

LATVIAN, LITHUANIAN AND ESTONIAN EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM FORMATION UNDER THE INFLUENCE OF THE BOLOGNA PRINCIPLES AND DECISIONS

Nikita Nikiforov

Abstract: *The purpose of the publication is analysis of the Bologna Process achievements through the evaluation of implementation of its 10 main directions into the national legislation. Author believes that Bologna declaration, which is the reflection of globalization process in education, made a significant impact on the national legislation of Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania in the last two decades.*

Keywords: *Bologna Process, Bologna principles, regional trends, intellectual potential, lifelong learning, government funding*

JEL Classification: A20

1 INTRODUCTION

The analysis of the Bologna Process achievements is first and foremost the evaluation of implementation of its 10 main directions (“The Bologna process 10 Action Lines”).

Six of them were outlined in the Bologna Declaration on the European Space for Higher Education of 19 June, 1999:

1. Adoption of a system of easily readable and comparable degrees
2. Adoption of a system essentially based on two⁷ cycles
3. Establishment of a system of credits (such as in the ECTS system)
4. Promotion of mobility of students, researchers, instructors and staff
5. Promotion of European co-operation in quality assurance
6. Promotion of the European dimension in higher education

⁷ Later.

The Bologna Declaration was followed up by the Prague Communiqué “Towards the European Higher Education Area” (2001) signed by 32 European Ministers in charge of higher education. They reaffirmed the principles of the Bologna Declaration and continued the list, specifying the importance of “lifelong learning” (7) and affirming that “students should participate in and influence the organization and content of education at universities and other higher education institutions” (8).

In the Berlin Communiqué “Realizing the European Higher Education Area” (2003) Ministers responsible for Higher Education from 33 European countries reviewed the progress of the Bologna Process and set priorities and news objectives for the coming years. They formulated the next two directions:

- promotion of the attractiveness of the European Higher Education Area (9)
- doctoral studies and the synergy between the European Higher Education Area and the European Research Area

On 19-20 May, 2005 Ministers responsible for higher education in the participating countries of the Bologna Process⁸ met for a mid-term review and set goals and priorities towards 2010 [8, 2005]. “We expect stocktaking to be based on the appropriate methodology and to continue in the fields of the degree system, quality assurance and recognition of degrees and study periods, and by 2007 we will have largely completed the implementation of these three intermediate priorities.

In particular, we shall look for progress in:

- implementation of the standards and guidelines for quality assurance as proposed in the ENQA report;
- implementation of the national frameworks for qualifications;
- the awarding and recognition of joint degrees, including at the doctoral level;
- creating opportunities for flexible learning paths in higher education, including procedures for the recognition of prior learning” [8,2005].

⁸ At present 45 countries participate in the Bologna Process. It is expected that by 2010 the number of universities included will reach 4000 with more than 12 million of students

The following objectives are set for the beginning of 2010:

- establishment of the European Higher Education Area based on the principles of quality and transparency;
- achievement of balance between national and pan-European (Bologna) together with avoiding excessive diversity by 2010;
- ensuring the necessary autonomy of the higher education institutions;
- ensuring the sustainable funding of the higher education;
- completing the adoption of the three-cycle structure of higher education;
- ensuring extensive application of the overarching framework of qualifications.

“As we move closer to 2010, we undertake to ensure that higher education institutions enjoy the necessary autonomy to implement the agreed reforms [8,2005].

Since higher education institutions autonomy is considered as the necessary and crucial factor of the Bologna reforms let us see it as the 10th direction of the Bologna Process.

On the basis of the foregoing it seems relevant and reasonable to evaluate the results of implementing the Bologna's ambitions by Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia judging by the 10 main Action Lines of the Bologna Process.

2 THE RESULTS OF IMPLEMENTING THE MAIN DIRECTIONS OF THE BOLOGNA PROCESS BY LATVIA, LITHUANIA AND ESTONIA.

The objectives formulated in the Bologna Declaration are to be reached “**within the first decade of the third millennium**” (emphasis added). Therefore it seems relevant and reasonable to sum up at least the preliminary results of the work done since 1999. Let us consider the results in relation to the Baltic States with regard to the topic of the given research work and since among the 31 signatures of the representatives of the European states there are signatures of the Ministers in charge of the higher education of the Baltic States:

- Tatiana Kokek, State Minister of Higher Education and Science (Latvia)
- Kornelijus Platelis, Minister of Education and Science (Lithuania)
- Tonis Lukas, Minister of Education (Estonia).

2.1 Adoption of a system of easily readable and comparable degrees. Implementation of the Diploma Supplement.

The procedures of national recognition of degrees, periods of study and credit points in accordance with the Lisbon Convention and recommendations on the Provision of Transnational Education of Council of Europe/UNESCO were worked out after signing by Latvia the Lisbon Convention in 1997 and its subsequent ratification in 1999.

In the process of working out the procedures of national recognition the amendments were made in the law on higher education institutions (articles 84 and 85) and in the law on education (article 11).

As far as the practice of issuing Diploma Supplements is concerned, Latvia was issuing them even before the Berlin conference of 2003. Since 1 January 2004 Diploma Supplements in Latvian and English have been issued to all graduates by all higher education institutions of Latvia.

Lithuania joined the Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region developed by the Council of Europe and UNESCO (hereinafter the Lisbon Convention). The Lisbon Convention was signed on 11 April 1997 and ratified on 15 October 1998. The Ratification Document was ready on 17 December, 1998 and entered into force on 1 February, 1999.

The provisions on the approval of regulations of assessment and academic recognition of foreign qualifications giving access to higher education and higher education qualifications affirmed by the Resolution No 60 of 21 January, 2005 by the Government of the Republic of Lithuania (hereinafter the Regulations of assessment and recognition) assign institutions for carrying out assessment of foreign qualifications giving access to higher education and higher education qualifications, to assess a foreign qualification as being equivalent to a corresponding qualification conferred in the Republic of Lithuania on condition that the holder of the qualification shall take a qualification examination and (or) complete supplementary courses, specifying the appeal procedures. The procedures of recognition of foreign higher education qualifications and of providing the information

on recognition have been worked out by the members of the Lithuanian ENIC/NARIC and by the Ministry of the Education and Science. The assessment of foreign qualifications in relation to the higher education is regulated by the Rules of assessment of foreign qualifications giving access to higher education adopted by the order No 1-24 of the Director of the Lithuanian Center for Quality Assessment in Higher Education (hereinafter the Center). These rules determine the procedures and stages of qualifications assessment, identify substantial differences and dictate the specific requirements for achieving qualifications in other foreign countries (for instance for countries where most candidates are from).

The Diploma Supplement was adopted legally on the national level in 2004. Since 2006 it has been issued free of charge in English and Lithuanian to all graduates and corresponds to the EU/CoE/UNESCO Diploma Supplement format.

The Estonian ENIC/NARIC (Academic Recognition Information Center) was established as a structural unit of the Archimedes Foundation in 1997 aimed at assessing foreign access and higher education qualifications. The Center assesses the quality of foreign qualifications comparing them with qualifications obtained in Estonia and assists higher education institutions and employers in making decisions on recognition of foreign diplomas. A guide under the title “Principles of Assessment and Recognition of Qualifications of Foreign Higher Education and Comparison with Estonian Qualifications” has been published. In 1999 some universities commenced issuing the Diploma Supplement in the format elaborated by the European Commission and European Council. Since 2002 the Diploma Supplements have been issued in Estonian free of charge by all higher education institutions to all graduates. In case of further graduate's education abroad the Diploma Supplement is issued in English.

The question of mutual recognition of degrees, periods of study and credit points in the Baltic States was solved in 2000 when the Agreement of the Government of the Republic of Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia “On the Recognition of Education in the Higher Education Area of the Baltic States” was signed and ratified. This Agreement was ratified on 12 December 2000 and came into effect on 12 January 2001.

2.2 Adoption of the three-cycle structure of education levels: Bachelor's study, Master's study and Doctoral study

In the Baltic States the adoption of the Bologna system of the three-cycle structure represented the transition from the Soviet system: “specialist – candidate of science – doctor of science” to the system “bachelor – master – doctor”. Altogether, this transition was accomplished rather fast and smoothly.

The implementation of the two-cycle structure in academic higher education started in Latvia in 1990. As of 2001, two-cycle system has been fully implemented also in the professional higher education sector, thus introducing bachelor and master degrees in the whole system - with the exception; like in many countries, of medicine, dentistry and pharmacy.

According to the Universities Act adopted by the the Parliament of Estonia (Riigikogu) on 12 January 1995 “article 24. Academic levels. (2) At a university, higher education is acquired at three levels – Bachelor's study, Master's study and Doctoral study”.

At the Berlin Conference of 2003 the Ministers considered it necessary to include the third doctoral level in the Bologna system of higher education. By this time the Baltic States have already had all the necessary preconditions for implementing the given decision: the 5-6-year period of specialists training was modified into two-cycle system “bachelor – master”, and the former system of postgraduate studies into doctoral studies. Thus, the establishment of doctoral studies as the third level of higher education has been accomplished in a relatively short period of time.

The three-level system of degrees was introduced into the Latvian system of higher education in 2000 [5,2006].

The three-cycle system has been legally enforced in Lithuania in 2000, though in fact it has been operating since 1993.

At the present time the system of doctoral studies in Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia is fully established and is performing successfully. Thus, more than 90 doctoral programmes were licensed in the Republic of Latvia in 2008.

2.3 Introduction of the credit point system ECTS (European credit Transfer System)

The credit point system is fully operating in **Latvia** since 1998. The system is readily compatible with ECTS but uses 40 (not 60) credits per year.

Complete switch to ECTS is foreseen in the draft of the new law on Higher Education. The Law was adopted in first reading by the Parliament of the Republic of Latvia and is highly probable to be enacted in 2009.

Lithuania also uses 40 credit point system per year. Though in the Diploma Supplement the ECTS points together with national credit points are mentioned. Following the Lithuanian Universities Rectors' Conference proposal the Ministry of Education and Science is preparing to make amendments in the Law on Higher Education regarding the switch to the European credit system (ECTS) [12, 2006].

The **Estonian** national credit points system is very similar to the Latvian and Lithuanian ones. Nowadays it is successfully performing and the switch to ECTS is planned in the nearest future.

2.4 Promotion of mobility of students, researchers, instructors and staff

The possibilities for mobility of students, researchers, instructors and staff of Latvian, Lithuanian and Estonian higher education institutions were very promising from the outset. The main obstacle for external mobility of students for several years was lack of funding. But due to funding via EU foundations in the last two years the situation has dramatically improved. Thus in Latvia for instance the cumulative state and EU funding has risen from 200 000 Euro in 2005 to 500 000 in 2006.

Promotion of mobility of students, researchers, instructors and staff of higher education institutions is a strand of politics of the Lithuanian government. The organized mobility is performed mainly via Leonardo da Vinci and Socrate programme and also via foundations specially appointed by the Ministry of Education and Science. The volume of student mobility reached 1200 people in 2007.

The following activities of higher education institutions supported by the Ministries of Education stimulate the student mobility of the Baltic States and to the Baltic states:

- increasing quantity of courses taught in English;
- development of interdisciplinary courses taught in English for the coming foreign students;
- improvement of living conditions of foreign students;

- active participation in international student exhibitions in Europe and worldwide;
- amendments to the law regarding the language of tuition, permitting the use of foreign language in the programmes where foreign students are enrolled.

In the Baltic States the academic mobility was initiated in connection with the supportive EU programme "Tempus Share" and later as a result of implementation of European Union cooperation programme "Erasmus".

2.5 Promotion of European co-operation in quality assurance

Quality assurance system of higher education was created in **Latvia** in mid-1990s. The first accreditation in Latvia happened in 1996. By the end of 2002 all programmes of studies and visas have completed the process of accreditation. According to the adopted regulations the accreditation is valid for 6 years (conditional accreditation - for two years). During this period the accredited programmes and higher education institutions should submit yearly self-assessment reports. The repeated accreditation can be carried out on the basis of institutions' self-assessment by one expert (not three as the first accreditation) who needs to validate the information presented in self-assessment reports.

New procedures for Accreditation aimed at improving their efficiency were ratified (Regulation № 821 of the Cabinet of Ministers, 3 October 2006). These procedures deal with external system of quality control and also affect some other aspects, such as promotion of inter cycle access, formation of curriculum based on results, implementation of inner quality control system of higher education institutions.

The **Lithuanian** national system of quality assurance of higher education has been established in 1995. Nowadays it complies with standards and governing principles of quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area. The article 1 of the Lithuanian Higher Education System Development Plan for 2006-2010 provides for renewal of curriculum and quality assessment of higher education.

The recognition of the issued diplomas in **Estonia** depends on the accreditation of a study programme and of an institution itself. The full accreditation of a program is in force for 7 years, the conditional accreditation – for 3 years. In the period of 1997-2002 the first round of accreditation was carried out. Altogether 500 curricula were accredited.

Nowadays the Baltic States perform the **internal** quality assurance system in form of yearly self-assessment reports from the institutions that are compulsory to all state and non-state higher education institutions, and **external** quality assessment performed by independent centers of quality control.

2.6 Promotion of the European dimension in higher education

The Latvian Government contributed to the implementation of the following crucial Bologna priorities into the national system of higher education:

- 1) establishment of two-cycle structure (in 1990);
- 2) creation of quality assurance system with international representatives' participation and accreditation of programmes and institutions (since 1996);
- 3) full establishment of the credit points transfer and accumulation system (since mid-1990s);
- 4) implementation of the Diploma Supplement issued to all graduates in Latvian and English (since 1 January 2004);
- 5) development of national programme for doctoral studies and post doctoral research support (mostly in natural sciences and engineering); development of national programme on implementation of lifelong learning.

The draft Law on Higher Education that has to replace the current law on higher education institutions in 2009 was approved by the Government for further approval of the Parliament. The draft Law covers numerous topical issues related to the Bologna Process, such as the structure of qualifications, qualifications based on results, flexible methods of education, recognition of prior learning, promotion of joint degrees and many others.

The Latvian higher education institutions more actively take part in European events in order to promote the European dimension in higher education: by means of European University Association activities as experts in projects happening in new countries joining the Bologna Process or outside it; as European speakers at conferences outside Europe. Latvia is a host country for conferences/seminars on European higher education with the participation of non-EU countries. When organizing international conferences the Latvian higher education institutions usually invite representatives from the neighbouring non-EU countries, mainly Belarus and Russia [13, 2006]. The good example is the Bologna seminar "New Challenges

in Recognition” held in Riga on 25-27 January 2007, organized by the Ministry of Education and Science of Latvia together with the Council of Europe and “Socrates” programme.

The implementation of the Bologna Process in **Lithuania** since 2004 has been supervised by the national Bologna Follow-Up Group which consists of the members of the Ministry of Education and Science, The Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education, the Rectors' Conference of Lithuanian Universities, the Directors' Conference of Lithuanian Colleges, students. This group is directly responsible to the Minister of Education and Science and coordinates dissemination of the information on the Bologna Process in Lithuania [6, 2006].

The Lithuanian national Bologna promoters' group effectively implements Bologna ideas in the academic society, organizes national conferences on Bologna issues inviting foreign experts, etc. There is a close cooperation between the national Bologna promoters' group and the national Bologna Follow-Up Group. Representatives of the business sector and staff trade unions are not members of these groups, nevertheless, they are permanent partners in ongoing discussions on how to involve in and play more actively contributing to the enhancement of the quality and competitiveness of the national higher education, how to meet the needs of a contemporary labour market in specialists training in higher education institutions.

Estonian institutions of higher education also participate in the work of the following international networks: the Institutional Network of the Universities from the Capitals of Europe (UNICA), the European Associations of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE), regional network of conferences of rectors, thematic networks supported by the European Commission and other field specific associations or networks.

Promotion of the European dimension in higher education in Estonia gets support on the state (governmental) level and also on the level of the higher education institutions. After 2003 the state-support schemes for mobility of students and academic staff have been worked out, as well as the strategy document for the internationalisation of Estonian higher education and international marketing strategy of higher education in Estonia [10, 2010].

Estonian institutions on higher education actively participate in educational and research programmes of the European Union. Although only a few institutions of higher education have developed a purposeful strategy

supporting internationalisation, the majority of institutions of higher education consider it important to increase the number of foreign students.

Participation in numerous international professional networks in the framework of which conferences, development projects (development of curricula, application of principles of quality management, application of information and communication technology in studies, training courses in marketing and fund-raising), exchange of students, members of the academic staff and trainees is organised has been a significant development-stimulating power within the last ten years.

2.7 Lifelong learning

In **the Republic of Latvia** the paths for achieving full qualifications in terms of lifelong learning have not yet been developed. However, it will be included through implementation of the just-launched national programme for developing and implementing lifelong learning strategies.

There are no national procedures for recognition of prior learning as yet. The problem is partly related to some attempts in recent past to use "previously acquired" courses of doubtful quality in order to shorten actual study time. This has created some mistrust in the society and therefore extensive developing of recognition of something acquired outside higher education system might not be well accepted. At the same time, on a case- to-case base higher education institutions may assess achievements outside higher education system and give some number of credits for it. The task to develop methodologies for recognition of prior learning has been assigned to Latvian ENIC/NARIC centre.

Nowadays there are multiple opportunities for distance and electronic learning in the Latvian higher education institutions. For instance, the teaching staff of the University of Latvia and Baltic International Academy where more than a third of all Latvian students study, were specially rewarded for distance learning courses development.

In **Lithuania** study periods are recognised by higher education institutions themselves. An *Order of the Ministry on the Procedures of Recognition of Study Periods* determines institutions' rights and obligations in study period recognition that both gives access to studies and allows the transfer of accumulated credits.

The following shall be recognised in Lithuanian higher education institutions: results of studies at a foreign higher education institution; results of studies at

another Lithuanian higher education institution of the same or different type; results of studies in accordance with another study program of the same higher education institution. Recognition of non-formal or informal prior learning is in future plans.

Results of continuing studies may be evaluated by credits in the order established by a higher education institution. A person who earns a required number of credits in accordance with a certain study programme, may, in the order established by the Government, be recognised as having acquired a higher education and be awarded a qualification.

Higher education institutions may create conditions for a student to study according to an individual study programme drawn up in the order established by that higher education institution.

By now compared with Latvia or Lithuania the conception of lifelong learning has been most developed in the Republic of Estonia where it got funding from the European Social Fund (ESF) in the amount of 1 million euros.

The program of lifelong learning is regulated by the all embracing document "Lifelong Learning Strategy 2005-2008 in Estonia" [9, 2005]. The documents covers not only principles and requirements of lifelong learning, but also purposes, measures and plan of actions. **The general purpose of the strategy** is to raise the opportunities and motivation of Estonian population to participate in formal, non-formal and informal training with the purpose of improving one's knowledge and skills in accordance with one's own needs and that of the citizenship, society and labour market. The strategy's aim is that the share of participants in education and training among people aged 25–64 will reach the level of 10% by the year 2008. In order to promote learning, education legislation must: include the idea of lifelong learning as pervasive; stand on common ground, use common terminology, be intelligible and unbiased towards all people willing to study; involve as many institutions as possible from all three sectors in the provision of training; establish a mechanism to finance and assure the quality of lifelong learning; allow recognition of previous learning and working experience in further studies.

The strategy of lifelong learning relates to all forms of formal education got within the system of adults' education obtained outside daytime or full time, non-formal education (connected with work and widely spread adult education), necessity and consideration of informal education, including the system of recognition of previous learning and working experience

and improvement of system of professional qualifications as well as need in quality assurance and the availability of training.

2.8 Involvement of students in the organization, content and quality assurance of education

Latvian Student Association is a body representing students' interests at national level. Student representatives participate in the Higher Education Council, and in the Accreditation Commission, as well as national Bologna group.

According to Law on Higher Education Establishments, students' representation in Senates of higher education institutions is at least 20% of senate membership. Student participation in faculty boards is regulated through by-laws of the higher education institutions, and it is often the same minimum 20%.

Students take active part in providing quality assurance of studies. Along with assisting in the activities of the Accreditation Commission of the Ministry of Education and Science, students take part in managing network of quality assurance national agencies through the representatives in Senates of higher education institutions that are shareholders of these agencies and govern their work. Student representatives' are always included in the team of expert groups who assess the quality of studies as observers or experts. Experts groups always meet students of the higher education institution assessed without academic or administrative staff present.

In the Republic of **Lithuania** the students' involvement in the system of higher education is set out by the Law on Higher Education. Minimum 10 percent of a self-governing body of a public higher education institution (both a senate of a university and an academic council of a college) have to be student representatives.

Student representatives are also members of the supervising and advisory body – a council of a higher education institution. Besides, each higher education institution has a commission for dispute resolution to settle disputes between students and administration of a higher education institution. Students are represented in this body on a par with the administration. However, student unions expect and expressed their wish to increase the role of students' influence to the governance and the quality of studies in higher

education institutions. The Ministry supports this point of view and is ready to take into consideration their relevant proposals, if received⁹.

The Lithuanian Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education started including students as full members in peer teams for external evaluation in 2006. Students are also included in internal quality assurance arrangements.

The legislation of **Estonia** provides the obligation of students' participation in the council of a university or institution of applied higher education and the representatives of students should make up not less than one fifth of the membership of the council.

2.9 Autonomy of higher education institutions and academic freedom

The range of issues that the higher education institutions of Latvia and Lithuania can decide autonomously (independent from Governments and other institutions) is more or less the same. The Baltic institutions of higher education have the right:

- 1) to develop and approve the constitution of the institution of higher education;
- 2) to form the academic staff of the institution of higher education; and
- 3) to independently determine:
 - a) the content and forms of study programmes,
 - b) additional provisions for the admission of students,
 - c) basic trends of scientific research work,
 - d) the organisational and managerial structure of the institution of higher education, and
 - e) rates of work remuneration which are not less than the rates determined by the Cabinet; and
- 4) perform other activities, which do not contradict with the principles and tasks for the operation of the institution of higher education determined by the founder thereof and this Law.

In the Republic of Latvia the higher education institutions' autonomy is regulated by the Law On Institutions of Higher Education (section 4)¹⁰,

⁹ Lithuanian portal: www3.lrs.lt/pls/inter2/dokpaieska.showdoc_l?p_id=281384

passed on 17 november 1995. In the Republic of Lithuania – by Law on Higher Education (Article 9 Higher Education Establishment Autonomy)¹¹, passed on 05. 10. 1995.

Academic freedom is described in detail in the legislation of the Republic of Latvia (Law On Institutions of Higher Education, section 6 “Academic freedom”) with respect to the freedom of studies, research work and artistic creation and rights of students to choose an institution of higher education, a faculty (department), study programme, periods of study and certain study disciplines.

In legislation of **Lithuania** (Law on Higher Education, Article 9) the academic freedom covers rights to select study forms and subject areas, to award research degrees, qualifications, academic titles.

Estonian public universities are remarkably autonomous. In addition to organising the academic life of the university the competence of universities extends to opening new curricula, establishing admission terms and conditions, approving the budget, deciding about the structure, approving the development plan, electing the rector and making restricted decisions in matters concerning assets.

Institutions of applied higher education are legally more restricted in their activities and the approval of the Ministry of Education and Research is required to open new curricula and establish terms and conditions for admission. Unlike universities, with whom the state enters into an agreement of state commissioned education, appropriations from state budget funds to institutions of applied higher education and vocational educational institutions are made under the directive of the Minister of Education.

Republic of Estonia Education Act [15, 1993] outlines in detail

- the extent of authority of legislative and executive power (Article 5);
- authority of Ministry of Education and Research (Article 6);
- authority of local governments (Article 7).

However the concepts of “education institutions autonomy” and “academic freedom” are not found in the Law. Not can they be found in the Applied Higher Education Institution Act that regulates the operation of state

¹⁰ Lithuanian portal: www.izm.gov.lv

¹¹ Lithuanian portal: www.lrs.lt

institutions of applied higher education. Legal status of institution of applied higher education is defined in the Article 3 in the following way: “An institution of applied higher education is a state agency administered by the Ministry of Education”.

The problem of autonomy is touched in the Estonia Private Education Institution Act. The exact terms of an institute's establishment are set by the Ministry of Education and Research (Article 3, Terms of Establishment); Article 6 Permission on foundation; Article 7 Refusal in granting the permission on foundation; Article 8 Licence on instruction; Article 11 Refusal in registration; Article 20 Supervision over activity; Article 21 Termination of activity; Article 23 Closure.

In the Universities Act and in the Law on the University of Tartu the concepts of autonomy and academic freedom are also not mentioned.

2.10 Contribution to the European dimension in national systems of higher education

In the **Republic of Latvia** there are no specific legal obstacles for development and implementation together with other European higher education institutions of programmes of study, joint diploma issuance, recognition of degrees, periods of study and for implementation of other European aspects in the national system of education.

Regulations for accreditation of study programmes require that the programme is compared with two similar programmes in other countries of the European Union. This requirement ensures that European experiences are taken into account.

European themes (the specifics of state structure, legislation, social politics) are included in many higher education institutions programmes of law, political sciences, economics, management, etc.

An important aspect of orientation towards European labour market has been adaptation of the study programmes leading to qualifications in regulated professions to the requirements of the EU directives. First of all, it has taken place in professions covered by the EU sectoral directives, such as e.g. medical and veterinary professions, architecture, law and others.

The Latvian higher education institutions more actively take part in European events in order to promote the European dimension in higher education: by means of European University Association activities as experts in projects happening in new countries joining the Bologna Process or outside it;

as European speakers at conferences outside Europe. Latvia is a host country for conferences/seminars on European higher education with the participation of non-EU countries. When organizing international conferences the Latvian higher education institutions usually invite representatives from the neighbouring non-EU countries, mainly Belarus and Russia.

In **the Republic of Lithuania** the key conception of the Lisbon Recognition Convention and the latter Supplementary Documents was included in national legislation in the sphere of higher education. The Centre for Quality Assessment has prepared the regulations on assessment of foreign qualifications.

The Law on Higher Education of the Republic of Lithuania (2000) and the General Requirements for Joint Degrees (2006) created a legal basis for higher education institutions of the Republic of Lithuania to conduct study programmes together with foreign higher education institutions and set common requirements for preparation and implementation of joint study programmes and award joint degrees and joint qualifications.

The similar legal acts of the Republic of the Lithuania (Regulations on the Assessment and Recognition of Foreign Qualifications) are applied to the assessment and recognition of joint degrees as well as others foreign qualifications of higher education. National legal acts oblige higher education institutions of Lithuania to enroll students who studied abroad.

The Law on Education of the Republic of Lithuania gives possibility for schools of foreign and international organizations to establish and organize studies in the Republic of Lithuania. The Law defines that education programmes of foreign states can be taught in language other than Lithuanian. However in that case the written permission of the Minister of Education and Science is required.

The Republic of Lithuania Government resolution On the Approval of the Lithuanian Higher Education System Development Plan for 2006-2010 is targeted at improving the procedure of preparation, assessment and registration of joint study programmes worked out by Lithuanian and foreign higher education institutions together and is regarded as precondition of higher education quality assurance in accordance with education needs.

Estonian institutions of higher education actively participate in educational and research programmes of the European Union. Although only a few institutions of higher education have developed a purposeful strategy supporting

internationalisation, the majority of institutions of higher education consider it important to increase the number of foreign students.

Participation in numerous international professional networks in the framework of which conferences, development projects (development of curricula, application of principles of quality management, application of information and communication technology in studies, training courses in marketing and fund-raising), exchange of students, members of the academic staff and trainees is organised has been a significant development-stimulating power within the last ten years. Foreign relations are fostered both in traditional universities and institutions of higher education that provide applied higher education and have been founded later.

Estonian institutions of higher education also participate in the work of the following international networks: the Institutional Network of the Universities from the Capitals of Europe (UNICA), the European Associations of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE), regional network of conferences of rectors, thematic networks supported by the European Commission and other field specific associations or networks.

A new strategic goal for the European Union is **“to become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy”** [11, 2000].

The guiding principles for future Community actions in the areas of education, training and youth are based on two basic issues and are set out by the Commission Communication: COM (97) 563. First of all to make “knowledge-based politics” one of the four fundamental pillars of the European Union's internal policies (as proposed in the Agenda 2000). And secondly to enhance the knowledge and skills of all Europe's citizens.

The gradual construction of an open and dynamic European educational area based on three main principles is the principal guideline. 1) the citizens of Europe will be able to develop their fund of knowledge; 2) development of employability through the acquisition of competencies made necessary through changes in work and its organisation; 3) enhancement of citizenship.

The very scale of these new challenges calls for a greater degree of integration between the fields of education, training and youth policy. The new generation of actions must focus upon a limited number of objectives:

- increasing the access of European citizens to the full range of Europe's education resources;
- innovation in resources;

- wide dissemination of good practice in education.

Six main types of action are envisaged:

- physical mobility of learners and teachers, that includes extension of the arrangements for mutual recognition;
- virtual mobility and the various uses of new information and communication technologies, promoting universal access to new educational tools and stimulating the production and dissemination of European multimedia products and services which are appropriate for use for the education, training and youth;
- the development of cooperation networks at European level in order to permit exchange of experience and good practice;
- the promotion of language skills and the understanding of different cultures;
- the continuing improvement of Community sources of reference with regard to the education, training and youth systems and policies of the Member States (key data, databases, etc).

All these activities are designed and managed at a transnational level.

The central idea underlying the development of the new generation of activities is based on the establishment of a framework of responsibilities shared between the Community, the Member States and the other parties involved: educational partners, social partners, economic partners, regional and local partners. This is also the necessary condition for the Europe of knowledge to take shape. [7, 2015].

According to the “Treaty Establishing the European Community” the

Community action shall be aimed at:

- encouraging mobility of students and teachers, by encouraging inter alia, the academic recognition of diplomas and periods of study;
- promoting cooperation between educational establishments;
- facilitate adaptation to industrial changes, in particular through vocational training and retraining;
- improve initial and continuing vocational training in order to facilitate vocational integration and reintegration into the labour market;

- stimulate cooperation on training between educational or training establishments and firms [16,2015].

The Bologna Declaration is not just a political statement but but a binding commitment to an action programme. The action programme set out in the Declaration is based on a clearly defined common goal, a deadline and a set of specified objectives:

- a clearly defined common goal: to create a European space for higher education in order to enhance the employability and mobility of citizens and to increase the international competitiveness of European higher education;
- a deadline: the European space for higher education should be completed in 2010;
- a set of specified objectives:
 1. the adoption of a common framework of readable and comparable degrees, “also through the implementation of the Diploma Supplement”;
 2. the elimination of remaining obstacles to the free mobility of students (as well as trainees and graduates) and teachers (as well as researchers and higher education administrators).

Among the latest event connected with the Bologna Process we'd like to draw your attention to the Recommendations of representatives of accreditation committees/agencies from countries which participated in Seminar on “Cooperation between accreditation committees/agencies” held on 14-16 February, Warsaw.

1. Mutual recognition of education and diplomas can be supported by mutual acquaintance of quality assurance systems. Mutual recognition of accreditation decisions should be encouraged.
2. As a necessary condition of building an agreement between participating countries of Bologna Process, we consider that it should ensure and provide for:
 - regular, mutual sharing of information about education and accreditation systems,
 - mutual visits, joint training of experts,
 - promotion of mutual mechanisms of recognition,
 - promotion of similarities in higher education systems

3. A higher education institution might apply for accreditation from an accreditation body from outside the country. This external quality assurance can be accepted and recognized if the external accreditation body is recognized by national authorities [14, 2005]

In preparation for the Conference of European Ministers for Education in Bergen (Norway, 19-20 May 2005) the European consortium for accreditation in Higher Education prepared the report on current state and perspectives of accreditation of programmes and higher education institutions in the European Space for Higher Education [8,2005].

The fourth chapter of the report is Transnational Recognition of Accreditation Decisions and states that in order to facilitate international acceptance of academic institutions, degrees and studies, «it will be necessary that future accreditation decisions in one country will also be recognised in another country».

The European consortium for accreditation in Higher Education calls upon the European Ministers for Education to contribute to the creation of the European Space for Higher Education by means of mutual recognition of the accreditation decisions of all Bologna signatory states [4, 2004].

The significant contribution to the creation of the European space for higher education by concluding agreements on cooperation in the sphere of education by the Ministries of the Baltic States was made even before the direct appeal of the European Ministers in Bergen. However, if the first agreement on cooperation of the Baltic States in the sphere of education was signed on the level of Ministries (Riga, 12 October 1990) and without direct regulative influence of recommendations of the European Union, in 15 years this agreement has got the intergovernmental status and contained direct references to the Lisbon Convention of 1997, its direct practical regulative standard.

The first agreement between the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Latvia, Ministry of Culture and Education of the Republic of Lithuania and Ministry of Education and Research of the Republic of Estonia on cooperation in the sphere of education was signed in Riga on 12 October 1990.

The Agreement's preamble states that striving to the further development and strengthening of the traditional fully formed friendly relations and cooperation between the three states and peoples, regarding the tasks and

goals of the Baltic Cooperation Council, in accordance with the Agreement on economic cooperation between Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia, realising that cooperation in the sphere of education **plays important role** (emphasis added) in reaching the above-mentioned goals... [1, 1990]

The Agreement outlined the spheres (Article 2) and forms of cooperation (Article 3), and also for the first time touched the topical issue of mutual recognition of education documents' equivalence.

The Article 5 declares that the Contracting Parties shall study the subject on mutual recognition of equivalence of school certificates, diplomas, academic degrees and for this purpose shall exchange documentation and hold meetings of experts.

The Article 10 states that the present Agreement is concluded for a three-year period and its validity shall be automatically prolonged for new three-year period if none of the Contracting Parties declares its intention to denounce it within a specified time frame [1, 1990].

In 2000 the governmental agreement among the Government of the Republic of Latvia, the Government of the Republic of Estonia and the Government of the Republic of Lithuania "On the Creation of a Common Educational Space in Higher Education within the Baltic States" was signed in Kreting.

The main aim of the Agreement was to stimulate the students' mobility and to grant them equal rights in all three countries.

In 5 years the Agreement among the Ministries of Education of the Baltic States turned into the Agreement between the Governments of the Latvian, Lithuanian and Estonian Republics "On The Academic Recognition of Educational Qualifications in the Baltic Educational Space" [2, 2000].

Its preamble has significantly changed and became more up-to-date. "Desiring to enable all people of the Baltic States to benefit fully from the study opportunities in any of the States; considering that the Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications Concerning Higher Education in the European Region adopted in Lisbon on 11 April 1997, (hereinafter "the Lisbon Convention"), should be fully implemented in order to strengthen the Baltic common educational space and to stimulate the academic recognition as well as the mobility of students and teaching staff among the Republic of Latvia, Republic of Estonia and Republic of Lithuania; considering that a follow-up to the ratification of the Lisbon Convention in the Baltic States

in a form of Agreement regulating the recognition of the concrete educational qualifications among the Baltic States is desirable...” [3, 2005].

The Agreement has an Article “Definitions” (definitions of the terms used, Article 1). The basic principles of the Agreement are formulated:

- 1) The Baltic States — the Republic of Latvia, the Republic of Estonia and the Republic of Lithuania (hereinafter, States) — agree to recognise each other’s higher education qualifications and qualifications giving access to higher education unless there is an evidence of substantial differences.
- 2) This Agreement shall deal with the qualifications awarded after completion of study programmes, which are recognised in the home country.
- 3) A higher education qualification or a qualification providing access to higher education shall give its holder the same rights in the other Parties as it gives in the State in which it has been awarded.

The following points are described in greater detail: 1) the specific admission requirements and admission to higher education studies (Article 4); 2) recognition of the first academic degrees for further studies (Article 5); 3) recognition of doctoral degrees (Article 7); 4) consequences of this agreement regarding professional recognition (Article 10) and other important aspects of creating Common Educational Space within the Baltic States [3, 2005].

The very existence of such Agreement, its spirit and content undoubtedly promote the development of intellectual potential of each Baltic state in particular and of the region as a whole.

3 CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of the publication is analysis of the Bologna Process achievements through the evaluation of implementation of its 10 main directions into the national legislation. Author believes that Bologna declaration, which is the reflection of globalization process in education, made a significant impact on the national legislation of Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania in the last two decades.

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AUTHOR

Nikita Nikiforov, Baltic International Academy, Lomonosova 4, Riga, Latvia, e-mail: nikiforovs.n@gmail.com