

## **1st meeting of the Bologna Working Group on Recognition,**

### **DRAFT OUTCOME OF PROCEEDINGS**

**Brussels 16 Feb 2010, 9.00-13.00**

**Venue: Boudewijn building (Flemish authorities)**

**Chair: Andrejs Rauhvargers, Latvia**

#### **1. Welcome by Chair**

The Chair presented his role and informed about the Report to the BFUG on the analysis of the National Action plans for recognition submitted by ministers in 2007.

#### **2. Adoption of agenda**

The agenda was adopted.

#### **3. Information by Chair and secretariat**

The Chair informed that the mandate of this WG is to prepare recommendations on the basis of the Report on the National Action Plans on Recognition. Due to the mixed composition of the group including both representatives from BFUG as well as the ENIC-NARIC centres the expertise of recognition centres and the BFUG can be used. Furthermore a mixed group between ENIC/NARIC persons would be favourable. Because the ENIC/NARIC-Centres have the „in-between-status”, they have the position and capability to advise both the governments and HEIs of their countries. The main purpose of the group’s work is to give clear recommendations to the Ministers to be reflected in the Communiqué of 2012.

The CoE informed that the „Improving recognition in the EHA: analysis of national Action Plans” and „Developing attitudes to recognition: substantial differences in an age of globalisation” have recently been issued in the CoE Higher Education Series and those books were distributed to WG members.

#### **4. The Working group on Qualifications Frameworks – information by the Chair of the WG**

The Chair of the Qualifications frameworks group (Mr Sjur Bergan, Council of Europe) explained the generics of the WG on QF. The first WG on Qualifications frameworks was appointed in 2003 and was then chaired by Denmark. This group developed the overarching framework of qualifications for the EHEA that was adopted by ministers in Bergen in 2005. In the Communiqué of 2007 the Ministers asked the CoE to coordinate the development of national qualifications frameworks compatible with the overarching framework of the EHEA and to ensure cooperation with the EU qualifications framework for lifelong learning (EQF-LLL). The current group on qualifications frameworks has existed since 2007.

The “Bologna Framework” covers Higher Education (3 cycles) with the option of intermediate qualifications within the cycles. The EQF-LLL, adopted by the Council of the

European Union and the European Parliament in 2008, covers 32 countries. The Chair underlined that at the outset there was risk that these two overarching frameworks would go in different directions but this was luckily averted and there is now close cooperation between the two frameworks. The Report given on the occasion of the Ministerial Conference of 2009 (Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve) showed that most countries were on their way to developing their national frameworks, and this impression had been further underscored by a new survey carried out by the CoE in early 2010. 8 countries have now self certified their national frameworks against the QF-EHEA; of these, Malta was the first country to also reference its national framework against the EQF in the same operation thereby demonstrating the compatibility of the two overarching frameworks. The final deadline for the completion of the NQFs is 2012. In most countries the shift towards learning outcomes is a difficult challenge. The main problem is furthermore not the development of a Qualifications Framework, but to make it work in practice. The Chair informed about a conference on Qualifications Frameworks in Dublin on April 15 to be followed by a meeting of national correspondents for Qualifications Framework on April 16. The national correspondents will be the link between the national level and the European level. The link to the topic of recognition is obvious and should be discussed.

##### **5. Discussion of Terms of Reference of the working group, setting road map and timetable.**

*Document: Terms of Reference of the Recognition Working group, Draft timetable of Bologna WG Recognition, Roadmap.*

**Regarding the Terms of Reference:** The main purpose of the WG is to come up with draft recommendations to the ministers and to improve the recognition within the EHEA and also mutual recognition with other parts of the world. The 5 specific tasks in the ToR were discussed (see ToR WG Recognition).

**Discussions on tasks set by TOR:** Final report should be ready in second half of 2011 and after discussion and approval by BFUG it should be presented to the ministers. The essence of the report (in form of recommendations) should be on the table of Ministers for approval.

The CoE informed the group that there had been a discussion about criteria and procedures at the meeting of the Mediterranean Network (MERIC) in Mostar.

ESU asked if the work of the WG will also cover recognition of prior learning. The Chair informed that the national action plans, according to the template were concentrating on the “regular” recognition of qualifications and credit points but not gathering information on recognition prior learning. In such a way the issue of LLL and recognition of prior learning, while being important, are not within the scope of this working group.

Denmark informed about the project „European area of recognition” and the foreseen kick-off meeting of it. The aim of the European Area of Recognition project is to produce a European Recognition Manual that provides a practical description of what should be the standard procedures, criteria and results of credential evaluation. The Netherlands proposed that a good-practice collection should be made and that it should be found out, how to find good practices. The CoE stated that the results of this good-practice collection should be the basis of the work of the WG Recognition. The CoE also stressed that the National action plans were rather disappointing mainly being information of the state of the affairs rather than actually planning improvements in recognition. The work of this WG should not be to repeat the action plans.

**Draft Timetable:** The Chair underlined that the meetings of the WG on recognition should be timed together with the Working Group on Qualification Frameworks. During March/May new ideas should be gathered and during the next meeting in Strasbourg in June 2010 a brainstorming on the recommendations should be made. This should be followed by a discussion of all the issues mentioned in ToR with the ENIC/NARIC Networks and be followed by the preparation of the first draft recommendations from July to October. The Members of the group informed that the suggested date for next meeting was not possible because overlap with other meetings (Recognition seminar from June 7 and 8 in Tallinn, Meeting of the European Consortium of Accreditation June 10 and 11 in Graz). After a discussion the date for the **next meeting in Strasbourg on June 10** was agreed. The meeting will start in the morning with a view to end not too late in the afternoon.

The Chair informed about an idea to organize a stakeholder meeting/conference involving all the parties interested in recognition and asked about the opinion of the participants and if a stakeholder seminar in 2011 is needed. The group suggested that if such a seminar would be organised together with the representatives of the Bologna Qualifications Frameworks group, a connection to a BFUG meeting could also be made. Assuming that a meeting will be held together with the representatives of the WG on Qualification Frameworks the interest will be high rather many participants could be expected. If the meeting is to be taken together with the BFUG meeting, a discussion with the Presidency and Co-Presidency has to be held. Such a stakeholders meeting however can take place only if funding can be secured.

With the above changes the timetable was approved.

**Roadmap:** The Chair informed that after gathering ideas from WG members in March/May the very first drafts on issues I) Roles of authorities, HEIs, ENIC/NARICs in implementing recommendations and II) considerations for reviewing legislation can be prepared and then discussed in June 10 meeting.

Parts I and II: A draft for a decision will be prepared by the Chair for the meeting in June.

Part III: differences in recognition criteria and procedures/more equal treatment in EHEA:

The Chair stated that the group could check the report and then get back to the Chair with suggestions. The Netherlands suggested that the outcomes of the kick-off meeting of the project „European area of recognition” in April could be used and that a definition of „good practice” is needed. It was agreed that for the table at the end of the “Report on the national Action plans” can be used to start discussion on the examples of good and bad practice. The Chair stated that for the meeting in June, only an outline would be needed and that a presentation of the state of play can be given there, while draft recommendations should be prepared by the autumn meeting of the group. The CoE stated that an identification of the differences in procedures could be made and ways how to reach more equal treatment should be explored.

Denmark expressed the view that the starting point should not be by talking about the differences, but the approaches, an identification of the differences has been already made. The Holy See supported this approach to concentrate on the good practice examples, Germany also supported it. The United Kingdom stated that the identification of „good-practice” examples is important, this would also improve the finding of a motivation. Austria asked if the countries should be addressed in a special way, a stronger attitude in naming countries would be recommended.

The Chair asked if the Netherlands as the country leading the European Area for Recognition project would agree to prepare a background document for the meeting in June.

- The Netherlands **agreed to prepare a document** on differences of approaches, criteria and procedures for discussion on part III at June meeting, with assistance of Finland as country chairing the LRC committee.

Part IV: Quality of recognition procedures:

The Chair informed that according to the Report on National Action Plans for recognition one way how to improve recognition practices within Higher Education Institutions is to include the institutional recognition procedures among the issues assessed by both the internal Quality Assurance inside the HEIs as well as the external assessments of institutions and/or programmes. National action plans have shown some examples of good practice in this area in a limited number of countries. The Chair however was concerned of the possibilities to obtain information about the internal procedures within institutions because the Stocktaking exercise had demonstrated that countries do not possess such information and asked whether the EUA would have such information.

The EUA expressed that some information on internal measures of HEI’s gathered by EUA for our publications, notably for the Trends 2010 report, could be made available. It could

furthermore be checked whether the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality assurance in the EHEA (ESG) are actually taken into account by EUA's Internal Evaluation Program. Generally, it was stated that there is no standardised procedure for an efficient collection of information from EUA's members. The Chair stated that when the ESG will be accordingly revised, the recognition procedures could improve. ENQA offered to provide some information on current procedures (via their direct contacts). The present representatives of E4 agreed that a short info could be provided in June and a more substantial information would be provided for a period later in 2010. Denmark suggested that quality assurance should not go into details of institutional procedures but rather to check if HEIs have implemented the Lisbon Convention. Estonia stated that there is also competence on these issues in the ERIC/NARIC Network and that a cooperation with and between the ENIC/NARIC and ENQA could be productive. EUA suggested to include the external quality procedures, the Commission reminded that this is already included in the ToR. The CoE informed that in the forthcoming ENIC/NARIC meeting, these issues would be put in for the discussion here. Germany suggested to collect first information, and after that recommendations should be formulated.

- EUA and ENQA (speaking for E4) agreed to prepare information for the meeting in June.

Part V: role of QFs in implementing the recommendations:

One purpose of the Qualification Frameworks is to make systems more transparent and to investigate how QFs can help making recognition easier. The QFs should give an answer also about the workload. The role of QFs in recognition has already been considered, e.g. at the 2009 NARIC meeting, and it shows that QFs indeed improve transparency and thus help recognition, yet it should be understood that it will not make recognition automatic. The usefulness of QFs for recognition much depends on the development and description of learning outcomes. The Chair suggested that this should be discussed at both working groups on QF and Recognition as well as to involve also the ENIC/NARIC network.

- The Chair concluded that a more substantial draft would be provided after the **end of June and discussed in the autumn meeting of the WG.**

Part VI: Improving recognition with other parts of the world:

A discussion about a draft (which would be ready at the end of June) is envisaged. The CoE stated that a global discussion can be done, although it would not be a one way conversation, but an exchange. Finland stated that a connection with the policy forum would be important. The CoE stated that a more substantial discussion with representatives of other parts of the world than the one which was held in Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve would be needed. It should be noted that several members of the WG are involved in the "Recognition in a global context" working group within the ENIC/NARIC networks.

- The WG welcomed proposal that Françoise Profit(France) and the bureaus of the ENIC and NARIC networks, will write a background document on the issue of recognition with other parts of the world but after all June meetings.

## **6. Presentation of the report on the analysis of National action plans for recognition and first discussion**

Document: Report on the analysis of National action plans for recognition

A large number of countries (Austria, Estonia, Hungary, Finland, Lithuania, Slovakia, Romania) stated that their national legislation has been adopted or amended on the basis of Lisbon Recognition Convention principles. Others have not amended legislation after ratification on the Lisbon Recognition Convention. Only few countries plan to make amendments. The Chair stated that Quality Assurance could be a helpful tool. ESU stated that the focus should be on different issues, also the QA Process should be observed. The CoE stated that autonomy and legislation are important, but that autonomy is a cross-sectoral matter. Germany stated that the improvement of the recognition process – especially the recognition of credits - is difficult, when it comes to stricter laws or other tools of governmental regulations, because of the autonomy of the higher education institutions. As an example Germany referred to the last OECD country report, where Germany is criticised for giving the German Higher Education Institutions not enough autonomy, even though much of the governmental regulations were already abolished. The EUA stated that universities have to build up institutions, because how to build and evaluate has to be concise. ENQA stated that the balance of the autonomy of universities and the legal framework has to be taken into account. It was stated that 6 countries still use the term “nostrification” (back to the 50ies) or the term “equivalence” (1970). There are different kinds of approaches, in some cases ENICs/NARICs receive the information and the autonomous institutions make their decisions. In other cases, these institutions have no right to ask the HEI these questions and in some countries, it is a centralised decision. There is also a difference between the authenticity and the translation of documents. Furthermore, different degrees have different recognition procedures.