Chapter 2

Reconsidering the EHEA Principles: Is There a “Bologna Philosophy”?

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2.1 Introduction

At first sight, it seems that compiling a list of the “EHEA principles” should not be a major problem: one would expect to be easily culled from official documents of the Bologna decade 1999–2010. Yet, the task proves quite difficult. The development of the fundamental items on which the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) should be based has had a long and occasionally winding history (see Chap. 3 by A. Corbett), leaving footprints in the documents. The term has never been used in a really coherent way: the “Bologna/EHEA principles”, “objectives”, “standards”, “rules”, “regulations” and even “action lines” often overlap the various Bologna dialects. As a matter of fact, what do we consider when we talk about the EHEA principles?

While using this term, we need to differentiate between several aspects, horizons and rationales. What kind of principle is at stake here? Principles may be procedural but also substantive; they can either be deducted from the real world or agreed among people (nations); in the latter meaning, they can function as a fundamental truth and/or a motivating force. They can justify the ruling opinion or form a doctrine. When using the term “EHEA principles”, one should bear several of these aspects in mind. But these aspects are not always and not necessarily congruent. Therefore, it is important to differentiate among them and, then, to systematise them. On the other hand, references to this term are very frequent when discussing the “Bologna”. However, the term is often understood in a very *general* sense, which is not really informative.

Addressing these issues, examining the original Bologna documents and trying to systematise “the EHEA principles” and reconsider them in the “beyond 2010” light is the main aim of this paper.

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2.2 Searching for the “EHEA Principles”

The term *principle* means, first of all, *a beginning* or *a foundation*; in this sense, ancient philosophers spoke of the “first” or “fundamental principles”. Through the centuries, the term with Latin roots and a Greek conceptual background has been used in various ways and today we most often associate it either with a *basic law* which underlies any world phenomena (natural as well as social) and from which their particular details and functioning can be derived, with a *personal or social conviction* (assumptions, beliefs etc.) which governs our individual and social life through various challenges and dilemmas, or with a *normative regulation*, which is deduced, agreed and set up – or enforced – to be implemented in societal life. In all cases, it denotes *a beginning, a foundation*: a basic rationale of understanding, acting, governing etc. However, the term is not restricted to just philosophical and scientific use; in its broad use it has developed further meanings.

When discussing higher education in general, all three of the abovementioned aspects can be relevant. We have our own – either personal or professional or social group – opinion regarding e.g. tuition fees, quality teaching, recognition of diplomas etc. Research provides insight (among others) into higher education and discovers its “basic laws”; however, by the very nature of research, researchers cannot and should not be totally unanimous on the issue because the discovery of basic laws always rests on a dispute. Governments and – taking the principles of subsidiarity and institutional autonomy into account – other organisations provide the necessary regulation based on basic assumptions to harmonise subjective convictions with the discovered objective trends (or vice versa) in order to normalise the social reality. At least three aspects are crucial in any attempt to grasp *higher education principles* and to link them to higher education policy.

“Higher education is, or should be, principled: based on propositions that provide primary ideal goals” (Furedy 2000, p. 44). In our case, i.e., referring to the Bologna Process, it has been assumed that there are certain *fundamental principles of the EHEA*. However, they should not be commingled with the principles of higher education in general. The EHEA principles are rooted in a particular European context. In a widely known but problematic – as we will see – way they have been recognised in the “commonly agreed Bologna objectives”, ten “action lines”: easily readable and comparable degrees; the two (three) cycle system; credits; the promotion of mobility; co-operation in quality assurance; European dimensions in higher education; lifelong learning; partnership (the role of institutions and students); attractiveness of the EHEA worldwide and, finally, linking the EHEA and the European Research Area (ERA). Yet, most – but not all – of them have been comprehensively elaborated as “tools”, e.g. in the *Framework of Qualifications* as well as in *Standards and Guidelines for QA* in the EHEA (Bologna Process 2005c), not as “principles”. Conversely, some important principles are missing from this list.

It does not look as if this is all of the truth about the EHEA principles. Namely, a principle as a foundation is not related to developing an *instrument*; it can be understood as a *value* foundation as well as a foundation of a *responsibility* that someone has towards a certain issue; in our case, towards (the European) Higher

Education (Area). In this sense, the EHEA principles should comprehend *a rule of action*; rules which make action possible and its outcomes feasible and sustainable. They also comprehend *standards* by which to judge and value the “EHEA-ness”, i.e. inherent qualities of the EHEA, like e.g. transparency, the social dimension, the European dimension, attractiveness etc. These are not “Bologna tools” (i.e., means); these issues target “goals” (i.e., ends): they address *substantial principles*. Can we expect something like a “Bologna Philosophy” to emerge on the horizon? This is a complex question and I will return to it at the end of this paper, after analysing the issue in its various aspects.

The first question should be: How does the term “the EHEA/Bologna principles” appear in language today, more than a decade after it was first drafted? Its use is quite frequent but often relatively vague, e.g.¹: “implementing the basic principles of the EHEA”, “the EHEA principles, tools and actions for curriculum development”, “the EHEA principle of encouraging the learning of students”, “programmes restructured to follow the Bologna principles”, “employers’ lack of information on the Bologna principles”, “an unbureaucratic EHEA based on principles, not regulations”, “subscribed to many of Bologna’s principles” etc. This list would be even more informative if we could add cases from various European languages.

Thus, a broad, popular use of this term usually connotes a principle in its general, “abstract” meaning: a shine of the overall “Bologna spirit” not distinguished or reflected in any detail. It looks as if, sometimes, this kind of use of the term also fits with declaring political correctness (“the EHEA principles have been fully implemented”) as well as to expressing a critical distance (“conforming to Bologna principles while not reducing the programme duration”). Often, and this should not come as a surprise, the meaning of the term is narrowed, e.g. related only to higher education teaching and learning (e.g. the “EHEA pedagogical principles”).

We may also come across a more focused use of the term: one – or a few – “principles” or “objectives” may appear crucial, e.g. “the development of mobility which is a *key* principle of the EHEA” or “the *core* principle of quality assurance in the EHEA”. Yet, how many “key principles” can be there? There are quite different views on this question again. Thus, as we can learn from Google, the “EHEA principles” have been straightforwardly divided by different authors into, e.g.:

- “three principles underlying [the Sorbonne] declaration” (i.e., mobility, recognition, lifelong learning);
- “four principles” which “the Bologna Declaration lays down” (i.e., quality, mobility, diversity and competitiveness);
- “five principles” (i.e., mobility, autonomous universities, student participation, public responsibility for higher education, the social dimension); and
- “six main principles” of the Bologna Declaration (obviously, six “Bologna *action lines*” are mentioned; a strange mix of terms which we will address later) etc.

¹When analysing the various Bologna dialects, we lean on various records and notes available from the Internet; for this purpose, it is not important here who the authors are and where quotations can be found. Google may help – and even provide further cases – anyone with a greater interest in this issue.

As we see from the above paragraphs, the uses of the term can really differ significantly. The weight of the term, as well as the interpretation of an inner “composition of principles”, vary from case to case. It seems that, at least partly, it is also due to the “modest” language of the early Bologna documents (albeit in this regard only) which does not use this term at all. Only a few years later, when the Process was broadly recognised as a success story, the need appeared to refer to *the principles, the foundations*. In a certain sense, the EHEA principles have been constructed *post festum*. Yet, to date, there is no official list; the term did not appear in the Bergen Bologna Glossary²; it did not appear as a menu link on the Bologna website; in the *EUA Bologna Handbook* (Froment et al. 2008–) there is no special chapter on this issue etc. But how has the term appeared in the Bologna documents?

The Sorbonne Declaration (Bologna Process 1998) does not use this term at all. The Bologna Declaration refers to the fundamental principles laid down in the Bologna Magna Charta Universitatum of 1988, but it does not establish its own ones – at least not using *this* term. Namely, “[w]hile affirming our support to the general principles laid down in the Sorbonne Declaration” Ministers agreed on the well-known *six objectives* (“action lines”) – “the following objectives, which we consider to be of primary relevance in order to establish the European area of higher education” (Bologna Process 1999). Retrospectively, it looks as if “the *objectives* to establish the EHEA” could be understood as conceptual fundamentals or principles. Yet, in a stricter sense, the EHEA principles still had to be articulated in a more precise way at that time.

A particular note should be offered here. We do not argue that the term needs to be set up only in a ministerial declaration or a communiqué to be trustful, valid and effective. A political declaration can recognise principles, i.e. their *legality*, but principles should be developed first against their *legitimacy*. In order to understand the Bologna ideas and key concepts, it is important to look into the “kitchen” where official statements and documents were being prepared, i.e. to look “behind the curtain”.³ Such an option did not really exist before the Prague conference; the Bologna-Berlin 2001–2003 website was the first comprehensive one and it allowed conceptual, ideational and policy developments to be followed. Nevertheless, interesting documents are also available from this early period, e.g. the Trends 1 and 2 Reports (which were quite different in character compared to the later ones). It was Trends 1 where Guy Haug put down the following “key attributes, which could also serve as *guideline principles* [our italics]:

- *quality*: reforms concerning credit systems or degree structures cannot substitute efforts to improve and guarantee quality in curricula, teaching and learning;

²The Norway Secretariat of the Bologna Process (2003–2005) made the first attempt to overcome the present situation characterised by “no authorised glossary for the Bologna Process”. See <http://www.bologna-bergen2005.no/EN/Glossary/Glos1.HTM> (accessed 30/08/2011). Also see Nyborg (2005, p. 14).

³“Behind the curtain”: a menu link to the Bologna-Berlin website (<http://www.bologna-bergen2005.no/>) which led to a password-protected treasure of working documents. The BFUG documents are very important for exploring the Bologna history, but have not been used much so far.

- *mobility*: the most powerful engine for change and improvement in higher education in Europe has come, and will come from growing awareness of alternative approaches and best practice in other countries;
- *diversity*: measures not respecting the fundamental cultural, linguistic and educational diversity in Europe could jeopardise not only the progress already made, but the perspective of continuing convergence in the future;
- *openness*: European higher education can only fulfil its missions within a world-wide perspective based on competition and cooperation with other regions in the world” (Haug et al. 1999, p. 24).

Yet, this was neither an official nor a final list of the EHEA principles. The term is not used in the Prague Communiqué (Bologna Process 2001) again, but “the principles of the Bologna Declaration” is also a relatively frequently used term in the Trends 2 Report prepared for the Prague conference (Haug and Tauch 2001). Here, the term looks already familiar but it is still used mainly in a generic sense and does not indicate what these principles are or could be.

It was only in the Preamble to the Berlin Communiqué (Bologna Process 2003) that Ministers “agreed on the following *considerations, principles and priorities*” (our italics), most clearly in its first paragraph where they highlighted the following issues⁴:

- [1] “the importance of the social dimension of the Bologna Process”;
- [2] “[t]he need to increase competitiveness must be balanced with the objective of [3] improving the social characteristics of the EHEA, aiming at strengthening social cohesion and reducing social and gender inequalities both at national and at European level”;
- [4] “higher education is a public good and a public responsibility”;
- [5] “in international academic co-operation and exchanges, academic values should prevail” (Bologna Process 2003).

Five more paragraphs in the Preamble are important for our investigation. Ministers first took “into due consideration the conclusions of the European Councils in Lisbon (2000) and Barcelona (2002)” and took note of the progress reports, but later some further “considerations, principles and priorities” can be recognised in the text (though they are, again, not directly referred to as “principles”), differing from more pragmatic issues in the Communiqué:

- [6] “to secure closer links overall between the higher education and research systems”;
- [7] “[t]he aim is to preserve Europe’s cultural richness and linguistic diversity, based on its heritage of diversified traditions, and [8] to foster its potential of innovation and social and economic development through enhanced co-operation among European HEIs”;
- [9] “the fundamental role in the development of the EHEA played by HEIs and student organisations”;
- [10] “the interest shown by other regions of the world in the development of the EHEA” is welcome (ibid.).

⁴Here, as well as later, figures in square brackets are inserted as they are used in the *Annexes* where these elements are listed and compared in two tables.

Later, in the first content section (Quality Assurance), another “key principle” is mentioned in the text for the first time, namely:

- [11] “the principle of institutional autonomy” according to which “the primary responsibility for [12] quality assurance in higher education lies with each institution itself and this provides the basis for real accountability of the academic system within the national quality framework” (ibid.).

Finally, in the concluding part of the Berlin Communiqué, “the principles and objectives” are mentioned once again and related to new accessions to the Process: countries eligible for membership of the EHEA should provide “information on how they will implement the principles and objectives of the declaration” (ibid.).

Two years later, Ministers stress in the first lines of the Bergen Communiqué that they “all share the common understanding of the *principles, objectives and commitments* of the Process as expressed in the Bologna Declaration and in the subsequent communiqués” (our italics). Later in the text, they commit “to ensuring the full implementation of its principles”, but they also welcome a new one: [1] “the principle of a European register of quality assurance agencies based on national review” (Bologna Process 2005a). They also commit to [2] “the full implementation of its [i.e., Lisbon Recognition Convention 1997] principles” and [3] “the further development of the basic principles for doctoral programmes” (i.e. Salzburg Principles; see Koch Christensen 2005): two principles which were developed outside the trend under our investigation. Further on and connected to the “attractiveness of the EHEA and cooperation with other parts of the world”, the Communiqué also refers to a very general principle which transcends the area of higher education – [4] “the principle of sustainable development” (Bologna Process 2005a).

In the concluding section on preparing for 2010, a comprehensive formulation of the Bologna goals can be found, which tries to recap its “foundations”:

“Building on the achievements so far in the Bologna Process, we wish to establish a EHEA based on the [5] principles of quality and transparency. We must cherish our [6] rich heritage and cultural diversity in contributing to a knowledge-based society. We commit ourselves to upholding the [7] principle of public responsibility for higher education in the context of complex modern societies. As higher education is situated at [8] the crossroads of research, education and innovation, it is also the key to Europe’s competitiveness. As we move closer to 2010, we undertake to ensure that higher education institutions enjoy [9] the necessary autonomy to implement the agreed reforms, and we recognise the need for sustainable funding of institutions.” – “The EHEA is [10] structured around three cycles, where each level has the function of [11] preparing the student for the labour market, for further competence building and for active citizenship. The overarching [10] framework for qualifications, [5] the agreed set of European standards and guidelines for quality assurance and the [2] recognition of degrees and periods of study are also key characteristics of the structure of the EHEA” (ibid.).

This section deserves full attention and a brief historical note. Before the summer break in 2004, at the end of an early phase of preparing for the Bergen conference, an interesting debate commenced within the BFUG Board. At first, this discussion

was about the criteria for the admission of new members to the Process following the task set in Berlin. On this basis, the Norwegian Secretariat prepared a working document for the BFUG Board “to meet this objective in a fair and transparent manner”, as well as to consolidate “*both principles and action lines of the Bologna Process into a single document*” (Bologna Process 2004a; our italics). In its first section (Principles), the document states as follows:

“While the *10 actions lines* are the main focus of members, it is equally important to note the *underlying principles* of the Bologna Process. The realisation of the EHEA can only be achieved by incorporating their *philosophy* within the higher education system of each country. These principles, which all come from the Bologna Declaration and/or from the Prague and Berlin Communiqué, are elaborated below:

- International mobility of students and staff;
- Autonomous universities⁵;
- Student participation in the governance of higher education;
- Public responsibility for higher education;
- The social dimension of the Bologna Process” (ibid., p. 1; our italics).

In this wording we note an important terminological differentiation: “*action lines*” – “*underlying principles*” – “*their philosophy*”; we will return to this issue later. Further down in the document, these five *principles* are illustrated with quotations from the Bologna Declaration and two subsequent communiqués. Then, the document elaborates on Objectives as being “summarised in its 10 action lines” introduced in Bologna (6 of them), Prague (3 of them) and Berlin (1 of them) and adding that “[t]he social dimension of the Bologna Process might be seen as an overarching or transversal action line” (ibid., p. 3). Obviously, this document strongly illuminates the questions discussed here, yet it also raises further questions.

Before the drafting process for the Bergen communiqué started (November 2004), another key issue was raised about “realising the vision”.⁶ In October, the Secretariat prepared an internal document to be discussed at the forthcoming meeting of the Communiqué Drafting Group (Bologna Process 2004b). Its first part elaborates directly on “basic principles”: four of them are supposed to be “inherent in the Bologna Process” and are listed in the same order as in the previous document, except the last one – the social dimension – is now missing, perhaps because it is a “transversal action line”. They are further elaborated in a way which subsumes some other items as inherent elements of these basic principles.⁷

⁵It is worth noting here that in the second line academic freedom was not explicitly mentioned. A direct reference to academic freedom only appears in the London Communiqué.

⁶*Realising the Vision* was the subtitle of the first variant version of the Bergen Communiqué (autumn 2004); in its final variant it was reformulated in *Achieving the Goals* (May 2005).

⁷E.g.: “Mobility is a basic idea in the Bologna Process; students and staff should move with ease and have faire recognition of their qualifications”; “The Prague Communiqué stated that higher education is a public good and a public responsibility. Public responsibility encompasses the structural elements of the Bologna Process such as: a national framework, degree structure, quality assurance and recognition” (Bologna Process 2004b, p. 1).

The whole paragraph starts by stressing the co-operative character of the Bologna Process which “builds on trust” and has “no central decision making power”; this statement can also be understood as an inherent EHEA principle. However, the most interesting sentence of the whole paragraph comes at the end: “*These principles are written into the draft Communiqué for Ministers to confirm. With the Ministers’ confirmation, the principles will constitute an important element in the description of the EHEA*” (ibid., p. 1). This was a clear and obviously radical discussion proposal; as we know with hindsight, the proposal was abolished and, so far, Ministers have not confirmed any such list. The Bologna Process remains a voluntary process and its principles seem to remain “flexible” (interpretative?) guidelines.

After discussing the “structures for the EHEA” in the second part, the third part of the working document poses a provocative question: “A common understanding or a legal instrument?” (Bologna Process 2004b, p. 2). This part starts by emphasising the voluntary character of the Process and the “co-operation and trust between the partners”. It then raises a dilemma which was obviously strongly felt during that period: “Ministers may consider whether commonly agreed principles, standards and procedures for the EHEA should be considered as *guidelines* for the independent national HE systems or be *binding* on the participating states.” The concern can be understood in light of the possible enlargement of the Process but, at the same time, it opens a more general dilemma which is expressed more clearly a little later: “If one of the Member States should unilaterally set aside agreed principles, standards or procedures, the Bologna partners may be free to reconsider the relations to such country.” As an option, the document sketches a proposal for adopting “a legal instrument”, i.e. “a convention, much the same way as it was done for the Lisbon Recognition Convention. This would imply that all participant states agree on the principles and mechanisms involved and that this is made binding by ratification” (ibid., p. 3).

We know today that further discussion⁸ on this issue within the Bologna Process turned towards “guidelines” and away from a “binding instrument”: it followed a characteristic logic of the “Europeanisation” processes – characteristic not only for higher education. This discussion also makes it easier to understand how the paragraph quoted above (*Preparing for 2010*) entered the Bergen Communiqué. From our point of view, this was a very important decision made in the middle of the Process. It remained influential over the following few years.

The London Communiqué again contains quite a similar formulation but with some new variants:

“Building on our rich and diverse European cultural heritage, we are developing an EHEA based on [1] institutional autonomy, academic freedom, [2] equal opportunities and democratic principles that will [3] facilitate mobility, increase employability and strengthen Europe’s attractiveness and competitiveness. As we look

⁸It continued right up to the Bergen meeting. See the decision of the BFUG Board meeting of 26 April 2005: “With some adjustments proposed at the Board meeting, the document will be sent to BFUG members for the possible use in a national preparation for the discussion at the Ministerial Conference concerning the EHEA beyond 2010” (Bologna Process 2005d). Also see a brief recap in Nyborg (2005, p. 42).

ahead, we recognise that, in a changing world, there will be a continuing need to adapt our higher education systems, to ensure that [4] the EHEA remains competitive and can respond effectively to the challenges of globalisation. In the short term, we appreciate that implementing the Bologna reforms is a significant task, and appreciate [5] the continuing support and commitment of all partners in the process. We welcome the contribution of the working groups and seminars in helping to drive forward progress. We agree to continue [5] to work together in partnership, assisting one another in our efforts and promoting the exchange of good practice” (Bologna Process 2007a, p. 1.3). This formulation again talks about a growing need to “consolidate principles in a single document” as already initiated before the Bergen Conference, but the dilemma of whether the principles should be binding or only serve as guidelines was obviously abandoned. Let us also note that it is here for the first time that the term academic freedom is used in a document like this one.

The next paragraph starts with a commitment to [6] “increasing the compatibility and comparability of our higher education systems, whilst at the same time [2] respecting their diversity”; then, the Ministers “recognise [7] the important influence HEIs exert on developing our societies, based on their traditions as centres of learning, research, creativity and knowledge transfer as well as their key role in defining and transmitting the values on which our societies are built”. At this point, we find a new formulation which is conceptually closely associated with the issue of the higher education foundations and, therefore, crucial to our discussion: “*a full range of purposes*” (our italics) of higher education. “Those purposes include: [8] preparing students for life as active citizens in a democratic society; [9] preparing students for their future careers and [10] enabling their personal development; [11] creating and maintaining a broad, advanced knowledge base; and stimulating research and innovation” (ibid., p. 1.4). Here we can, once again, peek “behind the curtain” to prove that the “full range of purposes” had been developed well before 2007 but had not previously been politically recognised in a communiqué.⁹

In addition, apart from the prevailing pragmatic wording in the Communiqué, there is one more element which is “essential” and can, therefore, be again treated as a “principle”: [12] “Fair recognition of higher education qualifications, periods of study and prior learning, including the recognition of non-formal and informal learning, are essential components of the EHEA” (ibid., p. 2.5). Similarly, the text points out “student-centred higher education” for the first time.

⁹“We can trace it from the reports of early official Bologna seminars or working groups, for example, a seminar on recognition issues in the Bologna process (Lisbon, April 2002; a document in the author’s archives), a seminar on employability (Bled, October 2004; a document in the author’s archives) and a report from the Bologna Working Group on Qualifications Frameworks (December 2004; [Berg], 2005b, p. 23). Documents prove that stressing a “full range of purposes” in higher education was, in particular, pushed forward by the Council of Europe’s agenda (Bergan 2004, p. 24; Weber and Bergan 2005, pp. 27, 235; Kohler and Huber 2006, pp. 13, 213)” (Zgaga 2009, p. 186). In ministerial documents we can identify such a statement for the first time in the concluding part of the Bergen Communiqué (Preparing for 2010) mentioning “the function of preparing the student for the labour market, for further competence building and for active citizenship”. Also see the above section on the Bergen Communiqué [11].

In the Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve Communiqué (Bologna Process 2009), the direct use of the term *principle* is again quite rare and not really central to the text, but the core issue is elaborated in a similar way as in the previous two communiqués and in a special paragraph describing the EHEA “essentials”:

“We pledge our full commitment to the goals of the EHEA, which is an area where [1] higher education is a public responsibility, and where [2] all higher education institutions are responsive to the wider needs of society through the diversity of their missions. The aim is to ensure that higher education institutions have [3] the necessary resources to continue to fulfil their full range of purposes such as [4] preparing students for life as active citizens in a democratic society; [5] preparing students for their future careers and [6] enabling their personal development; [7] creating and maintaining a broad, advanced knowledge base and stimulating research and innovation. The necessary ongoing reform of higher education systems and policies will continue to be firmly embedded in the European values of [8] institutional autonomy, academic freedom and social equity and will require full [9] participation of students and staff” (Bologna Process 2009, p. 4). In addition, three more “principles” are addressed: [10] LLL is subject to “the principle of public responsibility”; [11] “basic principles and procedures for recognition of prior learning”; [12] “transparency tools need to relate closely to the principles of the Bologna Process, in particular quality assurance and recognition” (ibid., pp. 10, 11 and 22).

Finally, the Budapest-Vienna Declaration is not, in its festive nature, a document which could further and substantially elaborate on this issue. Ministers only expressed a recommitment “to academic freedom as well as autonomy and accountability of higher education institutions as principles of the EHEA and underline the role the higher education institutions play in fostering peaceful democratic societies and strengthening social cohesion”. They again committed themselves to “the proper and full implementation of the agreed Bologna principles and action lines across the EHEA” (Bologna Process 2010).

2.3 Systematising and Reconsidering the “EHEA Principles”

As seen from the above analysis of the Bologna documents, there is no unanimously accepted set of the “EHEA principles”; on the contrary, they vary from one ministerial conference to another. We should again note that there have always been huge expectations in this area but, in practice, the term has been used in a vague way. Explicit definitions, as well as implicit traces in documents never directly contradict each other; nevertheless, certain dilemmas and polemics can be observed during the period of development and consolidation of the “EHEA foundations” (see e.g. Chap. 5 by E. Hackl and Chap. 7 by K. Miklavič).

Two periods can be identified: before and after 2003. Until the preparation work for the Berlin summit started, the “EHEA principles” were developed more or less implicitly while later, particularly between Berlin and Bergen, a need arose to consolidate “both principles and action lines of the Bologna Process into a single

document” (Bologna Process 2004a).¹⁰ The radical proposal of the working group was not accepted but later documents (Bergen, London and Leuven; in a certain sense already Berlin) comprise special sections which try to formulate the EHEA foundations, principles and cornerstones – the overall “Bologna doctrine”. We will now focus on these formulations and try to provide a list of “the EHEA principles” with a set of “common denominators” developed on the basis of clusters of notions extracted from the documents and which seem to contain the necessary constitutive elements of the principles.

As we have seen, we can already identify between the lines of the Sorbonne Declaration some implicit principles and outlines of a “philosophy” or “foundation ideas” for the EHEA, although the term “principles” as such was not used. For this purpose, as well as for the purpose of comparing all seven Bologna documents, two tables have been developed. In the first one (Annex 1), we analyse two declarations and the first communiqué, i.e. documents of the early period. They contain a number of elements which are later openly described as principles and/or objectives. We can also identify generic elements which subsequently got lost (e.g. “Europe is not only that of the Euro”, Bologna Process 1998; “the importance of educational cooperation in strengthening stable, peaceful and democratic societies”, Bologna Process 1999).

In the second one (Annex 2), we analyse the next four communiqués; here we focus on the direct uses of the term “principle” as well as on particular sections which aim at defining “the EHEA essentials”. Finally, in the first column of Annex 1 an attempt is made to establish “common denominators”, i.e. to classify and organise the extracted key words commonly found in most of the analysed documents and to present them in boxes. There are 15 boxes marked with letters (A – O); these letters are also used in other columns to indicate the connectivity of a particular document with our common denominators.

The material extracted in Annexes 1 and 2 is very complex and hence a little unclear when presented in these two tables. Therefore, in the second phase we designed a new one (see Table 2.1) to present the key findings and trends of developing and consolidating the “EHEA principles” in the analysed documents in a more transparent way. We use the classification from above (A – O) and try to identify *explicit statements* (marked + in blank boxes) as well as their *implicit traces* (marked + in light gray boxes) in the analysed documents. Some “denominators” do not appear in all documents (marked – in dark gray boxes). As a general trend, there are more blank and less gray boxes the more we move from 1998 towards 2009: the boxes are becoming lighter from the left to the right of the table and the “agenda” is broadening (7 “denominators” in 1998 vs. 15 in 2009). Nevertheless, three minor irregularities stand out in the otherwise linear development: an absence of “denominator” C in 2001, D in 2005 and B in 2007.

Therefore, the documents from 1998 to 2009 prove a continuum in developing and consolidating the “EHEA principles”. The Bologna Declaration does not need

¹⁰The term “action lines” is not used much from Bergen.

Table 2.1 Developing and consolidating “the EHEA Principles” (1998–2009)

“The EHEA is based on...”		1998	1999	2001	2003	2005	2007	2009
A	Respecting cultural, linguistic, HE etc. diversities; democratic values	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
B	HE is a public good and a public responsibility	–	–	+	+	+	–	+
C	Institutional autonomy (and academic freedom [since 2007]); academic values	–	+	–	+	+	+	+
D	Responsiveness to the needs of society; accountability; HEIs and society	–	+	+	+	–	+	+
E	HE, innovation, competitiveness, employability, LLL	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
F	Compatibility and comparability; common cornerstone qualifications	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
G	Recognition of HE qualifications, periods of study and prior learning	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
H	Educational co-operation; enhanced mobility of students and staff	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
I	Co-operation in quality assurance; European QA register	–	+	+	+	+	+	+
J	Working in partnership; HE stakeholders	–	–	+	+	+	+	+
K	Linking HE and research; doctoral programmes; research capacity	–	–	–	+	+	+	+
L	The social dimension; strengthening social cohesion, reducing inequalities	–	–	+	+	+	+	+
M	The European dimension: joint programmes and degrees etc.	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
N	The global dimension: attractiveness, competitiveness, co-operation	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
O	HEIs continue to fulfil their full range of purposes	–	–	–	–	+	+	+

much reading between the lines; it already differentiates between “principles” (actually, “principles of the *Sorbonne Declaration*”) and “objectives”, (i.e., six “action lines”). The “principles” of both declarations are again implicitly reconfirmed – and widened (see boxes B, J, L) – in the Prague Communiqué, without any further distinction. The Berlin Communiqué uses the term “principle” explicitly in the Preamble, but in a somewhat confusing context: “considerations, principles and priorities” (and in the section Further Follow-up: “the principles and objectives of the declaration”). How to differentiate among them?

The working document analysed above (Bologna Process 2004a) understands “objectives” as summarised in the “ten action lines” and distinguishes them from “the underlying principles” and “their philosophy”. Therefore, “principles” are prior to “objectives”; “objectives” are developed on the basis of “principles” (i.e., fundamental presuppositions), while “objectives” require setting up priorities for a political action. This is the document which has gone furthest into the core of this issue, at least to our knowledge. Yet, the question of what are, then, “the basic

principles” remains equivocal within the Bologna Process. We can see from the later communiqués that there was a constant aspiration and need to formulate the “EHEA foundations”; yet always again in a slightly different way. “The principles” are addressed either directly in a particular section of a communiqué or can be inherently found in phrases scattered through texts.¹¹ On the other hand, predominant parts of the communiqués address “objectives”, “priorities” and various practical and implementation issues – all perfectly normal.

The heading of this section promised a systematisation of the “EHEA principles”. We believe that the “common denominators” can be helpful in doing this but, nevertheless, we should be careful. The 15 boxes contain elements with quite diverse characteristics: on one hand, they address very general issues while, on the other, they can be quite specific, procedural and even pragmatic. In the “common house of higher education”, if I may use Roberto Carneiro’s metaphor of a “common home” (Carneiro 1997), there are “basement principles” and there are “principles on upper floors”.

Thus, the “basement principles” or the “EHEA foundations” comprise: (1) *democracy and democratic values*, including respect for educational, cultural etc. diversities as well as the free movement of people, ideas and goods on one hand; and (2) *academic values* – first of all, institutional autonomy and academic freedom – on the other. Both modern democratic “societies differently organised because of geography and historical heritage” and “an autonomous institution at the heart of societies” if we are to borrow the language of the Magna Charta Universitatum (1991), are put in a dynamic relationship: here is a source of the call for (3) strengthening *international co-operation in education and research*, as well as for broadening *mobility*. This is a base, some foundations.

Upon them, the first floor is built: (4) higher education is a *public good*; it requires *public responsibility for higher education*, but also (5) the *responsibility of higher education* – accountability, academic responsiveness to society. This floor would remain incomplete and unstable if (6) the *full range of purposes of higher education* is forgotten: active citizenship *and* competitiveness, personal development *and* employability, knowledge base *and* innovation etc. Then we already come to details regarding (7) *higher education structures* (the EHEA technical *condition sine qua non*): the comparability and compatibility of systems, quality assurance, recognition of qualifications etc. Finally, the building is strengthened by three transversals: (8) *the social dimension*; (9) *the European dimension* and (10) *the global dimension*. Last but not least, life in the newly constructed building – and already its construction process – would be impossible if there was no (11) *partnership* between public authorities, institutions, students and stakeholders in general.

¹¹Identifying these pieces was not easy; we helped ourselves with specific discourse contexts which hint at “essentials”, “foundations” and “principles”. E.g. in Bergen: “to establish an EHEA based on [...]”; “EHEA is structured around [...]”; “key characteristics of the structure of the EHEA”, also “EHEA must be [...]”; in London: “we are developing an EHEA based on [...]”; “essential components of the EHEA” or “we believe that [...]”; in Leuven: pledging “our full commitment to the goals of the EHEA”; “higher education should be based [...]” etc.

However, we do not suggest that the 15 “denominators” constructed above and now reduced to 11 rooms on several “floors” should be simply understood as *the true EHEA principles*. On the contrary; principles are slippery concepts and it is part of their nature that they resist and defy definitions of “once-and-for-all” style. They are *concepts in progress*: on one hand, they are emerging and being constantly reinterpreted in an ongoing discussion¹² while, on the other, the declared principles always need to be confronted with reality. Lofty principles may be easily lost in day-to-day rhetoric and the best way to protect, not the principles but their testing, and the discussion about them is to retain the gap between principles as *they are* and govern real life and principles as they *should be*. In other words, we need to take a critical stand towards reality as well as towards the declared principles. Therefore, the key question is not how to finalise a “true list” of EHEA principles; it is more about keeping the discussion on principles open and productive.

2.4 Conclusion: “The First Principle Is the Search for the First Principle”

Through the development of the Bologna Process, its “basic principles” have been gradually taken for granted. After Bergen, the real concern has involved their “full implementation” and the related problems. This shift should be seen as normal and expected: it is driven by a logic which can always be identified behind shifting from conceptualisation and development to realisation and consolidation.

Over the past decade, the Bologna Process has connected European ministries, higher education institutions and their partners and led to the establishment of the largest Higher Education Area so far. The Process and its outcome – the EHEA – have formed a common *agora* both for joint higher education policy development as well as for higher education analyses and research. It has reinforced European and also global higher education discussions in an unprecedented manner. Overall, “Bologna” has proven to be a success story. In a success story, principles are taken for granted. But taking part in success stories might be risky. The grand initiatives which we may remember from the past all have something in common: the energetic collective ascent, which is usually linked to developing a new “philosophy” is followed by embarrassment, which is usually linked to gradually emerging paradoxes of its realisation and which also brings a threat of dissolution of the “movement”.

The risk of the Bologna-beyond-2010 period is closely connected to the “Bologna success” and to the logic sketched out above. The hegemonic position of the “Bologna” discourse meant that, suddenly, all issues related to higher education have been coloured *Bolognese*-style. We can speak of the “Bologna omnipresence” or a “pan-Bolognasation” in contemporary European higher education discourses – be

¹²The development of principles is necessarily done by way of hypothesis, “as something to be tested and debated” (Docherty 2011, p. 17).

it in an affirmative, neutral or negative way. I think it is a dangerous phenomenon. It provides a cheap excuse to label all “principles” as “the EHEA principles”. Is there any firm argument why we should attribute every single higher education issue discussed in today’s Europe to “Bologna”?

This can only be a rhetorical question. The Bologna Process addressed a cluster of higher education issues which were crucial at the end of the 1990s: “the need to establish a more complete and far-reaching Europe, in particular building upon and strengthening its intellectual, cultural, social and scientific and technological dimensions”; “the Universities’ central role in developing European cultural dimensions” etc. (Bologna Process 1999). Guy Neave recently asked: “is it correct to see the Bologna Process as the Alpha of our present-day ambitions or the Omega of those of yesterday?”, but he also noted – making an allusion to Von Clausewitz – that “Bologna was the pursuit of national policy by other means” (Neave 2009, pp. 18, 51). Indeed, a number of issues which may – sometimes very indirectly – be influenced by the Bologna developments remain not only national, but also institutional, disciplinary etc. issues. The “pan-Bolognasation” is dangerous because it averts our concerns from issues originally beyond the scope of the Process and which lie beyond the scope of the EHEA today.

The “pan-Bolognasation” is also connected to the question we posed in the title of this paper: is there a “Bologna philosophy”? Is there an overarching, coherent and comprehensive *doctrine* which embraces the EHEA? A reader may already guess that our response is negative. The Bologna Process has provided an *agora* – not a “philosophy”, in particular not an all-round “philosophical school”. However, already at the dawn of Europe, an *agora* was a place where various philosophers liked to come. The “Bologna *agora*” has enabled us to formulate challenges, exchange ideas, test and debate and, finally, to take action. Instead of preaching a single “philosophy”, it has made it possible *to formulate and confront ideas on higher education* in Europe and worldwide. It has not been a philosophical school, but a political process with a limited scope; therefore, only a limited set of principles has been feasible and, even with this set, it has not been possible to avoid different and potentially contradicting interpretations.

These interpretations are often an expression of either particular local and/or national or prevailing “global higher education philosophies”. Occasionally, they contribute to the feeling that the EHEA principles are only meant rhetorically. For example, how to reconcile the principle of public good with the ongoing pressure for tuition fees; the principles of global openness with the co-operation vs. competition dispute (Bologna Process 2007b); global rankings with true quality; a full range of purposes with reducing higher education to its profitable dimension etc.¹³

¹³There is a long list of such questions; all of them entail a substantial dilemma in the background, as was well articulated by G. Neave and P. Maassen a few years ago: “The real question the Bologna Process poses is how far in advancing both an economic and social dimension a balance may be struck between the principles of individual opportunity and those of collective advantage. [...] In truth, the dilemma that confronts both Bologna and the EHEA is how to reconcile Adam Smith with Thomas Hobbes” (Neave and Maassen 2007, p. 152). This is a problem for this decade and the key issue of its higher education philosophy.

They are also influenced by the ongoing financial and economic crisis, with the weakening of the European idea etc. This reminds us of a situation, however quite a different one, from the late 1990s: a situation which required us to step to the *beginning*, to the *foundation* and to re-examine the *principles*. Beyond-2010 we again encounter the well-known question: Which higher education for the future? We are obliged to discuss and respond to it.

Our investigation proves that the basic principles should not be taken for granted. First, there is no final list of “the EHEA principles” and, second, even if there were one, the principles should not be regarded simply as action lines – readymade for an immediate useful application. In the same way sailors do not navigate to the Northern Star but only use it to help them define their position and their course at sea, the EHEA principles are not here to make them “fully implemented” (thus declaring the “end of history”?). The development of principles is necessarily done by way of hypothesis, “as something to be tested and debated”. Therefore, instead of fixing a “final list” of principles and their “full implementation”, our findings suggest the launching of a new discussion: a discussion on the reality and new challenges of higher education *beyond 2010*, including testing and debating its foundations, its principles. When discussing principles, the real point is to search, not to find; it is more important to travel than to arrive. The fact that the search for the EHEA principles necessarily involves universities should fill us with optimism: “The function of the University is precisely to be engaged in the search for first principles: that is to say, the first principle is the search for the first principle” (Docherty 2011, pp. 16–17).

Yet, do all universities really carry out this function today?

Annex 1: The Early Phase (1998–2001): Implicit Rather than Explicit ‘Principles and Objectives’

<i>Common denominators</i>	Sorbonne 1998	Bologna 1999	Prague 2001
A Respecting cultural, linguistic, HE etc. diversities; democratic values	– Europe is not only that of the Euro; it must be a Europe of knowledge as well	C Fundamental principles laid down in the Bologna Magna Charta Universitatum of 1988	A Democratic values, diversity of cultures, languages and HE
B HE is a public good and a public responsibility	E Intellectual, cultural, social and technical dimensions; universities play a pivotal role	– General principles laid down in the Sorbonne Declaration	B HE should be considered a public good and a public responsibility
C Institutional autonomy (and academic freedom); academic values	A Respecting our diversities; efforts to remove barriers	– The importance of educational co-operation in strengthening stable, peaceful and democratic societies	G Academic and professional recognition
D Responsiveness to the needs of society; accountability	H Enhance mobility and ever closer co-operation; one semester outside one's own country	D Changing needs, society's demands	D Accommodating the diversity of individual, academic and labour market needs
E HE, innovation, competitiveness, employability, LLL	N International recognition and attractive potential of our systems	E International competitiveness of the European systems of HE	F Common cornerstones of qualifications
F Compatibility and common cornerstone qualifications	F Two main cycles; international comparison and equivalence	N To promote the European system of higher education worldwide	E Compatibility, attractiveness and competitiveness
G Recognition of HE qualifications, periods of study and prior learning	E Initial or continuing education in different European universities; LLL	E <i>Objective 1</i> : a system of easily readable and comparable degrees; F employability; competitiveness	I Mutually recognised quality assurance systems
H Educational co-operation in enhanced mobility of students and staff	G Mutual recognition in the EU; the Lisbon Recognition Convention	E <i>Obj. 2</i> : two main cycles, relevant to the European labour market	H The objective of improving mobility of the utmost importance

(continued)

Annex 1 (continued)

Common denominators		Sorbonne 1998	Bologna 1999	Prague 2001
I	Co-operation in quality assurance; European QA register	F Harmonisation of the overall framework of our degrees	H <i>Obj. 3:</i> system of credits, promoting widespread mobility	M European dimensions in HE; courses with a "European" content
J	Working in partnerships; HE stakeholders	H Recognition vs. facilitating student mobility as well as employability E	G <i>Obj. 4:</i> free movement, mobility, recognition and valorisation H	E <i>Obj. 7:</i> LLL as an essential element of the EHEA
K	Linking HE and research; doctoral programmes; research capacity	– National identities and common interests can strengthen each other	I <i>Obj. 5:</i> European co-operation in quality assurance	J <i>Obj. 8:</i> involvement of HEIs and students as partners
L	The social dimension	N Europe's standing in the world	M <i>Obj. 6:</i> European dimensions in HE (integrated programmes etc.)	L The social dimension of the BP
M	The European dimension: joint programmes and degrees etc.		A Full respect of diversity	E Combining academic quality with relevance to lasting employability
N	The global dimension: attractiveness, competitiveness, co-operation		C University autonomy	N <i>Obj. 9:</i> promoting the attractiveness of the EHEA
O	HEIs continue to fulfil their full range of purposes			

Annex 2: The Advanced Phase (2003–2009): “The EHEA Is Based on Principles of ...”

Berlin 2003	Bergen 2005	London 2007	Leuven 2009
L [1] the social dimension	I [1] the principle of a European register of QAA based on national reviews	C [1] institutional autonomy, academic freedom; strong HEIs, diverse, adequately funded, accountable	B [1] HE is a public responsibility
E [2] to increase competitiveness	G [2] implementing the LRC principles; recognition of degrees and periods of study	A [2] equal opportunities and democratic principles; respecting diversities; non-discrimination, equitable access	D [2] HEI responsive to the needs of society; diversity of missions; HE has a key role to play [vs.] the development of our societies
L [3] strengthening social cohesion and reducing inequalities	K [3] basic principles for doctoral programmes [Salzburg Principles]	H [3] facilitate mobility, increase employability; strengthen Europe's attractiveness and competitiveness	B [3] HEIs have the necessary resources to fulfil their full range of purposes
B [4] HE is a public good and public responsibility	N [4] principles of sustainable development; the EHEA open and attractive	E [4] the EHEA remains competitive and can respond effectively to the challenges of globalisation	O.1 [4] preparing students for life as active citizens in a democratic society
C [5] academic values in international co-operation and exchange	I [5] quality and transparency; standards and guidelines for QA	J [5] commitment of all partners in the process; working in partnership	O.2 [5] preparing students for their future careers
K [6] <i>Obj. 10</i> : links between higher education and research	A [6] rich heritage and cultural diversity in contributing to a knowledge-based society	F [6] increasing the compatibility and comparability of our HE systems	O.3 [6] enabling their personal development
A [7] Europe's cultural richness, the heritage of diversified traditions	B [7] public responsibility for HE	D [7] the influence HEIs exert on developing our societies	O.4 [7] creating and maintaining a broad knowledge base and stimulating research and innovation

(continued)

Annex 2 (continued)

Berlin 2003		Bergen 2005		London 2007		Leuven 2009	
E	[8] to foster its potential for innovation and social/economic development	E K	[8] crossroads of research, education and innovation; the key to Europe's competitiveness	O.1	[8] preparing students for life as active citizens in a democratic society	C L	[8] European values of institutional autonomy, academic freedom and social equity
J	[9] The role of HEIs and student organisations	C B	[9] the necessary institutional autonomy; sustainable funding	O.2	[9] preparing students for their future careers	J	[9] participation of students and staff
N	[10] the interest shown by other regions of the world	F	[10] the EHEA is structured around three cycles; qualifications framework	O.3	[10] enabling their personal development	B	[10] LLL is subject to the principle of public responsibility
C	[11] the principle of institutional autonomy	O	[11] preparing the student for the labour market, further competence building and active citizenship	O.4 E	[11] creating and maintaining a broad knowledge base and stimulating research and innovation	G	[11] basic principles and procedures for the recognition of prior learning
D I	[12] quality assurance, accountability			G	[12] fair recognition of qualifications, periods of study and prior learning	I G	[12] principles of the Bologna Process, in particular QA and recognition

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