

FROM ESG 2005 TO ESG 2015: THE TIGHTENING OF A COGNITIVE FRAMEWORK

Miguel Souto Lopez*
François Fecteau**

*Université catholique de Louvain, miguel.souto@uclouvain.be

**Université libre de Bruxelles, françois.fecteau@ulb.ac.be

INTRODUCTION

A number of critical analyses have addressed the effects of quality assessment focussing, in particular, on the managerialization of higher education (Harris, 2011) through the introduction of New Public Management principles (Moorley, 2003), which are transforming the governance of universities (Kosmützky, 2016), and the power relationships between higher education institutions (Worthington & Hodgson, 2005). Other analyses have emphasised the market and competitive neo-liberal principles inherent in quality assurance in a globalised world (George, 2006; Jarvis, 2014), in which a university is expected to contribute to the growth of a knowledge-based economy (Olssen & Peters, 2007).

The contents of this article come in line with those analyses. The focus is on quality assurance within the Bologna Process, and the highlighting of the interconnection between European higher education policy and European Union lifelong learning policy, developed as part of the growth and employment strategy. In 2005, European ministers of higher education adopted the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) (Bergen communiqué, 2005). The ESG are the one of the most important instruments of the Bologna Process. They were drafted by the E4 group, which is made up of European institutional actors: the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) representing national quality assurance agencies of higher education, the European Students Union (ESU) representing students, the European University Association (EUA) representing universities, and the European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE) representing University colleges and other professional schools.

The ESG define a set of norms for evaluating higher education institutions, with which national quality assurance agencies are invited to comply. The ESG of 2005 (ENQA, 2005) were quite generic – this was because of concerns that existed over State-level reluctance to see their national sovereignty being undermined (Huisman & Westerheiden, 2010). Agencies were given a wide scope in their interpretation. In 2012, European ministers of higher education invited the E4 group to draft the new version of ESG (Bucharest communiqué, 2012). In 2015, the efforts invested in the process review resulted in the publication of the new version of the ESG, its main thrust being the introduction of more precise standards - thereby making them more restrictive insofar as there was less scope for differing interpretations.

This article considers the 2015 ESG to be the material expression of a cognitive framework. The ESG are a discourse encompassing a specific conception of higher education at European level in which a managerial vision of accountability is aimed at improving effectiveness. They anticipate the involvement of stakeholders at varying degrees of proximity to a university in programme design and evaluation as well as the empowering of higher education institutions, and the expectation that a culture of quality will be disseminated. They also advocate a student-centred approach.

This article delivers an analysis of the latent meaning of the ESG 2015. On one hand, the adoption of more accurate version of the ESG is an expression of the tightening of a cognitive framework that has progressively imposed itself from 1998 onwards through the Sorbonne Declaration. On the other hand, the cognitive framework - implemented via the ESG 2015 - extended its reach to encompass the European lifelong learning strategy, which aims to provide a flexible workforce able to adapt itself to the labour market's rapidly changing skillset requirements. It is in this way that the ESG have contributed to bringing higher education into line with the European Union agenda's targets focussing on knowledge-based economy growth, as first defined in the Lisbon Strategy (European Council, 2000) and later in the Europe 2020 Strategy (EC, 2010).

THE SOCIOLOGY OF THE APPARATUS

The concept of apparatus, defined by Foucault (1994) as a set of discursive and non-discursive heterogeneous elements that orientate the directions and thinking of involved parties, turns out to be a particularly heuristic

way of studying the way the cognitive framework, propounded within the ESG, has become tighter between 2005 and 2015. However it can also be employed to study the latent meanings of the ESG 2015 by considering them in relation to other instruments:

“the apparatus is the system of relations that can be established between all the heterogeneous elements that compose it. Thus, the relations between these elements give the sense of the apparatus and of all the elements that compose it. Every element is carried by strategic actors aiming at a precise objective. But these actors are forced to place their element, whatever its nature, in the existing apparatus. By being absorbed by the apparatus, every element modifies it and is modified by it at once. These modifications concern just as much the use made of each of these elements as the meaning which is given to it” (Charlier & Croché, 2011:306).

More specifically, this paper focusses on the “European higher education apparatus” constructed to study the Bologna Process’s development and history (Croché, 2010). The apparatus elements are all discourses and objects - abstract or concrete - that are directly or indirectly related to each other. These steer the behaviour of parties involved in European higher education. It is therefore impossible to describe the European higher education apparatus exhaustively, so the research work concentrates on surveying the most significant elements – in other words, those with the greatest influence and visibility (Charlier & Croché, 2013; Charlier & Panait, 2015; Croché, 2010; Souto Lopez, 2016).

This article concerns itself with a specific category of objects: policy instruments (Lascoumes & Le Galès, 2007). Their architecture and durability ensure that the apparatus is stable. The architecture imposes constraints of use, and imposes meaning that is more or less flexible. So, whilst the ESG are open to interpretation, they cannot be used to evaluate anything other than higher education institutions and the way in which national evaluation agencies carry out their evaluations. The instruments enable action as much as they restrict it. The durable nature of the instruments also ensures that the device is stable – they have a history behind them, and they continue to exert their influence as long as human beings agree to engage with them. Over time, elements appear and disappear while other elements transform themselves: the apparatus is reconfigured every time, impacting on the relationship between its elements. In this way, the ESG were adopted in 2005 and were then revised in 2015, establishing new or more pronounced links with other elements of the apparatus.

Each element of the apparatus is connected to the others both directly and indirectly. Direct relationships are these in which two elements are linked without the intervention of a third element. Indirect relationships are those in which two elements are connected with each other by way of the intermediary existence of a third element. So, we have elements A, B and C: were A and B to be in a direct relationship and B to be in a direct relationship with C, then A and C would be indirectly linked. The link may be direct in one direction whilst being indirect in another direction. In essence, A cannot establish a direct link with C, whereas C establishes a link towards A. This means that A is in an indirect relationship with C via B, and C is in a direct relationship with A. This can be mapped out as follows:

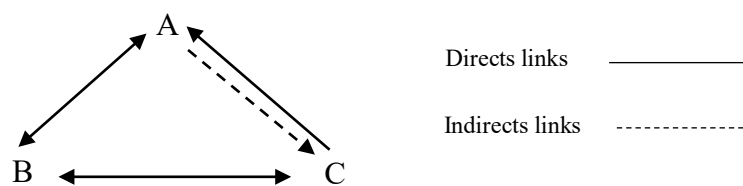


Figure 1. Directs and indirect links of the apparatus

The apparatus is an interpretative concept of the social order. The term “order” refers to an overall structure of the elements that make up the apparatus whose relationships are organised in line with an overall coherence. The structure is both what governs the elements and their relationship and the outcome of the order itself: the order is not a fixed, immutable state as such. The apparatus is an ongoing, evolving process whose outcome is always temporary, and this temporary aspect therefore requires a socio-historical analysis.

METHODOLOGICAL ELEMENTS

This article posits that the 2015 ESG contribute to integrating higher education into the European lifelong learning and education policy. This premise is made concrete in two ways: first, by the adoption of the new version of the ESG by European ministers of higher education: in this way, the 2015 ESG became an element of the European higher education apparatus. Secondly, the explicit connections established by the ESG between the learning outcomes and the overarching framework of qualifications of the European Higher Education Area

(QF-EHEA) indirectly link the ESG to the European Qualification Framework for lifelong learning (EQF), and therefore to the European lifelong learning and education policy. Those two instruments will be discussed in detail in the following sections.

To test this hypothesis, we will proceed with a comparative lexicometric analysis of the 2005 and 2015 versions of the ESG, combining this with a socio-historical perspective based on institutional documents produced during the Bologna and Copenhagen Process. The Copenhagen Process, launched in 2002, is directly coordinated by the European Commission. It anticipates cooperation between European higher education systems and professional training, leading to the fulfilment of the European growth and employment strategy. The EQF was constructed within the confines of this process.

FROM THE 2005 ESG TO THE 2015 ESG: UNDERPINNING THE COHERENCE OF THE COORDINATION

Shortly after the adoption of the 2005 ESG, the E4 group and the European Commission published a series of reports emphasising the perfectibility of the 2005 ESG. In 2007, the E4 group published a report in which it stated that “Care should be taken to make sure that the European Standards and Guidelines do not become a simple checklist for compliance purposes and that any revisions reflect the needs of higher education more broadly” (E4 group, 2007, p. 14). In 2009, a European Commission report (EC, 2009) recommended a revision of the ESG that, since its publication, has been reiterated systematically during the various encounters among entities involved in higher education. (E4 group, 2011). European higher education ministers expressed a wish in 2009 to see the E4 group continue to work towards strengthening the European quality dimension (Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve communiqué, 2009).

In 2011, the E4 group published the findings of a survey carried out in 2010 relating to the usage of the ESG in the various countries in the Bologna process, all within the scope of an ESG revision project (E4 group, 2011). The main conclusions of this survey showed that the ESG exerted a considerable influence on quality development in the countries, and was to be one of the most significant achievements of the Bologna process. In that respect, the revision of the 2005 ESG relates more to their formulation than to their contents and principles. The report emphasised the observed differences in interpretation. These were attributed to terminological issues, confusion between standards and guidelines, differing visions of quality, and diversity of national and institutional contexts. Such differences would be accompanied by the risk of inconsistent interpretations and implementation. In 2012, ministers invited the E4 group, together with the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR), Education International and Business Europe, to work on revising the ESG (Bucharest communiqué, 2012).

BETWEEN THE HARMONISATION OF POLICIES AND THE DIVERSITY OF EUROPEAN SYSTEMS

The 2005 and 2015 ESG express a tension between the diversity of the European higher education systems and the drive to harmonise practices. On the one hand, overly restrictive standards risk triggering reluctance among States, while on the other hand overly flexible standards would result in an excessive diversity of interpretation and practice. In order to resolve this tension, it was decided that standards would be put forward that were aimed at encouraging the adoption of common policies among the Bologna signatory countries, whilst also triggering the allegiance of the States. Such a balance is referred to in an identical fashion in the 2005 and 2015 versions of the ESG, indicating that the EHEA: “with its 40 states is characterised by its diversity of political systems, higher education systems, socio-cultural and educational traditions, languages, aspirations and expectations. This makes a single monolithic approach to quality, standards and quality assurance in higher education inappropriate” (ENQA, 2005:11 & ENQA, 2015:8).

This clearly demonstrates the emphasis in the 2005 and 2015 ESG on the diversity that characterises the countries engaged in the Bologna process, and their higher education systems. For this reason, the two versions assert that there can be no monolithic vision of quality. In 2005, this diversity is presented as “one of the glories”: “In the light of this diversity and variety, generally acknowledged as being one of the glories of Europe” (ENQA, 2005:11). In the ESG 2015 version, this quote has been removed from the document.

Hence, we observe a shift in which the diversity of European systems, considered as “one of the glories” (ENQA, 2005), is transformed into an obstacle to the harmonisation of practices (E4 group, 2011). This is a far from trivial development. It demonstrates the tightening of the cognitive framework of the ESG, in which the concern over the reluctance of States who might feel that their sovereignty is being undermined is dissolving. This was a good time to be gearing up for a reinforcement of the restrictive nature of the ESG through a reduction in the margin for interpretation. National agencies, who are in principle independent of any national

public authority, remain free to comply or not comply with the ESG. However, compliance with ESG raises an important issue: agencies' engagement with the EQAR, adherence to the ENQA as a full member, and therefore involvement in the definition of a quality evaluation policy at European level.

DISAMBIGUATION OF GUIDELINES, CLARIFICATION OF STANDARDS

A first clarification lies in the distinctions between standards and guidelines. Standards are objectives formulated in generic terms that have to be achieved by higher education establishments and agencies, while guidelines are formulated in a far more precise way but constitute only suggestions as to how the standards are to be reached. Tables 1 and 2 below show the respective frequency with which the words 'should' and 'must' appear in the 2005 and 2015 versions. The corpus composed of the 2005 and 2015 ESG has been split into two sub-corpus texts in order to analyse the changes in these frequencies of appearance in the standards section on the one part, and the guidelines section on the other.

For the standards section, the table below shows the stability of the frequency of the prescriptive form 'should' in the two versions:

Word	Standards 2005	Standards 2015
Must	0	0
Should	36	37

Table 1: Frequency of words "must" and "should" in the Standards 2005 and 2015.

For the guidelines section, the prescriptive forms "must" and "should" have completely disappeared from the guidelines in the 2015 version of the ESG:

Word	Guidelines 2005	Guidelines 2015
Must	3	0
Should	44	0

Table 2: Frequency of words "must" and "should" in the Guidelines 2005 and 2015.

The equally high frequency of prescriptive forms in the 2005 guidelines are a source of confusion as to what is actually required by the ESG (standards) and what is not (guidelines). Table 2 shows that these prescriptive forms were removed from the 2015 version of the ESG, suggesting that the drafters of the 2015 ESG were seeking to resolve the ambiguity between standards and guidelines, which, however, does not take anything away from the prescriptive nature of standards: "The standards make use of the common English usage of "should" which has the connotation of prescription and compliance" (ENQA, 2015:7).

A detailed comparative analysis of the 2005 and 2015 standards published in 2016 by Equip (Enhancing Quality through innovative Policy & Practice) focusses on the standards reconfiguration during the revision of the ESG. Although the document recalls that "The ESG 2015 continue to recognise the diversity of European higher education systems, institutions, and quality assurance agencies and continue to maintain, as in 2005, that 'a single monolithic approach to quality and quality assurance in higher education' in the EHEA is not appropriate" (EQUIP, 2016:2), the fact remains that the clarification of the standards restricts the agencies' room for manoeuvre insofar as the scope of application of what has been prescribed is reduced. EQUIP asserts that:

"the ESG 2015 take account of the developments in European higher education since 2005, such as the shift to student-centred learning and the need for flexible learning paths and the recognition of competencies gained outside formal education. In addition, the increased internationalisation of higher education, the spread of digital learning, and new forms of delivery are listed as important developments influencing the quality assurance of higher education. The ESG 2015 also make reference to other tools at the European level that contribute to transparency and trust in higher education, such as the qualifications frameworks, the ECTS, and the diploma supplement" (id.:1).

This quote demonstrates the link established with lifelong learning and education through the attention to the recognition of skills obtained outside the confines of formal education, as well as links with other instruments. The linking of the 2015 ESG with other instruments is also a linking of the cognitive framework of the 2015 ESG to the cognitive framework of each instrument. The following sections demonstrate that the most clearly expressed link is the one to the qualifications frameworks.

REINFORCING THE EFFECTS OF QUALITY THROUGH THE ESTABLISHMENT OF RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHER INSTRUMENTS

The comparative lexicometric analysis shows the lexical forms that mark the 2015 version of the ESG compared to those of 2005, as shown in the graph below.

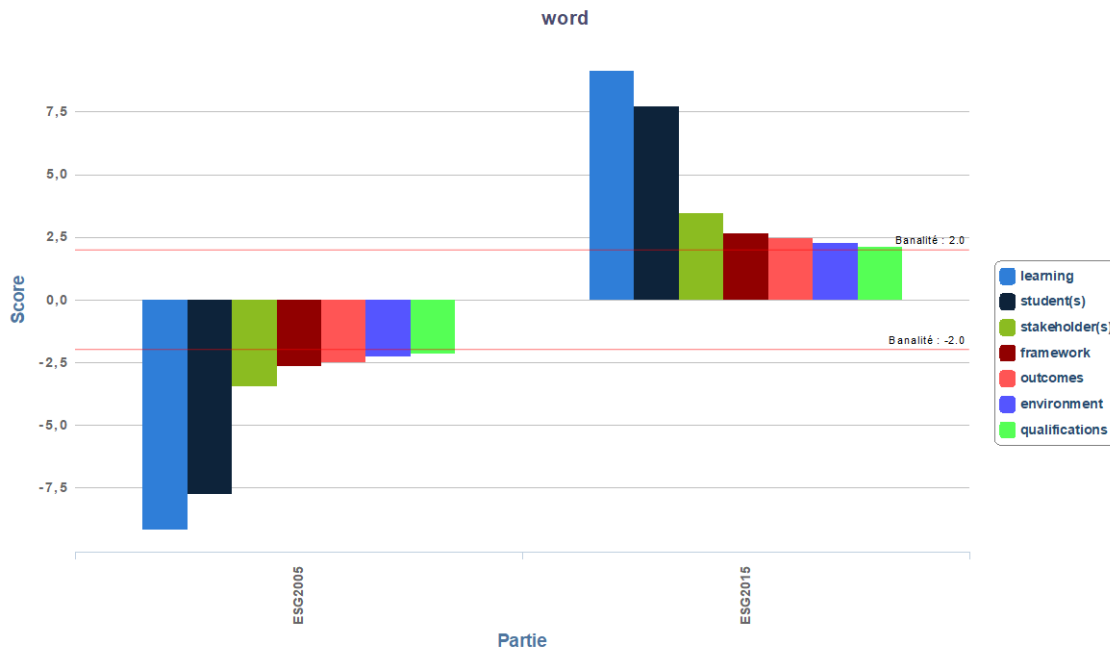


Figure 2. 2015 ESG: the interconnection of the Bologna instruments.

From the over-representation of the terms ‘learning’, ‘student(s)’, ‘framework’, ‘outcomes’ and ‘qualifications’ in the 2015 ESG, three observations can be made. First, the 2015 ESG emphasize the student-centred learning approach. Secondly, they advocate greater stakeholder involvement. Thirdly, and probably the most relevant point for this paper, there is an explicit relationship between the ESG, the learning outcomes and the qualifications frameworks. In the tables below, this relationship is illustrated by two observations. First, the phrase ‘learning outcomes’ appears more frequently in ESG 2015 than it does in 2005. Secondly, the expressions ‘qualification framework(s)’ and ‘framework for qualifications’ first appear in 2015:

Phrase	Frequency	ESG 2005	ESG 2015
Learning outcomes	10	3	7

Table 3: ESG 2005 & 2015: phrase with the form “learning”.

Phrase	ESG 2005	ESG 2015	Total
framework for qualifications	0	1	1
qualifications framework	0	1	1
qualifications frameworks	0	2	2

Table 4: ESG 2005 & 2015: phrase with the form “framework (s) and qualifications”.

The 2015 ESG emphasize the relationship between ‘learning outcomes’ and establish new links to the qualification frameworks. This interconnection between ESG, learning outcomes and qualifications frameworks is illustrated in particular by standard 1.2 “Design and approval of programmes” in the 2015 ESG:

“Institutions should have processes for the design and approval of their programmes. The programmes should be designed so that they meet the objectives set for them, including the intended learning outcomes. The qualification resulting from a programme should be clearly specified and communicated, and refer to the correct level of the national qualifications framework for higher education and, consequently, to the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area” (ENQA, 2015:11).

This lexicometric analysis does no more than highlight the most significant differences between the 2005 and 2015 ESG versions, including the explicit linking of the ESG to learning outcomes and the QF-EHEA, and their evolution from 2005 to 2015. This observation does however demand a consideration of the construction of these links within a sociohistorical perspective. The next sections will describe the direct links constructed between these instruments and the indirect links constructed between the ESG and the EQF, through the intermediary of the learning outcomes and the QF-EHEA.

DIRECT LINKS TO THE LEARNING OUTCOMES AND THE QF-EHEA

It was in Berlin in 2003 that learning outcomes were first brought up by European higher education Ministers as a way of describing the qualifications expected at the end of each higher education cycle, so that they could be made comparable over and above the diversity of national systems (Berlin communiqué, 2003, p. 4). Ministers also took the opportunity on the same occasion to discuss the future QF-EHEA. An informal network of experts financed by the European Commission – the Joint Quality Initiative – was working on just that, and was also tasked with considering the evaluation of the quality of higher education. The Joint Quality Initiative put forward what became known as the Dublin descriptors in 2002 to cover the first two cycles of higher education (Adam, 2003), extended to the third cycle of higher education in 2004.

During that same year – 2004 – the Bologna Follow-Up Group approved the constitution of the Bologna Working Group on Qualifications Framework (BWGQF), set up to put together the QF-EHEA. This group drew very heavily on the Dublin descriptors, and in February 2005 the group published a report (BWGQF, 2005) that defined the QF-EHEA. This dealt with the three cycles of higher education and set out the number of ECTS credits that a student had to achieve at the conclusion of each cycle apart from the third cycle, the doctorate. The report defined 5 generic descriptors: knowledge and understanding, applying knowledge and understanding, making judgements, communications skills, and learning skills (id.:65). For each cycle and each descriptor, a set of specified learning outcomes corresponds to what the student has to fully understand at the end of each cycle.

The QF-EHEA is an instrument that aims to bring European higher education systems into line and make them compatible with each other. Each higher education system is to put together its own national higher education qualifications framework in line with the specific characteristics of its institutional context. Each higher education programme must be positioned on the national framework, and each position on the national framework must be in line with a QF-EHEA position. One of the quality assurance roles is to ensure that positions are set within the national framework, and to ensure that the ways in which they are brought into line are consistent (ibid).

So there is a close relationship between learning outcomes, quality assurance, QF-EHEA and ECTS. It is no coincidence that the 2005 Bergen conference was the point at which ministers all adopted the ESG and the QF-EHEA. Furthermore, the BWGQF suggests that it has taken into account the E4 group and also the future European Qualification Framework for lifelong learning that was tried out as part of the Copenhagen Process. In this way, a connection is established between the Bologna Process instruments and the EQF. This connection with the ESG is indirect since it is enacted via the QF-EHEA and the learning outcomes. The next section will show that this connection contributes to placing the Bologna Process within the context of the European lifelong learning and education policy.

INDIRECT LINKS TO THE EQF

On April 23rd 2008, the European Parliament and the European Union Council published a Recommendation [...] on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning (OJEU, 2008). This is the most iconic of the instruments within the European lifelong learning and education policy, and it sets out 3 descriptors (knowledge, aptitudes and competencies) divided into 8 levels from the most elementary (level 1) to the most advanced (level 8). A set of learning outcomes is defined for each descriptor and each level.

The principle of the EQF is the same as that of the QF-EHEA, the main point of difference being that the EQF relates to other kinds of training (formal, non-formal and informal education) aside from higher education. The idea is to draw on a common reference framework to position certifications delivered by the educational, vocational training and validation of prior experience systems.

The EQF could be considered an element of the European higher education apparatus in the same way as the instruments already referred to herein, as it is directly linked to the QF-EHEA. There is explicit reference to compatibility between levels 5, 6, 7 and 8 of the EQF and respectively between the short cycle of the first cycle, and then the first, second and third cycles of higher education. Furthermore, European higher education

ministers have been emphasising the importance of complementarity since 2005 between the QF-EHEA and the future EQF when the QF-EHEA was adopted in Bergen (Bergen communiqué, 2005, p. 2).

The EQF was drawn up within the framework of the Copenhagen process launched on 29th and 30th November 2002, when ministers in charge of vocational education and training from 32 European countries signed the Copenhagen declaration (Copenhagen Declaration, 2002) in which they agreed – along with the European Commission – to strengthen their cooperation in professional training and teaching. For lifelong learning, the objective is to integrate vocational training and education systems into the Lisbon strategy: “The development of high quality vocational education and training is a crucial and integral part of this strategy, notably in terms of promoting social inclusion, cohesion, mobility, employability and competitiveness” (id.:1). Among the four major priorities defined for vocational education and training is one that relates to the potential for recognising skills and qualifications and introducing a quality assurance process. The priority given to skills and qualifications recognition is suggestive of the concept of a European Qualification Framework, whose orientation was clearly announced in 2004: “There is a need to develop a European framework, based on national frameworks, to stand as a common reference for the recognition of qualifications and competences. The recognition of diplomas and certificates everywhere in Europe is essential to the development of a European labour market and of European citizenship” (OJEU, 2004a:1).

The idea is to encourage permeability between all types and levels of education, training and validation of prior experience. Such permeability means that an individual must be able to move from one system to another at any time in their life, and must be able to acquire competencies or get them recognised and have them certificated. The European Union thereby aims to deliver “the smooth and effective functioning of the European, national and sectoral labour markets” (Maastricht communiqué, 2004, p. 4).

The drive towards permeability between the various forms of learning, recognition and transferability of qualifications foreshadows a network organisation of learning and validation of prior experience systems. According to the Commission, this organisation within the network works as long as “people need to want and to be able to take their lives into their own hands – to become, in short, active citizens” (EC 2000:7). For the Commission, the active citizen is characterised first and foremost by being employable (EC, 2000).

In 2005, the European Commission drew up a proposal for a recommendation aimed at establishing the EQF (EC, 2006). Citing the speed of economic and technological change along with the ageing of the European population, the Commission stated that “lifelong learning is essential if the Lisbon objectives are to be achieved” (id.:7) but that it is hindered by a “lack of communication and cooperation between education and training providers and authorities at national as well as at international level” (id.:8). The obstacles criticised by the Commission relate to the isolation of the learning systems from each other both within a country and between countries. The network sought by the Commission can only come about through the fluid circulation of communication and cooperation between the actors – only then, says the Commission, will it be open and lead to learner and worker mobility.

The transparency that the EQF has to deliver is considered to be all the more necessary given that European training and educational systems are particularly diversified. This diversity can become an obstacle if there is no Europe-wide common reference framework to translate these differences. Transparency should, therefore, encourage the fluid circulation of information, learners and workers within an open network.

On May 22nd 2017, the European Union Parliament and Council published a new recommendation relating to the EQF that cancelled that of 2008. The new recommendation further tightened the relationship with the Bologna quality assurance process by recalling that the ESG served as a basis for defining the quality assurance principles within the confines of the EQF, and that these are presently compatible with the ESG:

“Trust in the quality and level of qualifications that are part of national qualifications frameworks or systems referenced to the EQF (hereafter ‘qualifications with an EQF level’) is essential in order to support mobility of learners and workers within and across sectoral and geographical borders. The recommendation of [...] 2008 [...] contained common principles on quality assurance in higher education and vocational education and training. They respected the responsibility of Member States for quality assurance arrangements applying to national qualifications in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity. The [ESG] and the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training build a basis for such common principles” (OJEU, 2017:16).

The role of quality is clear: to ensure that there is confidence in training levels in order to generate worker and learner mobility. Through the EQF, the ultimate purposes of lifelong learning are also those of higher education. Links are also intermingled with transferable unit systems such as ECTS and their equivalent in vocational and education training, the European Credits for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET), with a view to facilitating the transition from one learning system to another:

“Credit systems can help individuals to progress in learning by facilitating flexible learning pathways and transfer across different levels and types of education and training and across national borders, enabling learners to accumulate and transfer different learning outcomes acquired in different learning contexts, including online, non-formal and informal learning” (ibid.).

In addition, the document already anticipates other links with the Bologna process, most notably where it refers to the creation of a register equivalent to the EQAR: “The possibility of developing a register, outside the field of higher education, for bodies monitoring quality assurance systems for qualifications could be explored” (ibid.).

CONCLUSION

Since its activation in 1998 with the Sorbonne Declaration (Croché, 2010), an increasing number of elements have fed into the European higher education apparatus, with some of these elements having a particularly significant effect - among them the instruments described in this article. Over time, some elements have appeared and then gone on to be replaced by others, such as the transition from the 2005 ESG to the 2015 ESG. Other links have also been created with other elements that do not on the face of it directly concern higher education such as the Lisbon strategy first of all, and then Europe 2020.

The cognitive framework of the ESG 2005 was flexible to begin with, and was then tightened up with the adoption of the 2015 ESG. Prior to the adoption of the 2005 ESG, those involved in European higher education had to accept that higher education quality evaluation policy was coordinated at European level, with the foundation of ENQA in 2000, a consequence of a European recommendation (OJEU, 1998). Then also had to agree to refer to the common standards that constituted the ESG. Later on, they had to agree to EQAR evaluating and accrediting the conformity of national agencies to the ESG. They then had to agree to clarify the ESG, thus reducing their potential margin of interpretation and also their room for manoeuvre. The 2015 ESG are the material manifestation of this tightening - in other words the European institutional actors’ willing subjugation that is gradually coming to fruition.

This willing subjugation concerns not just the overt meaning of the 2015 ESG relating to the way higher education systems and national evaluation agencies should be assessed but also their latent meaning, which becomes accessible by linking the ESG with other instruments as the QF-EHEA and the EQF – in other words, bringing the cognitive framework embedded within the ESG into a relationship with those embedded respectively by the QF-EHEA and the EQF. This linking between those cognitive frameworks specific to these instruments results in a broader framework that refers to the European “narrative” (Radaelli, 2000) which tells a story about the world, about Europe and its place in the world. This narrative, based on the *Memorandum on lifelong learning* (EC, 2000), the Lisbon Strategy (European Council, 2000) and the *Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe* (OJEU, 2004b), can be summarized as follows (Souto Lopez, 2016).

Europe has entered into a knowledge-based economy whose growth engine relies on technological innovation. The qualification needs of the employment market are changing rapidly as the population ages, and these changes carry with them a dual risk: an increase in structural unemployment, and the occurrence of manpower shortages. In circumstances like these, European citizens need to play an active role in the European Union’s social and economic development, and as far as the EU is concerned this involvement has to take the form of having a job. Individuals therefore have a duty to keep their skills up to date and to acquire new ones throughout their lives. They must be active citizens: this means being flexible, adaptable, mobile, multi-lingual and employable. The European Union and member States must, in return, create the right conditions for individuals to be in a position to enjoy lifelong learning opportunities by connecting the educational, vocational training and validation of prior experience systems. All this is to be achieved through the mutual recognition of certificates issued by each State. We would thereby be witnessing the definition of a social contract embedded within an active social State - one that manifests itself in general discourse through the stated intention of building a vast European network of the production and certification of skills useful to the employment market.

The relationship between the Bologna Process and a lifelong learning policy already existed with the Sorbonne Declaration (1998) which indicated that “education and training throughout life becomes a clear obligation”

(id.:1) in a context in which diversification of vocational careers had now become the norm. The idea was above all to encourage universities to offer educational programmes that enabled individuals to pick up their studies at any point during their career. Croché (2010) showed how the European Commission took over the leadership of the Bologna Process when, in 2003, ministers agreed the Lisbon Strategy objectives (Berlin communiqué, 2003). Considering the fact that we are seeing the Lisbon objectives being integrated along with the establishment of a relationship between the ESG and the EQF and the creation of ever closer links between European lifelong training and education policy and certain elements of the Bologna Process, it appears that we are at a tipping point. The issue is no longer to integrate lifelong learning into higher education policy, but rather to integrate higher education into European lifelong learning and education policy.

We now find ourselves within a discourse register positioned at European level. This does not at all mean that individual actors have interiorised this cognitive framework, nor that they have adhered to it. In order to study the concrete effects of the ESG in greater detail, it would be worth studying the ways in which these objects have been re-appropriated by individual actors in their daily practice. It is also worth shedding light on something of a blind spot in the literature by measuring the extent to which countries that are not members of the European Union and not seeking European integration assimilate these objects. Do these countries also contribute to the development of the European social project? Questions like these raise further issues. This article has dealt with processes that have resulted in a convergence in the behaviours and practices of the entities involved, but what about the process of resistance?

REFERENCES

- Adam, S. (2003). *Qualifications Structures in European Higher Education. To consider alternative approaches for clarifying the cycles and levels in European higher education qualifications*. Danish Bologna Seminar 27-28th March 2003
- Bergen communiqué (2005) *The European Higher Education Area - Achieving the Goals, Communiqué of the Conference of European Ministers Responsible for Higher Education*. Bergen, 19-20 May.
- Berlin communiqué (2003) *Realising the European Higher Education Area, Communiqué of the Conference of Ministers responsible for Higher Education*. Berlin, 19 September.
- Bucharest Communiqué (2012). *Making the Most of Our Potential: Consolidating the European Higher Education Area, Communiqué of the Conference of European Ministers Responsible for Higher Education*, Bucharest, 26-27 April.
- BWGQF [Bologna Working Group on Qualification Framework] (2005). *A Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area, Copenhagen*. Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation.
- Charlier, J.-É. & Croché, S. (2011) The Bologna Process: a tool for Europe's hegemonic project on Africa, *Power and Education*, 3(3), 304-316.
- Charlier, J.-É. & Croché, S. (2013). Comment le processus de Bologne a modifié la signification et les enjeux de l'évaluation des enseignements. *Revue Education Comparée (Nouvelle série)*, n° 8, 43-62.
- Charlier, J.-É. & Panait, O. (2015). The Bologna Policy Forum: The temptation to act on non-European higher education systems. In J.R. Olson, H. Biseth & G. Ruiz (Eds), *Educational internationalization, Academic Voices and Public Policy*. Rotterdam: Sense Publishers, 59-76.
- Copenhagen Declaration. (2002). *Declaration of the European Ministers of Vocational Education and Training, and the European Commission, convened in Copenhagen on 29 and 30 November 2002, on enhanced European cooperation in vocational education and training*.
- Croché, S. (2010). *Le pilotage du processus de Bologne*. Louvain-la-Neuve: Academia.
- E4 Group (2007). *Report to the London Conference of Ministers on a European Register of Quality*. Helsinki: ENQA.
- E4 group (2011). *Mapping the Implementation and Application of the ESG (MAP-ESG Project). Final report of the project Steering Group*. Brussels: ENQA.
- EC [European Commission] (2000). *A Memorandum on Lifelong Learning*. SEC (2000) 1832, 30 October.
- EC [European Commission] (2006). *Commission Staff Working Document Accompanying document to the Proposal for a Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the Establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning. Impact Assessment*. SEC (2006) 1094, Brussels, 5 September.
- EC [European Commission] (2009). *Report on Progress in Quality Assurance in Higher Education*. COM (2009) 487 final, Brussels, 21 September.
- EC [European Commission] (2010). *Europe 2020. A European strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth*. COM (2010) 2020, Brussels, 3 March.
- ENQA (2005). *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area*. Helsinki: European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education.

- ENQA (2015). *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area*. Brussels: EURASHE.
- EQUIP (2016). *Comparative analysis of the ESG 2005 and ESG 2015*. Available at: <http://www.equip-project.eu/> (accessed 5 February 2019).
- European Council (2000). *Presidency Conclusions Lisbon European Council*, 23 and 24 March.
- Foucault, M. (1994). *Dits et écrits*, Vol. 2. Paris: Gallimard.
- George, E.S. (2006). Positioning higher education for the knowledge-based economy. *Higher Education*, 52(4), 589-610.
- Harris, D. (2011). Managerialism and Myth: the legitimacy of management in higher education and the consequences of its decline. *Power and Education*, 3(2), 117-127.
- Huisman, J. & Westerheijden, D.F. (2010) Bologna and Quality Assurance: Progress Made or Pulling the Wrong Cart? *Quality in Higher Education*, 16(1), 63-66.
- Jarvis, D.S.L. (2014) Regulating higher education: Quality assurance and neo-liberal managerialism in higher education—A critical introduction. *Policy and Society*, 33(3), 155-166.
- Kosmützky, A. (2016). Mission Statements and the Transformation of German Universities into Organizational Actors. *Recherches sociologiques et anthropologiques*, 47(1), 41-66.
- Lascoumes, P. & Le Galès, P. (2007). Introduction: Understanding Public Policy through Its Instruments—From the Nature of Instruments to the Sociology of Public Policy Instrumentation. *Governance: An International Journal of Policy, Administration, and Institutions*, 20(1), 1-21.
- Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve Communiqué (2009). *The Bologna Process 2020 - The European Higher Education Area in the new decade, Communiqué of the Conference of European Ministers Responsible for Higher Education*. Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve, 28-29 April.
- London Communiqué (2007). *Towards the European Higher Education Area: responding to challenges in a globalised world*. London, 18 May.
- Maastricht Communiqué (2004). *Maastricht Communiqué on the Future Priorities of Enhanced European Cooperation in Vocational Education and Training (VET)*. Maastricht, 14 December.
- Morley, L. (2003). *Quality and Power in Higher Education*. Philadelphia: The Society for Research into Higher Education and Open University Press.
- OJEU [Official Journal of the European Union] (1998). *Council Recommendation of 24 September 1998 on European cooperation in quality assurance in higher education*. L270, 56-59.
- OJEU [Official Journal of the European Union] (2004a). 'Education & Training 2010'. *The success of the Lisbon Strategy hinges on urgent reforms. Joint interim report of the Council and the Commission on the implementation of the detailed work programme on the follow-up of the objectives of education and training systems in Europe*. C104, 1-19.
- OJEU [Official Journal of the European Union] (2004b). *Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe*. C310, 1-474.
- OJEU [Official Journal of the European Union] (2008). *Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 April 2008 on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning*. C111, 1-7.
- OJEU [Official Journal of the European Union] (2017). *Council Recommendation of 22 May 2017 on the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning and repealing the recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 April 2008 on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning*. C189, 15-28.
- Olssen, M. & Peters, M.A. (2005). Neoliberalism, higher education and the knowledge economy: from the free market to knowledge capitalism. *Journal of Education Policy*, 20(3), 313-345.
- Radaelli, C.M., Logiques de pouvoir et récits dans les politiques publiques de l'Union européenne. *Revue française de science politique*, 50(2), 255-276.
- Sorbonne Declaration (1998). *Joint declaration on harmonisation of the architecture of the European higher education system by the four Ministers in charge for France, Germany, Italy and the United Kingdom*. Paris, 25 May.
- Souto Lopez, M. (2016). *Acquis d'apprentissage et enseignement supérieur. Le management par la pédagogie au service du projet de société européen*. Louvain-la-Neuve: Academia.
- Worthington, F. & Hodgson, J. (2005). Academic labour and the politics of quality in higher education: a critical evaluation of the conditions of possibility of resistance. *Critical Quarterly*, 47(1-2), 96-110.