REAL-TIME SYSTEMS
Reflections on Higher Education in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovenia

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Real-time systems *(An ICT definition)*

In real-time multiprocessing there is the extra requirement that the system complete its response to any input within a certain critical time. This poses additional problems, particularly in situations where the system is heavily loaded and is subject to many simultaneous demands. Real-time systems are always dedicated. Most systems are not real-time.

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8. Degrees of Trust or Trust of Degrees? Quality assurance and recognition

Marijk van der Wende & Don Westerheijden

Introduction

In this chapter, we analyse the current state of higher education bringing together two policy instruments, which are like mirror approaches to the issue of transparency and mobility in the European higher education area, issues which have not been seen in a coherent fashion until very recently, namely quality assurance (which addresses the issue of degrees of trust), and international recognition of diplomas (the question of trust in degrees).

In the first part of our chapter we will present a sketch of trends in quality assurance in Europe, with a special focus on the four Central European countries. Its theme might be interpreted as how quality assurance, particularly in the form of accreditation, is a policy instrument that in these times of mass higher education has to replace traditional trust in the quality of university education. In the current context, we will move on from quality assurance instruments to international developments and especially the Bologna process as both the culmination of national developments and a source of new challenges. The issue of challenges is where we can make the transfer to the mirror image, because an older policy instrument for international relations in higher education was the recognition of degrees. The second part of our chapter therefore describes this instrument and its achievements over the decades. The third part – by way of a synthesis – addresses the question of how the two are brought together, as is now happening lately, and how this influences the agenda for future action in the European higher education area. Finally, in our conclusion we pose the burning question: what are the practical consequences for actors in Central and Eastern Europe of these developments at the 'lofty' European level?

Quality Assurance in Europe: Some historical notes

Quality Comes to Western Europe

'Quality' in the sense of achieving academic excellence always has been a central value in higher education. Neave rightly stated "quality is not 'here to stay', if only for

the self-evident reason that across the centuries of the university's existence in Europe, it never departed" (Neave, 1994: 116). However, quality as a separate instrument in university management and in government policy only started in the 1970s and 1980s, when it was discovered as a new management tool in industry mimicking the successes of the Japanese economy. First, higher education in the USA was influenced, later, around 1984, the first governmental policies were implemented in Western Europe. Apart from the old isomorphic drive to copy whatever seemed successful in US higher education, and the new isomorphic drive to copy whatever seemed successful in industry,[1] there were a number of reasons why new governance tools became necessary in Western European higher education at that point in time. In brief, they are (van Vught, 1994):

- 'massification' of higher education;
- the limits of central control were reached within these expanded higher education systems;
- deregulation was in vogue at the time, when neo-liberalism made a forceful entry into the political arena;
- governmental budget limits were reached, again because of the massification of higher education, but also more generally because governments under the neo-liberal influence were unwilling to increase the ratio of public to private earnings even more to maintain the welfare state.

This put 'value for money' high on the agenda, which resulted in higher education institutions being given autonomy to do 'more with less', as one of the half-serious, half-sarcastic slogans went. As Trow observed quite sharply, evaluation policies indicated the breakdown of the traditional degree of trust in society that higher education was functioning at a high level of quality (Trow, 1994, 1996).

Spreading the Gospel

The 'pioneer countries' in Western Europe, the United Kingdom, France and the Netherlands, started around 1985 with their first formal quality assessment policies.[2] In 1990, Denmark was first to follow these pioneers, and from then on, the 'quality movement' spread to the rest of Western Europe as a late 20th century version of the gospel. The conditions of higher education were similar all across Western Europe , as were the tendencies to mimic. An important tool in spreading the gospel of external quality assessment was the European Union Pilot Project, implemented in 1994

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1 We stress 'seems' here, because of the mimetic character of much of this copying behaviour, witnessed by the fact that many similar 'fads' fade away without leaving many traces after a number of years (Birnbaum, 2000).
2 Without attempting formal definitions, we use the term 'quality assessment' to denote the judgement or measurement of quality, while 'quality assurance' includes the institution's quality management as well as activities (possibly including external quality assessment) intended to inform society about quality. 'Evaluation' will be used as an umbrella term, covering all types of processes involving judgements about higher education programmes or institutions/units. When it comes to the agencies involved, the terms quality assurance agency and evaluation agency will be used as synonyms (pointing to the main function and the umbrella term of their activities, respectively), while 'accreditation agency' will only be used for organisations that do indeed accredit, i.e. connect a formal judgement involving at least a 'pass/no pass' decision to their evaluation activities.

(Management Group, 1995). It consisted of evaluation exercises involving one or two programmes in two knowledge areas in all (the then) EU countries.

In 1998, as a late consequence of the EU pilot project, the Commission of the EU made a recommendation to establish and support a network of the EU member states' quality assurance agencies (Kern, 1998). This network, the European Network of Quality Assessment Agencies (ENQA), became operational in 2000. By 2002, it had 36 member organizations and 30 government members. A voluntary but exclusive membership body, ENQA is for that reason heterogeneous in nature. The character of its operation is professional – a body of quality assurance experts – rather than political, although its work inevitably has political consequences, a fact of which ENQA certainly is aware.

In the same year, just before the Sorbonne and Bologna Declarations shifted the whole scene, two inventories were made of quality assurance provisions in Western Europe (Centre for Quality Assurance and Evaluation of Higher Education, 1998; Scheele, Maassen, & Westerheijden, 1998). From both, it can be concluded that almost all Western European countries at that moment had a government policy to assess quality in higher education. (The most notable exceptions were Germany, Italy and Greece.) Spontaneous serious involvement of universities in quality assurance without governmental policies were rare; among the few exceptions we note that several dozens of universities volunteered for the CRE's Institutional Evaluation Programme). And if universities engaged in quality assurance voluntarily, its effectiveness tended to be much more pronounced than when complying with government-initiated policies (Brennan & Shah, 2000).

At the level of instruments, one could find similar elements in practically all the quality assurance systems of Western Europe (van Vught & Westerheijden, 1994). All countries used different models of evaluation, with common elements, viz.:
- Managing agents (at the higher education systems level, operationally more or less independent from government);
- Self-evaluation, as the corner-stone of the evaluation methodology, in combination with
- Peer review (or external review if we use the term 'peer' in a strict sense, denoting that fellow-academics rather than other stakeholders, or in some cases even governmental inspectors, take part in external evaluations);
- Public reporting, for accountability reasons, of at least a summary of the evaluation results (national traditions regarding openness of public documents seemed to influence the degree of public accessibility of quality assurance documents);
- Some relationship with governmental funding decisions, although most often in an indirect and non-formulaic manner.

Central and Eastern Europe: Fall of the Wall, Rise of Accreditation Walls

With the demise of the communist-party regimes of Central and Eastern Europe in 1989–1990, the issue of quality assurance presented itself in a very different form in

this half of the continent. Various institutional arrangements were conceived to cope with the changes. In short, we might say that the main purposes of introducing quality assurance policies in Central and Eastern Europe included (cf. also Westerheijden & Sorensen, 1999):

- Transformation of higher education curricula to eradicate Marxist-Leninist dogma (which mainly affected curricula in humanities and social sciences, while curricula in technology and sciences were touched only in part or not at all).
- Rapid expansion to accommodate tremendous excess-demand for higher education (reflecting the needs of post-industrial societies in combination with the elite character of the higher education systems).
- Much freer entry to the higher education market than previously possible, for national private higher education institutions as well as for foreign (public and private) higher education institutions.
- Not mentioned by Westerheijden & Sorensen, but underlying these changes, was the change of the relationship between the state and higher education institutions: the state retreated radically from its former practice of strict central control, which led to extremely decentralised higher education systems.

Of course we shall go into the actual state of affairs in the four countries below, but we would argue that in general the model used for quality assurance in Central and Eastern European countries was that of state-controlled accreditation of all programmes and/or institutions in the country. Accreditation was used, in various situations, as a wall to keep out 'rogue' provision of higher education.

Briefly, the differences between Western European style evaluation and accreditation can be characterized as shown in Table 1. The contrasts are to some extent ideal-type contrasts: by far not all external quality assessment in Western Europe is improvement-oriented, nor does it always aim for diversity and innovation. Indeed, some observers would argue that on these dimensions, there is no difference between the *actual* external reviews of Western and Central/Eastern Europe. The point of the comparison is, however, that the emphasis placed on compliance with predefined standards of resources (including staff) and of curriculum content almost completely precludes any of the more developmental uses of external review.

Table 1: Evaluation vs. accreditation

Evaluation	Accreditation
Defined as: To estimate worth	Defined as: To give authority
Improvement orientation possible	Accountability orientation
'Fitness for purpose' possible	Threshold standards
Emphasis on self-evaluation	Emphasis on external evaluation
Diversity	Uniformity
Innovation	Compliance

Probing further into the different types of evaluation systems and their relationship in this context, we proposed the following contingency table (Table 2), showing how certain types of societal problem definitions (column 1) define different needs for

quality assurance to cover (column 2), with different types of information (column 3) and different types of external review (column 4).

Table 2: Phases in quality assurance systems (adapted from Jeliazkova & Westerheijden, 2002)

1 Problems	2 Role of evaluation	3 Information base	4 Nature of external review
Phase 1: Serious doubts about educational standards.	Identifying sub-standard educational programs.	Descriptive reports. Performance indicators.	Summative; accreditation, checking standards. Report to state.
Phase 2: Doubts about the efficiency of the higher education system and/or institutions.	a) Public accountability. b) Creating quality awareness in institutions.	Descriptive / strategic reports ('self-selling') covering: a) performance, b) procedures.	Ranking of institutions. One report to state and institutions. Identifying good practices.
Phase 3: Doubt about innovation capacity and quality assurance capacity of institutions.	Stimulate self-regulation capacity of institutions. Public accountability.	Self-evaluation reports about: a) procedures, b) performance.	Audit report to: – the institution – the state
Phase 4: Need to stimulate sustainable quality culture in institutions.	Split between: – improvement based on self-regulation; – public accountability.	Split between: – self-evaluative reports about processes and strategies based on SWOT and benchmarking; – self-reporting about performance indicators.	Split between: – audit report to the institution; – verifying data to be incorporated in public databases.
New challenge: Decreasing transparency across higher education systems.	Market regulation, i.e., informing clients (students, employers).	Performance indicators about 'products' (knowledge and skills of graduates).	Accreditation; Individual graduate-level information

Admittedly, this contingency table is a proposal, its reasoning based on theoretical tendencies and possibilities, informed but not constrained by the practice of quality assurance in higher education around the world. The proposal is intended to emphasise that evaluation systems are policy instruments in a certain policy (problem) context, that 'solving' one problem almost automatically leads to another (demanding a different approach to quality), and that actors need time to learn their roles in each phase.

A main difference between Western and Central/Eastern Europe at the time of introducing evaluation systems was that in the West, state-supported higher education systems already had made the change from elite to mass systems, with a reasonable level of state funding. Minimum quality levels therefore were not at the forefront of the social problems to be solved by introducing evaluation. More often, problems centred

on the lack of efficiency in performing the new tasks for an enlarged student population (in the UK explicitly in terms of 'value for money', in other countries like Germany in terms of the long time to degree and high drop-out rates). Assessment was an instrument fitted for this task. In Central and Eastern Europe, minimum levels were at stake, because they had to be redefined after the fall of communism, and had to be preserved in the face of 'rogue providers' (private higher education was received with a good dose of scepticism), making accreditation a perfectly sensible option.

In some of the more 'mature' cases in Western Europe, one could point to a development of the evaluation system to a higher level by the end of the 1990s. However, at that moment the Sorbonne and Bologna Declarations changed the problem situation almost completely, putting international transparency and mobility issues at the top of the policy agenda. A number of state governments immediately turned to accreditation with its clear yes/no distinction as the epitome of transparency. Alternatively, we proposed that as attention focused on individual graduates' capabilities and as fixed degree programmes more and more seemed to be giving way to modularisation (e.g., indicated by the rise of ECTS) and individual degree 'routes', the real issue was not so much at the programme level, but rather at the individual level. Originally, we mentioned the possibility of testing or assessing individual graduates, following a suggestion by American higher education researcher Elaine El-Khawas. Later in this chapter, we will see that a more generic entry in the bottom-right cell of Table 2, fits nicely into the current agenda of developments.

State of the art on QA in four countries

Now let us look at the four countries that are the prime focus of this book. Does their development of evaluation schemes invalidate the general scheme set out above?

Czech Republic

The Czech Republic gave the 1989 'Velvet Revolution' its name. The country also led the way in the development of a new higher education regime, adopting a new law in 1990 (Westerheijden, 1995). A single, statewide accreditation commission was established at the same time and has remained in place until the present time. The commission consists of 21 academics, appointed by the Government on the nomination of the Minister of Education who takes into consideration the suggestions of different bodies from within the academic community (to ensure the commission's independence), and supported by a staff office located within the Ministry of Education (Šebková, 2003).

The higher education Act of 1998 retained the Accreditation Commission in the same organisational form but expanded its role. One of its new tasks was to provide the Ministry with an expert view (based partly on evaluation, partly on 'standards') on   the quality of study programmes. This was to form the basis for ministerial decisions on awarding accreditation. All programs of study, in public as well as private higher education institutions, have to be accredited regularly in order to enrol students,   hold lectures or examinations, and to have the right to confer academic degrees. The Accreditation Commission's judgement is for all intents considered to be binding advice

to the Ministry of Education which has very limited space to diverge from it when awarding accreditation. The Accreditation Commission also advises the Ministry about the establishment of private higher education institutions and about conferring "higher" rights (habilitation, appointment of professors). The possibilities for the Ministry to diverge from the Accreditation Commission's advice are severely limited also in these matters.

Apart from expert views used in accreditation process, the Accreditation Commission was mandated to take care of the overall quality of higher education. In practice this means that it is engaged in improvement-oriented evaluations of faculties, but without punitive consequences. The public information developed through these evaluations is intended as a tool for institutional management to follow recommendations for improvement. This was also intended to help the ministry develop long-term strategies with respect to the institutional strong and weak points discovered by the evaluation (Šebková, 2003).

Hungary

Hungary's first new higher education law after the demise of communism was a hotly debated topic and accordingly was agreed upon only in 1993 (Westerheijden, 1995). It introduced a single Hungarian Accreditation Council (HAC), consisting of 30 academic members and a number of non-voting members (from disciplines not covered among the 30, from government agencies involved in higher education, as well as two student members, one for PhD candidates and one for undergraduate students). Members are drawn from higher education institutions, research institutes and professional organizations. HAC also has an international advisory board, which seems to be a unique feature among European quality assurance agencies. Also close to unique was the external evaluation that the HAC itself underwent in 1999–2000 (Rozsnyai, 2003).

By law, Hungarian higher education institutions and their programmes have to be accredited at the time they are first established and every eight years (Rozsnyai, 2003). The first round of institutional accreditations was completed in 2001. HAC used a strategy of gradual introduction of accreditation: first, the plans for PhD programmes were subject to accreditation. After 1989, as in many Central and Eastern European countries, the control over PhD training reverted from the Academies of Sciences to the universities, which was seen as a good time to establish the HAC and to seek clarity on the subject among the Hungarian universities. Moreover, this is the one area where the HAC has autonomy in making decisions, while in other matters it advises the Minister, Government and Parliament.

Like its counterparts in other countries involved in this book, HAC advises the Ministry of Education on quality-related subjects like the establishment of private higher education institutions, the official list of disciplines in which programmes must fit, etc. (Rozsnyai, 2003). Especially since 2000, the HAC has been active in establishing internal quality management schemes in the higher education institutions.

Poland
Poland's first post-communist higher education law was among the first in Central and Eastern Europe, dating from 1990 (Westerheijden, 1995). It was a clear example of the tendency to increase the autonomy of academe, although central-level control of quality remained within the Main Council for Higher Education (the *Rada Główna*) and in the Central Council for Academic Degrees. The change was, however, from state control to control by the academic oligarchy, thus increasing collective academic autonomy while keeping a strong central 'voice' against possible 'meddling' by the new state apparatus. Formal evaluation systems were not introduced at the time. A period of intense experimentation with new modes of study ensued in different higher education institutions (Sorensen, 1997). This period was characterized in equal measure by the study of Western (American and European) examples of evaluation (e.g. Wnuk-Lipińska & Wójcicka, 1995), leading to several pilot reviews under the aegis of the *Rada Główna*.

This led to a second phase, in which several categories of higher education institutions voluntary decided to embark on accreditation exercises: among them were UKA for (general or classical) universities, KAUT for universities of technology, KAUM for medical universities, FPAKE for economic universities, and the SEM Forum mainly for private business schools (Chmielecka & Dąbrowski, 2003). The organizations for accreditation of public universities operated under the umbrella of the confederated rectors' conferences (KRASP). UKA has accredited about 250 study programs to date.

KAUM had been established in response to the US Department of Education's withdrawal of recognition of Polish medical degrees for the reason that they were not accredited. Over five years of KAUM's activity, all medical faculties have gained accreditation (Chmielecka & Dąbrowski, 2003) – thereby regaining recognition of Polish physicians in the USA (which includes a sizeable number of US-born students!). Some of the other accreditation organizations were to complete their first accreditation sequences in early 2003, while still others had been established only recently and were elaborating their procedures, guidelines and criteria at the time of writing.

The first accreditation organization to be established, in 1993, was the SEM Forum, which services private business schools and has accredited programmes since 1994. Its board includes well-respected academics from highly regarded public business schools (www.semforum.org.pl).

These voluntary accreditations are not of official consequence for Polish higher education policy (Chmielecka & Dąbrowski, 2003).

A single state accreditation board was formed in 2002. Basically following the examples of neighboring states, the national board consists of 65 academics, appointed by the Minister of Education from a list proposed by the academic community. It has a brief to accredit *all* degree programmes at two major levels (*licencjat* and *magister* degrees) in all higher education institutions, public as well as private, on a regular, five-year basis. However, accreditation is also necessary after initiating a programme

or in the course of an application to be 'promoted' from Bachelor's to Master's level. Until the beginning of 2003, a small number of accreditation processes (13) were completed.

Slovenia
In Slovenia as well, new structures for quality assurance were included in the first higher education act after Slovenia's independence, dating from 1993. Quality assurance was intended to achieve 'international comparability, increased responsibility, improvement, and self-regulation of higher education' (Kump, 1998). The order of the aims is noteworthy: international aspects come first. Then comes accountability in the form of 'responsibility', and improvement-oriented aims are mentioned last (improvement and self-regulation).

There are two separate procedures, one for the accreditation of institutions and study programmes and the other for quality assessment. Accreditation is the task of the Council for Higher Education, established by the Government of the Republic of Slovenia in 1994. The Council is a consultative body of the government and consists of representatives of universities, freestanding institutions of higher education, and other experts. It is authorized to accredit new higher education institutions, to evaluate new *university* study programmes, to issue opinions on them (they are approved by the senates of universities themselves), and to accredit state-approved programmes of *freestanding higher education institutions*. An amendment to the Higher Education Act in 1999 added a task for the Council, to check at least every seventh year whether higher education institutions meet requirements for performance.

The Higher Education Quality Assessment Commission (HEQAC) was created by higher education institutions in 1996 and restructured in 2000. Its members represent all disciplines and professional fields. Its task is to monitor and assess the quality and effectiveness of teaching, research, cultural and professional activities of higher education institutions. The HEQAC is to perform its activities according to rules determined in co-operation with the senates of the higher education institutions and criteria defined by the Council for Higher Education. The Commission's main purpose is to assist higher education institutions in developing a methodology for, and a system of, self-evaluation. In practice, it collects annual self-evaluation reports of higher education institutions and publishes a national report. Commission members participate in international networks and events, and regularly organise seminars and workshops on quality assurance. Basically, the methodology for self-evaluation reports was developed within the framework of the PHARE Multi-country Programme on Quality Assurance and national research projects, and adapted to the needs of individual institutions.

The criteria and procedures for the accreditation of study programmes and higher education institutions were first adopted in 1994 and amended in 2002. The most important 2002 amendments deal with the international comparability of study programmes. Thus, new criteria include participation in the European higher education area and harmonisation with the *acquis* concerning regulated professions in the EU.

Most criteria now affirmed by the Bologna process were included already in the 1994 criteria and only have been refined now.

Although a system of external evaluations is not in place yet, both universities took part in the CRE Institutional Evaluation Program[3] and its follow-up, while some study programmes, mostly in regulated professions, gained accreditation from international professional associations in their respective fields.

The future development of the QA system in Slovenia is currently under consideration. The Ministry has established a working group, composed of representatives of higher education institutions, the Ministry, the Higher Education Council, HEQAC and experts in the field. This group will discuss the various opinions and proposals (e.g. for a new accreditation agency and for the integration of the separate procedures for evaluation and accreditation).

What Else Happened in 1990s?

The wider global context

Besides the more systematic development of quality assurance, higher education became more internationalised during the 1990s. This process was characterized by very different trends and elements.

On the European scene we observed the expanding agenda and programmes of the European Union. The ERASMUS programme funded the mobility of students and staff, the creation of university networks in all fields of study, as well as measures to promote and support recognition of study abroad periods (including ECTS). It became the EC's flagship programme. In it's first year (87/88) some 3.200 students were exchanged. In the year 2000/01 this had increased to 111.100. At present more than a million students have studied abroad under the auspices of the ERASMUS programme (which became an integral part of the wider SOCRATES programme in the mid-1990s). In 1990 the first version of the TEMPUS programme was launched, aimed at bringing the Central and Eastern European countries into the European pattern of co-operation and mobility. The EU programs were in many cases also a boost for the development of national policies for internationalisation in various member states. These policies were in the first instance mainly focused on the mobility and exchange of individuals. But gradually internationalisation became a more widespread and strategically important phenomon, including a broad range of activities, such as mobility, curriculum development, quality assurance, the establishment of consortia, etc. (Teichler, 1999).

In the same period, another trend in higher education emerged: a rapidly growing and diversifying demand for higher education, which was, especially in transitional and

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[3] Certain universities in the other three countries also took part in the CRE Institutional Evaluation Programme; until 2003: three in the Czech Republic, two in Hungary, one in Poland.

developing countries, often inadequately met by national provisions. Cross-border (or transnational) supply was launched by western institutions seeking to enter the overseas market with their educational programs and services. A global market for higher education evolved with a pattern of countries exporting and importing higher education. This market has an estimated annual value of several billions of US dollars and the expectations for growth have been spurred by the great hopes of ICT applications in this area: the e-learning hype. This trend introduced the notion of international competition and enhanced the economic rationale of internationalisation agendas and activities (Van der Wende, 2001a, 2001b). This process was further driven by the liberalisation initiatives taken by the WTO, in particular under the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS), which has included education services since 1995 (Van Vught et al., 2002).

Transnational education[4] has proven to be a rapidly expanding market, with the USA, the UK and Australia as the leading exporting countries. In Western Europe, Italy, Greece and Spain were the countries importing most educational services, followed by several Central and Eastern European countries (Dos Santos, 2000). The main problems related to these developments are recognised as regulation, quality assurance and recognition (Campbell & Van der Wende, 2000).

These trends of increased European co-operation and mobility on the one hand, and growing international competition on the other, have had numerous side-effects, two of which are of particular importance in this context. First is the need for the (smoother) recognition of degrees, and second, a demand for more internationally-oriented forms of quality assurance (accreditation).

At a certain point in time, however, it was recognized that:
- Although higher education was internationalising, its quality was still (mainly) assessed in a national context
- There was some internationalisation of quality assessment, but it did not result in a more international approach to methods and criteria
- The link between quality assessment and international recognition of qualifications was unclear (Van der Wende, 1999, Campbell & Van der Wende, 2000).

The challenges that this situation posed for quality assurance systems will be discussed in more detail below. First we will address the European response to these trends, i.e. the development of one European higher education area

The European Response to Globalisation: Bologna Declaration

In the so-called Sorbonne Declaration of 1998, four European countries (Germany, France, Italy and the United Kingdom) called upon other European countries to join them in an effort to harmonize the architecture of the higher education systems in Europe. One year later 29 European countries responded to this call by signing the

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[4] Higher education activities in which the learners are located in a host country different from the one where the awarding institution is based.

Bologna Declaration in which they jointly expressed their aim to establish a European higher education area by 2010. The introductory text of the declaration underlines that the need to respond to global challenges and international competition clearly lies behind this initiative. It states that: "We must look with special attention at the objective to increase the international competitiveness of the European system of higher education. The vitality and efficiency of any civilization is measured in fact by the attraction that its cultural system exerts on other countries. We need to ensure that the European system of higher education acquires in the world a degree of attraction equal to our extraordinary cultural and scientific traditions" (Bologna Declaration, p.2.). And in order to establish the European area of higher education, the following objectives will have to be attained:

- Adoption of a system of degrees easily readable and comparable in order to promote European citizens' employability and the international competitiveness of the European system of higher education.
- Adoption of a system based on two cycles, the first, of three years at least, relevant on the European labour market and in the higher education system as an adequate level of qualification.
- Establishment of a system of credits (developing the European Credit Transfer System) that extends to credit acquired in non higher education contexts, provided they are recognized by the university system, as a way to encourage the widest and most diffuse student mobility.
- Elimination of remaining obstacles to the effective exercise of the rights to free mobility and equal treatment.
- Implementation of the necessary European dimensions of the higher education space, particularly with regard to curricular content, inter-institutional co-operation, mobility schemes and integrated programmes of study, training, and research.
- Promotion of European co-operation in quality assurance with a view to developing comparable criteria and methodologies.

State of the art on Bologna implementation in the four countries[5]

Czech Republic
Bachelor's and Master's degrees were introduced in the Czech Republic about a decade ago (1990). Thus here the Bologna Declaration facilitated a process of debate and reform that had already started. It served to clarify issues in the move toward a more integrated higher education system, enabling a coherent approach with different and complementary types of institutions and qualifications. The Bologna Declaration also served as a basis for the government's White Paper on Higher Education Policy (December 2000). The new Higher Education Act of 1998 in its most recent, amended form states that university type higher education institutions will provide Bachelor's,

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[5] The information on the implementation of the Bologna Declaration is by and large based on the Trends in Learning Structures II Report (Haug & Tauch, 2001), complemented with additional information provided by the national co-ordinators. At the time of writing this chapter, a new survey on trends in learning structures was underway (as a preparation for the Berlin follow-up meeting). Unfortunately, however, data from this study were not yet available.

Master's and doctoral programmes. Non-university type institutions will offer primarily bachelor programmes (but may offer master degrees as well, provided that they are accredited). Bachelor programs in both types of institutions will take three to four years. In university-type institutions, there are still some exceptional one-tier programmes that take between 4 and 6 years.

Hungary
The new Higher Education Act of Hungary was adopted in 1993. The degree system is still primarily based on one-tier degrees. Universities offer one-tier programmes that lead to a Master's degree and take five to six years. In the non-university sector, colleges offer Bachelor's degrees that take three or four years, with the possibility to obtain a university Master's degree after another two to three years. Possibilities for college graduates to continue to university Master's programmes have expanded in recent years. In the wake of the Bologna Declaration, many institutions have started to introduce Bachelor-Master degrees, especially in programmes for foreign students. The country aims to attract more foreign students, and to that end, new Master's programmes are sometimes taught in English.

Poland
Poland is preparing a single Law on Higher Education (replacing the 1990 Act on Higher Education and the 1997 Act of Higher Vocational Education). This new Law will maintain a binary system of institutions. With this new Act, Poland plans to move from its current two-stage higher education system (Bachelor and Master) to a system in which doctoral studies will form a third stage. This level was not previously considered to be part of higher education. Bachelor's degrees will take three to four years and Master's degrees can take up to 2.5 years. One-tier five-year programmes will be maintained in some fields. In Poland the colleges established under the Higher Education Act of 1990 may offer Master's degrees, and by 2002, more than 70 of these schools (mainly non-state) had been accredited to offer Master's degrees.

Slovenia
Slovenia is among the countries where the Bologna Declaration led to a renewed focus on internationalisation. Slovenia was particularly aware that it needed to be attractive in the European context, in order to achieve balanced mobility. The Higher Education Act of 1993 provided for the introduction of three-year professional higher education programmes (leading to a diploma). Academically oriented programmes at the undergraduate level would last four to six years (and lead to a diploma). At the post-graduate level there would be specialisation degrees (1 to 2 years), Master's degrees (2 years) and doctoral degrees. With the Higher Education Amendment Act of 1999 it became possible to enrol in a doctoral programme immediately after obtaining a Bachelor's degree. Although transfer between the different levels and between the professional and academic tracks is possible, certain challenges of the Bologna Declaration seem not to have been met yet. In particular, the first cycle of the academic track is still quite long (especially when an extra year for thesis work must be added to the formal duration). In a recent review it was observed that the two-track system of traditional university degrees and other tertiary professional qualifications had been implemented within a short period of time. The differences in profile between the

academic and professionally oriented programmes will only gradually emerge, so the development of both tracks needs to be studied and monitored systematically (OECD, 1999).

Consequences and Challenges for Quality Assurance

The problems that emerged in the area of quality assurance and recognition as a result of increased international co-operation and competition were presented above. The Bologna Declaration was expected to make a difference in this area. The Declaration addresses both topics, although not so much in relation to each other. It seems clear that the proposed two-cycle structure is expected to create at least nominal progress. It is not clear, however, whether and how the new degree structure will lead to more actual transparency. First, because convergence at the level of degrees (general descriptions of qualifications) does as such not say very much about the actual competencies of graduates (learning outcomes). Second, because cultural and linguistic differences will remain.

Moreover, the Bologna Process started in an increasingly complex environment, and to some extent has actually added to that complexity. The Bologna Declaration was a free commitment jointly taken by national governments (i.e. bottom-up and not legally binding), which must be understood in terms of the limited competencies of the European Commission in the area of higher education policy (i.e., articles 149 and 150 of the EU Treaty, Amsterdam, 1999). As a consequence, the Bologna Process has moved in parallel with EU programmes and initiatives, but outside the formal EU context. From the outset, this implied a potential risk of loss of coherence with other EU actions. Furthermore, the lack of legally binding measures implies that there is no actual way to co-ordinate implementation at a national level and that individuals cannot derive any formal rights from the process (e.g., with respect to recognition) (Verbruggen, 2002). And in geographic terms, the Bologna area does not entirely coincide with the EU territory, although such differences will diminish in 2004 when ten new member states join the Union, including the four countries considered in this volume.

Complexity also results from the multitude of actors involved in the international field of quality assurance and recognition, such as the Council of Europe and UNESCO (who jointly developed a code of good practice on quality assurance and recognition of transnational education). Moreover, professional organizations, trade partners, governments and other intergovernmental organizations (e.g. the OECD) are concerned with these issues, for example in the context of regional and global trade agreements.

Challenges for Quality Assurance
The challenge that this complex international environment represents for quality assurance can be summarized as follows (Campbell & Van der Wende, 2000):
- How can quality assurance contribute to improving the international comparability of higher education and the recognition of diplomas and degrees, in the first

instance in the European context (Bologna Process) but also in the wider international context?

- Which methods and mechanisms for quality assurance and accreditation will best facilitate such international comparability and can be linked with recognition measures such as credit transfer and accumulation, including lifelong learning tracks?
- How can the international dimension of higher education be integrated better in quality assurance systems and methods? How can co-ordination between actors and agencies in the field of quality assurance and those involved in internationalisation including recognition agencies be improved?
- At what level should initiatives in this area in Europe be undertaken, and by whom?

Models for European and International Quality Assurance

These challenges and questions were taken up in different contexts (van der Wende & Westerheijden, 2001). Various possible approaches to a more international (or European) approach to quality assurance were conceptualised as follows in Table 3.

Table 3: Approaches towards international (European) quality assurance

European level options	International level options
0. Do nothing	1. Communication & exchange between national QAAs (e.g. ENQA, INQAAHE)
1. European clearing house	2. Mutual recognition between national quality assessment agencies
2. Mutual recognition between national quality assurance agencies	2* International quality assessment
3. European meta-agency to validate national quality assessment agencies	3. Validation of national quality assessment agencies at international level (World Quality Label)
4. Previous + ability to accredit directly	3* International meta-accreditation
5. European accreditation agency	5. International accreditation agency

Based on: Sursock (2001) and Van Damme (2000)

The European expert group led by Sursock as well as Van Damme presented the same number of options for quality assurance at a level beyond the nation state. However, they did not cover exactly the same 'scale' of options. Sursock et al. spanned the whole range from doing nothing to obligatory accreditation by a European agency. Van Damme left out the nul-option of doing nothing, and added some truly international solutions (2* and 3*), not connected to evaluation in nation states at all. Sursock et al. on the other hand took the role of the nation state as an axiom.

Some explanation may be needed on some of the options offered by Sursock and Van Damme. How could international accreditation work? The option more or less preferred by Sursock's expert group would be to create a platform at the European

level (Europe understood as the 'Bologna area', not just the EU) including all stakeholders, at first to exchange information about quality assurance systems applying to higher education institutions in this area. This option seems to lead to an almost inherent process of further development. For by virtue of its (unique?) collection of information, over time this platform might develop into a repository for trustworthy information on quality assurance and on its application to higher education institutions. In a third stage of development, this could be formalised into two registers: one of 'registered' quality assurance agencies, and one of 'registered' programmes and/or higher education institutions, somewhat like the recognition and information functions of the US Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA). The expert group did not go into the mechanisms underlying registration – those would have to be established in due course by the platform itself.

Van Damme, also one of the members of Sursock's expert group, elaborated a range of options for the global sphere, and came to advocate a formalisation of the final stage of the Sursock group at least regarding the quality assurance side. He proposed to introduce a World Quality Label to be given to quality assurance agencies qualifying for it (in later versions he called it a World Quality Register).

Both proposals contained elements of what Van Vught called a Multiple Accreditation System at the international level, and what we now prefer to call an 'Open Accreditation System' (OAS).[6] Originally thought out for application in (national) higher education systems, an Open Accreditation System is defined by the following characteristics:

- *Higher education programmes or higher education providers are free to seek accreditation from one or more agencies, to best fit their academic profile, quality objectives, and market position.* Academic programmes that wish to compete on the European or global market for research training, may want a different type of accreditation than those aiming for close co-operation with the regional labour market.
- *Accreditors are free to offer evaluation and accreditation services to institutions and programmes that fit within the agency's mandate and scope of operation..*
- *Governments promise to attach consequences to accreditation actions* in their country, such as the official status of degrees or use of titles protected by law. In this view, governments' role as the primary source of funds of higher education in much of the world would include a desire for accountability on the spending of tax money (legality, effectiveness and efficiency). More broadly, governments are guardians of the public interest and in that function need to provide 'consumer protection' to users of higher education (students as well as employers).

The advantages of an Open Accreditation System over one with a single monopolistic provider are especially evident in its accommodation of diversity (also discussed in

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[6] We prefer the term 'Open Accreditation System', to emphasise the fact that there is open access for accreditation agencies. The term 'multiple accreditation' often seems to be understood as meaning that higher education programmes or higher education institutions collect a number of accreditation 'kite marks' from different agencies. This is possible indeed in an Open Accreditation System, but it is not a necessary part of the definition.

Westerheijden, 2001b),[7] which is seen as a main requirement for higher education systems with a 'mass' or 'universal' character that serve a highly diverse student body. For one thing, 'vertical' diversity would be enabled: not just accreditation against the minimum threshold quality standards and the consequent fear of a 'race to the bottom', but also – optional for ambitious programs and higher education institutions – a drive to the 'top level'.[8]

The openness of an OAS in the first place applies to 'accreditors': any agency fulfilling requirements of credibility (independence of judgements, clear and effective procedures, etc.) would be allowed entry, from whatever country or stakeholder they originate. In particular, an OAS would lead higher education systems to recognize the need for (international) recognition in and by the professions, such as accountancy, engineering, medicine or management. But organizations representing mainly the academic disciplines such as Physics or Chemistry could organise evaluation and accreditation agencies as well. This could be called the horizontal aspect of diversity, for no one can say generally if 'academic' is 'better' than 'professional', and because they judge fitness for worthy purposes in *different* ways. At the same time, an OAS would be open to any provider of higher education (including foreign, private, for-profit and non-traditional providers); the accreditation should be a sufficient guarantee. Of course, this does not immediately imply an extreme *laissez-faire* higher education system. Governments may set additional requirements on the operation of an Open Accreditation System, such as proof of the credibility of accreditation, the inclusion of national education goals in the accreditation criteria, etc.

No policy option comes without drawbacks. One writer expressed a fear that the current 'jungle of degrees' (Haug, 1999) in Europe would be replaced by a 'jungle of accreditations' (Haug & Tauch, 2001). True, a single accreditation solution would provide more efficient information (if designed properly), and there can be no doubt about its credibility – it is this one or none. Multiple providers of accreditation would invite the classical *quis custodiet ipsos custodies* issue: Who accredits (or recognizes) the accreditors? Both the Sursock group and Van Damme offered a way out at the European or world levels. However, recent Western European trends seem to show that a similar solution can be developed within a single higher education system, for the German *Akkreditierungsrat* as well as the Netherlands Accreditation Organization (NAO) operate on similar principles. In both countries,[9] a single organization guards the credibility of the quality judgements by the multitude of evaluation agencies. Having become operational only after the Sorbonne and Bologna Declarations respectively, it may be too early to judge the effectiveness of the German and Dutch national OASs,[10] but the initiatives certainly are interesting from a methodical point of view.

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[7] Also available in Polish as (Westerheijden, 2001a).
[8] For instance, the EFMD's EQUIS label positions itself as a top-level quality kite mark for business schools.
[9] NAO is a bi-national system that encompasses the Netherlands and the Flemish Community of Belgium.
[10] However, an evaluation of the German Accreditation council took place in 2001–02, whereupon its temporary status was changed to a permanent one.

From Bologna to the Follow-Ups

The characteristic setting the Bologna Declaration apart from many other international agreements, is that the follow-up process has a 2010 time horizon, punctuated by biennial conferences, the first of which took place in Prague, 2001. The report of Sursock's expert group was one of the many elements taking a place in the run-up to the Prague conference. However, it was only a first input in a decision-making process of the European universities, which had to pass several hurdles before being tabled in Prague. The first reactions of the university representatives were not very positive; i.e., that the expert group perhaps had gone 'a bridge too far', and in the message from the Salamanca conference where the universities prepared for Prague, a quality assurance platform was not mentioned. Nor was it in the Prague communiqué, which said about quality assurance:

> Ministers called upon the universities and other higher educations institutions, national agencies and the European Network of Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) … to collaborate in establishing a common framework of reference and to disseminate best practice.

Regarding its *content*, this statement was not much more informative than the phrase in the Bologna Declaration. Concerning the *process* for taking quality assurance forward, however, progress was made. Indeed, there is a growing realisation that quality assurance, although mentioned only marginally in the Bologna Declaration, is central to its success – indeed, one may surmise that it is precisely the centrality of quality issues that made it necessary to remain rather vague about them in the diplomatic language of inter-governmental documents. The progress with respect to the process lies in the naming of a 'champion' for the quality assurance aspects, i.e. ENQA. While not the multi-stakeholder platform mentioned above, this provides a firm basis for giving attention to quality assurance in the Bologna process (a 'door bell', a term that we will use in our conclusion), with connections to official decision-making, which the expert group's proposal would have had to gain over many years – if ever. And interestingly, some of the main activities of ENQA since Prague have involved co-operation in projects with EUA (representing the universities) and ESIB (representing the students). This may fall short of the idea of engaging the 'stakeholder society' directly (professions and employers are absent), but it is a step forward that was far from self-evident, considering the governmental character of most quality assurance agencies in Europe.

However, the activities hinted at just now, are just a small part of what is happening on the European scene. Let us turn to a brief sketch of those now.

The Total Picture: Confused Activity

At present we are far away from a coherent or integrated European approach to quality assurance. The situation can rather be characterized as a mix of (mostly) bottom-up and (some) top-down initiatives, initiated by a range of different stakeholders. It would take us too far afield to go into the development of new quality assurance systems in each of the Bologna area countries – Germany and the Netherlands have been

mentioned already and Norway and Spain could be added, having introduced an accreditation system in 2003. In the preparation for the Berlin conference, a study of these developments was prepared by Schwarz & Westerheijden in co-operation with representatives of 21 European countries.[11]

As described above, there is co-operation at the European level stimulated by the European Commission and implemented mostly through ENQA, including co-operation with EUA and ESIB. Further, the Commission has launched, within the SOCRATES programme, various institutional-level projects (coordinated by EUA) in the area of quality assurance, most prominent of which is the 'quality culture' project, an effort to inculcate a quality culture in the participating institutions.

Second, there are multi-country initiatives such as the Joint Quality Initiative, led by the Dutch and Flemish governments, an informal (and still-growing) group of countries that want to take the harmonisation of quality in higher education further – or at a faster pace – than the Bologna process can with 30+ countries. Its first result was the identification of comparable outcomes of degree levels in the so-called 'Dublin descriptors' (Harris, 2003). Other regional initiatives exist as well; the long-established Nordic co-operation (for a long time bridging EU and non-EU countries!) would be the prime example. The lack of a common approach to quality assurance in these countries (as can be read from Hämäläinen, Haakstad, Kangasniemi, Lindeberg & Sjölund, 2001) apparently did not hinder their co-operation.

Third, there is a range of institution-level initiatives, notably the *Tuning* Project aimed at defining outcomes in terms of competencies at the level of disciplines (Gonzales Ferreras & Wagenaar, 2003), or the continuous institutional evaluation programme of the EUA. This level also includes various university consortia engaging in cross-institutional quality assurance (e.g. ECIU, Universitas 21 and the *Nordverbund*).

Fourth, at the level of disciplines and professions, initiatives have been taken toward European or international accreditation (e.g. the European Quality Improvement System, EQUIS (EFMD), or the new scheme of the European Association for Public Administration Accreditation, EAPAA). Next, we would like to mention at this level the cross-border evaluations through international peer review. These go back to the early 1990s (e.g. Brennan, Goedegebuure, Shah, Westerheijden & Weusthof, 1992; Goedegebuure, Maassen, Phillips & Smits, 1993; Vroeijenstijn, Waumans & Wijmans, 1992), but have been given a new impetus with the Trans-European Evaluation Projects (TEEP) that are running at the time of writing. There is a new impetus for these evaluations to be more integrated with national quality assurance systems and to proceed from more explicit sets of internationally-agreed criteria for quality judgements, including the Dublin and *Tuning* descriptors.

In sum, there is a multitude of activities and committed actors . Although we selected some activities that seem to show general tendencies, there is not, however, a clear overall strategy and co-ordination. The Bologna Process provides to some extent a

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[11] Bibliographic data unknown at the time of writing.

framework, increasing synergy with the EC actions, and may stimulate greater coherence between the different initiatives and their outcomes. But the risk exists that – to make the quote complete – "Europe may be moving out of a jungle of degrees into a jungle of quality assurance and accreditation standards, procedures and agencies" (Haug & Tauch, 2001, p. 36). At the same time the reasons behind this confusing situation have to be understood. European level initiatives and even co-operation is difficult to achieve, because the authority and competencies with respect to quality assurance of higher education are firmly set at the national level. It is also problematic because there still are major differences in the understanding of the various conceptions of quality, ranging from pragmatic fitness for purpose approaches to notions of academic excellence and elitism. Controversies also exist with respect to the concept of accreditation. It is seen on the one hand as the solution for compatible and comparable degree systems (as it is based on minimum standards), and on the other hand as a threat to current high levels of quality and the improvement function of quality assurance (because of the 'race to the bottom' supposedly induced by minimum standards). Furthermore there is the great diversity in actual criteria, methods and procedures for quality assurance across Europe. And finally, the increasing diversification of higher education institutions and programmes should be kept in mind. Many of the current initiatives are intended to overcome these problems. However, this will not be easy and could even prove to be impossible, which may actually lend support to our concept of open accreditation systems.

Recognition Issues in the Bologna Process

As mobility and employability are among the main objectives of the Bologna Declaration, the follow-up process has prompted a renewed focus on the recognition of degrees. A shift in attention can be observed in this context. At least at European level, the necessary legal framework is now mainly in place, with the Council of Europe/UNESCO Convention and the EU Directives (see below). Attention should now focus on implementing this framework, i.e. the use of instruments like ECTS[12] and the Diploma Supplement[13]. These instruments will become increasingly important, as the quest for transparency will only increase the need for information. But at the same time, diversity in European higher education is likely to grow, despite the establishment of the two-cycle degree structure. The employability issue has sharpened the focus on recognition for the purposes of the labour market, especially the non-regulated segment. The recognition of competencies gained through non-traditional forms of learning and relevant work experience will be a challenge. Finally the Bologna Process (especially the Prague Communiqué) urges stronger co-operation between quality assurance and recognition agencies (Bergan et al., 2001).

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[12] ECTS: the European Credit Transfer System seeks to facilitate the recognition of study abroad periods. The system contains the following elements: a credit point system (60 points per academic year), an information package (on course content, structure, and workload), a learning agreement between the student, the home and host institution, and a transcript of records.

[13] The Diploma Supplement provides information on the level of qualification, workload, content and results, the function of the qualification in the national framework, and a short description of the educational system.

Issues and Developments in Recognition

There are two types of international recognition of diplomas and qualifications: academic recognition (a decision that allows a person to pursue or continue studies, or to use a national title of degree) and professional recognition (a decision to grant professional rights, listing, or status to a graduate, as in engineering). The recognition methodology originated within the framework of academic recognition. It its early phase (1950s–1970s) the purpose was to establish equivalence (every component of the foreign programme had to match with every component of the receiving country's programme). In the 1980s this rigid concept was replaced by that of recognition (a qualification that is substantially, if not precisely equivalent, is recognized for a certain purpose if it fits that purpose), which in the terms of our chapter's title implies a higher degree of trust. Within the concept of recognition the idea of acceptance has more recently gained some ground in Europe. It means that a qualification can be recognized as the nearest comparable degree if differences are small and the degree meets broader shared objectives. The Council of Europe/UNESCO Recognition Convention of Lisbon (1997) adopts this idea of acceptance and has laid the burden of proof upon the host country. Mutual trust in each other's educational system (including quality assurance) makes such a change of attitude possible. In this respect, two important networks are involved in academic recognition: that of the National Centres for Academic Recognition (NARICs, established in 1984 by the EU, which itself does not provide any legislation or regulation concerning academic recognition and the European Network of Information Centres on Recognition and Mobility (ENICs, established in 1994 by the Council of Europe and UNESCO). These networks work in a collaborative manner, and at the national level may be embodied in the same organisations.

In the area of professional recognition, where the European Union engages in regulation, the early initiatives date back to the 1960s and 1970s. The first target was *de jure* professional recognition (of regulated professions). After initial attempts to harmonize curricula in these fields, a strategy of General Directives was adopted. These state that degrees completed after at least three years of higher education leading to regulated professional status should be recognized unless substantial differences can be proven. This legal solution is not applicable, however, in non-regulated professions, where *de facto* recognition is applied. It is especially in this field where a tremendous need for reliable information exists (Divis, 2002).

Another challenge in the field of recognition is related to the shift from education to learning and to the phenomena of lifelong learning and the emergence of non-traditional forms of learning (including informal, virtual, transnational, work-based learning, etc.). These developments emphasise the importance of assessing competencies rather than formal qualifications and the way they have been earned. However, the methodology of traditional credential evaluation is not up to assessing competencies. The criteria typically focus on the process, entrance level, course content and structure rather than on learning outcomes or the actual competencies acquired. Consequently, the traditional evaluation tools need to be modernised (Divis, 2002). Finally, quality assurance plays an important role in all of these issues.

Therefore, the networks of national equivalence and recognition centres should more closely co-operate with the relevant networks of quality assurance agencies. Initiatives in this direction will be discussed later in this chapter. First, we will look at the state of the art on recognition in the four countries of study.

State of the Art on Recognition[14]

Recognition, and in particular the ECTS as an instrument for academic recognition, was first encouraged as a priority under the TEMPUS programme. Efforts continued in the context of the countries' participation in the SOCRATES programme. The situation at the national level will be described below.

Czech Republic

The provisions with respect to recognition are laid down in article 89 and 90 of the Higher Education Act of 1998. Despite the fact that these regulations are derived from the Lisbon Convention (1997), the Act is quite cautious with respect to the idea of 'acceptance' instead of 'equivalence'. In practice there is significant variation; indeed, some higher education institutions (they are the responsible bodies - only in dubious cases is the Ministry authorised to decide) still base the recognition of foreign qualifications on their own careful and detailed comparisons of study programmes. In contrast there are higher education institutions that try to follow the new approach to recognition in agreement with the Lisbon Convention's principles. This variation may lead to problems with the recognition of qualifications, even those obtained in another institution within the country. Trust and reliable information still are challenges that must be addressed.

Institutions are not obliged to issue a Diploma Supplement, except when a student asks for it. There is a general acceptance of the instrument, but still a lack of information on both the student and institutional side. To improve this situation, NARIC holds regular seminars and a national template has been developed. It is important to note that the introduction of ECTS is not obligatory. Here, as elsewhere, information plays a key role. The idea of credits and comparability has generally been accepted. Higher education institutions have made satisfactory progress, as practically all of them have introduced or are introducing a credit system. Universities of technology and economics were among the first to introduce ECTS.

Hungary

Hungary ratified the Lisbon Convention of 1997 through an act in 2001. In the same year, requirements for recognition of international degrees were newly codified as well. The recognition of the level of qualification and of professional qualifications falls under to the authority of the Hungarian Equivalence and Information Centre

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[14] The information on the recognition practices and policies is by and large based on the Trends in Learning Structures II Report (Haug & Tauch, 2001), complemented with additional information provided by the national co-ordinators.

(HEIC), which is part of the Ministry of Education.[15] However, the nostrification of scientific degrees such as PhD's is in the hands of institutions of higher education.

A national version (template) of the Diploma Supplement has been in use in Hungary and has now been transferred to the European model. Diploma supplements are issued on request of students.
A decree of 1998 requiring all Hungarian higher education institutions to introduce some kind of credit system before 2002 was complemented by a decree of 2002 establishing a national credit transfer system fully in line with ECTS. The adoption of this system has been coupled with the creation of a National Credit Council, responsible for the introduction and co-ordination of an ECTS-type credit system in all higher education institutions.

Poland
Poland has not yet ratified the Lisbon Convention. Paragraph 150 of the Act on higher education from 1990 regulates recognition. It provides that the recognition of HE diplomas shall be defined by international agreements. In case there is no such agreement with a particular state, recognition is based on a so-called 'nostrification' procedure. This procedure and the units authorised to perform it are defined in the Minister's decree.

Poland is integrating EU directives on professional recognition into its curricula for professions such as nurses and midwifes. The Diploma Supplement is still being tested and is expected to be generalised soon. ECTS is mainly used for transfer in the context of EU mobility programs, but there is no national credit system or envisaged use of ECTS.

Slovenia
The process of renewing legislation in the field of academic and professional recognition, aiming at greater transparency and improving the recognition of qualifications and diplomas, is in the concluding stage. The academic recognition of higher education degrees is the responsibility of higher education institutions, while information on the procedure of recognition of foreign degrees and certificates is provided by the ENIC/NARIC. The Professional and Academic Titles Act that regulates professional and academic titles was adopted in 1998.

In 1999 Slovenia was among first countries to ratify the Lisbon Convention. With the adoption of the Diploma Supplement Order in 2000, the Diploma Supplement is a mandatory part of each Diplomas that is awarded. It is issued in the Slovene language and in English, if requested by the graduate.

The credit system was considered to be a criterion for the accreditation of study programmes as far back as 1994; this became obligatory in 2002. The implementation of a credit system was significantly advanced after 1999 when Slovenia entered the

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[15] There are some exceptions, e.g. for medical degrees the competent authority is in the Ministry of Health.

Community programmes and the Senates of the two universities ratified the decisions on application of ECTS for ERASMUS mobility. Although most study programmes follow the ECTS model, in practice there is no uniform application of the credit system. Following an initiative of the Council for Higher Education, the Ministry set up a working group to prepare uniform application of ECTS at the national level, taking into account the recommendations of the Bologna Declaration. The new law on the recognition of foreign certificates and degrees, currently being prepared, will round off the legislative process in the field of academic recognition. This law will differentiate between recognition for academic and for professional purposes, contrary to current legislation.

Prime responsibility for professional recognition lies with the Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Affairs. Two laws regulate this field, i.e. laws on the recognition of professional qualifications and on the recognition of qualifications in regulated professions held by citizens of EU Member States. The Ministry set up an information and contact point that is responsible for professional recognition procedures and the implementation of EU directives. In the process of professional recognition, the applicant – after the recognition of a foreign certificate by a competent institution – is granted the right to engage in a profession independently, provided that he/she has passed a (state) examination after completing a period of traineeship in Slovenia. Foreign state examinations are usually not recognised. The competent state body takes the final decision on whether an individual may actually work in a given profession.

Towards a Common Future: IR & QA – Two Sides of the Same Coin?

In the light of the Bologna Process, and as stipulated in the Prague Communiqué, an agenda for co-operation between recognition and quality assurance agencies has been developed, taking certain considerations into account. To begin, many of the generic issues and problems encountered in recognition practice come down to the question of whether or not a course meets a set of standards or complies with the quality criteria of a trustworthy institution. In other words: recognition requires information on the quality of a particular programme and institution, and on how and by whom this quality is determined in the national context. At the same time, the most important objective of quality assurance in the international context is the recognition of credentials across borders. The quality statement about a minimal standard (or an accreditation decision) is the first concern when assessing a credential for international recognition , both for academic and professional purposes. As a consequence, more and better information should be flowing through more transparent channels. It would be a great help if recognition and quality assurance agencies could work together to gather and disseminate information. Thus, a structured relationship for co-operation should be established between ENQA and the ENIC/NARIC Networks.

Based upon these considerations, the ENIC/NARIC Networks suggested an agenda for co-operation. It confirmed the crucial importance of quality assurance and reached out to ENQA to explore common objectives and interests (ENIC/NARIC, 2001). This joint agenda should focus in particular on shared challenges, which are most evident in the areas of globalisation, privatisation, diversification and virtualisation of higher

education (e.g. quality assurance in transnational education), in the area of lifelong learning, the shift from teaching to learning, and the consequent new emphasis on the assessment of competencies. A joint task force was established, whose concerns include the channelling of information, the development of a joint format for the description of programmes and qualifications, the issues of transnational education, and the shift from education to learning. Further steps were taken to look in particular at the recognition of non-degree programmes and joint degrees, and to join European wide initiatives regarding degree standards and outcome levels (e.g. The *Tuning* project and the Joint Quality Initiative). Recommendations were to be made to the ministerial follow-up meeting in Berlin 2003 (ENIC/NARIC, 2001, 2002).

Reflecting on these developments, it strikes us that they bring together two disparate approaches to the international comparison of quality. On the one hand, quality assurance can be characterized as 'supply-oriented'. It is focused on the provision of teaching rather than on learning, and involves the programme or unit (faculty, university) level. It is also a systematic approach in continental Europe, as government regulations seem to apply to *all programmes* within academic units. This contrasts with the US accreditation systems, which only apply to certain *programmes* (viz. in the professions); additionally higher education *institutions* need to be accredited as such. The regulatory frameworks for quality assurance in Europe are mainly national. Interestingly, the Bologna process is in stark contrast to this, as it is 'only' a declaration, not an international treaty or a national law. The lack of a legal basis has pros and cons. It makes the process more flexible, perhaps more fluid (what is in, what not?), but it means that the rights or obligations of parties and other stakeholders in the higher education systems are not clearly defined.

On the other hand, international degree recognition can be characterized as 'demand oriented'. It only applies to those students and graduates who need it because of (intra-European or worldwide) mobility. It can also be more demand oriented in that recognition decisions can be made in the light of the purposes for which recognition is asked (mainly: academic vs. professional). By definition, it is an international approach, not one of national regulation in isolation. And basically, the legal framework for it is in place. Implementation is now the crux of the matter.

Implementation is complicated by developments in the Bologna process – at least in the short run. Exploring quality assurance and degree recognition *together* is new for all parties involved and as we indicated above, the parties come from different backgrounds with different perspectives. In this respect, it is interesting to note the role played by the Prague communiqué, and in particular by making ENQA the 'door bell' or the 'champion' of the process. This statement was the catalyst that initiated the coming together of these two fields. Maybe this was an unexpected consequence of the statement, but even if unexpected, it still may be seen as a desirable consequence.

At the same time, the recent discussions between ENQA and ENIC/NARIC is an example of a networking strategy. And that is something to which we will return in our final section.

What Can Be Done?

The multitude of activities presented here, even in what were until recently the disparate fields of quality assurance and degree recognition, show that there is not a simple solution if a higher education institution or a country's higher education decision-makers want to enter the European process. In fact, that is why the modernist heading to this section like Lenin's 'What is to be done?' cannot be written any longer – supposing that we wanted to, *quod non*. There is no single doorbell that leads to a clear passage from 'where we are' to 'where we want to be'. On the contrary, the scene is characterized by a multitude of stakeholders, evidence of the realisation of 'the stakeholder society' in European higher education. From a policy perspective, this implies a major change in the steering or co-ordination of higher education systems. The state no longer is the only actor to give guidance to higher education institutions, with all these stakeholders' positions and demands being given ever greater legitimacy. The four countries have gone through the first stages of this 'changing architecture' as part of their transformation to a post-communist society. In that first transformation, Western examples may have provided guidance, as these countries went through massification in the 1960s, changed from industrial to service economies in the 1970s and 1980s, and struggled with the commensurate changing demands on the architecture of their higher education systems. Moreover, the decentralisation of decision-making power has been a very important driving force in the transition period in the four countries. This process went rather quickly, and in many aspects, broader and deeper than the move away from state control (Van Vught, 1989) in Western countries.

But now, the Bologna process creates further demands for change by introducing the international level.[16] And in that regard, all European countries are in principle in the same situation. These are new demands for every actor involved: how to operate in a single and more competitive European higher education area, how to be transparent, and how to demonstrate the quality of education at home and abroad? To be a (university in a) member state of the EU or not to be one, still makes a difference among the 'Bologna countries' as EU membership may be a threshold for participation in various projects and decisions. But that difference will diminish swiftly, at least for the four countries involved, as they are among the ten countries accessing in 2004.

Perhaps the primary conclusion for universities and other actors in the four countries, based upon our sketch of the pertinent developments, should be that becoming part of the EU cannot solve everything. Rather, the conclusion should be that it requires individual initiative on the part of any actor to enter these networks. We have not written a handbook on the techniques of networking, though the succession of conferences in and around the Bologna process clearly play an important role in networking. There are too many to attend them all, and there are no reliable rules for selecting the interesting ones: conference titles, locations, organisers (from all

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[16] The emphasis placed on the Bologna process and especially on (quality) regulation in the two-cycle structure (Bachelor/Master) should not obscure the fact that the diversity of higher education remains high, e.g. through life-long learning, sub-Bachelor diplomas, or transnational education (TNE).

stakeholders!) – all seem to be uncorrelated with relevance. In short, as Guy Neave title a recent article 'Anything goes' (Neave, 2002).

Networking, or for that matter, any form of (international) co-operation, is not a matter of *l'art pour l'art*, it is an instrument to achieve goals. The primary goal, in our perspective, is to get a *commitment* to quality from all stakeholders involved in higher education. The recent co-operation between the two quality assurance networks and degree recognition is a case in point: different 'stakeholders' coalesced to address an area of common concern, out of their commitment to assure and enhance the quality of European higher education.

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