

# Implementation of the Bologna Principles in the Georgian Higher Education System Irakli MACHABELI\*

## Abstract

The paper describes reforms in Georgian Higher Education System carried out in accordance with the demands of the Bologna Process.

The disintegration of the Soviet Union promoted the initiative to reform the European higher education system. It became necessary to work out mechanisms and procedures for recognition of higher education qualifications issued in different countries. With this aim the UNESCO, the European Commission and the Council of Europe created a draft of the Recognition Convention.

In 1997 in Lisbon the representatives of 35 countries signed a convention called the *Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications Concerning Higher Education in the European Region*.

Georgia was among those who signed the convention. It was ratified by the Parliament of Georgia in summer of 1999 and since December Georgia has become the full-fledged member of the convention.

Since the year 1997 the Ministry of Education is actively participating in the work of the so called "*European Network of Informational Centers*" (ENIC) and is implementing statements of the Lisbon Convention in Georgian higher education system.

Since 2003 the Division of Academic Recognition and Mobility of the Ministry of Education Science is acting as the Georgian ENIC.

Participation in ENIC Network means:

- To disseminate information about the Georgian Higher Educational System;
- To confirm the authenticity of Georgian qualifications;
- To recognize foreign qualifications;
- To accumulate information concerning the foreign education systems
- To implement the recommendations of international documents and organizations;
- To support students mobility.

The number of applications for recognition of foreign qualifications and verification of certificates issued in Georgia is annually increasing. For example, in 2005 the Georgian ENIC received about 1,000 applications 96 out of which were forged, whereas in 2006 this number of applications exceeded 6,100 and 76 documents among them were forged.

The Georgian ENIC as a part of the Ministry of Education and Science took an active part in dissemination and implementation of Bologna demands. The results of this work were examined by experts of the Council of Europe and in 2005 in Bergen Georgia had been affiliated with the Bologna process.

**Key Words:** European Higher Education System; UNESCO; Ministerial Conferences

## Support of the Bologna Process:

### 1. Adoption of a system essentially based on two cycles

Implementation of the Bologna requirements at the Georgian Higher Educational Institutions began in 1992, when 2 cycle study was introduced at two faculties of the Tbilisi Ivane

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Javakhishvili State University. Recently the majority of accredited higher education institutions converted their system to a two level degree system. To-day there is several fields in Georgian universities that continue 1 cycle studying. Mainly these are medical study fields: surgery, pediatrics, therapy, pharmacy, and etc. So far juridical studies were also 1 cycle courses, but now all leading universities implement 2 cycle programs.

## **2. Adoption of a system of easily readable and comparable degrees:**

The system of easily readable and comparable degrees envisages adoption by higher education institutions the diploma supplement of the form corroborated by the UNESCO, CoE, and Euro-Commission.

Seminars, conferences and consultation has been performed all over the Georgia by experts of Council of Europe, the ministry of Education and Science, as well as Georgian NGOs involved in education service. And the result was that in 2005 all Georgian HEIs began to issue Diploma Supplements of the international form.

According to the Minister's order the Diploma Supplement is necessary to give with diploma at all higher education level – graduate and post graduate. It is clear that not all supplements issued in Georgian HEIs meet to-day the requirements of high European standards but annual improvement of their contents is very encouraging sign.

## **3. Establishment of a system of credits:**

Special guidelines with concrete examples on implementation of ECTS have been prepared and delivered in HEIs.

A number of seminars and trainings had been arranged for HEIs. The Order of the Minister is prepared.

The Order of the Minister have been issued in January, 2007, that obliges accredited Georgian HEIs to introduce ECTS credit system beginning with 2007-2008 academic year. Now all Georgian HEIs are transforming their curricula according to ECTS demands.

## **4. European Dimensions in Higher Education:**

In 2004 the Parliament of Georgia passed the Law on Higher Education in which all the Bologna recommendations are envisaged.

Several days ago a new Law on Professional Education has been confirmed by the Georgian Parliament. The statements of the Law envisaged approaching the Georgian professional education to the best Western standards. Several new laws are developing in the Ministry of Education and Science that will help Georgian education system easily join to European education area.

## **5. Promotion of mobility:**

Georgian citizens do not have actual obstacles (except of financial and may be visas in some countries) for continuing their education abroad. Unfortunately, the number of enrollment of foreign students at Georgian HEIs was limited by legislation. Now this limitation is annulled. More than 6,000 Georgian young people are now studying in foreign universities. For example, there are more than 3000 students alone at German Universities.

## **6. Promotion of European co-operation in quality assurance:**

In 2005 the Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia carried out an institutional accreditation of Georgian HEIs. Among 250 institutions 113 of them passed the procedure. Quality assurance services are founded in a number of universities.

The procedure has been continuing in 2006 and to-day we have 40 accredited institutions. The next step toward the promotion of higher education quality is to carry out a program accreditation of HEIs. Now regulations for this procedure are proceeding in the Georgian Education Accreditation Center, which represents in our country the body responsible for quality assurance in Georgia.

The nearest goal is to make attempts for improving quality assurance of higher education to meet European standards and to join ENQA as a competent member of this international organization.

## **7. Promoting the attractiveness of the European Higher Education Area:**

Stability in Georgia, sufficiently high level of study and rather low tuition fee attracts foreign students to an increasing extent to Georgian universities. Recently more than 1600 foreign students are studying in our country. Annually increasing number of applications from foreign students is a very good indication that the Georgian higher education system is advancing.

The main goal of Georgian higher education system for the near future is to transform Georgia from a student exporter country to a student importer one.

Students from Turkey, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Japan, and Trinidad-Tobago and other countries have been enrolled at Georgian HEIs in 2006.

## **8. Lifelong learning:**

The Law on Professional Education adopted recently envisages methodologies for development of courses for lifelong learning. The ministry of Education and Science is now elaborating rules for introducing distance education. It is very important to share European experience in this topic and adjust it to the Georgian Higher Education System.

## **9. Higher education institutions and students:**

Unfortunately this item of Bologna is the most painful problem in the realization of Bologna tasks. The problem comes from political situation in our country. Recognizing the Georgian youth as a significant constraining force, political parties of Georgia try to capitalize their university student associations in their personal goals and objectives. But in spite of these types of obstacles, student social life is developing in the right directions. Student unions of several universities are in touch with the ESIB, invite their colleagues from other countries and international student organizations, study their good practice and adopt their experience taking into account local necessities.

## **10. Doctoral level (third cycle):**

Crucial reforms have been undertaken in scientific domain: from the out-of-date Soviet system of governing research under supervision of the Academy of Science, a grant system of financing have been realized in scientific institutions. Tenders among scientific groups reveal the best projects necessary for making headway of our country.

This process gave an impulse to rapprochement of the so called academic and university sciences. A number of research institutions previously belonging to the Academy of Science now

are parts of leading Georgian Universities. The process is in a conceptual stage and it is clear that the tendency is quite encouraging.

**With the aim to discuss the above listed issues** the Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia, together with some public organizations jointly hold seminars devoted to the recommendations of the Bologna process that have a vital importance for the development of the Georgian Higher Education System.