Chapter 8

RESTRICTURING BULGARIAN HIGHER EDUCATION
The Bulgarian Strategy Towards The Bologna Declaration

Snejana Slantcheva
PROPHE-CEE, Blagoevgrad

1. INTRODUCTION

The push towards membership in the European Union has been a major force in the development of Eastern and Central European countries. Bulgaria, like most post-communist societies, redirected its efforts towards entering the European Union immediately after the fall of the totalitarian regime. The country was granted associate membership in 1993. Negotiations for full membership began in January 2000. Amongst the first chapters to be signed by the Bulgarian government and the European Commission were those on “Education and Professional Qualification” and “Science and Research”. The completion of these two chapters signalled that the educational legislative framework in Bulgaria possessed the requisite conditions for accession to the European Union.

The EU objective of creating a “European area of higher education” is designed to promote free mobility of students, faculty and researchers in an integrated educational market. This network of higher education is to be created through voluntary co-operation among the different member states. Until the seventies, national governments were the dominant actors within the European Community and inter-governmental co-operation was the rule. In the eighties, the European Community became a key player in the implementation of higher education policies. Several action programmes and a declaration signed in Maastricht in 1992 stated that national governments should continue to have primary responsibility for higher education (Beverwijk 1999). Nevertheless, EU legislation and action programmes have

had a strong influence on national governments and universities. TEMPUS, ERASMUS and ECTS have stimulated student mobility and the introduction of new institutional structures. Three more declarations, the Lisbon Declaration of 1997, the Sorbonne Declaration of 1998, and the Bologna Declaration of 1999, as well as the results of the European Ministers of Higher Education Prague Summit in 2001, have all supported the drive towards the harmonisation of the architecture of the European Higher Education System.

Bulgaria has taken an active part in the different European initiatives on higher education. The Bologna Declaration has been an important factor influencing the direction of the on-going structural reform of Bulgarian higher education. As a signatory to the Bologna Declaration, Bulgaria became one of the twenty-nine countries voluntarily agreeing to co-ordinate their policies in higher education for the creation of a European Area of Higher Education and a common European market of higher education and research services. The Bologna Declaration (Declaration 1999) set six major goals, all of which attempt to promote institutional comparability. These six goals include:

1. *Adoption of a system of easily readable and comparable degrees*, as well as the implementation of the Diploma Supplement, in order to promote the employability of European citizens and the international competitiveness of the European higher education system.

2. *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 three years. The degree awarded after the first cycle shall also be relevant to the European labour market as an appropriate level of qualification. The second cycle should lead to master and/or doctorate degrees as it does in many European countries.

3. *Establishment of a system of credits—such as the ECTS—as a proper means of promoting the most widespread student mobility*. Credits could also be acquired in non-higher education contexts, including lifelong learning, provided they are recognised by the receiving universities concerned.

4. *Promotion of mobility* by overcoming obstacles to the effective exercise of free movement (of all members of the academic community).

5. *Promotion of European co-operation in quality assurance* with a view to developing comparable criteria and methodologies.