

**ERI SEE Seminar**  
**Removing obstacles to recognition of qualifications by aligning national legislation with UNESCO/Council of Europe/BFUG standards**

**Zagreb, Croatia, 23 September 2014**

**REPORT**

ERI SEE seminar on *Removing obstacles to recognition by aligning national legislation with standards of UNESCO/Council of Europe and Bologna Follow-up Group* was organised by the Ministry of Science, Education and Sports of the Republic of Croatia (MSES) in cooperation with the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC), Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The purpose of the seminar was to upgrade competencies for amending national legislative framework on recognition of qualifications in line with the UNESCO/CoE *Recommendation on the use of Qualification Frameworks in the recognition of foreign qualifications* (a subsidiary text to the Lisbon Convention) and the Bucharest Communiqué<sup>1</sup>, as well to provide a forum for discussing possible policy solutions. Harmonisation of all national legislative frameworks in the region with the UNESCO/Council of Europe/Bologna guidelines is a key mechanism for removing obstacles to recognition of qualifications and increasing regional mobility.

The seminar was attended by 36 participants, representatives of ministries of education, ENIC/NARIC offices, government agencies for education, ERI SEE Interim Secretariat and the European Training Foundation. The list of participants is in Annex II.

In her **welcome address**, Assistant Minister Prof. Ruzica Beljo Lucic stressed the importance of active support of Croatia to the EU enlargement process. There is a need for more enhanced cooperation at the education policy level between the countries in the region, notably ministries responsible for education. Various regional initiatives in the field of education should be brought together and this prompted the Ministry to organise a three day event (22-24 Sept 2014) and host ERI SEE seminar, annual meeting of the Council of Europe Regional Network on Qualifications Framework for South East Europe, and the annual meeting of the Bologna Follow – up Regional SEE working Group on Recognition of Qualifications.

The topic of mutual recognition of qualifications among countries of the region should be high on the national education policy agenda, since fair and fast recognition of qualifications is a prerequisite for regional mobility for the purpose of employment, as well as for the purpose of continuation of education.

**First session: National legislative framework on recognition: examples of good practice**

The first session hosted 2 speakers:

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<sup>1</sup> 'We are determined to remove outstanding obstacles hindering effective and proper recognition and are willing to work together towards the automatic recognition of comparable academic degrees, building on the tools of the Bologna framework, as a long-term goal of the EHEA. We therefore commit to reviewing our national legislation to comply with the Lisbon Recognition Convention' (The Bucharest Communiqué).

Ms. Sabina Zajc, ENIC/NARIC, Ministry of Education, Science and Sports of the Republic of Slovenia.

Mr. Nicolae Postavaru, President of the Romanian National Qualifications Authority.

Representative of the Ministry of Education, Science and Sports of **Slovenia**, Ms Zajc, gave an overview of the national legislative framework on recognition **ASSESSMENT AND RECOGNITION OF EDUCATION IN SLOVENIA**

An innovative and effective policy solution is that the Ministry of Education (ENIC/NARIC office) issues a statement about elements of qualification, with the informative and counselling purpose. It is not a legally-binding decision. The content of the statement is as follows: status of educational institution and educational programme, field or discipline of education, obtained title, level of education or education programme in the country of origin, a short description of education in the country of origin, rights that derive from the education in the country of origin (employment, further study). It provides information about comparability of foreign education certificates with the Slovenian educational system (level of education).

In some cases foreign qualification is not comparable to national qualification, but it does not necessarily lead to a negative decision.

Representative of **the Romanian National Qualifications Authority**, Mr. Postavaru, made comments on the Slovenian case, according to a note sent by the Ministry of Education of Croatia prior to the seminar (Annex 3). The Slovenian case was assessed as clear and transparent legislation. Recognition procedure uses the *Slovenian Qualifications Framework (10 levels)* which has been referenced to the EQF.

**Discussion** was moderated by Ms. Ana Tecilazić Goršić, MSES.

- The Slovenian concept is close to automatic recognition but in case of automatic recognition there is no procedure.
- Although the legislation does not stipulate administrative proceeding<sup>2</sup> in case of recognition for the purpose of employment, administrative proceeding are still obligatory in case of recognition for the purpose of continuation of study since it grants a right to enroll into a specific education institution.
- Appeals may be submitted to the Recognition Committee composed of representatives of the national ENIC office, education institutions and the national EURYDICE office.

### **Second session: Draft national legislative framework on recognition: example of reform initiative**

The second session hosted two speakers:

Ms. Ana Tecilazić Goršić, Ministry of Education, Science and Sports of the Republic of Croatia and

Mr. Filippo Del-Ninno, European Training Foundation, Torino, Italy.

Representative of the Ministry of Education, Science and Sports of **Croatia**, Ms Tecilazić Goršić, gave an overview of **Draft Proposal of the Act on Recognition of Foreign Education**

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<sup>2</sup> In many countries of the region, administrative proceedings ( in Croatian “upravni postupak”) still applies to recognition of foreign qualifications.

**Qualifications in the Republic of Croatia.** The Ministry of Education of Croatia proposes, as one of amendments, to abolish administrative proceeding in case of recognition for the purpose of employment (in line with the Slovenian case), so that ENIC office does not issue a legally – binding decision. The Ministry of Labour and Pension System of Croatia did not accept this proposal so a Draft Act on Recognition of Foreign Qualifications stipulates the administrative proceeding in case of recognition for the purpose of employment. A novelty is that the exposition of a legally binding document will include more detailed information on the foreign education qualification (level, scope, quality – accreditation of the institution/programme, NQF, relation to the EQF and QF-EHEA).

Draft Proposal of the Act on Recognition of Foreign Education Qualifications also introduces the possibility of automatic recognition in case that external evaluation of a study programme has been carried out by the Croatian Agency for Science and Higher Education. A respective decision will be made by the Minister of Education.

Representative of **the European Training Foundation**, Mr. Del-Ninno, assessed Croatian Draft Act as very pragmatic and straight-forward and suggested to expand the provision on the use of learning outcomes and the provision on the National Qualifications Framework. Another suggestion was to establish well-designed coordination mechanism at the national level since the procedure for recognition of education qualifications for the purpose of employment is carried out by three government agencies, while the procedure for recognition of education qualifications for the purpose of continuation of study is carried out by education institutions. ETF also proposed to include sectoral councils into the recognition procedure.

**Discussion** was moderated by Ms Loredana Maravić, MSES.

- Provisions for recognition for the purpose of employment do not emphasize the use of learning outcomes since there is no comparison with the national qualification. However, learning outcomes are crucial for recognition for continuation of study.
- Draft Act stipulates that national qualifications frameworks will be used only if referencing has been made, going beyond that would not be in line with required competences for ENIC office staff.
- Including sectoral councils into the recognition procedure is an interesting proposal that was considered during the elaboration of the Draft Act. However, it would mean going too much into the profile of qualification, and recognition of qualification for the purpose of employment should not go into its profile.
- Experience of Slovenia shows that too much information in the recognition statement is confusing employers.

### **Third session: Evidence base for reform initiatives**

The third session hosted two speakers:

Ms. Natalija Konjević, ENIC office, Ministry of Education, Science and Technology Development of the Republic of Serbia and

Ms Atdhetare Kelmendi, NARIC Office, Ministry of Education, Science and Technology of Kosovo\*.

*\* This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo Declaration of Independence.*

Representative of the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology Development of the Republic of Serbia, Ms. Konjević, presented **the evidence base for upgrading the recognition of qualifications in Serbia**. Amendments to the Act on Higher Education foresee a new procedure for recognition of foreign higher education qualifications for the purpose of employment to be carried out by ENIC Serbia (Ministry of Education, Science and Technology Development). At present this procedure has been carried out by higher education institutions. This novelty will make the recognition process more uniform and in line with the practice of the EU member states. In complex cases, expert opinion will be requested by a three-member committee composed of professors in the relevant field appointed by the Minister. Fees will be determined by the Minister (at present this issue is under responsibilities of higher education institutions carrying out the recognition procedure).

A prerequisite for full operation of the ENIC Serbia in its new role, is an electronic information/filing system, hiring new staff and their training (including study visits to their peers in the region) and a large-scale visibility campaign on the new procedure.

National qualifications framework is being developed by two teams (higher education and primary/secondary education). The next steps are joint work of both teams on tuning and implementation of the public call for academic staff to get involved into the elaboration of the national qualifications framework.

**Discussion** was moderated by Ms. Ana Tecilazić Goršić, MSES.

- Efforts on amending legislation were noted and welcomed. Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo\* have started discussions on amending national legislation stipulating recognition.
- What should be done in case that it is not possible to determine whether there is a substantial difference because there is no such qualification in the country carrying out a recognition procedure? In some countries legislation stipulates a possibility for convening a committee dealing with complex recognition cases. However, there is no need for an expert in specific discipline /profile of qualification. This is the old concept of “nostrification”. The focus should be on the system-level recognition.
- Professional recognition in line with the EC Directive on the recognition of professional qualifications (and its amendments) will be under responsibility of the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology Development of the Serbia. Croatia noted that this approach would cause difficulties in the implementation since national coordinator for professional recognition should be the ministry responsible for labour (this is the issue of access to the labour market and is especially sensitive in the case of health professions).

Representative of the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology of Kosovo\*, Ms. Kelmendi, presented **the evidence base for upgrading the recognition of qualifications in Kosovo\***. Well-functioning ENIC office is a unit of the Higher Education Department of the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology of Kosovo\*. A recognition procedure includes a Commission of Experts and the National Council for Recognition. The recognition procedure will be upgraded by amendments to the secondary law on recognition (Administrative Instructions), ratifying the Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region (the Lisbon Convention) and taking further steps to join the NARIC network.

\* This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo Declaration of Independence.

#### Fourth session: Further activities

The fourth session hosted a representative of the Ministry of Education, Science and Sports of the Republic of Slovenia that conducted a survey on recognition of degrees of other countries in the region (cross-recognition).

Representative of the Ministry of Education, Science and Sports of Slovenia, Ms. Sabina Zajc presented **results of the survey on recognition of degrees of other countries in the region (cross-recognition)**. Methodology was as follows: ENIC Slovenia elaborated a sample of Slovenian higher education degree types and requested similar tables of higher education degree types to be filled out by other countries. All degree tables were sent to each country in the region to enter the data on how would they recognize degrees of other countries. The goal of the survey was to map obstacles and elaborate measures for their removal in order to fulfil the goal of smoother recognition. There was a fruitful discussion on the tables containing data on cross-recognition.

General findings of the survey referring to **obstacles** were as follows:

- there are significant differences in national legislation and recognition procedures;
- recognition and assessment of pre-Bologna degrees present an obstacle since majority of the countries did not regulate how pre-Bologna degrees are placed in the current Bologna-based educational system;
- a stage of development of the National Qualifications Framework differs significantly among countries as well as its referencing to the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning (EQF) and self-certification to the Qualifications Framework of the European Higher Education Area (an obstacle to the automatic recognition);
- the so-called »specialized studies« have been carried out in majority of countries (except for Bosnia and Herzegovina and Slovenia).

General findings of the survey referring to possible **measures** for removing obstacles were as follows:

- exchange of information and practices in the field of recognition, mapping of current situation in the region (peer learning);
- increase the link between recognition procedure and European Qualification Frameworks (EQF);
- increase quality assurance mechanisms;
- comparable and uniform use of the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) and Diploma supplement (DS).

#### GENERAL CONCLUSIONS:

- Enhanced regional cooperation on recognition issues serves as a ground for mutual trust in qualifications. The recognition of qualifications facilitates both education and labour mobility. Quality assurance and recognition are crucial elements for the attractiveness, transparency and comparability of education qualifications.



- Hosts and participants thanked the Ministry of Education, Science and Sports of Slovenia on their dedicated work on cross-recognition survey.
- Identified obstacles and measures should be taken into consideration in the preparation of the ERI SEE Work Programme 2015, discussed at the annual meeting of Regional Network on Qualifications Frameworks for South East Europe to be held in Zagreb on 24-25 September 2014, and mentioned at the next annual meeting of ENIC/NARIC network.
- Activities on cross-recognition should be continued at the next ERI SEE event on the topic of recognition of educational qualifications. The Ministry of Education, Science and Sports of Croatia expressed its willingness to continue with coordination of activities related to this topic.



**AGENDA**

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| <p><b>9:30 – 9:40</b></p>   | <p><b>Welcome address</b><br/>Prof. Ružica Beljo Lučić, Assistant Minister, MSES</p>  |
| <p><b>9:40 – 11:00</b></p>  | <p><b>First session: National legislative framework on recognition: examples of good practice</b></p> <p>Moderator: Ana Tecilazić Goršić, MSES</p> <p><b>Presentation of national legislative framework on recognition</b><br/>Country case: Slovenia<br/>Sabina Zajc, ENIC/NARIC, Ministry of Education, Science and Sports of the Republic of Slovenia.</p> <p><b>Review/comments</b><br/>Nicolae Postavaru, President of the Romanian National Qualifications Authority</p> <p><b>Discussion</b></p> |
| <p><b>11:00-12:00</b></p>   | <p><b>Second session: Draft national legislative framework on recognition: example of reform initiative</b></p> <p>Moderator: Loredana Maravić, MSES</p> <p><b>Draft Proposal of the Act on Recognition of Foreign Education Qualifications in the Republic of Croatia</b><br/>Ana Tecilazić Goršić, MSES</p> <p><b>Review/comments</b><br/>Filippo Del-Ninno, European Training Foundation, Torino, Italy</p>  |
| <p><b>12:00 – 13:00</b></p> | <p><b>Lunch</b> (level -1)</p>  |
| <p><b>13:00 – 14:30</b></p> | <p><b>Third session: Evidence base for reform initiatives</b></p> <p>Moderator: Ana Tecilazić Goršić, MSES</p> <p><b>Evidence base for upgrading the recognition of qualifications in Serbia</b><br/>Natalija Konjević, ENIC office, Ministry of Education, Science and Technology Development of the Republic of Serbia</p> <p><b>Discussion</b></p>   |



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|                      | <p><b>Evidence base for upgrading the recognition of qualifications in Kosovo*</b><br/>Atdhetare Kelmendi, NARIC Office, Ministry of Education, Science and Technology of Kosovo*</p> <p><b>Discussion</b></p>  |
| <b>14:30-14:45</b>   | <b>Coffee break</b>   |
| <b>14:45 – 15:30</b> | <p><b>Fourth session: Further activities</b></p> <p>Moderator: Ana Tecilazić Goršić, MSES</p> <p><b>Survey on recognition of degrees of other countries in the region (cross-recognition)</b><br/>Sabina Zajc, ENIC/NARIC, Ministry of Education, Science and Sports of the Republic of Slovenia</p> <p><b>Discussion</b></p> |
| <b>15:30-16:00</b>   | <b>Closing remarks</b>  |

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## Annex II

ERI SEE seminar on *Removing obstacles to recognition by aligning national legislation with standards of UNESCO/Council of Europe and Bologna Follow-up Group*  
Zagreb, Croatia, 23 Sept 2014

### List of participants

| Name      | Surname     | Institution  | Country                |
|-----------|-------------|--|------------------------|
| BORCHO    | ALEKSOV     | Ministry of Education and Science                            | MACEDONIA              |
| LAJDA     | BANA        | Ministry of Education and Sports                             | ALBANIA                |
| RUŽICA    | BELJO LUČIĆ | Ministry of Science, Education and Sports                    | CROATIA                |
| TJAŠA     | BERIČIĆ     | Ministry of Education, Science and Sport                     | SLOVENIA               |
| BILJANA   | BIRAČ       | Ministry of Science, Education and Sports                    | CROATIA                |
| EMITA     | BLAGDAN     | Agency for Science and Higher Education                      | CROATIA                |
| FILIPPO   | DEL NINNO   | European Training Foundation                                 | ITALY                  |
| MLADEN    | DRAGAŠEVIĆ  | Regional Cooperation Council                                 | BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA |
| AIDA      | ĐURIĆ       | Ministry of Civil Affairs                                    | BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA |
| BUJAR     | GALLOPENI   | Ministry of Education, Science and Technology                | KOSOVO*                |
| FERIT     | IDRIZI      | Ministry of Education, Science and Technology                | KOSOVO*                |
| ORJANA    | IKONOMI     | Ministry of Education and Sports                             | ALBANIA                |
| JELENA    | KALEŽIĆ     | Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development | SERBIA                 |
| ATDHETARE | KELMENDI    | Ministry of Education, Science and Technology                | KOSOVO*                |
| NATALIJA  | KONJEVIĆ    | Ministry of Education, Science and Technological             | SERBIA                 |



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|-------------------|--------------------|--|------------------------|
|                   |                    | Development  |                        |
| SABINA            | KOVAČEVIĆ<br>RAJIČ | Ministry of Science,<br>Education and Sports   | CROATIA                |
| MIRJANA           | LAMPERT<br>PISAČIĆ | Ministry of Science,<br>Education and Sports   | CROATIA                |
| LOREDANA          | MARAVIĆ            | Ministry of Science,<br>Education and Sports   | CROATIA                |
| LADISLAV          | NOVAK              | Regional Platform for<br>Benchmarking and<br>Cooperation in Higher<br>Education and Research | SERBIA                 |
| DŽENAN            | OMANOVIĆ           | Centre for Information and<br>Recognition of Qualifications<br>in Higher Education           | BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA |
| MIRELA            | PINĐAK             | Agency for Science and<br>Higher Education   | CROATIA                |
| NICOLAE           | POSTAVARU          | The Romanian National<br>Qualifications Authority –<br>ANC                                   | ROMANIA                |
| KATARINA          | RANĐIĆ             | Ministry of Education,<br>Science and Technological<br>Development                           | SERBIA                 |
| PETRA             | REINER             | Ministry of Science,<br>Education and Sports   | CROATIA                |
| JEAN-<br>PHILIPPE | RESTOUEIX          | Council of Europe  | FRANCE                 |
| JASMINA           | SKOČILIĆ           | Agency for Mobility and EU<br>Programmes   | CROATIA                |
| BORKO             | SORAJIĆ            | Centre for Information and<br>Recognition of Qualifications<br>in Higher Education           | BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA |
| BARBI             | SVETEC             | Ministry of Science,<br>Education and Sports   | CROATIA                |



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|----------|----------------------|--|----------|
| KATARINA | ŠIMIĆ<br>JAGUNIĆ     | Agency for Science and<br>Higher Education   | CROATIA  |
| ANA      | TECILAŽIĆ-<br>GORŠIĆ | Ministry of Science,<br>Education and Sports | CROATIA  |
| ERZEN    | TOLA                 | Ministry of Education and<br>Sports          | ALBANIA  |
| MIRJANA  | VEJIN                | Ministry of Science,<br>Education and Sports | CROATIA  |
| SABINA   | ZAJC                 | Ministry of Education,<br>Science and Sport  | SLOVENIA |

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## Annex III

ERI SEE seminar on *Removing obstacles to recognition by aligning national legislation with standards of UNESCO/Council of Europe and Bologna Follow-up Group*  
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*Note for preparing review/comments on national legislation of another country*

Presenting (and, if possible, reviewing) countries should cover the following issues in their presentations (reviews):

General information about the legislative framework for the recognition of foreign qualifications and the period of study

What does the legislative framework for recognition of foreign qualifications consist of (e.g. laws, regulations at the national/institutional level that regulate recognition of education at all education levels and recognition of professional qualifications)?

Recognition of qualifications for the purpose of employment

Which institutions are the competent authorities for the recognition for the purpose of employment? What is the role of ENIC/NARIC offices, if there is any, in recognition of professional qualifications? What is the outcome of recognition procedure: legally binding document or informal opinion based on assessment? If the outcome is a legally binding document, how do you assure that information on qualification and foreign qualification system is thoroughly provided? In providing with elaborated information do you compare a foreign qualification with a national one? If the outcome is a non-legally binding opinion, can a holder of a foreign qualification apply for employment on equal terms as holders of documents that have legal value in your country? To what extent are the Bologna tools (NQF, EQF, QF-EHEA, DS, ECTS) used in the recognition process? In particular explain to what extent are National qualifications frameworks utilised as a tool for the recognition of foreign qualifications.

Recognition of qualifications for the purpose of further studies in HE (academic recognition)

Which institutions are the competent authorities for the recognition for the purpose of further studies? What is the role of ENIC/NARIC offices, if there is any, in recognition for the purpose of further studies? Are there two separate, formal procedures with two different outcomes, one for recognition and the other one for admission to a study programme or these are just two stages of a unique formal procedure with one formal outcome? If there are two formal outcomes, recognition decision and admission decision, what is the purpose of a recognition decision if a candidate is finally not admitted to a study programme – is this recognition decision recognised by other HE institutions (or by employers)? If there is one formal outcome, admission decision, does a candidate have a right to appeal and if yes, to whom? To what extent are the Bologna tools (NQF, EQF, QF-EHEA, DS, ECTS) used in the academic recognition?

Automatic recognition

Does legislation regulating recognition of foreign qualifications allow for automatic recognition (except for professional qualifications regulated by the EU Directive)? If yes, does it say explicitly (stated in the Law) or implicitly (there are no legal obstacles)? Is there an example of such a practice in your country with another country? Do you see that as a way forward for increased



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academic and labour mobility or you find it to challenging? If you are positive towards this idea how do you see it happening (e.g. bilateral/multilateral agreements at national/institutional level, cross border quality assurance...).