



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

*Brussels, 18.10.2018
C(2018) 6729 final*

Dear President,

The Commission would like to thank the Bundesrat for its Opinion concerning the proposal for a Council Recommendation on promoting automatic mutual recognition of higher education and upper secondary education diplomas, and the outcomes of learning periods abroad {COM(2018) 270 final}.

The Commission proposal follows up on the discussions during the Social Summit in Gothenburg and the conclusions of the European Council in December 2017, where Heads of State and Government expressed their willingness to do more in the areas of education and culture, recognising that these areas are key to building inclusive and cohesive societies, and to sustaining our competitiveness.

The objective of the proposed Council Recommendation is to ensure that any student, apprentice or pupil who has a learning experience abroad, whether for a qualification or learning mobility, has that experience automatically recognised for the purposes of further study. This shall not prejudice the right of an education and training institution to make decisions on admission.

The Commission agrees with the Bundesrat on the need to respect the differences between the education and training systems of Member States. The Commission also fully respects Member States' exclusive competences for the content of teaching and the organisation of education systems, in line with Article 165 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union. The Commission would like to recall that the Treaty stipulates that European Union action shall be aimed at 'encouraging mobility of students and teachers, by encouraging inter alia, the academic recognition of diplomas and periods of study'.

As a non-binding instrument, the Commission proposal invites Member States to commit politically to automatic recognition by 2025. This commitment, which is of a voluntary nature, would be accompanied by actions that will help Member States to build trust in each other's education systems, and support them in improving recognition in order to facilitate learning mobility.

*Mr Michael MÜLLER
President of the Bundesrat
Leipziger Straße 3 - 4
D – 10117 BERLIN*

In the field of higher education, the proposed Recommendation builds on the achievements of the Bologna Process, which also covers countries outside the Union. The key commitments of the Bologna Process (the 3-cycle system Bachelor-Master-Doctorate, quality assurance and automatic recognition) help to make higher education systems more transparent and qualifications more comparable. Although significant progress has been made in this respect, implementation of these key commitments is uneven, which hinders mobility. The Paris Communiqué of Ministers of the Bologna Process of May 2018 pointed out that work needs to be done to boost implementation of these commitments. The Commission plans to establish a peer support mechanism to achieve this goal.

Meanwhile, as reflected in the Council Conclusions of 14 December 2017, Member States are ready to enhance the pace of recognition, the key building block of the European Education Area. Automatic mutual recognition of qualifications and learning periods abroad in a Union context will also have beneficial effects in countries outside the European Union.

Given the diversity of higher education institutions and study programmes, it is unlikely that the learning outcomes of a single educational component in two different programmes will be identical. Recognition of qualifications obtained in another context, should therefore be based on compatibility of learning outcomes rather than equivalence of course contents. Work should continue on the implementation of the Union transparency and quality assurance tools (updated Course Catalogue, Diploma Supplement, and European Qualifications Framework) to foster trust in each other's education systems, which is necessary to achieve automatic recognition by 2025. In this context, the Commission agrees with the Bundesrat that the European Qualifications Framework is a tool to foster transparency in Member States' education and training systems and should not be used as a recognition tool.

As regards upper secondary qualifications, the stakeholder consultation carried out in preparation of the proposed Recommendation has shown that mutual recognition processes at upper secondary level are much less developed. Holders of qualifications giving access to higher education in one Member State often lack certainty about access to higher education in another Member State. The proposal does not aim to create new structures, but to foster transparency and trust among Member States in each other's education systems.

The Commission welcomes the Bundesrat's support for learning mobility in general and in secondary vocational education in particular. It recalls that the proposed Recommendation does not explicitly call for automatic recognition of the outcomes of study periods abroad in secondary general and vocational education, and wishes to link the recognition of study periods abroad in secondary general and vocational education to (i) an assessment of competences gained during the learning mobility and (ii) with already existing practices for learning mobility in vocational education and training organised in the context of the Erasmus+ programme.

As regards reporting requirements, the proposed Recommendation specifies that Member States' reporting should take place through existing frameworks and tools, in order to limit the burden on Member States as much as possible. At the same time, reporting is a necessary element to allow monitoring the implementation of the Recommendation.

The Commission hopes that the clarifications provided in this reply address the issues raised by the Bundesrat and looks forward to continuing the political dialogue in the future.

Yours faithfully,

*Frans Timmermans
First Vice-President*

*Tibor Navracsics
Member of the Commission*