

El proceso de Bolonia y su aplicación en España:  
Consideraciones críticas

*The Bologna process and its application in Spain:  
Critical considerations*

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to update all references to the texts on the Bologna process and the most important Spanish legislation in the same context, as well as to make an assessment of the process and of its application in Spain<sup>1</sup>.

**Keywords:** Bologna Process, European Higher Education Area, Education Policy in the European Union, Spanish University.

**JEL classification:** A22, A23, I21, I23, I28.

## RESUMEN

El objetivo de este trabajo es actualizar todas las referencias a los textos sobre el proceso de Bolonia y la legislación española más importante en el mismo contexto, así como para hacer una evaluación del proceso y de su aplicación en España.

**Palabras clave:** Proceso de Bolonia, Espacio Europeo de Educación Superior, política de educación en la Unión Europea, Universidad española.

**Clasificación JEL:** A22, A23, I21, I23, I28.



## 1. INTRODUCTION. MAIN FEATURES OF THE DECLARATIONS

The Bologna Process is a combination of political texts at European level agreed by the Ministers for Education of the various countries together with the subsequent legal process of adaptation in each country.

The first texts promoting the creation of a European Higher Education Area (EHEA) stand out for brevity and the general nature of the goals contained. They are very clear and manageable texts.

The number of countries involved in the project has increased significantly and progressively from the original four to the forty-seven countries participating in the Bologna process in 2010. This area now exceeds the borders of the European Union, and is becoming a Europe in a broader sense.

The working methods are based on intergovernmental cooperation in collaboration with organizations with competences in the field of higher education and the universities. It was also agreed at Bologna to hold Follow-up and Development Conferences every two years.

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The Bologna Follow-up Group (BFUG) was formed to coordinate the organization of these meetings and is composed of representatives of the States participating in the process that meet regularly, at least twice a year, to prepare various aspects of the Ministerial Conference. The Group also approves working programs that include seminars and meetings on issues specifically related to the process of European convergence, and maintain permanent communication with those responsible for research or employment policies.

Although to date the organizational structure of the Bologna process has not been questioned, the co-presidency of the country holding the Presidency of the EU and a non-EU country has been planned for the immediate future.

## 2. SUMMARY OF THE CONTENT OF THE BOLOGNA PROCESS TEXTS

### *1989. Bologna. Magna Charta Universitatum*

On the 900th anniversary of the founding of the University of Bologna, the university rectors signed the "Magna Charta Universitatum" on September 18, 1988 in which they consider that "at the approaching end of this millennium the future of mankind depends largely on cultural, scientific and technological development". The universities should contribute to spreading this knowledge.

### *1998. Sorbonne Declaration*

Joint Declaration to harmonize the design of the European Higher Education System.

In May of 1998, the Ministers responsible for Higher Education in Germany, France, Italy and the United Kingdom signed an agreement in Paris known as the Sorbonne Declaration to promote the development of a European Higher Education Area (EHEA). This was the first step in a political process to bring in a long-term change in higher education in Europe.

The arguments used in the harmonization of the system were:

- Europe should be a Europe of Knowledge as well (not only an economic or monetary unit).
- A system of Higher Education should be created providing students with the best opportunities to research and find their own area of excellence.
- An open European area for Higher Education requires mobility and an ever closer cooperation.
- A clear and simple university system is necessary to achieve international recognition and attractive potential. (This refers to a two-cycle system, graduate and postgraduate, which serves as the basis for international comparison and equivalence.)

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Means:

- In order to achieve stability and flexibility, a system of ECTS credits, European Credit Transfer System, and a structure of semesters was introduced. (The objective is for students to access the academic world at any point in their professional career and from various fields.)
- There should also be international recognition of the first cycle qualifications.
- During the postgraduate cycles there should be a choice between a short Master degree and a more extensive Doctoral degree.
- Encourage student mobility with semesters abroad for graduate and postgraduate cycles, and also teaching staff mobility (research abroad).

### *1999. Bologna Declaration*

- Joint Statement by European Ministers for Education at a meeting in Bologna on June 19, 1999
- The Ministers for Higher Education in 29 European countries held a conference in Bologna to develop a framework for the construction of the EHEA for the year 2010.



Ultimate goals:

- Respond to the challenges of the new millennium, together with an awareness of shared values and belonging to a common social and cultural space, i.e. as a means of building the EU, or at least a Europe as an entity with common values.
- Promote the mobility and employability of the citizens and the overall development of the Continent.

Highlighted Goals:

- Improve the competitiveness of the European Higher Education system. The vitality and efficiency of a civilization is measured by the appeal that its culture has for other countries.
- Promote the attractiveness of the system throughout the whole world.

Specific Objectives (commitments):

- The Bologna Declaration contains various political agreements relating to higher education in Europe, which the States are obliged to develop. These agreements are summarized in the following points:
  - First: Adoption of a system of easily readable and comparable degrees through the implementation of the European Diploma Supplement among other measures (as called in the Spanish Organic Act on Universities (LOU 6/2001) of 21st December) Sometimes the term “European supplement to the qualification” is used here.
  - Second: Adoption of a common framework for Higher Education based on two main cycles: graduate and postgraduate. Access to the second cycle shall require successful completion of first-cycle studies lasting a minimum of three years. The degree awarded after the first cycle should also be relevant to the European labour market as an appropriate level of qualification. The title of Graduate is obtained after passing the degree studies, while the Master and/or Doctor titles are obtained after passing the second cycle.
  - Third: Establishment of a system of credits obligatory for all higher education studies. This system of credits, based on the concept of ECTS credits, is intended to facilitate and encourage student mobility between the various States. These credits could also be acquired in non-higher education systems, including Lifelong Learning, provided they are recognised by the universities concerned.
  - Fourth: Promotion of mobility for students, teachers, researchers and administrative staff throughout the various European States.

- Fifth: Promotion of European co-operation in Quality Assurance with a view to developing comparable criteria and methodologies.
- Sixth: Promotion of European dimensions in higher education, particularly with regards to curricular development, interinstitutional co-operation, mobility schemes, and integrated programs of study, training and research.

The principle of full respect for the national educational systems and the autonomy of the universities is expressed and assumed.

The Prague meeting (2001) marked the objectives of Lifetime Learning; the importance of the participation of both universities and students as active partners in the establishment and creation of the EHEA; as well as the importance of demonstrating the attractiveness, quality and competitiveness of the EHEA to the rest of the world.

In Berlin (2003) a commitment was made to quality through the development of criteria and methodologies for the evaluation of shared quality; to develop the structure of degrees and a framework of international qualifications for the EHEA; by the Diploma of European Diploma Supplement automatically and without any costs; the importance of research in this process and the necessity of involving the third cycle in the convergence process, in order to establish links between the EHEA and the European Research Area.

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In Bergen (2005) the remaining challenges for a closer link between higher education and research were emphasized with the full incorporation of the Doctorate as a fundamental connection between the Higher Education and Research areas; the development of a social dimension of Higher Education by improving the conditions of equal access, reception and attention of the students and financial resources; and, finally, the international dimension of European education promoting mobility for both students and university staff.

In London 2007 the processes of the meeting held in Bergen were verified.

In April of 2009 in Louvain the challenges faced by the EHEA with respect to excellence from then to 2020 were highlighted; the social dimension; lifelong learning; employability; learning adapted to the student and the mission of teaching in Higher Education; education, research and innovation; international accessibility; mobility; data collection; multidimensional transparency tools; and funding. Unlike the previous texts with respect to each of these objectives, the Declaration of Louvain provides more specificity and details (e.g., in terms of mobility in 2020, at least 20% of those qualified within the EHEA enjoyed a period of study or training abroad). In Leuven the Bologna



Follow-up Group was entrusted with the preparation of a work schedule up to 2012 to examine how the EHEA construction process should continue (defining indicators, devising mechanisms to enhance mobility, development of transparency mechanisms, etc.) and a calendar for the next ministerial conferences was drawn up.

*Budapest Declaration – Vienna, March 12, 2010 on the European Higher Education Area<sup>2</sup>*

This Declaration made during the Ministerial Conference on the anniversary of the Bologna Process in Budapest during the presidency of Spain, was the official presentation of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) as stipulated in the 1999 Bologna Declaration. At the same time, Kazakhstan joined as the forty-seventh country participating in the EHEA.

The Budapest-Vienna Declaration emphasizes the importance of collaboration between public authorities, institutions of higher education, students and staff, as well as business persons, Quality Assurance agencies, international organizations and European institutions in the framework of the Bologna Process.

In terms of international projection, the process is successful as an example of regional and transnational co-operation in the field of higher education, leaving the door open to co-operation with other countries worldwide. However, there are some disputes and dissenting voices against the Bologna reforms, especially from students and teachers, due to the different degrees of implementation of the program in the various countries and some malfunctions in the introduction, or explanations given to the society. Thus, some perseverance will be required for a complete and correct implementation of the agreed objectives and agenda for the next decade contained in the Louvain Declaration.

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Other aspects highlighted by the ministers gathered in Budapest-Vienna in 2010 were academic freedom, autonomy and accountability of institutions of higher learning such as principles of the European Area of Secondary Education; the key role of the academic community – including representatives of the institutions, professors, researchers, administrative staff and students - in fully implementing the European Area of Higher Education; a dimension of higher education as a public responsibility, which necessarily has an impact on the demand for resources required “in a framework created and supervised by public authorities”; and finally, the efforts to achieve equality of opportunity in the framework of a quality education is emphasized with special attention on underrepresented groups.

Finally, a new meeting was scheduled in Bucharest for April 26 and 27, 2012, *the Bucharest Declaration on April 26 and 27, 2012*.

The Bucharest meeting concluded with the adoption of three important texts: the Bucharest Ministerial Communiqué, the EHEA Mobility Strategy and the Third Bologna Policy Forum Statement<sup>3</sup>.

The Bucharest Communiqué in 2012<sup>4</sup> issued by the ministers responsible for Higher Education in the 47 countries that make up the EHEA, naturally begins by stating how this area has been affected by the important economic and financial crisis being experiencing in Europe. It highlights the impact of the crisis on the resources allocated to education and on the uncertain expectations for student jobs. Higher Education should be part of the solution to the crisis.

On the one hand, it seeks to promote equal opportunities and access for underrepresented groups to Higher Education. On the other hand, it repeats the model of higher education focused on the student, in which educational innovations and students are an active part, promoting intellectual independence and critical thinking abilities.

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Concern for quality assurance, coupled with financing and governance in this area, and is closely linked to public accountability in Higher Education. Employability as an objective is related to promoting research as a means. It reiterates the need for comparison for an effective implementation of mobility. It attempts to promote joint studies and international openings. In order to make a better analysis of the progress made, data collection and transparency is also encouraged. Apart from those already mentioned, the objectives and priorities for the period 2012-2015 include reflections on the Implementation Report of the Bologna Process 2012 and a general examination development and results of the process in order to establish queries for example to Eurostat, Eurydice and Eurostudent. In the end, the analysis and monitoring of the results was postponed until the next Conference of EHEA Ministers to be held in 2015 in Yerevan, Armenia.

Among the priorities outlined above, mobility, international co-operation and exchanges are given such importance that a document relating to Mobility Strategy 2020 for the European Higher Education Area (*Mobility Strategy 2020 for the European Higher Education Area* (EHEA)<sup>5</sup> was drawn up. This text contains and examines the objectives set at Louvain in 2020 that at least 20% of the graduates in the EHEA should have had a study or training period abroad.

The Declaration of the Third Political Forum of Bologna focuses on the importance of creating and connecting national, regional and global areas of Higher Education<sup>6</sup>. It also insists on public accountability in higher education, on global academic mobility, on the relevance of quality or excellence in education, in the promotion of employability of graduates. Finally, a list of upcoming events for debate in the framework of the Forum is attached as an Annex for the next session scheduled for 2015 in Armenia.





### 3. BRIEF ASSESSMENT

The Bologna process affects aspects of simple academic organization (system of titles, two cycles, credits), as well as options for values such as co-operation or promotion of the European dimension, gradually extending the EHEA construction process. It can be noted that in the most recent texts, particularly in the Leuven Declaration, the tone has changed from a general description of the objectives to a detailed specification of some points, which reveals the intense willingness of compromise and deepening of the EHEA.

It is obvious that the initial simple description of general targets characteristic for the setup procedure has passed into a more detailed phase that reveals the degree of development reached after achieving the objectives set, but there are other dimensions such as learning based on the student, or highlighting the mission of lecturing in higher education. We believe that it was important that the dissension and protests caused by the Bologna process in some universities were officially noted at the 2010 summit, since this led to the need to explain the significance of the change towards the EHEA better in order to achieve a more correct application in each country. The problems caused by the Bologna Declaration seem to relate to the degree of generality in the planned reforms and the inadequate implementation in the practice.

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Of course, in more recent documents there are some concerns about the impact of the economic crisis on Higher Education in which more intense research and the mobility are considered to be useful tools for overcoming the crisis.

### 4. DESCRIPTION OF THE MAIN FEATURES OF THE MODEL IN SPANISH LEGISLATION

The Organic Law 6/2001 on Universities dated December 21, as amended by the Organic Law 4/2007 in its Explanatory Memorandum refers to the need for “competitive integration” of the Spanish university system into the new European university area. Among the key objectives of this Act is promoting mobility for students, professors and researchers not only within the Spanish system, but also in the European and international ones. This Act assumes financial commitments in order to achieve the objective of integrating the Universities into the European Higher Education Area.

Chapter XIII of the Spanish Act (LOU) is dedicated to the European Higher Education Area, entrusting the Government, the Autonomous Communities and the universities with the measures required to implement the aforementioned integration (art. 87). This Act also refers to promoting the mobility of Spanish students and graduates, the

European Diploma Supplement, the European credit and scholarships and grants (art. 88). Furthermore, the Act encourages mobility of lecturing staff (art. 89.4) and administrative staff and services (art. 89 bis). The necessity of an impulse to be given by the Government, the Autonomous Communities and the universities for the realization of programs aimed at a methodological renewal of university education for the fulfilment of the EHEA quality objectives (art. 89.5).

The provisions of the LOU have been developed and supplemented by a series of sectorial standards. For example, the regulations in relation to the European credits can be found in the Spanish Royal Decree 1125/2003 from September 5 establishing the European system of credits and the system of ratings in the university degrees of an official nature and valid throughout the national territory<sup>7</sup>. With regard to the European degree system, the Spanish Royal Decree 1044/2003 of August 1 establishes the procedure for the universities to issue the European Diploma Supplement<sup>8</sup>.

32 With regard to the structure of university education, after the Royal Decrees of 2005 were repealed, the Spanish Royal Decree 1393/2007 of October 29 establishes the university staff management in Chapter VI of the Organic Act in reference to the new structure of education and official university degrees and the convergence of Spanish university studies with the EHEA principles. The Royal Decree, alluding to the autonomy of universities establishes that “the universities themselves, in accordance with the established rules, will create and propose the studies and degrees to be imparted and issued, without being subject to the existence of a catalogue previously established by the Government, as was obligatory up to now” (Explanatory Memorandum).

It also points to the flexibility of the organization of university studies, while encouraging diversification of the curriculum and allowing the universities take advantage of their capacity for innovation, strength and opportunities. The Royal Decree also refers to changes required in the teaching methods, which should concentrate on the student's particular learning process and Lifetime Learning. The emphasis is not only on the contents itself, but also on acquiring the competences as set out in the tables for each module, or subject, included in the Royal Decree, and which, in addition to describing the contents, establishes the competences that students would acquire with each module, or subject.

The Royal Decree 1393/2007 has been modified by the Royal Decree 861/2010 of July 2. This Act forms part of the efforts made by Spain to comply with the objective of adapting all studies to the new structure of the European Higher Education Area in 2010, although it can be argued that the new degrees of Graduate, Master and Doctor have already been widely implemented during the academic year 2010-2011. The Royal Decree of 2010 has an impact on one of the new key elements of the system: the



verification procedure for official university degrees. In this way, in order to foster cooperation and mobility, it is envisaged that the universities establish joint degrees with other national, or international, universities in order to issue and clarify recognition and transfer of credits.

According to Royal Decree 1027/2011, the Spanish High Education Qualification Framework (MECES) is organized in four levels:

Level 1: Technician

Level 2: Grade

Level 3: Master

Level 4: Doctor.

The Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 April 2008 that advises States aligning their qualifications systems has been followed. Our country, like the rest of the countries involved in the Bologna Process, was committed to design and implement their qualifications framework for higher education that is comparable to its European counterpart. In 2005, the Conference of European Ministers of Higher Education held in Bergen on 19 and 20 May had decided to adopt a comprehensive framework of qualifications for the European area of higher education, built on the so-called "Dublin Descriptors".

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The Royal Decree 1707/2011 of November 18 regulates external academic practices of the university students. The emphasis on external practices is the motive for the commissioning of the EHEA, and in Spain was given a leading role in the Spanish Organic Act 4/2007 and in the regulations of the Royal Decree 1393/2007 (articles 12.2 and 12.6). The status of a university student as approved by the Royal Decree 1791/2010 of December 30 recognizes the right of students from grade to have practices (articles 8 and 24).

The Spanish Royal Decree 99/2011 of January 28 has regulated the official Doctor degree. Therefore, this Act regulates the third cycle in the framework of the construction process of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), bearing in mind the new foundations of the Revised Lisbon Agenda, as well as the construction of the European Research Area (ERA) and the goals established in the 2007 Green Paper.

Research as an essential element of a Society of Knowledge and mobility as an essential part in the training of young researchers appear again as key points, both in reference to the EHEA, and to the ISS.

## 5. FINAL ASSESSMENT

As usual, the distance between the regulations and the practice application is significant and dysfunctional. The well-meant intentions of the European Space for Higher Education and the Spanish legislation to incorporate these principles contrast with the reality of the interests at stake in the universities in applying regulations, designing curricula or establishing and implementing new teaching methods.

In relation to Law studies, in particular, it would have been more convenient for the Ministry to establish the guidelines (as in other careers) in order to avoid bad practices. In relation to mobility and openness of the European area, it would also be desirable that European universities adjust the peculiarities involved in legal studies, mostly of a purely national character, and devise a more logical system of making the degrees more accessible to student exchange, perhaps by establishing a year of shared common studies dedicated to the Law of the European Union and other materials not dependent on national law, such as International Law or European Constitutional Law.

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Commitment when persuading desirable objectives are essential against the narrow-mindedness in the design and implementation of rules. In any case, there is a joint responsibility of managers, universities, professors and students not to convert an opportunity for renewal such as Bologna into bureaucratically ballast, but into a platform for the necessary renewal and progress of the Spanish university.

Excellence in higher education and research should be articulated in such a way as to contribute to overcoming the current economic crisis, to create employment and welfare for all citizens.

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