

Strasbourg, January 30, 2008

BOLOGNA FOLLOW UP GROUP

Ljubljana, March 13 – 14, 2008

UPDATE ON DEVELOPMENTS WITH REGARD TO THE RECOGNITION OF QUALIFICATIONS

Sjur Bergan, Council of Europe

1. CONVENTION

As of 30 January 2008, the Council of Europe/UNESCO Recognition Convention had been ratified by 46 countries and a further 5 countries had signed the Convention and were in the process of ratification. The latest ratification is that of New Zealand, which was invited to accede to the Convention by decision of the Convention Committee in June 2007, and which deposited its instrument of ratification in December 2007.

2. PREPARATION OF THE ANNUAL JOINT ENIC-NARIC MEETING

The 2008 annual joint Network meeting will be held in Malta on June 15 – 17, at the invitation of the Maltese ENIC/NARIC. Key items on the agenda will be workshops on substantial differences (see below), a discussion of the preliminary report on national action plans (see below) and cooperation with other regions.

For the latter item it is intended to invite representatives of other UNESCO regions to participate in the meeting. It is also intended to invite the Chair of the Bologna Working Group on the Global Dimension to participate in this debate. A special issue concerns the MERIC network of national information centers for the Mediterranean Region, which was established by UNESCO at the end of 2006. It includes the ENICs/NARICs of the European countries of the Mediterranean Region as well as newly established centers from the southern shores of the Mediterranean (for the time being Algeria, Egypt, Morocco and Tunisia). This network was to have met in fall 2007 but the meeting had to be postponed, and it is hoped the Network will be able to meet in spring 2008.

2. WORKING PARTY ON SUBSTANTIAL DIFFERENCES

The Working Party on substantial differences has been tasked with exploring one of the key concepts of the Council of Europe/UNESOC Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region (ETS 165). The Working Party seeks to develop a common understanding of the differences that may

lead to a foreign qualification not being recognized or being given only partial recognition, and to improve practice in this area. In particular, the Working Party seeks to encourage parties to the Convention to take a broad rather than narrow view of what differences between qualifications may warrant less than full recognition.

The Working Party met in Bruxelles on December 3 and reviewed the workshops held on this topic at the 2007 ENIC/NARIC meeting and noted that these had been particularly well received.

The Working Party focused its work on considering possible case studies to be presented at workshops at the 2008 ENIC/NARIC meeting and charged some of its members with preparing the cases.

The Working Party also considered the outline of a publication to be prepared on the basis of the cases presented to the 2007 and 2008 Network meetings, and that would also include a theoretical outline of the issues.

3. NATIONAL ACTION PLANS FOR RECOGNITION

In the London Communiqué, Ministers stated (in para. 2.6):

There has been progress in the implementation of the Lisbon Recognition Convention (LRC), ECTS and diploma supplements, but the range of national and institutional approaches to recognition needs to be more coherent. To improve recognition practices, we therefore ask the Bologna Follow-up Group (BFUG) to arrange for the ENIC/NARIC networks to analyse our national action plans and spread good practice.

The ENIC Bureau and the NARIC Advisory Board have now appointed a working group to undertake this task. The working group includes representatives of the ENICs/NARICs of Armenia, Austria, Cyprus, Finland, France and Italy as well as the Chair of the Bologna Stocktaking Group (Latvia). In order to provide a broader perspective on the discussions, the European Student Union as well as a representative of New Zealand (the education representative of the New Zealand mission in Bruxelles) are members of the group, for which the Council of Europe provides the Secretariat. The European Commission and UNESCO/CEPES also participate in the work.

The Working Party held its first meeting on December 5, 2007. It decided to analyze the national action plans on recognition submitted by (almost) all members of the Bologna Process in 2007 with a view to identifying:

- common points in the action plans;
- important issues on which action plans may diverge;
- points inadequately covered by the action plans;

- measures the ENIC and NARIC Networks may take to help with the implementation of the national action plans.

At its first meeting, the Working Party asked the Council of Europe Secretariat and the Chair of the Bologna Stocktaking Group to deepen the preliminary analysis undertaken so far. The Working Party will meet again on April 3.

The Working Party aims to present a preliminary report at the joint ENIC/NARIC meeting in Malta on June 15 – 17, 2008 and to submit its final report to the BFUG by the end of 2008.