional self-realization among the younger generation. In the context of inadequate development of the infrastructure of educational markets in Russia, and inadequacy of the system of life-long learning, rapid massification of higher education in Russia relates to various forms of 'pseudo education' (MINOBR 2005).

This makes it abundantly clear that the phenomenal growth Russian higher education has experienced since the mid-1990s relates primarily to the fact that in the context of a continuously dysfunctional economy where paid employment is hard to find, the young have few alternatives (save the usual ones — military and prison) to gathering at the universities or provincial 'institutes' to spend what has turned out as the meaningless years of youth. However, this is only possible if the cost of education remains low, which leads to further deterioration in its quality. As there seems to be no internal way out of this vicious circle, it can only be broken by convincing the outside world that Russian higher education is excellent. That creates a theoretical opportunity, albeit difficult to realise, of attracting foreign students and badly needed cash. This, one may suggest, is the gamble that the Russian Bologna activists have taken in economic terms. Although not everybody feels the economic position is the most important.

A recent report from a special Duma committee *Russia in the United Europe*, having analysed the relations between the Russian Federation and the European Union since 1997, concludes that there is only one area in which progress can be made in the foreseeable future—culture and education. Progress in all the other areas, such as joining the common market or domestic and external security are inhibited by conflicting interests, as well as by

President Putin's 'authoritarian modernisation' project, which is increasingly unpopular in Brussels (Arbatova and Ryzhkov 2005). In 'cultural and educational co-operation', however, the Russian interest, although somewhat narrow, is clearly defined:

> For Russia, one of the most important issues in this area is the mutual recognition of diplomas [higher education degrees and qualifications V.T.] that would encourage the harmonisation of the educational systems of Russia and the European Union (ibid. p. 202).

In the context of a broad consensus among academics and the political élite on the high status of Russian higher education, its historical achievements and need for cash, the higher education community is deeply divided over the issue of the Bologna Process. A significant proportion of prominent university leaders, starting with the Rector of the largest university in the country—the Moscow State University—Prof. Sadovnichii have strongly opposed Russia's joining the Bologna Process, while the official position of the country, agreed back in 2003 between the then Minister of Education Mr. Filippov and President Putin himself, is that Russia should join the signatories of the Bologna Declaration. This it did in September 2003. It seems to be correct to argue that the decision to join the Process was made by the political élite against the will of the academic élite. The academics eventually mobilised to foster its implementation were, unsurprisingly, to be found among those most sympathetic to the foreign policy agenda, for example, the leaders of the Moscow State Institute of International Relations, the training base of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

From the moment that President Putin concluded that joining the Bologna Process was in Russia's interests, gaining access to the *Club* became a major foreign policy issue. As Mr. Filippov, the Minister of Education of the Russian Federation who facilitated Russia's membership in the Bologna Process, stated in an interview on Radio Mayak, Russia did not accept the initial response it received from the Bologna follow-up group to the effect that its membership was to be delayed until after new membership requirements and conditions were worked out at the Ministerial meeting in Berlin in September 2003 (Filippov 2003). Instead, Russia mobilized its foreign policy resources to achieve the goal. For example, President Putin addressed the issue at his meeting with President Chirac (Savickaya 2003). While immediately afterwards Russia signed the Bologna Process, the Russian media reported that this event signified a major success for Russian higher education. Minister Filippov, describing the voting process in Berlin, leaves little doubt that the victory was that of Russian foreign policy:

> Voting over the membership of every new country was secret, behind closed doors. We were very much helped by Italy, Great Britain, Spain and Germany, and also by the Council of Europe (NEWSru 2003).

We do not know exactly what the price of that vote was, but having learned something from the history of diplomacy one can be assured that the helpful countries certainly received Russia's support in other fora on other issues. Having a say over appointments to leading positions in intergovernmental organisations is one issue that constitutes highly valuable capital in bargaining situations like this. Luckily enough, Europe experiences no shortage of such organisations and jobs.

Although it was a great victory for Russian diplomacy, not everybody is happy about it. Conservative university leaders like Sadovnichii, the Rector of the Moscow State University have adopted a typical isolationist approach. Sadovnichii thinks that if the West wants to co-operate with Russia, it could equally well adopt Russia's time-honoured higher education system:

> We could suggest to the partners that they apply our experience with no less success. We have to protect the interests of the Russian educational system (RSR 2003).

For many of the contemporary ideologues of the Russian identity, the gap between Russian spirituality and Western materialism is insurmountable. Any dealings with those influenced by American consumerist decadence, that is the *West*, are better avoided. Perhaps because consumerism is an extremely contagious disease. Back in 1970s and 1980s, the knowledge that there was another world where people ate meat and wore blue jeans spread like a cancer in the body of the communist empire and the desire for the same eventually ruined it. Sadovnichii declares that for Russia "joining the Bologna Process would equal brain surgery where Russia has been given the role of organ donor" (Subetto and Chekmarev 2003), meaning that the Process would give a new boost to the brain drain. What he seems to be ignoring is the fact that those academics who have left Russia over the past fifteen years and those who will in the future have not been forced to go. They have left voluntarily, mostly for the reasons related to their living standards and work conditions. Therefore one may argue that the special type of Russian spirituality stressed both by conservative academics, as well as neo-fascist Eurasanists, like Aleksandr Dugin (see e.g. Tomusk 2004c), simply constitutes a naïve attempt to demonstrate the failings of the Russian economy and its poverty in a positive light that loses its attractiveness as soon as alternative options become available. For the great majority of Russian academics the only way to bridge the gap between Russia and the West is by moving physically from Russia to the West. Given the scale of the emigration, in which not only individuals leave the country but entire

laboratories and research groups together, not many choose to stick to past glory and non-material spirituality when proper work, food and shelter become available elsewhere. Clearly, the isolationist way of saving Russian higher education and research does not work. The only real option, therefore, is to co-operate. This is what the Russian bolognaphiliacs suggest. Although theirs is the minority voice in the academic community, they seem to be greatly encouraged by the top of the political establishment that finds it beneficial for its own massive geopolitical ambitions.

3. THE SOFT WAY

The pro-Bologna forces in Russian higher education lead by Andrey Melville, the Academic Vice-Rector of the Moscow State Institute for International Relations, propose what has become known as the *soft way* of implementation of the Bologna Process. It argues for careful and measured introduction of the main elements of the Bologna declaration while preserving the historical achievements and tested values of Russian higher education (Melville, et al. 2005).

While representing in many respects a minimum agenda, the soft approach constitutes a difficult compromise between what is tolerable to Russian academia and acceptable to the supra-national sponsors of the process as an implementation plan. Given the political nature of the compromise, it is therefore hard to judge to which extent the *softist* liberal-sounding academics actually share the view of the historical success of Russian higher education and how much it is being stressed to pacify the conservative communist romanticists. In either case, the soft approach obviously falls short of the expectations of the European Commission voiced by its mouthpiece the European University Association, that the Process is to be *implemented wholeheartedly across the board*.[2] Entirely sensible arguments for step-by-step implementation, like those presented by Melville and colleagues, fail to convince the emissaries of the Process:

> Responding to imaginary opponents one may say that in talking about the 'soft approach' to Bologna reforms in Russia we do not mean their imitation, but a conscientious and full meeting of the requirements of the Bologna Process (particularly the communiqués of the Prague and Berlin meetings of ministers responsible for higher education). At the same

[2] This is exactly the position expressed by Ms. Sylvie Brochu, a Program Manager of the European University Association at the expert forum 'Integration Assistance to Russian Higher Education Institutions into European Higher Education Area' Moscow, January 18-19, 2005.

> time, complicating fulfilment of the requirements, which are anyway not easy given the current situation in Russian higher education, with total reforms in all possible directions leading to unpredictable outcomes would be both unrealistic and irrational (Melville et al. 2005, p. 74).

It is nothing short of ironic that this time it is the representatives of the democratic free world who demand that the children of communism in an increasingly autocratic Russia follow their own Party-line without reflecting on its meaning, or even on the most efficient ways of implementing the Process. At least in this case Brussels requires blind submission, perhaps in fear that by letting the Process loose nothing at all will be accomplished.

Implementing a change in a chronically mismanaged and underfunded higher education system that consists of thirteen hundred universities and six million students like Russia's is a complicated task. A recent Government white paper characterises the situation in Russian education as follows:

> The Low level of officially paid salaries and inadequacy of the frameworks for additional legal earnings have lead to a growing shadow economy and the spread of corruption in education. The reputation of teachers and faculty members are on the decline, internal brain drain is not being reduced (MINOBR 2004).

In this respect the attempt undertaken by the *softists*, even if its intellectual foundations might be shaky, of opening Russian higher education to the extent that would allow the discussion of systematic sector-wide reform, should be understood if not approved of. However, given the complexities of the Russian reality, the only option to further the Process the group seems to have identified is selling it. Once again people who apparently talk from the position of the intellectuals consciously engage in raising expectations that could not be met. It is highly likely that in this case the outcomes will not even reach a level that could allow them to be described as *mixed* (Cerych and Sabatier 1986).

3.1 Economic Arguments for the Process

The main argument which Melville and colleagues apply in promoting the Bologna Process to the Russian higher education community is the simplest possible. They argue that the Bologna Process has a massive potential to generate funding for both Russian higher education as well as the individuals involved. This is supported by the position of the former chair of the Duma Committee for Science and Education, Shishlov, who believes that joining the Bologna Process will allow Russia to gain access to many-billions of dollars worth of world-wide higher education markets (Arsenina 2003).

For most of Europe the thought that the Bologna Process could have an immediately positive economic effect belongs to the past, although the long-term expectations, perhaps misplaced, of its generating funds on a large scale in the future remain high. However, an attempt to save money by allowing graduates with Bachelor degrees to enter the labour market instead of the graduates from traditional continental European long-cycle university studies has failed. So far, no significant reduction of study durations and related costs has taken place. Instead, it is becoming apparent that in order to implement the Bologna Process at the institutional level significant additional funding will be needed. This money, like any additional public funding for higher education in Europe, does not seem to be available. It is therefore surprising to find the Russian Bologna expert group lead by Melville arguing that the Process constitutes almost an infinite source of additional cash, which needless to say, Russian higher education badly needs and has been waiting for, for nearly two decades. Both for politicians and academics the expected economic benefits of the Process prevail over those related to reforming the higher education sector and fostering cultural co-operation.

Together with the rising international competitiveness of European higher education, the competitiveness of Russian higher education, constituting an inseparable part of European higher education by virtue of its membership in the Bologna Process, is expected to rise. That is expected to allow Russia to attract students from all over the world. Degrees and qualifications conferred by Russian universities will be fully recognized across the entire European Higher Education Area, and thus become highly attractive internationally. It is being argued that even if exchange students do not pay for their studies, they will eventually spend significant amounts of money on accommodation, food, medical service and entertainment (Melville et al. 2005, p. 82). It has, however, been assumed that in one way or another Russian universities will be able to impose fees comparable to *European standards* even on exchange students, and in such a manner earn very significant additional funding, which they will be able to spend as they please:

> Thanks to mobility of foreign students coming to universities for a semester or a year, Russian universities will receive additional non-budgetary funding. While the economics of student mobility needs to be further studied, the prospects for the improvement of the economic status of particular universities are already emerging. The fees that a foreign student is charged for education of an adequate level of quality should meet the *European standards* … (ibid. p. 89, my italics, V.T.).

Subsequently, the authors are carving out a particular market niche for Russian educational services, arguing that offering higher education in the Russian language to students from the former Soviet Union countries would allow western-level income to be generated by offering Russian education. This would perhaps be a smart calculation, except that countries like Kyrgyzstan are also ready to offer the same service at a lower price. Expectations set for funds to be collected are high. These are not only thought to suffice for the additional payments to the faculty, but also to allow investment in the deteriorating university infrastructure to an extent that makes Russian universities competitive with universities in Western Europe even in this respect. One may think that here the authors had lost control of their imaginations.

The plan to sell Russian higher education services to the citizens of former Soviet Union, particularly CIS (Commonwealth of Independent States, a somewhat post-colonial structure established to allow Russia maintaining close ties with its former colonies) countries at the *European* price may, however, be contested by a massive force of local origin—Russia's own foreign policy interests. According to President Putin:

> Training of specialists in [Russian] higher education institutions selected from among foreign citizens, primarily preparation of cadres for the member-states of the CIS, constitutes a task of absolutely the highest importance for Russia, both with regard to civilian as well as military education (RSR 2003).

Russia might after all not be able to make money from training individuals from the countries it intends to dominate by using the same individuals. Instead it may have to continue the practices developed by the Soviet Union (as well as the United States of America) during the Cold War, through which loyal elites in third countries were created by making free education available to a certain number of their citizens.

The Bologna Process is expected to add attractiveness to Russian universities internally, as well as externally. The internal reputation of universities that regularly send students to study in foreign universities (which to a significant extent is expected to be fully or partially paid by the government) is expected to rise. What, however, the benefits of that reputation would precisely be are not made explicit. The authors seem to feel somewhat uneasy about disclosing that Russian students will also have to compete both intellectually and economically for places in the better universities, an agenda for which low popularity among the Russian public is self-evident. Although carefully presented, the authors eventually acknowledge that the entire future of Russian higher education may depend on its ability to attract fee-paying

students, particularly those in a position to pay the European price. Starting on the assumption that:

> According to many theoreticians the Bologna Process should by no means become a commercial enterprise, an educational business.

The authors continue:

> However, for Russian higher education institutions, experiencing significant financial difficulties, the issue of foreign students paying for their studies may turn out to be the one of survival (Melville et al. 2005, p. 102).

It is hard to identify the theoreticians on whom Melville and colleagues rely in their argument, and the situation seems to be exactly the opposite—at least, since the very early days of the process some of the most powerful sponsors of the Process have been stressing the importance of European universities becoming more entrepreneurial and selling educational services world-wide, eventually entering into competition with the US universities. In this regard the Russian hope of saving their higher education by entering the global educational markets does not differ from that of Europe, which also experiences significant difficulties in adequately funding its expanding higher education sector albeit on a lesser scale.

There are other mechanisms, perhaps somewhat more Russian in nature, that are expected to add attractiveness to the Process. Some of them are purely bureaucratic, for example, the introduction of the ECTS (European Credit Transfer System) is expected to allow for *more efficient* measuring of faculty workloads, and that in turn is expected to lead to increases in faculty compensation (ibid. p. 87).

Travelling abroad is presented as a major source of motivation for both Russian students and faculty members implementing the process. It almost looks like everybody will travel and nobody will have to pay for it. Faculty exchanges are expected to become a regular part of university life and allow Russian academics to improve significantly their economic status as 'European standards of faculty compensation' start setting the level of compensation also in Russian universities (ibid. p. 88). Wider horizons are also being painted in bright colours:

> … participation in the Bologna Process should stimulate transition to western standards of funding of higher education and allow Russian universities to leave behind the current regime of operating at the level of mere survival (Melville et al. 2005, p. 81).

It is not entirely obvious where exactly all the necessary funds for this will come from and, if there is anything Russian government is expected to

contribute, why it has allowed the higher education sector to reach its current rather unfortunate state in the first place. While it is being argued that foreign universities pay Russian faculty according to their own standards, it is also argued that large numbers of foreign faculty will be teaching in Russian universities. By whom and according to which standards their compensation will be paid is cautiously left open. One may assume though, that the current compensation level in Russian higher education does not appear particularly attractive to the Russians themselves since 90 per cent of the individuals working in the educational sector earn less than 200 USD, and 35 per cent less than 100 USD monthly (MINOBR 2004).

The Bologna Process is also being expected to allow automatic equalisation of the Russian *Candidate of Science* degree with the *PhD* and that would once again guarantee Russian *candidates* equal pay-scales with *European doctors* (Melville et al. 2005, pp. 92-93). Without discussing in any further depth the complex issues related to the equivalence of academic degrees and their mutual recognition by sovereign states, one may suggest that the very possibility of uncontrolled entry into the European Union of literally millions of holders of degrees of questionable quality may force the Bologna Process into the direction of introducing more rigorous quality assurance mechanisms than the European habit so far has been, for example, a supra-national institutional accreditation. More interesting, however, is the fact that by promoting the benefits rising from the implementation of the Bologna Process, Melville and colleagues move dangerously close to feeding the very roots of bolognaphobia—the accelerating brain drain from Russia. It looks like the authors are at least implicitly suggesting that implementing the Bologna Process will smooth the way out of Russia for the best academics. Mr. Vladimir Filippov, albeit modestly, extends this promise to all Russian degree holders:

> Russian degrees must become understandable to western employers (Kara-Murza 2004).

3.2 Culture and Education of the Process

While money is a strong argument, it is not everything. At least the authors cannot leave the reader with an impression that it is everything, because they would be charged with *American materialism* and other deadly sins. To demonstrate the intellectual benefits rising form the Process, Melville and colleagues draw a picture of broader horizons of mutually beneficial academic co-operation, and joint research in particular:

> Faculty members from co-operating universities can jointly produce books, textbooks and teaching aids; university publications may appear in several languages (Melville et al. 2005, p. 90).

The practical side of such high-level professional co-operation has not yet been developed, although one can envision certain difficulties since according to the same authors, foreign language proficiency among Russian academics' remains limited. This has been the case ever since the times when Russian, the language of the most advanced part of the communist movement, was expected to be spread rapidly world-wide. That would be the official explanation of the limited ability to speak foreign languages in Russia. An alternative would be to argue that under the pretext that the entire world would soon be learning the Russian language and rendering other languages useless, the Soviet leadership for many decades systematically cut off its population's access to alternative sources of information and knowledge available in other languages. The full impact of that has still not been understood even among the Russian academics, many of whom continue to argue that Moscow State University and St. Petersburg State University are the world's second and third highest-ranking universities. The first being, as seen from Moscow, Sorbonne (!) (Fedotova 2003). Still it is perhaps not a mere coincidence that engaging in any collaborative intellectual activity is being directly related to nothing other than gaining access to European levels of income:

> To the more professionally competent and ambitious Russian academics this [the Bologna Process] allows significant improvement of their economic status (Melville et al. 2005, p. 97).

Earlier in this paper we already discussed the political dimension of the Bologna Process for Russia—an opportunity to establish herself once again as a superpower that divides and rules the world with one or two comparable powers. In addition to the political promise and great economic attractions described in the previous section, Melville and colleagues explain what cultural benefits would rise from the implementation of the Bologna Process.

In a manner similar to the early student exchange programmes within the European Community where major stress was laid on developing mutual understanding among European nations, if for nothing else than to avoid yet another Franco-German war, Melville and colleagues see certain benefits rising from exposing students to European cultural richness, simultaneously assuring Russia's own conservative public that the interests of its unique cultural identity will not be compromised:

> Maintaining national identity he [a student] can become a carrier of the European ideals of humanism, feel himself to be a citizen of a united Europe (ibid. p. 94).

Although the authors are looking for ways in which Russian universities could claim a share of the global higher education services markets immediately, without needing to spend many years reforming programmes and learning foreign languages, for example by serving the educational needs of Russian speaking neighbours, students at least are expected to learn other languages, too (ibid. p. 88). Such processes, however, always move in two directions as

> - a large number of Europeans receive an opportunity to learn Russian language, to familiarize with Russian culture and the pedagogical traditions of Russian higher education, that will be organically spread among foreign students and faculty that arrive in Russia on academic mobility programs (ibid. p. 81).

In the context of Central East European higher education reforms since the fall of state-socialism, Russia's position is most peculiar. While in its former East European satellite countries, as well as some of the parts of the former Soviet Union, the issue of overcoming Soviet influence has been addressed, at least to some extent, by discontinuing the grossest violations of intellectual integrity and the corruption of social sciences, Russian higher education has seen little of that. Here, *outstanding* nineteenth century Russian academic traditions have been argued to be paving the way for the glory of Soviet academic success, and the still further success of contemporary Russia (see e.g. Subetto and Chekmarev 2003). The Bologna Process has been argued for, because of its potential to take the message even further as, as a result if it:

> The value of Russian higher education diplomas [i.e. degrees] grows and these will become known to the entire world (Melville et al. 2005, p. 88).

Needless to say, higher education is once again expected to correct errors made throughout the decades in many areas—foreign and internal policy, economic as well as military:

> Many Europeans treat Russia watchfully, not viewing it as a stable and trustworthy partner. The complete entry of Russia to the Bologna Process may have a positive impact on the perception of Russia among the Europeans (ibid. p. 82).

As we have suggested elsewhere (Tomusk 2004a), the Bologna Process includes hardly any positive programmes for higher education itself. Here, the Russian Bologna group offers a couple of points that are expected to

make a positive impact on higher education. What is perhaps unique for the entire Bologna-movement, is the suggestion here that the introduction of new degrees would actually require the re-thinking of their educational meaning. So far it seems to have been the case for a large part of the Bologna Process membership that complying with the requirements has been far more important than making sense of them. Here, Melville and colleagues address the issue, though mentioning it is much easier than developing adequate structures and processes, not to mention funding these.

What is, however, even more interesting if not intriguing is the suggestion that introduction of the Master degree would allow Russian higher education institutions to be divided into research universities and undergraduate institutions, ending the artificially maintained *high level* of the entire sector, as

> It is not a secret that today many provincial higher education institutions cannot, for example in physics, offer more than what could be called the bachelor-level i.e. mass-scale basic professional preparation (ibid. p. 78).

This would perhaps be a step in right direction, although such divisions easily fail in massive political controversy since they lead to funding cuts for lower-ranking institutions, threatening their very existence and therefore mobilising political opposition among the inhabitants of small provincial towns where the poorest and lowest-quality institutions are located, and where people do not have the means to send their children to big metropolitan universities.

Another particularly interesting argument suggests that the implementation of the Bologna Process would allow Russian universities to fight the local educational bureaucracy. Universities, as the argument goes, could gain additional autonomy from the state bureaucracy by referring to the principles laid down in the Magna Charta of the European University. While this argument has a particular connotation in the Russian context where universities have fought for years against taxation authorities for the autonomy to use funds collected as tuition payments from the students, the issue also has a broader dimension. In order to create a federal Europe, the nation-state level should be weakened. Some of its powers should be devolved while others be concentrated in Brussels with a third group being handed over to the markets to take care of. Although regarding the latter, Europe has not been particularly successful. Even in higher education, its is more likely that choosing between the two evils—Brussels and the markets to look after higher education, Europe will choose the former, and that would be the end of Bologna, despite the intentions for the Process in Brussels have been clearly related to the desire to lead European universities to the marketplace. While Russian society is now being told that higher

education actually carries a price tag, although only for foreign students, for the French to reach even that stage would still require time.

4. OSTAP IBRAGIMOVICH, ANDREY YUREVICH, AND THE UNIVERSAL METROPOLIS OF ALL KNOWLEDGE

Reading the arguments Melville and colleagues present for the implementation of the Bologna Process in Russia, particularly its economic benefits originating from three main sources—tuition fees paid by foreign students; salaries paid by foreign universities to Russian faculty members; and investments forced on the Russian government in order to save its reputation while opening its universities to foreign students and academics on a large scale—is reminiscent of a piece of early Soviet literature written back in 1920s.

In January 1928, Ilya Ilf and Evgeny Petrov completed the manuscript of a novel that has served ever since as a guide to understanding Soviet life. The main characters of the novel 'Twelve Chairs' are Ippolit Matveevich Vorobyaninov (a.k.a. Kisa), a nobleman who has lost both his status and property in the event known in Soviet history as the Great Socialist October Revolution, and one Ostap Ibragimovich Bender (a.k.a. the Great Combinator), a petty criminal who with a great skill manages hundreds of legal methods of freeing fellow citizens from their property. In this novel, Ostap Bender and Ippolit Matveevich travel throughout Soviet Russia in a search of twelve antique chairs from the household of Klavdia Ivanovna, Ippolit Matveevich's mother in law, in one of which she had hidden the family diamonds. The trip takes both the heroes and the reader through an endless account of the dysfunctions of the emerging Soviet bureaucracy and introduces us to fools of all possible strains and varieties, whom the Great Combinator adeptly milks to fund his own and Kisa's adventures. In order to understand the argumentation that Melville and colleagues apply in their effort to convince the Russian higher education community in the (post)-Soviet context of the benefits of the Bologna Process, we should take a look at the events taking place in the chess club of the Horse Breeding Administration of Vasyuki, a small town on Volga, on June 22, 1927. The arguments presented by Andrey Yurevich Melville closely resemble the way Ostap Ibragimovich fundraises in Vasyuki.

Arriving in Vasyuki, Bender had not eaten for a full day—a hardship that adds particular eloquence to his speech. He introduces himself to the one-eyed chairman of the chess club as a grandmaster on his way from a tournament in Carlsbad to Kazan. To raise 30 badly-needed rubles he offers

a paid lecture on the latest in chess thinking and a simultaneous match on 160 boards, although he has played chess only once in his life and his knowledge of chess thinking is limited to a few old anecdotes on Emanuel Lasker, Jose Raoul Capablanca and some other famous chess stars of his day.

In order to gain access to the funds of the chess club, an additional 20 rubles, Bender offers to organise an international chess tournament in Vasyuki, the participation in which of all his famous friends is already guaranteed. This event is not only expected to turn a town of 8,000 inhabitants into the capital of the Soviet Union; to be called New Moscow with Moscow being renamed to Old Vasyuki. It also carries the potential of turning Vasyuki into the chess centre of the entire universe:

> The thought of chess that turns a provincial town into the capital of the planet will be transformed into an applied science, out of which will grow a method of interplanetary communication. Messages will go from Vasyuki to Mars, Jupiter and Neptune. … And then who knows, perhaps in eight years from now, in Vasyuki for the first time in world history an interplanetary chess congress will take place (Ilf, Petrov 1928/2003, p. 163).

The people of Vasyuki have their doubts. It feels intuitively that such a thing could not be done without very significant funding. Like the academic entrepreneurs of our own era, comrade Bender assures them that investment is not an issue. What is needed is but a few rubles to deliver the first telegrams to his friends (twenty rubles would be sufficient for this), after that money will flood the town and its chess club:

> Vasyukivites will not pay money. They will receive it! It is extremely easy. Together with the greatest grand masters, fans from all over the world will come to the tournament. Hundreds of thousands of people, rich, well-endowed people will try to reach Vasyuki (ibid. p. 161).

And again:

> I repeat, everything depends on your own initiative. I will take care of the organisational matters. No material expenses, apart from the consideration of the telegrams (ibid. p. 163).

Massive chess tourism would give an unheard of boost to infrastructural development—port, railway, airport, chess-palaces and hotels will all be erected within a matter of months. Hypnotised by Bender's hunger-induced visions the chess activists of Vasyuki see the miraculous transformation of their miserable town before their eyes:

> Marble stairs descended into blue Volga. On the river stood ocean liners. Cable cars lifted to the city the mug-faced foreigners and chess ladies, Australian devotees to the Indian defence, Hindus wearing white turbans, adherents of the Spanish style, Germans, French, New-Zealanders, inhabitants of the Amazonian delta and those envying the Vasyukivites – Moscovites, Leningradians, Kievians, Siberians and Odessans (ibid. p. 162).

Almost eighty years later the Russian Bologna expert group suggests a similar boost to Russian higher education to be released by means of implementing the Bologna Process. Russians will not need to pay, the argument goes, they will receive billions of dollars gladly contributed by foreign students and universities alike. Ostap Bender at least promised a great show—all the famous chess players gathering in Vasyuki. The Russian Bologna expert group does not even offer that. What the students from all over the world are expected to pay for are university degrees enjoying full European and international recognition awarded by Russian universities. That may work for a while, although one has to be aware that milling out diplomas with impunity cannot last for too long. An obvious threat for Europe is that having members with such intentions in the Club compromises the reputation of European higher education in its entirety, if what is foreseen in the Process as such is developed.

Perhaps one could also learn from the end of the Vasyukivites' short-lived chess-dream. Having lost to all thirty of the chess amateurs who had gathered to enter the simultaneous match, the Great Combinator and Kisa escape into the darkness enveloping the Volga, vanishing along with the beautiful dream of the chess capital of the universe. Whether the Bologna Process will follow the same way, remains to be seen. Ostap Bender's last words to the chess amateurs of Vasyuki, delivered from an escaping boat were:

> Good bye, one-eyed amateurs. I am afraid that Vasyuki will after all not become the centre of the universe. I do not believe that chess masters will come to the fools like you, even if I would to ask them to. Good-bye lovers of mighty chess experiences. Greetings to the 'Club of Four Knights' (ibid. p. 167).

Five years from now, how much will Russia remember of the Bologna Process, of one of the most successful days in the history of its higher education—that of signing the Bologna Declaration in September 2003—we do not know yet, neither do we know what the new great projects will be in which the Great Combinators of Russian higher education and politics will engage by that time.

5. CONCLUSION

Pizza is a poor man's meal, made of all the leftovers to be found in the kitchen, and so it seems is the Bologna Process. It is a single program made responsible for resolving all the problems faced by European higher education, perhaps for the reason that no supra-national capacity exists to address different issues through different programs and co-ordinate between them. And while there are common European concerns, each of the countries have their own problems that sometimes coincide with the European ones, and sometimes not. As a result, prospects that anybody will be satisfied with the meal one is expected to accept with a thankful attitude from the Great Commission remain bleak.

But the Bologna Process is not only an educational project, it even appears that education is the least important thing about it. Instead, it is concerns saving European economics, serving the interests of particular political groups and agendas, and fostering cultural understanding between nations. But it includes surprisingly little knowledge for a growing knowledge society. Almost everybody involved seems to be suggesting that we have no problem with knowledge in Europe, although this may not be the case. Why otherwise would Americans and the Russians have wanted to learn at German universities in the nineteenth century without the European Commission and mobility programs? Perhaps there was something there that has been lost since, although its may be available somewhere else, where everybody seems to be going nowadays. The problem with the Bologna Process is that it focuses on selling the already existing and not on creating anything new.

The Process becomes even more complicated when one looks at it more broadly than as the European Union's higher education policy. For some countries the guiding agenda is to join as many European schemes and initiatives as possible in the expectation of eventually winning the grand prize — full EU membership. This, however, is not the case with Russia. It is obvious that Russia will never become a part of the European Union. It needs the Process for different reasons. Joining the Bologna Process has allowed, after many years of decline, people to talk again about the success of Russian higher education and its politics in the international context. It has also allowed, largely for the purposes of internal political mobilisation, people to argue for Russia's continued importance as a world-superpower, a term repeatedly used in Russia's descriptions of herself. For the academic community it is the emblem of hope for economic improvement, despite the thought occurring that this dream will be frustrated fairly soon. For the public the message is that even if the Russian economy continues its unenviable record of failings, an internationally recognised degree from a

Russian university would eventually allow escape from the country. Finally, for the emerging Bologna élite in Russia, as in every signatory country of the Bologna Declaration, travelling from one meeting to the next and then spreading all the Bologna news at home offers a degree of excitement as well as empowerment, if not power. It looks like a quadruple-win situation, albeit that what is still missing is the reform of Russian higher education since the fall of state-socialism.

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