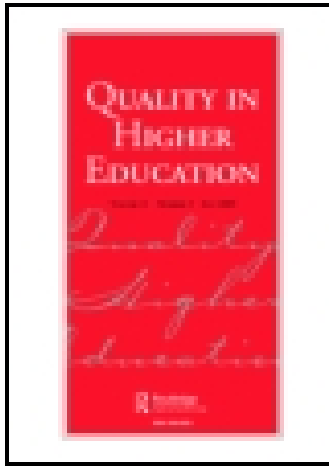


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Foteini Asderaki <sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup> University of Piraeus , Greece

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# The Impact of the Bologna Process on the Development of the Greek Quality Assurance System

FOTEINI ASDERAKI\*

*University of Piraeus, Greece*

**ABSTRACT** *Greece, an EU-member state since 1981, lagged behind other European countries in the development of a national quality assurance system. This article charts the route to the establishment of a quality assurance system in Greece. While national evaluation and accreditation systems were established in most European countries during the mid-1980s and 1990s, any attempt of assessing the quality of education and research or other services provided by Greek higher education institutions and of rendering social accountability for the public resources that they received, was considered a threat to their autonomy. Moreover, while Greece was a signatory state of the Bologna Declaration, the Bologna Process has been 'demonised' and the commitments concerning quality assurance remained a dead letter. However, it was the Bologna Process that led to the national quality assurance system being established by law in 2005, close to the Bergen Ministerial Conference. The stocktaking exercise played a key role in this development not only in the case of Greece but also for some other South East European countries.*

**Keywords:** quality assurance; Greek higher education; Bologna Process; stocktaking exercise

## Introduction<sup>[1]</sup>

### *Trends in Quality Assurance Systems*

Quality in higher education was for a long time linked with pure educational and scientific criteria pertaining to teaching and research and it was an internal responsibility and affair of the university or of the cathedra professor, which affected reputation. This changed, during the 1980s and 1990s, due to the massification of higher education (Neave & Van Vught, 1991), the diversification of higher education institutions, the weakness of the state to support higher education systems from the state budgets and the introduction of tuition fees and client-oriented policies by the institutions. The institutions' request for more autonomy was accompanied by the introduction of steering and audit systems by the state, while the

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\*Department of International and European Studies, University of Piraeus, Piraeus, Greece. Email: asderaki@unipi.gr

notion of accountability of higher education institutions towards society involved the social partners and other stakeholders within the evaluation processes. Describing this period, some scholars talked about the transformation of the 'interventionary' to a 'facilitatory' state (Neave & Van Vught, 1991) that 'steers at a distance' (Dill & Sporn, 1995; Goedegebuure *et al.* 1994; Van der Wende, 1999) but simultaneously encouraged the activation of higher education institutions in the market.

All the aforementioned reasons, to a varying degree of importance in each case, contributed to the establishment of quality assurance or accreditation agencies in the mid-1980s as was the case in the United Kingdom (after Minister Joseph's proposals), in France (Comité National d'Évaluation founded in 1984) and in the Netherlands (Inspectorate of Higher Education, established in 1986). During the 1990s, evaluation and accreditation agencies were established not only in most of the former Eastern Bloc countries (Czech Republic in 1990; Slovak Republic in 1990; Hungary in 1993; Latvia in 1994; Estonia in 1997) but also in most of the European Union countries (Denmark in 1992; Sweden in 1995; Finland in 1996) (European Commission, 2004). The Mediterranean countries that have endured dictatorships were very late in developing quality assurance national agencies, such as Spain (ANECA in 2002), Greece (HQAA in 2005) and Turkey (YÖDEK in 2005).

Moreover, the internationalisation of higher education, the emergence of new providers and new methods of delivering higher education and the need to evaluate their quality (Sadlak, 2000; Scott, 2005; Knight, 2005) as well as the inclusion of higher education services within the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) negotiations and the development of interuniversity cooperation addressed the need for setting standards and criteria at an international level. As a result, the quality assurance linked to recognition of degrees became an important issue within the fora of international organisations' such as the Council of Europe, OECD and UNESCO. The UNESCO/Council of Europe *Code of Good Practice in the Provision of Transnational Education*, the UNESCO/OECD initiative to develop guidelines on *Quality Provision in Cross-border Higher Education Activities*, the statement on *Sharing Quality Higher Education Across Borders* by the International Association of Universities (IAU), the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (AUCC), the American Council on Education (ACE) and the Council on Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) as well as *Guidelines of Good Practice in Quality Assurance* issued by the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education are the most important international attempts to address the need for a consensus on quality provisions among countries, international players, higher education institutions and stakeholders in cross-border higher education (Rauhvargers, 2005).

In the meantime, more and more league tables and university rankings are coming into the limelight. Their linkage with quality assurance and national accountability processes becomes a concern of university leaders and policy makers (Sadlak & Nian Cai, 2007).

### Europe focus on quality

During the 1990s, the evaluation of higher education systems was placed at the centre of the European Union initiatives. On the initiative of the Dutch European Union's Presidency (1991), the European Pilot Project for Evaluating Quality in Higher Education (1994–1995), in which a total of 46 institutions participated, was introduced (European Commission, 1995, Centre for Quality Assurance and Evaluation of Higher Education, Denmark and Comité National d'Évaluation, France, 1998). The Council's Recommendation of 24 September 1998 (98/561/EC) encouraged the European Union member-states to establish national quality

assurance systems for higher education based on the four-stage model; this included the establishment of an independent agency, internal and external institutional evaluation procedures, the involvement of various stakeholders and the publications of the results (ENQA, 2003). The European Network for Quality Assurance (ENQA) in higher education was established in 2000 and consisted of independent bodies and Quality Assurance Agencies recognised by competent public authorities of the EU member-states, the EEA/EFTA countries and the countries that participate in the EU programmes on Education and Training. Today, the European Association for Quality Assurance is open to quality assurance agencies coming from the member states of the Bologna Process.

Since 1994, the European Universities Association (EUA) (formerly CRE) has been carrying out the *Institutional Evaluation Programme* while the *Quality Culture Project* was introduced in 2002.

### **The impact of the Bologna Process on the development of national quality assurance systems**

The Bologna Process gave new impetus to the development of national quality assurance systems. 'Promotion of European co-operation in quality assurance with a view to developing comparable criteria and methodologies' (Bologna Declaration, 1999) was set as the fifth axis of the collaboration between the 29 founding member states of the Process. In Prague, on 19 May 2001, the Ministers 'encouraged closer cooperation between recognition and quality assurance networks' and 'they emphasized the necessity of close European cooperation and mutual trust in and acceptance of national quality assurance systems' as well as the need for cooperation between national agencies, higher education institutions and ENQA in order to 'collaborate in establishing a common framework of reference and to disseminate best practice'. As a result, bilateral and regional cooperation on quality assurance issues was developed after Prague and various networks were established (Joint Quality Initiative 2001, Nederlands-Vlaamse Accreditatieorganisatie 2002, Central and Eastern European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education 2002, European Consortium for Accreditation in Higher Education 2003, Nordic Quality Assurance Network in Higher Education 2003).

The mid-term goal that was set up in the Berlin Ministerial Meeting (19 September 2003) concerning quality assurance, gave an additional push to those countries that were behind time. The Ministers agreed that by 2005 national quality assurance systems would include: (a) definition of the responsibilities of the bodies and institutions involved, evaluation of programmes or institutions, including internal assessment, external review; (b) participation of students and the publication of results; (c) a system of accreditation, certification or comparable procedures; (d) international participation, cooperation and networking (Berlin Communiqué, 2003). Taking one step further, 45 countries adopted in Bergen (2005) the *European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance* in the European Higher Education Area (ENQA, 2005) as proposed by ENQA and its partners (EUA, EURASHE, ESIB), while in London (2007) the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR) was approved. EQAR was founded by the E4 Group on 4 March 2008. Since 2006, EUA and its partners have been organising an annual European Forum for Quality Assurance.

In fact, what was decided by the Ministers in Berlin was the resumption of the four-stage model introduced by the EU Recommendation of 1998. This was attributed to the extensive involvement of ENQA, whose foundation was a European Union initiative, and additionally to the substantial contribution of the European Commission which took part in the E4 meetings and safeguarded the *acquis communautaire* of 1998. There is no doubt that the European

Commission played a key role in this 'qualitative revolution' in Europe. Many European goals, such as the recognition of the degrees awarded in heterogeneous national systems, the enhancement of the mobility and employability of students, the organisation of joint study programmes, and last but not least the free movement of higher education services, are facilitated by the setting of minimum comparable qualitative standards concerning all national quality assurance systems and by the establishment of EQAR (Asderaki 2006a, p. 198). The four-stage model actually involved governments, higher education institutions, students and other stakeholders in quality assurance procedures. However, whether this bureaucratic approach that these procedures are establishing throughout Europe will lead to higher education institutions' excellence and to European Higher Education Area's attractiveness is under dispute.

### *The Stocktaking Exercise*

In Berlin (2003), ministers decided to assign the Bologna Follow-up Group (BFUG) to carry out a stocktaking exercise, which would record the progress achieved in the three priority action lines including quality assurance, that is, the establishment and the implementation of national quality assurance systems as described above. Countries' representatives as well as the European Commission, EUA, the European Student's Union (ESU) and Eurydice were involved in this exercise. Scorecards were set up according to certain criteria and benchmarks, following the traffic lights performance system; green stands for excellent (5), light green for very good (4), yellow for good performance (3), orange for some progress (2) and red for little progress (1) (Table 1) (Stocktaking Report, 2005). The scorecard criteria concerning quality assurance were: (1) stage of development of quality assurance system; (2) key elements of evaluation systems; (3) level of participation of students; and (4) level of international participation, cooperation and networking.

Peculiar as it might appear, the traffic lights scorecards which were issued to country representatives in March 2005 for comments or additional justification exerted pressure on the countries that in several cases tried to improve their national image. This occurred because, for the first time, there was a visual representation of the achievements or the delays of each country and respectively an assessment of the national ministries' accomplishment within the two-year period. Each country's scorecard would have two-level recipients: peers and the European Commission at European level as well as the domestic political élites, interest groups and the public opinion at national level.

Regarding the report results, North Europe has provided fertile ground for the development of quality assurance similar to its lush physical environment. On the contrary, as we move towards Southern Europe, the development of quality assurance systems is not equally fertile and it resembles a drier and more barren landscape similar to a desert (Table 2). It seems like the greenhouse effect!

TABLE 1. The traffic lights performance system

Green	Excellent performance (5)
Light Green	Very good performance (4)
Yellow	Good performance (3)
Orange	Some progress (2)
Red	Little progress (1)

Source: Bologna Process Stocktaking Report (2005, p.15).

TABLE 2. Part of the Bologna scorecard summary

Stocktaking Report (2005) Criterion 1: stage of development of quality assurance system			
Finland	5	Greece	3
Sweden	5	Italy	3
Estonia	5	Turkey	2
Germany	5	Slovenia	3
Denmark	5	Bulgaria	3
UK	5	Romania	3
Iceland	5	Serbia	3
Ireland	5	Bosnia-Herzegovina	3

Source: Bologna Process Stocktaking Report (2005).

The motivation and compliance mechanism of the stocktaking exercise are explained below. The Bologna Process is a voluntary, intergovernmental process based on the open method of coordination, which aims at the coordination of national policies in order to achieve specific goals (Asderaki 2006b, pp. 479–509). The open method of coordination introduces a ‘soft’ legal approach (Snyder, 1994; Trubek & Trubek, 2005) that produces guidelines and goals agreed at the European level during the ministerial meetings and implementation relies on national level. Thus, countries with economical asymmetries or social constraints can, nevertheless, move forward all together either speeding up or slowing down according to their capacities and depending on the occasion, as in the Greek case. Declarations and communiqués do not bring about legal sanctions in case a country decides not to act as agreed or delays but the national achievements are under peer review and include public ‘naming and shaming’ (Zängle, 2004). This is the key role of the *Stocktaking Report*, which was introduced in 2005 as a monitoring tool. Stocktaking was not the only exercise that monitored the progress of the Bologna Process. Monitoring was also provided by other pressure groups, such as higher education institutions, through EUA’s *Trends Report*, by students through ESU’s, *Bologna With Students’ Eyes* report as well as by the European Commission through Eurydice’s report, *Focus on the Structure of Higher Education in Europe 2004/05. National Trends in the Bologna Process* (Asderaki, 2008b, p. 509).

All these practices not only introduce ‘constructive peer pressure’ (Dion, 2005) but also provide a ‘window of opportunity’ for ministers and political élites to skirt round domestic reactions and take the appropriate legal measures. In this two-level game, European and national-reformist leaders often use the device of ‘blame-shifting’ or ‘tying the hands’ in order to overcome national oppositions (Reinhardt, 2002).

Moreover, the traffic-light scorecards were a simple and easy way to show to the political leaders at which level their country was in comparison to the progress of other countries. It was then clear that in the Greek case not only the commitments undertaken in Berlin but almost all the commitments undertaken within the Bologna Process in general, had not been implemented and remained a dead letter. This motivated the political leadership to proceed with legislative reforms and to make quality assurance a top priority (Hellenic Ministry of National Education and Religious Affairs, 2005). Thus, slightly before the Bergen Ministerial Meeting (19–20 May 2005), the draft law, concerning the development of the national quality assurance system, the obligatory implementation of the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) and the issuing of the Diploma Supplement by all institutions, was presented. The traffic-light scorecards had the same effect on the other South-East

TABLE 3. Establishment of quality assurance agencies in the South-East European countries

Country	Year of accession in the Bologna Process	Quality assurance agency	Year of establishment of quality assurance agencies
Greece	1999	Hellenic Quality Assurance Agency (HQAA)	2005
Romania	1999	Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS)	2005
Croatia	2001	Agency for Science and Higher Education (AZVO)	2004
Turkey	2001	Commission for Academic Assessment and Quality Improvement in Higher Education Institutions (YÖDEK)	2005
Serbia	2003	Commission for Accreditation and Quality Assurance (KAPK)	2005–6
Montenegro	(2003) 2007	Council for Higher Education	2004
Bosnia-Herzegovina	2003	Not Yet	—

European countries and national quality assurance agencies were established during 2004–2005 (Table 3).

Many of the priorities of this reform effort, modernising the higher education system, enhancing the European dimension and mobility, promoting life-long learning in higher education, improving transparency and reinforcing the social dimension of Greek higher education, were determined by the Bologna agenda (Asderaki, 2006b, 2008a). In addition, internationalisation, attractiveness and openness became strategic goals of these reforms as well. The simplification of the process for the recognition of foreign degrees, the establishment of joint study programmes with foreign higher education institutions, the introduction of the use of other language in the study programmes, the foundation of the Hellenic International University, the establishment of institutes of life-long learning by the universities and technological education institutions, are all included in the new legislative framework. Two years later, a new Higher Education Act was passed reforming the institutional framework for the structure and operation of higher education institutions (L.3549/2007), followed by a new law concerning postgraduate studies as well as the modernisation of the legislative framework for research and innovation.

### **Quality assurance in Greece—a rough road—attempts at establishing a quality assurance system (1982–2005)**

#### *Higher Education in Greece*

Higher Education in Greece is provided, according to the Constitution, by self-governed, legal entities under public law (Article 16 par. 5) which are supervised by the Ministry of National

Education and Religious Affairs. Establishment of private higher education institutions is strictly forbidden (Article 16, par. 8). The attempt to include the Article 16 in the articles to be amended by the next Revisory Parliament was not met with success as the governmental proposal failed to receive the majority designated by the Constitution. This amendment would allow the establishment of non-state and not-for-profit higher education institutions and would regulate the operation of many private franchise institutions which operated outside any legal framework and offer unrecognised degrees. Finally, a new law was passed through the Parliament in summer 2008, which classifies these private institutions in the post-secondary education and regulates functional prerequisites and quality standards. However, universities and students strongly object to the equivalence of the awarded qualifications of these institutions with university degrees despite the fact that Greece has been condemned by the European Court of Justice for not complying with the Directive 89/48/EEC (ECJ Case 274/05—23.10.08).

Higher education comprises two parallel sectors: the university and the technological sector. Nowadays, 18 universities, two technical universities, the International Hellenic University, the Open University and the School of Fine Arts compose the university sector and 15 technological education institutions as well as the School of Pedagogical and Technological Education compose the technological sector. Higher education institutions consist of schools or faculties, departments and sections. The department is the autonomous educational unit entitled to award degrees (Kyriazis & Asderaki 2008, pp. 44–49).

The expansion of Greek higher education started during the 1970s whilst from the mid-1980s up to today it has developed according to a regional approach. This means, that universities and technological education institutions were founded within a region and their schools or faculties or departments were spread in the capitals of the prefectures or other big cities (including the University of Thrace, University of Macedonia, University of Aegean, University of Thessaly, University of Peloponnese, Technological Education Institution of Crete, Technological Education Institution of Ionian Islands).

The higher education system is mainly public funded, based on the notion that 'Education constitutes a basic mission of the State' (Greek Constitution, Article 16 par. 2). Study programmes, with the exception of the programmes of the Open University and some post-graduate programmes, are free of charge and students enjoy several benefits (healthcare, free text books, scholarships, interest-free loans, free accommodation and board or a housing grant, depending on their income, reduced price tickets for means of transport, theatres, cinemas). According to Eurostat data, Greece, which spends 1.3% of the GDP for higher education, is the country with the highest participation of public higher education funding with a percentage of over 98% (EE-25: 82.8%), whereas household contribution is almost minimal (EU-25:12.1%) and private funding is below 1% (EU-25:5.1%) (Ministry of National Education and Religious Affairs, 2007). Professors, according to the Constitution, are public functionaries while the administrative staff of higher education institutions are civil employees. Around 70.3% of the Lyceum graduates were admitted to higher education in 2008. Still, the demand is so high, that Greece is an exporter of students to the UK, Germany, Italy, France, and the USA (OECD, 2006).

### **Systemic deficiencies of the Greek higher education system leading to the lack of higher education institutions' motivation for quality assurance**

There are several reasons for higher education institutions to seek quality assessment and quality assurance labels. In some countries, quality assessment and accreditation procedures



are connected to the licensing of the institution or of particular programmes and its ability to gain financial state support. In other cases, quality assurance and accreditation are connected to reputation and market-oriented policies developed by the institutions in order to charge variable tuition fees and attract high-income students. Nowadays quality assurance is used 'as a mechanism in which higher education has to provide 'evidence of quality' as proof of value for money, effectiveness and fitness for purpose' (Sadlak, 2006).

None of the above reasons apply in Greece. Public universities and technological education institutions are founded by the state and have the right to award recognised degrees. The approval and operation of the undergraduate study programmes are an institutional affair while a bureaucratic procedure through the Ministry of Education used to lead to the establishment of postgraduate programmes, without any prior accreditation. The main financial sources for higher education institutions derive from the state budget and no extra funding is provided for the best performance. However, the recent law on postgraduate studies associates the licensing of a university or technological education institute department to run postgraduate programmes with its evaluation.

The institutions were not in favour of quality assurance procedures for some additional reasons. As vacancies of the academics are determined by the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Finance, vacancies of the supporting laboratory and technical staff are determined by the Ministries of Education, of Finance and of Internal Affairs, the institutions usually face many deficiencies. Additionally, the number of new entrants is determined by the Ministry of Education despite the desperate voices of higher education institutions that they cannot educate such a large number of students in 'mega-classes' (Thanopoulos, 2007). These 'mega-classes' become even bigger because the system, until 2007, allowed students to attend unlimited semesters. Also, the transfer system for specific groups of students, that is, students from families with at least three children or students with health problems, led to the overcrowding of the highly-preferred universities of Athens and Thessaloniki.

Moreover, the centralised national examination system distributes the candidate students to the universities and technological education institutions according to their achieved grades and their preferences without any institutions' participation. Thus, any kind of competitiveness between higher education institutions, which under different circumstances would possibly seek for a quality label in order to attract the best students, is annulled. In any case, there is such a high demand for higher education that is not being fulfilled which leads many unsuccessful candidate students to go abroad.

#### *The Historical Course: Evaluation Attempts and Procedures*

In Greece, evaluation has never been an easy subject to tackle. This is due to the impact the military dictatorship (1967–1974) had on the academic independence. The dictatorship tried to manipulate universities and strangle the reactions of professors and students against the régime, leading to violations in 1973. After the collapse of the regime, the Constitution of the Third Hellenic Democracy entrenched the right of the academic freedom and the freedom of teaching and research. Thus, any attempt at any kind of evaluation on performance and accountability of the higher education institutions was connected with a presumed attempt of ruling and controlling them and was considered a threat to their academic independence. This was also the case for Spain and Portugal that had suffered dictatorships as well. Within the spirit of democratisation of the Greek society, at that time, the law predicted a wide participation of students in the governance process of the universities and university

asylum in order to ensure the free circulation of ideas. However, there have been some evaluation attempts but without any success.

*Teaching Evaluation.* Until 2001, higher education included only the universities and not the technological education institutions, which were considered as professional institutions (polytechnics). The law framework (1268/82) that regulated higher education allowed teaching evaluation only as an element during the electorate or assessment process for the promotion of the academic staff. According to the law, teaching competence is evaluated every semester by the students who participate in the relevant course. The vice-rector on academic affairs and staff are responsible for the collection and processing of questionnaires and for keeping the relevant records. However, these procedures are seldom applied and teaching capacity is based on the views of the students' representatives that are present during the election process.

*Institutional Evaluation.* In the early 1990s an attempt was made to introduce institutional or departmental evaluation (Article 24 Law 2083/1992, 21.09.1992) but met strong reactions from the opposition political parties and universities as well. The law predicted the establishment of an 'Evaluation Committee' in the Ministry of National Education and Religious Affairs for a four-year tenure. The Evaluation Committee would consist of nine members, five of whom were to be nominated by the Rectors' Conference and the Presidents of the Administrative Committees of the technological education institutions. The remaining four members were to be academic staff of national or foreign higher education institutions with a relevant expertise who would be appointed by the Minister of Education. The Committee would take into consideration the schedule of the higher education institution and the result of the evaluation would affect the amount of extra funding for the institution (performance-based extra funding).

The law was treated as an attempt from the ministry to control universities and was not implemented. Rectors never appointed anyone for the Evaluation Committee until its annulment in 1995. The next government put the quality assurance issues under the responsibility of the National Council of Education that was established in 1995 but never actually functioned until 2004 when it was reactivated.

#### *Greek Participation in International and National Quality Assurance Initiatives*

Despite the strong resistance against any national evaluation framework, Greek universities and technological education institutions participated in various international evaluation projects since mid-1990s (Table 4). However, this participation has not been sufficient for the development of a quality culture.

#### *National Attempts as Part of the Europeanisation Process*

The Council's recommendation on quality assurance of 1998 reinforced the feeling of the shortage of a quality assurance mechanism. During the period 1998–1999, funding was given to the institutions sourced by the Second Community Support Framework (1993–1999) [Operational Programme for Education and Initial Vocational Training: I, Action-line 4: Development and Improvement of Tertiary Education], under the action 'Assessment of Higher Education Institutions' in order to be assessed by external evaluation

TABLE 4. Greek higher education institutions participation in international quality assurance initiatives

<b>EU initiative</b>	European Pilot Project for Evaluating Quality in Higher Education (1994–1995)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. National Technical University of Athens (Department of Electronic Engineering and Computer Engineering)</li> <li>2. Technological Education Institution of Patras (Department of Electrical Engineering)</li> </ol>
<b>IMHE-OECD project (1994–1998)</b>	Quality Management, Quality Assessment and the Decision-Making Process(1994–1998)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Athens University of Economics and Business</li> <li>2. Technological Education Institution of Patras</li> </ol>
<b>CRE/EUA projects</b>	Institutional Evaluation Programme (1994–)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. University of the Aegean, University of Ioannina</li> <li>2. Aristotle University of Thessaloniki</li> <li>3. Democritus University of Thrace</li> <li>4. University of Patras</li> <li>5. University of Macedonia Economic and Social Sciences, Thessaloniki</li> <li>6. University of Thessaly</li> <li>7. University of Crete</li> </ol>
	Quality Culture Programme Phase I: Management Network 1: Research	Aristotle University of Thessaloniki
	Phase II: Theme 1: Research Management and Managing Academic Staff Career	National and Kapodistrian University of Athens
	Phase III: Theme 3: Implementing Bologna Reforms Theme 4: Teaching and Learning: Implementing Learning Outcomes	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Athens University of Economics and Business</li> <li>2. University of the Aegean</li> </ol>

Sources: European Commission (1995), EUA Institutional evaluation programme (<http://www.eua.be/events/iep/who-has-participated>, retrieved 30 April 2007).

groups that were comprised of Greek and foreign experts. This practice continued with sources that ran up to 4.3 million euros from the Third Community Support Framework (2000–2006) (Kyrazis & Asderaki 2008, p. 132). However, there was neither a central strategy nor a certain methodology that was followed during this process. Institutions, either faculties or departments were funded to be assessed on a voluntary base; the results of these assessments were never taken into consideration and all these actions had no continuity. As Billiris (2005) mentioned ‘the participation of the academic community was not massive and there were not the appropriate conditions for follow-up activities and for the creation of a mechanism that would assist the development of a quality culture within the institutions’. However, it was revealed that institutions trusted international organisations and experts in contrast with any internal evaluation mechanism.

## The impact of the Bologna Process in the development of the Greek quality assurance system

### *Misinterpretation of the Bologna Process*

Greece was a signatory country of the Bologna Declaration (1999). Nevertheless, the Declaration did not receive the appropriate approval especially from the universities (Asderaki, 2008a). The controversial issue was the reference to the three-year minimum duration of the first cycle since most of the universities' first-cycle study programmes last four years, those of technical universities' last five years and those of medical schools' last six years. The three-year Bologna bachelors' programmes corresponded to those of the technological education institutions' which, at that time, did not belong to higher education.

The thirty-seventh Rectors' Conference (10–11 November 2000) declared unanimously this opposition:

The proposed model of the European University seems to abandon permanently the historical notion of *Universitas* and to adopt structures and functions that may resemble professional knowledge but do not express European culture on science and research.

If the suggestions proposed in Bologna Declaration are applied, the status of Greek Universities is degraded. In particular, the establishment of a first study-cycle of a three-year duration inevitably leads either to the division of the structure of studies in Greek Universities or to their *de facto* degradation by placing them in the category of non-Higher Education Institutions (which offer three-year duration study-programmes) that belong to the Post-Secondary Education.

Subsequently, the voices against Bologna Process were multiplied. The notion that public education would be degraded, that universities would be transformed into 'supermarkets' or 'quasi' universities and that students would be treated as customers, was widespread (Xanthopoulos, 2001, 2003, 2005). Meanwhile, there were controversial discussions about the upgrading of the technological education institutions and, therefore, the two technical universities and the schools of engineering reacted intensely.<sup>[2]</sup> On the other hand, technological education institutions adopted a positive attitude towards the Bologna Process seeking a way in order to be included *de facto* in higher education. Bologna seemed to enhance and complicate a national educational problem about which several judgements were issued by the Supreme (Administrative) Court and also to reinforce the keen competition between universities and technological education institutions.

However, the fifth goal of the Bologna Process gave impetus to the attempt of the Ministry of Education to establish 'a national system for quality assessment and assurance in higher education, relevant to the corresponding point of the Bologna Declaration and in the frame of the European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education' (Kladis, 2000). On 15 March 2001 the Ministry sent a 'Proposal for the establishment of a national quality assurance system in higher education' to higher education institutions. The proposal predicted the establishment of an 11-member National Council for Quality Assurance, which would operate in close liaison with the National Council of Education that would be reactivated by a Presidential Decree (Hellenic Ministry of National Education and Religious Affairs, 2001). In the meantime, the Law 2916/2001 upgraded the status of technological education institutions without any previous evaluation of the institutions and that led to strong reactions from the universities, to students' protests and rectors' resignations.

After the Ministerial Conference in Prague (2001), discussions on this issue revived. In early spring (21–22 March 2002) the Ministry organised a seminar titled ‘Evaluation and QA in Greek Higher Education’ where universities and technological education institutions were invited to express their views. A year later (March 2003), a draft law was presented to the Rectors’ Conference and the Ministry declared its intention to pass this law via parliament before September 2003, when the Berlin Ministerial Conference would take place. During this conference, the Greek minister and the other 39 European ministers, committed themselves to ‘support further development of quality assurance at institutional, national and European level’. Still, the law concerning quality assurance never passed through parliament before the government lost the elections in 2004.

In March 2004, the newly-elected government made pledges to carry out reforms in order to modernise and update the whole educational system and especially higher education within the framework of the Bologna Process and the Lisbon Strategy (Kyriazis, 2006, Kyriazis & Asderaki, 2008, pp. 51–55). After the elections, the National Education Council was reactivated and the issue of quality assurance was put in the centre of national dialogue. There, representatives of the higher education institutions, students, the political parties and the social partners were invited to participate. Soon many of them walked out. Discussions also took place within the Cultural and Educational Committee of the Parliament, where representatives of EUA and ENQA were invited to express their views and inform the Members of Parliament.

Although this period was full of controversial aspects, one could claim that it was a very fruitful one. The public dialogue highlighted the problems and deficiencies that Greek higher education had faced for many years, as well as the sound practices that other European countries followed. It also stressed the need for the modernisation of the obsolete legal framework that regulated higher education, the need for the enhancement of higher education institutions’ autonomy and flexibility to respond to contemporary challenges, as well as the need for supplementary funding for higher education institutions based on concrete strategies and goals set up within mid-term development programmes.

#### *The Stocktaking Exercise Effect*

The traffic-light scorecard was sent to the Ministry of Education in March 2005. The third column of Table 5 illustrates the ‘negative image’ of the country, raising a red alert. This, made the leadership of the ministry realise that there was no time left for delays and that decisions concerning the legislative framework for the establishment of the national quality assurance system had to be taken. Following Greece’s commitments in Berlin, the Minister presented the draft law for quality assurance before the Bergen Ministerial Conference (2005) and the country scorecard was improved as shown in column four of Table 5.

The Law 3374/2005 introduced a national quality assurance system in higher education according to the *European Standards and Guidelines* and established the ECTS and the Diploma Supplement. It ensured the independent, objective and transparent function of the national system, which included the main elements of the four-stage model (internal and external evaluation processes, publication of the report and international participation as well as peer review for the quality assurance agency). The law clearly stated that the quality assurance system would be both an improvement and information tool and not a compliance one.

Once again, the approval of the law caused reactions to universities by professors and paradoxically by student unions. On the other hand, the law was supported by all the technological education institutions which declared their willingness to be evaluated. They

TABLE 5. Greek Scorecard in Bergen Stocktaking Report (2005)

Quality assurance	Draft Scorecard, 14 March 2005	Scorecard of May 2005
1. Stage of development of quality assurance system	2	3
	Preliminary planning phase OR No quality assurance system in place yet, but initial debate and consultation has begun	Legislation or regulations prepared, awaiting implementation
2. Key elements of evaluation systems	2	4
	Implementation of an evaluation system including one of these elements has begun OR Preliminary planning is in progress for implementing an evaluation system including these elements	All of the following elements are in place, but are not in operation in all Higher Education <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- internal assessment</li> <li>- external review</li> <li>- participation of students</li> <li>- publication of results</li> <li>- international participation</li> </ul>
3. Level of participation of students	1	3
	No student involvement yet OR No clarity about structures and arrangements for student participation	Students participate at <b>two</b> of the four levels
4. Level of international participation, cooperation and networking	2	4
	Involvement in other forms of transnational co-operation in executing quality assurance	International participation at <b>two</b> of the three levels: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- In the governance of national bodies for quality assurance</li> <li>- In teams for external review</li> <li>- Membership of ENQA or other international networks</li> </ul>

Sources: Ministry of National Education and Religious Affairs and Bologna Process Stocktaking Report (2005, p. 79).

considered the evaluation as an opportunity to upgrade their status and to gain the competence to organise and operate postgraduate programmes independently. At the moment, technological education institutions offer only four-year undergraduate programmes and can participate in joint postgraduate programmes organised in cooperation with Greek or foreign universities but the degrees are awarded by the universities.

The establishment of the quality assurance system led to the improvement of the country's image as indicated in Table 6, which represents the Stocktaking Report (2007) results. In the following years the challenge was the implementation of quality assurance procedures. At the beginning of 2009, significant steps have been made. Internal evaluation procedures are in place in almost all universities and technological education institutions. A total of 196 departments are running internal evaluation processes, 77 are ready to be externally evaluated while five departments have already been externally evaluated by international experts and the evaluation reports have been published on the Hellenic Quality Assurance Agency for higher education web site both in Greek and in English. The national 'image' within the Bologna Process keeps improving. The most important is that introversion came to an end and Greek higher education institutions will foster their potential.

### **The national quality assurance system**

According to the Law 3374/2005 the main goal of the Greek quality assurance system is to establish an integrated approach in order to record, comprehend, evaluate systematically and improve the activity and tasks of all higher education institutions regarding their mission and their profile. The quality of teaching and research, study programmes and all other services provided by higher education institutions, are assessed by internal and external procedures using objective indicators and standards in order to note their achievements and also to trace their weaknesses in such a way that they can be treated accordingly, with the state support. Evaluation can concern institutions as a whole or particular faculties or departments or programmes.

The law establishes an independent administrative authority called the Hellenic Quality Assurance Agency for higher education (HQAA) located in Athens, which coordinates the evaluation processes at a national level. HQAA consists of 15 members, including professors nominated by the rectors' and presidents' of technological education institutions conferences, student representatives, researchers and social partners. The HQAA is a body responsible for the smooth operation of the national quality assurance system. It supports the higher education institutions during their self-evaluation processes and keeps the competent bodies of the state and higher education institutions up-to-date concerning the international trends and developments in quality assurance. HQAA compiles, keeps and revises a Register of Greek and foreign experts and specialists; it organises the external evaluation process, keeps an archive containing all evaluation reports and annually submits a general report to the Parliament. In this report, it makes suggestions and recommendations regarding the improvement of the national higher education system. Last but not least, HQAA is also placed under a self-evaluation and peer-review process. Since September 2007, HQAA has been an associated member of ENQA.

Higher education institutions evaluation is carried out in two stages. It starts with the internal evaluation process carried out by the institutions (self-evaluation) and continues with the external evaluation carried out by a group of experts, nominated by HQAA in cooperation with the higher education institution. Students and international experts also take part in quality assurance processes. In order to secure transparency, the external evaluation report

TABLE 6. Greek scorecard in London Stocktaking Report (2007)

Quality assurance	
4. National implementation of <i>Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the EHEA</i>	4 The process of implementing a national quality assurance system in line with the <i>Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the EHEA</i> has started
5. Stage of development of external quality assurance system	4 A quality assurance system is in operation at national level and applies to all higher education. The quality assurance system covers three elements: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- internal assessment</li> <li>- external review</li> <li>- publication of results</li> </ul> But no procedures are in place for peer review of national quality assurance agency(ies) according to the <i>Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance</i> in the EHEA
6. Level of student participation	4 Students participate at three of the four following levels: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- in the governance of national bodies for quality assurance</li> <li>- in external review of Higher education institutions and/or programmes: either in expert teams, as observers in expert teams or at the decision making stage,</li> <li>- in consultation during external reviews</li> <li>- in internal evaluations</li> </ul>
7. Level of international participation	4 International participation takes place at three of the four following levels: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- in the governance of national bodies for quality assurance,</li> <li>- in the external evaluation of national quality assurance agencies,</li> <li>- as members or observers within teams for external review of Higher education institutions and/or programmes,</li> <li>- membership of ENQA or other international networks</li> </ul>

Source: Bologna Process Stocktaking Report (2007, p. 65).

is publicised by HQAA. This process must be carried out every four years. Every time, the treatment of any previous weaknesses or inefficiency of the institution should be examined.

## Conclusions

The route to the establishment of a quality assurance system in Greece resembled the Odysseus' journey towards Ithaka, 'Full of adventures, full of discoveries',<sup>[3]</sup> placing the Greek higher education system and its problems under the spotlight, as well as focusing on the



political disputes that led to wide reforms. The Bologna Process and its action lines determined these reforms, which in their turn resulted in the modernisation and the internationalisation of the Greek higher education system. The stocktaking exercise despite its methodological weaknesses acted as catalyst and a 'window of opportunity' for the final decision-making process towards the establishment of the national quality assurance system. This system is in line with the *acquis Bolognaise* (*European Standards and Guidelines*) for quality assurance.

The whole procedure enhanced the interest of the academic community towards sound practices already followed by other European countries as to international and European developments. Quality assurance and Bologna Process were for a long time in the centre of discussions, conferences and parliamentary sessions. The flow of information and public dialogue contributed to minimising academic scepticism that evaluation would function as a compliance mechanism or as a mean for the decrease of the state funding. The fact that the system was structured according to the *European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance*, which were elaborated by the European Associations of the higher education institutions and students, and which establish independent agencies and practices implemented by 46 European countries, reinforced the above feeling for the greater part of academics, diminishing introversion. The participation of students in all the procedures of the evaluation process had the same effect on students. Three-and-a-half years later, taking into consideration the response of universities and technological education institutions that organised the internal evaluation process, one can firmly claim that the quality assurance system has re-established a fresh and more creative relationship between the state, academics, students and society and will reinforce the international reputation of Greek higher education institutions.

## Notes

- [1] The first version of this paper was announced at the 2nd Athens International Conference on University Assessment, Assessing Quality, in Athens on 12–14 October 2007, under the title 'The Bologna Process and its impact on the development of the Hellenic Quality Assurance System. See [http://quality.hau.gr/pages/key\\_abstracts.htm#Asderaki\\_abs](http://quality.hau.gr/pages/key_abstracts.htm#Asderaki_abs)
- [2] There are two technical universities in Greece, the National Technical University of Athens and the Technical University of Crete, which are different from the technological institutions. There are also schools of engineering in several universities such as the University of Thessaloniki, of Patras, of Thessaly. They offer five-year study programmes that lead to professions such as engineer, architect, civil engineer. The technological institutions offer four-year study programmes that do not meet licensing requirements for engineers as issued by the Technical Chamber of Greece.
- [3] *As you set out for Ithaca*  
*hope your road is a long one,*  
*full of adventure, full of discovery.*  
*Laistrygonians, Cyclops,*  
*angry Poseidon—don't be afraid of them:*  
*you'll never find things like that on your way*  
*as long as you keep your thoughts raised high,*  
*as long as a rare excitement*  
*stirs your spirit and your body.*

*Arriving there is what you're destined for*  
*wealthy with all you've gained on the way,*  
*not expecting Ithaca to make you rich.*

Kavafis, *Ithaca*

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