

**ENIC NETWORK (COUNCIL OF EUROPE/UNESCO)
NARIC NETWORK (EUROPEAN COMMISSION)**

DGIV/EDU/HE (2004) 17
ED-2004/UNESCO-CEPES/ENIC.11/9
DGEAC/NARIC/04-19
Strasbourg/Bruxelles/Bucureşti, 16 April 2004

11th Joint Meeting of the ENIC and NARIC Networks
7 – 8 June 2004
Room 9, Council of Europe Headquarters, Strasbourg

**STRASBOURG STATEMENT ON
RECOGNITION ISSUES IN THE EUROPEAN
HIGHER EDUCATION AREA
CONTRIBUTIONS BY THE ENIC AND NARIC NETWORKS
TO THE BOLOGNA PROCESS**

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ITEM 9

Distribution: meeting
Document available on <http://www.coe.int/DGIVRestricted>

1. Already on the day the Bologna Declaration was adopted, the **ENIC and NARIC Networks** declared their willingness to **contribute to the creation of a European Higher Education Area** (EHEA), and they have outlined how recognition of qualifications may be improved to help make the EHEA a reality by 2010. Thus, at their annual meetings in 1999 and in 2003, the ENIC and NARIC Networks adopted statements outlining their contributions, and in 2001 they adopted a report on Recognition Issues in the Bologna Process.
2. As the ENIC and NARIC Networks meet in 2004, in Strasbourg, the Bologna Process approaches the **half way mark** between the adoption of the Bologna Declaration and the establishment of the EHEA. As underlined by the Ministers in their Berlin Communiqué, this is a time for refining goals as well as for taking stock of results. Half way on the road to the European Higher Education Area, **the ENIC and NARIC Networks reconfirm their commitment to the Bologna Process and reinforce their efforts to facilitate the recognition of qualifications within the European Higher Education Area** as well as between the EHEA and other parts of the world.
3. In this context, the ENIC and NARIC Networks recall that their contribution to the European Higher Education Area is particularly valuable in **building bridges** between education systems and qualifications and as fora for the further development of recognition policies in the European Region as well as between this region and other parts of the world.

The Lisboa Recognition Convention

4. In Berlin, Ministers called on all States party to the Bologna Process to ratify the Lisboa Recognition Convention. The ENIC and NARIC Networks note with satisfaction that at the time of their 2004 meeting, 38 States¹ have already done so, of which 31 are parties to the Bologna Process and one further country has applied for access to the Process. The Networks, in cooperation with the Lisboa Recognition Convention Committee, will continue their efforts to encourage further ratifications. Their main efforts will, however, be focused on **improving the implementation** of the Lisboa Recognition Convention as well as the European Union Directives on professional recognition.

ECTS and the Diploma Supplement

5. The ENIC and NARIC Networks also note with satisfaction the commitment undertaken by Ministers to issue the Diploma Supplement to all students automatically and free of charge in a widely spoken language by 2005 and their call for developing the European Credit Transfer System to a transfer and accumulation system for lifelong learning. **The Networks pledge their cooperation in these undertakings.**

¹ As of 16 April 2004

Joint Degrees

6. The ENIC and NARIC Networks have made an important contribution to the European dimension of the Bologna Process by elaborating a draft **Recommendation on the recognition of joint degrees**. The Recommendation will be submitted to the Lisboa Recognition Convention Committee for adoption on 9 June 2004.

Quality Assurance

7. The **improved recognition of qualifications is intimately linked to improved and transparent quality assurance** through cooperation between national systems based on a common understanding of goals, procedures and methods. The ENIC and NARIC Networks contribute to this effort through regular discussions with ENQA and are willing to engage in discussions with other relevant organizations.
8. The Networks wholeheartedly support the principle that the recognition of qualifications be made contingent on the provider of education having been subjected to transparent quality assessment. They draw the attention of Ministers to the fact that this principle cannot be implemented unless all providers have **adequate access to quality assessment**, regardless of whether the providers are public or private, a part of a national higher education system or not, leading to a full qualification or not, and unless the **outcomes of quality assessments are made public**.

Qualifications Frameworks

9. In the elaboration of qualifications frameworks, the definition of learning outcomes will be of key importance, as it will be in the **further development of a fair recognition of qualifications based on what a person knows and is able to do** rather than on the formal procedures that have led to the qualifications. A satisfactory definition of learning outcomes is one of the major challenges the Bologna Process will face, and it is an area in which the concerns of policy makers, recognition specialists, quality assurance agencies and other stakeholders come together. The ENIC and NARIC Networks are prepared to contribute to the definition of learning outcomes and the further development of good recognition practice in this area, including the results obtained by the Joint Quality Initiative and the TUNING project as well as the outcomes of the Bologna seminar on learning outcomes to be organized by the United Kingdom in Edinburgh in July 2004.
10. The ENIC and NARIC Networks therefore underline the importance of **drawing fully on the experience of the “recognition community” in developing an overarching qualifications framework for the European Higher Education Area** as well as in establishing national qualifications frameworks. They declare themselves fully prepared to contribute to the development of an EHEA qualifications framework under the authority and coordination of the Bologna Follow Up Group, leading to a recommendation to the Bergen Ministerial

Conference in May 2005. The Networks take this opportunity to underline the considerable benefits that a qualifications framework for the European Higher Education Area could entail in **providing an overarching framework within which the learning outcomes of individual qualifications**, as defined by the relevant national qualifications framework, would be placed. This EHEA framework would therefore considerably simplify the recognition of qualifications and – through the national qualifications frameworks, also ensure that the quality of the qualification has been assessed.

Lifelong Learning

11. The elaboration of qualifications frameworks and the definition of learning outcomes will also be crucial to **furthering the fair recognition of qualifications earned through lifelong learning paths and arrangements**. Lifelong Learning is developing into a concept that encompasses all learning, including prior learning assessment and recognition, regardless of educational providers and learning paths. Higher education plays an important role in this concept, by being the main provider of advanced qualifications that will form the backbone of a qualifications framework. From the perspective of recognition it is crucial that qualifications frameworks provide the transparency needed to provide a fair recognition of qualifications regardless of the learning paths through which they have been obtained. This is a crucial aspect of the European Higher Education Area, including as a measure to improve opportunities for underrepresented groups to earn to higher education qualifications. The ENIC and NARIC Networks will continue to work on the recognition of lifelong learning achievements in this context.

Information on recognition

12. **Clear, relevant and to-the-point information on recognition and higher education systems, well adapted to main target groups**, will be of key importance to enable employers, individual holders of qualifications, higher education institutions and public authorities to take full advantage of the possibilities offered by the European Higher Education Area. The ENIC and NARIC Networks and their individual member centres will continue to play an important role in providing such information, which must bring together information on education systems and qualification frameworks, higher education institutions and individual qualifications. To this effect, the ENIC and NARIC Networks, at their 2004 meeting, adopted a **new information strategy**.

Transnational Education²

13. The issue of **transnational education**, and in particular higher education provision not rooted in a national system, continues to be of concern and requires a

² The terms transnational, cross border and borderless education are all in current use, sometimes with slightly different meanings. In this text, the term transnational education is used as a generic term, in line with the previous practice of the ENIC and NARIC Networks and adopted texts, such as the Code of Good Practice in the Provision of Transnational Education.

coordinated response through cooperation between policy makers and specialists in recognition and quality assurance.

14. In this area where, due to the unclear status or even absence of physical jurisdiction, **legal measures are only partially useful** in distinguishing the well structured and legitimate providers of cross border education from those that are less well structured and that provide offers of questionable quality. Potential students, employers and other users of qualifications stemming from transnational or cross border arrangements are in particular **need of reliable and transparent information on the status and quality of providers and their qualifications**. If such information is not made available by providers as well as by competent education authorities, the most likely consequence is that serious cross border education providers will find fair recognition unduly difficult to obtain, while on the other hand many potential students, employers and other users will continue to be misled by unscrupulous education providers.
15. To **improve information in this crucial area**, the ENIC and NARIC Networks will publish **an overview of questions prospective students and employers should ask** of education providers. The overview will be widely disseminated by the Networks and their member centres and should also be disseminated through Ministries and other relevant bodies at national level. As a further step, a working group is overseeing a pilot project on an information database network on transnational education providers.
16. The ENIC and NARIC Networks also recall that in 2001, the Lisboa Recognition Convention Committee adopted a **Code of Good Practice in the Provision of Transnational Education**. The ENIC and NARIC Networks have also contributed to **two studies on transnational education in Europe**, financed and launched by the European Commission, and they have contributed to the **UNESCO Global Forum on International Quality Assurance, Accreditation and the Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education**.

Recognition for the labour market

17. If the labour market is increasingly an international one, as is foreseen in the Bologna Process, it follows that **recognition for the purpose of access to the non-regulated part of the labour market** will also be increasingly important. **Employers will increasingly need reliable information on foreign qualifications**. 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 will 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.

Cooperation with other regions of the world

18. Fair recognition of qualifications is also an essential part of – and precondition for – higher education cooperation between the European region and other parts of the world. The ENIC and NARIC Networks provide, on the one hand, a forum for linking and exchanging the exceptionally broad knowledge individual national centres have of other education systems and, on the other hand, a unique platform for the development of good recognition policies and practice. **Improving the exchange of information with competent recognition authorities of other regions, particularly through the framework of UNESCO, as well as cooperating on the further development of recognition practice will therefore be a significant contribution to the “external dimension” of the Bologna Process.**

Further Development of Recognition Issues in the Bologna Process

19. Three years after the original report on Recognition Issues in the Bologna Process, the ENIC and NARIC Networks take pleasure in seeing that much has already been done to address the issues outlined in the report. At the same time, the Networks recognize the need to review the agenda of recognition issues in the light of developments in the Bologna Process as well as in other areas of higher education policies. Therefore, they will appoint *[have appointed]* a Working Party to review the goals for recognition in the Bologna Process *[, with a view to making proposals in time for the Bergen Ministerial meeting/contributing to the Bologna work programme for the period 2005 – 2007]*

The Development of the Networks and the National Centres

20. In 2002, the NARIC Network underwent an evaluation by external experts. While formally limited to the NARIC Network, the evaluation *de facto* also had implications for the ENIC Network as well as for national centres. The recommendations made by the evaluators and endorsed by the SOCRATES Committee are now being implemented and will form a basis for a discussion of the future work of the Networks. At their 2004 meeting, the ENIC and NARIC Networks adopted a Charter for national information centres which will better enable ENICs/NARICs to play a key role in the implementation of the Bologna Process in their respective countries and that will also guide the Networks in fulfilling the same role in the European Region.

Persistent Recognition Problems

21. In spite of the progress made in the recognition of qualifications over the past decade, recognition problems remain a significant obstacle to the establishment of a European Higher Education Area as well as to cooperation between the European Region and other parts of the world. While the ENIC and NARIC Networks are committed to the continued improvement of recognition, they also feel obliged to point out that a number of **persistent recognition problems arise from inadequate legal provision in member states, insufficient resources and, in some cases,**

inflexible attitudes concerned more with the letter of the law than with the reasonable interpretation of its spirit, leading to undue delays, problems of non-recognition and discrimination and perceptions of inefficiency and ill will.

Conclusion

22. The ENIC and NARIC Networks will continue to do their utmost to help make the European Higher Education Area a reality by 2010, to further develop recognition policies and practice in the European Region and to further the fair recognition of qualifications between the European Region and other parts of the world. In particular, the Networks will:
- a. continue to improve the provision of information on recognition to students, institutions, employers and other stakeholders;
 - b. work with ENQA and other partners to ensure fair recognition based on transparent quality assessment according to agreed standards in the European region;
 - c. contribute to the development of a qualifications framework for the European Higher Education Area in which all stakeholders will find their place and that will be of use to both higher education institutions and in furthering fair recognition;
 - d. continue the development of recognition methods to meet the challenge of giving fair recognition in the context of lifelong learning;
 - e. work to solve persistent recognition problems, in cooperation with Ministries, higher education institutions and networks and other partners.