

DRAFT CONCEPT NOTE

EU-Southern Mediterranean Seminar on credit recognition and portability of qualifications

Brussels on 1-2 June 2015

Background

This seminar is organised in the frame of the Dialogue with Southern Mediterranean countries on higher education policies and programmes which was launched in 2012 following the adoption of two important EU Communications "A partnership for democracy and shared prosperity with the Southern Mediterranean" and "A new response to a changing Neighbourhood".

At the last meeting of the Policy Dialogue in June 2014, Southern Mediterranean stakeholders expressed the need for deepening their knowledge and developing cooperation on credit recognition and portability of qualifications which are the basis of any successful mobility schemes between the EU and Southern Mediterranean partners.

Context

An increasing number of students are going to study abroad either for gaining additional credits or for getting a complete degree. This is a general trend all over the world to which the European Commission expects to contribute, not only between European countries themselves but also with EU international partners. For that purpose, it has defined its priorities in the 2013 Communication "The European Higher education in the world"¹ and proposed to EU Member States and the European Parliament the Erasmus+ programme (2014-2020) supporting, among others, mobility of students and staff between European higher education institutions and their partners worldwide.

In this context, the Southern Mediterranean region was defined as one of the priority geographical area and allocated a large part of the budget. Consequently, around 25000 Southern Mediterranean students (and staff) are expected to benefit from credit mobility over the next 6 years making shared recognition mechanisms even more important.

However, while recognition of academic qualification acquired abroad is the basis for a successful and useful mobility, it is not always insured in a proper way between universities and national recognition offices on the two shores of the Mediterranean and even within both regions... At the moment, procedures for recognitions of credits and portability of

¹ Brussels, 11.7.2013, COM(2013) 499 final

qualifications both in higher education institutions and national offices recognising foreign degrees are often lengthy, cumbersome and not always transparent.

Objectives of the seminar

The seminar aims at exchanging information and best practices on credit transfer systems and transportability of qualifications which are put in place both at the levels of higher education institution and national authorities.

The first part of the event will be dedicated to an overview of the situation both in Europe (especially following the Bologna Ministerial Conference of May 2015) and in Southern Mediterranean countries. The state of play of the legal international framework on degree recognition will also be presented.

This general introduction will be complemented by testimonies of students, universities and national recognition offices which will explain how this legal and policy frameworks work in practice and what are the difficulties met in their daily activity.

In smaller groups, participants will then have the opportunity to deepen their knowledge and exchange information on two main issues:

- **The recognition of credits at institution level with a focus on the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS)** established under the Bologna Process. Set up in 1989 within the Erasmus programme, it represents as a way of transferring credits that students earned during their studies abroad into credits that counted towards their degree, once back studying in their home university. Initially used in learning mobility, it is now also implemented for accumulating credits in institutions' degree programmes.

It is based on workload and learning outcomes and helps in the design, description and delivery of programmes. ECTS is also a means – even though a technical one – of helping a culture shift inside HE. ECTS and the learning outcomes approach underpin the shift to the setting up of programmes with more focus on developing clearly identified skills and competences.

Southern Mediterranean stakeholders (both universities and national authorities) will also be given the possibility to explain the challenges met when working with different credit systems at national level.

- **The recognition of foreign degrees at national level** with a focus on the role and capacity of Recognition Centres both in Europe and in Southern Mediterranean countries. Members of the ENIC-NARIC will explain which coordination mechanisms are put in place in Europe to ease the recognition of degrees between countries

while recent trends in some Southern Mediterranean countries will also be presented. Practical tools to support the work of Recognition Centres will also be explored.

Target groups

The seminar will take place **in Brussels on 1-2 June 2015** (place to be confirmed).

It will target Southern Mediterranean higher education main stakeholders: national administrations (ministries, national offices responsible for the recognition of foreign degrees) and academic representatives (higher education institutions in a broad sense).

9 partner countries will be covered: Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Palestine and Tunisia.

Southern Mediterranean regional organisations will also be invited such as: the Arab Network for Quality Assurance (ANQAHE), Conference of rectors...

EU level actors representing higher education institutions and recognition actors will be present: European Network for Quality Assurance, European University Association, European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education...

Unesco, Council of Europe will be invited.

Other European Commission DGs and services may also attend.

The number of participants is estimated to around 100 people.

Possible agenda

Day 1

9.00 - 9.30 - Opening session

- Welcome by the European Commission
- Statement by a representative of a Southern Mediterranean Ministry
Speaker?

9.30 – 10.30 - The political and legal frame of recognition of credits and degrees

- Last developments at EU level in the frame of the Bologna process
- The Unesco and Council of Europe legal frameworks – State of play in the European and Southern Mediterranean regions (2 existing conventions + MERIC)
- The situation in Southern Mediterranean countries (use of transfer credit systems, role of recognition institutions).

Speaker ?

- Discussion

Coffee Break

11.00 – 12.45 - The challenges met in practice

- Testimonies of mobile students
- Testimony from universities welcoming foreign students
Speaker

- Testimony from national recognition offices

Recognising a South Med degree in Europe: a case study

Recognising a European degree in a South Med country: a case study *Speaker?*

Lunch break

Recognising credits at higher education institution level

Participants divided in 2 sub-groups rotating

14.15 – 15.45: Tools and tricks for recognising credits acquired abroad

- Using the new ECTS guide when designing a study programme (workload, learning outcomes, assessments, credits)
- Useful agreements and tools when organising mobility projects (learning agreements, course catalogue, transcript of records...)
- Discussion

Coffee break

16.15 – 17.45 Experiences of universities in introducing and using ECTS

- The challenges of adapting an existing system to ECTS

Tempus project SMHES in Morocco

- *Introducing the ECTS concept in Universities*

Tempus project Corinthiam

- *Discussion*

Diner

Day 2

Recognising foreign degrees at national level

Participants split into two sub-groups rotating

09.00 – 10.00 - Role and capacity of recognition centres on both shores of the Mediterranean

- ENIC-NARIC centres – Their role, status and practices in Europe, common principles and variety of situations
- Using EU programmes to strengthen capacity of national recognition centres in Southern Mediterranean countries

The RecoNow Tempus project

- Discussion

10.00 – 11.00 – Useful tools, sharing of best practices when recognising foreign degrees

- The European Recognition Manual for Higher Education Institutions
- Use of Qualification frameworks in recognition
- Discussion

Coffee break

11.30 – 12.30 – Closing session

Plenary session

Feedback from sessions on

- Recognition of credits at institution level
- Recognition of foreign degrees at national level

Closing remark from a representative from Southern Mediterranean countries

Speaker

Closing remark from the European Commission