

BOLOGNA THEMATIC PEER GROUP B ON THE LISBON RECOGNITION CONVENTION FIRST MEETING

Tirana (Albania), 31 January 2019

Minutes

List of participants

Delegation	First Name	Surname
Albania	Edmond	Hajderi
Albania	Linda	Pustina
Austria	Katrin	Forstner
Belarus	Liudmila	Kazhukhouskaya
Belgium Flemish Community	Erwin	Malfroy
Bosnia and Herzegovina	Dženan	Omanović
Bosnia and Herzegovina	Mirta	Mandić Martinović
Bulgaria	Vanya	Grashkina-Mincheva
Croatia	Ivana	Ramić
Croatia	Marina	Crnčić Sokol
Czech Republic	Julie	Oravova
Czech Republic	Lucie	Trojanová
Denmark	Allan Bruun	Pedersen
EI - ETUCE	Alessandro	Arienzo
EQAR	Colin	Tück
Estonia	Gunnar	Vaht
ESU	Urša	Leban
EUA	Helene	Peterbauer
European Commission	Julie	Anderson
European Commission (Eurydice)	David	Crocier
France	Hélène	Bekker
France	Nathalie	Nilsson-Thiello
Greece	Ilias	Santouridis
Holy See	Melanie	Rosenbaum
Ireland	Angela	Lambkin

Italy	Chiara	Finocchietti
Italy	Letizia	Brambilla Pisoni
Kazakhstan	Almagul	Kultumanova
Kazakhstan	Zhanar	Yergaliyeva
Luxembourg	Andreia	Alves
Luxembourg	Isabelle	Reinhardt
Malta	Rose Anne	Cuschieri
Netherlands	Bas	Wegewijs
Norway	Stig Arne	Skjerven
Poland	Hanna	Reczulska
Slovenia	Polonca	Miklavc Valenčič
Ukraine	Kateryna	Suprun
Ukraine	Tetiana	Vahina
Ukraine	Valentyna	Krasnoshchok
BFUG Secretariat	Clarissa	Ioimo
BFUG Secretariat	Edlira Adi	Kahani Subashi
BFUG Secretariat	Luca	Lantero
BFUG Secretariat	Rocío	Iglesias De Ussel Rubio
BFUG Secretariat	Susanna	Taormina
External	Adnan	Dautbegović

Apologies from Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belgium French Community, Council of Europe, EURASHE, Germany, Lithuania, Montenegro, Romania, Russian Federation, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Switzerland, UNESCO, United Kingdom (Scotland).

1. Welcome address by the Albanian Hosts and the 3 Co-chairs of the peer group

The meeting was opened by Linda Pustina, the Albanian Co-chair of the Thematic Peer Group B (TPG B) on the Lisbon Recognition Convention (LRC), who greeted the participants on behalf of the Albanian Minister of Education. The Minister apologised for not being able to attend the meeting and greeted the participants, due to last minute political engagements.

Hélène Bekker, the French TPG B Co-chair introduced herself, and greeted the participants. She emphasized the fact of this activity being seen as a dialogue among peers, as a dialogue to learn from each other, share good practice examples and brainstorm on the common grounds for the work of the TPG B and beyond.

Chiara Finocchietti, the Italian Co-chair of TPG B, introduced herself and underlined the pleasure she has on being part of this group, considering recognition is also an important issue for Italy. She emphasized the fact of the peer group being a space for the participants

and invited all of them to make the best use of it, by learning from each other and by taking advantage from the expertise of each other and share recommendations, advise or else.

The agenda was adopted without any modification.

Attachment: TPG_B_RO_MK_1_Agenda.pdf

2. Key commitments within the Bologna Process & Creation of the Thematic Peer Group structure within the Bologna Follow Up Group (Luca Lantero, Head of the BFUG Secretariat)

Mr. Lantero, Head of the BFUG Secretariat, presented the Bologna Implementation Coordination Group (BICG) and BFUG 2018-2020 work plan, following the Paris Communiqué. The EHEA Ministers in Paris decided to establish the BICG, which would help the implementation of the Bologna three key commitments, crucial to reinforcing and supporting quality and cooperation within the EHEA.

Mr. Lantero presented the composition of the BICG, which was established in the BFUG meeting in Vienna and is comprised by: Austria (Co-chair), Bulgaria (Co-chair), Croatia (Co-chair), Italy (Vice-chair), the European Commission (EC), EUA, EURASHE, one Co-chair of Working Group 1 on Monitoring, one Co-chair of TPG A on QF, one Co-chair of TPG B on LRC, one Co-chair of TPG C on QA.

The BICG coordinates the work of Three Thematic Peer Groups (TPGs):

- TPG A– Qualifications Frameworks QF-EHEA
- TPG B– Lisbon Recognition Convention LRC
- TPG C– Quality Assurance QA

The work Plan for 2018-2020 was presented with its composition, the BFUG Secretariat, and the Working Group, Advisory Groups, and Coordination Groups.

Mr. Lantero announced the launching of the new EHEA website. The new web site (www.ehea.info) was constructed anew, considering the fact there was no possibility to pass it from the previous BFUG Secretariat, due to technical difficulties. All participants were invited to make use of the website, get updates and give feedback to the BFUG Secretariat.

Attachment: TPG_B_RO_MK_1_BICG_WP_18-20

3. Bologna Implementation Report 2018 & overview on indicators on Recognition (David Crosier, Eurydice)

David Crosier (EURYDICE) introduced the indicators from the Bologna Process Implementation Report 2018 (BPIR). He emphasized that in the report, the matters are reported based on the findings, with the idea to reflect back on how things are seen and to enable the issue to be addressed properly.

All three Bologna Key Commitments are already known to all, recognition being one of them. As mentioned in the 2012 BFUG WG recognition report: *"If recognition does not work properly across the EHEA [...] the Bologna degree system, joint degrees, mobility of students and academics, integrating lifelong learning into higher education and others will become just lip service."*

Mr. Crosier mentioned the fact that if all instruments are in place and working properly, then recognition will disappear as an issue and it will become a normal procedure. The findings of the report showed that most of the LRC countries are fully compliant with all five principles of the LRC. However, he pointed out the fact that the signing and ratification of the LRC as well as national legislation do not necessarily reflect the principles of the LRC. The actions needed to be taken should be the review of the national legislations and the modification legislation in case it violates the principles of the LRC.

In the findings, another issue raised regards Quality Assurance (QA). It would be expected that the HEIs should have internal QA, while in practice recognition decisions taken by the HEIs are not QA monitored.

The issues to be addressed by the TPG B could be:

- How to support reviews of legislation (in some countries) using European expertise?
- Should responsibility for system level recognition (not admission) continue to lie with HEIs?
- How can we ensure that credential evaluators work on full understanding of LRC principles?
- What should be the role of QA in recognition practice?

Mr. Crosier welcomed all participants to have the copies of this report, in hard copy or e-version of it.

Following the presentation, the floor was opened to all participants for a session of Q&As. The discussions and issues raised from the participants, tackled the issue of LRC principles implementation on HEIs level and the problems they face in practice, as well as the fact of shaping the recognition tools. Another issue was the revised subsidiary text of the LRC regulating the work of the ENIC-NARIC centers, which should be revised in the near future. The ADREN initiative was introduced as a good example on the topic, which could be used by ENIC-NARIC centers or other recognition bodies. Automatic recognition in compliance also with the European Commission recommendation was another topic which was discussed in this session.

Attachment: TPG_B_RO_MK_1_BPIR_2018

4. Networking activity of expectations/engagements of the different countries: point of strengths and weaknesses at national level with regards to Key Commitment 2 (chaired by H  l  ne Bekker, France)

The French Co-chair introduced the networking activities. Two slots – 30 minutes each – were dedicated to this item on the agenda. Each country was provided with a poster, in which they could add their own peer support to the LRC, strength and needs as well as expectations. After the break a second slot of 30 minutes was dedicated to the identifications and the assistance which could be given to specific countries (good practice sharing). The Co-chair gave French case as an example to share the good practice of the French NARIC on digitalisation of the recognition process, which could be shared with other centers in need of advice in this field; on the other hand, the French NARIC could use other countries' experience in developing stronger relations with HEIs.

5. Networking activity of expectations/engagements of the different countries: matching need and offer with regards to Key Commitment 2

This session was dedicated to analysing the strengths and weaknesses/needs for each country and match them with the list of interested parties participating in the networking exercise. Participants followed a walk around tour to add to each country possible cooperation, according to the findings listed from each of them.

All notes before and after were electronically documented and were sent to the participants via e-mail.

6. Common standards for the assessment of foreign qualifications in the EHEA: challenges and proposals (Chiara Finocchietti, Italian Co-chair)

The Italian TPG B Co-chair introduced the common standards of foreign qualifications in the EHEA. The question raised was whether to agree on certain standards for assessment, considering the elements of qualifications and the main elements of an assessment report being always the same. She shared with the participants some examples.

The first sample was from the French NARIC: Assessment certificate containing the necessary data of the qualification.

The second sample was from CIMEA–NARIC Italia containing the elements of the qualification (according to the sections 2.3 and 2.4 of the diploma supplement of the LRC).

The third sample was the European Qualification Passport for the Refugees developed in the framework of a project led by the Council of Europe (CoE), with the participation of several NARIC centers. In the mentioned project, all partners agreed on a template, containing standard information for the qualification of refugees, including additional relevant information to best assess the qualifications that were presented for recognition by refugees.

The tentative proposal to the TPG B group was to set common standards as a reference for national formats of assessment reports, useful to recognition authorities, in order to do their assessments, which in a way could be a tool similar to the Diploma Supplement, ensuring fair recognition and having better portability of qualifications recognition.

Then the floor was opened to the Q&A session. During the discussions, many practical proposals were raised by several participants with the Co-chairs who took note of them and proposed for some to be raised in the future meetings of the TPG B in Bologna and France.

7. Parallel subgroups on different subthemes:

All four subgroups were designed to take place twice, each slot of 40 minutes.

7.1 Establishing the legal framework to allow the implementation of the LRC – chaired by Gunnar Vaht, Estonia

This subgroup was dedicated to the establishment of the legal framework to allow the full implementation of the LRC and chaired by Gunnar Vaht also in his role as President of the Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee. The findings from the 2015 report of the LRC implementation of each country, are not very positive, therefore countries should look at the

obstacles on national level in regard to improve them. If a country signs the LRC, the national authorities have the responsibility to implement the LRC. If the national authorities are not competent authorities, the provisions mention clearly that the country should take the necessary steps to ensure implementation.

The countries are invited to implement the main text of the LRC. The recommendations of LRC are legal text, they invite national authorities to implement the subsidiary texts. As there are different ways to implement the LRC, there should be a transparent process to the assessment, with very clear criteria and procedures, within a fair time limit, the right of appeal and obligation to recognise the refugee qualifications, even without the documents. In many countries party to the LRC, there are no regulations, or there is partial regulation to the implementation of the LRC.

The presentation was followed by a Q&A session.

The participating countries in the sub-group raised each the issue of their own obstacles in the implementation of the LRC, this is also in line with the networking session and the information written down by each of them.

Attachment: TPG_B_RO_MK_1_LRC_Implementation

7.2 Achieving automatic recognition (chaired by Linda Pustina, Albania)

The Albanian Co-chair opened the discussion asking the participants on the main issues to address in order to rule automatic recognition, then passing the floor to Julie Anderson, European Commission (EC) representative to do a brief presentation on the Council Recommendation on the Automatic Mutual Recognition of Diplomas and learning periods abroad.

The EC introduced the Council Recommendation approved by ministries on the 26th of November 2018, with the idea to reach automatic recognition by 2025. The recommendations point out the common and unique definition of “automatic recognition” as the most challenging issue. The EC underlined that agreeing upon a common and unique definition of was the most challenging issue for ministries. The EC then briefly described the structure of the Recommendation. As a good example on the subject, the EC mentioned the importance and usefulness of the Italian project of Blockchain as a great facilitator towards automatic recognition, in addition to other activities/frameworks such as Erasmus+.

The discussions in the sub-group were raised mainly about the council recommendations on automatic recognition and ways to comply with such procedure. The group proposed to the TPG B to set a section at the ENIC NARIC website, with all national qualifications, their NQF level and the EQF referencing level. The Co-chairs will work with Italy and Ireland to prepare proposals for such table and present it to the TPG B for discussion, prior to become a tool for use by recognition authorities.

Another proposal was on a database of qualifications for the participating countries. Bulgaria presented in this subgroup with the project on the Bologna Process degrees comparing them with the pre-Bologna degrees. This database contains specific qualifications issued by HEIs in the participating countries. Such database does not exist in all countries, considering there are differences between the public and private HEIs, and the Belgium Flemish Community’s experience could be a starting point for discussion on the subject. The EC should launch a

Call for Proposal, allowing countries with no database to participate and enable the establishment of the database, according to the EQAR standards.

7.3 Qualifications held by refugees (chaired by Stig Arne Skjerven, Norway)

Stig Arne Skjerven, Head of the Norwegian ENIC-NARIC, chaired this parallel sub-group, and started the discussion by presenting two projects that have been created in regard to this topic. The first one is “[Toolkit for Recognition of Refugees’ Qualifications](#)”, based on the recommendations of the LRC, a project that addressed the need for identification of a set of common principles, best practices and workable tools for the recognition of refugees’ qualifications. The second one, called “[React](#)”, aims at establishing a more efficient and consistent approach to the recognition of refugees’ qualifications in Europe.

Two main questions were discussed by the group:

- What are the challenges countries face within the European Higher Education Area, especially in relation to [article 7 of the Lisbon Recognition Convention](#)?
- What can be done and what are possible solutions?

One of the main issues discussed was the problem of the language refugees face, not only at the time of doing the recognition, but also once it is done, while they start studying and working in the country. Another issue with the language is the necessity of official translators, that apart from knowing the language, should be trained in credential evaluation.

Another issue is the question of trust, that many times is due to the fact that some refugees don’t have any document at all.

Many countries did implement article 7 of the LRC, even though many, especially small countries, don’t face the problem of refugees as they don’t have them in their countries.

Some solutions found by the members of this parallel subgroup are the need of learning from each other, especially countries that don’t face the problem of refugees yet, to learn from countries that do face this problem in case they will need the knowledge in the future; the cooperation with HE Institutions; and the fact that refugees should be seen as potential academics, and not only as refugees.

Attachment: TPG_B_RO_MK_1_Recognition_Refugees

7.4 Optimizing the potential of digital technology for the recognition agenda (chaired by Chiara Finocchietti, Italy)

Chiara Finocchietti Co-chair of TPG B and vice director of the Italian NARIC centre introduced the issue with a short presentation.

The idea of this sub group was based on the work on the topic of digitalisation to try to figure out how countries and institutions can use digitalisation for implementing the Lisbon Recognition Convention. She explained the benefits of digitalisation e.g. security and faster process, while not forgetting some key issues like trust resources, privacy issue (protection of personal data and GDPR), and standard guidelines. The most important thing emerged by dialogue concern four different level interrelated to each other: political, legislative, cultural and practice.. One of the questions was if digitalisation is a strategic point for each EHEA

country because, at the moment, in some countries paper is not only requested, but the digital document is not yet accepted. On the other hand, there are growing number of countries and institutions that are offering digital databases and digital data for the verification of their reports.

The better use of digitalisation was one of the topics raised for discussions. The first point has been discussed on political level: there was the need for a strong push for digitalization and for push in this direction from the BFUG. On the other side, there is no homogeneity in all EHEA countries, and there is the need to avoid having a kind of “two speed EHEA” and nobody should be left out. It is important to find out the minimum requirements, also leaving coexistence of paper and common standards and guidelines. The idea of creating better coordination among different stakeholders, ministries, high education institutions etc, was discussed as a starting point. The relevant legal aspects should be considered, as well: in some countries there are legal obstacles to the use of digital data (for instance in some countries the signature of the diploma should be on paper). Two examples of the use of databases for verification, used by some countries, are using blockchain technology, and at the level of ENIC NARIC centres, the DigiREC project is very important. The importance was given also to the Groningen Declaration (<https://www.groningendeclaration.org/>). The group discussed also about the qualifications awarded before the digital era.

Attachment: TPG_B_RO_MK_1_LRC_Digitalisation

8. Presentation of submitted projects proposals relevant for TPG B in the framework of the Erasmus+ KA3 – Support for Policy Reform – Invitation to submit EACEA/35/2018 “Support to the implementation of EHEA reforms - 2018-2020”

The session was dedicated to the projects submitted in the framework of the Erasmus Plus KA3, and relevant to the work of the TPG B. The Italian Co-chair emphasized the importance of the fact that the selection is still ongoing and that only the submitted projects were being presented in the meeting. She also thanked the colleagues who willingly shared their submitted proposals in a transparent way. Then three projects were presented, with their main objective, aim target groups and participating partners.

9. Design of work program for the peer group member countries (Linda Pustina, Albanian Co-chair)

Following the networking exercise, with strength and needs/weakness of each country on recognition of qualifications, all participants would receive an electronic version of each flipchart paper so they could have it as a roadmap for future actions. Peer learning activities are foreseen, based on the needs of each participating country for the remaining time, so that the work plan could be drafted. It was recommended that each country should forward the country input report the latest February 15, 2019.

10. Cooperation with other Thematic Peer Groups

Lucie Trojanová, Co-chair of the TPG A, presented the report on the 1st meeting of the TPG A in Finland. She mentioned the fact that this meeting was more of an introductory meeting, with a high number of participations, divided in two parts, the first part based on theory (ECTS guide, etc.), the second part was more of an interactive activity, with exchange of strengths

and weakness on policy aspect. The EURASHE representative has asked Lucie to raise the issue of level 5 qualifications, with many countries not being sure where to pick the level 5 qualifications. It would be useful to interact among the TPG A and TPG B work on recognition, considering there are similar grounds for that. The discussion about level 5 should be raised in different peer group meetings. The TPG A would continue to discuss the issue internally, aiming also that the cooperation with the TPG B group work.

The Italian co-chair proposed this issue to be inserted in the agenda in one of the coming meetings of the TPG B. The Representative of Denmark mentioned the fact of level 5 qualifications discussions being raised at the annual ENIC-NARIC meeting this coming June and proposed the topic to be discussed in the framework of it as well.

11. Wrap up of the first meeting & way forward

The meeting was wrapped up by the Albanian host thanking all the participants for the fruitful meeting, especially for the engaged discussions, proposals presented by many participants on practical steps for the future work of the TPG B.

The next two steps are the presentation of the country input within the 15 of February and the next TPG meeting in Bologna, Italy on the 24-26 June 2019.

The meeting was covered through social media of Albanian MESY, ENIC-NARIC, BFUG Secretariat and specific ENIC-NARIC centers.