



REPUBLIC OF CROATIA
AGENCY FOR SCIENCE AND HIGHER
EDUCATION

CROATIAN ACTION PLAN FOR RECOGNITION

December 2006

CROATIAN ACTION PLAN FOR RECOGNITION

1. Legislation

1.1 Council of Europe/UNESCO Convention

Republic of Croatia was one of the original signatories of the Lisbon Recognition Convention, in April 1997. The Convention was ratified by Croatia in October 2000.

1.2 Review of national legislation relevant to recognition

Foreign education qualifications are recognized based on the Act on the Recognition of Foreign Education Qualifications¹ (Official Gazette, issue 158/2003 and 198/2003) that came into force on 1 July 2004. With this Act, the Act on Recognition of Equal Values of Foreign Degrees and the so called *nostrification* procedure were annulled (Official Gazette, issue 57/1996). During a review of national legislation, performed in 2005, it was found that some parts of this legislation need to be amended.

- *The timetable and organization of the review of national legislation*

In October 2006 the Commission for the amendments to the Act on the Recognition of Foreign Education Qualifications, after a year and half of preparation and discussion period, prepared amendments and revisions of the Act which clearly separate academic and professional recognition of higher education qualification.

The amendments took effect on 28th of December 2006² and now the Agency and the Croatian ENIC/NARIC Office are no longer responsible for the final decision on the recognition of academic qualifications which has been transferred to higher education institutions. Croatian ENIC/NARIC Office still performs its role as the information centre responsible for recommendations regarding both the academic and professional recognition. The Agency still retains responsibility for professional recognition.

The amendments also annulled a paragraph in the Act which demanded that foreign citizens provide legal interest for recognition of qualification while Croatian citizens were not obliged to do so.

Parallel to the establishment of the new system for recognizing qualifications, Croatia will adapt its entire legislative and administrative framework for an efficient application of the new system for the recognition of qualifications. The existing regulations on the responsibilities of individual administrative bodies will be aligned with their new responsibilities in terms of recognition of qualifications. Institutional changes within the

¹ Official Gazette, no. 158/03 <http://www.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeno/2003/2258.htm> and Official Gazette, no. 198/06 <http://www.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeno/2003/3154.htm>

² Official Gazette, no. 138/06 <http://www.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeno/2006/3114.htm>

framework of the competent ministries and professional associations will be carried out with the purpose of their adjustment to the new system recognizing qualifications. Development of the national nomenclature of professions and of the catalogue of regulated professions, as well as the alignment of educational programmes will continue. The Ministry of Science, Education and Sports has already taken steps in this direction with the proposal for development of the Croatian Qualification Framework (CROQF) that has been prepared at the end of 2006 and disseminated to all stakeholders.

Review of the national legislation will be translated into English, published and disseminated to all interested stakeholders and partners in Croatia and the European Higher Education Area. Further information will be available through publications under the MATRA project: *Strengthening the Role of Croatian ENIC/NARIC Office* which will start on 29th of January 2007, while the Croatian ENIC/NARIC office will publish a periodical newsletter and organize open days for higher education institutions, other professional bodies and student organizations.

1.3 Bilateral or regional recognition agreements

Croatia has bilateral agreements on recognitions with several EU countries³. All agreements are in line with the principles of the Lisbon Recognition Convention. Regarding the protection and recognition of qualifications acquired within its territory, Croatia included in the Act on the Recognition of Foreign Education Qualifications a statement that qualifications of its citizens acquired in the territory of the former Yugoslavia before 8 October 1991, to which the Croatian legislation expressly extends equal status as those acquired in the territory of the Republic of Croatia, be recognized as acquired rights⁴.

2. Recognition practice

2.1 Criteria and procedures

Croatian ENIC/NARIC office completely follows the principles of the *Recommendation on Criteria and Procedures for the Assessment of Foreign Qualifications and Periods of Study*.

The criteria for the assessment are given in the Act on the Recognition of Foreign Education Qualifications and are based on the principles of the *Recommendation on Criteria and Procedures for the Assessment of Foreign Qualifications and Periods of Study*. The Croatian ENIC/NARIC office completely follows these principles, which are

³ Austria, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Romania and Slovakia

⁴ “Qualifications issued until 8 of October 1991 in the educational institutions on the territory of former Yugoslavia, shall have equal legal force as qualifications in the Republic of Croatia and shall not be subject to the recognition procedure.” Act on the Recognition of Foreign Education Qualifications, Article 19.

transparent, coherent and reliable, and are periodically reviewed with a view to increasing transparency and measurability, taking account of developments in the education field and eliminating requirements leading to undue complications in the procedure.

In the assessment of foreign education qualifications, differences in terms of content, profile and learning outcomes are considered in a flexible way, and only substantial differences in view of the purpose for which recognition is sought (academic or professional recognition) lead to partial (alternative or conditional) recognition or non-recognition of the foreign qualifications.

Credential evaluators take into account learning outcomes and competencies, as well as the quality of an educational programme and consider its duration and admission requirements as merely indications of the level of achievement reached at the end of the programme. Instead of making detailed comparisons of course material and curricula, the assessment of foreign education qualifications seeks to determine whether applicants have demonstrated skills and competence which are of a level comparable to that which they would have achieved had they obtained a degree in the country where the degree is to be recognized.

The following principles are already included in the criteria for assessment:

- applicants' right to fair assessment,
- recognition if no substantial differences can be proven,
- demonstration of substantial differences, where recognition is not granted,
- recognition decision is based on the knowledge and skills certified by the higher education qualification,
- provision of information about Croatian higher education programmes and institutions:

Croatian ENIC/NARIC office cooperates with Department for Higher Education within Agency for Science and Higher Education and has detailed information regarding all accredited higher education programmes in Croatia. The office maintains a website but most information is provided on request.

Croatian ENIC/NARIC office publishes standardized information on the procedures and criteria for the assessment of foreign education qualifications. This information is automatically given to all applicants as well as to persons making preliminary inquiries about the assessment of their foreign qualifications.

The Agency for Science and Higher Education through the Croatian ENIC/NARIC Office conducts the procedure of recognition of foreign education qualifications. Maximum legal duration of the procedure is three months, starting from the date when the application with complete documentation is received. Average duration of recognition procedure is two months.

According to the Act on the Recognition of Foreign Education Qualifications, once a positive recognition has been received the same qualification cannot be subject to another assessment and such recognition is applicable to all future cases of recognition of the same higher education qualification.

To maintain the consistency in the recognition procedure the Croatian ENIC/NARIC office maintains an inventory of typical recognition cases and a comparative overview of other education systems or qualifications in relation to that of Croatia. The office makes this information available to applicants with the provision that this information is to serve only as an indicative guide, and that each application will be assessed on an individual basis.

Administrative fee for professional and academic recognition of foreign higher education qualifications of a completed undergraduate, graduate and postgraduate programme is 400 KN which is approximately 60 EUR. Administrative fee for recognition of periods of study spent in a foreign higher education institution is 200 KN which is approximately 35 EUR. Low income groups, refugees, displaced persons and other disadvantaged groups do not pay the administrative fee for the recognition.

2.2 Joint Degrees

Croatian legislation creates no obstacles for the recognition of joint degrees. Croatian ENIC/NARIC office recognizes foreign joint degrees unless it is possible to demonstrate that there is substantial difference between the joint degree for which recognition is sought and the comparable qualification within the national higher education system. Croatian ENIC/NARIC office recognizes these degrees with the greatest flexibility possible. So far, the office has recognized several joint degrees.

2.3 Overview of institutional practice

At the end of the July 2004 the Minister of Science, Education and Sports established the Croatian ENIC/NARIC office. By the end of December 2004 the Croatian ENIC/NARIC Office became fully operational and in March 2004 it was transferred to the newly established Agency for Science and Higher Education. Until then, recognition of foreign education qualifications has been conducted by faculties.

The new amendments to the Act will separate academic and professional recognition of higher education qualification and the Agency will be no longer be responsible for final decisions on academic recognition. This will from now on be the responsibility of higher education institutions. Croatian ENIC/NARIC office will still perform its role of the information centre and be responsible for providing recommendation for both the academic and professional recognition. In this way the office will assure that consistency in recognition is maintained and that the principles of the Lisbon Convention are

followed. In order to provide information and instruction to the staff of higher education institutions that will perform recognition, the office has organized several workshops.

2.4 Transparency tools for recognition

With the introduction of the study programmes restructured in accordance with the principles of the Bologna process in the academic year 2005/06, all higher education institutions were legally obliged by the Act on Scientific Activity and Higher Education to implement ECTS for all three study cycles, to be used both in terms of transfer and accumulation.

The EU/CoE/UNESCO diploma supplement format was established in Croatia through the Ordinance on the Content of Diplomas and Diploma Supplements which came into force in January 2005. Amendments to this Ordinance that came into force at the end of 2006 ensure that all students graduating from the Bologna adjusted study programmes at Croatian higher education institutions in 2007 and onwards will receive their diploma supplements automatically, free of charge, in Croatian and English languages and in the EU/CoE/UNESCO format.

In the past few years several activities have been taking place that are related to *Europass*, however the implementation levels of the five components of *Europass* has not yet been systematically organized. The biggest advances in implementation have been made in the following three components: *Europass CV*, *Europass Diploma Supplement*, and *Europass Language Portfolio*. Information on components of *Europass* are available in different levels of specificity on Internet pages of public administration institutions, educational organizations, nongovernmental and private institutions in the field of education, the Croatian Chamber of Economy as well as various local web-portals. The most relevant progress in the last two years has been the creation of a legal basis for implementing *Europass* through amendments to existing and passing of new legislation, as well as institutional and human resources development.

2.5 Borderless/transnational education

In the recognition procedure the Croatian ENIC/NARIC Office completely follows the main principles of the Lisbon Recognition Convention and later supplementing documents including the Code of Good Practice in the Provision of Transnational Education. There are no legal obstacles for the recognition of qualifications gained through cross border higher education and the office performs the recognition with the greatest flexibility possible. Such degrees are recognized unless it is possible to demonstrate that there is substantial difference between the degree for which recognition is sought and the comparable qualification within the Croatian higher education system. As regards the quality of borderless/transnational education, the standard procedures of

recognition take into account the past experiences with their quality and are adjusted accordingly. Practice in this field is actively monitored.

3. Information provision

3.1 Provision of information on recognition

Croatian ENIC/NARIC office maintains a web site (www.azvo.hr/enic) within the Agency for Science and Higher Education web site (www.azvo.hr). The site is available in Croatian and English languages and all the relevant information regarding the procedure for recognition, including application forms, is published on it.

The office has also published several publications containing the basic information on the recognition procedure, including the recent changes, and has distributed them on Croatian universities, among student organizations, and offices of foreign cultural and educational organizations. In the near future the office plans to publish new information packages, mostly through the MATRA project: *Strengthening the Role of Croatian ENIC/NARIC Office* which will start in January 2007.

3.2 Information package for applicants

Croatian ENIC/NARIC office provides all the necessary information regarding the procedure of recognition of foreign education qualifications on its web site. Besides the Lisbon Convention, with all its subsidiary text, and the national legislation, the information also includes the sample of best practices in other European countries. The standard information for the applicants includes at least the following elements:

- documentation required,
- requirements for authentication and translation of documents,
- description of the assessment process, including the role of the Croatian ENIC/NARIC office, higher education institutions, professional bodies, the Agency and the Ministry,
- description of the assessment criteria,
- time needed to process an application,
- status of recognition statements,
- fees to be charged,
- conditions and procedures for appealing against a recognition decision,
- references to national legislation and international conventions and agreements which may be relevant.

4. Structures

4.1 National information centre

At the end of the July 2004 the Minister of Science, Education and Sports established the Croatian ENIC/NARIC office. By the end of December 2004 the Croatian ENIC/NARIC Office became fully operational and in March 2004 it was transferred to the newly established Agency for Science and Higher Education.

According to the Act on the Recognition of Foreign Education Qualifications the Agency is responsible for the professional and academic recognition of foreign higher education qualifications on the basis of the preliminary evaluation of the qualification by the Evaluation Committee and the recommendation given by the Croatian ENIC/NARIC office. Croatian ENIC/NARIC Office is also an information centre on academic mobility and recognition of foreign higher education qualifications, and is a member of the European Network of National Information Centres on recognition and mobility.

The office has started with the implementation of the MATRA project: *Strengthening the Role of Croatian ENIC/NARIC Office* in cooperation with Dutch Ministry of Education and Ministry of Foreign Affairs, with a goal to align Croatian legislation in the area of mutual recognition of professional qualifications with the requirements of the EC Directive and to create administrative and institutional preconditions for the best possible implementation of the legislative solutions in practice. The project will focus on strengthening the Croatian ENIC/NARIC office to perform its tasks as the national information centre for recognition of foreign higher education qualifications (academic, professional, regulated and non-regulated professions). This will be accomplished through the exchange of best practice, transfer of knowledge and technical assistance.

By strengthening the Croatian ENIC/NARIC office as the information centre for recognition of professional and academic qualifications, the project will contribute to the establishment of a network of universities and professional organisations which are foreseen to become the future competent authorities regarding recognition of academic and professional qualifications respectively. The MATRA project will determine the best possible model for such a network. The available budget for the project is 275.000 EUR.

4.2 Cooperation recognition/quality assurance bodies

The bodies responsible for quality assurance are the National Council for Higher Education, an expert and advisory body tasked with the development and quality of higher education system in Croatia, and the Agency for Science and Higher Education which provides professional support to the National Council and which is responsible, through its Quality Assurance Department, of assisting in the development of the quality assurance systems at higher education institutions and their evaluation. The Croatian ENIC/NARIC office cooperates with the Quality Assurance Department and it will use the information on the outcome of quality assessments in the recognition of qualifications.