

**FORGING THE REFORM<sup>1</sup>:  
BOLOGNA REFORM BETWEEN THE NATIONAL AND  
THE EUROPEAN, THE TRADITIONAL AND THE ‘MODERN’<sup>2</sup>**

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**Martina Topić**

University of Zagreb, Faculty of Political Science, Zagreb, Republic of Croatia

**Abstract.** *This paper analyses the Bologna reform in Croatia in the context of a broader Europeanization debate. Hence, Bologna is analysed in line with Croatia's long-term struggle to enforce Europeanization under its own terms. This means that, throughout history, Croatia has made attempts to Europeanise and modernise the country but, at the same time, enforced and maintained the national. This particularly applies to the education sector that has always been the battlefield for enforcing the national. In more recent history, this mostly reflects on the primary and secondary education whereas the higher education is left on its own. However, the higher education is poorly managed and the reform is imposed from the above. Thus, the Bologna reform clearly failed in Croatia. The qualitative research conducted for this study shows dichotomy of the national and the European, as well as the traditional and the modern. The conclusion of the paper is that Croatia is trying to enforce Europeanization under its own terms, which clearly fails every time such attempt is made and results in Europhobia. As a consequence, every reform with European connotation fails, and this happened with Bologna reform of the higher education.*

**Key words:** *higher education, Bologna reform, national, European, modern, traditional.*

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**Corresponding author:** dr Martina Topić

University of Zagreb, Faculty of Political Science, Lepušićeva 6, 10 000 Zagreb, Republic of Croatia

E-mail: martinahr@gmail.com

<sup>1</sup> The title ‘Forging the Reform...’ is inspired by the book written by Mark Thompson on the war in former Yugoslavia entitled ‘Forging War: The Media in Serbia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Luton: University of Luton Press, 1995 (Croatian translation).

<sup>2</sup> This paper is a result of research conducted within the international collaborative research project ‘Identities and Modernities in Europe’, financed by the European Commission under the Seventh Framework Programme (FP7). The author of this article was a researcher in the Croatian team (University of Zagreb). This paper is based on the research work conducted on work packages 6 and 7 (WP6 and WP7), where the author explored the Bologna system of education and the identity related debates. An earlier version of this paper was also presented at the 10<sup>th</sup> ESA conference: Social Relations in Turbulent Times, held from 7<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> September 2011 in Geneva, Switzerland. The conference paper was co-authored with S. Rodin under the title ‘Bologna changes between national and European: Lessons from Croatia’ and it was presented in a ‘Sociology of Education’ research group. An even earlier version of the paper was written for a CES’ annual conference held in Barcelona in June 2011. That paper analysed the Bologna reform in four countries (France, Greece, Turkey and Croatia) and it was presented under the title: ‘Bologna process as Modernization and Europeanization’ (co-authored with N. Garcia, H. Kuoki, A. Kaya and A. Tecmen). An updated version of the Barcelona conference paper was submitted as a WP9 (comparative) report to the European Commission.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The Bologna Declaration was signed on 19<sup>th</sup> June 1999 by 29 states<sup>3</sup>, and it has had five enlargement processes so far<sup>4</sup>. The idea originates from the Sorbonne Declaration signed in 1998 by French, British, Italian and German ministers of education. In a year, the idea spread to the first 29 countries that signed the Declaration. The Declaration never envisaged a universal education system in entire Europe but it specifically underscored that diversity should be respected and that the Declaration goals are set to converge education systems in Europe rather than impose changes over a signatory country<sup>5</sup>. Thus, the Bologna Declaration identified the ‘tools’ that need to be implemented to create the European educational space that will ensure mobility. The objectives of the Bologna declaration are:

“The adoption of a common framework of readable and comparable degrees, “also through the implementation of the Diploma Supplement”; the introduction of undergraduate and postgraduate levels in all countries, with first degrees no shorter than 3 years and relevant to the labour market; ECTS-compatible credit systems also covering lifelong learning activities; a European dimension in quality assurance, with comparable criteria and methods; the elimination of remaining obstacles to the free mobility of students (as well as trainees and graduates) and teachers (as well as researchers and higher education administrators)”<sup>6</sup>.

More specifically, the Declaration envisaged:

“Adoption of a system of easily readable and comparable degrees, also through the implementation of the Diploma Supplement, in order to promote European citizens employability and the international competitiveness of the European higher education system; Adoption of a system essentially based on two main cycles, undergraduate and graduate. Access to the second cycle shall require successful completion of first cycle studies, lasting a minimum of three years. The degree awarded after the first cycle shall also be relevant to the European labour market as an appropriate level of qualification. The second cycle should lead to the master and/or doctorate degree as in many European countries; Establishment of a system of credits - such as in the ECTS system - as a proper means of promoting the most widespread student mobility. Credits could also be acquired in non-higher education contexts, including lifelong learning, provided they are recognised by

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<sup>3</sup> Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Switzerland, United Kingdom.

<sup>4</sup> Croatia, Cyprus, Turkey and Liechtenstein joined the Bologna Declaration in 2001; Albania, Andorra, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Russia, Serbia and Macedonia joined in 2003; Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine joined in 2005; Montenegro joined in 2007 and Kazakhstan joined in 2010.

<sup>5</sup> Bologna, thus, derives from the Sorbonne Declaration, and the original idea was to build a Europe of knowledge and not just the monetary union. The Declaration specifically states: “The European process has very recently moved some extremely important steps ahead. Relevant as they are, they should not make one forget that Europe is not only that of Euro, of the banks and the economy; it must be a Europe of knowledge, as well. We must strengthen and build upon the intellectual, cultural, social and technical dimensions of our continent. These have to a large extent been shaped by its universities, which continue to play a pivotal role in their development” (Reinalda and Kulesza, 2005: 115).

<sup>6</sup> Bologna Declaration on the European space for higher education: an explanation. Retrieved from: <http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/educ/bologna/bologna.pdf> on 29 October 2011.

the receiving universities concerned; Promotion of mobility by overcoming obstacles to the effective exercise of free movement with particular attention to (...); Promotion of European co-operation in quality assurance with a view to developing comparable criteria and methodologies; Promotion of the necessary European dimensions in higher education, particularly with regards to curricular development, inter-institutional co-operation, mobility schemes and integrated programmes of study, training and research”<sup>7</sup>.

Despite the goals designed for the common good, when looking into the sector of higher education in Europe, it seems as if every country is facing the problem of implementing the Bologna reform in one way or another. Very often the Bologna process is understood as a top-down initiative enforcing Anglo-American system of education, and Croatia is not an exception (Kurelić, 2009).

Once the Bologna reform was implemented in Croatia, students found themselves with a higher workload even though it was expected to be decreased. Also, studying rules changed from one academic year to another as the process of implementation was evolving (Topić and Vasiljević 2011; 2011a). At the same time, different Universities and different Faculties inside Universities implemented the reform differently, and this eventually caused dissatisfaction among students that culminated in 2009 when large student protests entailed, leading to constant dissatisfaction and quests for reform ever since.

However, unlike Western Europe where the major problem seems to be the increase of tuition fees<sup>8</sup>, the higher education reform in Croatia brought not only a decrease of tuition fees but also the problem of chaotic implementation, considering that the old system of studying all of a sudden changed the new rigorous system and that the study rules were subject to frequent change. The Bologna reform also brought the problem of employability which is one of the key objectives of the Bologna Declaration, and this is where Croatia failed (Kurelić, 2009).

All of these issues have generated a conflict between the traditional and the 'modern', where the state has been apparently enforcing the 'modern' while those who should be in charge (students) insist that the traditional system of studying was better. The University academic staff (who are often partially blamed for the failure of the Bologna process) also have issues with the Bologna reform. Thus, the Bologna reform turned out to be a disappointment in terms of enthusiasm and Europeanization primarily among the students. In that sense, two large discourses may be identified in Croatia when it comes to problems of the higher education system: the conflict between the traditional and the 'modern', as well as the conflict between the European and the national.

This paper, therefore, discusses the Bologna reform in the context of a broader Europeanization debate. In that context, it firstly discusses the Bologna reform in Croatia as such, and the critique it caused. Secondly, it discusses the notions of the national and the European in the Croatian context since these two notions are inextricably linked and tend to affect all policies in Croatia, particularly those pertaining to the education sector. Finally, the paper presents the results of research conducted on the issue of the Bologna system of higher education, the attitudes of the civil society (NGO and lay people) towards the Bologna reform and the attitudes of the civil society on the interplay between the national and the European.

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> For example, in the UK students protested against the increase of tuition fees (see Ichijo, 2011).

## 2. BOLOGNA REFORM AND ITS CRITIQUE IN CROATIA

When it comes to Croatia, the education system can hardly be discussed within a general educational debate because the education system has always been a place for manipulations and indoctrination. This has its worst manifestation in the primary and secondary education where the state enforces the national aspect over the European, and where there is a large control of the state over the content of textbooks in all fields. However, when the system of higher education is concerned there tends to be more control over the implementation rather than content (Rodin et al, 2010). This is because the Constitution guarantees autonomy to Universities in a sense that Universities can solely design the content, textbooks and the literature students need to apprehend<sup>9</sup>. However, this has also caused the failure of the Bologna system which may be said to be ‘modern’, particularly in comparison to primary and secondary education which may be perceived as being traditional. After completing the traditional primary and secondary education (which, despite the changes, is still largely based on learning and memorising the content), students are expected to employ both the traditional study method (based on learning and memorising) as well as the ‘modern’ study method (based on creativity and personal involvement) (Rodin et al, 2010). An additional issue arising from this perception is the question of what the concept of being ‘modern’ actually means in Croatia<sup>10</sup>.

Croatia signed the Bologna Declaration in 2001 and, thus, obliged itself to harmonise its system of higher education with the Declaration requirements. As already noted, the Bologna reform was at first presented as a modernisation and Europeanization because the old system was perceived as outdated and non-compatible with the European ones. The new system of studying was meant not only to advance the European higher education but also to ensure the mobility and possibility of entering European work market for all EU citizens due to the recognition of degrees.

In that effort, Croatia set three priority goals that were meant to be accomplished between 2003 and 2005: the establishment of the education quality control; the introduction of two studying cycles (undergraduate and graduate) and the recognition of foreign diplomas due to ECTS system of credits for each course. The Ministry of Science, Education and Sports reported that:

“In order to realise its strategic goal, Croatia has taken it upon itself to promote education intensively, with an emphasis on higher education: (a) The acceptance of the European standards in the area of scientific research and higher education has initiated significant changes within Croatian science and higher education, the aim of which is to raise a level of efficiency in these areas and thus facilitate Croatian integration into ERA – European Research Area and EHEA – European Higher

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<sup>9</sup> The Constitution of the Republic of Croatia, Retrieved on 29<sup>th</sup> October 2011 from: <http://narodne-novine.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeni/232289.html>

<sup>10</sup> Modernity is seen as a term that appears in Europe whenever the “consciousness of a new epoch formed itself through a renewed relationship to the ancients-whensoever, moreover, antiquity was considered a model to be recovered through some kind of imitation” (Habermas, 1983: 4). In that sense, being modern is changing “with the belief, inspired by modern science, in the infinite progress of knowledge and in the infinite advance towards social and moral betterment” (Habermas, 1983: 4). In sociology, modernity, therefore, means “processes of economic growth, differentiation, rationalization, individualization, urbanization, and so on, as central dynamics of a theorized process of modernisation (Smith, 2006: 1). Additionally, modernity is also understood as a belief in human potential to resolve problems as well as a removal from emotions and magic, religion, etc. (see Haralambos and Holborn, 2002).

Education Area; (b) An increase in the number of students will alter the percentage of university and college educated citizens and, thus, provide Croatia with human resources necessary for its development; (c) The planned changes will be made feasible by financially strengthened science and higher education...<sup>11</sup>.

The Bologna reform was also supposed to decrease the workload<sup>12</sup>, but it turned out that students ended up being additionally burdened because the courses that used to last for two semesters (through autumn and spring terms) became two courses lasting one semester each. Yet, the workload in terms of the course literature remained the same whereas the students also got weekly assignments and mid-term examinations<sup>13</sup> which did not exist before. This practice apparently increased the quality of studying because students were now required to give presentations or write essays on selected literature, thus developing their presentation skills and academic writing skills, but at the same time the workload was not significantly decreased as they were still obliged to absorb a vast amount of literature for each course. Additionally, there were differences in the implementation of the Bologna reform from one Faculty to Faculty and the rules were subject to frequent change, which caused problems in the course of study (Topić and Vasiljević, 2011).

The issue of tuition fees was successfully resolved at Faculties that had a good will to decrease the tuition fees and implement the new system of payment based on excellence in the course of academic study; however, being partially implemented, the new system again caused dissatisfaction among the student population because some students pay more to study than others.

Ultimately, students still lack the competences that need to be developed before entering the job market, which was a major weakness of the old system of higher education. But, in the present situation, students are discriminated in the job market because employers do not understand the new qualifications<sup>14</sup>. In this sense, employers consider new BA degree as a former associate degree and not as a full BA degree because this first academic degree now

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<sup>11</sup> National report on Bologna implementation, Ministry of Science, Education and Sports 2002-2003 (at the time it was Ministry of Science and Technology). Retrieved on 29<sup>th</sup> October 2011 from: <http://public.mzos.hr/Default.aspx?art=6217&sec=2275>

<sup>12</sup> The old system of studying was a burden to students due to the vast amount of literature student needed to absorb during their studies. Examinations were mostly oral and thus too difficult; essays and presentations did not exist in most courses and, where they did exist, they were of no relevance to the final grade; etc. (see Kurelić, 2009). The huge workload is the reason why it was possible to recognize the old four-year Bachelors programs as Bologna Masters.

<sup>13</sup> The colloquia (mid-term exams) used to exist as an option to decrease the amount of literature required for the oral exam at the end of the academic year, but they were not mandatory. With the Bologna changes, every course is obliged to offer colloquia and students who fail are required to take a written exam. Oral exams remained in some courses as an option for increasing the grade achieved in the written exam. However, all these rules vary from one Faculty to another or from one Department within different Faculties to another.

<sup>14</sup> For example, a student survey conducted on the national sample showed that students are particularly dissatisfied with a large number of issues: a low amount of practical work and too much theoretical workload; poor examination management; a small number of optional courses; impossibility to take courses at other Faculties; too much workload (essays, programmes, mid-term exams); insufficient student mobility; non-compatible ECTS credits and the actual workload in courses; large study groups; official (final) exams are still the most important part of the final grade rather than the other (pre-exam) requirements fulfilled during the semester; etc. Retrieved on 29<sup>th</sup> October 2011 from: <http://ebookbrowse.com/analiza-anketa-o-bolonji-07-nacionalna-razina-unizg-uniri-unios-unizd-unist-pdf-d9225161>. For problems on finding work with Bologna-designed Bachelor degree, see: Globus (2010), H-Alter (2008) and dubrovacki.hr (2010).

lasts one year shorter than before<sup>15</sup>. This is causing inflation of potential employees with Master degrees because all students are now seeking (Bologna-designed) Master degrees that are again not properly recognized in the job market given the fact that employers are somewhat suspicious about a large number of potential employees with Master degrees<sup>16</sup>.

An additional problem is the terminology. In Croatian law, “the first academic degree (Bachelor), which is conclusive and should guarantee employability, is translated as *prvostupnik* (first-leveler), which instantly suggests that there is a second level which needs to be completed. The second cycle is translated as *diplomski* (graduation level), which suggests that it is equal to a pre-Bologna 4-year diploma<sup>17</sup>. So, undergraduate and graduate cycles are recognized as two levels of a pre-Bologna 4-year diploma. This is not a wrong translation but a conscious change of meaning” (Kurelić, 2009, 15-16).

There have been many problems in the implementation of the Bologna reform from the moment it was introduced. However, the revolt culminated in spring 2009 with students’ protests, when “many voiced that the Bologna system caused an identity crisis and a conflict between the national and traditional versus the European, the global and modern versus the national and traditional” (Topić and Vasiljević, 2011, 10-11). The students’ protest first emerged in support of the International week against commercialization of education (Mesić, 2009); however, “since the political establishment did not really wanted to face the problem let alone resolve it, but rather started to shift responsibility from one to another, the protests took a rather different connotation” (Topić and Vasiljević 2011, 11; see also Index 2009 b; Jutarnji 2009).

The student protests were immediately compared with large student’s protests from 1968 that threatened the Communist regime in former Yugoslavia (see Jandrić, 2002), and the link between the 1968 protests and the 2009 protests was reflected in the students’ discourse on protests articulated in terms used by Saint-Simone used when describing ‘parasites’ who are controlling the suffering masses (see Skripta 1-35). To be more explicit, Saint-Simone “when discussing these issues talked about aristocracy in France that was holding power over working population, but even in 2009 students found a common ground to enforce criticism towards the Government, in this vision seen as parasites holding power over everybody else” (Topić and Vasiljević, 2011, 11; Fiamengo

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<sup>15</sup> This is because the Act on Scientific Activity and Higher Education has equalized the former four-year Bachelor degree with the present five-year Master degree. It means that the former Bachelors are now entitled to (Bologna-designed) Master degrees and the official document recognizing the change of degree is being issued by Faculties. See the Act on Scientific Activity and the Higher education, retrieved on 29<sup>th</sup> October 2011 from:

[http://www.unizg.hr/fileadmin/rektorat/dokumenti/propisi/Zakon\\_o\\_znanstvenoj\\_djelatnosti\\_i\\_visokom\\_obrazovanju\\_procisceni\\_tekst\\_.pdf](http://www.unizg.hr/fileadmin/rektorat/dokumenti/propisi/Zakon_o_znanstvenoj_djelatnosti_i_visokom_obrazovanju_procisceni_tekst_.pdf)

<sup>16</sup> Formerly, Bachelor degree lasted four years, and a Master degree lasted for two years (with qualification MSc). Now, there are two models of study. Most institutions have opted for the 3+2 model of study, leading to obtaining a Bachelor degree qualification after 3 years of study and the possibility of obtaining a new (Bologna-designed) Master degree after 2 years of study. This model provides Masters qualification that did not exist before because it is only a Master degree but not an MSc degree. Concurrently, some Faculties implemented the 4+1 model of study which implies that the Bachelor degree study takes 4 years with the possibility of obtaining a Masters degree after one year of additional study, but again it is not an MSc degree. In comparison to the original idea of the Bologna process, the problem is that other countries (such as the UK, for example) consider Bachelor degree as a first degree that ensures employability, whereas Master and PhD degrees are considered as advanced degrees (Kurelić, 2009).

<sup>17</sup> This is because the former four-year Bachelors were designated as “graduated” students (*diplomski studij* in Croatian language). In this, the present Master is called *diplomski* (graduate), a term used for the previous four-year Bachelor study.

1987). It was, therefore, stated that students acted as a student movement (Mesić, 2009) although the organisational structure had little similarity with an organised movement. Additionally, "some voiced the identity crisis and the economic insecurity as reasoning behind protests with international event against commercialization of education just fuelling what has been hidden" (Topić and Vasiljević, 2011, 11).

As already noted, when it comes to control of the higher education, the state primarily controls the implementation of the Bologna process but not the content; this policy is directly opposite to the one used in primary and secondary education where the state controls the content (Rodin et al, 2010). The ultimate results were chaotic. It would be a speculation to state that this was done on purpose; however, this practice undermined the quality of higher education in Croatia and its international ranking, which is already very low due to the absence of sufficient research work inside the Croatian academia<sup>18</sup>.

Finally, some authors (Kurelić, 2009) point out that it is not possible to enforce changes where changes are not desired, that nobody in Croatia wanted those changes and that everybody was more or less happy with the way things were. As noted by some other authors, this means that Croatia faced some sort of "paradigm change", speaking in terms of Thomas Kuhn, and that the "paradigm change" was in interaction with tradition, speaking in Feyerabend's terms (Kurelić, 2009). In that sense, the Bologna system of higher education "is an undesired mixture of Croatian old tradition and the model introduced by the Bologna Declaration. Strictly speaking, this model is not a tradition because nobody on Earth practiced it when it was introduced (...) Scientific revolutions are impossible if scientists are satisfied with their paradigms. Radical changes in traditions of higher education are also questionable if the practitioners are not aware that changes should be made, i.e. if they do not have any problems with the way things are" (Kurelić, 2009, 11).

### 3. THE NOTIONS OF THE NATIONAL AND THE EUROPEAN, AND THEIR RELATIONS WITH THE EDUCATION SYSTEM

When it comes to notions of the European and the national, Croatia is a case of interplay of the two, and this interplay is a historical discourse. In this sense, throughout Croatia's history, the European element was used as an instrument for achieving the national (Topić, 2011). Education system, however, has always had a significant role in this because, whereas the official discourse was Europeanization, the discourse in the education system was to enforce the national<sup>19</sup>.

The discourses of Croatia being the cradle of Christianity and defending Europe from the Ottoman threat (*antemurale Christianitatis*) were the dominant discourses throughout history (Topić 2011; Topić et al 2009). Whenever Croatia was part of a state union, most

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<sup>18</sup> Croatian Universities generally have low international rating. This is the general situation, regardless of whether it is a survey investigating visibility of the University on Internet like the one conducted by Webometric or the quality rating (see NSZ, 2011).

<sup>19</sup> Several discourses rule Croatia's relations with Europe: a) Notion of *antemurale christianitatis* according to which Croatia is seen as a cradle of Christianity that defended European Christianity from the Ottoman threat and, thus, from Islam because it served as the outer wall; b) Notion of unquestionable belonging to Europe; c) Notion of the necessity to return to Europe; d) Notion of the European betrayal because Europe never properly thanked Croatia for its historical help to Europe and rejected Croatia in its unquestionable efforts to 'return' to the European club (Lasić 1992; Topić et al 2009; Topić and Todorović 2010; Topić 2011; Topić 2011 a; Topić 2011 b; Žanić 2003).

notably of the Yugoslav ones, at the rupture point, the discourse of a necessary 'return' to Europe and Croatia's unquestionable belonging to Europe would come into play in the public and the political sphere<sup>20</sup>. When the 'return' to Europe failed, the discourse of European betrayal would be brought into play (Topić et al, 2009). This happened in more recent history such as the one from the 1990s. When Croatia voted to leave the Yugoslav federation in 1990, the ruling elite reinstated the discourse of necessity to return to Europe and Croatia's unquestionable belonging to Europe (Topić and Todorović 2011; Topić et al 2009). However, from the 1990s, the regime enforced the politics of ethnic exclusivist orientation and praised some aspects of the notorious Croatian Nazi regime from World War II<sup>21</sup>. These policies were accompanied by the violation of rights of the national minorities (mostly Serbs) and diminishing women's rights who were only expected to procreate new members of the ethnically cleansed Croatian nation (Bijelić 2006; Kesić 1994; Topić 2009), as well as reinstating the Catholic Church and its radical policies in political and the public sphere (Bijelić 2006; Kesić 1994; Topić 2009; Topić et al 2009). As these policies were enforced, Europe did not respond with recognition to Croatia's aspiration to belong to Europe. Instead, being in the middle of the process of unification which is today reflected in the policy of 'United in diversity', the EU responded to the Croatian authoritarian regime with harsh critique. Hence, the discourse of European betrayal re-entered the public sphere (Topić et al, 2009). These manipulations with the European betrayal eventually resulted in wide-spread Euro-scepticism (see e.g. Eurobarometer 71). The Euro-scepticism again led to a massive referendum campaign to vote for entering the EU; the referendum was held in January 2012 but the referendum campaign was on the verge of being successful due to the pressure imposed on citizens to vote affirmatively (Politika.hr 2011; Udarno media 2012).

The education system served as a battle field for enforcing 'Croatism', which is comparable to the policy enforced by the Communist party in former Yugoslavia in an endeavour to diminish the national in favour of the Yugoslav. In spite of claiming to be different from the Communist regime and to be working for the Croatian interests, the political establishment from the 1990s actually pursued its own legitimacy through education. In that course, the political establishment enforced historical revisionism taking Croatia out of the regional, European and the world context, and placing it in the position of a martyr.

In this sense, the so-called mass slaughter of Croats in Bleiburg was a mandatory topic in history textbooks (see Grahek 2005; Najbar-Agičić 2001) while the atrocities committed by the Croatian Nazi regime from WW II, and in particular the issue of the Jasenovac concentration camp, were neglected and undermined (Goldstein 2001; Pavlaković 2009)<sup>22</sup>. Therefore, it can

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<sup>20</sup> This concept was placed on the Yugoslav public agenda when a group of left-oriented intellectuals formed a magazine '*Nova Evropa*' (New Europe) where they advocated Europeanized Yugoslavia. Under this concept, Yugoslavia was meant to be Europeanized following Croatia's European character (Roksandić 1989; Topić et al 2009).

<sup>21</sup> During World War II, Croatia established the Ustaša regime, a marionette Nazi regime that committed mass atrocities. The Ustaša movement was led by Ante Pavelić who had a status of a German *fürher* (in Croatian 'poglavnik'). The movement was founded in exile during the 1930s, and it had an anti-Yugoslav orientation. In 1941, the Ustaša's established a Nazi puppet state designated as 'The Independent State of Croatia' (Nezavisna Država Hrvatska). That state opened concentration camps and enforced a mass slaughter, under the mask of enforcing a sovereign Croatian state lost during the medieval times (see Pavlaković, 2008).

<sup>22</sup> Textbooks were also full of pictures of enemies and stereotypes (Karge, 2001: 21) and they were censored during the F. Tuđman regime, which particularly applied to textbooks critical of his regime (Höpken, 2006).



be said that the "lieux memoire for Croatian identity in textbooks was not Jasenovac but Bleiburg" (Höpken, 2006, 167 in Rodin et al 2010, 24), nor was it European either.

The Catholic Church also took a leading role in this discriminatory practice and found its place in history textbooks by claiming its crucial role in the creation of the Croatian nation<sup>23</sup> while concurrently ignoring, undermining, or in some instances fully denying its responsibility for the atrocities committed during WW II. Catholic priests also sit in committees for approving history textbooks and sometimes directly censor the content in case the author tries to diminish their presence in history textbooks and refuses to glorify their role in establishing the Croatian nation (Topić and Vasiljević, 2011).

After the change of Government in 2000<sup>24</sup>, the new regime liberalised the society, politics and the education system. However, the Coalition Government could not cleanse all of the nationalistic policies in only one mandate; thus, the education system remained the same<sup>25</sup>. These initial changes brought more pluralism in history textbooks; however, the problematic control of the Ministry of Science, Education and Sports as well as the presence and the influence of the Catholic Church remained (Rodin et al, 2010). The legislation remained more or less the same; the new National Curriculum (2008) enforced by the ruling party envisaged the European-oriented educational policies, as requested by the EU, but they are not fully implemented. Even though the National Curriculum prescribes the Europeanization of Croatia through its education system, it strongly enforces the national. On the other hand, the 'National Curriculum' is not strictly observed in practice and it is in collision with the Teaching Curriculum (plan and program of study) which overemphasizes the national aspect over the European (Rodin et al, 2010; National Curriculum, 2008)<sup>26</sup>.

Therefore, after years of 'Europhoria' and high expectations, citizens were disappointed (Fisher 2006; Novosel 1991) and Euro-scepticism entailed alongside with the indoctrination from the political establishment and the Catholic Church that re-entered the public and political sphere. As Croatia kept facing numerous obstacles (in these fields and others) on its way towards the EU, Euro-scepticism kept growing (see e.g. Eurobarometer researches 75, 71, 70, 64, 62). Therefore, it may be said that Europe and the European has always served as a reference point but, at the same time, as an instrument to achieve nationally oriented

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<sup>23</sup> It is true, indeed, that the Catholic Church played a vital role in Croatia's nation formation, particularly when it comes to the unification of Dalmatia with Croatia. However, considering how the role of the Catholic Church is portrayed in history textbooks, it appears as if Croatia would not exist had there been no Catholic priests to lead the nation formation process. The latter is overestimated and, thus, inappropriate for history textbooks.

<sup>24</sup> From 1990 until 2000, Croatia was ruled by the Croatian Democratic Union (Croatian: Hrvatska Demokratska Zajednica) of late Franjo Tuđman, Croatia's first president after first free elections in the 1990s. In 2000, a Coalition led by Social Democrats took over the power but only for one term of office, and the CDU gained power in two subsequent elections. Although the CDU has low support in urban areas, it has a significant support in rural areas, mostly due to the impact of the Catholic Church which openly supports this party in every election campaign because of favourable contracts they have with the state (Topić and Vasiljević 2011).

<sup>25</sup> The only change made by the former regime was a slight liberalization of the textbook market in 1996 but it did not put an end to the dispute over textbook content (Rodin et al, 2010).

<sup>26</sup> In fact, the only attempt to modernise the society can be found in liberal educational policies of Vice-Roy Mažuranić. These reforms started in 1848 and Mažuranić enforced them in 1873 and 1874. These reforms are considered as a first step toward full Europeanization of Croatia (Čepulo 2000; 2002). A further attempt to Europeanize the education system is considered to be the introduction of Croatian language as a mandatory subject in schools (Čepulo, 2002).

goals. It was not always the nationalist discourse that deployed these policies; however, one way or another, it is part of Croatian historical discourse<sup>27</sup>.

All these obstacles in the Europeanization process had a considerable impact on the society which largely demonstrated Euro-scepticism and Euro-pessimism. Consequently, every reform with European connotations had a good chance of receiving a negative response. In this context, the Bologna reform also got a negative response especially because it was enforced by the state, i.e. 'from the above' (Kurelić, 2003), whereas the changes were not really wanted (Kurelić, 2009). In this sense, the Europeanization project ended up confronted with the tradition, the latter being supported by both the Catholic Church and the state; thus, every effort eventually results in Europhobia.

#### 4. METHODOLOGY

For the purpose of investigating the discourses surrounding the Bologna system of higher education, as well as the general sentiments toward the national and the European, we conducted in-depth interviews with NGO representatives and private individuals. The methodology for analysing discourses surrounding the Bologna reform of education with reference to the Bologna system as such and the identity-related debates slightly differed in the conducted research involving the NGO sector and the private individuals.

Therefore, we conducted 12 interviews with the representatives of the NGO sector, including student organizations (6 interviews) and peace and minority<sup>28</sup> NGOs (a total of 6 interviews, 3 interviews per minority group). The interviews were conducted in the period from August to November 2010.

Then, we conducted 29 interviews with private individuals from the education sector, minority corpus and the general population. These interviews were conducted in the period from November 2010 to February 2011.

All interviews were taped (subject to the participants' consent) and transcribed for further analysis. The material was analyzed using the critical discourse analysis. The discourse analysis was conducted using the approach of Ruth Wodak (1999) who defines discursive 'topoi' as a core argument that appears in the interviewees' oral account, as well as Van Dijk's discourse studies (2007; 2009) using the 'problem-oriented approach'.

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<sup>27</sup> Stjepan Radić, a prominent national politician, sought independence for Croatia but not via nationalist policies of exclusivist approach; he particularly underlined the role of education and Europeanization as relevant for Croatia because education was meant to assure freedom (Radić 1971 in Roksandić 1989). He identified Croatia as a European nation situated between the east and the west. This discourse has been present in the Croatian public sphere until the present day. Radić urged for modernisation via the so-called 'agrarian industrialisation', thus underlying the crucial role of peasantry in modernising the country and achieving freedom (Radić 1994; Roksandić 1989), social equality and equal rights; this necessarily implied mandatory education free of charge (without paying tuition) and free textbooks (Boban, 2001). However, Radić also fostered the discourse of betrayal. He believed Europe did not understand the Croats; hence, he considered Europe as stupid and incompetent to develop in line with the United States (Boban 2005; Topić 2011).

<sup>28</sup> These groups included Serbs, Muslims and Jews. The majority of victims in WW II were Serbs but, due to the war from the 1990s, the populist discourse equalizes the blame; on the other hand, the atrocities against the Jews are simply ignored as there are no grounds for any excuses and justification. The Italian victims are subject to similar treatment and Italian politics toward Croatia is often demonised; thus, every attempt of the Italian government to pursue the recognition of atrocities committed against Italians during WWII is perceived in the populist discourse as an attack on Croatia.

The main research questions focused on the respondents' general attitudes toward the European and the national in general, as well as attitudes toward the national, the European and the modern within the education sector. The general attitudes were analysed through the question how the interviewees construct/make sense of their identity as regards their view of themselves as nationals, Europeans and modern subjects.

The interviews were conducted by using the semi-structured questionnaire which included a set of general questions but the interviewees were allowed to discuss issues they considered important within the research topic.

#### 5. DISCOURSES ON THE BOLOGNA REFORM IN CROATIA: BETWEEN THE NATIONAL AND THE EUROPEAN, AND THE TRADITIONAL AND THE MODERN<sup>29</sup>

Debates on the Bologna reform in Croatia largely focus on the impossibility to apply the Bologna reform to Croatian education system, the inadequate recognition of academic degrees, employment problems, as well as on the lower quality of education and a complete chaos this reform brought. However, there are two fundamental discourses: the problem of implementation reflected in the interplay of traditional versus modern, and Europe as a reference point.

##### **Problem of Implementation: Traditional versus Modern**

When it comes to discourses surrounding public debates on the Bologna reform, they are largely negative. The general argument underlying the narration of the civil society is that implementation of the Bologna reform in Croatia has been poorly managed. As seen by interviewees, this is due to Croatia's "unwillingness to adhere to any attempt to modernise the traditional Croatian society" (Topić and Vasiljević, 2011: 11). Therefore, the interviewees divided into those who perceive the Bologna changes as positive but not suitable for the Croatian education system due to its Anglo-American character:

"In Croatia we had a different education system. The Bologna process is a whole new process, a positive change, but it seems it is mostly inspired by the Anglo-Saxon education system. It seems as if their model has just been copied into our system which is so much different" (FP/ZG-1; Student representative, Croat)."

Some respondents see it as positive but poorly managed:

"...the Bologna process is understood in a totally different way. The competitiveness does not rely on the name of the degree but on the competitive knowledge. If we look into our literature, which is old and needs to be updated, professors who still teach same things, read old books, students who are not motivated and still only passively listen without any practical experience, we need to declare the break down of the Bologna process. (...) I think that the state has a status of traditional rather than modern. The traditional heritage is always in the foreground, and every process of

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<sup>29</sup> WP6 report had 61 pages and WP7 report had 46 pages. The whole section was written on the basis of findings contained in these two reports (not as a mere copy of the reports but a paper written on report findings). Thus, the quotations from the transcripts are taken directly (original reports include more statements from interviewees) but comments and the contextualization are newly written, or appropriately quoted from reports.

reform is somehow slowed down by some traditional point of view. I think that politicians are responsible for the current state of mind in our country” (FP/ZGS-2, Jewish minority representative).

Students believe that the Bologna reform is not designed for Croatia’s study system; there is a problem of uneven and chaotic implementation, where study rules often change and where studying terms and conditions are not the same for everyone. On the other hand, national minorities which are not directly included in the system of higher education see it as a positive change that is meant to modernise the education system and then consequentially the society as well. However, it has failed because of Croatia’s traditionalism. As it spreads to the wider society, it becomes a larger problem:

“I think that Croatia is more traditional than modern. That is the current state of mind in Croatia. Sometimes I feel I live in a truly traditional and conservative country. I think that one of the reasons for that kind of the state of mind is strong influence of the Catholic Church. We need to open our minds and aspire to become a democratic and modern country” (FP/ZGS-1, Muslim minority representative).

Here, tradition emerges as something negative but it is perceived through different issues. For students, it would be more comfortable to study in the old system whereas minorities insist that tradition is to be blamed for the low progress and the current mindset of the society in general; it further implies that tradition should be abandoned, including the traditional education system. It, therefore, seems that “discourses on the Bologna reform polarized between those who see the Reform through the education system (including all but most harshly students) and those who see Bologna as a means to enforce modernisation of the education system and the withdrawal of policies founded on tradition and traditional (including all but most harshly national minorities)” (Topić and Vasiljević, 2011, 12). This is also to say that the minorities who are not involved in the higher education process primarily look on the issue of tradition through the prism of modernity while the students who are involved in the education process primarily look on the issue of tradition through the prism of modernisation. When asked about tradition in the wider society, students tend to express critical views as well.

This has given rise to the question of Croatian and European values. In this context, there is no polarization; interviewees tend to believe that Croatian and European values are compatible but they think that these values are not fully implemented in the wider Croatian society. For the example, student says:

“I think values are the same, but they haven’t been put into practice (...) I think that we still haven’t reached the state of affairs where we can say we are actually pursuing those values. This is particularly due to that type of politics that is the way it is, that is leading the state, and that still doesn’t recognize those values as fundamental. I think we should hope that some day, when we have better people leading the country, we will come closer to the EU values and the system we should be” (FP/ZG-5, Student representative, Croat).

This may be directly related to the obstacles encountered in the Bologna reform. The state, which is blamed for the lack of appropriate values, is enforcing reform in an

incompetent way. The interviewees clearly detach themselves from the state and its activities, which raises an issue of state legitimisation given the fact that citizens oppose state policies (Ichijo et al, 2011).

The interviewees also recognized that the primary problem in the Bologna reform lies in the conformist old system of education which was more flexible in terms of students' needs whereas the new system is seen as an attack on the traditional way of studying; in the interviewees' opinions, these were the grounds for the student protests in 2009. Thus, according to the interviewees, the student protests were more about the quest for identity, or a battle for reinstating the lost (in this sense, traditional) identity and less about financial matters, or the economic crisis" (Topić and Vasiljević, 2011, 13). For example, students note:

"The protests were indeed in favour of tradition. Students protested because there was no explanation about what they should expect from the new system. The rules established for one generation did not apply to the next one (...) The protests were not a result of the economic crisis because they had begun before the crisis peaked. The protests were actually a result of identity crisis because the education system was changed to the core. The identity of the academic society has changed. The protests were not exclusively focused to this, but they had much more to do with identity crisis than with economic crisis. The education system was changed to the core overnight. The change did not come from within the society but was imposed from the outside, and it caused a disorder. The autonomy of the University has been largely affected. Students were not quite aware of that but professors were, and I hold it against them that they weren't involved in the protests" (FP/ZG-1, Student representative, Croatia)

"...I think the old system of education was better. It seems that pre-Bologna engineers were leaving their faculties with much more quality knowledge and they were much better than the present ones" (FP/ZG-6, Student representative, Croatia).

"... After five years of education, people have less knowledge than before when the study lasted for four years. The system is turning people into idiots because, when they come to the exam, the professor is not allowed to ask them questions outside of the textbook they studied. Professors do not expect them to know how to analyse the material and to think (...) They can't be scientists because they can't think; and if they cannot be asked anything that is not written in the textbook, then what does that make of them? Geeks!" (FP/ZG-4, Student representative, Croatia).

In this view, tradition is favoured but the state and politics are blamed for the lack of appropriate implementation of the reform. These views are reiterated within the minority population group but, on the other hand, minority interviewees specified that, with or without the education-related problems, Croatia has a long problem of dichotomy between the traditional and the modern, which is a much larger societal problem. In their view, this is primarily due to the Government policies, as well as the policies of the Catholic Church which has too much influence in politics and society. For the example:

"There is a terrible dichotomy between modern and traditional. (...) There are two Croatia's that co-exist in a way; however, the traditional moral is still too strong.

(...) The tradition is treated as some fairytale, or there is a creation of a fairytale out of the tradition” (FP/STŽ-1, Jewish Publicist and activist).

Once again, the minorities see the tradition as a threat to the Croatian society and its modernity, i.e. as a state of mind, while the students support the tradition when it comes to the education system. In that sense, there is a consensus on the critique of the society and the policy, but students tend to see it through their own interest-oriented prism. However, in terms of higher education, “although the Bologna process is generally seen as positive, when looking deeper, it is still viewed as a threat to the traditional society. In this sense, Europe is threatening the Croatian system by enforcing its ‘modern’ policies and, thus, interviewees involved in the Bologna process reject this change. The interviewees themselves recognize the problem but, at the same time, they seem to seek solutions that are of more traditional nature.” (Topić and Vasiljević, 2011, 15).

When it comes to private individuals (lay people), the Bologna reform of higher education is generally recognized as the most important change in the Croatian education system, but private individuals also express truly critical attitudes over its implementation. For example:

“...Personally, I think it’s something that is well-envisaged in theory but inside the framework of our education system it can hardly function. We do not have enough teachers, nor can our technical conditions at faculties meet the requirements of such a project. Let alone the fact that we are ‘producing’ people with Bachelor titles while at the same time we do not have a labour market for them...” (FP/Antonija, professor of Croatian language and culture, Croat).

All interviewees agree on this view, regardless of whether they are “professors, students, or private individuals” (Topić and Vasiljević, 2011a, 8). The difference is only in the approach. For example, professors speak about teaching conditions:

“... Irrespective of accepting the National Curriculum and rejecting the Croatian National Educational Standard, everything is still very the same and dependent on professors and their teaching methods and classroom management skills. All theoretical issues that were meant to help us in the implementation are still not enforced. We know that Croatian schools are poorly equipped; we know that in rural areas classes are still held in classrooms heated by fire stoves, where pupils have to put a plank of wood in the stove every two hours to keep warm, etc. Everything is still on the professors” (FP/Hrv./BI, professor of Croatian language and culture, Croat).

On the other hand, students speak about the poor implementation and inadequate study conditions. For the example:

“...I think Bologna is a good thing but it has been implemented badly here. Nobody deals with it too much; they simply implanted it and now they expect everyone to adjust to it in a way that best fits everyone” (FP/Kristina, Student, Croat).

“I think that Bologna has been introduced in Croatia too early without adequate preparation so that students could use all advantages that Bologna offers. There is also a problem of adjustment of professors to a new way of teaching, especially the

older ones, as well as the impossibility of qualitative teaching because of large study groups..." (FP/Nataša, Student, Croatia).

Other individuals (primarily from the minority corpus) who are not directly involved in the education system also speak about the poor implementation, which is viewed as a national discourse:

"I think that the Bologna system brought some improvements into university education but, at the same time, it is trying to meet the form instead of the content of education" (FP/SV/Msl, Muslim national minority representative).

Therefore, "it seems that all interviewees see Bologna as something good but, at the same time, poorly implemented. If comparing these results with attitudes of the NGO interviewees, it appears that there is an agreement within the citizenry that Bologna simply does not function in Croatia. Most interviewees state this is because it has been implemented without being adjusted to the national conditions, which further implies that Croatia was meant to find its own solutions to implement this important change. When asked this question directly (i.e. whether the EU should bring one common solution), majority of interviewees decline this and state that Croatia should find its own solutions" (Topić and Vasiljević, 2011a, 9).

In addition, it is worth noting the different opinions of student representatives and average students. Whereas student representatives underscore that students acted in favour of the tradition, students themselves indirectly deny this stating that they generally see the Bologna reform as something positive and well-envisaged but that they protested against its bad implementation. Concurrently, there is some truth in the statements of student representatives because students indeed pointed out that they would leave schools without relevant knowledge, which is the predominant discourse in the general public and the media.

### **Europe as a reference point**

Europe proved to be a reference point. Although general sentiments of the public opinion remain negative toward the EU, when it comes to the system of higher education, Europe is a reference point in a positive sense. For example, private individuals tend to see Europe as more modernised than Croatia. This is the general belief even though the interviewees tend to know very little about Europe and the educational problems Europeans are facing, or they do not know whether they are facing any problems but simply assume that education systems work better in other European countries. For example:

"Well, I think that developed countries in the EU already went through these problems and that situation in their countries is much better" (FP/Kristina, Student, Croatia).

"...I don't think so because other European countries are more developed in an economic sense" (FP/SV/SrOrt, Serbian national minority representative).

On the other hand, the students who are familiar with some problems other European students are facing "mostly know about student protests or they have vaguely heard about something going on in Europe, but they do not seem to know what is it about. Yet, in terms of Bologna as a system of education, none of the interviewees has shown any knowledge of the problems in the rest of Europe" (Topić and Vasiljević, 2011a, 10). For example:

“I think those problems exist. I am not really informed about the nature of problems in other countries, but I certainly saw in newspapers that the problems exist, that students are protesting, but I am not informed about what exactly happened” (FP/Jasna, Student, Croat).

Some students perceive European countries as being more modern than Croatia. For example:

“I think that European means modern and that other citizens of the EU are more modern than we are because they are turned to new encounters, they have fewer prejudices and they are more ready to change” (FP/Nataša, Student, Croat).

In this sense, interviewees recognize Europe as a reference point, and this primarily applies to the European state of mind which reflects a modernity discourse. The interviewees apparently recognize traditional beliefs and traditional states of mind as negative although, when it comes to the education system, they recognize tradition as something more positive. Thus, we may conclude that students are not against modernisation but against poor Bologna implementation. In that sense, they protested in favour of tradition, but not tradition as a state of mind and general societal discourse but rather in favour of the traditional education that provided more security in terms of study conditions and future employment. However, what is problematic is the attitude that the old system of education was of higher quality than the new one, and this might be a huge obstacle for the implementation of the Bologna reform in the future.

## 6. CONCLUSION

On the one hand, it appears that Europe serves as a reference point and, on the other hand, European policies tend to be seen as inadequate and non-applicable to Croatia. Thus, whereas the European values are generally perceived as compatible, they are not enforced due to the poor governance of the state.

Tradition is favoured by students in terms of the study conditions, but not when perceived as a state of mind; the latter aspect is criticized by both students and other respondents. In that respect, tradition as a state of mind is seen through the modernity prism and, thus, it has been evaluated as negative while the tradition in the education system is seen as positive. Accordingly, tradition remains defended as a way of managing things that fall within the ‘paradigm change’ mentioned earlier in this paper. Thus, tradition is defended because people were satisfied with the way things were in the education system and because the change was imposed from the above; for these reasons, the reform failed.

Modernisation of education is perceived as unsuccessful although it was well-envisaged and (partially) wanted. This particularly applies to general population, minorities and students whereas student representatives, or those who have to deal with problems the implementation is causing, tend to see Bologna as non-applicable and inadequate for Croatia.

While the process of Europeanization is the official state policy, the state concurrently fosters the national. In primary and secondary education, this tendency is reflected in the control of textbook contents; in higher education, it seems to be reflected in the lack of control and imposing the educational policy which is poorly managed even though it clearly stands as a paradigm of Croatia’s Europeanization.



Whereas the Europeanization discourse seems to be ruling the Croatian public policy, a poor management of this process causes dissatisfaction and, ultimately, Euro-scepticism towards all European-oriented policies. Thus, every bad policy is seen as an imposed but necessary part of the Europeanization process.

Therefore, Croatia is forging Europeanization once again while concurrently trying to preserve the national. In the education system, the national is preserved in the primary and secondary education while the higher education is left on its own. At the same time, there is a huge gap between the teaching methods and learning processes in primary/secondary education and those used in higher education.

Croatia seems to be forging the Europeanization process in an attempt to implement it under its own terms. It is some sort of continuous attempt to enforce Europeanization through the national, which ultimately implies blaming 'Europe' for everything that goes wrong or treating Europe as some sort of 'other' that Croatia should return to but constantly fails to do so. Thus, the notion of the European again serves as an instrument for fostering the national and the traditional.

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## **KOVANJE REFORME: BOLONJSKA REFORMA IZMEĐU NACIONALNOG I EUROPSKOG TE TRADICIONALNOG I “MODERNOG”**

*U radu se analizira primjena Bolonjske reforme u Hrvatskoj u kontekstu šire rasprave o europeizaciji. Drugim riječima, Bolonjska reforma analizira se u kontekstu dugogodišnjih nastojanja Hrvatske da provede europeizaciju pod svojim uvjetima. To znači da je, kroz povijest, Hrvatska u više navrata pokušavala provesti europeizaciju i modernizaciju zemlje ali je, u isto vrijeme, zadržavala tradicionalno i nacionalno uvjetovanu politiku. To se posebno odnosi na područje obrazovanja koje je*

*oduvijek bilo područje borbe za očuvanje nacionalnoga. U novijoj povijesti ova politika uglavnom se odražava na osnovno i srednje obrazovanje, dok je visoko obrazovanje prepušteno samo sebi. Međutim, visokim obrazovanjem se loše upravlja i reforma je često nametnuta odozgo. Shodno tome, Bolonjska reforma očito nije uspjela u Hrvatskoj. Kvalitativno istraživanje provedeno za ovu studiju pokazuje dihotomiju između nacionalnog i europskog te tradicionalnog i modernog. Zaključak rada je da Hrvatska pokušava nametnuti europeizaciju pod svojim uvjetima, što evidentno ne uspijeva budući da svaki takav pokušaj završi u eurofobiji. Kao posljedica, sve reforme s europskom konotacijom pokazu se neuspješnima, a to se dogodilo i s bolonjskom reformom visokoga obrazovanja.*

Ključne reči: *visoko obrazovanje, Bolonjska reforma, nacionalno, europsko, moderno, tradicionalno.*