Quality Assurance/Accreditation in the Emerging European Higher Education Area: a possible scenario for the future

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The evaluation, improvement and certification of 'quality' are core constituents of the 'Bologna process' of convergent reforms towards a coherent, compatible and competitive European higher education area. Yet, the articulation of a system or mechanism able to deal with this topic at European level, and the way leading to its emergence, remain surrounded with much confusion and doubt. This article tries to imagine the main articulations of a possible quality assurance/accreditation system that could combine the diverse, and often contradictory expectations of countries and universities in this respect.

It should be clear from the outset that its sole ambition is to sketch a scenario with a future. It is not based on a comprehensive review of academic research into quality and accreditation, or on a thorough survey of the position of all main stakeholders. The aim here is rather to provide a vision, drawing on in-depth knowledge of the debate and on an 'educated' intuition of what is needed to make the European higher education area a functioning reality by 2010.

It is also important to point out that the elaborate scenario that follows was first sketched in a presentation given in March 2000 in Dublin for the members of the Institutional Evaluation Programme of the EUA (then still CRE) (Haug, 2000). It is itself based on the conclusions of the 'Trends 1' report for the preparation of the Bologna conference and declaration in the spring of 1999. This report already called for independent 'accreditation', a network of agencies, the appointment of non-nationals on their board, a European quality label organised along subject lines and not distorted by national league tables, accreditation with no binding consequences for State authorities, etc (Haug & Kirstein, 1999). The main thrust of the scenario has not much changed in the meantime, even though it may have gained more consistency or accuracy as a result of the ongoing debate on what Europe needs and is willing to accept in this area.

A Weak Point in the Bologna Declaration

Quality assurance was not among the most prominent features of the Bologna Declaration. The Sorbonne Declaration[1] that preceded it by one year aimed for the 'harmonisation' of qualifications in order to make them readable and ease their recognition both within Europe and world-wide, but did not mention any quality-based mechanism to achieve this. While Bologna called in a rather clear and operational way for the introduction of an undergraduate-postgraduate articulation of

qualifications and for credit systems compatible with ECTS, it demonstrated a less innovative spirit or lower ambitions in the field of quality assurance. There, it only called for the 'promotion of European co-operation in quality assurance with a view to developing comparable criteria and methodologies'. This is confirmed by another interesting observation, i.e. that quality assurance is the only item where the 30 Ministers who signed the Bologna Declaration shied away from the much more pro-active proposal of the preparatory report[2].

In spite of the vague, non committal phrase in the Declaration, the follow-up work to the Bologna Declaration filled the vacuum by paying significant attention to quality aspects, starting with evaluation and quality assurance. The word 'accreditation' found its way into the implementation process with the 'Salamanca Message' of European universities (March 2001) and from there it was taken into the Prague Communiqué of Ministers (May 2001) as one possible mechanism of quality assurance[3].

The pressure towards more quality assurance, including in the form of accreditation, has continued to increase since. Hence, the main conclusion at this stage is that even though the quality assurance/accreditation dimension has not been easily accepted in the Bologna process, it has soon imposed itself as an absolutely essential building brick of the European higher education area. With many countries re-organising their entire higher education system, the pattern of reforms prompted (or eased) by the Bologna process tends to be built around 3 corner stones: the introduction of bachelors-masters instead of long, traditional, tunnel-type degrees; the adoption of ECTS or ECTS-compatible credits; and the setting-up of quality assurance/accreditation mechanisms usually entrusted to a national agency. This 'golden triangle'[4] of reforms leading to the European higher education area has developed in spite of the weak initial impetus coming from the Declarations on which the movement has been based. This amply demonstrates that the coherent, compatible, internally and externally legible common framework of European degrees called for in the Bologna process requires an effective multilateral mechanism for the assurance and demonstration of the quality of what is delivered by higher education institutions in Europe[5].

Need for a Coherent Response at European Level

In spite of the hesitation of many institutions and systems and the active resistance of some, an organised answer at European level is necessary in quality assurance/accreditation. Some of the main reasons for this are explored in the following paragraphs.

The Limitations of National Approaches

Nearly all European countries have set in place a national system or agency for the purpose of quality evaluation, quality assurance or accreditation. Irrespective of how effectively and efficiently these systems or agencies carry out their own work, the purely nationally based approach to the quality issue presents three built-in limitations:

— They tend to be set up in isolation from what is happening in other countries, and therefore differ from each other in any possible respect: status

of the agency (quasi-governmental, semi-independent or private), mission (authorisation, evaluation, improvement, accreditation), approach (at institutional or system level, looking at programmes or whole institutions, input-based or outcome-based), as well as means, size, etc. With nationally-based approaches only, there is a high risk (even a near certitude) that while the Bologna process is trying to lead Europe out of its chaotic jungle of degrees/qualifications, this may be impeded by the creation of a chaotic jungle of quality assurance systems and agencies.

— Secondly, such national approaches are not exempt from the suspicion of being self-serving or of tolerating complacency, and they may find it very difficult to establish their real trustworthiness — all the more so as the national higher education is smaller. Quality cannot be self-decreed; it only exists when it is perceived as such by others (stakeholders, users). National quality assurance tools miss their very purpose if they are not trusted outside of the country where they are established (which may in turn affect their appeal and credibility in their own country). Irrespective of the maybe genuine efforts made locally, investment in quality assurance mechanisms that do not have the critical mass, or a sufficient degree of independence from vested local interests are unlikely to pay off. Credibility can however be derived from the inclusion of national agencies into a broader scheme, where their own quality is ascertained and the validity of their decisions or conclusions is endorsed. In other words, a mechanism for the assurance of the quality of the work done by quality assurance agencies is essential, and can only be arranged within a multilateral scheme at the European level.

— Thirdly, some of the key issues confronting Europe by their very nature reach beyond national boarders. This is the case in particular for the quality assurance of 'imported' or 'transnational' education, which has been developing across Europe over the last decade and has become a significant reality in many countries, in particular in Central/Eastern and Southern Europe. Purely national answers to this new international issue may lead to consequences that have hardly been measured in Europe: a given programme of e.g. a US university made available through branch campuses or distance education in various countries in Europe may well be fully accredited in some and ignored, not recognised or even prohibited in others; this is a potentially important new source of chaos, or at least inconsistency, in the landscape of European higher education qualifications. Another aspect is that the accreditation of a non-European institution or programme in just *one* EU country may entail direct consequences in all others (e.g. through their inclusion in cooperation consortia), and measures to guarantee that there is no easy backdoor to the European higher education area can only be taken at European level.

The Huge Cost of Status Quo

Other reasons advocating for a coherent answer at European level are related to the huge cost that its absence (or even its late introduction) may entail.

— One is that most of the world is accustomed to some kind of accreditation, and that European universities will remain placed at a disadvantage in the world-wide competition between higher education institutions and systems if they are not in a position to supply evidence that they are somehow 'accredited'. While this may not be obvious for those looking at the picture from within Europe (where some kind of quality image may be associated with a particular institution or system), the same does not hold in other continents, where only a handful of European universities have a 'brand name' that renders a quality seal or label ('accreditation') superfluous for them. For the vast majority of universities, internal quality assurance mechanisms, however necessary, will not be sufficient: good quality needs to be demonstrated, and this requires some kind of external certification.

— Possibly as a long unnoticed consequence of this, for want of a trustworthy European label of accreditation, European universities have started to turn towards US accreditation agencies to acquire theirs. This movement is already quite visible in such key areas as engineering (through the ABET) and management (through the AACSB) and there is no reason why it should not spread to other professional areas, such as architecture, medicine (examples already exist), etc. In other words, the absence of an accreditation scheme in Europe opens the door to well-established, non-European quality assurance/accreditation agencies and pushes universities to seek a quality label from abroad. The success of EQUIS (European quality label for business/management schools and faculties) however shows that possible answers may be developed in Europe — even though nothing comparable exists (yet?) in any other subject or professional area.

— Yet, the highest cost of the *status quo* (i.e. of not setting up a European mechanisms for quality assurance/accreditation) is most probably that it would mean that European Higher Education Institutions/systems would miss a unique chance for self-regulation. The Salamanca Message issued by the 2001 Convention of European Higher Education Institutions underlined their willingness to self-regulate and their responsibility in adopting 'mutually acceptable mechanisms for the evaluation, assurance and certification of quality'. A few weeks before the second Convention of European higher education institutions in Graz[6] and a few months before their next meeting with Ministers in Berlin, it is far from obvious that a similarly clear vision of how the future may be shaped by universities themselves will prevail. Contrary to some unjustified hope expressed here and there, internal quality assurance will remain 'unfinished business' if not complemented by some kind of external certification, and mere partnerships between universities that see themselves as of comparable level do not have the potential to solve this issue: however useful, mutual recognition for student exchanges and joint degrees does not ensure system consistency — usually not even between all partner universities involved and across a broad spectrum of disciplines.

— Finally, there is a risk that quality assurance mechanisms, including accreditation, may be applied primarily in areas where the risk of really

poor quality is not highest. It is of course easier to design systems address-ing 'traditional' higher education, i.e. post-secondary, initial, classroom education at established, in Europe usually public, universities. Yet, really useful mechanisms for quality assurance/accreditation in Europe as well as elsewhere need also to address the more complex picture of tertiary education colleges (which make up about half the student population in several European countries), private institutions (which are mushrooming in parts of the continent), lifelong learning courses/qualifications, distance education, as well as transnational education.

A European Clearinghouse for the Demonstration of Quality

The scenario proposed to address simultaneously the issues and challenges raised above is based on three key principles:

— The respect for system and subject/profession diversity, thus also ensur-ing that accreditation does not inhibit universities' innovativeness in cur-ricula by pushing them towards sheer compliance;
— Mutual trust and confidence, nourished by quality checks and therefore more sustainable than would be the case in a system where actors are expected to blindly trust all other players without any control; such mutual trust and confidence would also be enhanced if all countries involved in the Bologna process were to sign and ratify the 1997 Lisbon Convention for the recognition of foreign degrees in the Europe region.
— The need to avoid overloading European universities with an additional layer of assessment and control procedures and bureaucracy — a very real risk entailing negative reactions in the academic community and coun-terproductive outcomes, as has already been experienced in some coun-tries in Europe.

The main mechanism put at use is that of 'meta-accreditation', i.e. a multilateral system based on some form of 'accreditation' of accreditation agencies. The core idea underpinning it is that if quality assurance/accreditation in a given region or sector is indeed well done and trustworthy, then the work should not be redone at European level; rather, its outcomes can then be taken over: if an institution or programme is good enough to be accredited by someone who is doing the job properly, then it is good enough to be recognised by those who trust in the quality of the work done, and the accreditation can be 'extended' beyond its own country into a broader region.

This approach for Europe draws in particular on the model developed since 1998 (first on a pilot basis until 2002) in Germany, a country with a highly decen-tralised education system at all levels, including higher education, and one where Bologna-type reforms have been pushed and pursued by policy leaders as a response to the international challenge of regaining attractiveness and the inter-nal need for more efficiency and a new approach to quality.

The accreditation of accreditation agencies is in all likelihood going to be the pivotal feature of any future European mechanism or system. The 'accredi-tation' process needed to evaluate and select agencies that will participate needs not be a top-down approach: within the European context, it could more

easily start with a stage of co-optation between existing agencies applying to themselves a set of key criteria. Once this is done, the inclusion of additional agencies into the original nucleus needs to be based on a similar series of explicit criteria.

Diverse Quality Assurance/Accreditation Agencies . . .

The profile of 'quality assurance' or 'accreditation' agencies that could be 'accredited' in this way may be (and most probably will be) quite diverse. They may be national or regional (i.e. sub-national, in particular in countries with a 'federal' educational system); at a later stage, it is quite possible that several national or regional agencies may see the value of joining forces and forming regional ones (in the sense of a part of Europe, e.g. the Nordic or Iberian region) or linguistically based ones (e.g. the French-speaking, German-speaking, or Slavic-speaking ones). Both trends (geographical and linguistic clusters) can be expected; accreditation within linguistic zones may become a particularly attractive option in Europe: the existence of speakers of a given language in various educational systems may provide a useful reservoir of experts and evaluators able at the same time to build up the cohesiveness of the qualifications available in that language and to enhance the credibility of otherwise purely national/ systems.

Agencies specialised in a particular subject or professional area (e.g. in physics, engineering or veterinarian studies) are another type of those that may be accredited. Yet others may look into a particular segment of the overall higher education system, e.g. colleges of tertiary education, research-intensive masters, doctoral studies, or 'European' and 'double' degree curricula. It is not inconceivable that some of the well-established, large networks already in operation in Europe (e.g. those linking a particular type of universities) may think of establishing an agency paying special attention to their difference and seek accreditation for it within the European clearinghouse system.

. . . Linked by a Common Set of Quality Criteria for their Work

While the type of agencies that may be considered for accreditation may thus be quite diverse, only agencies meeting a set of fundamental, common criteria may be 'accredited' in the system.

Such basic criteria should pay attention to some core aspects, such as the following:

— Composition: in order to enhance their credibility, agencies that can be accredited may be required to have a sufficient number and variety of decision-makers in order to bring in the views of various actors: in addition to academics, a minimal representation of students, employers or civil society in the broader sense may be required; it would also be in line with European values and traditions to include governmental representatives. Finally, it seems also important that a significant minority (that may in certain cases be a majority, as is already the case of the Austrian Accreditation Council) come from outside the country: a minimal number of 'foreigners', from other European countries or from other continents,

who do not have a vested interest in the system they evaluate, should be required from agencies seeking accreditation.

—   Standards and procedures: a key aspect of the meta-accreditation system is that each agency needs to have a set of clear, disclosed and sufficiently stable standards and procedures that will guide its decisions, but these need not to be exactly the same. Level descriptors (general and by main subject area) are required, but meta-accreditation does not imply a strict standardisation of standards. What matters is that the descriptors, standards and procedures applied[7] are able to create enough trust in other agencies party to the system. Thus, agencies may focus more or less on inputs or on outcomes without compromising the quality of their work; neither evaluation/accreditation based exclusively on inputs, or based exclusively on outcomes is likely to be sufficient: a mixed approach is nearly unavoidable (even in an outcome-based approach, the quality of teachers and curricula may still make a difference for the majority of learners . . .), although the mix of what suits best in a particular context should be left open to choice and even to competition.

—   Critical size/breadth: this is a decisive aspect for the credibility of efforts; the fragmentation of higher education systems in Europe is such that some existing national agencies may have just a very small number of institutions to evaluate — too small to lend them credibility; while no absolute minimal number or size should be fixed, only agencies meeting the 'critical size' should be accredited; this may entail the grouping of some, but it will bring them a potential of trust that would not otherwise be possible.

—   Independence: what matters in this respect is not so much the legal status of the agency as its ability to carry out its work independently, without external pressure that a given programme or institution should be accredited for reasons other than its quality. This may be achieved, in different ways, in quasi-governmental, semi-public or private bodies; respect for the diversity of higher education systems and traditions should command respect for the diversity of the legal status of agencies in their own environment. Independence should rather be judged according to the appointment procedure, the protection of members of accreditation bodies (duration of terms, guarantees against outside pressure or threats), the presence of 'outsiders' (non-nationals, non-academic staff) as well as the availability of sufficient means (human resources, funding) for the agency to carry out its tasks respecting the necessary level of quality.

Meta-accreditation and Multiple Accreditation

The mechanisms set out above could function at European level and could be set up in stages, without much bureaucracy, starting with a limited number of recognised agencies of quality assurance and/or accreditation and expanding their number over time, as others are created and their capacity to meet similar standards is checked. Over time, the small initial nucleus is expected to grow and to increase its attractiveness for other agencies: with a good 'magnet' in place for those agencies not yet in line with the emerging European pattern, these will

increasingly see their interest in joining in; in this way the overall cohesiveness of the system could be maintained, or even sharpened as it develops.

Two corollaries of meta-accreditation in such a system would be the co-existence of institutional and programme accreditation and the possibility of multiple accreditation. The system may function without requiring an *a priori* choice between institutional and programme accreditation — which is one of the problematic issues in the whole quality assurance/accreditation debate.

— Concerning the issue of *programme vs. institutional accreditation*, Europe seems to have embarked in some countries on mechanisms too heavy to be sustainable, e.g. where the individual accreditation of each single programme is required. While this may be justified in certain circumstances, such as the need to establish a new category of degrees (e.g. the new Bachelors and Masters in countries where they were unknown hitherto), or to ensure that real curricular renovation is taking place when the degree structure is re-organised, or when high professional standards must be enforced in regulated professions, the absolute generalisation of programme accreditation would be neither possible, nor desirable. It could lead to the paralysis of the system (as is nearly the case in some countries where too many new programmes are in a queue for accreditation, thus hampering the development of new curricula instead of boosting it . . .) and inhibit much needed innovativeness in curriculum development. Hence, the longer term development is nearly inevitably going to be in the direction of institutional accreditation, complemented by programme accreditation in certain areas (e.g. those singled out above) or in certain cases (e.g. institutions not able to be accredited in all areas, but doing well in a few, or those seeking to mark their excellence in a particular subject/discipline). The mix between institutional and programme accreditation may vary between systems, institutions, areas of specialisation, levels, etc. and may also adjust to varying requirements over time. Any system starting from a ruling in favour of only one of the two approaches would be doomed for failure in Europe — and also elsewhere, as can be seen clearly in the US from the balance between regional, institutional accreditation and specialised, professional accreditation.

— Institutional accreditation, which is understandingly more attractive to institutions attached to their autonomy, may of course be carried out applying some common, core criteria. Examples of these in the European higher education area could be the requirements:

— that an institution demonstrates that it has put in place an effective internal system for quality assurance and improvement;
— and that the procedure for accreditation be based on an internal review followed by an external one carried out by auditors coming from e.g. at least 3 different European countries.

This would mean that European universities would typically seek one institution-wide accreditation, and a number of programme accreditations (from a national agency or from a specialised, sectoral 'European' one) in areas where it would be required or where the institution itself wants to establish its quality. Needless to

say, some accreditation may be mandatory (e.g. institutional accreditation in the country where the institution is registered, or for professional programmes opening access to regulated professions) and may be sought in other areas by universities according to their own needs and priorities. Multiple accreditation would thus become an exercise where each university could seek the highest, or most suitable accreditation according to its own strategy/profile. Such a system is therefore more compatible than any other with the overarching principle of institutional autonomy — which confers to it an enormous advantage in the European context. Also needless to say, governments as well as funding agencies (where they exist) would not be bound to draw automatic conclusions from a decision to accredit or to not accredit: accreditation provides an authorised message about quality, aimed at students, employers and public authorities, leaving to each of them the decision they wish to draw from this piece of information[8].

Another important rule that should prevail throughout the multilateral system should be that universities may seek accreditation from agencies that are not located in their country/region in order to demonstrate that they meet the quality standards of that agency. A missing element in Europe is that (except in business/management studies thanks to EQUIS) universities do not have independent European bodies to which they could turn for an evaluation/accreditation of their curricula that would not be biased by national stakes[9]. Changing this is important for various reasons:

— To offer an opportunity to get accreditation to universities that do not, or not yet, have an accredited accreditation agency in their country to demonstrate their quality;
— To allow universities to seek accreditation from an agency that better suits their profile;
— To avoid a situation where universities which feel a need for accreditation from outside their country have only the possibility to do so by approaching a US agency.

In order to stimulate this process within the framework of multiple accreditation, a basic agreement could be that agencies in the European clearinghouse system should be allowed to examine requests for accreditation coming from any higher education institution in Europe — and from overseas as well. Alternatively, the clearinghouse could run a special commission to deal with such cases. The effect of such a system would be to create a dynamic environment for accreditation within the quality assurance system of the European higher education area, allowing universities to be accredited in Europe, outside of their own country, if they do not have an adequate possibility to do so at home.

Special Roles of the Clearinghouse

The main function of the cluster of agencies forming the European clearinghouse would of course be to serve as a 'clearinghouse' for quality assurance/accreditation outcomes between all parties involved. This would require a small operational unit mainly responsible for keeping a register of such outcomes.

To this basic function could be added, right from the beginning or at a later stage, several other roles, notably:

— The award of a special label that would be protected against misuse and would be reserved for institutions or programmes that have met the threshold standards of one of the qualified agencies, and thus enjoy the status of being accredited in the European accreditation clearinghouse system; while the accreditation would be gained from one agency, the label would be valid throughout the system — in the same way as in the German decentralised model, where the main function of the central accreditation council is precisely to control a single quality seal, while leaving to accredited regional agencies the power to decide who deserves it and who doesn't.

— Another important function that is likely to be felt soon in the future development of the system is the need to ensure overall coherence of the European system where it interacts with others, in the first line with the US system. This would require mainly: a coherent approach to transnational education; and the pursuit of external convergence, where degrees of the same category within the European system are dealt with differently in third countries. Fulfilling this function would of course also require seeking coherence in the recognition given in Europe to third-country degrees.

What the Clearinghouse Would NOT Be

Finally, it seems important to stress what the clearinghouse would ***not*** be:

— Not a monopoly: multiple accreditation is possible, and the development of this major European scheme endorsed by the main players would not block the possibility for certain institutions or groups of institutions to set up their own structure and arrange 'accreditation', either for their members or for institutions of a particular type. Such private accreditation initiatives already exist on a large scale in the USA, but also in Europe, even though the process is probably only starting. There is for example an Accreditation Board of Higher Education Schools (EABHES) with headquarters in London that 'recognises and approves the diplomas issued by its members'[10]. Private initiatives of this kind are unavoidable and in a continent very attached to the 'public good' nature of higher education, this should be a powerful incentive to establish a clearinghouse system bringing together the main national and regional agencies supported by public authorities[11].

— Not a ranking system: accreditation in the multilateral system is based on threshold standards, and has not as its aim to 'rank' universities or programmes or to establish 'league tables'. Multiple accreditation may even be seen as a way to circumvent the issue of whether accreditation should be based on minimal or higher standards, i.e. whether it should distinguish all quality institutions or the 'club' of the best ones: both are possible when universities are free to seek the kind(s) of accreditation that best suits their strategy and profile. Rankings may of course be drawn up informally, outside of the accreditation process (usually at the initiative of the media) and will anyway remain subject to much controversy, not

least because of the linguistic and systemic diversity of European higher education.

— Not a superstructure: the clearing house is in essence a mechanism that merely *extends* accreditation gained in one part of Europe to a broader part of the continent — possibly some time in the future to the whole of the EU, or to all countries participating in the Bologna process, or to the whole Europe region.

— Not an additional burden on universities: one of the great merits of a European clearinghouse would be precisely that work already properly done at national/regional level needs not to be redone at European level. Universities besieged with quality assurance/accreditation self-assessment, external audits, reports and related paperwork should applaud this decisive advantage of the system.

— Not a closed system: while the clearinghouse function will be set up according to the needs of European higher education, it would function in a world-wide perspective, serving the purpose of increasing the attractiveness of European higher education abroad, but also that of easing cooperation with all other world regions. The internationalisation of quality assurance is a world-wide movement[12] within which a European system consolidated at regional level could play an important role.

The process sketched above may emerge spontaneously from the building-up of closer ties between some of the existing accreditation agencies in place in European countries. Their number keeps growing as the Bologna process develops, and preliminary contacts based on shared interest have already been established through various initiatives:

— on a cross-border level, e.g. through the creation of a joint agency between the Netherlands and Flanders, and its announced intention to seek partners across the German border; this has developed into the 'Joint Quality Initiative' which already involves several other partners;

— on a linguistic basis, which is already visible not only in the Dutch-Flemish agency but also in the DACH initiative linking German-speaking agencies in Germany, Austria and Switzerland;

— or on a broader basis, between those agencies in Europe actually doing 'accreditation' (rather than 'quality assurance'), starting from a promising meeting of 8 of them in the Hague in the spring of this year where they launched the European Consortium for Accreditation (ECA).

The nucleus needed in Europe to make the scenario set out in this article could well emerge from one of these initiatives — or from their combination. The European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) and the European University Association (EUA) will in all likelihood also have a role to play in this scenario, and all these actors could easily find their place in the setting up of the European clearinghouse. It is not inconceivable that this be prompted by an ambitious jump forward in the Berlin meeting of Ministers in September 2003. Otherwise, filling this vacuum would most probably be an inevitable development in the process of the growing together of European higher education institutions and systems.

NOTES

1. Joint Declaration on the harmonisation of the architecture of the European higher education system by the four Ministers in charge for France, Germany, Italy and the United Kingdom, Paris, The Sorbonne, 25 May 1998.

2. *Trends and Issues in Learning Structures in Higher Education in Europe* ('*Trends 1*'), op.cit.

3. Shaping the European higher education area, Message from the Convention of European higher education institutions, 31 March 2001; Prague Communiqué of Ministers of Education, 19 May 2001.

4. Towards the European higher education area: survey of main reforms from Bologna to Prague ('Trends II'), Guy Haug and Christian Tauch, 2001.

5. Cf. also Don Westerheijden and Marijke Van der Wende, *Who says B also has to say A: from Bologna to Accreditation, design requirements for quality assurance in Europe*, INQAAHEE Conference, Bangalore, 19–22 March 2001.

6. This Convention took place in May 2003. It stressed the role of universities' internal quality culture and proposed a Higher Education Quality Committee for Europe as a discussion forum, but provided no scenario for the organisation of quality assurance at European level. The question marks raised in this article therefore stay.

7. On this issue, cf. 'Working on the European Dimension of Quality', Bologna seminar on quality assurance in higher education, Amsterdam, 12–13 March 2002 (Dutch and Flemish ministries of education, 2003).

8. On this issue in the area of quality **assurance**, see *Evaluation und ihre Konsequenzen, Beiträge zur Hochschulpolitik 2/2003, Projekt Q-Qualitätsicherung*, German Rectors' Conference (HRK), Bonn, 2003.

9. The development of the EU-funded TUNING project in several disciplines may open the way to further progress in this respect.

10. http://www.eabhes.org

11. Dirk van Damme has repeatedly drawn attention to this: in the absence of a public, or publicly-supported European (and international) frame for quality assurance the floor would be left fully open to market forces, resulting in a combination of (over) regulation within each national context and a vacuum of public rules at the European/international level. Cf. for example, Van Damme, *Quality Assurance in an international environment: national and international interests and tensions*, CHEA International Seminar, San Francisco, 2002.

12. See for example Franz Van Vught and Don Westerheijden, Globalisation and internationalisation: policy agendas compared, 2002 (in O. Fulton and J. Enders, *Higher Education in a Globalising World*, Kluwer, Dordrecht, The Netherlands, 2002).

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HAUG, G. & KIRSTEIN, J. (1999) *Trends and Issues in Learning Structures in Higher Education in Europe* ('*Trends 1*') Cf. Section III 'Possible ways into the future'.