

BFUG4 9c

REPORTS FROM
POTENTIAL NEW MEMBERS OF THE BOLOGNA PROCESS

Country:	Republic of Azerbaijan
Date:	30 November 2004
Contact person for the BFUG (one name only): Official position:	Azad AKHUNDOV Chief Executive, Ministry of Education
Email address:	a_akhundov@yahoo.com

1. Towards Bologna**1.1. Give a brief description of policy developments and legislative reforms in higher education in your country**

Education sector, including higher education sector is considered a field of activity of strategic significance and priority development and a pre-requisite for development of society and state in Azerbaijan. Higher education system of our country has a democratic and secular nature and it is based on national values and values that are common to all mankind. Radical changes, including legislature reforms have been implemented in higher education sector in order to secure the citizens' right to education based on principles of Azerbaijan state education policy stipulated under the Education Law.

For instance, the first national Education Law was adopted after Azerbaijan gained its independence. According to the Education Law the new Regulations, rules and procedures were developed and a transition to multilevel system of higher education (bachelorship and magistracy) was implemented. Since 1993 non-state higher educational institutions were established and began functioning along with the state higher educational institutions. A number of higher educational institutions were awarded university and academy status and 6 higher educational institutions acquired the right to function on self-governance basis. After "Education Reform Program in Azerbaijan Republic" was approved by the President of the Azerbaijan Republic through his decree dated June 15, 1999, a new phase of reforms started at all levels of education, including higher education sector.

Two phases (1999 and 2000-2003) of the Reform Program that identified strategic areas, goals and objectives of education reforms, national education structuring and state education policy in our Republic, as well as aimed at bringing our national education system into accord with international standards and our integration into the world education system and divided into three implementation phases have already been completed. The most part of the planned activities related to higher education have been completed during these phases, normative, juridical and economic basis and database for new education system securing the Azerbaijan citizens' right to education stipulated under the Constitution and satisfying the market economy requirements have been established.

At present the activities stipulated under the 3-rd phase (beginning from 2004) of the Reform Program are being implemented consecutively.

At the same time, a new Education Law was developed taking into consideration social and

political changes occurring in the country and results of completed education reforms. After nation-wide discussion this Law was submitted for consideration to Milli Madjlis (National Parliament). After the new Law comes into effect the relevant modifications and improvements will be made in all legislative acts, Regulations and rules, other normative and juridical and other special documents related to education, including higher education.

2. National organisation

2.1. Give a short description of the structure of public authorities responsible for higher education, the main agencies/bodies in higher education and their competencies (For example, do higher education institutions report to different ministries?)

The Cabinet of Ministers of the Azerbaijan Republic is an authorized supreme Government agency responsible for education sector, including higher education. The Cabinet of Ministers determines the higher education strategy, supervises implementation of the Education Law and related legislative acts and documents, establishes and administers central state structures for education management, determines the organizational structure of higher education system management, determines procedures for establishment, restructuring and closing of institutes of higher education, approves list of specialities and enrollment plans for higher educational institutions, as well as regulations and rules related to higher education, etc.

The education strategy, the unified state education policy and all decisions issued by the Cabinet of Ministers are implemented by Ministry of Education, that is a central management agency for education system of the Azerbaijan Republic.

The teaching and methodological leadership over all higher educational institutions functioning in the Azerbaijan Republic, regardless of its type of ownership and subordination, as well as supervision over quality of teaching and learning process at these institutions is conducted by the Ministry of Education. The Ministry of Education reports to the Cabinet of Ministers.

Within the Ministry of Education the direct responsibility for higher education belongs to Higher and secondary specialised (professional) education department. This department coordinates activities of all higher educational institutions regardless of type of its ownership and subordination, conducts teaching and methodological leadership and supervision over quality of teaching and learning process at these institutions. The Department coordinates its activities with relevant units, divisions and other institutions of the MoE, all state and non-state educational institutions, regardless of type of its ownership and subordination, ministries, agencies and head offices that have higher educational institutions under its supervision, as well as other educational establishments. Higher educational institutions report to the Ministry of Education.

2.2. Give a short description of the institutional structure (For example, number of public/private universities/other higher education institutions or numbers/percentage of students in public/private sector)

47 higher educational institutions are functioning in the Azerbaijan Republic, including 31 state and 16 non-state higher schools. Among state higher educational institutions 5 are of special purpose (police academy, higher schools of military profile etc) and 6 are self-governance institutions. Higher educational institutions of the Republic include 25 universities, 11 academies, 4 institutes, 2 higher colleges, 1 seminary, 1 conservatoire, 3

institutions with higher educational institutions status. Two higher educational institutions has its branches in Azerbaijan (Azerbaijan Teachers Institute has a branch in 11 regions) and abroad (Azerbaijan Economy University has a branch in Derbent, Russian Federation). The 25 state (total 31) and 13 non-state (total 16) higher educational establishments deliver master degree program along with bachelor program. Thus, the magistracy is functioning and master degree program in 80 specialties is being delivered at 38 higher educational establishments (total 47).

The 81380 students (including 37116 students funded by state and 44264 students paying tuition fees) have enrolled in higher educational institutions that report to the Ministry of Education. Among them 62607 are full-time students, 18632 part-time students and 141 evening-shift students. Number of evening-shift students was minimized (8 students at Azerbaijan Architecture and Construction University and 133 students at Azerbaijan Languages University). About 6 thousand students have enrolled for the magistracy level. The 9702 professors and teachers, including 745 doctors of science, professors and 4232 candidates of science, assistant professors are occupied with learning and education of the above-mentioned students.

The structure of a higher educational institutions include Scientific Board, faculties and their scientific boards, departments, divisions , scientific and teaching laboratories, etc. Activities of the mentioned structural units, as well as faculty' and students' activities are regulated by approximately 50 regulations and rules issued by the Cabinet of Ministers and the Ministry of Education.

2.3. To what extent are private and State higher education institutions covered by the same regulations?

The mentioned Regulations and rules apply to both private and state higher educational establishments on the equal terms.

3. Quality assurance

If the answer to any of the questions 3.1. to 3.3. is no, what are your plans in the respective direction?

3.1. Does your country have a national quality assurance system? What are the responsibilities of the bodies and institutions involved?

Ministry of Education and its Department of Higher and Secondary specialised education is responsible for education quality assurance in higher educational institutions. Azerbaijan Institute for Educational Issues under the Ministry of Education is also involved in this process.

3.2. Does your national quality assurance system include evaluation of programmes or institutions, external review, international participation, participation of students, the publication of results? (If yes, please describe)

Evaluation of programmes and higher educational institutions is implemented by the Ministry of Education. Monitoring of study process is also conducted by the Ministry of Education, while control over financial activity of higher schools is implemented by the Ministry of Finance.

3.3. Does your national quality assurance system include accreditation, certification or comparable procedures? (If yes, please describe)

A major goal of education reforms implemented in Azerbaijan is the improvement of education quality and establishment of new education management mechanism. For instance, implementation of multi-score (100 score) student assessment system at higher educational establishments of our country and monitoring of semester examinations created pre-requisites for education quality improvement.

Control over education quality in higher education system of the Azerbaijan Republic was conducted through inspections for many years. But in fact the results of these inspections affected the improvement of educational establishments.

Establishment and implementation of new mechanism for supervision over education quality in our country was emphasized in the Decree of President of the Azerbaijan Republic dated June 13, 2000 and titled "About improvement of education system in the Azerbaijan Republic" and the Ministry of Education was charged with execution of this Decree. Within the framework of implementation of the Decree the MoE developed an education quality supervision mechanism and the Regulations titled "About certification and accreditation of higher and secondary specialised educational institutions" was approved by the Decision of the Cabinet of Ministers dated April 15, 2004. According to these Regulations the criteria and requirements were developed for assessment of activities and identification of status for various educational establishments during its certification and accreditation.

In our opinion, these completed activities in the area of education quality assurance and control may be considered as the first step towards integration into Certification model to be implemented in all-Europe education area.

4. The two-cycle degree system

4.1. Has your country introduced a national degree system for higher education based on two main cycles (equivalent to a BA/MA structure)?

(If yes, please describe - for instance, are two-cycle degrees optional or obligatory for the institutions? - If not, what are your plans for introducing this measure?)

Two phases of higher education are proposed in Bologna Declaration. The first phase includes an education prior acquiring of the first academic degree, and the second phase includes an education after acquiring of the first academic degree. The duration of the first phase is 3-4 years. Graduates of the second phase acquire master (1-2 years) or doctor (7-8 years) degree. In all cases establishment of agreed, adapted and comparable qualifications is stipulated under the Declaration. Azerbaijan has already gained some experience in this field.

For instance, in 1993 the transition to two-level (bachelorship, magistracy) higher education system was implemented in our country.

At the first level of higher education, i.e. at bachelorship level a general course in some basic area or certain professions is delivered. The bachelor degree program provides opportunity for gaining general scientific, humanities and specialised applied knowledge in the areas covering relevant fields of activity. The duration of full-time bachelor degree education is 4 years. The bachelor degree study is implemented according to teaching plans developed on the basis of standards relevant to certain areas (specialties) and approved by the Ministry of Education. Graduates of bachelor level write degree work and defend it before the State Attestation Committee.

Successful graduates of bachelorship level of higher education are conferred with bachelor qualification degree based on decision by the Scientific Board and recommendation of the State Attestation Committee.

Establishment of the second, i.e. master level of higher education in our country was

implemented during 1997-98 academic year. The purpose of this level is to develop specialists in certain areas who will be able to work independently and creatively. According to the Education Law of the Azerbaijan Republic, the most talented and promising specialists conferred with bachelor degree are retained in magistracy on a competitive basis. Graduates of higher educational institutions delivering only bachelor level can also apply for participation in competitions for magistracy. Magistracy is delivered full-time and part-time. The official duration of magistracy depends on master education programs and ranges between 1,5-2 (part-time 2,5) years subject to specialty. During the final semester of the magistracy the students defend master thesis. Students who successfully executed individual plan on the master program and defended master thesis are conferred with the master qualification and academic degree and are given a master diploma of unified sample approved by the state.

4.2. Are different orientations of degrees embedded in the system e.g. through a legal division between academic and professional degrees, or through a binary system of institutions?

One-level education is delivered at 9 higher educational establishments (total 47) that are functioning in our Republic. Among them, one higher educational establishment (Azerbaijan Medical University) delivers two level education in “Pharmacology” area along with common one-level (5 years) education.

5. Recognition of degrees and periods of study

5.1. If your country has not ratified the Lisbon Recognition Convention, when do you plan to do so?

In 1997 the Republic of Azerbaijan signed the Lisbon Recognition Convention and in 1998 officially ratified it. participated as the country to support the Lisbon Convention on the recognition of the educational documents. In March 2000, the Convention on the recognition of the higher education specialties in the European region was officially ratified, the official Government Structure, namely the Ministry of Education was determined for this process. In May 2003, by the Governmental decree “The rules for recognition of the higher education specialties of the foreign countries and determining of the equivalency (nostrification)” were approved. The committee established in the Ministry has started with the actual activities.

5.2. Does every student graduating in your country receive the Diploma Supplement?

- *automatically and free of charge?*
- *in a widely spoken European language?*

If not, what are your plans for introducing this measure?

Azerbaijan provides the Diploma Supplement for the bachelor and master diplomas. The Supplement is surely provided with the diploma. The graduates pay very little amount (12,000 manat-2 Euro) for getting diplomas.

- The diploma and its Supplement is filled in the Latin script
- The diplomas of the foreign students studying in Azerbaijan are written in two languages - Azerbaijani and English.

In the future the following issues may be taken into consideration: to provide the diplomas

free of charge, to write the higher education documents in the mostly used European language (for example, in English).

6. Doctoral studies and research

6.1. Give a short description of the organisation of third cycle studies

(For example, direct access from the bachelor level, balance between organised courses, independent study and thesis)

At present, the post graduate studies (for doctoral degree) cover different spheres. Those doing research for the doctor degree defend their thesis on different specialties in the Specialized Councils after completion of their research studies and are awarded “Doctor of science”

6.2. What are the links between higher education and research in your country?

(For example, what percentage of publicly-funded research is conducted within HE institutions?)

There are close relations between the higher education and scientific- research sector in the higher education institutes of the Republic. More than 40 % of the scientific capacity of the country is in the higher education system. In addition to having a teaching load of 450-500 hours the professors and teachers of higher educational institutions do scientific researches in the chairs, laboratories and scientific-research institutes attached to the higher education establishments.

The emphasis is put on application of the outputs of the scientific-research activities in the teaching and learning process and active participation of the students in the scientific-research activities. The subject Olympiads, the contests for the best student and diploma paper and student conferences are held in this regard.

7. Mobility of students and staff

7.1. Describe the main factors influencing mobility of students from as well as to your country *(For instance funds devoted to mobility schemes, portability of student loans and grants, visa problems)*

After gaining independence, the embassies, permanent representations have been opened in Azerbaijan, as well as diplomatic representations of our republic have been opened in the foreign countries, including European states as well. The intensive development of this process has facilitated travel of the Azerbaijani citizens to foreign countries and has provided simplified entry of the foreign citizens to our country. At present, approximately 3000 foreign citizens study in 20 state higher educational establishments of Azerbaijan to get bachelor, master and post graduate degree and work for probation period. The geography of this contingent covers approximately 20 countries. At present, more than 1000 citizens of the Republic study abroad on the state finance and more than 4000 citizens study on fee-paying basis.

7.2. Describe any special measures taken in your country to improve mobility of students from as well as to your country

Necessary legal basis was established and conditions were created for our citizens studying abroad and for foreign citizens to get education

7.3. Describe the main factors influencing mobility of teachers and staff from as well as to your country (For instance tenure of appointment, grant schemes, social security, visa problems)

Mobility of teachers and staff is implemented in compliance with appropriate bilateral and multi-lateral agreements, protocols and other documents signed between the Ministry of Education and ministries of education of different countries, as well as on the basis of direct agreements signed by our higher schools and their partners abroad.

7.4. Describe any special measures taken in your country to improve mobility of academic teachers and staff from as well as to your country

Favorable conditions have been created to provide for the mobility of the teaching and other staff. At present, the Azerbaijani specialists work in the higher educational institutions of the world and European higher educational institutions. The scholars and specialists from several foreign countries work in the higher educational establishments of Azerbaijan.

8. Higher education institutions and students

8.1. Describe aspects of autonomy of higher education institutions

Is autonomy determined/defined by law? To what extent can higher education institutions decide on internal organisation, staffing, new study programmes and financing?

In conformity with the Article 24 of the Education Law of the Republic of Azerbaijan the higher education institutes are granted the autonomy on the basis of staff capacity, material-technical resource and scientific achievements.

Autonomous higher education institutions which function on the self-governance basis are directly financed from the state budget.

At present, 6 higher educational institutions of the Republic of Azerbaijan (Baku State University, Azerbaijan State Oil Academy, Nakhichevan State University, Azerbaijan State Institute of Economics, Azerbaijan Medical University, Azerbaijan Agricultural Academy) operate on the basis of the self-governance. The activities of such institutions are regulated by the "Regulation on higher education institutions functioning on the basis of the self-governance" approved by the decree No 191 of the Cabinet of Ministers dated December 4, 2004 and by the Charter developed and approved accordingly.

8.2. Describe actions taken to ensure active participation from all partners in the process

The heads of students' unions, students' scientific societies and students' councils are included in the Scientific Councils (on the higher institutes and faculties) on the basis of their positions. They take an active part in the discussion of all issues of the Council and those related to the content and organization of the education.

8.3. How do students participate in and influence the organisation and content of education at universities and other higher education institutions and at the national level? (For example, participation in University Governing Bodies, Academic Councils etc)

According to the existing syllabus the hours assigned for the optional subjects constitute 20 % of the auditorium teaching hours thus enabling the students to select the subjects independently. Such involvement of the students in the organization of the education, development of the content and management of the education has a positive impact on the quality of the education and on development of democracy.

9. The social dimension of the Bologna Process

9.1. Describe measures which promote equality of access to higher education

In conformity with the Constitution of the Republic of Azerbaijan and Education Law all citizens of our country has the right to education and higher education, irrespective of his/her race, national and religious identity, language, sex, age, health, social-financial status, social origin, political belief, imprisonment cases. The equality of rights determined in the laws are provided by the state. There are no gender restrictions for the access to higher educational institutions. This allows women to participate in all spheres of production as an equal-righted specialist.

The age restrictions for people wishing to be admitted into higher schools has been cancelled. The representatives of national minorities have the same rights to education as national majority . They successfully participate in international and republican contests on different subjects organized by the higher schools, and also in young talents contests.

The legislation of Azerbaijan Republic provides equal rights in all areas of life for men and women. The main principles of gender equality and policy are considered when drawing up the laws in the society.

Several trainings have been conducted within the framework of “Strengthening the activities against violence to women” project together with Azerbaijan Women Managers Association in higher schools of the country during the previous years.

“Summer schools” have been set up in order to prepare higher school female teachers to provide training in “History of women education in Azerbaijan and abroad”, “Psychology and methodology of teaching the gender courses”, “Integration of gender problems into the humanities”.

Gender centers have been set up in some universities. With assistance from the Ministry of Education, trainings have been conducted on “Gender education” for teachers from higher schools specialized in social sciences and humanities in March-June 2003. In addition, a special course on “Gender theory fundamentals” is taught for students from social and humanity departments in Public Administration Academy under the President of Azerbaijan Republic, and also in “Western” and “Caspian” Universities.

As may be seen, a sufficient number of activities have been carried out in order to provide for equal rights in higher education.

10. Developments in lifelong learning

10.1. What measures have been taken by your country to encourage higher education institutions in developing lifelong learning paths?

For the first time in the Republic, specific conceptual provisions on adult education (lifelong education) have been developed and the Concept has been adopted after serious discussions at the Ministry of Education Board.

It may be seen, when looking at the chronology of development of lifelong education, that since 1997 Azerbaijan has officially been recognized as participant of the international processes going on in area of lifelong education. Thus,, related specialists from Azerbaijan didn't only participate at Fifth International Conference on Adult Education (Hamburg Declaration on Adult Education, 1997), European Summit on Lifelong Education (European Union Memorandum on Uninterrupted Education, Lisbon, 2000), Sophia Conference on

“Education for All” Program (Call, 2003), Eighth Conference of Education Ministers of CIS countries (Resolution on Development of Adult Education System and Enlightenment, 2003), Regional Conference on “Education for All-Lifelong Education in Middle Asia” (Declaration of First Regional Conference, 2003), but they also made presentations of national reports and brought the Azerbaijani approaches onto the global “educational scene”. Our official delegation participated at the International Conference on “Adult Education: Development Perspectives in 21st Century” (Sankt-Petersburg) organized by CIS Inter-Parliamentary Assembly Educational Cooperation Council together with Russian Education Academy, which defined the action strategy for initial period of implementation of adult education concept, analyzed and appreciated the relevant Azerbaijani model.

The approval of Azerbaijan Model on Adult Education Concept at the First National Conference on Adult Education (Azerbaijan, 2003) organized by German Peoples’ Universities Association, International Cooperation Institute together with Milli Medjlis (Azerbaijan Parliament), Science and Education Standing Committee, Ministry of Education, Baku Science and Training Center and National Confederation of Businessmen Organizations probably was a positive result of intensive activity in the area.

The inclusion of new approaches, such as adult education, formal and informal education in the new draft of “Law of the Azerbaijan Republic on Education” is considered to be one of the important elements in the whole education policy.

10.2. Describe any procedures at the national level for recognition of prior learning/flexible learning paths

In -service training and retraining for teachers and high officials of education management bodies is implemented through short specialised courses,taking into consideration their concrete interests. Study process at these courses is implemented through flexible programmes.

11. Contribution to the European dimension in higher education

11.1. Describe any transnational co-operation that contributes to the European dimension in higher education

It is important to strengthen foreign relations and have cooperation with other countries when developing and implementing the Education Process. During the previous years, relations have been expanded and these relations fascilitate and promote the integration of our education system into european educational community. Ministry of Education of Azerbaijan Republic has signed a number of international agreements and protocols (with Russian Federation and American International Education Council (ACTK/ACCELS) in 2001, with China People’s Republic in 2002 and with Georgian Ministry of Education in 2003).

Today young Azerbaijanis have opportunity to study abroad using both the governmental and non-governmental support. Student exchange on a state level is carried out on the basis of Inter-State Contracts.

At the moment, Azerbaijan citizens are receiving state-funded education in Turkey, Russian Federation, Ukraine, Arab Republic of Egypt, People’s Republic of China, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Greece and other countries.

During the last three years, the Ministry of Education sent 500 Azerbaijan citizens to universities of foreign countries. At the moment, 800 Azerbaijan citizens are studying at higher schools of foreign countries.

The number of foreign citizens studying in Azerbaijan has also increased. At the moment, 2431 citizens from 35 countries receive education in Azerbaijan higher schools, as compared with 1900 students from 30 countries last year.

Direct cooperation with international government and non-government organizations in the field of education is the main direction of the international cooperation of the Ministry of Education. Active cooperation is being implemented in this area with Council of Europe, European Union, European Training Foundation, YUNEVOK and UNICEF.

International cooperation in the field of education between the Ministry of Education and Council of Europe started far before our country officially joined this organization.

At the moment, joint large-scale are being implemented in the field of higher education.

Thus, in 1998 Azerbaijan joined the "Tbilisi Initiative" regional project of the Council of Europe. The main objective of the project is to prepare and publish a teaching aid on "History of Caucasian peoples". The authors team from Azerbaijan, Georgia, Russian Federation and Armenia, and the Council of Europe experts team from Great Britain, Poland, Holland, Germany are participating in the implementation of the project. At the moment, the teaching aid is entirely ready and it is planned to publish it in English language in the first quarter of 2005.

Starting from 2000, Ministry of Education together with the Council of Europe has been implementing a large-scale regional project on "Legislation in the the field of higher education in Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia". The project aims at providing European Union expert assistance of the Council of Europe to three countries in improving their education quality assurance mechanism (accreditation, licensing, recognition of diplomas (nostrification)) in accordance with the international standards. The project finished in 2004.

At the moment, a large-scale Council of Europe project on "Education for Democratic Citizenship" which involves all European countries is underway.

Taking into consideration the importance of this issue the Council of Europe declared the year of 2005 as "Democratic citizenship through education" year. The Ministry of Education plans to conduct a number of activities in educational institutions of the country.

Council of Europe joint project with participation of 7 CIS countries on "Students participation in governance of higher education" is also worth mentioning. National report on this topic has already been prepared and submitted to the Council of Europe.

In 2001-2004 higher educational institutions of the country have been more actively involved in the TEMPUC/TASIS program financed by the European Union.

The Ministry of Education of the Republic of Azerbaijan is closely cooperating with the UNICEF within the frame of the current main plan of activities of the cooperation plan between the Government of Azerbaijan and the organization.

Direct cooperation of higher educational establishments of Azerbaijan with foreign higher educational establishments has also developed. Preparation of specialists based on a completely new program is being carried out at Azerbaijan State Oil Academy jointly with Georgia State University (USA) "Master program and teacher training in MBA" and with support of the Ministry of Education. Bachelor program is also carried out under this program based on relevant curricula of the US higher educational establishments. Academy commenced a bachelor program in "New technologies", "Management", "Mechanitronics", "Information systems" and "Engineer-business" together with the Zingen University in Germany.

Together with Cologne University of Germany Azerbaijan Technical University has developed a new curriculum under TEMPUS program, which was approved by the Ministry of Education and provides for the preparation of bachelors of science in "Electric technology". New computer and teaching laboratory centers equipped with modern

technologies have been established at the University.

Master groups (under DUSS program) have been established in the State Economics University of Azerbaijan under SD YER 21154-2000 project participated by Montpellier University of France and Luxembourg Financial Operations Agency. Teachers from France and Luxembourg teach the courses.

University has also established a “Management” department in 2001 under the agreement with Istanbul, Chanakkale, Dumlu-Pinar universities of Turkey and classes are taught in Turkish language.

As the first stage of the agreement between the University and Moscow State Economics Statistics and Information University, “MBA” program is operating since 2001.

Preparation of specialists is also carried out at Baku State University together with “Nice, Grenoble” universitite of France and “Genoa” university of Italy under Tempus/TACIS Program.

11.2. Describe how curriculum development reflects the European dimension

(For instance foreign language courses, European themes, orientation towards the European labour market)

Certain activities have been carried out in our country in the are of curriculum development. Based on the Ministry of Education’s order 234, dated April 22, 1997 and in accordance with the Education Law of Azerbaijan Republic national standards of higher education, basic educational plans and teaching plans for higher education have been prepared and approved. But as those documents were implemented and as the experience of developed countries in this field was studied it was obvious that number of subjects and instruction hours in our higher educational establishments are far more. This results in students’ overload with unnecessary subjects.

Starting from 1999 when a 100-point system was piloted for assessment of students’ knowledge in HEIs a need for revision of the existing curricula arouse.

Based on the experience of America, European countries and Turkey, as well as the recommendation of the World Bank consultants a number of subjects in the existing plans were integrated, some subjects were excluded, number of hours were reduced and new pilot plans were developed. The number of subjects were reduced to 40 and the number of auditorium hours were reduced to 3,800.

Considerable work has been carried in relation to curriculum development at master level higher education. Since 1998 educational programs and plans providing for the minimum national requirements for the master level specialities have been developed and approved.

At present curricula for both levels of the higher education (bachelor and master) are revised, renewed and simplified based on the world and European experience in education.

As seen from the above-mentioned, development of the curricula in Azerbaijan is evolutionary and reflects European values to some extent.

12. Promoting the attractiveness of the European Higher Education Area

12.1. Describe any actions taken by your country to promote the attractiveness of European higher education

During the latest years, the Ministry of Education in cooperation with major international organizations organized seminars, conferences and other events, where different issues (recognition of diplomas, quality assurance, legislative framework, students participation in governance of higher education etc) related to higher education in Europe have been

discussed. Information on European higher education area disseminated during these events, as well as discussions and presentations by international experts promoted attractiveness of European higher education.

13. Concluding comments

13.1. Give a description of your national Bologna strategies

Analysis of political and cultural aspects of Azerbaijan's participation in Bologna process, and of our country's problems as related to the integration of our HEIs to European HEIs shows that Bologna process is an efficient means for the joining of the HEIs of participant countries. In our view joining Bologna process could provide opportunities for the development of its foreign policy directed towards cooperation and integration with Europe. As a result of Azerbaijan's participation in this process competitiveness of education services and of the specialists in our country will increase.

Despite the fact that a number of activities have been carried out to join Bologna process, we consider the following strategic activities as expedient:

13.2. Give an indication of the main challenges ahead for your country

Necessary activities to provide for simple, transparent and mutually recognizable degrees (simplifying recognition of various parts of courses, degrees and other relevant achievements at academic and professional levels; providing the opportunities for citizens of Azerbaijan to efficiently utilize their qualifications, knowledge and skills in European higher education Zone; simplified, effective and fair recognition of degrees).

Improvement of the existing two level (bachelor, master) system (determine the capacity of the programs to meet the requirements of the educational institution, the learners and the labor market; explain and support the Helsinki seminar on the bachelor level degree).

Establishment of the credit system (opting for one of the credit systems currently used in the world and Europe or development of an own credit system by Azerbaijan, innovations in the programs and educational process as related to the credits system).

Supporting mobility (this clause has a special role and ensures free movement of students, researchers and apparatus staff; taking on responsibilities to eliminate any obstacles in this direction and prevent bureaucratic barriers; resolving social problems as related to implementing mobility).

Support to European cooperation for quality assurance (acceptance of quality assurance systems at the national levels; accreditation (certification) and acceptance of modern mechanisms of assessment commensurate with universally recognized principles; utilizing advanced experiences of countries not members of European network on quality assurance in higher education).

Support by Azerbaijan of European approach to higher education (determined movement toward "European" content; improvement of development modules for courses and programs at all levels for supporting employment of graduates).

Implementing concept of life-long education (life-long education as the main element of European education Zone; it is planned to implement on a wide scale the life-long education models by fulfilling the progressive duties as competitiveness, use of new technologies, empowerment of social unity, equal opportunities and improvement of living conditions in Europe).

Higher educational establishments and students (determine the component, active and constructive role of Azerbaijan's HEIs and students in the establishment and formation of

European higher education Zone; improvement of educational programs in HEI's in Azerbaijan commensurate with Bologna process; expansion of students' participation in the organization and formation of education).

Support attractiveness of European higher education Zone (improving attractiveness of European higher education for Azerbaijani students; by broadening informational support the higher education degrees, high quality, accreditation and assessment mechanisms are transferred to world countries, including Azerbaijan and this in turn leads to expansion of the general framework of qualifications).