

## Quality Assurance Features of Higher Education in the Bologna Process

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**Abstract:** This article analyzes some features of the higher education quality in the Bologna process. The authors conclude that the years of schooling at a particular stage are not considered to be the key point in higher education, this role belongs to the level of competence. It is noted that along with the agreed standards and procedures for evaluating the quality of education that are created at the European level in accordance with the requirements of the Bologna Declaration there are also accreditation methods of agencies engaged in determination of the quality of education that are also being adjusted. The authors point out certain circumstances that could have a direct negative impact on the Russian education system during the realization of the Bologna process. This article proposes the idea of forming an alternative Eurasian educational system of the CIS and the Baltics.

**Key words:** The Bologna process • Bucharest communiqué • The quality of education • Private accrediting agencies • Mobility

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### INTRODUCTION

The mankind has entered a new historical condition where the main resource of development is the man himself, his education and professional competence, moral and volitional qualities. This is manifested both in the growing intellectualization of the main factors of production and in the transition to economy based on information technologies.

Mathematically proved that the increase in the percentage of people with higher education increases the labor force productivity in the region and the level of wages of all categories of employees [1].

The revenue from people getting higher education increased by 2-4% before the transition to the market economy and by 8-10% before 2000-2005 [2].

More and more people resume their studies at the age of 30-40 years to complete previously started education or to change the career direction. The first higher education institutions for people of retirement age have already appeared in Europe.

It should be noted that the share of the state-financed students in the social states of Europe is very high: in Germany it exceeds 90%, in France it is more than 80%. On the other hand, in the United

States and Great Britain the number of such students is small (no more than one-third), but there is a developed system of student loans that enable citizens to pay for their education after it is received on quite favorable terms. [3]

The global system of higher education has not formed yet. Globalization is contradictory; it makes its way through the integration of local economic and political groups. Thus regional integration processes still dominate in the field of education.

**Problem Analysis:** One of them is the Bologna Process named after the city where the Bologna Declaration was signed in 1999 (a decade earlier, in 1988, there was signed Magna Charta Universitatum). The process was initiated by the administrative authorities of European Universities and later it was supported by Education Ministers of European countries in favor of graduates going to work in neighboring countries. It was necessary to coordinate training programs of Universities, develop common approaches to education quality assessment, define clear units for estimation of trust called credits. The Bologna process is actively developed, its interim results are continuously monitored and recorded in international instruments (Table 1).

Table 1:

Year	2001	2003	2005	2007	2009	2010	2012
City	Prague	Berlin	Bergen	London	Leuven	Budapest-Vienna	Bucharest

In 2009 the communiqué of the Conference of European Higher Education Ministers stated: "We recognize the critical role of higher education in successfully meeting the challenges facing us and in further social and cultural development of our societies. Therefore we believe that government investment in higher education is of paramount importance"[4].

The main purpose of the Bologna process is to ensure the transparency of national education systems based on accepted guidelines and procedures with the maximum provision of consistent information and simultaneous preservation of the education system's features of each participating country.

Integration of higher and post-graduate education of Russian Federation with simultaneous preservation and development of its achievements and traditions into the global system of higher education is the most important principle of the Russian state policy. State Program of Education Development represents a significant expansion of Russian education export including the creation of networks of inter-institutional offices in CIS and non-CIS countries and attracting foreign citizens to study in Russian universities. The solution of this problem includes the growth of national higher education competitiveness on the international higher education market and the provision of the opportunity of participation in the international continuing education for Russian under- and postgraduates.

In Russia which has signed the Bologna Declaration in September 2003, the scientific and university community most actively discusses the purposes and principles of the analyzed process and, for example, the content and the language of the Diploma Supplement (DS). Members of the Bologna process have decided to give each graduate the DS for free in one of the most widely spread European languages and to adhere to the Lisbon Recognition Convention of 1997. Russia has validated the Lisbon Recognition Convention; however there is still no clear distinction between the concepts of academic and vocational qualifications [5].

The Federal Law "On Amendments to Certain Legislative Acts of the Russian Federation (concerning the establishment of higher education levels)" was adopted in October 2007.

The "Concept for the Long-term Social and Economic Development of the Russian Federation for the period up

to the year 2020" was approved by the Regulation of the Government No. 1662-r in November 17, 2008.

The two-stage system of higher education. It is more properly to speak of the three-stage system of higher education which in addition to the Bachelor's and Master's degree programs includes Post-graduate Master's degree program as the third stage (identical to the Doctorate in Europe). The main point is considered to be the level of competence versus the number of schooling years at a certain stage of education. In addition, each stage must prepare the student not only for the labor market, but also for moving to the next stage of education. Compared to Russia where bachelors face significant difficulties in finding a job, in the USA and Europe they are in demand on the labor market. National higher education standards for bachelors and masters are oriented towards the second level of qualification. Therefore, according to the Bologna Declaration, if the international expertise affirms that the competences of graduates correspond to the second stage of education, it won't any more matter whether this education was got with traditional Russian program of higher education (Specialist degree) or with two consecutive steps.

Credit system was created in Europe as a tool for student mobility (European Credit Transfer System-ECTS) with a guarantee of transformation from a transfer to the collecting system. This rule in general corresponds to the Russian higher education institutions' tradition to record in the Diploma Supplement not only academic success in each discipline, but also the duration of its study. The determination of the parameters of academic qualifications and accurate translation of all disciplines' names and different types of academic work from the Russian language are considered to be necessary to bring the Russian Diploma Supplement in accordance with the requirements for the Diploma Supplement with ECTS.

Quality of education. The quality of education in Europe has become the motto of the last 20 years and the result of large-scale reforms of national education systems.

In 1991 the Commission of the European Community issued a Memorandum on Higher Education which formulated the development and the transformation of priorities of the higher education of the European countries according to the statements of the Sorbonne and Bologna declarations [6].

The Bologna Declaration describes this problematic as "the promotion of European cooperation in the field of quality assessment by developing comparable criteria and methodologies" [7].

The promotion of the European cooperation in education quality assurance is provided primarily through the development of the necessary criteria. There are three levels: higher education institution, country and Europe as a whole. Each country participating in the Bologna process evaluates the program of higher education institutions according to the system of accreditation and comparable procedures; publishes the results of quality assessment of professionals' education; participates in the international cooperation and the establishment of a network of agencies specializing in determination of the higher education quality.

Not only agreed standards and procedures for evaluating the quality of education are being developed in accordance with the requirements of the Bologna Declaration at the European level but also the accreditation methods of agencies occupied with the determination of the quality of education are being conformed.

In 2005 at its next ministerial meeting in Bergen ENQA presented a paper on "Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area."

The report was prepared by ENQA in conjunction with the European University Association (EUA), the National Unions of Students in Europe (ESIB) and the European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE) after discussions with different profile networks. Of course, the report absorbed researches and developments made by UNESCO-CEPES.

The main results and the recommendations of the report are:

- There will be European standards for internal and external quality assurance and for external quality assurance agencies.
- European quality assurance agencies will get cyclical review every five years.
- There will be an emphasis on subsidiarity, with reviews being undertaken nationally where possible.
- A European register of quality assurance agencies will be produced.
- European Consultative Forum for Quality Assurance in Higher Education will be established. [8]

However, at the Anniversary Conference of ministers responsible for higher education of the European countries participating in the Bologna process held on March 11, 2010 in Budapest (Hungary), the new President of ENQA Akim Hopbach (Germany) reiterated the basic principles of the development of quality assurance in higher education. They are:

- Higher education institutions have the primary responsibility for the quality of higher education;
- All forms and quality assurance procedures should be focused on further improvement of the quality of education;
- The diversity of approaches is encouraged, if common principles of evaluation and quality assurance are used;
- All members of the educational process and especially students, participate in the procedures and the work of quality assurance agencies;
- The quality assurance agencies must be independent.

26-27 April 2012 in Bucharest was held the Conference of Ministers responsible for higher education and the third Bologna Forum "Beyond the Bologna process: Creating and connecting national, regional and global higher education spaces" was the part of the conference.

During the conference the ministers have adopted the Bucharest communiqué where it was noted that higher education should be the main objective of the efforts of the Bologna Process participants in overcoming the crisis now more than ever before.

According to the opinion of Y.B. Rubin, "within the activities and meetings of countries participating in the Bologna process the concept of education quality is not only confirmed, but also significantly supplemented, updated, transformed and enriched with the new content". [9]

Russia has developed a state system of assessment of education quality and accreditation program; however Europe offers to refuse from it. According to the European criteria the weakness of the Russian higher education system is still considered to be the quality control at intermediate periods of education.

The value of the lower quartile of quantitative (metric) indicators of state accreditation of institutions developed by the National Accreditation Agency of the Federal Service for Control in education for public and private institutions can be used as an example (Table 2).

Table 2:

Index	State higher education institutions	Non-state higher education institutions
Percentage of faculty with academic degrees and (or) titles	54,2	60,4
Percentage of doctors of sciences and (or) professors	7.1	9.4
The average annual number of monographs by 100 full time educators with academic degrees (or) titles	2.1	3.2
The average annual amount of research by one member of scientific and pedagogical staff during the period of 5 years (thousand rubles)	3.1	3.1
The average annual R and D funding during the period of 5 years (thousand rubles)	386.0	386.0
The average annual amount of the defenses of theses by 100 members of research and teaching staff during the period of 5 years	1.0	0.0

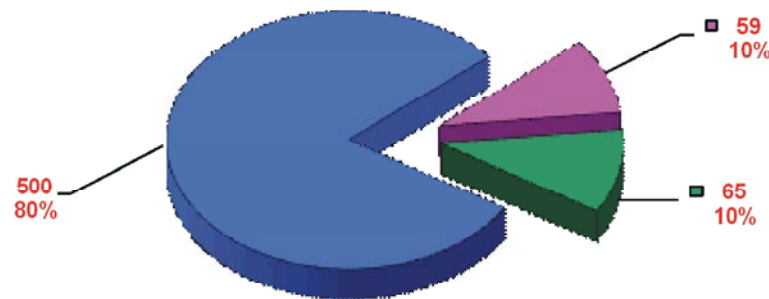


Fig. 1: The ratio of state and non-state higher education institutions in Russia at the beginning of the XX century

Disparity in performance index does not improve the quality of education, in reality it creates more complex environment for private universities when passing the state accreditation of State Supervision Service in the sphere of education, meanwhile the other countries participating in the Bologna process abandon it and move to public education accreditation. In Russia such accreditation could be held by the National Centre of professional accreditation. It is active at the international level and is considered to be the centre of the network of higher education quality assurance agencies in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE Network) and Asia Pacific Quality Network (APQN). Besides it has an associated status by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) and associated membership in the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE).

It would be more appropriate to support non-state higher education sector in Russia.

It has to be said that education institutions of this type were quite popular in Russia in the early XX century when there were 59 non-state higher education institutions (65 state higher education institutions) and more than 500 private institutions of secondary and vocational education (Figure 1).

In the beginning of 1991 45 non-state higher education institutions were at the stage of registration in

Russia, in 1992 there were 92 of them, in 1993 a license was got by 78 non-state higher education institutions, in 1994-by 157 of them, in 1995-by 193, in 1996-by 244, in 1997-by 302, in 1998-by 334, in 1999-by 349, in 2000-by 399, in 2001-by 410, in 2002-by 525, 2003-by 578, in 2004-by 627, in 2005-by 647, in 2006-by 665, in 2007-by 671, in 2008-by 673, in 2009-by 674, in 2010-by 509, in 2011-by 484, in 2012-by 452.

B. Weisbrod indicates that the nonprofit sector comes in response to the failure of government agencies to meet the total demand for public goods, especially in social sphere [10].

No wonder that former Deputy Minister of Education of Malta in his book "Education in Malta" notes that the non-state sector "can provide educational services to their customers faster, more direct and more efficient than the state sector because non-state education institutions serve their customers directly compared to the bureaucratic state system and they are free of those national commitments that states and governments usually face. As non-state education institutions generally operate independently and are not burdened by the state bureaucracy, they can be more aware of the market needs and can deliver the "product" faster and sometimes even more effective than the bulky and cumbersome state system "[11].

The European dimension in higher education. Promoting European dimensions in higher education (in the spirit of Europeanism) according to the experts is far from the pressing problems of Russian higher education because education is intended to give a broader view of the world. The Glasgow Declaration (EAU, 2005) developing the ideas of the Bologna process is called "Strong Universities for a Strong Europe". The Declaration says nothing about Russia.

Promotion of academic mobility. Promotion of the mobility of students, teachers, researchers and administrative staff of higher education institutions is the most difficult problem for Russia.

The transition to a unified European system of training qualified personnel depends on the processes of economic globalization and requires compatibility of educational programs. The Russian market is quite satisfied with the traditional specialist. Even joining the WTO under the current raw material export orientation of the Russian economy can't guarantee fast globalization of the labor market.

It is necessary to consider the conflict of global, regional and national interests on the education market. Higher education has transformed from elite into massive and has become a global industry with a turnover of 27 billion dollars. Herefrom comes the interest of most governments to the national programs of attracting foreign students. These programs are found in France, UK, the Netherlands, Japan and the United States. Experts predict the number of students studying abroad may reach 2.8-3.0 million by 2020. The USA receives from 10 to 12 billion dollars a year for foreign students. Nowadays about 90 thousand foreign students are getting higher education in Russia and 53% of them are trained at the expense of the state budget of the Russian Federation.

The probability of penetration of Western European providers of education to the Russian market is insignificant due to the low solvency of the majority of Russian population. However the drain of wealthy Russian applicants and students to Europe and the United States is a very real phenomenon.

## **CONCLUSION**

The main advantages of the Russian higher education model include its fundamentality, scientific character and practical orientation. The credit system and the system of educational modules as the way of learning recommended by the Bologna Declaration conflict with the system of education courses. The practice of the

Bologna Declaration realization shows the challenges facing the educational globalization process. In some EU countries the transition to a single educational standard is going at a slow pace, while some universities (such as Oxford or Cambridge) proclaim the non-participation in the Bologna process [12].

The main thing in the Bologna process is considered to be the compatibility of training programs providing academic mobility of students and comparable quality of higher education. To what extent is this problem pressing for our students? From our point of view the problem of academic mobility still continues to be a speculative notion for Russia. Nowadays this problem is not fully resolved in Western European higher education institutions either. For example, in Italy there are no bachelors and in the United Kingdom German Bachelor's degree is considered inadequate for admission to the English master's degree program.

Furthermore, there are certain circumstances that during the implementation of the Bologna process could have a direct negative impact on Russian higher education system. One of these circumstances is the lack of significant public funding of the Bologna process in Russia, while the experience of other countries shows that as a rule around 60% of the budget of national ministries of Education and individual higher education institutions is spent on the financing of the Bologna reforms in the transition period.

Certainly it is impossible to reduce all educational reforms only to the Bologna process, especially in the Russian tradition of campaigning. It is necessary to focus on the global trends and at the same time to take into account the internal needs and the Russian mentality.

In the context of the national security interests of our country, challenges of globalization and recent developments of the international situation, the Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation can be offered the idea of forming a Eurasian alternative educational system of the CIS and Baltic countries, based on the Russian language. This would allow the Russian language to return its former greatness and power, besides Russia would be able to strengthen its position internationally and become a bridge between East and West.

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