

Cross-border Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area New Developments since the Bucharest Communiqué

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**In Line with European Developments:
Austria's New Quality Assurance System**

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Structure of the presentation



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Introduction



- Since the 1980s, cross-border higher education in Europe has grown considerably through student mobility, the development of joint study programmes and research cooperation.
- National legislation and national QAA have had some difficulties adapting to, and coping with, these new activities because they take place partly beyond their borders.
- **The Bologna Process has accelerated these trends and has developed a common framework adopted by all signatories to facilitate a dialogue between national actors.**

Part 1- Some progress around EQAR registered agencies



1.1 A favorable European context

- **Clear will of the EHEA ministers:**

“ We will allow EQAR registered agencies to perform their activities across the EHEA, while complying with national requirements. In particular we will aim to recognise QA decisions of EQAR-registered agencies on joint and double degree programmes. ” (Bucharest Communiqué, 2012)
- **Commitment of all HE actors to EQAR’s success.** They are concerned by and involved in EQAR; HEIs, students and QAAs support and manage EQAR and have fixed as a strategic goal:

“the international trust and recognition of registered QAAs, their results and decisions throughout the EHEA”
- **Mutual trust already exists among national QAAs** who have been working together (trainings, seminars, workshops) and exchanging best practices through ENQA for many years.

Part 1- Some progress around EQAR-registered agencies



1.2 General trend

- Countries have started to open their HE system to non-national QAAs for programme or institutional evaluations
- Most often with some restrictions:
 - After a first national accreditation
 - If using the same criteria as the national QAA
 - Final decision still in the hands of national authorities
 - Reserved to EQAR-registered agencies that are ECA members

Part 1- Some progress around EQAR registered agencies



1.3 Interesting examples

- **Austria** July 2011 law: EQAR-registered agencies are placed at same level as the Austrian national QA agency for the' periodic external institutional audit requirements of public universities.
- **Flanders** July 2013 law: automatic, full recognition of HE degrees given after successful completion of programmes accredited by an accreditation agency included in EQAR.
- **Denmark** for the accreditation of Erasmus Mundus joint programmes or Danish diplomas offered abroad: internationally recognised agencies play the same role as the national Danish agency; EQAR-registered agencies are automatically “recognised”.
- **Poland**
 - to apply for the right to offer doctorate degrees, Polish HEIs must be reviewed by an EQAR-registered agency
 - to have the right to establish branch HEIs or departments in Poland, foreign HEIs must be accredited by any EQAR-registered agency

Part 2- How to achieve more



2.1 EQAR's contribution through an analysis of the recognition of registered agencies (EC grant 10/2013 - 9/2014)

Purposes:

- Understand the rationales of countries that do not recognise foreign EQAR-registered agencies
- Inform stakeholders and policy makers and enable them to build on the experiences of different EHEA countries
- Promote, through EQAR, international trust and recognition of registered QAA agencies as well as their results and decisions

Outcomes:

- Mapping the national legal frameworks
- Highlighting the experience of higher education institutions and understanding the benefits of working with (EQAR-registered) QAAs from other countries
- Examining the reasons that are behind the QAAs' pursuit of international activities

Part 2- How to achieve more



2.2 As a first step, find a solution for the QA of joint degrees in the EHEA

- **Paradox of the EHEA: joint programmes and QA are strongly promoted but coexist without links**
- **At the moment, no clear QA procedures for joint programmes, even for Erasmus Mundus Master label that have existed for several years**
- Two BFUG working groups are trying to propose one procedure built on EQAR-registered agencies and their substantial compliance with the ESG principles adopted in the EHEA
- This could also help promoting an automatic recognition of degrees within the EHEA

Conclusion: why is it so difficult to make progress?



For reasons linked to QA in the EHEA

- Great diversity of European QA practices (evaluation, accreditation, audit, etc.)
- National and historical specificity in awarding degrees (as ECA study shows) and of linguistic diversity in Europe (QAA are not able to operate everywhere)
- QA and finance (easier if the link was not so tight in many countries)

For more general reasons

- National authorities and agencies: are they prepared to loose some control or power ?
- Why adopt rules only for EHEA in a global context?