

European Quality Assurance  
Register for Higher Education



# Recognising International Quality Assurance Activity in the European Higher Education Area (RIQAA)



Lifelong  
Learning  
Programme

With the support of the Lifelong Learning  
Programme of the European Union

European Quality Assurance  
Register for Higher Education



# Findings on the recognition of External Quality Assurance (EQA) reviews across borders

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RIQAA Final Conference, EQAR Members' Dialogue



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# Outline



1. European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR)
2. Recognising International Quality Assurance Activity in the EHEA
3. Findings on the recognition of External Quality Assurance (EQA) reviews across borders
4. Conclusions

# 1. European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR)



Register of quality assurance agencies that comply substantially with European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (ESG)

- Established by E4 at Ministers' request
- Jointly governed by stakeholders (E4, social partners) and EHEA governments
- External review of agencies by independent experts
- Independent **Register Committee**
  - Composed of 11 quality assurance experts
  - Nominated by E4, but not representatives
  - Takes all decisions related to registration



# EQAR's role in the EHEA



European reference point for QAAs working in substantial compliance with the ESG;

*“The purpose of the register is to allow all stakeholders and the general public open access to objective information about trustworthy quality assurance agencies that are working in line with the ESG” (London Communique, 2007)*

Ensure trust and recognition in QAAs

*“[...]to enhance confidence in higher education in the EHEA and beyond, and facilitate the mutual recognition of quality assurance and accreditation decisions” (London Communique, 2007)*

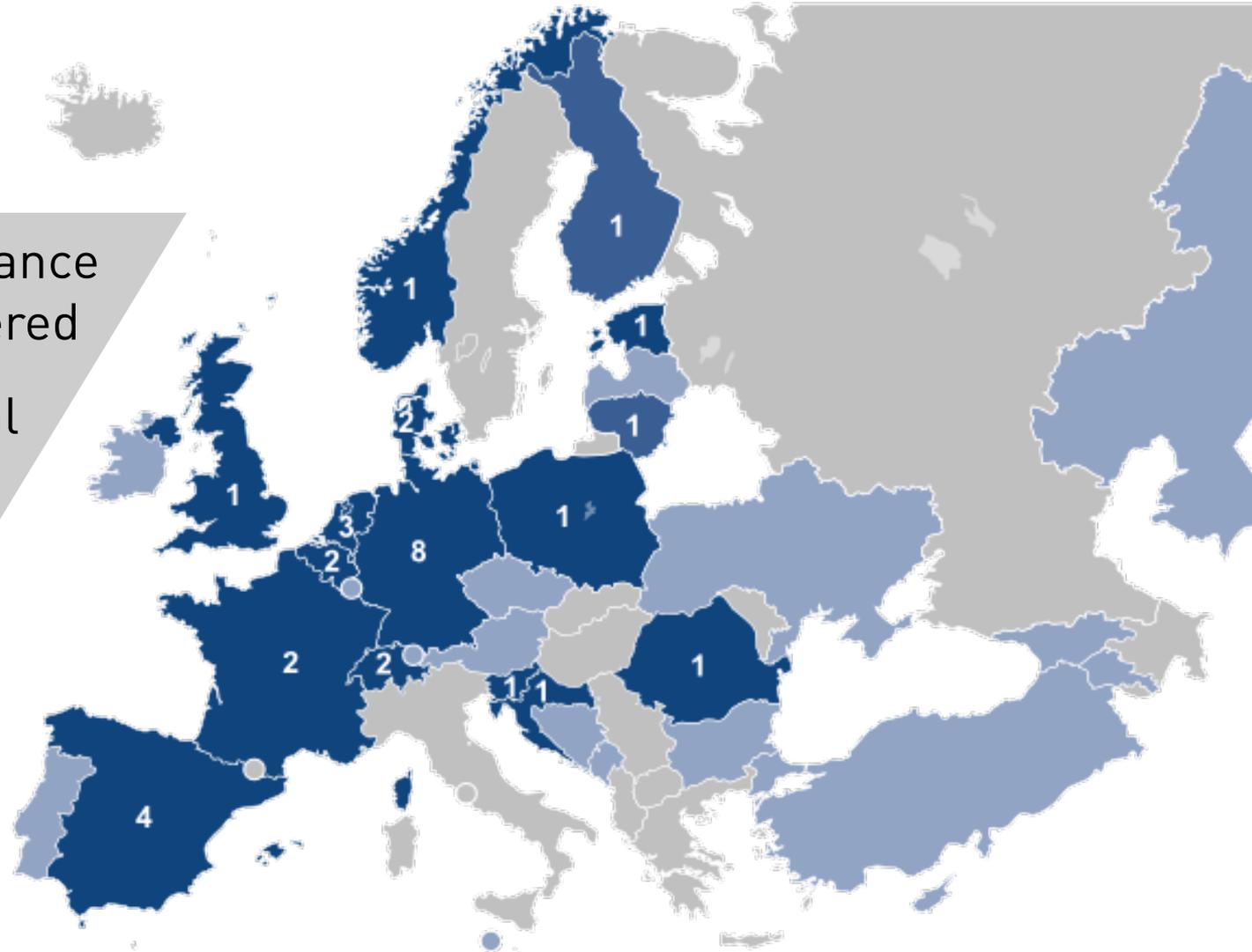
Facilitate cross-border recognition of QAAs

*“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 quality assurance decisions of EQAR-registered-agencies on joint and double degree programmes.” (Bucharest Communiqué (2012)*

# Agencies and Governments



- 32 quality assurance agencies registered
- 31 Governmental Members



## **Strategic Goal 1: International Trust and Recognition of Registered Quality Assurance Agencies Across Europe**

In line with national requirements:

- > all EQAR-registered agencies and their decisions are officially recognised
- > all EHEA countries allow higher education institutions to request evaluation, audit or accreditation by any registered agency to fulfil their formal external quality assurance obligations.

## **Strategic Goal 2: Enhanced Transparency and Information Provision EQAR**

- > operates transparently, responds to the expectations of its key target groups and provides information that is useful to them.

## 2. Recognition of External Quality Assurance (EQA) reviews across borders



### Research questions:

How **higher education institutions (HEIs)** make use of the possibilities to request quality reviews by foreign agencies listed on the Register, as well as their rationale behind it.

What are the different dimensions/levels of recognition, specific **national requirements** in place as well as inhibiting factors both on the side of governments and HEIs.

What is the extent of the cross-border external quality assurance activity within EHEA? What are the opportunities and challenges faced by **QA agencies** carrying out reviews across borders?

Implementation: “Recognising International Quality Assurance Agencies Activity in the EHEA” (**RIQAA**) with co-founding from the EU Lifelong Learning Programme

1. Desk research mapping recognition of EQAR-registered QAAs across the EHEA
2. Qualitative analysis on the rationale for international EQA activity of (EQAR-registered) quality assurance agencies
  - Survey “Cross Border EQA Activities of QAAs”  
*(February – March & May-June 2014);*
  - A seminar for quality assurance agency representatives  
*(Bayreuth, 29-30 April 2014)*
3. Overview of 12 HEIs experience with an international quality review
4. Final project report & final conference (*Palermo, 21-22 October 2014*)

## 3. Findings

- ❑ Overview of national legal frameworks on cross-border EQA
  - ❑ Analysis of cross-border EQA activity
  - ❑ QAAs & HEIs experience with cross-border EQA
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# Overview of national legal frameworks on cross-border EQA

# 'Readiness' to cross-border EQA

20 of the EHEA member countries allow (under certain conditions) their HEIs (some or all) to discharge their obligatory external quality assurance (EQA) requirement with a foreign QAA

12 of these 20 EHEA members have specifically referenced EQAR listed QAAs within their legal provisions

A manifold of national legal specificities:

- the possibility of HEIs to choose a QAA is sometime limited to:
  - a certain group of HEIs (e.g. full universities in Austria)
  - to certain types of external QA (e.g. only for programme accreditation, but not for institutional accreditation (LT) or not for initial accreditation.
- Conditions of a prior agreement with the national QAA (AM, PT, NL) or being accredited by the national council/register (DE, KZ)

# Cross-Border Openness to EQAR-Registered QA Agencies



- Countries recognising internationally active EQAR-registered agencies to operate as part of the national requirements for external QA;
- Countries recognising foreign agencies as part of the national requirements for external QA
- Countries not open to external QA evaluation by an internationally active EQAR-registered QA agency

# Characteristic of national legal frameworks on cross-border EQA

Country	Which agencies?		Which HEIs?			Which types of EQA?		Recognition?	
	EQAR-reg.	National req.	All	Some	Only JD/TNE	Inst.	Prog.	Directly	Approval
BG	■		■			■	■	■	
DK	■				■		■	■	
LI	■		■			■	■	■	
RO	■		■			■	■	■	
AT	■			■		■	□	■	
PL	■				■	■	■	■	
KZ	■		■			□	■	■	
AL	■		■			■	■		■
AM	■		■			■	■		■
BE-Fl	■		■			□	■		■
LT	■		■			□	■		■
PL	■				■	■	■		■
DE*	■				■	□	■		■
DE*	■	■				■	■	■	
EE		■	■			■	■		■
AZ		■	■			■	■	■	
DE		■	■			■	■	■	
FI		■	■			■		■	
MD		■	■			■	■	■	
CH		■		■			■	■	
ME		■	■			■	■		■
NL		■	■				■		■
PT		■	■			■	■		■
TR		■	■			■	■		■

# EQA of joint programmes



often “fragmented”:

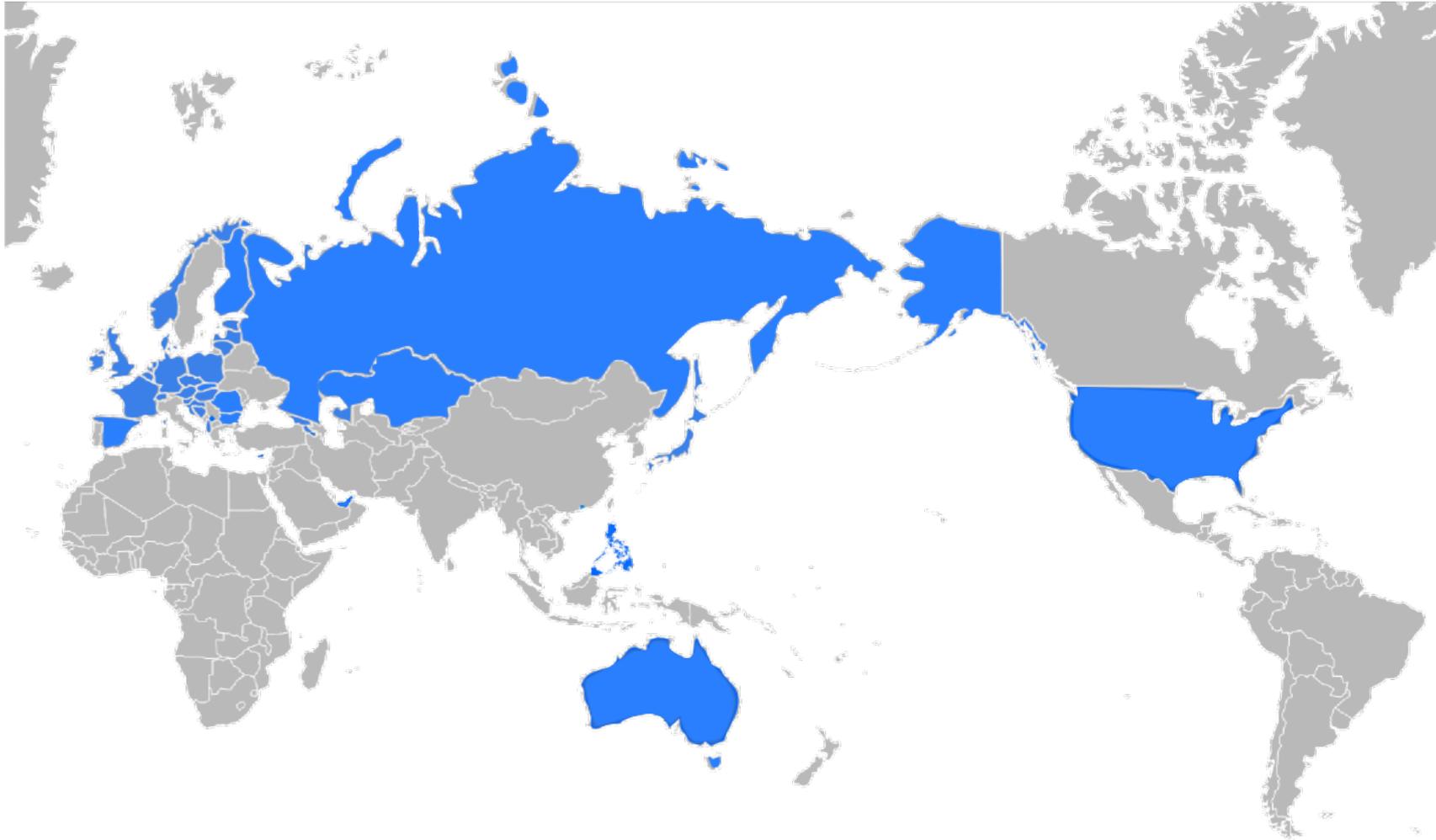
- Accreditation/evaluation procedures, external quality assurance of joint programmes is different, agencies from different countries review the bits and pieces of the programme delivered in “their” country
- European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes proposed by the BFUG

# Analysis of cross-border EQA activity

# Launching a survey to QAAs

(February- March & May-June 2014)

eqar



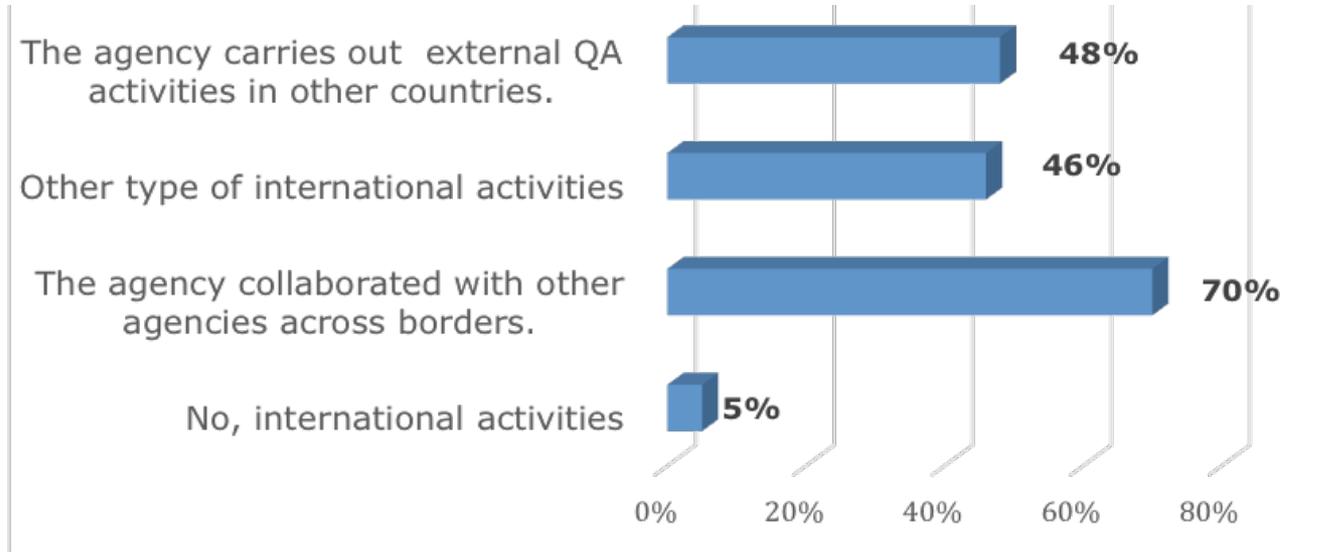
- 30 EHEA & 7 non EHEA QAAs

## Profile of surveyed QAAs:

- 7 QAAs set up primarily with the purpose of cross-border EQA (e.g. AEC, EAPAA, ECCE, FIBAA, IEP)
  - Half of the nationally or regionally established QAAs carry out reviews across borders
  - 2/3 of QAAs that carry reviews across borders are registered in EQAR
  - Some QAAs are not allowed to carry out reviews across borders (i.e. CAA, AI)
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## □ Survey of cross-border EQA

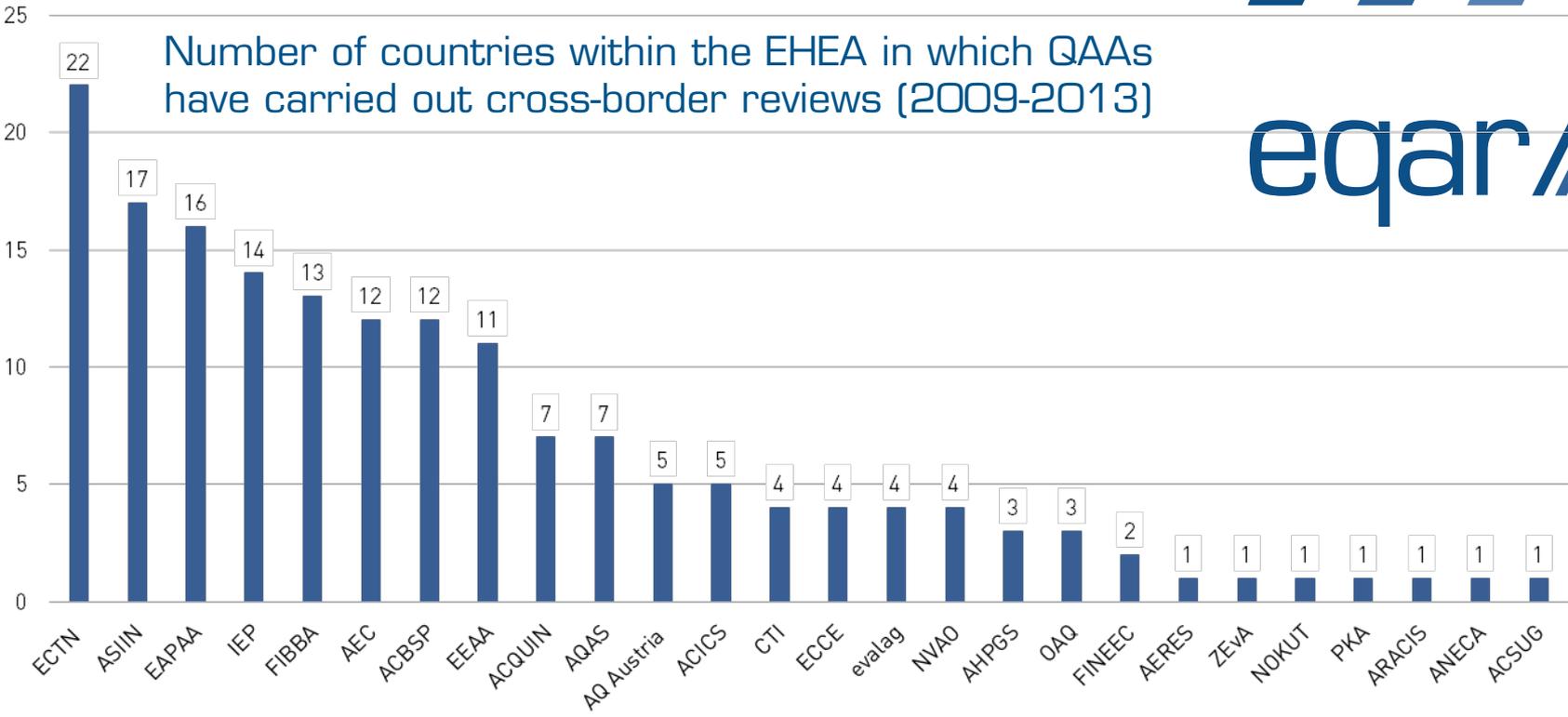
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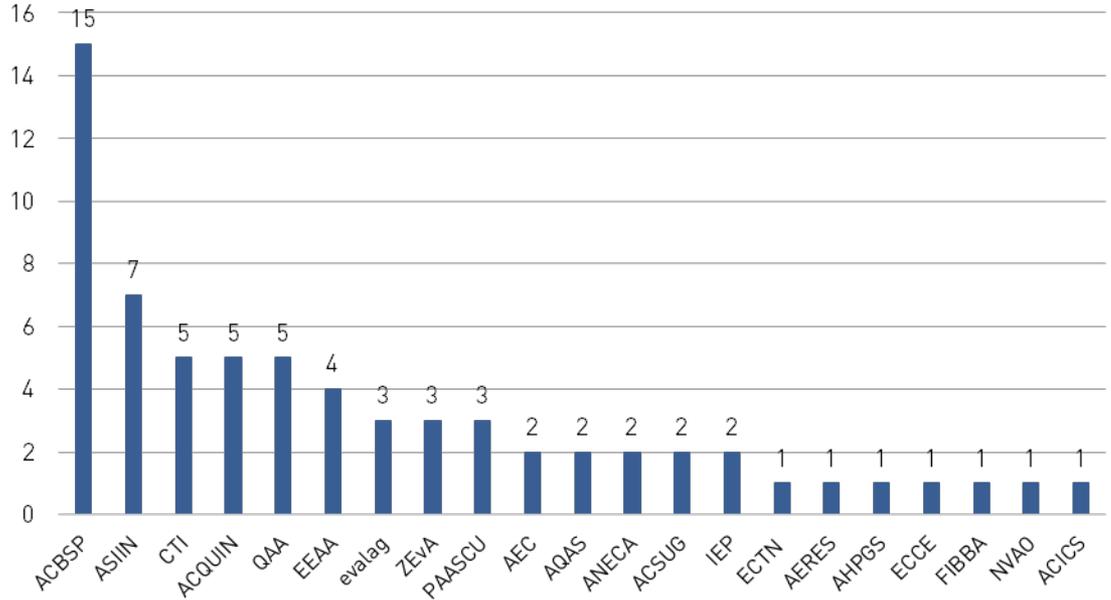
The international dimension of quality assurance seems to be part of the daily life of QA agencies:

- International QA activities (international quality assurance networks, bilateral cooperation and agreements, joint projects etc)

### Number of countries within the EHEA in which QAAs have carried out cross-border reviews (2009-2013)



### Number of countries outside the EHEA in which QAAs have carried out cross-border reviews (2009-2013)

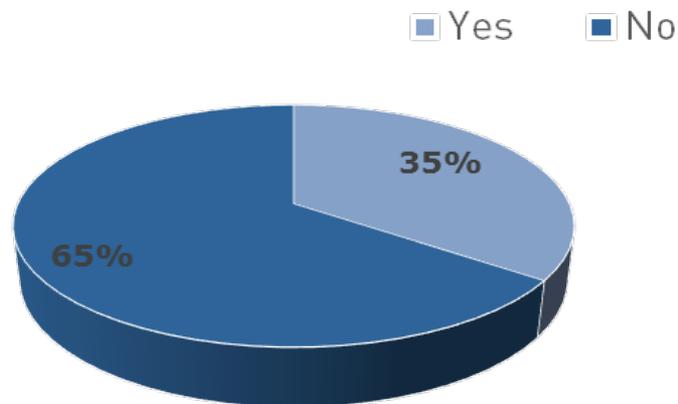


## Some findings regarding EQA practices

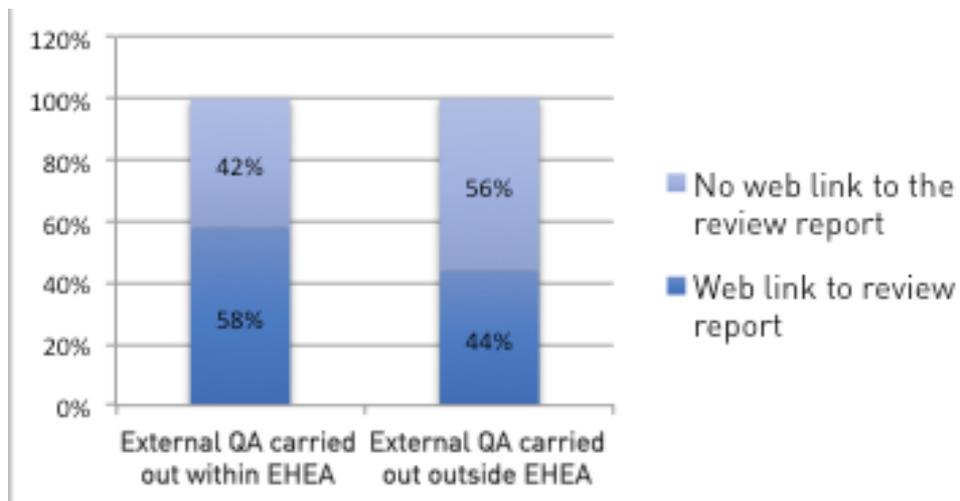
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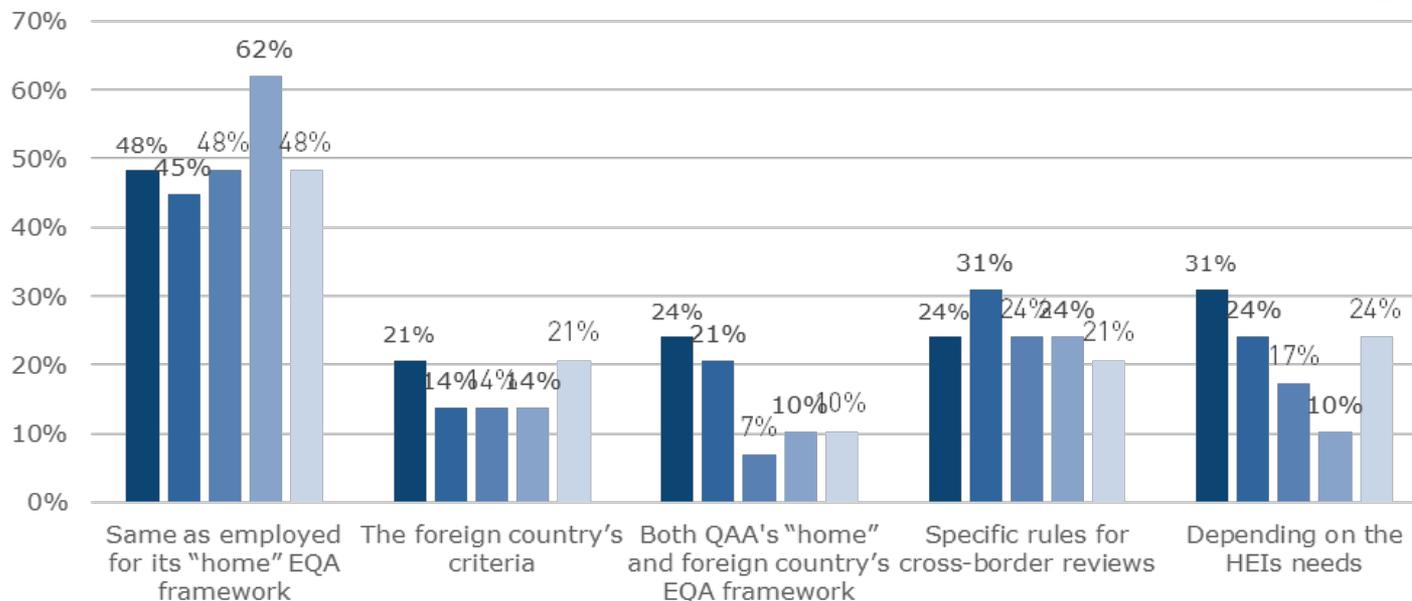
Specific policies regarding cross-border EQA



Publication of reports



# Criteria and processes employed by QAAs across borders



- a) Criteria for decisions and formal outcomes
- b) Composition of the expert group
- c) Publication of reports
- d) Appeals or complaints procedure
- e) Follow-up activities

- HEIs experience with cross-border EQA

# 12 case study interviews



## I. HEIs from 4 countries that recognise reviews of foreign EQAR-registered agencies as part of the national requirements for external QA (National setting I):

**Austria:** Universität Wien (OAQ, quality audit 2013), University of Graz (FINHEEC, institutional audit, 2013)

**Belgium:** Flemish Community (BE-nl) Ghent University (AQAS Joint degree accreditation, 2012/2013) & Royal Military School (CTI & NVAO joint review, 2011)

**Lithuania:** VTDK University (evalag, programme accreditation 2011); Mykolas Romeris University in Vilnius (AHPGS, programme accreditation 2011)

**Romania:** University of Bucharest (IEP evaluation, 2012) & Dimitrie Cantemir University from Targu Mures (AHPGS, programme accreditation, 2012)

## II. HEIs from 4 countries that do not recognise (or are in progress of recognising) cross-border reviews (National setting II):

**Croatia:** University of Zagreb (ASIIN, Faculty of Electrical Engineering and Computing, accreditation 2013 and Faculty of Civil Engineering, programme accreditation 2013);

**France :** Centre d' Etudes Supérieures Européennes (CESEM) at NEOMA Business School (FIBAA, accreditation of a double degree, 2011) ;

**Sweden:** University of Lund (Lund School of Economics and Management - LUSEM, EFMD accreditation, 2014);

**Portugal:** University of Aveiro (IEP evaluation, 2007).

# Case-study Research Questions

Research dimension	General Questions	Specific questions
Description of the institutional/programme review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>When was the QA review carried out? What type of QA review was carried out?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li></li> </ul>
The rationale for the review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Why has the HEI turned to a non-national QAA? Is this the first experience with a cross-border EQA review?</li> <li>Was the institution responsible for selecting the QAA? If so, how was the selection process organised? If not, how was this decision made?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>NS1</i>: Has the institution also carried out an external review with a national QA</li> <li><i>Joint/double degree</i>: Was a consultation process set up with the partnering institution(s) for selecting the QAA?</li> </ul>
The review process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What were the main criteria of the selection process for the QAA? (e.g. International profile, expertise in a specific field/discipline, affordability, reputation, better recognition of degrees abroad, methodology approach (best support in enhancing our QA), country of origin, working language, other).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>NS1</i>: Why didn't the HEI select a national QAA for the review?</li> </ul>
Results: perception and impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What did the HEI find noteworthy (and different from what it is used to) in terms of how the agency worked? (e.g. composition of panels, drafting/style of reports, conduct of interviews, sort of people to be interviewed)</li> <li>What were the main impressions regarding the external QA review?</li> <li>What were the main challenges encountered? At what level? How were they overcome?</li> <li>What were the main benefits of the evaluation? / Did the HEI get what it had hoped for from this process? / Would the institution be interested in contacting the QAA for another review?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li></li> <li><i>NS2</i>: Would the HEIs choose a cross-border QAA to fulfil the official requirements for external QA if the possibility existed?</li> </ul>

# The rationale for the review



Increasing the international visibility and reputation (NS1 & NS2)



Development of institution's management and organisation



Achieving "Bologna-compatible" degrees



Development of institution's quality culture



Seeking a different EQA review or approach



The reviews were sometimes carried out in the context of national reforms or to achieve accreditation for regulated professions.

# Selection of a suitable QAA



International reputation



Expertise in a particular field



Peers



Affordability



Language



Country of origin



The selection process involves considerable desk research (e.g. *expertise in different methodologies of external quality assurance, countries where agencies have worked*)

# General Findings on the opportunities and challenges in cross-border EQA



	Opportunities	Challenges
<b>Higher education institutions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>International profile</li><li>QA that fits their needs</li><li>Specialised agency</li><li>Stakeholder engagement</li><li>Development of IQA</li><li>Strengthening own responsibility for quality</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Extensive preparation phase</li><li>Understanding of the national educational system</li><li>Legislative context</li><li>Language barriers</li><li>Complexity of the review</li></ul>
<b>QA agencies</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>International experience</li><li>Enhance their methods</li><li>Expand their network</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Familiarise with foreign system</li><li>Capacity (peers, language, etc.)</li><li>Basis on which to work (adapting to different national requirements )</li></ul>
<b>Governments</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Institutional responsibility</li><li>International openness within the EHEA and beyond</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Less control</li><li>Funding of external QA</li></ul>

# Conclusions



- ESG working as a sound and Solid Basis for Cross-Border EQA
- Slow Progress in Opening National Systems
- HEIs Making Use of New Opportunities
- QAAs Increasing EQA Activity Across Borders
- Systematised Activities of Cross Border EQA



Thank you for your attention!

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