

# Bologna's challenge *about to be taken up*

"Switzerland finds itself one of the front runners" asserts Susanne Obermayer, responsible for Bologna coordination with the Rector's Conference of the Swiss Universities (CRUS)

By Camille Bozonnet

**The Bologna Declaration of 19 June 1999 was signed by all the European Ministers of Education.** It states that "a Europe of Knowledge is now widely recognized as an irreplaceable factor for social and human growth and as an indispensable component to consolidate and enrich the European citizenship, capable of giving its citizens the necessary competences to face the challenges of the new millenium, together with an awareness of shared values and belonging to a common social and cultural space." In order to achieve the creation of such an European higher education area, both the learning systems and diplomas are being harmonized. The new degree course is based on two main cycles, undergraduate or Bachelor and graduate or Master. Access to the Master shall require successful completion of the first cycle, lasting a minimum of three years. One of the cornerstones of this standardization concerns the establishment of a unique system of credits – the ECTS system – designed to favour students' mobility between institutions.

In a way, the Swiss undergraduate cycle's reform is completed, given that all new students will start a Bachelor this autumn in all universities. A Master will therefore be available in all disciplines in three years, when they finish their Bachelor. Of course, those who started the old degree course one or two years ago will continue within the old system. And it is true that Swiss universities and their different faculties did not start the reform's implementation at the same time. The University of St Gallen finished it two years ago while Zurich's Faculty of Arts, gathering different heterogeneous disciplines, has just completed its preparation. However, less than 5% of

students should pursue old degree courses in 2011 according to estimations, confides Susanne Obermayer, Compared to the rest of Europe, Switzerland finds itself "one of the front runners", she underlines. The main reason is the completion of the undergraduate cycle's reform. An other element should be mentioned : the introduction of the reform in all the disciplines, which is not the case in all European countries yet. Switzerland looks an exception, particularly regarding Medicine

as other countries still delve into endless discussions. A Bachelor in Medicine is thus to be found in all Swiss eponymous faculties in 2007. It will undoubtedly reinforce students' mobility, which is a goal fully admitted by the reform's actors: universities aim to a target-figure of 25%



University of Geneva, Working area

of foreign students (inter-cantonal and foreigners) in their graduate cycles.

For any further informations, official websites of each *alma mater* provide with the needed details. Even though there are still adjustments to set up and individual problems to solve, dedicated people are there to answer the questions. And the CRUS is working on a database listing the whole of Bachelors and Masters finally available in Switzerland. This tool will help any student to find its way and path career. Bringing the Bologna's challenge to a successful end.