

Since fifty years now, countries all over the world have considerably expanded their public universities or have seen the expansion of their private universities. The overall aims of these policies and developments are

- to strengthen the national science and research base, within and outside the university sector (in the beginning with a strong emphasis on nuclear and space research and technologies, but always including broader motives such as progress of mankind in understanding our existence and promoting sustainable ways of living),
- to provide higher education and training not only in order to train young researchers but go far beyond and meet the aspirations of students and their families for highly esteemed university degrees and to meet the growing demand of industry for scientifically trained staff,
- to promote university-industry relations in two directions: make university research more relevant and enable the transfer of research results into practice, new products, services and jobs.

Universities thus have become central sectors of all education systems. They contribute considerably to the public understanding of science and – economically of central importance – to innovation in each society and the economy. They are important factors in international cooperation and competition. The ongoing process of globalisation is partly driven by universities, partly calls universities to respond. They have promoted international exchange of knowledge, staff and students and have developed effective instruments to cooperate on an institutional (university or faculty) basis as well as of promoting individual mobility.

Education systems have at the same time and corresponding to the interest of students in higher qualifications expanded participation of pupils in secondary education, including students from culturally, socially or economically disadvantaged groups. Access of girls and young women to schools and universities has become an important policy concern – how to meet the needs of diversified student populations and of constantly rising numbers of students.

Another concern is the dominance of students participating in humanity studies as against the growing demand for qualifications in natural and technological studies. Unemployment of university degree holders is on average considerably lower than unemployment of groups with lower qualifications. However, in many countries, persons with humanities degrees do not find jobs or are employed below their potential.

The growing diversity of student populations has been met by universities and other post-secondary education and training institutions by offering courses on different levels and in new fields of studies. It is therefore more appropriate to broaden the discussion to embrace tertiary education as the third sector of national education and training systems.

Progress of science and knowledge has led to new fields of studies and of combinations of research areas. Universities have entered into national and

increasingly international competition, aiming at more quality, a growing share of public resources and support from companies and foundations, and more attraction by the best students. Countries are supporting this international orientation with marketing campaigns abroad.

The framework for international cooperation and competition is not clear, however. Policies to promote excellence are implemented in many countries. These processes are also encouraging international orientations of universities, e.g. hiring excellent staff abroad. Competition in this field may lead to rising salaries and increasing mobility and in the end may result in countries and single universities as winners or losers of international competition. The recognition of credentials and the need to acknowledge university degrees from different countries has led to the Bologna process as a good example for multinational cooperation to develop a common framework for comparable study structures. The European Research Area is another example that will change the framework in the European Union in favour of international cooperation within the region.

Some fears regarding the consequences are: The time span for Bachelor students is too short to be able to pass some courses abroad; the Bologna process may create new hurdles for universities outside the process. However, the Bologna process is in principle open to any country, and the European Union has implemented neighbourhood policies, e.g. with the Arabian countries in the Euromed region.

Support for talented students and/or students with low family income continues, sometimes lagging behind inflation rates and individual needs. A growing tendency of policies to charge fees, both from nationals and foreign students, can also be observed. Universities are spending some of these new resources to cover e.g. expenditure in favour of individual support, e.g. for foreign students. Reliable information about the structure and quality of courses at foreign universities can help students make rational choices. Governments – both of home and host countries - are supporting students willing to pursue their studies or part of them in foreign countries with government grants. Visa procedures and the social status of foreign students are still a matter of debate in and between countries and regions.

Policies to change brain drain into brain circulation and to encourage expatriate graduates to return to their home country are being called for.

To sum up, three related areas can be identified that may need further analysis and discussion in the BEMENA and G 8 discussions:

- Relevance with regard to the overall coherence of education systems,
- relevance with regard to the labour market, and
- overall quality and performance.

Questions for discussion may include the following (see also the cross-cutting issues):

- (1) As the international connectedness of tertiary systems evolves further, what is the scope of national policies, and how can the framework for international cooperation be developed further?
- (2) What are status and roles of tertiary education in BMENA and G 8 countries, as compared to the relatively low esteem that is attached to TVET and middle level skills in many countries?
- (3) How can the growing demand for science and technology qualifications be met, and how can the prospects of academics with degrees in humanities be improved?
- (4) How are access to universities and the overall coherence and quality of education systems be promoted in BMENA and G 8 countries??
- (5) How can multinational, bi- and multilateral cooperation of universities be enhanced in a beneficial way for both sides?
- (6) What are the prospects and how can the Bologna process be extended and made relevant?
- (7) How can international mobility of staff and students be promoted further?
- (8) What is best practice with regard to innovative measures to promote cooperation among tertiary institutions, e.g. creating foreign dependencies of universities, and what does constitute for example a bi-national university in the BMENA region?

One operational question is whether a fourth working group on Tertiary Education should be established. Education Ministers may wish to propose this to the Forum for the Future. Such a proposal should specify the mandate, participation – also from Ministries for Higher Education, universities and NGO's, the working methods and management of such a new working group, taking into account also the experience with the existing three working groups.