

## **Franz Kok: Bologna Process as normative EU Soft Power?**

Instituto Incontri Culturali Mitteleuropei (ICM). 55<sup>th</sup> meeting on Humanitas Arte, Kultur Sozitja Tiara Mosaico (Mittel)Europeao, Gorizia, 14 Nov 2020.

---

The Bologna process has started as internal process of EU countries in 1999 and has developed a global international impact in HE. Using the recent published analysis of “The Bologna Process and its Global Strategy” (Moscovitz/Zahavi 2020<sup>1</sup>) this article argues about the normative impact this development in HE as European Soft Power instrument. It comes out that main elements of the Bologna reforms follow a humanist approach in focusing academic teaching to the students learning outcomes. The empowerment effects of the specific inclusive and international institutional setting supports the academic independence of individuals and HEIs also in participating countries outside the EU (2020: 48 countries) and even beyond.<sup>2</sup>

### Bologna as EU internal process<sup>3</sup>:

The Intentions of the Bologna Declaration<sup>4</sup> described best in its own words as “strengthening the international recognition and attractive potential of our systems, increasing the international competitiveness of the European system of higher education” and “a world-wide degree of attraction”. Recognition of degrees and mobility between the member states was one of the prior motivations behind.

The properties and instruments of this initiative a policy field dominated by the national legislation and regulation competences of the member states seemed to be weak: Joint objectives as voluntary commitments but no binding rules, catalogues of recommendations for implementation but also implementation progress reports created transparency of the process.

The expert driven Bologna Follow Up Group and its committees initiated policy exchange meetings and prepares the Bologna Minister conferences happening every second year. The European Commission supports this BFUG work and initiated activities as Erasmus, Erasmus Mundus and Erasmus+ to bring intensifies for implementation to the HEIs in the EHEA and its external partner/participants.

### Bologna as global approach

In Bergen 2005 the Bologna minister agreed to open and attract the EHEA “to other parts of the world” and had the support of reforms in neighbouring regions in focus. The London conference 2007 addressed this to the global context with intensification of policy dialogues

---

<sup>1</sup> Hannah Moscovitz and Hila Zahavi (Ed.): The Bologna Process and its Global Strategy. Motivations and External Responsess. Routledge 2020

<sup>2</sup> This article is part of an ongoing project preparation about governance impacts of the Bologna Declaration Yerevan 2015 about the European Accreditation Approach. This project will analyse how the experience of Joint Program implementation using this European Accreditation Approach can argue for a change of the regime character of the Bologna Process.

<sup>3</sup> Manja Klemencic: 20 Years of the Bologna Process in a Global Setting: The external dimension of the Bologna Process revisited. In: Moscovitz/Zahavi 2020 1-5.

<sup>4</sup> Bologna Declaration. 1999. “The Bologna Declaration of 19 June 1999: Joint declaration of the European Ministers of Education”, 1-3

and further recognition of qualifications. Leuven/Louvain 2009 established the Bologna Policy Forum as approach for going global and to establish the EHEA QA measures (ECTS etc.) as global bench marks into consideration. "Higher education has become strategically important for the European Union in creating both "minds" and "markets" for the European knowledge economy"<sup>5</sup> and intellectual environment of the Lisbon strategy 2000 (to make the EU until 2010 to the most competitive and productive economic sphere in the world). This shift from a regional to a global approach was criticized as hegemonic instrument or imperialising power, even the resources for such strategy where limited. (Moscovitz/Zahavi 2020, 10)

### Bologna as international, deliberative and multilevel governance model<sup>6</sup>

While Europeanisation & policy diffusion along joint principles are standards in the EU internal formation in main fields of integration (single marked, agriculture etc.) the Bologna Process as multilateral process is addressed to a field where national competences of the member states are dominating and it included also non EU member states into this development in HE. The adaption of national HE policies and institutions to the EU model in these countries might follow different motivations depending on the status and geographic distance of a country. Countries in the neighbourhood (like Western Balkan) have aspirations to join the EU and want to proof their reform capacities, others intending to become associated or special partners (as Georgia and Ukraine). But even beyond that more or less distanced relation the Bologna Process defunded into HE policies<sup>7</sup>.

Seen from international relations perspective Zahavi/Friedman<sup>8</sup> explaining this capacity of the *Bologna process as international regime* with principles, norms, rules and decision-making procedures covering expectations<sup>9</sup>. Successful international regimes as the Bologna Process become "player with a life of its own" (p23) which leads to questions about the resources for their power.

One resources of this power is connected to the specific EU governance model of *multilateral and multilevel Open Method of Coordination (OMC) leading to declarations of the Bologna* minister conferences every second year. Including experts of all participating countries and of different levels of actors in the field of HE in working groups and its institutionalization in constant conferences as the Higher Education Reform Experts (HERE) connects the policy preparing Bologna Follow Up Group (BFUG) with the problems, standards, needs and feedbacks of the HE systems. Looking to the publicity of these working groups the legitimation of their activities is based on the expertise and transparency of the

---

<sup>5</sup> Ruth Keeling: The Bologna Process and the Lisbon Research agenda: The European Commission's Expanding Role in Higher Education Discourse". European Journal of Education 41 (2): 203-223, 222

<sup>6</sup> Div. Moscovitz/Zahavi 2020, 10-51)

<sup>7</sup> Moscovitz/Zahavi 2020 shows a collection of regional impact analysis of the Bologna Process for Canada, New Zealand, Asia, Israel and Africa.

<sup>8</sup> Hila Zahavi and Yoav Friedman: the Bologna Process: an international higher education regime. In: Moscovitz/Zahavi 2020, 22-38.

<sup>9</sup> With using Stefan Krasner D. (1982): Structural Causes and Regime Consequences: Regimes as Intervening Variables. In: International Organization 36 (2) 185-205, p186 they define international regimes as "implicit or explicit principles, norms, rules and decision-making procedures around which actors expectations coverage in a given area of international relations".

documents. Seen under institutional aspects the structural resources of the EU institutions to steer this process are not very strong but effective with connecting to the jointly developed normative understandings.

Defining a platform as infrastructure and language for joint understandings of HE made the Bologna Process to a global provider of a *Public Good* in the field of HE and in that sense the EU could develop a capacity as hegemon for a global developments (Zahavi/Friedmann 2020 p.28). Functionally this Public Good of “a uniform pedagogical and administrative language facilitates international academic collaboration” and the Bologna Process with that minimizes the chaos in international HE and lead to “collaboration in the name of better competition” (ebd).

From the perspectives of all participating states (2020: 48) the participation in the Bologna Process enables their HE systems to support the countries societies in the globalization process. International recognized HE has increasing importance for economic developments in a competitive global environment. Seen from the young generation of academics this strengthens their role in society but also on the international labour market.<sup>10</sup>

#### Normative dimensions of Bologna and impacts on the HE reforms.

Another resource is the *normative dimension of HE* where a universal set of principles following modern scientific thinking is promoted and the Bologna Process established a global thinking about these as “Bologna Philosophy” or “European Values” in HE: Humanistic tradition, importance of academic freedom in research and publicity as ethical basis for all HEIs research and teaching. Representatives from HE worldwide find a backing of these values in different activities connected to the Bologna Process independent from the situation in their country or region. The inclusive character of the diplomatic activities (Policy Forums, HERE etc.) and incentives coming via Erasmus/Mundus (CBHE, mobility grants) made students, staff and HEI’s to cooperative partner an Epistemic Community supporting this progress.

In the European Qualification Framework<sup>11</sup> as structure for three academic cycles of education from 2005 ongoing not only the recognition and mobility of grades within the EU and partner countries of the Bologna process was supported but a *change of the pedagogic paradigm* in many academic teaching cultures was indicated: The *learning outcomes of students* at the end of a program are defined in dimensions of knowledge, competences & skills. Experts from member states where participating in this multilateral policy making process and states started processes to bring their national models of qualification in relation to this framework. This lead to several conflicts and intensive discussions in all academic fields of HE when implementation policies of the member states reached HEI and started curriculum reform processes.<sup>12</sup>

---

<sup>10</sup> Including problematic developments as braindrain for less competitive countries.

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.ehea.info/page-qualification-frameworks>

<sup>12</sup> See Franz Kok: Bologna: A plot against academic truth and reliability? [www.erasmusnetwork.eu](http://www.erasmusnetwork.eu) annual meeting in Loeven/Ghent - 22 May 2014.

See as example for resistance against reforms several articles in ECPR: eps European Political Science Vol 12 (4) 2013.

Beside the needs and interests towards more comparability, better access and increasing relevance (also for the labour market) of the EHEA the shift to learning outcomes put the students education into the focus of academic educational reform. Seen from a humanist perspective this shift from the normative dominance of teacher this new student centred approach was a positive development. Never the less many examples showed that many administrative and technical misunderstandings in the implementation led to a negative image of “Bologna” as the reason for the decline of academic life.<sup>13</sup>

### Conclusions:

Nomative impacts of the Bologna Process can be located at different levels:

Higher Education Institutions: With the European Qualification Framework not only a more transparent education standards were defined to serve mobility and employability of alumni for the labour market but a Student centred Teaching Approach formulated students knowledge, competences and skills as reference for successful education.

Deliberative international regime: The inclusive multilateral and multilevel coordination of the institutions involved in the policy making and the permeability of these process for researchers and HEI’s are an example for a deliberative, knowledge driven approach in international policy making. The EU commission can influence this process and the resources of the actors with incentives (Erasmus, Mundus, CBHE) but the implementation is in the hands of the signatory states of Bologna declarations.

Soft Power for external relations strategies: Within the EU Neighbourhood policy and Eastern Partnership strategy the field of HE was very successful and met the needs of academics and HEI’s for orientation and participation in international developments of science and education. States in post war and break away situation (Western Balkan, Caucasus, Central Asia) since the 1990’s are open to adopt instruments of the Bologna process to demonstrate and allow independent national strategies in HE beyond the dominance of former big players as Russia and interests of China with its infrastructure based approach (Silk Road Strategy). Although EU foreign policy is still weak compared to the instruments and resources of these other big players in that “*Region of Change*” (RoC). The participation of the mostly small countries between these spheres in the Bologna process shows that there is a rising interest of the academia and the HE policies to connect to the values and principles of the EU model of HE. Beside the internal discussions about the Bologna implementation within the EU member states the Bologna process and its international influence shows a higher level of EU soft power impact in field of HE. Where the internal perception is dominated by the changes and needs for adoption from outside Bologna is seen as a positive landmark for development in that RoC.

---

About Bologna implementation at Austrian HEI’s: Franz Kok und Markus Pausch (2013): „Bologna“ als Modernisierungsmotor oder Schreckgespenst im österreichischen Hochschulsektor. FH 2030 - Zur Zukunft der österreichischen Fachhochschulen. Wien-Münster: Lit. Verlag, S. 209-236 27 S.

<sup>13</sup> See sources in previous footnote.