

Support to strengthening the higher education system in Azerbaijan



Twinning project ENI/2018/395-401

Mission Report

Short-Term Mission on Activity 4.1. Assess the current legal and regulatory framework on education standards, quality assurance, credits and recognition of parts of studies

(June 9, 10, 23, 26 2020)

1. Name and Function of the Expert:

Full name of expert

Mr. Kristina Sutkute, Lithuania



Signature

Full name of expert

Ms. Inara Dunska, Latvia



Signature

2. **Objective and Tasks of the Mission:**

The mission is carried out within the framework of:

COMPONENT 4: RECOMMENDATIONS ON AMENDMENTS OF LEGISLATIVE AND REGULATIVE FRAMEWORK DEVELOPED

Activity 4.1. Assess the current legal and regulatory framework on education standards, quality assurance, credits and recognition of periods of studies

Benchmarks for this activity are:

- Draft Recognition Rules developed by the Nostrification Department of the newly created Education Quality Assurance Agency are reviewed and proposals are made to ensure compliance with best European practices

3. Time schedule of the mission:

Date and Time	Activity
<p>Tuesday – 9 June 2020</p>	<p>11:30-13:30</p> <p>Online briefing meeting with staff of Nostrification Department of newly established Education Quality Assurance Agency (EQAA)</p> <p>Participants: <i>Ms. Turan Topalova</i>, head of Nostrification Department, EQAA <i>Mr. Fariz Gasimzade</i>, staff member of Nostrification Department <i>Mr. Gashgay Orujlu</i>, staff member of Nostrification Department</p> <p>14:00-16:00</p> <p>Deskwork</p>
<p>Wednesday – 10 June 2020</p>	<p>11:30-13:30</p> <p>Online meeting with staff of Nostrification Department of newly established Education Quality Assurance Agency (EQAA)</p> <p>Participants: <i>Ms. Turan Topalova</i>, head of Nostrification Department, EQAA <i>Mr. Fariz Gasimzade</i>, staff member of Nostrification Department <i>Mr. Gashgay Orujlu</i>, staff member of Nostrification Department</p> <p>14:00-16:00</p> <p>Deskwork</p>
<p>Friday – 23 June 2020</p>	<p>11:30-13:30</p> <p>Online meeting with staff of Nostrification Department of newly established Education Quality Assurance Agency (EQAA)</p> <p>Participants: <i>Ms. Turan Topalova</i>, head of Nostrification Department, EQAA <i>Mr. Fariz Gasimzade</i>, staff member of Nostrification Department <i>Mr. Gashgay Orujlu</i>, staff member of Nostrification Department</p> <p>14:00-16:00</p> <p>Deskwork</p>

Monday – 26 June 2020	<p>11:30-13:30</p> <p>Online meeting with staff of Nostrification Department of newly established Education Quality Assurance Agency (EQAA)</p> <p>Participants: <i>Ms. Turan Topalova</i>, head of Nostrification Department, EQAA <i>Mr. Fariz Gasimzade</i>, staff member of Nostrification Department <i>Mr. Gashgay Orujlu</i>, staff member of Nostrification Department</p> <p>14:00-16:00</p> <p>Deskwork</p>
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4. Relevant Background Information/State of Affairs regarding the mission

The recently created and restructured Education Quality Assurance Agency has asked for EU experts' assistance to check the compliance of revised rules for recognition with EU best practices. A short-term mission, conducted online, was performed accordingly by two EU experts from institutions in charge of recognition of qualifications in Lithuania and Latvia.

The experts were also asked to share the practice of organisation on implementing their workflow.

5. Achievement of the Expected Results

All of the results expected with the mission were achieved:

- The experts have provided their comments on the new legislation with the view of its compliance with the Lisbon Recognition Convention, its subsidiary documents, the EAR Manual, and other international documents and instruments of good practice ;
- The experts provided a separate opinion on the concept and implementation of the substantial difference in recognition processes;
- The comments were clarified and discussed with the representatives of the Education Quality Assurance Agency;
- The experts shared their experience on how such provisions can be implemented in practice to ensure a streamlined process of recognition.
- The experts provided practical information which could be useful for credential evaluators (data bases for checking authenticity of educational documents, national data base of regulated professions as an example for further developing Recognition Rules and professional recognition practice).

It is expected that at the end of this mission, the representatives of the Nostrification Department of the Education Quality Assurance Agency (EQAA) are aware of the provisions of the new draft legislation regarding recognition, which correspond to the good practice and know, which provisions could be improved to ensure further compliance. In addition to this, the representatives are aware on how the provisions of LRC, such as the concept of substantial difference, can be implemented in practice.

6. Unexpected Results

There were no unexpected results.

7. Issues Left Open After the Mission

There are no issues left open after the mission. The purpose of the mission was fulfilled.

8. Recommendations (including recommendation for future missions)

In general, the newly drafted legislation represents a substantial step towards compliance with the good recognition practice and the relevant international instruments and tools. Below are specific recommendations to ensure further compliance and a fair and efficient recognition process.

The system of recognition established by the new legislation is centralised with the decision making in the hands of one national body (EQAA). Given the current state of internationalisation in Azerbaijan, the experts consider this to be a good and effective model to ensure fair recognition. However, the experts suggest considering the following:

- Given the scope of the EQAA mandate provisioned in the new legislation, the Nostrification Department, which was reduced to 6 people (including management personnel), might be understaffed to ensure fast and efficient decisions making.
- Splitting experts work areas geographical approach seems more suitable, however, multitasking skills might be trained in case of providing interchangeability of experts if it is needed. Structure of EQA) should determine workload sharing between employees paying attention to percentage devoted to international communication, giving responses to ENIC/NARIC, technical and unexpected issues.
- Capacity building of the department's staff must be included in the department's activity plan, using work based training, the opportunities offered by the ENIC / NARIC network, participation in the projects, study visits, etc.
- Experts suggest that, despite the many tasks of the department, informative seminars on recognition for universities should be included in the yearly activities.
- As internationalization will be increasing in the future, the centralised decision making will be more difficult to sustain. Therefore, there should be steps taken to consider decentralization in the future with decision making for the purpose of further study concentrated within higher education institutions with EQAA as an advisory body providing recommendations, information, and advice to the HEIs.
- The experts also recommend to apply the same recognition scheme to all types of qualifications covered by the Lisbon Recognition Convention (including access qualifications and qualifications belonging to the Bologna third cycle).
- The experts suggest evaluating the list of regulated professions and consider including in the list those professions whose minimum educational requirements in the European Union are regulated by Directive 36/2005/EC nurses, midwives, doctors, specialized doctors, pharmacists, dentists, veterinarians, architects.

In order to ensure fair decision making, the following could be considered:

- Centralised decision making in recognition of foreign qualifications very often entails recognition decisions, which refer to the comparability of the level of the foreign award (e.g. comparable to Bachelor degree). The decision regarding the comparability to a specific field of study and/or specialization (e.g. comparable to a Bachelor degree in Information Technology) is usually left up to HEIs (when the purpose of recognition is further study). This means that the centralised recognition authority usually does not have to analyse and compare contents and programme or specialization specific learning outcomes, which require in depth subject specific knowledge. Thus, the experts would also suggest for EQAA to focus on determining the comparability of generic system level requirements (level, quality, workload, generic learning outcomes). The comparability in terms of programme specific learning outcomes could be determined by a HEI or an employer. This would create a more flexible recognition system, which would allow recognizing qualifications that do not have a matching study field in Azerbaijan.
- Distance learning is a valid and legal form of study in many countries. The fact that distance learning programmes do not exist in Azerbaijan, should not be an obstacle for recognition of quality assured foreign qualifications awarded through distance learning as long as they comply with the requirements of the Revised Code of Good Practice in the Provision of Transnational Education adopted by the Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee (LRC).
- The legislation should provision the implementation of the Article VII of the LRC and provide conditions and possibilities for recognition of qualifications for undocumented refugees.

- Rankings of institutions should not be considered as a valid criterion for recognition as often ranking criteria have no direct impact on the awarded qualification and its learning outcomes (e.g. they heavily rely on research capacity). It should be sufficient for the institution and/or programme to be recognised and/or quality assured.

In order to ensure fast and efficient decision making, the following could be considered:

- The experts recommend reconsidering the requirement for an Apostille and/or full consular legalisation of documents. These procedures are very lengthy and, in certain circumstances, very difficult to fulfill. In addition to this, they do not guarantee authenticity and the truthfulness of the contents of the document. Please consider other, more trustworthy forms of authentication and/or verification, such as official online databases, contacting the issuing authorities, etc.
- It is recommended to accept documents without translation for the most common languages, such as English. This would allow for faster decision making and will save time and resources for your applicants. Please note that many Bologna countries are issuing bilingual Diploma Supplements with English as one of the languages in efforts to reduce the need for translations. In addition to this, translations done by translators, which are not experts in the field of education and its terminology, may also be misleading.

9. Acknowledgments (if any)

The experts would like to congratulate EQAA with the newly drafted law. The provisioned changes in the legislation and recognition policy eliminating the nostrification process for foreign qualifications, are a much welcome achievement, which will allow for a more flexible and fair recognition of foreign qualifications in Azerbaijan.

Annexes (if any)