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The Committee of the Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher
Education in the European Region

JOINT ENIC/NARIC CHARTER OF ACTIVITIES AND SERVICES

Adopted on 9 June 2004

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The Committee of the Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region

Conscious of the responsibilities of the ENIC and NARIC Networks for different aspects of recognition: academic recognition, recognition for the purpose of access to regulated professions and for access to the non-regulated part of the labour market;

Desiring to increase the relevance and the added value of the Networks in terms of promoting the European Region dimension in recognition;

Attaching great importance to the necessity of enhancement of the visibility of their activities, while providing users with the same level of quality throughout the European Region;

Conscious of the responsibilities of the ENIC and NARIC Networks, where applicable, for the development of the recognition policies and practice under the Bologna Process aiming at realising a European Higher Education Area by 2010;

Conscious of the fact that the organization, provision of resources for and allocation of the various tasks described in this Charter are a national responsibility;

Endeavouring to further increase the relevance of the work of the Networks on the recognition of qualifications in an ever more globalising world of higher education;

Conscious of the fact that the ENIC Network encompasses members of the European Union as well as other countries party to the European Region, and that the specific provisions and legislation of the EU apply only to national centres of countries of the European Union, the European Economic Area and EU candidate countries;

Interested in favouring international dialogue and cooperation within the field of recognition between various constituencies of the European Region

Has adopted the present Joint ENIC/NARIC Charter of Activities and Services (here after called "The Charter"):

SECTION I.   **DEFINITION OF TERMS**

For the purpose of this Charter, the terms used have the meaning as defined in the Council of Europe/UNESCO Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region (Lisbon Recognition Convention) and the European Union Directives on regulated professions.

SECTION II.   **TASKS AND ACTIVITIES**

II.1 Tasks and activities of a national ENIC/NARIC centre

The tasks to be fulfilled by an ENIC/NARIC centre are the following:

- Provide adequate, reliable and authenticated information, within reasonable time as prescribed by the Lisbon Recognition Convention, national and EU legislation, on qualifications, education systems, and recognition procedures to individual holders of qualifications, higher education institutions, employers, professional organisations, public authorities, ENIC/NARIC partners and other interested parties;

- Provide information, advice or formal decision on the recognition of qualifications on the basis of their assessment by applying existing criteria and procedures developed by the Networks, as well as new criteria for assessment of qualifications described in terms of workload, level, learning outcomes, competences and profile;

- Provide to citizens information on their rights regarding recognition;

- Serve as the main information point on the recognition of higher education and higher education access qualifications at national level;

- Cooperate in related matters with other information centres, higher education institutions, their networks and other relevant actors in the national context;

- In the EU-context, and as far as NARICs have competence in professional recognition matters, cooperate with the National Coordinator[1] and the competent authorities for the professional recognition of the regulated professions (EU Directives);

- Contribute to higher education policy development and legislation at regional, national and European level;

- Co-operate within the ENIC and NARIC Networks on the development of an overarching framework of qualifications for the European Higher Education Area and accordingly contribute at national level to the further development of the education systems;

- Participate in the elaboration of publications, informations and other materials on the home education system and participate in publications, surveys, comparative studies and other research activities undertaken by the European Commission, Council of Europe, UNESCO and other international organizations;

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[1] Each Member State shall designate a person responsible for coordinating the activities of the authorities empowered to receive the applications and take decisions referred to in these Directives. His/her role shall be to promote uniform application of these Directives to all the professions concerned.

- Collect and regularly update information on: education systems, qualifications awarded in different countries and their comparability to the qualifications in the home country, legislation on recognition, information on officially recognised and accredited institutions, admission requirements;

- Develop cooperation with relevant organisations in countries in other regions of the world working in the field of recognition;

- Create, maintain and regularly up-date the information on the national education system in the format given in the Annex to the present document;

- Where entrusted by the national authority, elaborate and maintain the description of the national education system to be included in the Diploma Supplement;

- Promote the activities of the ENIC and NARIC Networks in countries in other regions of the world;

- Refer to the membership of the ENIC and NARIC Networks in all publications and correspondence and on web-sites and make appropriate use of its logo[2];

- other tasks as decided through national regulations.

II.2 Tasks and activities of the ENIC and NARIC Networks

The mandates of the ENIC and NARIC Networks and their responsibilities under the Bologna Process presuppose the following tasks:

- Exchange information on the assessment of the qualifications and on the national qualifications system;

- Provide a forum for amicable settlement of recognition disputes;

- Provide and disseminate updated information on education systems and recognition procedures;

- Improve knowledge about other network partners' systems, qualifications, recognition criteria and working methods and procedures;

- Benchmarking, setting and promoting best practices, development of methodologies on recognition in line with the criteria and procedures defined in the Council of Europe/UNESCO Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region (Lisbon Recognition Convention);

- Improve the range of information tools for the national centres by development of suitable databases, information materials etc;

- Provide the ENICs and NARICs with guidelines on the structure and the organization of the information they offer to relevant target groups, in particular: higher education institutions and bodies, public authorities, quality assurance agencies, employers, professional organizations and individual holders of qualifications;

- Develop and implement common Information Strategies for production, selection, quality assurance, presentation and provision of information on recognition-related issues;

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[2] to be designed

- Further strengthen the network functions of the two Networks through contacts between the national ENICs and NARICs as well as by helping the individual centres in their capacity building;

- Promote cooperation with quality assurance bodies and networks, in particular ENQA in order to establish a common framework, share information and increase mutual trust between education systems;

- Ensure coherence and interactivity with other partners and networks in related fields: recognition, quality assurance, accreditation, education and training, employment;

- Provide a forum for the debate and development of policies that promote and facilitate the recognition of qualifications in the European Region;

- Enhance the European dimension in recognition in the Lifelong Learning context of the European Higher Education Area

SECTION III.   RESOURCES AND EXPERTISE

The ENIC/NARIC staff should be versed in evaluating foreign qualifications in line with international best practices in methodology and procedures of recognition, including:

- Conducting research into home and foreign education systems;

- Identifying the status of the institution awarding a qualification;

- Identifying the value of a given qualification by taking into account the academic and professional rights that qualification gives to the holder in the country in which it was conferred;

- Identifying the most appropriate comparison to the foreign qualification in the home education system;

- Providing a well-founded statement of existence/absence of substantial differences between the foreign qualification and the home one.

III.1. Staff

The ENIC/NARIC centre shall be adequately staffed by each country taking into account: the size of the country, the numbers of institutions, the number of national and foreign students, the average number of applications for recognition, the intensity of information flow and the specific position of the ENIC/NARIC centre within the legal and administrative framework and higher education system of the given country.

The ENIC/NARIC personnel involved in recognition should meet the following basic requirements:

- Higher education qualification or equivalent
- Familiarity with the international and national legal framework for recognition
- Skills in assessment of foreign qualifications

- Knowledge of foreign languages
- Computer literacy and skills in using ICT.

III.2. Documentation

Each ENIC/NARIC centre is expected to possess:

- Reference works on foreign education systems

- Reference works on national education system of the country in which the centre is working: national education legislation (in national and foreign language), legislation in the field of recognition, lists of officially recognised and accredited institutions/programs, description of the national education system, description of the national criteria and procedures for recognition of foreign qualifications, etc.

- National/international institutional catalogues

- Recognition conventions, bilateral agreements, EU Directives, other relevant documents emanating from the European region and other relevant bodies.

III.3. Technical equipment

Each ENIC/NARIC is expected to have appropriate hardware and software equipment in order to:

- Maintain e-mail connection
- Have access to the Internet
- Work into interactive databases
- Have access to publishing on the web
- Maintain a database on previous evaluations carried out by the ENIC/NARIC centre

REFERENCE DOCUMENTS

Council Directive 89/48/EEC of 21 December 1988 on a general system for a recognition of higher education diplomas awarded upon completion of professional education and training of at least three years' duration, may be found at www.europa.eu.int/scadplus/leg/en/cha/c11022b.htm .

Council Directive 92/51/EEC of 18 June 1992 on a second general system for recognition of professional education and training to supplement Directive 89/48/EEC, may be found at www.europa.eu.int/scadplus/leg/en/cha/c11022c.htm.

Council of Europe/UNESCO Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher education in the European Region (the Lisbon Recognition Convention), may be found at http://conventions.coe.int/Treaty/EN/cadreprincipal.htm -search for ETS 165.

Council of Europe/UNESCO Recommendation on Criteria and Procedures for the Assessment of Foreign Qualifications and Periods of Study (adopted by the Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee at its second meeting, Riga, 6 June 2001), may be found at http://www.coe.int/T/E/Cultural_Co-operation/education/Higher education/ENIC_Network .

Draft Recommendation on the Recognition of Joint Degrees (adopted by the ENIC and NARIC Networks, Vaduz, 20 May 2003), may be found at www.cepes.ro/hed/recogn/.

External Evaluation of the NARIC network – Final report – August 2002.

Operational Guidelines for National Information and Recognition Centres in Europe, PHARE Multi-Country Project on Recognition (1998).

Realising the European Higher Education Area, Communiqué of the Conference of Ministers responsible for Higher Education in Berlin on 19 September 2003 (Berlin Communiqué), may be found at http://www.bologna-berlin2003.de/en/communique_ministers/index.htm.

Recognition issues in the Bologna Process- final report (of the ENIC Working Party on Recognition Issues in the Bologna Process), Strasbourg/Bucharest, 2001, see http://www.lu.lv/

Statement by the ENIC and NARIC networks prior to the Bologna Conference, and adopted in Vilnius in June 1999.

Statement by the ENIC and NARIC Networks on the European Higher Education Area, 10th Joint meeting of the ENIC and NARIC Networks, Vaduz (Liechtenstein), 18-20 May 2003 (Vaduz Statement), may be found at www.bologna-berlin2003.de/pdf/Naric.pdf.

The European Higher Education Area Joint Declaration of the European Ministers of Education convened in Bologna on the 19 June 1999 (Bologna Declaration), may be found at www.bologna-berlin2003.de/pdf/bologna_declaration.pdf

Towards the European Higher Education Area, Communiqué of the meeting of European Ministers in charge of Higher Education in Prague on 19 May 2001 (Prague Communiqué), may be found at www.bologna-berlin2003.de/pdf/Prague_communiqueTheta.pdf.

UNESCO/Council of Europe Code of Good Practice in the Provision of Transnational Education, may be found at http://www.coe.int/T/E/Cultural_Co-operation/education/Higher_education/ENIC_Network

RECOMMENDED FORMAT OF THE INFORMATION ON THE NATIONAL EDUCATION SYSTEM

- Legal basis and description of the education system (a short version of which could be used for the Diploma Supplement);

- Lists of recognised and accredited higher education institutions and programs;

- General description of the national system for evaluation and accreditation with web-sites of the relevant bodies;

- Description of the national procedure for academic recognition of foreign qualifications in terms of:

  National legal framework for recognition;
  Description of the assessment methodology;
  Processing time and possible delays;
  Rights and possibilities for appeal
  Requirements regarding information applicant must provide;
  National requirements on the certification of foreign qualifications;
  Fees for evaluation and/or translation of educational documents (where applicable);
  Possible requirements regarding the translations.

ACCOMPANYING NOTES

The purpose of the present Charter is to elaborate on minimum services to be provided by every national ENIC/NARIC centre. The document also outlines the minimum structural needs of an ENIC/ NARIC in terms of political support, equipment, human resources and funding.

Special attention is devoted to the public aspects of the Charter including quality, format and minimum services to both the Networks and the public. The Charter identifies the different components of the common services, thus enhancing the visibility and the effectiveness of the ENIC and NARIC Networks.

Having as starting point the recommendations in the NARIC Network evaluation report, the present Joint ENIC/NARIC Charter has the ambition to become a useful tool for further improvement of the two Networks in terms of both activities and services in a rapidly changing recognition environment.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The ENIC and NARIC Networks operate in an international legal framework which is largely in place. The Council of Europe/UNESCO Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region (the Lisbon Recognition Convention), as well as the European Union Directives on professional recognition provide the necessary legal grounds for developing recognition policy and practices in the European Region. Moreover, the developed transparency instruments like ECTS and Diploma Supplements assist the two Networks while fulfilling their tasks.

The 1999 Bologna Declaration initiated one of the major reforms in the European higher education in terms of both scope and content. Already on the day the Bologna Declaration was adopted, the ENIC and NARIC Networks declared their willingness to contribute to the creation of a European Higher Education Area and they have outlined how recognition of qualifications may be developed to help make that area a reality by 2010.

At their annual meeting in Vilnius in June 1999 the ENIC and NARIC Networks adopted a statement outlining their contribution and in 2001 they adopted a Report on Recognition Issues in the Bologna Process. The report set a comprehensive recognition agenda meeting the priorities of the Bologna Process.

Since the Prague meeting of European ministers in charge of Higher Education in 2001, the ENIC and NARIC Networks were quite active by complementing the Lisbon Recognition Convention in the light of the Bologna – related developments with a set of important documents adopted or prepared for adoption by the Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee (*Code of Good Practice in the Provision of Transnational Education, Recommendations on Criteria and Procedures for the Assessment of Foreign Qualifications, Recommendation on the Recognition of Joint Degrees*).

In May 2003 the ENIC and NARIC Networks adopted the Statement on the European Higher Education Area (Vaduz statement), thus expressing their willingness to continue to be part of

the Bologna Process and to further contribute to the realization of some of the most important goals of the Bologna Process via recognition of qualifications.

The present document takes into account the main Bologna action lines as defined in the Bologna declaration (1999), the Prague Communiqué (2001) and the Berlin Communiqué (2003) and more precisely the intermediate priorities for 2003 - 2005 as defined in Berlin, among which the "recognition of qualifications and periods of study" holds a key position. The document goes further in compliance with the initiative for a design of an overarching framework of qualifications for the EHEA as well as with the initiative for orientation towards "qualifications described in terms of workload, level, learning outcomes, competences and profile".

The document also takes into account the emerging need of changes within the field of recognition in order to fulfil the Bologna objectives. These changes are mainly related to the shift from the formal recognition of a foreign qualification towards a more substantial and sophisticated assessment, and from pure academic towards professional recognition for the labour market.

The document makes use of the previous experiences acquired in the framework of the PHARE Multi-Country Project on Recognition.

Finally, the document was developed in compliance with the main strategic documents of the two Networks, among which one can mention the Information Strategies which cover the short and long-term priorities in the information provision to the general public.

BACKGROUND TO THE JOINT ENIC/NARIC CHARTER

- In 2002 the NARIC network was the subject of an external evaluation. The purpose of the evaluation was to assess relevance and added value of the network in promoting European dimension in academic recognition. Some of the recommendations in the evaluation report were focused on the efficiency and effectiveness of the NARIC network in achieving its objectives and tasks, as well as to the quality of its image to customers and stakeholders, and more precisely:

  Recommendation N 1: Charter of minimum NARIC services
  Recommendation N 2: Public aspects of the Charter
  Recommendation N 10: Identification of common services

- The NARIC network had a first discussion on the evaluation report at their annual meeting in Brussels on January 27, 2003 and endorsed its conclusions.

- An ad-hoc NARIC working group with the participation of the NARIC Advisory Board (NAB) and invited by DG EAC, discussed the outlines of the document on February 14, 2003.

- The first draft of the Charter was discussed by the NAB at the invitation of DG EAC on December 8, 2003.

- Subsequently to this meeting a second draft of the Charter was sent for comments to the members of the NAB and to the Secretariat of the ENIC Network with the intention to proceed towards a joint ENIC/NARIC charter in compliance with the traditionally established and further developed cooperation between the two Networks.

- The document was largely discussed by the NARIC network at its annual meeting on January 12-13, 2004. Several concrete and valuable comments were made, thus providing grounds for further improvement of the docume nt.

- Further consultations took place with the NAB and the Secretariat of the ENIC Network, thus preparing the draft Joint ENIC/NARIC Charter of Activities and Services.

- The draft Joint ENIC/NARIC Charter was discussed at the Joint ENIC/NARIC Meeting in June 2004 and subsequently endorsed by the competent bodies of the Commission/EU/Member States, the Council of Europe and UNESCO.

- The endorsed Joint ENIC/NARIC Charter will be further presented to the States represented in the NARIC network to adopt suitable initiatives as a sign of their political commitment to assist its implementation at national level, as well as to the Bologna Signatory States.

- The NAB and the ENIC Bureau will follow the implementation of the Charter at international/national level and will regularly inform the two Networks on the results of the monitoring process, thus ensuring reliable feedback on the usefulness of the present document.

SECTION II. TASKS AND ACTIVITIES

The scope of the activities of the ENIC and NARIC Networks is defined in their mandates. For the NARIC Network it is formulated in the EC Decision establishing the SOCRATES II: *"It will collect and disseminate authenticated information, which is necessary for the purpose of academic recognition, also bearing in mind synergies with professional recognition of diplomas"*.

According to the Terms of Reference for the ENIC Network it *"is set up under the authority of the Committee of Ministers (Council of Europe) and the regional Committee (UNESCO) with a view to facilitating co-operation between national information centres on academic mobility and recognition in the European Region"*

The ENIC and NARIC Networks provide a forum for the development of European recognition policies and practices through networking between individual ENICs and NARICs from the Member States.

ENICs and NARICs should promote, at institutional, national and European level, simple, efficient and fair recognition, while paying due attention to the diversity of qualifications.

The increasing globalisation of education and training requires close cooperation between the two Networks and their counterparts in other regions of the world, in terms of further development of adequate criteria and procedures for recognition in a changing qualification

framework. In order to do so, the ENIC and NARIC Networks will permanently improve the effectiveness, will cooperate with networks in the field of accreditation and quality assurance in the European region, and notably ENQA.

SECTION III.   RESOURCES AND EXPERTISE

Each ENIC/NARIC centre should meet the expertise requirements in the field of recognition, by recruiting well trained staff, knowledgeable of internationally accepted good practices for foreign qualification evaluation, capable to apply the relevant methodologies and procedures.

Preparing, disseminating and providing information to students, academics, higher education institutions, employers, social partners, agencies, citizens etc. and assisting the general public to navigate through that information is another core function.

In order to fulfil its duties, each ENIC/NARIC should be given adequate human, documentary and equipment resources, as well as appropriate national funding.

ENICs and NARICs should give their staff members the possibility to regularly upgrade their qualifications by participation in national and international training courses and seminars. The centres should also organize internal staff training in order to present and implement the last developments in the field of recognition.