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How Not to Defend Your Tradition of Higher Education

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Summary

The paper focuses on the perception and implementation of the Bologna Process in Croatia. The author makes a distinction between the harmonization of higher education in Europe (the Bologna Process) and the attempt to introduce the Bologna Process in this country ('Bologna'). Kurelić discusses the growing concern that 'Bologna' does not have much in common with the original harmonization and explains why 'Bologna' is a distortion of the original idea. It is often said that the Bologna Process represents a paradigm change in European higher education, the change from a number of national, continental traditions of higher education to a sort of Anglo-American model. This is the reason why Kurelić uses the concepts of "paradigm change" and "tradition" to explain why the Bologna Process has been misrepresented in Croatia. He argues that 'Bologna' is an example of a failed reform and an example of unwilling Europeanization.

Key words: The Bologna Process, paradigm change, Croatian tradition of higher education, Europeanization

In this paper I write on the perception and implementation of the Bologna Process in Croatia. I make a distinction between the harmonization of higher education in Europe (the Bologna Process) and the attempt to introduce the Bologna Process into our country ('Bologna'). It is more or less common knowledge that 'Bologna' does not have much in common with the original harmonization. I will try to explain why 'Bologna' is a distortion of the original idea and why it represents an example of a failed reform. The fact that the failure is still not recognized by the policy makers is particularly frightening.

The paper consists of five segments. In the first one (A) I present two concepts used in epistemology and political theory in order to explain the perception of the

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Bologna Process in Croatia. They are “paradigm change” and “tradition”. In the second segment (B) I briefly present the key elements of the Bologna Process. In the third (C) I compare the original process with its implementation in Croatia. In the fourth (D) I present a short list of serious problems resulting from misrepresentation of the original idea of harmonization, and in the final section (E) I sum up the argument.

I argue that fundamental reforms which almost represent a change of paradigm presuppose a sense of crisis, some sort of bottom-up urgency in which practitioners within a certain tradition want to change it themselves. Top-down paradigm changes with no genuine will to improve a certain tradition may create dysfunctional systems.

A

It is often said that the Bologna Process represents a paradigm change in European higher education,¹ the change from a number of national, continental traditions of higher education to a sort of Anglo-American model. So the harmonization happens as a cooperated conversion to a new tradition. This new tradition is *sort of* Anglo-American, because it differs significantly from either American or British tradition.² The process of paradigm change is done in a piecemeal way, which is exactly what the word “harmonization” means in this context. The Bologna Process introduces solutions which to non-Americans and non-Brits look like the Anglo-American model, but in fact it creates something fundamentally new.

In this paper I would like to show that ‘Bologna’ understands the Bologna Process in a way which makes its implementation in Croatia impossible. In order to do that, I will use Thomas Kuhn’s understanding of “paradigm change”³ and Paul Feyerabend’s concept of “tradition”.

In Kuhn’s opinion, scientific revolution happens when scientists realize that their paradigm cannot explain the world properly. Faced with a serious “crisis” of their understanding of the world, scientists switch to a new paradigm, a dramatically new way of practicing science and understanding reality.

¹ “Although new degree structures are still commonly perceived as the main Bologna goal, there is increasing awareness that the most significant legacy of the process will be a change of educational paradigm across the continent” (Crosier, Purser i Smidt, 2007: 8).

² Bob Reinalda, one of the distinguished authorities on the Bologna Process, writes: “The pan-European Bologna Process is also a transformation of European higher education systems, moving towards a common, more or less Anglo-Saxon, model...” (Reinalda, 2007: 47).

³ For extra-epistemological aspects of Kuhn’s *Structure of Scientific Revolutions* see my paper in Croatian ‘Izvanepistemološki utjecaj Kuhnove *Strukture znanstvenih revolucija*’ (Kurelić, 2008).

In Feyerabend's theory, tradition is a "rich articulated practice" such as composing, voting, punishing criminals, painting or worshipping. Obviously, in Feyerabend's view, an articulated practice in higher education would also be a tradition. His understanding of "interaction" of two traditions is particularly interesting. The outcomes of interactions can be surprising. A result can be a new style in painting, rejuvenated science or improved agriculture. "In all these cases we have a practice, or a tradition, we have certain influences upon it, emerging from another practice or tradition and we observe a change. The change may lead to a slight modification of the original practice, it may eliminate it, may result in a tradition that barely resembles either of the interacting elements" (Feyerabend, 1987: 17).

By combining Kuhn's "paradigm change" and Feyerabend's "interaction of traditions" I want to show that 'Bologna' is an undesired mixture of Croatian old tradition and the model introduced by the Bologna Declaration. Strictly speaking, this model is not a tradition, because nobody on Earth practiced it when it was introduced. I will try to show that the paradigm change, understood as a change of tradition through the process of harmonization, did not happen in the desired way because the reason for change was not the desire to improve our articulated practice of higher education. Scientific revolutions are impossible if scientists are satisfied with their paradigms. Radical changes in traditions of higher education are also questionable if the practitioners are not aware that changes should be made, i.e. if they do not have any problems with the way things are.

I will return to Kuhn and Feyerabend in the third segment, but first I would like to stress the key intentions of the Bologna Process.

B

The Bologna Process started in Sorbonne, so if it really is a form of Anglo-Americanization of European educational traditions, at least it was initiated by the French education minister Claude Allegre. He invited his Italian (Luigi Berlinguer), British (Tessa Blackstone) and German (Jurgen Ruttgers) colleagues to Paris to celebrate the 800th anniversary of the Sorbonne University. The Sorbonne Declaration signed in May of 1998 is an important political document, which started a pan-European political process now called the Bologna Process. For a political scientist, two developments are quite interesting. Firstly, it is the very idea of dealing with national educational problems by including the entire continent, and secondly, it is the fact that four member states of the European Union did not start the process within the EU but went pan-European and introduced intergovernmentalism as a way of dealing with educational issues in Europe.⁴

⁴ I clarified most of the ideas presented in this paper during European Political Science Network (epsNet) conferences in Prague, Paris, and Ljubljana. epsNet is nowadays sadly dysfunctional,

The Declaration says: “The European process has very recently moved some extremely important steps ahead. Relevant as they are, they should not make one forget that Europe is not only that of Euro, of the banks and the economy; it must be a Europe of knowledge as well. We must strengthen and build upon the intellectual, cultural, social and technical dimensions of our continent. These have to a large extent been shaped by its universities, which continue to play a pivotal role for their development” (Reinalda, Kulesza, 2005: 115).

The Sorbonne Declaration introduces a few action lines which later determined the Bologna Process. They are: mobility of students and academics, the introduction of two cycles – undergraduate and graduate, and the introduction of the credit system. The Declaration clearly points out: “International recognition of the first cycle degree as an appropriate level of qualification is important for the success of this endeavour, in which we wish to make our higher education schemes clear to all.

In the graduate cycle, there would be a choice between a shorter master’s degree and a longer doctor’s degree, with possibilities to transfer from one to the other. In both graduate degrees, appropriate emphasis would be placed on research and autonomous work” (*ibid.*: 116).

The idea that the Sorbonne Declaration introduced an Anglo-American model in a moment when four European education ministers started thinking about the architecture of the European higher education is an oversimplification; however, a few English and American solutions were recognized as desirable. In both countries, the UK and the US, a bachelor’s degree is recognized as the one which secures the “appropriate level of education” and employability. In both countries, master’s and doctor’s degrees are advanced degrees. The Declaration uses the word “graduate” in the American way; it is “postgraduate” in English and *poslijediplomski* in Croatian.

The Bologna Declaration spread the idea of Sorbonne to 29 countries. It started one of the most important intergovernmental projects in modern European history (15 countries which signed the Declaration were EU Member States, while 14 were not). The Declaration launched the continental project aimed at the creation of the “European Area of Higher Education” by 2010.

but its role in the development of pan-European political science cannot be denied. For a discussion between intergovernmentalist and supranational interpretations of the Bologna Process, see Bob Reinalda, ‘Intergovernmental Momentum of the Bologna Process 1998-2004’ and Carolin Balzer, Kerstin Martens, ‘International Higher Education and the Bologna Process. What Part Does the European Commission Play?’, *epsNet Kiosk Plus THE NET Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 3, No. 1, June 2005.

The spirit of the Sorbonne Declaration is present in every paragraph, and the ideas presented in Paris are transformed into six precisely defined objectives. The objectives of the Bologna Declaration are:

- Adoption of a system of easily readable and comparable degrees;
- Adoption of a degree system based on two main cycles (undergraduate and graduate);
- Establishment of a system of credits (ECTS);
- Promotion of mobility and elimination of obstacles to the effective exercise of free movement of students and academics;
- Promotion of European co-operation in quality assurance;
- Promotion of the necessary European dimensions in higher education.

The European area of higher education should create the “Europe of knowledge”, “enrich the European citizenship” and “promote citizens’ mobility and employability, and the Continent’s overall development” (Reinalda, Kulesza, 2005: 118). The process started with the Declaration as initiated by the politicians and stresses the political and economic importance of the reform of higher education in Europe, not just in the EU.

“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” (*ibid.*).

By signing the Declaration, each signatory country freely committed itself to reform its own system of higher education, so the four EU member states from the Sorbonne conference encouraged 29 European countries to “search for a common European answer to common European problems” (*ibid.*: 122).⁵

What are the common problems? There are several reasons why the French minister initiated the conference in Paris. The most obvious are: the crisis of the European welfare state, the employability of graduates and the need to create an educational model which is affordable and globally attractive. The fact that the US attracts more foreign students than the four countries drafting the Sorbonne Declaration together did not go well with the initiators of the Bologna Process. The creation of the European area of higher education should achieve three politically and economically extremely important objectives.

⁵ Confederation of European Union Rector’s Conference and the Association of European Universities, *The Bologna Declaration on the European space for higher education: an explanation*, 20 February 2000.

“1) To facilitate the speedy entrance of educated professionals into the job market through shortened degrees.

2) To enhance the cross-border mobility of students and job seekers.

3) To increase the competitiveness of European higher education internationally.”⁶

The introduction of the English-type 3-year bachelor’s degree and of the American-type credits becomes the essential part of the project. It is not true that some imaginary Anglo-American model is forced down on all Europeans, as is usually understood in Croatia. Europe is not trying to internationally challenge the American system of higher education by becoming Americanized. The Bologna Process two-cycle model dramatically differs from the UK and the US models; however, it uses parts of them to secure commensuration and harmonization between the diverse European models. If the UK ever decides to accept the Bologna model in full, it will have almost as many problems as Germany or Italy. The only thing they will not have to worry about is the 3-year bachelor’s degree and the employability of B.A. graduates, which is one of the key objectives of the reform.

Croatia signed the Declaration in Prague in 2001 together with Cyprus and Turkey. Prague represents a fundamental step in the shaping of the process because the European Commission got formally on board. This gives a new dimension to the intergovernmentalism of Sorbonne and Bologna. After Prague, convergence between the Bologna Process and the EU education policy becomes very important for countries like Croatia.⁷ Potential EU members feel the need to harmonize their educational systems with the one which is forming within the EU. The Bologna Process becomes a mixture of intergovernmental and supranational elements in which the original intergovernmental co-operation gets a coordinating organ in the European Commission. It is not surprising that the process was presented in Croatia as a prerequisite for becoming a member of the EU.

The Prague Declaration introduces three new action lines: lifelong education, involvement of students, and promotion of the attractiveness and competitiveness of the European higher education area to other parts of the world. All three were, in one way or another, implicitly or explicitly present in the Sorbonne Declaration and the Bologna Declaration.

⁶ This is Robert Sedgwick’s understanding of the key objectives. He got them right, unlike numerous Europeans. ‘The Bologna Process: As Seen From the Outside’, *World Education News and Reviews*, September/October 2003, <http://www.wes.org/ewenr/03sept/pffeture.htm>

⁷ “Although the Bologna process was initiated as mainly an intergovernmental process, there is an evident and *growing convergence with EU processes* aimed at strengthening European co-operation in higher education.” *Zgaga Report 2003*, in: Reinalda, Kulesza, *Bologna Process...*, p. 138.

The tenth objective or “action line” of the process was added in Berlin in 2003, and it is the creation of doctoral studies through the synergy between the European higher education area and the European research area. In Berlin the list of members was expanded by seven (Albania, Andorra, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and Montenegro, Holy See, The Russian Federation, and Macedonia).

The hard core of the process is: employability of bachelor graduates in order to secure faster entrance of educated professionals into the job market, mobility of students and job seekers, and global competitiveness of European higher education. If the first two elements are not secured, we can safely say that a country is not doing the Bologna Process properly. This is exactly what has happened in Croatia.

C

I will try to explain the distortion of the original process, our ‘Bologna’, by Kuhn’s concept of “crisis”. There is no paradigm change without a crisis. Kuhn argues that scientists satisfied with their own paradigm do not recognize anomalies. Anomalies appear when nature cannot be forced into the inflexible box supplied by the paradigm. Bruner and Postman’s experiment with playing cards explains the conservative character of “normal science”. During the experiment, subjects were shown abnormal cards like the black four of hearts. When a card that normally does not exist in a deck was shown to subjects, they recognized it as a standard existing card, as the four of hearts or the four of spades. “Without any awareness of trouble, it was immediately fitted to one of the conceptual categories prepared by prior experience” (Kuhn, 1970: 63). So, if the scientists believe that all swans are white, a black swan will be interpreted as a big crow or a white swan which has flown through the chimney.

In this paper I argue that the Bologna Process degrees are black swans for the Croatian tradition of higher education; however, they are recognized as dirty white swans. The key part of the Bologna Process is the shortening of a 4-year diploma to a 3-year bachelor’s degree. On the other hand, the essence of ‘Bologna’ is the equality between pre-Bologna 4-year diplomas and the new master’s degree. This means that something fundamentally new was recognized as something we already have. Consequently, the easiest way to do a reform was to extend our overloaded 4-year diploma programs to 5 years and to call this extension a harmonization with Europe. This is strikingly obvious in the Croatian translation of the two Bologna cycles. The first degree, bachelor, which is conclusive and should guarantee employability, is in Croatian law translated as *prvostupnik* (first-leveller), which instantly suggests that there is a second level which needs to be completed. The second cycle is translated as *diplomski*, which suggests that it is equal to a pre-Bologna 4-year diploma. So, undergraduate and graduate cycles are recognized as two levels of a pre-Bologna

4-year diploma. This is not a wrong translation, but a conscious change of meaning. Earlier I showed that in the Sorbonne Declaration and in the Bologna Declaration the doctoral degree was part of the second cycle.⁸ It was established as the third cycle in Berlin, but without ECTS credits and as a cycle which presupposes the learning outcomes of the Bologna master's degree. It is essential for the process to have a clear cut between the cycles. A person with a Bologna bachelor's degree should be educated and skilful enough to enter the job market. Students who want to continue their education at the master's level should be educated enough to do that. It is understood that a large portion of bachelor graduates will not enrol in master's programs either because they want to get a job or because their grades are not good enough for the advanced studies. By recognizing the master's degree as equivalent to a Croatian pre-Bologna 4-year diploma, the former was made relevant for the Croatian labour market. In our interpretation, a society of knowledge is a society of masters. After three years of studying Croatian students do not get a diploma, but a certificate (*svjedodžba*), and bachelor graduates are expected to continue their education at the master's level. This *de facto* creates a two-gear five-year diploma in which only the worst students do not enrol in the second cycle. The frightening thing is that the number of students who want to enter the master's cycle is so big, and their grade point average is so low, that proper education at the master's level becomes impossible for a number of faculties in social sciences and humanities. Instead of having a break after the first degree, the Croatian reform forces everyone to go for the second, consequently implementing an anti-Bologna Process. This starts a scary domino effect with a number of seriously undesirable consequences. I will make a short list of seven.

D

Undesirable "side effects" of 'Bologna' are:

- 1) Failure to adopt a system of easily readable and comparable degrees;
- 2) Problems in recognition of international degrees;
- 3) Stopping of mobility;

⁸ "The degree awarded after the first cycle shall 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." The Bologna Declaration, in: Reinalda, Kulesza, *The Bologna Process...*, p. 119. It is interesting to note that the meaning of the two cycles was correctly translated in *Vjesnik*, feuilleton 'Studiji 2005./06.' Zagreb, 28 June 2005, p. 2. The second objective of the process in Croatian sounds like this: "Prihvaćanje sustava temeljenog na dvama glavnim ciklusima, dodiplomskom i postdiplomskom. Pristup drugom ciklusu zahtijeva uspješno završen prvi ciklus studija koji mora trajati najmanje tri godine. Stupanj postignut nakon tri godine smatra se potrebnim stupnjem kvalifikacije na europskom tržištu rada. Drugi ciklus vodit će magisteriju i/ili doktoratu, kao što je to slučaj u mnogim europskim zemljama."

- 4) Discouragement of lifelong education;
- 5) Creation of a system which is not compatible with job creation in the EU;
- 6) Endangerment of the doctoral level of education;
- 7) Non-utilization of the most vital part of the population – the young and educated.

Let me briefly describe each of the structural dysfunctions of 'Bologna'. (1) Croatia introduced an anomaly called "postgraduate specialist program" (something like post-master master). The problem with this degree is that it is designed for pre-Bologna students who have a 4-year diploma, for candidates who are *ex lege* master's degree holders. It is called postgraduate, but it remains at level 7 of the European qualification framework, which is a clear-cut anomaly. (2) The decision to make a pre-Bologna diploma equal to the new master's degree opened a can of worms in the recognition of international degrees. A 4-year diploma from former Yugoslav universities is recognized as equal to a Croatian 4-year diploma. This means that someone from Skopje, Mostar or Priština can come to Croatia, become *ex lege* master and continue his/her education at the doctoral level, but if a person is a four-year high-honours bachelor from Harvard or Yale, he or she will be recognized as *prvostupnik* (first-leveller) and asked to continue education at the master's level. Of course, the problem is not that bachelors are expected to continue their education at the master's level, but the fact that, according to our law, a former Yugoslav pre-Bologna diploma secures learning outcomes which were literally unknown in the moment the diploma was issued. This means that by recognizing former Yugoslav diplomas as higher, we *de facto* create a Former Yugoslav higher education area in which a 4-year diploma from Banja Luka has more value than a 4-year degree from Harvard. Nothing more, nothing less. (3) This also stops mobility (and lifelong education), because Croatian pre-Bologna graduates are not encouraged to continue their education at the master's level abroad. If there is no difference between the old diploma and the new master's degree, there is no point in spending one year in Europe trying to earn something you, *ex lege*, already have. Pre-Bologna students who earned one-year, full-time M.Sc. degrees at the best European universities (Chevening scholars and others) are not distinguished in any way in Croatia. They do not get a salary increase and their M.Sc. degree is recognized as inferior to the pre-Bologna two-year, part-time "scientific master". Non-consecutive, one-year programs at the master's level designed for foreign students and ideal for mobility do not exist in Croatia. Any kind of horizontal mobility of our students is almost impossible, because the bachelor's degree is not an appropriate level of qualification for the Croatian labour market. (4) Instead of non-consecutive master's degrees, Croatia has postgraduate specialist degrees in which Bologna bachelor graduates cannot enrol. This degree makes sense only as a form of lifelong

education, but unfortunately it does not secure any pay raise either, so in that respect it is as useless as the new master's degree. (5) This all shows how 'Bologna' actually creates a big problem for Croatian citizens. While in the rest of Europe a bachelor's degree becomes recognized as one which secures employability and decent jobs, including the positions of high-ranking bureaucrats in Bruxelles, in Croatia it is impossible to teach Mathematics in primary school without a master's degree in Mathematics. (6) Finally, mistakes made at the first two levels are going to make doctoral programs extremely problematic. The master's level in our interpretation cannot secure the learning outcomes needed for normal doctoral programs. *Ex lege* master graduates who graduated 15-20 years ago can enter the third cycle without any preconditions, and universities will accept them if they can pay the tuition. The state overspent on the first two levels and it cannot afford to pay for the third cycle as well. It is a well-known fact that in social sciences the paradigm disappearance of Marxism created completely new programs, so *ex lege* master's degree holders do not have basic information about contemporary social sciences. Frankly, it is questionable if a political scientist who graduated in 1975 would be informed enough about modern political science to continue his/her education at the master's level.

In Croatia, a master's degree is recognized as a proper diploma which guarantees employability, so almost all students want to enrol in the second cycle, even the candidates with a very low grade point average. This dramatically lowers the quality of teaching and seminar work and directly prevent Croatia from securing the learning outcomes necessary for doctoral programs. Not surprisingly, one of the best models of organizing doctoral studies – the graduate school model⁹ – is ruled out in Croatia. In a system in which the first two levels are actually connected, it is almost impossible to organize a graduate school. *'Bologna' structurally produces a decrease of quality in higher education.* (7) This all amounts to a major problem which goes beyond higher education. The fact that our students who have distinguished international master's degrees are not recognized in Croatia does not mean that they are not recognized in Europe. If our bachelor's degree holders are not employable in Croatia, it does not mean that they are not employable abroad. The full extent of the mistake made by 'Bologna' will be obvious when Croatia becomes a Member State of the European Union. Then 'Bologna' will literally force out of the country the most vital and the best educated segment of the Croatian population.

⁹ "An analysis of trends across Europe shows two main organisational models emerging as vehicles for promoting high quality, internationally oriented and networked doctoral/research/graduate schools: Graduate school and Doctoral/Research school", EUA publication 'Doctoral Programmes in Europe's Universities: Achievements and Challenges', 2007, p. 10 (<http://www.eua.be/events/eua-council-for-doctoral-education/publications/>).

E

In this paper I argued that Croatian 'Bologna' is a more or less coherent anti-Bologna Process with deeply undesirable consequences. The original process was "misrepresented" because there was no genuine will to significantly change the Croatian tradition of higher education. By using concepts of "paradigm change" and "tradition", I tried to show that there can be no radical reform of any tradition if the practitioners do not feel the need to change it. The reason for starting the reform was the belief that this was a necessary precondition to becoming a member of the EU. When it was realized that it was not so, the only reason for making the reform evaporated. The end result is a system which is no better than the old one,¹⁰ and a system which does not harmonize our higher education with the rest of Europe and the EU. It is more expensive, and the level of dissatisfaction of both students and staff, especially in social sciences, is worrying. The worst is yet to come. If the idea of 'Bologna' was to protect our higher education and our old diploma by making it equal to the new master's degree, that idea backfired. The full scope of the mistake will become obvious when Croatia eventually becomes a Member State of the EU. Then it will become clear that a system designed to defend it from imported models was not necessary while we were not in the EU, and that it is useless once we are. As a matter of fact, 'Bologna' will become a form of discrimination against our own citizens because they will be asked to study five years for jobs for which Europeans study three. The brain drain will be the logical outcome of that mistake.

Finally, if we are doing other reforms just to get them off our back, and if we feel that reforms are just a pain in the neck enforced on us by the too demanding EU, the results will be equally undesirable. 'Bologna' is an example of how not to do a reform.

¹⁰ The student protests at the Faculty of Philosophy and the Faculty of Political Science in Zagreb actually insisted on a return to the pre-Bologna model. Paradoxically, the students who see themselves as revolutionary anti-globalists and anti-capitalists accused the conservatives who prevented the reform of not being conservative enough.

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