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### **Circular Letter No. 3**

To the Chancellors, Rectors and Deans  
of Ecclesiastical Faculties  
and for the information of  
the Rectors of Catholic Universities and  
Presidents of Episcopal Conferences:

At the end of the current academic year, the Congregation for Catholic Education addresses this additional Circular Letter to the attention of all those responsible for Ecclesiastical Faculties in order to inform them of the recent developments related to the Bologna Process. Moreover, the Congregation shares its contents with those responsible for the administration of Catholic Universities as well as the Presidents of Episcopal Conferences to keep them abreast of this important information.

Since the writing of our last letter, dated 28 October 2004, particularly intense activity has ensued. The Commission of the Congregation for the Bologna Process has met in Rome five times and various members have taken part in numerous seminars and meetings, fostering the Bologna Follow-Up Group (BFUG).

With this correspondence, we intend: to provide a synthetic review of the work that has transpired in the course of the year; to report on the recent Ministerial Meeting held in Bergen (Norway); to recall the objectives the Bologna Process that require specific action on the part of the Ecclesiastical Faculties; and to highlight some important recommendations.

#### **1. Follow-Up Seminars and Other Initiatives**

Between October 2004 and May 2005, members of the Commission and Officials of the Congregation participated in a number of the study seminars organized for the countries party to the Process as well as various meetings of the Secretariat of the BFUG.

It was decided to attend the seminars that focused on topics particularly useful to implementing a careful study of the technical requirements connected with the Bologna Process. In Nordwijk (10-12 October 2004), the seminar focused on student mobility and related matters; at Riga (3-4 December 2004), the recognition of academic degrees and duration of study programs was treated; in Copenhagen (13-14 January 2005), the various aspects of the Qualifications Framework were deliberated; and in Warsaw (14-16 February 2005), cooperation among the various accreditation agencies was discussed.

This year the BFUG has had a very ambitious work schedule, which included the four meetings of the Secretariat, in preparation of the Bergen Ministerial Meeting. The Holy See was represented at these meetings that had a particular significance for checking the progress of initiatives oriented toward achieving the common objectives set for 2005: namely, the three-cycle higher education system; the introduction of the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS)—a new system for

measuring, comparing and transferring credits; and the Diploma Supplement, a document attached to a higher education diploma aiming at improving international transparency and at facilitating the academic and professional recognition of qualifications.

In this regard, like all the other nations party to the Process, the Holy See through the Congregation, was required to submit to the BFUG a detailed report (Stocktaking Report) of the level of conformity of Ecclesiastical Faculties in implementing the reforms agreed upon in the Process. The BFUG has analyzed the submitted Reports and have given a comprehensive evaluation. As reported on the Bologna Process website (cf. [http://www.bologna-bergen2005.no/Bergen/050509\\_Stocktaking.pdf](http://www.bologna-bergen2005.no/Bergen/050509_Stocktaking.pdf)), the Holy See has received a good rating.

## **2. The Ministerial Meeting at Bergen (19-20 May 2005)**

The work of the Fourth Conference of European Ministers Responsible for Higher Education focused on two main topics: a mid-term evaluation of the progress made thus far, tracing the various efforts to implement the Bologna Process between 1999 and 2005; and to set goals and priorities to be in place by 2010 as well as to begin reflecting on the post-Process situation from 2010 and beyond. Information on this topic is available in the Bergen Communiqué detailing the work accomplished at the Bergen Meeting on the Bologna Process website (cf. [http://www.bologna-bergen2005.no/Docs/00-Main\\_doc/050520\\_Bergen\\_Communique.pdf](http://www.bologna-bergen2005.no/Docs/00-Main_doc/050520_Bergen_Communique.pdf)).

Regarding the mid-term evaluation, generally speaking, satisfactory progress has been made. The last two years, in particular, have witnessed an accelerated effort in applying the agreed upon priorities and goals: the introduction of a common degree system; the coordination of the creation of mechanisms and/or agencies for Quality Assurance; the implementation of a common credit transfer system, ECTS.

Further challenges and priorities for the future were identified as: the importance of academic research, particularly the third cycle (research doctorate); the quality of the social dimension of the conditions of higher education; and facilitating the mobility of students as well as the academic and professional staff. In the next two years (2005-2007), all the members of the Process must present a progress report to the BFUG, particularly dealing with: the implementation of the standards and guidelines for Quality Assurance; creation of the National Framework for Qualifications (a guide to all the academic requirements of the educational systems of each member country); the presentation of statistical data on the mobility of staff and students as well as on the social and economic situation of students.

## **3. Objectives to be Implemented**

We wish to highlight some of the obligations that the Ecclesiastical Faculties are expected to implement beginning with the academic year 2005-2006.

**a.** With the new academic year, all Ecclesiastical Faculties must implement the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) and introduce the Diploma Supplement. In this regard, those responsible for the administration of the Faculties are asked to follow the directions laid down in the General Guidelines that were sent together with the previous Circular Letter, dated 28 October 2004. If the Faculty is planning to implement the ECTS gradually, the new system can be introduced alongside the old system. With regard to the Diploma Supplement, however, the Secretariats of the Faculties are to implement its use immediately. In any case, students should have the opportunity to request the Diploma Supplement during the course of the 2005-2006 academic year, even if a definitive form is not yet ready.

**b.** More complex, however, are the efforts to create effective policies and procedures necessary to guarantee Quality Assurance. This endeavor will involve various levels of responsibility, including that of the Congregation for Catholic Education.

The first level of responsibility falls, however, on the academic institution itself. Each Ecclesiastical Faculty or Ecclesiastical Institute should draw up policies and procedures that are appropriate to carry out a periodic review or self-evaluation of the regular and effective operation of the institution in all its aspects (academic courses, the number of teachers, evaluation of the teaching, the size and use of the library, enrollment, internal relations, etc.).

The Congregation requests that each Faculty, during the 2005-2006 academic year, create, within itself, a committee to initiate the process of self-evaluation. To this end, the Congregation's Commission for the Bologna Process has prepared an outline of useful guidelines in this regard. (cf. the attached "Guidelines for Internal Evaluation"). We underline the fact that this first level of evaluation is a task entrusted to the responsibility of each Faculty and that the enclosed guidelines are only suggestions. At the request of BFUG, the European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) has prepared guidelines to follow in this matter. The most updated text is available at the following address: <http://enqa.net/bologna.lasso> .

It is extremely important to engage this process in order to achieve two results: above all, for the Ecclesiastical Faculty or Ecclesiastical Institute itself, to acquire a more detailed and objective knowledge of the effectiveness and performance of the institution, in accord with its mission; and secondly, to prepare a dependable database which will facilitate establishing the requisite Agency of Evaluation, in the near future.

#### **4. Recommendations**

The Holy See, in its commitment of implementing the goals of the Process, has obtained officially recognized positive results. Yet, there remains much to do in the coming months and years. These tasks include: a more resolute examination of the mechanisms of Quality Assurance; the appropriate use of the ECTS system; the creation of a centralized data base; and student participation in these processes.

In order to proceed correctly, without creating unnecessary distraction from the ordinary operation of our academic institutions, we ask that the recommendations provided by the Congregation in these Circular Letters be implemented responsibly.

An express recommendation is made concerning the implementation of the three academic cycles in the Faculty of Theology. It must be applied with careful attention to the canonical prescriptions of the Apostolic Constitution, *Sapientia christiana* (cf. Artt. 46-50 and 66-74). This legislation, which is to be implemented without exception, requires that the duration of the First Cycle of theological studies is five years, of which a philosophical biennium is included. This is directed particularly toward the Theological Faculties that also offer programs regulated by other member countries of the Bologna Process. On the basis of these valid ordinances, the three Ecclesiastical academic degrees fully correspond to the three academic degrees of the Bologna Process. Changes, therefore, to the general structure of the program or in the norms regulating the curriculum are prohibited without the express permission of this Dicastery.

In entrusting the above mentioned guidelines to the attention of the administrations of our Ecclesiastical Faculties and Institutes, we are grateful for your cooperation and are convinced that the Bologna Process can provide an opportunity to assess and strengthen the many academic Ecclesiastical institutions.

Have a safe and restful vacation!