



International conference
Automatic recognition: potential and challenges

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CONFERENCE CONCLUSIONS

CONCLUSIONS OF PARTICIPANTS' DISCUSSIONS

- Bologna tools (EQF, NQFs, DS, ECTS) are significant part of automatic recognition. Quality assurance is highly important aspect in automatic recognition.
- When implemented automatic recognition should be automatic, i.e. there should not be any procedures – HEIs have right to recognize qualifications according to certain guidelines, and ENIC/NARIC office could be consulted when there are some complicated cases.
- Mutual agreements between governments (agreements with countries outside EU) are useful for both sides, i.e. easier to recognise qualifications in both countries.
- Agreements between governments may ensure automatic recognition, but they should be regularly updated (every five years).
- Regional agreements on automatic recognition may be seen as a step towards EHEA level agreement.
- When introducing automatic recognition, the main focus should be students – how to help them in the most efficient way.
- Automatic recognition may be practiced through different routes: 1) qualification – procedure (with the use of Bologna tools) – recognition; 2) qualification – governmental decree – recognition; 3) qualification – bilateral agreement – recognition.
- It is important to consider the purpose of recognition and to be aware of the elements of qualifications (level, learning outcomes, quality, workload, profile). The elements should be used to note the similarities between qualifications.
- There are Latvian higher education qualifications that are not subjected to automatic recognition.
- The introduction of automatic recognition will bring some challenges:
 - 1) Some details of automatic recognition may require substantial changes in legislation, which may be a lengthy and complicated process;
 - 2) Harmonization in recognition practices within three countries should be ensured;
 - 3) The introduced changes regarding automatic recognition may be affected by changes in the national education systems, which will require reviewing the table of comparability;

- 4) Automatic recognition may be considered as a “fast track” for recognition of applicants;
 - 5) Precise and up-to-date information for competent recognition authorities about education systems, qualifications and awarding institutions should be provided.
- There are some obstacles for introducing automatic recognition:
 - 1) The term “automatic recognition” is still not clear to institutions that will be entitled to perform the recognition, and there is a room for interpretation;
 - 2) Developments and changes in education systems and qualification structure, e.g. introduction of new qualifications, may affect the comparability of qualifications;
 - 3) There are various names of professional diplomas at different cycles of higher education in some education systems, which hinder the understanding of the degree;
 - 4) Recognition of qualifications outside of Bologna structure;
 - 5) Differences in legal provisions, e.g., the recognition criteria are regulated at national level and there are no exceptions in case of automatic recognition.
 - A common database of qualification for Baltic countries could be developed in order to ensure exchange of information.
 - Further discussions are necessary to implement automatic recognition between the Baltic countries.

RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS OF CASE STUDIES IN THE WORKING GROUPS

- Although professional recognition of regulated professions (under the EU directive 2005/36/EU, with amendments 2013/55/EU) is considered automatic, the applicants always have to submit their credentials to competent body for evaluation and receive a positive statement, but no further requirements, e.g. examination, may be proposed.
- The concept of automatic recognition is understood differently in Russia comparing to the results of project. The automatic recognition is practised in two ways: through international agreements and officially approved – by a Government decree – list of universities (universities ranked as top 300 universities simultaneously in three ranking lists; at present the list includes 213 universities). Both types of automatic recognition include some voluntary procedures for credential evaluators to check certain data regarding qualification (e.g., document name, level of education, period of studies, academic/professional rights, recognition in the country of issue, authenticity).
- Credential evaluators and admission officers should be aware of differences in the elements of qualifications, but also respect them. Automatic recognition may be defined as an automatic right of an applicant holding a qualification of a certain level to be considered for an entry to further study in the next level (access). Access is the right to be considered for an entry, if there is some other requirement (test, language requirements etc.), this is question of admission.
- Main features that support automatic recognition are: qualifications should be quality assured; recognition is supported by Bologna process (i.e., qualifications become more transparent for employers and HEIs); qualifications should be recognized on the same level in all the three Baltic countries. The Baltic ENIC/NARIC offices have different approaches to assessment and recognition. Common historical background of Baltic countries provides potential to include a wider array of qualifications, which fall outside the EHEA degree structure (e.g.

long-cycle qualifications). Further harmonization of recognition criteria and procedures may be necessary for successful implementation of automatic recognition.

- Lithuanian professional higher education has obtained significant role both in higher education system and labour market. Lithuania participated in the HAPHE/EURASHE project, which compared professional bachelors in 15 countries.
- In future short-cycle qualifications will be subject to recognition in every country as a graduated study programme, not only as a part of qualification. In Latvia the diploma of professional higher education may be issued that grant qualification of professional higher education without granting a degree (non-degree study programs). In Latvia, according to the law, there is no possibility to automatically recognize Master's diploma, which is obtained in less than 5 years of full-time studies. This regulation will not be changed; therefore, it should be taken into account when recognizing a qualification as a Master's degree.
- In Estonia automatic recognition is considered as recognition of formal academic right, i.e. what a holder of degree can do in their home education system. Thus, first cycle degree is recognised as a first cycle degree in Estonia if the qualification gives access to a Master's programme at home country; second cycle degree – as a Master's degree if the qualification gives access to a Doctoral programme at home country.
- For higher education institutions the implementation of automatic recognition will be a challenge. The advantage of current qualification recognition system is that evaluation is done by the specialists and is reliable. A written statement is issued with thorough overview about the obtained qualification which very useful. The disadvantage of present recognition system is that it is time-consuming. The challenges for automatic recognition include: 1) admission officers who would have full responsibility may lack adequate expertise; 2) information exchange between HEIs about accreditation has to be ensured; 3) there may be risk of accepting falsified documents.

QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION

- Do we all understand what “automatic recognition” means?
- Do we all have necessary information available to make recognition decision automatically?
- Is it still automatic if there are restrictions?
- Is it still automatic if it requires certain knowledge and judgment for implementation?
- What should be the scope of automatic recognition in terms of the time of the award of a qualification?
- How to make automatic recognition comprehensible to the employers and HEIs?

