

## **Session: Meeting implementation challenges together**

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The implementation of the Bologna ministerial commitments has not always been easy and without challenges. The Bologna process Implementation Report provides us with a fruitful set of data and comparative analysis that could inform policy developments and decision making processes.

Instead of using it for self-promotion I would rather look at it as a valuable source of information on how we implement our joint commitments.

Challenge is, however, that data is based on self-reporting mechanism and it could hinder a potential for a reliable benchmarking. Therefore, I support the role of Bologna Implementation Coordination Group that can contribute to a better efficiency of the implementation of the Bologna commitments that could make it easier to exchange our experience and good practice in reaching the Bologna goals and to have a better external peer view and assistance in addressing the challenges in the implementation.

I believe that we must always remind ourselves of the origins of the Bologna process that is built on the ideas and the common values such as openness for the argument and fact-based debate, power of scientific proof, acquisition of critical thinking skills, development of research capabilities, encouragement of pluralism of ideas, transparency and accountability that all have fundamental importance for education and human development.

Therefore, the biggest challenge is to find the best balance between removing barriers to a more intensive cooperation between our higher education institutions and governments while keeping our different choices.

The challenges to the implementation of the Bologna goals should be considered holistically and we must see the interplay and dependences among the Bologna commitments. For example, if we are not able to assure assessment based on learning outcomes, it is not easy to gain trust and this can, as a consequence, hinder mobility, use of qualification framework and quality assurance system becomes just another bureaucracy and burden for HEIs.

As a result, as reported by the students, there are serious obstacles for recognition of study period and ECTS gained abroad and automatic recognition of qualifications and comparable degrees is far from a reality.

Although we have developed our national qualifications frameworks, our degree structures are still not always easily comparable and as a consequence, the NQFs are

not always properly used for the recognition purposes, not even for academic purposes and let alone for professional recognition.

All that is connected to assessment based on learning outcomes that majority reported to be perfect and, by my experience, as a university professor active on EU level the situation is far from perfect.

Two more things: the social dimension has become an important strategic orientation in the Bologna countries. However, we are far from stating that the socio-economic structure of the student body reflects the socio-economic structure of the overall population in our countries. In that respect opening access is not enough and support for underrepresented and vulnerable groups should start in the kindergarten and intensify during study to raise retention and completion. In Croatia, program agreements between government and universities will take into account indicators on first-generation students.

Digitalization is one of our newest challenges and deserves our full attention. We must acknowledge the use of the digital tools, not just in teaching and learning, education and research but also in management and administration, share of information and transparency, quality assurance and mobility.

Finally, Bologna Process has been, of course, a voluntary endeavor of the countries committed to work together towards reaching the common goals. However once we agreed on the joint commitments we must jointly work towards the achievements of our common goals without having double standards. Better implementation of our common goals with high level of transparency, will increase the trust between our systems.