

NATIONAL ACTION PLAN FOR THE RECOGNITION OF QUALIFICATIONS IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

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"Strengthening Higher Education in Bosnia and Herzegovina"

INTRODUCTION

In the Bergen Communiqué 46 ministers of education committed themselves to

draw up national action plans to improve the quality of the process associated with recognition of foreign qualifications. These plans will form part of each country's national action plan for the next Ministerial Conference.

Within the joint EC/CoE project “Strengthening Higher Education in Bosnia and Herzegovina” a working group was formed in May 2006 to draft the national action plan for improving the quality of the process associated with the recognition of foreign qualifications. The working group includes representatives of education authorities and of higher education institutions in Bosnia and Herzegovina. At its first meeting the task force agreed to divide its work load and establish subgroups in accordance with the structure of guidelines for national action plans¹.

Taking into account the significance of the implementation of provisions from the Lisbon Recognition Convention the task force drafted the following action plan.

1. Legislation

1.1 *Lisbon Recognition Convention*

Bosnia and Herzegovina signed the Lisbon Recognition Convention on 17.07.2003. The Convention was ratified by the BiH Presidency on 19.11.2003. (BiH Official Gazette No. 15/03) after both chambers of the BiH Parliamentary Assembly had voted in favour it.

1.2 *Review of national legislation relevant to recognition*

Since the ratification of the Lisbon Recognition Convention, several legislative reform initiatives in higher education were launched. These include drafting a state level higher education law as well as initiatives at the levels of Entities and cantons.

At the time this action plan is produced the state level higher education law has not been adopted.

Despite these reform initiatives, the legislation regulating recognition issues is largely based on the traditional principles of nostrification. Specific procedures for academic recognition are not stipulated by law.

¹ Guidelines for NAP elaborated by the ENIC Bureau, the ENIC Advisory Board and the Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee. The Bologna Follow up Group approved the Guidelines in Vienna on April 7, 2006

It is recommended that the BiH Ministry of Civil Affairs coordinates activities with the objective to review the existing legislation and its compliance with the provisions of the Lisbon Recognition Convention and its subsidiary texts. The review should include the current legislation as well as recommendations for the implementation of the principles of the Lisbon Recognition Convention and its subsidiary texts.

The mentioned activities will be conducted through a working group which will be composed of representatives of education authorities and higher education institutions. The foreseen deadline for realisation is one year.

The review should be published and available to all interested parties within the country and abroad.

1.3 *Bilateral or regional recognition agreements*

It is recommended that the working group (1.2) includes existing bilateral and regional agreements for recognition in the review.

2. Recognition practice

2.1 *Criteria and procedures*

Due to different legislation and a lack of a state level higher education law, the procedures and criteria are not fully in compliance with recommendation on criteria and procedures for the assessment of foreign qualifications and periods of study, adopted in 2001.

It is recommended to ensure the implementation of obligations from the Lisbon Recognition Convention for the entire territory of BiH through one law at state level. It is necessary to prescribe identical jurisdictions and procedures for the entire territory, in other words to harmonise legal regulations in a way that ensures equality, and unifies the time frame for processing applications (not longer than 60 days), regardless of which institution is running the process.

It is recommended that the BiH ENIC centre has a coordinating role in promoting the implementation of recommendations on criteria and procedures for the assessment of foreign qualifications and periods of study.

2.2 *Joint degrees*

Also in this area, the legislation is inconsistent and does not specifically refer to criteria and procedures for recognising joint degrees.

2.3 *Overview of institutional practice*

See 2.1.

2.4 *Transparency tools for recognition*

In accordance with the Bologna process the majority of higher education institutions introduced ECTS as well as a Diploma Supplement. Some universities have a Diploma Supplement in English language published on their web site.

It is recommended to introduce a «transcript of records» in BiH's recognition practice, as one of the commonly recognised documents serving transparency in the recognition of qualifications in the EHEA as well as reaching the Bologna objectives concerning horizontal and vertical student mobility.

2.5 Borderless/transnational education

There is no defined policy at any level (educational authorities/higher education institutions) which regulates the recognition of borderless/transnational qualifications.

3. Information provision

3.1 Provision of information on recognition

In accordance with Lisbon Recognition Convention and the ENIC/NARIC Code of good practice for information provision, which is one of the subsidiary texts of the Lisbon Recognition Convention, the draft of the state level law on higher education foresees the establishment of a Centre for information and recognition in the area of higher education, i.e. a BiH ENIC centre. The centre's foreseen functions are *inter alia*:

- the collection and update of information on education systems and qualifications;
- advisory functions;
- ensuring adequate, reliable and authentic information.

The future BiH ENIC centre should by all means have its own web portal, since this would encompass its full transparency in the country and abroad while also facilitating access to information.

It is recommended that the importance of establishing a web portal and its maintenance is taken in consideration when elaboration legal documents that regulate the work of the future BiH ENIC centre, by including the position of an IT expert profile in the foreseen staff structure. This also implies planning an adequate budget.

In this transitional period, until the BiH ENIC centre is established, information on higher education in BiH and higher education institutions are available on the web site of the BiH Ministry of Civil Affairs and the web sites of higher education institutions.

The deadlines foreseen for these measures are certainly related to the adoption of the state law on higher education. Assuming that in the near future the existing draft of the state law on higher education is adopted and taking into account that through projects of the Council of Europe, the European Commission and other donors certain steps have already been made, it can be said that the optimal deadline for the establishment of a func-

tional BiH ENIC centre after the adoption of the state law on higher education is one year.

3.2 Information package for applicants

Due to the currently rather fragmented situation in the BiH higher education area, as referred to in item 2.1, the approach to the provision of an information package for applicants varies across the country. It is the universities and faculties that are directly addressed by an applicant, who provide information, in most cases on ad hoc basis, regarding the conditions for the recognition of qualifications through their offices.

It is recommended that the future BiH ENIC centre develops a template for information packages that is made available to applicants. The purpose of the information package is, first of all, to familiarise applicants with the recognition procedure in a simple and easily understandable way. The package should include:

- A listing of documents the applicant is obliged to submit for the purpose of recognition (verified copies, translations of originals, CV, ID, information on the higher education institution's conditions).
- The information package should contain one part explaining the purpose of recognition, in other words, an applicant should always indicate for which purpose he/she requests recognition.
- The duration of the evaluation process
- The information on who performs the evaluation
- The information on who takes the final decision
- The applicant's rights
- Prices/fees

4. Structures

4.1 National information centre

Due to the obligations taken from Lisbon Recognition Convention and the participation in the Bologna process i.e. the shown commitment of Bosnia and Herzegovina to have all its institutions participate in the creation of a European Higher Education Area, certain steps have already been taken in the area of information collection. Within the Ministry of Civil Affairs a small team has been established with the support of the international community to start collecting information on higher education in BiH. Outcomes achieved so far: relevant legal documents and regulations and bilateral agreements are being collected, systematic collection of information on the higher education in progress, participation in the ENIC-NARIC network.

In terms of its responsibilities the role of future ENIC centre in Bosnia and Herzegovina will be advisory i.e. it will serve education authorities and higher education institutions in facilitating recognition procedures. The final decision on recognition should be made by the relevant education authorities or higher education institutions.

It is recommended to promote the concept of ENIC/NARIC network and its role in the process of academic recognition as much as possible. It is necessary to implement an open method of cooperation in the country and abroad. It is very important to further strengthen the cooperation between the ENIC/NARIC centres in the region, since the highest mobility of students takes place between BiH and its neighbouring countries.

4.2 *Cooperation recognition/quality assurance bodies*

As far as the quality assurance concept in BiH is concerned, an agency at the state level is not yet established as a body in charge of quality assurance, i.e. the establishment of joint standards/mechanisms for quality assurance.

It is recommended to establish an agency for quality assurance in higher education in accordance with ENQA standards and to establish cooperation with the BiH ENIC centre in the country and similar bodies abroad. Online forums, as well as periodical experience exchange through conferences with emphasis on good practice examples should be foreseen in relevant budgets.

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in Bosnia and Herzegovina

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