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НАГОРНО КАРАБАХСКАЯ
РЕСПУБЛИКА
МИНИСТЕРСТВО
ОБРАЗОВАНИЯ И НАУКИ
МИНИСТР

REPUBLIC OF NAGORNO
KARABAGH MINISTRY OF
EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

ՆԱԽԱՐԱՐ

MINISTER

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**<<30>> october 2014г.
Stepanakert**

Ms. Gayane Harutyunyan

Head of the Bologna Follow-Up Group Secretariat

Honorable Ms. Harutyunyan,

On behalf of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Nagorno Karabagh Republic (NKR) I would like to confirm the willingness of our Government to pursue comprehensive reform in the Nagorno Karabagh Higher Education system, which will be based on the Bologna Principles.

In 2014 The Ministry of Education and Science of the NKR organised an International Conference «Education Without Discrimination: Bologna Context». The Conference brought together government officials, researchers, international experts and also representatives from non United Nations member States. At the end of the Conference participants adopted the Declaration where they gave great importance to a full realization of the right to education and further development of European Higher Education Area without discrimination and “white spots” aimed at strengthening stable, peaceful and democratic societies.

The Ministry of Education and Science of the NKR being aware of the crucial role of education and cooperation for strengthening peaceful and stable democratic societies has embarked on the all-encompassing reform process of education and more specifically the reforms of higher education.

Meanwhile, being a part of political developments the Higher Education is a bridge for cooperation between the unrecognized countries and EHEA member states. This will ensure development of democratic values and basic rights of the people living in those countries.

The Ministry of Education and Science of the Nagorno Karabagh Republic kindly requests to join European Higher Education Area.

Please find attached the filled questionnaire “Information to be provided by the countries applying for accession of the EHEA” and document on ratification of the “European Cultural Convention” by National Assambley of the NKR. The report covers the current state of reforms' implementation in the NKR HE system as well as plans and timelines for further implementation.

We believe that our application will be given a due consideration.

Sincerely yours,



Slava Asryan

Minister of Education and Science

towards the european higher education area

bologna process

REPORTS FROM NEW MEMBERS OF THE BOLOGNA PROCESS

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I. OVERVIEW OF THE NATIONAL HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM

1. Please describe the national higher education system including a) an outline of the main regulatory documents b) the governance arrangements of the system (main regulatory bodies, their competences and interactions) c) the institutional structure underpinning the national higher education system (number and types of institutions, student enrolment and academic staff structure).

Education system of Nagorno-Karabakh Republic (NKR) has 1600 years history and traditionally has been highly regarded. The school has always been part of Armenian Christian culture and tradition. The foundations of contemporary education were laid down during the early 4th century. According to medieval chroniclers, St. Gregory the Illuminator founded the Amaras Monastery at the start of the 4th century. At the beginning of the 5th century Mesrop Mashtots, the inventor of the Armenian Alphabet, established in Amaras the first-ever school that used his script.

Higher education prototype schools were established in Nagorno-Karabakh at the medieval period. During the 18th century the education system of the NKR entered a new era with its center in Shushi. In the early 20th century Nagorno-Karabakh became a part of Soviet Union. According to one of the first soviet decrees, in 1920 the school was separated from church and became secular. The whole system of education became state-owned. After the collapse of the Soviet Union and referendum on

independence in 1991, the education system, as well as the whole Armenian population living in the NKR (Artsakh society) started to overcome constructive rapid changes. Article 41 of Constitution of the NKR adopted in 2006 states that all citizens of NKR have the right to education. It also asserts that basic general education is compulsory and the secondary education in state schools is free of charge. According to the same article of the Constitution, every citizen of the NKR has the right to get free vocational or higher education in state educational institutions on competitive basis.

Since gaining the independence, the higher educational system in the NKR has been continuously changing and developing. Being involved in war the NKR education system has to resist to the unprecedented upheavals of transition, particularly, over the first years: the multifold cuts of state financing due to the economic crisis, the poverty of the population and dramatic drop in the labor force demand. At the same time, it had to adequately respond to the demands of the new social and economic demands within a very short period.

a) The development of educational system was one of the priority policy areas of new founded NKR. The whole educational system of the NKR was rebuilt in a very short period of time. As a result of unprecedented reforms NKR has established stable higher education system.

The legal bases for implementing the principles of the Bologna Process have been established by the Law on Education (2000), Law on Higher and Postgraduate Professional Education (adopted by the National Assembly in 2005), National Strategy for Development of NKR (including the part on Higher Education approved by the Government in 2012).

The law on Education established the two-tier degree structure that was introduced in two State Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and three non-governmental (accredited) HEIs. So far, the law on Higher and Postgraduate Professional Education was a major starting point for the reforms in the higher education field which are targeted towards the Bologna Process principles.

The Law on Higher and Postgraduate Professional Education provides the definition of quality as such, the quality provision, quality improvement, self-evaluation, as well as the definition of accreditation and credit system, which shaped the new model of quality assurance. The three-tiered degree structure in higher and postgraduate education with qualification of Bachelor, Master and Researcher/Doctorate entered in force in 1999-2000. Last but not least, ECTS operates in all Higher Education Institutions of

NKR starting from 2008.

b) State HEIs in the NKR are subordinated to the Ministry of Education and Science. Meanwhile, the Artsakh State University and NKR branch of the Armenian National Agrarian University are also closely cooperating with the Ministry of Health of NKR and the Ministry of Agriculture of NKR accordingly.

During the Soviet period, the Higher Education System was highly centralized and strictly controlled by the central government. According to the provisions of the Law on Higher and Postgraduate Professional Education at present, the higher education institutions (HEIs) in the NKR are moving towards greater institutional autonomy. They are autonomous in determining the main spheres of activity, adopting annual budgets and supervising execution thereof, introducing new specialties and changing existing ones, adopting curricula and choosing teaching methods. The deans of HEIs are now elected by the boards of the faculties consisting of academic community and student representatives. Rectors are also elected by the boards of the HEIs, which consist of governmental responsible bodies, academic staff and students.

According to the law on Higher and Postgraduate Professional Education HEIs have the right to decide the tuition fee amount and the number of students studying on the fee-paying bases. The Government approves the fields of study and the list of specialties to be taught. The Government also issues licenses, forms the list of the specialties, approves the admission procedures for the state and private accredited HEIs and supervises their implementation.

c) Total number of academic staff, students in the NKR, as well as the number of state, private universities is provided in the table below:

NAME OF HEI	TYPE OF HEI	ACADEMIC STAFF	STUDENT - BACHELOR	STUDENT – MASTERS
1. Artsakh State University	STATE	343	2997	498
2. Armenian National Agrarian University Stepanakert branch	STATE	171	739	81
3. MesropMashtots University	PRIVATE	74	532	95
4. GrigorNarekatsi University	PRIVATE	47	481	82
5. Gyurjyan Applied Arts Institute	PRIVATE	17	40	4
TOTAL		652	4789	760

2. Please give a description of the strategies that your country is currently pursuing in the field of higher education.

The law on Higher and Postgraduate Education as well as The Strategic Plan boosted the development of the Higher education system in the NKR and shaped main direction of reforms, which are carried on according to the main objectives and principles of Bologna Declaration. Therefore the main strategies that the NKR is currently pursuing in the field of Higher Education are as follows:

1. Further development and implementation of three-cycled system.
2. Defining broad, narrow and detailed fields of study in Higher Education according to the International Standard Classification of Education.
3. Defining qualifications as learning outcomes in the categories of knowledge, skills and general competencies.
4. Improving national legislation on recognition of qualifications through ratifying the Lisbon

Recognition Convention.

5. Taking measures to increase the level of mobility for both students and academic staff.
6. Improving quality assurance and accreditation procedures according to the ESG.
7. Giving particular importance to social dimension through increasing and widening participation in HE as well as making it more equitable. Particularly taking targeted measures to counteract under-representation and support vulnerable groups of students.
8. Increasing employability of students through including mandatory practical periods, internships and practice-based teaching and learning in educational programs as well as developing close cooperation between employers and HEIs.
9. Developing HEIs career Centers and encouraging cooperation of employers with Career Centers.
10. Strengthening cooperation of HEIs in the NKR with HEIs in other countries and improving information on HEIs of the NKR.

3. What are the partnership arrangements underpinning the system? Is there any specificity of your national higher education system that needs highlighting?

Being unrecognized country the NKR has established only two partnership agreements underpinning the HE system so far:

- ✓ Partnership agreement between the Republic of Armenia and the NKR;
- ✓ Partnership agreement between the Pridnestrovian Moldavian Republic and the NKR.

The agreement that regulates the cooperation between the NKR and the RA Ministries of Education and Science was signed in 2014.

The cooperation between the HEIs of NKR and foreign HEIs is mainly based on inter-university cooperation agreements between those HEIs (e.g. the Artsakh State University and the Economic State University of Saints-Petersburg signed in 2013, the Artsakh State University and the Leuven Catholic University signed in 2014).

4. What are the main challenges that the national higher education system in your country is facing?

The HE system of NKR faces numerous challenges and majority of them directly results from the issue of recognition of the state, such as recognition of the NKR universities, qualifications and diplomas, which causes difficulties in mobility of staff and students discriminating their basic to education and free mobility. However there are also a number of sub secondary challenges faced by the HE system

1. Low level of state funding of HE.
2. Relatively low level management skills of HEIs.
3. Limited organizational and academic autonomy of HEIs.
4. Lack of training and expertise in international quality assurance in HEIs.
5. Lack of scholarships, grants and loans to student.
6. The big gap between the HEIs and research environment of the country;
7. Difficulties in developing one of the main components of the ECTS - credit transfer system.
8. Non equitable access to HE
9. Low employability of students and of the skills and competences acquired in higher education to the labor market demand.
10. Weak internationalization perspectives.

5. Why does your country want to join the EHEA?

In the last few years, the European process has become a tangible reality for the European Countries and its citizens. The NKR expresses its willingness to undergo all the necessary reforms to become a full-fledged member state. The Ministry of Education and Science of the NKR being aware of the crucial role of education and cooperation for strengthening peaceful and stable democratic societies has embarked on the all-encompassing reform process of education and more specifically the reforms of higher education.

Clearly understanding that the Europe of Knowledge is acknowledged as an influential factor for human, social and thus economic development of the societies the Law on Higher and Post Graduate Professional Education of the NKR has envisioned a central role for the HEIs, which by assuming the responsibility for quality assurance, respecting the academic and institutional freedoms will come to the doorsteps of belonging to a common social and cultural European space.

Meanwhile, being apart from political developments the Higher Education is a bridge for cooperation between the unrecognized countries and UN member states. This will ensure development of democratic values and basic rights of the people living in those countries. One of the main goals of joining the EHEA should be realizing the ideas, principles and values of the European common culture heritage and development of the NKR national heritage contribution to it. Furthermore, this is of highest importance for the NKR as joining to the EHEA will ensure that. HE system of the NKR will continuously adopt to changing needs, society's demands and advances in scientific knowledge of Europe.

At this point, it is valuable to refer to the Bologna Process, one that NKR is willing to join as NKR wants to ensure the competitiveness of its higher education system and commends the integration of education system with the international education systems.

In addition to all the foregoing, joining the EHEA will allow the NKR to engage in coordinating its policies aimed at reforming and strengthening the NKR HE system based on the main objectives and principles of EHEA: adoption of ECTS, three cycled degree system and comparable degrees, establishment of quality assurance system with a view to developing comparable to ESG criteria and methodologies, allow and promote wide mobility and the recognition of qualification and diplomas.

II. STRUCTURAL REFORMS

The EHEA is built on structural components: quality assurance, degree structures/qualifications frameworks and the recognition of qualifications. This part of the questionnaire covers each area.

1. Degree structure system/ Qualifications Frameworks/ Employability

A. Please describe the higher education degree system/qualifications framework of your country. Specifically, please describe how this relates to the overarching framework of qualifications of the European Higher Education Area (QF-EHEA) adopted by Ministers in 2005 as well as the further procedure and timetable for self certifying your national framework against the QF-EHEA. The description should specify whether any study programmes are exempted from the three-tier structure and, if so, describe their position in your higher education system and indicate the proportion of the student body concerned.

Degree system for higher education is based on three main cycles.

The three-cycle degree system (bachelor-master, researcher/doctoral) in NKR was introduced according to the Law on Higher and Postgraduate Professional Education as early as in 2005. It applies to both the state and private HEIs.

Higher and postgraduate professional education in the NKR is being provided through the following basic and supplementary programmes:

- ✓ Through basic programmes of higher professional education (Bachelor's, Master's, degreed specialist's);
- ✓ Through basic programmes of postgraduate professional education (researcher's);
- ✓ Supplementary education programmes (retraining, upgrading of qualification of specialists).

Educational programmes of higher and postgraduate professional education are developed and approved by the HEIs and/or organizations providing postgraduate professional education on the basis of State Educational Standards.

The curricula and courses in accordance with professions and specializations offered by the HEIs and by the organizations providing postgraduate professional education guarantee the learning process of learners at different stages of education (enrolment to the educational programme and withdrawing from the programme), ensuring the accumulation and transfer of educational credits, and awarding qualification degrees.

Basic higher professional education programmes may be implemented uninterruptedly and with interruptions, in accordance with cycles. As mentioned above, the NKR established a three-cycle qualification system of higher professional education. The persons, who pass the final certification exam, are awarded with:

- ✓ The Bachelor's degree in the first cycle;
- ✓ The Master's degree in the second cycle;
- ✓ The Researcher's/Doctoral degree in the third cycle.

Degreed specialist's qualification is also retained in the NKR. Besides, the NKR has introduced researcher's qualification degree at the postgraduate level. The duration of instruction of basic education programmes of higher and postgraduate education are:

- ✓ 4 years for obtaining a Bachelor's degree, with exception of professions/programs in the field of Police work, which last 3 years.
- ✓ 5 years for obtaining a qualification degree of the Degreed Specialist, with exception of professions/programs in the field of Art and Physical Education, which last 4 years.
- ✓ 1 to 2 years for obtaining a Master's degree, with exception of medical professions, which last 4 years.
- ✓ At least 3 years for obtaining a Researcher's Degree.

Access to the second or third cycles requires successful competition of the first and second cycle students and obtaining of the relevant degree diploma. Receiving education through programmes for different cycles of higher education for the first time is not deemed as second higher professional education.

The NKR has adopted National qualifications framework (NQF) and generic descriptions for each cycle based on learning outcomes and competences in 2011. The NKR NQF is compatible with the overarching framework of qualifications of the EHEA (QF-EHEA).

The HE qualifications in the NKR NQF: namely Bachelor, Master and Doctoral qualifications are places respectively at the level 6,7 and 8 and correspond to the European Qualification Framework (EQF) levels 6,7 and 8. The plans for NKR Ministry of Education and Science are to adopt timetable and procedures for self-certifying its NQF against the QF-EHEA and develop action plan for its implementation.

The three-cycle system implemented in the NKR is coherent to QF-EHEA.

B. The development of the national qualifications framework is, among other things, closely linked to the concern for improving the employability of higher education graduates. Please provide a description of your policies and priorities for improving the employability of higher education

graduates and, in doing so, please cover the public as well as the private sector of the labor market. Please address the extent to which first cycle degrees (Bachelors or equivalent) are considered for employment, with specific reference to both the public and the private sector.

Being implemented through learning outcomes and competences, the NKR NQF closely link the HEIs with the labor market. The learning outcomes help students understand what they will know and be able to do at the end of their studies. On the other hand, learning outcomes also provide information to the HEIs regarding where the students should be heading and what they should learn. The Ministry and HEIs pursue following policies to enhance employability of students:

- Develop close cooperation between employers and HEIs:
 - Include employers in the HEIs governing boards
 - Involve employers in the design of curriculum and study programmes in order to make courses more relevant to their needs
 - Promote direct recruitment from HEIs
 - Provide better post-graduation support.
- Develop HEIs' Career Centers and encourage cooperation of employers with the Career Centers.
- Conduct studies and analyse information about the career paths of graduates.
- Implement Bologna Structural reforms, including:
 - National Qualification Framework
 - Learning outcome based curricula
 - Increasing number of part-time students and possibilities for students to work.

2. Quality assurance

Please describe the national quality assurance arrangements in your country, with reference to both the internal quality development at higher education institutions and arrangements for external quality assurance, normally conducted by quality assurance agencies.

A. For internal quality assurance, describe whether higher education institutions in your country have quality assurance arrangements in place and, if not, what the plans and timetable are in this regard.

The concepts and requirements for QA and Accreditation are stated in the Articles 3 and 13 of the Law

on Higher and Postgraduate Professional Education. Based on the provisions of the Law on Higher and Postgraduate Professional Education the Procedures for both institutional and program accreditation were adopted by the NKR Government in 2011. However, Standards and Guidelines for internal and external QA are not yet developed in NKR.

Consequently, the QA arrangements are not yet in place in HEIs in the NKR. The plans of the Ministry of Education and Science (MoES) of NKR are to develop timetable and implementation plan for approving internal and external QA standards and Guidelines according to the ESG of QA.

B. For external quality assurance arrangements, the description should focus on the way in which the competent authorities of your country comply with the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) adopted by Ministers in 2005. To the extent that your country does not comply with the ESG, the description should include your plans for doing so and the timetable for achieving this. Elements that may be covered include cooperation with quality assurance agencies of other countries with a view to assessing the quality of your institutions as well as with organizations and networks such as ENQA.

As mentioned above, the NKR Government adopted a decree on accreditation of HEIs and their educational programmes in 2001.

According to the Accreditation Decree the HEIs of the NKR were accredited. However as mentioned above the plans of MoES are to develop timetable and implementation plan for approving internal and external QA standards and Guidelines according to the ESG of QA.

Besides, the Government of the NKR plans to establish a professional agency for QA that will take over the full responsibility of conducting internal and external QA according to ESG.

3. Recognition of Qualifications

A. The fair recognition of foreign qualifications is a prerequisite for academic mobility and the fundamental principle of the Council of Europe/UNESCO Lisbon Recognition Convention. If your country has not yet ratified the convention, please indicate your plans and timetable for doing

so. Regardless of whether your country has ratified the convention or not, please outline your actions, plans and priorities in regards to the recognition of foreign qualifications in your country, with an indication of a timetable. It is suggested the description comprise the organisation and competence of the national competent authorities for recognition and the role of ENICs/NARICs. Arrangements and policies for the recognition of qualifications earned through alternative learning paths/lifelong learning should also be addressed.

Being driven by numerous reasons and the determination to build a higher education system that could meritoriously become one of the leading in the region the national assembly of NKR is willing to adopt the UNESCO Lisbon Recognition Convention in 2015. Besides, clearly understanding the nature of the right for education, the NKR government made the higher education accessible to everyone and provided equal opportunities to pursue education free of charge in HEIs of NKR.

Nevertheless, the reforms lasting already 20 years are aimed to implement the Lisbon Recognition Convention points (e.g. NKR transferred to three-cycle system, adopted the NQF, implemented the ECTS, created the QF and transparency tools, implemented diploma supplement etc.). NKR authorities do recognize that Lisbon Convention creates a legal ground for mutual recognition of qualifications for the whole European region. On the other hand, the sample Diploma Supplement developed by the European Commission, Council of Europe and UNESCO creates a mechanism for the recognition and evaluation of individual qualification in foreign countries. In general the lack of international recognition put obstacles in recognition of qualifications and diplomas awarded by the NKR HEIs, as well as hinder the process of recognition of qualifications by the NKR.

B. The Diploma Supplement and the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) are important transparency instruments for improving recognition and Ministers have committed to implementing both; in the case of the Diploma Supplement to deliver it automatically, free of charge and in a widely spoken language. Please describe the current state of implementation of these instruments in your country as well as your plans, priorities and timetable for further developments.

The Law on Higher and Postgraduate Professional Education does allow HEIs of the NKR to issue European Diploma Supplement in addition to the compulsory diploma supplement in the form that

is recognized by the State. Basically the NKR HEIs deliver to their graduates a document, which accompanies higher education diploma and in its nature is close to Diploma Supplement. It provides a description of the nature, level and content of the studies completed by its holder. In particular it provides information identifying the holder of the qualification (name, family name, date of birth), information identifying the qualification (title of qualification, main field of study, name and status of the awarding institution) information on the level and content of the qualification and results gained. It also has necessary certification: date, signature, official stamp. Currently, the Ministry of Education and Science considers the possibility of introducing European Diploma Supplement in all HEIs since 2015. The Diploma Supplement will be delivered automatically, free of charge and in widely spoken European language.

III. OTHER KEY AREAS

1. Academic mobility

A. Please provide a description of the place of academic mobility, defined as the mobility of higher education staff and students, in your national higher education policy. Your description should comprise the current situation as well as your plans, priorities and timetable for further development. In particular, the description should outline your country's plans regarding the objective adopted by EHEA Ministers in 2009 of attaining 20 per cent mobile graduates in the EHEA by 2020.

The following documents serve as a legal basis for academic and student mobility in the NKR:

- ✓ Law on Education (2000);
- ✓ Law on Higher and Postgraduate Professional Education (2005);

and four other legislative documents (Government Decrees) :

- ✓ The Student Mobility Procedures (2009);
- ✓ The Procedure for Outgoing Mobility for the NKR Citizens (2010);
- ✓ The HEIs of NKR: the Procedure for Incoming Mobility (2011);
- ✓ Government Decision on Scholarships, Grants and Loans for the NKR Citizens Provided by the HEIs of the Republic of Armenia (2011).

Most unrecognized countries face serious problems with academic and student mobility and the NKR

is not an exclusion. While taking steps to improve the current situation with incoming and outgoing mobility the NKR signed one intergovernmental agreement with the Republic of Armenia and several bilateral agreements with other foreign HEIs, which promote mobility. Moreover, to further develop the incoming mobility the NKR authorities elaborate native language courses and improved living conditions for foreign students. As a result of these actions about 25 foreign students (e.g. from Ukraine, Turkmenistan and Russian Federation) studied in HEIs of the NKR.

Furthermore, the NKR adopted the procedures for outgoing mobility to ensure that 60 students each year study in HEIs of the Republic of Armenia without any tuition fees. A number of the students studying abroad increase each year. Recently established intergovernmental foundation that provides financial assistance for students studying abroad. In current difficult situation the NKR reached the target of about 1 % for outgoing mobility. Due to the absence of bilateral agreements the EHEA target for academic mobility is hard to achieve.

B. It is suggested that the description include reference to financial incentives, such as scholarships, grants and loans offered to staff and students wishing to go abroad for a period and incentives (financial or otherwise) offered to foreign staff and students wishing to spend a period in the country, as well as to whether loans and scholarships are portable.

During recent years students with high academic performance got an opportunity to study in leading European Universities, such as the Dublin Trinity College, London Royal Collage, US Colombia University, as well as several Russian Universities. 50% of those scholarships are covered by the Government and the rest of the amount is paid by the non-governmental foundation. The respective non-governmental foundation is also covering the leaving costs of the outgoing students. Meanwhile; if no scholarship is received the Government may cover all the expenses and tuition fees.

C. It is further suggested that the description refers to any specific impediments to mobility that you may have identified for your country as well as to how your country plans to overcome them.

The main challenge that is hindering the mobility in the NKR is the issue of being not recognized by UN member States. Thus, the basic right for free movement of students and academic staff of NKR is discriminated. Joining the EHEA could help the NKR people to overcome the above mentioned challenge.

2. The Social Dimension of Higher Education

Work to strengthen the social dimension of higher education aims at realizing the aspiration expressed by the EHEA Ministers at their 2007 meeting that “the student body entering, participating in and completing higher education at all levels should reflect the diversity of our populations”. Please describe the social support mechanisms for students in your country.

Please provide a description of the main achievements in strengthening the social dimension of higher education in your country as well as of the main challenges in strengthening it further, including your priorities, plans and timetable in this respect.

It is suggested the description comprises an outline of the social composition of the student body in your country, including an overview of possible under-represented groups and whether your country has any national targets for access and completion in higher education of students from under-represented groups. In this context, it may be relevant to describe whether there are systematic differences between study programs and/or institutions (e.g. in terms of the profile of study programs or the geographical location of the institutions within the country) and whether there are national or institutional strategies in place for making the student body reflect the diversity of your national population. A description of current data collection in this area as well as plans and timetable for further improving such data collection would also be welcomed.

There are two legal acts regulating the issue:

- ✓ The Government Decree on Provision of Grants and Loans to the Students Studying in HEIs of the NKR (2007);
- ✓ The Government Decree on Support to Under-Represented Groups Studying in State and Private HEIs of the NKR.

According to the above mentioned two legal documents the following main groups are considered as under-represented in the NKR:

- ✓ Artsakh war victims children and wives;
- ✓ Orphans;
- ✓ Individuals with disabilities;

- ✓ Children of individuals with disabilities caused by the Artsakh war.

The Government provides financial support and covers tuition fees for the above-mentioned under-represented groups. Several other support mechanisms were elaborated to support other under-represented groups cover tuition fees.

Moreover, the NKR authorities developed a strategy creating social prerequisites for equitable access to Higher Education and providing state support to under-represented groups of students through:

1) Setting up criteria for determination of students' needs.

- ✓ Establish state standards for student need determination (by consolidating the cost of education and financial status of the student);
- ✓ Introducing living stipends to be awarded according to the combined need and merit based combined criteria;
- ✓ Introducing state guaranteed (subsidized and unsubsidized) student loan programs on the merit-based basis;
- ✓ Providing state subsidized work-study opportunities/programs to Higher Education Institutions.

2) Establishing Institutional Aid Programs at Higher Education Institutions. The specific measures are:

- ✓ Establish financial aid offices at Higher Educational Institutions to administer all types of aid, consult the students, and to diversify aid sources;
- ✓ Offer student teaching and research assistantship programs and on-campus part-time work;
- ✓ Offer university fellowships, tuition reduction or waivers to well performing students from under-represented groups.

IV. VALUES AND FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES

1. Academic freedom and institutional autonomy

Please describe the fundamental values underlying your higher education system and provision. It is suggested that the description includes an outline of the legal provisions concerning academic freedom and institutional autonomy as well as a description of how these fundamental values are ensured in practice. It is further suggested that reference be made to provisions of the Magna Charta Universitatum in this respect.

Development of academic freedom and autonomy of HEIs is one of the main policy areas in the field of Higher Education. This aspect is regulated by the article 4 of the Law on Higher and Postgraduate Professional Education (2005). According to the respective Law the State HEIs in the NKR are autonomous legal entities that possess, utilize and manage their property according to their mission and policies. The private HEIs can have any organizational-legal form provided by the Law. The most important parts of the autonomy of HEIs are self-governance and corporate leadership.

The institutional autonomy of the HEIs in the NKR should be analyzed in 4 main directions of autonomy.

a) Organizational autonomy.

According to the Law on Higher and Postgraduate Professional Education the HEIs are legal entities with the statues of Non Commercial State Organizations. The Law on Higher and Postgraduate Professional Education and Charters of the HEIs define the governing structure of HEIs. Their governing bodies are the Board of Institution, the Academic Council and the Rector. The Board of the Institution is a corporate governing body that is created for a 5 year period and is responsible for the overall management and organization of the institution. According to the Law the Board is responsible for approval of the annual budget and strategic programme of the Institution, bearing and assesing annual reports, election of the rector, proposing changes to the Charter. The Board is drawn from the representatives of the faculty and students of the institution as well as representatives of the founder (Government of the NKR) and the authorised body (MoES). Each of the 4 parties (faculty, student, founder and MoES) has 25% of the members in the Board. It is important to note that with respect to the student participation level – 25% in the Board, the NKR standing quite high in comparison to European countries. The other 25% is academic representation of the institution's staff. Thus the equal destribution between Government, Ministry representation and the institutions' faculty and students body precludes state control in HEI governance.

Infact the Government and the MoES often suggest board members from among NGOs and relevant employers.

The Academic Council of the Institution is defined according with it's charter and deals mainly with academic and scientific issues. The Academic Councils of the HEIs are fully independant and the state has no power over its activities and decesion-making. So, HEIs have full freedom in setting their own academic structures.

Day-to-day management of the HEIs is the responsibility of the Rector, who is selected by the Board of the institution in an open competition and voting process. The Government approves the

result of the selection.

Universities may create their own legal entities according the decision of the Government of the NKR.

b) Financial autonomy.

The NKR HEIs have quite high degree of autonomy with respect to managing their own funds although the overall level of Public funding is low. Public funding to HEIs is delivered via annual block grant based on student numbers.

With respect to tuition fees, the NKR HEIs have right to set their own rates. Universities have freedom over financial management of their capital assets, which they acquire by their own means, though sale or rental of those properties requires Government authorisation. Besides, the status of HEIs as non-commercial state organisations means that they are prohibited from borrowing or raising money on the financial markets.

c) Staffing autonomy

HEIs staff are employed and dismissed by the institution's themselves, institutions determining the salaries of the staff. Thus in terms of staffing autonomy the NKR HEIs operate with a quite high degree of freedom.

d) Academic autonomy

Academic autonomy in the NKR HEIs is still limited. At each study level, the HEIs can offer only licensed by the MoES programmes. The number of fee-paid places for each programme is set by the Government. Besides, the HEIs must negotiate with the MoES for the allocation of fee-paid places, which is also set for individual programmes. (there is a state control over entrance exams, to public HEIs approving content and overseeing the process centrally.) However there is more freedom for selecting Master's students. The HEIs are free to decide to introduce new programmes from the list of specialties approved by the Government. So the overall autonomy of HEIs in the NKR is quite advanced, however there is still a lot that should be done to improve the level of institutional autonomy. And still the progress made by the NKR in this respect should be appreciated in the light of the fact that the NKR started the transition only in 2006-2007 and from a point of facing highly centralised and strictly control by the state system.

2. Public responsibility for higher education

EHEA Ministers have twice – in 2001 and 2003 – stated that higher education is a public good and a

public responsibility. Please describe how the public responsibility for higher education is organized and put in practice in your national higher education system. It is suggested that the description comprises a consideration of the role and responsibilities of various actors as well as a consideration of the main challenges in this area and your plans, priorities and timetable for meeting these challenges.

The NKR acknowledges that the right of education is fundamental part of human heritage values. The Constitution of the NKR asserts that HE is a right rather than privilege and states that every citizen has the right to get HE. Thus, the NKR authorities take steps towards increasing the number of citizens receiving a higher education degree and making it more equitable. The NKR society representatives (elected in the boards of the universities) being involved in the Higher Education management process increase the public responsibility in the field, by taking part in decision-making process of the HEIs. In particular, they are involved in the elections of the HEIs rectors, budget adoption and the drafting of the annual report. Last but not least, the final examinations commission chair in HEIs is usually a representative of stakeholders, non-governmental organizations or a specialist in the particular field.

3. Cooperation among stakeholders and student participation

Within the EHEA, higher education policies are developed in partnership between public authorities, the higher education community and other stakeholders. Please provide a description of who you see as the main stakeholders in higher education in your country, how these stakeholders are involved in developing higher education at present and what you see as the main challenges in this area, including your plans, priorities and timetable for addressing the challenges. In view of the fundamental role of student participation, the description should be explicit on the role of students in higher education governance at both institutional and system level, including whether student representatives are elected by the student body and whether there is an independent, democratic and representative national student union open to all students.

The structure of the boards of HEIs is being regulated by a law adopted by the Government. It is precisely underlined in the law that 25% of boards should consist of student representatives. Meanwhile, stakeholder representatives are also elected in the boards of HEIs.

All the Universities have their own Student Councils, including faculty councils elected on a

democratic basis. The faculty boards, holding the deans election processes, are also elected on democratic base and include representatives of Student Councils. The labor market and Student Councils representatives are also involved in the drafting process of educational programmes.

There are several major stakeholders in NKR involved in the Higher Education process. Mainly, the “K-Telecom” communication company, “Vallex” Base Metals Company and the NKR branch of “Synopsys Armenia” Information Technology Company. More than 60 students were employed in those companies during the last three years.



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