

1 **DECLARATION ON RECOGNITION OF ACADEMIC** 2 **QUALIFICATIONS IN THE WESTERN BALKANS**

3

4 **Preamble**

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6 Taking into account the commitments undertaken in the Multi-Annual Plan on Regional
7 Economic Area we aim to deliver on these commitments and to actively contribute to the
8 European Higher Education Area and European Education Area;

9 Acknowledging that in an increasingly globalised context, students and graduates should be
10 able to make the best possible use of all learning opportunities;

11 Recognising the importance of mobility of students and regional cooperation in higher
12 education, for personal development and increased employability of students, and in
13 particular the development of inter-cultural skills; fostering the internationalisation and
14 enhancing quality of higher education; and strengthening of peaceful and democratic
15 societies;

16 Convinced that through joint regional cooperation we will consolidate the efforts to align in
17 full with the principles of the European Higher Education Area outlined in the Bologna
18 process Communiqués and the Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning
19 Higher Education in the European Region (Lisbon Recognition Convention), as well as the
20 Council Recommendation on promoting automatic mutual recognition of higher education
21 and upper secondary education and training qualifications and the outcomes of learning
22 periods abroad;

23 We hereby undertake to attain the automatic mutual recognition¹ of academic
24 qualifications based on the principles set out in this Declaration on Recognition of Academic

¹ Without prejudice to check the authenticity of documents by competent authorities.

25 Qualifications in the Western Balkans² while taking into full respect the diversity of higher
26 education systems and of the University autonomy.

27

28 **Access to higher education**

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30 In principle, a secondary education qualification of the European Qualifications Framework
31 (hereinafter: EQF) Level 4 giving access to higher education should be recognised for the
32 purpose of giving access to higher education, without prejudicing a higher education
33 institutions' or the competent authorities' right to set specific admission criteria for specific
34 programmes or to check authenticity of documents.

35 Furthermore, we commit to grant automatic recognition of general education qualifications
36 and of Matura exams where they are organised for the purpose of giving access to higher
37 education, without prejudicing a higher education institutions' or the competent
38 authorities' right to set specific admission criteria for specific programmes or to check
39 authenticity of documents.

40 **Recognition of short cycle qualifications**

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42 In principle, the short cycle degrees, of minimum duration of one or two years or 60 or 120
43 ECTS, awarded in the public, accredited higher education institution should be recognised as
44 an EQF Level 5 degree, where foreseen and in line with the National Qualifications
45 Frameworks, without prejudicing a higher education institutions' or the competent
46 authorities' right to set specific admission criteria for specific programmes or to check
47 authenticity of documents.

48 For the purpose of employment, the competent authority, should automatically issue a
49 document attesting that the short cycle degree, of minimum duration of one or two years or
50 60 or 120 ECTS, awarded in the public, accredited higher education institution is recognised

² This Declaration is without prejudice to the existing agreements on recognition of academic qualifications in the Western Balkans.

51 as an EQF Level 5 degree without prejudice to check the authenticity of documents by
52 competent authorities.

53 For the purpose of continuing academic studies, ECTS acquired during the short cycle
54 degree, of minimum duration of one or two years or 60 or 120 ECTS, awarded in the public,
55 accredited higher education institution can be recognized as respective ECTS of a first cycle
56 degree, where possible and in line with the learning outcomes of the receiving study
57 programme, by the receiving higher education institution, without prejudicing the higher
58 education institutions' right to set specific admission criteria for specific programmes or to
59 check the authenticity of documents.

60

61 **Recognition of first cycle academic qualifications**

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63 In principle, the first cycle degrees, of three or four years in duration or 180 or 240 ECTS,
64 awarded in the public, accredited higher education institution should be recognised as an
65 EQF Level 6 degree without prejudicing a higher education institutions' or the competent
66 authorities' right to set specific admission criteria for specific programmes or to check
67 authenticity of documents.

68 For the purpose of employment, the competent authority, should automatically issue a
69 document attesting that the first cycle degree, of minimum duration of three or four years
70 or 180 or 240 ECTS, awarded in the public, accredited higher education institution is
71 recognised as an EQF Level 6 degree, without prejudice to check the authenticity of
72 documents by competent authorities.

73 For the purpose of continuing academic studies, the first cycle degree, of minimum duration
74 of three or four years or 180 or 240 ECTS, awarded in the public, accredited higher
75 education institution should give access to second cycle studies, without prejudicing the
76 higher education institutions' right to set specific admission criteria for specific programmes
77 or to check the authenticity of documents.

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79 **Recognition of second cycle academic qualifications**

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81 In principle, the second cycle degrees, of minimum duration of one to - two years or 60 - to
82 120 ECTS, awarded after completion of the first cycle study programme in the public,
83 accredited higher education institution should be recognised as an EQF Level 7 degree. The
84 appropriate sub-level of the EQF 7 will be determined based on the type of the completed
85 second cycle degree, i.e. whether the second cycle degree is awarded after completion of
86 academic or professional studies.

87 For the purpose of employment, the competent authority, should automatically issue a
88 document attesting that the second cycle degree, of minimum duration of one to two years
89 or 60 to 120 ECTS, awarded after completion of the first cycle study programme in the
90 public, accredited higher education institution is recognised as an EQF Level 7 degree,
91 without prejudice to check the authenticity of documents by competent authorities. The
92 appropriate sub-level of the EQF 7 will be determined based on the type of the completed
93 second cycle degree, i.e. whether the second cycle degree is awarded after completion of
94 academic or professional studies.

95 For the purpose of continuing academic studies towards the third cycle studies, the second
96 cycle academic degree, of minimum duration of one to two years or 60 to 120 ECTS,
97 awarded in the public, accredited higher education institution should give access to third
98 cycle studies, as foreseen in the domestic framework, without prejudicing the higher
99 education institutions' right to set specific admission criteria for specific programmes or to
100 check the authenticity of documents.

101

102 **Recognition of integrated second cycle degrees**

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104 In principle, the integrated second cycle degrees, of minimum duration of five to six years or
105 300 to 360 ECTS, respectively, awarded in the public, accredited higher education
106 institutions, should be recognised as an EQF Level 7 degrees without prejudicing a higher

107 education institutions' or the competent authorities' right to set specific admission criteria
108 for specific programmes or to check authenticity of documents.

109 For the purpose of employment, the competent authority, should automatically issue a
110 document attesting that the integrated second cycle degrees, of minimum duration of five
111 to six years or 300 to 360 ECTS, respectively, awarded in the public, accredited higher
112 education institutions, is recognised as an EQF Level 7 degree without prejudice to check the
113 authenticity of documents by competent authorities.

114 For the purpose of continuing academic studies, the integrated second cycle degrees, of
115 minimum duration of five to six years or 300 to 360 ECTS, respectively, awarded in the
116 public, accredited higher education institutions, should give access to third cycle studies,
117 without prejudicing the higher education institutions' right to set specific admission criteria
118 for specific programmes or to check the authenticity of documents.

119

120 **Recognition of study periods abroad**

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122 Periods of study completed abroad within the framework of higher education programme
123 provided by the public, accredited higher education institution shall be recognised with a
124 view of granting transfer of maximum credits relevant to the programme.

125 In cases when periods of study abroad have been completed according to a previous
126 agreement between higher education institutions a full credit transfer shall be granted
127 without a delay in accordance with the established agreement.

128 **Advancing regional cooperation in higher education**

129 In light of this Declaration, we encourage all higher education institutions and competent
130 authorities to respond to requests aimed at checking the authenticity of higher education
131 qualifications within two weeks and free of charge.

132 We take the commitments outlined in this Declaration to be of utmost importance,
133 therefore we mandate the Working Group on Recognition of Academic Qualifications, under
134 auspices of Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) and Education Reform Initiative of South
135 East Europe (ERI SEE) to report annually on the implementation of the Declaration on
136 Recognition of Academic Qualifications in the Western Balkans.

137

138 In view of enhancing recognition procedures to the benefit of all graduates, we further
139 mandate the Working Group on Recognition of Academic Qualifications to initiate expert
140 discussion and prepare expert recommendations on recognition of academic qualifications
141 issued prior to the implementation of the Bologna system of three cycle studies and the
142 third cycle academic degrees by the next Western Balkan Summit in 2020.

143 In light of developments of qualifications frameworks in the Western Balkans we task the
144 WG to carry out a comparison of the established qualifications frameworks to facilitate
145 further recognition of qualifications in the region

146

147 Acknowledging the importance of fostering transparency and building trust in each other's
148 higher education systems to achieve automatic mutual recognitions, we commit ourselves
149 to align our quality assurance systems with the most recent Standards and Guidelines for
150 Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG). In line with the European
151 Higher Education Area key commitments we aim to ensure that external quality assurance is
152 performed by independent agencies that demonstrably comply with the ESG and are
153 registered on the European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR).

154 To facilitate these goals, we will engage in bi-/multi-lateral exchanges with partners that
155 have established and have mature quality assurance systems. We will actively use the peer-

156 learning opportunities, e.g. staff exchanges between Quality Assurance bodies or ministries,
157 offered within the context of the Bologna Process or initiated in the context of joint regional
158 cooperation. We also encourage our Quality Assurance bodies to actively participate in
159 existing European and regional networks or associations, i.e. European Association for
160 Quality Assurance in Higher Education and Central and Eastern European Network of Quality
161 Assurance Agencies in Higher Education. We further mandate the Regional Cooperation
162 Council and Education Reform Initiative of South East Europe to jointly establish an informal
163 Western Balkans Network of Quality Assurance bodies with an aim of supporting the
164 alignment with the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the
165 European Higher Education Area, as well as to work jointly on implementation of the ESG
166 with an aim of preparing harmonised operational guidelines and procedures for external
167 quality assurance, i.e. accreditation and reaccreditation of institutions or programmes. We
168 also mandate the Working Group on Recognition of Academic Qualifications to discuss
169 possibilities of cooperation and participation in ongoing initiatives aimed at ranking higher
170 education institutions or to propose a model for ranking higher education institutions in the
171 Western Balkans.