

# The Bologna Process in Slovenia

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## *Introduction*

In the beginning of the 1990s, significant changes in the political, economic and social structures happened in South-Eastern Europe. The Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia was replaced by many smaller states as a result of bloody conflicts which had serious consequences on the development of the region. Among these countries, Slovenia stood closest to the EU. As the armed conflict lasted only for a short time, Slovenia could start the integration process earlier which meant the break up with the Balkan past. For the country of 20,273 square kilometres and ca. two million inhabitants which had just got away from its former economic linkages, it was of utmost importance to build broader relationships with the EU and its Member States. Therefore, accession process following the association agreement adopted in 1996 became a priority on the political agenda. Nonetheless, the European commitment was accompanied by strong protection of national interests which enabled Slovenia to join the EU in May 2004 under favourable conditions.

In parallel with the European integration process, Slovenia was forming its separate higher education system, which the European higher education reform processes - called Bologna process after the Bologna Declaration of 1999 - affected in a growing extent. Nevertheless, the higher education reform process had already started in the 1980s which was partly initiated by the higher education institutions and partly by the ministry. The reforms became necessary as a consequence of changes in the social and economic environment, in which the higher education system should have prepared itself for the new challenges. Among others, quality issues

related to increasing number of students in higher education got on the surface in the competition with US system which allured more and more European and Asian students and researchers. Furthermore growing attention was paid to the role of higher education in increasing economic competitiveness in which aspect that time the European Community lagged behind the USA and Japan. This was one of the reasons why strengthened cooperation among and harmonization of European higher education systems had been fostered in the framework of the European integration. It was thought that reform and harmonization of higher education systems, increasing mobility of students, professors and researchers and the recognition of qualifications at European level would smooth the way for optimal use of European labour force and knowledge.

Thanks to this, European mobility programmes (i.e. Socrates/Erasmus) had been launched along with the establishment of the framework for mutual recognition of qualifications which resulted in the adoption of the Lisbon Convention in 1997. Furthermore, the credit transfer system and the diploma supplement had been formulated in order to foster mobility but the European wide exchange of views and experiences on quality assurance can be also mentioned as important steps. In 1998 four education ministers of the EU from France, Italy, United Kingdom and Germany signed the Sorbonne Declaration in which they reaffirmed the importance of the above mentioned goals and they agreed on the foundation of a European higher education area. In 1999 many other countries joined this initiative in the frame of the Bologna Declaration which soon transcended the EU's borders. Therefore it is important to note that the Bologna process is not exclusively connected to the EU, even though it plays an important role in its promotion.

It is also to be noted that heads of higher education institutions joined the process as well, which could provide a wider legitimacy to these reforms. Namely, higher education institutions had also launched a cooperation process by the Magna Charta Universitatum

in 1988 in which they confirmed their common values on higher education like institutional autonomy and the freedom of education and research which also meant a distinction from the central governments. This increased the significance of that the different stakeholders stand together for the goals of the Bologna process. Since the sign of the Bologna Declaration more than a decade has passed through which enormous reforms have been carried out. Many steps were taken in order to establish the European Higher Education Area. However, this doesn't mean that these actors represent a common standpoint since there are many fields where their interests confront. In the light of this, achievements in the Bologna process shall be examined and evaluated by considering views of all these actors. Furthermore, traditions and characteristics of the higher education systems shall be taken into account – in this case, the heritage of the Yugoslav higher education – which to a wide extent determine the way of the implementation of the Bologna process. In this paper, I take an attempt to introduce the Slovenian case in this way.

### *Antecedent of the Bologna process*

Slovenia as it was formerly part of Yugoslavia inherited many characteristics of its higher education system. The disintegration of the federal state had seriously affected the direction of the Slovenian higher education reform. Beyond the change of borders, economic transformation, globalization and the European integration process can be mentioned as main motivating factors of the reforms. In Yugoslavia, though the member states had the authority on higher education policy, their systems showed uniformity from various points of view. Among others, the fragmented institutional structure of the universities should be highlighted that was handled in very different ways in the new states after the disintegration of

Yugoslav federal state. The university with fragmented structure means a loose association of faculties, professional colleges and art academies having a wide range of autonomy within which the university level represents only weak competences. The important decisions were made by the heads of the subunits (Clark, Neave 1992, 813). As a consequence, there was no opportunity to form a university-level development strategy and there was a lack of communication among the subunits of the university (Haug, Tauch 2001, 59-60) and the financial resources could not be efficiently utilized. Next to universities, higher vocational schools and cadre training institutions worked but their role decreased significantly by the 1980s (Clark, Neave 1992, 813). Accordingly, universities had become the main actors of the system, and their social and economic role had further strengthened on the ground of their research activities.

Study programmes covered both the theoretical university studies and the professional practice-oriented studies. Students could choose professional trainings of 2-3 years as well as studies of minimum 4-5 years ending with university-level degree. Nevertheless the latter type of studies lasted usually 1 or 2 years longer and drop-out rates were relatively high. The accomplishment of the first university studies could be followed by either specialized studies of 1-2 years or the 2-year long master studies (*magisterium*). Doctoral studies represented the highest level of education that needed in general 3-5 years (*ibid.*, 815).

The change of regime and the disruption of Yugoslavia had serious consequences on the higher education of the newly independent state of Slovenia. On the one hand, it had become necessary to expand the institutional system as the country had only two universities – the University of Ljubljana (*Univerza v Ljubljani*) and the University of Maribor (*Univerza v Mariboru*). On the other hand, a new legislative framework corresponding to the new economic, social and political conditions should have been established. The

first Slovenian act on higher education had been adopted in 1993 which was later modified in 1999 on the basis of evaluation of experiences. In compliance with the act, only the universities and higher education institutions independent from universities are legal entities so it has unified legally the universities' structures. Furthermore, it has regulated the relation of the universities and the central government and has provided decision-making competences to the higher education institutions regarding their internal institutional issues. The universities were legally prescribed to adopt a new university statute. However, these measures and those took later could not lead to the full unification of university structure. For instance in the biggest universities of Slovenia in Ljubljana and Maribor, the faculties still enjoy broad range of autonomy and freedom of action, and understand and implement the decisions of the university senate in very different ways – as found by the EUA evaluation reports (University of Maribor, EUA Evaluation Report 2004, University of Ljubljana, EUA Evaluation Report 2007). Similar issues appear in the case of the University of Primorska which despite of its late establishment in 2003 has similar decentralized (or asymmetrically centralized) institutional structure (University of Primorska, EUA Evaluation Report 2010).

Beyond the reform of university structure, the new act also enabled the establishment of private institutions independent from universities. Specific attention was paid to the development of higher vocational and technical training on which a separate act was adopted in 1996. As a result of these advancements, the institutional and material preconditions for higher education have been broadened (Master Plan for Higher Education 2002, 1). Accordingly, the following types of institutions are functioning in Slovenia currently: university (*univerza*), faculty (*fakulteta*), art academy (*umetniška akademija*) and higher professional school (*visoka strokovna šola*). Since the late 1990s Slovenia experienced a significant wave of founding institutions. The third public university

has been established in Primorska (*Univerza Primorskem*), as well as a private institution in Nova Gorica (*Univerza v Novi Gorici*). Furthermore, there was an increase in the number of small scale higher education institutions mainly providing vocational training which counteracted the great geographic centralization of the Slovenian higher education system (ibid.). This was also necessary in order to increase participation in higher education. From this point of view, the system seems to be successful as the number of those involved in higher education has been tripled (Bologna National Report 2004-2005, 10).

In 1995 and 1996 study structure has been reformed as well, which resulted in the restructuring of study cycles (establishment of undergraduate study and post-graduate study) and ended the former shorter, 1-2 year long professional programmes and introduced instead of them 3- and 4-year long professionally-oriented undergraduate study next to first-cycle academic university study. The latter also held on to last 4 years and gave university degree. The act defined three different qualifications at post-graduate level:

- specialist (*specializacija*): qualification offered after accomplishing 1 or 2-year long post-graduate study;
- master degree (*magisterij*): 2-year long study which can be followed by doctoral study;
- doctoral degree (*doktorat znanosti*): 4-year study.

From the end of 1990s, the Act on Higher Education did not restrict the participation in doctoral studies to those finishing successfully their master studies so the two study cycles could not be divided so clearly. In order to enable future reforms and formulate higher education policy, the act foresaw the establishment of more puffer organizations which since then supports the communication and exchange of views among higher education institutions and central government. The most important advisory body is the Council for Higher Education (*Svet za visoko šolstvo*) functioning since 1994

whose twelve members is appointed by the Government for four years. Members shall represent the scientific fields, arts and different professions. Accordingly, six members are nominated from professors and academics proposed by the institutions. Furthermore, rectors of universities and the head of the Slovenian Academy of Science and Arts (*Slovenska akademija znanosti i umetnosti*) take place in the Council. The body has the following tasks among others:

- to professionally prepare in cooperation with higher education institutions and the ministry the future national higher education reform programme;
- to approve education, research and artistic programmes;
- to define the criteria of assessment of study programmes, taking into account international requirement of comparability and the length of studies;
- to determine the conditions of transfers between study programmes; and
- to examine the intention of founding new higher education institutions and introduction of new study programmes, etc.

The Council with some changes in its function and membership has been taking the responsibilities mentioned above till now. Beyond the Council for Higher Education, based on the initiative of the Rectors' Conference the Quality Assessment Commission (*Komisija za kvaliteta visokega šolstva*) has been established in 1996 which consists of the representatives of different fields of professions and sciences. It pursued the regular evaluation of higher education institutions and the monitoring of their activities in line with the criteria prescribed by the Council for Higher Education and reported about the results to the higher education institutions, the Council for Higher Education and the Scientific and Technological Council (*Svet za znanost in tehnologijo*) (Higher Education Act [Amendments 1999] Art. 80).

Reforms related to the Bologna process have been taken place after the end of the 1990s. Credit system was introduced in 1998 in case of post-graduate studies. Furthermore, the preparation of diploma supplement started. The European Credit Transfer and Accreditation System (ECTS) served as a basis for the credit system, however, as a consequence of various practices used by higher education institutions, no unified system could be elaborated (Sziójártó 2006, 136). The processes started in 1990s which on the one hand led to the self-standing Slovenian higher education and supported the accommodation to European and international trends on the other hand, were not finished by the end of decade. The Slovenian higher education system is still in the process of continuous reform motivated partly by the Bologna process which is an important but very controversial factor at the same time.

### *Implementation of the Bologna process*

#### Establishment of legal and institutional framework

In the 1990s, legal and institutional framework of the self-standing Slovenian higher education system has been mainly created. Nevertheless, in 1999 new wave of reforms has started in Europe, to which Slovenia joint as well. The signature of the Bologna Declaration was one of the first steps taken that was followed by further reforms. Among others, the study cycles and in this context, the labour market adequacy of new qualifications as well as quality assurance, appropriate modification of credit system and the consequences of internationalization and the tasks accompanying it needed to be reconsidered. A successful planning and implementation demanded the possible widest social participation, involving employers and students so the circle of actors in higher education reform broadened. In 2000 Quality Assessment Commission's



membership was complemented by representatives of students, and worked further on under the name of National Higher Education Quality Assessment Commission (*Nacionalna komisija za kvaliteta visokega šolstva*). The most important changes happened in 2004 when the Parliament adopted the amendment of the Act on Higher Education. The number of members of the Council for Higher Education has been raised to 15 by involving the representatives of the government, students and employers. In addition, its task changed according to the following:

- in cooperation with higher-education institutions and the ministry responsible for higher education, prepare professional starting points for the design of the national programme of higher education,
- advise the Government of the Republic of Slovenia in the preparation and adoption of higher-education legislation,
- advise the Government of the Republic of Slovenia in the planning of the development of higher education,
- determine the criteria for accreditation and re-accreditation of higher-education institutions and study programmes,
- determine the criteria for the design and accreditation of joint study programmes, wherein it shall apply the principles on establishing a European higher education space and other international principles and recommendations for the design of such programmes,
- determine the criteria for credit assessment of study programmes under ECTS and define minimum proportion of selection in study programmes,
- determine criteria for transfers between study programmes,
- determine criteria for recognising knowledge and skills acquired prior to enrolment in the programme,
- provide professional opinions on compliance with conditions for the establishment or transformation of a higher-education institution,

- give consent for study programmes,
- give repeat consent for study programmes at least every seven years, wherein it shall primarily respect the findings from self-evaluation and external evaluation reports,
- give opinions regarding the criteria of higher-education institutions for appointment to titles of higher-education teachers and scientific workers,
- issue to independent higher-education institutions consent to the appointment to titles of higher-education teachers, scientific staff and higher-education staff,
- cooperate with foreign accreditation institutions and their experts. (Higher Education Act (Zvis) 2004, Art. 49)

The Council for Higher Education can furthermore initiate the set up of expert committees for promoting accreditation and other activities. Later, according to a decision of the Constitutional Court in 2008, the professional, administrative and technical tasks and duties were overtaken by the Secretariat of the Council (National Bologna Report 2007-2009, 2). In 2004 the amended Act on Higher Education ordered the introduction of the Bologna three-cycle education system, the adaptation of the credit system to ECTS as well as the reorganization of puffer organizations. The ministry had been also restructured. The Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Technology (*Ministrstvo za visoko šolstvo in tehnologijo*) took the tasks of the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport in the field of higher education in 2004 (Bologna National Report 2004-2005, 1). In addition two other acts of 2004 are to be mentioned: the Act on Recognition and Assessment of Education and the Act on Higher Vocational Training.

It highlights the significance of quality assurance and accreditation that the act furthermore prescribed the establishment of a national agency by 31 December 2005. In the Bergen Report, it was called Council for Evaluation of Higher Education. This Coun-

cil would have replaced the National Higher Education Quality Assessment Commission. Accordingly, the Council for Evaluation of Higher Education would have carried out the external evaluation of the institutions and programmes, including post-secondary vocational training programmes (ibid., 2). However, this national agency had been not established finally. Instead, in compliance with the amended Act on Higher Education of 2006, the Agency of Higher Education (*Urad RS za visoko šolstvo*) has been established within the Ministry in order to provide professional, administrative and organizational promotion to the work of the Council for Higher Education which has become also responsible for external evaluation. The Council for Higher Education got further support from the Council for Science and Technology, while the Council for Student Affairs deals with the affairs of students. The supervision of the Bologna process is carried out by the National Bologna Promoters' Group set up in 2004, and at national level by an expert group established in 2003.

Before going to details of the evaluation of the elements of the Bologna reforms, it is worth briefly writing about the content of the Master Plan for Higher Education adopted in 2002. The Master Plan analyses in detail the most important steps should be taken in the field of higher education. The document put emphasis on the issue of adapting the Slovene higher education system to the international circumstances. The internationalization of higher education, the increase of competition among institutions – both at international and national level – provides many opportunities but appears also as challenge for the Slovene higher education. The Slovene higher education institutions – because of the small size of the country and the decreasing ratio of the population who usually participate in higher education<sup>1</sup> - shall on the long run attract also in-

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<sup>1</sup> Note: According to the draft National Higher Education Plan 2011-2020: "By 2020, the number of nineteen year-olds, i.e. the generation which usually enrolls in higher education institutions, will decrease by 20% compared to 2010. (p. 4.), [http://www.mvzt.gov.si/fileadmin/mvzt.gov.si/page-uploads/pdf/odnosi\\_z\\_javnostmi/14.10.\\_NPVS.pdf](http://www.mvzt.gov.si/fileadmin/mvzt.gov.si/page-uploads/pdf/odnosi_z_javnostmi/14.10._NPVS.pdf), accessed 29/05/2011.

ternational students as well in order to be able to sustain their activities. Taking into account the other side of the coin, the openness of the system could provide better opportunities for Slovenes, as the Slovenian higher education institutions won't be able to offer study programmes in all professional fields in a cost efficient way. In this light, the targets of the Bologna process and the participation in international programmes become very important. Nevertheless, these aspects do not always show up (Master Plan for Higher Education 2002).

### Introduction of the three study cycles

As described above, the structure of studies in Slovenia differed from the Bologna three-cycle study from several aspects. On the one hand, similarly to other European countries the basic university study programmes were longer, lasted usually for at least 4-5 years and their curricula focused on the transfer of a broad scale of theoretical knowledge. These study programmes often were unable to follow the changes in the labour market and the economy. Concerning the post-graduate level, the master and doctoral studies did not build on each other so closely as in the Bologna system. The Master studies – unlike general trends – were not always a prerequisite for doctoral studies. It was rather a possible intermediate stage between the university degree and attainment of doctorate. The reform of the study structure was prepared by the amendments of the Act in 2004. Nonetheless, the implementation took several years. It was the first academic year in 2009/10 when students could only enrol in Bologna programmes (National Bologna Report 2007-2009, 4.) The study cycles have been structured in the following way:

1. *First cycle (bachelor)*: Study programmes in this cycle can be either professionally oriented or academic studies lasting for at least 3 or 4 years and in accordance with Bologna system provides an opportunity to achieve 180 or 240 ECTS. Their accomplishment is awarded by either university degree (*diplomirani...[UN]*), or professional degree (*diplomirani...[VS]*).
2. *Second cycle (master)*: The 1-2 year long master study has become an independent study cycle – in converse to the former system – which is also a requirement for being accepted into a doctoral programme. Students can gain 60 or 120 ECTS in this cycle and at the end of their studies get a Master degree (*magister*). However, in some specific fields 5-year long studies (for 300 credits) are still existent. These are the so called long non-structured master studies.
3. *Third cycle (doctoral study)*: to be eligible for a three-year long (180 ECTS), students firstly have to finish either their master studies or a 5-year long basic studies (for 300 ECTS). Students finishing a 4-year long bachelor study may also apply for doctoral studies if they have documented research results. The name of the doctoral title (*Doktor znanosti*) did not change. Doctoral studies shall include courses in the value of at least 60 credits providing basic knowledge to doctoral students needed for their research work but these programmes mainly based on the cooperation and dialogue of the mentor and the student.

The slow introduction of the three cycles reflected the cautiousness and scepticism of the actors of the Slovenian higher education system, particularly faculties defending their position and status from any interference. (Zgaga, Miklavič 2011, 20) The Bologna National Report in 2003 expressed their concerns that the introduction of the new structure without a preliminary examination and evaluation may have had negative effects (Implementation of the Bologna Declaration. 2003, 1). Not surprisingly, only three faculties accred-

ited Bologna-type study programmes in 2005 (Bologna National Report 2004-2005, 2). Conversely, the Bologna National Report published in the end of 2006 has already reported about 162 study programmes from which 80 per cent is the restructured form of formerly existing programmes. At the same time, only 95 Bologna-type study programmes started in 2006 which only accounted for ca. 22 per cent of all study programmes (Bologna National Report 2005-2007, 7). In the academic year 2008/9 more than half of the undergraduate and one third of the post-graduate programmes have been organized according to the new structures (National Bologna Report 2007-2009, 4). The University of Ljubljana in its Self-Evaluation Report put great emphasis on the reform of study structure. It foresaw the introduction of the bachelor studies by 2007, then secondly of the Master studies by 2008 and last but not least of the new doctoral studies by 2009 (Self-evaluation report of the University of Ljubljana 2007). A similar plan was described by the University of Maribor which defined 2009 as a deadline for restructuring. At the University of Maribor, the Bologna structure mainly characterized the professionally oriented bachelor study programmes (Undergraduate study at the University of Maribor 2007) and some faculties (i.e. Faculty of Agriculture and the one of Logistics) launched new master and doctoral programmes (Postgraduate study at University of Maribor 2007). The University of Primorska also initiated the accreditation of the new programmes in 2005 and predicted the finalization by 2008 (Programme restructuring 2007). Nevertheless, turning back to the reform process at the University of Ljubljana, it is to mention that there was no unified implementation strategy so the subunits of the universities did not restructure their programmes in the same way that could cause some confusion for outsiders (University of Ljubljana, EUA Evaluation Report 2007).

Difficulties in introducing the new study structure was also related to the political approach from 2004 which simply made paral-

rels between the former and Bologna structures by making former diploma correspondent with the second-cycle degree and according to which the development of the structure equalled to upgrading curricula. (Zgaga, Miklavič 2011, 20)

The development of national qualification framework (NQF) is stipulated by the Higher Education Act. This process started by the drafting of the Decree on the Introduction and Use of the Classification System of Education and Training (KLASIUS) by representatives of the Ministry of Education and Sport, the Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Technology and the Statistical Office. The Decree adopted in 2006 is used as the compulsory national standards. In 2008 the ENIC/NARIC Centre joint also international projects in order to promote the formation of NQFs. In 2008 the Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Technology published a tender within so called targeted research programmes scheme Slovenia's Competitiveness 2006-13 for the development of NQF for higher education (Bologna National Report 2007-2009) but the process has not finished yet and so has become an element of the recent higher education master plan.

### ECTS and the Diploma Supplement

The ECTS and the diploma supplement are two elements of the Bologna process which play important role in fostering mobility and the set up of conditions for the mutual recognition of qualifications. With regard to the fact that Slovenia is a small country and is a member of the European Union since May 2004, these aspects gain more significance. The ECTS besides playing an important role in assessing the education achievements and the formulation of life-long learning system serves the promotion of international mobility which is an outstanding issue for the Slovene higher education. The Council for Higher Education decided to eliminate differ-

ences in the use of credit system in 2003 and worked out the regulatory framework in accordance with international standards. (Sziójártó 2006) The system introduced in 2004 enabled both the transfer and accumulation of credits and obligated its use for all study cycles (Eurydice 2007, 286). Nevertheless, the credits attained by the courses did not always reflect the real workload but simply the number of lessons. Therefore further modifications were still necessary. The last Bologna National Report 2007-2009 states that the use of ECTS is linked to learning outcomes in cases of all study programmes. The appropriate implementation of the ECTS was supported by a public tender (p. 27).

The higher education institutions have issued diploma supplements since the academic year 2000/01. The regulation adopted in 2004 developed this system by further prescribing that the Diploma Supplement shall be provided for all study programmes in Slovenian and another official language of the EU for free of charge. The content of the Diploma Supplement is determined by the minister for higher education on basis of the proposal of the Council for Higher Education. At the beginning the Ministry promoted the issuance of the diploma supplement by organizing seminars and workshops and financial contribution as well. Besides the Ministry, Bologna Supporter Group did a lot in order to enable the introduction of diploma supplement. (Eurydice 2007, 286.) Since then diploma supplement has become a useful instrument of recognition procedure as well.

### Recognition of qualifications

Slovenia signed Lisbon Convention among the first countries in 1997 which was then ratified and got into force in 1999. At the beginning, the recognition process was regulated by the Act on the Recognition of Certificates of Foreign Schools which was super-



seded by the Act on the Recognition and Assessment of Education in January 2005. Both measures remitted the recognition of higher education qualifications to higher education institutions. The national assembly amended to some extent the act and excluded the Ministry from the academic recognition procedure but authorized the latter to make decisions on professional recognition cases. Furthermore the act obligated the higher education institutions to appoint a contact person who would be responsible for such issues. (Bologna National Report 2004-2005, 6) Within the Ministry, Education Recognition Division manages the tasks related to professional recognition and functions as an information centre for ENIC (*European Network of Information Centres*) system. (Bologna National Report 2005-2007, 17) The Division is responsible for both national and international duties and tasks:

- It collects and provides adequate, reliable and authentic information on national and foreign education systems, admission requirements, qualifications awarded in Slovenia in other countries, legislation on recognition, recognition procedure, information on accredited institutions, the Lisbon Recognition Convention etc. to all interested parties;
- In accordance with the Recognition and Assessment of Education Act the Slovenian ENIC is a competent authority for professional recognition, assessment of the Slovenian and foreign qualifications (citizens, higher education institutions, etc);
- ENIC provides basic information on the professional recognition of the regulated professions (EU Directives);
- It contributes to higher education policy development and legislation, changes of the education system at national level;
- It organises or actively participates at national information seminars and workshops, prepares publications, information and other materials on education system, recognition, and participates in publications, surveys, comparative studies and other research activities;

- It promotes the Lisbon Recognition Convention, ENIC and NARIC Networks;
- It cooperates with different organisations/institutions in the field of recognition and it participates in the elaboration of publications, information and other materials on the home education system and participates in publications, surveys, comparative studies and other research activities undertaken by the European Commission, Council of Europe, UNESCO and other international organisations. (Bologna National Report 2007-2009, 25-26)

For ensuring appropriate understanding, implementation and performing of recognition procedures at educational institutions seven national information seminars and workshops were organised which proved to be very useful in a view of better communication with institutions, exchange of good practices and the promotion of Diploma Supplement, stipulations of the Lisbon Recognition Convention and its Supplementary Documents (*ibid.*, 26).

### Mobility and internationalization

As mentioned earlier, it is very important for Slovenia to participate in international cooperation and mobility programmes. Slovenia firstly joined the EU Tempus programme and then expanded its involvement in mobility programmes like the Socrates/Erasmus, Leonardo da Vinci, etc. Since then student mobility has significantly increased. In the times of joining the Socrates programme, in the academic year of 1999/2000 only 170 students were involved while in 2005/06 already 879.<sup>2</sup> The most visited countries were Germany, Austria, Spain, Italy and France. Concerning the ratio of

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<sup>2</sup> Time series: Erasmus student mobility (number of outgoing students): 1987/88-2006/07, <http://ec.europa.eu/education/programmes/llp/erasmus/statisti/table1.pdf>, accessed 01/12/2011.

incoming and outgoing students, Slovenia was rather an exporting country at the beginning: in the academic year 2004/05, Slovenia has 742 outgoing students and 387 incoming students, while in 2009/2010 there were 1368 outgoing and 1237 incoming students.<sup>3</sup> In the frame of the Erasmus programme, mobility toward Central and Eastern Europe is marginal but this is balanced by the involvement in CEEPUS (*Central European Exchange Program for University Studies*) programme through which 400 students – approximately the same number of incoming and outgoing students – moved from one country to another each year. Beyond these, exchange of students is arranged by bi- and multilateral agreement among universities but these represent minor ratio in the whole student exchange. According to the Trends V Report, the ratio of incoming and outgoing students got balanced in 2007 (Crosier et al 2007, 44.) and since then this has not really changed.

What professors mobility concerns, 139 professors left and 154 arrived to Slovenia through the Socrates programme in the academic year 2004/05.<sup>4</sup> These numbers increased to 277 and 316 in 2009/10<sup>5</sup> and reflect the growing interest of foreign academics toward the country. This process can be partly the consequence of that the Slovene Government contributed to the development of university networks and relations from the resources of Structural Funds. (National Bologna Report 2005-2007, 23)

It marked the recognition of the significance of mobility that the Slovene Government established the Ad Futura – Scientific and Education Foundation in 2002 whose main responsibility is the financial and information promotion of international mobility. Tak-

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<sup>3</sup> Erasmus: student mobility 2004/2005: Total number of students by home and host country, <http://ec.europa.eu/education/programmes/llp/erasmus/statisti/table105.pdf>, accessed 01/12/2011. Outgoing and incoming Erasmus student mobility in 2009/2010, <http://ec.europa.eu/education/erasmus/doc/stat/0910/students.pdf>, accessed 10/06/2011.

<sup>4</sup> Erasmus teacher mobility 2004/2005: Number of teachers by home and host country, <http://ec.europa.eu/education/programmes/llp/erasmus/statisti/table305.pdf>, accessed 01/04/2007.

<sup>5</sup> Outgoing and incoming Erasmus staff mobility for teaching assignments in 2009/2010, <http://ec.europa.eu/education/programmes/llp/erasmus/statisti/table306.pdf>, accessed 10/06/2011.

ing into account the financial burden of mobility, the Slovene Government endeavours to promote it by loans and scholarships also available abroad (National Bologna Report 2004-2005: 7.) Next to governments, the higher education institutions themselves got more active in fostering international mobility – both in case of incoming and outgoing mobility. With their participation, the Centre for Mobility, European Education and Training Programmes has been established which has the task to carry out activities (set up of information web portals, publish brochures, etc.) in order to promote and intensify mobility. (National Bologna Report 2005-2007, 23) Furthermore, at national level special scholarships (e.g. company scholarships) and loans are offered by the Slovene Human Resource Development and Scholarship Fund. The Slovenian Government also set quota of subsidized accommodation in dormitories. Majority of grants and loans are portable in case of short-term mobility programmes. Concerning full programmes, scholarships are provided if that type of programmes are not available in Slovenia or it is more suitable to study abroad. International involvement of the Slovenian higher education has broadened in the frame of the Euro-Mediterranean region but the Western Balkans also belongs to the priority regions too. Relations to Asian countries started to develop as well. Provisions for transnational education have been strengthened by the amendment of the Higher Education Act in 2009 (National Bologna Report 2007-2009).

However, it is to note that level of mobility and internationalization of the Slovene higher education actors is still relatively low in comparison with EU averages and therefore, it is an important element of the current draft National Higher Education Plan 2011-2020 (Draft of National Higher Education Plan 2011-2020).

## Quality assurance

Quality assurance may be one of the priority areas of Bologna reforms in Slovenia. Since the 1990s it has been the Council for Higher Education responsible for determining its conditions (i.e. defining criteria, monitoring of results, etc.). At the same time, the task of evaluating quality is performed by higher education institutions. Since 2000 the National Higher Education Quality Assessment Commission consisting of representatives of higher education institutions and students has provided support to self-evaluation process. The Commission monitored and evaluated the efficiency and quality of research, teaching and artistic activities carried out by higher education institutions. In 2004 the quality assurance system was modified and restricted. It was an important change on the one hand that representatives of students and employers have been involved into the process. On the other hand, the law envisaged a regular external evaluation procedure and the establishment of new bodies (Agency for Higher Education, Evaluation Council). The National Higher Education Quality Assessment Commission also prepared the Criteria for monitoring, assessment and assurance of quality in the higher education institutions, study programmes, science and research, and in artistic and professional work in October 2004, taking into account Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG).

Despite these advancements, many plans have not been implemented: the new bodies have not been established so the most important tasks related to quality assurance and accreditation remained the competence of the Council for Higher. This was incorporated into the Act on Higher Education amended in 2006. The authority of the Council for Higher Education has broadened and got involved into the external evaluation of the higher education institutions and their study programmes as well. According to the

amended act, the Council as accreditation body performs independently the following tasks:

- determines the criteria for accreditation and re-accreditation of higher education institutions and study programmes,
- determines the criteria for the design and accreditation of joint study programmes, wherein it shall apply the principles on establishing a European higher education space and other international principles and recommendations for the design of such programmes,
- determines the criteria for credit assessment of study programmes under ECTS and define minimum proportion of selection in study programmes,
- determines the criteria for transfers between study programmes,
- determines the criteria for recognising knowledge and skills acquired prior to enrolment in the programme,
- co-operates with foreign accreditation institutions and their experts,
- provides professional opinions on compliance with conditions for the establishment or transformation of a higher education institution,
- gives consent for study programmes,
- co-operates with foreign accreditation institutions and their experts,
- at least every seven years gives renewed consent for study programmes, taking into account the findings of self-evaluations reports and external evaluations reports.

The Council also creates a Senate for evaluations that will set up and guide the external evaluations procedures. A special unit within the Ministry of Higher Education will provide administrative assistance to the Council. As evaluation body, the Council:

- monitors, assesses and assures the quality of higher education institutions and higher vocational colleges, their study programmes as well as research, artistic and professional work
- determines the criteria for monitoring, assessment and assurance of quality of higher education institutions and higher vocational colleges, study programmes and research, artistic and professional work,
- co-operates with higher education institutions and higher vocational colleges and stimulates self-evaluations,
- co-operates with foreign accreditation institutions or bodies,
- organises training of external evaluation commissions,
- publishes reports on individual external evaluations and analyses them, prepares and publishes annual national reports.

The Senate performs the following tasks during the evaluation procedure:

- collect and analyses the self-evaluation and external evaluation reports,
- prepare the professional basis and conduct the external evaluation procedure,
- nominate the member of the external evaluation expert committees,
- direct and report on the external evaluation procedure and initiate the start of the self-evaluation. (National Bologna Report 2005-2007)

At institutional level procedures for quality assurance system have been developed gradually. The annual self-evaluation reports of higher education institutions were prepared by the institutions' specialized committees, and then the National Higher Education Quality Assessment Commission collected and published them in the form of a national evaluation report. External evaluation was usually initiated by the higher education institutions and accomplished

by the European University Association (EUA). The international dimension of quality assurance was strengthened by that the National Commission participated in the ENQA and CEE Network. Nonetheless, there was a need to establish a regular external evaluation procedure which was partly regulated by the above mentioned law. (Bologna National Report 2005-2007, 14) Deficiencies related to external and internal evaluation were also underlined by the reports of the European University Association. In 2006 first four pilot institutional external evaluations were performed that, among others, also tested the compliance of external evaluation procedures and criteria with the ESG. In March 2007 on the final meeting stakeholders involved in external evaluation presented their opinions and views on the procedure and agreed in general with that the instruments and the way of external evaluation were appropriate. There were some suggestions, however, to improve the survey questionnaire and the site-visit protocol for further evaluations. The results of first external evaluations have been published in the Report on Building the External Evaluations System of Slovenian Higher Education Institutions. For external evaluations in 2008 a new survey questionnaire has been prepared and two training courses have been organised for all involved. Meanwhile the Council for Higher Education further analysed external evaluations of 2007 and 2008 and published the final report in the beginning of 2009. (Bologna National Report 2007-2009, 13)

Internal evaluation practices which belongs to the competence of higher education institutions went under also changes. A general problem related to internal quality of assessment was that activities within universities were not harmonized. Evaluation of quality was not reconciled at university and faculty level. It could also happen that there was no communication on this issue within the university which hampered to a wide extent to the formation of a unified system for quality assurance. (University of Maribor. EUA Evaluation Report, 2004; University of Ljubljana, EUA Evaluation Report



2007) The Council for Higher Education contributed to the development of such procedures. There are quality assessment commissions at each university that prepare annual self-evaluation reports which also include students' questionnaires. The system of self-evaluation and the methodology for self-evaluations was developed jointly by all stakeholders. The Council for Higher education collected self-evaluation reports of all higher education institutions which served as a basis for procedure of external evaluations. (Bologna National Report 2007-2009, 15)

In 2009 the quality assurance system has been upgraded by the amendment of the Higher Education Act. Further steps were necessary since according to the Decision of the Constitutional Court, issued in February 2008, the establishment of a new body for professional support to the Higher Education Council was required instead of the ministry's administration. (Tertiary Education in Slovenia, website of the Ministry of Education and Sport<sup>6</sup>) The Slovenian government established the Slovenian Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (SQAA) by its decision while the Council for Higher Education finished its work on 28 February 2010. The Agency performs professional and developmental tasks in the field of higher education and regulatory tasks for the purpose of external quality assurance (external evaluation and accreditation) in higher and tertiary vocational education. The Agency performs, as being within its original competence, tasks that are in the public interest to assure permanent, professional and independent support for quality assurance and quality enhancement in higher education. (Website of the SQAA<sup>7</sup>)

The Agency has three main bodies: the Council, Director and the Appeal Committee. The Agency Council consists of 11 members including representatives of students (2), the Rectors' Conference (Universities) (3), private higher education institutions (2), the

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<sup>6</sup> [http://www.mss.gov.si/en/areas\\_of\\_work/tertiary\\_education\\_in\\_slovenia/](http://www.mss.gov.si/en/areas_of_work/tertiary_education_in_slovenia/), accessed 10/06/2011.

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.nakvis.si/indexang.html>, accessed 10/06/2011.

Government (2), higher education institutions (1), employers (1) and unions in the field of higher education (1). The SQAA Council nominates the director and Appeal Committee, accepts the quality assurance acts, makes accreditation decisions, appoints experts, accepts internal quality standards of the SQAA, accepts the cross-boarder standards, follows the ESG and accepts Work Plan and Annual Report for the SQAA. (“Quality Assurance in Higher Education in Slovenia”. Presentation by Dr Mojca Novak (Director, SQAA) on the Accession Seminar on Higher Education for Slovenia by OECD/Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Technology, Ljubljana, 26th May 2011<sup>8</sup>) The Agency is foreseen to play an essential role in the development of the external quality assurance system in Slovenia.

### Role of students

The role of students in implementation of Bologna process has increased significantly all over Europe and became also more important. Along with European trends, level of representation of students developed also in Slovenia. Representatives of students had already sat in university senates, faculty councils and other leading bodies in the 1990s. All higher education institutions have their own students’ councils. Accordingly, students can express their views on questions concerning them. However, differences among institutions are existent and for instance the European University Association experienced surprisingly that no student participated in the work of the university senate and management at the University of Maribor between 2002 and 2004. (University of Maribor, EUA Evaluation Report 2004: 9.) Despite this, students broadened their activities. Currently, they showed serious interest and higher level

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<sup>8</sup> [http://www.mvzt.gov.si/fileadmin/mvzt.gov.si/pageuploads/doc/dokumenti\\_visokosolstvo/Dogodki/OECD\\_seminar/03-M-Novak\\_OECDseminar\\_26-5-2011.pdf](http://www.mvzt.gov.si/fileadmin/mvzt.gov.si/pageuploads/doc/dokumenti_visokosolstvo/Dogodki/OECD_seminar/03-M-Novak_OECDseminar_26-5-2011.pdf), accessed 10/06./2011.

of activity in the field of quality assurance. Among others the Slovenian Student Association organized the above mentioned conference on external quality-evaluation.

The number of bodies at national level in which students can voice their opinion and defend their interests increased significantly. In 2000 membership of the National Higher Education Quality Assessment Commission was expanded by student representatives so 3 of 24 members are now students. The Government established in 2001 a consultative body, the Council for Students Affairs which aims the coordinated handling of student affairs. In 2004 the membership of the Council for Higher Education was broadened which happened again in 2006. Currently, four student representatives take place in the Council of 20 members and one student sits in the senates with nine members mentioned earlier. (Bologna National Report 2005-2007)

### Social dimension and life-long learning

For several years more than 60% of the age cohort enrolls in tertiary education every year. Concerning the composition of students, the research project "The system of financing tertiary education, its equity and economic efficiency" demonstrated that undergraduate and especially graduate studies are less accessible for students from families with lower income and less educated parents. Education level of parents was identified as influential factor regarding reproduction of social inequalities by the census in 2002 as well. (Bologna National Report 2007-2009) In Slovenia higher education is free for full-time students while part-time students shall pay tuition fee. Financial burdens may be further decreased by scholarships provided by the state and employers. In 2005, approximately 22.5 per cent of the scholarship was financed by the government and 18.5 per cent by the employers. Special attention was paid to stu-

dents with multiple disadvantages who are eligible for further contributions. Furthermore, students are supported in the forms of food, accommodation, health care and travel allowances (Bologna National Report 2004-2005). Despite these contributions, many students work next their studies, according to a survey made in 2005 ca. two-thirds of them. Students got tax relief on these earnings. The Government planned the adoption of a new act on scholarships in 2007 in order to combining public and private resources (Bologna National Report 2005-2007, 22). Students receive direct and indirect state financial support. Scholarships are offered on the basis of social need (54%) and study results (30%). There are also other scholarships targeting specific social groups (i.e., disabled students, students from distant places). (Bologna National Report 2007-2009, 39) According to the Bologna National report 2007-2009, 4.1% of students have some special needs. Students with high disability in constant need of personal assistance have their aid's room rent subsidised. 7% of students are married and 8% of students have at least one child. These students are offered to have "child's bed" and/or "partner's bed" subsidised.

Parents receive financial assistance in the form of family allowances (taking into account the family income) and tax relief (a lump sum amount) on their annual income for children up to 26 years of age who are either students or unemployed. (Bologna National Report 2007-2009, 39) For fostering social dimension, the Government also tried to build better communication with the employers. Nonetheless, the higher education institutions weren't very much confident regarding social benefits of the new higher education system as more than half of them did not expect much change and the majority of them thought that they took all the necessary steps for this issue. (Crosier et al. 2007, 66)

Life-long learning is an outstanding issue from various aspects in the Slovene higher education. On the one hand it is in the interest of higher education institutions to involve more generations be-

cause of the shrinking number of students in the future while on the other hand fast changing demand in the economy and the labour market make it also necessary. In order to this, they try to develop cooperation with the employers to which there used to be examples in the field of technical studies and wish to develop the necessary study opportunities (i.e. e-learning, distance learning, flexible study structure, etc.). (Bologna National Report 2004-2005) It was also an important step in the establishment of the framework for life-long learning to create the possibility of recognition previously attained education, even non-formal ones. In 2004 Criteria of accreditation of higher education and study programmes were adopted which set up a framework for recognition of prior learning. According to the Criteria, higher education institutions recognise acquired knowledge, skills and competencies that fully or partly correspond to general or subject-specific competences and requirements, set by individual study programme. Knowledge, skills and competencies acquired by both formal, non-formal and informal learning are taken into account. Nonetheless, it is to be noted that this procedure is used limitedly, mainly in case of universities enrolling part-time students who are or were employed. (Bologna National Report 2007-2009, 28-29)

Lifelong learning is also supported by flexible organization of studies by using e-learning, distance learning, etc. which are available in more and more higher education institutions. Public tenders in 2007 and 2008 for development projects of higher education institutions supported, among others, also the introduction of Bologna study programmes. In the selection procedure it was an asset if the project application included elements to facilitate flexible learning paths, modern learning methods or adjustments for disabled students (*ibid.*, 29). A positive sign for lifelong learning is that Slovenia has the highest enrolment rate of adults aged 18-39 in tertiary education (15.5%).

Nonetheless, changes are still to come as social dimension and the promotion of groups underrepresented in higher education was mentioned as one of the main four pillars of the future higher education reform in the first draft of the new master plan (*ibid.*, 7) as well which may gain even greater significance if negative social impacts of the current economic and financial crisis will get stronger.

### Relation of higher education and research

In Slovenia similarly to other European countries research is strongly linked to higher education, particularly to universities. Namely, these institutions are authorized to organize doctoral study programmes and they employ approximately one-third of the researchers. 36 per cent of the research activities are pursued by higher education institutions. However, currently the business sector is also as much significant as the former since it gives job to the 34 per cent of the researchers and provides the highest contribution to R+D (67%). The government sector employs 30% of the researchers and has a share of 19.8 per cent covering R+D expenses. In GDP ratio, private funds provided 1% contribution while public funds did 0.58%. (Bologna National Report 2004-2005, 7; Bologna National Report 2005-2007, 21; Bologna National Report 2007-2009) Nonetheless, the share of research funding in the higher education sector is, in comparison with the national research sector among the lowest in the European Union (Draft of National Higher Education Programme 5).

Research activities are organized in the frame of research groups and research centres. According to the Bologna Report of 2005, there were 255 research groups at the University of Ljubljana and 86 at the University of Maribor. Beyond these, universities but especially these two function as research centres as well. In the non-university sector 47 research centres were established from

which 18 are handled as national research institute. Considerable research activity is carried out by the business sector as well.

Taking into account the strategic importance of research for the development and competitiveness of the country, research is also fostered by the support of young researchers. Yet since 1985 the Young Researchers Programme has been working successfully, thanks to which research community got much younger in the state and public sector. After the fashion of this programme, the Young Researchers for Economy Programme has been launched in 2001 in order to increase the number of people bearing Ph.D. in business sector. (Bologna National Report 2005-2007, 21) The Slovenian Research Agency (ARRS) is funding salary and material costs for young researcher for maximum of four and a half years while it also follows their career development. (Bologna National Report 2007-2009)

Despite these developments, the first proposal for the new master plan 2011-2020 includes several measures in order to further strengthen research capacity of the country. Among others it foresees stronger link between higher education institutions and research institutes, development of research infrastructure and enhanced support for research career, as well as more defined research profile for universities.

### *Conclusion*

Since Slovenia became an independent state, the country has gone through significant higher education reforms. The process started slowly but having a look on the current state of the implementation of the Bologna reforms, it could be said that more and more articulated steps have been taken and actions put in place since 2004. The Government, the higher education institutions and other relevant stakeholders got involved more actively in the frame of vari-

ous institutions and development projects which led to major changes in higher education, particularly in the field of quality assurance and recognition of qualifications and skills.

It also seems that former fragmented initiatives were replaced by more centralized and coordinated initiatives and regulations. Regular external evaluation has been introduced while internal evaluation procedures have been developed through exchange among higher education institutions. International dimension and mobility got also increased attention in this period. Despite these advancements, there is still a great need for further reforms as stated also in the last Bologna National Report and the draft Master plan 2011-2020. Among others, in order to enhance better employability of students, it is inevitable to strengthen cooperation and link between higher education institutions and economic sectors both regarding the content of study programmes and research activities. In many cases evidence-based changes haven't been possible since reforms introduced in this paper will have just led to tangible and measureable results and consequences nowadays. Therefore, it is very important to pay attention to collection and analyses of appropriate information and data which are the very bases of a new wave of reforms.

This aspect is extremely important since the new reform plans included in the first draft already mentioned in this paper foresees very comprehensive actions and goals related to four pillars (1. diversification of types and missions of higher education institutions and study programmes; 2. internationalisation; 3. quality, which is crucial for internationally comparable and recognised higher education, employability and mobility of graduates, both within Europe and worldwide; 4. social dimension, which will allow equitable access to higher education and conditions for completion of studies [draft National Higher Education Plan 2011-2020, 7]) which needs careful implementation and follow-up. As Slovenia is in the first phase of the realization of these reforms, proper bases of monitoring and evaluation need to be prepared as well.



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