

REPUBLIC OF BULGARIA

Action Plan in the field of academic recognition

1. LEGISLATION

1.1. Lisbon convention of Recognition

The Republic of Bulgaria is among the first countries to sign on the spot the Lisbon Convention of Recognition. The Convention was ratified by the National Assembly on March 15, 2000 (State Gazette Issue 25 from 28.03.2000). The country submitted its instrument of ratification to the Council of Europe.

After the ratification of the Convention the necessary measures have been taken up for the further development of the sub delegated legislation in the filed of the academic recognition.

1.2. Domestic legislative acts

The issues of the qualification recognition are regulated by:

- The Higher Education Act. According to its article 10, paragraph 2, section 4 the minister of education and science is responsible for the procedure of recognition and legalizing of the diplomas of people who have graduated from foreign higher education institutions.

- The Regulation on the state requirements about recognition of higher education degrees and completed courses of education in universities and colleges abroad, adopted through the Decree by the Council of Ministers N 167 dated 14.08.2000 (State Gazette Issue 69 from 22.08.2000).

The regulation quoted above totally adheres to the principles of the Lisbon Convention of Recognition, specifically:

- The right to fair recognition is guaranteed for everyone;
- Recognition in all cases when it is impossible to prove substantial difference is the main principle of recognition.

- The existence of substantial difference as grounds for rejection is always quoted in the decision for rejection issued by the Commission for recognition of the higher education. For example, the qualification acquired does not meet the requirements of the state for the awarding of the respective qualification degree in Bulgaria.

At the same time during the period 2001-2004, the Committee for implementation of the Lisbon Convention adopted additional documents which reflect the new reality and new stages in the development of the higher education and academic recognition. In this respect a review of the legislation can be suggested, especially the one concerning joint degrees.

Possible Measures after adoption of the Strategy for higher education development and adoption of the new Higher Education Act:

- Review of the implementation of the Regulation on the state requirements for recognition of higher education degrees and completed courses of education in universities and colleges abroad, adopted through the Decree by the Council of Ministers N 167 dated 14.08.2000 (State Gazette Issue 69 from 22.08.2000), specifically as regards the possibility for recognition of “mutual educational degrees”;

- Preparation of amendments and supplements to the Regulation if needed;
- Procedure of adoption of the changes to the Regulation.

Our partners will be informed about the implemented changes by using and implementing of the practice of internal information within the ENIC/NARIC networks.

1.3. Bilateral agreements

Bulgaria has signed agreements of mutual recognition of educational documents with a number of countries from the Bologna Process. The agreements signed after 2000 fully adhere to the principles of the Lisbon Convention for Recognition.

Possible Long-term Measures¹:

1. Review of the existing agreements.
2. Initiation, where necessary, of preliminary negotiations for signing of new agreements for mutual recognition of educational documents.
3. Polishing of texts through diplomatic ways.
4. Organizing of the procedure for approval of projects and agreements by the Council of Ministers at national level as a basis for talks.
5. Carrying out negotiations and signing of the agreements.

2. PRACTICES OF RECOGNITION

¹ Usually agreements are negotiated through diplomatic ways and because of that deadlines at this stage can not be established

2.1. Criteria and Procedures

- The procedures implemented in Bulgaria follow the Recommendation for criteria and procedures of assessment of qualification acquired abroad;
- The Commission for recognition of higher education², established in accordance with an ordinance by the minister of education and science adheres to the guiding principles quoted in the Recommendation

Possible Measures:

- Updating of the criteria for recognition with respect to the latest development within the Bologna Process, more specifically: the implementation of ECTS credits for separate educational qualification degrees. This could be achieved by amendments to the Regulation on the state requirements for recognition of higher education degrees and completed courses of education in universities and colleges abroad.

For processing of requests for recognition computer processing of information has been adopted lately. Thus the time necessary for taking a decision becomes less. At the same time the reliability of storage of information becomes better and opportunities for statistic analysis are arisen. The biggest problem still remains the access to information about educational institutions from Asia and Africa. At the moment this information is acquired through diplomatic ways. The usage of reliable information data acquired through the ENIC/NARIC networks can shorten the time necessary for taking of a final decision.

2.2. Joint degrees

The current Bulgarian legislation provides for recognition of double educational degrees. A number of Bulgarian higher education institutions award such degrees in cooperation with universities abroad. On the other hand, the Regulation on the state requirements for recognition of higher education degrees and completed courses of education in universities and colleges abroad also provides for recognition of double educational degrees.

Possible Measures:

1. Amendments to the legislation concerning higher education with respect to regulate the opportunities for awarding of “real” mutual degrees.

².The official authority to take decisions on recognition

2. Amendments to the Regulation on the state requirements for recognition of higher education degrees and completed courses of education in universities and colleges abroad in order to provide for recognition of “real” mutual degrees, for which there are several awarding institutions.

2.3. Review of the institutional practices

- In Bulgaria the decisions for recognition are taken by a commission appointed by the minister of education and science, which includes representatives of the academic community and the Ministry of Education and Science. In this respect the national authorities are well-informed about the implementation of the principles, established through international documents, as well as the principles, established by the national legislation.

- Representatives of the Ministry of Education and Science take part in the development of the procedures for recognition of educational courses and the heads of the higher education institutions are responsible for that.

- The holder of some qualification has the opportunity to inform (in written form, on the phone or via e-mail) the official authorities about their problems with recognition of the qualification arising when international documents are not implemented.

- The Regulation on the state requirements for recognition of higher education degrees and completed courses of education in universities and colleges abroad guarantees to the holders of qualification acquired abroad the right to appeal.

2.4. Means for transparency in recognition

- With the amendments to the Higher Education Act, adopted in June 2004, ECTS is officially implemented to the Bulgarian higher schools;

- With the amendments to the Higher Education Act, adopted in June 2004, the diploma supplement is officially implemented;

- The National Agency implementing the Lifelong Learning Program (Human Resources Development Center) has been appointed responsible for the Europass.

Possible Measures:

1. Completion of the procedure for appointing an official Europass authority.
2. Start of the effective activity of the official Europass authority.
3. Preparation for the implementation of Europass.
4. Promotion of usage of Europass.
5. Usage of Europass.

2.5. Education without Borders/Transnational Education

- The Higher Education Act provides for access to education without boundaries. According to paragraph 4 foreign higher education institutions cannot open their affiliates on the territory of the Republic of Bulgaria. In this sense the official recognition authority does not recognize higher education degrees awarded through providing of educational services on the territory of the Republic of Bulgaria by a foreign higher school. This measure absolutely adheres to the provisions in the Code of Good Practices in granting transnational education, according to which the providers of educational services must not break the higher education regulations of the host country.

- The latest amendments to the Higher Education Act made in September 2005 stipulate that since the date of accession of Bulgaria to the EU higher schools officially recognized by the EU member states, the members of the European Economic Community and Switzerland will be able to open their affiliates in Bulgaria under the condition that they adhere to the regulations of the Higher Education Act.

3. ACCESS TO INFORMATION

3.1. Access to information concerning recognition

Access to information concerning recognition of higher education qualification can be gained in the following ways:

- through Bulgarian embassies abroad;

- from the internet site of the Ministry of Education and Science;

- after a request of the qualification holders (in a written form, on the phone, via e-mail);

- from the internet site of the ENIC/NARIC networks (www.enic-naric.net) and in the publications of the Information Network on education in Europe EURYDICE, where there is information about the Bulgarian educational system.

- at the Bulgarian ENIC/NARIC centre which is a part of the European Integration and International Cooperation Directorate of the Ministry of Education and Science and regularly processes and gives information to the public on different issues of recognition. This information is published in a special publication in Bulgaria and abroad or it is presented during conferences, seminars, informational sessions, etc. The Bulgarian ENIC/NARIC centre also regularly informs the administrations of Bulgarian higher schools

about the latest developments in the field of academic recognition (for example, the Marketplace for university candidates).

Possible measures:

Preparation of informational brochures, leaflets and other printed material on issues of the education recognition which could be given to everyone interested in the matter.

4. STRUCTURES

4.1. National Academic Centre for academic recognition and mobility

Within the European Integration and International Directorate of the Ministry of Education and Science there is a functioning National Academic Centre for academic recognition and mobility, which is a member of the ENIC/NARIC networks. The Centre is established by an Ordinance by the minister of education and science. Within the scope of its competence the Centre:

- assists practical work on recognition of educational qualification;
- takes part in functioning international networks for exchange of information on the problems of the educational systems and their development and academic recognition that goes together with it, as well as in international programmes for academic exchange;
- provides Bulgarian educational institutions, experts in the field of education and citizens with information on international educational systems, current international agreements in the field of education, academic recognition and academic mobility; assists national educational institutions with their accession to international educational programmes;
- sets national criteria for selection of projects and takes part in the arrangement of competitions for recruiting participants in the monitoring systems of mobile streams and efficiency assessment of the Bulgarian participation into the programmes.

The activities listed above are carried out through active assistance to the ENIC/NARIC networks for academic recognition.

The Centre promotes academic mobility by developing integrated criteria and procedures for academic recognition of educational qualification, as well as by granting access to information on educational systems. In this respect the Centre:

- carries out at national level the fulfillment of international responsibilities taken up by Bulgaria and arising from the adoption of different framework documents; arranges the practical implementation of the decisions of ENIC network in the field of academic recognition;

- takes part in the updating of legislation concerning recognition of educational documents and to this end develops criteria and procedures for recognition in accordance with the international practices; develops a reliable system of assessment of the activity concerning academic recognition and also establishes the main trends for its modernization and efficiency;

- arranges the access to the latest information on the Bulgarian educational system for the partners from the European information networks in the respective field;

- participates in the preparation of publications, comparative researches and reference books of the Council of Europe, the European Union and other organizations by elaborating of the national sections dedicated to different aspects of the Bulgarian educational system; prepares programme documents and carries out researches for the needs of the ENIC/NARIC networks (Chart of services and activities of the networks, research on the main issues in the recognition practice);

- assists the activity of the Bulgarian higher schools connected to their participation in different educational programmes by granting access to information about foreign educational systems.

Possible Measures:

Strengthening the administrative capacity, including eventual increasing the number of employees working on the issues of the academic recognition.

4.2. Cooperation with the National Evaluation and Accreditation Agency (NEAA)

Main forms of cooperation:

- Preparation of joint publications (Focus on the higher education systems in Europe, 2005);

- Exchange of current information;

- Participation in joint information sessions for employees of the Ministry of Education and Science and the National evaluation and accreditation agency;

- Mutual exchange of information on the activities of ENIC/NARIC networks and ENQA;

- Mutual cooperation with other centers from the ENIC/NARIC networks.