

Report

COM/LAIR/REP/002/FINAL

Seventh Meeting
Astana, 1 March 2019

***“PROBLEMS OF EQUIVALENCE PROCESSES IN HIGHER EDUCATION
IN TURKPA MEMBER COUNTRIES”***

I. INTRODUCTION

The role of higher education in sustainable economic and social development increase year by year. Higher education can be seen as a focal point of knowledge and its application, an institution which makes a great contribution to the economic growth and development through fostering innovation and increasing higher skills. One of the missions of the modern universities is finding solutions to big challenges and conducting research within global priority areas, contributing to social outcomes such as health and social engagement. Knowledge is the true basis of higher education: its production via research, its transmission via teaching, its acquisition and use by students.

Internationalization is not new in higher education. Universities, although they are national entities, have been recognized as some of the most international institutions. Globalization, on the other hand, assumes that borders and national systems as such tend to become blurred or disappear. The internationalization of education implies the imparting of knowledge, skills and values which have universal appeal and application. Globalization of higher education can be seen as part of internationalization. Globalization implies higher education becoming a designed activity to introduce an international and multicultural outlook.

Cross-border education is the best visible example of globalization of higher education. It implies the mobility of students, teachers and programmes across national boundaries. One of the important components of cross-border education involves the movement of students from domestic to foreign countries. Internationalization of education, with a good measure of cross border education and trans-national education, has gained importance in the recent years.

Member states of the Parliamentary Assembly of Turkic Speaking States (TURKPA) have well-developed and advanced higher education systems both in terms of qualitative and quantitative aspects. Globalization and internationalization of education on the other hand has led to the increasing number of students from TURKPA member countries to move from one country to another in order to take university education. This phenomenon has brought the issue of the recognition of qualifications received from the foreign countries. Keeping in mind that each and every member country has its own and unique system, this report aims to present the main characteristics of the higher education systems and equivalence processes in TURKPA member countries. By this way, similarities and differences will be put forward and the parties will have an opportunity to learn from each other's experiences and adopt the best practices to their own systems.

The following section contains information on higher education systems and equivalence processes of TURKPA member countries received from relevant governmental bodies through national parliaments.

I. HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEMS AND EQUIVALENCE PROCESSES IN TURKPA MEMBER COUNTRIES

AZERBAIJAN

There are 51 (40 state, 11 private) higher education institutions in Azerbaijan. For the 2018/2019 academic year, 171,104 students, including 157,662 at the bachelor's and 13,422 at the master's degrees (including 131 under the share of ANAS institutes) are enrolled in higher education institutions, where services are provided in four languages i.e. Azerbaijani, Russian, English and Turkish.

With the official accession to the Bologna Process in 2005, as well as with adoption of the '*Law of the Republic of Azerbaijan on Education*' in 2009, the contents of higher education system were substantially refreshed, the implementation of the European Credit Transfer System and three levels of higher education (bachelor, master and doctorate) staff training have been initiated. The "State Strategy for the Development of Education in the Republic of Azerbaijan" approved by the President of Azerbaijan in 2013 aims at forming a leading education system in the world, with a high level of infrastructure based on modern technologies. This concept paper identifies the creation of equal and quality education opportunities for each individual, as well as for content development and institutional framework of the education system at all stages and levels.

Azerbaijan has become an equal member of the European Higher Education Area and the activities of higher education institutions are fully adapted to the requirements of the Bologna Process. Implementation of the European Credit Transfer System, effective

use of experience of Europe and leading universities of the world created opportunities for the development of the process of education in terms of form and content. Significant successes have been achieved in the introduction of new approaches and methodologies in the preparation of highly qualified staff, improvement of student admission rules, establishment of quality management centers at universities, improving the effectiveness of career centers serving graduates, and increasing the effectiveness of scientific activities.

Based on the principles of educated, skillful and trained specialists the SABAH project has been launched for the first time on the basis of new content and teaching technologies. At present, SABAH teams cover 39 universities and more than 2300 students, operating in 12 higher educational institutions. Dual diploma programs implemented jointly with leading European universities have played an important role in improving the content of higher education and enhancing the international reputation of higher education institutions.

“State Program on Education of Azerbaijan Youth Abroad in the years 2007-2015” approved by the relevant decree of President İlham Aliyev, can be assessed as one of the most important events in the field of education. In the framework of this successful program, 3558 Azerbaijani young people have gained the opportunity to study at the most prestigious universities of the world at the bachelor's, masters and doctoral levels. The vast majority of these young people have already returned following the completion of their education and started to contribute to the future development of the country.

As a further example of great importance attached to the higher education by the state and continuation of the work in this direction, “State Program on Increasing International Competitiveness of the Higher Education System in the Republic of Azerbaijan for 2019-2023”, approved by the Presidential Decree on November 16 2018, puts forward new tasks in line with the requirements of the modern era.

As a result of result-oriented state policy in the field of education, the number of foreign students studying in Azerbaijan is constantly increasing. In the academic year 2017/2018, 5871 foreigners from 76 countries acquired higher education in Azerbaijan. This is an increase of 17% compared to the previous year. The Republic of Azerbaijan has joined several international conventions on the recognition of foreign higher education specialties and determination of their equivalence. The procedure of recognition of foreign higher education specialties and determination of their equivalence (*nostrification*) is implemented on the basis of “Rules of Recognition of Specialties of Foreign States in the sphere of the Higher Education and Determination of their Equivalence (Nostrification)”, prepared in accordance with the provisions of the Lisbon Convention on “Recognition of Qualifications Concerning Higher Education in the European Region” and approved by the Resolution № 64 of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Azerbaijan, dated from May 13, 2003.

The Republic of Azerbaijan is also a partner of the Regional Convention on the Recognition of Training courses, Academic Degrees, Degrees in Higher Education in Asia and Pacific countries for Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education, which also includes Turkey, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan and refers to the provisions of the Convention in the implementation of the procedure for identifying and equivalence of foreign higher education.

The number of applications from the graduates of higher educational institutions of Turkey, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan that applied for the recognition and equivalence (nostrification) of the foreign higher education specialties to the Ministry of Education of Azerbaijan during the year 2018 is 528, 55 and 11 respectively. The main problematic issues and related recommendations existing between the Republic of Azerbaijan and Turkey, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan can be grouped as follows. While the overall situation regarding the recognition and equivalence of foreign higher education qualifications of graduates of higher education institutions of the Republic of Turkey is satisfactory, it should be noted that recently the number of citizens receiving education on distance learning has been increasing. In this connection it must be underlined that the mechanism of organization and assessment of distance education in the territory of the Republic of Azerbaijan is not provided by the legislation. In view of the above noted, it is not possible to identify the recognition and equivalence (nostrification) of the qualifications of these applicants.

KAZAKHSTAN

There are 131 higher education institutions in Kazakhstan i.e. 10 national, 31 state, 14 non-civil, 1 joint-stock companies' union, 1 international, 18 joint-stock companies and 56 private. More than 500,000 students receive higher and post-graduate education and more than 38,000 are trained in teaching.

In order to ensure access to higher education, a regulation has been issued on reintroduction of Unified National Testing (UNT) and Complex Testing (CT) from 2016, as well as conditional acceptance of persons who cannot obtain a threshold score on a paid basis by the end of the first academic period. This event allowed the Kazakhstani higher educational institutions to receive more than 30 thousand young people.

There are a number of innovations to help candidates in 2019. Starting from 2019 the UNT is held four times a year (January, March, June-July, August) and students can be admitted to the University by paying a certain fee.

Mandatory requirements for the complex testing for the transfer of students from foreign higher educational institutions to the Kazakhstani higher educational institutions were eliminated in 2018. It is possible to use the results of admission tests received from

foreign countries at the entrance to a university. As a result, about 22 thousand young people from abroad without UNT and CT attend Kazakhstan universities.

During the recognition and nostrification process (equivalence), the educational certificate issued by the foreign organization determines the equivalent (equivalent) of the Republic of Kazakhstan to compulsory educational standards. The recognition and nostrification procedure is a public service and regulated by the following normative legal acts:

- the order of the Minister of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan from January 10, 2008 № 8 "About approval of Rules of recognition and nostrification of documents on education";
- the order of the Minister of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan from April 16, 2015 of No. 212 "About approval of the standard of the state service" Recognition and nostrification of the documents on education ";
- The order of the Minister of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan from August 13, 2015 of No. 528 "About approval of the standard of the state service" Recognition and nostrification of education documents ".

State service provider in equivalence process, department for "Recognition and Nostrification of Education Documents" is the Centre for Bologna Process and Academic Mobility.

KYRGYZSTAN

There are 63 universities in Kyrgyzstan, of which 32 are state and 31 are private. The total number of university students is 162,200. 16% of students in the universities study at the expense of the state budget and 84% of students are on a contract basis. There are 10,812 teaching staff at the universities, of which 3,225 are PhD candidates, 748 are PhD, 2,147 are associate professors and 596 are professors. The admission plan to universities on a grant/budget basis is annually approved by the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic. For the academic year 2018-2019, universities have been allocated 5,705 grant places. In general, for the specialties in 2018, 582 grant places were allocated (10% of the total number of grants).

Since the end of 2017, the Ministry has been working to determine the ranking of universities of the Kyrgyz Republic by programs. For the first time in 2018, an independent accreditation and rating agency determined a ranking of educational programs (specialties) and a ranking of faculty members of universities using digital ranking technology based on a methodology developed in accordance with the principles of objectivity, transparency, reliability and accessibility. The objectivity of the methodology is determined by summing up the indicators according to five criteria

that are identical for the levels studied, taking into account the information entered by the university itself. The independent ranking of universities of the Kyrgyz Republic 2018 was an effective tool for ranking and evaluation, which contributes to improving competitiveness and increasing the potential of educational services, aimed at supporting and promoting the culture of quality national education.

In accordance with Article 40 of the ‘Law on Education’, in order to confirm the quality of the educational services provided, educational organizations are accredited as an institution and (or) on program basis. At this stage, universities have the right to issue certificates of education to graduates according to the results of this accreditation. For the period 2017-2018, according to the data provided by the accreditation agencies, accreditations were held in 29 universities for 167 higher professional education programs, in 33 educational organizations (universities, colleges) for 143 secondary vocational education programs, in 15 vocational schools for 97 primary vocational education programs.

In accordance with the “Regulation on Secondary, Higher, Additional and Postgraduate Professional Education Documents”, approved by the Government Resolution of the Kyrgyz Republic of February 3, 2004 No.53, education documents issued by higher and secondary vocational educational institutions of other countries are recognized in the Kyrgyz Republic on the basis of relevant international treaties or agreements on recognition or after accreditation of an educational institution in the Kyrgyz Republic.

In the absence of international agreements on recognition, the Ministry of Education and Science of the Kyrgyz Republic individually examines the education documents of certain foreign countries for compliance with the level of professional education and a certificate of their recognition is issued. According to the Instruction on issuing certificates confirming the level and content of education documents issued by foreign educational institutions, approved by Order No.45/1 of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Kyrgyz Republic dated February 1, 2005, the level of education in the absence of international treaties or agreements on recognition is determined by the periods of education.

In accordance with the Government Resolution of the Kyrgyz Republic dated 04.07.2017 No.421, to obtain the equivalence certificate, the following documents must be submitted: an application of a citizen; the original and a copy of the education document; the original and a copy of the annex to the education document, which indicates information on the form and duration of training, the system of knowledge assessment, a list of academic disciplines, the total amount of class and independent hours (credits); a notarized translation of the education document in Kyrgyz or Russian; copies of documents provided for examination; a request of the educational establishment, institution where the continuation of education or professional activity of the applicant is planned; an identity document of the applicant in person.

Examination of education documents issued by educational institutions of the states with which the Kyrgyz Republic has intergovernmental agreements on the recognition of education documents is carried out within two working days. Examination of education documents issued by educational institutions of states with which the Kyrgyz Republic does not have intergovernmental agreements on the recognition of education documents is carried out within one month. If there are controversial issues regarding the determination of the level of education documents issued by foreign educational institutions, the Ministry of Education reserves the right to require the provision of additional documents confirming the period and content of education.

Education documents issued in the Republic of Belarus, the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Russian Federation and the Republic of Tajikistan after October 1, 1999 are recognized without a nostrification procedure in accordance with the Agreement on 'Mutual Recognition and Equivalence of Education Documents, Academic Degrees and Titles' dated November 24, 1998.

There are no special problems in the examination of education documents issued by foreign educational institutions. But it would be more convenient to receive from the parties' samples of documents on education, as well as regulatory legal acts regulating the rules of registration and issuance of education documents, information on the procedure for recognition of foreign education documents and information about authorized bodies for recognition of education documents.

TURKEY

The Council of Higher Education (CoHE) was established by Law No. 2547 dated 06 November 1981. With this law, all higher education institutions in Turkey were gathered under the roof of Higher Education Council (CoHE) i.e. the institution responsible from higher education. The Council of Higher Education (CoHE) focuses mainly on strategic planning in higher education, coordination between universities, and most importantly, responsible for quality assurance mechanisms.

There are 129 state universities, 72 private universities and 5 private vocational high schools in Turkey. A total of 7.5 million students receive education at these higher education institutions. 125,000 of them are registered as international students. In terms of academic staff, there is 158 thousand teaching staff in these institutions.

Turkey became a member of the Bologna Process in 2001. The goals set by the Bologna Process provide suitable tools for Turkey to bring higher education studies to the global dimension.

Recognition and Accreditation process in Turkey began to be carried out by "Equality Unit" which was established in 1983 by the decision of the Higher Education Council

(HEC) within Higher Education Council. In 2017, the said Unit was transformed into 'Recognition and Equivalence Services Department'. Accreditation process in Turkey is carried out in accordance with the Convention on the Recognition of Documents Related to Higher Education in the European Region (Lisbon Convention - 11/04/1997), the article 7/p of Higher Education Act no 2547, the Regulation on Recognition and Accreditation of Higher Education Diploma Received from Abroad (05/12/2017), relevant legislation on Higher Education and Vocational Execution and bilateral and multilateral Higher Education Agreements.

The first condition in the equivalence evaluation process is that the higher education institution that gives the required diploma should be recognized. In order for a higher education institution to be recognized, it should be recognized by the competent authorities of the country in which it is active, as an institution authorized to award academic degrees within the system of higher education.

The authenticity of the diplomas obtained from the recognized foreign higher education institutions and the confirmation of whether the diploma belongs to the applicant is made through foreign representations i.e. diplomatic missions. As a result of the confirmation process, studies are carried out to determine whether the higher education program graduated by the concerned person is equivalent to the programs and degrees in the Turkish higher education system in terms of minimum time, credits and achievements. As a result of the evaluations made by the commissions composed of academicians working in higher education institutions in Turkey and, if necessary, in line with the opinion received from the universities, equivalence is awarded to those who meet the required duration for formal education and graduated from the fields appropriate for the degree and programs in Turkish higher education system in terms of the academic and professional achievements of the graduate program, the language of education, its quality, theoretical and practical courses, internships and projects.

The applications for graduates of non-recognized higher education institutions or programs that do not have compulsory attendance such as distance education, those that are not appropriate to Turkish education system in terms of minimum time, credits and achievements and the equivalence applications for diplomas taken without fulfilling the requirements of formal education are rejected.

In case of deficiencies in terms of academic and professional competencies related to the diploma program demanded for equivalence, the applicant may be asked to test the knowledge and skills or complete the missing achievements and enrol into one or several applications under the 'Level and Proficiency Identification System' especially for the purposes of adaptation in areas requiring professional execution. These applications are Level Identification Examination, Course Completion, Structured Clinical Examination, Scientific Identity Identification, Project Making, Clinical Practice, Internship and Course Completion.

One of the important stages of the equivalence process is the ‘confirmation process’ in which the accuracy of diplomas and the content of education is questioned and this process is carried out by communicating the information received from the higher education institutions in the country concerned through foreign representations. The authenticity of the diplomas received and the qualitative and quantitative characteristics of the higher education are questioned in confirmation process. Incoming answers play an important role in determining the outcome of the equivalence application. According to the contents of the responses, different practices are undertaken on the applicants in line with the opinions of the relevant commissions and universities i.e. equivalence, rejection or examination.

For this reason, during the confirmation, special attention is given on the existence of information on whether the education type of the students is formal or distance education, in the higher education programs where both is given together, the percentage distribution of these education types in the total education period and the serial number of the higher education diploma. Information about those who have been graduated after a transfer from one university to another must include information on universities where graduates start higher education and graduated (by specifying the education years and courses separately for each university).

As according to the higher education legislation in Turkey, it is required to attend the courses and practical studies in formal education, the duration of the stay in the foreign country have been taken into consideration. In case the applicants who have graduated from the formal education programs in the relevant countries are found not to comply with the obligation of attendance required by formal education, equivalence applications are rejected. For this reason, higher education institutions and students should be sensitive about the duration of their attendance to the courses.

The number of accreditation applications in Turkey from the graduates of higher education institutions of Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan equals to thousands every year. Azerbaijan has the highest number among the other countries in terms of the number of annual equivalence applications. Turkey has signed a memorandum of understanding only with Azerbaijan in the field of higher education among TURKPA members.

The universities in Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan which are included in the 2018 YKS (Higher Education Institutions Exam) Guide are as follows: Kyrgyzstan-Turkey Manas University (Kyrgyzstan), Hoca Ahmet Yesevi International Turkish Kazakh University (Kazakhstan), Odlar Yurdu University, Nakhichevan State University, Baku State University, Baku Slavic University, Azerbaijan Languages University, Azerbaijan State Civilization and Fine Arts University, Azerbaijan State Pedagogical University, Azerbaijan University of Architecture and Construction, Sumgait State University, Azerbaijan Medical University (Azerbaijan).

The number of applications of graduates from universities at the YKS Guide and other universities in Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan is approximately five thousand. When the citizens of Azerbaijan, Republic of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan registered to universities in Turkey are also taken into consideration, a high level of student mobility and huge number of equivalence applications is observed in the countries of the Turkic World.

III. CONCLUSION

Higher education is a convenient mechanism to generate knowledge and enable its application, an institution which makes a great contribution to the economic growth and development through fostering innovation and increasing higher skills. By means of internationalization of education and with the impact of the globalization process, higher education has increasingly become an activity with an international and multicultural outlook, leading to the mobility of students, teachers and programmes across national boundaries.

Member states of the Parliamentary Assembly of Turkic Speaking States (TURKPA) have well-developed and advanced higher education systems both in terms of qualitative and quantitative aspects. Globalization and internationalization of education on the other hand has led to the increasing number of students from TURKPA member countries to move from one country to another in order to take higher education. This phenomenon has brought the issue of the recognition of qualifications received from the foreign countries. The main characteristics of the higher education systems and equivalence processes in TURKPA member countries makes it clear that TURKPA member countries has a great potential in terms of cooperation in higher education especially with regard to the equivalence process. By strengthening the legal and institutional framework, learning from each other's experiences, adopting the best practices to their own systems and facilitating the flow of information, each and every TURKPA member country can make a great contribution to the improvement of the higher education in general and equivalence processes in particular among four participating states.

