

# **Switzerland goes Europe?**

## **Swiss Education Policy Making under the Impact of the Bologna Process**

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### **ABSTRACT**

In the last decade, comprehensive reforms were introduced in Swiss higher education that modified both the policy making procedures and the structure of the education system. The reforms were promoted by an international initiative – the Bologna Process. It is supported by the EU Commission and gave central impulses for domestic reforms in the non-EU country by applying diverse instruments of soft governance whose impact outstripped domestic obstacles. Despite the high number of veto-players in Switzerland and cultural guiding principles of education that did not completely match the Bologna ideals, this paper finds a high approximation of Swiss education policy making towards the propositions and aims of the Bologna Process.

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## **KEY WORDS**

Bologna Process, Direct Democracy, Education Policy-Making, European Union, Federalism, International Organization, Switzerland, Veto-Player

## **1 INTRODUCTION**

Particularly since the boost of globalization in the 1980s, the adaptation to international developments and discourses in education policy making is inevitable for any country (Drezner 2001). On the international level, the aim of enhancing global competitiveness is the particular focus of diverse educational initiatives furthered by international organizations (IOs). One of the most outstanding examples of international initiatives in education policy making in the last decade is the intergovernmental ‘Bologna Process’ of 1999 for integrating European higher education (HE) supported by the European Commission (Bologna Declaration 1999; Hackl 2001; Martens/Weymann 2005). The Bologna Process intends to create a “European Higher Education Area” by 2010 and aims at improving the employability of students (Wächter 2004). The aim of harmonization of higher education systems in Europe requires the introduction of two-tiered study structures, systems of quality assurance and a credit transfer system (ECTS), increased mutual recognition and transparency of final degrees and the promotion of student and academic mobility.

Regarding research, education policy is the stepchild of policy analysis, particularly concerning internationalization processes, as it is a policy field typically associated with the nation-state’s autonomy (Martens/Wolf 2006). It is mostly examined by education scientists and sociologists, less often by political scientists. Moreover, their studies have another research focus for which reason many questions on policy making have remained unaddressed. As a result, research on the influence of international educational initiatives on national education systems is still underdeveloped. Europeanization effects on higher education policy have been studied by Bache (2004: 3) who states that these effects do not only differ across but also within countries, while changes of policies and institutions are more common than those of identity. He explains this by the fact that international pressure for reform on individual countries differs as well as countries’ reactions to this pressure, depending on how international aims are in line with domestic practices and preferences. Likewise, Héritier et al. (2001) argue that a mismatch between policy demands of international initiatives and national policies generates pressure on participating states to adjust. Research on this topic therefore must draw on and generalize from studies on soft governance mechanisms (Héritier 2002).

Even today, there is still a lack of academic studies researching the mechanisms of influence exertion of international initiatives on domestic policy making. In contrast to the existing internationalization literature, this pioneer study examines the approximation of national policy making towards international policy models. It focuses on Switzerland as a case study (Blatter/Blume 2008). It is a least likely case for policy change induced by an international initiative for diverse reasons: First, institutional settings in Switzerland are hardly reform furthering (Bonoli/Mach 2000). Direct democracy, the cooperative federalism<sup>1</sup>, and consociationalism<sup>2</sup> do not only prolong decision processes and involve many veto players in the domestic sphere, but also handicap the coordination with international organizations and other countries. Second, the policy field of education is traditionally closely linked to the nation-state, more than any other policy field. This means, if the transformation of statehood in a traditionally nationally hold policy field – such as education – takes place in Switzerland, it is even more likely to take place in other countries. Third, in the context of educational internationalization, Switzerland takes a special position concerning the EU, because it is isolated as a nonmember (Fischer, Nicolet, Sciarini 2002; 2004), but takes part in the Bologna Process as a bottom up initiative. By now, the Bologna Process and the EU are intertwined, which raises the question how Switzerland as a non-EU member interacts with the EU.

The resulting puzzle is: Is there an approximation of Swiss education policy making towards the Bologna Process? If so, what are the *underlying causal* mechanisms of the influence of the Bologna Process and of domestic political settings? To identify these mechanisms, this paper draws on a theoretical framework combining sociological institutionalism and rationalism. The main theoretical argument states that international organizations exert influence through instruments by which IOs can build up governance capaci-

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<sup>1</sup> The highly heterogeneous education system is also regionally coined by the existence of a German and a French part.

<sup>2</sup> First, the federalist political system, that is constitutionally guaranteed, consists of the three levels: the Federation, cantons and communes. Second, there are few countries in which people have such far-reaching rights of codetermination as in the liberal conservative welfare state. The impact of the veto-like right of referendum on the political process is used to hinder or retard change (<http://www.eda.admin.ch/eda/en/home/reps/afri/vsdn/infoch/chpoli.html> as of 10.03.09) like it is also in education policy the case. Finally, consociationalism requires the consultation of all potentially concerned interest groups to give their opinion on a new legal proposal. To present referendum-robust proposals, the Federal Council invites cantons, parties and associations to comment, when preparing constitutional changes, new laws, or treaties under international law. This makes the enacting of new reforms rare but guarantees a broad assistance in the implementation of reforms. Unlike the consideration of all parts of the country, consociationalism is not given by the Constitution, but has developed for decades due to the protection of minorities, visible in direct democracy or in the “majority of cantons” (“Ständemehr”).

ties (Leuze et al. 2009). The policy making process beyond conventional steering devices is designated as governance, consequently the term of governance capacity refers to the capability to form policies. The term of governance is not as strong as government but stronger than cooperation as it relates to a system of rules that transcends the voluntarism of cooperation (Lavenex 2004: 4). The according *instruments* are characterized as soft modes of governance by which international organizations are able to put those capacities into practice.<sup>3</sup> A typology of five instruments includes more detailed instruments than the traditional mechanisms of governance of hierarchy, network and market. First, the capacities of an international organization to form organizational processes by gathering all relevant actors are referred to as coordinative activities. Second, the instrument of non-binding standard setting includes prescriptions for public policy. Third, the capability of an international organization to influence national debates on a policy issue is referred to as discursive dissemination. Fourth, an international organization may transfer financial means to a country with the aim of giving incentives to implement its favored programs. Finally, an international organization may provide technical assistance to provide countries with knowledge for the implementation of policy goals, and development of a specific policy to a country.

However, the degree to which a country will respond to these international stimuli is mediated by *national transformation capacities* (Weymann/Martens 2006). These country-specific determinants influence the degree of impact of governance by international organizations, and also which political dimensions are affected. They may hinder or further the influence of international organizations and thus influence the approximation of domestic education policy making towards an international initiative. Two crucial elements of these capacities are in this framework for examining education policy, the institutional factor of *veto players* and the ideational factor of nationally rooted *guiding principles* of education. *Veto players* are actors that are able to veto a political decision and accordingly to prolong the decision making (Tsebelis 1995; 2000). National *veto players* are decisive factors for determining the potential for a change of policy making and depend on the political organization and institutions of a country. This includes a rationalist perspective that focuses on actors and their institutional potential for action. As education is closely linked

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<sup>3</sup> Particularly for Switzerland that lacks legal integration with the EU due to its non-membership and thus is not subject to compliance demands, these new governance modes are highly relevant for explaining the policy-making regarding developments of internationalization (Schmidt/Bläuberger/van den Nouland 2008: 275).

to the domain of the nation state, *guiding principles* of education frame the understanding of education in the domestic system. This constructivist perspective involves ideas, norms and identities as the core of the domestic institutional structure and the collective interpretation scheme. Consequently, they define the domestic developments, making them to some degree path dependent (Pierson 2000).

To sum up, I hypothesize that the degree of implementation of and approximation towards the Bologna Process depends on *national transformation capacities* and international *governance instruments*. For investigating this multilevel game between the international organization and Switzerland (Putnam 1988), the study draws on qualitative methods of expert interviews with twenty-three Swiss education policy makers and the Directorate-General for education and culture of the European Commission, document analysis and secondary literature<sup>4</sup>.

I first elaborate on education policy making in Switzerland, its current education system, the historical roots, and the international background (chapter 2). Subsequently changes in education policy making since the 1980s, most prominently the reforms induced by the Bologna Process, are presented (chapter 3). Based on expert interviews and document analysis, the empirical analysis demonstrates the influence of *national transformation capacities* and IO *governance instruments* on reform processes in Swiss education policy making (chapter 4). The concluding chapter summarizes the main findings and points to subjects of further research.

## 2 SWISS HIGHER EDUCATION POLICY AND ITS HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

The unique federalist<sup>5</sup> organization of the Swiss education system is firmly rooted in the local municipalities, cantons and language regions. The obligations of the Federation and the Cantons in education are regulated by the Constitutional Article 61a on the “Swiss Education Area” that provides three main regulations. First, the Federation and the cantons are jointly obliged to ensure the high quality and accessibility of the Swiss education area. Second, through joint administrative bodies and other measures, they coordinate their ef-

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<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Brüggemann/Martens 2006, Dexter 1970 and Esser/Hill/Schnell 1999.

<sup>5</sup> The Federation has authority in all areas in which it is constitutionally empowered. Other tasks are matters for the 26 cantons, the original states that are divided into communes. Each canton has its own Constitution, parliament, government and courts. The degree of autonomy granted to communes is determined by individual cantons and varies considerably.

forts and ensure their cooperation. Third, they ensure that general and vocational courses of study achieve equal recognition in society.<sup>6</sup> The Federation, cantons and communes share supervisory responsibility for various parts of the system. The extent of cantonal and communal autonomy varies according to the type of higher education institute, and the level of education. The educational structure splits up into the three levels of primary, secondary, and higher education (HE). I will elaborate on the latter as it is the educational level possibly affected by the Bologna Process.

## **The Higher Education System**

### *Structure*

The dual Swiss HE sector<sup>7</sup> comprises two types of HE institutes at Tertiary A<sup>8</sup> level, with the same status but different educational philosophies. First, the traditional universities, i.e. cantonal universities and federal institutes of technology (ETHs), centre their instruction on basic research and teaching. Their approach is academic. The term ‘universities’ encompasses all ten cantonal universities and two ETHs, i.e. the ETH Zurich and the federal polytechnic school Lausanne<sup>9</sup>. The federal Constitution requires the Federation and the cantons to jointly coordinate the university system to ensure quality (article 63a). Second, universities of applied sciences (FHS) have the same educational task as universities, combined with elements of general vocational education. In contrast to universities, they take a more practice-oriented approach through a close link between teaching and applied research. On the national level, there are eight FHSs, i.e. seven public, one private, recognized by the Federal Council.<sup>10</sup>

### *Competences*

According to the Constitutional Article 63 on „institutions of HE“, the Federation holds the regulatory powers for the ETH and supports the cantonal universities. The Federation and cantons are jointly responsible for the coordination and guarantee of quality in Swiss HE, and take account of the autonomy of the universities. Moreover, they ensure the equal treatment of institutions with the same functions. They enter into agreements and delegate

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<sup>6</sup> The third regulation is of high importance due to the Swiss system specificity of dual vocational education.

<sup>7</sup> [http://www.sbf.admin.ch/htm/themen/uni/study-ch\\_en.html](http://www.sbf.admin.ch/htm/themen/uni/study-ch_en.html) as of 20.03.2009

<sup>8</sup> In addition, there are many options in the field of higher vocational education (Tertiary B level) with the practically oriented certificate and diploma exams and courses at the colleges of higher vocational education.

<sup>9</sup> In 2007, ca. 115,000 people studied at one of these 12 universities, ca. 49 per cent women and 23 per cent foreign nationals.

<sup>10</sup> In 2006/2007, around 57,000 people were studying at the seven public FH.

certain powers to joint administrative authorities. If they fail to reach their common goals by means of coordination, the Federation issues regulations on levels of studies and the transition from one level to another, on postgraduate education and on the recognition of institutions and qualifications.

### *Financing*

Cantons are the main funding bodies of cantonal universities and FHs. They pay the lion's share to conventional universities and FHs, although the Federation makes contributions (OECD 2007). Financially weaker communes and cantons receive compensatory payments from richer ones. There is also a provision whereby communes and cantons whose students and pupils study in neighboring communes or cantons have to make compensatory payments to the latter (Coradi/Wolter 2004). Thus, additional funding of cantonal universities stems from the Federation and the other cantons, the latter within the framework of corresponding intercantonal agreements. The Federation supervises and funds the ETHs, FHs and cantonal universities. Article 66 of the Constitution on "grants in education" states that the Federation may contribute to cantonal expenditure on grants provided to students at universities and HE institutions. Moreover, it may encourage the intercantonal harmonization of education grants and lay down principles for the payment of education grants.

General data and trends reveal that Switzerland belongs to the group of countries that invests above average in their education systems concerning the public education expenditures in percent of the Gross Domestic Product (EVD 2002). Switzerland invests more than the mean of other OECD countries in education. International figures show that, in 2001, taking all levels of education together, the Swiss State spent US\$ 8,800 for each child at school or adult student (OECD mean: US\$ 6,200). Between 1995 and 2001, the biggest increases in expenditure was spent on students in HE. Much of this extra money was needed for the creation of FHs. One of the explanations for Switzerland's high educational spending is certainly the country's elevated wage levels. The outlay on human resources is 77 per cent of running costs in HE (OECD means: 67 per cent). However, the above average expenditure is generated by the decentralized organization of the education system and the existence of four languages, but also occasioned by the high quality of the educational infrastructure (OECD 2007; Coradi/Wolter 2004).

## *Decision Making and Legislation*

The complexity of decision and legislative processes as well as of the constellation of actors and their roles in Swiss education policy making reflects the main political features of federalism (Scharpf 1988), direct democracy, and consociationalism, involving the Federation, the cantons and the people as the main *veto players*. The HE system is characterized by historically grown competences divided between the Federation, the cantons and communes<sup>11</sup> (Coradi/Wolter 2004). This variety of actors involved implies a high complexity of political decision-making structures, legal rules and financing mechanisms. The Federation has jurisdiction over the ETHs and FHs, and each canton over the university located within its boundaries.

The primary responsibility for education and culture is located with the 26 education departments of the cantons that are responsible for cantonal universities. They coordinate at the national level via the Swiss Conference of Cantonal Ministers of Education (EDK)<sup>12</sup>, i.e. the 26 cantonal ministers of education. This national coordination agency has overall responsibility for education policies at primary and secondary level, and with respect to the tertiary level for professions is not regulated at federal level and for FHs are subject to cantonal authority. Legally binding, intercantonal agreements ('concordats') form the foundation for its work. It cooperates with the Federation on the FHs, recognition of secondary school diplomas, aid to universities, development of scholarship programs, specialized instruction, public health and promotion of culture and sports. The intercantonal FH Council is the strategic political organ of the EDK. Jointly with the Federation, it performs development and coordination functions. It comprises the ministers of education of the seven FH regions, a federal representative, a representative of the Rectors' Conference of the Swiss FHs (KFH), a representative of the Swiss conference of Universities of Teacher Education (PPhs), and the general secretaries of the EDK and the Swiss University Conference (SUK).

In contrast, the role of the Federation is to guide FHs and cantonal universities as well as the ETH area of two ETHs and four federal research labs, to encourage research and to decree laws on FHs. Federal authorities in Swiss education policy are the State Secretariat for Education and Research (SBF) in the Federal Department of Home Affairs (EDI), and the Federal Office for Professional Education and Technology (BBT) in the Federal De-

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<sup>11</sup> And occasionally professional organizations.

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.edk.ch/dyn/11553.php> as of 20.03.09

partment of Economic Affairs (EVD). The EDI is in charge of planning, controlling and coordination in the decision-making process between the Head of Department and the federal offices. It provides the department's resources and consultancy services. As part of the EDI, the SBF is the Federation's competent authority for national and international issues involving education in general (Matura schools), university instruction, research and the spatial domain. It implements policies in the area of science, research, university instruction and education and encourages universities, cantonal projects, agencies furthering research, research institutes and related scientific services. The EVD has the task to guarantee optimal conditions to employers, to the business, and for small and medium sized enterprises. The BBT as a part of the EVD implements federal government policy in VE and advanced VE, FHs, technology and innovation. It acts through the FHs and the "Commission for Technology and Innovation". The "Swiss Science and Technology Council" is the Federal Council's advisory body for policy issues involving science, HE, research and technology. The "Federal Commission for the FHs" was instituted by the Federal Council for advising operational authorities on FH issues and lays the groundwork for decisions of the Federal Council and the EVD relating *inter alia* to FH certification and quality management.

Cooperation of the two political levels of Federation and cantons is promoted by three coordinating organs, the SUK, and the two executive bodies in universities and FHs, the Rectors' Conference of Swiss Universities (CRUS) and the KFH. The SUK is a joint body in which the Federation and the cantons collaborate on university policy. It includes the university cantons' ministers of education, representatives of the other cantons, the SBF and the President of the ETH Board<sup>13</sup>. At the behest of the SUK, the Accreditation and Quality Assurance Body (OAQ) fulfils a number of tasks relating to quality assurance (QA) and accreditation. The CRUS deals with all matters requiring mutual agreement or joint positions<sup>14</sup>, represents all universities and coordinates their operative guidance. The independent KFH harmonizes the FH development at the operational level and works with the Federation on technical matters via the BBT.

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<sup>13</sup> The ETH board is subsidiary to the EDI and administers the two ETHs and four research institutes. It coordinates and develops strategic plans, allocates resources, and appoints teaching staffs and senior officials.

<sup>14</sup> This involves curricula, syllabi, examination rules, diploma requirements and harmonization of HE admissions requirements.

## **Historical and Ideational Context**

### *The History of the Swiss Education System Since the 19<sup>th</sup> Century*

Specific historical developments are responsible for the current situation and the *guiding principles* of the Swiss education system (Hega 1999). The Swiss education system faced many challenges from 19<sup>th</sup> century until 1980, especially regarding the struggle between the cantons and the Federation for the competences in education. The foundations of the Swiss public education system developed in 19<sup>th</sup> century. Before, education was in the hands of the church. Clerical schools existed throughout the middle ages, but only reformation and counterreformation intensified educational efforts. The first attempts to secularize and centralize the system were made during the short Helvetic period of centralism from 1798 to 1803. The first federal public education law made school a State's policy field, ameliorated teacher education, and created the unique institution of nonprofessional school boards for integrating the nation of will (*ibid.*). Thus, the position of communes in obligatory schooling (OS), that since then took 9 years, became very strong. This proposal aroused opposition and was mitigated, requiring each community to found a public school and introduce compulsory winter schooling.

After the collapse of the Helvetic Republic and the restoration of decentralism, only the boards lasted, as their composition combined uniquely centralist with federalist principles (*ibid.*). During the Restauration (1815-30), education administration was transferred back to the cantons that passed own school laws. However, the State had established itself in education that caused the emergence of a public primary school system. During the Regeneration period (1830-48), particularly in liberally governed cantons, education reforms were carried further by introducing compulsory primary education (PE), founding cantonal secondary schools and universities. The split after 1830 between liberal protestant and conservative cantons entailed a brief civil war in 1847, until the liberals won over conservative reactionary cantons, curtailed by the Constitution of 1848 transforming the loose federation of sovereign cantons into the federal state of Switzerland with strengthened central powers.

However, education policy was exclusively a matter of cantonal authority, and revision left little political authority to federal government<sup>15</sup>. Hence, Switzerland was the only

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<sup>15</sup> Except for the provision that federal government establishes a federal university, a polytechnic school and teacher academies.

European country where the liberal reformation of 1848 succeeded. While revising the Constitution, the ‘school bailiff struggle’ against federal influence on cantonal systems increased. The revision in 1874 changed little regarding the cantonal control of education, but made PE in public schools free, compulsory, state-controlled and secularized. Since the Constitution and its revision, education policy is the prerogative of subnational governments.

For most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the education system lacked intercantonal and international cooperation characterized by a permanent search for equilibrium between federal and cantonal power. This is illustrated by the fact that an own department for education was never established (*ibid.*). Although in 1897 the EDK was created as a federal platform for coordination of cantonal school systems, the cantons cut their own paths until World War II. Only in the 1960s, the need for intercantonal, and later international, coordination rose due to the need for interior mobility, e.g. the EDK created four regional coordination areas and committees to intensify coordination. The conflict between unification and decentralism was also active in education policy making in the expansion phase of the system around 1970. Economic depression stopped education euphoria of the expansion phase. The reason for proceeding HE expansion cautiously was to sustain high quality and to match the output to the demand of the employment system. HE has been characterized until recently by its relatively low rates of entry and graduation. The OECD (1992) education statistics show that HE entry and graduation rates in the 1970s/1980s did not follow the pattern of expansion experienced in other OECD countries such as its large neighbors Germany or France.<sup>16</sup>

During expansion, the education field differentiated, as new actors appeared and traditional players endue themselves with scientific staff due to the demand for rational education politics (Osterwalder/Weber 2004). In HE, the Federation created a scientific council in 1965 to enforce a harmonized policy vis-à-vis the cantons. It decreed the federal law on HE promotion in 1968 to establish a Swiss HE area and to transfer the management in coordinating and harmonizing cantonal universities to the Federation, based on its financial contributions. A constitutional amendment for education was rejected by the cantons in the popular vote of 1973 (Hega 1999). Thus, attempts to empower the Federation failed first in 1874 with the conflict on the school bailiff, rejected in the referendum of 1882, and

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<sup>16</sup> The OECD warned that this policy might trigger a shortage of highly qualified people and concluded that ‘the need for a continuing increase in the skill potential of the Swiss labor is obvious’ (1991: 38).

then again in 1973. In 1968, there were trials of harmonization, by linking university policy and science policy vertically under central guidance. These were hindered in 1978 by a successful referendum of the Swiss Federation of Trade Unions against the revision of the HE promotion law. Because of these historical developments, at this very day cantonal diversity and regional disparities in school systems, enrolment rates and education opportunities were striking, causing problems for intra-Swiss mobility of students and teachers.

### *Guiding Principles of Education*

The cultural legacy of specific *guiding principles* of education implies some main features. First, *guiding principles* of education differ according to the level of education. In OS, but also until secondary-II level, education is considered a civil right and aims at equality of opportunities. Later, macroeconomic *guiding principles* of education as human capital and of performance fairness inspired HE, as education is considered the only resource for competing with other nations. The first connotation is rather political, the latter economic (Interview CH5). Second, there are regional differences. Switzerland has a ‘split’ education system, following the French and the German model. In the German part, the *guiding principle* rests on Humboldt’s unity of research and teaching, as German universities were the model (Horvath 2000) for most Swiss universities, described by Clark (1983: 50) as ‘institute universities’. Like Germany, the Swiss school system in the German part is tripartite (Interview CH14). French-speaking Switzerland aspires the Matura for all to realize chance equality, while German-speaking Switzerland measures chance equality by what students work after studies (Interview CH15). Third, the performance component in education was very strong in 19th century, but with welfare state development, its importance vanished. Since 1848, school has become a factor of cohesion of society, the individual was not in the foreground. Finally, there exists the myth of Switzerland of 1959 of having the world-beating education system. A sacred cow of this system is the dualism of general and professional education, without officially hierarchical order (Interview CH20). Another function of the education system is social mobility, i.e. both equity of chances and performance fairness (Interview CH 5). The aim of HE comprises social mobility, as it has a mainly publicly financed system with comparatively low study fees. Accessibility<sup>17</sup>, selectivity and competition via performance are distinct features of the Swiss HE system (Interview CH5).

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<sup>17</sup> Except for medicine studies, there is no numerus clausus.

In sum, the Swiss education system is marked by a complex division of responsibilities between the cantons and the Federation, shaped in the 19<sup>th</sup> century by the Constitution and its revision. Transformation processes of the State taking place in Swiss HE must be seen in the context of these historic developments. However, in the last decade the international context in which the Swiss system is embedded has challenged the former structures and procedures in education policy.

### **3 LATEST REFORMS IN HIGHER EDUCATION POLICY**

The Swiss education system experienced a backlog of reforms in the 1980s (Osterwaller/Weber 2004). Thus, I analyze the transformative process of education since the 1990s, highlighting the establishment of the FHs, the implementation of the Bologna Process, and the “Swiss Higher Education Landscape” project. Finally, I will sum up the changes in the three dimensions of policy-making: policy, politics, and polity. The policy dimension refers to concrete educational reforms and their contents. The dimension of politics designates the actors and procedures of decision making. Polity refers to constitutional preconditions. To find out if the Bologna Process caused changes in these three dimensions, I assess if the turn of the century is characterized by a turn in reform activity.

#### **The Creation of Universities of Applied Sciences in the 1990s**

Next to the university education, Switzerland provides the possibility to acquire a tertiary degree in professional education. Until 1997, this was possible in the polytechnics, the higher commercial or administration colleges, the higher technical schools for design etc. In order to be able to guarantee the recognition of these degrees abroad, first, the professional Matura was introduced on the federal level in 1993. Second, parliament passed a law on FHs in 1995 and the EDK created the intercantonal FH Council. Universities of applied sciences (FHs) were introduced as another type of HE institutes in addition to universities in 1997. They emerged from the amalgamation and specialization of around 70 advanced technical schools consisting of technical colleges and higher commercial comprehensive schools. In 2003, they received a final operating permit after a comprehensive inspection by the FH Commission that was supported in its work by Swiss and foreign experts.

## Implementing Bologna after 1999

Today, the internationalization of the Swiss education system is particularly determined by its participation in the Bologna Process.<sup>18</sup> Swiss universities are currently working hard to bring their curricula in line with the Bologna aims. They include the harmonization of structures such as the length of study, ECTS, and compulsory quality assurance (QA) systems. Switzerland is called the “poster child” for its quick and thorough implementation of the Bologna goals.

### *Bologna related legislative reforms*

Shortly after the Bologna Declaration in 1999, Swiss higher education institutes (universities and FHs) recognized the significance of this reform and established project organizations. In federalist Switzerland, the Bologna reform process concerns many actors and requires national regimentation for guaranteeing uniform and coordinated reform implementation. For this aim of the coordinated renovation of education of Swiss HE institutions in the framework of the Bologna Process<sup>19</sup>, the SUK adopted legally binding “Bologna Directives” for universities in 2003, the EDK for FHs and PHs in 2002. These directives fix a uniform framework for the introduction of Bachelor, Master and ECTS, for the admission to Master studies, for the title awards and for the reform implementation.<sup>20</sup> They base upon the convention on the cooperation in HE institutions of 14 December 2000 between the Federation and university cantons. They are limited to the necessary, and leave leeway for cantons. Subsequently, university cantons adapted their legislation.<sup>21</sup> These legal foundations for the two sectors prepared by the Rectors’ Conferences<sup>22</sup> in close cooperation are reciprocally compatible, to assure that the reforms are well interconnected and consistent across the entire HE sector.<sup>23</sup> The Rectors’ Conferences achieved an agreement on the permeability between the three different kinds of HE institutes in November 2007, which came into effect on 1<sup>st</sup> August 2008. Regarding the Bologna coordi-

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<sup>18</sup> Another factor for internationalization of the system consists in the rising importance of international comparisons and rankings.

<sup>19</sup> [http://www.sbf.admin.ch/htm/themen/uni/bologna\\_fr.html](http://www.sbf.admin.ch/htm/themen/uni/bologna_fr.html) as of 20.03.2009

<sup>20</sup> The SUK added an article on the equivalence between diploma/licence and master on 1 January 2005.

<sup>21</sup> In 2005, the “Federal Universities of Applied Sciences Act” was revised in accordance with the new study structure

<sup>22</sup> The political authorities have conferred responsibility for coordinating the implementation of the reforms to the Rectors’ Conferences. The Federation that financially supports the Bologna reform, contributes CHF32 million respectively €20 million for the years 2004-2007 to the cantonal universities. At the federal level, the Federation finances the Bologna coordination of the rectors’ conference.

<sup>23</sup> For all HE institutes, the new system is based on a first cycle comprising 180 ECTS credits (Bachelor) and a second cycle comprising 90 or 120 ECTS credits (Master). For physicians, one additional year of clinical education is required.

nation in Switzerland during the period 2008-2011, the SUK will effect a huge monitoring project considering all core Bologna characteristics (SBF/BBT 2008).

In 2001, the independent organ for accreditation and quality assurance (OAQ), common to the Federation and the cantons, came into being to set QA related requirements and to check compliance regularly. The corresponding legal foundations are the Law on University Promotion (UFG) of 1999, the Intercantonal Concordat on university coordination of 1999 and the Agreement of Federation and university cantons on the cooperation in the HE area of universities of 2000 that obliges universities to have QA mechanisms. There will be a new law on HE in 2012 that includes a unitary responsibility and regulation for QA. For all types of HE institutions, there will be a harmonization that is not yet achieved.

### *Structure for Bologna Implementation*

Legal responsibility for the Bologna process lies in the SUK for the cantonal Universities and the ETH, in the FH Council for Universities of Applied Sciences for FHs, and in the EDK for PHs. The three bodies have passed legally binding “Bologna Directives”. At the institutional level, the implementation of the legal framework is overseen by the three executive bodies<sup>24</sup>, which collaborate closely and report to their respective political authorities. All three have set up Bologna commissions, which bring together representatives of all member institutions and other stakeholders to ensure a coordinated implementation of the reforms. Their activities include the establishment of guidelines, recommendations and codes of best practice regarding general aspects of the reforms as well as coordination and support of curricular reforms, ECTS, admission regulations, mobility, monitoring, improvements, QA and the social aspects including gender equality. They provide a platform for inter-institutional discussion of all Bologna-related issues (SBF/BBT 2008).

### *Progress*

The Bologna implementation made considerable progress in the last years. In autumn 2006, all first year students except for medicine entered bachelor programs. Since autumn 2007, this is also the case for medical students. In fall 2008, the FHs started their first master programs, after having delivered their first bachelor degrees in the same year. The PHs have delivered their first bachelor degrees in 2004 and their first master degrees in 2007 (SBF/BBT 2008). Already in 2010, Bachelor and Master studies will have replaced the

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<sup>24</sup> Rectors' Conference of the Swiss Universities, Rectors' Conference of the Swiss Universities of Applied Sciences, Swiss Conference of Rectors of Universities of Teacher Education.

single-level diploma or degree studies. Before this date, the various universities still award degrees according to the existing Swiss tradition, i.e. the degree of diploma, doctorate and state doctorate. Likewise, those interested in international cooperation are very active in trying to reduce most of the other potential barriers. For example, the ECTS, which facilitates recognition of study periods abroad upon return to the home country, is being introduced rapidly at all university-level Swiss institutions.<sup>25</sup>

The stage of implementation of *ECTS* is 100 per cent of the total number of HE programs. This means that all program components are linked with ECTS credits. ECTS is regarded as revolution in universities, and as an instrument for mobility, because the actual study time of students becomes decisive (Interview CH6, 18). However, ECTS credits are only in some programs linked with learning outcomes in Switzerland. According to an interview partner, *ECTS* is one of the rare points that do not yet work very well in Switzerland and are considered a completely new instrument (Interview CH2). A national student survey at Swiss Universities reveals that there are still too many differences between institutions or subject areas regarding the use of ECTS and workload per credit, that learning outcomes are often not communicated, or that some curricula are not flexible enough (SBF/BBT 2008). Critiques claim that academic studies are nowadays determined by the collection of credit points, not any more by cognitive interest (Interview CH12). The ECTS is said to have led to a strong regimentation that can be seen positively or negatively.

A key element in the Bologna Process is the *modularization* of study programs. Modules are considered the building blocks forming the curriculum. Similar to ECTS, modularization is said to have caused regimentation and is also considered to be a novel device. In its importance, modularization, ECTS and targeting is even regarded as a more decisive instrument than the introduction of the Bachelor/Master structure and a central philosophy of Bologna (Interview CH6).

*Mutual recognition* of study degrees is, besides the ECTS, another aim of Bologna that has not been desirably fulfilled yet. ‘This would be the aim, this is the philosophy of the Bologna Process. Simple mobility without high hurdles. In the moment there are still many hurdles, such as that of recognition.’ (Interview CH21).

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<sup>25</sup> [http://www.sbf.admin.ch/htm/themen/uni/universitaeten\\_en.html](http://www.sbf.admin.ch/htm/themen/uni/universitaeten_en.html) as of 20.03.2009

*Mobility* and exchange have been furthered, particularly within Switzerland but also with other European countries, due to the enhanced transparency via harmonization of study structures as well as due to QA (Interview CH2, 17, 18, 21). Transparency also furthered competition (Interview CH17).

*Without some comparability of the quality of institution and study programs, this European vision of mobility of students could not be realized. Thus, it is important to make QA on the international level (Interview CH21).*

On the other hand, critics state extended mobility was only a promise (Interview CH6). Due to the increased structuring of studies, it would not have been enhanced (Interview CH3).

#### *Changes of the Actor Constellations*

The Bologna Process modified the Swiss constellation and preferences of actors. Surprisingly, the Bologna reform changed the division of power in favor of the executive at the expense of the legislative. The federal government has become more powerful as it provides financial means and has clear competences, e.g. in research. The cooperation between the Federation and the cantons has been strengthened through the introduction of the Swiss University Conference in 2001, consisting of representatives of both sides. This guaranteed the feasibility and bindingness of the Bologna Process. For the first time, guidelines could be fixed that are binding for all universities (Interview CH2). In the context of a lack of financial resources in HE, processes of cooperative federalism were enhanced due to Bologna. Without federal financing, universities never would have been able to introduce Bologna (Interview CH7, 14).

The successful implementation of the Bologna aims strengthened both university institutions – the CRUS and the SUK (Interview CH14) – and the FH institution, the KFH. The initial evaluation of the Bologna Reform in Switzerland began with the assessment of the status quo and an appraisal attempt in 1999. For the coordination of *universities*, the CRUS assembled an implementation project with the approval of the Swiss federal government. The most important phase in Switzerland was marked when the CRUS, whose attitude towards Bologna is meanwhile positive, was given the responsibility for the coordination of Bologna in 2000. The federal level would not have been able to take this task because the cantons had rejected this as an intervention in their field of competence (Interview CH2).

The SUK comprises all cantons with HE institutions. Formerly, it only had the possibility to give recommendations. Already before Bologna, it received the financial and policy-making power, i.e. the directives it authors are binding framework regulations and state that implementation of the new structures for all study programs of universities will be completed by the end of 2010. Although single cantons sometimes mention criticism, the SUK is pro-Bologna, furthers Bologna related projects and finances universities in their process (Interview CH2).

In the same year, and in a similar fashion as the universities, the *FHs* also recognized the importance of the Bologna reform process and commenced its own parallel FH reform project in agreement with the universities. The *KFH* cooperates with federal and cantonal authorities and acts as the coordinating body for the Bologna implementation process in the *FHs*. After the recently created colleges of education started operations over the past few years, they also started a reform project that was closely modeled on the projects of the *FHs* and the universities. A steering committee, which is made up of representatives from all three HE institution types, officials from directly involved federal offices and the EDK delegates, coordinates the implementation of the Bologna Declaration throughout Switzerland.

## **Revised Constitution and Swiss Higher Education Landscape**

Only at the turn of the century, substantial HE reforms came into action for harmonizing cantonal systems due to the rising cross-cantonal and international need for coordination. The highly positive recognition of the new *Constitutional Article 63a on Higher Education* by the people and the cantons in 2006 marks this development of harmonization (Interview CH13). The article regulates that Federation and cantons jointly steer the HE institutes. Thus, the new regulation obliges the Federation and the cantons to enhance their cooperation and coordination in HE and undertakes a harmonization of the Swiss education system such as of study phases and of financing, without fundamentally changing the existing division of competences. In a referendum on 21 May 2006, 86 per cent of voters and all cantons accepted the revised Constitution. Surprisingly, the *veto players* did not hinder change. They paved the way for far-reaching change in Switzerland.

The new article on HE 63a regulates that federation and cantons provide the coordination and quality assurance in HE via contracts and transfer of competences to common organs. The article created the necessary preconditions under constitutional law for a strong all-

Swiss guidance of the whole HE area, for a transparent financing orientated on performance and results, for a strategic planning and a better task sharing among HE institutes. Hence, it provides the foundation for the new reform project “*Higher Education Landscape Switzerland*”.

This project is currently worked on by the Federation and the cantons<sup>26</sup>. Their aim is to enact legislation regulating the entire HE sector in a uniform fashion and to create a unitary national ‘area of HE and research’ to guarantee that universities supply high quality and stay competitive, and to ameliorate the coherence and efficiency of the system and its institutions.<sup>27</sup> In the reform process, elite universities were discussed to enable universities to choose students themselves. However, this was never implemented because of the *guiding principle* that Matura qualifies for university accession to accomplish equality of chances regarding individuals. Equality of chances regarding the universities is necessary to assure a good quality in all cantons and in all universities (Interview CH2).

According to the new Constitutional Article 63a, the Federation and the cantons together coordinate and guarantee quality in Swiss HE. This requires new legal foundations for both sides. On the side of the Federation, it is the Federal Law on Promotion and Coordination of HE Institutions (HFKG) draft. The HFKG draft is currently under examination by the EDI and the EVD and will be passed by the Federal Council in summer 2009. It will be the only legal basis of the Federation for the financial promotion of cantonal universities and FHs, and for the political steering of the whole HE system together with the cantons.

## **Changing Dimensions of National Education Policy Making**

This chapter brought certain evidence that an unusually high number of reforms was introduced in Swiss HE since the 1990s. In sum, this chapter set out to provide a picture of the reforms introduced during the last three decades in Swiss HE in the three dimensions of national policy making. The reforms in HE *policy* mainly consisted in the introduction of Bologna related reforms, such as the two-tier study system, the ECTS, and the QA system. Reforms triggered by the Bologna Process make up the majority of reforms in Swiss education policy since the late 1990s. Interestingly, the introduction of the Bologna reforms in

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[http://www.sbf.admin.ch/htm/dokumentation/publikationen/grundlagen/factsheets/FS01\\_Hochschulsyste\\_m\\_e\\_2008.pdf](http://www.sbf.admin.ch/htm/dokumentation/publikationen/grundlagen/factsheets/FS01_Hochschulsyste_m_e_2008.pdf) and [http://www.sbf.admin.ch/htm/themen/uni\\_hls\\_de.html](http://www.sbf.admin.ch/htm/themen/uni_hls_de.html) as of 20.03.2009

<sup>27</sup> [http://www.sbf.admin.ch/htm/themen/uni\\_en.html](http://www.sbf.admin.ch/htm/themen/uni_en.html) as of 20.03.2009

all 26 cantons led to a more unitary Swiss education system. Internationalization thus triggered domestic harmonization. For *polity*, the constitutional duty for joint steering of HE by the Federation and the cantons is in the center. The new Constitutional Article on HE aims to improve cooperation between the Federation and the cantons in the realm of colleges and universities. Consequently, changes in polity also caused changes in *politics*: Processes changed because new actors entered the scene, due to the establishment of the OAQ, the PHs and the FHs, along with the KFH and the FH Council. However, there were not as many changes as in policy.

The period from the 1980s until the mid-1990s was determined by few changes, but in the last decade the level of education reforms increased dramatically and led to a huge wave of reforms. As a result, the reform activities can be divided up into two periods, a rather passive and a highly active. The cutting line is the Bologna Process of 1999. This incise reveals the important role of the Bologna Process as influence factor for the reforms in Switzerland.

## 4 INTERNATIONAL AND DOMESTIC MECHANISMS TRIGGERING REFORMS

As the Bologna Process employs the “Open Method of Coordination” as an intergovernmental method for fostering mutual learning, there are no coercive mechanisms towards the member states that account for the high level of adaptation to Bologna principles. In the contrary, in a policy field that is skeptically defended against exogenous invasions, voluntary, informal methods even succeed the best. Consequently, the diverse “new”<sup>28</sup> *governance instruments* (Borrás/Conzelmann 2007) used by the EU Commission in the case of the Bologna Process to build up its competencies in HE and to exert influence on the nation-states did not directly trigger changes in Switzerland. Thus, the mediating influence of *national transformation capacities* such as *veto players* and nationally rooted *guiding principles* of education must be considered as well.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> „Old“ governance includes e.g. the asymmetrical relationship between insiders and outsiders, the imposition of predetermined formal rules, the exclusive participation of bureaucratic actors, or top-down communication structures (Schimmelfennig/Sedelmeier 2004: 675).

<sup>29</sup> See theoretical discussion of IO governance instruments and national transformation capacities (Leuze et al. 2008).

## **EU Governance Instruments and Guiding Principles on Education**

The EU entered the “forbidden” area of higher education crabwise, as it does not have any legal competences in the field of education, and as Switzerland as a non EU member would have repelled direct intrusion in their domain. The EU Commission influences the signatory states indirectly via *governance instruments* applied in the unbinding intergovernmental Bologna Process, and is thus able to release transformations in the states. Thus, the Bologna Process accounts for the majority of Swiss reforms in HE.

### *Standard Setting*

The Commission makes up a central part of the Bologna Process, so that its forces cannot be explained without referring to the Commission. Via the Bologna Process, the Commission takes part in *setting standards* by establishing a definite set of aims for HE. Prominently, these are the Bachelor-Master structure, quality assurance standards, mobility enhancement, the ECTS, and mutual recognition of study degrees. The achievement of the Bologna Process is in first line due to this ability of *setting standards* on the basis of which the Swiss system was transformed. As previously shown, most of them were ideally implemented in Switzerland. The first ambition of the introduction of two-tier study structures of the *Bachelor/Master* is terminated to a large extent compared with the guidelines and is also especially advanced when it comes to the comparison with other Bologna countries. A problem exists concerning the employability and professional qualification of Bachelor alumni (Interview CH2, 4, 6).

*The degree of Bachelor serves for mobility and not as first degree that enables a chance on the labor market. But now the discussion begins so that also the economy starts to discover the value of the Bachelor (Interview CH2).*

### *Discursive Dissemination*

As a voting member in the Bologna Follow-Up Group<sup>30</sup>, the EU Commission contributed to the Bologna Stocktaking exercise through the contributions of the Eurydice network producing country analysis and comparative overviews. Via Bologna, the Commission provides a platform for the international and national discussion of educational topics, thus

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<sup>30</sup> The Bologna Follow-Up Group chaired by the EU-Presidency includes the European Commission as a voting member, representatives of the 46 signatory countries as well as the stakeholder organizations as consultative members. The Bologna preparatory group is composed of representatives of countries having hosted the previous ministerial meetings, the host of the following ministerial meeting, two EU member states and two non-EU member states (elected by the Bologna Follow-Up Group), the European Commission and the present EU-Presidency.

spreading international policy models via transnational communication processes and policy learning, in the countries participating in Bologna. Particularly the Bologna seminars reveal the importance of this instrument of *discursive dissemination*. By making diverse recommendations and disseminating publications that were used as terms of reference for the reconstruction of the Swiss HE system, the Commission impacted on domestic policy making. For instance, it disseminated the idea of stressing the economic effects of education, and of competition, so QA and evaluation came to the foreground. Bologna *disseminated* the *consciousness* for the importance of quality assurance and the *guiding principle* of education as a means for economic aims, particularly regarding labor market issues and employability. The implementation of the aim of employability was realized by introducing the new study structures. The professors were not on principle against the goal of employability. However, informal *veto players* were the student associations that feared a potential higher impact of employer associations. The *national transformation capacity* of *guiding principles* matched quite well the aim of employability as the Swiss system is in general more practice oriented as, for example, the German one. However, the aim of education as cultural good can not be neglected in the Swiss educational tradition. Historically evolved *guiding principles* of education mainly refer to education as Dahrendorf's civil liberty and the German Humboldt model of education as self-actualization, not as macroeconomic 'wealth of nations' or microeconomic human capital. In sum, the Swiss *guiding principles* of education did not completely match the Bologna goals so that they had to be made compatible to enable far-reaching transformations. This blazed a trail for the integration of Bologna aims into the Swiss tradition.

Regarding quality assurance systems (EUA 2006), many reforms were introduced due to the Bologna Process and to the enhanced autonomization of HE institutions and their consequential accountability (Interview CH21). The *idea disseminated* via Bologna of enhancing quality matches the Swiss *guiding principle* of Humboldt's ideal of unity of teaching and research. This point was furthered by the student associations as they saw an advantage for their studies.<sup>31</sup> Although specific European trends are discussed, QA is still considered an issue of national sovereignty. Only a limited market is supposed to come

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<sup>31</sup> Formerly, the Federation was responsible for accreditation and doing peer review, now it is the Organ for Accreditation and Quality Assurance (OAQ) that works like an agency and prepares the decisions for accreditation. The final decision of accreditation is made by the SUK. Accreditation is a new process in HE introduced in whole Switzerland in 2002 to guarantee the quality of HE institutions to the Federal Office (Schwarz/Westerheijden 2004). The OAQ organizes the self-evaluation process, the peers, experts and files motions (Interview CH12, 14).

into being in the field of accreditation so that institutions can choose the institution (Interview CH21). Likewise, every university is obliged to have a QA system, but the choice of the system is up to the university (Interview CH2). This is due to the adoption of the European Standards and Guidelines of Quality Assurance (ENQA 2005). A consequence expected by interview partners will be the increased international competitiveness (Interview CH4) as well as the enhanced power of ‘customers’, i.e. students, due to the countrywide introduced evaluation of teachings (Interview CH6). Another effect is said to be not QA itself but its formalization (Interview CH21).

*I really think that QA can contribute to Bologna in two ways. On the one hand, there is the simplification of international recognition of degrees, on the other hand is the enhanced transparency in the HE area as a clear help of orientation for students, parents, labor market and society, so that they know what is offered where in which quality. Here, external QA can really help. These are main elements of the Bologna Process. Bologna cannot be implemented without QA (Interview CH21).*

In sum, the Bologna ideal of enhancing the quality of HE institutes by accreditation and evaluation, as well as the employability reveals a world view orientated rather on the labor market than on education as a cultural asset.

*“One motto of our globalization is surely the international economy in which we are integrated like few other countries. Thus it is sure particularly concerning tertiary education that we are compatible with the cultures of the international economy. This is the main driving force. We need qualified labor and produce labor with our education system.” (Interview CH24).*

### *Coordinative Activities*

As a consultative member in the Bologna Follow Up Group, the EU Commission was successful by creating benchmarks via the Open Method of Coordination. The Open Method of Coordination applied to Bologna by the EU is a case of the instrument of *coordinative activities* through executive surveillance, which is particularly significant due to the little Swiss involvement with the EU. The use of Open Method of Coordination as a means of voluntary and legally non-binding benchmarking increased the importance of the EU in Swiss HE.

## **The Special Role of Veto Players**

Switzerland’s position regarding the Bologna Process is determined by its *transformation capacities*. Cooperative federalism, direct democracy and consociationalism involve a

high number of *veto players* that may complicate cooperation with the actors on the international level. How can the low resistance of Swiss *veto players* to the strong invasion by the Bologna Process into the domestic education system be explained? The reasons for the participation in the Bologna Process consist in the pressure of broad participation of the surrounding EU countries, particularly as Switzerland is isolated concerning EU membership (Riklin 1995). Thus, even the *veto players*, such as the people and the cantons, regarded the participation necessary to make the Swiss education system compatible with the other European countries, including the introduction of the ideal of the Anglo-American two-tier system (Interview CH6, 14). Moreover, the consultation procedure concerning the Bologna Process by which the Swiss participation was decided was unusually short, and the Federation was falsely accused of not having consulted the cantons – as formal *veto players* - and HE institutes - as informal *veto players* - in advance, as usually. In fact, consultation had taken place, but the consequences of the reform – that is perceived as ‘the biggest reform since Humboldt’ – were underestimated (Interview CH2). Another motivation for joining the international initiative was the strategic use of the Bologna Process by the rectors of HE institutes – also informal *veto players* – for reaching their own aim, namely the renovation of Swiss teaching. By taking part in Bologna, other reforms were introduced to overcome the reforms’ backlog of the 1980s and 1990s. The Bologna Process thus was exploited by domestic actors as a remedy for the legitimization of their policy-making (Moravcsik 1993).

*The reasons why resistance of students and professors was not enormous is due to the high need for reforms in universities. Bologna was used by university rectors and professors to implement reforms that were overdue. Insofar, Bologna was a vehicle for other reform processes (Interview CH7).*

In general, the Bologna Process is looked upon favorably in Switzerland but also deemed necessary for international competitiveness of both HE institutions and economy. So the corresponding reforms were introduced comparatively quickly and extensively. This is also because policy actors used the “international argument” – i.e. Bologna – as a scapegoat to blame when introducing controversial reforms (Gonon 1998). Despite some criticism<sup>32</sup>, the cantonal education directions took hold fast because universities had a high need for reform after the backlog of reforms (Interview CH7).

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<sup>32</sup> The HE institutions sometimes condemn Bologna. Disapproval also depends on the branch of study. Often humanities consider Bologna negative because their implementation process is different from natural sci-

## Summary

In Swiss HE, there was an enormous impact of EU governance instruments: As a Bologna member, the Commission is able to influence Switzerland indirectly via the Bologna Process. It impacts on Swiss policy making predominantly via *soft governance instruments* that differ in their degree of impact, with the instruments of setting educational standards, dissemination of ideas, and coordinative activities ranking on top.

The creation of guidelines of education through the IO governance instrument of *discursive dissemination* reveals its significance mainly in the Bologna seminars, to which interviewees ascribe a central driving force for the Swiss implementation of the Bologna Process. This is because Bologna provides a platform for the international and national discussion of educational topics, thus assigning them a high relevance and spreading knowledge and ideas. Via processes of transnational communication and policy learning, international models are spread in the participating countries. Moreover, the EU Commission is a voting member in the Bologna Follow-Up Group<sup>33</sup>, and contributed to the Bologna Stocktaking exercise through the contributions of the Eurydice network producing country analysis and comparative overviews. Of all IO governance instruments, this instrument influenced Swiss HE the most.

Informal *standards* by prescribing behavior were set via the Bologna Process and its follow-up conferences by the European Commission, to be achieved until 2010. For instance, in the FH area, Switzerland adapted completely to the European Standards and Guidelines of Quality Assurance (ENQA 2005).

The EU's Open Method of Coordination applied to the Bologna Process is an example for the *coordinative activities* through executive surveillance, which is especially important due to the rather low contact of Switzerland with EU countries in educational matters. In

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ences that counter minor problems when introducing Bologna (Interview CH2). The Union of Students in Switzerland, sometimes also professors, mentions criticism such as the regimentation of studies (Interview CH13). The most important problem of Bologna for students is seen by interviewees in the regimentation processes that make it impossible to have a job during studies (Interview CH2, 13). This issue was not that salient in FH studies, as they already had been more structured than those of universities (Interview CH7). Reasons for regimentation are also due to the public budget (Interview CH2). Some interviewees regarded regimentation positive (Interview CH6).

<sup>33</sup> The Bologna Follow-Up Group chaired by the EU-Presidency includes the European Commission as a voting member, representatives of the 46 signatory countries as well as the stakeholder organizations as consultative members. The Bologna preparatory group is composed of representatives of countries having hosted the previous ministerial meetings, the host of the following ministerial meeting, two EU member states and two non-EU member states (elected by the Bologna Follow-Up Group), the European Commission and the present EU-Presidency.

this context, the governance instruments of *financial incentives* in form of transfer payments, e.g. EU project financing, as well as *technical assistance* were found to be rather indecisive.

The strong impact of these governance mechanisms of the EU Commission succeeded to overcome Swiss reform-hindering settings, its *national transformation capacities* consisting of *guiding principles* and *veto players*. First, the participation in Bologna altered domestic *guiding principles* on education of policy makers in Switzerland towards its idealistic frameworks, so that they matched the Bologna goals. This facilitated the implementation of the aims of Bologna. Second, domestic *veto players* orient on their own profit, that of their country and of their stakeholders. The consideration of advantages and disadvantages ended clearly in favor of reforms, not of stagnation and maintaining the status quo. They expected higher advantage of reform than of non-reform, because the adaptation to Bologna is highly relevant to the Swiss labor market and yields advantages for the economy, as Switzerland is a small open economy surrounded by the EU market. European integration is the most pressing problem the Swiss are facing. Moreover, to overcome long-standing backlog of reform, *veto players* used Bologna strategically. By referring to international requirements of Bologna, domestic reforms were justified.

As a consequence of this special constellation of national and exogenous influence factors, a wave of decisive reforms (see chapter 3) ended the backlog. Today, reforms induced by Bologna account for the majority of all Swiss reforms in higher education.

## 5 CONCLUSION

To demonstrate the high impact of international initiatives, I chose Switzerland as the least likely case for exhibiting reforms induced by the Bologna Process because of its reform obstructing political-institutional settings, the comparatively low involvement with international organizations, reflected in its non-membership in the EU. However, the Swiss adjustment to the Bologna Process was found to be extremely high: Far-reaching reforms were not hindered by its myriad of institutions prone to hinder change. The most important reforms in Swiss higher education were related to the European Bologna Process that underlines quality measures, the introduction of standards in education, and increased autonomy of educational institutes. The core educational reforms were heavily inspired and triggered by the Bologna Process and account for the majority of Swiss higher education

reforms. Both provoked the use of quality assurance measures, school autonomy, and educational indicators. This reveals that the impact of soft *governance instruments* of the European Commission, such as standard setting and discursive dissemination, outstripped the conservative effects of national *veto players* and *guiding principles* of education. The international initiative under study has played an unparalleled role in influencing Swiss education policy making in promoting overdue and controversial reforms. This reveals the success of the European Commission in furthering its aims in education.

The *national transformation capacities* – consisting of a high number of *veto players* (Tsebelis 1995) and *guiding principles* of education that did not completely match the Bologna aims – did not hinder reforms in Swiss education policy. In the contrary, there have been many reforms in Swiss education policy making in the last decade. First, this paper argued that *veto-players* may influence the possibility of domestic reform. I found that the high number of domestic *veto-players* did not act as a blocking factor. An important reason is the high degree of connectedness of the adaptation to the Bologna reform with labor market exigencies. As a non EU member, the Swiss labor market depends on the compatibility of its education system with those of the EU. Moreover, the cooperation of the *veto players* may be due to the long backlog of reforms in Switzerland, which was obvious to all *veto players* so that they were convinced of the need for reform or did not want to be blamed to hinder necessary reforms. Second, the compatibility of international frameworks and domestic *guiding principles* of education plays a multifaceted role. The medium degree of misfit even took a supporting effect and furthered change – while a total fit or a total misfit would not have promoted reforms (Börzel 2003). The European Commission's ideational framework was primarily economically coined, for example education is regarded a precondition for entering the labor market, human capital, and labor mobility (Ciccone/ de la Fuente 2002), while Switzerland relied on the ideals of Humboldt and education as self-realization. The Bologna Process altered these *guiding principles* of Swiss education policy actors that did not match its goals so that the implementation of the Bologna goals was alleviated.

In sum, the theoretical framework generally turned out to be useful for the assessment of policy change induced by an international initiative. Further research is needed to assess the underlying motives for the passiveness of veto players, and to examine in detail the domestic *guiding principles* of education and their stability over time. Particularly the literature on cultural accounts seems to be adequate (Goldstein/Keohane 1993; Meyer et al.

1997). On the basis of the empirical results however, an extension of the model might be considered by including the factor of necessity for reform after a long backlog of reforms. Thus, further research should focus on the temporal dimension of reforms, as the length of non-reform in a policy field might influence the probability for reform.

As the degree of impact of international organizations on different countries in education policy is still unclear, research on other states is needed to generalize the observed patterns beyond the Swiss case to embed it in the broader context of general developments in the field of internationally induced education policy reforms. For example, quantitative research comparing a high number of countries might help to assess if different countries transform similarly under the influence of international organizations and thus converge.<sup>34</sup>

Alternatively to this model, further research on the domestic adaptation towards international models, which is called delta convergence<sup>35</sup>, may use the theoretical approach of convergence theory (Knill 2005; Obinger et al. 2008). As this paper revealed that structural and ideational factors were not able to explain the high convergence in the Swiss case, the arguments of economic and political pressure may be fruitful for enhancing the understanding of adjustment processes. Moreover, its small size turned out to make Switzerland very adaptive to the international scene (Katzenstein 1993; Kux 1998). The pressure that the surrounding countries introduce reforms actually impacted on Switzerland. Therefore, research on small open economies may be applied (Armingeon 2007). In this context, the following argument may be assessed:

Both the Bologna Process and the European Commission, particularly their combination united in this process, were important forces driving higher education reforms in Switzerland. First, the participation in the European Higher Education Area is highly relevant to Switzerland in terms of mobility, competitiveness, and scientific exchange. Second, the EU influence was important, because it influences – as the main financial contributor to the European Higher Education Area – the Bologna goals and thus takes indirect influence on Switzerland via Bologna. Moreover, the Bologna Process also must be seen in a broader context as it has consequences for and is linked to economic and labor market policies (Armingeon 1999): Bologna membership is the ticket into the EU (labor) market. Being completely surrounded by a political and economic community of which it is not a

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<sup>34</sup> This would be captured by the term of sigma convergence, which describes “the extent to which policies of countries have become more similar over time” (Holzinger 2008).

<sup>35</sup> Delta convergence can be described as the decreasing distance of policies towards an exemplary model (Holzinger et al. 2008: 83), which is here the Bologna Process.

member, Switzerland did not take part in Bologna purely for educational reasons but acts in the interest of its economy and aims at a closer linkage to the EU. Without its participation in Bologna, Switzerland as isolated, single state would have been in danger not to be able to take part in and thus to fall behind the developments of the EU market.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<b>BBT</b>	Federal Office for Professional Education and Technology
<b>BFS</b>	Federal Statistical Office
<b>CRUS</b>	Rectors' Conference of the Swiss Universities
<b>ECTS</b>	European Credit Transfer System
<b>EDI</b>	Federal Department of Home Affairs
<b>EDK</b>	Swiss Conference of Cantonal Ministers of Education
<b>ETH</b>	Swiss Federal Institute of Technology
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>EVD</b>	Federal Department of Economic Affairs
<b>FH</b>	University of Applied Sciences
<b>HarmoS</b>	Swiss Reform Project for the Harmonization of Obligatory School
<b>HE</b>	Higher Education
	Federal Law on the Promotion of Universities and Coordination among Swiss
<b>HFKG</b>	Institutions of Higher Learning
<b>IO</b>	International Organization
<b>KFH</b>	Rectors' Conference of the Swiss Universities of Applied Sciences
<b>OAQ</b>	Center of Accreditation and Quality Assurance of the Swiss Universities
<b>OECD</b>	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
<b>OS</b>	Obligatory Schooling
<b>PE</b>	Primary Education
<b>PH</b>	University of Teacher Education
<b>QA</b>	Quality Assurance
<b>SBF</b>	State Secretariat for Education and Research
<b>SUK</b>	Swiss University Conference
<b>VE</b>	Vocational Education

## LIST OF INTERVIEW PARTNERS

### Switzerland

Organization	Acronym
Swiss Society for Research in Education	SGBF
Commission for Science, Education and Culture of the National Council	WBK NR
Department of Higher Education of the Education Directorate of the canton Zurich	HSA Zürich
Swiss Trade and Crafts Association	SGV
Organ for Accreditation and Quality Assurance	OAQ
Federal Statistical Office	BFS
Swiss University Conference	SUK
Swiss Employers Association	SAV
Association of Swiss Enterprises	ECO
Service for Education Research	SRED
Education Directorate of the canton Zurich	BD Zürich
Federal Office for Professional Education and Technology	BBT
Swiss Conference of Cantonal Ministers of Education	EDK
Swiss Rectors' Conference of Universities of Education	COHEP
Swiss Conference of Cantonal Ministers of Education	EDK
Swiss Federation of Trade Unions	SGB
Commission for Science, Education and Culture of the National Council	WBK NR
Umbrella Association of Swiss Teachers	LCH
State Secretariat for Education and Research	SBF
Swiss Science and Technology Council	SWTR

## **European Commission**

<b>Organization</b>	<b>Acronym</b>
Directorate-General for Education and Culture, European Commission	EK
Directorate-General for Education and Culture, European Commission	EK

## **BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE**

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