Since the middle of the 1990s, Europe has laid a foundation with the so-called Bologna Process that enables a comparison of educational systems in Europe and the rest of the world. The tools for doing that are offered in the Bologna Process. A starting point of the ‘Bologna Process’ was a ‘strong heterogeneity of the national education systems, which were perceived more and more as an obstacle for the wished-for mobility of students and research staff’ (Keller, 2004).

Before the Bologna Declaration in June 1999 came the Sorbonne Declaration (‘Joint Declaration on Harmonisation of the Architecture of the European Higher Education System’)$^1$ on 25 May 1998. This was passed, on the occasion of the 800th anniversary of the foundation of the Sorbonne University, by the Ministers of higher education of the big four in Europe: France, Germany, Great Britain and Italy.

The wording of the Declaration uses the idea of the common European Higher Education Area for the first time. The aim is to improve student mobility within Europe. Only through this mobility can the growing demands on students and academics be met with continuously developing career and education opportunities. In reference to hundreds of years of the European university tradition, the Declaration asks for a ‘Europe of knowledge’ (‘. . .Europe is not only that of the Euro, of the bank and the economy, it must be a Europe of knowledge as well’).$^2$

The Sorbonne Declaration reflected these demands for the first time, which later became an integral part of the Bologna Process:

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$^2$ ibid.
Nora Butter

• a continuous convergence of the overall framework of degrees in an open European area for higher education;
• a common degree system for undergraduates (Bachelor’s degree) and graduates (Master’s and doctoral degree);
• facilitating student and teacher mobility (i.e., students should spend at least one semester abroad); removing obstacles to mobility and improving the recognition of degrees and academic qualifications.3

The Sorbonne Declaration closes with a plea for other countries in Europe (members and non-members of the EU) to join the goals expressed in it. Within 1 year, the Sorbonne Declaration was signed by 25 nations.

1 The Bologna Declaration 19 June 1999

The Bologna Declaration (‘19 June 1999’) signed by 29 European Ministers of Higher Education was in line with the Sorbonne Declaration. The Declaration pointed out that a ‘Europe of Knowledge’ is an important factor for social and human growth. The importance of education and educational co-operation for the development of stable, peaceful and democratic societies is acknowledged as being paramount. The Ministers emphasised that the improvement of the international competitiveness and global attractiveness of the European higher education system should be the central point of a homogeneous European Higher Education Area. The Ministers agreed on some central issues which should improve compatibility and comparability among European higher education institutions. A catalogue of six measures was passed, which was meant to be the cornerstone for a common European Higher Education Area:

• Adoption of a system of easily comprehensible and comparable degrees, through the implementation of the diploma supplement, in order to promote European citizens employability and the international competitiveness of the European higher education system.
• Adoption of a system essentially based on two main cycles, undergraduate and graduate. Access to the second cycle shall require successful completion of first-cycle studies, lasting a minimum of 3 years. The degree awarded after the first cycle shall also be an entrance qualification to the European labour market. The second cycle should lead to the master’s and/or doctorate degree.

3 ibid.