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UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL, SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL  
ORGANIZATION

INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION ON THE RECOGNITION  
OF STUDIES, DIPLOMAS AND DEGREES  
IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE ARAB AND  
EUROPEAN STATES BORDERING ON THE MEDITERRANEAN

Intergovernmental Committee

Sixth Session

*Valletta, Malta, 14-15 January 2002*

**FINAL REPORT**

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Final Report

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## **I. Introduction**

1. The Sixth Session of the Intergovernmental Committee for the application of the International Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees in Higher Education in the Arab and European States bordering on the Mediterranean was held at Valletta, Malta, on 14-15 January 2002.

2. Contracting States present at the meeting were Algeria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Egypt, Italy, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Malta, Morocco, Slovenia and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.

3. Cyprus, Greece, Lebanon, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Syria and Tunisia participated as observers.

4. The Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization (ALECSO), the Council of Europe, the Community of Mediterranean Universities (CMU), and the International Baccalaureate Organization (IBO) were also represented as observers.

(Annex I: Final List of Participants).

## **II. Opening of the Session**

5. The session was opened on Monday, 14 January 2002 by Professor Charles Farrugia, President of the Maltese National Commission for UNESCO. Ms Joyce Pullicino, Director of the Maltese NARIC, welcomed the participants on behalf of Mr Paul Attard, Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Education. The Representatives of ALECSO and the Council of Europe, Mr Hassan H. Sakhi and Mr Sjur Bergan respectively, provided opening remarks to the Conference. Ms Stamenka Uvalic-Trumbic, Secretary of the Intergovernmental Committee gave an opening speech in which she stressed the unique nature of the Mediterranean Convention, expressed appreciation for the positive response of Member States to participating in the meeting and thanked the Maltese authorities for the hosting the meeting in the historic city of Valletta, as an excellent venue, part of the UNESCO's World Heritage List. On behalf of the Director-General, the Secretary of the Intergovernmental Committee expressed the hope that all countries bordering the Mediterranean would soon join this Convention.

6. The Committee adopted its rules of procedure as amended at the opening session, enlarging the Bureau to two Vice-Presidents instead of one to better reflect the heterogeneity of the Committee. (Annex II: the Amended Rules of Procedure).

## **II. Organization of the Session**

### **a) Election of the Bureau**

7. The Committee elected Mr. Paul Heywood, Head of the Malta Equivalence Information Centre – MEIC (Malta) as its President, Ms. Hadda Isbayene, Chief of the Service for Equivalences and Diplomas, Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research (Morocco) and Ms. Teresa Cuomo of the Ministry of University Teaching and

Research (Italy) as its Vice-Presidents, and Ms. Polona Miklavc Valencic, Counselor to the Minister, Ministry of Education, Science and Sport (Slovenia) as its Rapporteur.

**8. b) Adoption of Agenda and Programme of Activities**

The President presented the proposed Annotated Agenda which was approved with minor modifications. (Annex III: Annotated Agenda).

**c) Languages of Work**

**9.** According to Rule 13 of the 'Rules of Procedure of the Committee', the working languages of the Committee were Arabic, English and French. Speeches made in one of the working languages were simultaneously interpreted into other working languages. The majority of documents were made available in all three languages.

**III. Summary of Discussions**

**a) Report of the Secretariat**

**10.** Ms Stamenka Uvalic-Trumbic, Secretary of the Committee, welcomed the participants and introduced Item 4. Overview of Ratifications: Obstacles and Opportunities. Ms Uvalic-Trumbic informed participants that as of that day, the Convention is ratified by 11 States, the latest being The Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. The Secretary of the Committee also highlighted the fact that since the convening of the 5<sup>th</sup> session of the Intergovernmental Committee, in 1995, key changes have occurred in the field of higher education. In this framework, Ms Uvalic-Trumbic stressed the renewed importance of recognition and quality assurance in a global context, with a focus on the relevance of these developments for countries bordering the Mediterranean. (Annex IV: The Report of the Secretariat of the Intergovernmental Committee).

**b) Reports by Member States and Organisations**

**11.** In accordance with Articles II, III, IV, V and IX of the Convention, the representatives of the Ratifying States present: Algeria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Egypt, Italy, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Malta, Morocco, Slovenia and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia made oral presentations of their national systems of recognition of study and qualifications in higher education and informed participants of the latest developments and changes in this field introduced at governmental and university levels. This was followed by a presentation of the same topic by Observer Member-States: Lebanon, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Syria and Tunisia. The discussion that followed underscored the urgent need expressed by participants for enhanced efficient relevant and accurate information flow between Member States in order to promote the effective implementation of this Convention.

#### **IV. Summary of the Discussions of Member States and Organizations Reports**

**12.** The Discussions of Item 4 ‘Overview of Ratifications: Obstacles and Opportunities’ focused on modalities to increase participation in the Convention and its Committee. Issues raised included: the recognition of degrees from transnational and/or open and distance learning institutions; use of certain terms such as ‘equivalence’ versus ‘recognition’; the effect of political developments since the last time the Committee was convened, and their effect on the application of the Convention (in particular the problems of recognising diplomas from ex-Socialist countries). The Representative from Algeria outlined the recent developments in the Recognition of Diplomas in Algeria. The Representative of Bosnia and Herzegovina signalled the growing problem of brain drain. The Representative of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia outlined two main challenges faced by the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia: the recognition of foreign diplomas obtained abroad by returning nationals, and the issue of transnational providers of education in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Tunisia highlighted difficulties in recognizing diplomas provided by open and distance learning institutions. Stressed throughout this discussion was the need for better information and documentation circulation among countries of the region concerning higher education systems and qualifications

**13.** This session was followed by Item 5. ‘Information Exchange and Networking’ in which the Representatives of Italy, Greece, Morocco, and Slovenia discussed the role of the National Information Centres in their countries. The Representative of Greece presented the Inter-University Center for the Recognition of Foreign Degrees (DIKATSA), a national centre outside the education ministry, which provides the recognition of qualifications for university studies. The Representative of Slovenia presented the recognition process in Slovenia, and highlighted certain challenges such as the translation of documents and the recognition of professional titles. The Representative of Morocco outlined the new law introduced in Morocco for the recognition of diplomas. The Representative of Italy informed of the 1999 reform of higher education in Italy which led to the introduction of two types of *Laurea* degrees. She also informed of a new law allowing expatriates to practice their profession in Italy. The Representative of the Council of Europe presented the functions and working methods of the European Network European National Information Centres (ENIC). The Secretariat presented the Questionnaire distributed to the Intergovernmental Committee, and highlighted the revision of the contents of the UNESCO publication Study Abroad. Member States were kindly requested to check the validity of their country’s inputs, and provide the contacts of the responsible body/expert who could verify the validity of this information in the future. The Representative of Greece pointed out that the information on Greece in the 2000 issue of this publication was inaccurate and misleading. (Annex V: Questionnaire distributed to the Intergovernmental Committee).

**14.** Item 6. ‘Developments in Europe and the Arab States’ highlighted current recognition concerns in the Region. In this session, the Secretary of the Convention on the Recognition of Studies and Degrees concerning Higher Education in the Arab States, Mr Ramzi Salamé of UNESCO Beirut underlined two new issues in the application of the Arab States Convention: the renewed need for reliable information exchange, and the growing importance of addressing quality assurance issues when dealing with academic recognition. In addition, Mr Salamé stated that there was an increasing demand for the recognition of new types of post-secondary education such as those provided by transnational providers including open and distance learning institutions. Mr Salamé also informed the Committee that a new regional quality assurance committee for Ministers of

Higher Education in the Arab States Region has been established. This quality assurance committee results from the understanding that recognition issues cannot be divorced from quality assurance factors in the recognition of diplomas. Mr Bergan, representing the Council of Europe, and Co-Secretary of the Lisbon Recognition Convention presented the development of this new Convention. In particular, Mr Bergan highlighted the Bologna Process aimed to establish a European Higher Education Area by 2010 and stated that in the trend towards increased global mobility, improved recognition policies and practices will be of crucial importance. In that respect, the Mediterranean Convention is particularly important in this regard, as it includes countries both in the Europe Region and outside the Europe Region.

**15.** In Item 7. 'Codes of Good Practice', Professor Stephen Adam of the University of Westminster presented the Diploma Supplement and the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) as tools for more comprehensive information exchange for assessing qualifications, in his capacity as Expert.

## **V. Decisions and Recommendations**

**16.** In the light of the discussions, the Intergovernmental Committee for the application of the International Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees in Higher Education in the Arab and European States bordering on the Mediterranean welcomed the organization of its 6<sup>th</sup> session at a time of renewed interest in dialogue and need to strengthen the cultural bonds that history and geographical proximity have established between countries bordering on the Mediterranean and adopted the following recommendations:

V.1 To establish an information exchange network as a starting point for on-going effective dialogue in areas of common interest, in particular :

- a. transparent description of higher education systems and qualifications;
- b. links between recognition and quality assurance;
- c. defining criteria for assessing qualifications from new providers of higher education such as open and distance learning institutions (ODL) as well as transnational education (TNE) and/or private providers;
- d. methods, criteria and procedures for the assessment of qualifications;

V.2 To promote partnerships in issues of common concern with existing regional networks in the same field, in particular the ENIC network as well as relevant IGOs and NGOs such as ALECSO, the Association of the Arab Universities, the Community of Mediterranean Universities (CMU) and the International Baccalaureate Organization (IBO);

V.3 To establish contact points for the Southern Mediterranean countries, it being understood that the ENIC Centres would serve as the contact points for the Northern Mediterranean countries;

V.4 The Committee accepted the kind offer by Malta to take on a coordinating role in launching the network and developing an action plan with UNESCO's assistance;

- V.5 The Bureau will initiate the implementation of activities such as:
- a. development of a web page on the UNESCO Access, Mobility and Quality Assurance Site on issues of common concern to the Intergovernmental Committee;
  - b. establishment of Working Groups on specific issues of interest in partnership with the ENIC network, when appropriate;
  - c. circulation of documents of interest to the Committee on issues regarding recognition of qualifications such as 'The Tunisian Guide to Higher Education Diplomas' ('Le guide des diplomes tunisiens'), the European Credit Transfer System, the Diploma Supplement as well as documentation on the Bologna Process;

V.6 The Bureau will explore the possibilities of raising additional funds for the functioning of the network and report on development of the activities above to the 7<sup>th</sup> Session of the Intergovernmental Committee for the application of the International Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees in Higher Education in the Arab and European States bordering on the Mediterranean.

V.7 The Intergovernmental Committee recommends to the Director-General of UNESCO that the 7<sup>th</sup> Session be held in 2004 in Dubrovnik, upon the kind offer by the Government of the Republic of Croatia.

## **VI. Closing**

**17.** At the end of the Session, the Committee expressed deep thanks to the Government of Malta for hosting the session and appreciation for the efforts made by the Foundation for International Studies, Malta for the organization of the session. The UNESCO Secretariat thanked the Member States for their active contribution to the meeting and the spirit of co-operation that they demonstrated during its proceedings.