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Riitta Pyykkö
(University of Turku)

“Bachelors for Europe, *Specialist* for the Fatherland”: Bologna through Russian Eyes

Media discourse reacts rapidly to changes in society, and as with all discourse, it both creates the society around it and reflects the changes in that society. In contemporary Russian discourse, the concept of *Bolonskij process* is widely discussed in newspapers. The aim of this paper is to analyse the discourse about the Bologna process in contemporary Russian media texts. How do the Russians see the Bologna process as a whole, what are the component parts of it, what is the role of Russian higher education institutions in the process, and what are considered to be the consequences of the process for Russian society. The material of the study consists of 80 newspaper articles from the period of 20.04.2007 – 20.4.2008 gathered from the Russian database *Integrum*. The documents analysed are from journals and magazines (10), and central (30) and regional (40) newspapers.

Russia as a member of the European educational environment

Russian institutes of higher education are facing the same challenges as US and European universities: changes in age groups, the internationalisation of education, changes in technological development and economic globalisation, which intensifies the changes in the external environment of these institutions (see Troyan 2008, 107–109). All this has led to different modernisation processes. Two main steps in Russia have been the national “Education” project and joining the Bologna Process in 2003 in Berlin.

This is not the first time Russia has become a member of the Western European educational environment. As Vladimir Troyan (2008, 109–110) pointed out, Peter the Great used the experience of prominent European scientists already when preparing the Decree of 28 January 1724 on the institutions of the Grammar School, the University and the Academy of Sciences. One of the specific features of Peter’s university was the active participation

of students in research work, which made it a research university close to the Humboldtian model.

Since 2003, Russia has been linked to the Bologna process, but the speed and level of introduction of the Bologna principles and guidelines differs considerably in various institutions. Also, the picture of transition to the three-cycle system with all other elements of the Bologna process found in official state documents differs from that found in academic discourse. For example, the national report for the London ministerial follow-up meeting (see *Bologna Process. National Reports 2005–2007. Russian Federation*) and the article of Vladimir Troyan as a national representative of Russian higher education for an international publication give quite a positive picture of the speed and rate of the implementation. On the other hand, even the articles in the official electronic Bologna CD collection (*Болонский процесс* 2008) tell us about at least hesitation concerning the process in Russia.

The titles of official Russian documents from 2002 onwards tell about the steps in the process. In 2002 there was a *Plan of measures for inclusion of the Russian system in the Bologna process*, in 2003 a *Working group for studying the aspects of the Bologna process*, in 2004 a *Working group for implementing the common European Bologna principles of development in Russian higher education*, etc. (*Болонский процесс* 2008).

The process has been very much “top-down”, and both the Russian media and personal discussions with representatives of the Academia in Russia reveal a slow and/or superficial movement. Also, the titles of the articles by individual Russian authors on higher education from 2004–2007 (*Болонский процесс* 2008) express a contradictory attitude: there are problems in implementing the process (*Болонский процесс: проблемы реализации в России*, 2004), the process is one-way traffic (*Болонский процесс, или дорога с односторонним движением*, 2004), there are special features and limits to be considered in the process in Russia (*Высшее образование в Болонском измерении: российские особенности и ограничения*, 2004), the two-tiered system is not suitable for the technical universities (*Техническим вузам не подходит система бакалавр-магистр*, 2004), does Russia need Bachelors (*Нужны ли нам бакалавры?* 2005), is the Bologna process a myth or reality (*Болонский процесс: миф или реальность?* 2005), does it mean standardisation or free flying (*Болонский процесс – стандартизация или свободный полет*, 2005), or does the Bologna declaration mean integration or absorption for Russian higher education (*Болонская декларация: интеграция или поглощение российского высшего образования?* 2006).

The two tiers of higher education were established in the Federal Law on Higher and Postgraduate Professional Education from 24 October 2007 (see *Закон* 2007). The Bachelor (3–4 years) – Master (2 years) model as opposed

to the traditional Russian specialist (which will be maintained in some areas, especially in Medicine and State Security) is still the most intensely discussed part of the Bologna process. This will also be seen in the analysis of the material for this paper.

What is the Bologna Process?

In the material, the Bologna process is called by different names. Besides a “process” (Болонский процесс), it is also called an “agreement” (Болонское соглашение) or “agreements” (Болонские соглашения), a “declaration” (Болонская декларация), a “system” (Болонская система), a “concept” (Болонская концепция) and a “convention” (Болонская конвенция).

Many of the 80 articles analysed are neutral and purely informative: they tell the readers about the content of the process, and especially about the two-cycle Bachelor-Master system:

- (1) Болонский процесс обычно ассоциируется с переводом высшего образования на двухуровневую систему «бакалавр-магистр», но в действительности предполагает также введение модульной структуры образования, единой системы зачетных единиц (кредитов), единых требований к качеству образования и обеспечения эффективного контроля за ним. (“Коммерсантъ-Власть” 01.10.2007)

The articles also explain the implementation of the process in Russia, what has really been done, and how it influences higher education. The participation has had a “fragmentary character” (2), the process “concerns mostly only the Humanities” (3), “formally Russia joined the process in 2003, but the first real steps are taken only now” (4), and there are “only 19 Russian higher education institutions which participate in the process” (5).

- (2) Участие России в Болонском процессе до сих пор носило фрагментарный характер. (“МЕТРО” 08.06.2007)
- (3) Введение Болонской системы коснется прежде всего гуманитарных специальностей. (“МЕТРО”, 08.06.2007)
- (4) Формально Россия присоединилась к Болонской декларации еще в 2003 году, но первые реальные шаги по реорганизации нашего образовательного пространства делаются именно сегодня. (“АиФ – Рязань” 19.3.2008)
- (5) На данный момент в России только 19 вузов участвуют в Болонском процессе. (“Наша версия”, Москва, 22.10.2007)

As the examples show, some newspapers see the actions taken in Russia in the Bologna process as being quite formal or just starting. This may be real-

istic, but may also be an underestimation, because there are also some quite active participants among the institutions.

Possibilities and challenges offered by the process

In most Bologna countries, the legitimisation of reform within the Bologna process generally draws upon both an economic discourse and a discourse of European cultural values and identity (see Fairclough 2006, 74). During the process the economic discourse has become more prominent, with an increasing emphasis on competitiveness and higher education as a driver of international competitiveness, the “lighter part” of the Lisbon Declaration.

At the governmental level in Russia, there is a commitment to the Bologna process, which can be seen, for example, in the public presentations of the Minister of Education Andrei Fursenko. Nevertheless, the economic reasons are less present in the Russian discourse. The reform is legitimised mostly in terms of the need for better quality (6) and the edification of a new kind of generation (7), as well as the inevitability of the process: “the process has already started” (6). “With good partners the process is not frightening” (8) writes a newspaper in Orenburg about a project on implementation of the Bologna process together with Finnish institutions of higher education.

- (6) *Процесс этот уже пошел, поскольку людей мыслящих качество государственной школы явно не удовлетворяет. (“Коммерсантъ-Власть” 01.10.2007)*
- (7) *На сегодняшний день Болонское образование интенсивно формирует новое поколение людей. (“Репортер”, Саратов, 13.02.2008)*
- (8) *С хорошими партнерами Болонский процесс не страшен. (“Южный Урал”, Оренбург, 26.11.2007)*

Signing the Bologna declaration itself already means that there also has to be a commitment in the institutions (9), (10). There are predicted risks and dangers if Russia only watches from a distance (11), (12), and it is no longer possible or reasonable to turn the process back (13).

- (9) *Подписав Болонскую декларацию в 2003 г., наша страна взяла на себя обязательства по реформированию высшей школы. (“Медицинская газета” 11.05.2007)*
- (10) *Процессы глобальные. Нужно найти выход, единый как для Европы, так и для нас, что и выразилось в принятии самих Болонских соглашений и в том, что Россия поставила под этим документом свою подпись. (“Литературная газета” 05.06.2007)*

- (11) Наша страна, подписав Болонское соглашение, не может оставаться в стороне от европейской образовательной интеграции. (“Социс – социологические исследования” 29.06.2007)
- (12) Если мы не войдем в Болонский процесс, мы будем на обочине мирового образовательного пространства. (“Российская газета” 19.12.2007)
- (13) Болонский процесс – *тот поток, который нельзя и неразумно повернуть назад.* (“Репортер”, Саратов, 13.02.2008)

Most documents reflect a quite contradictory attitude to the Bologna process. “It is obvious, that joining the Bologna declaration brings both pluses and minuses” (14), “My view is quite critical, but there is also an opposite opinion” (15). In (15) the risk of staying “in the periphery of the international educational area” is also mentioned.

- (14) *Очевидно, что России присоединение к Болонской декларации принесет как плюсы, так и минусы.* (“Социс – социологические исследования” 29.06.2007)
- (15) *Мой взгляд на положения Болонской конвенции достаточно критичен. [...] Но существует и противоположное мнение: если Россия не поддержит Болонский процесс, она рискует остаться на периферии международного образовательного пространства.* (“Экономика и жизнь” 29.03.2008)

In any case, the process in Russia will be “complicated” (16), “not simple and slow” (17), but the difficulties can be conquered (18). A mere mechanical participation in the process does not solve the problems of education (19). There is a threat of a gap between the official words and the reality.

- (16) Процесс будет довольно *сложным.* (“АиФ – Рязань” 19.03.2008)
- (17) Процесс *непрост и длителен.* (“Белгородская правда” 16.07.2007)
- (18) Все это вызывает трудности вступления России в Болонский процесс, но трудности преодолимые. (“Вечерний Ставрополь” 02.06.2007)
- (19) Механическое вхождение в Болонский процесс не решит проблемы современного образования. (“Вечерний Челябинск” 03.08.2007)

Not for us, maybe for Europe

The attitude of the Russian Academia to the Bologna process is “suspicious” (20). There is also doubt about the quality of education in the European countries participating in the process.

- (20) В целом отношение российской вузовской общественности было и остается весьма *настороженным*. (“Вечерняя Москва” 31.07.2007)

The process is not based on the traditional Russian schooling system, “the agreement requires a 12-year schooling” (21) and works “only in a united political and economical area” (22).

- (21) Правда, Болонское соглашение *требует от стран-участниц обязательное 12-летнее школьное образование*. (“Газета” 08.12.2007)

- (22) Противники реформы отмечают, что “Болонское соглашение” *по-настоящему работает только в условиях единого политического и экономического пространства Европы*. (“Культура” 20.12.2007)

The main arguments against the Bologna reforms concern the two-cycle degree system (23). Joining the Bologna process forces Russia to give up the traditional five-year degree of a *specialist*. This can be seen as a loss for Russian education (24), and that is why the reform meets with considerable opposition, especially from teachers and pedagogues (25).

- (23) В связи с вступлением в Болонский процесс нам рекомендуют отказаться от сложившейся отечественной системы образования, принять западную двухуровневую модель подготовки кадров. (“Ежедневные новости. Подмосковье” 05.07.2007)

- (24) Мы входим в полосу реформ, обусловленных участием России в Болонском процессе, и здесь мне видятся не столько приобретения, сколько потери для нашего образования. (“Санкт-Петербургские ведомости” 03.09.2007)

- (25) Переход на обучение в соответствии с Болонскими соглашениями встретил мощную оппозицию в лице педагогов. (“Литературная газета” 05.06.2007)

In the discourse there can be seen a strong “us-them” opposition: Europe has designed the reform for itself, with European interests in mind (26), (27), but the interests of Russia may be different.

- (26) Европа придумала Болонский процесс, защищая свои интересы, вот и нам требуется найти, при каких условиях в конкурентной среде имеем шанс не только выжить, но и хорошо жить. (“Поиск” 11.04.2008)

- (27) Болонская декларация разработана европейцами для Европы с учетом интересов Европы, а что такое Европа, выражаясь словами Аркадия Гайдара, «мы с ними понимаем по-разному». (“Приокская правда”, Рязань, 06.03.2008)

In its most dramatic form, the “us-them” question was expressed in a regional newspaper from Kemerovo: “is the Bologna process a threat to the Slavic peoples?” (*Болонский процесс – угроза для славян?* “Кузбасс”, 22.08.2007)

Discussion

The analysis of the newspaper discourse has shown that the attitude toward the Bologna process in Russia is quite uneven and contradictory. Even the terminology is still unstable, and so is the understanding of the consequences of the reform for Russian higher education. Some features of the international Bologna discourse have been well adopted, for example the use of the words “area”, “space” and “environment” (*prostranstvo*) in the connection of higher education. Nevertheless, the traditional Russian specialist is still considered to be of higher quality than the new Bachelors or Masters (the title of an article from *Izvestija* 2007: “Европе – бакалавров, Родине – специалистов”).

Although the Bologna reforms have been legally institutionalised in Russia and several universities have implemented measures, there is still tension between the official documents and the reality in the universities. There is some general cynicism about the reform, especially about the gap between the words and the actions.

Implementation of the process depends on the national context, including the history of education. One reason for the negative attitude in the universities might be the lack of competition, the “monopoly” of many universities in their own region. This status is quite often based on a myth of the quality of the traditional degree system. The actual outcomes of the reform in Russia – as in many other countries – are difficult to predict.

Author’s email address: rpyykko@utu.fi

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