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**THE FRAMEWORK FOR QUALIFICATIONS OF
THE EUROPEAN HIGHER EDUCATION AREA**

STAKEHOLDERS´ PANEL

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The “Framework for qualifications of the European Higher Education Area” the working group has developed is a good starting point for the ongoing debate.

Yes, we need a European Qualifications Framework. With such an instrument it would be possible to get more transparency, more mobility and more mutual trust. The most important goal the European business would like to aim is the permeability within the education systems both on a national level and on a European level.

Therefore the paper we are discussing today is a very helpful one pushing the discussion in the right direction. But on the other hand there are several lacks I would like to mention:

- The paper focuses too much on the type of the institutions giving the qualifications – that means we have to discuss the competences each learner can or will receive and focus on that rather than on the type of the institution the learner is visiting.
- The paper gives several definitions of important terms used in the paper – but I think the definitions are not used consequently in the paper: for example the term “qualification” is defined as “any degree, diploma or certificate” – but the framework given in Appendix 7 uses the term “qualification” in the meaning of competences; this is an important difference! I would like to suggest to use competences rather than qualification because then you have the possibility to describe all the things – in another terms all the “competences” – a individual has learned without having received a certificate, a diploma or a degree.
- The paper says too less about the practice-oriented part of higher education; as you can mention the world of business is interested in a form of higher education which is as much as possible practice-oriented. That doesn´t necessarily mean a form of higher education which educates just for one enterprise. Instead it means the orientation of the outcomes on the needs of the different parts of the labour market; the different part of the labour market means both enterprises and science or research as well as (public) administration.
- There are no ECTS given in the third cycle. This is systematically the wrong way, I think. We are talking about lifelong learning, continuing education and so on – why isn´t it possible to “earn” credits during each phase of the education process? Why should it end with the second cycle and the degree given at that time?
- That leads to another remark: as far as I understand the paper this framework of the EHEA argues in the meaning if higher education as a “first training/education” after school. But the reality already today differs from that. Higher education already today

is often a form of training or education after a degree taken within the system of vocational education and training. So I think we have to make the framework at least comparable to the system of vocational education and training.

- This leads to the most important point I would like to mention: As I said before, this paper is a very important and helpful one – but before going into details and discussing the question of how to put it into work we should go a step back and try to develop a system of credits for both parts of the education system, for the part of higher education as well as for the part of vocational education and training. If we succeed in that we would have a reliable system of credit points each learner is possible to “earn” independently of the form of learning-institution he has chosen. Then we would have real permeability – a thing both enterprises and the European knowledge society needs to become the worlds most innovative and successfully region in the world.
- A prerequisite for such a system is a transparent and reliable form of quality assurance. I think the form of quality assurance we have within the world of higher education using the instruments of evaluation and accreditation is the right way also for other parts of the education system. We need agreed criteria, transparent processes of quality assurance and the participation of all stakeholders – including business – within the whole process. It really is a prerequisite! But then we would have the best form of education system we can think about – and we need the best one to achieve the goals Europe has agreed upon in the Lisbon strategy.

So there are two main issues we have to talk about: the development of an European Credit Transfer System for all parts of the education system and the form or system of quality assurance for all parts of the education system. I would like to suggest to concentrate on these goals before pushing a European qualification framework concerning just a part of our education system. Therefore we need rapidly the cooperation between the Bologna-Process and the Copenhagen-Process putting together our common efforts in developing the overall European Qualification Framework. I think this should be the most important signal towards the meeting of the European Ministers responsible for higher education in Bergen in May this year.