



**Euronest Parliamentary Assembly  
Assemblée parlementaire Euronest  
Parlamentarische Versammlung Euronest  
Парламентская Ассамблея Евронест**

Committee on Social Affairs, Education, Culture and Civil Society

## **DRAFT REPORT**

**on the mutual recognition of professional qualifications, work  
experience and the university diplomas within the Bologna process**

Committee on Social Affairs, Education, Culture and Civil Society

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## **EURONEST PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY - MOTION FOR A RESOLUTION**

### **on the mutual recognition of professional qualifications, work experience and the university diplomas within the Bologna process**

*The EURONEST Parliamentary Assembly,*

- having regard to the Joint Declaration of the Eastern Partnership Summit (Vilnius, 28-29 November 2013) Eastern Partnership: the way ahead,
- having regard to the Joint Declaration of the Warsaw Eastern Partnership Summit of 29-30 September 2011,
- having regard to the European Parliament's resolution of 23 October 2013 on '*European Neighbourhood Policy, working towards a stronger partnership – European Parliament's position on the 2012 progress reports*',
- having regard to the Constituent Act of the EURONEST Parliamentary Assembly of 3 May 2011,
- having regard to the Yerevan 14/15.05.2015 Ministerial Communiqué of the EHEA Fourth Bologna Policy Forum and Ministerial Conference,
- having regard to the Joint Communication of 15 May 2012 of the European Commission and of the High Representative of the EU for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy on Eastern Partnership: A Roadmap to the Autumn 2013 Summit,
- having regard to the resolution of 3 April 2012 of the Euronest Parliamentary Assembly on Strengthening of civil society in the Eastern Partnership Countries, including the question of cooperation between government and civil society, and the question of the reforms aimed at the empowerment of civil society,
- having regard to the Sorbonne Joint Declaration on harmonisation of the architecture of the European higher education system by the four Ministers in charge for France, Germany, Italy and the United Kingdom, signed in Paris on 25 May 1998 (Sorbonne Declaration)<sup>(1)</sup>,
- having regard to the Joint Declaration signed in Bologna on 19 June 1999 by the ministers of education from 29 European countries (Bologna Declaration)<sup>(2)</sup>,
- having regard to the Communiqué issued by the Conference of European Ministers responsible for Higher Education held in Leuven and Louvain-la-Neuve on 28 and 29 April 2009<sup>(3)</sup>,
- having regard to the Budapest-Vienna Declaration of 12 March 2010 adopted by the Education Ministers from 47 countries, which officially launched the European Higher Education Area (EHEA)<sup>(4)</sup>,
- having regard to the communiqué issued by the Ministerial Conference and Third Bologna Policy Forum held in Bucharest on 26 and 27 April 2012<sup>(5)</sup>,

- having regard to the Mobility Strategy 2020 for the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) adopted by the EHEA Ministerial Conference held in Bucharest on 26 and 27 April 2012 <sup>(6)</sup> ,
- having regard to Directive 2013/55/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 November 2013 amending Directive 2005/36/EC on the recognition of professional qualifications and Regulation (EU) No 1024/2012 on administrative cooperation through the Internal Market Information System (‘the IMI Regulation’)<sup>(7)</sup> ,
- having regard to the recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 28 September 2005 to facilitate the issue by the Member States of uniform short-stay visas for researchers from third countries travelling within the Community for the purpose of carrying out scientific research<sup>(8)</sup> ,
- having regard to the European Higher Area for Education in 2015 – Bologna Process Implementation Report,
- having regard to the recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 February 2006 on further European cooperation in quality assurance in higher education<sup>(9)</sup> ,
- having regard to the recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 April 2008 on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning (EQF-LLL)<sup>(10)</sup> ,
- having regard to the Council conclusions of 12 May 2009 on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (‘ET 2020’)<sup>(11)</sup> ,
- having regard to the conclusions of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, meeting within the Council, of 26 November 2009 on developing the role of education in a fully-functioning knowledge triangle<sup>(12)</sup> ,
- having regard to the Council conclusions of 11 May 2010 on the internationalisation of higher education<sup>(13)</sup> ,
- having regard to the Council recommendation of 28 June 2011 on policies to reduce early school leaving<sup>(14)</sup> ,
- having regard to the Council recommendation of 28 June 2011 entitled ‘Youth on the Move – Promoting the learning mobility of young people’<sup>(15)</sup> ,
- having regard to the report entitled ‘Higher Education in Europe 2009: Developments in the Bologna Process’ (Eurydice, European Commission, 2009)<sup>(16)</sup> ,
- having regard to the report entitled ‘The European Higher Education Area in 2012: Bologna Process Implementation Report’ (Eurydice, European Commission, 2012)<sup>(18)</sup> ,
- having regard to the Final report of the International Conference on Funding of Higher Education held in Yerevan, Armenia, 8-9 September 2011<sup>(22)</sup> ,
- having regard to its resolution of 23 September 2008 on the Bologna Process and student mobility<sup>(23)</sup> ,

- having regard to its resolution of 13 March 2012 on the contribution of the European institutions to the consolidation and progress of the Bologna Process<sup>(25)</sup> ,
- having regard to the European Fund for Strategic Investments (EFSI),
- having regard to the Association Agreements signed between the European Union and the governments of Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine,
- having regard the Erasmus+ and Erasmus Mundus scholarship schemes,

- A. Whereas the mutual recognition of higher learning diplomas between the EU and the Eastern Partnership (EaP) countries is still a difficult and complex process, despite the advances made by the Bologna Process and the European Higher Education Area,
- B. Whereas students from Eastern countries find it difficult and sometimes impossible to have their diplomas and qualifications duly recognized in some countries of the EU, while at times students from the EU face similar issues within the Union or EaP countries,
- C. Whereas the stumbling blocks in the recognition of diplomas can prevent the fostering of more educational ties between the sides, the promotion of academic research and the overall betterment of many fields of science in Europe,
- D. Whereas there is no particular system for the recognition of professional qualifications for the nationals of EaP countries, which prevents many highly qualified professionals from many regulated fields, such as medicine, engineering, physics and many others from enhancing their skills by practicing them within the European Union, from bringing valuable knowledge back in their home countries but also from filling gaps in the highly skilled workforce of Union member states,
- E. Whereas there is a strong need for more higher learning institutions, including doctoral schools, to be developed in the EaP countries and thus offer more options to local students,
- F. Whereas the current situation often leads to unnecessary duplication of studies and financial resources, but also fosters brain drain with talented nationals from these countries preferring to obtain their diplomas fully outside their home state, therefore depriving many EaP countries from much needed expertise,
- G. Whereas there is little or no consensus within the EU or between the EU and the EaP countries on the recognition of work experience,
- H. Whereas, in more than two thirds of participating countries, final decisions on the recognition of foreign qualifications are the responsibility of higher education institutions themselves ;
- I. Whereas there are still concerns with the fairness, transparency, high standards and accountability of many higher education institutions in many of the EaP countries,

J. Whereas corruption and outdated mentalities dating from Soviet times can still be

encountered within many institutions of higher learning in the Eastern Partnership countries and occasionally in the East of the European Union, something that needs to be addressed and reformed,

- K. Whereas universities are areas that foster the development of new ideas and rely on freedom of speech and thought for the pursuit of academic development, something that can come into conflict with conservative attitudes of many politicians, thus often making students the subject of harassment and even human rights abuses,
- L. Whereas Erasmus+ and Erasmus Mundus programmes are crucial tools for modernising EU and EaP higher education institutions, stimulating international cooperation with EU institutions and contributing to higher education reform and to greater student mobility,

### *General principles*

1. Affirms that mutually recognized quality higher education for students in the European Union and Eastern Partnership (EaP) countries, as well as mutual recognition of professional qualification for key regulated professions and full acknowledgement of work experienced acquired on both sides can be a key to increasing and improving cross-cultural socio-economic ties, fostering peace, development, prosperity and stability,
2. Welcomes the signing of Association Agreements with three countries of the EaP, looking forward to this development having a positive incidence on the mutual recognition of diplomas, and considers it a main priority to find meaningful and lasting means of cooperation with the other countries, ensuring the continuing of cooperation on this and other issues; notes at the same time that the Association Agreement framework is in no way exhaustive in addressing the issues of diploma, qualification and experience recognition but that they do provide enhanced communication and cooperation governmental and parliamentary tools for increased work to be done in these areas,
3. Stresses that the Bologna Process is by no means a one-way system, but is meant to foster development of higher learning and mobility of students between the EU and the EaP countries, with students on both sides in need of a better access to higher learning institution, diploma recognition, scholarship programs and full acceptance in different education systems provided they meet all the necessary academic criteria,
4. Underlines that the current situation, where persistent systemic issues make it difficult for many students and young professionals from the Eastern Partners to see their diplomas or professional qualifications recognised in the EU create an important barrier to the development of good relations between the two sides,
5. Notes that the socio-economic development of the EaP countries can be greatly enhanced by the availability of young graduates, professionals and entrepreneurs who have acquired new experiences in foreign environments, which in turn allows the emergence of new ideas , attracts the trust of foreign investors and helps prevent stagnation,
6. Believes that there is a strong need to reverse the brain drain tendencies of talented youth from the EaP region towards the West, depriving these countries of much needed expertise without which there can be little or no improvements in their societies,

7. Underlines the need for all parties involved in the Eastern Partnership to ensure both in their legislation and practice full access to higher education for all students, with no discrimination based on gender, religion, ethnicity or political views; notes that universities are universally recognized as places of learning and free speech and that fostering academic excellence is best served by protecting students from any manner of persecution or harassment,
8. Considers it a priority for the European Commission to work with responsible academic, administrative and government authorities to prioritise as much as possible addressing the concerns of students and young professionals from the EaP states in order to identify specific issues for their region and find solutions,
9. Stresses that EaP governments need to intensify their efforts for introducing adequate quality controls and assurance systems, together with universities and national authorities responsible for specific regulated professions, in order to offer their nationals adequate possibilities to enrich their studies and experience also in the territory of the European Union,
10. Notes with concern that there are still persistent gender imbalances in the vast majority of EaP countries, and considers that an equal access to tertiary levels of education for both sexes needs to be actively promoted,
11. Points out that since the visa liberalisation process has been achieved for all countries in the EaP with the exception of Belarus, the increased numbers of students from the region interested in furthering their studies in the EU has also increased,

#### *University diplomas in the framework of the Bologna Process*

12. Welcomes the fact that all countries in the EaP are members of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and that, despite various differences in implementation of the Bologna Process principles, they are all striving to reach the same standards in higher education as are present in the rest of the European Union, and that automatic immediate recognition for all higher learning diplomas should be the main goal across the whole area,
13. Further welcomes the dedicated roadmap addressed to Belarus in accordance with the values, principles and goals of the EHEA, seeing in this development a proof of the inclusiveness of the Bologna process; strongly encourages Belarus to create the conditions for the return from Vilnius to Minsk of the European Humanities University, in full respect of academic freedoms and the University's independent self-governance;
14. Considers it that the tools of the Bologna Process, in particular the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) and the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) have at this time a good overall implementation in the Eastern Partners and that, while there are still improvements to be done, the criteria to be recognised by EU counterpart authorities within the European Area of Recognition (EAR) for the automatic recognition of university diplomas should lead to an accelerated and increased rate of diploma recognition of students from EaP countries,
15. Acknowledges that state expenditure in higher learning is widely different between the Eastern Partnership countries, as it is between the Member States of the EU themselves but

deplores the fact that in many EaP countries and the neighbouring EU Member States, the percentage of GDP spent on tertiary education is the lowest seen in all of the EHEA, making the adequate development of the field difficult or impossible,

16. Notes that the Bologna cycle structure for higher learning of BA, MA and PhD, while not implemented identically all across the whole of the EHEA, is mostly respected in the EaP countries, with the problem that there is a distinct lack of adequate numbers of doctoral schools and options for students in these states, which is the main reason of most students affected seeking doctoral degrees elsewhere,

17. Stresses that as higher education institutions themselves are largely the main responsible bodies for quality control criteria and diploma issuing procedures respecting the principles of Bologna and the Lisbon Recognition Convention, there is a strong need for the development of newer, stronger and more independent academic institutions within the EaP members and calls on the EC and EEAS to examine means to promote this development together with national authorities,

18. Urges the governments and parliaments of both Eastern Partnership countries but also EU members states to work to better enforce in national legislation the principles of the Lisbon Recognition Convention regarding both the quality nature of the issuing diplomas on national soil but also on the facilitation of the automatic recognition of diplomas from foreign universities,

19. Points out that corruption, over-centralisation of universities as well as improper levels of state interference, needless bureaucracy, low implementation of quality controls and different standards as regards to the Bologna tools remain the main issues preventing many EU bodies to be able to automatically recognise diplomas issued in the Eastern Partnership countries,

20. Calls on the governments on both sides to step up their efforts to combat corruption in the higher learning system, in particular by ensuring a fair playing field in admission and testing exams, access to resources and classes, equal rights for scholarships and, most importantly, final diplomas being issued only to the students who meet all the needed, internationally recognised academic results necessary for that respective qualification,

21. Strongly calls on the EU bodies but also universities to examine and identify meaningful ways of supporting students from EaP by increasing the number and visibility of academic scholarships targeted at students in these countries, by using the various tools of the Union, but also by encouraging national governments, foundations and NGOs to address the needs of students from the EaP states who often come from under-privileged economic backgrounds and despite high academic performances find it financially difficult to study in the European Union,

22. Welcomes the active participation of the Eastern partners in Erasmus+ and Erasmus Mundus programmes and the fact that their budget absorption capacity is very good; regrets, therefore, that the funding available for the Eastern Partnership countries under these programmes for 2014-2020 has remained roughly equivalent to the previous financial period,

23. Considers it highly important for the objective of fostering more cooperation, to bolster the financial resources available to EU scholarship programmes like the Erasmus Mundus and Erasmus+ schemes targeting specifically Eastern Partnership students, and creating a specific chapter within EU financing schemes for this region, which is of the outmost strategic and

cultural importance for the Union,

*Professional qualifications and work experience*

24. Considers that the mutual recognition of professional qualifications is a necessary step for ensuring several critical steps for the development of both sides in the Eastern Partnership project, including improving temporary mobility for the purpose of job specialisation, opening up the possibilities for nationals of EaP countries to acquire new skills which can be used for improving their professional output back home but also to fill vital gaps in the workforces on both sides,

25. Notes that while professional qualifications are strongly related to the improvement of recognition of diplomas within the Bologna Process, there is no specific document similar to the Directive 2013/55/EU regulating the issue within the EU, the European Economic Area and Switzerland which would currently include the Eastern Partnership countries; encourages, therefore, new initiatives aiming at giving a truly continental dimension to this priority

26. Calls on the European Commission and the EEAS to examine, together with the governments of the EaP states, the possibility to create a new framework for the European Neighbourhood in order to extend the European Professional Card (EPC) system to these partners; would hope that this " European Neighbourhood Professional Card" system would lead to a newer and more dynamic professional mobility in Europe and its surroundings, to the avoidance of capability gaps in various professions across the board and have mutually beneficial effects for all sides,

27. Stresses that any cooperation on the mutual recognition of professional qualifications should be aimed at benefitting the ability of professionals from both sides to enhance their skills and practice, without endangering the workforce availability in the EaP countries, nor creating any imbalances within the EU,

28. Considers the mutual recognition of work experience of skilled workers to be a vital component in the development of a dynamic job market in Europe and that basic criteria should be created that can be shared, between Member States and other partners, in order to record and quantify meaningful work experience of workers,

29. Notes that besides using criteria related to quality, transparency and integrity, member states of the EU should ensure in their national legislations that national authorities dealing with professional qualifications and any associations and employers' federations dealing with work experience recognition will do their utmost to avoid any type of discrimination on any grounds, related to gender, religion, ethnicity or country of origin, including any of the EaP states;

30. Instructs its Co-Presidents to forward this resolution to the President of the European Parliament, to the Council, the Commission, the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the Commission, the EEAS, the governments and parliaments of the Member States and of the Eastern Partnership.