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# **COUNCIL OF EUROPE CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE BOLOGNA PROCESS**

Directorate General IV: Education, Culture and Heritage, Youth and Sport  
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Distribution: Bologna Follow Up  
Group  
CD-ESR delegations and observers  
General

## INTRODUCTION

The Bologna Process is the most important and wide ranging reform *of* higher education in Europe since the immediate aftermath *of* 1968. The ultimate aim *of* the Process is to establish a European Higher Education Area by 2010 in which staff and students can move with ease and have fair recognition *of* their qualifications.

The purpose *of* the present document is to provide a brief overview *of* the Council *of* Europe's contribution to this Process. A first version was submitted to the Bologna Follow Up Group for the meeting held on November 4, 2002.

## THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE CONTRIBUTION

The Council of Europe is now firmly established as an important contributor to the Bologna Process, in several ways:

- (i) as an observer in the formal structures of the process; on the Follow Up Group as well as on the Preparatory Group;
- (ii) as a bridge between those countries party to the Process and the remaining European countries that may benefit from the Process but that are not party to it;
- (iii) as a platform for debate between Ministry and academic representatives, through the double composition *of* CD-ESR representatives, and the role of the EUA and ESIB as observers on the Committee as well as the Council's close cooperation with both organizations;
- (iv) as an important actor in the field *of* recognition;
- (v) through other aspects of the activities programme.

The role *of* the *Steering Committee for Higher Education and Research (CD-ESR)* <sup>1</sup> is crucial in that it comprises government and academic delegates from the 48 States party to the European Cultural Convention as well as observers representing countries<sup>1</sup> relevant *to* the external dimension of the Bologna Process and international IGOs and NGOs active in the higher education field, notably the *EUA* and ESIB. At the 2001 and 2002 plenary sessions of the Committee, its round table debate focused on the Bologna Process. The debate was of high quality and also fulfilled an important information function, in particular with regard *to* "non-Bologna" countries.

The Council *of* Europe has also contributed through organizing, in cooperation with the Portuguese authorities, one *of* the *official Bologna seminars* in the work programme between the Ministerial conference *of* Praha and Berlin. The conference on Recognition Issues in the Bologna Process was held in Lisboa on 11 - 12 April 2002 and also marked the fifth anniversary of the adoption of the Lisboa Recognition Convention<sup>2</sup>. The conclusions of the General Rapporteur, Lewis Purser of the EVA, were adopted by the 2002 plenary session of the CD-ESR (Strasbourg, 3- 4 October 2002) and addressed to various actors in the Process: higher education institutions, academic networks, student organizations, the ENIC and NARIC Networks, governments and the Council of Europe and other international organizations. In particular, the CD-ESR drew attention to the recommendations addressed to the Ministers of the Bologna Process meeting in Berlin in September 2003:

<sup>1</sup> Currently Canada, Israel, Japan, Mexico, the USA

<sup>2</sup> The text of the Convention and its Explanatory Report as well as an updated list of signatures and ratifications will be found at <http://conventions.coe.int>, search for ETS 165.

- *In response to concerns expressed by apart of the higher education community, including some students, make clear that new degree structures should continue to ensure that higher education promotes three main qualities in its graduates:*
  - *Preparation for the labour market*
  - *Preparation for active citizenship*
  - *Preparation for continued personal development*
- *Encourage further work at national and European levels on the issue of learning outcomes*
- *Encourage the development. of a stronger European awareness of recognition issues, by strengthening existing networks and promoting more open access to relevant information*
- *Invite all European States of the Bologna Process to ratify the Lisbon Recognition Convention, as a major element to facilitate the creation of the European Higher Education Area.*

The Council of Europe has also contributed to other Bologna seminars through presentations and will continue to do so in spring 2003.

On the basis of the discussion at the 2002 plenary session of the CD-ESR plenary session, the CD-ESR Bureau has recommended thatthe2004 activities programme in higher education be structured around three pillars:

- (i) the European Higher Education Area, including
  - a. recognition of qualifications (implementation of the Council of Europe/UNESCO Recognition Convention and the ENIC Network);
  - b. bilateral cooperation with that have only recently or not yet joined the Bologna Process;
  - c. participation in the Bologna follow up structures;
- (ii) public responsibility for higher education, including
  - a. defining the responsibility of public authorities for different aspects of higher education (framework, provision, finance, etc.)
  - b. trade in higher education/GA TS as a supplement to higher education provision within national systems;
- (iii) higher education governance.

It further noted that two further topics identified by the plenary session - the role of law in higher education and research policy - are relevant to one or more of the main topics suggested above, all of which are also of relevance to the European Higher Education Area.

The *recognition of qualifications* is one of the Council of Europe's long standing contributions to higher education in Europe and one that plays a key role in the Bologna Process. The Council of Europe/UNESCO Recognition Convention and the Code of Good Practice in the Provision of Transnational Education are important standard setting instruments. The Recommendation on criteria and procedures should also be noted in this context. The ENIC Network, in close cooperation with the NARIC Network, is working on areas of importance to the Bologna Process,

including the cooperation between the recognition and quality assurance communities. The importance of the ENIC Networks, an advisory body to the CD-ESR should be made more visible.

The conference on Recognition Issues in the Bologna Process also identified a number of additional issues that needs further work:

- (i) information on recognition;
- (ii) recognition for the labour market;
- (iii) recognition of non-traditional qualifications and learning outcomes;
- (iv) recognition of transnational education.

In this context, the 2002 plenary session of the CD-ESR encouraged the ENIC Network to pursue its cooperation with the NARIC Network and ENQA with a view to submitting a subsidiary text on the synergies between quality assurance and recognition to the Lisboa Recognition Convention Committee and to identify further areas of cooperation in time for the Berlin Ministerial conference. In January 2003, the Bureau of the Convention Committee as well as the ENIC Bureau and the NARIC Advisory Board considered the first draft of a Recommendation on the recognition of joint degrees. It is intended to submit this draft for comments to the ENIC Network meeting in Vaduz in May 2003 and then to the Convention Committee for adoption at its next meeting (spring 2004).

In addition, it is clear that the issue of *trade in higher education* in the context of GATS is emerging strongly as an issue related to the external dimension of the Bologna Process. In recognition terms, the issue above all how the Council of Europe/UNESCO Convention and other recognition instruments can serve as standards against which to measure the quality of "trade offers" in higher education. GATS was the topic of a separate item on the CD-ESR agenda, and the Committee approved the action undertaken by the Chair and the Bureau in the discussions on trade in higher education in the framework of GATS.

The CD-ESR further:

- underlined the need for transparent quality structures also in trade in higher education;
- underlined the pertinence of the Lisbon Recognition Convention also in the context of GATS;
- encouraged delegations to contact their respective representatives in the GATS negotiations with a view to making sure that the views of the higher education community are adequately represented in the negotiations;
- underlined the importance to the higher education community of a transparent process in the GATS negotiations.

The *link between quality assurance and recognition* was underlined by the Ministers in their Praha Communiqué in which they called on the recognition and quality assurance networks to cooperate more closely. Steps are already being taken in this direction through discussions between the ENIC, NARIC and ENQA networks (see above). However, it may be worth underlining that as late as 1997, when the Lisboa Recognition Convention was adopted, it proved difficult to will approval for forceful provisions on quality assurance, or rather on the outcomes of quality assurance as a factor in the recognition of individual qualifications, in the text of the Convention. Today, the discussion is no longer on whether quality assurance is legitimate and needed, but on what kind of quality assurance best serves the purpose. Amending the Lisboa Recognition Convention to take account of this development would clearly be a very difficult undertaking, but the Convention foresees that the Convention Committee may adopt subsidiary texts. Such texts may be considered both on the

relationship between quality assurance and recognition and the recognition of joint degrees.

In a passage that has been given somewhat less publicity, the Bologna Declaration also point to the *role of higher education in developing and maintaining democratic societies*, with a specific reference to South

East Europe. In other words, the Ministers recognized that higher education has an important mission in building and maintaining the *democratic culture* without which democratic institutions cannot function. The Council of Europe can draw on a rich experience in this field, both through the pilot project on the University as a Site of Citizenship and the Legislative Reform Project. The current Bologna work

programme in particular emphasizes student participation, and the Council of Europe will contribute to the Bologna seminar on student participation in higher education governance that will be organized by the Norwegian authorities in Oslo in June 2003.

*Lifelong learning* was the topic of CP-ESR project, with special emphasis on equity, which led to Recommendation (2002) 6 by the Committee of Ministers to member states on higher education policies in lifelong learning. The transferability in and openness<sup>3</sup> of the system are two important objectives of the lifelong learning attitude to the implementation of the principles of the Bologna Declaration into higher education systems. In this sense we also understand lifelong learning as one of the priority topics in the Bologna process as underlined in particular in the Praha Communiqué. In June 2003 the Czech authorities will organize a seminar on Recognition and Credit Systems (ECTS and ECTS compatible) for Higher Education in the Context of Lifelong Learning, to which the Council of Europe will contribute, in particular on the basis of the third workshop of the Lifelong Learning project, on qualifications in higher education.

The Council of Europe's role as a *bridge between "Bologna" and "non-Bologna" countries* implies a particular role in helping disseminate information on the Bologna Process in the countries party to the European Cultural Convention that are not party to the Bologna Process as well providing advice on higher education reform. The most comprehensive examples of this is the Council's efforts, with the EUA, in favour of higher education in Serbia as well as its work on higher education legislation in Kosovo. The aspect of Bologna was also very present in the advice given on draft higher education legislation for *Republika Srpska* in May - July 2002.

The Council has organized *information seminars* on the Bologna Process in countries in South East Europe that have now applied for accession, to be followed up by more targeted activities on specific topics. Thus seminars were held in Tirana on 7 - 8 November, in Sarajevo on 11 - 12 November 2002 and in Skopje on 5 February 2003. In Yugoslavia, this work is further advanced, as there was a large conference on higher education policies and reform in March 2001 that was followed up by a conference on quality assurance and evaluation in November 2001. The EUA has since carried out an institutional self-evaluated programme, and the Council and the contributed to the final conference of this project, held in Beograd on 14 - 15 November 2002. The Council and the EUA also organized a higher education component of a large scale conference on education reform in Beograd on 5 - 7 September 2002.

Russia has also expressed a strong interest in the Bologna Process, and, with the Russian authorities, the Council of Europe organized a major national conference in Sankt Petersburg on 2 - 3 December 2002. The Russian Minister of Education, Professor Filippov, the Chair of the Duma

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<sup>3</sup> Meaning open pathways which allow continuity in studies at any age and time.

Education Committee, Dr. Shishlov, and a high number of Rectors and Vice Rectors participated in the conference, as did the Chair and Vice Chair of the CD-ESR, the Chairs of the Bologna Follow Up and Preparatory Groups, the Rapporteur of the Follow Up Group for the Berlin Higher Education Summit, the Council of Europe Secretariat, representatives of ESIB and international experts.

These activities are also linked to the question of *further accessions* to the Bologna Process and of taking stock of the progress made in implementing the goals of the Process is currently being debated within the follow up structures and is likely to be on the agenda of the Ministerial conference in Berlin. The Council of Europe is contributing actively to this debate with the goal of making the Process as broad as possible yet also making sure that there is a real chance of implementing its policy goals, and it has participated in the *ad hoc* Working Group on milestones, stocktaking and accessions.

The Council of Europe further contributes to the *external dimension* of the Bologna Process through its contribution to the UNESCO Global Forum on International Quality Assurance, Accreditation and the Recognition of Qualifications<sup>4</sup> (Paris, 17- 18 October 2002) and its participation in the working group that prepared the Global Forum. Several UNESCO Regions are now considering revising their respective regional conventions on the basis of the Lisboa Recognition Convention, and the African Region is already doing so. Developments in the Bologna Process have also been prominent in the discussions of the Global Forum and the working group.

Finally, at a time of extensive reforms it is particularly useful to stop and consider how higher education in Europe has developed over time and which values have been transmitted through generations of scholars and students. This is been the focus of a Council of Europe project on the *heritage of European universities* carried out jointly by the Departments and Steering Committees responsible for higher education and cultural heritage. The outcomes of the first phase of the project have now been published<sup>5</sup>, and the second phase of the project aims, *inter alia*, to establish standards for the governance of the university heritage.

Finally, the Council of Europe has compiled a *compendium of basic documents* in the Bologna Process, bearing the reference DGIV/EDU/HE (2002) 13 rev. 1.

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<sup>4</sup> For further details, see [http://www.unesco.org/education/studyingabroad/launch\\_gf02](http://www.unesco.org/education/studyingabroad/launch_gf02)

<sup>5</sup> Nuria Sanz and Sejur Bergan (eds.): *The Heritage of European Universities* (Strasbourg 2002: Council of Europe Publishing), ISBN 92-871-4960-7 (English version), 92-871-4959-3 (French version).