



Bundesministerium  
für Bildung  
und Forschung

# **Welcome Address**

**by the MinDirig  
at the Federal Ministry of Education and Research,  
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**on the Occasion of the**

**Bologna Seminar "The Quality Assurance System  
for Higher Education at European and National Level"**

**in Berlin**

**on 15 February 2007**

**For release upon delivery!**

**Check against delivery!**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to welcome you to the seminar "*The Quality Assurance System for Higher Education at European and National Level*". I am pleased about three things:

- first, that I have the honour to open this Bologna Seminar,
- second, that almost 200 participants from government departments, universities and accreditation organizations as well as from the social partners and international organizations have come to Berlin specifically for this seminar, two thirds of them from abroad,
- and third, that we are not just meeting here because the Bologna process is important and because Berlin is an interesting city! At the end of the meeting we plan to have concrete recommendations for the conference in London in early May. In London, we will critically review the development regarding the recognition of qualifications, the changes in study structures and in quality assurance. Under the co-chair of Great Britain and Germany, the next steps for the realization of the European Higher Education Area can be defined at the conference in London.

## I.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The London Conference and our meeting today are milestones of the **German Council Presidency**. In the field of education, we chose the motto "Education Unites" for this Presidency, and are thus taking up one of the *leitmotivs* of a great European, Jean Monnet:

*"We do not build coalitions of states. We unite people."*

The sum total of individual opportunities in the life of European citizens decides on the competitiveness of European industry, social cohesion and not least on whether Member States grow together on the basis of a common understanding of democracy, the rule of law and values. Education plays an important role. It facilitates an understanding of others on the basis of a consolidated identity, it builds bridges and brings people and cultures closer together.

At the beginning of this year, –Germany – in addition to European responsibility – has also assumed **particular international responsibility**: Besides holding the **G8** presidency, Germany also holds the **chair of the Bologna process**. We – and I mean all 45 countries in the Bologna process – are facing a double task:

- We must mobilize forces for the final spurt to the creation of a joint European Higher Education Area in 2010. 2010 – that is, more or less, tomorrow!
- At the same time, we will have to develop ideas for how to continue cooperation between the Bologna states beyond 2010.

## II.

Let's take a closer look at the past: What has happened in Germany since the last Bologna conference? We have been particularly successful in introducing the two-cycle study structure:

- The German institutions of higher education have largely **implemented** the "**European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education**" and established quality assurance systems for higher education.
- Germany is in a good position regarding **quality assurance**. However, there is still a need for action, for example in internal quality assurance or regarding the question of how to deal with programme and process accreditation in future. In this national process, our institutions of higher education are playing a decisive role since they themselves decide on their quality management (*higher education autonomy*).
- Greater autonomy of the institutions of higher education is linked to an **obligation for accountability**.
- Furthermore, **external certification** is necessary which lives up to the quality management used by institutions of higher education or builds on it (*compatibility of criteria*).

Nevertheless, much remains to be done until 2010, also in Germany. But we are on the right way. From my point of view, three criteria seem most important:

- (1) diversity,
- (2) transparency, and
- (3) quality.

Bologna does not aim at a single Europe-wide project but at diversity as Europe's strength. As a prerequisite for our future, **quality** must be the **main criterion** everywhere. Quality assurance and quality development must be **the** central tasks for institutions of higher education.

## III.

The **accreditation of study courses** plays an important role. In Germany, we have discussed this extensively and tested it in a pilot project. Both have shown that there are good prospects of successfully developing our present system further. So far, *individual study courses* are accredited. The future objective is a true quality management *of an entire institution of higher education*. Accreditation should then aim more at supporting the management of the higher education institution and the departments in their efforts for **effective quality management**.

The **accreditation agencies** are playing an important role in this process. This is reflected in our efforts to create a "European Register for Quality Assurance Agencies". The Register can:

- promote student mobility as it strengthens people's confidence in higher education and encourages the mutual recognition of degrees in the Bologna states; it can
  - contribute to inspiring confidence in the agencies of the Bologna states and thus to reducing fears of an excessive accreditation bureaucracy; it can
  - serve as a basis for the selection of an accreditation agency across national borders, thus promoting the establishment of a European Higher Education area;
- and last but not least, the Register can
- contribute to improving the quality of quality assurance agencies both nationally and throughout the Bologna states by promoting competition between the agencies as well as mutual confidence

We want to intensify cooperation between nationally recognized agencies. **What we want is coherence, not standardization, of the accreditation agencies.**

In this context, we need to consider in detail how national and international **quality assurance** systems can interact in an optimal way. We will therefore take a close look at the quality assurance systems of different countries during this conference. I believe and hope that this will provide us with ideas for how to link national and international aspects in the best possible way.

#### IV.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

German and European institutions of higher education find themselves in an **international competition** in which we can only succeed on the basis of excellence and clear profiles. We need excellence in research and in teaching. That is a prerequisite for excellently trained students.

At the same time, the structural change of European economies is gathering speed. It brings about a growing demand for university graduates on the labour market. This also means that we need

exchanges of European students, graduates and researchers, but we must also be attractive for young researchers from outside Europe.

Encouraging student mobility is an independent objective in education and science policy. We need considerably more university graduates who have spent some time abroad since excellent training does not only take place at home. Industry, science and politics need experts with European and international experience and background.

**Promoting mobility and the recognition of credits earned abroad** are therefore one of the *leitmotivs* of the Bologna process.

On the one hand, we must campaign for studies and science in Europe even more, on the other hand we must also establish the necessary framework conditions – at national and European level.

An attractive research environment, good working conditions for researchers and for their families, and appealing professional and private prospects will bring back to Europe more qualified European researchers who went abroad.

## V.

Politicians can launch ambitious international projects such as the Bologna process, but these projects can only become a success story if they are supported and promoted by the stakeholders. On this note, I would like to thank you for participating in this conference and hope that we will have intensive discussions and fruitful cooperation in order to realize and develop the Bologna process further. In conclusion, I would like to wish you an interesting seminar, which – and now I am quoting George Bernard Shaw – you should leave with at least one new idea:

*„If you have an apple and I have an apple and we exchange these apples – then you and I will still each have one apple. But if you have an idea and I have an idea and we exchange these ideas, then each of us will have two ideas.“*