

**POWER TO THE FACULTY APPROACH IN THE BOLOGNA PROCESS:  
HOW DOES THE EUROPEAN APPROACH TO ACCREDITATION OF JOINT  
PROGRAMS ENHANCE INNOVATION CAPACITY?  
LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE WESTERN BALKANS FOR PROJECTS IN THE  
EASTERN NEIGHBOURHOOD**

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**Abstract**

The article analyzes how the application of the new system for the accreditation of joint Master's programmes helps to improve the quality of training in accordance with requirements in the context of Europeanization and globalization of the educational space. The processes of democratization taking place in the European space, the active formation of public institutions, the strategy of integrating the countries of the Western Balkans and the Eastern Partnership into the European community, including the European educational space, put forward new requirements for higher education, in which the need to ensure a high quality of education is clearly visible, meeting European standards.

In the context of the formation of a knowledge society, higher education in the field of political science is becoming a priority in the development of the countries of the Eastern Partnership and the European Community. The development tasks of this sphere are ambiguous, manifesting themselves in complex and contradictory relations with society. Experiencing the influence of modern trends in social development, the sphere of higher education in the field of political science becomes at the same time their active participant, driving force and catalyst.

In an environment of growing globalization, which is manifested in the intensification of competition on a global scale, there is a strengthening of the positions of the EU member states. The decisive factor in overcoming the secondary position of Europe in the market of educational services is the unification of the efforts of all European countries aimed at achieving the

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competitiveness of higher education. The embodiment of this idea is the Bologna Process, which aims to create a common European education area.

**Keywords:** Bologna Process, European accreditation approach, Western Balkan, Europeanization, Erasmus plus, multilateral joint programmes, European approach, European Political Science.

## Introduction

The Bologna Process (BP) has started as internal process of EU countries in 1999 and has developed a global impact in HE. Using the recent published analysis of “The Bologna Process and its Global Strategy” (Moscovitz and Zahavi 2020) this article will present the experience of an international higher education (HE) consortium developing and implementing a joint master’s programme at 9 universities in 7 countries since 2015<sup>1</sup>. This will illustrate how the Bologna model operates and give some ideas for a development of the arguments about the conditions for policy implementation.

The article<sup>2</sup> compares models of implementation along the experiences of a consortium implementing a joint master’s programme in seven countries and ten university partner institutions. It will be analysed how the “European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes” (Yerevan 2015) can be seen as a new approach to intervene in the national HE policies in the field of programme accreditation (impact on ministries, accreditation agencies, HE institutions (HEIs)). This includes new mechanisms that allow a bypassing of national regulations with getting accreditation from another Bologna country based (and EQAR registered) accreditation agency. It includes several elements into the deliberative but more top-down working regime approach from Hila Zahavi

1. It allows the universities to become acting and active actors with joining an international consortium – they need not ask any authority to do so.

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<sup>1</sup> European Political Science MA (EuroPS) - Erasmus+ Programme KA2 Capacity Building Project No. 561485-EPP- 1-2015-1-AT-EPPKA2-CBHE-JP in Higher Education 2015-2017. For further details about the project <http://euro-ps.org/> delivers information. The participation of the partner from Italy stopped during the project after it came out that the financial rules for public universities in Italy do not allow additional programmes without extra financial support as the EMJMD programme delivers.

<sup>2</sup> The intended outreach of this article is to give an example about how Bologna (or Europeanization) works as a multilevel governance example. If we can show some originality it might be interesting to use the model of analysis also for further cases, especially multilateral joint programmes (JP) which have used European Approach (EA) accreditation (as the FRONTEX joint degree programme of universities from the Baltic States to Spain or an Economics consortium led by Erasmus University Rotterdam) to develop more theoretical power.

The observations about several multilateral JP’s shows that Europeanization can work better outside the EU than inside (PoSIG example of Slovenia). Experiences about the accreditation of the multilateral MA Advanced Border Management for FRONTEX show that EU member states can be very creative in complicating the implementation of EA accreditation as well, so Slovenia is maybe not the only example for that. Maybe neighbourhood countries and applicants for membership negotiation with the EU show more motivation to implement EA accreditation.

2. The accreditation is managed by an EQAR listed agency after a procedure based on ESG<sup>3</sup> in one of the countries represented in an international consortium.
3. It puts pressure on the responsible regulatory institutions at national level to recognise this accreditation after the procedure is finished. (Otherwise, they would proof their missing capacity to implement the Yerevan 2015 declaration about joint programme accreditation as agreed by the responsible ministers).

One must think how these elements can help to develop the regime theory of Moscovitz/Zahavi 2020 as framework for further Bologna research and strategy for further policy development. The “European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes” (EA) is changing the resources of the actors responsible for the BP. While the regulatory reform capacity about HE is in the hands of the national authorities (legislative, executive) the implementation of JP’s is in the hand of HEIs. The case of the joint master’s programme Political Science – Integration & Governance (PoSIG) shows that it where the involved universities who have initiated the JP and stressed the national authorities to implement their Bologna commitment from Yerevan 2015. Looking at these universities it where groups of young faculty member with strong international background who run the project and in many cases have pushed the university management. Young and international embedded faculty are the innovators and driving force for modernization of curricula and HEIs but also successful national Bologna implementation. EA accreditation of JP therefore can be an instrument for a faculty based, bottom-up reform in the BP.

In a first step we will present the BP as it was established in the 1990’s, the motivation behind and how it gained global relevance. In literature this was analysed as development of an international regime based on a specific set of normative policy positions.

The second step will present the EA as anew instrument of the BP. Its setting and also the case study about PoSIG as a multilateral joint programme (JP) will show that with the Yerevan declaration 2015 a new step in the development of the BP took place with shifting the innovator role for national BP policies from central to decentral, to HEIs and their faculties.

## **The globalisation of the Bologna system as international soft power regime**

### *Bologna as EU internal process (Klemencic 2020)*

The Intentions of the Bologna Declaration<sup>4</sup> are described best in its own words as “strengthening the international recognition and attractive potential of our systems, increasing the international competitiveness of the European system of higher

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<sup>3</sup> Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)

<sup>4</sup> Bologna Declaration. 1999. “The Bologna Declaration of 19 June 1999: Joint declaration of the European Ministers of Education”. *The European Higher Education Area*. Accessed January 1, 2023. [http://www.ehea.info/media.ehea.info/file/Ministerial\\_conferences/02/8/1999\\_Bologna\\_Declaration\\_English\\_553028.pdf](http://www.ehea.info/media.ehea.info/file/Ministerial_conferences/02/8/1999_Bologna_Declaration_English_553028.pdf).

education” and as “a world-wide degree of attraction”. Recognition of degrees and mobility between the member states was one of the prior motivations behind.

The properties and instruments of this initiative (a policy field dominated by the national legislation and regulation competences of the member states) seemed to be weak: Joint objectives as voluntary commitments but no binding rules, catalogues of recommendations for implementation supplemented by implementation progress reports which created transparency of the process (Crosier and Parveva 2013, 34-37).

The expert driven Bologna Follow Up Group and its committees initiate policy exchange meetings and prepares the Bologna Minister conferences happening every second year. The European Commission supports this BFUG work and initiates activities as Erasmus, Erasmus Mundus and Erasmus+ to bring incentives for implementation to the HEIs in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and its external partners.

### *Bologna as global approach*

In Bergen 2005 the Bologna ministers agreed to open and attract the EHEA “to other parts of the world” and had the support of reforms in neighbouring regions in focus. The London conference 2007 addressed this to the global context with intensification of policy dialogues and further recognition of qualifications. Leuven/Louvain 2009 established the Bologna Policy Forum as an approach for going global and to establish the EHEA quality assurance (QA) measures (ECTS etc.) as global benchmarks. “Higher education has become strategically important for the European Union in creating both ‘minds’ and ‘markets’ for the European knowledge economy” (Keeling 2008, 222) and intellectual environment of the Lisbon strategy 2000 (to make the EU until 2010 the most competitive and productive economic sphere in the world). This shift from a regional to a global approach was criticized as a hegemonic instrument or imperialising power, even the resources for such a strategy were limited but effective because of their creative design (Moscovitz and Zahavi 2020, 10)<sup>5</sup>.

### *Bologna as international, deliberative and multilevel governance model*

While Europeanization & policy diffusion along joint principles are standards in the EU internal formation in main fields of integration (single marked, agriculture etc.) the Bologna process as a multilateral process included also non-EU member states into this development (Klemenčič 2020, 1-5; Moscovitz and Zahavi 2020, 6-21; Zahavi and Friedman 2020, 22-38; Asderaki 2020, 39-56). The adaption of national HE policies and institutions to the EU model in these countries might follow different motivations depending on the status and geographic distance of a country. Countries in the neighbourhood (like Western Balkan) have aspirations to join the EU and want to proof their reform capacities, others are intending to become associated or special partners

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<sup>5</sup> For example, with its regional strategies as Bologna in the EU Neighbourhood policy (EC2017) and the installation of structures and instruments (NEO’s, CBHE, Mundus).

(as Georgia and Ukraine). But even beyond that neighbourhood the Bologna process defunded into HE policies.

Seen from an international relations perspective Hila Zahavi and Yoav Friedman explain this capacity of the *Bologna process as and international regime* with principles, norms, rules and decision-making procedures covering expectations (Zahavi and Friedman 2020, 22-38)<sup>6</sup>. Successful international regimes as the Bologna process become “player[s] with a life of [their] own” (Zahavi and Friedman 2020, 23) which leads to questions about the resources for their power.

One resource of this power is connected to the specific EU governance model of *Open Method of Coordination (OMC)* leading to declarations of the Bologna minister conferences every second year. This includes experts of all participating countries and of different levels of HE in working groups and its institutionalization in constant conferences as the Higher Education Reform Experts (HERE) and connects the policy preparing Bologna Follow Up Group (BFUG) with the problems, standards, needs and feedbacks of the HE systems. Seen under institutional aspects the structural resources of the EU institutions to steer this process are not very strong but effective with connecting to the jointly developed normative understandings.

Defining a platform as infrastructure and language for joint understandings of HE made the BP to a global provider of a *Public Good* in the field of HE and in that sense the EU could develop a capacity as hegemon for global developments (Zahavi and Friedman 2020, 28). Functionally this public good of “a uniform pedagogical and administrative language facilitates international academic collaboration” minimizes the chaos in international HE and leads to “collaboration in the name of better competition” (Zahavi and Friedman 2020, 28).

From the perspectives of all member states their participation in the BC enables their HE systems to support their respective societies in the globalisation process.

Internationally recognized HE has increasing importance for economic developments in a competitive global environment. Seen from the young generation of academics this strengthens their role in society but also on the international labour market<sup>7</sup>.

### *Normative dimensions of Bologna and impacts on the HE reforms*

Another resource (=motivation for participants) is the *normative dimension of HE* where a universal set of principles following modern scientific thinking is promoted. The Bologna Process has established a global thinking about these as “Bologna Philosophy” or “European Values” in HE: Humanistic tradition, importance of academic freedom in research and in publishing as ethical basis for research and teaching (Jongbloed, Enders and Salerno 2008, 303-324).

- Representatives from HE worldwide find a backing of these values in different activities connected to the BP, independent from the situation in their country or region.

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<sup>6</sup> Using Krasner’s approaches, they define international regimes as “implicit or explicit principles, norms, rules and decision-making procedures around which actors expectations coverage in a given area of international relations” (Krasner 1982, 186).

<sup>7</sup> Including problematic developments as brain drain for less competitive countries.

- The inclusive character of the diplomatic activities (Policy Forums, HERE etc.) and incentives coming via Erasmus/Mundus (CBHE, mobility grants) made students, staff and HEIs to cooperative partners in an epistemic community that supports this progress at different levels of the policy community and at HEIs.

The European Qualification Framework (EQF)<sup>8</sup> defined three academic cycles of education and supports the recognition and mobility of grades within the EU and partner countries of the BP with the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS).

The EQF and even more the ECTS also brought a *change of the pedagogic paradigm* in many academic teaching cultures with a new humanist focus on students:

- The *learning outcomes of students* at the end of a programme are defined in dimensions of knowledge, skills & competences (note: in the context of the EQF, competence is described in terms of responsibility and autonomy, hence does not follow the common perception of the term competence). Experts from member states were participating in this multilateral policy making process and states started processes to bring their national models of qualification in relation to this framework. This led to several conflicts and intensive discussions in all fields of HE when implementation policies of the member states reached HEI and initiated curriculum reform processes<sup>9</sup>.
- Beside the needs and interests towards more comparability, better access and increasing relevance (also for the labour market) of the EHEA the shift to learning outcomes puts the students into the focus of academic educational reform. Seen from a humanist perspective this shift from the normative dominance of the teacher to this new student-centred approach was a positive development. Nevertheless, several examples showed that many administrative and technical misunderstandings in the implementation led to a negative image of “Bologna” as the reason for the decline of academic life (Reinalda 2013; Corbett and Henkel 2013; Münch 2013; Savigny 2013; Berndtson 2013; Schönwälder and Bloemraad 2013; González-Ferrer and Morales 2013).

### **Inputs from using the European Accreditation Approach for a multilateral Political Science Master**

The Bologna declaration *Yerevan 2015* had established an “*European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes*” and the PoSIG consortium used this new procedural instrument for its accreditation process. It means that one EQAR registered QA agency can run the accreditation procedure for an international consortium. The accreditation regimes of the signatory states of Yerevan 2015 must accept and

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<sup>8</sup>EHEA. 2005. “Qualification Frameworks/Three-Cycle System.” Accessed January 1, 2023. <http://www.ehea.info/page-qualification-frameworks>.

<sup>9</sup> See As an example of resistance to reform, several articles in ECPR that were published in “European Political Science, Volume 12, Issue 4, December 2013.” Accessed January 1, 2023. <https://link.springer.com/journal/41304/volumes-and-issues/12-4>. About the case of Bologna implementation at Austrian HEIs see Franz Kok und Markus Pausch (2013).

implement the results of this accreditation without any separate accreditation procedure.

After several years of experience with student and staff exchange with partners in the Western Balkan region University of Salzburg (PLUS) together with nine partner universities from seven countries applied successfully for a “Erasmus Community Building HE” (CBHE) project to develop and establish a Joint Master in Political Science in 2015-2017.<sup>10</sup>

After joint preparatory work in the consortium including 90 professionals from all participating universities (administrators and managers, but mainly academics) *a joint curriculum* with more than 60 jointly developed course syllabi and *an institutional contract* covering all needs for the management of a multilateral joint programme were established. The accreditation process for PoSIG with AQ Austria (the Austrian EQAR-registered QA agency) started in autumn 2016 with the submission of a self-evaluation report to an international expert panel, followed by their site visit in December 2016. Finally, the accreditation was granted with a decision by the agency’s board in February 2017. The programme welcomed its inaugural cohort of students in October 2017 and celebrated its first graduates in 2019<sup>11</sup>.

### **Experiences from the implementation of PoSIG accreditation in the represented countries**

To support the partner universities in the accreditation of the joint programme was part of the CBHE project design delivered to EACEA in February 2015. To manage this foreseeable complex, aim the support by the European Consortium for Accreditation (ECA) as external expert was planned in that time. Expert support by ECA and their involvement in the development of the *Yerevan 2015* paper together with AQ Austria experts opened this historic window for experience to the PoSIG consortium. The multilateral approach of the planned joint programme and its international and multilevel management approach made the project to a suitable pilot for the new Bologna instrument.

However, as documented in the Bologna Implementation Report 2020 also by 2018/19 “[t] The commitment to implement the European Approach has not been treated as a high priority in many national systems. There is a slight majority of countries where there is no legal obstacle to using the European Approach for quality assurance of joint programmes. 30 systems now permit the European Approach for quality assurance of joint programmes to be used. These include the countries where quality assurance is primarily undertaken at institutional level, and therefore the European Approach would have a less significant impact.” (Eurydice 2020, 79)

The report continues: “Since the Yerevan Communiqué, only Georgia, Malta, Moldova, Poland and Slovenia have amended legislation to permit the European Approach. This action is also foreseen in Azerbaijan. The majority of the 20 systems

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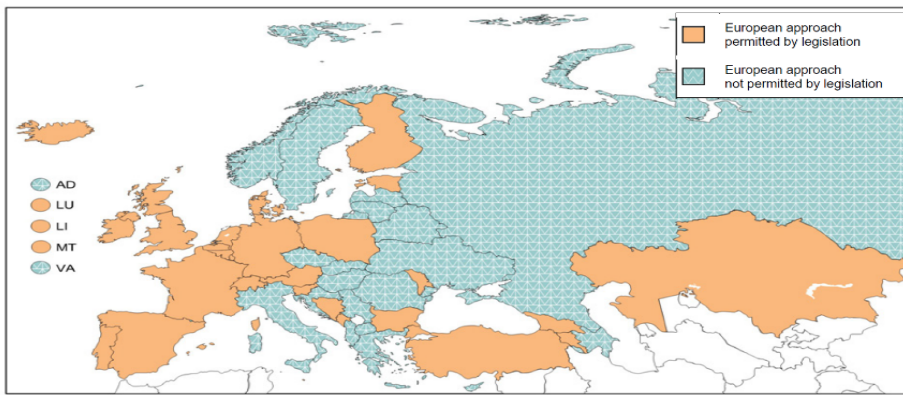
<sup>10</sup> Erasmus+ Programme KA2 Capacity Building Project No. 561485-EPP- 1-2015—1- AT-EPPKA2-CBHE-JP in Higher Education.

<sup>11</sup> Further details about the programme are available from <http://posig.info/>.

that reported that the European Approach to quality assurance of joint programmes is not permitted by their legislative framework have a quality assurance system that is based on programme-level accreditation. This means that these are countries where the European approach could be particularly beneficial to quality assurance of joint programmes.” (Eurydice 2020, 79)

According to the Bologna implementation report 2020 the EA accreditation was not permitted by legislation in Albania and North Macedonia.

Figure 1. Countries allowing the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes, 2018/19 (Eurydice 2020, 79)



The PoSIG accreditation procedure performed from 2016-2018 shows that there is a variation of policies how the EA can be implemented, even in countries like Albania and North Macedonia where the BFUG data indicate that this would be impossible.

In the following table several variables are listed to show the conditions for the implementation of the EA in the PoSIG accreditation as it was observed by the lead partner of the consortium as coordinator of the procedure and local coordinators at participating HEIs (\*=public university, \*\*=private university):

Country	Austria	Slovenia	North Macedonia	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Albania	Kosovo
Higher Education Institution	University of Salzburg*	University of Ljubljana*	Ss.Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje*	University of Sarajevo* Sarajevo School for Science and Technology**	University of Tirana* European University of Tirana**	University of Business & Technology** FAMA College**
Available information and awareness on EA Accreditation: Y/N if Y high/mid/low						
University Level:	N	N	Y- low	N* N**	N* Y**	UBT: N FAMA: N
National Accreditation body:	Y - high	Y-low	Y-low	Y - low* Y - low**	N* ASCAL is aware of EA accreditation**	UBT: Y - high FAMA: Y - high



Ministry – if relevant:	Y - high	Y-low	Y- mid	Y – low* Y – low**	N* Ministry is aware**	UBT: Y – high FAMA: Y- high
Experience with joint programmes: Y/N if Y High/mid/low						
Ministry – if relevant:	Y - high	-	Y- mid	Y – mid* Y – high**	N* Y**	UBT: Y-mid FAMA: Y- mid
National Accreditation body:	Y - high	Y-low	Y-low	Y – low* Y – low**	N* Y**	UBT: Y-mid FAMA: Y- mid
University Level:	N	Y-mid	Y- low	Y – mid* Y – low**	N* Y*	UBT: N FAMA: N
Support and opportunities positive/negative, yes1 with high capacity, yes2 with low capacity, no, no* but no official denial						
University level:	Y1	Y1	Y2	No* Y2**	Y2* Y2**	UBT: Y1 FAMA: Y1
National Accreditation body:	Y1	Y2	Y2	No* No**	Y2* Y2**	UBT: Y1 FAMA: Y1
Ministry – if relevant:	Y1	-	Y2	No* No**	Y2* Y2**	UBT: Y1 FAMA: Y1
Confirmation of EA accreditation:						
Unexpected Formal requirements for confirmation of EA accreditation:	N	N	There was no process of confirmation	N* N**	Y* Y**	UBT: N FAMA: N
With/without – EA- documentation?	Y	N	It was submitted, but was not formal requirement	Y* Y**	N* N**	UBT: Y FAMA: Y
Translation from English to national language?	N	Y	N	Y* Y**	Y* Y**	UBT: N FAMA: N
Executive decision by accreditation body or also by board?	B (Senate acting as Board for self-accreditation)	National accreditation procedure in front of the National Accreditation Agency (NAKVIS)	National agency for accreditation	Y* Y** (Cantonal Ministry of HE both)	Decision of Board of Accreditation: No. 07, date 30.03.2018* Accreditation Decision for PoSIG in Albania no. 54, date 27.11.2020**	UBT&FAMA National Quality Council (NQC) of Kosovo Accreditation Agency
Additional evaluation of the JP?	N	N	Y, yes using the standard national procedure	N* N**	Y* Y**	UBT: N FAMA: N
Fees for national implementation of the EA?	N	N	Y, fee as for any national programme	N* N**	Y* Y**	UBT: N FAMA: N

In particular, on PoSIG-accreditation (2016-2018) the situation in the participatory countries was as follows:

- **Austria:** PoSIG was approved by the Austrian Quality Assurance Agency (AQ Austria). Nevertheless, for the Austrian partner no national accreditation or approval would have been necessary due to the self-accrediting status of the Austria universities.
- **Albania:** The ministry in charge accepted the outcome of the EA accreditation as a form of pre-accreditation for both Albanian partner institutions by June 2018 (one public, one private). Nevertheless, after one year the study programme had to undergo national accreditation, what was in fact not a full accreditation but a form of study programme evaluation after the first year of programme implementation.
- **Bosnia and Herzegovina:** Both partner institutions received a letter of “consent for the implementation of the study programme” from the ministry in charge in July 2018; no further steps were necessary.
- **Italy:** The Italian partner had to withdraw from the consortium at an earlier stage of the CBHE project due to legal restrictions regarding the funding of study programmes (no possibility to use synergies with other programmes but proof of additional staff capacities for the whole programme).
- **Kosovo:** The Kosovo Accreditation Agency has approved the result of the EA-accreditation for both partner institutions in July 2017; no further steps were necessary.
- **North Macedonia:** A process for full national accreditation had to be started and was successfully finished by April 2018 (i.e., no direct ratification of the EA-accreditation; but usage of the AQ board decision in the accreditation procedure).
- **Slovenia:** Even though Slovenia is labelled as “European approach permitted by legislation” in the Bologna implementation report (EC et al, 2020, p. 79) for the process of PoSIG accreditation the situation was different: A then new law on Higher Education in Slovenia included a regulation about the membership of national accreditation agencies in EQAR as a condition for an “easy” confirmation of an EA accreditation. As not all relevant quality assurance agencies of all relevant countries were registered in EQAR the national accreditation agency of Slovenia, NAKVIS, required the University of Ljubljana to undergo full national accreditation.

Regarding the analysis of Bologna implementation in the Western Balkan region as it was reported 2013 by an expert team (Zgaga, Klemenčič, Komljenovič, Miklavič, Repac, and Jakačič 2013) the differences in the HEI landscape, the governance of HEI and the national policies has continued (Klemenčič and Zgaga 2015). The PoSIG case made these differences even more visible for the consortium. Although the institutional development and capacities of the accreditation systems have improved meanwhile.

Several observations during the accreditation process made by the consortium show the **challenges and strategic resources** for all actors involved in the accreditation process.

**Timeplan/foreseeability:** Compared to the perspective of single procedures for the nine remaining HEIs in the involved six countries the EA accreditation allowed the composition of a single ESG based self-evaluation report and the institutional agreements for its implementation. Best cases for the implementation are PLUS as self-accrediting public university in Austria and the legally given option for implementation by approval in Kosovo. But even formal delays resulting from translation and second evaluation procedures with a max delay in Slovenia of 2 years are the variations that might also have occurred without using the EA accreditation procedure. Therefore, the role as pioneer not only brought much work to the coordinating partner in the consortium but also new experiences as part of an internationally recognized consortium to all partners.

**Challenges in the management of the multilateral consortium:** Compared with other JP consortia PoSIG developed with 9 private and public degree giving universities from 6 countries a very multilateral JP with high complexity. The legal frame for EA in all 6 countries had to be identified and compared. National accreditation procedures in these countries with ESG based but diverse tracks and requirements for documentation and periods of board meetings had to be managed. The involved academic coordinators and quality managers from all partners had diverse backgrounds and experience in curriculum development, accreditation, and study programme management. Big public universities mostly had complex internal procedures and regulations. External experts had concerns regarding the multilateral governance approach used for PoSIG since academic programme cooperation usually is limited to a smaller number of HEIs.

**Strategic Bologna bias:** The strong involvement of faculty at the participating HEIs and the international relevance (status as EU CBHE project) of the joint preparatory work of academics in the preparatory project established the accreditation of PoSIG to an example about the fulfilment of European standards and the commitment of the HEIs and the involved national bodies (agencies<sup>12</sup>, ministries<sup>13</sup>). The fact that an international consortium with high academic reputation, the visibility of the preparatory standards (Erasmus+ project) and the involvement of the consortium lead management and ECA as consultant produced a high risk for no decision or a negative decision pushing the rectorates and national authorities for accreditation in several countries the multilateral consortium could implement the curriculum and the necessary institutional agreements as it was accredited by AQ Austria.

**Normative Bologna bias:** The specific history of the PoSIG consortium with experiences for exchange of students and staff for several years had built up a strong

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<sup>12</sup> Accreditation agencies were mostly informed (only one not) and where acting cooperative. Only one agency was acting as veto player after being not contracted as procedure leading agency. The start of the PoSIG accreditation process was presented at 13 May 2016 at the CEENQA meeting in Cracow. From that time all involved agencies knew about the project and could prepare for implementation.

<sup>13</sup> Ministries were surprised that at the beginning of the AQ Austria coordinated process they had to confirm the eligibility of the involved HEI from their country. It came out that signatures in Yerevan 2015 did not trickle down to administration – EA issues we always had to negotiate with the political management of ministries (except Austria). Where legal clarifications or implementation were discussed this was refused with “once we made a law we do not want to do anything else...”. The fact that EA accreditation leads to a new variation in the national accreditation regime was recognised as surprise.

commitment of the involved Political Science faculties. Mostly young members of faculties found the opportunity to implement academic standards in science and teaching known from international exchanges also at their home university. The ongoing Bologna reform elements at universities were pushed by this faculty-based initiative and university management (at some public universities) could not ignore the initiative although in many cases hindered the implementation with administrative and technical instruments. With the resources of the EA accreditation process and with being part of an international consortium, the faculty could implement the new JP curriculum and proof its innovation and Europeanization capacity also for further career options. The Erasmus CBHE project here had an enormous impact on the community building of the faculty as capital for innovation<sup>14</sup>.

## Conclusion and discussion

The PoSIG *faculty approach* in developing and implementing a multilateral JP with using EA accreditation shows that national BP policies do not necessarily have to be top-down organized. The joint language of Bologna about academic teaching and its normative commitment to a modern science based and student-centred academic teaching can be implemented by a community of academics sharing these “public good”. This brings international embedded faculties into the role as innovators in the BP. Their character as multilateral epistemic communities in their field of study supports not only their individual academic career but is also a relevant resource for the HEI and the national HE policies. In some cases, they have the potential to push these higher-level actors in the policy field. *International publicity* in the academic field and in the accreditation relevant milieus make such projects and their implementation visible and increase the attention to the capacity of the accreditation policies in the involved countries. *With the EA accreditation of JP the BP as global relevant international regime has an additional bottom-up based actor available as supporting resource*. The power of that resource is depending on the international embedding of faculties in the scientific community and incentives necessary to invest energy and commitment of academics also into academic teaching (as CBHE does). Where these conditions are given, national institutions must expect further pressure from new emerging JP’s.

*EA accreditation can be seen as strategic resource for the internationalization strategy of small HEIs and countries or in transformation*. It can be used as instrument for the internationalization of compared to the international market *small but excellent HEIs capacities*. Even small HEI’s with small but not a full discipline covering excellent academic capacities can be relevant contributors to a JP consortium<sup>15</sup>. This

<sup>14</sup> Yunus, Muhammad. 2021. “Designing the future: role and responsibility of Higher Education Institutions.” In: *Erasmus+ Capacity Building in Higher Education Grantholders Meeting (Online-25/01/2021, 14:00)*. Accessed January 1, 2023. <https://www.beyond-events.eu/index.php?eventid=69&roomid=180>.

<sup>15</sup> One could argue about at least 30 ECTS credits excellent courses one HEI has to offer to become part of an multilateral JP consortium. This is the equivalent of one term of academic studies. Consortia and accreditation have to decide if students once have to be enrolled in a JP partner university to allow a

might be an opportunity of special importance for small countries with a diverse HE landscape. The potential for this strategic approach is increasing with internationalization of faculty and the use of multilateral cooperation as a resource. At the same time such strategy needs the will to expose the academic capacity to international benchmarks. Many countries discussion about brain drain could find a new instrument to encourage local academic excellence of teacher and of students. In disciplines with academic excellence this will be easier than in others.

Within the *EU Neighbourhood policy and Eastern Partnership strategy* the field of HE was highly successful and met the needs of academics and HEIs for orientation and participation in international developments of science and education. States in post war and break away situation (Western Balkan, Caucasus, Central Asia) since the 1990's are open to adopt instruments of the BP to demonstrate and allow independent national strategies in HE beyond the dominance of former big players as Russia and interests of China with its infrastructure-based approach (Silk Road Strategy). Although EU foreign policy is still weak compared to the instruments and resources of these other big players in that "Region of Change" (RoC). The participation of the mostly small countries between these spheres in the Bologna process shows that there is a rising interest of the academia and the HE policies to connect to the values and principles of the EU model of HE. Beside the internal discussions about the Bologna implementation within the EU member states the BP and its international influence shows a higher level of EU soft power impact in the field of HE. Where the internal perception is dominated by the changes and needs for adoption from outside Bologna is seen as a positive landmark for development in that RoC. The request for such approaches increased dramatically since 24 February 2022.

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