

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The overall objectives of this paper are:

1. to explore and explain the gap between the current situation in the BiH higher education sector and the requirements and standards set by the Bologna Process, that BiH joined in 2003, and
2. to offer viable arguments - based on a detailed analysis of the sector - why and how would BiH benefit most from addressing the problems and shortcomings of its contemporary higher education system as well as the Bologna Process requirements at the state-level.

To be included in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) by 2010 and to become Euro-compatible and competitive, the higher education system of BiH must urgently start to meet the Bologna Process requirements, and at the same time become sustainable in the long term by overcoming current political, ethnic, financial, institutional, administrative and other constraints.

In order to achieve these goals, the process of higher education reform in BiH needs to be taken forward on four more or less equally important fronts.

Firstly, a new state-level legislative framework, looking forward to the EHEA rather than to the former Yugoslav tradition, needs to be established as a priority. (BiH is currently the only member of the Bologna Process without a new law on higher education harmonized with its requirements.) Secondly, reform and harmonisation of the financial framework of higher education, primarily based on *per student* and *per program* formula is essential, as current mechanisms are unequal, inefficient, lacking transparency and accountability while providing various opportunities for discrimination and resulting in the waste of already minimal resources. Thirdly, policy, strategy and planning should be organised at the state level, with a clear perspective to move it to the regional level, especially in post-graduate studies and research. Finally, a new institutional framework, a restructured and integrated university, in a sense of enhanced democracy, autonomy, governance and management, is also fundamental for bringing the higher education system of BiH closer to EAHE.

HE reform in BiH can be successful only if all these four key elements are put in place together, as pieces of one bigger picture. The failure to adopt and implement the full package would inevitably result in new misunderstandings and differences in BiH HE system.

It is important to bear in mind that HE the new HE framework is a condition and not a goal of HE reform.

Adoption of a new legislative framework, as one of the CoE post-accession requirements for BiH and by the European Partnership, should be the first step and the main policy tool that will directly shape overall reform, but even this most important element is still missing. Namely, after three years and six drafts, not only does BiH still not have a state-level higher education law but it is not clear when and in what form will it be adopted.

The absence of this law was the main reason why BiH ended up last among the Bologna Process members at the 2005 Bologna stocktaking/ mid-term conference.

As “all inclusive” and simultaneous approach to HE reform will currently not work, a possible, but still not certain, way ahead could be a quick adoption by the BiH Council of Ministers and Parliament of the draft HEL from December 2005, that fully meets all Bologna Process requirements, followed by a clear strategy and timeframe on how and when to tackle the remaining three elements.

This realistic step-by-step approach to HE reform would enable BiH to still participate and progress in the BP and improve its HE sector.

However, the fact that 2006 is an election year will unfortunately not help or speed up the HE reform process. But all those who are currently in charge of HE system/s in BiH, whether they are politicians, civil servants, or rectors, deans or professors at HE institutions must not – at any cost - allow that HE in BiH and BiH students, remain outside of the EHEA unable to communicate with the rest of the Europe on an equal basis.