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FROM LONDON TO LEUVEN/LOUVAIN-LA-NEUVE: CONTRIBUTION OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE TO THE BOLOGNA PROCESS

Directorate General IV: Education, Culture and Heritage, Youth and Sport
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INTRODUCTION

The present document gives an overview of the Council of Europe's contribution to the Bologna Process since the London Ministerial conference as well as an indication of future plans.

So far, the Council of Europe contributions to the Bologna Process have focused on:

- i) active participation in the BFUG and Board as well as in Bologna working groups;
- ii) recognition policy, including the role of the Lisbon Recognition Convention as the only legally binding text of the Bologna Process;
- iii) specific policy areas of relevance to the Bologna Process as well as to the basic values of the Council of Europe, in particular the public responsibility for higher education and research, the responsibility of higher education for democratic culture, higher education governance and quality assurance;
- iv) bilateral and regional activities assisting newer member states with the implementation of "Bologna inspired" policies at national level. These activities have in particular focused on countries that acceded to the Bologna process in 2003 and 2005.

The Council of Europe intends to continue to contribute to the Bologna Process along these lines, and will in addition take on responsibility for coordinating the sharing of experience in the elaboration of national qualifications frameworks compatible with the overarching framework of qualifications of the EHEA, as requested by Ministers in the London Communiqué.

QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORKS

The overarching framework of qualifications of the EHEA was adopted by Ministers in Bergen in 2005, and the development of national qualifications frameworks is within the competence and responsibility of the competent national authorities. It is recalled that Ministers committed to launching this work by 2007 and to complete it by 2010.

The role of the Council of Europe is therefore to facilitate the sharing of experience so that the competent national authorities can benefit from relevant experience from other countries to the extent that the national authorities see fit to do so. This is in keeping with the London Communiqué:

We note that some initial progress has been made towards the implementation of national qualifications frameworks, but that much more effort is required. We commit ourselves to fully implementing such national qualifications frameworks, certified against the overarching Framework for Qualifications of the EHEA, by 2010.

Recognising that this is a challenging task, we ask the Council of Europe to support the sharing of experience in the elaboration of national qualifications frameworks. We emphasise that qualification frameworks should be designed so as to encourage greater mobility of students and teachers and improve employability.

The Council of Europe's proposals for how this mandate can be carried out in the next work period (2007 – 2009) have been submitted to the BFUG in a separate document for consideration in the context of the work program. Suffice to recall that the proposals comprise:

- (i) the organization of European conferences, aimed at all members and consultative members of the Bologna Process;
- (ii) regional conferences
- (iii) work with individual countries.
- (iv) the relationship between qualifications frameworks and the further development of recognition policies and practice, in the context of the ENIC and NARIC Networks.

In addition, it contains a proposal for a Coordination Group appointed by and reporting to the BFUG.

The Council of Europe will organize the first European Forum on qualifications frameworks at Council Headquarters in Strasbourg on October 11 – 12, 2007, and invitations have been sent out to the BFUG and the Council's Steering Committee for Higher Education and Research (CDESR), as well as to the ENIC and NARIC Networks.

The Council of Europe organized a national conference on qualifications frameworks in Azerbaijan on June 12 – 13, 2007 and will contribute to a national conference in Turkey on September 27 – 28.

RECOGNITION OF QUALIFICATIONS

The Council of Europe/UNESCO Recognition Convention is the only legally binding text of the Bologna Process and 40 Bologna members have now ratified the Convention, while 6 members have yet to do so¹. The development of policy and practice in recognition is furthered by the ENIC and NARIC Networks, which are served jointly by the Council of Europe, UNESCO/CEPES and the European Commission.

The Council of Europe will continue to play a leading role in recognition policy, in close cooperation with UNESCO/CEPES and the European Commission. Recognition issues in the Bologna Process will remain high on the agenda of the ENIC and NARIC Networks, which – through their connection to other UNESCO regions – will also play an important role in facilitating recognition between qualifications from the EHEA and those from other

¹ A constantly updated list of ratifications and signatures may be found at <http://conventions.coe.int/>; search for ETS 165.

areas of the world. The ENIC and NARIC Networks will in particular continue to develop policy and practice with a view to arriving at a greater measure of common practice in the interpretation of “substantial differences”. This key concept of the Lisbon Recognition Convention designates differences between a foreign qualification and similar qualifications from the host country that are sufficiently important to warrant non-recognition or partial recognition of the foreign qualification. The aim of the ENIC/NARIC work on this issue is to ensure that this concept is interpreted reasonably and that it not be given a too narrow interpretation. The annual ENIC/NARIC meeting in Bucureşti in June 2007 included an extensive discussion of this issue.

The ENIC and NARIC Networks will also analyze the national action plans on recognition with a view to identifying common issues and potential problems. This will be a main issue at the 2008 meeting of the Networks, to be held in Malta in June.

As indicated above, the ENIC and NARIC Networks will continue to consider the impact of qualifications frameworks on the recognition of qualifications, and qualifications frameworks will be an element in developing the understanding of the concept of substantial differences.

SPECIFIC POLICY AREAS

Beyond the work on qualifications frameworks and recognition, outlined above, the Council of Europe is fully prepared to continue to contribute to the development of other policy areas within the Bologna Process. In particular, we are prepared to contribute to three major policy areas.

Firstly, the Council of Europe contributed to the working group on the *Bologna Process in a global context* in the period 2005 – 2007. This work led to the adoption of a Strategy by Ministers in London. We recommend that a new working group be appointed to coordinate the implementation of this strategy and to further the measures that do not depend solely on respective national authorities or where responsibility lies with specific actors, and the Council of Europe is fully prepared to participate in such a working group.

Secondly, the Council of Europe has also – we believe – played a constructive role in *considering how the European Higher Education Area should develop beyond 2010*, and we would like to contribute to any work on this topic in preparation of the 2009 Ministerial meeting. While structural reform will remain an important feature of the European Higher Education Area, the Council of Europe believes it will be essential to the further development of the EHEA that the roles and functions of higher education in modern societies be put on the EHEA agenda in broader terms. In particular, it would seem essential to include the role of higher education in developing and maintaining democratic culture and in furthering intercultural dialogue as important elements of the EHEA beyond 2010. The reflections on the EHEA beyond 2010 should also include a consideration of how to approach countries that may fall significantly short of implementing key “Bologna goals”. Possible measures may include offers of advice and assistance in devising national

policies in specific areas and offers of sharing of experience from countries that have experienced - and overcome – similar problems.

Thirdly, the Council of Europe has undertaken work on the definition of the *public responsibility for higher education and research* in modern societies, following the statements by Ministers in Praha and Berlin to the effect that higher education is and should remain a public good and a public responsibility. The Council's work has, among other things, led to a Recommendation by the Committee of Ministers². While this is a significant text, the Council of Europe believes the public responsibility for higher education and research should remain high on the EHEA agenda, and that this should include a consideration of the interaction between higher education policies and other areas of public policy.

STEERING COMMITTEE FOR HIGHER EDUCATION AND RESEARCH

The Steering Committee for Higher Education and Research (CDESR) is a pan-European forum in which delegations of the 49 States party to the European Cultural Convention – 46 of which are also members of the Bologna Process - are made up of academic as well as government representatives. In addition, important intergovernmental institutions as well as non-governmental organizations active in higher education policy have observer status with the CDESR, which is one of the main pan-European fora for higher education policies.

Developments in the Bologna Process have been an important item on the agenda of the CDESR plenary sessions over the past few years, as they will be at this year's plenary session, which will be held in Strasbourg on September 20 – 21. As of 2008, the annual plenary session will be held in spring rather than autumn.

At the 2007 plenary session, the CDESR will elect a new Chair, as the current Chair, Professor Luc Weber (Switzerland), will have completed two terms of office and is therefore no longer reeligible under Council of Europe rules. As Professor Weber is an academic member, the new Chair will be a governmental member of the CDESR, while the new Vice Chair will be an academic member.

WORK WITH SPECIFIC COUNTRIES OR REGIONS

Within the Bologna Process, the Council of Europe has been given specific responsibility for cooperation with the newer members of the Process, and the Council has played an important role in developing the Bologna Process into a truly European Higher Education Area.

The Council of Europe has carried out 10 – 15 bilateral or regional cooperation activities per year, with a strong focus on countries that have acceded to the Bologna Process in 2003

²

<http://wcd.coe.int/com.instranet.InstraServlet?Index=no&Command=com.instranet.CmdBlobGet&DocId=1108590&SecMode=1&Admin=0&Usage=4&IntranetImage=156249>

or later and with a thematic focus on legislation, quality assurance, qualifications frameworks and the recognition of qualifications.

Since the London Ministerial conference, the Council of Europe have organized conferences on quality assurance in Armenia on June 4 – 5 and on qualifications frameworks in Azerbaijan on June 12 – 13.

On October 4 – 5, the Council of Europe will contribute significantly to a conference on Bologna related issues to be held at the Russian University of Peoples' Friendship in Moskva. This conference is aimed at representatives of the academic community of CIS countries.

A regional conference on qualifications frameworks is planned for November 1 – 2 in Beograd as a part of the Serbian Chairmanship of the Council of Europe.

PUBLICATIONS

The Council of Europe Higher Education Series³ is by now well established. Several of the volumes published since December 2004 address key issues in the Bologna Process, and we will aim to continue to contribute to the EHEA also through the Higher Education Series.

At the time of writing, a volume on *Qualifications: Introduction to a Concept* has just been published, and volumes on quality assurance and on the responsibility of higher education for democratic culture will be published in the course of 2007. The manuscript of a volume on “New Challenges in Recognition: Recognition of Prior Learning and Recognition in a Global Context”, on the basis of the Bologna seminar coorganized by Latvia and the Council of Europe in Rīga in early 2007, has just been completed, and it is hoped that this publication will appear in early 2008.

³ http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/highereducation/Resources/HEseries_en.asp