

Joint Degrees – Problems and Developments

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In the fast-spreading “Bologna slang” *Joint Degrees* are usually understood as “pillars of future European higher education development” or as least as best example of inter-university co-operation. Since the signing of the *Bologna Declaration* (1999)¹, there has been explicit interest in developing and promoting “integrated” or “joint” programmes “of study, training and research” in Europe. This intention was reinforced in the *Prague Communiqué* (2001)² and in the *Berlin Communiqué* (2003).³

However, despite this clear endorsement for joint programmes already in Bologna in 1999 and despite a high level of political and institutional interest, very little has been known about the existence of joint degrees in Europe until recently. It was EUA who expressed a particular interest in exploring these issues – connected with the similarly vague European landscape of Master Degree programmes – and commissioned Ch. Tauch and A. Rauhvargers to prepare *Survey on Master Degrees and Joint Degrees in Europe* (published in September 2002).⁴ For reasons of this paper, the focus is given only to the second part (Rauhvargers’s) of the survey. Shortly: it was found that *serious legal recognition difficulties* exist for joint degrees across Europe, that there are various ways for degree recognition but bilateral arrangements are most frequent, and that joint degrees are more common at the Master and Doctoral level but very rare at the Bachelor level.

¹ See the last (sixth) action line: “Promotion of the necessary European dimensions in higher education, particularly with regards to curricular development, inter-institutional co-operation, mobility schemes and integrated programmes of study, training and research.” – Almost all “Bologna” related documents can be find at <http://www.bologna-berlin2003.de>.

² *Prague Communiqué*; see the paragraph on *Promotion of the European dimensions in higher education*: “In order to further strengthen the important European dimensions of higher education and graduate employability Ministers called upon the higher education sector to increase the development of modules, courses and curricula at all levels with “European” content, orientation or organisation. This concerns particularly modules, courses and degree curricula offered in partnership by institutions from different countries and leading to a recognized joint degree.”

³ *Prague Communiqué*; see the paragraph on *Promotion of the European dimensions in higher education*: “Ministers note that, following their call in Prague, additional modules, courses and curricula with European content, orientation or organisation are being developed. - They note that initiatives have been taken by Higher Education Institutions in various European countries to pool their academic resources and cultural traditions in order to promote the development of integrated study programmes and joint degrees at first, second and third level. - Moreover, they stress the necessity of ensuring a substantial period of study abroad in joint degree programmes as well as proper provision for linguistic diversity and language learning, so that students may achieve their full potential for European identity, citizenship and employability. - Ministers agree to engage at the national level to remove legal obstacles to the establishment and recognition of such degrees and to actively support the development and adequate quality assurance of integrated curricula leading to joint degrees.”

⁴ See http://www.eua.be/eua/jsp/en/upload/Survey_Master_Joint_degrees_en.1068806054837.pdf

Even the vocabulary itself is still rather vague and no central information on this issue is available. In discussions various terms have been used – ‘*joint*’, ‘*double*’, and ‘*integrated*’ programmes – but what is the difference between them often remains unclear. Until today, there has been no common definition of what constitutes ‘*joint*’ degrees, ‘*double*’ degrees and ‘*integrated*’ programme or curricula. Different terms are sometimes used to mean the same thing, and one term is sometimes used to signify different things.

Nevertheless, the existing practice – and reflection of this practice – offers some starting points for a new systemic approach. First, as the biggest advantage of studying for a joint degree it is most often stressed that ‘*joint programmes*’ place students in (learning) situations which require real flexibility, more openness to diversity, strengthened quality assurance, opportunity to improve language skills, last but not least, more creative approaches to learning than in traditional environments. Further, it became more or less common that ‘*double degrees*’ indicate that two study programmes were developed together, and a student completes one before pursuing the second, receiving two national degrees upon their completion. On the other hand, ‘*joint degrees*’ demand *more than two institutions working together*. But as shown in the Rauhvargers’s report, due to legal difficulties and formal regulations a ‘*joint curriculum*’ with study periods at multiple institutions in most cases currently leads to just one national degree, often accompanied by a ‘*joint certificate*’. This situation is due to the lack of explicit approval within national legislations to approve university degrees awarded jointly.

As a pan-European organization, EUA understood that its role and its mission demands to provide support and advocacy for its members – European universities. This was probably the main reason that – parallel to publishing *Survey on Master Degrees and Joint Degrees in Europe* – EUA developed the *Joint Masters Project* (funded in the Erasmus framework and launched in September 2002) to further examine the concrete operation of joint degrees offered at the Master level. The project selected 11 programmes to participate in a process of self-evaluation and research, internal development, and sharing of findings. The aim is to help existing networks improve the programme they are currently offering, while also leading towards a set of recommended practices for networks wishing to develop such programmes. The project covered a lively period of increased ‘Bologna activities’ inside its second phase (2001-2003): a period of intensified ‘official follow-up seminars’, Graz Convention of European Rectors and the Berlin ministerial meeting. Officially, its final evaluation was given at the EUA Conference on Joint Degrees “*Universities working together in Europe*” held 24-25 October 2003 at Babes-Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca (Romania).

I.

Bologna Process and the ongoing discussion on Joint Degrees

Rauhvargers’s survey and EUA’s *Joint Masters Project* gave good input for discussions of the 2001–2003 Bologna follow-up period which put *the development of joint degrees* very high on its agenda.⁵ Two (out of ten) international seminars covered this particular issue: “Seminar on Joint Degrees within the Framework of the Bologna Process” (Stockholm, 30-31 May 2002) and “Integrated Programmes – Implications and Prospects” (Mantova, 11-12 April 2003). In practical terms, the issue was also explored in a number of pilot projects, and ENIC/NARIC also approached it from the angle of recognition. However, referring to *Trends III Report*,⁶ joint curricula and joint degrees still do not receive sufficient attention from

⁵ See note 3.

⁶ Reichert, S. and Tauch, Ch., Trends 2003. Progress Towards the European Higher Education Area. Bologna four years after: Steps toward sustainable reform of Higher Education in Europe. EUA: Genève. See also at <http://www.bologna-berlin2003.de> (20. 09. 2003).

national ministries and Rectors' Conferences. There is much more support at the level of institutions, but it seems that initiatives are still left to individual professors. At the follow-up seminars and other occasions, a consensus was reached that joint degrees – in principle Master and Doctoral – at the European level should become an important feature of European higher education, both to promote intra-European co-operation and to attract talented students and researchers from other continents to study and work in Europe.

At the *Stockholm seminar*, participants stated that joint degrees are important instruments for implementing the objectives set out in the *Bologna Declaration* and the *Prague Communiqué*: promoting student and teacher mobility, employability, quality, the European dimension and the attractiveness and competitiveness of the EHEA. Joint study programmes could provide an instrument for giving students the chance to gain academic and cultural experience abroad, and institutions of higher education an opportunity to co-operate closely. Such co-operation could exploit a wider range of competences and resources than those available at any single institution. Participants expressed *a need for a common framework for joint degrees*, tried to draft some criteria which could be useful common denominators for joint degrees in Europe, reminded us of the contents of the Council of Europe/UNESCO *Lisbon Recognition Convention* (1997) but also noted that in most countries a jointly awarded degree would require amendments to the national legislation. As also shown in the above-mentioned Rauhvargers's survey, very few countries have specific legal provisions regarding joint degrees; in particular, *the award of a single degree on behalf of several institutions is still legally difficult*. When a joint degree is awarded as a national degree, it is recognized like any other foreign degree. If it is a real joint award of several institutions from various countries, it falls outside the framework of both national and international legislation and encounters problems of recognition.

The *Mantova seminar* (April 2003) gave some new inputs to this issue. It affirmed again the high value of integrated curricula and joint degrees in reaching the EHEA objectives, and warned again against legislative obstacles. A report on "Joint Degrees: the Italian Experience in the European Context" provided some background information on *the Italian case* and attracted participants' attention as *an example of good practice*. The 1999 reform had already introduced the new possibility of awarding joint degrees to encourage the development of inter-university co-operation. Based on special agreements, Italian universities are legally enabled – since recent legislative reform – to give joint awards with other Italian or foreign universities. The rules governing procedures for the award of joint degrees are referred back to university teaching regulations. In the case of joint degrees between Italian universities, the degree itself should include a list of the universities that are parties to the agreement; in the case of joint degrees involving foreign universities, award procedures should be expressly governed by individual agreements, given the diversity of regulation among national education systems.

The Mantova seminar focused on the *curricular component of joint degree programmes*, based on the view that curricular integration – intended as joint curriculum design and implementation – is a necessary condition for awarding joint degrees. Joint degree programmes based on integrated curricula were recognized again as most valuable instruments for developing European 'citizenship' (i.e., cultural, linguistic and social experience) and European 'employability' (i.e., competences necessary to have a successful professional life). Participants agreed that the future development of European joint degree programmes depends considerably on *common criteria*, as proposed already at the Stockholm seminar. Moreover, a clear distinction should be made between *joint and double degree programmes*, in terms of their curricular objectives and organizational models, also with a view to protecting students, and a complete glossary of terms should be drawn up for the purpose of evidence. Learning outcomes and competences, as well as student workload described in ECTS credits, should be seen as *essential elements in constructing any joint programme*. Adequate *quality assurance procedures* should be jointly developed and

activated by partners in a joint programme, and made explicit to learners and users. Students, graduates, employers and other relevant actors should be consulted about *the areas in which the implementation of joint degree programmes would be most appropriate*. Higher education institutions – as partners for a joint degree programme – should be chosen on the basis of shared mission and clear commitment, as well as their *capacity to develop and sustain such a programme* in academic, organizational and financial terms. Thematic networks could provide experience for identifying suitable partners in any European country.

The Mantova seminar finally stressed that joint doctoral programmes educating for *research professions* in Europe should be understood as a cornerstone for greater co-operation between EHEA and ERA. Synergy between the two areas is viewed as an essential prerequisite for the creation of a Europe of Knowledge. However, a need for *more structured Doctoral studies* in Europe has been expressed also at other occasions and in various discussions.⁷ According to *Trends III Report*, in half of the countries Doctoral students receive mainly individual supervision and tutoring today, while in the other half taught Doctoral courses are offered in addition to individual (research) work.⁸ Increasing international co-operation and attempts to develop joint degrees demand more attention to comparable Doctorate degrees, first of all to ensure *quality standards*. Doctoral studies will certainly be a crucial lever of the knowledge society, and form an important element of the attractiveness of the EHEA. Therefore, an answer to *a need for a transparent, readable and comparable “third degree”* should be elaborated seriously in the next Bologna follow-up period 2003–2005.⁹

As we can see, several questions have been raised in these discussions. In certain aspect, the issue of the *recognition of joint degrees* seems to be crucial at the stage reached today. This issue is seriously treated in a circle called *the ENIC and NARIC Networks*.¹⁰ They declared their willingness and ability to contribute to the Bologna process already in 1999; since then, their support for the Process has been constant. At their meeting in May 2003, the Networks

⁷ In particular, the EUA Convention in Graz (May 2003) affirmed *a need to upgrade the Process towards a three-tier system*. The Doctoral level should be conceived as the third cycle, and – together with post-doctoral study – seen as an integral part of the European Higher Education Area, integrated with the European Research Area. A broad consensus was reached that the Process now enters a phase when strengthening the role of institutions will be decisive for success. For details see <http://eua.uni-graz.at/>. - Similar message was sent to Berlin Summit also from two Engineering associations CESAER and SEFI.

⁸ In our Survey on trends in learning structures at institutions of teacher education (provided by the Centre for Educational Policy Studies at the University of Ljubljana and presented also at the EPAC Summer 2003 ERASMUS-EUDORA Intensive Post-graduate Course) we found out that the general trend seems to be similar also at institutions of education and teacher education: almost one half of respondents (47.3%) already offer taught courses in addition to tutoring. – See P. Zgaga, *Teachers' Education and the Bologna Process. A Survey on Trends in learning structures at institutions of Teachers' Education*. In: F. Buchberger, S. Berghammer (Eds.), *Education Policy Analysis in a Comparative Perspective II*, Linz: IVE Publication Series, 2003; http://www.palinz.ac.at/international/Alert/Tntee/Tntee_publication/menu.htm.

⁹ In fact, *Berlin Communiqué* broadened the existing “nine Bologna action lines” (after Prague) to ten: “Ministers consider it necessary to go beyond the present focus on two main cycles of higher education to include the doctoral level as the third cycle in the Bologna Process”.

¹⁰ ENIC (Council of Europe / Unesco) and NARIC (European Commission) Networks; highly respected authorities in the field of recognition of higher education qualifications. See <http://www.enic-naric.net>.

considered a far-reaching *Draft Recommendation on the Recognition of Joint Degrees*, to be submitted to the Convention Committee for adoption in 2004.¹¹

The key point of this document is *to improve recognition of joint degrees* and other innovative initiatives aimed at increasing student mobility, bridging the gaps between national education systems, and increasing their readiness to contribute to these objectives. The *Draft Recommendation* refers to the *Lisbon Recognition Convention* and to its double function: (a) in legal terms, it is a treaty between states, and as such it is valid as a *legal standard for the recognition of qualifications* awarded by the higher education systems of the parties to the *Convention* as well as the qualifications covered by its subsidiary texts; (b) in a broader sense, it also serves as a *guide to good practice*. In this sense its provisions can be applied to all higher education qualifications, regardless of their origin. These are also major reasons why participants of various events so often urged countries that have not yet ratified the *Convention* to do it at the earliest occasion. By end-2003, about two-thirds of the Bologna signatory countries had already ratified the *Convention*¹².

II. Joint Degrees – definitions

Therefore, the main purpose of the new *Draft Recommendation* is *to help ensuring a fair recognition* for a kind of qualification that has considerable potential, but that is – in a strictly legal sense – not covered by the *Lisbon Recognition Convention*. It seeks *to define joint degree as a generic term* and *to explore the main types of joint degrees*. According to the *Draft*, joint degrees should be recognized at least as favourably as other qualifications from the education systems from which they originate. On the other hand, the *Draft* makes a case for reviewing national legislation, which is quite in line with statements and recommendations expressed at some seminars: *»Governments of States party to the Lisbon Recognition Convention should therefore review their legislation with a view to removing any legal obstacles to the recognition of joint degrees and, where appropriate, introduce legal provisions that would facilitate such recognition«*.¹³ At any rate, the next session of the *Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee* (expected in June 2004) could be an important further step towards EHEA and the development of joint degrees; this again is a reason to speed up the ratification procedures in all countries – members of the Bologna process – which haven't yet ratified the *Convention*.

We mentioned not only recognition problems but also a vague vocabulary, a lack of centralized information etc. In this sense, the ENIC/NARIC *Draft Recommendation* outlined some *common characteristics of joint degrees*. In the paragraph on *Definitions* they stated:

»5. A joint degree shall, for the purposes of this Recommendation, be understood as referring to a higher education qualification issued jointly by at least two higher education institutions on the basis of a study programme developed and/or provided

¹¹ Version as approved by the ENIC Network on 20 May 2003 for submission to the Lisboa Recognition Convention Committee. It is expected that the Committee will decide on this draft in June 2004. At the time of writing this paper, it is still *a draft*. – The document is obviously firmly based on A. Rauhvarghers's findings in the above mentioned Survey (see note 4).

¹² See <http://conventions.coe.int/Treaty/EN/cadreprincipal.htm> for detailed information (not only on Bologna countries). "Total number of ratifications/accessions: 33. Total number of signatures not followed by ratifications: 11." (Checked 05/01/04.)

¹³ Paragraph on *Legislation*, point 9. - See also above, note 3, last sentence: it is obvious that the proposal made by ENIC-NARIC in Spring 2003 – and supported by other institutions and individual experts at various events – entered the *Berlin Communiqué* in Autumn 2003.

jointly by these institutions, possibly also in cooperation with other institutions. A joint degree may be issued as

- a. a joint diploma in addition to national diplomas,*
- a. a joint diploma issued by the institutions offering the study programme in question without being accompanied by a national diploma,*
- b. (a) national diploma(s) issued officially as the only attestation of the joint qualification in question.«*

The *Draft Explanatory Memorandum*¹⁴ to this document is even more precise at this point:

»This part of the Recommendation seeks to define joint degree as a generic term and to explore the main types of joint degrees. It is worth noting that the EUA study on joint degrees found that there is no common definition in use today, whether explicitly or implicitly, but a joint degree can be said to have all or some of the following characteristics:

- the programmes are developed and/or approved jointly by several institutions;*
- students from each participating institution physically take part in the study programme at other institutions (but they do not necessarily study at all cooperating institutions);*
- a students' stay at the participating institutions should constitute a substantial part of the programme;*
- periods of study and examinations passed at the partner institutions are recognized fully and automatically;*
- the partner institutions work out the curriculum joint and cooperate on admission and examinations;*
- after completing the full programme, students either obtain the national degree of each participating institution or a degree (usually an unofficial "certificate" or "diploma") awarded jointly by the partner institutions;*
- require before a collaborative programme is validated or a joint award is made, that the providing and awarding bodies enter into appropriate agreements.«*

Thus, the ENIC/NARIC proposal of May 2003 is not only the first systemic attempt to synthesize existing practice, trends and experiences and to offer a comprehensive *content definition of joint degrees*; addressing it to *Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee* it is also on best way to become part of national legislation – at least of those 33 countries which already ratified the *Lisbon Recognition Convention* – providing also the necessary *formal definition of joint degrees*. However, the content and legal definition of joint degrees gives only one answer to complex of issues raised in discussions. Another – likely even more important issue – seems to be *quality assurance and institutional recognition*. In the very front of the Bologna action lines there is not only a common “system of easily readable and comparable degrees”; it is not isolated but linked to other action lines, first of all to “promotion of European co-operation in quality assurance with a view to developing comparable criteria and methodologies”.¹⁵ Saying in a very non-diplomatic way: joint degrees should not be an excuse to award non-recognized (non-accredited etc.) or even bogus degrees.

¹⁴ *Draft Explanatory Memorandum to the Draft Recommendation on the Recognition of Joint Degrees*. ENIC and NARIC Networks, Vaduz (Liechtenstein), 18-20 May 2003, pp. 4-5 (9 pp.).

¹⁵ See Bologna Declaration (1999). – In this context, the *Berlin Communiqué* is far more definitive: *»The quality of higher education has proven to be at the heart of the setting up of a European Higher Education Area. Ministers commit themselves to supporting further development of quality assurance at institutional, national and European level. They stress the need to develop mutually shared criteria and methodologies on quality assurance.*

Therefore, they agree that by 2005 national quality assurance systems should include:

- A definition of the responsibilities of the bodies and institutions involved.*

The ENIC/NARIC *Draft Recommendation* stated in the paragraph on *Quality assurance and institutional recognition*:

»1. *Competent recognition authorities may make the recognition of joint degrees conditional on all parts of the study programme leading to the degree and/or the institutions providing the programme being subject to transparent quality assessment or being considered as belonging to the education system of one or more Parties to the Lisbon Recognition Convention.*

2. *Where the joint degree is issued on the basis of a curriculum developed by a group or consortium consisting of a number of recognized higher education institutions, recognition of the degree may be made contingent on all member institutions or programmes of the group or consortium being subject to transparent quality assessment, or being considered as belonging to the education system of one or more Parties to the Lisbon Recognition Convention, even if only some of these institutions provide courses for any given degree.«*

It is important to refer directly to the *Lisbon Recognition Convention* here. As already mentioned, no special provision on joint degree was made in Lisbon in 1997 but in the Section I (*Definitions*)¹⁶ there are some definitions which are very important in discussing his issue:

»*Higher education institution. An establishment providing higher education and recognised by the competent authority of a Party as belonging to its system of higher education.*

Higher education programme. A course of study recognised by the competent authority of a Party as belonging to its system of higher education, and the completion of which provides the student with a higher education qualification.

Period of study. Any component of a higher education programme which has been evaluated and documented and, while not a complete programme of study in itself, represents a significant acquisition of knowledge or skill.

Qualification. A. Higher education qualification. Any degree, diploma or other certificate issued by a competent authority attesting the successful completion of a higher education programme.«

With regard to the assessment of higher education institutions and programmes the following statement is also very important:

»*Each Party shall provide adequate information on any institution belonging to its higher education system, and on any programme operated by these institutions, with a view to enabling the competent authorities of other Parties to ascertain whether the quality of the qualifications issued by these institutions justifies recognition in the Party in which recognition is sought.«*¹⁷

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- *Evaluation of programmes or institutions, including internal assessment, external review, participation of students and the publication of results.*
 - *A system of accreditation, certification or comparable procedures.*
 - *International participation, co-operation and networking.«*

¹⁶ *Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region* (1997), Article 1.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, Article VIII.1

We can conclude that the definitions cited above already form the common understanding on the issues concerned (as results of a broad international discussion in professional bodies), having also legislative weight (as in case of Lisbon Recognition Convention) or getting it soon (as in case of ENIC/NARIC *Draft Recommendation*). Therefore, any productive discussion should start from these definitions and take them seriously.

III. Experiences with Joint Degrees – structure and curriculum

It is still difficult to get in touch with systemized experiences on joint degrees development. The already mentioned *Survey on Master Degrees and Joint Degrees in Europe*¹⁸ gives an excellent overview of the European “joint degree landscape” but it was not focused to analyse particular experiences in developing structures and curriculum. The *EUA Joint Masters Project* finished only recently¹⁹ and the experience gathered has been not analysed systemically yet. However, at the Bologna follow-up seminar in Mantova (April 2003), interesting Italian experiences were presented and a special publication was also delivered.²⁰ In the following paragraphs we draw some points which should be of particular interest from all institutional and/or national perspectives.

Italy was not only the host of Bologna Conference 1999; it also launched a broad higher education reform more or less at the same time. An important turning point for the development of joint degrees was the approval of the *Regulation on University Autonomy*²¹ which set out the norms concerning the curricular autonomy of universities. Among other provisions there is also a special provision about the possibility to award joint degrees between Italian universities as well as with foreign universities. Such a provision is the missing element in most of national legislations in Europe today. Of course, it is also an expression of the particularity of Italian higher education system and its traditions. Now, their rules governing the award of joint qualifications are delegated to the general academic regulations of a university, adding that

»- In the case of joint degrees with foreign universities, the procedure for the award of the qualification concerned should be expressly regulated in the respective inter-university agreements, given the differences in the national rules among various countries.«²²

Of course, »the differences in the national rules among various countries« are the real issue in this matter. It become more obvious when institutions try to implement the norm. By rule, they meet financial problems. Italy supported the development of joint degrees financially through a special support plan; similar are some other national approaches as well as the policy of the European Union (a new challenge offered in Erasmus-Mundus scheme).

¹⁸ See above, note 4. – Among other issues, Rauhvargers also gives a comparison of fields of study in which it was reported to be particularly difficult or particularly easy to establish joint degrees (see *Survey*, p. 31, Table 1). Educational science falls into the particularly difficult field, together with most of – nationally or internationally – regulated professions (architecture, engineering, medicine etc.). However, this analysis refers mostly to Master degrees.

¹⁹ EUA Conference on Joint Degrees "Universities working together in Europe", held 24-25 October 2003 at Babes-Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca (Romania). – See <http://eua.ubbcluj.ro/>.

²⁰ Capucci, S., Finocchietti, C., Sticchi Damiani, M., Testuzza, V. (ed.), *Joint Degrees. The Italian Experience in the European Context*. Rome: Cimea, Fondazione RUI, April 2003.

²¹ *Official Journal of the Italian Republic*, January 2000.

²² Capucci, S. (et al.), p. 16.

The above-mentioned analysis of Italian experience gives some interesting institutional cases. Let's quote from one of them, the International Degree Programme and Joint Degree in Biotechnology from University of Perugia:

»The degree programme lasts three years and is held in English language as it caters for students from different nationalities. In the initial stage there are 40 students, equally representing the participating universities and chosen by them. The course is held in Perugia while the thesis is done in the university of another country or in a company. The course is very much oriented towards industry and seeks to educate graduates who can directly find a job in industry or even set up a business themselves. Each semester comprises 300 contact hours, of which a third are lectures with the balance dedicated to practicals. In the final semester the students concentrate on writing their thesis. At the end they receive a joint degree certificate which bears the signatures of all the universities in the consortium.«²³

Analysing their own experience, Italian colleagues note that in some cases institutions developed a parallel and contemporary study offer allowing students to follow the same course in different locations; in other cases specific segments which complement the overall course were also designed. They also worry about logistic and financial aspects of programmes which are crucial for the organization of the studies but also for the academic success of this common enterprise. *“A lower level of integration occurs in cases where the periods of student mobility are limited in comparison to the overall duration of the studies, where the contribution of teachers is marginal with respect to the general programme or where students are selected by each institution in accordance with different criteria.”²⁴*

There are more and more institutional experiences with joint programmes today. Materials from the already mentioned *EUA October 2003 Conference* also brought some new perspectives. The conference stressed a need to *develop an institutional strategy on joint programmes*. Rapporteurs Roderick Floud and Lewis Purser synthesized the discussion from one of the working groups.²⁵ Their report starts in referring to the Workshop on Joint Degrees at the Berlin Ministerial Conference on 19 September 2003. ENIC/NARIC proposals to supplement the Lisbon convention on recognition of qualifications got support again. On the other side, participants warned about *higher costs of joint degree study* and stressed: *“[...] ministers should recognise that development and maintenance costs are high and will need support. [...] We ask ministers to support the portability of grants and loans for students and the transfer of social benefits for staff.”* Another particular comment is also very visible in this report which can be for specific reasons very influential in the further development of European joint degrees:

»5. We consider that joint programmes are not required in all fields. Ministers may wish to work with universities to identify specialist fields in which the European need and benefit is particularly strong, but where only a small number of people will participate in each country: an example is the successful Masters course in Humanitarian Assistance. Other examples are likely to be in similar professional or vocational areas, where student mobility may be limited. We therefore have to be flexible in determining periods of study abroad, while recognising that study in other learning environments is a major benefit of joint degree programmes.«

²³ Ibid., p. 17.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 20-21.

²⁵ Report from Working Group 1 A, by Prof. Roderick Floud and Lewis Purser; see at the official web site http://www.unige.ch/eua/En/Forthcoming_events/Cluj_Conference/Cluj-Report-WG1A.doc.

European joint degrees studies encounter *competition* from the very beginning. They don't develop an ordinary mobility; they should be based on high quality performance and excellent institutional references; they are more expensive and therefore priority lists should be expected when public resources – national or European – are mentioned. Under such expectations, a strong institutional strategy is necessary. The working group discussed what the necessary components of an institutional strategy on joint degrees might be, and some criteria for establishing joint degrees were identified:

»a) *They must be in the interests of students, although it is not expected that all students will necessarily be involved or interested in such programmes. The view of several participants was that joint degrees are most suitable to specialised topics – e.g. Humanitarian Assistance, and programmes which have cross-disciplinary aspects. The strengths of various institutions can thus be brought together to create attractive programmes with clear value added. We should accept that the majority of students will not be mobile, and such programmes bring European benefits into a single institution. Joint degrees must have very clear structures so that students know who is responsible for the programme and degrees awarded.*

b) *They must also be in the interests of staff. All our experience so far, and this was confirmed by participants in the working group, is that joint degrees are difficult to develop and costly to maintain, and only possible with the full support from the staff involved. Thus they have to be of direct benefit to these staff who make the effort to develop and deliver such programmes. One such benefit may perhaps be through synergy to research networks. The experience so far shows that joint programmes originate from and are driven by content, not by structural obligations: i.e. that the impetus for such programmes comes from the bottom-up, not top-down.*

c) *They must also be of interest and benefit to the institution. Such programmes should fit with the mission and financial circumstances of the university. The university also needs to be entirely clear about the financial and legal obligations and consequences of such programmes, since it is accepting a long-term obligation to students and must have the means to fulfil this. This means that even if joint programmes only represent a small proportion of the range offered at the institution, these must be fully integrated within the institution's structures and quality assurance procedures. Participants in the working group emphasised once again the cost and complexity of administrative and financial arrangements for such programmes and the students involved.«*

IV. Some conclusions and recommendations

Only an (higher education) institution established according the *national legislation* could award degrees which are legally recognized in a given country (countries). Only on this basis, and on basis of *international law*, a national degree can be recognized in other countries.

Under the *Bologna process*, national systems of higher education and related legislation are in certain “*process of harmonisation*”: structures are getting more comparable and compatible, content should remain to reflect “*European diversities*” as our common richness.

All this can be equally applied to the case of jointly developed study programmes, integrated curricula and the award of joint degrees. In the process of designing curricula, co-operating institutions should find (a) *balance among different institutional and/or national approaches and traditions*, and should (b) *consider the results of discussions in ongoing Bologna process* and in particular good practices developed in other networks so far.

Therefore, it is at least clear, that institutions which aim at providing a (joint) programme should be *recognized higher education institutions*, subject to *transparent quality assessment*. As an *entrance qualification* for the Doctorate study (“third degree”) they demand a Master degree of 300 ECTS (or a comparable extent in other credit systems). Etc., etc.

EUDORA was born and has been developing several features which could be and which are worth to be developed into a joint degree. According to public information, there is no similar initiative of this size in the area of European education and teacher education today. Therefore, chances are obvious.

However, there are several problems and issues which should be developed in details. Some of them could be made clear by engaging in the following tasks:

- to study good practices of the development of joint degrees in other areas;
- to draft a broad “Doctorate framework of qualifications”;
- to draft a core curriculum which fits into similar trends observed in Europe; simultaneously, to “harmonize” it on the background of various institutional and national contexts;
- to develop a joint institutional strategy on the foreseen Joint Degree programme;
- to get an official support from rectors of universities engaged and to sign an inter-institutional agreement;
- to get support from national authorities (Ministries etc.), in particular for reasons of financing higher costs and employment of graduates;
- to consider Erasmus-Mundus as a vehicle of further development;
- to finalize study programme(s), to get appropriate recognition(s) and a guarantee that the awarded Joint Degrees will receive full recognition internationally,
- to precise organization and logistic details - and to launch regular studies...

Further conclusions should be a result from our today’s discussion.

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