

**Report
on the analysis
of the National Action Plans
for recognition**

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General findings

- ▶ 5 countries did not submit NAPs, most of the submitted are actually status reports
- ▶ NAPs are an interesting collection of good, bad and unacceptable practice, they should be further analyzed and improvements made in recognition practices
- ▶ a number of countries have amended their legislation or are currently analyzing the recognition practices
- ▶ not all countries provided answers to all questions
- ▶ not all answers are clear
- ▶ recognition practices and even the terminology used vary greatly between the countries.
- ▶ not many countries plan to amend legislation but rather plan information and dissemination measures

Review of national legislation

- ▶ Quite some countries have not provided any timetable or details of organization of the review
- ▶ Some provide a list of legal acts concerning recognition or HE in general but don't provide any analysis
- ▶ A large group of countries, e.g. AT, EE, HU, FI, LT, SK, RO, and others state that their national legislation has been adopted or amended on the basis of LRC principles
- ▶ A number claim compliance with LRC while their legislation still talks about *nostrification* or *equivalence*. This underlines that legislation should be amended after ratification

In the past an assessment of foreign qualifications entailed a detailed comparison of curricula and lists of material studied ("equivalence"), the emphasis has now shifted to a broader comparison of the qualifications earned ("recognition")."

(LRC Explanatory Report, April, 1997)

Approaches to implementation of LRC

- ▶ **Typical:** ENIC/NARIC issues a recommendation, HEIs make autonomous decisions but being well informed are expected to follow LRC principles
- ▶ **“Hands off”** : autonomous Universities take decisions and don't have to inform about their decisions, so it is not possible to guarantee implementation
- ▶ **Centralised:** the actions and responsibilities are reversed. ENIC/NARIC or HEIs or ad-hoc committees prepare decision and minister/ ministry/ central body decides, so implementation of LRC (theoretically) ensured

Approaches to implementation (modifications of the “typical” case)

- ▶ **Legal I:** autonomous HEIs decide - but HEIs have to obey a laws and LRC is one - inspectorates or ministries check compliance (e.g. Estonia)
- ▶ **Legal II:** principles of LRC have been transposed into national laws - HEIs ARE autonomous but they have to obey law
- ▶ **Quality-related** - Fair recognition of qualifications is a part of quality so LRC implementation is checked at quality assurance (e.g. Norway, Iceland)

Comparing with host country's qualification

- ▶ Problems when there is no host country's qualification to compare the foreign qualification in question with.
if a "prototype" qualification can not be found, recognition is refused and appeal is possible.
- ▶ Some have started to make comparison to a general level in their system (or Bologna process). It is not quite clear what rights does it give to the applicant though...

"A review of the foreign HEI by a scientific committee to determine whether it is "essentially equivalent"

... of the Department and program the student attended considering number of professors who hold PhD, teaching & examination procedures and degree titles awarded,"

In case the outcome is positive, qualification is considered either "equivalent" or as "equivalent and correspondent"

Comparing with host country's' prototype

- ▶ **What does this actually mean?**
- ▶ ***"If there is no substantial difference between the programmes student shall be **entitled to credit** for this programme"***
- ▶ ***"**compatibility of foreign programme** with programmes in host country's institution is established"***

Different recognition procedures for different types of qualifications?

- ▶ There can be different competent authorities (and modified procedures) for 'academic' and 'applied' qualifications.
- ▶ Some countries have different avenues of recognition for different levels of degrees: either doctoral degree is treated separately from the bachelor and master degrees or 'postgraduate' (doctoral and master degrees) separately from bachelor degrees.
- ▶ Cyprus separates 'Bologna' degrees from 'pre-Bologna' ones
- ▶ Albania – different competent authorities for bachelor and master degrees taken in the same or different HEI

2 stages in recognition - but which?

Stage I	Stage II
recommendation	recognition decision
level recognition	recognition for further studies
level recognition	recognition of comparability
recognition for further studies	establishing equivalence
establishing equivalence	issuing host country's diploma
equivalence	equivalence and correspondence

Conclusions

- ▶ in those countries that have not amended their legislation there are still legal problems LRC and its Subsidiary texts
- ▶ There are implementation difficulties due to the interpretation of autonomy. The best way out is making recognition process a part of both internal and external QA
- ▶ The terminology used in different countries is confusing and too diverse, same words have different meaning.
- ▶ Some countries still speak of 'nostrification' or 'equivalence' - outdated concepts not compatible with the principles of LRC.
- ▶ Most countries compare the foreign qualification with the relevant qualification in the host country. Some countries have started recognizing the general level of the qualification. It should be clarified what rights that kind of recognition gives to the holder.

Conclusions (II)

- ▶ In most countries the recognition procedure involves two steps that can differ. Those steps must be discussed at European level and procedures made more coherent.
- ▶ The role of various institutions in making recognition decisions should also be made more coherent across Europe.
- ▶ The criteria used and their relative importance varies from country to country: contemporary approaches look at QA status, learning outcomes and level, some others first look at contents and length.
- ▶ NAPs demonstrate that lack of mention of joint degrees in the legislation does not necessarily mean that there are no legal obstacles to award them.

Conclusions (III)

- ▶ Many countries have a very limited knowledge regarding the institutional recognition practices and thus cannot guarantee application of internationally approved principles.
A more intensive cooperation between the ENICs and HEIs is needed to better support and guide HEIs and to receive better information on the procedures and decisions at HEIs
- ▶ DS: It is not always clear if the DS is issued to all graduates of all levels of qualifications and whether the 'national' DS are fully following the European format
- ▶ ECTS or national systems are progressing. However, credits are not yet linked with learning outcomes. In some countries implementation is limited to the 'new' Bachelor and Master programmes. QA can be used as a tool for implementation

Conclusions (IV)

- ▶ A good will to respect the *bona fide* TNE provision in some countries, while TNE qualifications not recognized in others. The main principles for recognition of TNE quoted are those recommended by the Code of Good Practice
- ▶ Quality of information provision both on own HE and on the recognition is very different across Europe. Information being one of the main tasks of the ENICs, there is a clear need for improvement in some of countries
- ▶ ENICs intensively use QA information but often obtain it online or through the ENIC/NARIC channels, therefore the cooperation between the Recognition and QA bodies may not be so visible.

The cooperation becomes closer because of work at NQFs and because QA can be used tool for proper implementation of the LRC

The summary

- ▶ The LRC and its subsidiary texts are indeed setting standards for recognition. These standards are and they should be flexible to accommodate the whole variety of different qualifications in the European region.
- ▶ As a side-effect, this flexibility unfortunately also opens doors to different understanding of the most important principles of the Convention in different countries:
- ▶ Applicants should have the right to a fair assessment of their previous qualifications or study periods, but – how is ‘fair assessment’ understood and how far does the ‘right’ go in the eyes of different countries?
- ▶ A qualification should be recognized if there are no substantial differences with the relevant host country’s qualification, but how does each country interpret the ‘substantial differences’?

To ensure more coherent recognition across the EHEA, we have to

- ▶ find an appropriate solution in the ‘triangle’ of international legislation (the LRC legal framework), the national laws and regulations concerning recognition and the issue of institutional autonomy in all countries,
- ▶ carry out international discussion of the variety of national recognition practices (including stages therein) and terminology,
- ▶ continue discussion and reach consensus on the understanding of “substantial differences”
- ▶ follow up by tuning national approaches to recognition, recognition practices and terminology.

Recommendations to the ministers

- ▶ those countries that still have not become Parties to the LRC are recommended to sign and/or ratify the Convention without further delay.
- ▶ those countries that have not yet amended their legislation to adopt the principles of the LRC and its Subsidiary texts are recommended to do so.
- ▶ those countries that have not amended their legislation to allow and encourage establishment and recognition of joint degrees are recommended to do so.
- ▶ all countries are recommended to link quality of institutional recognition procedures to internal quality procedures and include it into the quality reviews.

Recommendations to ENIC & NARIC networks

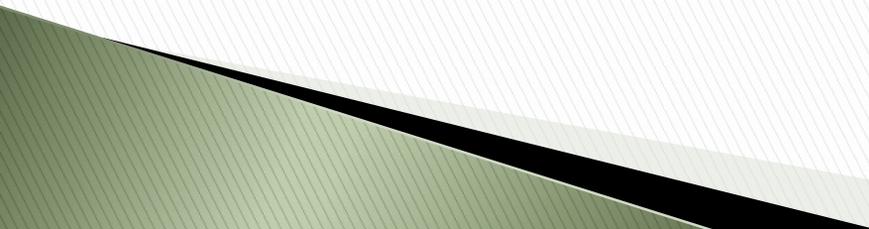
- ▶ Take up work in order to clarify the differences in terminology used in the recognition legislation and practices of different countries and take steps to move towards a more coherent terminology across the EHEA.
- ▶ Organize discussion between the national ENIC /NARIC centres to clarify the differences in the recognition criteria and procedures among the countries.

On the basis of that discussion, new developments in the EHEA and the results of the WP on Substantial Differences a revised Recommendation on the Criteria and Procedures should be drafted.

Recommendations to national ENIC/NARICs

- ▶ ENIC/NARIC centres of those countries that have not amended their legislation adopting the principles of the LRC and its Subsidiary texts are recommended to assist their Ministries in preparation of the appropriate amendments.
- ▶ To improve mutual recognition with countries outside the EHEA, the ENIC/NARICs are encouraged to apply the principles of the LRC also at assessment of qualifications those countries.
- ▶ Provide information, guidance and counselling to the higher education institutions to help them establish and maintain recognition procedures based on the principles of the legal framework of the LRC.

Recommendations to HEIs

- ▶ Make the recognition of qualifications a part of the internal quality assurance of the institution.
 - ▶ Draw up institutional guidelines and recommendations for recognition ensuring implementation of the principles of the LRC across the institution.
 - ▶ Ensure the implementation of the LRC at the level of faculties and departments
 - ▶ Cooperate with other higher education institutions and the national ENIC/NARIC centre with a view to ensure coherent recognition across the country
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Thanks for your attention!