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(Acts whose publication is not obligatory)

## EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND COUNCIL

## RECOMMENDATION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL

of 15 February 2006

on further European cooperation in quality assurance in higher education

(2006/143/EC)

THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION,

Having regard to the Treaty establishing the European Community, and in particular Articles 149(4) and 150(4) thereof,

Having regard to the proposal from the Commission,

Having regard to the opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee <sup>(1)</sup>,

After consulting the Committee of the Regions,

Acting in accordance with the procedure laid down in Article 251 of the Treaty <sup>(2)</sup>,

Whereas:

(1) Although the implementation of Council Recommendation 98/561/EC of 24 September 1998 on European cooperation in quality assurance in higher education <sup>(3)</sup> has been a marked success as demonstrated in the report of the Commission of 30 September 2004, there is still a need to improve the performance of European higher

education, particularly as regards quality, in order for it to become more transparent and trustworthy for European citizens and for students and scholars from other continents.

(2) Recommendation 98/561/EC called for support to and, where necessary, the establishment of transparent quality assurance systems. Almost all Member States have set up national assurance systems and have initiated or enabled the establishment of one or more quality assurance or accreditation agencies.

(3) Recommendation 98/561/EC called for quality assurance systems to be based on a series of essential features, including evaluation of programmes or institutions through internal assessment, external review, and involving the participation of students, publication of results and international participation. The results of quality assurance assessments play a significant role in helping higher education institutions to improve performance.

(4) The essential features referred to in recital 3 have generally been implemented in all quality assurance systems and they have been affirmed by the European Ministers of Education, in Berlin, in September 2003, in the context of the Bologna Process, working towards the realisation of a European Higher Education Area.

(5) The European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) was established in 2000 and has a growing membership of quality assurance or accreditation agencies in all Member States.

(6) In the context of the Bologna Process, Ministers of Education from 45 countries adopted the standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area, as proposed by ENQA, during their meeting in Bergen on 19 and 20 May 2005 and as a

<sup>(1)</sup> OJ C 255, 14.10.2005, p. 72.

<sup>(2)</sup> Opinion of the European Parliament of 13 October 2005 (not yet published in the Official Journal) and Council Decision of 30 January 2006.

<sup>(3)</sup> OJ L 270, 7.10.1998, p. 56.

follow-up to the meeting in Berlin in September 2003. They also welcomed the principle of a European register of quality assurance agencies based on national review and asked that the practicalities of implementation be further developed by ENQA, in cooperation with the European University Association (EUA), the European Association for Institutions of Higher Education (EUR-ASHE) and the National Unions of Students in Europe (ESIB), with a report back to Ministers through the Bologna Follow-up Group. They furthermore underlined the importance of cooperation between nationally recognised agencies with a view to enhancing the mutual recognition of accreditation or quality assurance decisions.

- (7) EU action supporting quality assurance should be developed in coherence with activities carried out in the context of the Bologna Process.
- (8) It is desirable to draw up a register of independent and trustworthy quality assurance agencies operating in Europe, be they regional or national, general or specialised, public or private, to support transparency in higher education and help the recognition of qualifications and periods of study abroad.
- (9) In the context of the Lisbon Strategy, the European Council in Barcelona, in March 2002, expressed their conclusion that European education and training systems should become a 'world quality reference',

HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT MEMBER STATES:

1. encourage all higher education institutions active within their territory to introduce or develop rigorous internal quality assurance systems, in accordance with the standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area adopted in Bergen in the context of the Bologna Process;
2. encourage all quality assurance or accreditation agencies active within their territory to be independent in their assessments, to apply the features of quality assurance laid down in Recommendation 98/561/EC and to apply the common set of general standards and guidelines adopted in Bergen, for assessment purposes. These standards should be further developed in cooperation with representatives of the higher education sector. They should be applied in such a way as to protect and promote diversity and innovation;
3. encourage representatives of national authorities, the higher education sector and quality assurance and

accreditation agencies, together with social partners, to set up a 'European Register of Quality Assurance Agencies' (European Register) based on national review, that takes account of the principles set out in the Annex, and to define the conditions for registration and the rules for management of the register;

4. enable higher education institutions active within their territory to choose among quality assurance or accreditation agencies in the European Register an agency which meets their needs and profile, provided that this is compatible with their national legislation or permitted by their national authorities;
5. allow higher education institutions to work towards a complementary assessment by another agency in the European Register, for example to enhance their international reputation;
6. promote cooperation between agencies in order to build up mutual trust and the recognition of quality assurance and accreditation assessments, thus contributing to the recognition of qualifications for the purpose of study or work in another country;
7. ensure public access to the assessments made by the quality assurance or accreditation agencies listed in the European Register,

INVITE THE COMMISSION:

1. to continue, in close cooperation with the Member States, its support for cooperation between higher education institutions, quality assurance and accreditation agencies, competent authorities and other bodies active in the field;
2. to present triennial reports to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on progress in the development of quality assurance systems in the various Member States and on cooperation activities at European level, including the progress achieved with respect to the objectives referred to above.

Done at Strasbourg, 15 February 2006.

*For the European Parliament*

*The President*

J. BORRELL FONTELLES

*For the Council*

*The President*

H. WINKLER

## ANNEX

**'European Register of Quality Assurance Agencies'**

The Register should provide a list of reliable agencies whose assessments Member States (and public authorities within Member States) can trust. It should be founded on the following main principles.

1. The list of agencies should be drawn up by representatives of national authorities, the higher education sector (higher education institutions, students, teachers and researchers) and quality assurance and accreditation agencies active in the Member States, together with social partners.
  2. Conditions for registration of agencies could include, *inter alia*:
    - (i) a commitment to complete independence in reaching their judgement;
    - (ii) recognition by at least the Member State within which they operate (or by public authorities within that Member State);
    - (iii) operation on the basis of the common set of standards and guidelines referred to in recommendations 1 and 2 addressed to the Member State;
    - (iv) regular external review by peers and other experts, including publication of the criteria, methodologies and results of such review.
  3. In the event of an initial refusal of registration, re-evaluation is possible on the basis of improvements made.
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