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University development and co-operation in Norway and Europe

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After the Second World War, higher education became one of the driving forces in a continuing societal and industrial development. University leaders started to meet regularly, to develop common principles for the further development of higher education and research in the universities. As rector conferences developed into association of universities, new fora were established where university representatives met with representatives for national and European authorities, discussing higher education policies, culminating with the 1999 Bologna Conference and the still continuing Bologna Process. This article describes the development of the Norwegian higher education system and the parallel development of the Norwegian rectors' conferences into the Norwegian Association of Higher Education Institutions. On the European level it describes the development of rectors' conferences, leading to the European University Association, the cooperation between university and ministerial authorities in the Council of Europe, and how it all came together in the Bologna Process. In Norway, this was the start of the Quality Reform. Now, ten years later, we may need a new reform, focusing on experience-based tertiary education relevant for a labour market in rapid change.

Introduction

In Norway, as in other countries in Europe, higher education and research became one of the driving forces in a continuing societal and industrial development after the Second World War. Higher education policies developed in an interaction between public authorities and university leaders, both nationally and on European level.

In 1958, the rectors of the Norwegian universities decided to meet once or twice a year to discuss common problems and challenges. In 1963, these meetings were formalized as the Norwegian University Rectors' Conference.

Similar permanent rectors' conferences were established in other countries. Over the years, the rector conferences developed into regular bi-annual meetings and later into university associations. In Norway, the Rectors' Conference developed into the Council of Universities and then into the Association of Higher Education Institutions (UHR).[1]

On European level, rectors' conferences in Cambridge (1955), Dijon (1959) and Göttingen (1964) led to CRE – Standing Conference of Rectors of European Universities and to the Confederation of EU Rectors' Conferences. CRE representatives also met as national academic representatives in the Council of Europe Committee for Higher Education and Research. In 2001 CRE and the Confederation merged, establishing the European University Association (EUA). There was a European network of rectors and of the organisations they represented.

As Secretary General of the Norwegian Council of Universities and later on the Norwegian Association of Higher Education Institutions, I was taking active part in this co-operation in the period 1991–2005. I regularly attended meetings in CRE and the Confederation and I also met as the academic representative for Norway in the Council of Europe Committee from 1991, acting as the committee's Vice-Chair and Chair 1999–2003. I was also involved in establishing the Nordic University Association in 1995, acting as this association's first secretary general up to 2001.[2]

Much happened in this period, culminating with the 1999 Bologna Ministerial Conference and the development of the Bologna Process. Here, the university associations joined forces with national government representatives and the EU Commission in the development of the European Higher Education Area. As a Council of Europe representative, I participated in the Bologna Follow-up Group (BFUG) until 2003, thereafter being Head of the BFUG Secretariat up to the 2005 Bergen Ministerial Conference.

Ten years later and ten years retired, I have been looking back to this hectic and very interesting period.[3] Much has been written about the Bologna Process, but until recently, little has been written about the university co-operation that preceded it.[4], [5] This presentation covers the fifty years from the 1955 Cambridge conference up to the 2005 Bergen conference

1 Nyborg P. *Universitets- og høgskolesamarbeid i en brytningstid, Femti års utvikling.* Oslo: Unipub 2007.

2 Nyborg P. *Det Nordiske Universitetssamarbeidet vokser frem* http://www.uhr.no/internasjonalt/samarbeidspartnere/nus/sentrale_dokumenter

3 Nyborg P. Den sosiale dimensjonen i høyere utdanning, *Michael,* 2013; 10: Supplement 14.

4 Barblan A. *Academic cooperation and mobility in Europe: how it was, how it should be.* 2003. http://www.eua.be/eua/jsp/en/upload/CEPES_30thAn.1069322899147.pdf

5 Nyborg P. *The Roots of the European University Association.* 2014. http://www.eua.be/about.aspx

– coinciding with my own retirement. A more detailed presentation is available on internet.[6]

1. Development of higher education in Norway

Norway's first university – the University of Oslo – was founded in 1811, three years before the country's independence from Denmark. By 1938 there were 4 200 students at the university, the total number of students in the country then being 5 600, as specialised institutions for agriculture, veterinary medicine, dentistry, theology, technology and business studies had been established. [7]

The University of Bergen was founded in 1948, but as late as in 1956, the total number of students at Norwegian higher education institutions was not higher than it had been in 1938, i.e. 5 600.

The expansion started in 1957, the year of *Sputnik*. In 1960 the number of students in Norway had reached 9 600, a 70 % increase over four years, with no indication of a flattening out. The increased demand for places at universities could not be explained only by a higher number of candidates from the relevant age groups and a response to growing employment options. In Norway, as in many other countries, it was probably also a result of the population's higher social and cultural expectations.

There was now a need for planning higher education development, by the authorities and in the institutions. On the national scene, a commission was set up, chaired by State Secretary Per Kleppe (b. 1923) from the Ministry of Finance. The 1961 report from this commission estimated a need for 30 000 study places by 1970, but deemed such an expansion unrealistic and advised Government to build a "normal capacity" of 18 000 by 1970. This was followed up by a White Paper in 1962 and approved by Parliament (Stortinget) the next year.

1.1. The Ottosen Commission (1966–70)

By 1970 there were more than 30 000 students in Norway and still no indication of flattening out. The next national commission, appointed already in 1965 with Kristan Ottosen (1921–2006), founding father of student services in Norway, as its Chair, was given a much wider mandate than its predecessor,

– to propose ways and means for better use of study time and capacity;

6 Nyborg P. *Fifty years of university co-operation in Europe.* 2015. http://www.uhr.no/om_uhr/about_uhr_1

7 For references to documents in the Norwegian language mentioned in chapters 2 and 3, see reference 1 above.

– to consider alternatives to the university institutions for lower level education;
– to consider alternatives to the traditional long university studies;
– to estimate capacity needs in a long term perspective.

In the period 1966–70, the Ottosen Commission produced five reports, the first one estimating a need for 100 000 study places by 1985. The next one proposed a three-cycle main structure for university degrees, the first two cycles of 4 years and 2 years duration respectively. Life-long learning was also introduced in higher education. The third report advocated a system of regional state colleges for professional training and short cycle higher education. This was an immediate success and the first regional colleges began operations in 1969. New teaching methods were proposed, focusing on what we 40 years later would call learning outcomes and competences. Contents and quality of study programmes should be an institutional responsibility. A credit system should simplify transfer between institutions (including transfers from colleges to universities). The social dimension of higher education was introduced: All qualified applicants should have the possibility for higher education, irrespective of socio-economic conditions.

The follow-up of the total Ottosen package came in a White Paper to Parliament in 1973. However, a change of government resulted in a withdrawal of that document and the production of a new one and finally a full discussion in Parliament in 1975. By then many proposals of the Ottosen Commission had already been realised by the Ministry of Education and by the higher education institutions themselves. The Commission's estimate of 100 000 study places was reduced to 80 000 by Government and Parliament. Traditional training of teachers, nurses and other groups was upgraded to higher education, but it took another twenty years to merge the small professional schools with the new regional colleges. Still, a binary higher education system was the outcome. Student numbers reached 100 000 in the mid-1980s, with approximately 50 000 study places in the university sector and another 50 000 in the college sector.

1.2. The Hernes Commission (1988)

A new national commission, chaired by Professor Gudmund Hernes (b. 1941), later Minister of Education and Research, gave its recommendations to the Government in 1988. It was followed up by a White Paper to Parliament in 1991. The policy drawn up by Hernes in the White Paper was based on a binary system of interacting institutions with a university sector and a college sector, each institution being under Ministerial supervision of its

educational programmes. As a national system of higher education, it was more centralised than what the university sector had previously experienced.

The follow-up of the Hernes Commission brought many improvements to Norwegian higher education: Transfer of credits and recognition of previous learning became necessities, institutional co-operation was stimulated, and organised doctoral programmes were introduced for the third cycle. Quality of teaching and research came into focus. Internationalisation was to be an external dimension of Norwegian higher education.

A continued expansion of the higher education system was necessary to cope with the rapidly increasing number of young students queuing for admission. By 1997, the student count was over 170 000. Then, the number of new students started to decline. So did the budgets of higher education institutions. Later, student numbers increased again, but slower than previously. Higher education budgets grew even slower.

During the 1980s and 1990s the binary system was eroded by a sequence of decisions in Parliament, giving colleges the right to develop secondary, research-based degrees, to hire professors and to take part in the training of researchers, to engage in fundamental as well as applied research, and placing universities and colleges under a common law in 1996. After a change of government, the new Minister of Education and Research gave additional concessions to the state colleges, including the right to some colleges to award doctoral degrees in special fields. As he also decided that state colleges might be called university colleges, and that such institutions might be upgraded to universities, little was left of the binary system when the next commission submitted its report in May 2000. This commission was chaired by Professor Ole Danbolt Mjøs (1939–2013), former Rector of the University of Tromsø and former President of the Norwegian Council of Universities.

1.3. The Mjøs Commission (2000) and the Quality Reform

When the Mjøs Commission started its deliberations in 1998, it was apparent that challenges from the private sector had rendered the legal and economic framework for state higher education institutions obsolete, hindering contract activities and co-operation with external institutions. Stronger university leadership was also needed.

While the commission was still sitting, ministers responsible for higher education in 29 European countries met in Bologna in 1999. This certainly influenced the Norwegian process and the report from the Mjøs Commission was in many respects a fusion of national development, signals from Bologna and a dash of market liberalism. For the higher education institutions, the outcomes would clearly be of great importance.

The objectives of the resulting Norwegian policy on higher education – the Quality Reform – as defined in the 2001 White Paper, very strongly involved the HE institutions, making it clear that higher education is a public responsibility and an element in national politics, and that HE institutions are *partners* in the realisation of a national policy for higher education.

Bachelor and Master's degrees were introduced. A national grading system with A, B, C, D, E for passed and F for failed and the use of a Diploma Supplement was prescribed by the law.

With increased autonomy, much of the follow-up was left to institutions, such as the development of new study programmes and new teaching methods. Development work started immediately after the Parliamentary decision in 2001. The Reform was operational from the academic year 2003–2004.

An independent national body for accreditation and evaluation (NOKUT) started operations in 2003 to oversee institutional quality and to accredit institutions and study programmes. On the outset, the four existing universities were accredited with the right to establish new programmes in any field and at any level. State colleges were allowed to establish new programmes in any field at Bachelor level. They may seek programme accreditation on higher levels and they may also be upgraded to universities by a special accreditation procedure. Private institutions may operate on the basis of programme accreditation in special fields, but they may also apply for institutional accreditation.

The assumption of the Ministry for Education and Research was that the Quality Reform should be financed by higher efficiency in universities and colleges. However, the Norwegian Association of Higher Education Institutions (UHR) pointed out to the Parliamentary Committee that the proposed improvements in teaching and learning would have a much higher cost. As a result, Parliament asked for extra resources to make the Quality Reform operational. The State budget for 2003 included such resources and this was followed up in later budgets until the agreed level had been reached, but only to be cut back in 2006 after a change of government.

A revision of the Law on Universities and Colleges was proposed by Government and decided by Parliament in 2002. It was a leaner law than its predecessor, delegating more decision power to the institutions. Three years later (2005) it was superseded by the Law on Higher Education (state and private) giving state institutions even more autonomy, with more responsibility and accountability. The outcome was that Norwegian HE institutions obtained the autonomy they had asked for: The institution

appoints its professors, admits its students, decides its study programmes, is responsible for the quality of its programmes, and receives a lump sum budget from the state in addition to income from contracts with industry and state agencies.

1.4. The imprints of Bologna

In this way, national higher education policies and the Bologna Process came together in the Norwegian Quality Reform. Institutions and their umbrella organisation have been and still are important partners in the process.

An independent evaluation of the Quality Reform was carried out in 2007. The report and the following White Paper concluded that great changes had taken place since the new system became operational in 2003. A large number of new study programmes have been introduced at Bachelor and Master level, in universities as well as in university colleges. There has been an important expansion in research and research training at PhD level (third cycle), even though teaching had become more time-consuming. Four institutions have been upgraded to universities by the new accreditation procedures.

Over the years, student numbers have continued to increase, reaching 200 000 in 2001 and 250 000 in 2014.[8]

2. Norwegian Association of Higher Education Institutions

In 1958, the rectors of the seven university-level institutions in Norway[9] decided to meet once or twice a year to discuss common problems and challenges. In 1963, these meetings were formalized as a standing conference: *The Norwegian University Rectors' Conference* (De norske rektormøtene).

2.1. A Standing Conference (1958)

As a basis for discussions in their semi-annual meetings of their standing conference, the Norwegian university rectors organised groups of university professors to discuss and prepare written reports to the rectors. Among the themes discussed during the first years (and also later), were the following:[10]

- The expansion of higher education;
- The role of universities in a new structure of higher education;
- Open access;

8 http://dbh.nsd.uib.no/statistikk/

9 University of Oslo and University of Bergen, specialized universities for technology, business administration, agriculture, veterinary medicine, and teacher training.

10 See previous references 2 or 7 for more details.

– Access of students not having a diploma from secondary school;
– Recognition of exams from other institutions;
– University staff;
– Training of young researchers;
– Research and education;
– University budgets;
– Developments in university administration.

Most of these topics, if not all, were in the same period of time discussed with European colleagues at European Rectors' Conferences and later on in CRE meetings (chapter 3). The first item on the agenda for the Norwegian Rectors' Conference was always *Reports from international meetings.* Discussions regarding the 1968 student unrest were reported back to the Norwegian rectors both from the CRE Permanent Committee and from Council of Europe's Committee on Higher Education and Research (see chapter 5).

In 1973 the Ministry of Education presented a White Paper to Parliament on the further expansion and organisation of higher education in Norway. The Rectors' Conference commented that a priority for the universities would be to meet the demand for higher education from all qualified candidates.

The Conference saw the new regional colleges as an important supplement to the universities, giving shorter, professionally oriented education. The rectors pointed out that such education might be integrated in a university degree; they also indicated that first level university studies might be given by colleges. There should be a possibility for research in the regional colleges, preferably in co-operation with a university. It was an implicit understanding that higher level courses and research training was to be carried out in the universities.

Some years later, in 1982, the rectors took an initiative for a broader discussion – involving also college representatives and students – on the co-operation and sharing of responsibilities between the university sector and the college sector. It was agreed that education on the highest level and the training of young researchers must be the duty and responsibility of the universities. The main responsibility for institutions in the college sector should be short, professionally oriented education and practically oriented research and development related to local industry and administration. As mentioned previously (chapter 1), over time, this binary system gradually eroded.

2.2. A Council of Universities (1977)

When the first White Paper on Norwegian research policy was discussed in Parliament in 1976, there had been no comments from the Rectors' Conference, as the rectors met two weeks *after* the discussion in Parliament. It now became clear to the rectors that for influencing political discussions relating to research and higher education, semi-annual meetings were not enough. In 1977 the Norwegian rectors copied the 1964 European Rectors' Conference in Göttingen (see chapter 3.), transforming their Conference into an organisation, *The Norwegian Council of Universities* (Det norske universitetsråd).

In between Council meetings, a Steering Group would act on behalf of the Council. One of the university directors served as Secretary General.

With the expansion of higher education during the 1960s and 1970s, universities had been rapidly growing, with new infrastructure and more staff. Research was not any longer only a privilege for professors; it was seen as an important factor for societal development. University budgets had been growing with the ongoing expansion, but were now levelling off. However, money for research was coming in from new sources. How should universities meet the new challenges? University budgets were still decided in detail by the Ministry of Education with no flexibility for the institution to reallocate. The rectors and their Council of Universities started to ask for more autonomy.

It would only come gradually.

In 1977, a Working Environment Act came into force, to ensure sound conditions of employment and to protect the rights of employees. Regulations according to the new Act were formulated by the new Ministry of Cultural and Scientific Affairs in late 1981. As a consequence, several hundred «unofficial» research staff obtained regulated contracts with the universities where they had been working for years. But this was only after Council of Universities and the Norwegian Association of Researchers for a long time had been pressing for a solution of the problem.

As early as 1970, the Rectors' Conference had taken an initiative for organised research training. The Association of Researchers started negotiations with the Ministry of Education, relating structured doctoral education and doctoral programmes to the working conditions of research assistants. Little came out of this at that time. It was only in 1986 that the Ministry of Cultural and Scientific Affairs decided on new regulations concerning doctoral students and research assistants in universities. Doctoral studies were then linked to the junior academic position of *Doctoral Research Fellow*. From now on, the young research fellow was a *doctoral candidate*,

not a student. The objective of a research fellowship should be completion of research training to the level of a doctoral degree within four years of employment.

However, the prospects for a university career were bleak. From the mid-1960s, the Association of Researchers had been arguing for better career possibilities. In the late 1970s, the Council of Universities also engaged itself actively in this field. When finally the Council of Universities gave its recommendation to the Ministry in 1980, a radical change was proposed:

All teaching personnel in permanent positions should equally share responsibilities and privileges in teaching, research and administration. Department heads should be elected among the permanent academic staff. Teaching load and level should be decided on basis of competence and interests in the various specialised fields. The Council pointed out that this should also imply greater flexibility in the traditional system; lecturers were redefined as assistant or associate professors. Highly qualified associate professors should have the possibility for advancement to full professor based on personal qualifications. This was in full agreement with previous requests from the Association of Researchers. Most of the proposed changes were realised in a short time, by the university, by the ministry and by negotiations between the ministry and the Association of Researchers.

2.3. An Association of Universities (1990)

In 1989 the statutes were revised, giving the Norwegian Council of Universities a much more active role as an association of institutions, to contribute to the further development of national policies for higher education and research and to national and international coordination. The association decided to establish its own secretariat and to appoint a full-time secretary general to realise the new mandate.

2.3.1. A personal note

This is where and when the present author came into the picture: I was appointed Secretary General of the Norwegian Council of Universities in 1990 and the new secretariat was operational in early 1991. Before this, I had been a university professor, a labour unionist, a director general in the ministry and a research council director. I thought I knew the universities from most angles, and I had been involved with the Council of Universities both as a union representative and as a ministry representative.

As President of the Norwegian Association of Researchers in the 1970s, I had been fighting for regulated employment conditions for the research

assistants and for organised research training towards a doctoral degree (see 2.2.). From the same platform I had proposed a procedure for advancement to full professor based on personal qualifications (see 2.2.). As Director General in the Ministry of Cultural and Scientific Affairs in the 1980s, I had signed the regulations for research assistants and other groups of contract personnel and for doctoral research fellows. In the Ministry I had also been responsible for the administration of the Norwegian State Loan Fund for Education and for mobility programmes for Norwegian students abroad and for students from development countries – the social dimension of higher education. As Director with the Royal Norwegian Research Council for Science and Technology, I had negotiated the first Norwegian participation in EC research programmes. I did not know that these experiences should turn out to be very useful when I joined the Norwegian Council of Universities.

In 1991, the EFTA countries joined the EC Erasmus Programme. The Council of Universities was asked by the Ministry of Cultural and Scientific Affairs to be in charge of the Norwegian participation. To handle this, a section for international programmes was established at our new secretariat. We were also asked by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to establish a programme for research co-operation with universities in developing countries. This turned out to be a successful operation and our *Centre for International University Co-operation* grew rapidly, soon having a staff much larger than the secretariat itself. In 2003 it was transformed into a government agency, the *Norwegian Centre for International Cooperation in Education.*[11]

But I should also discover that there were more angles to universities and university co-operation than those I already knew. I did not know the international network of university rectors. However, I got a quick start in this field, with a Nordic University Rectors' meeting in Copenhagen and CRE meetings in Leningrad and Utrecht within a few months.

2.3.2. A White Paper on Higher Education

From the start, our focus was on national development and strategies in higher education and research. A government commission, chaired by a university professor and later Minister of Cultural and Scientific Affairs, had given its recommendations to the Government in 1988 (see 1.2.). In 1990, as a minister, he wanted to discuss the realisation of his ideas with the Council of Universities. In the White Paper to Parliament that followed in 1991, there were many challenges to the universities and to their asso-

11 http://siu.no/eng/About-SIU

ciation. The follow-up of the White Paper became a Council priority for the coming years.

In 1991, the Norwegian Association of Researchers convinced the Parliamentary committee for higher education and research that a procedure for advancement to full professor should be introduced in Norwegian universities The outcome was that the Council of Universities was mandated by the Ministry of Cultural and Scientific Affairs to establish a national procedure for advancement to full professor based on personal qualifications. Here the final decision would be with the institution where the candidate for advancement was employed. We would advise based on the opinion of a group of experts, a procedure similar to the one institutions used for appointing professors. I was now administrating a scheme that I had myself proposed 30 years previously on behalf of the Association of Researchers.

The Council of Universities took the responsibility of coordinating the organisation of research training in Norway (see 2.2.). In 1993, we presented national regulations pertaining to organised doctoral studies. Since then, such doctoral degree regulations, based on structured courses and certification, have been introduced at all university-level institutions.

In this way, the Norwegian Council of Universities added new functions to the traditional role of a rectors' conference and an association of institutions. The Council of Universities had no decision power over institutions; it was always an advisory function. On the other hand, the Ministry could not *instruct* the Council, it might ask for advice or assistance. The relation between the Ministry and the Council of Universities was based on trust, usually this worked to the satisfaction of both parties. It happened, however, that a minister of education took his own advice against the Council and its appointed experts. On one occasion, when the minister overruled our experts, the Council broke with the minister. The Government fell soon afterwards (for other reasons!) and relations were re-established with the incoming minister, who promised *not* to overrule expert advice in academic matters.

2.3.3. More students!

In a comment to the Government's budget proposal for 1993, the Council of Universities pointed out that the number of students in the country had increased from 100 000 to 150 000 over only four years and that university budgets were inadequate to meet this rapid growth.

The following year, 1994, the pressure for higher education was even higher than before and the universities had to limit admittance. There were protests. Deans at the University of Oslo wanted to open the traditional

academic studies in the social sciences, natural sciences and humanities for all qualified applicants. They got a huge media coverage, and the next day the Council of Universities received a letter from the Minister of Cultural and Scientific Affairs, asking how the universities could realise the deans' proposal.

The answer was; it is too late this year (studies had already started), but it can be done next year (1995), provided universities and state colleges were given extra money for new study places. Extra money was provided for 3500 new study places. A national admission service was established, all qualified students were admitted, but not necessarily at the institution they had given first priority. The national admission service has been in operation since 1995. Student numbers reached 200 000 in 2001 and 250 000 in 2014.

2.3.4. Time for change

During the 1990s the binary system was gradually eroded by a sequence of decisions in Parliament, giving colleges the right to develop secondary, research-based degrees, to appoint professors and to take part in the training of researchers, to engage in fundamental as well as applied research, and placing universities and colleges under a common law in 1996. After a change of government in 1997, additional concessions were given to the state colleges, including the right to some to award doctoral degrees in special fields. As the state colleges now were called university colleges and even might be upgraded to universities, little was left of the binary system at the end of the 1990s.

This was not the only challenge. At the end of the 1990s, it was apparent to the Council of Universities that challenges from the private sector had rendered the legal and economic framework for state institutions obsolete, hindering contract activities and co-operation with external institutions.

An assessment of the traditional four-year cand.mag.-degree was made by the Council of Universities in 1997. A proposition to go for a three-year degree was turned down by the academic community, but in 1999, inspired by the Bologna Conference, the Council recommended a 3/5/8 year degree system and a national grading system based on ECTS.

In 1999, a new national commission was appointed to recommend on the further development on higher education in Norway (see above in 1.3.). Most of our proposals mentioned above were followed up by the commission when it presented its report in May 2000. The commission also proposed many other changes – some of them inspired by New Management

theories. (The follow-up by Government and Parliament has been described in the first section of this article (1.4.).)

2.4. An Association of Higher Education Institutions (2000)

In May 2000 the Council of Universities merged with the Council of State Colleges to form the *Norwegian Association of Higher Education Institutions* (Universitets- og høgskolerådet).[12] Ever since the state colleges came under the same legislation as the universities in 1996, university rectors and university professors had fought against this "watering out" of academia, but to no good. The leadership of the two organizations now agreed that it must be better to stand together on behalf of higher education and research.

Bologna gave a helping hand: We wanted a system of easily readable and comparable degrees, a system based on two main cycles and on top of that, a doctorate degree. We already had a common system of credits for student mobility between our institutions. We very much wanted autonomous institutions. We gave a unison opinion on the Quality Reform (see above in 1.4.).

The Norwegian Association of Higher Education Institutions has been, and still is, a partner in the continuing process. After a new Law on Higher Education, covering both state and private higher education, came into effect in 2005, also private institutions have joined the Association as full members.

3. European Conferences of University Rectors

3.1. Cambridge (1955), Dijon (1959), Göttingen (1964)

At the initiative of the Western European Union, nearly one hundred university representatives, most of them rectors or vice-chancellors, met in Cambridge in 1955, to discuss common problems and challenges to their institutions.[13] They came from fifteen different countries in Western Europe.

They discussed the need for university autonomy, the selection, training and welfare of the student body and the university's role in society. The conference adopted recommendations that were still relevant fifty years later:

> In all countries universities should have a greater degree of autonomy.
>
> In connection with sponsored research, the university authorities have a responsibility for safeguarding the university autonomy and for ensuring free choice and independent direction of research by its staff.

12 http://www.uhr.no/om_uhr/about_uhr_1

13 *Report of Proceedings, Cambridge Conference of European Rectors and Vice-Chancellors,* Western European Union, 1956.

Contracts should not forbid the publication in due course of the results of research carried out in universities.

In all circumstances the freedom of thought of university staffs must be safeguarded; no governmental supervision should be exercised in this sphere.

Any system for selection of students must always avoid discrimination on grounds of race, religion or political creed.

In all countries financial assistance should be made available to students whose capacities are sufficient to pursue their studies with diligence and success.

Universities, conscious of their responsibility for the preparation of leaders of society, should adapt their teaching to comply with the increasing needs of the community.

Students should be encouraged to pursue part of their studies at universities abroad.

International exchanges between staffs of universities should be encouraged and Governments should be requested to ensure that the necessary funds are available.

It was recommended that similar conferences be convened periodically, also to ensure a permanence of relations between the universities. The European Universities Committee was formed under the auspices of the Western European Union, to follow up the Cambridge conference.

The next European conference of rectors and vice-chancellors was held in Dijon in 1959. The heads of universities in twenty-two European countries were invited, together with high government officials, experts, and representatives of international organisations.[14] This Second Conference decided to set up a *Standing Conference of Rectors ad Vice-Chancellors of the European Universities* which should meet at least once every five years and a *Permanent Committee* for the Standing Conference. The intention of the rectors was that the new Permanent Committee should take over the functions of the WEU European Universities Committee.

As the Council of Europe was considering setting up an advisory body on university matters, it was proposed that the Permanent Committee for the Standing Conference should fill this role. As described later (in 5.1.), this was realised in 1960.

At the next Conference in Göttingen in 1964, nearly two hundred Rectors and Vice-Chancellors from all over Europe participated. Invitations had been sent also to universities in Eastern Europe, and representatives from Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Rumania and Yugoslavia attended. The Conference wanted to be open to universities from the whole of Europe; that had been one reason for breaking the relations to the Western European

14 *Report of Proceedings, Second Conference of European Rectors and Vice-Chancellors,* Western European Union, 1959.

Union. As a representative for universities in the dialogue with political decision-makers, the Conference wanted a full independence. The new ties to the Council of Europe were therefore not unproblematic, as also the membership of the Council of Europe was restricted to countries in Western Europe.

In Göttingen, a great part of the working sessions were devoted to the discussion of a draft constitution for the Standing Conference. The constitution was formally adopted, setting the rules for the organisation.

But academic subjects were also discussed: The optimum and the maximum size of a university was at the centre of the debate; a size relative to society's expectations, to students' growing presence in higher education, and to the quality of research and service to industry.[15]

3.2. CRE – Standing Conference of University Rectors (1964)

CRE – Conférence Permanente des Recteurs, Présidents et Vice-Chanceliers (Rectors) des Universités europeennes, was established in September 1964. The objective of this Standing Conference was co-operation between rectors, between universities, between academic staff and students. Members of the Standing Conference were the rectors. There was to be a General Assembly meeting every five years, a Permanent Committee with representatives of the national rectors' conferences, a President and a Bureau. It was not until 1994 the constitution was amended so that *the universities* were the members, not the rectors.

3.3. Relations to the Council of Europe

In 1960, the Council of Europe took over responsibility for the work of the former Universities Committee of the WEU and set up in its place a Committee for Higher Education and Research (CHER), composed of university rectors on one hand (the CRE Permanent Committee) and senior civil servants on the other, to advice governments on policies in this field (see 5.1.).

The CRE Permanent Committee was used to prepare university positions before discussing higher education policy with ministerial delegates in CHER. The ministerial delegates in this Council of Europe committee were often the same people whom the representatives of the national rectors' conferences would meet at national level. In this way, discussions on university problems and higher education policy at national level could benefit from discussions both in CRE and in the Council of Europe.

15 *Protocol*, Standing Conference of Rectors and Vice-Chancellors of European Universities, Göttingen 1964.

The year 1968 became one of much unrest and demonstrations in Europe – both East and West. The Council of Europe at that time represented only the Western part of the continent. To underline the pan-European ambitions of CRE, it was decided by the 1969 CRE General Assembly to formally distance CRE from the Council of Europe. However, after the 1968 Soviet intervention in Czechoslovakia, East-West relations froze. It should take another twenty years to bring universities from the whole of Europe together in CRE.

Presidents of national rectors' conferences in Western Europe continued to co-operate in the CRE Permanent Committee and they also continued as national academic representatives in CHER. After 1989, both CRE and the Council of Europe developed into pan-European organisations, working to bridge former gaps between higher education systems of East and West, co-operating in many projects and programmes.

3.4. CRE activities (1969–1983)

Up to 1969, the activities of CRE had been limited to meetings of the five-yearly General Assembly. Then the Permanent Committee started to organise semi-annual CRE conferences. The conferences were held in different countries, at the invitation of a member university. Among themes discussed during the period up to the General Assembly in 1974, were the following:[16]

- The Role of the University within the Structure of Higher Education;
- Mobility of Students and Collaboration between Institutions;
- The Teaching Role of the University;
- University Staff;
- Research and Higher Education;
- The Expansion of Higher Education;
- Access to Universities;
- University Government.

These semi-annual conferences were in a way "continuing education" for academic leaders, who, after the reforms resulting from the 1968 student troubles, were asked by new regulations to get more and more involved in the management of their enlarged institutions. Those that did not participate at a conference would be informed through the bulletin *CRE Information.*

16 *CRE from 1969 to 1974,* Quienquennial Report of the Permanent Committee to the 1974 General Assembly.

In addition to organisational matters, also the CRE General Assemblies discussed academic affairs. The 1974 Assembly treated the following topics:[17]

- The university and the changing needs of society;
- University teaching;
- University research;
- University government;
- The financing of universities.

The 1979 CRE General Assembly discussed *the role of the university in society.* A second topic was *the present conditions of university life*.[18] What dominated the discussion on this second theme, was the staggering growth in the number of students and increase in the number of establishments. But the rectors also noted that the differences existing between universities and other institutions of higher education had largely been ironed out in the course of the years. Academic-type studies had undergone reforms in most countries. University courses had developed towards a better preparation of the student to face working life. Specialised schools had widened their concept of professional training to avoid that candidates would leave with narrow qualifications.

3.5. The association at work (1984–1989)

In 1983, CRE described itself as an association of executive heads of universities in Europe, with 360 members from 23 different countries. *The Association at work* was the heading of the CRE report for the five-year period 1984–1989.[19] Much was done. New programmes were started; most of them with external partners (see reference 6). However, the semi-annual conferences continued as a core CRE activity. New topics were taken up for discussion:

- The impact of new information technologies;
- Vocational training or general education?
- The pursuit of excellence;
- The university between tradition and progress;
- University contracts with outside partners: a tool for autonomy?
- Academic mobility: present realities and new opportunities;
- University graduates: the quality/quantity dilemma;
- The European university confronted by change;
- Universities and professional training.

17 *Quiquennial Report of the Permanent Committee to the 1979 General Assembly.*
18 Barblan A. *Higher Education in Europe.* 1979; 4(4): 29–32.
19 *Quinquennial Report of the Permanent Committee* 1984–1989.

3.5.1. Magna Charta Universitatum (1988)

In 1988, the University of Bologna celebrated its 900th anniversary. It was a great celebration. The Magna Charta Universitatum was signed by 388 rectors present in Bologna:

> The university is an autonomous institution at the heart of societies differently organised because of geography and historical heritage; it produces, examines, appraises and hands down culture by research and teaching.
>
> To meet the needs of the world around it, its research and teaching must be morally and intellectually independent of all political authority and intellectually independent of all political authority and economic power.
>
> Teaching and research in universities must be inseparable if their tuition is not to lag behind changing needs, the demands of society, and advances in scientific knowledge.
>
> Freedom in research and training is the fundamental principle of university life, and governments and universities, each as far as in them lies, must ensure respect for this fundamental requirement.

The principles of the Magna Charta later found their way into the Bologna Declaration of European Ministers of Education in 1999, leading to a university- government partnership in the Bologna Process.

3.6. New times (1989–2001). An Association of Universities

In 1989, the Berlin Wall was falling down. CRE centred much of its development over the next five years on integrating the universities of Central and Eastern Europe into the association.[20] The May 1991 semi-annual conference took place in Leningrad and provided an opportunity to affirm the greater Europe for the academic community. By 1994, the CRE membership included 80 universities from former communist countries.

The high level of activity continued in the 1990s. Some of the topics discussed at the semi-annual conferences were:

- Preparing for employment;
- Institutionalization of quality;
- Human resource management;
- Future missions of the university;
- Academic co-operation networks,
- Improved management of available resources.

20 *Quinquennial Report on activities,* 1989–1994. See also Barblan A., Reference 4.

The theme for the 1994 General Assembly in Budapest was *A university policy for Europe.* This meant the whole of Europe – East and West. The name of the organisation was formally changed to *CRE – Association of European Universities.* It was no longer a rectors' club.

CRE did much to promote the creation of inter-institutional networks, inviting universities to set up and strengthen joint programmes. This linking activity brought CRE in closer contact with the European Commission, which now was very active in the higher education area, through programmes such as ERASMUS, LINGUA, COMETT and TEMPUS. This also led to closer contact and a concerted policy approach with the *Liaison Committee* (see next chapter), representing universities in EC member states through the national rectors' conferences. As these rectors' conferences were also represented in CRE's Permanent Committee, the need for coordination became apparent.

Following the publication in the autumn of 1991 of the Commission's *Memorandum on Higher Education,* the two organisations joined forces to sound out the opinion of their members and give an input to the Commission. Following this, a number of opinions concerning specific aspects of university life in Europe were formulated in conjunction with the Liaison Committee for the Commission: Internationalisation of teaching and research, development of institutional networks, support polices for Central and Eastern European universities and management training for university executive heads.

4. Confederation of European Union Rectors' Conferences

The Confederation started its life in 1973 as the *Comité de Liaison des Recteurs des Etats membres de la Communauté européenne.* The *Liaison Committee* had its roots in the WEU European Universities Committee set up in 1955, just as the CRE Permanent Committee. Whereas CRE focused its work on the challenges facing all universities in Europe, the Liaison Committee focused on a stronger collaboration between universities within the European Community, to respond to Community initiatives affecting research and higher education and to be heard by the European Commission.

4.1. The first years as the Liaison Committee (1973–1992)

The inclusion of research and higher education in Community policies developed slowly at first. However, from the academic year 1976–77, the *Joint Study programmes* and the *Short Study Visits* scheme were in operation. The Liaison Committee followed the development and actively disseminated information. In the field of *Mobility and Co-operation within the Community,*

the LC considered questions such as academic recognition, admission procedures for students from other member countries, mobility of research students and staff.

With the introduction of the Framework Programme for Research and Technology Development in 1984 and the ERASMUS mobility programme for higher education in 1987, universities in Community countries were meeting new challenges. The coordination of university interests through the Liaison Committee became increasingly important.

As already mentioned in the preceding chapter, the Liaison Committee and CRE formulated a joint statement to the European Commission on the Commission's 1991 *Memorandum on Higher Education in the European Community.* Following this, a number of opinions concerning specific aspects of university life in Europe were formulated in conjunction with CRE for the Commission.

The single market was launched in January 1993 and in November the treaty of Maastricht came into force. The new treaty provided, for the first time, a legal framework for EC initiatives in the field of higher education. In December 1993, a White Paper presented by the President of the Commission, Jaques Delors, incorporated education among the areas to secure growth, competitiveness and employment in the years to come.

For the Liaison Committee, the year 1993 marked the change from a loose discussion club of rectors into a professionally managed and effective body representing the interests of the European universities. The LC 1993 Action Programme covered a wide range of activities:

- Organisation of the Academic Year;
- EC Research Policy;
- Memorandum on Higher Education;
- EC Mobility Programmes;
- Quality Assessment;
- Open and Distance Learning;
- Co-operation between University and Industry;
- ECTS.

4.2. From Liaison Committee to Confederation (1995)

At the 57th meeting of the Liaison Committee in November 1995, it was decided that the LC should be redefined as *The Confederation of European Union Rectors' Conferences*, with new statutes and mission statement.[21]

21 *Liaison Committee Annual Report* 1996.

The 1996 Annual Report pointed out that areas of importance were research policies, quality assurance, higher education policies, and reactions to a number of EU policy documents. Research policies concentrated in 1996 on the future Fifth Framework Programme, specifically the need to strengthen the social sciences and the humanities in Community research and to ensure training of young researchers. A pater on *Diversification of higher education* was presented to the annual conference of Directors General of higher education and Presidents of national rectors' conferences.

4.3. The Sorbonne Declaration (1998)

At the Sorbonne in May 1998, Ministers of Education from France, Germany, Italy and the United Kingdom signed a declaration on harmonization of the architecture of the European higher education system:[22]

> A system, in which two main cycles, undergraduate and graduate, should be recognized for international comparison and equivalence, seems to emerge.
>
> At both undergraduate and graduate level, students would be encouraged to spend at least one semester in universities outside their own country. More teaching and research staff should be working ioutside their own country.
>
> A convention, recognizing higher education qualifications within Europe, was agreed on last year in Lisbon[23]. Standing by these conclusions, one can build on them and go further.
>
> Progressive harmonization of the overall framework of our degrees and cycles can be achieved through strengthening of already existing experience, joint diplomas, pilot initiatives, and dialogue with all concerned.

The concept of *harmonization* was not popular with universities. The Confederation President made a statement relating to this in October 1998:[24]

> We should concentrate in a concerted action of national governments and Rectors' Conferences – representing the whole range of the universities in the member states of the European Union – on creating a framework for convertibility of credits, intermediate and final exams in undergraduate, graduate, postgraduate and continuing education.

At the end of his statement, the Confederation President proposed

– to establish a working group to deal with an agreement on accreditation results open for joining to all universities;

22 See http://www.ehea.info/article-details.aspx?ArticleId=80

23 The Lisbon Recognition Convention, see www.coe.int/t/dg4/highereducation/Recognition/default_en.asp

24 Statement presented by Hans-Uwe Erichsen, Vienna 28/29 October 1998.

– to establish a working group developing a framework for mutual recognition of credits;
– to define a European structure of higher education it in a concerted action.

Together with CRE, the Confederation was invited to take part in the preparations for the follow-up conference to be held in Bologna, where such topics would be on the agenda (see chapter 5.1).

5. Joining forces: European Association of Universities

The Confederation had since its early beginnings as the Liaison Committee acted as a political lobby for the universities vis-à-vis the authorities of the European Community and later the Union. As the EU programmes in research and higher education not only continued to grow during the 1990s, but also were widening out to include co-operation with non-EU countries in Eastern Europe, not only the Confederation, but also CRE got more and more involved in EU policy and programs. Both organisations were now representing the same European universities. There was an increasing need for coordination of CRE and Confederation activities.

5.1 Bologna 1999

5.1.1 The Trends Project

On the basis of the 1998 Sorbonne declaration and preparing for the follow-up conference in Bologna, the Confederation and CRE initiated a joint project to outline and overview the learning structures in higher education in EU Member States and associate countries. The Trends Report [25] was presented at the Bologna Conference in June 1999.

This survey of existing structures showed an extreme complexity and diversity of curricular and degree structures in European countries. The Sorbonne Declaration had recommended that studies should be organised in an undergraduate and a graduate cycle, but did not provide an indication of their duration. The debate that followed focussed on a possible European model with 3 main levels of qualifications requiring 3, 5 or 8 years of study. This model became one of the building stones in the Bologna Process. Another important contribution was the recommendation of an enhanced European dimension in quality assurance, evaluation and accreditation.

The 1999 Trends Report was to be the first of such reports prepared by EUA for Ministerial Conferences in the Bologna process.[26]

25 Haug G, Kirstein J. *Trends in Learning Structures in Higher Education,* June 1999.
26 http://www.ehea.info/article-details.aspx?ArticleId=87

5.1.2 The Bologna Conference

Representatives of CRE and the Confederation were very active in the preparation for the Ministerial Conference to be held on 18–19 June 1999. The idea was that the first day should be an "academic day"; the second day would have a separate session for the Ministers to finalize their Declaration. Representatives for the university system were invited according to nominations by CRE and the Confederation, among them representatives from all national rectors' conferences. Thus the university sector was broadly represented in Bologna: of a total of 250 participants, some 150 came from the higher education sector, the ministerial delegations totalled 50.

Presentation of the Trends Report was a central element in the programme for the first day, together with a presentation by the Confederation President on *The Challenges of a European Higher Education Space*.[27] He pointed out that higher education was a responsibility not only of governments, but also of universities. Magna Charta Universitatum confirmed the autonomy and freedom of the university. Also the CRE President had a central role in the programme, reporting on the first day's discussions to the Ministers, before they sat down to finalize the declaration that started the Bologna Process.[28]

5.1.3 The Bologna Declaration

The footprints of university representatives in the Bologna Declaration can easily be seen:

> European higher education institutions, for their part, have accepted the challenge and taken up a main role in constructing the European area of higher education, also in the wake of the fundamental principles laid down in the Bologna Magna Charta Universitatum of 1988. This is of the highest importance, given that Universities' independence and autonomy ensure that higher education and research systems continuously adapt to changing needs, society's demands and advances in scientific knowledge.

There was full agreement between ministerial and university representatives concerning the objectives of the follow-up:

- Adoption of a system of easily readable and comparable degrees;
- Adoption of a system based on two main cycles, undergraduate and graduate;
- Establishment of a system of credits to promote student mobility;
- Promotion of mobility by overcoming obstacles to free movement;
- Promotion of European co-operation in quality assurance;

27 Statement presented by Hans-Uwe Erichsen, Bologna Forum, 18 June 1999.
28 See http://www.ehea.info/article-details.aspx?ArticleId=80

– Promotion of the necessary European dimensions in higher education.

There was also an obligation for universities: Ministers expected universities *to respond promptly and positively and to contribute actively to the success of the endeavour.*

When a Follow-Up Group was established for the Bologna Process, the Confederation and CRE were invited to participate. The need to speak with one voice on behalf of the European universities was now absolute, but some time was still needed to straighten out the formalities of a merger.

5.2. Founding the European University Association (2001)

The merger of CRE and the Confederation was finally realised when the Constitutive Assembly of the European University Association met in Salamanca, 31 Mach 2001.[29] At the Salamanca Convention the European higher education institutions confirmed their support to the principles of the Bologna Declaration and their commitment to the creation of the European Higher Education Area. *The Salamanca Message*[30] describes the principles and key issues as seen from the university system.

6. Working together under the Council of Europe

The Council of Europe was founded in 1949. Culture was a part of its activities from the start. In 1954, the *European Cultural Convention* [31] came into force as a basis for co-operation in the cultural field, including education.

In the field of higher education, several conventions were developed in the early years: *On the Equivalence of Diplomas leading to Admission to Universities* (1953), *On the Equivalence of Periods of University Study* (1956), *On the Academic Recognition of University Qualifications* (1959). [32] This work was of course very relevant, not only for university rectors looking for a partner for their Standing Conference (sections 3.1 and 3.3), but also for Ministers of Education.

6.1 From Western European Union to Council of Europe

A first European Conference of Ministers of Education had been organised in 1959 under the auspices of the Western European Union, but as the rectors, the ministers saw the possibility for a broader collaboration under

29 *Minutes,* Constitutive General Assembly of the EUA, Salamanca, 31 March 2001.
30 http://www.eua.be/eua/jsp/en/upload/Salamanca_declaration_en.1066755820788.pdf
31 http://conventions.coe.int/Treaty/en/Treaties/Html/018.htm
32 http://conventions.coe.int/Treaty/Commun/ListeTraites.asp?CM=8&CL=ENG

the Council of Europe. However, the Ministers of Education did not wish to be formally linked with an intergovernmental organisation steered by the Ministers of Foreign Affairs. Still, they were supported by the Council's secretariat, they could influence on the Council's priorities. Projects might be financed by means of the Council of Europe's Cultural Fund. This was a pragmatic and – at least at first glance – also an efficient solution.

The ministers, having heard from the university rectors meeting in Dijon, had a clear message to the Council of Europe:[33]

> The Conference of Ministers, after having examined the conclusions of the Conference of Rectors of the European Universities and of the government officials held in Dijon, recommends the setting up, within the Council of Europe, of a consultative council for university problems.

In 1960, the Council of Europe took over responsibility for the work of the Universities Committee of the WEU and set up in its place a Committee for Higher Education and Research, composed of university rectors and vice-chancellors on one hand (the CRE Permanent Committee) and senior civil servants on the other, to advice governments on policies in this field.

The Ministers of Education continued to meet under the auspices of the Council of Europe, the 22nd session was held in 2007.

6.2. Committee for Higher Education and Research (1962)

In 1962, the activities of the Council of Europe in the field of culture and education were reorganised. At the head of the new structure was a *Council for Cultural Co-operation (CCC).* Under the CCC three permanent committees were established. Cultural affairs were taken care of by the CCC.

By this reorganisation, the Committee for Higher Education and Research (CHER) became a sub-committee reporting to the Council of Cultural Co-operation. The CCC reported to the Committee of Ministers (Ministers of Foreign Affairs). There was no formal link to the Ministers of Education.

After the reorganisation, CHER had its first meeting in April 1962. The link to the CRE Permanent Committee was clear: The elected Chairman was Rector of the University of Karlsruhe, Chairman of the *Westdeutsche Rektorenkonferenz.*

33 1959 Conference of European Ministers of Education, https://wayback.archive-it.org/1365/20110530013116/http://www.coe.int/T/E/Cultural_Co-operation/education/Standing_Conferences/

6.2.1 What was discussed?

The 1963 CHER programme included the following themes: The founding of new universities, exchange for postgraduate studies and research, the legal position of higher education in member countries, model curricula and equivalence of university qualifications, non-university research centres and their links with universities, structure of university staffs.[34]

In 1968 the Secretary General of the Council of Europe reported to the Council of Ministers that the work programme for CHER had been allocated to the problem of adjusting universities to the new requirements of modern society.[35] Work was going on in the following subjects: Examination systems, courses of study, university staff structure, the role of universities in drawing up courses of study, diversification of post-school education.

The Secretary General referred to the unrest and student demonstrations that in 1968 were taking place at university campuses in many member countries, thinking it would be advisable to convene a special meeting of the CHER. He also mentioned that the CRE President, who attended meetings of the CHER as a member of the Swiss delegation, had expressed his keen interest in holding a special meeting. Apparently the Council of Ministers were not convinced, as no report of such meeting can be found.

The agenda for the 34th CHER meeting in November 1976[36] indicates the type of themes then discussed:

- the current situation and trends in tertiary education;
- the recognition of degrees and diplomas;
- the current situation and trends in university research;
- the teaching of human rights;
- mobility of higher education staff and students;
- the future programme of the Committee.

The 35th meeting of the committee was held in May 1977. The main theme for that meeting was *University research.*[37]

6.3. Standing Conference on University Problems (1978)

In 1978 the Council of Cultural Co-operation (CCC) was reorganised in the Council of Europe hierarchy as a steering committee (CDCC) and the Committee on Higher Education and Research came out of this reorgani-

34 *Report,* CCC Second Session, May 1962.
35 *Memorandum 27 May 1968,* Secretary General, Council of Europe.
36 *Higher Education in Europe* 1976; 1(2): 6–8.
37 *Higher Education in Europe* 1977; 2(6): 3–4.

sation as an ad hoc committee of experts entitled *Standing Conference on University Problems (CC-PU),* working under the authority of the CDCC.[38]

The work of the committee (conference) did not change much as a consequence of the new formal setting. The first meeting of CC-PU was held in December 1978.[39] Issues discussed were the promotion of student mobility and the interrelations between employment and training.

Based on the conclusions of an Expert Group on Academic Mobility and Equivalence of Diplomas, publication of a *Handbook for Foreign Students* was proposed. The meeting saw co-operation between the national information centres as important and expressed hope for a European network of information centres. The follow-up of this work was reflected in the Council of Europe Recommendation R 84(13) on the situation of foreign students. Another result of the work of the CC-PU, Recommendation R 85(21), focused on the mobility of academic staff. (See reference 6.)

6.4. Bridging East and West. The LRP programme (1991–2000)

As the Berlin Wall fell in late 1989, new possibilities opened up for broader academic co-operation. The first new democratic states in Eastern Europe – Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Poland – joined the Council of Europe and the CC-PU in March 1990. Following the proposals from a consultative meeting with representatives of the new member countries, the Council of Europe initiated a regional and multilateral project *Legislative Reform for Higher Education in Eastern and Central Europe*, later called the *Legislative Reform Programme (LRP*).[40]

The primary aim of the LRP was to provide support to the processes of legislative reform in higher education and research, as part of the consolidation of democratic regimes in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe.

Between 1991 and 2000 the LRP carried out over 70 advisory missions to countries in eastern and south-eastern Europe.

After 2000, when the LRP programme formally ended, the Council of Europe continued activities relating to legislative reforms, recognition and access as a contribution to the Bologna Process, assisting countries in South-Eastern Europe that wanted to join Bologna. (See reference 3.)

38 Conclusions of the 280th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies, Dec. 1977.

39 *Higher Education in Europe.* 1979; 4(2): 32–33.

40 *Legislative Reform Programme in Higher Education and Research 1991–2000, Final Report* (Doc. CC-HER (2000) 40), http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/highereducation/CompletedActivities/LRP_en.asp

6.5. Committee for Higher Education and Research (1994)

In 1994, the Standing Conference on University Problems (CC-PU) regained its status a specialised committee under the CDCC, once more bearing the name *Committee for Higher Education and Research*, but now labelled *(CC- HER).* The new mandate asked the Committee to focus on:

– the development of European higher education and research on the basis of common democratic principles and of the values of the European university heritage, including the freedoms of learning, teaching and research, and the self-government of academic institutions within a democratic society.

After 1989, university leaders in East and West could easily agree to these principles. However, the economic resources for making the necessary changes were not available in many of the new democracies.

The widely different conditions for students and for academic staff in the different parts of Europe were a challenge to the traditional ideas of academic mobility: Was it now a one-way flow, leaving the poorer countries without the intellectual resources they needed for their own economic and cultural development? It must be a shared responsibility for sending and receiving countries to make it possible to create some balance in the mobility. This was reflected in the Council of Europe Recommendations R (95)7 on the brain drain in higher education and research, R (95)8 on academic mobility, and R (97)1 on recognition and quality assessment.

6.5.1. The Lisbon Recognition Convention (1997)

The Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region was developed by the Council of Europe and UNESCO and adopted by national representatives meeting in Lisbon in April 1997. This convention – usually referred to as the Lisbon Convention – has since been ratified by most European countries.[41] As a convention, this document is an agreement in international law, binding for the signatory states.

Among the main points of the Lisbon Convention are the following:

– Holders of qualifications issued in one country shall have adequate access to an assessment of these qualifications in another country.
– No discrimination shall be made in this respect on any ground such as the applicant's gender, race, colour, disability, language, religion, political opinion, national, ethnic or social origin.

41 http://conventions.coe.int ETS165

– The responsibility to demonstrate that an application does not fulfil the relevant requirements lies with the body undertaking the assessment.
– Each country shall recognise qualifications as similar to the corresponding qualifications in its own system unless it can show that there are substantial differences between its own qualifications and the qualifications for which recognition is sought.
– All countries shall develop procedures to assess whether refugees and displaced persons fulfil the relevant requirements for access to higher education or to employment activities, even in cases in which the qualifications cannot be proven through documentary evidence.

The Lisbon Convention was taken up in the 1998 Sorbonne Declarations:

> A convention, recognising higher education qualifications in the academic field within Europe, was agreed on last year in Lisbon. The convention set a number of basic requirements and acknowledged that individual countries could engage in an even more constructive scheme. Standing by these conclusions, one can build on them and go further.

It became the only formally binding document in the Bologna Process:

> We note that 36 of the 45 participating countries have now ratified the Lisbon Recognition Convention. We urge those that have not already done so to ratify the Convention without delay. [42]

6.5.2. Access to higher education (1998)

One of the central projects for the CC-HER in the years 1996–1998 was *Access to higher education*. This resulted in Recommendation R (98)3:

> All who are able and willing to participate successfully in higher education should have fair and equal opportunities to do so.
>
> The higher education population as a whole should increasingly reflect the diversity of a changing society in each member state, while continuing to welcome students from other parts of Europe and the world.
>
> Admissions systems and the learning environment in higher education institutions should give equal opportunities to all individuals and groups in society.
>
> Efforts to maintain and raise the quality of higher education systems should include the criterion of effective access offered to all groups in society.

42 http://www.ehea.info/Uploads/Declarations/Bergen_Communique1.pdf

Later on, the concept of *access* should become central in relation to the *social dimension* of the Bologna Process.

6.6. Steering Committee for Higher Education and Research

In November 2001, it was decided to transform the Council for Cultural Co-operation (CDCC) into four steering committees. One of the four committees was the *Steering Committee for Higher Education and Research* (the abbreviation

CD-ESR coming from the French version of the name). For the first time since 1962, the committee for higher education and research reported directly to the Committee of Ministers.

At the first meeting of the CD-ESR in 2002, I reported, as Chair of the Committee, on this transition of the Committee to a Steering Committee and reminded the delegates of the new mandate; to develop higher education in Europe and to contribute to the building of democratic societies. The challenge that the CD-ESR faced, were that even as a steering committee it had very limited steering power. Still, a lot was done in the years of the committee's existence. (It came to an end in 2011).

6.7. The Bologna Process: Early achievements and challenges

The Committee had given important contributions to the European co-operation regarding *access* and *recognition,* central elements in the Bologna Declaration and from early 2000, the Chair and the Secretary participated in the meetings of the follow-up groups (chapter 7).

A central point on the agenda for the first plenary session of the CD-ESR in October 2002 was a round table debate on the Bologna Process. In my introduction, as Chair of the Committee, I recalled the contributions that the Council of Europe had made so far and could make to the further process:[43]

- the Council was a bridge between the Bologna countries and the "non-Bologna" countries in East and South-East Europe and had promoted further accession of countries to the process;
- the Council provided a platform for interaction between government representatives and academics through the CD-ESR;
- the Lisbon Recognition Convention was a very important tool in the process as well as documents supplementing the Convention, such as the Code of Good Practice in the provision of Transnational Education.

43 *CD-ESR Meeting Report,* 1st plenary session, 3–4 October 2002.

On the basis of the outcome of the round-table discussion, the CD-ESR asked for further Council of Europe contributions to the Bologna Process, including :

– aspects of university autonomy;
– the role of legislation in the creation of the European Higher Education Area;
– higher education as a public good and a public responsibility.

In the follow-up, these topics were given high priority, together with access, recognition, student participation and the social dimension.

The role of legislation in the creation of the European Higher Education Area was a central element in the Council of Europe's assistance to countries in East and South-East Europe in their preparation for joining the Bologna Process: Albania, Andorra, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Georgia, Moldova, Montenegro, Russia, Serbia and Ukraine; countries joining the Bologna Process in Prague (2001), Berlin (2003) and Bergen (2005).

7. Co-operating in the Bologna Process (1999–2005)

To achieve the objectives set by the Bologna Declaration, a steering group and a larger follow-up group was stablished in September 1999. After some restructuring by the ministers in Prague (2001) and Berlin (2003), the steering of the Bologna Process was taken care of by the Bologna Follow-up Group (BFUG), composed of the representatives of all members of the Bologna Process and the European Commission, with the Council of Europe, EUA, EURASHE, ESIB and UNESCO/CEPES as consultative members.

In this way, the European universities, through CRE and the Confederation, teamed up with national authorities and the EU Commission for the follow-up of the Bologna Ministerial Conference. Instead of lobbying from the outside as interest groups, they were inside and partners in the steering of the process.

There were probably several reasons why this co-operation worked well:

– In many countries (e.g. Norway) national rectors' conferences had developed a dialogue with national authorities, including the Minister of Education, which over the years had developed mutual understanding and trust.
– During the 1990s, there had been increasing contacts between the Confederation and CRE with the EU Commission, not always without friction, but at least leading to a mutual understanding.

– The regular meetings between the Confederation and national directors general responsible for higher education certainly helped to pave the way, as the latter would later meet as national representatives in the BFUG.
– Many of the national academic representatives in CD-ESR were also active in CRE and the Confederation; the lists of participants would indicate that this could be ten or twelve out of some forty academics meeting in CD-ESR.
– Some of the national representatives in the BFUG, possibly eight to ten out of fifty, would also represent their ministries in CD-ESR.

Another very important factor was that the academic community over time had discussed all the relevant topics in the Bologna Process. In addition to traditional academic debates on research and education in universities, rectors discussed the challenges of rapidly increasing student numbers, the role of the university within the structure of higher education, university governance and university financing. They discussed conditions for staff and students. There was a clear focus on academic freedom and institutional autonomy already in Cambridge in 1955, culminating in Bologna in 1988.

Both nationally and with their European partners; the rectors' conferences, developing into association of universities, studied challenges related to access, recognition, the social dimension, quality assurance, mobility of students and staff, training of young researchers. They were very well prepared for Bologna.

Both nationally and on European level, the associations of universities were engaged in policy discussions relating to higher education and research.

On this basis, the Confederation and CRE influenced a lot already in Bologna. The input from the Trends Report regarding a common degree structure with three main levels of qualifications and a European dimension in quality assurance, evaluation and accreditation, certainly contributed to the outcome of the conference. The reference in the Ministers' Declaration to the 1988 Magna Charta Universitatum also tied the universities to the follow-up: Ministers expected universities *to respond promptly and positively and to contribute actively to the success of the endeavour.*

Also the Council of Europe became an important partner in the Bologna Process. The Lisbon Recognition Convention was the only formally binding obligation for the participating countries. Over the first five years of the Bologna Process the number of ratifications increased from 9 to 36. The CD-ESR followed up the concept of public responsibility for higher education, introduced by the 2001 Ministerial Conference in Prague, also stress-

ing the responsibility for realising the social dimension. The Council of Europe served as a bridge to the Bologna Process for countries that were not yet part of it.

At the 2003 Ministerial Conference in Berlin, the Confederation and CRE -now together in EUA – obtained full support for the inclusion of *doctoral studies* as an added Bologna action line. Based on the *Salzburg Principles*[44], recommendations from a Bologna Seminar organised by EUA in February 2005, doctoral studies was followed up in the Communiqué from the 2005 Bergen Ministerial Conference[45]:

> The core component of doctoral training is the advancement of knowledge through original research. Considering the need for structured doctoral programmes and the need for transparent supervision and assessment, we note that the normal workload of the third cycle in most countries would correspond to 3–4 years full time. We urge universities to ensure that their doctoral programmes promote interdisciplinary training and the development of transferable skills, thus meeting the needs of the wider employment market. --- We consider participants in third cycle programmes both as students and as early stage researchers.

The concept of *doctoral candidate* was introduced in the Salzburg Principles, inspired by the Norwegian decision that doctoral studies should be seen as early stage researchers (see section 2.2). Ministers in Bergen decided to see them *both* as students and as early stage researchers.

Before the 2005 Ministerial Conference in Bergen, several states in South-East Europe wanted to join the Bologna Process. They were told that their applications should contain information on how they would implement the principles and objectives of the declaration. While the Bologna Action Lines were obvious objectives, it was not equally obvious what were the main principles; principles that should be incorporated within the higher education system of each country. On the basis of previous communiqués, the BFUG [46] came up with this list:

- International mobility of students and staff;
- Autonomous universities;
- Student participation in the governance of higher education;
- Public responsibility for higher education;
- The social dimension of the Bologna Process.

44 http://www.eua.be/eua/jsp/en/upload/Salzburg_Report_final.1129817011146.pdf
45 http://www.ehea.info/Uploads/Declarations/Bergen_Communique1.pdf
46 BFUG Board Meeting 14 July 2004.

Applicant states were requested to confirm their respect for these principles in their applications. These were all principles close to the heart of the academic representatives in the BFUG.

These examples illustrate how ideas, principles and objectives discussed by university leaders during fifty years came together with the responsibility of governments to further develop higher education in Europe and in each individual country. European universities gained influence through their national associations, through EUA – the European University Association- and through the concerted actions of the Bologna Process.

8. Ten years later

8.1. The Bologna Process

The goal set for the Bologna Process in 1999, was to establish a European Higher Education Area by 2010. In the first years, developments were fast.

At the 2005 Bergen Conference I reported to the Ministers that we, halfway in the Bologna Process towards 2010, could see the contours of the European Higher Education Area, not as a single, unified higher education system, but as a group of more than forty national systems developing according to jointly agreed principles. The Ministers confirmed their commitment to coordinating their policies through the Bologna Process to establish the EHEA by 2010.

However, as new tasks were included, such as the social dimension and a global strategy, the process slowed down, and in 2009 the Leuven Communiqué announced that the process would continue until 2020. The 2015 Yerevan Communiqué[47] tells us that

- Implementation of the structural reforms is uneven and the tools are sometimes used incorrectly or in bureaucratic and superficial ways. Continuing improvement of our higher education systems and greater involvement of academic communities are necessary to achieve the full potential of the EHEA. We are committed to completing the work, and recognize the need to give new impetus to our cooperation.
- EHEA faces serious challenges. It is confronted with a continuing economic and social crisis, dramatic levels of unemployment, increasing marginalization of young people, demographic changes, new migration patterns, and conflicts within and between countries, as well as extremism and radicalization. On the other hand, greater

47 http://www.ehea.info/Uploads/SubmittedFiles/5_2015/112705.pdf

> mobility of students and staff fosters mutual understanding, while rapid development of knowledge and technology, which impacts on societies and economies, plays an increasingly important role in the transformation of higher education and research.

As of 2015, the Bologna Process clearly has lost momentum. The EU Commission is the strongest driving force in European higher education. The Council of Europe's Committee, CD-ESR, is only history.

One reason for the loss of momentum may be that the European Ministers of Education once more took the easy way out: No binding commitment, no budget, no permanent secretariat. Forty years previously, Ministers of Education counted on assistance from the Council of Europe (section 6.1). In the Bologna Process, they count on assistance from the next hosting country for their conference. Whereas university rectors over time learned that meetings are not enough to change a system – you need your own dedicated organisation –Ministers of Education may never learn.

8.2. Norwegian higher education

The 2007 evaluation of the Norwegian Quality Reform – the Bologna Process in Norway – was on the whole quite positive (see part 1.4). Since then, developments have been slower. However, a 2014 national student survey indicates that Norwegian students in general are satisfied with their study programme.[48] Bachelor students are more satisfied than master students. Students from new universities are less satisfied than students from traditional universities. Institution size matters; the larger the institution, the less satisfied students are with the overall quality of their programme. Efficiency has increased only slightly, from an overall annual average of 39.1 ECTS credits in 2000 to 41.7 ECTS credits in 2014. [49]

The Quality Reform coupled institutional autonomy with a responsibility for achievement of national objectives (see 1.3): The institutions should be *partners* in the continuing development of the national higher education system.

Perhaps institutions got too much autonomy: With their new institutional autonomy, university colleges have given priority to establishing Master and Ph.D.-programmes, aiming for university status. Traditional experience-based education for professions such as nursing, teaching and

48 http://www.nokut.no/studiebarometeret/analyser
49 http://dbh.nsd.uib.no/dbhvev/student/student_studiepoeng_rapport.cfm

engineering is changing into research-based education in institutions that want to be universities. For teaching, you will now need a Master Degree.

The Bologna Declaration saw it the other way:[50]

> The degree awarded after the first cycle shall also be relevant to the European labour market as an appropriate level of qualification.

For those that are not inclined towards an academic career, we now probably need a new type of short, post-secondary non-university education, to open up for new forms for learning relevant to the labour market.

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50 http://www.ehea.info/Uploads/Declarations/BOLOGNA_DECLARATION1.pdf