

BOLOGNA ISSUES IN THE CONTEXT OF GLOBALIZATION

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Abstract

As a rule, in professional literature Bologna process is analyzed in terms of building a single European educational area leaving the comments regarding educational market global competitiveness in the shadow. This paper is an attempt to analyze Bologna process issues not only from a European but also from a geopolitical perspective.

Keywords: *student mobility, education supplying competition, economic reasons of Bologna process, social dimension.*

JEL classification: P50

1. Did Bologna process start only on the basis of educational motives?

The core and supreme purpose of Bologna process is formation of the European higher education area which necessity was observed two decades ago. Now it has become urgent. However, Bologna process started not only on the basis of educational motives. These reasons were more profound and troubling for Europe¹.

First, common European labor market is rapidly developing. Higher education specialists freely moving within the territory of European Union are given various evaluations by employers from various countries. Therefore, actual mutual recognition of diplomas awarded to graduates of European Universities and formation of mutual trust towards the quality of education are considered to be very important and possible through the development of a single educational area.

Within the territory of European Union not only higher education graduates but also students and university staff have started to participate in mobility programs. Therefore, education of the same specialists in Universities from different countries according to unified educational standards has become a necessity and the establishment of the European higher education area can significantly contribute to it.

And finally, Europe's attractiveness and competitiveness in the field of educational services has also become a question on of agenda. Currently, educational services are not only a major factor in

¹ Yeritsyan S., Tshuguryan A ., 100 questions and answers about Bologna process, Yerevan, "Edit print", 2007, p. 6

the formation of human capital but also a business. Thus, based on data regarding international students USA is considered to be the leading country in this area also ensuring large inflows of educational fees from Europe. Therefore, in terms of competitiveness, European higher education should be able to adequately respond to global challenges.

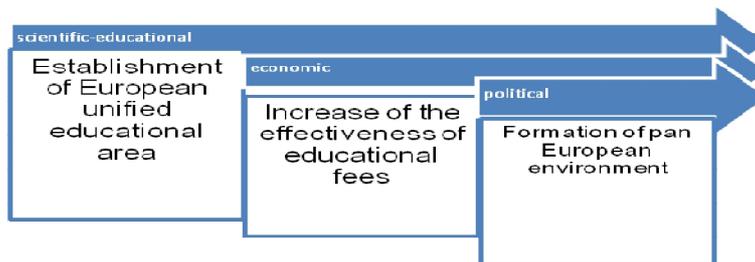


Figure 1: Bologna process main reasons²

Thus, the main reason of the Bologna Process was not only the establishment of unified European educational area, it also suggested political and economic benefits (see Figure 1).

2. What was the impact of Bologna process on EHEA University environment?

In 2010, the European University Association published the report “Trends VI” dedicated to higher education changes occurred during the last decade. The report consisted of 4 parts, the first one introducing the impact of Bologna process on European university environment during the last decade. Particularly, regarding the question what changes have occurred in quality assurance process during the last decade, 60% of European universities stated that changes are obvious. 53% of the universities also noted that due to Bologna process co-operation with other universities has become more active and 45% agreed that during that time University autonomy has been expanded (see Figure 2). At the same time it was noted that due to Bologna process only 28% of European universities have changed their academic policy, and 20% - their educational fees.

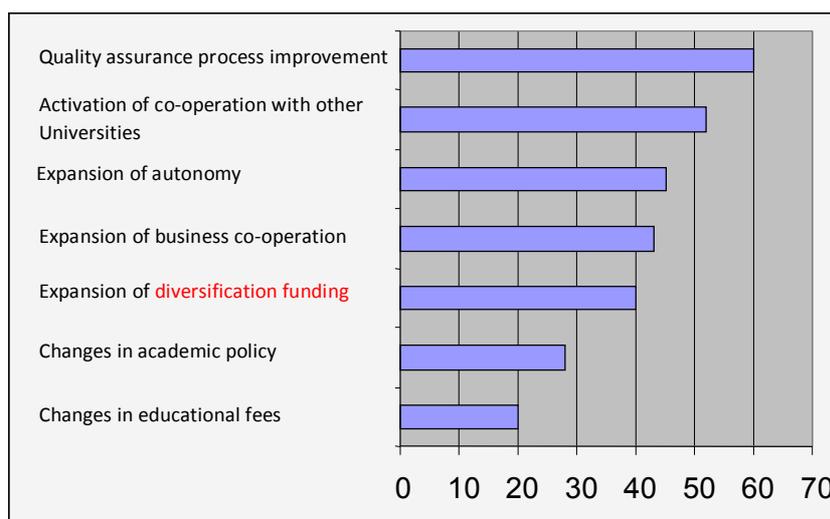


Figure 2: Bologna process impact on European University environment³

The report does not include separate analysis per countries, but European Higher Education Area

² Drawn by authors

³ Official website of European University Association <http://www.eua.be/eua-work-and-policy-area>

(EHEA) maps (see Figure 3) submitted with the report give an opportunity to determine Armenia's position in the torrent of Bologna process. Thus, 54% of the Universities believe that European higher education formation process have had only positive impact on provision of educational services, 3% consider that it have not had any impact and 38% consider that it have had both positive and negative influence. Our Republic was included in the report “Trends VI” within 54% positive impact evaluation range and was placed in a group of 6 countries (Norway, Estonia, Ireland, Finland, Lithuania, Armenia) most positively responding to Bologna process⁴.

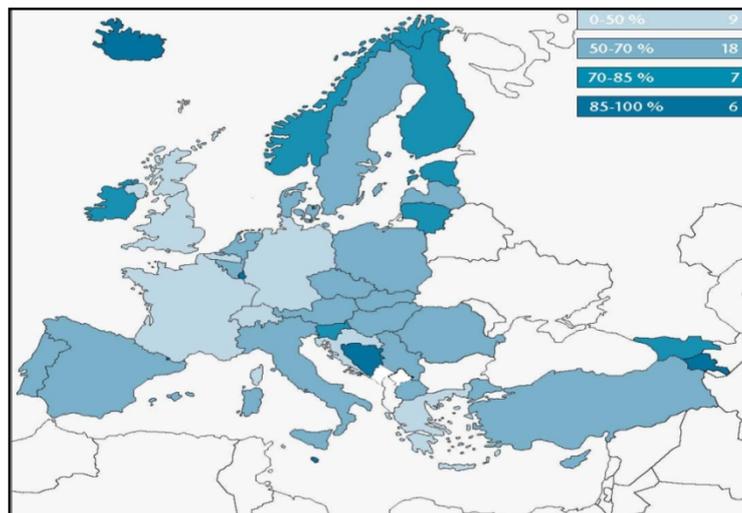


Figure 3: Degree of impact of Bologna process on EHEA countries⁵

According to the report “Trends VI”, in 2010, 95% of European countries have already introduced the 3 degree system and in terms of system’s introduction stage the distribution of 40 studied countries was represented as follows: 37 countries - 85-100%, 3 countries - 70-85%: According to European observers Armenia is among those 37 countries. Moreover, our republic belongs to the group of 38 countries applying European Credit Transfer System (ECTS). England is the only country which applies academic credits not on ECTS base.

3. Which are the economic reasons of Bologna process?

Higher educational services have a tendency to grow in price and it is conditioned not only by high inflation rates registered in the global economy. Nowadays, labor market requirements toward specialists are rapidly changing and becoming more high quality demanding. As a result, skills and competencies of university graduates acquired during education may "get old" from the very start of their work.

Naturally, professional educational services should resist competitive challenges of the labor market and spend more resources for the purpose of ensuring necessary education quality. It is not accidental that during the last decade the price of higher professional education within European higher education area has increased by 16%. Moreover, education and science expenditure share within European countries GDP’s passed the 5% threshold. It is natural that in this situation

⁴ Assessment scale for positive changes caused by Bologna process influence: 6 countries - 85-100%, 7 countries - 70-85 %, 18 countries - 50-70%, 9 countries - 0-50 %

⁵ Official website of European Universities Association <http://www.eua.be/eua-work-and-policy-area/building-the-european-higher-education-area/trends-in-european-higher-education/trends-vi.aspx>

European countries should take measures to increase the effectiveness of educational expenses and Bologna process tools bring significant contribution to this issue.

Thus, the transfer of academic credits implies not only academic freedom; it has also an economic context. In case of mutual recognition and acceptance of credits from other educational institutions the University does not spend any more resources on teaching a similar module and in such a way makes savings of educational costs. Granting joint diplomas by different universities pursues the same goal, as the costs of educational services provided to graduates are effectively distributed between universities thereby reducing the price of education. Large-scale application of ongoing education systems also contributes to price reduction of educational services especially in cases when Universities accept academic credits from non-university entities thereby “liberating” themselves from teaching certain modules.

However, in terms of forming economic results Bologna process application tools are more strongly perceived not from the perspective of increased efficiency of educational services price but from that of labor market regulation and unemployment reduction in Europe. Each corner of the common economic area within the framework of European Union should be available for free movement of the workforce. Therefore, universities will strive to educate specialists able to find job and demanded by the employers of different countries.

Table 1: Share of unemployed people per groups with different levels of education, 2011(%)⁶

Academic degree	EU	Italy	France	Czech Republic	Poland
Secondary	14.4	11.9	12.3	15.5	41.7
Vocational	9.5	8.8	15	6.6	25.4
Higher	10.2	12.3	9.8	5.3	16.1

According to statistics, the share of unemployment in groups with higher education was at a lower level since there is a greater demand for them within the labor market (see Table 1). So, the main task of the University is to educate specialists complying with the requirements of globalizing economy.

4. By what political reasons is Bologna process guided?

Bologna process is not limited by the educational framework only, it was introduced as an alternative version of currently operating globalization actions. Bologna process is part of the general scenario according to which people, concepts, information and quality workforce should freely pass state borders. And professional higher education consists of the above-mentioned components.

Studying basic documents regarding the Bologna process it becomes obvious from the first glance that the task is directed not only to internationalization of educational services but also to occupation of competitive positions in the global educational market. Of course, it is not explicitly

⁶ Key Data on Education in Europe, Eurostat 2012, p.186

mentioned in official documents but Europe strives to respond to the challenges of overwhelming advantages of USA educational system, a system which has been a world leader in the field of attracting international students and exporting educational services. In this regard, even Salamanca convention, adopted in 2001, explicitly mentioned that “European higher education institutions strive to become centers immersing talents from the world”.

However, the framework of Bologna process political reasons is not limited only to consolidation of European higher educational services potential and provision of competitive positions towards Transcaucasia. There is also another task: to strengthen Western European values and expand democracy.

Europe established the idea according to which the university is a guarantor of traditions and through the elimination of political and geographical boundaries during its operation it takes a mission to apply these traditions and interact with different cultures. Based on this the Charter of university freedoms was adopted on September 18, 1988, having the following fundamental principles:

1. The University is a geographically established institution having historical heritage, where research and education implemented to satisfy the needs of society must be independent of political and economic power.
2. Research activities and education should be unified and meet the changing requirements of the society.
3. Research and education freedom is the fundamental principle of university life. Rejecting intolerance and accepting dialogue style the University is an ideal place for professors to develop research activities and to transfer knowledge as well as for students having desire to gain that knowledge.
4. For significant knowledge development there is a particular need for university information exchange as well as for implementation of joint programs aiming the progress of education.

5. What does the trajectory of Bologna process social dimension look like?

If during the first years preceding the launch of Bologna process, the basic components of its tools have been created (quality assurance, academic credits accumulation and transfer, mutual recognition, education) leaving the analysis of social consequences of this process on the background, then during London Communique a serious statement was made to promote all levels of higher education in the direction of social justice towards entering, studying and graduating students. It became clear that Bologna process could not run effectively or it could even fail if it would not have been based on social justice. For this purpose it was intended to take additional measures to organise students' education irrespective of their social and economic status, revealing flexible educational paths and providing educational services on an equal basis.

In addition to all this, Bologna process *social dimension* was clearly underlined during the Leuven conference. It was decided that students should reflect the diversity of population of Europe aiming at achieving equal rights for quality education. It includes improvement of educational atmosphere, elimination of all obstacles and establishment of relevant economic conditions so that students can be provided educational services for all levels.

It was also mentioned that each participating country should set measurable targets for overall involvement in educational programs and improvement of various groups' participation indexes at all levels and should also develop standards and mechanisms for their periodic review.

In addition, it was also suggested to increase the Universities' responsibility for ensuring their graduates' social perspectives (employment, career opportunities).

Studies show that in EHEA countries the distribution of migrant and non-migrant students is not equal. In general, in all countries availability of higher education to migrants is significantly low. If in Netherlands, Czech Republic, Finland the ratio of migrant and non-migrant students is somehow equal, in Italy, Estonia there is a triple split emerging between them. Such distribution does not indicate the social balance of students' admission to EHEA Universities (see Figure 4):

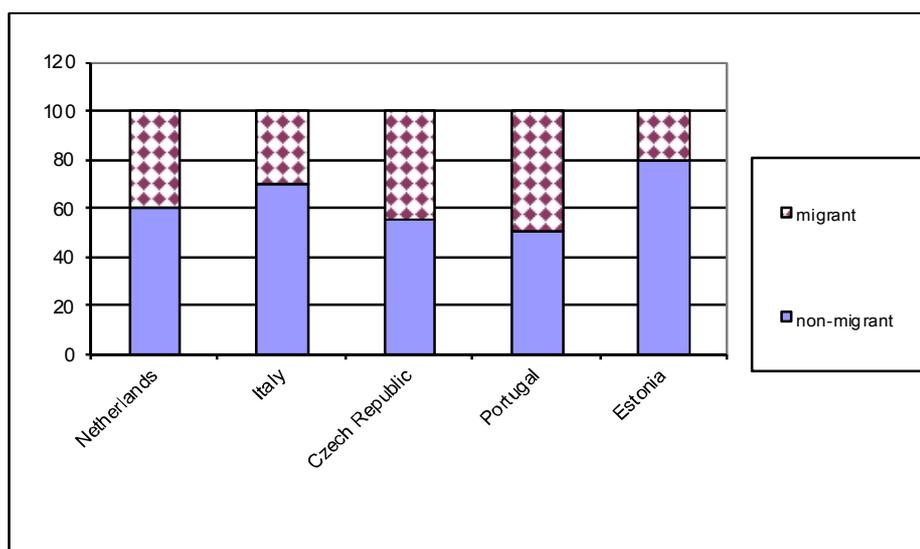


Figure 4: Distribution of migrant and non-migrant students at universities in EHEA countries (%)⁷

Furthermore, applicants' admission to Universities in several EHEA countries is conditioned by availability of higher education by their parents. The degree of connectivity between parents' qualification and the number of applicants is especially high in Slovakia, Romania and Bulgaria, where parents' psychological and economic support is great⁸.

Naturally, economic and psychological influence conditioned by parents' educational qualification hinders the provision of Bologna process in terms of social equality and this is clearly seen in the Republic of Armenia. Currently, in our universities the number of regional applicants is gradually decreasing because of their domestic socioeconomic situation.

⁷ Eurostat & Eurostudent 2009, p. 98

⁸ Eurostat, LFS ad-hoc module 2009

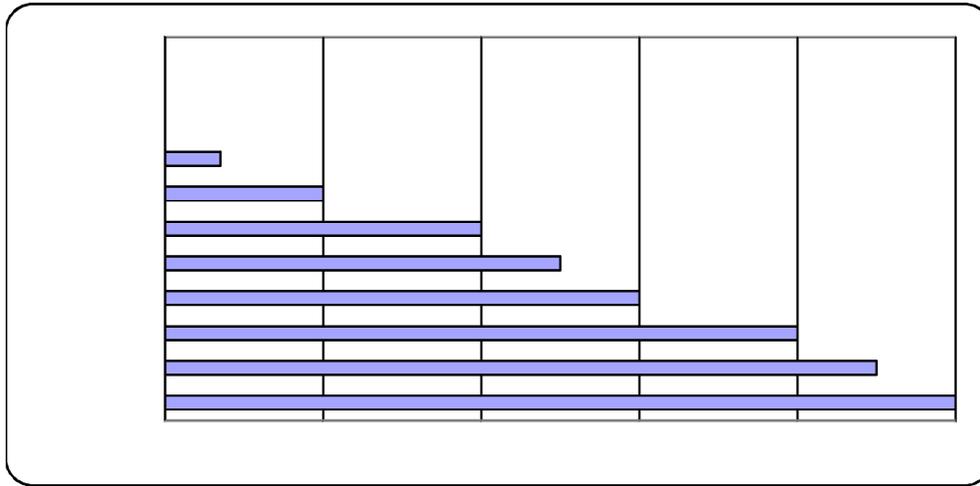


Figure 5: The ratio of Bachelor students paying for education in 2010/2011 academic year (%)⁹

Paid education is an obstacle for Bologna process social equability. Studies show that in EHEA countries there are different solutions for this issue. So, if in Scandinavian countries Bachelor's studies are free of charge, in France, also a developed country, the majority of Bachelor students follow studies within a payment-based system (see Figure 5).

Table 2: Dynamics of payment-based and state-funded education within Bachelor's educational system in Armenian state universities¹⁰

Systems	2010/2011	2011/2012	2012/2013
State-funded	23%	26%	21%
Payment-based system	78%	74%	79%
	100%	100%	100%

For comparison it should be mentioned that in the Republic of Armenia all educational programs for Bachelor's studies are payment-based and state-funded system range from 32% to 35% (see Table 2). Particularly, applicants coming from the regions cannot afford themselves to follow studies within payment-based systems, thus higher education in our Republic is gradually becoming "elite"-type undermining the grounds of Bologna process social dimension.

6. What does Bologna process trajectory look like according to the held summits?

Bologna process motives are regularly reviewed based not only on geopolitical developments but also on structural peculiarities of a unified educational environment. So, the implementation framework of this process does not remain unchanged and is being constantly reviewed during summits held in regional countries, and this trajectory is shown in Figure 6.

⁹ The European Higher Education Area in 2012: Bologna Process Implementation Report, page 95 <http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice>

¹⁰ www.armstat.am

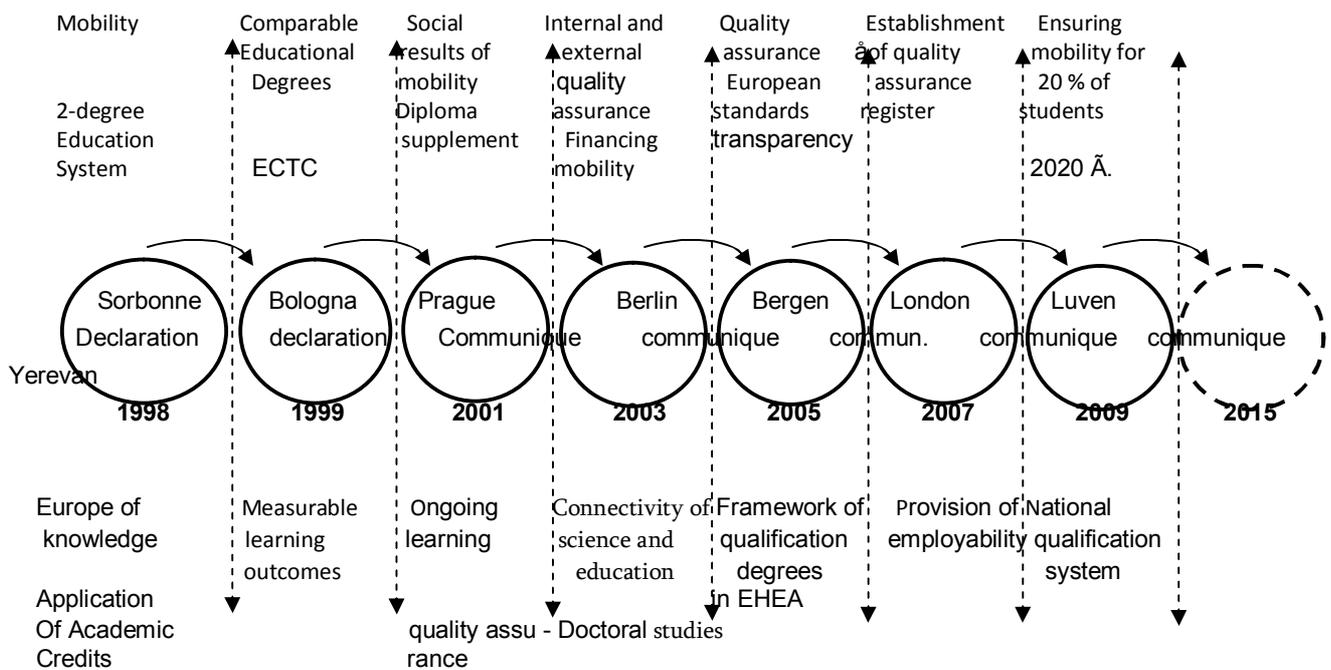


Figure 6: Bologna process trajectory according to the held summits¹¹

At the launch of Bologna process the complexities, whose reduction would require a long time, had not been revealed yet. Therefore, even initially it was scheduled to complete the process in a decade. However, at present the “romance” of Bologna process is not clearly felt and countries of the region still have a long way to go in this area.

Thus, if at the beginning of the process the main task was the introduction of a two-degree system in EHEA countries in a short period of time, then few years later it became clear that introduction of a three-degree system, including doctoral studies, was necessary. Even after passing this stage it was not possible to generalize the professional education degree system, as some problems connected with the framework of education qualification degrees appeared and have not been solved yet.

Quality assurance is also a key topic of discussion at Bologna process summits. Its incomplete implementation is a serious obstacle for transfer of credits and student mobility.

7. Conclusions

Implementation of global competitive tendencies of Bologna process policy did not make us wait long. Some regions of Transcaucasia peculiarly responded to this process. However, the experience showed that in general Bologna process enforcement tools were considered acceptable outside the European higher education area¹².

Asian region:

Australia came up as an initiator establishing Asian-Pacific unified educational area, a regional zone which has the same functions as EHEA. According to the Communiqué adopted on April 4th,

¹¹ Compiled by the authors

¹² Daviy Crosier, Teodora Parveva The Bologna Process: Its Impact in Europe and Beyond, //UNESCO, International Institute of Educational Planning, Paris, 2013, www.iiep.unesco.org

2006 in Brisbane, 27 regional countries announced the creation of unified educational area, where student and staff mobility, credit exchange and, therefore, introduction of unified quality system are highly encouraged. A regional center for higher education and development (RIHED) was established in Thailand, introducing tools complying with Bologna process in countries joining Brisbane Communiqué within Pacific and Asian regions¹³.

Latin America and Caribbean basin

Inter-American Organization for Higher Education (IOHE) includes over 300 Universities from 26 countries of Latin America aiming at harmonizing higher education approaches in that region. IOHE organization develops common regional principles for mutual recognition of academic credits, quality assurance, acceptance of diploma's unified supplement¹⁴.

Africa

African continent is also interested in the creation of higher professional educational area.¹⁵ During the joint meeting of higher education ministers of 18 countries of the region, the African Higher Education Harmonization Union was formed mostly emphasizing mutual recognition process and quality assurance. Currently, the Union has also set a task to strengthen public responsibility on the availability of higher educational services, which is very important for developing African countries. Moreover, the Union has several ways to integrate the Bologna process (EUA, 2010).

Northern America

The origin and enforcement of the idea of academic mobility and credit system initially started in the United States, which has been a world leader at attracting international students until now. Therefore, in this region a serious attitude towards Bologna process should be shown in terms of maintaining competitive positions in global educational market. At present the Pan-Canadian professional academic degree awarding system is being developed. In the USA the "Tuning" pilot program operates which is aimed at making some academic programs and qualification degrees in concord with European ones, thus making North-American region attractive for European students¹⁶.

Northern Africa and Middle East

Although the countries of this region are not official members of Bologna agreement they are closely related to this process and perform active collaboration directed to EHEA integration. Particular target areas regard the harmonization of Bachelor's and Master's qualification degrees, quality assurance, student mobility, on which the European TEMPUS program is focused¹⁷.

Thus, Bologna process makes its way into overseas educational areas in two aspects. On the one hand, developing countries strive to employ the tools of this process and are in search of ways to integrate into EHEA. On the other hand, countries with developed educational systems and being education services leaders with rich traditions, not only do not reject Bologna principles,

¹³ Brisbane communiqué Issued at the Asia- Pacific education ministers' meeting, Brisbane, Australia, 4 April 2006

¹⁴ The Bologna Process for U.S. eyes: Re-learning higher education in the age of convergence', // Washington, DC: Institute for Higher Education Policy. 2012, // www.ihep.org/assets/

¹⁵ Bayemi, G. Dao Sow, A. 2006. 'Support for higher education in WAEMU countries'. Appraisal report for the African Development Fund.

¹⁶ Tuning Educational Structures USA, // www.tuningusa.org.

¹⁷ *Countries in the Southern Mediterranean (2009–2010)*. A Tempus Study, No. 03. Brussels: EACEA. Retrieved from: http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/tempus/tools/documents/bologna_implementation_mediterranean_countries_1005.pdf

moreover, somehow applying them, they strive not to lose their competitive positions in a globalizing educational market.

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