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**THE SORBONNE-BOLOGNA PROCESS: A FRENCH NATIONAL AND
INSTITUTIONAL POINT OF VIEW**

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It is truly a great pleasure for me to be here in Madison and to give this talk. Thanks to the organizer Kris Olds and thanks to Gilles Bousquet and to the University of Madison for welcoming us for this symposium.

Even for a French academic himself, it is sometimes very difficult to understand how the French system of Higher Education is organized and works! But I will try to enlighten your opinion.

A Brief History of the French Higher education system

This session is not consecrated to the Bologna Process history nor the history of a particular national system, but I think that some historical recall could be useful to understand the present French situation.

The French universities are among the oldest in the world. The first ones (Sorbonne, Montpellier, Toulouse) were created in the early thirteenth century. All along the period of the French monarchy, these universities were religious corporations. During the French Revolution, the Convention suppressed colleges and faculties because they were too compromised with the monarchy. In place of colleges and faculties, the Convention created special Higher Education Institutions, some of them being vocational schools, some others general schools. For example, the Ecole Normale Supérieure, at the Ulm's street in Paris, was created in this time. This historical fact is important because these schools were truly the ancestors of the French Grandes Ecoles. Each of them was specialized: mines (Ecole des Mines), bridge and roads (Ecole des Ponts et Chaussées), armaments and guns (Ecole Polytechnique), education for teachers (Ecole normale supérieure) ... These institutions were not in charge of research activities. Their mission was essentially to educate the civil servants for the French State, and the officers for the French Army. Since this time the elites of the nation are essentially educated in the French Grandes Ecoles with a major consequence for the French universities: they are marginalized for the education of the elites of the nation.

In 1806 Napoléon created the Imperial University and restored the old faculties. The academic corporation was created at the national level and the French University was directly under the responsibility of a “Grand Maître de l'Université”, appointed by the central State. Of course the position of Grand Maître de l'Université was largely a symbolic one, but it was

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also the symbol that the Faculties have no autonomy at all to define their own strategy in Research or in Education. Napoléon created the Imperial University and not the imperial universities. Finally, since this time, the whole Higher Education System was completely centralized because the Grandes Ecoles were soon directly under the supervision of several Ministries. This situation was at the opposite of the other Higher Education systems observed during the same period everywhere in Europe.

It is only under the Third Republic, in 1896, that the faculties were authorized to be gathered in universities, in general one for each important city. In this time it was possible to speak about the University of Paris, of Toulouse, of Montpellier... But each university was chaired by a rector appointed by the central power. This rector chaired a university council composed of the deans of the different faculties. The autonomy of these faculties was always very weak and the funding was entirely given by the State. The staff, academic or not, was composed of civil servants. It was exactly the same centralized and very State-dependant organisation for the "Grandes Ecoles" and in many aspects the present situation of the French system is not very far from this general framework.

It is important to recall that at the same time in Berlin, Wilhelm von Humboldt created the Humboldt University around the concept of the modern universities, namely the integration of the two basic missions, Education and Research. In fact this concept is also at the basis of the development of the universities in the USA during the 19th century and also, more or less in other European countries. But French HEI were created on a conceptually opposite basis. In this time there was a sort of republic of Faculties, with strong disciplinary and corporatist concerns, without any significant activities in research.

It is only in 1968 that the word "autonomy" appeared in the text of a law (Loi Faure) about universities. This law establishes two principles for the universities: autonomy and participation. The modern French universities were more or less created on a pluridisciplinary basis, with elected deans, elected presidents and some decentralization on some fields, like internal organization, curricula, agreements with other institutions, and a beginning of financial autonomy, with the possibility to organize themselves a part of their budget and to obtain money by autonomous activities (consulting, lifelong education etc...). These principles were reaffirmed in 1984 by a new law (loi Savary), which is today the legal framework of the French universities.

During the same period, research institutions were also transformed in Public institutions (Etablissements publics): CNRS (Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique), INSERM (Institut National des Sciences et de la Recherche Médicales) and many others, which are more or less linked with Higher Education Institutions, but are not themselves Higher Education institutions. The "Organismes de recherche" cannot deliver the doctorate outside a cooperation with an university. All the researchers were integrated as civil servants, like the academics in the Universities. Since this time there are in France two entirely distinct categories of academic civil servants: the "enseignants-chercheurs", in the universities, who have two functions, research and education, and the "chercheurs" in the public research institutions, who have only research activities. But the two ones are civil servants all along their professional life. So for example even if a "chercheur" has not found anything during a very long time, he, or she, stays a "chercheur" all along his, her, professional life! It is difficult to understand the logic of this situation. This situation is a very strong constraint and a true handicap in terms of competitiveness. Of course it is a major weakness for the effectiveness of our system.

During the eighties and early nineties, the French Universities have done a sort of training of their new autonomy, through a process of learning by doing. But they suffer to be too dependant of the State. The U2000 Plan elaborated by Claude Allègre in 2000 released

this strong constraint because since this Plan, the local authorities (the “Régions”) are implied in cooperation with the universities through the funding of a part of their investments.

Another very important change in the relationship between universities and the National Education Ministry was the introduction of a contractual procedure in the beginning of the nineties. Each four years, each university concludes with the Ministry an agreement in which they agree on the principal strategic orientations of the University. This agreement process seemed not very important in the beginning of the process, because the funding of these agreements represented only a little part of the money given each year by the Ministry to the universities. But this process has completely changed the point of view of the universities on themselves: they have understood that they were truly more autonomous, with the necessity to make choices between different projects and different orientations.

Of course the governance in the universities is always weak and for some of them it is always truly difficult to elaborate a global strategy. But since the end of the nineties a true move toward more autonomy begun and we hope that this move is very far from being finished! My colleague Christine Musselin gave an excellent historical and political analysis in her book “The Long March of the French Universities” (translated in English in 2004). We can say that the French universities are very young. They are only twenty years old, in their modern configuration.

The Higher Education system in France today:

Data:

The academic landscape in France is composed by three sorts of institutions. Firstly, there are 81 Universities. There are also the only institutions that deliver undergraduate degrees, graduate degrees and doctorates. They have also very significant research activities. They are essentially state funded and the access is totally free at the undergraduate level. Secondly we have the Grandes Ecoles: Engineers schools and Commercial schools. There are more than 200; more or less 50% are Engineers Schools. The majority of these Engineers Schools is inside the Universities. The Grandes Ecoles select their students two, often three years after the French Baccalauréat. The fees can be expensive but not in all the cases, and public money is, like for the universities, the main part of their resources. The Grandes Ecoles organize also graduate studies, but are not authorized to deliver Doctorates except more or less 15 of them, which have also significant research activities. Thirdly, there are the research institutions (CNRS, INSERM...). These last institutions organize no Education, and they cannot deliver Doctorates. Of course they have often strong cooperation with the Universities.

In France we have 2 200 000 students enrolled in the different Higher Education Institutions, 75 % of them being enrolled in the universities. For research activities, a large majority of the human resources and of the buildings are coming from the universities.

Finally three points summarize the situation:

- Firstly a very complicated landscape, with numerous very different institutions, all public except a Business School in Fontainebleau INSEAD;

- Secondly, a very dense “degrees and diplomas forest” before 2002: more than 15 degrees at different levels for the universities, plus vocational degrees delivered outside the universities, plus the Engineers diplomas and the diplomas of the Commercial schools. We have more than one hundred degrees at different levels in Higher Education!

- Thirdly the majority of the best students coming from the High Schools are selected by the Grandes Ecoles, in which in general no research activities are

organized. It is a great weakness of the French system. Of course all the best students are not becoming researchers, but it is very important that the best students can be selected in Research Universities. All of them will not become Nobel Prize, of course, but in France the elites are rarely in touch with researchers and research activities. It is not the case in the USA or in the UK, even in Germany where the best universities for Education are in general the best in Research too.

The assurance quality is organized around the very restrictive concept of "habilitation" for the universities: the experts of the Ministry examine the projects for each university and give or not the authorization to deliver the different degrees (Diplômes nationaux). For the Engineers Schools, a National Commission composed by professionals and academics (Commission du Titre) plays the role of an accreditation institution. For the Commercial schools there is nothing except, for some of them, the European and international accreditation systems. In any case the whole system of "habilitation" is not very clear in France.

The autonomy of the French Higher Education Institutions (Universities and Grandes Ecoles) is not a complete autonomy: they cannot decide the level of salaries neither for academics nor for staff, they cannot determine the level of the fees, they cannot decide the attribution of the grants and of any financial aids for the students, they have not the full ownership of their buildings. In practice different "solutions and arrangements" are working, but these situations are always very time and energy-consuming for the academics and the Presidents. But truly speaking, when a University expresses a strong collective willingness around a coherent project, the Ministry is conducted to accept the propositions of the University, except of course about the money, which is a true problem!

The Sorbonne Bologna Process: a look of the story by a French President

Even if these historical and empirical developments seem very long, they are necessary to understand the impact and the reality of the Bologna Process in France. For us, in fact, this process begun in may 1998 with the publication by Jacques Attali of the report "Pour un modèle européen d'enseignement supérieur" (Jacques Attali was the principal political adviser of the President Mitterrand). This report was an official request by the Minister Claude Allègre. He asked Jacques Attali to propose him new structures for the degrees and the general organisation of Higher Education allowing more mobility for students inside the European Union and more competitiveness for the European countries.

In fact Europe was a sort of pretext to analyse the French system and to give some recommendations for changing it. The main propositions were not only the LMD System (Licence, Bachelor in English, Master, Doctorate), but also the convergence between Universities and Grandes Ecoles through the new cursus. Some propositions introduced also important changes in the organization of the governance of the French HEI, with more autonomy and more open institutions. In his report, Attali gave also some propositions about evaluation.

The décor was set for the Bologna Process, and the first European concretisation took place at the Sorbonne in 1998 where four European Ministers of four countries, UK, Germany, Italy and France agreed on the following points: convergence to a simplified system of degrees in Europe in order to facilitate the mobility for students and academics, and to create a common European culture for Higher education. It's why these aspects are today

so prominent for the French Universities and the French Authorities. It was the beginning of the French L-M-D Process (Licence Master Doctorate).

In 1999, the Bologna declaration, signed by 31 Ministers in charge of HE, was much more complex and defined six points for the so-called Bologna Process: easily readable and comparable degrees, two main cycles, system of credits, promotion of mobility, European cooperation in quality assurance, and European dimension of Higher education. Since Berlin in 2003, we have also Lifelong learning.

In France all the attention was focused on the four first points and almost nothing was done about the others one, particularly quality assurance and European dimension. The first reason was the absolute necessity to put in order the incredible imbroglio of the French degrees and diplomas system! Even French people were unable to understand this complexity. In fact it was first inside the French system that we needed easily and readable comparable degrees, and to create the possibility of mobility between the different French institutions! So the French version of the Bologna Process was initially a process to rationalize the French degrees and diplomas and perhaps to improve mobility inside the French system itself. The second reason is that the two last objectives (cooperation in quality assurance and promoting an European dimension in Higher Education) concern points which are the heart of our weakness. The French Higher Education System is a public system with a high degree of centralization that theoretically should contribute to a good global planning of the system by the Ministry. So in theory, the high quality level is guaranteed by the State and to organize a system of quality assurance appears as totally inappropriate. It would be a quality assurance system for the French State itself! It is unimaginable for the central power. We have in some respects the same problem of quality assurance as the soviet planning at the end of the USSR. Quality assurance is a necessity in a totally decentralized system, but not in a centralized system if this centralization is efficient. Otherwise it is the centralization itself which is inefficient. Of course I think that centralization in complex systems is inefficient, but in the French Jacobinism context it is something difficult to be recognized. It is more or less analogous for the European dimension of Higher Education. Here the point is not only to introduce more European culture, more European political consciousness in the curricula. That would be very easy. The point is to internationalise truly the Higher Education Institutions, in their management and also in the recruitment of the students and the academics. It is different from the mobility, because to introduce this European dimension in this sense would mean major changes in the internal organization of the Universities. For example: how to attract European academics in French institutions with a status of civil servant, without any degree of autonomy to decide the level of salaries and any incentives. Another example in the management of the institutions: how to introduce this European dimension when the funds are allowed to the universities on a quantitative basis, the number of students, and practically not on qualitative basis, quality of research, quality of partnerships, etc... The number of foreign students has no influence at all on the funding of the French universities. So why produce any effort when the institutions have no incentive to do it? Of course, to be complete, I shall recall that we have an agreement procedure with the State to introduce some qualitative criteria. But only a very little part of the global funding is concerned. For all these reasons, France is very late for the two last objectives of the Bologna Process and actually it is not clear to understand how to draw near to these two last Bologna objectives. The problem of autonomy and consequently of the quality assurance for the French Higher Education Institutions is truly perceptible when French Universities' Presidents or simply the directors of the Grandes Ecoles are discussing in an European or International context. I had this experience when I was at the head of the French Conference of the University's Presidents in 2001 and 2002, just at the beginning of the implementation of the Bologna Process in France. But in any case the Bologna process, even in its French

somewhat soft version is very positive and implies a strong dynamic on the global system and the institutions themselves.

Implementation and first consequences of the Bologna Process in the French Higher Education Institutions

The concrete implementation of the Bologna Process began in France at the end of 1998 with the first discussions at the national level. The legal framework, always very important in France, was discussed in 2001 and finalized in April 2002. At this time the Ministry announced a very large freedom for the universities to propose the curricula for the new degrees. Of course the traditional unions of students and teachers were very reluctant about this freedom, because they understood that such a capacity of initiative could bring more autonomy. The University President's Conference (CPU) was unanimous to implement the Bologna Process and claimed also for more autonomy. The new L-M-D system was experimented in three universities in 2002-2003. To day more than 60% of the Universities have organized their degrees with the new system and in two years all the system should be concerned.

In the autumn 2003 demonstrations were organized by the unions in some universities, but quickly people realize that it was contradictory to be against the new system, because to fight this system meant to be against the European mobility for students and finally against the European idea itself! The principal oppositions were more seriously coming from some disciplinary sectors, like Law Faculties, but they were not very serious.

In my opinion, the major difficulties were created essentially by the method imposed by the Ministry to introduce the reform and not by the reform itself. Indeed, the Universities and the Ministry used an incredible energy to define detail points, like the disciplinary title of the degrees. In fact it was the manifestation of a sort of fight between the central power and an emerging power at the level of each University.

Today, the governance in the universities is always weak for a large part of them, but since the end of the nineties a true move toward more autonomy begun and we hope that this move is very far to be finished! But in any case, because the French Conference of the University Presidents (CPU) and the great majority of the academics and students supported the implementation of the L-M-D, it was the occasion for the French Universities to appropriate the cursus and the curricula and to have a very deep thought on Education, at any level.

All these discussions implied at least two important consequences.

Firstly, in order to redefine the curricula, many discussions took place between the different faculties and departments, and a lot of innovations were introduced. Another important point concerns also the organization of the doctoral programs, with an important interrogation about the articulation Master-PhD.

Secondly, the implementation of the Bologna Process implies strong changes also for the Grandes Ecoles. Their curricula and the organization of their studies are completely closed on the French society and completely out of touch of European and international reality. Except some Commercial Schools, all the other Grandes Ecoles are still organized only to educate the high civil servants of the French State: their degrees have nothing to do with the L-M-D degrees. Each Grande Ecole has its own diploma and the studies are organized on a strictly French basis, namely a sort of two-years cursus outside universities and Grandes Ecoles (classes préparatoires), with no degree at the end of these studies, a hard competition to be enrolled in a Grande Ecole, and, after three, sometimes four, years-studies a diploma specific to the concerned Grande Ecole. In the beginning of the Bologna Process, Grandes

Ecoles said that they were not concerned, but quickly, they realize that it was dramatically false and that the Bologna Process was a marginalizing process for them. It's why a system of equivalences between their diplomas and the master degree is now organized through two specific procedures. These equivalences are not automatic and are only given after an analysis and an evaluation of the curricula. This complete inadaptation of the Grandes Ecoles to an European framework was a sort of intellectual shock in France, even if the quality of the education in the great majority of the Grandes Ecoles is truly very high. Another surprising discover for many people in France was also that the curricula of the Grande Ecoles are not truly evaluated from an external point of view. In the same time many people in France realize that practically no research is organized in the Grandes Ecoles, except in 10 to 15 of them. I recall that we have in France more than 200 Grandes Ecoles.

Finally one of the most important consequence of Bologna in France is perhaps to enlighten the fact that the French Grandes Ecoles are not adapted to the European Higher Education Area and the necessity to organize a convergence between Universities, Grandes Ecoles and also Research Institutions to improve the system. Then interesting consequences of Bologna in France could be in the middle term a better understanding of the necessity of more autonomy and more quality assurance and the necessity to reorganize the system around the universities, with the condition that they become strong, autonomous, responsible institutions, with a rigorous assurance quality system in order to push them to the best possible management.

It is too early to evaluate the impact of the Bologna Process on the mobility of French students and academics in the European Higher Education Area. Now mobility is very low: less then 2% of the French students are concerned, just in the European average. In fact, Erasmus , the mobility exchange framework is a failure, because the initial objective was to organize such mobility for more than 10 % of the students. The situation is still worse for the French academics. We have here a strong negative tradition of closeness on our own country and on the francophone countries. It is impossible to appreciate now the future impact of Bologna on the intra European mobility, but it seems that the Bologna Process is now familiar in the French academic landscape, and it seems difficult to go backward.

Now the true challenge is to reorganize the system around the universities and to reinforce the universities themselves, with more responsibility and more accountability, in order to make them able to assume their new responsibilities. My opinion is that constructing European Higher Education Area is for us the most efficient process to modernize our own national system. It's true for France but also for other European countries.

In this field like in many others, constructing Europe is truly the only future of the old continent.

Some references for completing the scope of this talk:

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