



EUROPEAN
Higher Education Area



MINISTERUL EDUCAȚIEI NAȚIONALE



Republic of North Macedonia
Ministry of Education and Science

Last modified: 02.09.2019

BOLOGNA THEMATIC PEER GROUP B ON THE LISBON RECOGNITION CONVENTION 2ND MEETING

Bologna, Italy, 24 June 2019

Minutes

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Apologies from Azerbaijan, Council of Europe, ESU, Germany, Montenegro, Portugal, Serbia, Slovenia, Spain and UNESCO.

1. Welcome addresses and update by the BFUG and BICG

Italian Co-chair opened the meeting welcoming the participants on behalf of the Co-chairs of the TPG B on LRC.

Luca Lantero, Head of BFUG Secretariat then greeted and welcomed the participants. He presented the state of art of the BFUG Secretariat work so far. The [web site](#) launched was presented anew and participants were informed on the possibility of restricted area for their group. This could enable document sharing among all members. In the workplan 2018-2020, the TPG B is under the Bologna Implementation Consultation Group (BICG). Then he presented the composition of the BICG and informed all countries that the TPGs are open for all BFUG countries to join, if they haven't done so yet. The goal of the TPG B on LRC is to have all the LRC elements implemented on national level, especially when it comes to recognition aspect. Some topics were also discussed during the last ENIC-NARIC annual meeting in Cologne, Germany in 16-18 June 2019.

One of the main topics for the next Ministerial Communique regards the future of the Bologna Process (BP), which is also one of the topics for discussion during the [XX Anniversary of Bologna Declaration](#) event. This also due to the fact of over 1100 participants representing many Higher Education Institutions, Students, Authorities and other stakeholders in Higher Education. The Bologna Process Implementation Report (BPIR) questionnaire was sent to all BFUG members and the deadline for receiving countries feedback was 12 June 2019. Some questions in the BPIR are connected to the LRC and recognition issues, therefore all participants interested are welcomed to contact their countries BFUG representatives. Other relevant documents would be produced by the BFUG advisory and working groups. The Ministerial Conference as well as Global Policy Forum will be organised in Rome in June 2019, enabling to discuss recognition issues with other regions, on a global level. Ideas for events related to the Ministerial Conference in Rome are more than welcome to be proposed to the BFUG Secretariat. Drafting committee of the BFUG will be meeting back to back with the XX Anniversary event.

Dr. Federico Cinquepalmi, Head of the Department for Internationalisation of Higher Education at the Ministry of Education, University and Research (MIUR) welcomed the participants on behalf the Italian Government and MIUR.

Attachment: 1_TPG_B_RO_MK_2_info_BFUG.pdf

2. Approval of the agenda

The agenda was presented by the Italian Co-chair with a slight change. The agenda would contain:

- A brief overview of the state of art within the TPG B on LRC from December 2018 to date, to be presented by the French Co-chair;
- Italian Co-chair would present the Umbrella project, together with a summary of the projects from the Dutch and Croatian colleagues (I-COMPLY and EPER);
- European Commission should present the new EHEA call for projects. The three projects on recognition were selected during the previous call for proposals;

- Albanian Co-chair would give an overview and analysis on the country input received and suggestions for thematic groups of interest;
- The participants then should be divided into three groups in a self-assessment exercise, to discuss a full range of tools to use on recognition process, as well as to see whether there is common basis for a project to be proposed in the new EHEA call. The exercise would also give the opportunity to have a common reference, common standard in the assessment work and the template of assessment template with good practice sharing from Ireland, Italy and Netherlands;
- The group should discuss possible proposal to the Ministerial Communiqué regarding the European Assessment Report (EAR);
- There are grounds of common work with other TPGs, even though each of the groups operates autonomously. The issue of recognition is linked with quality assurance and qualification frameworks.

The agenda was approved with the changes proposed.

Attachment: TPG_B_LRC_RO_MK_2_Agenda.pdf

3. The work done so far and the roadmap for the next months: discussion about the action plan for the group, staff mobility

French Co-chair informed the participants on the state of art of the work done by the TPG B on LRC so far. The 1st meeting of the TPG B on LRC was in Tirana with a high number of participants. The meeting was followed by a seminar on diploma mills and fraudulent documents. [BFUG workplan](#) is published on the EHEA web site, including general information and the topics. Members are welcomed to look at the work plan and give feedback. So far 28 countries have given their feedback on indicating the objectives to be reached by 2020 and beyond. Most of the objectives are linked to the topics identified, as priority topics by the BFUG. The topics identified by many countries in their country input regards: the issue of legal framework on national level for the implementation of the LRC, adaption of the legal framework for procedures of recognition of qualification held by refugees, automatic recognition as a relevant issue for many of the countries in their country input, digitalisation at several levels, database for recognition procedure and linkage to the use of blockchain technology and digitalisation of the process, the dialogue with HEIs, the description of course contents in terms of learning outcomes, Diploma Supplement, in itself linked to the theme of digitalisation, recognition of prior experiential learning, as well as substantial differences linked to fair assessment. The survey raised the question of a better linkage and cooperation of ENIC-NARIC centers with HEIs. Following the presentation in Tirana, a further elaboration on the concept of the EAR has been presented during the meeting in Bologna with the common criteria to be used on comparability statement in addition to the personalised one adopted on national situation. Another follow up of the meeting in Tirana was the need to raise awareness on quality assurance in regard to recognition procedures, as well as awareness on fraud and diploma mill phenomenon and the potential digitalisation to address it. Three projects were presented in Tirana and participants would get more information later on. There is the need to decide which information the countries should forward on their country input and this information should be expected to be forward by the end of April 2020, allowing the group to prepare for the Ministerial Conference. There is also the need on identifying the possibility of exchange, based on the needs and the expertise sharing. The third

meeting, which will have as its main focus information provisions, is foreseen to be held in Paris with tentative dates of 9-11 March 2020, while the final dates will be sent at a later stage. Staff mobility is foreseen to take place in 2020. Discussions from the participants raised the issue of the need for more information on the EAR, which as explained by the Co-chairs would be presented to the participants during the meeting.

Italian Co-chair presented the umbrella call funded by the EC, focusing on the administrative regulations. The overall objective is to support the implementation of LRC in each country. TPG is composed of 46 BFUG countries and consultative members and this shows the importance of the topic on national level. The 1st year foresees the seminars, while on the second time the projects foresees also staff mobility, In the second year, the project will offer the peer learning for participants. There are foreseen 20 receiving and 20 outgoing peer learning activities. There is still time to decide how the peer learning will work better. Then participants were introduced to the regulations and rules regarding reimbursement. For all TPG B on LRC meetings and seminars, there is the possibility to reimburse one representative of each country. Peer Learning Activities (PLA) foresee reimbursement for 20 participants for five working days for each PLA. There are 15 partners in the project, but the aim of the project foresees the support all the TPG B on LRC members.

Croatia presented the EU funded project EPER – kick-off event will be in July 2019 in Zagreb. The agenda foresees the participation of some experts from ENIC-NARIC centres. The 1st part of the conference will be dedicated to best practice, while the 2nd part will be a panel discussion to discuss the challenges in the area of recognition. The working group will have its 1st meeting one day before the conference to agree on the draft on new act of recognition and hopefully this act will pass till the end of the 2019. Emphasize will be put on drafting of the automatic recognition provisions and provision of recognition of qualifications held by refugees.

The project I-COMPLY had its kick-off meeting in May 2019, with **Dutch Ministry of Education and Dutch ENIC-NARIC** as its coordinator. The goal of the project is in line with the goal of the TPG B on LRC, five countries got together to work on self-evaluation, roadmap and improving the recognition aspect in their respective countries. Project has also other countries which are involved. The project is completely based on the LRC monitoring exercise of some years ago. The project is also based on the elements of former project Fair, focusing on practicalities of the LRC implementation. This project aims at improving the results and we expect lots of discussions among the project partners. The results of the project could be useful for other countries. The format which would be developed could be useful also for other countries on their self-evaluation process.

Attachment: 3_TPG_B_RO_MK_2_TPG-LRC_Project.pdf

4. Presentation of the new EHEA project call: analysis of needs starting from country inputs, networking time to discuss possible peer projects and thematic needs and offers matchmaking - Klara Engels-Perenyi, European Commission

Representative of the European Commission (EC) informed the participants on the new call for projects launched for participation of the EHEA countries on the implementation of Bologna Process key commitments/reforms. The call for projects was disseminated to high level representatives of the BFUG Members, through the

BFUG Secretariat, as well as the Erasmus Plus National Offices. Thematic of the proposals should focus on the Bologna Process key commitments, such as Learning & Teaching, innovation, social dimension, etc. Three commitments are interlinked in the work of all the TPGs; therefore, the EC encourages synergies and joint work among them. The EC considers the work of the TPG on LRC quite crucial, and if there are some difficulties on the national level, countries are highly recommended to participate with projects. Activities could be peer support, national interest cooperation activities to implement the reforms (it can be for legislation, or similar actions). Peer support is considered an added value for the proposal, giving high ranking on the evaluation. All applicants could be the Erasmus + program countries, EFTA and BFUG consultative members. They could submit the application and there is the need to cooperate and include at least another country, from all EHEA (if a consultative member submits the application there should be at least two countries). The need to look at the stakeholder's involvement on national level could give added value to the project and its implementation, which should be explained quite well, to justify the project. Then the EC continued with practical and technical information regarding the regulations for the applications. The call has only one strand and activities which could be funded are linked to any of the topics covered by the Paris Communiqué. EC intends to publish another call next year for the NARIC centers, already familiar with these regulations. The projects should be really of good quality and the added value of working together in the consortium should be well explained. The national authorities are the applicants, while non EHEA countries can be partners on the project but cannot directly apply. One important element should aim at thinking about the future. In the BFUG meeting in Bucharest there were good discussions on the topics of the future of BP and there was a general agreement to reflect on the current needs of the BP, with more flexibility on program design, social dimension, while other key commitment are strongly recommended to be further discussed and put into projects. The call is a restricted call and there is a limited number of the beneficiaries. The documents are not on line, but you could receive the documents and access to them through the respective BFUG members. The deadline is 12 September, 2019. Selection process until end of 2019, and earlier projects could start their activities with the date after the expiration of the deadline, with an explanation as to why these activities should take place at that time.

Attachment: 4_TPG_B_RO_MK_2_new_EHEA_call.pdf

5. Working groups on country input, self-assessment and roadmap at national level with regards to Key Commitment 2

Albanian Co-chair presented the analysis of the country inputs received by each TPG B on LRC member country, even though some inputs are still missing. The purpose of the session is on sharing the comparative analysis and express interest on participating in future activities, as well as cooperation and joint work on projects in the future in certain topics from the thematic indications. The excel file on the EHEA web site would be used during the round table discussions for the group discussions later during the day. The activities were divided by topics, such as: credential evaluators training, training for HEIs on presenting specific tools for partial recognition, legal provision for recognition of qualifications held by refugees, specification on substantial differences, digitalisation of DS, use of Blockchain technologies, activities regarding automatic recognition, etc. The topics were grouped into three main areas;

- *Drafting legal provisions:*

for refugees;

on specification on substantial differences and appeals procedures.

- *Digitalisation of the Diploma Supplement (DS), use of Blockchain Technology:
digitalisation of the databases on total cases treated by ENIC-NARIC center*
- *Training of Credential evaluators of ENIC-NARIC center:*

Recommendations for HEIs on partial recognition, specific tools for helping the HEIs.

Then participants were divided into three groups to discuss further on the topics. The exercise would be useful for countries to better understand their needs and learn on good practices useful to them and on finding common ground for future projects under the new call.

Attachment: 5_TPG_B_RO_MK_2_Country_inputs.pdf

5.1 Rapporteur of Group I

During the gathering in round table, there were lots of discussions and points raised, trying to find practical outcomes and solutions to the discussions and topics raised. Many of participants in the group come from ENIC-NARIC offices, therefore being familiar with what's available to the evaluators. On the first topic on drafting legal provisions for refugees, discussions raised the issue of definition of "legal" provision and what it means, since it is not always a legal provision rather than policies and procedures at national level. The LRC is the legal context for all of the activities. There is a lot of material and information about the refugees on ENIC NARIC web site. The work that could be done is to bring together the good practice, cases studies, study visits on how to work with refugees and qualification recognition. The seminar on substantial differences would be a good opportunity to raise other discussions and solutions on the case. The group didn't talk on the appeals procedures, but it is understandable on what it is meant by appeals procedure and if appeals provision is applicable on country's own context. In regard to digitalisation of the DS, the group agreed on the need for an inventory of all the activities in relation to digitalisation, mapping of what's available, as there seem to be quite a lot going on in the digital space, and peer learning is helpful from all this. There is a need to understand better what's available. The mentioning of the *Europass* developed in a certain context, but LRC goes beyond that and it won't be of direct help for countries outside EU.

In relation to the training of credential evaluators, the group agreed on the importance of such training, particularly for new credential evaluators, who arrive in the recognition space. The idea of a new project from the colleague from EUA on leading a project on the topic, to revitalise the stream platform and bring some training into the specific area. There is already the Dutch ENIC-NARIC training through online blended learning, training programs, and there is the need to update some of the training material, to allow for the partial recognition or prior learning being mentioned.

5.2 Rapporteur of Group II

This group focused on the three topics, with several countries participating, different realities and state of art from each of them. As discussed in the group, it turned out

that countries are working on legal provisions for refugees, and this is the topic discussed most in the group. From the discussions, some countries with less experience on the subject, as legal provisions are different, based on the national legislation, and there is the need to think further on the issue, since the realities are different. Legal provisions existing in the country, doesn't mean there are practical ways settled to implement those provisions, therefore there is the need to find practical steps. Some countries have legal provisions between themselves (case Belorussia Ukraine). Czech Republic are working on the amendments of an Act of HE, highlighting the transnational HE part. In regard to the digitalisations, there was the sharing of the experience and the needs for the process, paying attention to the legal provisions on the topic, as certain countries issue legally binding decision an recommendations, and the legal provisions for digitalisations in this case are different and there is the need to think through about the countries in which non digital ways of work are in place to a larger extend (hard copy and archiving of documents). Participants in the group agreed that training is essential, and the online courses are welcomed and encouraged to continue

5.3 Rapporteur of Group III

Discussions regarding the legal provisions on specification of substantial differences, focused on assessing the respective country legislation to see whether there is any implementation on the substantial differences. The focus was on practice rather than on legal implementation. There is the lack of communication between the credential evaluators on the HEI level, while looking into the US experience could be interesting in regard to the HEIs network of credential evaluators. On European level there are several projects on DS and coordination of these projects is not easy, with the request to the EC to inform the stakeholders of each country on the project. There are several databases developed in different projects and follow up on these databases would be useful. In regard to the recognition of partial academic education, there is the need to inform the HEIs on the tools being developed, and the training of evaluators should be carried out also on the HEIs level.

The Co-chairs will send to all participants the comparative table to fill in and in ten days they should be sent back. Then the data will be gathered and elaborated. Participants will also receive information on how to fill the template, showing the different stages and different situations for each of the countries to enable a clear picture of the state of art for each country.

6. Common standards for the assessment of foreign qualifications in the EHEA. How to build a common reference to foster portability and automatic recognition: examples from ENIC-NARIC centers – *Angela Lambkin, ENIC-NARIC Ireland; Chiara Finocchietti, ENIC-NARIC Italy; Bas Wegewijs, ENIC-NARIC the Netherlands*

French Co-chair chaired the discussions, presenting the topic and emphasizing the fact that the discussion on the topic started in Tirana in January, and the discussions raised the fact of several common assessment on the recognition.

6.1 ENIC-NARIC Ireland is a small organization (of four professional staff) offering information and advice on foreign qualifications. NARIC Ireland is part of the Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI), as the national agency. Advising on recognition of foreign qualifications is not legally binding, only advisory one. They provide advice on the qualifications, with next decisions remaining with the regulated and academic authorities. This is a good opportunity to see on how an automatic recognition looks like. The stakeholders of NARIC Ireland are various, and the work is based on the LRC. Irish NARIC provide the foreign qualification referring to European Qualifications Framework (EQF) as a very important part of the advice. There are over 12000 qualifications on the database of the web site and the information is free. Information is divided per country and each qualification having information on the level of qualification on the origin country and how it is evaluated in Ireland. The information is generic and is not for partial qualifications. The response is good, with over 25000 downloads in 2018 and the info graphics shown in the data graphic of the web site Brazil is the largest area of data traffic, following by the UK, Poland, India, Spain, Croatia, etc. There is no particular information on a particular HEI, rather than information on the particular country, with the final decision remaining with the authorities asking for recognition. All services are online and there is a customer platform to submit applications, free of charge. A small NARIC center, aiming to public service.

6.2 ENIC-NARIC Italy presented the [Diplome](#) project. The participants were presented with the process through the web site, in every step of the process, and in compliance with GDPR, the applicant should give a written consent. The qualifications are divided onto HE qualifications and secondary school qualifications. The section services contain the information on the category of the service the request of information each applicant could require. The FAQ section contain a lot of information available to the public prior to contacting CIMEA. There is information for each of the countries and the documented necessary and required for CIMEA to carry out the evaluation process. The final section is the statement, which is digital, while the assessment is given both on electronic as well as the original hard copy. The site is secure, with the cryptographic key enabling the entrance to the restricted area. Information in the site is metadata. While information sharing is free of charge, statement of comparability is not free of charge, and the fee was agreed upon with the MIUR.

6.3 ENIC-NARIC the Netherlands – In Albania in January, the topic of portability of recognition statements was discussed, and participants were introduced to the new project called EAR-NET. The new project deals with testing automatic recognition and how to apply that, but one of the side lines within the projects aimed at testing the portability of recognition decisions/evaluations. The testing phase consisted on testing what types of evaluation statements are being produced and their collection. Following that phase, other ENIC-NARIC centers were called to have a look at those statements/evaluations. There were two recognition statement collected by each participating country. Dutch ENIC-NARIC is still in the middle of the project and the results are not final yet. One of the questions regarded the information used from any other center. The information gathered showed that most centers provide the minimum amount of information on the evaluation statement. With the lack of information, there is the need to rely on the professionalism of the other center, working based on the regulations and properly. There is always the need to know on how other centers do

recognize, as in some cases the assessment could be different from the one. Whether it is risky to accept the comparability from other countries and put the trust on other centers, while each center look into information gathered differently and what could be substantial differences on quality assurance, with many centers sharing different answers. The tests have shown that the comparison assessments from other centers were also analysed by Dutch ENIC-NARIC staff and the results were the same.

Attachment: 6_TPG_B_RO_MK_2_common_standards_EHEA-QQI.pdf

7. Presentation and discussion of the template of the European Assessment Report (EAR)

Italian Co-chair presented the template of the European Assessment Report (EAR). To remain in the same wavelength of the discussions, in Tirana there were discussions on the template, which could provide a transparent tool on recognition statement in the EHEA. The basic information, common to all statement of comparability remain the same, as seen in the cases analysed during the meeting in Tirana. EAR should contain basic information, name of the qualification, in original language, and translation or transliteration, another element the name of the HEI or body, name of the awarding and teaching HEI (the same as in the DS), status of the HEI (as per each country's accreditation system). Profile of the qualification, relevant for the assessment, workload and the credits, corresponding with the ECTS (where available) and corresponding to the years of studies, according to the information, and the space for the assessment of the qualification. The idea is to have a transparent tool, giving information at European level.

Point for discussion which could be raised in regard to the EAR:

- Name of the document;
- Set of information included in the report (awarding country/system of reference, entry requirements, academic rights, etc);
The template should contain a brief explanatory note of what it is;
- What the TPG B on LRC should propose to the Ministerial Conference in Rome 2020, through the BICG. There is the need to report on the achievements and what could be done more, as well as the vision for the next years;
- The EAR should be seen as a process and not only as a simple document on an European level.

In the discussions participants raised questions as to whether the EAR template is not a replacement for the DS, the idea is to have a transparent tool on European level, also when considering the diversity of all countries, with the statement of comparability even if looking different, containing some common information agreed by all centers. It is up to the TPG B decision on the concrete level of implementation.

The template as a transparent tool should not be on the recognition statement but could be used for future EHEA countries to start their statement, also for the other end users. The template would be a transparent tool on recognition statements. Discussions emphasized the fact of the template as an additional document, which could not bring too much benefits to the recognition process. Participants also shared the hesitation that there is the Ministerial statement in regard to the BP on the long-term goals on automatic recognition. Therefore, there is the need to focus the work on the recommendations.

8. Cooperation with other Thematic Peer Groups

The panel of the session was comprised also from Co-chairs of two other TPGs; TPG A on QF and TPG C on QA

Co-chair of the TPG A on QF gave a brief update on the work of the TPG A on QF, regarding the qualification framework, discussions on the short cycle, as well as the meetings in Prague (both *ad hoc* and planned ones). The *ad hoc* meeting had as main theme self-certification and was attended by eight countries, also due to a short time. In the meeting good practices were shared with all countries informing on the state of art on self-certification. There will be a follow up on the subject in September during the meeting of the EHEA network of QF correspondents which should be organised by the Council of Europe (CoE). The planned meeting took place in Prague and the subject of recognition of short cycle came across of the meeting again. The subject is very popular and there is further need with TPG B on LRC, to be elaborated more at a later stage. The ECTS conference followed the TPG A on QF meeting, with speakers from academia focusing on the current stage and the future of the ECTS. All the information is on the [EHEA web site](#).

Co-chair of the TPG C on QA updated on the work of the group, with 45 countries and consultative members and two meetings have already taken place. During the 2nd meeting in Cyprus, there was an additional day for a PLA dedicated to the European approach of QA on joint programs. The topic was interesting, and it was decided as one of the main topics most of the countries were asking for peer support. 3rd meeting of the TPG C on QA will be in Ghent on January 2020. TPG C on QA is facilitating staff mobility also through EU funded projects, and the staff mobility will take place between October 2019 to May 2020, with the possibility of two staff/country to focus on the specific needs of their country, to learn from their peers. There is expected to have the peer mobilities reports, shared with the TPG C on QA. All the information of the TPG C on QA is on the [EHEA web site](#).

9. Conclusions and way forward

Italian Co-chair thanked all participants for their participation, sharing some practical information and the fruitful discussions, which participants should be encouraged to take also for the PLA seminar on 26 June, discussing substantial differences on the process of recognition.

French Co-chair gave information on the next meeting in Paris. The Co-chairs are expecting the feedback from the countries, and all participants were invited to share their ideas and recommendations on how to organize the next peer meetings.