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RECOGNITION ISSUES IN THE BOLOGNA PROCESS: FOLLOW-UP TO THE SALAMANCA AND PRAHA MEETINGS

Working Party on Recognition Issues in the Bologna process

RECOGNITION ISSUES IN THE BOLOGNA PROCESS – FINAL REPORT

Directorate General IV: Education, Culture and Heritage, Youth and Sport (Directorate of School, Out-of-School and Higher Education - Higher Education and Research Division) of the Council of Europe, UNESCO European Centre for Higher Education (UNESCO-CEPES) and Directorate General for Education and Culture of the European Commission

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Bologna Declaration, or better the ensuing Bologna Process of higher education reform in Europe, highlights the crucial issues on the Higher Education agenda. The main objective of this process is the fostering of international mobility of students, graduates and professionals within a European higher education area with a clear relevance to the labour market.

To achieve this goal, many ways and instruments have been mentioned. In this document, the focus is on the international recognition of diplomas and qualifications. With this perspective in mind, the ENIC network¹, in close cooperation with the NARIC network, define the agenda for the near future for international recognition and suggests ways and actions to be taken by different stakeholders in the field of education and employment in Europe.

Much has been achieved in the field of recognition. This document clarifies the main results in legislation, methodology and procedures, networks and information and then outlines ten considerations for the recognition agenda.

With the ratification by many European states of the Lisbon Recognition Convention and the existence of the European Directives for professional recognition, the international legal framework is largely in place. The focus should now be on the enforcement of existing legislation and the elaboration, codification and promotion of European-wide standards for recognition, for example in the form of codes of good practice.

Bringing the structure of degrees in European countries closer together will eventually ease recognition. Still, a large and reliable flow of information will be necessary to sustain this development. Instruments for transparency such as the Diploma Supplement, but also digital information sources, will become increasingly important.

International recognition of diplomas and qualifications for academic purposes will continue to be important, and recognition for the labour market will grow intensively in importance. For most recognition agencies, this entails a switch of focus to a relatively new target group with specific needs.

Another related development is the concept of *Lifelong Learning*, together with the accompanying emergence of new educational providers and forms of education, including work-based learning, poses another challenge for recognition. This development requires different methods and procedures of assessment: from the evaluation of courses and curricula to the assessment of learning outcomes and competencies.

In all the issues mentioned, the issue of quality assurance is always at hand. Therefore the networks of national equivalence centres should closely cooperate with the relevant networks of quality assurance agencies.

¹ ENIC: European Network of Information Centers on Recognition and Mobility of the Council of Europe & UNESCO. NARIC: National Academic Information Centres of the European Commission.

INTRODUCTION

The ENIC/NARIC Working Party on recognition issues in the Bologna Process was established in order to ensure that the knowledge and experience of the ENIC and NARIC Networks is put to good use in the Bologna Process. Its aim is to identify recognition issues of importance to the Bologna Process where solutions have yet to be found and to submit proposals in time for them to be taken account of in the preparation of the Academic Convention to be held in Salamanca in March 2001 as well as the next Ministerial meeting in the Process, to be held in Praha in May 2001.

The Working Party met in Bruxelles on 1 March 2000, in Den Haag on 9 October 2000 and in Strasbourg on 12 January 2001. It was chaired by Mr. Jindra Divis (Dutch ENIC/NARIC), and the Council of Europe provided the main Secretariat for this Working Party. A list of the members of the Working Party is included in Appendix 2. The ENIC Bureau and the NARIC Advisory Board considered an advanced draft of the report on 16 November 2000, and the NARIC Network was informed of the report at its meeting on 17 November. The Working Party was authorized to finalize its report and to channel it into the relevant part of the Bologna Process.

THE BOLOGNA PROCESS

The Bologna Declaration was signed on 19 June 1999 by the Ministers of Education of 29 European countries (Appendix 1). The Bologna Declaration builds on the Sorbonne Declaration, signed in May 1998 by the Ministers of Education of France, Germany, Italy and the United Kingdom.

The Bologna Declaration is a key statement on higher education policy and reform in Europe. It is a part of a process – referred to as the Bologna Process – driven by the participating countries but also involving the European Commission, the CRE – Association of European Universities, the Confederation of Rectors Conferences of the European Union², the Council of Europe, the Student Platform and EURASHE as partners in the follow up process. The next major meetings in the Bologna Process will be the Academic Convention to be held in Salamanca on 29 – 30 March 2001 and the Ministerial Conference to be held in Praha on 18 –19 May 2001.

Five parts of the Bologna Declaration are particularly relevant to the recognition of qualifications:

- (i) The concern for “adoption of a system of easily readable and comparable degrees”. In this context, specific mention is made of the Diploma Supplement, whereas the Lisboa Recognition Convention was mentioned in the Sorbonne Declaration;

² The CRE and the Confederation will be merged into a new European University Association by the end of March 2001.

- (ii) the reform of higher education systems, where specific reference is made to the adoption of “a system essentially based on two main cycles” [i.e. prior to doctoral studies];
- (iii) a clear emphasis on the role of higher education in preparing students for the labour market, as exemplified in the statement “The degree awarded after the first cycle shall also be relevant to the European labour market as an appropriate level of qualification”;
- (iv) the establishment of a credit system, where specific reference is made to the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS). In this context, it may be interesting to note that ECTS transcripts can easily be incorporated into the Diploma Supplement; in fact, the Supplement recommends that institutions using the ECTS incorporate the transcripts;
- (v) “promotion of European co-operation in quality assurance”;

The present document takes the importance of recognition issues as underlined in the Bologna Process as its starting point. It aims to present some of the key issues that will need to be addressed to develop recognition policy further in the direction of creating a European Higher Education Area, and in particular to point to ways in which various actors, in particular the ENIC and NARIC Networks – as well as individual ENICs and NARICs – can contribute to this development. The overview of the key issues is preceded by a brief presentation of the Networks and of the most important achievements in the recognition of qualifications over the past few years.

THE STARTING POINT - ACHIEVEMENTS IN RECOGNITION

In order to look to the future, it may be useful to take a brief look at the past. Substantial progress has been made toward improving recognition over the past 15 years or so. Important achievements include:

The *Lisboa Recognition Convention* (Council of Europe/UNESCO) provides an overall framework for the recognition of qualifications in the European Region. It replaces a number of previous, by now outdated, conventions and provides an up to date legal framework. An updated list of signatures and ratifications may be found at <http://conventions.coe.int/treaty/EN/cadreprincipal.htm>.

European Directives 89/48/EEC and 92/51/EEC provide the framework for the recognition of qualifications for the purpose of access to regulated professions in the countries of the European Union and the European Economic Area.

The *Diploma Supplement*, developed jointly by the European Commission, the Council of Europe and UNESCO-CEPES, provides a format for describing individual qualifications in a way making it easier for foreign credential evaluators and admissions

officers to assess them. The Diploma Supplement helps situating a qualification within the education system to which it belongs.

The ***ECTS (European Credit Transfer System)***, developed by the European Commission, facilitates the transfer of credits obtained during periods of study abroad to the home institution (or another institution), so that students will not “lose” by doing part of their work for a degree at a foreign institution.

The ***ENIC and NARIC Networks*** provide an important forum for the development of European recognition policies and practice as well as for cooperation between individual information centres. The two Networks cooperate very closely and hold joint annual meetings as well as joint meetings of the ENIC Bureau and the NARIC Advisory Board. The ENIC Network also has a statutory role in the implementation of the Lisboa Recognition Convention. The NARIC Network encompasses the countries of the European Union and the European Economic Area as well as the Associated Countries. The ENIC Network encompasses all NARICs as well as all parties to the European Cultural Convention (Council of Europe), members of the UNESCO Europe Region, parties to the Lisboa Recognition Convention and/or parties to the UNESCO Regional Convention for Europe. The ENIC Network therefore covers all countries of Europe³ as well as Australia, Canada, Israel and the United States of America. While academic recognition is the main area of activity of both networks, many NARICs also function as contact points for the EU Directives on professional recognition.

The ***Recommendation on International Access Qualifications***, primarily developed by UNESCO/CEPES and adopted by the Lisboa Recognition Convention Committee in June 1999, will facilitate the recognition of school leaving qualifications not belonging to a national education system for the purpose of access to higher education.

Two important initiatives are also under preparation: a ***draft Code of Good Practice in the Provision of Transnational Education***, developed by a working party for which UNESCO/CEPES provided the main Secretariat, and a ***draft Recommendation on Criteria and Procedures for the Assessment of Foreign Qualifications and Periods of Study***, for which the Council of Europe provided the main Secretariat. It is hoped that both texts may be submitted to the Lisboa Recognition Convention Committee for adoption in 2001.

A number of other ***ENIC working parties*** have addressed specific recognition issues. In addition to those which have led to proposals for standard setting texts, such as on transnational education or criteria and procedures, these include the working parties on European – US recognition, Russian education, the recognition of qualifications held by refugees and the NEED group. The latter, active in the early 1990s, elaborated a first overview of the education and qualifications systems of the countries of Central and

³ Following the political changes in Serbia from October 2000, the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia is expected to join the ENIC Network in the near future. The Federal Republic of Yugoslavia has now been admitted as a member of UNESCO and has been invited to accede to the European Cultural Convention of the Council of Europe.

Eastern Europe after the political changes that made full pan-European cooperation possible.

The *ACE⁴ professional section of the European Association for International Education* (EAIE) has both some ENICs/NARICs and credential evaluators at higher education institutions among its members. It contributes to both the development of policy and good practice and to the training of credential evaluators in European standards and practice.

The *Multi Country PHARE programme* – both the recognition strand and the quality assurance strand - contributed to developing recognition practice in the participating PHARE countries and to develop the national information centres in these countries. The efforts made within both these strands with regard to dissemination have contributed to facilitating cooperation between recognition and quality assurance specialists.

Important developments have also taken place at *regional and national level*, both in the implementation of recognition policies and practice and not least in the training of credential evaluators as well as in awareness raising. For example, in many countries national seminars have provided training as well as a platform for discussion. In another example, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania have concluded a regional agreement on recognition, based on the principles of the Lisboa Recognition Convention. At Nordic level, there is also a well-established cooperation in the field of recognition, both on the basis of the 1975 Sigtuna Agreement, through cooperation in the framework of the Nordic Council of Ministers and between the Ministries of Education of the Nordic countries and through the Nordic Association of University Administrators (NUAS).

There have also been important developments at *institutional level*, not least in the development of *double or multiple degree programmes* where students obtain elements of their degree at two or more institutions. The institutional agreements which form the basis of these programmes represent a very concrete form of recognition.

All of the above developments have contributed to and partly codified what is perhaps the most important development of all: a *change of attitudes toward recognition*. Instead of making detailed comparisons of reading lists and curricula, the assessment of foreign qualifications is increasingly seeking to determine whether applicants have a comparable level of skills and competence as they would have had if they had held a degree of the home countries. This shift is reflected also linguistically, in that there is less talk about “equivalence” and more about “recognition”.

⁴ Admission officers and Credential Evaluators. For further information, please see the ACE web page: <http://www.lu.lv.ace>.

THE WAY FORWARD

While much has been achieved, much remains to be done. In this section of the paper, a series of considerations and questions will be formulated, and possible action is suggested as a way to meet the challenges described.

First consideration: the legal framework for recognition is largely in place

The backbone of this framework is the Council of Europe/UNESCO Lisboa Recognition Convention and the EU Directives on recognition for professional purposes. It can even be argued that we are reaching the limits of what can be regulated through legal provisions. Legislation is only useful to the extent that it can be implemented or enforced. Implementation or at least enforcement presupposes that States⁵ or supra-national bodies⁶ have a minimum authority in the matter. For academic recognition, the higher education institutions operate within a general framework of institutional autonomy. While they are bound by general regulations, there are therefore limits to direct state influence on the recognition decisions reached by individual institutions. New developments, like transnational education or other new forms and types of education, are also increasingly important, and some of these developments are not clearly linked to territorial jurisdiction. It is not clear that national or international/European legal authority is sufficient for legal measures to be a viable form of regulation of these developments.

While the international legal framework largely seems to be in place, there may, however, be a case for reviewing national legislation to verify that it is compatible with the international legal framework as well as to consider the possibility and desirability of establishing further agreements at regional level.

Suggested action

- (i) Countries in the European Region which have not yet done so, should be encouraged to sign and ratify the Council of Europe/UNESCO Lisboa Recognition Convention;
- (ii) National authorities should be encouraged to reconsider their national laws concerning the recognition of qualifications to make sure they are compatible with the international legal framework. In this process, they should make good use of ENICs/NARICs, as centres of competence on recognition matters and on structures and qualifications in a broad range of countries.
- (iii) National authorities should also be encouraged to establish regional and/or subject based agreements, where appropriate. Such agreements can be useful tools for concretizing the more general

⁵ Whether through central authorities or through local and regional authorities, cf. Section II of the Lisboa Recognition Convention.

⁶ Like the European Court of Human Rights (Strasbourg) with regard to the European Convention on Human Rights or the European Court of Justice (Luxembourg) for EU legislation.

provisions of the Lisboa Recognition Convention and applying them among a group of neighbouring countries. Such agreements should be non-discriminatory and focus on implementing the European framework at regional level. They should not contain provisions which would make it more difficult or cumbersome to recognize qualifications from outside of the region in question, or delivered in subjects or academic disciplines other than those covered by the agreements.

Second consideration: continuous efforts will be needed to improve the implementation of the legal framework

While the European legal framework for recognition is essentially in place and we may be close to the limits of what can be achieved through legislation, the European Higher Education Area will only be established through continuous efforts to improve the implementation of this framework through improved information on recognition issues (see third consideration, below) as well as through a number of other measures, in particular through the further development of standards and through institutional agreements and contacts.

Standards should here be taken to mean agreed norms for conduct or profile⁷ rather than a harmonization of degrees and study programmes, which would go against the European tradition of diversity. These standards will most likely not be binding legal instruments but standards which countries or institutions may adhere to or implement on a voluntary basis, such as recommendations and, in particular, codes of good practice. They may be subsidiary texts to the Lisboa Recognition Convention or they may be elaborated in other contexts. They may address overall recognition issues or be elaborated for one or a small group of academic disciplines or subject areas. In the latter case, they should be sufficiently flexible to allow candidates to move easily not only between education systems but also between subject areas, in order to facilitate career reorientation.

Even if such texts may not have formal legal status, this does not mean that they are less important in practice, as there may be consequences for those who do not adhere. For example, one of the intentions with the Code of Good Practice in the Provision of Transnational Education is clearly that education programmes that do not comply with the Code will generally not be given recognition, but it is also that programmes which do comply should also have some kind of assurance that the qualifications they issue will be fairly considered for recognition. Different kinds of instruments may be envisaged, ranging from Recommendations adopted by the Lisboa Recognition Convention Committee to codes of good practice. It seems reasonable to assume that developing good practice in various areas of recognition may be particularly important in the years to come, and an area in which the ENIC and NARIC Networks could play a considerable role.

⁷ One can also talk about European standards in other areas, e.g. human rights, where standards tend to be codified, or academic freedom and university governance, where standards are largely unwritten.

Double and multiple degree programmes are one of the important achievements in recognition over the past decade or so. Organized mobility programmes, such as SOCRATES or NORDPLUS, also presuppose institutional agreements on recognition. As these kinds of academic mobility become more important, the need for institutional agreements, especially on the recognition of periods of study, will increase. This will be particularly important for recognition for academic purposes, but will indirectly be important also for recognition for professional purposes.

It is, however, important to underline that institutional agreements and good practice should be developed within the framework of the European framework for recognition, such as the Lisboa Recognition Convention. Institutional agreements should be seen as a form of implementation of this overall framework. They may cover a wide range of disciplines or be subject based. The Diploma Supplement, elaborated jointly by the European Commission, the Council of Europe and UNESCO-CEPES, and the ECTS (European Credit Transfer System) are important tools designed to facilitate the recognition and transfer of qualifications and credits between higher education institutions. ENICs and NARICs can provide valuable assistance and advice on the elaboration of inter-institutional recognition agreements.

Suggested action

- (i) the ENIC and NARIC Networks, as well as the Lisboa Recognition Convention Committee, should give the highest priority to implementing the European legal framework for the recognition of qualifications, to disseminate information on this legal framework and to develop and encourage good practice. ENICs/NARICs should play the same role at national level, in cooperation with Ministries and higher education institutions;
- (ii) in this, they should consider further developing European norms that could contribute to further developing good practice;
- (iii) the ENIC and NARIC networks as well as national authorities and higher education institutions should work to implement the Diploma Supplement;
- (iv) ENICs/NARICs as well as higher education institutions should seek to expand the use of the Diploma Supplement and the ECTS;
- (v) ENICs and NARICs should provide assistance and advice on the elaboration of inter-institutional recognition agreements.

Third consideration: the diversity of higher education systems makes reliable information increasingly important for recognition

This has to do with the development of European higher education. The Bologna Declaration foresees two major levels of qualifications – undergraduate and graduate - as well as a minimum duration for each level. This, however, should not be seen as an attempt at harmonization. Rather, it seems reasonable to assume that the European Higher Education Area will still be characterized by its diversity. There is a tendency today to design ever more specialized study programmes and qualifications. This has many

positive sides, but does not contribute to “readability”, to stay with the language of the Bologna Declaration.

There is therefore a need to provide a systematized framework for this diversity, and the Bologna Declaration proposes one such framework. The ENIC and NARIC Networks have an important role to play both in helping design this part of the framework for a European Higher Education Area and, once the framework has been designed and accepted, elaborating models and formats for providing information in such a way that it relates to the framework and is seen as transparent and meaningful. The ENIC and NARIC Networks should therefore elaborate and promote European standards or models for the provision of information on higher education systems. In this context, it should be recalled that the European Commission/Council of Europe/UNESCO-CEPES Diploma Supplement provides a format for the description of individual qualifications. It may therefore be particularly important to develop formats for the description of higher education systems.

A thorough implementation of the Diploma Supplement will also require a major effort. The European Commission is now launching an implementation project for the EU/EEA countries. It could be argued that a major implementation project for all “Bologna countries” would be a natural part of the Process, but this would require extra funding.

The reform of higher education systems towards a two tier model, as outlined in the Bologna Declaration, may well lead to a more uniform terminology. This terminology may, however, conceal significant differences between systems within a common framework. Information on such remaining differences will be an important task for the ENIC and NARIC Networks. These differences may not necessarily be an obstacle to recognition provided that differences are not seen in terms of “less good” but rather in terms of different emphasis or orientation at similar levels of qualification.

Another concern is how to make sure that the information provided is up to date. The ENIC Network has appointed a Working Party on electronic communication and information that will address a number of issues related to the provision, update and organization of information, as well as communication between ENICs. Information on the ENIC Network on the Web is one important step in this direction.

Suggested action

- (i) The ENIC and NARIC Networks should help design the part of the framework for a European Higher Education Area concerning qualifications;
- (ii) the ENIC and NARIC Networks should propose further European standards or formats for the provision of information on higher education systems and qualifications in order to make these more easily “readable”;
- (iii) in this context, the ENIC and NARIC Networks as well as national authorities and higher education institutions should work further to implement the Diploma Supplement.

Fourth consideration: recognition will become an increasingly important issue for the labour market

Three different kinds of recognition may be identified:

- (i) academic recognition;
- (ii) *de jure* professional recognition for access to regulated professions;
- (iii) *de facto* professional recognition for access to the non-regulated parts of the labour market.

It can, however, reasonably be argued that the main distinction is between *de jure* professional recognition (i.e. recognition for access to regulated professions) and all other forms of recognition. If the labour market is increasingly an international one, it follows that recognition for the purpose of access to the non-regulated part of the labour market will also be increasingly important. This assessment will need to take account not only of formal higher education qualifications but also of competence gained through relevant work experience. Such assessment will be important both for access to the non-regulated part of the labour market and in the case of persons wanting to return to the higher education system to further and update their qualifications on the basis of both a previous higher education qualification and work experience.

Employers will increasingly need reliable information on foreign qualifications, e.g. through recognition statements⁸ from competent recognition authorities. Credential evaluators will therefore increasingly be faced with issues of *de facto* professional recognition, which will require a further development of their skills and, in some cases, a change of attitudes. ENICs and NARICs should play an important role in providing such information, in training employers, professional bodies and other labour market partners in recognition issues and practices and in working with them to define their needs with regard to recognition.

Suggested action

- (i) the ENIC and NARIC Networks should develop methodologies, procedures and descriptions adapted to the needs of the assessment of qualifications for the non-regulated part of the labour market;
- (ii) the ENIC and NARIC Networks, as well as national authorities and individual ENICs/NARICs, should develop contacts with employers, professional bodies and other labour market partners in order to improve information and training on recognition issues.

⁸ These are not necessarily formal recognition decisions, but could be expert statements on a person's competencies as certified by a higher education qualification.

Fifth consideration: there will be an increasing number of applications for the recognition of non-traditional learning

This has to do with changes in the way in which knowledge and skills are developed and conveyed – i.e. changes in teaching and learning. The traditional classroom or campus will be the setting for a smaller proportion of the overall education effort. More education will be delivered through the Internet, through transnational arrangements, through a combination of traditional and non-traditional learning, through the recognition of various kinds of prior learning, including work based and technology based learning.

Much non-traditional learning will be provided on a different time scale. For this, lifelong learning is a key concept, but not “just” in the form of specifically designed courses for those already employed who have a degree, who need to develop their competence further, and who are prepared to pay substantial fees for this (or whose employers are prepared to do so). Rather, lifelong learning will become a better integrated part of the mission of higher education. One crucial question will be whether to develop a separate set of qualifications for non-traditional learning, or whether to integrate non-traditional learning into the overall qualifications structure⁹. The former option risks branding non-traditional learning as second rate, and the questions of recognition will still have to be dealt with. The second option requires substantial rethinking of the way qualifications are earned and recognized. The concept of learning paths should be added to the concept of study programmes: rather than talking about non-traditional qualifications, the aim should be to develop alternative paths to a common set of qualifications and to assess these qualifications on the strength of the skills and competencies they convey rather than on the way in which the qualifications were earned.

Suggested action

- (i) national authorities as well as the Council of Europe, UNESCO, the European Commission and other international organizations should explore ways in which to incorporate non-traditional ways of reaching a given qualification (e.g. through lifelong learning arrangements) within the framework of the European Higher Education Area;
- (ii) the ENIC and NARIC Networks should develop methods and procedures of assessing qualifications earned through alternative learning paths on the strength of the skills and competencies they convey.

⁹ See also the proceedings of the Council of Europe workshop on Structures and Qualifications in Lifelong Learning (9 – 11 November 2000, Krajnska Gora, Slovenia). The workshop was part of the project “Lifelong Learning for Equity and Social Cohesion: a new Challenge to Higher Education” of the Council of Europe’s Higher Education and Research Committee (CC-HER).

Sixth consideration: there will be an increasing number of applications for recognition of qualifications earned through transnational arrangements

Transnational education may be seen as a sub-category of non-traditional education. However, the explosive growth in transnational arrangements as well as the fact that such arrangements are delivered independently – or outside – of any territorial jurisdiction warrant a separate consideration of transnational education. Franchised higher education, off shore institutions and Internet-based virtual higher education are some frequent forms of transnational higher education provision, but the examples are far from exhaustive, and new forms of transnational provision are likely to be developed in the years to come.

Transnational education provision may offer increased opportunities to those who may not be able to gain a place of study in a traditional higher education programme and may also offer opportunities to develop new forms of learning and teaching. There is, however, a considerable problem of controlling the quality of transnational education programmes and in ensuring that students are given adequate and accurate information on the transnational programmes in which they may want to enrol. This is in large part linked to the lack or ambiguous state of national and international jurisdiction over such provision. The rapid development of communication and information technology makes the issue of territorial jurisdiction even more complicated but probably also less relevant. Information and the implementation of good practice will be more important than legal regulations in helping students and employers distinguish good transnational programmes from less good ones.

UNESCO-CEPES and the Council of Europe have elaborated a draft Code of Good Practice for the provision of Transnational Education. The draft Code was approved by the ENIC Network at its 2000 meeting (Bruxelles, 22 – 24 May) and will be submitted for adoption to the Lisboa Recognition Convention Committee at its next meeting (Rīga, 6 June 2001).

Suggested action

- (i) The Lisboa Recognition Convention Committee should adopt the draft Code of Good Practice for the provision of Transnational Education;
- (ii) The ENIC and NARIC Networks as well as national authorities should work to implement this code, and in particular develop ways to provide reliable information on transnational education programmes to students and employers.

Seventh consideration: more emphasis should be put on assessing learning outcomes and competencies

The developments outlined in the fourth, fifth and sixth considerations all lead in the direction of putting more emphasis on assessing learning outcomes and competencies rather than the way in which qualifications have been earned. This is not to say that this aspect is absent today. In fact, there have already been encouraging developments in this

direction. For example, work is under way in the Netherlands (e.g. through the ACCEPT project of NUFFIC, the Dutch ENIC/NARIC), Sweden and the United Kingdom. The European Language Portfolio, developed by the Council of Europe's Modern Languages Division, provide a framework for the description of foreign language skills. Future versions of the ECTS are also likely to emphasize learning outcomes more strongly.

However, this development will need to be taken further. Learning outcomes describe the more or less traditional objectives of the curriculum or the educational process, whereas competencies describe the actual skills and abilities of the person concerned, independently of whether these have been acquired through formal education programmes, informal learning or even work experience. Methods and procedures must be developed that allow learning outcomes and competencies to be described and compared. The past and current emphasis on length of study is in part explained by the fact that length of study (especially when expressed as years of study, which is not the only measure of time) is seen as an easily quantifiable and understandable indication of workload. It is not ideal, and objections have been raised, but it still seems reasonably well accepted, also by those whose applications for recognition are not fully accepted. If we are to move further toward a direct assessment of learning outcomes and competencies, alternative standards will have to be developed.

Suggested action

- (i) national authorities and higher education institutions should review the way in which higher education programmes and qualifications are described in order to ensure that these give an adequate description of the competencies conveyed by the programme;
- (ii) the ENIC and NARIC Networks, in cooperation with national quality assurance agencies, should develop international standards for the assessment and recognition of competencies, as well as ways in which adequate information may be provided in this area.

Eighth consideration: the link between recognition and quality assessment/accreditation should be strengthened

This is a logical consequence of diversification. With a wide choice of higher education provisions, much of it beyond the confines of traditional state provision, the need to distinguish the good programmes from the less good ones increases. This is partly a question of students having a right to make informed choices on education, partly of employers and other higher education institutions having a right to fair information on the qualifications they are asked to recognize. Students may choose to spend their time and money earning qualifications that will not readily be recognized, but they should be informed that this would be the likely consequence of their choice. This also implies at least a tacit promise of recognition if certain conditions are fulfilled. Thus, students who follow

- study programmes recognized as belonging to a national education system by the competent authorities of the country in question;
- study programmes delivered under arrangements conforming to international good practice;
- study programme otherwise validated through a quality assessment system;

should also have a right to expect that their qualifications will be recognized.

The European Network for Quality Assessment (ENQA) has recently been established for the EU countries. This is a very positive development, and cooperation should be encouraged between the ENIC and NARIC Networks and the ENQA, while the ENQA should also be encouraged to expand its membership to non-EU countries.

Suggested action

- (i) The ENIC and NARIC Networks should seek to strengthen their cooperation with national quality assessment and accreditation agencies and networks;
- (ii) the recently established European Network for Quality Assessment (ENQA) should be encouraged to expand its membership to non-EU countries.

Ninth consideration: some special efforts will be required in certain parts of Europe

While almost all States party to the European Cultural Convention and/or members of the UNESCO Europe Region participate in the ENIC and/or NARIC Networks, special efforts may for various reasons be required in certain countries or regions. The Bologna Declaration specifically mentions South East Europe, where the Council of Europe and UNESCO, as well as the European Commission, are active. The ENIC and NARIC Networks have experience and expertise that would be highly relevant to developing recognition policies and practice in areas that require special attention from the international community. Such action would be an important contribution to bringing additional countries into the European Higher Education Area in a formal or informal way.

Suggested action

- (i) The ENIC and NARIC Networks should undertake action to assist with the development of recognition policy and practice in countries with special needs;
- (ii) This action should include advice and assistance to national authorities of the countries concerned to establish national information centres on recognition in order to provide transparent and reliable information on their education systems.

Tenth consideration: improved recognition policies will contribute to strengthening the external dimension of the Bologna Process

One stated aim of the Bologna Process is to make European higher education more competitive in other parts of the world. At the same time, the Bologna Process has attracted attention well outside of Europe, not least in Latin America.

Improving recognition policies and procedures and providing a more transparent description of European education systems and qualifications will help strengthen the international position of European higher education. At the same time, these policies are in some ways models for other regions. The measures outlined in this document may therefore serve the external dimension of the Bologna Process in two ways: both in making European higher education more transparent and better known internationally and in helping improve recognition policies and practice in other parts of the world. This will also benefit European higher education by facilitating the recognition of European qualifications outside of Europe. The ENIC network is a particularly valuable tool in this respect, both because it includes non-European members and because it can cooperate directly with similar UNESCO networks for other parts of the world.

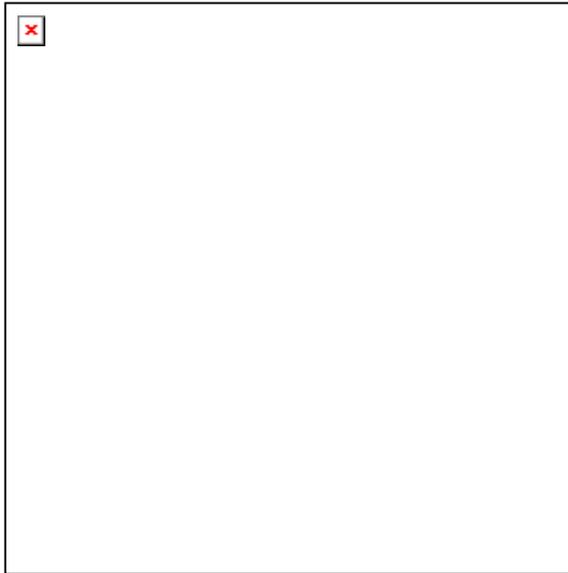
In the spirit of the Bologna Declaration, which underlines the importance of cooperation between European higher education and other parts of the world, the expertise of the ENIC and NARIC networks should also be used to strengthen work on recognition issues outside of the European Higher Education Area. In the context of the Lisboa Recognition Convention, contacts with the other UNESCO Regions and Regional Conventions for other parts of the world are also important, and this could be the basis for a concrete European contribution in this direction.

Suggested action

- (i) the ENIC and NARIC networks should intensify their efforts in providing information on European qualifications to non-European partners;
- (ii) the ENIC and NARIC Networks should cooperate with other parts of the world, in particular within the UNESCO framework, with a view to sharing their experience with the recognition of qualifications in Europe and assisting in the further development of recognition policies and practice.

CONCLUSION

Fair recognition and effective procedures are essential to the realization of the European Higher Education Area. The ENIC and NARIC Networks should make key contributions to implementing this goal.

APPENDIX 1

**THE EUROPEAN HIGHER
EDUCATION AREA**
**Joint declaration of the European Ministers of Education
Convened in Bologna on the 19th of June 1999**

The European process, thanks to the extraordinary achievements of the last few years, has become an increasingly concrete and relevant reality for the Union and its citizens. Enlargement prospects together with deepening relations with other European countries provide even wider dimensions to that reality. Meanwhile, we are witnessing a growing awareness in large parts of the political and academic world and in public opinion of the need to establish a more complete and far-reaching Europe, in particular building upon and strengthening its intellectual, cultural, social and scientific and technological dimensions.

A Europe of Knowledge is now widely recognised as an irreplaceable factor for social and human growth and as an indispensable component to consolidate and enrich the European citizenship, capable of giving its citizens the necessary competencies to face the challenges of the new millennium, together with an awareness of shared values and belonging to a common social and cultural space.

The importance of education and educational co-operation in the development and strengthening of stable, peaceful and democratic societies is universally acknowledged as paramount, the more so in view of the situation in South East Europe.

The Sorbonne declaration of 25th of May 1998, which was underpinned by these considerations, stressed the Universities' central role in developing European cultural dimensions. It emphasised the creation of the European area of higher education as a key way to promote citizens' mobility and employability and the Continent's overall development.

Several European countries have accepted the invitation to commit themselves to achieving the objectives set out in the declaration, by signing it or expressing their agreement in principle. The direction taken by several higher education reforms launched in the meantime in Europe has proved many Governments' determination to act.

European higher education institutions, for their part, have accepted the challenge and taken up a main role in constructing the European area of higher education, also in the wake of the fundamental principles laid down in the Bologna Magna Charta Universitatum of 1988. This is of the highest importance, given that Universities' independence and autonomy ensure that higher education and research systems continuously adapt to changing needs, society's demands and advances in scientific knowledge.

The course has been set in the right direction and with meaningful purpose. The achievement of greater compatibility and comparability of the systems of higher education nevertheless requires continual momentum in order to be fully accomplished. We need to support it through promoting concrete measures to achieve tangible forward steps. The 18th June meeting saw participation by authoritative experts and scholars from all our countries and provides us with very useful suggestions on the initiatives to be taken.

We must in particular look at the objective of increasing the international competitiveness of the European system of higher education. The vitality and efficiency of any civilisation can be measured by the appeal that its culture has for other countries. We need to ensure that the European higher education system acquires a worldwide degree of attraction equal to our extraordinary cultural and scientific traditions.

While affirming our support to the general principles laid down in the Sorbonne declaration, we engage in co-ordinating our policies to reach in the short term, and in any case within the first decade of the third millennium, the following objectives, which we consider to be of primary relevance in order to establish the European area of higher education and to promote the European system of higher education world-wide:

Adoption of a system of easily readable and comparable degrees, also through the implementation of the Diploma Supplement, in order to promote European citizens employability and the international competitiveness of the European higher education system
Adoption of a system essentially based on two main cycles, undergraduate and graduate. Access to the second cycle shall require successful completion of first cycle studies, lasting a minimum of three years. The degree awarded after the first cycle shall also be relevant to the European labour market as an appropriate level of qualification. The second cycle should lead to the master and/or doctorate degree as in many European countries.

Establishment of a system of credits - such as in the ECTS system - as a proper means of promoting the most widespread student mobility. Credits could also be acquired in non-higher education contexts, including lifelong learning, provided they are recognised by receiving Universities concerned.

Promotion of mobility by overcoming obstacles to the effective exercise of free movement with

particular attention to:

- for students, access to study and training opportunities and to related services
 - for teachers, researchers and administrative staff, recognition and valorisation of periods spent in a European context researching, teaching and training, without prejudicing their statutory rights.

- Promotion of European co-operation in quality assurance with a view to developing comparable criteria and methodologies
- Promotion of the necessary European dimensions in higher education, particularly with regards to curricular development, inter-institutional co-operation, mobility schemes and integrated programmes of study, training and research.

We hereby undertake to attain these objectives - within the framework of our institutional competencies and taking full respect of the diversity of cultures, languages, national education systems and of University autonomy - to consolidate the European area of higher education. To that end, we will pursue the ways of intergovernmental co-operation, together with those of non-governmental European organisations with competence on higher education. We expect Universities again to respond promptly and positively and to contribute actively to the success of our endeavour.

Convinced that the establishment of the European area of higher education requires constant support, supervision and adaptation to the continuously evolving needs, we decide to meet again within two years in order to assess the progress achieved and the new steps to be taken.

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| Caspar EINEM Minister of Science and Transport (Austria) | Gerard SCHMIT Director General of French Community Ministry for Higher Education and Research (Belgium) |
| Jan ADE Director General Ministry of the Flemish Community Department of Education (Belgium) | Anna Mmia TOTOMANOVA Vice Minister of Education and Science (Bulgaria) |
| Eduard ZEMAN Minister of Education, Youth and Sport (Czech Republic) | Margrethe VESTAGER Minister of Education (Denmark) |
| Tonis LUKAS Minister of Education (Estonia) | Maija RASK Minister of Education and Science (Finland) |
| Claude ALLEGRE Minister of National Education, Research and Technology (France) | Wolf-Michael CATENHUSEN Parliamentary State Secretary Federal Ministry of Education and Research (Germany) |
| Ute ERDSIEK-RAVE Minister of Education, Science, Research And Culture of the Land Schleswig-Holstein | Gherassimos ARSENIS Minister of Public Education and Religious Affairs |

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| (Permanent Conference of the Ministers of Culture of the German Länders) | (Greece) |
| Adam KISS Deputy State Secretary for Higher Education and Science (Hungary) | Gudridur SIGURDARDOTTIR Secretary General Ministry of Education, Science and Culture (Iceland) |
| Pat DOWLING Principal Officer Ministry for Education and Science (Ireland) | Ortensio ZECCHINO Minister of University and Scientific And Technological Research (Italy) |
| Tatiana KOKEK State Minister of Higher Education and Science (Latvia) | Kornelijus PLATELIS Minister of Education and Science (Lithuania) |

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| Erna HENNICOT-SCHOEPGES Minister of National Education and Vocational Training (Luxembourg) | Louis GALEA Minister of Education (Malta) |
| Loek HERMANS Minister of Education, Culture and Science (the Netherlands) | Jon LILLETUN Minister of Education, Research and Church Affairs (Norway) |
| Wilibald WINKLER Under Secretary of State of National Education (Poland) | Eduardo Marçal GRILO Minister of Education (Portugal) |
| Andrei MARGA Minister of National Education (Romania) | Milan FTACNIK Minister of Education (Slovak Republic) |
| Pavel ZGAGA State Secretary for Higher Education (Slovenia) | D.Jorge FERNANDEZ DIAZ Secretary of State of Education, Universities, Research and Development (Spain) |
| Agneta BLADH State Secretary for Education and Science (Sweden) | Charles KLEIBER State Secretary for Science and Research (Swiss Confederation) |
| Baroness Tessa BLACKSTONE of Stoke Newington Minister of State for Education and Employment (United Kingdom) | |

APPENDIX 2**MEMBERS OF THE WORKING PARTY**

Chair: Mr. Jindra Divis, Dutch ENIC/NARIC

Members: Ms. Carita Blomqvist, Finnish ENIC/NARIC
Ms. Graça Fialho, University of Lisboa
Mr. Guy Haug, CRE – Association of European Universities
Ms. Chantal Kaufmann, Belgian ENIC/NARIC (French Community) –
Vice President of the ENIC Network
Ms. Jette Kirstein, Danish ENIC/NARIC (until 31 October 2000; Cirius
from 1 November 2000)
Ms. Ginette Nabavi, European Commission/DG Education and Culture –
Chair of the NARIC Network
Mr. Ulf Öhlund, Swedish ENIC/NARIC
Mr. Andrejs Rauhvargers, Latvian ENIC-NARIC - President of the ENIC
Network
Mr. Jan Sadlak, Director of UNESCO-CEPES
Ms. Štěpánka Skuhrová, Czech ENIC/NARIC
Mr. Lazar Vlăsceanu, Programme Specialist - Deputy Director of
UNESCO - CEPES

Mr. Christian Tauch, German Rectors' Conference (HRK), participated in
the final meeting of the Working Party

Secretary: Mr. Sjur Bergan, Head of the Higher Education and Research Division,
Council of Europe