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## **Higher Education as a Public Good and a Public Responsibility**

The Bologna Process is not only about structures, such as the degree systems, recognition and quality assurance, there is also a social dimension to this process. It was introduced in Prague (May 2001), where Ministers responsible for the Bologna Process gave their support to the idea that higher education should be considered a public good and that it is and will remain a public responsibility. In Berlin (September 2003), Ministers reaffirmed their position on this issue.

In economic terms a public good is generally defined as a good that people can consume without reducing what others may consume. Pure public goods are rare. In principle, a public good cannot be provided for profit because it is impossible to exclude access to it. Therefore, public goods are normally provided by the state. Professor Hübner has just told us about this.

The question how well higher education in this sense is serving as a public good is a complex issue. In the context of declining public subsidies and increased globalisation of higher education as a tradeable service, discussion is going on at government level, among university leaders and with student representatives. It certainly has been a hot topic in the Bologna follow-up.

Higher education may also – at least partially – be interpreted as a private good because most of the graduates capture the benefits of the training in the form of higher, additional life-time income. We also know that many people are willing to pay for a private higher education – even in cases where they may have public higher education for free.

Having served for many years with the Council of Europe, I find it relevant to refer to the Council of Europe / UNESCO Convention – the Lisbon Recognition Convention:

“The Parties to this Convention are conscious of the fact that the right to education is a human right, and that higher education is a cultural and scientific asset for both individuals and society.”

To my mind, this is one way to express – as a political message - that higher education is a public good. I feel confident that also the Ministers in their Prague Communiqué saw their statement on higher education as a public good to be a political message, even more so as it was reaffirmed in Berlin (September 2003).

Focussing now on *the public responsibility* for higher education, I would describe the functions of higher education in the following way, slightly different from professor Hübner:

- to prepare individuals for the labour market;
- to prepare for life as active citizens in democratic society;
- to contribute to personal growth;
- to maintain and develop an advanced knowledge base.

Clearly, higher education has both societal dimensions and individual components and they can only partly be separated.

Public responsibility is a precondition for a national higher education system. The Lisbon Recognition Convention builds on the concept of national higher education systems. The Bologna Process is a process of national systems interacting in the European area.

In Europe we agree that public authorities have a responsibility for higher education. This responsibility must at the very minimum extend to the make-up of the education system, the framework within which higher education is delivered, regardless of by whom.

One important part of the higher education system is the qualifications framework. There is agreement in Europe that public authorities decide the degree structure and its requirements. If this were not to be the case, one of the key goals of the Bologna Process – a two-tier degree structure – would be difficult to implement, as would the goal of transparency. Obviously, you are aware of this.

In the Bologna Process, another important element of the higher education framework is quality assurance. There now seems to be agreement that public authorities are responsible for ensuring that there is adequate provision for transparent quality assurance, whether they themselves carry it out or not.

I believe equal access for all qualified candidates to higher education is an important element of higher education policies in Europe. Public authorities must ensure that qualified candidates are treated equally. I believe the public responsibility should also include measures to improve educational opportunities for underprivileged groups.

Funding of higher education may be considered a public responsibility. However, in any system, individuals have to carry some of the cost. The difficult part is to agree on how much public funding is reasonable, and on what conditions. Students claim that there should be no tuition fees. I hope that we in the European Higher Education Area will at least maintain that public authorities should have the main responsibility for funding higher education.

Inadequate funding of higher education institutions is a problem in Ukraine as in many other countries. Introducing Bologna usually requires extra funding, for better teaching methods and for quality measures. The responsibility for adequate funding was acknowledged yesterday by the representative of the Verkhovna Rada. Money has to be found in the state budget.

Student support is another key economic issue where no readymade answer exists, but which is intimately linked to the public responsibility for making higher education more accessible. The basic principle seems clear to me: it is a public responsibility that no qualified candidate should have to abstain from higher education because he or she lacks the means to study.

In their Berlin Communiqué, Ministers stressed the need for appropriate studying and living conditions for students, so that they can successfully complete their studies within an appropriate period of time *without obstacles related to their social and economic background*.

Mobility is one of the basic principles of the Bologna Process. Realising it implies money for student support. Clearly, this is one element in the Bologna Process that will add to the costs.

Seeing the Bologna Process in a global perspective, a striking observation is that at the same time as *co-operation and mutual thrust* are key terms in European higher education, *competition* is a driving force on the global scene.

The 1995 General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) under the World Trade Organisation (WTO) defines rules for a global market that also includes educational services. Little is yet known about the consequences of GATS for quality, access, and equity of higher education. Although the present round of negotiations has come to a stand-still, we have to face the challenges of the global marketplace.

The lack of progress in the GATS negotiations has given the higher education sector time to contemplate how to meet the challenges of global trade. Trade in educational services is now being discussed in international forums relating to education and higher education, such as UNESCO and the OECD. These two organisations are now co-operating to develop *international guidelines for quality assurance, accreditation and recognition*. Thus, public responsibility for higher education may hopefully also become effective in the trade of educational services.

The UNESCO/OECD co-operations has the following base:

- *Learner protection is a policy objective. Quality assurance and accreditation systems should guarantee that learners are acquiring qualifications that are meaningful, valid and fairly assessed.*
- *Qualifications should be readable and transparent in order to increase their international validity and portability. Reliable information sources on national education systems and qualification frameworks should inform their holders of their academic and professional validity in the various national systems.*
- *Qualifications should be recognised internationally with as few difficulties as possible. National control over qualifications will remain necessary, making systems of recognition of foreign qualifications indispensable. Recognition procedures should be transparent, coherent, fair and reliable and impose as little burden as possible to mobile professionals.*
- *National quality assurance and accreditation agencies need to intensify their international co-operation. An international network of quality assurance should be constructed to safeguard academic standards of provision and qualifications.*

I am very glad to observe that these ideas reflect the same basic principles that we have in the Bologna Process. I believe that the co-operation between the Council of Europe and UNESCO/CEPES that led to the Lisbon Convention and the Code of Good Practice in Transnational Education, has been an important basis for the present global efforts of UNESCO and the OECD. To me it means that public responsibility for higher education now also is becoming visible on the global scene.