IMPROVING RECOGNITION IN THE EUROPEAN HIGHER EDUCATION AREA: AN ANALYSIS OF NATIONAL ACTION PLANS

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Presented at BFUG Meeting
In their London Communiqué, Ministers asked the Bologna Follow-up Group (BFUG) to arrange for the ENIC/NARIC networks to analyse our national action plans and spread good practice.

The ENIC and NARIC Networks appointed a working party for this purpose, and the Council of Europe Secretariat commissioned Professor Andrejs Rauhvargers and Ms. Agnese Rusakova to draft the study.

The working party was served by the Council of Europe Secretariat and had the following composition:

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## Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Executive summary</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion and recommendations</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusions</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommendations</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To the Ministers</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To the ENIC and NARIC Networks</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To national ENIC/NARIC Centres</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To higher education institutions</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>1. Legislation</strong></td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1. Ratification of the Lisbon Recognition Convention.</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2. Review of national legislation relevant to recognition</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review of legislation</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal and institutional autonomy issues in implementation of the Lisbon Recognition Convention.</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examples of follow-up measures planned</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3. Bilateral recognition agreements</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conformity of bilateral agreements with the principles of the Lisbon Recognition Convention</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2. Recognition practice</strong></td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1. Recognition procedures and criteria</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overview of the practice of competent recognition authorities</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognition procedure: in two stages. But which stages?</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognition criteria</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Measures to improve implementation of criteria and procedures</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overview of the time required to process applications for recognition and measures to improve this time</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2. Joint degrees</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3. Overview of institutional practice</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4. Transparency tools for recognition</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Joint European Diploma Supplement</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implementation of the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5. Borderless/transnational education</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3. Information provision</strong></td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1 Provision of information on recognition</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2. Information package for applicants</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>4. Structures</strong></td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1 National information centre</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The formal status of the national information centre</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A summary: who actually makes recognition decisions?</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff and budget;</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capacity building in terms of expertise and service to the public</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Networking and cooperation at national level and internationally.</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2 Cooperation recognition/quality assurance bodies</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information exchange between the bodies responsible for recognition and quality assurance</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion of and agreement on working methods between these bodies</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of information on the outcomes of quality assessments in the recognition of qualifications;</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of membership of international networks</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Action Plans as a collection of best practices</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Concluding remarks</strong></td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collection of good and not so good practices</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix: Guidelines for national action plans for recognition
Executive summary

Part I

Ratification of the Lisbon Recognition Convention. 38 out of 46 Bologna countries had ratified the Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications Concerning Higher Education in the European Region (Lisbon Recognition Convention) at the time when the National Action Plans (NAP) were prepared. Andorra, Germany, Turkey and the Netherlands added their ratifications later. Belgium and Italy have signed the Lisbon Recognition Convention but not ratified it; Greece and Spain have not signed the Lisbon Recognition Convention.

Legislation review. Quite a number of countries have not provided any timetable or details of organisation of the review of national legislation. A significant number of countries state that their legislation is already in compliance with the Lisbon Recognition Convention even if it has not been amended after joining the Lisbon Recognition Convention. In reality, while there may be no explicit contradiction between national legislation and the letter of the legal framework of the Convention, a doubt remains if there is also no contradiction with the spirit of the Lisbon Recognition Convention and its subsidiary texts.

Some countries use outdated terminology which is linked to concepts that are not compatible with the Lisbon Recognition Convention. Thus, at least five countries still use term nostrification which is linked to a recognition concept seeking full identity of the foreign qualification, or the term equivalence. None of those is used in the Lisbon Recognition Convention or its subsidiary texts because they are linked with the outdated principle where the main focus of assessment was on detailed comparison of curricula and lists of material studied.

Legal and autonomy-related implementation difficulties. In some cases countries report problems in implementing the Lisbon Recognition Convention because the national legislation is in contradiction to the legal framework of the Lisbon Recognition Convention. This indicates that the country should either amend its legislation or ensure that the priority of the international legislation is observed.

Some countries report that since the recognition decisions are taken by the higher education institutions and since these institutions are autonomous, the state cannot ensure that the principles of the Lisbon Recognition Convention are followed. This is clearly not acceptable practice, and these countries, through their laissez faire approach, actually do not fulfil the requirements of the Lisbon Recognition Convention to take all possible steps to application of the Lisbon Recognition Convention provisions in higher education institutions.

One good solution to this issue is making the recognition of qualifications in higher education institutions part of quality assurance which will then assess compliance with the
Lisbon Recognition Convention. Another solution is that the state bodies that monitor the observation of national law by higher education institutions also monitor their observation of the Lisbon Recognition Convention principles. A less favourable solution mentioned by some countries is that recognition decisions are made by a central body - the Minister or somebody in his/her name - and not by higher education institutions.

**Follow-up measures.** In most countries the follow-up procedures planned do not involve amendments of legislation but rather information and dissemination measures.

**Bilateral agreements.** Not all countries have bilateral recognition agreements. The number of bilateral agreements is typically 5 - 10 per country. Bilateral recognition agreements are often concluded either among countries which are geographically/historically close or with countries which are not part of the European region and are therefore not covered by the Lisbon Recognition Convention.

It is worth considering the proposal not to conclude further bilateral agreements with Parties to the Lisbon Recognition Convention in order to support the implementation of the Lisbon Recognition Convention in the countries involved in the Bologna process.

**Part 2 Recognition practice**

Nearly all the countries declare that the recognition criteria and procedures they use are in compliance with the Council of Europe/UNESCO Recommendation on Criteria and Procedures for the Assessment of Foreign Qualifications and Periods of Study.

**Procedures**

**Authenticity and translations.** Practice in some countries still seems to be exaggerated. Requesting that all documents be presented are officially translated and have apostille is burdensome to the applicants while the verbatim official translations may appear misleading from a recognition point of view. A good practice seems to be not to require translations if the documents are in widely spoken languages. Countries replying to this point mention e.g. English, German, French, Spanish, also Latin.

**Comparing qualifications with the relevant host country’s qualification.** With few exceptions the recognition procedures include comparing the foreign qualification in question with the relevant qualification in the host country.

Some countries have invented a procedure whereby it is possible to recognise a foreign degree as a general degree or as corresponding to a certain Bologna cycle without comparing it to a particular host country’s qualification. It is not clear, however, whether this recognition procedure, which is claimed to be less time-consuming and simpler, gives the holder full rights in acceding to further studies and the labour market or whether it is just a pro forma statement with few or no legal consequences. Some examples of unacceptable practice demonstrate that some countries tend to assess the foreign institution and programme using quite formal criteria rather than relying on the information
on the status of institution and programme provided by the country of origin which is mentioned as an important principle by a number of other countries.

A clearly positive development is moving away from seeking that the foreign qualification can replace the relevant home qualification in all aspects towards comparing only those aspects relevant to the right or function which the holder of the qualification is trying to exercise. In some countries there are separate avenues for different kinds of qualifications, so assessment can be done using different procedures or by different bodies depending on the profile (academic or professional, level. Postgraduate (doctoral and Master degrees) can be treated separately from Bachelor degrees, Bologna degrees, separately from Pre-Bologna and finally depending on whether the Master degree has been obtained in the same field (and institution) which awarded Bachelor degree.

Partial recognition. In many countries partial recognition is possible if there is substantial difference between the qualification for which recognition is sought and the corresponding qualification in the host country. Looking at the recognition criteria mentioned in the national action plans the question still remains whether granting partial recognition in each particular case is a good or a bad practice. Has it been applied because some important learning outcomes of the foreign qualification were missing so that the applicant was not able to pursue the intended learning or professional activities; or is partial recognition granted rather because the content of studies was not identical?

Links between procedures of academic and professional recognition. Many countries report that academic recognition often has consequences for the recognition for the non-regulated part of the labour market. An alarming finding, however, is, that some countries require full academic recognition (including comparison of programmes carried out by higher education institutions) if the applicant intends to enter a regulated profession. There seems to be a growing number of countries that attempt to assess qualifications even in cases when evidence is incomplete or lacking.

Recognition procedure: in two stages, but which? In many cases the first stage ends with issuing a statement that serves as a recommendation to the competent authority which takes the decision. This often is a higher education institution, but it is not the only possibility. There are various two-stage procedures in different countries that are not compatible with each other. For instance, recognition for further studies and establishing equivalence can be the result of the second stage of recognition in some countries, but serving as the result of the first stage in others. In the latter case it looks as if in some countries the second stage rather resembles the nostrification of an earlier age. A discussion is needed at European level to clarify the terminology used and the stages of the recognition procedure with a view to agree upon coherent and mutually understandable procedures across Europe.

Criteria. The criteria used and the relative importance of different criteria vary significantly from country to country. Criteria may vary from comparing learning outcomes to attempting to assess the teaching staff of an institution in another country. Approaches
indicated in the replies include e.g.: taking into account differences in the education systems, counting on quality and trusting quality assurance in other countries, assessing learning outcomes wherever possible, attempting to take into account prior learning, taking into account the previous recognition practices in similar cases. If purposes for which recognition is sought and study workload are added to the list to make an up-to-date approach to recognition. Giving consideration also to the purposes for which recognition is sought and study workload seems to constitute an up-to-date approach to recognition?

However, a number of countries mention such criteria as the contents of the curriculum and the length/duration of the programme instead of e.g. learning outcomes. These seem quite backward-looking approaches.

**Role of the national ENIC/NARIC in academic and professional recognition**
The most typical case is that the national information centre (ENIC/NARIC) is an advisory body for both academic and professional recognition, while the decisions are taken:

- for academic recognition - by higher education institutions,
- for *de facto* professional recognition in non-regulated professions by employers,
- and for regulated professions (*de jure* professional recognition) by the competent authorities of each profession.

There are several other possibilities:

- The ENIC/NARIC is the decision-making body for all cases of recognition,
- The ENIC/NARIC makes decision in the name of Minister,
- Decisions are taken by Minister/Vice Minister/ Ministry upon advice of:
  - The ENIC/NARIC,
  - higher education institutions or
  - committees of academics/scientists.

In a number of countries the ENIC/NARIC makes recognition decisions with a view to employment in non-regulated professions.

In most cases the *de jure* professional recognition for employment in regulated professions is carried out by competent authorities (often professional organisations) nominated by government, but in some countries the specific Ministries are in charge.

**Attempts to improve recognition criteria and procedures.** Not all countries plan any measures to improve recognition practices as a result of the review of legislation and procedure. The main measures countries plan to improve procedures and criteria are: ensuring possibilities for applicants to appeal, dissemination of information on recognition

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1 For more information on the ENIC and NARIC Networks as well as on the national information centres that constitute the two networks, see [http://www.enic-naric.net/](http://www.enic-naric.net/)
criteria and procedures among all stakeholders, updating the criteria for recognition according to the latest developments in the Bologna Process, establishing databases of recognition decisions, assisting higher education institutions and monitoring the drawing up and implementation of institutional regulations. It should be noted that the countries that already demonstrate the best recognition practices also plan most measures for improvement.

**Time required for recognition.** In most cases applications for recognition are processed within a three-month limit and the time needed is even being reduced.

**Joint degrees.** In the 2005-2007 period a number of countries changed their legislation with regard to joint degrees. Another group of countries states that while the law does not specifically mention joint degrees, there are no legal obstacles for their establishment either. However, the lack of mention of joint degrees in the legislation does not necessarily mean that there are no legal obstacles to awarding them. Obstacles to joint degrees often rise from various regulations that have been prepared without regard to the possibility of offering joint degrees.

A number of countries still have no possibility to award state-recognised joint degrees and therefore they use joint programmes as a way out. The graduates would then receive one degree from their home institution.

In several countries the Ministry, the rectors' conference, the ENIC-NARIC, or these organisations in cooperation have prepared guidelines for establishing joint programmes.

Most countries state that their legislation allows recognition of joint degrees (meaning joint degrees from abroad that are submitted for recognition). In the majority of cases countries mention the criteria listed in the Recommendation on the Recognition of Joint Degrees\(^2\) as the criteria they use for recognition of joint degrees.

**Institutional practices.** A number of countries either do not answer this part or just inform that they do not have any information on institutional practices and rather describe the measures that ENIC/NARIC centre takes in order to assist institutions. Just a few countries have actually carried out institutional reviews but not all of them describe the results in their NAPs. There are only a couple of countries that can report that the institutions follow common guidelines or use common recognition procedures. The institutional practices seem to be better coordinated in cases where recognition of qualifications at higher education institutions is included in the quality assurance system. In some cases the institutional reviews have indicated that higher education institutions still have difficulties with recognition of study periods/credits and therefore need more information and training.

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The institutional procedures in recognition of credits may range from comparing learning outcomes to looking for full compliance with their own curricula.

**Diploma Supplement.** Many countries made issuing of Diploma Supplements (DS)\(^3\) compulsory between 2002 and 2005. In 2007 in more than half the countries all graduates receive the DS automatically; free of charge and in a widely spoken language. If countries that issue a DS upon request are also included, in 2007 graduates received Diploma Supplements in two-thirds of the countries. There are, however, several countries that seem to issue the DS to the graduates of the “new style” Bachelor and Master degrees but do not issue the DS to graduates from the “old style” long one-tier study programmes.

It should nevertheless be recalled that in the Berlin Communiqué (2003), Ministers set the objective that every graduating student receive the Diploma Supplement automatically, free of charge and in a widely spoken language by 2005. The National Action Plans show that even at the end of 2006, half of the Bologna member states had yet to comply with the Ministers’ commitment.

Some countries have created national versions of the Diploma Supplement but it is not clear from the NAPs if the “national” diploma supplements fully follow the EU/Council of Europe/UNESCO Diploma Supplement format and to what extent they are customised. Most countries issue the DS in both the national language and a widely spoken European language (most often English), but there are also countries where the DS in a widely spoken European language is available only on request.

**Implementation of ECTS\(^4\).** While the implementation of ECTS as a credit transfer and accumulation system is indeed progressing, there are a number of issues to be noted:

- In quite a number of countries credit systems are used for both transfer and accumulation.
- Not all countries, however, use ECTS itself; there are a number of cases where ECTS-compatible national credit system is used.
- ECTS key features should be further discussed and fine-tuned so that all countries can adhere to the definitions therein.
- There are some countries where credit system is implemented but it does not yet apply to all higher education.
- In most countries implementation of ECTS so far has not concerned linking credits with learning outcomes. There is a growing understanding that linking credits with learning outcomes is an important component of the credit system; however, implementation of this feature of ECTS will still take time.
- A good practice seems to be using quality assurance as a tool for implementation of ECTS, i.e. setting implementation of ECTS as a quality requirement.

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\(^3\) [http://www.enic-naric.net/documents/THE_DIPLOMA_SUPPLEMENT.pdf](http://www.enic-naric.net/documents/THE_DIPLOMA_SUPPLEMENT.pdf)

**Transnational/ borderless education.** Countries express their good will to give green light to *bona fide* transnational/ borderless education, but they also express concerns about possibilities to access reliable information on the quality of transnational education, possibilities to check whether the transnational e-learning has been properly assessed and whether allocation of credits for work experience has been properly done. These issues have often been discussed but proper solutions have yet to be found.

**Information provision.** The quality of information provision seems to be quite different in different countries, and the spectrum seems to be quite broad. It ranges from countries that have excellent information for applicants in their national language and in English (or other widely spoken European languages) available online, in printed and possibly in other forms; to countries where only a minimum of information is provided in the national language only and this information may be available at the ENIC/NARIC centre. An example of good practice is that provision of recognition information is coordinated between ENIC/NARIC and the higher education institutions so that the specific information from higher education institutions adds on to the general information provided by the ENIC/NARIC.

Information on education systems is well established in some countries, but some countries only provide general information on their education systems that contains too little information of the kind that is actually needed for credential evaluation.

**Capacity development.** Competence development is underlined as an important aspect by a number of ENIC/NARICs. The main kinds of capacity building measures inside the ENICs/NARICs are staff training and regular updating of information and competences, participation in the joint ENIC/NARIC meetings, study visits, organising national or regional training and dissemination events (Nordic, Baltic countries, and others), preparing detailed manuals for staff, recruiting of staff with specific knowledge of education and/ or language skills relevant to different world regions. Another important aspect of capacity building is organising different dissemination and training events for the recognition staff of higher education institutions and providing guidance to higher education institutions.

Again, many of these important measures seem to be present in a number of the most well supported and developed national information centres while a number of others mainly mention study visits or have not given any notion of capacity building measures at all.

**Cooperation between recognition and quality assurance bodies.** Information on quality assurance is used in the daily work of credential evaluation. In a number of countries the ENIC/NARIC centres widely use information on quality assurance when assessing foreign qualifications. They also provide other ENIC/NARICs with information on the quality assurance status of programmes and institutions in their countries. As the information on quality assurance is often accessible online, the above does not
necessarily mean that ENICs/NARICs have intensive daily contacts with their own country’s quality assurance body.

The most far-reaching agreement between ENIC/NARICs and quality assurance bodies is the Joint declaration by some of the countries participating in the European Consortium for Accreditation in Higher Education\(^5\). Its final goal—the eventual automatic recognition of qualifications—can, however, only be reached through long-term bilateral work. It has been noted that recognition and quality assurance bodies often discuss the relevant issues and work together at various national working groups or during workshops, especially in those devoted to establishment of national qualifications frameworks. Quality assurance is a powerful implementation tool in the framework of the Lisbon Recognition Convention in higher education institutions if the assessment of recognition practices becomes part of the quality assurance system of institutions and programmes.

\(^5\) The Joint Declaration can be accessed through the ECA web site http://www.ecaconsortium.net/index.php?section=content&id=1
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

1. Four Bologna countries remain that had not ratified the Lisbon Recognition Convention as of May 12, 2008: Belgium and Italy that have signed the Convention but have not ratified it, and Greece and Spain which have not signed the Convention.

2. The NAPs demonstrate that there are still legal problems in implementing the principles of the Lisbon Recognition Convention and its subsidiary texts in the countries that have not amended their legislation adopting the above principles.

3. In some countries there are difficulties in implementing the principles of the Lisbon Recognition Convention and its subsidiary texts due to the interpretation of the autonomy of higher education institutions. The best way to overcome these difficulties is to make the recognition process a part of both internal quality assurance of higher education institutions and external quality assurance.

4. The NAPs clearly demonstrate that the terminology used in different countries with regard to recognition is too diverse and unclear. The same terms have different meanings in different countries and in other cases different terms are used in different countries. It creates misunderstandings and certainly does not improve mutual understanding.

5. The terminology used in the national legislation of some countries uses the terms nostrification and equivalence, which are outdated concepts of recognition and not compatible with the principles of the Lisbon Recognition Convention.

6. Some countries that have bilateral recognition agreements with other countries have not updated these agreements according to the principles of the Lisbon Recognition Convention.

7. To support implementation of the Lisbon Recognition Convention new bilateral agreements among Parties to the Convention should not be concluded. If applicable, bilateral recommendations could be developed by these countries.

8. In some countries the requirements for translation and legalisation of documents are exaggerated. Countries should look for possibilities to reduce the number of documents that need to be translated.

9. In most countries the recognition procedure includes comparison of the foreign qualification with the relevant qualification in the host country. Some countries have started an easier recognition procedure recognising the general level of the qualification without comparing it to a particular host country’s qualification. While the overall development seems positive, it should be clarified what rights that kind of recognition gives to the holder of the qualification in question.
10. In most countries the recognition procedure involves two steps, but these steps can differ: the first step varies from a recognition statement which is advice to the competent authority making the decision on recognition for further studies or an equivalent statement. The second step in turn varies from a decision on recognition for further studies to full comparability with the issuing of the diploma of the host country. The steps of the procedure must be discussed at European level and steps should be taken to make procedures more coherent.

11. The ENIC/NARIC centre can have a different role in the diverse national recognition procedures: its statement on recognition can be advice to higher education institutions or advice to the Minister or another central body taking the decision, or the ENIC/NARIC centre itself may be the competent authority making decisions. This is yet another issue where European practices are different and it should be part of the European discussions that will be initiated in order to come up with proposals for more coherent procedures and criteria across the EHEA.

12. The criteria used and their relative importance vary from country to country. The contemporary approaches use quality assurance status, learning outcomes and level as the main criteria; some others first look at contents of the curriculum and the length/duration of studies.

13. The time used for the recognition procedure seems not to deviate much from the recommended 3 months and is much shorter in some cases. Therefore, the time required for processing applications for recognition generally does not seem to be an issue.

14. A number of countries have amended their legislation to allow the establishing of joint degrees, whereas others state that there are no legal obstacles for establishment of joint degrees, as the law does not specifically mention them. However, NAPs demonstrate that lack of mention of joint degrees in the legislation does not necessarily mean that there are no legal obstacles to awarding them.

15. In many countries ENIC/NARIC centres have a very limited knowledge regarding institutional recognition practices and outcomes of assessment at the higher education institutions. It also means that these countries cannot guarantee the application of internationally approved principles in their higher education institutions. A more intensive cooperation should be established between the national ENIC/NARIC centres and higher education institutions both for better support and guidance to higher education institutions and for better information on the recognition procedures and decisions at higher education institutions.

16. The Diploma Supplement is issued automatically, free of charge and in a widely spoken language in many countries. In some countries it is issued in just a part of the higher education system. It is not always clear whether the DS is issued to graduates of all levels of qualifications and whether the national diploma supplements fully follow the European Diploma Supplement format.

17. Implementation of ECTS or compatible national credit systems is progressing. However, credits are not yet linked with learning outcomes. In some countries
ECTS is implemented only for the Bachelor and Master programmes. Using quality assurance as a tool for ECTS implementation might help the process.

18. While there is good will to respect the *bona fide* borderless education provision in some countries, in a small number of countries qualifications earned through transnational arrangements are not recognised at all. The main principles for recognition of transnational qualifications quoted in the NAPs are those outlined in the Code of Good Practice in the Provision of Transnational Education.

19. The quality of information provision both on one's own higher education system and on the recognition procedures and criteria is very different in different countries. Providing information being one of the main tasks of the ENIC/NARIC centres, there is a clear need to improve information provision in some of them.

20. There is close cooperation between recognition and quality assurance bodies, since the recognition bodies intensively use quality assurance information. Due to the fact that quality assurance information is often available online and that ENIC/NARIC centres successfully obtain the necessary information from abroad through the ENIC/NARIC channels, the cooperation between the national recognition and quality assurance bodies may not be very visible. The cooperation between the two bodies becomes closer because of work on national qualifications frameworks and because quality assurance can be used as a tool for the proper implementation of the Lisbon Recognition Convention.

**Recommendations**

**To the Ministers**

1. Ministers of those *Bologna* countries that still have not become Parties to the Lisbon Recognition Convention are recommended to sign and/or ratify the Convention without further delay.

2. Ministers of those countries that have not amended their legislation to adopt the principles of the Lisbon Recognition Convention and its subsidiary texts are recommended to assist their Ministries in preparation of the amendments in line with the principles of the legal framework of the Lisbon Recognition Convention.

3. Ministers of those countries that have not amended their legislation to allow and encourage establishment and recognition of joint degrees are recommended to do so.

4. Ministers of all countries are recommended to include the quality of institutional recognition procedures into the internal quality procedures of the higher education institutions and also include it into the external quality reviews.
To the ENIC and NARIC Networks

1. The ENIC and NARIC Networks should take up work in order to clarify the differences in terminology used in the recognition legislation and practices of different countries and take steps to move towards a coherent terminology across the EHEA.

2. The Networks should organise discussions between the national ENIC/NARIC centres to clarify the differences in the recognition criteria and procedures among the countries. On the basis of these discussions, taking into account new developments in the European Higher Education Area and the results of the Working party on Substantial Differences, a revised Recommendation on the Criteria and Procedures for the Assessment of Foreign Qualifications and Periods of Study should be drafted by the Bureau of the Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee.

3. This revised draft Recommendation should be submitted to the Committee of the Lisbon Recognition Convention for adoption in 2010.

To national ENIC/NARIC Centres

1. ENIC/NARIC centres of those countries that have not amended their legislation adopting the principles of the Lisbon Recognition Convention and its subsidiary texts are recommended to assist their Ministries in the preparation of the amendments for adoption of principles of the legal framework of the Lisbon Recognition Convention.

2. With a view of improving mutual recognition with countries outside the European Higher Education Area, the ENIC/NARIC centres are encouraged to apply the principles of the Lisbon Recognition Convention also to the assessment of qualifications from countries that are not Parties of the Lisbon Recognition Convention.

3. ENIC/NARIC centres should provide information, guidance and counselling to the higher education institutions in order to help them establish and maintain recognition procedures based on the principles of the legal framework of the Lisbon Recognition Convention.

To higher education institutions

1. Higher education institutions should make the recognition of qualifications a part of the internal quality assurance of the institution.

2. They should draw up institutional guidelines and recommendations for recognition ensuring implementation of the principles of the Lisbon Recognition Convention across the institution.

3. They should ensure implementation of the Lisbon Recognition Convention at the level of faculties and departments.
4. They should cooperate with other higher education institutions and the national ENIC/NARIC centre with a view to ensure coherent recognition across the country.
INTRODUCTION

The mutual recognition of qualifications is a prerequisite for mobility of students, staff and graduates, and thus is also one of the cornerstones of a genuine European Higher Education Area (EHEA).

At their 2005 conference in Bergen the European Ministers responsible for higher education\(^6\) committed themselves to ensuring the full implementation of the principles of the Lisbon Recognition Convention, and to incorporating them in national legislation as appropriate. They called the participating countries to address recognition problems identified by the ENIC\(^7\) & NARIC\(^8\) networks in their Strasbourg Statement of 2004\(^9\) and to draw up National Action Plans (NAPs) to improve the quality of the process associated with the recognition of foreign qualifications. The National Action plans for Recognition had to be prepared according to guidelines\(^10\) adopted by the ENIC and NARIC networks and adopted by the Bologna Follow Up Group. The deadline for submission was December 15, 2006. The guidelines are reproduced in the Appendix.

In their London Communiqué, Ministers asked the Bologna Follow-up Group (BFUG) to arrange for the ENIC/NARIC networks to analyse our national action plans and spread good practice\(^6\). The ENIC and NARIC Networks appointed a working party for this purpose, and the Council of Europe Secretariat commissioned Professor Andrejs Rauhvargers and Ms. Agnese Rusakova to draft the study. The working party was served by the Council of Europe Secretariat and had the following composition:

Ms. Carita Blomqvist (Finland, Chair)
Ms. Gayane Harutunyan (Armenia)
Ms. Christoph Demand (Austria)
Ms. Elpida Keravnou-Papaeliou (Cyprus)
Ms. Françoise Profit (France)
Mr. Luca Lantero (Italy)
Mr. Andrejs Rauhvargers (Latvia)
Ms. Frances Kelly (New Zealand)
Mr. Bruno Carapinha (European Student Union)

Mr. Ruard Wallis de Vries (European Commission), Ms. Venera Ioniţă and Mr. Peter Wells (UNESCO/CEPES) have also participated in the work of the group. The Council of Europe Secretariat has been represented by Mr. Sjur Bergan and Mr. Jean-Philippe Restoueix.

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\(^7\) ENIC network \(\ddot{\text{i}}\) Council of Europe and UNESCO European Network of National Information Centres on academic recognition and mobility
\(^8\) NARIC network \(\ddot{\text{i}}\) the EU Network of National Academic Recognition Information Centres
Most countries involved in the Bologna Process submitted the National Action plans although many did so with a substantial delay. The five countries that did not submit National Action plans were Azerbaijan, the Holy See, Luxembourg, Moldova and Portugal. Russia submitted a document of a somewhat different character the “Plan of activities aimed at supporting the development of export of educational services for the period up to the year 2008” which included some elements relevant to recognition of qualifications.

First of all, the National Action Plans for Recognition are a collection of best practice, not so good practice, and in some cases even unacceptable practice. The plans should therefore be further analyzed and used for making proposals to improve recognition. A number of countries either have amended their legislation with regard to recognition within the last couple of years or are currently analyzing the recognition practices with a view to making adjustments in the legislation or procedures. At the same time, far from all the countries provided answers to all the points of the Guidelines for the National Action Plans and therefore in several aspects it is not easy to draw conclusions about the EHEA as a whole.

Analyzing the NAPs was a difficult exercise because of the diverse quality of the National Action Plans. It should also be admitted that while the document is called “plan” most of the NAPs actually are rather reports on the status quo and in many cases they contain little information on what the countries intend to do to improve recognition. It should also be born in mind that in some cases important questions were not included in the Guidelines for National Action Plans, e.g. within the section on joint degrees, in order not to overburden the exercise.

While some countries submitted NAPs whose structure corresponds to the Guidelines for National Action Plans for Recognition and which comprised all the information requested, others prepared their National Action Plans without answering a number of questions or changing the structure of the document. Particularly, quite a number of countries in their National Action Plans have dealt with the organisational issues of the legislation review, the planned follow-up activities and recognition procedures at national and institutional level together. When doing so countries often did not provide the expected details on each of these aspects. In chapter 1.2, instead of information on review of national legislation, many countries have just provided a list of national laws and regulations concerning recognition without information on how those legislative documents regulate recognition processes.

One general conclusion from the analysis of the National Action Plans for Recognition is that the recognition practices and even the terminology used vary greatly between the countries and that definitely does not help mutual understanding. This issue has to be discussed further in the ENIC and NARIC networks, since mutual and shared understanding is a cornerstone when discussing joint criteria and procedures for recognition. Very few countries have actually provided information on recognition procedures at higher education institutions and just five countries had actually carried out a survey of institutional practices. Not all countries have indicated such issues as the time that the recognition procedures take until the recognition statement is issued, few report
on applicants’ possibilities to appeal the recognition statement or on the costs the applicant has to pay for the assessment/recognition of their qualifications.

As regards information provision, most countries have not distinguished between information provision on own higher education system to be provided for recognition of own qualifications abroad and the information package for applicants seeking recognition of foreign qualifications.
1. LEGISLATION
By Andrejs Rauhvargers

1.1. Ratification of the Lisbon Recognition Convention.

38 out of 46 ‘Bologna’ countries had ratified the Lisbon Recognition Convention at the time when the National Action Plans were prepared. Germany and Turkey ratified the Convention later in 2007, the Netherlands in the beginning of 2008 and Andorra later in 2008. As of December 2008, Belgium and Italy had signed the Convention and are currently at different stages of internal arrangements in order to ratify it. Greece and Spain had not signed the Convention.

Most of the above countries declare in their National Action Plans that despite not having ratified the Convention, their recognition practices are already in line with its main principles. Indeed, the good will may be there and indeed there is evidence that at least in some of the ‘Bologna’ countries that are not yet parties to the Convention the recognition procedures applied may be among the examples of good practice. However, while a voluntary application of the Convention may at least partly resolve recognition issues for incoming foreign qualifications, such voluntary compliance with the Convention will only work “until a problem comes and if it comes, there will be no legal obligations on the country to follow the Convention. At the same time, the ‘good behaviour’ of the country with regard to incoming students would not help the outgoing students – in the case of assessment of qualifications from a country that has not ratified the Lisbon Recognition Convention, the Convention principles will naturally not be binding on the competent authorities of other countries. It is nevertheless worth underlining that some of the countries that have signed the Lisbon Recognition Convention but have not ratified it actually disseminate the Convention principles and practices.

Summary
38 out of 46 ‘Bologna’ countries had ratified the Lisbon Recognition Convention at the time when the National Action Plans were prepared, while Andorra, Germany, the Netherlands and Turkey added their ratifications later. Belgium and Italy have signed the Convention but not ratified it; Greece and Spain have not signed the Convention.

1.2. Review of national legislation relevant to recognition

The questions in the template for national action plans invited countries to submit information on

a. The timetable and organisation of the review of national legislation (including secondary legislation);
b. Steps envisaged as a result of the review, e.g. as regards amending national legislation where needed and an indicative timetable for such amendments.
c. When and how the outcomes of this review will be published;
d. How partners in the European Higher Education Area will be informed of the outcomes.

Review of legislation

This part of the National Action Plans appears to be somewhat confused. Quite a number of countries have not provided any timetable or details of organisation of the review of national legislation. One reason why no plans to review legislation are presented could be that at the time when these countries prepared their National Action Plans they had already completed a review of their national legislation. However, another possibility remains that those countries that have not indicated a timetable for review of their legislation are actually not planning to do so.

Another group of countries provides a list of legal acts either concerning specifically recognition or dealing with higher education in general in this section of their National Action Plans, in most cases with little or no explanation of the way in which these legal acts address the principles of the Lisbon Recognition Convention and its subsidiary texts. Thus, the answers are there, they demonstrate that the legislation of these countries addresses recognition but they are not particularly helpful for any further analysis or comparisons with other countries. A third group of countries describe issues that are more related to recognition criteria and procedures and thus do not address legislation review or plans to make legal changes already in this chapter instead of providing legislation review. All-in-all, not so many countries have provided details about their legislation review or plans to carry it out. In many cases it also remains unclear how the country in question is able to inform other countries and maybe more importantly those who seek recognition.

A significant number of countries state that their legislation is already in compliance with the Lisbon Recognition Convention and its supplementary documents. Several of those countries, e.g. Austria, Estonia, Hungary, Finland, Lithuania, Romania, the Slovak Republic and others, explicitly state that their national legislation has been adopted or amended on the basis of principles laid down in the Lisbon Recognition Convention and its subsidiary texts. Finland, where incorporation of the Convention principles into national legislation has also been done through several laws adopted or amended after the ratification of the Lisbon Recognition Convention, has in addition issued a government document explaining the principles of the legal framework of the Lisbon Recognition Convention. Several countries, e.g. Italy, Romania, Slovenia, Spain and others, mention that legislation they have adopted in the recent years simplifies recognition procedures.

It should be mentioned as an example of good practice that several countries are applying the Lisbon Recognition Convention principles to all applicants including those whose qualifications originate from countries that have not ratified the Convention. Such

In some cases, while it may be true that there is no explicit contradiction between national legislation and the letter of the legal framework of the Convention, some doubt remains as to whether there is also no contradiction with the spirit of the Convention and its subsidiary texts. Alas, the descriptions of recognition procedures at national or institutional level sometimes strengthen this doubt.

**The terminology issue.** One way in which the national practices diverge from the spirit of the Lisbon Recognition Convention is usage of outdated terminology linked to concepts that are not compatible with the principles of the Lisbon Recognition Convention. It is at least not self-evident that a given national legislation is in compliance with the Lisbon Recognition Convention legal framework if the legislation uses term *nostrification*, which is the case in at least five Bologna countries, or *equivalence*, which is the case in many more countries, especially those that have not made amendments to legislation concerning recognition after they acceded to the Lisbon Recognition Convention. Arguments are sometimes heard from the countries which use terms *equivalence* or even *nostrification* that in their national contexts these words mean the same thing as *recognition*.

In whatever meaning the terms may be used locally, in the international context the words "*nostrification*" and "*equivalence*" have their connotations originating from the assessment procedures of the past (or are they rather still alive?) which were relevant under the old international conventions and agreements on recognition and which are not compatible with the Lisbon Recognition Convention. They indicate a much stronger requirement for similarity between qualifications if foreign qualifications are to be recognised than what is understood by "*recognition*" and the key provision of the Lisbon Recognition Convention: that foreign qualifications shall be recognised unless the competent recognition authority can demonstrate that there is a substantial difference between the foreign qualification for which recognition is sought and the corresponding qualification of the host country.

For exactly this reason there is no mention of *nostrification* or *equivalence* neither in the Lisbon Recognition Convention itself nor in the supplementary legal documents adopted within the legal framework of the Lisbon Recognition Convention.

*Nostrification* is a term originating from recognition practices that were widely used several decades ago. Nostrification means acknowledgement of full identity of the foreign qualification in all its aspects and therefore nostrification often leads either to issuing the appropriate host country’s qualification or allowing use of the host country’s title.
Equivalence is a more recent term denoting a somewhat softer procedure than nostrification but is not the same as recognition in the terminology of the Lisbon Recognition Convention. The Explanatory Report to the Lisbon Recognition Convention provides an explanation why the word ‘equivalence’ is not used in the Lisbon Recognition Convention:

“Practices concerning the recognition of qualifications have developed considerably over the past decades. Whereas an assessment of foreign qualifications often entailed a detailed comparison of curricula and lists of material studied (‘equivalence’), the emphasis has now shifted to a broader comparison of the qualifications earned (‘recognition’). Likewise, a tendency has become apparent for formal international regulations to emphasize the procedures and criteria applicable to the process of recognition of foreign qualifications rather than to list or define degrees and diplomas that shall be recognized under the regulation.”

Thus, as the Lisbon Recognition Convention was adopted in 1997, today it is twelve years late to assess foreign qualifications by seeking equivalence but the terminology and as a result also the practice is still alive.

This observation is yet another indication that the national legislation should be amended after acceding to international treaties or otherwise the application of the new approach in practice may be hindered. Terminology does matter: if terminology is used that actually denotes outdated procedures that do not ensure ‘fair recognition’ in the letter and spirit of the Lisbon Recognition Convention, the terminology should be changed.

It is therefore highly recommended that countries that have not yet done so adapt their terminology to the terms used in the Lisbon Recognition Convention rather than keep the kind of terminology which – at least in their international meaning - contradicts its principles.

Summary on legislation review. Quite a number of countries did not provide any timetable or details of organisation of the review of national legislation. A significant number of countries state that their legislation is already in compliance with the Lisbon Recognition Convention even if this legislation has not been amended after the countries acceded to the Lisbon Recognition Convention. In reality, while there may be no explicit contradiction between national legislation and the letter of the Convention, there may be contradiction with the spirit of the Convention and its supplementary legal documents.

Some countries use outdated terminology which is linked to concepts that are not compatible with the principles of the Lisbon Recognition Convention. Thus, at least five

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countries still use term *nostrification* which is linked to a recognition concept seeking full identity of the foreign qualification, or the term *equivalence*. None of those terms is used in the Lisbon Recognition Convention or its subsidiary texts because they are linked with outdated principles and methodology where the main focus of assessment was on a detailed comparison of curricula and even lists of material studied.

**Legal and institutional autonomy issues in the implementation of the Lisbon Recognition Convention**

It is interesting that this point arises and is being intensively discussed as theoretically there should be no problems at all. Since the Lisbon Recognition Convention is an international treaty, after a country becomes Party to the Convention, i.e. ratifies it, the Convention should take precedence over national legislation. In reality, however, the National Action Plans for Recognition demonstrate something else (and the same is often heard at international meetings where recognition is discussed): the superiority of the international over national legislation in practice does not work so smoothly in all countries.

Two kinds of difficulties are mentioned most often. The first one is related to those cases where the national legislation contradicts with the legal framework of the Lisbon Recognition Convention. Most typically this may happen if the contradictory clauses have already existed in the national legislation before the country in question acceded to the Lisbon Recognition Convention. In these cases the natural solution should be to amend the national legislation accordingly in order to bring it in the line with the Lisbon Recognition Convention. There is a large group of countries that have done so or are planning to do so. However, there are also examples of the opposite i.e. cases where national legislation has been amended or replaced with new generation legislation without respect to the international legislation in which case the contradictions may become even deeper.

The other type of hindrances to the implementation of the Lisbon Recognition Convention seems to be linked to the interpretation (or rather misinterpretation) of the key principle of institutional autonomy. The autonomy of higher education institutions is a cornerstone of the heritage and practice of higher education in Europe, and it is one of the fundamental principles of the European Higher Education Area. It certainly does not mean, however, that higher education institutions have the liberty to ignore the laws or international treaties signed by the State and the Lisbon Recognition Convention is one. Still, where this type of interpretation takes place, the various formulations in National Action Plans have approximately the same overall meaning: since the recognition decisions are taken by the higher education institutions and since these institutions are autonomous, the state cannot ensure that the principles or procedures stipulated in the legal framework of the Lisbon Recognition Convention are followed. Such an answer shows that countries actually do not fulfil the requirements of the Lisbon Recognition Convention which obliges the central authorities of the state party of the Convention to take all possible steps to
encourage the favourable consideration and application of the Convention provisions in higher education institutions\textsuperscript{13}.

Several different approaches regarding the legal aspects of implementation of the Lisbon Recognition Convention in relation to national legislation and institutional autonomy have been observed.

**The most widespread approach** seems to be the one where the ENIC/NARIC centre assesses the foreign qualification and issue a statement, which is a recommendation to the autonomous higher education institutions. The universities indeed make their autonomous decisions on recognition but, since they should be aware of the international legislation and since they often rely on the professionalism of their national ENIC/NARIC centre\textsuperscript{14} they are expected to follow principles of the Lisbon Recognition Convention.

**A sample of unacceptable practice is the “hands off” approach**, where it is considered that due to institutional autonomy it is not possible to request that higher education institutions follow the principles of the Lisbon Recognition Convention in their recognition practices. In a couple of cases this type of interpretation goes even further, claiming that state has no right even to ask for information about the actual recognition practices inside higher education institutions or that even advising the higher education institutions on recognition can be problematic because of autonomy.

**The ‘centralised’ approach** is used by some countries. There the actions and responsibilities are reversed. A central body - the Ministry, the Minister or another senior ministry official personally or a ministry-approved committee - makes decisions on recognition. Recognition decision may in this case be prepared either by the higher education institutions or the ENIC/NARIC centres or ad hoc committees. A couple of countries consider this type of approach as a solution to the autonomy issue. As an extreme case of this approach, in one country higher education institutions have no mandate or say in recognition decisions at all.

There are three interesting variations of the “most typical” approach described above. One of them involves some power play\textsuperscript{15} autonomous higher education institutions take decisions but inspectorates, ministries or other bodies that monitor observation of law in higher education institutions follow the implementation of the Convention.

In the second variation of the typical approach a legal solution is sought: the principles of the Lisbon Recognition Convention are transposed into national legislation. While universities are autonomous, they still have to respect the law; therefore this approach ensures that the recognition decisions should be in line with the Lisbon Recognition

\textsuperscript{13} Cf. Article II.1 of the Lisbon Recognition Convention

\textsuperscript{14} In the EU, EEA and EU candidate countries the recognition centres belong to both ENIC and NARIC networks. The Bologna Process also covers countries outside the EU and the national recognition centres of these countries belong to the ENIC network only. For the sake of simplicity, reference is to ENIC/NARIC centres throughout the text.
Convention. This practice, which is followed in several countries, clearly shows that international legislation is not always seen as taking priority over national legislation in practice hence the described measures.

The third variation of the typical approach seems to be the best practice. It is related to quality assurance: since fair recognition of qualifications is considered to be part of the overall quality assurance system of the higher education institution, the institutional recognition procedures and implementation of the Lisbon Recognition Convention is assessed at the periodic quality reviews, audits or accreditation.

**Summary on legal and autonomy-related implementation difficulties.** In some cases countries report problems in implementing the Lisbon Recognition Convention because their national legislation contradicts the legal framework of the Convention. This indicates that the country should either amend its legislation or ensure that the precedence of the international legislation is observed.

Some countries report that since the recognition decisions are taken by the higher education institutions and since these institutions are autonomous, the state cannot ensure that the principles of the Lisbon Recognition Convention are followed. Thus, these countries actually do not fulfil the requirements of the Lisbon Recognition Convention to take all possible steps to application of the Convention provisions in higher education institutions. This is clearly not acceptable practice.

The best solution to this issue is making the recognition of qualifications in higher education institutions part of quality assurance, which will then assess compliance with the Lisbon Recognition Convention. Another solution is that the state bodies that monitor observation of law in higher education institutions also monitor observation of the Lisbon Recognition Convention principles. A less favourable solution mentioned by some countries is that recognition decisions are made by a central body: the minister or someone in his/her name and not by higher education institutions.

**Examples of follow-up measures planned**

Not many countries are planning to amend or draft legislation. The following are some examples of countries planning to do so.

In Malta a process has been initiated so as to streamline and simplify legislation, and this process will address both the academic and professional recognition. A working group established in 2006 for the review of legislation in Albania has proposed amendments to two national regulations in order to ensure compliance with the Council of Europe/UNESCO Recommendation on Criteria and Procedures. Armenia stated that it had no specific legislation on recognition so far and therefore the Lisbon Recognition Convention is being applied directly in Armenia, but Armenia has prepared amendments to legislation in the course of 2007-2008 has submitted it for adoption. In Latvia the legislation is in line with the principles of the Lisbon Recognition Convention but those principles have so far
not been explicitly mentioned. For this reason, the principles of the Lisbon Recognition Convention are listed in the draft law for higher education which has been submitted to the Parliament for adoption. Bosnia and Herzegovina informs that due to different legislation in the different parts of the country and lack of a state level higher education law, the procedures and criteria are not fully in compliance with Recommendation on Criteria and Procedures, and therefore the state level recommends sticking to the principles laid down in the international legislation.

In most countries the follow-up procedures planned do not involve amendments of legislation but rather information and dissemination measures.

A number of countries, including those known for having the best recognition practices and which therefore often share their experiences with others, indicate that different stakeholders involved in the assessment and recognition of qualifications still need more information on the principles of the Lisbon Recognition Convention. It is specifically underlined in several National Action Plans that training in the practical application of the Convention principles is still needed and the ENIC/NARIC centres of these countries therefore plan more dissemination and training events for higher education institutions, employers and other parties involved in recognition.

Austria considers that its legislation is in compliance with the Lisbon Recognition Convention legal framework and plans to inform partners in the EHEA by publishing the new amendments and preparing English translations of the relevant legislation. So does Croatia, where the amendments to legislation took effect at the end of 2006.

**Summary on follow-up measures.** In most countries the follow-up procedures planned do not involve amendments of legislation but rather information and dissemination measures.

### 1.3. Bilateral recognition agreements

**a. Conformity with the principles of the Lisbon Recognition Convention**

Regarding the bilateral recognition agreements, the main findings are as follows. Far from all countries have bilateral recognition agreements with other countries. Where a country has such agreements, the number of agreements is usually three to four, although in some cases the number of agreements is greater. Thus, Germany, the Czech Republic and Slovenia have more than ten bilateral agreements each, Romania has 8, Poland 7, and the Slovak Republic and Albania have 5 bilateral agreements.

Bilateral recognition agreements are often concluded among geographically close countries or among countries with a common history. Examples of this phenomenon are

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15 A state level law on higher education was adopted in Bosnia and Herzegovina after its NAP was written.
the agreement between the Nordic countries, the one between the Baltic countries, at least part of the agreements concluded by such countries as Austria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Liechtenstein, Romania, Slovakia and Switzerland. The Russian Federation sees bilateral agreements as part of its plans to increase the export of its higher education services. In the above cases the bilateral agreements usually go further than the Lisbon Recognition Convention: in some cases the agreements include notions on how particular qualifications of one party of the agreement should be recognised in other party (ies).

Another group of bilateral recognition agreements are those which provide legal grounds for mutual recognition with countries that are not part of the European Region and are therefore not covered by the Lisbon Recognition Convention. Several Bologna countries have concluded bilateral agreements with China, some with Latin American countries, Egypt, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Iran, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and others.

**Conformity of bilateral agreements with the principles of the Lisbon Recognition Convention**

Most countries state that their bilateral recognition agreements are in conformity with the principles of the Lisbon Recognition Convention. Yet, in several cases countries have indicated that bilateral agreements are becoming outdated and should therefore be revised which may partly be caused by the rapid changes of qualifications systems within the Bologna Process.

Austria notes that, as its policy is to support the implementation of the Lisbon Recognition Convention in the countries involved in the Bologna Process, Austria is not planning to conclude further bilateral agreements with States parties to the Lisbon Recognition Convention. Instead, it is more useful to develop bilateral recommendations with these countries, working together with their relevant institutions and using the Convention as the only legal basis.

**Summary on bilateral agreements.** Not all countries have bilateral recognition agreements. The number of bilateral agreements is typically 5-10. Bilateral recognition agreements are often concluded either among geographically/ historically close countries or with countries that are not part of the European region and are therefore not covered by the Lisbon Recognition Convention.

It is worth considering the proposal not to conclude further bilateral agreements with States parties to the Lisbon Recognition Convention in order support implementation of the Lisbon Recognition Convention in the countries involved in the Bologna process.
2. RECOGNITION PRACTICE

By Andrejs Rauhvargers

2.1. Recognition procedures and criteria

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**.¹⁶

b. **Measures to improve implementation**.

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

A. Overview of the practice of competent recognition authorities

**Recognition procedures**

With few exceptions, all the countries declare that the recognition criteria and procedures they use are in compliance with the Council of Europe/UNESCO Recommendation on Criteria and Procedures for the Assessment of Foreign Qualifications and Periods of Study (further: Recommendation on Criteria and Procedures). Among the exceptions are Spain, which does not claim compliance with the Recommendation on Criteria and Procedures, and Bosnia and Herzegovina which informs that due to different legislation in the different parts of the country, the procedures and criteria are not fully in compliance with Recommendation on Criteria and Procedures and therefore the state level recommends to stick to the principles of laid down in international legislation. Some countries, e.g. Bulgaria, link their updating of the criteria for recognition with the latest developments within the Bologna Process.

**Authenticity and translations of documents.** While we do not question the principle that documents presented for recognition should be authentic and that fraud should be eradicated, practices in some countries nevertheless seem to be exaggerated. Requesting that all documents to be presented are officially translated and have an apostille is burdensome to the applicants but, on the other hand, a verbatim offical translation may appear misleading from a recognition point of view. Albania, for instance therefore states that the confirmation of the authenticity can be realised through direct correspondence with the institution of origin. In Hungary, half of the institutions do not require translations if the documents are in English or German, while Italy recommends that institutions accept documents in English, French, Latin and Spanish.

Comparing a foreign qualification with the relevant host country’s qualification.

With few exceptions, the recognition procedures include comparing the foreign qualification in question with the relevant qualification in the host country. It is not the case e.g. in France, where so far foreign qualifications are not compared with the relevant French qualification. However, France is currently attempting to introduce such practice.

Comparing a foreign qualification to the host country’s qualification which it is going to substitute is a logical approach. However, it can create problems in cases where there is no host country qualification to compare the foreign qualification in question with. Thus, one country stated that in case a relevant qualification to be used as a prototype cannot be found in the institution to which the application has been addressed and also in other institutions of the host country, recognition is refused. The applicant can then appeal and after appeal the Ministry of Education should decide. While such cases might be relatively rare, this does not appear to be good practice because it actually means denying recognition without any assessment of the foreign qualification. This practice thus contradicts one of the main principles of the Lisbon Recognition Convention: applicants’ right to a fair assessment of their qualification. Spain has a procedure for recognising foreign higher education qualifications which provides a clear equivalent to Spanish academic degrees. Under the 2004 regulation, it is possible to recognise a foreign degree also as a general degree in the Spanish system without comparing it to a particular Spanish qualification.

Under the new recognition legislation the procedures in Slovenia have moved away from requiring that the foreign qualification is equivalent to the relevant home qualification in all aspects towards comparing only those aspects relevant to the right which the holder of the qualification is trying to exercise in Slovenia.

The most detailed approach to comparison to a qualification in the host country’s system is perhaps the United Kingdom case. The UK ENIC/NARIC has prepared a Code of Practice which advises on the criteria and procedures for the recognition of international qualifications and skills. The detailed procedure called “band framework” leads to location of the foreign qualification in the 17-level UK system comprising academic and vocational qualifications at all levels of education. A rather similar approach is used by Ireland where the foreign qualification is related to the Irish qualifications framework.

In Ukraine the foreign programme is compared to the domestic one in order to establish the level of correspondence according to the Ukrainian state standards and Cabinet regulation.

A very special way of comparing with host country’s qualification is applied in one country where the recognition process involves a two-step assessment of the higher education institution and programme from where the foreign qualification in question originates as the following quote from the National Action Plan shows:

“1. A review of the foreign higher education institution by a scientific committee of university professors to determine whether it is “essentially equivalent” to that country’s higher education institutions.
2. An assessment of the particular Department and the program the student attended is made considering parameters such as admission requirements, number of professors who are PhD holders, teaching and examination procedures and degree titles awarded.”

Following these two steps, the academic qualifications are considered either as equivalent or as equivalent and correspondent.

This kind of practice could perhaps be understandable some 10-15 years ago, when the quality assurance systems in Europe were not yet established. Today, quality assurance systems have been established throughout the European Higher Education Area, and countries are increasingly building trust between their educational systems on the basis of national quality assurance and the European cooperation in quality assurance through ENQA, ECA and other networks of quality assurances. For the above reasons attempting to assess quality of a foreign higher education institution from a distance (and probably using limited information) rather than consulting the national quality assurance results in the country that has issued the qualification does not seem to be acceptable practice within the EHEA.

Different recognition procedures for different types of qualifications? In some countries there are separate avenues for different kinds of qualifications.

Profile. In some countries there may be different avenues of recognition depending on the profile of the qualification. In other words, there can be different competent authorities (and modified procedures) for ‘academic’ and ‘applied/professional’ qualifications.

Level. Some countries have established different avenues of recognition for different levels of degrees. First of all, some countries treat doctoral degrees as ‘scientific’ degrees separately from the ‘academic’ bachelor and master degrees. Others treat the ‘postgraduate’ (doctoral and master degrees) separately from bachelor degrees.

Finally, some countries, e.g. Cyprus, separate ‘Bologna’ degrees from ‘pre-Bologna’ integrated degrees awarded after completion of ‘long’ programmes, and has separate procedures for these two groups. In the French Community of Belgium, for instance, the concept of ‘level equivalence’ with generic academic Bachelor and Master Degrees was introduced in 2004. This type of recognition is applied in cases where the studies undertaken abroad have been at the Bachelor or Master level but their contents do not correspond to any programme in the French Community of Belgium.

An example of quite diverse procedures is Albania where, in addition to treating doctoral degrees separately from other qualifications there are different competent authorities looking at cases where the master degree has been obtained in the same field (and institution) which awarded bachelor degree, and cases where the master degree is in a different field or has been awarded by a different institution.
Partial recognition. In many countries in cases where full recognition cannot be granted because there are substantial differences, it is possible to have a partial recognition. As an alternative to partial recognition some countries mention compensatory measures suggested that would enable applicants to meet requirements for recognition at the desired level. It is believed that granting partial recognition is a very common practice in most countries, and therefore countries probably did not consider it necessary to specifically mention it in their National Action Plans. The possibilities of partial recognition/compensatory measures are specifically mentioned by e.g. Belgium (French Community), the Czech Republic and Latvia.

Is granting partial recognition good or bad practice? It is impossible to judge without seeing examples of cases. Of course, for the applicant partial recognition or imposing compensatory measures is better than non-recognition. However, unlike the recognition of professional qualifications in the EU, where the EU Directive 2005/36/EC sets some regulations on the application of compensatory measures, there are no international regulations for this issue in academic recognition. So the question that should be asked when compensatory measures or partial recognition is applied is: are those measures applied because some important learning outcomes of the foreign qualification were missing so that the applicant is not able to pursue the intended learning or professional activities; or are the measures applied to make the contents of studies that the foreign applicant has taken identical to the ones after which the relevant local qualification is awarded?

Links between procedures of academic and professional recognition. While not all countries mention it explicitly, there is a feeling that, as underlined by e.g. Estonia, Georgia, Greece, Sweden and other countries, academic recognition often has consequences in de facto professional recognition, i.e. the recognition for the non-regulated part of the labour market. Spain in turn reports that academic recognition is easier if the applicant already has professional recognition.

A rather strange finding is that some countries require full academic recognition (including comparison of programmes carried out by higher education institutions) when the applicant intends to enter a regulated profession. While the issue is outside the scope of the present report, it should be underlined that such developments are not in line with one of the general principles of the EU Directive on the recognition of professional qualification, which is that a professional who had the full right to practice in the member state of origin should be given the same rights also in the host member state rather than go into detailed comparison of the academic content of training.

It is important to note that as far as possible the procedures of recognition for academic and professional purposes for the non-regulated part of the labour market should be coherent first of all, for the sake of applicants. Having two sets of incompatible procedures also looks strange given that the majority of ENIC/NARI centres at the same time have functions in professional recognition. In the EU countries they usually serve as contact points for professional recognition, and in other countries they may have various functions in professional recognition from advisory bodies to competent authorities.
Recognition in the cases when evidence is incomplete or lacking. In cases where evidence is lacking the assessment of an applicant’s qualifications is difficult and requires good will. Nevertheless, there seems to be a growing number of countries that attempt to assess qualifications even in these cases. Denmark is one example of the countries where the ENIC/NARIC will assess applications from persons lacking documentation of their qualification. If the applicant cannot provide a transcript, but only has the diploma, the foreign qualification will only be compared with a general level of the Danish education system.

Recognition procedure: in two stages. But which stages?

It has become quite common that the overall procedure from the moment when holder of a foreign qualification submits application to the moment a decision on recognition is taken includes two main stages. The National Action Plans demonstrate that these two stages can be quite different.

Recommendation followed by a decision on recognition. In many cases, the first stage ends with issuing a statement on recognition which is not yet a decision and is therefore not binding. The recognition statement then serves as a recommendation to the competent authority which takes the decision. In quite a number of countries the recommendation is issued by the ENIC/NARIC centre and the final recognition decision is taken by the higher education institutions (for further studies) or by employers (for employment in non-regulated professions).

There can be variations to the recommendation decision two-stage procedure: in some countries it is an ad hoc committee of experts (and a higher education institution in one country) and not the ENIC/NARIC centre that prepares the recommendation. The decision in some countries may be taken by the minister (vice-minister, ministry), in some others by an ad hoc committee of experts, and in some countries by the ENIC/NARIC centre.

As can be seen from the National Action Plans, the two-stage procedure can involve stages different from recommendation and decision and can vary substantially between countries. The various first and second stages of the two-stage procedure are summarised in table 1.
Table 1. Two-stage recognition procedure as described in the National Action Plans for Recognition submitted by different countries\(^\text{17}\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage I</th>
<th>Stage II</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A Recommendation on recognition</td>
<td>Recognition decision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B Formal recognition</td>
<td>Recognition for continuation of studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C Recognition of level</td>
<td>Recognition of comparability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D Recognition positioning in the home system</td>
<td>Recognition statement establishing equivalence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E Recognition for further studies</td>
<td>Establishing equivalence with issuing host country's degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F Establishing equivalence</td>
<td>Establishing comparability (with all legal rights)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Some differences from the "typical" recommendation-decision procedure A seem to be obvious.

In case B the first stage ends with "formal recognition". Thus, the result of the first stage is already a decision. This decision probably gives some rights to the holder and is not a recommendatory statement as in the "typical" procedure.

In case C there are also two recognition decisions. The first acknowledges the level of the foreign qualification without comparison to a particular qualification of the host country and may also give some rights to the holder. With the introduction of the Bologna three cycle system, "level recognition" without a detailed comparison to a particular qualification of the host country seems to become more widespread. In the second stage the foreign qualification may be recognised as comparable to a particular qualification of the host system. In principle the "formal" or "level" recognition may fit some of the needs of the qualification holder. However, taking into account that in some countries there is still a tendency to seek full identity of the foreign qualification to the relevant home qualification, the first stages in cases B and C may also be used to say "not recognised" in a polite manner. It would therefore be important with regard to cases B and C to clarify what is actually the function of the two different levels of recognition, what rights the first stage of recognition actually gives to the holder and how similar the qualification must be to the relevant host country’s qualification to reach the kind of recognition foreseen in stage II.

In cases D, E and F countries in their National Action Plans use the term "equivalence", which has already been discussed in the section 1.2. Review of national legislation relevant to recognition.

\(^{17}\) Names of stages taken from the National Plans submitted by countries
In cases E and F the result of the first stage seems to correspond to the result of the stage II of cases A, B C and D. Stage II of cases E and F apparently is something even more. In case E, the second stage of recognition leads to issuing the host country’s qualification.

Regarding case F, equivalence is already established in the stage I but only in stage II does the holder of a foreign qualification gain the full legal rights. In any case, the fact that equivalence in different countries may appear either as a result of the first and the second stage of the recognition procedures clearly demonstrates that the discussion should continue at European level to clarify the terminology used and the philosophy followed.

A conclusion from the above is that there should be a discussion on European level to clarify the terminology used and the stages of the recognition procedure with a view to agreeing upon coherent and mutually understandable procedures. Besides the representatives of the ENIC/NARIC centres the discussion should also involve policy makers and representatives of higher education institutions, as the national recognition procedures are often regulated in legislation and as the higher education institutions are often involved in the last stage of recognition.

**Recognition criteria**

The criteria used and the relative importance of different criteria vary significantly from country to country. Criteria may vary from comparing learning outcomes to attempting to assess the teaching staff of an institution in another country.

Some examples of contemporary approaches will be described first.

*Take into account differences in the educational systems.* The Flemish Community of Belgium, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and several other countries state that they acknowledge differences between education systems and take them into account in their assessment of foreign qualifications.

*Count on quality and trust quality assurance in other countries.* It can be seen that one of the common tendencies is using quality as a criterion and trusting the quality assurance in the country of origin. It becomes a norm that quality assurance (resulting in national recognition) of the programme and/or institution from which the qualification originates is a necessary precondition for the recognition of individual qualifications. This approach leads to the principle stated clearly by Austria: rely on the recognition in the country of origin.

*Assess learning outcomes wherever possible.* Several countries, e.g. Croatia, Denmark, Latvia, Malta and Norway, emphasise that whenever possible, recognition is based upon a comparison of learning outcomes or competences. Even more, one country has stated that recognition can only be denied if there is clear evidence of substantial differences in learning outcomes. Some countries emphasise other elements of qualifications frameworks, such as profile.
Attempt to take into account prior learning. Several countries, e.g. Denmark, France and Norway, state that they attempt where possible to evaluate and take into account the prior learning or such learning for which the applicants lack documentary evidence.

Taking into account the previous recognition practice of similar qualifications is explicitly mentioned by e.g. the Czech Republic, Italy, Lithuania and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. Countries like Denmark, the Netherlands, Norway, Ireland, Malta, Sweden, and the United Kingdom have established databases on previous recognition decisions, and more are planning to do so.

The following criteria for recognition are most often mentioned:

- the recognition or quality assurance/accreditation status of the institution/qualification in the country of origin
- the level of the qualification
- the learning outcomes/stipulated aims of the programme
- the contents of the curriculum
- the rights of the qualification holder in the home country
- the conditions for access to the programme,
- the length/duration/volume of the programme,
- the purposes for which the recognition is sought

There are also other criteria that are mentioned less frequently:

- the level of the institution
- the profile of the institution
- the number of study hours covered by the programme,
- the traineeships, practical exercises, dissertations and theses,
- the examination results obtained,
- the accreditation or recognition by the foreign authorities
- the professional recognition of the study programme in the home country
- the relevant professional experience

Some of these criteria raise further questions. It is not absolutely clear what the level of the institution means. It may be just an issue of wording, but it also might be related to putting a professional higher education institution at a different level compared to a university while in fact both may award qualifications at the same level. Using the number of study hours covered by the programme as a recognition criterion is an old-fashioned approach from the times when every detail of the programmes was compared.

Summary on recognition criteria

The criteria used and the relative importance of different criteria vary significantly from country to country. Criteria may vary from comparing learning outcomes to attempting to assess teaching staff of an institution in another country. The contemporary approaches include e.g.: taking into account differences in the educational systems, counting on
quality and trusting quality assurance in other countries, assessing learning outcomes wherever possible, attempting to take into account prior learning, taking into account the previous recognition practices in similar cases. Adding the purposes for which recognition is sought and study workload seems to make an up-to-date approach to recognition.

However, a number of other countries start with mentioning such criteria as contents of the curriculum and length/duration of the programme instead which seem to represent quite backward-looking approaches.

**B. Measures to improve implementation**

Not all countries plan any measures to improve recognition practices as a result of the legislation and procedures review.

The country that is planning the greatest number of activities is Albania: it plans to reduce the number of the documents to be legalised, to ensure possibilities for applicants to appeal against recognition decisions and to improve the procedures for appeal, to reduce by half the fees for recognition and to further reduce the time needed to process applications for recognition (even if the time is in line with the Convention already). Poland states that it will prepare new rules for nostrification.

Many countries, including a number of those who are known for best recognition practices, plan to continue to disseminate information on recognition criteria and procedures among all stakeholders and to provide advice and training to the relevant staff of the higher education institutions as well as employers, i.e. to those who in most cases are actually the competent recognition authorities. Some countries state that it is especially necessary for private institutions; some others have so far provided such information to universities only and are now planning to include also the applied higher education institutions.

Bulgaria, Croatia and others plan updating the criteria for recognition according to the latest developments in the Bologna Process and in the education field in general. Croatia also plans to eliminate requirements leading to undue complications in the procedure.

Several countries plan to establish databases of recognition decisions with a view to simplifying procedures in the future, while Ireland, Malta and some others will develop databases on qualifications systems abroad and further strengthen the ENIC/NARIC centre.

Some countries, e.g. Italy and Norway, plan to monitor the drawing up and implementation of institutional regulations with special reference to academic recognition and the application of the Lisbon Recognition Convention. Norway will also make it compulsory to include recognition procedures in the formal quality assurance system of all higher education institutions. Italy, which has stressed the importance of discussing the
substantial differences issue internationally\textsuperscript{18}, also plans an intensive national discussion on cases of substantial differences.

**Summary on improving the recognition practices.** Not all countries plan any measures to improve recognition practices as a result of the review of legislation and procedures. The main measures countries plan in order to improve procedures and criteria are: ensuring possibilities for applicants to appeal, dissemination of information on recognition criteria and procedures among all stakeholders, updating the criteria for recognition according to the latest developments in the Bologna Process, establish databases of recognition decisions, assisting higher education institutions and monitoring the drawing up and implementation of institutional regulations. It should be underlined that the same countries that already demonstrate the best recognition practices also plan most measures for improvement.

**C. Overview of the time required to process applications for recognition and measures to improve this time**

The time required for recognition generally does not seem to be worrying. Quite a number of respondents, among them Albania, the Flemish Community of Belgium, France, Italy and Poland mention the 3 months time limit.

There are also a number of countries that do it in substantially shorter time: Georgia in 15 -30 days, Malta in not more than 15 working days, Iceland in 15 days (but that concerns procedures up to receiving ENIC/NARIC advice), Denmark in 26 days (and the time is still decreasing), Estonia in 30 days, and Latvia in most cases in 15 days, in more complicated cases more but not exceeding 3 months (in theory, the law allows for 6 months, though). The Czech Republic, Lithuania, Liechtenstein and Switzerland usually do not require more than 1 month with extension up to 3 months if necessary, Norway needs 2.6 months on average and Hungary and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia normally take up to 2 months; in Hungary there is extension possible up to 3 months.

In Slovenia and Bosnia and Herzegovina the desired time for recognition theoretically is 2 months; however the recognition decision is not issued in this time in all cases (one half of cases in Slovenia). Cyprus and Sweden aim at 3 months, but in Sweden 90% cases are completed within this time already today. The procedure still takes 4 months in Armenia.

**Summary on the time required for processing applications for recognition.** Overall, it seems that in most cases the time required for processing applications for recognition are within a three-month limit and that the time are still being reduced. It should, however, be noted that not all countries have answered the question regarding the duration of recognition procedures.

\textsuperscript{18} An ENIC/NARIC working party, served by the Council of Europe, was appointed in early 2006 at the suggestion of Italy. The issue of substantial differences was a major topic at the annual ENIC/NARIC meetings in 2006, 2007 and 2008, and a book on substantial differences is forthcoming in the Council of Europe Higher Education Series.
2.2. Joint degrees

a. Overview of the legal provisions concerning the recognition of joint degrees.
b. Amendments to remove legal obstacles or to establish legal provision favouring the recognition of joint degrees.
c. Beyond legal provision, suggestion of policy measures to ensure the recognition of joint degrees.
d. Overview of double and multiple degrees and policy measures to encourage the recognition of such degrees.

It is evident from the National Action Plans for Recognition that within the past couple of years legislation has been reviewed in a number of countries with regard to the awarding and recognition of joint degrees. Since 2005 there has been a progress in establishing joint programmes and awarding joint degrees. In the two-year period between the Bergen and London ministerial conferences a number of countries changed their legislation with regard to joint degrees. Laws explicitly address joint degrees in e.g. Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Finland, France, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Norway, Poland, Romania, Serbia, and Spain, making it possible to award and recognise joint degrees.

Another group of countries like Croatia, Cyprus, Denmark, Georgia, Germany, Liechtenstein, and Switzerland state that while the law does not specifically mention joint degrees, there are no legal obstacles for their establishment either. The previous experience with the joint degrees however tells that no mention of joint degrees in the legislation does not necessarily mean that there are no legal obstacles to awarding them. Obstacles to joint degrees often arise from regulations that have been prepared without regard to joint degrees and are not directed against joint degrees specifically. They probably date from a time when joint degrees were not yet an issue. For instance, these can be regulations on the minimum part of the programme to be studied at the home institution, a requirement that the final thesis has to be written at the home institution, regulations on issuing state recognised diplomas (can foreign rectors/deans put their signature on the diploma?). In some countries even the officially approved layout of the state-recognised diplomas and many other seemingly simple formal issues may become obstacles to joint degrees.

Thus, e.g. in Latvia and in the Slovak Republic there are in principle no legal obstacles, yet the law restricts the text that may be written in the certificate, in Estonia joint programmes and award of joint diplomas are allowed, but the joint degrees awarded are not officially recognised by the state. In Latvia and Sweden it is legally possible to establish joint programmes but joint degrees are still impossible to award.

Some other countries, e.g. Bulgaria, Cyprus, Malta and Slovenia, report that their legislation allows the recognition of joint degrees but do not mention any legal possibilities.

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to award joint degrees. Bulgaria and Malta underline that universities are intensively establishing joint degree cooperation.

It seems that, like several years ago, some countries that have no possibility to award joint degrees use joint programmes as the way out. The programmes are established and carried out jointly but upon completion of studies each higher education institution awards its own degree to its own students. It should also be underlined that countries in their NAPs often do not distinguish between cooperation on joint programmes and awarding degrees jointly and probably that is one of the reasons for optimism when stating that while the legislation does not mention joint degrees, they are still possible.

In several countries, e.g. Austria, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Norway and Spain, the ministry, the rectors’ conference, the ENIC/NARIC centre, or these organisations in cooperation have prepared guidelines for establishing joint programmes. Ireland and Norway have established procedures for joint quality assurance of the joint programmes.

It is specifically mentioned in several National Action Plans that higher education institutions are encouraged to establish joint degrees. This is the case in Austria, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Iceland, Italy, Norway, Poland, Sweden and Switzerland. Some of these countries also mention financial incentives: the Czech Republic, France and Italy for joint degrees in general whereas Switzerland specifically mentions incentives for joint doctoral programmes. The answers of countries on encouraging establishing joint degrees or financial incentives to joint degree cooperation, however, do not allow drawing any overall conclusions on these issues because there were no questions asked about encouraging or providing financial incentives to joint degrees in the template for the NAPs.

There is also a group of countries that are preparing changes to legislation with a view to addressing joint degrees, among them Bosnia and Herzegovina, Denmark, Liechtenstein, Latvia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

**Obstacles.** The most frequently mentioned obstacles to awarding and recognition of joint degrees are not new. They are:

- lack of national legal regulations on joint degrees;
- the text on the diploma is regulated by legislation and it excludes possibility to award degrees jointly,

Germany and several other countries underline the need for more international cooperation in the quality assurance of joint programmes.
The most typical conditions for recognition of foreign joint degrees most often applied by the countries are actually those included in the Council of Europe/UNESCO Recommendation on the Recognition of Joint Degrees:

- all parts of joint degree must have been subject to transparent quality assessment;
- all participating higher education institutions should be recognised institutions;
- all parts of the joint degree must belong to a national educational system.

Some countries also require that a similar programme exist in their country.

As a summary, there has been a progress in the area of establishing joint programmes and awarding joint degrees since 2005. In the two-year period between the Bergen and London ministerial conferences a number of countries have changed their legislation with regard to joint degrees; others have started joint programmes in practice. The resulting situation is that in most countries either the awarding and recognition of joint degrees is explicitly allowed and encouraged by national legislation, or there is no explicit mention of joint degrees in the legislation but the legislation does not hinder the establishment of at least joint programmes whereas the actual awarding of joint degrees may be more problematic.

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.

This section of the National Action Plans belongs to the least informative ones: several countries just report that they do not have any information on institutional practices, sometimes mentioning institutional autonomy as a reason (e.g. Albania); to the contrary, in Slovenia the ENIC/NARIC centre keeps records of all the recognition statements. In the French and Flemish communities of Belgium as well as in France no information on institutional practices is available yet.

Many countries only describe the measures that the ENIC/NARIC centre takes in order to assist institutions (websites, databases, seminars, hotlines etc.). Austria relies on counselling the institutions and authorities and not on influencing institutional action by legal remedies. Turkey has no information on this point because higher education institutions have no mandate or competence for the recognition of foreign higher education qualifications, Ukraine because institutions are involved under coordination of the ministry and in the cases where the ministry considers that institutional level

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20 Recommendation JD, 2005
involvement is needed. In some more countries, e.g. in Romania and Spain, institutions only deal with recognition of credits. In Bulgaria higher education institutions do not decide on recognition either, and the same is true for Croatia, but in the latter country the ENIC/NARIC centre will in the future no longer be responsible for final decisions.

Just a few countries, e.g. the Czech Republic, Denmark, Hungary, Latvia, Norway and Poland, have actually carried out institutional reviews. However, even the countries that have completed surveys do not always disclose the findings but rather state that there will be actions taken to improve the situation or assist the institutions on the basis of the results (e.g. Hungary, Poland).

In the Czech Republic, according to its statement, higher education institutions act in line with the basic steps proposed in the Recommendation. In Denmark, Estonia, Malta, the Slovak Republic and Sweden, where the Lisbon Recognition Convention and its subsidiary texts are embedded into the national legislation, the appropriate instances can and do follow whether the higher education institutions stick to the legal regulations including the Lisbon Recognition Convention and its supplementary texts. For instance, in Estonia it is done by the Ministry and in Sweden by the National Agency of Higher Education. In Iceland the cases of non-compliance with the Lisbon Recognition Convention legal framework would be reported in the accreditation report and the higher education institution in question will be given a certain time limit to correct its procedures.

Ireland has experienced a large growth in immigration, and therefore the issue of recognition of foreign qualifications has become a much more prominent and pressing one for higher education institutions. Recognition procedures in institutions have become quite formalised, standardised and well documented, with institutions applying common procedures and processes in recognising foreign qualifications.

In Switzerland, with its positioning of the the ENIC/NARIC centre within the Rectors' Conference, higher education institutions and recognition authorities collaborate very closely. The recognition bodies meet regularly to discuss their recognition practices. Together with the Swiss ENIC/NARIC the CRUS Commission for Admission and Equivalence supports and monitors the implementation of the Convention and discusses problems arising.

The United Kingdom states that there is no evidence to suggest that individual institutions are in breach of Convention requirements. Under the Lisbon Recognition Convention, responsibility for demonstrating that an application to an institution does not meet the requirements for further higher education study lies with the institution.

In Latvia the survey has demonstrated that in most cases there are no problems in recognising foreign qualifications on the basis of the current legislation. According to the views of higher education institutions, recognition is in line with the Lisbon Recognition Convention and national legislation. At the same time only some of the higher education institutions have adopted internal documents on recognition practices based upon national
legislation. Higher education institutions also stressed a problem of lacking information and skills for credit transfer on equal level.

In Denmark the survey demonstrated that higher education institutions follow Cirius (the Danish ENIC/NARIC) guidelines, that many institutions have common standards, and that they use the Cirius hotline. The survey has also yielded a number of suggestions for further improvements.

In Norway all phases of the recognition procedure at higher education institutions are described in detail and are a part of the internal quality assurance system. The Norwegian survey has demonstrated that most of the higher education institutions have written procedures, only a minority have routines to detect possible mistakes or routinely send receipts to confirm reception of applications, a few routinely inform applicants about the expected time needed to process and some are actively working on measures to reduce the time. In the survey, the higher education institutions were also asked to estimate their own degree of implementation of the Lisbon Recognition Convention on a scale from 1 (low) to 5 (high). Half of the higher education institutions responded gave themselves the score 4, 15% reported full implementation (score 5), six scored 3 and one claimed to have the score 1. Norway sees as the most effective measures the inclusion of the use of the Criteria and Procedures in the higher education institutions system for quality assurance.

Institutional practices in recognition of credits/study periods. Very few countries have mentioned the recognition of credits in their National Action Plans. In most cases the section on institutional practices just generally describes the implementation of the national and international legislation or organisation of recognition at higher education institutions but the section on ECTS in turn is devoted to implementation of ECTS credits in their own programmes.

The limited number of answers shows that the decision on recognition of credits/ study periods is usually taken by the higher education institutions (e.g. Czech Republic, Hungary, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania and since 2002 France) or higher education institutions on the advice of the ENIC/NARIC centre (Denmark, Estonia, Sweden). A more peculiar situation is in Spain where universities are entitled to recognise periods of university studies abroad while periods of foreign non-university studies are recognised by the Ministry of Education, and in Germany where in cases where a programme concludes with "state examinations," credits are recognised by the examination authorities of the Land.

The procedures for recognition of study periods/credits vary. While Sweden claims that in recent years recognition of study periods is based on the existence or non-existence of substantial differences in learning outcomes rather than on differences in detailed content, Denmark admits that it could not be clarified whether the institutions look for full compliance with their own curricula and Germany reports that laws on higher education stipulate that equivalence must be determined in order to recognise course credits earned abroad and that detailed information on equivalency determination is given in the
framework examination regulations. In Latvia higher education institutions admit that they have too little experience and should have more information in order to provide fair recognition of credits earned abroad. Denmark and Romania report that in the case of exchange agreement with a foreign institution the recognition of study periods can be automatic and with full credit. Denmark underlines the importance of the existence of appeals procedures and informs that it has also amended legislation so that Danish students are given the same opportunities of appealing credit transfer decisions which has been possible for persons with foreign degrees or study periods.

As a short summary, even from the limited number of responses it can be seen that while some countries tend to compare learning outcomes of the foreign and home study periods, others may apply detailed comparison of contents/ equivalence procedures to study periods thus reducing the chances of credit transfer. As the automatic recognition of study periods in those cases where there was a mobility agreement with the foreign institution is mentioned by just a couple of countries, there is no evidence that such practice is widespread.

Credit recognition and recognition of prior learning

The Template for National Action Plans did not explicitly request description of practices for recognition of prior learning and for this reason no overall conclusions can be drawn. Just three countries - Denmark, Italy and Slovenia - have mentioned recognition of prior learning but there are definitely more countries that allocate credits for prior learning. The three above countries have mentioned very interesting and important issues and therefore it is worth mentioning the practices of each of them.

Denmark has a policy on recognition of such foreign degrees where, if a part of the credits towards a degree has been allocated in the country of origin on the basis of recognition of prior learning, the Danish ENIC/NARIC does not question the credit transfer decisions of a publicly recognised/accredited foreign institution.

In Italy recognition of prior learning has been possible since 1999 and it is used to recognise language and computer skills acquired in alternative ways, credits or certificates from postsecondary educational activities and, upon agreements between universities and professional associations, certificates issued by these associations upon completing education and training activities. It is not evident, however, that the same is possible with regard to recognition of prior learning acquired outside Italy.

The response from Slovenia addresses a particular case related to transnational education: it mentions that in cases where the transnationally operating institution or programme as a whole is not recognised, credits could be recognised for the purpose for further education at a Slovenian higher education institutions through the mechanisms of recognition of prior or informal learning.
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
c. Plans and timetable for the implementation of possible other transparency tools.

(MOVED!!)

Implementation of the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System

More than half of the countries report that they have implemented the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) for both credit transfer and accumulation. While quantifying student workload and linking all courses of the programme with a certain number of credits is already an important tool for curriculum development, the full effect of implementing a credit system is yet to be achieved through formulating learning outcomes both for the programme as a whole and for each course and a consequent linking credits with learning outcomes. This will facilitate adequate recognition of study periods, credit allocation for lifelong learning, as well as provide a basis for dialogue among higher education institutions, employers and students on curricular matters.

It is quite difficult to spell out what it actually means if a country claims to have implemented ECTS. The learning outcomes aspect appeared relatively recently and there are not so many countries that have actually re-worked their study programmes linking each course with learning outcomes. Also, implementation of ECTS does not always mean national implementation of the ECTS grading scale.

Thus, the feeling is that a statement that a country has implemented ECTS currently means limited implementation where:

- the country has implemented a workload-based credit system used for both transfer and accumulation and
- the workload is measured on the basis of assumption that yearly workload of a full-time student is calculated as 60 credits.

Thus, using the above understanding of what full implementation of ECTS currently means, countries could be divided into the following groups:

- countries that have implemented ECTS as a transfer and accumulation system in the whole higher education system,
- countries that have implemented workload based ECTS-compatible national credit systems across the whole higher education system,
- countries that are implementing ECTS but so far have done so only in part of higher education system,
- countries that are preparing for implementation of ECTS
countries that have credit systems not compatible with ECTS.

ECTS as a transfer and accumulation system introduced in the whole higher education system. According to the National Action Plans, ECTS has been fully or nearly fully implemented in a number of countries. Albania, Austria, Belgium, Croatia, Denmark, Iceland, Hungary, Liechtenstein, Malta, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Slovenia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and possibly more countries have started implementation. Denmark and Iceland state that they focus on proper use of ECTS meaning that credits are linked to learning outcomes and plan to ensure it through quality assurance procedures, and the same seems to be the case in Finland. Some of these countries, e.g. Iceland and Malta, have had workload-based credit systems for decades, whereas others started implementation of ECTS as a transfer system in the 1990s and changed it to an accumulation system recently. Yet others, e.g. Albania, Croatia, Poland and Serbia, started just a couple of years ago. Several countries of this group indicate that there are some particular types of institutions that are not obliged to use ECTS (Denmark), that there are still implementation difficulties (Albania, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia). The French Community of Belgium reports that while credit system is fully introduced, the study year still remains the main benchmark.

ECTS-compatible national credit system implemented in the whole higher education system. The countries mentioned below have fully implemented credit systems and some of them did so a decade or even several decades ago. These countries include Estonia, Finland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Sweden, and Slovakia. Some of the above countries, e.g. Finland, Italy, and Norway, even apply 60 credits as the measure of yearly workload but because of other differences in their NAPs still regard their own credit systems “compatible” and do not claim to be using the ECTS itself.

Others like Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, are planning to switch their national credit systems to the ECTS. Estonia, where an ECTS-compatible credit system has been used for about a decade, states openly that it will have implemented ECTS properly in the academic year 2009/2010 because rearranging of programmes linking them with learning outcomes takes time. Lithuania and Sweden planned to use ECTS as of 2007, whereas in Latvia the draft Law stipulates switch to ECTS but there are delays in adoption of law.

Ireland and the United Kingdom might also have ECTS-compatible credit systems but the relevant information is missing in the NAPs. The UK also states that it has reservations towards ECTS and is negotiating with the EU Commission about amendments to the ECTS itself. It seems that the reasons for using national ECTS-compatible systems are sometimes in the ECTS itself: some countries wanted a somewhat clearer definition of what one ECTS credit means, considering the 25-30 student workload hours a somewhat blurred definition; others wanted to keep national grading scale rather than to apply the ECTS scale.
ECTS is implemented but only in part of the higher education system. A number of countries are implementing ECTS but not yet for all higher education. This may have different reasons: in Cyprus, the Czech Republic (also other credit system may be applied) and France the use of ECTS is recommended but not required by legislation, so higher education institutions apply it voluntarily and not yet everywhere. Some countries have made implementation of ECTS compulsory only for the Bologna two-cycle programmes but not for the remaining long single-stage study programmes. This is certainly the case in Germany and might also be the reason why the ECTS applies to 48% of the total student population at the Universities and 30% of the student population at the Universities of Applied Sciences in Switzerland.

Just preparing to implement ECTS. Some countries, e.g. Armenia, Georgia and Spain, note that they are preparing to implement ECTS and list different measures of preparation. Armenia planned to have guidelines for ECTS in 2007, Georgia in 2008 and Spain in the 2008/2009 academic year.

National systems not compatible with ECTS. There are two countries – Spain and Turkey - where the national credit systems are based on contact hours. Spain plans to introduce ECTS in the whole higher education system in the 2008/2009 academic year and both use ECTS credits for international student exchange.

A summary on implementation of ECTS. While the implementation of ECTS as a credit transfer and accumulation system is indeed progressing, there are a number of issues to be noted:

- In quite a number of countries credit systems are used for both transfer and accumulation;
- Not all countries, however, use the ECTS itself; there are still a number of cases where an ECTS-compatible national credit system is used;
- ECTS key features should be further discussed and fine-tuned so that all countries can adhere to the definitions therein;
- There are some countries where credit system is implemented but it does not yet apply to all higher education;
- In most countries implementation of ECTS so far has not concerned linking credits with learning outcomes. There is a growing understanding that linking credits with learning outcomes is an important component of the credit system, however, implementation of this feature of ECTS will still take time;
- A good practice seems to be using quality assurance as a tool for implementation of ECTS, i.e. setting implementation of ECTS as a quality requirement.

The joint European Diploma Supplement

The National Action Plans show that there has been a substantial progress in the implementation of the joint European Diploma Supplement (DS): in 2007 in more than half the countries all graduates received the DS automatically; free of charge and in a widely
spoken language. If countries that issue a DS upon request are also included, in 2007 graduates received Diploma Supplements in two-thirds of the countries. It should nevertheless be recalled that in the Berlin Communiqué (2003), Ministers set the objective that every graduating student receive the Diploma Supplement automatically, free of charge and in a widely spoken language by 2005. The National Action Plans show that even at the end of 2006, half of the Bologna member states had yet to comply with the Ministers’ commitment.

One further observation is that while some countries consider it natural to issue Diploma Supplements to graduates of doctoral programmes, others seem not to consider doctoral students.

A less positive observation is that a couple of countries issue a DS to graduates with a bachelor’s degree only upon request. This practice seems to reflect the national understanding of a bachelor’s degree as just an intermediate qualification rather than as a higher education qualification in its own right.

Most countries have made issuing of Diploma Supplements compulsory, and in many of them the compulsory issuing of DS started in between 2002 and 2005. In Spain the legislation on Diploma Supplements was adopted in 2003 but, as it is very recent, a statistically significant number of DS have not yet been issued.

The Flemish Community of Belgium, the Czech Republic, Latvia and some others started implementation of Diploma Supplements immediately after the EU/CoE/UNESCO Diploma Supplement format was adopted but issuing of Diploma Supplements has been officially made compulsory at a later stage (e.g. 2002 in Latvia and 2005 in the Czech Republic).

There are several countries that seem to issue Diploma Supplements to the graduates of the “new style” bachelor and master degrees but do not issue the DS to graduates from the “old style” long one-tier study programmes. Thus, in Germany in 2006 the Diploma Supplement was awarded in 63 per cent of Bachelor degree courses and in 55 per cent of Master degree courses, in Switzerland it was 100% of bachelor and master degree holders but just a part of Swiss higher education institutions issued Diploma Supplements to graduates of long programmes. The compulsory issuing of DS concerns only the bachelor and master graduates also in Hungary.

However, in some other countries, e.g. Austria, Cyprus and the United Kingdom, higher education institutions do not have an official obligation to issue Diploma Supplements.

While the guidelines for implementation of Diploma Supplements strongly recommend not producing customised versions of Diploma Supplements, some countries mention that they have created national versions of the Diploma Supplement. As there is no further information given in the National Action Plans of those countries, it is not clear if the national diploma supplements fully follow the EU/Council of Europe/UNESCO Diploma Supplement format and just the relevant national information is added in e.g. points 6 and 8 of the Diploma Supplement (i.e. additional information and description of the national
higher education system) or whether the national Diploma Supplement has been further customised.

The languages of the Diploma Supplements. Most of the countries that have mentioned the language aspect report that the Diploma Supplements are issued in the national language and in a widely spoken European language, some issue them in the national language and in one of the official languages of the European Union, in another group of countries the other language of Diploma Supplement is always English. There are, however, a couple of countries that offer Diploma Supplements in the native language while Diploma Supplements in a widely spoken European language are offered only on request. In Hungary, where appropriate, the Diploma Supplement is also available in minority languages upon request.

Plans to introduce Diploma Supplements after the time when National Action Plans were compiled. In Armenia it was planned to introduce the DS in 2007, in Italy it was to become legally binding as of 2007. In the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia the first students will receive the Diploma Supplement in the academic year 2008-2009. In the United Kingdom, following a recommendation by the Measuring and Recording Student Achievement Steering Group in October 2007 a Higher Education Achievement Report will be developed which will incorporate and build on the Diploma Supplement.

Summary on Diploma Supplement. Many countries have made issuing of Diploma Supplements compulsory between 2002 and 2005. In 2007 in more than half the countries all graduates received the DS automatically; free of charge and in a widely spoken language. If countries that issue a DS upon request are also included, in 2007 graduates received Diploma Supplements in two-thirds of the countries. There are, however, several countries that seem to issue the Diploma Supplement to the graduates of the new style bachelor and master degrees but do not issue DS to graduates from the old style long one-tier study programmes.

Some countries have created national versions of Diploma Supplement but it is not clear from the NAPs if the national diploma supplements fully follow the EU/Council of Europe/UNESCO Diploma Supplement format and to what extent they are customised.

Most countries issue the Diploma Supplement in both the national language and a widely spoken European language (most often English), but there are also countries where the DS in a widely spoken European language is available only on request.

2.5. Borderless/transnational education

a. National and/or institutional policies concerning the assessment of borderless/transnational education.
The answers regarding borderless/transnational education demonstrate that the attitude towards borderless education has changed. While they are aware of the difficulties that borderless education may also bring, countries tend to ensure that the procedures and requirements applied do not exclude borderless education. Thus, the Czech Republic and the Slovak Republic state in their National Action Plans that the aim should be to avoid discrimination of high-quality institutions and that recognition of transnational education should not be rejected for formal reasons.

A number of countries, e.g. Croatia, Estonia and Iceland, underline the importance of the UNESCO/Council of Europe Code of Good Practice in the Provision of Transnational Education\(^\text{21}\) and the UNESCO/OECD Guidelines for Quality Provision in Borderless Education\(^\text{22}\). Some respondents, e.g. the Flemish Community of Belgium, Hungary, Italy, Norway, Slovenia and Ukraine, have adopted the principles in their national legislation (or ENIC/NARIC guidelines in the case of the UK). The Code of Good Practice was consulted when drafting legislation in Serbia. However, some other countries report that their procedures for accreditation and the recognition of qualifications are still not geared to addressing cross-border provision. In e.g. Austria, the French Community of Belgium, Georgia and Denmark (where legislation was in the drafting stage at the time of submitting the National Action Plan) there is no specific legislation concerning transnational/borderless education, while Bosnia and Herzegovina and Iceland state that they do not have a specific policy on transnational/borderless education.

Most countries link recognition of borderless education to compliance of the provider with the national legislation of both the sending and receiving country, information provision and quality assurance. Several countries, e.g. Belgium (French Community), Denmark, Italy, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Malta, the Slovak Republic and Switzerland, link recognition of cross-border qualifications to accreditation or official recognition of the institution/programme in the receiving country. Finland reports that while in the case of academic recognition and \textit{de facto} professional recognition the decision on the recognition of transnational qualification is for higher education institutions or employers, respectively, to make, in the case of \textit{de jure} professional recognition in regulated professions the qualification has to be officially recognised in the country of origin.

The following kinds of requirements for recognition of cross-border qualifications are mentioned in National Action Plans for Recognition of different countries:

- The awarding institution\(^\text{23}\) and/or the programme is recognised/accredited in the sending country. In Denmark, for instance, accreditation in the sending country may imply the right to establish Danish-accredited cross-border education.


\(^{22}\) \url{http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0014/001433/143349e.pdf}

\(^{23}\) Here and further the definitions from the Revised Code of Good Practice in the Provision of Transnational Education.
the cross-border institution or programme is accredited/recognised in the receiving country, e.g. Italy, provided that there have been adequate QA arrangements in place, e.g. Ireland.

Some countries apply both of the above requirements, e.g. the French Community of Belgium, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Sweden and some others stress that a condition for recognition of cross border qualifications is that the transnationally provided programme should be accredited/recognised separately from the ones offered by the awarding institution in the sending country,

- cross-border education should comply with the legislation of the receiving country. E.g. in Czech Republic compliance with the legislation may result in accreditation of the cross-border education in the receiving country,

- the same or essentially similar programme should be provided by the awarding institution in the sending country, e.g. Sweden.

As regards the international higher education institutions that do not belong to any national education system, some countries report in their National Action Plans for Recognition that degrees awarded by such cross-border providers are considered for recognition if they are recognised in the country where the programme is provided. In Slovenia, in the cases where the transnationally earned qualification as a whole is not recognised, credits could be recognised for the recognition for the purpose for further education through the mechanisms of recognition of prior or informal learning.

Denmark has indicated an issue that may well be relevant to more countries: in Denmark the borderless education providers are treated like other private higher education institutions that exist outside the public system, which means that they cannot offer Danish national degrees. As regards Danish higher education institutions, they do not have the possibility of delivering nationally recognised degrees outside Denmark.

In Russia export of Russian education is considered a very important issue and therefore the Gosudarstvennaya Duma has adopted a plan of measures to stimulate it.

In Turkey transnational qualifications are not recognised. In Bulgaria transnational institutions were allowed but not recognised. As of the accession of Bulgaria to the EU, higher education institutions officially recognised by the EU member states, the European Economic Area and Switzerland can open affiliates in Bulgaria under the condition that they adhere to the regulations of the Higher Education Act.

While Georgia says there is no transnational education on its territory yet and Slovenia says it has little, Malta has a considerable number of licensed private providers of courses leading to foreign qualifications. Cyprus reports serious difficulties in connection with transnational degrees, because the transnationally earned qualifications often include a high number of credits based on work experience or huge parts of if not all education has taken place through e-learning. According to the Cyprus NAP, the assessment of transnational qualifications may therefore take more time than recommended in the Lisbon Recognition Convention, especially in the case of transnational distance learning qualifications.
While some countries express their good will to give green light to *bona fide* transnational/borderless education, countries also express concerns about their possibilities to access information on quality of transnational education, possibilities to check whether the transnational e-learning has been properly assessed and whether allocation of credits for work experience has been properly done. These issues have often been discussed but proper solutions have yet to be found.
3. INFORMATION PROVISION

By Agnese Rusakova

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;
b. The timetable envisaged for such measures;
c. The bodies or institutions responsible for the measures;
d. The state of electronic provision of information on recognition;
e. Whether the national information centres establish and maintain their own web pages, linked to the ENIC-NARIC Web site.

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

It is important to note that most countries have not distinguished between points 3.1 and 3.2 in their National Action Plans. The answers are often unclear and represent a mix of description of how countries provide information on their own educational systems and how they provide recognition-related information to holders of foreign qualifications applying for recognition.

Most countries have mentioned their ENIC/NARIC centres as the main disseminator of information packages for applicants. Some countries have mentioned the respective Ministry of Education or its division responsible for the academic recognition or the higher education institution.

The level of support to applicants for recognition differs from country to country. There are countries with a high level of service that aside from an information package provide applicants with feedback on the status of their applications. The French Community of Belgium offers online status check possibility on their website24. In Denmark the applicants are notified in case the processing for their application has been prolonged. Denmark is planning a user survey to receive information on how the existing system can be improved while Sweden has stressed the need for more active information measures at higher education institutions in their follow-up study of 2004. Germany is currently developing standards of assistance in recognition procedures.

24 http://www.equivalences.cfwb.be/dossier.asp, site in French only
The service level of some other countries is more passive. Some of the respondents declare that they provide the very basic information needed for starting the application process just the list of documents necessary for the recognition of qualifications and the special application form. This is less applicant-friendly and efficient in case the applicant needs more standardised information. There are cases where information is provided only by means of posting it in the building of the recognition authority, which can make the information rather inaccessible to applicants. The applicants can be well served not only by counselling in person, per telephone, but also by conducting individual research on the website (where the information also should be organised in an accessible manner), receiving the documents needed upon request by email or standard mail. Provision of information in paper form only (Armenia) may mean longer processing time altogether.

Most often the criteria and procedures for the assessment and recognition of foreign qualifications are regulated at national level, prepared in the majority of cases by the ENIC/NARIC centre or the respective ministry. The recognition authorities have to follow the standard criteria and procedures, but usually there is no national level regulation on standardised information packages.

Denmark, Estonia, Iceland and others state that experience based standardised information package or a list of documents have been elaborated and contain at its best the information on:

1) who may apply;
2) guidelines on how to fill in the application;
3) the purpose(s) of recognition;
4) documents required;
5) assessment procedure, including the role of the recognition authority, other assessment agencies and higher education institutions (who takes the decision, how binding this decision is);
6) object and criteria of the assessment;
7) processing fees;
8) time normally required for processing;
9) outcome of the assessment;
10) status of assessment;
11) conditions and procedures for appealing against a recognition decision, according to national legislation, rights regarding recognition;
12) final clauses;
13) contact data;
14) additional information (government decrees on recognition i.e. full text, reference to the national laws and international conventions and agreements which may be relevant to the assessment of foreign qualifications.

Such standardised information is available on the website and as printed materials (brochure) in the national language.
In some countries not all information on recognition is available online yet. Albania plans to link the recognition authorities responsible for recognising foreign masters’ degrees and foreign PhDs to the ENIC/NARIC website by the end of 2007. While responsibility for the recognition of different cycle diplomas in Albania is dispersed among different recognition authorities, the French Community of Belgium in its turn plans to create a one-stop office dealing with all requests for the recognition of qualifications from secondary and higher education, believing that this would allow applicants to be guided more efficiently. Several countries have a single e-mail address to which questions concerning recognition can be sent.

In the good examples, the information is available in both electronic and printed form in a number of locations, e.g. on the website and programme prospectus of the higher education institution and the websites of various state bodies and agencies (stakeholders) etc. Higher education institutions are usually the first stop for the applicants; therefore Albania is planning to link the website of the recognition authority to the higher education institution websites.

Even if the information is provided, one has to make it accessible to the audience: both local and foreign. Denmark and Hungary not only provide information to the local audience, but also take a step further by ensuring that the information available is understandable and does not contain specific terms, obvious only to specialists.

It can be noted that in several countries the recognition information is provided in the national language only. Without information available in widely spoken European languages the content of the websites is not easily accessible to speakers of other languages.

Some countries report that if the main information on recognition is available and accessible (easy to find, no language barrier) on the website of the ENIC/NARIC centre, higher education institutions might only provide information on the entry requirements for each programme and the information of the ENIC/NARIC centre in the programme prospectus of each higher education institution. In Poland the higher education institutions provide all information on their own. The respective responsible body having published the information is usually in charge of updating the information. In Germany the information is provided by many stakeholders and it could be reviewed whether the requirements and process of assessment and recognition procedures could be presented more concisely.

In Hungary the recognition application form and relevant information on recognition is available on the ENIC/NARIC website, but due to the great variation in foreign applicant numbers at the higher education institutions, the level of support varies from standard information accessible already at the website of the higher education institution to answers given by phone upon request. It is recommended that higher education institutions with a significant number of applications provide essential information on their academic recognition procedure on their websites as well. Armenia is even planning to introduce the possibility to apply for the recognition online.
Several countries, e.g. Belgium and Sweden, are currently conducting research on how to improve the recognition process in the country. Ireland is reorganising the website in a more user friendly manner.

In the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia the ENIC/NARIC centre is highly involved in creating and improving the legislative framework, while the assessment of foreign qualifications itself is delegated to the higher education institutions, whose recognition decisions are then monitored and examined by the Information centre and then approved.

An interesting observation is that, like with some other issues, the countries that already provide good information are also the ones planning further improvements.

Just a few countries mention information provision on their education systems at all. This is symptomatic and links to fulfilling the obligations the Parties have undertaken when they ratified the Lisbon Recognition Convention. Provision of information regarding one's own educational system is of high importance for credential evaluators in other countries. It is very helpful on condition that it is specifically targeted at credential evaluators and contains concentrated information on the types of institutions, programmes and qualifications, quality assurance, recently also the qualifications frameworks etc. Some countries in their NAPs have mentioned that the function of information provision on their education systems abroad is delegated to other bodies. At best, those bodies are specific education information agencies that might be able also to provide recognition-related information, but this arrangement is highly questionable if the information provision is left to general representations of countries abroad, overall national promotion agencies, embassies etc., as mentioned in several NAPs. The problem here is that the information at the level of those providers is usually too general and too much targeted at a general public or at young people who are considering going to study abroad. Lack of recognition specific information causes the need to send large number of questions to other countries' ENICs to receive information that could otherwise have been found on the web.

**Summary on information provision.** The quality of information provision seems to be quite different in different countries, and the spectrum is quite broad. It ranges from countries that have excellent information for applicants in their national language and in English (or other widely spoken European language) available online, in printed and possibly in other forms; to countries where only minimum information is provided in the national language only and this information may be available only at the ENIC/NARIC centre.

An example of good practice is that provision of recognition information is coordinated between the ENIC/NARIC centre and the higher education institutions so that the specific information from higher education institutions adds on to the general information provided by the ENIC/NARIC centre.

Information on education systems relating specifically to the recognition of qualifications is well established in some countries but other countries only provide general information on
their educational systems that contains too little information actually needed for credential evaluation.

4. Structures

By Agnese Rusakova

4.1 National information centre

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

- The formal status of the centre;
- Legal competence (e.g. advisory or decision making; academic, de jure professional, de facto professional recognition);
- Staff and budget;
- Capacity building in terms of expertise and service to the public;
- Networking and cooperation at national level and internationally.

The formal status of the national information centre

The different options for the setting up of the national recognition centre (ENIC/NARIC) may vary greatly across the EHEA. The main ways in which the national ENIC/NARIC centre can be established are:

1) as a part of the ministry responsible for higher education:
2) as an organisation subordinated to the ministry, e.g. the Flemish Community of Belgium, Denmark, Turkey
3) as an independent agency established either by the government/ministry or ministry together with higher education institutions, e.g. Italy, Norway, Sweden;
4) as a part of the national rectors'conference, e.g. Switzerland;
5) as a private body operating on a government mandate, e.g. the United Kingdom.

In most countries the national information centre is not formally separated from the ministry responsible for higher education. In such cases the ENIC/NARIC activities are fulfilled by a separate department, e.g. Albania, Hungary, Romania, Serbia, Slovenia; or a division of the corresponding ministry (Greece). In Ukraine it is a board (Licensing, Accreditation and Nostrification Board) of the Ministry of Education and Science.

In some countries, e.g. in Greece, it is planned to increase the autonomy of the national information centres by establishing it separately from the ministry as an authority dealing with ENIC/NARIC issues.

There are countries where the national information centre enjoys a formal status of independence. For example, the Danish ENIC/NARIC is part of the national authority CIRIUS, which in its turn is under the supervision of the Danish Ministry of Education. The Bureau for Academic Recognition and International Exchange in Poland is a state institution informing the minister of higher education about its activities. In Norway the
NOKUT\textsuperscript{25} is an independent government agency. In Sweden the national information centre is a part of the Swedish National Agency for Higher Education. It is independent, but it gets its mandate and funding from the government. In France the International Centre for Education Studies\textsuperscript{26} is a public institution of the Ministry of National Education.

In most cases the national information centre is financially dependent of the respective ministry. In some countries special funding for this function has been allocated, e.g. Armenia, Latvia, which alleviates the financial management. In a few cases the ENIC/NARIC is a structural unit of a foundation, i.e. the Estonian ENIC/NARIC is a structural unit of the Archimedes Foundation.

In the Czech Republic, the Centre for Equivalence of Documents about Education is one of the sections of the state funded Centre for Higher Education Studies. In Italy the role of the national information centre is entrusted with CIMEA, a section of the Fondazione Rui; a private entity legally recognised as a non-profit body.

There are countries where the tasks of the ENIC/NARIC centre are fulfilled by higher education institutions. For example, the Icelandic Ministry of Education, Science and Culture entrusted the University of Iceland, with the supervision of Iceland’s ENIC/NARIC centre. In Switzerland in its turn the ENIC/NARIC centre is a department of the Rectors’ Conference of the Swiss Universities (CRUS). In these cases, the bodies designated by the Ministry have a national mandate.

There are countries where the national information centre has not been founded by the respective national ministry of education. In Germany the Central Office for Foreign Education (ZAB) is a department of the Secretariat of the Conference of Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the federal states.

The UK ENIC/NARIC centre is managed by a private company on behalf of the UK Government’s Department for Education and Skills. It is thus a private body operating under a public mandate. The National Qualifications Authority of Ireland is an agency of the Department of Education and Science and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment.

The competences of the ENIC/NARIC centres are usually regulated by national law or secondary legislation. Serbia considers adopting a separate recognition law.

In most cases the ENIC/NARIC centre has as its main function to inform and support the decisions made by the competent authorities for recognition.

\textbf{Role of national information centre in academic and professional recognition.} The area of recognition (professional and academic) and sometimes even the extent of the

\textsuperscript{25} Nasjonalt organ for kvalitet i utdanningen i the Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education
\textsuperscript{26} CIEP i Centre international d’études pédagogiques
qualification level affected by the decision vary between different countries. Thus, for example, Albania states that “there is no actual difference between the academic and the professional recognition.” In Denmark, to create a better synergy, one single national entry point (namely CIRIUS) in relation to recognition of all kinds of qualifications, both professional and academic, has been created. The ENIC/NARIC centres of EU/EEA countries are often also the contact points for recognition of qualifications covered by EU Directive 2005/36/EC (professional recognition). The ENIC/NARIC centre in Iceland in its turn deals with academic recognition issues only, while professional recognition is handled by the appropriate ministries.

In cases where the ENIC/NARIC centre is not responsible for professional recognition in the relevant professional area, it refers applicants to the appropriate competent authority, acting as the contact point on professional recognition. Some ENICs perform de jure professional recognition of teacher qualifications for the purpose of practicing the profession (e.g. Denmark, Hungary). In other cases, on request by the applicant, the Hungarian ENIC/NARIC centre assesses the foreign qualification and does de facto recognition.

In Sweden the decisions by the ENIC/NARIC centre on teaching certificates have formal legal status, whereas other regulated professions in Sweden are evaluated by the competent authority appointed by the Government.

In most cases the ENIC/NARIC centre has an advisory role and the decision on recognition is taken by a different competent authority. The recognition statement delivered by the ENIC/NARIC centre is essentially a recommendation and thus not legally binding. It usually describes the level and status of the given credential in the country of its origin and often the possible recognition in the host country in question. The final decision in countries like Cyprus, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Serbia, Spain, Sweden, Turkey and the UK lies with the higher education institution, employer or professional body concerned. However, it is usual that the position taken by the national information centre is trusted and endorsed by the bodies concerned. In order to ensure the quality of decision making on the basis of the recommendations issued, the Swiss ENIC/NARIC centre participates in the CRUS Commission for Admission and Equivalence, which oversees the recognition practices of the universities.

In some cases the competence of the ENIC/NARIC centre is planned to be changed to decision making (e.g. Latvia), but other countries (e.g. Estonia) do not plan to change anything in the status of the national information centre.

The decisions taken by the national information centre in the French Community of Belgium have the form of decrees in the name of the government and therefore have legal status: “a favourable decision on the equivalence of a foreign diploma provides the same legal effects as the diploma awarded in the French Community to which it is considered equivalent.” France in its turn states that “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.” Therefore the
admission of foreign students to French higher education institutions requires a decision on exemption, issued by the Rector LOOKED AT THE FRENCH NAP - IT IS MEANT AS THE HEAD OF HEI BUT THEY THEMSELVES CALL HIM Rector" or the Director of the institution concerned.

There are countries in which the ENIC/NARIC centre has both advisory and decision making functions by having an advisory role in academic recognition and a decision making role in professional recognition. Thus, for example the Hungarian ENIC/NARIC centre operates as an advisory body on issues of academic recognition but it makes legally binding decisions in cases concerning recognition for employment purposes. The situation is similar in Armenia. The Slovak Centre for Recognition of Diplomas decides on the recognition of qualifications of citizens of the Slovak Republic and EU member countries received abroad for the purposes of performing regulated professions and issue a certificate on automatic recognition of higher education of third cycle obtained qualifications abroad and on educational competence obtained on the territory of the Slovak Republic. In Albania, the Department of Higher Education and Recognition of Diplomas researches the cases and provides a draft decision, which is then signed by the Deputy Minister and thus becomes valid.

**Summary on the role of national ENIC/NARIC in academic and professional recognition**

The most typical case is that the national information centre is an advisory body for both academic and professional recognition while the decisions are taken:

- for academic recognition - by higher education institutions,
- for *de facto* professional recognition in non-regulated professions by employers,
- and for regulated professions by the competent authorities of each profession.

There are several other possibilities:

- the ENIC/NARIC centre is the decision-making body for all cases of recognition,
- the ENIC/NARIC centre makes the decision in the name of minister,
- Decisions are taken by minister/vice/ minister/ ministry upon advice of:
  - the ENIC/NARIC centre;
  - higher education institutions; or
  - committees of academics/scientists.

In a number of countries the ENIC/NARIC centre makes recognition decisions with a view to employment in non-regulated professions. While in most cases the *de jure* professional recognition for employment in regulated professions is carried out by the competent authorities (often professional organisations) nominated by government, in Malta and Iceland the relevant specialised ministries are in charge.
A summary: who actually makes recognition decisions?

In a substantial number of countries, e.g. the Czech Republic, Estonia, France, Georgia, Germany, Latvia, Liechtenstein, the Netherlands, Poland, Switzerland and the United Kingdom, the national information centre is an advisory body while the decisions are taken: for academic recognition - by higher education institutions, for de facto professional recognition in non-regulated professions - by employers, and for de jure professional recognition for access to regulated professions - by competent authorities nominated for each profession.

However, this is not the only possibility. In some cases, e.g. Armenia, the French Community of Belgium and Croatia, the ENIC/NARIC centre is the decision-making body for all cases of recognition.

Recognition decisions can also be taken (at least nominally) by the minister/vice/minister/ ministry, as in e.g. Albania, Denmark, Lithuania, Romania, and Ukraine (by the nostrification board of the ministry) or Bulgaria (commission for recognition established by the minister. The case of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia is interesting as the recognition seems to be done in a reverse order compared to the typical case: in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia the higher education institutions prepare recognition decisions, these decisions are examined by the ENIC/NARIC centre and then officially signed by the minister. In Turkey the recognition decisions are made by the Council of Higher Education (YÖK, in which the ENIC/NARIC is located) and higher education institutions have no function in recognition at all. In Spain, while higher education institutions can decide on recognition of master and doctoral degrees, for all other degrees the decisions are no longer taken by the ministry, but instead technical committees created within the University Coordination Council will issue statements on recognition of a particular foreign qualification or parts of it.

In a number of countries the ENIC/NARIC centre makes recognition decisions with a view to employment in non-regulated professions, e.g., in Greece (here the academic and de facto recognition is considered the same), Hungary, Slovenia and Sweden.

While in most cases de jure professional recognition for employment in regulated professions is carried out by competent authorities (often professional organisations) nominated by government, in Malta and Iceland the specific ministries are in charge.

Staff and budget

The number of persons involved in the national recognition process rather: employed by the ENIC/NARIC centre? ranges from 40 (administrative personnel included) in the United Kingdom, closely followed by 36 staff members in Germany down to 1 person responsible for recognition issues in Albania. However it is planned to increase the staff to 3 members in 2007 in Albania. In some countries, e.g. Slovakia and Turkey, the employees are civil servants even if the ENIC/NARIC centre is not part of a ministry.
Staff members are not always employed full time. For example, in Iceland of the 5 persons dealing with recognition, none is employed full time for this task. Staff is sometimes supported by senior policy experts in the respective organisations who are not dealing with the processing of recognition applications as their primary job, as e.g. in Ireland. In France «rédacteurs» 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 recognition attestations indicating the level of studies to holders of foreign credentials living in their region. In Denmark CIRIUS occasionally buys consultant services. In Ireland, experts and internship students from foreign ENIC/NARIC centres and higher education institutions in e.g. Germany, Italy and Poland, have worked for short periods with the recognition of qualifications.

In somewhat larger units, next to the (professional, academic) evaluation experts there may be: a head of office, secretary and information officer. The Estonian ENIC/NARIC shares the services of the general secretariat, the accounting department and the IT manager with the other departments and offices of the Archimedes Foundation. Latvia plans to employ a lawyer, Iceland already does. CIRIUS in Denmark considers the inclusion of juridical competences “both necessary and a clear advantage in connection with CIRIUS efforts to establish itself as an authority making authoritative decisions and standard setting and to proactively influence the legal framework and frame of competence of CIRIUS.”

The budget ranges from 25 000 EUR (Latvia) up to 1 175 000 EUR (Denmark, excluding 25% of indirect costs). In a number of countries, e.g. Albania, Belgium (French Community), Hungary, Serbia and Spain, where the national information centre is part of a bigger organisation, the budget of the national information centre is not separated from the overall budget.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Staff</th>
<th>Comments</th>
<th>Budget</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Albania</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>no separate budget</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Armenia</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>50 000 USD</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belgium French Community</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>no separate budget</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Czech Republic</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>full-time</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>head of office, 7 credential evaluators, one information officer, two employees dealing with professional de jure recognition and one secretary. 2 part time student employees</td>
<td>1 175 000 EURO to recognition of foreign qualifications (direct cost)s with the addition of approximately 25 percent of this amount for indirect costs (administration, support etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Country</td>
<td>Staff</td>
<td>Comments</td>
<td>Budget</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>--------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estonia</td>
<td>3.75</td>
<td>full time equivalent staff positions</td>
<td>150 000 Euros, all charges included</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>full time</td>
<td>The budget of the division is the part of the budget of the Ministry of Education and Science. The annual salary fund of the division is about 29 400 Gel (13 320 ú; 1GEL = 0.45ú)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgia</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>head of the division, two senior specialists and two specialists</td>
<td>the Central Office does not have a separate budget</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>full-time equivalent of 28.5 positions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>permanent staff, there are also academic advisors (temporary staff)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hungary</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>no separate budget</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iceland</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>part-time</td>
<td>The Ministry does not pay for the day to day operations of the centre, but has paid for variable costs. Decisions on the payment of these expenses are taken on an ad hoc basis. Apart from this, the unit is financed from the budget of the University of Iceland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>full-time, and 3 part-time</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>full-time and 2 part-time</td>
<td>ú 230 000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latvia</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>full time and 1 half time</td>
<td>2006: 25 000 ú per year, 2007: est. 50 000 ú per year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Netherlands</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>not all full-time</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norway</td>
<td>10 ½</td>
<td>full-time equivalents</td>
<td>ENIC-NARIC function within NOKUT has approx. ú 606 000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romania</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
<td>The NCRED is doubly financed, from the State Budget and from the external sources (its own funds).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serbia</td>
<td></td>
<td>No separate budget</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slovakia</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>civil servants</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slovenia</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td>No separate budget</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td></td>
<td>No separate budget</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>The information centre is part of the Department for Evaluation of Foreign Higher Education, within the National Agency. The Department has a staff of 22 of whom 16 are credential</td>
<td>The budget for the Department is about 11.5 million SEK (of which 10.5 are costs for staff), plus overhead costs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Country</td>
<td>Staff</td>
<td>Staff Comments</td>
<td>Budget</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Switzerland</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2 scientific collaborators and 2 secretaries</td>
<td>CHF 405,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turkey</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>civil servants</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ukraine</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>There are 15 members of staff employed on activity concerned directly with the recognition and evaluation service. This function operates and is supported by a wider infrastructure with a total of 40 staff</td>
<td>The UK NARIC service is provided on a self-funding basis.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Capacity building in terms of expertise and service to the public**

The United Kingdom operates a structured and continued staff development policy, including induction training and continued professional development.

CIRIUS in Denmark employs internal as well as external Quality Assurance mechanisms. An employee manual (personalehåndbog) collects the accumulated knowledge and best practice. The manual functions as a starting point for staff training and is a guarantee that cases are handled in a professionally consistent way. The assessment procedures for the various recognition modes are described step by step. Other internal mechanisms are recurring evaluation seminars, checklists supporting the evaluation procedure and double-checking of all statements. The filing of all incoming and outgoing mails is introduced to support the sharing of knowledge and information and consistency in assessments. An annual contract between the Director and the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Education forms the basis of the external quality assurance mechanisms. CIRIUS is responsible for preparing annual report on the state of recognition work in Denmark. This report is transferred to the Ministry of Education and presented to the Parliament (Folketinget) by the minister.

In Albania no special qualifications are formally stipulated for the ENIC/NARIC staff. In some cases, e.g. in Sweden, credential evaluators should have at least a first (Bachelor) degree. Except for the secretary and the student employees all employees hold a second (Master) degree in Denmark. All staff members of the Estonian ENIC/NARIC hold at least master-level qualifications, same is true in the United Kingdom. Many countries emphasise that staff members should have skills in the assessment of foreign qualifications and should be familiar with the international and national legal framework for recognition. This can be acquired either by recruiting the new staff members preferentially from related fields of activities, or ideally, by maintaining the staff loyalty and accumulating the staff experience. Thus, for example, in Iceland both of the specialists have even been involved in academic recognition for more than 20 years. In Sweden half of the staff has
been working with credential evaluations for more than ten years; several others have about five years' experience.

A knowledge of languages is essential. Apart from commonly spoken languages such as English, French and German as well as the other Nordic languages, including Finnish, the office in Sweden handles documents in Spanish, Russian, Polish, Turkish, Chinese, Japanese and Arabic. In Denmark, apart from Danish, Norwegian, Swedish, English, French and German, CIRIUS is currently able to deal with files in Finnish, Spanish, Greek, Russian, Ukrainian, Turkish and Arabic. 5 nationalities are represented in the CIRIUS staff. In addition to the language competences, candidates for employment at the Latvian ENIC/NARIC centre have to be computer literate and have skills in using ICT.

The expertise of the staff is built up through on the job training i.e. processing of case-files as the most common method (Armenia, Latvia), communication with other members of diverse networks, regular trainings and participation in international meetings both as speakers, trainers and simple participants, study visits and international projects and cooperation. The Latvian ENIC/NARIC centre organises internal staff training in order to present and implement the latest developments in the field of recognition.

The ENIC/NARIC centre often performs knowledge transfers to the national higher education institutions and other competent recognition authorities. As a result, the external bodies should be able to improve their services to the public. Georgia posts revealed forged documents on the web page of the ministry. The Estonian ENIC/NARIC centre in cooperation with partners from other countries or under the auspices of some international organisations, organises at least one international training course on recognition issues, the Bologna Process or assessment of foreign qualifications per year. It is planned to run such training courses at national level regularly 1 to 3 times per year. Poland also invites foreign experts to conferences and workshops organised for higher education institutions. It is not rare that the staff members are invited to participate in the working groups established by the respective Ministry of Education and other law elaborating entities.

The information database is essential in the work on academic recognition. The Centre in the Czech Republic maintains two databases on higher education institutions, their accredited study programmes and fields of study in Czech and English. Ireland is currently developing an online database which will provide advice regarding the comparability of foreign qualifications in Ireland as well as information regarding education and training systems abroad.

**Summary on capacity development.** Competence development is underlined as an important aspect by a number of ENIC/NARIC centres. The main kinds of capacity building measures inside ENIC/NARICs are staff training and regular updating, participation in the jointENIC/NARIC network meetings, study visits, organising national or regional training and dissemination events (Nordic, Baltic countries, and others), preparing detailed manuals for staff, recruiting of staff with specific knowledge of education and/or language skills relevant to different world regions.
Another important part of capacity building is organising different dissemination and training events for the recognition staff of higher education institutions and providing guidance to higher education institutions.

Again, many of these important measures seem to be present in a number of the most well supported and developed national information centres while a number of others mainly mention study visits or have not given any information on capacity building measures at all.

**Networking and cooperation at national level and internationally**

The range of cooperation partners is directly dependent on the range of activities of the office. Thus, for example, in Germany the Central Office for Foreign Education works very closely with the German Federal Foreign Office, the German University Rectors' Conference and the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), as it is involved in the preparation of government agreements on equivalency in the higher education area as well as in equivalency arrangements of another sort. CIRIUS’s assessments are seen as part of the integration process of foreigners in Denmark. In this respect CIRIUS has close relations with guidance counsellors, job centres, social partners and other parties engaged in integration.

The partners depend on the role the recognition office plays. The Danish Integration Ministry is another important partner of CIRIUS, since its assessments form part of the integration process by clarifying foreigners of their possibility to seek employment or further education in Denmark. Collaboration worth to mention has developed in Italy with professional councils, and such organisations as chambers of commerce, trade unions, etc., regional authorities competent for education and training, CRUI, higher education institutions, and other public authorities in charge with finalised academic recognitions.

Also the staff members define the scope of collaboration and networking. Due to the part time activities of staff members, the office employees in Iceland participate in the work of the NUAS Ekvivaleringsgruppen, and NUS (the Association of Nordic Universities) and the EUA (European University Association). The head of staff in Iceland is the Secretary General of the Icelandic Rectors Conference. Staff members in the Netherlands are active in various national and international networks, e.g. KBS, a network of international student counsellors.

At national level the ENIC/NARIC centres collaborate with different ministries, and national education institutions, student unions, rectors’ conferences, national accreditation service, quality assurance agency and similar bodies.

As other cooperation partners are mentioned: transparency and information centres ì Europass, Euroguidance, Eurydice, and Eures, mobility agencies ì e.g. Socrates. Ireland,

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27 Recognition group of the Nordic cooperation association for university administrators.
for cooperation at a national level, even established a consultative group to advise it on its approach to performing its recognition co-ordination function and to working with stakeholders, in general, and awarding bodies, in particular, in this regard.

The Nordic ENIC/NARIC centres have formed an umbrella organisation called NORRIC. There is also strong cooperation between the Baltic ENIC/NARIC centres. The Austrian ENIC/NARIC has organised a close cooperation with the ENICs of the neighbouring countries and beyond.

At international level ENIC/NARIC centres, first of all, are members of the ENIC and within the EU/EEA also NARIC networks. Apart from that, they most often mention collaboration with foreign higher education institutions. There are evidently very internationally active centres – e.g. CIMEA (the Italian ENIC/NARIC) is a member of the ENIC, NARIC and MERIC networks, but it also cooperates with AEC, EAIE, EURES, FEDORA, ECSTA, FEANI, as well as with foreign organisations like Education International, NAFSA, NIAF, and WES in the USA, BBT in Switzerland, DAAD in Germany, the British Council as well as foreign Embassies and Consulates, etc.

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28 Mediterranean Recognition Information Centres, a UNESCO network established in 2006 and made up of national centres from the southern as well as the northern shores of the Mediterranean.
4.2 Cooperation recognition/quality assurance bodies

- Information exchange between the bodies responsible for recognition and quality assurance;
- Discussion of an agreement on working methods between these bodies;
- Use of information on the outcomes of quality assessments in the recognition of qualifications;
- 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.

The section on cooperation between recognition and quality assurance bodies seems to be one of the least developed in many National Action Plans. The answers to the questions in this section, if provided at all, are uneven and do not allow us to draw many conclusions. One reason for this might be that the information on quality assurance that the ENIC/NARIC centres need in their everyday work is nowadays available on the websites of the quality assurance bodies and so the ENIC/NARICs can use them without direct contacts to the staff of national quality assurance agencies. What regards information on the quality assurance status of programmes or institutions in other countries, ENIC/NARICs are used to easily get information through the close and well-established cooperation within the ENIC and NARIC networks.

Information exchange between the bodies responsible for recognition and quality assurance

In a number of countries, e.g. Armenia, France, Ireland and the United Kingdom, there is close cooperation between the bodies responsible for recognition and quality assurance, some others, e.g. Serbia, plan to establish such cooperation. There are countries, e.g. Belgium (French Community) Estonia, Denmark, Ireland and Norway, where the quality assurance body is a part of the body responsible for recognition or vice versa, or where both bodies are part of some umbrella organisation.

Others, e.g. the Czech Republic, Germany, Latvia and the Slovak Republic, do not have an institutionalised cooperation between recognition and quality assurance bodies, but these bodies have frequent contacts in everyday work and use each other’s information base. Some of these countries admit that informal information exchange also takes place when representatives of both bodies participate in seminars on quality evaluation and recognition or when both bodies are represented in working groups concerning development higher education, including in creating a national qualifications framework. This might also be the case in other countries.

Finally, some of the countries - e.g. Georgia - did not yet have a quality assurance agency.
Discussion of and agreement on working methods between these bodies

The most far-reaching agreement on working methods between ENIC/NARICs and quality assurance bodies is the Joint declaration by some of the countries participating in the European Consortium for Accreditation in Higher Education (ECA). This declaration aims at establishing a mutual recognition of accreditation decisions that might in the future lead also to automatic recognition of qualifications.

Some other countries state that they have a clear structure of competences of both bodies and therefore believe that there is no need to have a specific agreement on working methods between these bodies. France currently studies the activities of the two institutions, while Germany plans to do so. In Denmark both organisations already have descriptions of their working methods in the fields of recognition and quality assurance. These have been published on their respective websites. A proposal for setting up new structures for accreditation and quality assurance in Denmark is on hearing.

Norway has put forward an important point for the cooperation between quality assurance and recognition: quality assurance is a powerful implementation tool of the framework of the Lisbon Recognition Convention in higher education institutions if the assessment of recognition practices becomes part of the quality assurance of institutions and programmes.

Use of information on the outcomes of quality assessment in the recognition of qualifications:

In most countries the ENIC/NARIC centre disseminates information on the outcomes of quality assurance to other ENIC/NARICs so that the latter can use this information when assessing qualifications. They seek similar information from sister ENIC/NARIC centres but also consult national and international quality assurance bodies regarding quality assessments which have been undertaken abroad.

The United Kingdom takes into account a range of factors, including any available information on the outcomes of quality assessments. France seeks to improve its current procedures, which could evolve towards the inclusion of competences in the recognition process. The French Community of Belgium states that information about the quality of foreign institutes that award diplomas for which recognition is requested is not taken into account in the criteria for awarding equivalence. Estonia states that all outcomes of quality assessment are available to the Estonian ENIC/NARIC. Germany reports that German legislation does not allow to award accreditation of degree courses in which a degree is awarded exclusively according to foreign law. The Swiss ENIC/NARIC centre recognises accreditation decisions taken by the respective quality assurance body.

Use of membership of international networks

Most of the countries simply state that the respective bodies are active members of the ENIC and NARIC networks and of ENQA (Norway, United Kingdom). The participation of
different countries in current international debates on quality assurance varies in its involvement and strength, if applicable. France and Poland are observers in ENQA. Both Ireland and the United Kingdom report a very close cooperation with ENQA based on the close involvement of the representatives of their relevant bodies in the board of the association. Estonia reports that there are no direct contacts between the Estonian ENIC/NARIC and ENQA. In Iceland the recognising bodies are the universities, which makes it difficult and costly for them to be members of international networks and associations. The French Community of Belgium plans, in the future, to be more active in events related to mobility and the recognition of diplomas and qualifications (NAFSA, EAIE, student exhibitions) Thus for example AEQES is a candidate member of the ENQA network, and so is the respective institution in Serbia as well.

**Summary on cooperation with quality assurance.** Information on quality assurance is used in the daily work of credential evaluation. In a number of countries the ENIC/NARIC centres widely use the information on quality assurance when assessing foreign qualifications. They also provide the sister ENIC/NARICs with information on quality assurance status of programmes and institutions in their countries. As the information on quality assurance is often accessible online, the above does not necessarily mean that ENICs/NARICs have intensive daily contacts with their own country’s quality assurance body.

The most far-reaching agreement between ENIC/NARIC centres and quality assurance bodies is the Joint declaration by some of the countries participating in the European Consortium for Accreditation in Higher Education. Its final goal – eventual automatic recognition of qualifications - can, however, only be reached through long-term bilateral work.

It has been noted that recognition and quality assurance bodies often discuss the relevant issues and work together in various national working groups or during workshops, especially in those devoted to the establishment of national qualifications frameworks.

Quality assurance is a powerful implementation tool of the framework of the Lisbon Recognition Convention in higher education institutions if the assessment of recognition practices becomes part of the quality assurance of institutions and programmes.

**National Action Plans as a collection of best practices**

The National Action Plans for recognition can also serve as collection of best practice within the European Higher Education Area. The section below shows examples of best practices in various aspects related to recognition.

A number of countries have found suitable solutions in the ‘triangle’ of Lisbon Recognition Convention legal framework as international legislation, national laws and regulations concerning recognition and the issue of institutional autonomy. The solution usually has been found either through transposing the principles of the Lisbon Recognition
Convention into national legislation or through making fair recognition of foreign qualifications a criterion for quality assurance of higher education institutions. Some countries have clearly demonstrated in their National Action Plans for Recognition that they apply the legal framework of the Lisbon Recognition Convention according to the spirit of the documents and do not just seek formal compliance with the letter of these documents.

In some countries the principles of the Lisbon Recognition Convention legal framework are also applied to the recognition of qualifications from countries that are not party to the Convention. At least in some countries there is a clear emphasis on identifying and comparing learning outcomes and not programme details and the learning outcomes approach is also applied to the recognition of study periods.

A number of ENIC/NARIC centres supply higher education institutions and employers with information on foreign education systems and recommendations for recognition of the qualifications appearing most frequently, make recommendations on recognition of qualifications from particular countries or create collections/databases of previous experiences.

The Flemish Community of Belgium and France are already advanced in RPL (recognition of prior learning). In Finland, a working group has made recommendations for common national principles for the recognition of prior learning to be applied in all higher education institutions. In Denmark, the ENIC/NARIC centre will assess applications from persons lacking or partly lacking documentation of their qualification.

A number of countries can firmly state that their higher education institutions trust and rely on and intensively cooperate with their national ENIC/NARIC centre. In several cases the cooperation includes providing feedback on the recognition decisions the higher education institutions make. Several countries have established mechanisms to identify mistakes in the recognition practices.

There are examples where clear procedures for appeal against a recognition decision have been established.

Quite many ENIC/NARIC centres provide information on the home country’s qualifications framework/system for use by credential evaluators abroad and on the quality assurance status of the institutions/programmes in the home country. There is also an information package for the applicants, including application forms, information on criteria and procedures applied, information on possibilities for appeal. The information is available either on the website or upon request or in printed versions.

Joint applications. Finland has created joint application system for Bachelor degree programs conducted in English in the Finnish polytechnics, applying the same admission criteria.
Dissemination of good practice is another task to be taken up in the next Bologna period as fulfilling the tasks for recognition actually means that all of the above should become a reality throughout the whole EHEA.
CONCLUDING REMARKS

The National Action Plans show that countries are striving to implement the principles of the Lisbon Recognition Convention. At the same time the National Action Plans also demonstrate that the real practices of assessment of foreign qualifications are very different in different countries and that means that the outcome of the assessment of the same qualification could also differ in different countries.

The Lisbon Recognition Convention and its subsidiary texts are indeed setting standards for recognition. These standards are and should be flexible to accommodate the whole variety of different qualifications in the European region and of the national settings. But, as a side-effect, this flexibility unfortunately also opens doors to different understanding of the most important principles of the Convention in different countries:

- Applicants should have the right to a fair assessment of their previous qualifications or study periods, but how is ‘fair assessment’ understood and how far does the ‘right’ go in the eyes of different countries?
- A qualification should be recognised if there are no substantial differences with the relevant host country’s qualification, but how does each country interpret the ‘substantial differences’?

To reach the final goal to ensure more coherent recognition across the EHEA - we need to

- find an appropriate solution to the ‘triangle’ of the Lisbon Recognition Convention legal framework as international legislation, national laws and regulations concerning recognition and the issue of institutional autonomy in all countries;
- conduct an international discussion of the variety of national recognition practices (including stages therein) and terminology;
- continue the discussion and reach consensus on the understanding of ‘substantial differences’;
- and follow up by tuning national approaches to recognition, recognition practices and terminology.

And the final measure of our success will be a greater coherence in the outcome of the assessment; i.e. that assessment of one given qualification in different countries leads to relatively similar result.
## APPENDIX 1 Collection of good and not so good practices

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Good practice</th>
<th>Not so good practice or unacceptable practice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Legislation</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National legislation has been adopted or amended on the basis of the principles laid down in the Lisbon Recognition Convention and its supplementary legal texts.</td>
<td>National legislation is not amended after ratification of the Lisbon Recognition Convention. National legislation uses outdated terminology linked to such concepts and approaches in recognition which the Lisbon Recognition Convention aims to abolish (<em>nostrification, equivalence</em>).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The principles of the Lisbon Recognition Convention are transposed into national legislation. Higher education institutions observe the national law and hence follow the Convention principles.</td>
<td>National legislation contradicts with the legal framework of the Lisbon Recognition Convention. Observing national law, the institutions actually ignore the Convention principles.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutional recognition procedures are related to quality assurance: since fair recognition of qualifications is a part of quality, the institutional recognition procedures and implementation of the Lisbon Recognition Convention are included in the institutional internal quality assurance and assessed at the periodic quality reviews, audits or accreditation.</td>
<td>It is considered impossible to implement the principles of the Lisbon Recognition Convention at institutional level: it is considered as breach of institutional autonomy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Databases of recognition cases which can be used to make recognition procedures simpler in similar cases.</td>
<td>For autonomy reasons it is considered that state authorities cannot request information from higher education institutions regarding recognition cases</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Authenticity and translations of documents</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If necessary, the authenticity of documents is verified through the</td>
<td>Requesting that all documents have an <em>apostille</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good practice</td>
<td>Not so good practice or unacceptable practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>correspondence with the country of origin.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not requiring translations if the documents are in widely spoken languages</td>
<td>Requesting that all documents to be presented are officially translated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applying the Lisbon Recognition Convention principles to all applicants including those whose qualifications originate from countries that have not ratified the Convention.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Bilateral agreements**

- Discontinue further conclusion of bilateral agreements with States parties to the Lisbon Recognition Convention but develop bilateral recommendations with these countries or regionally, working using the Convention as the only legal basis instead.

**Recognition criteria and procedures**

- Acknowledge differences between education systems and take them into account in the assessment of foreign qualifications
- Moving away from seeking full comparability of the foreign qualification to the relevant home qualification towards comparing only those aspects relevant to the rights and functions which the holder seeks to exercise in the host country
- Using quality as a criterion and trusting the quality assurance in the country of origin
- Whenever possible, basing recognition on comparison of learning outcomes, competences
  - Seeking full comparability of programme contents
  - Attempting to review the foreign higher education institution, department and the programme instead of checking the quality assurance status with the issuing country’s quality assurance body
  - Using programme duration and content details as main criteria for recognition
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Good practice</th>
<th>Not so good practice or unacceptable practice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attempting to assess qualifications even in those cases when evidence is incomplete or lacking</td>
<td>Refusing recognition in case a relevant qualification to compare foreign qualification to cannot be found in the higher education of the host country</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Granting partial recognition or setting compensatory measures when differences of the foreign qualification compared to the relevant home qualification are substantial with a view of the purpose for which recognition is sought</td>
<td>Applying partial recognition or setting compensatory measures when the differences of the foreign qualification are solely in the course content and are not important for the purpose for which recognition is sought</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applying a two-stage recognition procedure in which the second stage involves detailed comparison of curricula and the material studied, and is at the same time necessary to gain full rights in the host country</td>
<td>Applying different recognition procedures for different kinds of degrees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excluding higher education institutions from the recognition procedure</td>
<td>Require full academic recognition (including comparison of programmes carried out by higher education institutions) if the applicant intends to enter a regulated profession</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Measures to improve practices</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disseminate information on recognition criteria and procedures among all stakeholders and provide advice and training to the relevant staff of the higher education institutions and employers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutional practices</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutions apply common procedures/ follow common guidelines/ use common standards in recognition of qualifications. Recognition procedures are part of the internal quality assurance of the higher education institution.</td>
<td>Institutions have not developed guidelines for recognition and the practice is case-to-case and may differ within the same institution.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good practice</td>
<td>Not so good practice or unacceptable practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Countries monitor how the principles of the Lisbon Recognition Convention and its subsidiary texts are followed by higher education institutions. (Through observing legislation, monitoring preparation of institutional guidelines, encouraging institutions to prepare common procedures for recognition or by including recognition procedures in internal quality assurance of higher education institutions).</td>
<td>Countries consider that state cannot influence or monitor recognition procedures at higher education institutions due to institutional autonomy.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Prior learning**

In cases where a foreign qualification contains credits allocated through recognition of prior learning, accept decision of the awarding institution provided that the institution is recognised in the country of origin.

**Transparency tools – Diploma Supplement**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issuing the Diploma Supplement to all graduates of all programmes, free of charge and in a widely used European language</th>
<th>Issuing Diploma Supplements to graduates of the (new) Bachelor-Master programmes only and thus leaving many graduates without Diploma Supplements</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Issuing Diploma Supplements also in the languages of national minorities where appropriate</td>
<td>Issuing Diploma Supplements in the national language only</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using the official format of the Diploma Supplement and the revised explanatory notes.</td>
<td>Customising the Diploma Supplements in local versions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Transparency tools – ECTS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Using quality assurance as a tool for the implementation of ECTS, i.e. setting the implementation of ECTS as a quality requirement.</th>
<th>Leaving ECTS implementation as completely voluntary, including the choice of the credit system to be applied by each higher education institution.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Linking credits with learning outcomes, including learning outcomes of Keeping contact-hours based credit systems.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Good practice</strong></td>
<td><strong>Not so good practice or unacceptable practice</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>informal and non-formal education and work experience.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Borderless/transnational education</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Setting regulations in such a way that <em>bona fide</em> transnational education can be legally established and recognised.</td>
<td>Fully ignoring (and refusing recognition of) transnational providers in own country without giving them a chance to demonstrate the quality of the education provided.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In cases where the transnationally provided education qualification is not recognised: using the methodology for recognition of prior learning to check whether some parts of the education in question could be recognised and some credits allocated to the qualification holder.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Information provision</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providing applicants with full set of necessary information on recognition: criteria and procedures, how to apply, what documents should be provided. Using different means to provide information: printed, electronic and by telephone</td>
<td>Providing fragmented information on recognition. Information provision only by posting on the wall at the ENIC/NARIC centre or only in paper format.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providing applicants with online possibilities to monitor the progress of the application or providing no feedback to applicants.</td>
<td>Provision of recognition information in the national language only.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providing a hotline for higher education institutions to quickly consult on recognition issues.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coordination of information provision between the ENIC/NARIC centre and higher education institutions, covering both the general and institution-specific information.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information on own higher education system is available electronically in widely spoken European languages and the content is specifically prepared</td>
<td>Information on a country’s education system is</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a) only available in national language,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good practice</td>
<td>Not so good practice or unacceptable practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to be useful at assessment of country’s qualifications in other countries</td>
<td>b) is not focused on issues important in recognition of qualifications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>c) is being disseminated through too general channels having no experience in education (e.g. embassies, representations etc.)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**National information centre**

The ENIC/NARIC centre acts as one single entrance point for both academic and professional qualifications. Decisions upon recognition are made by bodies outside the ENIC/NARIC centre and outside higher education institutions such as “nostrification boards” or “equivalence boards”

The ENIC/NARIC centre cooperates with higher education institutions or their organisations with a view to ensuring the quality of decision making on the basis of ENIC/NARIC recommendations. Higher education institutions do not participate in decision making on recognition at all

The ENIC/NARIC centre has established internal quality assurance system and is also being assessed externally

The ENIC/NARIC centre has prepared internal manuals for staff containing step-by-step description of recognition procedures

The ENIC/NARIC centre organises regular study visits and training of its own staff and training events for credential evaluation staff of higher education institutions and competent authorities
GUIDELINES FOR NATIONAL ACTION PLANS FOR RECOGNITION

elaborated by the ENIC Bureau, the NARIC Advisory Board and the Bureau of the Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee

Approved by the Bologna Follow Up Group, Vienna April 7, 2006
INTRODUCTION

In the Bergen Communiqué, Ministers committed themselves to

draw up national action plans to improve the quality of the process associated with the recognition of foreign qualifications. These plans will form part of each country’s national report for the next Ministerial Conference.

On this background, the ENIC Bureau, the NARIC Advisory Board and the Bureau of the Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee have drawn up draft guidelines for the national reports and hereby submit the draft to the Bologna Follow Up Group.

The Guidelines were approved by the Bologna Follow Up Group (BFUG) at its meeting in Vienna on April 7, 2006. The present version reproduces the Guidelines as adopted by the BFUG.

The Guidelines will be found in Appendix 1.

An explanatory note will be found in Appendix 2. This note also provides a number of useful references.
APPENDIX 1

NATIONAL ACTION PLANS FOR RECOGNITION

Guidelines for national action plans to be elaborated under the Bologna Process, proposed by the ENIC Bureau, the NARIC Advisory Board and the Bureau of the Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee

1. Legislation

1.1 Lisbon Recognition Convention
   b. Plan and timetable for ratification if not yet accomplished

1.2 Review of national legislation relevant to recognition

Should include:
   a. The timetable and organisation of the review of national legislation (including secondary legislation);
   b. Steps envisaged as a result of the review, e.g. as regards amending national legislation where needed and an indicative timetable for such amendments.
Could also include:
   c. When and how the outcomes of this review will be published;
   d. How partners in the European Higher Education Area will be informed of the outcomes.

1.3 Bilateral or regional recognition agreements
   a. Conformity with the principles of the Lisbon Recognition Convention

2. Recognition practice

2.1 Criteria and procedures

   d. 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.
   e. Measures to improve implementation.
   f. Overview of the time required to process applications for recognition and measures to improve this time.
2.2 Joint degrees

e. Overview of the legal provisions concerning the recognition of joint degrees.
f. Amendments to remove legal obstacles or to establish legal provision favouring the recognition of joint degrees.
g. Beyond legal provision, suggestion of policy measures to ensure the recognition of joint degrees.
h. Overview of double and multiple degrees and policy measures to encourage the recognition of such degrees.
2.3 **Overview of institutional practice**

Consider what measures have been or should be taken to allow national authorities to know:
- Whether higher education institutions and other competent recognition authorities comply with the Lisbon Recognition Convention and with national laws;
- What measures could be taken if given institutions or authorities were shown consistently not to apply the Convention and/or relevant national laws.

2.4 **Transparency tools for recognition**

- Plans and timetable for the implementation of the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS)
- Plans and timetable for the implementation of the Diploma Supplement
- Plans and timetable for the implementation of possible other transparency tools.

2.5 **Borderless/transnational education**

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

3. **Information provision**

3.1 **Provision of information on recognition**

- Measures taken or envisaged to improve the provision of information on recognition criteria and procedures and on the national education system;
- The timetable envisaged for such measures;
- The bodies or institutions responsible for the measures;
- The state of electronic provision of information on recognition;
- Whether the national information centres establish and maintain their own web pages, linked to the ENIC-NARIC Web site.

3.2 **Information package for applicants**

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

f. The formal status of the centre;

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

h. Staff and budget;

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

j. Networking and cooperation at national level and internationally.
4.2 Cooperation recognition/quality assurance bodies

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

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

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

h. 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.
APPENDIX 2

NATIONAL ACTION PLANS FOR RECOGNITION

Explanatory note to the Guidelines

INTRODUCTION

In their Bergen Communiqué, adopted on May 20, 2005, the Ministers responsible for higher education of the Bologna Process reviewed progress and objectives with regard to the recognition of qualifications and committed to elaborating national action plans for recognition to improve the recognition of qualifications.

The part of the Bergen Communiqué related to recognition reads:

We note that 36 of the 45 participating countries have now ratified the Lisbon Recognition Convention. We urge those that have not already done so to ratify the Convention without delay. We commit ourselves to ensuring the full implementation of its principles, and to incorporating them in national legislation as appropriate. We call on all participating countries to address recognition problems identified by the ENIC/NARIC networks. We will draw up national action plans to improve the quality of the process associated with the recognition of foreign qualifications. These plans will form part of each country’s national report for the next Ministerial Conference. We express support for the subsidiary texts to the Lisbon Recognition Convention and call upon all national authorities and other stakeholders to recognise joint degrees awarded in two or more countries in the EHEA.

We see the development of national and European frameworks for qualifications as an opportunity to further embed lifelong learning in higher education. We will work with higher education institutions and others to improve recognition of prior learning including, where possible, non-formal and informal learning for access to, and as elements in, higher education programmes.

The Bergen Communiqué further underlines the importance of recognition policy in establishing the European Higher Education Area, and Ministers have undertaken further commitments in this area. Due reference is also made to the Council of Europe/UNESCO Convention and to the role of the ENIC and NARIC Networks.

In this context, the Bologna Follow Up Group has expressed the desire and indeed the expectations that the ENIC and NARIC Networks put forward a proposal for guidelines for the national action plans for recognition that should be elaborated in time for the London Conference of Bologna Ministers.
in May 2007. With the present proposal, the ENIC Bureau and the NARIC Advisory Board, acting on behalf of both Networks, as well as the Bureau of the Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee, put forward suggested guidelines for the National Plans.

PURPOSE AND SCOPE

As stated in the Bergen Communiqué, the national action plans should improve the quality of the recognition process. This should be interpreted to mean that recognition practice should facilitate the fair recognition of learners’ qualification, so that learners can move between higher education systems as easily and flexibly as possible without losing the real value of their qualifications through unreasonable procedures and practice. This again relates to recognition practice, which in the worst case may discourage learners from applying for recognition or from completing their application procedure, and to content, where unreasonable assessments could grant learners with foreign qualifications less than the real value of their foreign qualifications as expressed in terms of the education system of their host country\(^29\).

The Bologna Process acknowledges a number of texts that provide guidance with respect to recognition practice, and that also entail obligations for parties. Thus is above all true with regard to the Council of Europe/UNESCO Recognition Convention, which was adopted in 1997 and which entered into force in 1999. As of February 24, 2006, 37 of the 45 members of the Bologna Process had ratified this Convention, while a further 5 members of the Bologna Process\(^30\) had signed but not ratified the Convention and 3\(^31\) had neither signed nor ratified.

In addition, the four subsidiary texts to the Convention, adopted by the Convention Committee, offer guidance. These are:

- Recommendation on International Access Qualifications (1999);
- Recommendation on Criteria and Procedures for the Assessment of Foreign Qualifications and Periods of Study (2001);
- Code of Good Practice in the provision of Transnational Education (2001);

All the above texts, as well as the Joint ENIC/NARIC are Charter of Activities and Services, are available in a joint publication\(^32\) and on the web. Web references will be given in the relevant parts of this explanatory note.

\(^{29}\) Which can be the learners’ home country if they have obtained their qualifications abroad and then return to their country of origin.

\(^{30}\) Belgium, Germany, Italy, Netherlands and Turkey

\(^{31}\) Andorra, Greece and Spain.

The National Action Plans should identify what, in the view of the Minister responsible for higher education, needs to be done in each country in order to ensure fair recognition. The precise actions and measures will of course depend on the situation of each country, but it is entirely possible to offer guidelines as to what major areas of policy and practice might be considered in elaborating the national action plans and what kind of measures might be envisaged.

It should be noted that since Ministers committed to issuing the Diploma Supplement automatically, free of charge and in a widely spoken European language by the end of 2005, and since the implementation of this commitment will be a part of the stocktaking report for 2007, the Diploma Supplement is not included in the outline for the National Action Plans.

OUTLINES OF AN ACTION PLAN

The components of an action plan are outlined below, organised around four major categories:

1. Legislation
2. Recognition practice
3. Information provision
4. Structures

1. Legislation

1.1 Council of Europe/UNESCO Convention

The action plan should

- Specify whether the Convention has been ratified and,
- If it has not, what the plans for ratification are.

It should be borne in mind that for the purposes of the Convention, ‘ratification’ means that the instrument of ratification has been deposited with one of the depositaries of the Convention, i.e. the Secretary General of the Council of Europe or the Director-General of UNESCO. This follows after completion of the ratification procedures at national level\(^\text{33}\).

\(^{33}\) An updated overview of ratifications and signatures may be found at [http://conventions.coe.int](http://conventions.coe.int); search for ETS 165.
1.2 Review of national legislation relevant to recognition

In the Bergen Communiqué, Ministers committed themselves to "ensuring the full implementation of its principles [i.e. the principles of the Lisbon Recognition Convention], and to incorporating them in national legislation as appropriate." This cannot be ensured without a review of national legislation to verify that it is fully compatible with and promotes the implementation of the Convention and its subsidiary texts.

The action plan should outline

- The timetable and organisation of the review of national legislation (including secondary legislation);
- What steps are envisaged as a result of the review, e.g. as regards amending national legislation where needed and an indicative timetable for such amendments.

In addition, the action plan could outline

- When and how the outcomes of this review will be published;
- How partners in the European Higher Education Area will be informed of the outcomes.

It should be underlined that even countries that consider that their legislation in general complies with the Lisbon Recognition Convention and takes on board the subsidiary texts may wish to review its legislation since legislation may still contain clauses that perhaps unexpectedly hinder recognition.

Reference documents

The Lisbon Recognition Convention
Subsidiary texts, cf. above

1.3 Bilateral or regional recognition agreements

Many countries are party to bilateral and/or regional recognition agreements. The national action plan could assess whether these are in conformity with the principles of the Lisbon Recognition Convention and, to the extent they are not, consider what measures could be taken to bring them to conformity.

2. Recognition practice
2.1 **Criteria and procedures**

The Recommendation on Criteria and Procedures for the Assessment of Foreign Qualifications and Periods of Study, adopted in 2001, outlines the main steps involved in processing an application for recognition as well as the main considerations of substance and form.

**The Action Plans should consider**

- To what extent the practice of competent recognition authorities in the country implements the Recommendation;
- What measures could be taken to improve implementation;
- The time required to process applications for recognition and measures to improve this time.

It is recalled that the time a competent recognition authority requires to process an application is of key importance to the applicant. Parties to the Lisbon Recognition Convention undertake to make decisions on recognition within a reasonable time limit specified beforehand by the competent recognition authority.

*Reference document*

Recommendation on Criteria and Procedures for the Assessment of Foreign Qualifications and Periods of Study

For the obligation to make decisions within a reasonable time limit, see also Article III.5 of the Convention and the Explanatory Report to this Article.

2.2 **Joint Degrees**

Joint degrees are an important instrument for developing student mobility as well as the Europe dimension of higher education. In some contexts, they are still referred to as "double degrees" even if there is a clear difference between joint and double degrees. A part of the discussions within the

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35 A joint degree is a higher education qualification issued jointly by at least two or more higher education institutions or jointly by one or more higher education institutions and other awarding bodies, on the basis of a study programme developed and/or provided jointly by the higher education institutions, possibly also in cooperation with other institutions. A joint degree may be issued as a **a. joint diploma in addition to one or more national diplomas**, **b. a joint diploma issued by the institutions offering the study programme in question without being accompanied by any national diploma**, **c. one or more national diplomas issued officially as the only attestation of the**
Bologna Process have focused on how to develop further joint degree programmes, but the recognition of qualifications granted within such arrangements is also a key policy measure.

The National Action Plans should

- Provide an overview of the legal provisions concerning the recognition of joint degrees;
- Suggest amendments to remove legal obstacles or to establish legal provision favouring the recognition of joint degrees;
- Beyond legal provision, suggest policy measures to ensure the recognition of joint degrees;
- Provide an overview of double and multiple degrees and suggest policy measures to ensure the recognition of such double and multiple degrees.

Reference document

Recommendation on the Recognition of Joint Degrees

2.3 Overview of institutional practice

In most countries, many recognition decisions are made by higher education institutions or other competent authorities that are not part of Ministries or agencies of the government. The principle of institutional autonomy is also one of the basic principles of the European Higher Education Area. The Convention, in Section II, recognises that the legal framework of parties varies in this regard. Nevertheless, even if national authorities may have limited legal competence in recognition cases, they would have an interest in obtaining and providing information on the practice of competent recognition authorities and to encourage these to follow international best practice. They will of course also need to follow national laws, where applicable. Possibly, national Bologna groups made up of both Ministry and academic representatives may play a role in this regard.

The National Action Plans may wish to consider what measures have been or should be taken to allow national authorities to know

Joint qualification in question.

Available in the publication referred to and at
• Whether higher education institutions and other competent recognition authorities comply with the Lisbon Recognition Convention and with national laws;
• What measures could be taken if given institutions or authorities were shown consistently not to apply the Convention and/or relevant national laws.

2.4 Transparency tools for recognition

The transparent recognition of qualifications is one of the main objectives of the Bologna Process, as a key means of improving mobility within the European Higher Education Area. At European level, the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) and the Diploma Supplement are key transparency tools. While the Prague Communiqué refers to a credit system such as the ECTS or one that is ECTS-compatible, no alternative system has been developed at European level. In the Berlin Communiqué, Ministers renewed their support for ECTS. However, some countries have developed national credit systems. Countries may therefore implement the ECTS either by adopting and implementing the ECTS in their national context or by specifying how their national system, provided it be based on student workload and applicable for both transfer and accumulation, articulates with the ECTS so that national credits may easily be translated into ECTS credits for mobility purposes. Other transparency tools such as the Language Portfolio are listed in the EUROPASS initiative

The National Action Plans should include

• Plans and timetable for the implementation of the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS);
• Plans and timetable for the implementation of the Diploma Supplement;
• Plans and timetable for the implementation of possible other transparency tools.

Reference documents

ECTS User’s Guide
Diploma Supplement
Europass

37 The web link to Europass is <http://europass.cedefop.eu.int/> http://europass.cedefop.eu.int/
38 Available at: http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/programmes/socrates/usersg_en.html
39 Available at http://www.aic.lv/ace/ace_disk/Dipl_Sup/index.htm
40 http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/programmes/europass/index_en.html
2.5 Borderless/transnational education

The emergence of higher education provision not linked to national systems and often also without a clear geographical location is an important development over the past decade. The Lisbon Recognition Convention applies to programmes and institutions that are a part of the national education systems of parties, yet its provisions can be adapted to other provision, whether from the national systems of non-parties or to provision not linked to national systems. A major concern with borderless or transnational provision is that it is often difficult to assess its quality, and that opportunities for providers to undergo quality assessment may be lacking.

The national action plans could outline

- Whether there are national and/or institutional policies concerning the assessment and recognition of qualifications awarded under borderless/transnational education provision;
- What the main points of such policies are or, alternatively;
- Whether such qualifications are turned down for formal reasons, without further consideration of their content;
- Whether any action has been taking to implement the UNESCO/OECD\(^41\) guidelines for quality provision of cross border higher education.

Reference document

Code of Good Practice in the Provision of Transnational Education\(^42\)

3. Information provision

3.1 Provision of information on recognition

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Provision of information on the procedures and criteria for recognition and on the education system of the country are of key importance to the mobility of students, staff and holders of qualifications. Information will often need to be adapted to specific target groups and be provided through a variety of means, including electronic means. The ENIC and NARIC Networks have established a joint Web site\(^43\), which is currently managed by the Canadian ENIC and an ENIC/NARIC Working Party. Links to the web sites of national information centres as well as other relevant pages are provided from this site.

**The National Action Plans could describe**

- What measures have been taken or are envisaged to improve the provision of information on recognition criteria and procedures and on the national education system;
- What time table is envisaged for such measure;
- What bodies or institutions are responsible for the measures;
- The state of electronic provision of information on recognition;
- Whether the national information centres establish and maintain their own web pages, linked to the ENIC-NARIC Web site.

**Reference document**

ENIC/NARIC Code of Good Practice on Information Provision\(^44\)

\(^43\) [http://www.enic-naric.net/](http://www.enic-naric.net/)

3.2 **Information package for applicants**

A particular point in the Recommendation on Criteria and Procedures concerns the provision of information on the rights of applicants and the criteria and procedures for recognition to all applicants, where the Recommendation suggests applicants should be provided with an information package at the same time that receipt of the application is acknowledged.

The National Action Plans could consider

- To what extent information packages are provided and;
- If needed, how practice could be improved.

*Reference document*

Recommendation on Criteria and Procedures for the Assessment of Foreign Qualifications and Periods of Study, paragraphs 13 ᵈ 16 and the Explanatory Memorandum

4. **Structures**

4.1 **National information centre**

The action plan should outline the functioning of the national information centre (ENIC/NARIC) and set goals for improving the functioning of the centre. This could comprise considerations of:

- The formal status of the centre;
- Legal competence (e.g. advisory or decision making; academic, *de jure* professional, *de facto* professional recognition);
- Staff and budget;
- Capacity building in terms of expertise and service to the public;
- Networking and cooperation at national level and internationally.

*Reference document*
4.2 Cooperation recognition/quality assurance bodies

The action plan should outline how the national information centre cooperates with the body responsible for quality assurance and, if required, how this cooperation could be improved. Regardless of whether the national information centre and the QA body are located within the same organisation or in different organisations, this could comprise considerations of how

- Information is exchanged between these bodies;
- Working methods are discussed and agreed;
- Information on the outcomes of quality assessments are used in the recognition of qualifications;
- Membership of international networks and associations in recognition (e.g. ENIC and NARIC Networks) and quality assurance (e.g. ENQA) are used for the mutual benefits of both bodies.

Reference documents

- Lisbon Recognition Convention, Section VIII
- Joint ENIC/NARIC Charter of Activities and Services
- European Quality Assurance Standards

Available at [link](http://www.bologna-bergen2005.no/EN/BASIC/050520_European_Quality_Assurance_Standards.pdf)