

Report from the Official Bologna Seminar on *Recognition issues in the Bologna Process*

With Conclusions and Recommendations

(Riga, Latvia, January 25-26, 2007)

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The *recognition of qualifications* has always been one of the key priorities of the Bologna Process since it is a key element in facilitating *mobility* of students and graduates. In this regard, mobility should be understood as a free mobility of students, graduates and staff *within* the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) as well as with other parts of the world (mobility *to* and *from* the EHEA).

1. The context of a new seminar on recognition issues

Recognition issues have always found a sound position in the Bologna follow-up activities. In Prague, “*Ministers encouraged the follow-up group to arrange seminars*” to explore several areas in order to take the process further, including “*recognition issues and the use of credits in the Bologna process*” (Prague Communiqué, 2001). The first official Bologna Seminar on these issues was held in Lisbon in April 2002, that is, during the 2001 – 2003 follow-up period. In Berlin, Ministers declared to “*strengthen their efforts to [...] improve the recognition system of degrees and periods of studies*” (Berlin Communiqué, 2003). During the period 2003 – 2005, the second Seminar was held in Riga (December 2004). The ENIC and NARIC Networks as well as the Committee of the Lisbon Recognition Convention have also importantly contributed to the elaboration of recognition issues within the Bologna Process (e.g. Vaduz Statement, 2003; Recommendation on the Recognition of Joint Degrees, 2004).

In May 2005, when summarizing the progress in this area, Ministers in Bergen noted under the heading “Recognition of degrees and study periods”

“that 36 of the 45 participating countries have now ratified the Lisbon Recognition Convention. We urge those that have not already done so to ratify the Convention without delay. We commit ourselves to ensuring the full implementation of its principles, and to incorporating them in national legislation as appropriate. We call on all participating countries to address recognition problems identified by the ENIC/NARIC networks. We will draw up national action plans to improve the quality of the process associated with the recognition of foreign qualifications. These plans will form part of each country’s national report for the next Ministerial Conference. We express support for the subsidiary texts to the Lisbon Recognition Convention and call upon all national authorities and other stakeholders to recognise joint degrees awarded in two or more countries in the EHEA.”

We see the development of national and European frameworks for qualifications as an opportunity to further embed lifelong learning in higher education. We will work with higher education institutions and others to improve recognition of prior learning including, where possible, non-formal and informal learning for access to, and as elements in, higher education programmes.” (Bergen Communiqué, 2005)

The Bergen Communiqué determined “*recognition of degrees and study periods*” as one of “*three intermediate priorities*” and added that “*procedures for the recognition of prior learning*” should be included into stocktaking exercise for 2007. Further on, the Communiqué stressed that “[*t*]he European Higher Education Area must be open and should be attractive to other parts of the world” and “*a strategy for the external dimension*” was asked to be elaborate. A draft strategy (presented to BFUG in November 2006) made it already clear that “[*d*]eveloping policies and practices to further the fair recognition of qualifications is [...] a key element of the Strategy for the European Higher Education Area in a Global Setting”.

Thus, recognition issues got a distinctive position on the *Bologna Work Programme 2005 – 2007*. On top of tasks fixed in Bergen for the 2005 – 2007 follow-up period the third Seminar on “Recognition of prior learning and recognition of European degrees outside Europe” was also agreed.

The seminar¹ was held in Riga on 25 and 26 January 2007. It dealt with challenges and answers to recognition issues as appearing in the course of the Bologna Process gradually progressing towards the European Higher Education Area in 2010. The seminar attracted a very international audience. About 130 participants joined the seminar in Riga, coming from 30 member countries of the Bologna Process (representing ministries as well as universities and other institutions and organisations) as well as from 4 other countries (Belarus, Canada, New Zealand and USA).

Besides its working character, the Riga seminar had also an exclusive memorial feature: *ten years* have passed since the Council of Europe and UNESCO *Recognition Convention* was agreed and signed in Lisbon (April 1997). A reflection on these ten years as well as a look ahead were present in inaugural addresses by Baiba Rivža, Latvian Minister of Education, Sjur Bergan, Head of Department of Higher Education and Research, Council of Europe, and Tatjana Volkova, President of the Latvian Rectors Conference, but also in presentations and discussion during the seminar.

2. Recognition issues as a priority on the Bologna agenda

In ten years, the *Lisbon Recognition Convention* has been fully adopted into the Bologna framework. It can't be treated as a “genuine product” of the Bologna Process since it was signed two years *before* the Bologna Declaration; however, it already expressed what has

¹ Official Bologna Seminar organized by Latvia and Council of Europe. *New Challenges in Recognition: recognition of prior learning and recognition of European degrees outside*. Riga, Latvia, January 25-26, 2007; <http://www.aic.lv/bologna2007>.

been later called the “Bologna spirit”. In recent years, it has been also often stressed that the Convention is the only legal instrument within the Bologna Process so far. Communications from ministerial summits and from other events organized within the Process have continuously referred to the principles laid down in the Convention, supported its implementation and further developments (e.g. subsidiary documents).

The Sorbonne Declaration (1998) already referred to it directly and stressed that it “*set a number of basic requirements*” and that “[s]tanding by these conclusions, one can build on them and go further”. The Bologna Declaration (1999) with its six objectives focused at “*the creation of European area of higher education as a key way to promote the citizens’ mobility and employability and the Continent’s overall development*”. Indeed, the Process built on these “basic requirements” and “went further”. Recognition has not been seen any more only as tools and techniques of changing “degree currency” at check-points between national higher education systems. On the contrary, recognition issues intersect with all other objectives of the Bologna Process and form fundamentals for the European Higher Education Area.

Recognition is not a magic word of the Bologna Declaration; in fact, it contains only one, rather marginal reference to “recognition”.² Was the Bologna Declaration a step back with regard to the Sorbonne Declaration? Not really. Inherently, all “Bologna objectives” or action lines are closely connected to recognition. Within the Bologna Process, the *adoption of a system of easily readable and comparable degrees and establishment of the system of credits* as the most central Bologna objectives have been very closely related to recognition procedures. *Promotion of mobility* has been linked to principles of mutual recognition of degrees and study periods. *European co-operation in quality assurance*, another genuine Bologna objective, aims at removing most of mistrust among national higher education systems. *Promotion of European dimension in higher education* underpins these aims in new ways. All in all, it is obvious that improved recognition procedures can most effectively enhance *the attractiveness of the European Higher Education Area*. Recognition is not only an issue for national ministries and agencies; “higher education institutions as partners in the Bologna Process” have a lot to do in this field as well. Finally, *lifelong learning as an essential element of the European Higher Education Area* substantially depends on prior learning assessment and recognition, which has – unfortunately – entered the Bologna agenda with a delay.

Despite delays, important milestones have been set up after Bologna. In Prague (2001), Ministers “*strongly encouraged universities and other higher education institutions to take full advantage of existing national legislation and European tools aimed at facilitating academic and professional recognition of course units, degrees and other awards, so that citizens can effectively use their qualifications, competencies and skills*”

² See the fourth Bologna action line: “Promotion of mobility by overcoming obstacles to the effective exercise of free movement with particular attention to:

- for students, access to study and training opportunities and to related services;
- for teachers, researches and administrative staff, recognition and valorisation of periods spent in European contest researching, teaching and training, without prejudicing their statutory rights.”

throughout the European Higher Education Area” and “called upon existing organizations and networks such as NARIC and ENIC to promote, at institutional, national and European level, simple, efficient and fair recognition reflecting the underlying diversity of qualifications”. The Prague Summit also stressed, for the first time, the importance of “closer cooperation between recognition and quality assurance”.

In Berlin (2003), Ministers underlined “the importance of the Lisbon Recognition Convention, which should be ratified by all countries participating in the Bologna Process, and call on the ENIC and NARIC networks along with the competent National Authorities to further the implementation of the Convention”. In addition, the Berlin Communiqué brought forward certain topics which can’t be avoided in “translating” new recognition philosophy into higher education practices: academic recognition for further studies, recognition of joint degrees and – in relation to for lifelong learning – recognition of prior learning.

The key message on recognition issues from Bergen (2005) has been already quoted above.

Thus, it can be concluded that – inherently or explicitly – *recognition is a cross-cutting Bologna issue*. It is a complex issue since is a term with a broad meaning extending at various levels from e.g. recognition of *foreign qualifications* via *recognition of study periods* (as e.g. in Erasmus programme and other short mobility schemes) to *recognition of prior learning*. Recognition belongs to key Bologna terms with highest frequency in policy documents and background studies (see *Table 1*).

Table 1: Frequency of key Bologna terms in Declarations and Communiqués

	Sorbonne	Bologna	Prague	Berlin	Bergen
Mobility	3	4	8	8	7
Recognition	4	1	4	8	13
Quality Assur.	0	1	9	11	13
2 (3) Cycles	4	5	3	12	8
Qualification Fr.	(1)	0	1	5	10
Attractiveness	(1)	(1)	6	3	4
Employability	1	2	2	2	2
LLL	0	1	5	4	2
Learning Outc.	0	0	0	1	1
Prior Learning	0	0	0	1	1

3. Recognition issues and the Bologna Process: where are we today?

Since 1997, not only the language but also issues have evolved. Developments in this area are obvious; but, as it was already said, there are also delays. Remind only that in Bergen, ministers noted “that 36 of the 45 participating countries have now ratified the Lisbon Recognition Convention” and urged “those that have not already done so to ratify

the Convention without delay". They also promised to work "to improve recognition of prior learning". What is a situation today, that is, 20 months after Bergen and 10 years after Lisbon? Today, it is probably too early to make firm conclusions for the period 2005 - 2007: stocktaking analysis 2007 is not ready yet and some other Bologna biannual reports are still in progress. However, some data are already (and continuously) available and some preliminary results from the Trends 5 Report were communicated few weeks ago. Let focus to some facts and figures.

As one can check at the Council's of Europe conventions website (status as of 23 January 2007),³ there has been *very little progress in this area*: two new countries (Malta and Turkey) are now on the list of ratifications while *not less than seven* "old Bologna countries" – with their mostly large and important national higher education systems – who have been members of the Process since 1999 (and two of them since 1998!) are still missing (see *Table 2*). On the other hand, seven countries who are not members of the Bologna Process either signed or ratified the Convention (Australia, Belarus, Canada, Israel, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic and USA). What could be the inner logic of the European Higher Education Area after 2010 about if the Lisbon Recognition Convention would not be ratified by all its genuine members?

Table 2: Ratification of the Lisbon Recognition Convention by Bologna members

LRC ratifications	Bologna members	Ratified	Not yet
May 1999	29	7	22
May 2001	33	21	12
Sept. 2003	40	29	11
May 2005	45	36	9
January 2007	46	39	7
→ ???	(all)	(all)	0

There is an additional point in monitoring the Bologna Process which should get us even more anxious. On one hand, reports proved that an important progress and developments have been achieved e.g. in implementing the three cycle system, ECTS, understanding and promoting employability of new degrees, quality enhancement, internationalization of higher education etc. Unfortunately, on the other hand, recognition seems to be a rather gray area on this map. If a comparison between the Trends 3 Report from 2003 and preliminary results from Trends 5 is made, *almost no improvement in recognising credits from partner institutions has been achieved*. In 2003, 50% of respondents answered that "some students have problems" but during the last four years the figure has remained almost the same and it amounts today to 48%. Almost the same figure (47%) refers to higher education institutions which already issue Diploma Supplement to all their students. Less than a half! Saying it in a more simple way: *only three years before entering a common European Higher Education Area, one half of our students "have problems" in recognising credits achieved in mobility schemes with partner institutions*.

³ <http://conventions.coe.int/Treaty/Commun/ChercheSig.asp?NT=165&CM=8&DF=1/23/2007&CL=ENG>

These and similar cases request us to consider the years behind us as well as years to come. They request us to go deeper and to go further. Briefly, and from today's point of view, the Process at early stages was mainly occupied (a) by *negotiating* and *developing* principles and tools and (b) had a predominantly *internal focus*: it was a "European occupation with Europe". The Process at the present stage is characterised (c) by *implementation* of principles and their elaboration for practice; (d) by "*looking out*" to cooperation with other parts of the world and, last but not least, (e) by *questioning about the future*: what will EHEA be over 2010?

Bologna is a construction of necessary common tools and frameworks (*how* does it work?), which have to be implemented until 2010, but not only. It is also a "*philosophy*": it is laid down on agreed principles (*why* all this work?); it is a reconstruction of our higher education systems on basis of *common values* (*why* do we need it?). Therefore, not only a change of tools and frameworks but also a *change of minds* (e.g. a change of academic culture) is necessary.

This change already takes place; it could be illustrated by a number of cases. Let take, for example, international cooperation; last but not least, it is closely related to various aspects of recognition. As we can see from preliminary results of the Trends 5 survey, there have been shifts in perception of international co-operation in higher education with various world regions (*Table 3*).⁴ These shifts can affect recognition issues in future, in particularly if the observed trends will continue.

First of all, it is obvious that European higher education institutions are still highly occupied with cooperation among European higher education institutions, *but less than three years ago*. They are "looking out". At the present stage of development, it seems normal that international co-operation in higher education as a predominantly European business will continue to decrease in the years to come and that interest in other world regions will increase. Of course, a division to "Europe" and "East Europe"⁵ (i.e. "the European interest in East Europe") should be also addressed until establishment of a common EHEA in 2010.

Secondly, there is a visible and *substantial shift of European interest in Asian higher education systems* which confirms this finding. In European eyes, Asia lagged rather far behind East Europe and North America in 2003, but in a rather short period of three years it overtook US and Canada and came as close as possible to the (constant) position of Eastern Europe. Probably, there could be some miscalculation in evaluation of this shift⁶ but it is clear that Asia came very high on European higher education institutions' priority lists.

⁴ The first figure refers to Trends 5 (2006 survey) while the figure in brackets (T3) refers to Trends 3 (2003 survey).

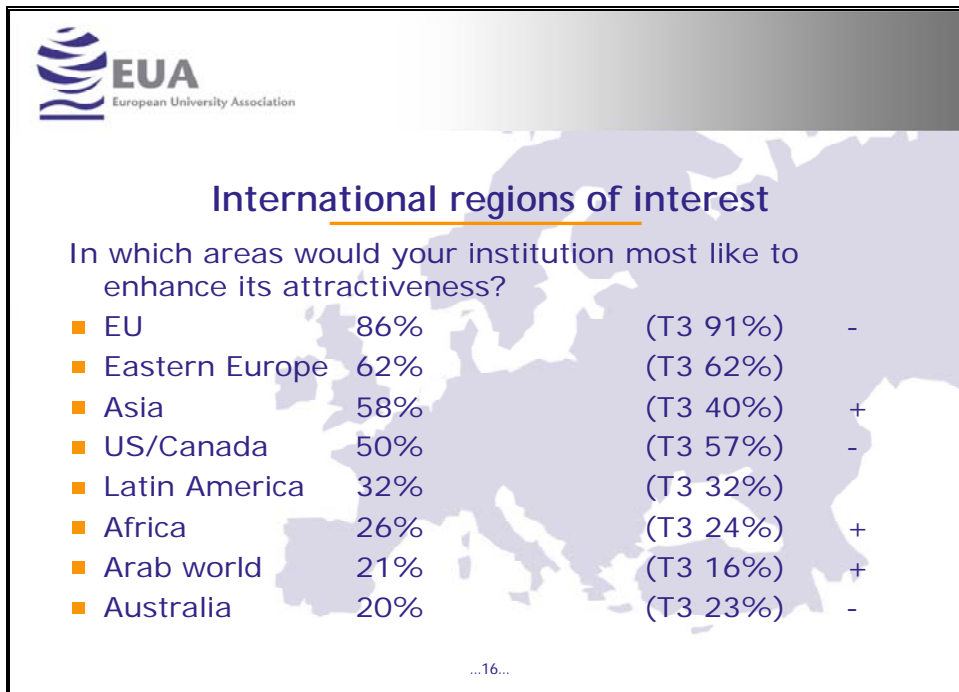
⁵ It is easy to note that the so-called "East Europe" and Latin America are the only two constants of the *Table 3*.

⁶ As one could conclude on basis of available data (e.g. ACA study on Perception of European Higher Education in Third Countries, 2006) it seems that there is no similarly substantial shift of interest in Europe from Asian countries.

Thirdly, some of those regions which were at the bottom of regions of interest in 2003 – *Africa and the Arab world* – are now positioned better and perceptible in European eyes more “attractive”. In these cases, shifts are not substantial and a real improvement of cooperation should be evaluated again later. On the other hand, Latin America is another constant and lead to a scruple that interest is not shared equally in all parts of Europe.

Lastly, US, Canada and Australia are the only *two regions with a slightly decreased interest*. Of course, changes in perception of world regions influence each other and cause relative and absolute shifts on the table. However, US and Canada still reach rather a high score of one half (50%) and quality of trans-Atlantic cooperation gives good prospects for future. The negative shift in interest for Australia (rather low already before) is more questionable: indeed, in European eyes it is “most far” region and it can produce pragmatic concerns with regard to mobility, but in 2006 Australia increased its interest in the Bologna Process launching a national consultation process on it – with no similar action on European side (if invitations to some Bologna follow-up seminars are excluded).

Table 3: Preliminary results of the Trends 5 Report



Similar shifts could be observed and similar reflections could be made also with regard to – on the first side rather “technical” – issues as e.g. mobility, credit systems, issuing Diploma Supplement, developing frameworks of qualifications, learning outcomes based courses, recognition of prior learning, quality enhancement, etc. All these shifts prove that important changes take place not only at the system and institutional levels of European higher education but also in broader “academic culture”: they do not give only evidence on “quantitative effects” of common tools and frameworks implemented so far

but draw attention to “qualitative effects” of higher education reforms. On-going changes are closely connected to new aims and they are also connected to values – new values as well as traditional ones.

Of course, changes never take place without a resistance. But if the new values are so appreciated and broadly shared we should ask – why resistance? First of all, we should always ask: are they really so appreciated and broadly shared? Secondly, and as it has been always a case, values are disputed in human culture and subjected to different interpretations. Since 1999, for example, “*the experience [...] has demonstrated that there is ample room for different and at times conflicting interpretations regarding the duration and orientation of programmes. Especially the employability of 3 year Bachelor graduates continues to be an issue in many countries*” (Trends 4, 2005). From the recognition point of view, this is a very serious interpretation issue and a problem: if there is no firm agreement on it within Europe, if there are e.g. attempts to “equalise” previous 4-year Diploma as the new “Bologna Master”, how could Europe expect from e.g. US to recognise the new “Bologna Bachelor” in full? However, a dispute is a “normal” – sometimes even necessary – way of changing minds and cultures, academic culture in particular. On the other hand, resistance can also take place when certain preconditions (resources, skills, “tools” etc.) for change are not met. This could be a “less normal” (at least less favourable) situation.

The Bologna Process has made clear from the beginning that the achievement of the EHEA “*requires continual momentum in order to be fully accomplished*” (Bologna Declaration, 1999); through demanding discussions and long lasting consultations it has proceeded from basic principles to elaboration of rather concrete details. Since Berlin, the progress of the Bologna Process has been monitored systematically while fostering implementation and checking critically about eventual delays. The issue of “different and at times conflicting interpretations” should be a part of this monitoring as well, aiming at achieving a dynamic consensus which could enhance the momentum, allow for European diversities – and test as well as promote the new higher education philosophy and/or culture.

Learning from good practice is (also) a Bologna characteristic. In this context, good practice in higher education is a proof of emerging new academic culture. As it is often possible to see at Bologna seminars, there is a hunger for new approaches and practices which could show reliable paths how to “translate” principles to concrete actions and how to implement systemic tools into everyday life of European higher education institutions. This is a Bologna bottleneck. As Stephen Adam noticed already at the previous Riga seminar of 2004, “*we are faced with a big problem – the reality gap between having systems and process and using them. [...] The problem is that there is still widespread ignorance, poor practice, xenophobia and reluctance to move from viewing recognition of qualifications as a process of simply looking for exact equivalence rather than ‘fair recognition’.*”⁷ And “fair recognition” is a challenge, which has not only to deal with tools and techniques but with aims and values.

⁷ Stephen Adam, *Final Report and Recommendations of the Conference*; Bologna Seminar on Recognition, Riga, 3-4 December 2004 <<http://www.aic.lv/rigaseminar/>>.

4. The seminar work

The Riga seminar on new challenges in recognition addressed a number of questions which crosscut both “how” as well as “why” horizons. Two distinctive recognition dimensions were addressed: (1) recognition of prior learning and (2) recognition of European degrees outside.

At the beginning of the first plenary session, Stephen Adam, rapporteur at the 2004 Riga seminar, presented a comprehensive paper on APEL. On backgrounds of significant developments in the area of international recognition since the inception of the Bologna reforms he noted that the challenge facing us now is not to create more devices but to ensure the existing ones are properly and extensively employed. He focused on Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) and Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL) and exposed a number of intertwined issues which make clear the importance of recognition of prior learning in today’s higher education as well as the national and institutional implications for lifelong learning. At the end of his paper he contributed a proposal with concrete recommendations which were taken further in discussion groups and synthesized in final conclusions and recommendations of the seminar.

In the continuation, recognition of lifelong learning was extensively illustrated by examples of practices from Belgium Flemish community, France, Estonia and Canada. Stephan Neetens, on behalf of National Union of Students in Flanders (VVS), presented reach Flemish experience in Recognition of Prior Learning. In Flanders, lifelong learning has been high on the agenda since the late nineties – both in education and training as well as in labour and employment. The policy objective of “the right of the individual to have her/his experience and knowledge recognized” was legally translated in two Parliamentary decrees and today recognition of prior learning is an established practice in academic as well as in professional context. Definitions, standards and procedures are well elaborated. E.g. Recognition of Prior Acquired Experiences (EVC) is defined as a total of knowledge, insight, skills and attitudes acquired via learning processes that have not resulted in a certified proof of study.

Michel Feutry from the University of Sciences and Technologies of Lille presented another long and well established national practice. Validation of non formal and informal learning in France (VAE) underwent three historical steps: validation for access to Universities (1985), validation for credits (1992) and, recently, validation for a qualification (2002). The last step allowed institutions to award a full qualification (a degree, a diploma or a certificate) on the basis of individual experience. By this way VAE is opening up a new road towards qualifications by comparison with schooling, apprenticeship, or further education. The whole experience of an individual, and not only professional/work experience, should be taken into account. The duration of the experience required has been reduced from 5 to 3 years. In future, a move from an individual to a collective demand (human resource policies in companies) is envisaged.

Aune Valk from University of Tartu reported on AP(E)L and reforms in higher education in Estonia. In last 15 years, the system of higher education in Estonia underwent several reforms and deeply changed. Consecutive changes of degree systems and more flexible university curricula resulted in a need of individuals to assess their qualifications already achieved and to help them to advance in the new qualification structure. There were also changes in status of higher education institutions, which created the need for transfer of credits between institutions. Against this background, discussions on AP(E)L started and according to the University act all institutions have to adopt detailed regulation on this issue. At the University of Tartu, regulation now in force allows up to up to 50% of the Bachelor studies to be obtained through APL (accreditation of prior learning) and 50% of the applied higher education degree and Master studies through APEL (including experiential learning). Since 2006 APEL is also possible in Bachelor studies but access is not possible. Several issues are still open, but AP(E)L principles, assessment methods and procedure have been developed importantly.

Yves E. Beaudin from Canadian Information Centre for International Credentials at the Council of Ministers of Education presented good practice in Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR) in Canada. Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR) is a widely accepted practice. Canada is a nation of immigrants and recognition of their qualifications is of utmost importance. Very few provinces have developed formal policies on recognition of prior learning but this does not mean that policies do not reflect the importance of such methods of assessment. It is done differently in a decentralized environment. Universities are responsible for setting academic standards and for assessing formal, non-formal and informal prior learning for admissions and credit purposes; they also develop their own assessment methods and procedures. Most universities have personnel dedicated to PLAR activities at the institutional, departmental or faculty level. In the development of PLAR policies they use competency-based assessments, summative assessments, portfolio development and challenge examinations, etc. Credit transfer systems are used towards a university degree and challenge for credits towards specific courses are authorized. Some universities use portfolio assessments for non-formal and informal learning towards a degree program. There are also other institutions and bodies with responsibilities in this area.

The second plenary under the heading “Bologna and the World or Bologna vs. the World” addressed recognition of European degrees in a global setting. Stephen Hunt from US Department of Education contributed analytical views on a transatlantic cooperation. Last ten years show a gradual progress from problems towards mutual understanding. In mid-nineties, there were several obstacles in recognition on both sides and there was a mutual incapability to understand other higher education systems. Concerned educators and policymakers in many countries began to push for the policing of national systems and transnational activities via international organizations and agreements. When the UNESCO European Region countries negotiated and signed the Lisbon Recognition Convention in 1997, the transatlantic cooperation entered a new phase. Recent surveys show that over 50% of US and even more Canadian institutions are aware of the Bologna Process and its importance. 56% of the US and Canadian graduate schools that accept the most international students now accept 3-year degrees,

and nearly half (44%) of the rest. US institutions that have close partnerships with EHEA institutions, are aware of the Diploma Supplement and sometimes use it. US, Canadian and European educators now hold frequent conferences and participate in one another's meetings. This is what makes good prospects for future.

Nina Gustafsson Åberg (ESIB) spoke on a relationship between Europe and other parts of the world and warned about the possibility that the building of the EHEA creates new obstacles for student mobility in both directions – from outside to the EHEA as well as from the EHEA to other countries of the world. She stressed that recognition of degrees or study periods rests on the same principle no matter where a student got his/her degree or learning experience. Since the purpose of the Lisbon Convention is to create and to increase mutual trust, it is important that trust increasing activities are undertaken between European institutions and institutions in other regions. It is similar with recognition of prior learning: the procedures have to include also students from outside of the EHEA. She was rather critical about traditional recognition approaches at institutions and recognition authorities; the use of the concept of learning outcomes and competences must be more widely implemented than it is today. On behalf of ESIB, she also expressed concerns about the fact that several Bologna countries haven't ratified the Convention yet. The Lisbon Convention principles can be used not only within European region but also for qualifications from outside Europe. The EHEA has to be open to the world and must not result in an academic Fortress Europe, she concluded.

At the end of the second plenary, Andrejs Rauhvargers from University of Latvia and organizer tireless organizer of Riga Recognition seminars, provided participants with some provoking thoughts on the Diploma Supplement ten years after its inception. Has anything happened afterwards, he asked. Of course, profound changes have occurred and it is obvious that these changes request certain modifications. Rauhvargers suggested some necessary changes and argued – for good reasons – in favour of modifying the Explanatory Report of the DS and not the DS as such.

Seminar participants had good opportunities for discussions in four working groups of manageable size. Working Group 1 dealt with recognition between Europe and North America and Working Group 2 extended this topic to recognition between Europe and other parts of the world. Other two groups discussed various topics of recognition of prior learning: defining and recognizing learning outcomes (Working Group 3) and recognition for access (Working Group 4). Group rapporteurs synthesized discussions in four reports and their key recommendations are recapitulated in conclusions and recommendations at the end of this report.

In the concluding part of the seminar, Andrejs Rauhvargers, this time as a chair person of the BFUG stocktaking working group, presented *first findings from the national plans for improving recognition*. This was another opportunity to get preliminary information on monitoring the progress of the Bologna Process between Bergen and London. His presentation was underpinned with an important statement: *recognition of higher education qualifications or of a period of studies acquired abroad is an integral part of the right to education and the promotion of the freedom of movement*. Actually, this

statement was – inherently or explicitly – present in a number of other presentations and discussions and represents well the seminar atmosphere in the halls of *Banku Augstskola*, (Banking Institute of Higher Education) which hosted the event.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

The Bologna Seminar *New Challenges in Recognition: recognition of prior learning and recognition between Europe and other parts of the world* (Riga, Latvia; 25 – 26 January 2007) was a well organised *European/international forum* as well as another opportunity to *share good practices* and deepen *understanding of new paradigms* in higher education.

The following conclusions and recommendations were summarized:

1. First of all, the seminar reaffirmed that *recognition of higher education qualifications, of periods of studies acquired abroad or of prior (experiential) learning are an integral part of the right to education and the promotion of the freedom of movement.*

Seminar also reaffirmed the *value aspects of higher education*. Recognition should not be understood in a narrow instrumental sense but *in relation to all fundamental objectives of the higher education*:

- *preparation for the labour market;*
- *preparation for life as active citizens in democratic society;*
- *personal development;*
- *development and maintenance an advanced knowledge base.*

2. Participants encourage all European HEIs, ENIC/NARIC centres and other competent recognition authorities *to assess qualifications from other areas of the world with the same open mind with which they would like European qualifications to be approached elsewhere*, and to assess qualifications from outside Europe according to the criteria and procedures outlined in the Council of Europe/UNESCO Recognition Convention and its subsidiary texts.

In view of the great variety of higher education systems and approaches worldwide this should include shifting the emphasis further *from input characteristics* of the qualifications *to the learning outcomes* achieved.

The Convention and its principles should be observed in a spirit of openness to all potential partners and a revision of regional conventions in a mutual dialogue should be encouraged as well.

3. *Reliable, easily understandable and easily accessible information on education systems and qualifications frameworks is essential to promoting the fair recognition of qualifications from the EHEA in other parts of the world.*

To a large extent information on educational systems is already provided. Yet, there is a need to adapt this information for easier understanding by those from outside the EHEA who are not familiar with the specific terminology created through the Bologna Process.

The information should be made available on the web together with other information on the Bologna Process.

4. Participants firmly support *the proposal to establish policy fora with partners from other areas of the world*, as a part of the Bologna Process in a global context.

They encourage the BFUG to make recognition the topic of one of these fora, building on the work undertaken in this area by ENIC/NARIC Networks and involving them closely in this work.

A promotion of cooperation between the ENIC/NARIC Networks and similar networks from other world regions, in particular with a view to the development of a common understanding of recognition criteria, procedures and practices as well as transnational higher education provision is highly recommended.

5. European HEIs rely today on a number of useful tools developed through the Bologna Process and these tools are often well accepted in other areas of the world. These tools should be kept update and efficient. Participants realize that the *Diploma Supplement was designed already in 1998* and that *afterwards European higher education systems have undergone substantial reforms*. The Diploma Supplement is still well suited but it is *recommended to amend and renew its Explanatory Report* (e.g. joint degrees, workload and credits, quality assurance systems, transnational higher education etc.). Since the Diploma Supplement is a joint instrument, amendments have to be adopted both in the framework of the Lisbon Convention Intergovernmental Committee and the European Commission.

6. Participants realize that *recognition of prior learning and credit allocation for competences acquired outside formal higher education (APL/APEL)* is well developed only in a relatively small part of the emerging EHEA. Therefore, it is essential that progress be made in this area in the next period and ministers in London should make a specific commitment in this regard. Existing and planned developments to create national lifelong learning systems, including the “new style” qualification frameworks, should include systems to facilitate APL/APEL and recognition of prior learning should be used also for access to higher education. This will, *inter alia*, require that study programmes and individual courses of formal higher education be linked to *learning outcomes and competences*. ENIC/NARIC Networks can give information also about APL/APEL and similar strategies in various countries – in Europe and worldwide – and their educational systems.

7. The seminar proved that *recognition issues are substantially interlinked with quality assurance issues*. Therefore, participants encourage ENQA, in conjunction with E-4 partners and other appropriate bodies, to *explore the creation and implementation of good practice* (models, procedures and guidelines) *for recognition procedures in general*, including *APL/APEL*, consistent with their ‘Standards and Guidelines’ and in the context of lifelong learning.

8. National higher education authorities are encouraged to include *elements to facilitate APL/APEL in the national lifelong learning systems*, including the development of ‘new style’ qualifications frameworks. National authorities are also expected to introduce operational *guidelines and principles for APL/APEL fully integrated with national quality assurance processes* and to promote the widespread implementation and acceptance of APL/APEL and lifelong learning by academics, employers and students.

9. Similarly as in quality enhancement issues, main responsibility for improvement of recognition lies with institutions. All European HEIs are encouraged to *put in place clear processes and practices that transparently detail their internal APL/APEL systems and procedures for staff, students and employers*. They are also expected to adopt appropriate staff development strategies to overcome barriers to broader implementation of APL/APEL and to ensure that all processes are transparent, fair, rigorous and efficient.

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