The Bologna Process in Central and Eastern Europe: A Comparative View

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After the first decade of the Bologna process, the literature talks mainly about the extent to which the original objectives have been met. The literature also deals with the great amount of work still to be done to reach the initial targets (see Trends I-V). This paper takes a different stand. It will analyse the Bologna process as a process of political events in selected Central and Eastern European countries' higher education. The reason for this unusual view is simple. The Bologna process has a different meaning in Central and Eastern Europe than in the rest of the Continent. The Bologna process became an element of the economic, social and political change sometimes called the 'system change' (cf. Johnson 1996), or more regularly the 'transition' (Kozma, Polonyi 2004). Recent higher education reforms can only be understood, if they are put within the context of this long and painful political process. The Bologna process in Central and Eastern Europe is not only a higher education reform. It is part of this system change.

Since the Bologna process is part of the wider process of transformation, it has to be viewed as a political process. The relevant approach to the Bologna process in Central and Eastern Europe is the political science approach. This paper will analyse the agents as well as their interests and efforts in the course of events. The Bologna process will therefore be presented as the outcome of various actions and efforts in the higher education policy area of Central and Eastern Europe. The basis of this analysis is a series of case studies of higher education of selected countries of the region. The original studies reflected the Bologna process, where it succeeded and where it failed in the second part of the first decade of the 2000s (Kozma, Rébay 2008). Their follow-up versions can be

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found in the present volume. Most of the statements in this paper refer to those case studies and their findings. To analyse case studies for international comparison, one must consider the methodology of discourse and critical discourse analysis (see Roger 2011). Comparatists must not forget that most of their material is educational policy discourse. When we compare systems or policies (in education as well as in other areas of social and political life) we have to draw our attention to the following fact: Even statistical data – let alone narrative presentation of a system or policy – are social constructions created by those who are responsible for the particular system or policy. The 'trustworthiness' of the material is the question which the critical discourse analysis tries to answer (Hülsse 2003). Discourses do have their own rules independent of the field they present. They develop according to their own rules regardless of the field they present. This holds entirely true regarding our cases dealing with the Bologna process in Eastern Europe. Our cases are not government texts, rather they have been collected mostly at institutional level. They have been created by former institutional leaders and administrators. However, they are still discourses having been constructed by selected agents of the political game called the Bologna process. To apply critical discourse analysis is therefore crucial, when we use those case studies for international comparisons (See also Donati 1992).

The structure of this study is the following:

- First, it introduces the agents of the Bologna process in Central and Eastern Europe, that is, the international (supranational) and national organisations, the institutions and the professional and interest groups inside them.
- Second, this paper reveals the special (political) interests (both manifested and latent) of those agents in the Bologna process.
- Third, the non-government institutions and their special interests will be involved. Non-government higher education essen-

tially differs from government (state or national) higher education in Central and Eastern Europe. Dealing with their special problems, the weaknesses of the Bologna process can be demonstrated.

- The concluding part of the paper offers a summary of the differences between the Bologna process in the 'East' and the 'West'.

The agents of the Bologna process

Government organisations. The main agents of the Bologna process are, without question, the governments. The higher education reform in Central and Eastern Europe is a government initiated and controlled change; The Bologna process is a top-down reform (Alesi et al. 2005). To foster the Bologna process, some governments set up buffer organisations. In the course of events, however, the buffer organizations start independent lives and act according to their own interests and rations? The growing distances between the national governments and their buffer organisations give the impression that the Bologna process is managed by the buffer organisations. Here are some examples: The Ministry for Education and Science of Ukraine set up a so-called national team to follow-up the Bologna process. A committee called 'Joining the European Higher Education Area' was formed in Hungary in 2002. In Slovakia all the buffer organisations were integrated into the Institution of Educational Information and Prognostics in Bratislava. As a result of the emerging buffer organisation, the Bologna process in Central and Eastern Europe is being formed in cooperation and conflicts between governments and their buffer organisations. In other words, governments and their semi-independent buffer organisations simulate a 'political arena' for the Bologna process. The Bologna process – as the official higher education reforms of

Central and Eastern Europe – runs in this simulated political place. It seems as if the governments and their buffer organisations were the only agents of the Bologna process in Central and Eastern Europe. It also seems as if 'higher education policy' was formed entirely by the governmental policy makers in cooperation – sometimes in conflict though – with their buffer organisations. It seems as if the concept 'education policy' refers entirely to the policies of the governments. (This interpretation stems from the communist regimes of Central and Eastern Europe which monopolised the political processes and centralised decision-making.)

Institutional agents. There are, however, other agents (sometimes called 'stake-holders') in the Bologna process. They are, of course, the institutions. The institutions play sometimes visible, sometimes invisible roles in the process. When they play a visible role, the governments (and their buffer organisations, the original players in the game) feel, they lose control. And they are probably right. The third parties – in this case the institutions – may direct the Bologna process in new directions, away from the original targets set by the governments. The most visible/or semi-visible/invisible institutional agents are the heads of the institutions. Heads of universities and colleges have a strong – even decisive – influence on higher education reforms. This creates a political environment where the final outcomes of the Bologna process depend mostly or at least partly on the institutions. Higher education policies of former Yugoslavia are typical with regard to this. During the former regime, the university faculties became gradually independent. The national higher education acts adopted by the post-Yugoslavian states between 2000 and 2006 created a 'corporative model' (universities formed an 'umbrella organisation' covering independent faculties).

This development reflects the 'self-governance' which has a long tradition in the Balkans and which became the official ideology of Tito's Yugoslavia.)

Students. The students are also 'policy makers'; and as such they are also agents of the Bologna process (ESIB 2005; 2007). They are represented by their national associations in the decision making bodies of the universities in Central and Eastern Europe. These student organisations – unlike others in Western Europe – have originally been formed by the communist parties after the 1968 youth unrests of the region (the best-known of which was the 'Prague Spring'). Controlled by the Communist Party's youth organisations, the student bodies took part – at least in a formal way – in the institutional decision-making process. This continued to be the case after the transition of 1989/90. Their ideology was and still remained that of a 'self-governed' institution. According to this ideology, all members (called 'citizens') of the given university have the right to participate in the institutional decision- making process (Ruegg 1993-2004, see especially vol. II, ch. IV). Despite of this, the real participation of the Central and Eastern European students in the Bologna process is to 'vote by foot'. They either join the students' mobility programs - or more regularly stay away from them. The student mobility scheme is usually described as one of the unquestionable successes of the Bologna process (see Teichler 2011). Students' mobility in East-Central Europe is, however, rather a failure (as could have been predicted long before the Bologna process, cf. Kozma 1993).

This failure is explained by three causes. One of them is financial. Neither students nor universities in Central and Eastern Europe receive enough financial support for foreign studies (thus Croatia set up a fund for this aim). If more financial support arrived – it is argued –, more student mobility could be expected. The second reason is organisational. The credit system of the Central and Eastern European institutions does not promote foreign studies, rather it makes them difficult. Credits acquired outside the national systems are difficult to get accepted. (The 'European Credit Transfer System' might be a solution.) The third reason is communica-

tion and the new role of the national languages in the region. They hold the new-born national identities after the long period of communist internationalism. At the same time they prevent communication among Eastern and Western students and institutions. Western language competencies have essentially been growing among students of Central and Eastern Europe, however they are still not good enough to help students integrating into the 'European higher education area'. For one reason or the other, students of Central and Eastern Europe have not been touched by the Bologna process. For the time being they cannot or do not want to get involved in international programmes, programmes that were designed for them by the founders of the 'European higher education area' in the project (student mobility), that is the main message of the Bologna process.

The academic circles. The academic circles of Central and Eastern Europe were not involved in the initial design of the Bologna process. The Bologna process – as it emerged from the official biannual meetings – was a product of the government circles. The academic staff participated (in some places and at some times they were rather pushed) in the implementation phase only, during which time the new study programmes were drafted (Kehm, Teichler 2006). So the involvement of Academia in the Bologna process was reduced to their activities as curriculum planners and developers. One can even say that the higher education of Central and Eastern Europe inherited from the 19th century was restructured by the curriculum developers – that is, the academics. Left at the margin of the political struggles, Academia has become highly critical of the Bologna process. It fulfils the role a teacher fulfilled four decades earlier, when they criticised the great school reforms of the 1960s (Husén, Boalt 1967).

The better organised they (academics) are, the better they can protect their interests against the emerging 'managerialisms', which seem to be enlightened modernisation and which support the Bolo-

gna process wholeheartedly. Since the Bologna process is communicated in Central and Eastern Europe as an effort to 'catch up' with Europe, academics who criticise it, seem to hinder this 'Europeanisation' process.

Employers. The graduates' wishes to find a job and the employers' needs to find new candidates are continuously referred to in Central and Eastern Europe. Career advice in organized forms exists in few countries e.g. in Austria, Hungary or Serbia. 'Labour market needs' are among the arguments for the creation of the bachelor cycle, otherwise unknown to the traditional Central and Eastern European universities. The agents outside the realms of higher education, however, were left out of the modernisation process. It seems as if the whole the Bologna process was an issue of close-knit higher education circles.

The Bologna process as a political game

The quest for legitimacy. Keeping all this in mind, the Bologna process in Central and Eastern Europe can be viewed as the result of conflicting interests. However, the interest groups in and around higher education struggle not only for their own interests, they also struggle for transition. The concept of 'transition', though, is interpreted in various, sometimes, conflicting ways. Transition and transformation may lead to new national identities and new independence (interpretation A); or they can lead from old imperial structures (the Soviet Union) to new international ones (NATO, the EU). Being in conflict, both interpretations look for powerful governments either for rebuilding the old national identities or for negotiating membership in the international organisations.

The governments of the falling regimes lost their power and legitimacy together with the collapsing orders. The governments of

Central and Eastern Europe now take the Bologna process as a tool for new legitimacy.

Manifest aims – hidden agendas. This is the reason why the Bologna process in Central and Eastern Europe is explained mainly as a chain of government decisions. Being kept far away from the general public (other possible agents of the game), 'government decisions' emerge from the realm of government and buffer organisations. The conflicting interests are expressed as manifest objectives, while other interests remain hidden. The official goals of the Bologna process are common all over Europe. While the official aim of the Bologna process is unanimously accepted all over Central and Eastern Europe ("entering the European higher education area"), each national government has its own agenda. The Bologna process is therefore used as a unified umbrella on the various national agendas. For example, there are attempts to limit the autonomy of university faculties in former Yugoslavia, or to shrink mass higher education in Slovakia and Hungary. Many governments want to create a national higher education system which is different from the others', and thus would become a symbol of national independence. To strengthen the national identity in Ukraine or to reinforce the political legitimacy of the education policy in Serbia or Hungary, hidden agendas have manifested themselves as 'the logical results of the Bologna process.

Bureaucratic or market coordination? The Bologna process is kept on the move mainly by offices, governments and buffer organisations that mediate between the institutions and the governments. The changes in higher education in Central and Eastern Europe have been bureaucratically initiated. It is a top-down bureaucratic rather than a bottom-up process launched by the institutions themselves and the market forces around them. The Bologna process is a top-down bureaucratic process everywhere. In Central and Eastern Europe, however, it is closely connected with the new, emerging powers of the educational governments. New (higher)

education acts that incorporate the manifest aims of the Bologna process are adopted sooner or later – showing when and how the respective governments are able to control the higher education institutions (Slovenia: 1999–2004; Slovakia: 2002; Ukraine: 2002; Croatia: 2003–2004; Serbia: 2005; Hungary: 2005–06; Romania 2006). The means and tools supporting (or even pushing) the Bologna process ahead differ from system to system. One extreme is the way the Serbian educational government acts under the name of 'the Bologna process'; the other extreme may be the Ukrainian Bologna process (weak vs. tough government policies using the Bologna process for nation building). The government policies in Slovakia or in Hungary are in between the two (more international involvement, fewer nation-building efforts). The differences are rooted not only in history (more or less authoritarian governments), but also in each country's relationship with the European Union. Governments that have already joined the European Union use the Bologna process to strengthen their legitimacy internationally. Governments which are still far from EU membership use the Bologna process as a facade for the building of their own national higher education systems.

'Catching up' and drifting. The Bologna process has arrived in Western Europe gradually. The higher education systems have joined the reform step by step. It was the original design of the change planned and signed by the ministers of education in Bologna, Italy, in 1999. It reflects how they thought of the Bologna process. It happened, however, in another way in Central and Eastern Europe. Since various governments have joined the Bologna process at various times after 1999, they have always been in a rush to 'catch up'. They had to make more than one decision at the time, they had to speed up the process. These decisions were forced upon the institutions, which reinforced their resistance.

All this gets 'politicized' under the circumstances of the transformation. Successes were seen as breakthroughs of the transition;

while problems of the Bologna process were considered failures of the political and social transition. Becoming a crucial matter of the political transition and societal transformation, the Bologna process in the region ended up not in a process of modernisation, but in a policy of drifting.

Here are some examples for the policy of drifting: The Bologna process in Ukraine – in spite of the manifest aims – serves to strengthen the identity of the nation state by rebuilding the higher education inherited from a Soviet model to a national Ukrainian one. The Bologna process in Serbia serves as a tool and a political slogan for reintegrating the deeply decentralised institutions, and thus to empower the decentralised governmental decision-making process in higher education. The Slovenian Bologna process is also taking place in a decentralised political environment. The educational government is looking for new authorities by its international integration; at the same time the institutional level is remaining decentralised. The Bologna process in Croatia serves partly as a means of the government's international policies and partly as an argumentation for the on-going massification of higher education. While (as mentioned) the Bologna process in Slovakia as in Hungary serves exactly the opposite. It has become a reference of a new government strife, that is, the shrinking of the system.

Governments which are drifting between the search for a national identity of the 1990s and the EU integration of the 2000s, use the Bologna process for their own purposes in the region. The Bologna process has been used everywhere as an element of the political transformation (domestic politics) and as an element of the 'Europeanisation' (international politics). Drifting between this Scylla and Caryptis, the socio-economic transformation of the region has become a matter of international politics with the help of the Bologna process.

Minorities: new stake holders in the Bologna process

Minority higher education. If we look at it as a political game, the Bologna process has the same stake holders both in Western and Eastern Europe. Central and Eastern Europe is different with regard to this, too. The unusual stake holders – important, though rarely mentioned – actors are the Central and Eastern European minorities (national, ethnic, religious etc. communities). Central and Eastern Europe is full of national minorities. Their problems, however, do not appear in the Bologna process. The Bologna process goes on without even saying a word about minority higher education. The issue is not even realised at relevant international forums; as if they did not even realise the existence of those communities in Europe. And if the international structures acknowledged the problem, they would just leave it to the national governments to solve it. The issue of minorities does not appear in the Bologna process as a European question, rather as a problem for the national higher education systems.

'Minority education' refers to all (higher) education forms that are run or required by a minority of a given society. There are two such groups in Central and Eastern Europe: national (minority) communities and the (Christian) churches. Thus 'minority (higher) education' in this region means (higher) education that is kept up for, owned by and referring to the needs of certain ethnic communities or church institutions of the region. Churches and nationalities (national/ethnic communities) are often tightly bound to each other. They are split into orthodox national churches; the Ukrainian, Romanian and Serbian orthodox churches are the biggest in the examined region. Consequently Romanian, Ukrainian or Serbian minorities – where they exist – are usually orthodox minorities at the same time. Similarly, protestant churches are also tightly bound to nationalities that are almost exclusively Hungarian national communities. Catholics – in contrast to them – are international.

Some churches, however, interweave more and more with the political entity in which they function – Slovak, Slovenian, Croatian or Hungarian Catholics, Romanian, Ukrainian (Russian) Orthodox Christians. This special connection between religious and national communities results in the ambiguity of the issue. Sometimes it seems to be a national issue, at other times a question of faith-based education. Institutions run by national communities are often church institutions; faith-based higher education is sometimes established for national communities. It is one of the specialities of the higher education policy-making in Central and Eastern Europe (cf. Kozma 2005). This is especially so since the transition.

The position of minority institutions in the national higher education system is influenced by traditions and has a dynamic character. Experts – mainly in the American literature (Levy, Slantcheva 2007) – celebrate the appearance of minority higher education in the national systems as the spring of private provisions in the higher education systems. To them, those private provisions are a clear characteristic of political liberty and an educational 'market' where institutions of various types may compete. Opposite to this idealistic picture (Kozma 2004), private provisions are mostly the legal forms of the faith-based higher education, which, in turn, may also be the new appearance of higher education of minority communities.

Minority higher education and the transformation process. Previous regulations lost effect or at least loosened during the first stage of the transformation process. (See Kozma, Polonyi 2004 about the stages of the transformation in Central and Eastern Europe.) The first stage of this transformation occurred sometime between 1988 and 1994. With the exception of Hungary and Romania, the previous political states had fallen apart, while new political entities were emerging. The elites of these new political entities, however, were inherited from the previous regimes. Their political objectives had been formed long before the transition, during

the old regimes (where they created the ‘democratic oppositions’). Being new to the emerging new world, those elites followed their traditional goals: to find a third way between Communism and Capitalism. These efforts are called the ‘Third Way Concept’ in Central and Eastern Europe. It has a long tradition which goes back to the 19th century political debates. The ‘Third Way’ movements of the region involve ideas such as self-governance, direct democracy, collective rights, self-supplying communities, and heated fights against any kind of government intervention in civic life. In the political vacuum of the first stage of transition – when old governments lost their power and the new ones had not received it yet – an explosion of higher education started. Among others, private higher education institutions appeared in many forms in the region. Peculiar formations were the community (local, regional) colleges or ‘local universities’ which aimed to satisfy the local needs that had already been present for a long time, but had been neglected by the central (party and government) authorities. The leaders of those movements turned their political ambitions towards creating higher education institutions at that historical moment. They were mainly supported by the churches or the national minorities.

The second stage of the transformation was the consolidation (from the mid-1990s to the mid-2000s). In those years a second elite entered the political arena, which aimed at the integration of Central and Eastern Europe into the European Union. While the previous elite had focused on independence and national identity, the new elite urged the integration into international organisations and a globalised market. This period brought consolidation for higher education, as shown by the adaptations of the first higher education acts (Slovakia 1990, Ukraine 1991, Slovenia and Hungary 1993, Croatia 1994, Romania 1996). Those consolidation acts aimed at rebuilding the national institutions of higher education in the new nation states of Central and Eastern Europe. They also determined the place and role of private higher education. Contrary to

great expectations, private higher education has not become a leading sector but played a complementary role only. Local institutions created under irregular conditions either integrated into the national system or were marginalized. Many of them could only survive when financial and (or) political supporters could be found. The process presented a real danger to the local interest groups, who organised the local institutions so as to meet the local educational needs.

Minority higher education and the Bologna process. The Bologna process started at the second stage of the transformation process. This explains its regional specificities as well as why it was successful in one country but failed in another. It determined the minority institutions and their perspectives. Three strategies can be identified and applied.

Strategy A is a strategy of integration into the national system. The minority institutions which want to have national support – both financial and political – are pushed into full integration. The way to fully integrate into the national system is to participate in the national accreditation system, to follow the necessary prescriptions, to comply with the national requirements. National requirements refer to the requirements of majority higher education, including the use of the majority language, the majority norms and the majority cultures. By following the rules of the majority (national) higher education, the minority institutions lose the local support. It would not meet the needs of the local public – be it a national or a religious community. Becoming elements of the national system, the minority institutions not only lose their local (regional) support; they also lose the authority originating from the services of the local public. While gaining a national legitimacy, the minority institutions lose the original mission for which they had been established.

Strategy B is a strategy of separation. The Bologna process strengthens the national systems; by its support the national sys-

tems become not only the systems of the majority, rather the each of them the 'one, best system' of a nation's higher education. Fighting for separation would throw the minority institutions into the margin, or rather it would push them out of the system of higher education. If they do not accept the national accreditation (to mention but one) they will not be entitled to grant degrees. If they did not join the national 'league table' of higher education ranking, they would lose (?!) most of their students (or at least the best). Keeping the local ties – serving the local communities and their identity needs – the minority institutions would easily lose track of their original mission as an institution for higher learning. They may remain in the service of the local community – not as a higher education institution but as an institution of local culture and folkloric activities. The danger of strategy B is the loss of the minority institution as a place of higher learning.

Is there a 'third way' between those two? An optional strategy C might be a sign of integration not into the national system of the given country but the integration into an alternative higher education system or network. If strategy C did really exist, it would ease the tensions of both strategies, A and B. The national institutions might be integrated into a larger system without giving up their oppositional status against that of the majority system. They would also serve their founders without being separated and, thus, be destroyed. Strategy C is still only an idea rather than reality. However, there are clear signs for it being it. Minority institutions might be accredited alternatively (e.g. by the accreditation agency of the neighbouring country, where the national community does not represent a minority but is holding majority status). Faith-based institutions might be accredited by church agencies (the strongest of them being the Roman Catholic Church with its agency). Local institutions may create virtual communities for accrediting the members of the given networks.

Although the Bologna process aims at creating a 'European higher education area', it supports and strengthens the national systems. The Bologna process is not sensitive towards civic initiatives, market-type competitions or private provisions in higher education. It does not know minority communities and grass root institutions ('newborn universities'). An unintended result of this forced national integration in higher education might be the struggle for alternative networks. This way the Bologna process in Central and Eastern Europe has initiated its own alternatives.

Last but not least: why is (higher) education so important for the national/ethnic/church communities in Central and Eastern Europe? The answer lies in the dual function of education. Education is partly a community action, and partly, an action of the state. As a community action education – mainly in its non-formal and informal types – intends to share the culture and to integrate the new members into the collective. At this stage education is always going on, in various forms, in different time and in all places of the community. Education is, therefore, a condition for the community life and as such it doesn't need governmental intervention (rather, it protects itself against any kind of outside intervention. For that reason, education – in its broad sense – is the unavoidable condition for minority living and development. Education, on the other hand is a function of the state; formal education is a vehicle that transports government messages, rules and ideologies to the minority communities. In this sense, education is a symbol of the political existence. If formal education exists, a political entity may exist. Formal education – schooling and training – is, therefore, important for a minority community for two reasons: First, it is a condition of living, a means of transmitting the cultural heritage including narratives of identity and the language. Second, it is a symbol that the given community has not only cultural identity but a political identity, too. When arguing in favour of government supported and accepted minority (higher) education, the manifest argumentation is

usually is usually that culture and language are to be protected. The hidden strife behind this manifest argumentation is, though, political. Having a formal minority education the community may have its political identity too. Minority (higher) education is, therefore, a symbol of the political existence of a community; a symbol for the political entity of the given national, ethnic or church community.

Summary

At the turn of the millennium, the Bologna process was and still is an effort of the European Union to extend their territory of educational and cultural influence and to create a unified European Higher Education Area. A decade after its beginnings, the successes and failures of the effort can be analysed critically. This is the aim of the present paper. Our special interest is the Eastern part of Europe, the new member states or, in other words, the emerging democracies that underwent a transformation after the political change of 1990. The Bologna process, for them is not only a higher education reform, rather, an element of their economic and political transformation. It is, therefore, a political process and has to be analysed accordingly. The Bologna process started in the region right in the middle of the political transformation (in its second stage), and contributed to the reinforcement of the national governments and the national higher education systems. At the first period of the transformation (the transition process) the revitalised nation-states of the region looked after their own national identities. They rebuilt their higher education in order to differ from one another and to symbolise the national independence. In contrast of those efforts, the Bologna process guided them – sometimes even pushed them – into the opposite direction. The Bologna process initiated integration into the European Higher Education Area, in other words, to ‘catch up’ with Europe at least as far as higher edu-

cation is concerned. The quest for national identities on the one hand and the strife for European integration on the other create a catch for the region's higher education policies. Higher education policy makers would like to save their national systems, at the same time they are looking for international recognition. This double responsibility and double engagement makes the Bologna process so unique in Central and Eastern Europe.

The Bologna process contributes to the new empowering of the governments of Central and Eastern Europe. However, it also has to face a "third party" of higher education policy making in Central and Eastern Europe – the national communities with minority status. They developed their separate institutions and systems during the transition and today they are trying to protect them against the Bologna process -supported 'nationalisation'. It is not an easy game. Strategy A is the integration into the given national system; strategy B is being left outside. Some think, there is a third strategic option: alternative accreditations and recognitions. It would be essential for those institutions with minority status since education has a double function. It is conveying the cultural heritage from generation to generation (a cultural function). But it also symbolises the political identity of a community with a minority status within the majority society.

Note

Some of the ideas of the concluding study have been developed and formed out in a former paper (see *Kozma 2008*).

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