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## **Draft Report on the Bologna Pathfinder Group on Automatic Recognition**

### **Context**

The Bucharest Communiqué committed participating countries to setting up a fast track to recognising each other's qualifications, ultimately paving the way for a realising the long-term goal of automatic recognition of comparable academic degrees. Ministers proposed that a Pathfinder Group of countries would explore ways to achieve this. The European Commission is facilitating the work of the group, which is composed of representatives from 9 countries: BE-fr, BE-fl, DE, DK, EE, LU, NL, PT, SE, and SI. The group has met twice, in October 2012 and February 2013.

### **Scope of the work**

The recognition of doctorates for access to post-doctoral positions appears not to present a problem in any of the participating countries. Therefore, the work of the group will focus on academic recognition of bachelor and master degrees issued by recognized/accredited higher education institutions (HEIs). The group has agreed to focus on the recognition of qualifications at *system* level, namely on the level of a bachelor degree (first cycle of EHEA-QF or level 6 EQF) and a master degree (second cycle of EHEA or level 7 EQF). While not cutting across the autonomy of institutions to make decisions about admitting individual students, the shift to a system-based approach might nonetheless require a change in practices, policy attitudes, and culture in order to ensure that a graduate from an EHEA country has the automatic right to be considered (though not necessarily admitted) for entry to a programme of further study at the higher level in any other EHEA country.

Although the group will concentrate on recognition for the purpose of further study, recognition also impacts on labour market issues and the group will take account of this where appropriate<sup>1</sup>.

The Group is especially keen to see how the existing Bologna and EU tools can be used and articulated more effectively with recognition procedures, in particular quality assurance systems and mechanisms, such as qualifications frameworks, ECTS, grading tables and the Diploma Supplement, but also to explore for example how IT tools could be better used to support recognition.

The Pathfinder Group of countries already has some experience of more automatic forms of recognition on a national level (such as the Portuguese practice of giving the holder of a bachelor degree the automatic right to be considered for entry to a master's degree programme); or on a regional basis, either through a formal process (such as the Dutch-Flemish Treaty, based on a joint accreditation agency, the NVAO) or cooperation at 'practitioners'-level via groupings of the existing ENIC-NARICs. The Group has agreed to build on these experiences to try to identify the key features which lead to improved academic recognition and which may be transferable to other countries, thus enabling an extension of the existing cooperation frameworks to neighbouring countries, but also to learn from each other to see what may be improved in their own countries. With support from other members of the Group, Slovenia has agreed to explore with other countries in the Western Balkan Region how similar cooperation might be established there.

As a first step, the countries are beginning a mapping of the difficulties in recognition which exist between them, including through contacts with ENIC/NARIC offices, higher education institutions and student organisations. The Pathfinder Group of countries also wishes to associate European stakeholder groups to its work, in particular HEIs – which take the majority of decisions which affect the holders of diplomas directly – and students. The European Students' Union and the Erasmus Students' Network have kindly agreed to survey their members to get feedback on their experiences and suggestions for improvement.

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<sup>1</sup> This is especially true for the non-regulated professions. As far as the EU is concerned, Directive 2005/36/EC on the recognition of professional qualifications applies to the access to regulated professions. Therefore that recognition is not considered in the work of the Pathfinder Group.

The Pathfinder Group will report on their experiences and suggestions to the BFUG in autumn 2014 so that the BFUG can consider how to present it to Ministers. The Group will also keep the Structural Working Group informed of its progress in the meantime.