

The Bologna Declaration
on the European space for higher education:
an explanation

This document was prepared by the Confederation of EU Rectors' Conferences and the Association of European Universities (CRE). It includes :

- **a comment on the meaning and significance of the Bologna Declaration and information on the follow-up process in progress;**
- **the text of the Declaration;**
- **a list of internet addresses from which more detailed information can be obtained.**

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The Bologna Declaration: an explanation

The Bologna Declaration is a pledge by 29 countries to reform the structures of their higher education systems in a convergent way

The Declaration is a **key document** which marks a **turning point** in the development of European higher education.

- It was **signed by 29 countries** which “undertake to attain the Declaration’s objectives” and to that end “engage in coordinating [their] policies”.
- It is a **commitment freely taken** by each signatory country to reform its own higher education system or systems in order to create overall convergence at European level. The Bologna Declaration is not a reform imposed upon national governments or higher education institutions. Any pressure individual countries and higher education institutions may feel from the Bologna process could only result from their ignoring increasingly common features or staying outside the mainstream of change.
- The Bologna process aims at creating convergence and, thus, is not a path towards the “standardisation” or “uniformisation” of European higher education. The fundamental principles of autonomy and diversity are respected.
- The Declaration reflects a **search for a common European answer to common European problems**. The process originates from the recognition that in spite of their valuable differences, European higher education systems are facing common internal and external challenges related to the growth and diversification of higher education, the employability of graduates, the shortage of skills in key areas, the expansion of private and transnational education, etc. The Declaration recognises the value of coordinated reforms, compatible systems and common action.

The Bologna Declaration is not just a political statement, but a binding commitment to an action programme

The **action programme** set out in the Declaration is based on a clearly defined common goal, a deadline and a set of specified objectives:

- a clearly defined common goal: to create a European space for higher education in order to enhance the employability and mobility of citizens and to increase the international competitiveness of European higher education;
- a deadline: the European space for higher education should be completed in 2010;
- a set of specified objectives:
 - the adoption of a **common framework of readable and comparable degrees**, “also through the implementation of the Diploma Supplement”;

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The Bologna Declaration and global competitiveness of European higher education

- Next to the need to “achieve greater compatibility and comparability in the systems of higher education” (mainly intra-European issue), the Declaration wants “in particular” to increase “the international competitiveness of the European system of higher education”. It says that the “vitality and efficiency of any civilisation can be measured by the appeal its culture has for other countries”. The signatory countries explicitly express their goal to “**ensure that the European higher education system acquires a worldwide attractiveness equal to [Europe’s] extraordinary cultural and scientific traditions**”.
- **On these “external” issues, the Bologna Declaration is genuinely opening up new avenues.** In stressing so explicitly the need for European higher education as a (cohesive) system to become successful in other world regions, it provides more reason for moving in the direction of a coherent European system and implicitly invites European institutions to compete more resolutely than in the past for students, influence, prestige and money in the worldwide competition of universities.

From Declaration to implementation: an organised follow-up structure and process

- The 29 signatory countries committed to attain the Declaration's objectives will “**pursue the ways of intergovernmental cooperation**”, in collaboration with higher education institutions and associations.
- **Ministers have agreed to meet again in Prague in May 2001**, together with representatives from European higher education institutions and associations, in order to assess progress achieved and to agree on new steps to be taken.
- They have also established a specific **follow-up structure with a mandate** to prepare the Prague Conference and to facilitate and coordinate the action needed to advance the goals of the Bologna Declaration. The follow-up structure is based on:
 - a “consultative group” consisting of representatives of all signatory countries;
 - a smaller “follow-up group” comprising the countries successively holding the EU Presidency in the 2 years from Bologna to Prague (Finland, Portugal, France, Sweden), the Czech Republic, the European Commission, CRE and the Confederation;
 - in addition, since new political decisions may need to be taken in the process towards Prague, the follow-up to the Bologna Declaration will be on the agenda of meetings of EU education ministers.
- **Follow-up work is in progress at the European, national and institutional level.** The Declaration states that the process of establishing a European space for higher education requires constant support, supervision and adaptation to continuously changing needs.
 - A series of surveys and studies are in progress at the initiative of the group of national contact persons of the signatory countries, the EU Presidency, the European Commission and higher education associations and networks. They deal with transnational education, accreditation, credit systems, quality assurance, etc., and serve as preparatory steps for the next stages in the process.
 - Signatory countries are considering or planning legislative reforms and/or governmental action in relevant areas of their higher education systems; **convergent reforms** have already been introduced or are in progress in several European countries. They signal a move towards shorter studies, 2-tier degree structures, credit systems, external evaluation, more autonomy coupled with more accountability. Another trend is towards the blurring of boundaries between the different constituent sub-sectors of higher education.
 - Individual universities as well as higher education consortia, networks and associations are studying and discussing the implications of the Bologna process in their particular country, subject area, or type of institution.

The Bologna Declaration invites the higher education community to contribute to the success of the process of reform and convergence

- The Declaration acknowledges the crucial role of the higher education community for the success of the Bologna process. It says that inter-governmental cooperation should be “together with non-governmental European organisations with competencies in higher education”. Governments also “expect universities to again respond positively and to contribute actively to the success of (their) endeavour”. It is therefore clear that higher education institutions have a unique opportunity to shape their own European future and to play a crucial role in the development and implementation of the Bologna process.
- The Declaration specifically recognises the fundamental values and the diversity of European higher education:
 - it clearly acknowledges the necessary independence and autonomy of universities;
 - it explicitly refers to the fundamental principles laid down in the *Magna Charta Universitatum* signed (also in Bologna) in 1988;
 - it stresses the need to achieve a common space for higher education within the framework of the diversity of cultures, languages and educational systems.
- In order to respond to the invitation contained in the Bologna Declaration, the higher education community needs to be able to tell Ministers in a convincing way what kind of European space for higher education it wants and is willing to promote. **Universities and other institutions of higher education can choose to be actors, rather than objects, of this essential process of change.** They may in particular :
 - profile their own curricula, in accordance with the emerging post-Bologna environment, in particular through the introduction of bachelor courses in systems where they have not traditionally existed, and through the creation of master courses meeting the needs of mobile postgraduate students from around the world;
 - activate their networks in key areas such as joint curriculum development, joint ventures overseas or worldwide mobility schemes;
 - contribute individually and collectively to the next steps in the process.
- The Confederation of EU Rectors’ Conferences and the Association of European Universities (CRE) plan to organise a **convention of European universities and other institutions of higher education a few weeks before the Prague meeting.** This convention should provide an opportunity for the higher education community to discuss the main issues at stake and to produce a communication to Ministers on what higher education expects from the Prague meeting.

29 February 2000

Joint declaration of the European Ministers of Education convened in Bologna on the 19th of June 1999

The European process, thanks to the extraordinary achievements of the last few years, has become an increasingly concrete and relevant reality for the Union and its citizens. Enlargement prospects together with deepening relations with other European countries, provide even wider dimensions to that reality. Meanwhile, we are witnessing a growing awareness in large parts of the political and academic world and in public opinion of the need to establish a more complete and far-reaching Europe, in particular building upon and strengthening its intellectual, cultural, social and scientific and technological dimensions.

A Europe of Knowledge is now widely recognised as an irreplaceable factor for social and human growth and as an indispensable component to consolidate and enrich the European citizenship, capable of giving its citizens the necessary competencies to face the challenges of the new millennium, together with an awareness of shared values and belonging to a common social and cultural space.

The importance of education and educational co-operation in the development and strengthening of stable, peaceful and democratic societies is universally acknowledged as paramount, the more so in view of the situation in South East Europe.

The Sorbonne declaration of 25th of May 1998, which was underpinned by these considerations, stressed the universities' central role in developing European cultural dimensions. It emphasised the creation of the European area of higher education as a key way to promote citizens' mobility and employability and the Continent's overall development.

Several European countries have accepted the invitation to commit themselves to achieving the objectives set out in the declaration, by signing it or expressing their agreement in principle. The direction taken by several higher education reforms launched in the meantime in Europe has proved many Governments' determination to act.

European higher education institutions, for their part, have accepted the challenge and taken up a main role in constructing the European area of higher education, also in the wake of the fundamental principles laid down in the Bologna Magna Charta Universitatum of 1988. This is of the highest importance, given that Universities' independence and autonomy ensure that higher education and research systems continuously adapt to changing needs, society's demands and advances in scientific knowledge.

The course has been set in the right direction and with meaningful purpose. The achievement of greater compatibility and comparability of the systems of higher education nevertheless requires continual momentum in order to be fully accomplished. We need to support it through promoting concrete measures to achieve tangible forward steps. The 18th June meeting saw participation by authoritative experts and scholars from all our countries and provides us with very useful suggestions on the initiatives to be taken.

We must in particular look at the objective of increasing the international competitiveness of the European system of higher education. The vitality and efficiency of any civilisation can be measured by the appeal that its culture has for other countries. We need to ensure that the European higher education system acquires a world-wide degree of attraction equal to our extraordinary cultural and scientific traditions.

While affirming our support to the general principles laid down in the Sorbonne declaration, we engage in co-ordinating our policies to reach in the short term, and in any case within the first decade of the third millennium, the following objectives, which we consider to be of primary relevance in order to establish the European area of higher education and to promote the European system of higher education world-wide:

- Adoption of a system of easily readable and comparable degrees, also through the implementation of the Diploma Supplement, in order to promote European citizens employability and the international competitiveness of the European higher education system;
- Adoption of a system essentially based on two main cycles, undergraduate and graduate. 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 shall also be relevant to the European labour market as an appropriate level of qualification. The second cycle should lead to the master and/or doctorate degree as in many European countries;
- Establishment of a system of credits - such as in the ECTS system - as a proper means of promoting the most widespread student mobility. Credits could also be acquired in non-higher education contexts, including lifelong learning, provided they are recognised by the receiving universities concerned;
- Promotion of mobility by overcoming obstacles to the effective exercise of free movement with particular attention to:
 - for students, access to study and training opportunities and to related services;
 - for teachers, researchers and administrative staff, recognition and valorisation of periods spent in a European context researching, teaching and training, without prejudicing their statutory rights;
- Promotion of European co-operation in quality assurance with a view to developing comparable criteria and methodologies;
- Promotion of the necessary European dimensions in higher education, particularly with regards to curricular development, inter-institutional co-operation, mobility schemes and integrated programmes of study, training and research.

We hereby undertake to attain these objectives – within the framework of our institutional competencies and taking full respect of the diversity of cultures, languages, national education systems and of University autonomy – to consolidate the European area of higher education. To that end, we will pursue the ways of intergovernmental co-operation, together with those of non governmental European organisations with competence on higher education.

We expect Universities again to respond promptly and positively and to contribute actively to the success of our endeavour.

Convinced that the establishment of the European area of higher education requires constant support, supervision and adaptation to the continuously evolving needs, we decide to meet again within two years in order to assess the progress achieved and the new steps to be taken.

Signed by:

Austria, Belgium (French community), Belgium (Flemish community), Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Swiss Confederation, United Kingdom.

Internet addresses

for more detailed information

crue.upm.es/eurec (Confederation of EU Rectors' Conferences)

Link to the report on "Trends in Learning Structures in Higher Education"

Presentation by Hans-Uwe Erichsen, President of the Confederation, at the Bologna Conference ("The challenges of a European higher education space")

eaie.nl (European Association for International Education)

"Bologna and beyond: visions of a European future", keynote address by Guy Haug to the EAIE Conference in Maastricht in December 1999

Link to report on "Trends in Learning Structures in Higher Education"

Text of Bologna Declaration

must.it/convegni/bologna99 (Italian Ministry of Education)

Text of the Bologna Declaration in Italian and English

Crui.it/altridoc (Italian Rectors' Conference)

Texts of the Sorbonne and Bologna Declarations

Presentations by Luciano Guerzoni, Deputy Minister for Universities, and Luciano Modica, President of CRUI, at the Bologna Conference ("Higher education reforms in Italy, 1996-1999")

Text of the *Magna Charta Universitatum*, signed in Bologna in 1988, which sets out the fundamental university rights.

europedu.org (Sorbonne-Bologna process, French Ministry of Education)

Text of the Sorbonne Declaration of 1998 and the Bologna Declaration of 1999 in English, French, German and Italian, together with data on the higher education system of the signatory countries of the Sorbonne Declaration