

# Support to strengthening the higher education system in Azerbaijan



Twinning project ENI/2018/395-401

## Mission Report

Short-Term Mission on Activity 4.2. Assess the recognition practices in the pilot universities and develop proposals for changes to reflect recognition based on learning outcomes and in line with European best practices

(February 25 – March 1, 2019)

1. Name and Function of the Expert:

Full name of expert

Ms. Kristina Sutkutė, Lithuania

Signature 

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 4.2. Assess the recognition practices in the pilot universities and develop proposals for changes to reflect recognition based on learning outcomes and in line with European best practices

Benchmarks for this activity are:

- **Recognition practices in the pilot universities assessed**
- **A proposal on the amendment of regulations for recognition at institutional level to allow for recognition of parts of studies based on learning outcomes and in line with European best practices**

## 3. Time schedule of mission:

<b>Date and Time</b>	<b>Activity</b>
Monday 25 February 2019	A meeting with staff of the Nostrification Department. Presentation of recognition practices in Lithuania and Latvia.
Tuesday 26 February 2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Reviewing the Draft Law on Nostrification</li><li>- A workshop on recognition practices at the Nostrification Department (<i>Stakeholders: Ms. Turan Topalova, Head of Nostrification Dept., Ms. Sakina Huseynova, Lawyer</i>)</li></ul>
Wednesday 27 February 2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Meeting with Ms. Nargiz Garakhanova, CL IV, Senior Advisor at Higher Education Department to discuss current practices in recognition of periods of study in Azerbaijani HEIs.</li><li>- Workshop in Azerbaijan State Pedagogical University on recognition periods of study and ECTS credits (<i>Stakeholders: See the Annex</i>)</li></ul>
Thursday 28 February 2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Workshop in Azerbaijan Oil and Industry University on recognition of periods of study and ECTS credits (Attended also by Azerbaijan Technical University representatives) (<i>Stakeholders: See the Annex</i>)</li></ul>
Friday 1 March 2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Debriefing meeting with Science and Higher Education Department of the Ministry of Education</li></ul>

#### **4. Relevant Background Information/State of Affairs regarding the mission**

The mission encompassed meetings with the staff of the Department of Accreditation and Nostrification (ANO), the staff of higher education institutions, and review of relevant national legislation.

During the meetings with ANO, current nostrification procedure was discussed. According to the provided information, applications can be submitted through an online system by uploading scans of all the necessary documents. All documents should be translated and legalized and/or certified with an Apostille.

The recognition procedure consists of several steps:

- identifying the level and the equivalency of the award,
- interview (for selected countries and/or applicants), and
- checking for border crossings.

The process of assessment involves checking for equivalency subject by subject according to the national curriculum, which includes subjects for all fields of study. When a specific field of a foreign qualification is not offered in Azerbaijan (for example, dietology), there are no possibilities to recognize the qualification.

The staff of ANO does not specialise as experts in specific system of foreign education, but are responsible for specific steps within the recognition procedure. Thus, one application goes through several employees.

About 20 percent of the applications get a negative report. There is no possibility to appeal, but some applicants contests the decisions in court.

The experts were notified that a new legal act is in the process to be approved and experts were presented with a copy of the legal act.

During the mission meetings with representatives from three universities were held in order to review the recognition procedures at the institutional level. Azerbaijan State Pedagogical, Azerbaijan State Oil and Industry University and Baku Technical University have different experience in recognition practice.

In most cases the foundation course is provided for foreign students if they do not have the necessary language skills (students from Bangladesh, China, Turkey, Iran, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Russia etc.) (for first cycle studies the universities are competent recognition authorities, for incoming students – additional examination is organised if necessary).

Students mobility is not well developed because of difficulties on recognition of study periods which is the responsibility of universities. Each higher education institution has a special commission gathered for assessing grades/credits gained during studies within Erasmus or exchange programmes. In most cases the commission task is to find equivalence of subject content which is serious obstacle for students' mobility. The result of the evaluation is prepared in written form and can be used for further studies. The commission offers summer schools in order to compensate lost credits.

Recognition practice of periods of study should be based on learning outcomes, if subjects did not match completely but programme is in the same level it could not be the reason for rejection.

It is not necessary to compare acquired subjects within mobility programme with “local” subjects.

Some of local curriculum does not enable mobility (90% of subjects are mandatory). Such amount of mandatory credits makes difficulties for building Joint programmes with foreign universities.

New standards and new classification do not include some specialities (system engineering).

In Europe universities have no national standards for curricula at HEIs, lectures have pedagogical freedom developing study programmes.

Universities in Azerbaijan are open for cooperation in order to overcome problems and ready for changes.

## **5. Achievement of the Expected Results**

All expected results were achieved.

## **6. Unexpected Results**

No unexpected results occurred.

## **7. Issues Left Open After the Mission**

No issues regarding the mission were left open. The purpose of the mission was fulfilled.

## **8. Recommendations (including recommendation for future missions)**

Recommendations for nostrification of qualifications:

- Transitioning from nostrification to recognition:
  - contents/subjects should not be one of the criteria;
  - comparability of generic learning outcomes (related to the level and type of award) should be considered for comparability to the level;
  - comparability of field specific learning outcomes should be considered on the level of HEI, employers, or competent professional recognition authorities.
- Applying the concept of substantial difference:
  - a foreign award should not be expected to fit into the national legislation;
  - differences, which are not substantial should be allowed (e.g. some differences in duration, which are within the framework of Bologna process).
- The practice of verifying aspects that are not directly related to the award should be abandoned:
  - checking language;
  - checking border crossings.

- Learning outcomes approach to recognition should be used with focus on the overall outcomes not process:
  - qualifications awarded through distance education should be considered for recognition.
- Rankings of HEI should not serve as the basis for recognition;
- There should be a possibility to appeal;
- There should be a procedure to recognise undocumented refugee qualifications.

Recommendations for recognition procedures at the institutional level:

- universities should use more flexible approach for recognition of study periods with focus on learning outcomes not subjects;
- Ministry of Education may provide new regulations in order to make procedure of recognition of study periods easier and to attract more students to take part in exchange programmes abroad;
- standards of programmes and qualifications requires a revision, standards should be more flexible and based on learning outcomes;
- flexibility in filling out academic transcript with the possibility to indicate subject taken abroad which do not necessarily match the subjects of the national curriculum but are comparable in terms of learning outcomes;
- workshops for universities should be organised.

It is recommended that future missions can lead to the following:

- Further work with the recognition procedure of ANO;
- Review and proposals for amending national legislation, which is impacting recognition of periods of study;
- Further interviews with higher education institutions (it would be advisable to meet with administrative staff that is directly responsible for recognition of periods of study);
- A presentation to the staff of higher education institutions on how periods of study can be recognized and incorporated into their programs.

## **9. Acknowledgments (if any)**

### **Annexes**

Comments on the new law regarding recognition

Recommendations to the Department of Accreditation and Nostrification (ANO)