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FRANCE**NATIONAL ACTION PLAN FOR RECOGNITION - EN Version****1. Legislation****1.1 *Lisbon Recognition Convention***

- a. Plan and timetable for ratification if not yet accomplished

France is one of the first countries to have signed the Lisbon Convention on April 11th 1997 and ratified it on October 4th 1999.

1.2 *Review of national legislation relevant to recognition*

Since the Bergen Conference of the European Ministers (May 19th -20th 2005), France has implemented new legal provisions in keeping with the Bologna Process according to the following main lines : joint thesis supervision, award of qualifications within international partnerships, doctoral schools.

In line with the need to strengthen the promotion of the European Higher Education Area attractiveness, France has adopted significant measures to reorganise and modernize doctoral programmes opening them up to internationalization.

1.2.1 International joint thesis supervision

The legal provision published on January 6th 2005 modifies the operating conditions of international joint thesis supervision.

<http://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/WAspad/UnTexteDeJorf?numjo=MENS0402905A>

It allows French higher education institutions, awarding the doctorate degree (Ph.D), to establish, with one or more foreign higher education institutions, a convention aiming at the organisation of an international joint thesis supervision.

The text allows the institutions to depart from the French rule when French rules and those valid in the partner country are incompatible.

It enhances the international dimension of doctoral schools, favours the mobility of doctoral candidates in different scientific and cultural environments and develops scientific cooperation between French and foreign research teams.

There is a unique thesis defence. The institutions which signed the convention, can award either a doctorate degree jointly (a joint degree) ; or a doctorate degree (Ph.D) from each institution (a double degree). Whatever the degree formula, in both cases, the diploma will mention the international joint supervision.

1.2.2 Recognition of joint degrees

With the adoption of the 2005 May 11th Decree on the award of qualifications within international partnerships, France widened its regulating framework for a larger recognition of joint degrees and periods of studies done within partnerships between French and foreign universities which agreed on common curricula leading to a joint degree or to a double degree.

<http://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/WAspad/UnTexteDeJorf?numjo=MENS0500862D>

This measure is consistent with one of the Bergen communiqué ambitions : recognition of joint degrees awarded in two or more countries of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA).

The new aspect of the decree is the institutional capacity to sign an agreement with a foreign institution able to award in its country a qualification of the same level and in the same field, in order to jointly organise the program and award a joint degree or a double degree.

The partnership quality will be appreciated during the periodical national assessment.

1.2.3 Reformed doctoral programmes

The legal provision dated August 7th 2006, concerning doctoral programmes, stresses the importance of research and of research education in order to maintain and improve quality in the EHEA and to enhance its scientific competitiveness.

<http://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/WAspad/UnTexteDeJorf?numjo=MENS0602083A>

The measures announced in this text allow to establish a stronger link between doctoral programmes and the labour market and to set up a system to support of PhD holders' integration into the labour market. It integrates interdisciplinarity in programs and encourages a European and international dimension through cooperation actions with foreign higher education institutions or research centres.

This text aims at organising the whole doctoral school system whose accreditation depends on a periodical national assessment by the evaluation Agency for research and higher education (AERES < *Agence d'évaluation de la recherche et de l'enseignement supérieur*).

ENIC-NARIC France regularly informs its network colleagues on the French legal innovations in the field of recognition. The legal provisions are spread through the ENIC-NARIC network.

1.3 Bilateral or regional recognition agreements

a. Conformity with the principles of the Lisbon Recognition Convention

1.3.1 Bilateral agreements:

Since the Bergen conference, France has pursued negotiations for the signature of a bilateral agreement with Spain, reaffirming the two countries' engagement within the Bologna Declaration framework. The terms of this agreement concern academic recognition of qualifications and periods of studies. The agreement has been signed on November 16th 2006 by the two countries' ministers.

A similar recognition agreement should be signed in the near future between France and Poland.

1.3.2 Regional agreements

As for regional agreements, France signed on April 11th 1997 and ratified on October 4th 1999 the Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region (STCE n° 165). The text was implemented on December 1st 1999.

The international Convention on recognition of studies and qualifications of higher education in the Arabic States and the European States of the Mediterranean (Nice 17 December 1976), was signed by France on 17 December 1976, but hasn't been ratified yet.

2. Recognition practice

2.1 *Criteria and procedures*

- a. Overview of the practice of competent recognition authorities in applying the Recommendation on Criteria and Procedures for the Assessment of Foreign Qualifications and Periods of Study.

In conformity with the “Recommendations on Criteria and Procedures for the Assessment of Foreign Qualifications and Periods of Study” (adopted by the Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee at its second meeting, Riga, June 6th 2001) ENIC-NARIC France uses transparent and reliable procedures and criteria, in order to facilitate the recognition of qualifications, when compiling its recognition document called *attestation de reconnaissance de niveau d'étude*”.

ENIC-NARIC France, after a fair assessment of applications, issues personalised documents, which give advice to the following applicants for their own decision-making processes :

- individuals ;
- education and training institutions ;
- employers ;
- specific commissions set up by French ministries.

Considering the current competitive examination system of the civil service and the terminology used by French employers, the ‘*attestation de reconnaissance*’ of foreign credentials is currently based on duration criteria, without neglecting the qualitative aspect of the evaluated qualification.

Currently this document does not imply a comparison between the foreign credential and similar qualifications in France.

- b. Measures to improve implementation.

ENIC-NARIC France is working towards an improvement of criteria and procedures transparency in order to take into account the developments in the educational field and to avoid useless requirements complicating the application procedure.

The centre participates to projects and/or working groups concerning learning outcomes and competences, in order to integrate them in the future in the assessment process of foreign credentials.

At the same time, the centre is considering an evolution of the current form of its foreign qualification assessment towards comparability with similar qualifications in France. This evolution takes into consideration the works on the overarching qualifications framework for the EHEA and the European qualifications framework (EQF).

- c. Overview of the time required to process applications for recognition and measures to improve this time.

ENIC-NARIC France respects the recommended time for processing recognition applications, once all relevant information has been provided by applicants. What the centre is aiming at is to reduce the processing time in the future, as much as possible .

2.2 *Joint degrees*

- a. Overview of the legal provisions concerning the recognition of joint degrees.

Since the Bergen Conference, France published the 2005-450 decree dated May 11th 2005 concerning the award of qualifications within international partnerships.

<http://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/WAspad/UnTexteDeJorf?numjo=MENS0500862D>

This decree states that the jointly awarded qualification is fully recognized in France and that it has to be recognized in the partner country or countries as well.

Article 2 of this decree mentions the procedures of this recognition and specifies that:

‘The international partnership is organised by a convention made between one or more French higher education institutions and one or more foreign higher education institutions.

French institutions must have an ‘*habilitation*’ (a kind of accreditation) by the State to award the credential concerned by the international partnership. When several French institutions have a joint ‘*habilitation*’ to award this qualification, the partnership convention must be signed by each institution.

The foreign contracting institution(s) must have the ability to award, at the same level and in the same educational field, a recognised credential by the competent authorities of their own country.’

- b. Amendments to remove legal obstacles or to establish legal provision favouring the recognition of joint degrees.

Through these measures allowing, if necessary, an adaptation to the legislation of the partner country, the French national legislation removes obstacles to the award of qualifications within international partnership and encourages mobility.

- c. Beyond legal provision, suggestion of policy measures to ensure the recognition of joint degrees. See points a. and b.

- d. Overview of double and multiple degrees and policy measures to encourage the recognition of such degrees.

There is no official list of joint, double or multiple degrees. Several higher education institutions in France established international partnerships with institutions abroad aiming at the award of this type of qualification. Every university is free to set up partnerships with foreign institutions in the framework of the 2005-450 decree.

2.3 Overview of institutional practice

Consider what measures have been or should be taken to allow national authorities to know

- a. whether higher education institutions and other competent recognition authorities comply with the Lisbon Recognition Convention and with national laws;
- b. what measures could be taken if given institutions or authorities were shown consistently not to apply the Convention and/or relevant national laws.

The French ministry of national education, higher education and research (MENESR) with the 2002-529 decree removed the remaining obstacles met by institutions during the validation of periods of studies accomplished abroad. The MENESR intends to fully respect the institutional autonomy and will not interfere in the treatment of applications at all. It is the sole responsibility of the institutions to appreciate and take a decision on the validation of the applications submitted by candidates.

2.4 *Transparency tools for recognition*

- a. Plans and timetable for the implementation of the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS)
- b. Plans and timetable for the implementation of the Diploma Supplement

The 2002-482 decree dated April 8th 2002, about implementing the European higher education area (EHEA) principles in the French higher education system, recommends the adoption of ECTS and the provision of the diploma supplement.

<http://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/WAspad/UnTexteDeJorf?numjo=MENS0200157D>

Paragraphs 3 and 4 in article 2 specify that the national implementation of the EHEA principles is notably characterised by:

‘3/ the adoption of the European credit transferable system called ECTS ;

4/ (and) the award of a descriptive appendix to the qualification called ‘diploma supplement’ in order to ensure the readability of learning outcomes (knowledge, competences and skills), for the sake of international mobility”

The implementation of the Bologna Process in France is backed up with the progressive generalisation of the award of the diploma supplement and the adoption of the ECTS system.

- c. Plans and timetable for the implementation of possible other transparency tools.

Europass was officially launched in France in December 2005. Three ministries jointly manage the Europass-Mobility tool : the ministry of national education, higher education and research, the ministry of employment and social cohesion and the ministry of agriculture and fishing. The administration of this tool is carried out by the French Socrates-Leonardo Da Vinci agency.

2.5 *Borderless/transnational education*

- a. National and/or institutional policies concerning the assessment of borderless/transnational education.

1. With the 2005 decree, France facilitated the implementation of joint masters by French higher education institutions with universities from other countries. The first ones started in 2002. Programmes get an ‘*habilitation*’ or accreditation from the countries involved and are closely monitored by them.

The French current policy aims to develop these privileged partnerships leading to joint degrees in most cases, even though the double degree formula can still be used by institutions.

2. More and more, doctoral education is integrated in the overall consideration on internationalisation of higher education. France set up bilateral doctoral schools with the participation of about 48% of the French universities.

This system, created in 2004, is based on a chart co-signed by the two countries. It allows doctorate candidates’ exchanges, mainly in joint supervision, between French higher education institutions and the partner country institutions.

3. Higher education institutions take also part in this evolution by organising programmes abroad with the award of French national qualifications or joint ones.

The French education ministry wants the award of these degrees to be monitored and to correspond to the same quality criteria used in France. These programs will be submitted and integrated into the general institutional assessment, within the framework of the 4-year university contract.

3. Information provision

3.1 Provision of information on recognition

- a. Measures taken or envisaged to improve the provision of information on recognition criteria and procedures and on the national education system;

Information on recognition can be found on the website of the ministry of national education, higher education and research (MENESR) and on the website of the *Centre International d'Etudes Pédagogiques* (CIEP).

ENIC-NARIC France also provides a descriptive sheet of its activities. Interviews in oral and written press are regularly published.

The ministry of national education, higher education and research provides official information on higher education system, including the list of engineering schools, universities, university institutes of technology (IUT), university institutes for teacher education (IUFM), 'grandes écoles' and 'grands établissements'.

<http://www.education.gouv.fr/pid10/enseignement-superieur-et-recherche.html>

The education structure in France (<http://www.etudiant.gouv.fr/etudes-superieures/un-coup-oeil/10.html>), as well as all the necessary information for students, are available on the purpose-built website recently launched by the ministry : <http://www.etudiant.gouv.fr/>.

- b. The timetable envisaged for such measures;

All these websites are regularly updated.

- c. The bodies or institutions responsible for the measures;

The ministry of national education, higher education and research is responsible for its website and the operators are responsible for their own ones.

- d. The state of electronic provision of information on recognition;

The pages of the '*Centre International d'Etudes Pédagogiques*' hosting ENIC-NARIC France are currently under revision and reconstruction, in order to be able to reach a foreign public better by providing information in different languages.

- e. Whether the national information centres establish and maintain their own web pages, linked to the ENIC-NARIC Web site.

<http://www.ciep.fr/enic-naricfr/>

3.2 Information package for applicants

- a. The extent to which information packages are provided for applicants by higher education institutions and other competent recognition authorities and,

Higher education institutions are autonomous and fully sovereign in their recognition decisions. Rules on incoming foreign students are given by the 71-376 decree dated May 13th 1971 and rules on foreign students' enrolment are given by the 81-405 decree dated April 28th 1981.

Information is also available on the website of the ministry of national education, higher education and research under the heading '*venir étudier en France*' (coming to France to study):

<http://www.education.gouv.fr/pid43/mobilite-des-etudiants.html>

- b. If needed, how practice could be improved.

4. Structures

4.1 National information centre

Outline the functioning of the national information centre (ENIC/NARIC), e.g. with regard to:

- a. The formal status of the centre;

Missions of ENIC-NARIC France are provided by the *Centre International d'Etudes Pédagogiques* < the International Centre for Education Studies >, a public institution of the ministry of national education, higher education and research is responsible for. The status of the CIEP is published in the Official Journal of the French Republic :

<http://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/WAspad/UnTexteDeJorf?numjo=MENJ0601284D>

- b. Legal competence (e.g. advisory or decision making; academic, de jure professional, de facto professional recognition);

ENIC-NARIC France provides study level recognition documents with no legal value. It is an information given to help job-seekers or anyone who applies to education institutions. A legal principle of equivalency between foreign qualifications and French qualifications awarded by the ministry of national education, higher education and research does not exist.

To pursue studies in a French higher education institution, holders of a foreign credential may apply at the institution where they wish to prepare the French qualification and ask for an exemption. The Rector or the Director of the institution concerned determines the admission level based on the advice of an education commission (see interdepartmental 85-906 decree dated August 23th 1985). This exemption should allow students to keep some part or all of what they learned before.

As for professional recognition of foreign credentials, it's up to employers or administrations organising competitive examinations to determine whether the qualifications correspond to the position looked for.

- c. Staff and budget;

Five people work full time at ENIC-NARIC France. Moreover, since 1998 *rectorats* - that is, State administrations depending on the ministry of Education (MENESR) and set up in each local Education area (*'académie'*) in France -are competent to provide study level recognition attestations to holders of foreign credentials living in their region. This national organisation is currently being re-examined.

ENIC-NARIC France budget is 150 000 euros, all charge included.

- d. Capacity building in terms of expertise and service to the public;

ENIC-NARIC France is recognized by its national partners as expert in the field of foreign credential recognition.

- e. Networking and cooperation at national level and internationally.

ENIC-NARIC France is associated to the works pertaining to its field of competence at national level (works with the ministry of national education, higher education and research, with the

'grandes écoles' conference, with the commission for engineer degrees and with the French Rectors' Conference ; with other institutional partners). In particular, it is associated to the making of mutual recognition agreements between France and a partner country. It is also associated to the works concerning the implementation of European directives at a national level. ENIC-NARIC France is also associated to UNESCO works leading to the creation of the MERIC network.

4.2 *Cooperation recognition/quality assurance bodies*

- a. Information exchange between the bodies responsible for recognition and quality assurance;

ENIC-NARIC France and the evaluation agency for research and higher education (AERES) share their practices.

- b. Discussion of and agreement on working methods between these bodies;

The works accomplished by the two institutions are currently being studied. The two bodies are building a project on the joint assessment of the diploma supplement.

- c. Use of information on the outcomes of quality assessments in the recognition of qualifications;

ENIC-NARIC France follows all the discussions on this subject in order to improve its procedures that could evolve towards the inclusion of competences in the recognition process.

- d. Use of membership of international networks and associations in recognition (e.g. ENIC and NARIC Networks) and quality assurance (e.g. ENQA) for the mutual benefits of both bodies.

ENIC-NARIC France is participating, as an observer, to current international debates on quality assurance.