

## CHAPTER FIVE

# THE EUROPEAN INTEGRATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND THE ROLE OF PRIVATE HIGHER EDUCATION

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### **Introduction**

The Bologna process—a major European integrating initiative in higher education started by the Bologna Declaration in 1999 and to be completed by 2010—seems to disregard one of the most significant recent developments in several major post-communist transition countries in Central and Eastern Europe: the rise and rapid growth of the private sectors in higher education and, more generally, the emergence of powerful market forces in higher education. Consequently, the ideas behind the Bologna process, the analytical tools, and policy recommendations it provides may have unanticipated effects on higher education systems in certain Central and Eastern European countries. The growth of both the private sector in European (and especially Central and East European) higher education systems and the emergence of powerful market forces in the educational and research landscape in Europe warrant further consideration by the Bologna process if it is not to turn into a merely “theoretical,” myopic exercise. The downplaying of the role of market forces in higher education and research and development in the Bologna documents and the omission of the private sector (with its evident successes in some places and failures in other places) from the overall conceptual scheme of the Bologna process give potentially misguided signals to educational authorities in transition economies. Consequently, the Bologna process might thwart the development of the private sector in countries where chances for the expansion of the educational system otherwise than through privatization have been limited. The expansion of educational systems here is crucial for the implementation of

the Lisbon strategy of the European Union, as described briefly in the next section. Thus, while the implicit disrespect for market mechanisms in higher education may have limited impact in Western European systems, which have increasingly taken many market-related parameters of their operation in public universities for granted, it might have long-lasting negative impact on legislation and general attitude toward the private sector in some Central and Eastern European countries. With its magnitude, the role of the Bologna process in (indirectly) granting or refusing legitimacy to institutions across Europe is strong. This chapter is divided into the following sections: the Bologna process within a Europe of Knowledge strategy; the role and legitimacy of private higher education; the denying of private sector legitimacy and the Bologna denigration of market forces in higher education; and conclusions.

### **The Bologna Process within a Europe of Knowledge Strategy**

Recent attempts at the revitalization of the so-called Lisbon strategy of the European Union (through such widely debated documents like the Wim Kok Report, EC 2004a) seem to be going hand in hand with recent reformulations of the Bologna process in European higher education (Reichert and Tauch 2005). The Lisbon strategy of 2000 is a comprehensive program for increasing EU competitiveness to be implemented in three large areas: economic, social, and environmental. It has set a strategic goal over the next decade: "to become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion." This goal requires setting up programs for building knowledge infrastructure, enhancing innovation and economic reform, and—of most interest to us here—"modernizing social welfare and education systems" (Lisbon Council 2000, p. 1).<sup>1</sup> The future of Europe seems to be located in a Europe of Knowledge, to be achieved through redefined higher education gained from reformed educational institutions and through boosted research and development in both public and private sectors. New modes of viewing educational institutions are probed (universities as entrepreneurial providers of skilled workforce for the globalizing economy and students as individual clients/buyers of conveniently rendered educational services) and new ideas about citizens gaining enhanced European identity through education useful for knowledge-based Europe are presented (EC 1997; EC 2000d; EC 2003b).

Consequently, in recent years, the project of the European integration seems to have found a new leading motif: education and research for the Europe of Knowledge. At the same time, the Bologna process has been part

and parcel of these wider processes of European integration intended to lead to the emergence of the Europe of Knowledge and to the preservation of a distinctive European social model. A crucial component of the Europeanization process today is its attempt to make Europe a knowledge society (and, perhaps even more, a knowledge economy) in a globalizing world. Education and training (to use a more general EU terminology) became a core group of technologies to be used for the creation of a better integrated Europe. The EU has set itself the goal of creation of a distinctive and separate European Higher Education Area and a European Research (and Innovation) Area by the year 2010. The construction of a distinctive European educational policy space—and the introduction of the requisite European educational and research policies—has become an integral part of the EU revitalization within the wide cultural, political, and economic Europeanization project. As Martin Lawn writes, the emergence of a European education area is “fundamental to the contemporary structuring of the EU; it announces the arrival of a major discursive space, centered on education in which the legitimation, steering and shaping of European governance is being played out” (Lawn 2003, pp. 325–326).

We are witnessing the emergence of a new Europe whose foundations are being constructed around such notions as knowledge, innovation, research, education and training. Education, and especially lifelong learning, becomes a new discursive space where European dreams of common citizenship are currently located. However, this new knowledge-based Europe is becoming increasingly *individualized*; ideally, it consists of individual European *learners* rather than *citizens* of particular European nation-states. The emergent European educational space is unprecedented in its vision, ambitions, and capacity to influence national educational policies far beyond the current 25 EU member states. In the new knowledge economy, education policy, and especially higher education policy, it is argued, cannot remain solely at the level of Member States because a new sense of European identity can be best forged only through the construction of a new educational space in Europe. “Europeans,” in this context, could refer directly to European (lifelong) learners, individuals investing their dreams for the future in a specific kind of knowledge—knowledge for the knowledge economy.

Clearly then, the Bologna process needs to be viewed in a wider context provided by the idea of the Europe of Knowledge, to be achieved through the implementation of the Lisbon strategy. Most generally, the success of the Bologna process depends on the extent to which it is going to contribute toward the goals of the Lisbon strategy. Its goals, as initially formulated in 2000, were numerous and multidirectional; consequently, most of them were not achievable. Current possible reformulations of the strategy, if it is going to stay alive in the years to come, may include leaving aside both its

environmental concerns and most of its social and welfare concerns. The major goals of the strategy would most likely be economic goals, mostly in the spirit already guiding the Lisbon strategy, if not exactly in letter.

Thus the Bologna process is going to be successful if it contributes to the reformulated Lisbon strategy goals, mostly directed toward closer links between education and employability (if not direct employment, as differentiated by Neave 2001) of its graduates, lower unemployment rates, and higher individual entrepreneurship of graduates. Some of the major Bologna goals that today clearly coincide with the goals of the Lisbon strategy include more practically oriented higher education programs, shorter periods of study for the majority of students by a division between the undergraduate and graduate levels, lowering the number of students at the master level, greater intra-European student mobility through various EU-funded mobility schemes, and wider use of credit transfer systems, including within national frameworks.

### **The Role and Legitimacy of Private Higher Education**

The role of the private sector in the countries of Western Europe—where the Bologna process was born—remains marginal. Major EU economies, including Germany, France, Italy, and the United Kingdom, do not have significant private sectors in higher education. But the Bologna process runs far beyond Western Europe to also involve countries where private higher education figures prominently, exceeding 10 percent of total enrollments in Belarus, Bulgaria, Hungary, and Ukraine, 20 percent of enrollments in Latvia, Moldova, Romania, and 30 percent of enrollments in Estonia and Poland.<sup>2</sup> In 2004, over 700 private institutions (including 300 in Poland, 200 in Ukraine, and 70 in Romania) functioned across Central and Eastern Europe, where all countries are already Bologna signatories. In Russia, private enrollments exceeded 14 percent and the number of private institutions reached almost 400. In sum, private sectors present a significant and rapidly developing segment of education—and economy—in Central and Eastern European countries, as testified by Tomusk (2004).

Private institutions in Central and Eastern European countries serve a number of functions, both positive and negative: depending on the country, private institutions may provide fair access to affordable higher education but may also lead to the disintegration of the whole sector, especially if tight licensing and accrediting measures are not in place. These institutions continue to be grappling for legitimacy. The initial social acceptance was strongly impacted by the emergence of many of these institutions in a legal vacuum. Their creation can be attributed both to the enthusiasm for institutional autonomy and the appeal of hitherto nonexistent nonstate

educational institutions in new democracies. Currently, most private institutions in the region have been legalized, no longer having to operate on the fringes of the system and are recognized by local national accreditation boards. Their search for social recognition—reflecting the acceptance by the society, the labor market, and their state peers, however, continues.

Private institutions presented the simplest venue toward the expansion of educational systems, which under communist rule were elite. Due to the rapid development of the private sector (and corresponding parallel expansion of the public sector), in some Central and Eastern European countries, higher education became an affordable product. Initial legitimacy of the private sector, in many cases, reflected the social acceptance of the fact that it provided affordable higher education to young people who would not have had a chance to receive it in the closed elite and fully public systems of the former communist countries. In knowledge-based societies, being cut off from affordable education may easily lead to social exclusion and marginalization. Market legitimacy then evaluates the correspondence of the knowledge portfolio received via education with current and future labor market needs. Finally, consumer-granted legitimacy reflects whether services delivered correspond to the personal and professional needs of graduates.

There are Central and Eastern European countries in which the advantages and disadvantages of the existence of the private sector have to be carefully weighed: they have severe problems with the quality of instruction, shortage of qualified (and especially full-time) staff, appearing and disappearing institutions, institutions selling diplomas in a “diploma mill” manner, and so on.

Private institutions are not subsidized by the state except in some cases in some countries; in general, they are almost fully subsidized by students who purchase their teaching services. As a result, the private sector is mostly a teaching sector, with no accompanying research carried out. Consequently, private institutions derive a strong degree of their legitimacy from their students and their families who recognize them as institutions providing services worth paying for. In many cases, being market-driven and consumer-driven in their orientation, private institutions are more flexible to adapt their curricula according to demand, open short-term courses, offer MBA programs, liaise with foreign institutions and offer dual degrees, provide distance education, weekend education, and other modes of learning convenient to the student. Often private institutions monitor the labor market, open career centers for their graduates, and introduce explicit internal quality assurance mechanisms. Many follow market mechanisms in their functioning as business units, use public relations and marketing tools to have significant portions of local, regional, or national educational “markets,” and finally prepare their graduates for living and working in market realities. They have also exerted huge impact on academicians themselves.

Many of the above aspects of private institutions in transition countries—and often in contrast to many public institutions—correspond closely to what the Lisbon strategy in general suggests for the education sector in the future. From a certain perspective, it can be argued that most ideas developed in theory in Western Europe and referred to as the Bologna process were actually applied in practice in the private sector in Central and Eastern European countries (those in which the sector exists more than marginally) already in the 1990s, before the ideas of the Bologna process were formulated. The Lisbon strategy in general, and the EU publications about the European Research Area in particular, stress the importance of market forces, individual entrepreneurship of graduates, and new modes of governance of academic institutions; both underlie the perspective of the end-user of knowledge that is the student—rather than its provider, the academic institution. The overall emphasis moves away from the respectable and trustful institution toward the consumer of educational services.

However, the direction of the Bologna process with respect to the Lisbon strategy remains unclear. Above all, the Bologna process seems to downplay the role of market forces in higher education and research and development and omit to consider the private sector that is booming in the transition countries in its overall conceptual scheme.

### **The Denying of Private Sector Legitimacy and the Bologna Denigration of Market Forces in Higher Education**

Despite its intergovernmental (rather than EU) origins, the Bologna process has come to be viewed as an instrument for wider processes of European integration and for wider attempts to preserve a European social model. It is not accidental that there is a common deadline for the Bologna process, the EU Lisbon Agenda of transformations of education, welfare, and economy and the Brugges-Copenhagen process for the integration of European vocational education. The differences between higher education and research in the old EU Member States (EU-15) and the new EU entrants, not to mention other Fast European Bologna signatory countries, in general, are critical. Higher education in the majority of Bologna-signatory transition countries has been in a state of crisis for over a decade now. While higher education systems in Western European countries seem to face new challenges brought about by the emergence of the knowledge-based economy, globalization, and market-related pressures, most of the Bologna signatory transition countries face old challenges as well, in varying degrees with the need of expansion of their systems at the forefront.

The Bologna process in general seems to focus mostly on new challenges and new problems; most transition countries, by contrast, are still embedded in old-type problems generated predominantly in the recent decade by the need for massification of higher education under severe resource constraints. Bologna-related reforms undertaken in Western Europe are much more functional (fine-tuning, slight changes, etc.); reforms in most Central and Eastern European countries, by contrast, need to be much more substantial (or structural). There is little common ground between the two sets of reforms except for technical details and the Bologna process in its official documents so far seems not to have drawn a sufficiently clear distinction between functional and structural reforms needed in different parts of Europe. Even though the passage to mass systems in Western Europe has been well documented, the current process toward massification of higher education in the transition countries is taking place under different conditions. Therefore, few available recommendations based on the expansion experiences of the EU countries from two-three decades ago exist to the countries of transition. Major suggestions for Western European institutions of higher education may not be sufficient to guide institutions in transition countries. Blind acceptance of the Bologna process and especially blind acceptance of its general conceptual framework may have far reaching consequences for educational systems in these countries. The future of the private sector in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, despite its controversial role in some of them, is a good example here.

The growing demand for higher education—clearly Daniel C. Levy's "demand-absorbing" wave of the growth of the private sector—gave rise to the booming of private higher education institutions in several transition countries. While, apparently, the rapidly developing private sector seems of marginal importance for the Bologna process in Western Europe (and perhaps therefore it has not been dealt with in the Bologna documents so far), it certainly is a problem (and/or solution) for some transition countries, where private sectors play a significant role, including Poland, Ukraine, Estonia, and Romania. The rapid development of private higher education as well as the emergence of powerful market forces on the educational and research landscape of most transition countries, I believe, require further analyses, and, consequently, the consideration into the debates accompanying the implementation of the Bologna process on a European scale. So far, by ignoring the booming private sector in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, and thereby ignoring powerful market forces and market mechanisms in higher education there, the Bologna process appears to be indirectly refusing legitimacy to institutions of private higher education. The fact that the Bologna process does not use the word "market" or



the word "private," in transition countries that still have their systems in flux, and have no guidance on how to expand access to higher education under severe state underfunding, suggests a refusal to grant legitimacy to the sector, an indirect rejection of the competition between the public and private sectors, and an implicit suggestion that the existence of market mechanisms in teaching and research is fundamentally wrong.<sup>3</sup>

Yet, it is the private institutions, which, especially in transition countries with larger private sectors, are often closer to the recommendations of the Lisbon strategy than public institutions. And the Bologna process becomes increasingly part of a much larger social and economic transformation of Europe epitomized by this strategy. The Bologna game in higher education is the most powerful game in town in most transition countries; for most governments in these countries, it provides the best rationale available for reforming the systems. The number of signatory countries already exceeds 40. Bologna provides a major impetus for the otherwise often static systems, and the idea of catching up with a larger European trend is often much better received by the general public in these countries than in Western European countries. More so, in some non-EU transition countries following Bologna requirements is even regarded as bringing the country closer to the EU, or seen as a temporary substitute for EU membership.

As a result, the Bologna process is one of the most ambitious transformations of higher education systems on a regional scale in the world today. Its impact on the future of European higher education is potentially deep and long-lasting (as is potentially the impact of the emergence of the European Research Area, discussed in Kwiek 2006). Since the very beginning, the Sorbonne Declaration, through the Bologna Declaration—Prague and Berlin summits (2001 and 2003), as well as from the Salamanca (2001) to the Graz (2003) to the most recent Glasgow (2005) declarations of higher education institutions, the private sector has been neglected as a topic of educational analysis. As an example, in the most recent European University Association's Glasgow Declaration "Strong Universities for Strong Europe," the word "private" appears once (private funding), and the word "market" appears twice: labor market and employment market (*Glasgow Declaration* 2005). For the official documents and accompanying reports of the Bologna process, the private sector does not exist. While declarations and communiqués of the Bologna process have not made a single reference to private higher education in the last seven years, *Trends III* report of 150 pages (prepared for the Berlin summit of Bologna signatories in 2003) mentions the term half-a-dozen times but only in connection with the GATS negotiations, as if the issue of the rapidly emerging private sector and an increasing market orientation of higher education institutions both globally and in many Bologna signatory countries were irrelevant. The situation is



not different in the recently published *Trends IV* report: the word "private" appears four times but never in connection with the higher education sector; the word "market" appears more than a dozen times but almost exclusively in relation to the labor market. There are also no indications that the notion of "competition" is taken seriously by the report, either in its spirit or as part of the vocabulary used in the body of the text (Reichert and Tauch 2005). The omissions go against global trends in which the role of the private sector in teaching and research is on the rise, market forces are a significant part of the educational and research landscape, and the competition for students, public, and private research funds, and competition between institutions and faculty is an important factor (Altbach 1999; Levy 2003).

Consequently, the ideas behind Bologna, the analytical tools it provides, the wider picture of the role of higher education in society and economy, and policy recommendations it develops may have unanticipated and mixed effects on higher education systems, especially in Eastern (rather than Central) Europe where it is still possible to grant or refuse legal legitimacy, for example through new legislation. To be an effective integrating tool on an European scale, the Bologna process would need to take into account the fundamental difference between Western European countries and some transition countries with respect to the role of the private sector and the role of market mechanisms in higher education. In most transition countries (especially in Central Europe), private institutions currently play a significant role.

At the same time the role of the private sector in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe—considering its ability to adapt to the new societal needs and new market conditions combined with the drastically underfunded and still unreformed public institutions with limited capacities to enroll larger numbers of students—and despite its lack of recognition on the part of the Bologna process is bound to grow. Private institutions represent a wide variety of missions, organizational frameworks, legal status, and relations to the established institutional order. What is needed is the disinterested analysis of the current (in-transition) state of affairs, largely unexplored so far in international educational research, and conclusions as to how to deal, in theory and in practice, with growing market forces in education; how to regulate privatization and corporatization of educational institutions and research activities within ongoing reform attempts, and finally how to accommodate principles of the European Research Area and requirements of the Bologna process to local conditions of new EU countries. Unfortunately, the Bologna process in its current form, in general, remains indifferent to these developments even though their appearance in transition countries might prefigure many future options that Western European policymakers might face.

### Conclusions

The refusal of legitimacy to private higher education and the market forces in education in general within the Bologna process may lead to a limitation in the expansion of higher education system as a whole, in numerous Central and Eastern European countries where the private sector has not been developed so far. In Central and East European transition countries, educational business is increasingly private, teaching-focused, and market-driven. It does not seem to change the substance of the implementation of the Bologna process but it does affect the overall functioning of the two sectors in transition countries and consequently the effectiveness of Bologna reform strategies. There is a strong market-driven competition for students between private institutions, and a strong competition for faculty between private and public institutions. Transition countries, generally, have to start or already cope with the rapid massification of their systems, with the number of students being on the rise. The Bologna process has been developed for Western European countries and now it is being implemented from Portugal to the Caucasus. In most of them, the process is viewed in terms of "catching up" with the West, quite often as a substitute for the political integration. At the same time, long-term consequences of the process for national education systems with vastly different problems are unclear. Unfortunately, major Bologna-related documents do not seem to take the problem of both the private sector and the market forces in higher education into account. The overall revitalization of the European integration project through education, and the accompanying production of the new European citizenship, may bring about unexpected effects in transition countries in which welfare state regimes are different, higher education systems and labor markets have their own traditions, and which generally are at different stages of economic development. Strong private sector and powerful market forces can be viewed as good examples of significant (but so far neglected) differences between the countries where the Bologna ideas were born and the countries where these ideas are currently, almost unanimously, implemented.

Private higher education and strong market forces in education in transition countries require careful analysis in European educational research. Little known in the old EU-15 (except for example Portugal, the Netherlands, or the United Kingdom), they may indicate more global trends and tendencies, to be seen in the old EU-15 in the future. Both serious problems and excellent solutions brought about by the private sector in transition countries deserve careful research attention. The Bologna process, neglecting these developments, is an example of how experiences in the peripheral European countries can be out of research focus today.

## Notes

1. The shift to a digital, knowledge-based economy is a powerful engine for growth and competitiveness, the strategy argues. Consequently, the document affirmed the idea of a European Area of Research and Innovation. The necessary steps mentioned for the education sector include e.g. developing mechanisms for networking, improving the environment for private research investment, research and development partnerships and high technology start-ups, encouraging the development of an "open method of coordination" for the benchmarking of national research and development policies, taking steps to increase the mobility of researchers and introducing Community-wide patents (Lisbon Council 2000, pp. 3–4). The targets set in Lisbon for education included a substantial annual increase in per capita investment in human resources, the number of 18 to 24 year olds who are not in further education and training to be halved by 2010, schools and training centers to be developed into "multi-purpose local learning centers" accessible to all, and the development of a European framework defining the new basic skills to be provided by lifelong learning and defining a common European format for curricula vitae.
2. Consider, for example, the robust growth of the Polish private higher education sector. Until the collapse of Communism in Poland in 1989, higher education there was fully controlled by the state. A new Higher Education Act of 1990 paved the way to the development of the private sector in general and a Vocational Higher Education Schools Act of 1997 provided legal grounds for lower-level vocational private sector. The number of private institutions rose from 3 in 1991 to 250 in 2002 and 301 in 2005. Since the beginning of the 1990s, the private sector has changed the educational landscape in Poland beyond recognition. In the last decade and a half, the number of students rose more than four times, from about 400 000 in 1990/1991 to over 1 900 000 in 2004/2005. In academic 2004/2005, almost one third of the student body (over 30 percent) went for private higher education institutions. In recent years, private higher education institutions have been developing smoothly and under the close supervision of the Ministry of Education. They have become a challenge to public institutions. Their increasing number has also increased the accessibility of the higher education system as a whole. Private institutions, especially in smaller towns, often provide the only available form of higher education (which is also cheaper than public education in university cities when accommodation costs are taken into account).
3. The strangeness of omitting private dynamics is illustrated by data on public funding for higher education. Poland's public funding (1995–2004) has generally been between 0.8 and 0.9 percent of GDP, a figure slightly lower than those in other EU countries (For 2001, from 0.8 in Italy and the United Kingdom up to 1.5 in Sweden and 1.8 in Denmark, respectively (combined with private funding, the percentage of GDP for education in these countries was: 0.9 in Italy, 1.0 in Germany, 1.1 in France and the United Kingdom, 1.2 in Spain, 1.3 in the Netherlands and Ireland and 1.8 in Denmark). The highest percentage of private funds spent on higher education as a share of GDP has been 0.3 (Spain, Ireland, and the United Kingdom).

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