TWINNING AZERBAIJAN

Support to the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Azerbaijan for Further Adherence of the Higher Education System to the European Higher Education Area (AZ-ad-EHEA)

**AZ/14/ENP/OT/31**

**EU Short Term Expert Mission Report**

**1. Basic Information**

**Component and Activity:**

Component: 3. Developing AzQF

Activity: 3.5 Enhancing Practices and Procedures

**Name of the Expert:** Mr Gunnar Vaht; Ms Baiba Ramina

**Dates of the Mission:** 27 February – 3 March 2017

**Contractor:** Finnish Education Evaluation Centre (FINEEC) /

Estonian Quality Agency for Higher and Vocational Education (EKKA)

**2. Relevant Background Information/State of Affairs**

The Republic of Azerbaijan signed the Lisbon Recognition Convention (LRC) in 1997 and was first country that ratified (1998) the Convention. The preliminary system of recognition of foreign qualifications was introduced in 1992, but the Government Regulation on recognition process according to the principles of the LRC was adopted in 2003.

Until 2016 the competent authority for nostrification was Ministry of Education, since April 2016 the recognition and nostrification tasks were transferred to the ANO when this new institution was established for accreditation and nostrification/recognition.

The Republic of Azerbaijan is highly interested in qualified specialists studied abroad, and for this purpose there is a strict and detailed assessment of study programmes and foreign qualifications. The recognition authority often meets the problem that the quality of some individual qualifications from some countries of former Soviet Union is not at appropriate level to the labor market in Azerbaijan.

About 70% of foreign qualifications are recognised in practice, 20% are not recognised on the reason that knowledge of holders of foreign qualifications are at lower level than requirements in national standards and 10% of applicants present incomplete documentation for nostification.

The ANO is the only competent authority for recognition of foreign qualifications in the Republic of Azerbaijan. The holder of qualification should present the application together with all documentation on-line to the ANO. According to the national legislation, all documents must be translated and certified by *apostille*. In case the country is not party to the Hague Convention, the legalisation is required. The time limit is usually one month and the process is not free of charge to the applicant.

The procedure to the nostrification has three steps: 1) checking application and documents submitted for nostrification, and assessing whether the qualification is awarded by a recognized education institution; 2) assessing and giving equivalency to the qualification, and 3) inviting the applicant to the interview, and making final nostrification decision.

The assessment of foreign qualification for nostrification is based on seeking equivalency of the study programme. During the assessment of programme it is compared whether the programme completed abroad correspond to the national standard of the same or similar programme. The assessment of equivalency takes place at universities where the same or similar programmes are offered. The comparison of equivalency includes the list of courses and number of hours of each course. The programme content should be the same or very similar to the programme provided by the universities in Azerbaijan. In case the programme is not offered by the universities in Azerbaijan, the foreign qualification should be not recognized.

If a foreign qualification is not recognized, the ANO will explain the reason of rejection. The applicant has right to appeal the nostrification decision.

At the end of nostrification process an applicant receive two certificates – one for general recognition and one for nostrification.

**3. Objectives and Tasks of the Mission**

The objective of the mission was to facilitate the elaboration of a proposal for reflecting higher education of the AzQF in Azerbaijani recognition procedures and practices. The objective includes one-day national seminar on academic recognition of foreign qualifications and periods of study in Europe and Republic of Azerbaijan, and workshop on recognition practices and assessment criteria to the staff of ANO. The main task of the mission was to share information about best practices in Europe and to facilitate recognition criteria and procedure in the Republic of Azerbaijan.

**4. Time Schedule of the Mission**

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| **Date** | **Activities/Meetings**  BC experts met  (title and institution) | **Remarks** |
| 27.02.2017 | Kick-off meeting of the mission on Objective of Activity 3.5 at the Ministry of Education. Planning and preparing of programme and agenda to the seminar on recognition of foreign qualifications:  Mr. Aazad Akhundov – Senior Adviser, Science and Higher Education Department, CL3  Mr Emin Nasirov – Head of ENIC Azerbaijan, ANO |  |
| 28.02.2017 | Preparation of seminar presentations. Work with presentation slides. | Individual work |
| 01.03.2017 | Seminar on assessment and recognition of foreign qualifications for the representatives of the Ministry of Education, ANO and higher education institutions. Presentations and discussions. |  |
| 02.03.2017 | Workshop with the staff of ANO; presentations and discussions on assessment and recognition criteria and recognition practices in Latvia, Estonia and Azerbaijan. rafting report and conclusions of two-day visit to ANO.  Mr Emin Nasirov – Head of ENIC Azerbaijan, ANO  Other ANO staff (6 peaople) |  |
| 03.03.2017 | Meeting at the Ministry of Education. Reporting the visit (mission review). Presentation of observations and main findings. Remarks and recommendations for further cooperation in the field of recognition of qualifications. |  |

**5. Achievement of the Expected Results**

The expected results of the mission were proposals for updating recognition procedures and practice.

All expected results were achieved. Seminar on assessment and recognition of foreign qualifications for the representatives of the Ministry of Education, ANO and higher education institutions, and workshop together with the staff of ANO were organised.

**6. Unexpected Results**

No unexpected results occurred.

**7. Issues Left Open After the Mission**

No issues regarding the mission were left open. The purpose of the mission was fulfilled.

**8. Recommendations for Future Missions**

No missions foreseen with the project.

**9. Conclusions and General Remarks Concerning the Project**

Since the ANO was established in 2016 there have been successful developments for assessment and recognition of foreign qualifications in the Republic of Azerbaijan. The staff of the recognition division is open to introduce new developments according to the LRC and its subsidiary texts.

The ANO receives a lot of foreign qualifications for recognition, the important amount of applicants are coming from the countries of former Soviet Union, mostly from Russian Federation, Ukraine and Georgia, where fake degrees and studies are problems to the office work. The ANO is putting a lot of efforts to check the authenticity of educational documents, and quite a lot of time is spent for verification and interviews of the holders of qualifications. Verification of evidence of studies is important part of recognition, however it could be clearly stated in operational charter of recognition, that interviews is not a tool for all applicants, and that it is used only when evaluator have some doubts about evidence of studies. Hereby it is suggested to create schematic outline as it is used in European Area of Recognition (EAR) Manual <http://ear.enic-naric.net/emanual/> .

The workshop with the staff of ANO was focused on recognition criteria, and special cases and practices with the qualifications from different countries.

Current system of recognition of foreign qualifications is focusing on the content of the programme, the content of each course, number of working hours and other input elements that makes the recognition too detailed and complex. According to the national regulation: *definition of the equivalence of higher education specialties is carried out through: Examination – recognition of higher education specialties of foreign countries and definition of compliance of the education acquired in the foreign country with educational standards of the Republic of Azerbaijan* <https://www.nostrifikasiya.edu.az/frontend/en/content/item/9-%C3%BCmumi-qaydalar>.

According to the subsidiary texts to the LRC the recognition of foreign qualifications should be based on five key elements of the qualifications – level, workload, profile, quality and learning outcomes, and the function of a qualification (formal right of the holder of qualification in home system of education). The ANO works for simplification of the assessment process, but the draft guidelines for new recognition system are not yet adopted by the Government. Therefore it can be suggested that the Ministry of Education will improve the recognition procedures moving from equivalence to the recognition unless substantial differences can be shown between the foreign and national qualification. It is suggested to implement the assessment and recognition system in the light of guidelines approved by the ENIC (European Network of Information Centres on Academic Recognition) – European Area of Recognition (EAR) manual, which is a practical tool for recognition authorities, credential evaluators and admission officers.

Also it can be suggested to use and implement subsidiary texts to the LRC to improve fair recognition of qualifications concerning higher education. Recommendation on Criteria and Procedures for Assessment of Foreign Qualifications (revised, adopted in 2010), and Recommendation on the Use the Qualifications Frameworks in the Recognition of Foreign Qualifications (adopted in 2013) are the fundamental tools for this process to introduce recommended criteria and procedure towards fair recognition based on learning outcomes.

According to the Recommendation on the Use the Qualifications Frameworks in the Recognition of Foreign Qualifications, the competent recognition authorities should also refer to the National Qualifications Framework, European Qualifications Frameworks and other similar Qualifications Frameworks as part of the assessment process. Therefore the development of Azerbaijan Qualification Framework will be a good transparency tool for the recognition of qualifications awarded by the education institutions in Azerbaijan.

LRC states that authorities shall provide adequate information on any institution belonging to its higher education system, andon any programme operated by these institutions. Higher education institutions in Azerbaijan are recommended to provide minimum information about their higher education programmes and qualification on their websites. Minimum information should be provided not only on national, but also on commonly used language, preferable in English.

It is very important to provide information about the educational system of Azerbaijan and on recognition issues on the website of ANO.

ENIC Network is useful in collecting information about education systems and lists of recognised education institutions. ANO looking forward to cooperate with the activities of the network, including the participation on recognition listserv (ENIC listserv). The ENIC network is established to exchange information and support assessment and recognition of foreign qualifications as well to exchange information on higher education systems and recognized institutions. Therefore a suggestion is also to improve information provision about Azerbaijani higher education system and recognition in the network´s website [www.enic-naric.net](http://www.enic-naric.net).

Effort should be put to improve language skills of the recognition staff of ANO. The working language of ENIC Network is English, also all projects introduced by the European Commission and working documentation presented by the Council of Europe and UNESCO are in English. Capacity building of the staff of ANO should be part of development strategy of ANO. Therefore the suggestion is to organise regular staff training in the forms of study visits to other countries, on-line training courses, participation in conferences and seminars organised by the ENIC offices or international organisations in the field of recognition.

To improve cooperation with universities and disseminate information on recognition practices it is suggested to organize regular seminars on recognition for higher education audience.

ANO recognition terminology is recommended to use in light of Lisbon Recognition Convention. Therefore the use of term “nostricifation”, which is common term for old recognition approaches, at least on English translations is recommended to change to term “recognition”.

Higher education institutions have interest to develop internationalisation activities and therefore have interest on recognition procedures for admission of students holding a foreign qualification. Seminar for higher education institutions on recognition issues was held in Baku State University on 1 March 2017. There were a total of 34 participants mainly from the universities as Azerbaijan State Oil and Industry University, Azerbaijan State Arts and Culture University, Azerbaijan Technical University, Khazar University, Azerbaijan State Economic University, Azerbaijan University of Languages, Baku Engineering University, Sumgait State University, Nakhchivan State University, Azerbaijan State Pedagogical University, but also participants from Ministry of Education and ANO. The agenda of the seminar was focused on the presentations on international legal instruments; reforms in the European Higher Education Area; assessment recognition practices in Europa; assessment criteria and procedure; recognition networks; information provision; and recognition system, principles and procedure in the Republic of Azerbaijan.

**03/03/2017 , Baku \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

(Date and place) (Signature of Expert)

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