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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
(Directorate of School, Out-of-School and Higher Education/Higher Education and Research Division)

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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 has in addition taken 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 chairs the Bologna Coordination Group on Qualifications Frameworks, which was set up by the BFUG at its meeting in Lisboa on October 2 – 3, 2007. The activities on qualifications frameworks are outlined in a separate report, and they focus on:

- (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) developing a Bologna web site on qualifications frameworks;
- (v) the relationship between qualifications frameworks and the further development of recognition policies and practice, in the context of the ENIC and NARIC Networks.;
- (vi) developing the relationship between the development of national frameworks comparable with the overarching framework of qualifications on of the EHEA and the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning.

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

The Council of Europe organized the first European Forum on qualifications frameworks at Council Headquarters in Strasbourg on October 11 – 12, 2007.

The Council of Europe organized a regional conference on qualifications framework for South East Europe in Beograd on November 1 – 2, 2007, as a part of the program of the Serbian Chairmanship of the Council of Europe.

The Council of Europe organized a national conference on qualifications frameworks in Azerbaijan on June 12 – 13, 2007 and contributed 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 total number of ratifications – including non-members of the Bologna Process – is now 46, with New Zealand as the latest ratification. 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 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 București in June 2007 included an extensive discussion of this issue, which will also feature prominently on the agenda of the 2008 Network meeting in Malta (June 15 – 17)..

The ENIC and NARIC Networks will also analyze the national action plans on recognition with a view to identifying common issues and potential problems. In December the ENIC Bureau and the NARIC Advisory Board appointed a working group to analyze the national action plans for recognition submitted by (most) Bologna members for the London conference. The Council of Europe provides the secretariat for this working party, which aims to submit a preliminary report to the 2008 ENIC/NARIC meeting in Malta in June and a final report to the BFUG by the end of 2008.

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.

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

Firstly, the Council of Europe contributed to the working group on the *Bologna Process in a global context* in the period 2005 – 2007 and continues to do so in 2007 - 2009.

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 will contribute to the preparation of 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 Council of Europe’s new project on “the University between Humanism and the Market”, which considers the role and functions of higher education in modern society, with particular emphasis on democratic culture and intercultural dialogue, will constitute an important contribution to this work. The project was launched at a conference in Strasbourg on November 21 – 22, 2007² and will be followed up with a conference on the campus as a site of intercultural dialogue in Strasbourg on March 4 – 5, 2008.

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 Ministers³. 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

² http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/highereducation/UnivHumanismMarket/Default_EN.asp#TopOfPage

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

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 March 6 -7, 2008. The 2008 plenary also marks a shift from holding the annual plenary session in autumn to holding it in spring.

At the 2007 plenary session, the CDESR elected Professor Radu Damian, a government member from Romania, as its new Chair and Professor Virgílio Meira Soares, an academic member from Portugal, as its new Vice Chair. Professor Luc Weber (Switzerland), who was no longer reeligible under Council of Europe rules, left the Bureau after serving for a total of 8 years as Chair, Vice Chair and Bureau member and will remain a member of the Committee.

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.

In 2007 – 2008, the Council of Europe is in particular engaged in two major projects for the reform of higher education in Bosnia and Herzegovina and in Serbia, respectively. Both projects have been undertaken at the request of the competent public authorities of the countries concerned, and both focus on quality assurance, qualifications frameworks and recognition. Both projects also have an element on the development of policies, standards and, where required, legislation. The project in Bosnia and Herzegovina was completed by the end of January 2008, and a final conference was held in Sarajevo on January 18. It will be followed up by a new project that will be launched in spring 2008. The project in Serbia was launched in September 2007 and is ongoing.

The Council of Europe has also carried out several bilateral or regional cooperation activities per year, with a strong focus on countries that have acceded to the Bologna Process in 2003 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, 2007 the Council of Europe contributed significantly to a conference on Bologna related issues to be held at the Russian University of Peoples' Friendship in

Moskva. This conference was aimed at representatives of the academic community of CIS countries. On December 11 – 12, the Council of Europe organized a session focusing on recognition issues at the annual meeting of Vice Rectors for international relations of Russian universities. This conference was also held at the Russian University of Peoples' Friendship.

As mentioned in the section on qualifications frameworks, a regional conference on qualifications frameworks was held on November 1 – 2 in Beograd as a part of the Serbian Chairmanship of the Council of Europe.

PUBLICATIONS

The Council of Europe Higher Education Series⁴ 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.

Three volumes have been issued since the London conference:

- *Qualifications: Introduction to a Concept* (author: Sjur Bergan) was issued in September 2007;
- *Higher Education and Democratic Culture: Citizenship, Human Rights and Civic Responsibility* (editors: Ira Harkavy and Josef Huber) was issued in January 2008;
- *The Legitimacy of Quality Assurance in Higher Education* (editors: Luc Weber and Katia Dolgova-Dreyer) was also issued in January 2008.

The manuscript of a volume on New Challenges in Recognition: Recognition of Prior Learning and Recognition in a Global Context (editors: Andrejs Rauhvargers and Sjur Bergan), on the basis of the Bologna seminar coorganized by Latvia and the Council of Europe in Rīga in early 2007, has been completed, and it is hoped that this publication will appear in time for the BFUG meeting in March 2008.

WEB SITE

The Council of Europe's higher education web site was thoroughly revised in 2005 and now presents an up to date overview of the Council's activities as well as of higher education policies in Europe. It can be accessed at http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/highereducation/Default_en.asp.

⁴ http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/highereducation/Resources/HEseries_en.asp

STAFF

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