

bologna process**NATIONAL REPORTS 2004 – 2005**

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1. Main achievements since Berlin***1.1. Give a brief description of important developments, including legislative reforms***

After the Berlin Conference Bulgaria continued its efforts to implement at national level the main objectives of the Bologna Process. The main concern is to ensure the adaptability of the education system towards new challenges, as well as to guarantee sustainable system development in compliance with the objectives of the European Higher Education Area and capable to provide valuable and competitive knowledge and skills.

Actually the major legal documents regulating the national qualifications framework for higher education are The Law on Higher Education (1995, last amendments - SG 64/6 June 2004) and The Classification of the higher education fields of studies and the professional areas (SG 64/02.07.2002). The 2004 amendments of 1995 Law on Higher Education brought considerable changes in the structure of the higher education in Bulgaria by introducing the degrees system. The amendments to that Law, related to the structure of higher education qualifications, are mainly oriented towards improving the opportunities for equal access to further studies, as well as towards increasing system effectiveness and internal mobility.

The most important step when amending the Law was the official implementation of the ECTS and the Diploma Supplement in their capacity of measures supporting mobility and assisting recognition in Europe. With the texts of the Law on Higher Education adopted by the Bulgarian Parliament on June 4 2004 (State Gazette issue 48/04.06.2004) both the a system for accumulation and transfer of credits and the Diploma Supplement were legally introduced. Accordingly, the secondary legislation was updated thus providing the legal framework for their practical implementation.

That secondary legislation consists of the Ordinance on the state requirements on the content of the basic documents issued by the higher education institutions, adopted with Council of Ministers Decree N 215 as of 12.08.2004. At the same time the Diploma Supplement has been promoted by different means (including seminars at national and university level, information brochures, meetings etc.) in order to assist the higher education institutions with these activities. Thus, as from 2005 the graduates will receive the Diploma Supplement automatically issued in one of the widely spoken languages in EU and Bulgarian. The second

document is the Ordinance N 21 for the implementation of a system for credits accumulation and transfer within the higher education institutions (State Gazette issue N 89/12.10.2004)

Another part of the achievements after Berlin is the accreditation system in Bulgaria- that is undergoing considerable change in terms of scope and framework. By the end of 2001 all 47 higher education institutions had received an external visit from the National Evaluation and Accreditation Agency and on the basis of their institutional review got their accreditation status. By the end of 2004 a new cycle of institutional review and accreditation starts, including already 51 institutions.

In 2004 the trend for a growing number of requests for assessment and accreditation continues. Between January and September, 2004 the Agency has accredited 354 programmes and another 180 are scheduled for assessment until the end of the year. 28 programmes failed to get accredited from the beginning of the year 2004. Accredited programmes are distributed between the various qualification levels.

In 2003-04 the Agency made considerable efforts in furthering and improving its methods of evaluation and accreditation. A great part of its proposals took place in the new amendments of the Higher Education Act (in effect since June 2004). A number of paragraphs had been re-formulated so that a shift was made towards the evaluation of quality, rather than the evaluation of compliance with the state requirements. Institutional accreditation is now explicitly linked to the evaluation of the effectiveness of internal quality assurance processes and structures. Programme assessment method is also moving from a programme by programme basis towards a subject level evaluation. The 52 subject fields in the National Classification will be evaluated in the next 2-3 years, as the new method suggests a considerable reduction of the scope of the assessment exercise. Additional measure to enhance the effectiveness of the Agency work deals with the new accreditation powers transferred from the Accreditation Council to the 8 subject level Standing Committees. The latter render the responsibilities for final accreditation of programmes since June 2004. This shift helped the Agency to overcome the delays in its work and to finalise over 180 programme evaluations in the period between June and September 2004.

Another innovation in the Agency method is the introduction of a post-accreditation monitoring, which is expected to become effective in 2005. The Agency is establishing a separate unit with responsibilities for a follow-up review. The follow-up review report may have serious consequences for the visited institution, up to the withdrawal of an accreditation status. This legal and structural move of the Agency reflects the greater awareness of the need for protection of the interests of society in the quality of higher education.

A step towards establishing environment to put the concept of lifelong learning into practice is the drafting of the National Strategy on Continuing Training for the period 2005 – 2010, adopted by a Council of Ministers' on 14 October 2004. The aim of the document is to define national priorities for the development of continuing training in the context of lifelong learning as well as to identify responsible institutions for their realization. To ensure the implementation of the strategy development of an Action plan is foreseen in order to specify concrete practical measures.

2. National organisation

2.1. Give a short description of the structure of public authorities responsible for higher education, the main agencies/bodies in higher education and their competencies

(For example, do higher education institutions report to different ministries?)

As stipulated in the Law on Higher Education the State provide favourable conditions for unrestricted development of higher learning through: elaborating and implementing national policies for the development of higher learning and ensuring higher schools' academic autonomy;. overseeing the quality of specialist training and research; subsidising tuition at public higher schools; and providing, under certain conditions, scholarships and dormitories for students.

The State exercises its functions in the management of higher education through the National Assembly and the Council of Ministers.

The National Assembly: render decisions to establish, transform, rename or close higher schools, as well as affiliates and faculties offering tuition in the specialities related to regulated professions;. allocate annually the subsidy provided to each public higher school via the State Budget Act.

The Council of Ministers: validates the guidelines of national policies in the field of higher education; make motions to the National Assembly to establish, transform, rename or close down higher schools, as well as propose the amount of annual budget subsidies to be allocated to each public higher school; open, transform or close down faculties.

The state authority vested with the implementation of national policies in the area of higher learning is the Ministry of Education and Science and particularly the Department: Policy in Higher Education and Graduate and Post Graduates Studies.

The Ministry of Education and Science perform co-ordinating functions in the relationship between the autonomous higher schools and the state; it also make arrangements for recognition and legitimisation of diplomas of persons who have graduated abroad; exercise control over higher schools. The Minister of Education and Science is entitled to initiate a procedure for accreditation as well as to make a proposal to the National Agency for Assessment and Accreditation to withdraw the accreditation of Higher educational institutions.

The National Evaluation and Accreditation Agency under the Council of Ministers is the specialised state authority vested with the assessment, and accreditation and of the quality control of the activities of the HE institutions. The Agency is supported by the budget. The Agency is exercising post-accreditation monitoring and supervision of the capacity of the institution and its primary units and affiliates to ensure high quality of education and research through an internal system for quality assessment and assurance and the fulfillment of the recommendations given in the course of the assessment and accreditation

The national body vested with expressing the common interests of all students and doctoral candidates is the National Representation of Student Councils. The National Representation of Student Councils is made up of the Chairpersons or the delegated representatives of all higher schools' Student Councils. The National Representation of Student Councils puts forward viewpoints and recommendations as to issues relative to higher learning and science within higher schools concerning educatees thereat and expresses an opinion about the draft state budget in its section concerning higher education and science.

2.2. Give a short description of the institutional structure

(For example, number of public/private universities/other HE institutions or numbers/percentage of students in public/private sector. To what extent are private and State higher education institutions covered by the same regulations?)

In Bulgaria exist two kind of higher education institutions: Universities, Specialized HE institutions and independent colleges. The colleges, are independent entities/that could be public and private/ or within the structure of the HE institutions.

Up to the statistics for 2003/2004 the number of the public higher schools /including universities and equivelent institutions/ in Bulgaria is 37

The number of the private higher schools in Bulgaria /including universities and equivelent institutions is 14

For 2003/2004 the number of the students in public universities is 195 666

For 2003/2004 the number of the students in private universities is 32 802

2.3. Give a brief description of the structure which oversees the implementation of the Bologna Process in your country

(National Bologna group, thematic working groups, composition and activities, stakeholder involvement)

National Bologna group includes representatives from the Bulgarian Ministry of Education and Science, Rectors' Council, HEIs and students. The activities of Bologna group are - elaboration of national Qualifications framework, analyzing developments in higher education in Bulgaria and in Europe and making proposals for actions and legislation changes, organizing dissemination events.

The Bologna Process is mainly held by the structures of the Ministry of Education and Science.

3. Quality assurance

The following questions have been included in the template at the request of the Working Group on Stocktaking.

3.1. National quality assurance systems should include a definition of the responsibilities of the bodies and institutions involved.

Please specify the responsibilities of the bodies and institutions involved.

In 2003-04 the National Evaluation and Accreditation Agency /NEAA/ made an efforts in improving its methods of evaluation and accreditation. A great part of its proposals took place in the new amendments of the Law on Higer Education (in effect since June 2004). Institutional accreditation is now explicitly linked to the evaluation of the effectiveness of internal quality assurance processes and structures. Programme assessment method is also moving from a programme by programme basis towards a subject level evaluation. The new method suggests a considerable reduction of the scope of the assement exercise. Additional measure to enhance the effectiveness of the Agency work deals with the new accreditation powers transferred from the Accreditation Council to the 8 subject level Standing Committees. The latter render the responsibilities for final accreditation of programmes since June 2004.

Another innovation in the Agency method is the introduction of a post-accreditation monitoring, wich is expected to become effective after January 2005. To this end the Agency is establishing a separate unit with responsibilities for a follow-up review. The follow-up review report may have serious consequences for the visited institution, up to the withdrawal of an accreditation status. This legal and structural move of the Agency reflects the greater awareness of the need for protection of the interests of society in the quality of higher education.

The Agency management is also expected to get improved after the composition of its new Accreditation council. The Rectors Conference quota in the Council rose from 4 to 6 members, and the new body for the next 6 years will be composed of 11 members, including the President and the Vice-President. The Vice-President is nominated also from the Rectors Council quota and will be responsible for the Post-accreditation monitoring unit.

3.2. National quality assurance systems should include a system of accreditation, certification or comparable procedures.

Describe the system of accreditation, certification or comparable procedures, if any.

NEAA evaluates and awards accreditation to Higher education institutions in Bulgaria. It is in Agency's competence to withdraw courses or study programmes that do not correspond to the state requirements adopted. The Agency has also the right to propose changes in the legal status of institutions following a negative accreditation assessment.

NEAA also evaluates the higher education institutions study programmes. It has the right to withdraw state recognition for particular programmes that do not satisfy the requirements with respect to curricula, academic staff, physical infrastructure, etc.

The scheme includes:

- self-assessment report by institution/programme,
- peer review visit

The Accreditation procedure concludes with a substantiated decision of the accreditation Board or the Standing Committee respectively.

Provision and guaranteeing the quality of education are considered as one of the requirements of primary importance for the development of the national education system that is relevant also to the issues of mutual recognition of diplomas and professional qualifications. Therefore, special attention has been given to the problem of establishing reliable systems for internal evaluation.

Currently, the focus is placed on the necessity for transparent qualifications, study-courses and curricula. One of the main reasons for concentrating efforts to this effect is the concern of higher education institutions and the state authorities regarding the quality of education in certain specialities and institutions.

3.3. National quality assurance systems should include international participation, co-operation and networking.

Are international peers included in the governing board(s) of the quality assurance agency(ies)?

Up till now international peers do not participate in the work of The National Evaluation and Accreditation Agency, but the Strategy for 2004 stipulates active partnership and networking with other foreign organizations in the field of quality assurance. The number of HE institutions working with international evaluation and assessment bodies has been increasing. The help from such international organizations does not lead to getting an evaluation from the National Agency but is a factor for improvement of their concept and organization of work.

Please add any general comments, reflections and/or explanations to the material on quality assurance in the stocktaking report.

4. The two-cycle degree system

The two-cycle degree system is covered by the stocktaking exercise. Please add any comments, reflections and/or explanations to the stocktaking report.

Bulgaria has implemented 3 cycle degree system in its higher education system. It introduces bachelor, master and doctor degree in the whole system. The degrees are:

- First degree requires a minimum 4-year course of instruction and the graduates acquire the educational and qualification degree of Bachelor. Training for each speciality is finalised by sitting for state examinations or defence of a diploma thesis.
- Second degree requires a minimum 5-year course of instruction, or an extra year after the Bachelor's degree, and the graduates acquire a Master's educational and qualification degree. Training for each speciality is finalised by sitting for state examinations or by defending a diploma thesis.
- Third degree requires minimum a 3-year course of instruction after the Master's degree or minimum a 4-year course of instruction after the Bachelor's one. Graduates are awarded a Doctor's degree. The higher school may train for the third degree in a listed scientific speciality for which it has been accredited for. Doctorands are trained according to individual curricula and should prepare and defend a dissertation. The training is carried out under the guidance of a scientific supervisor appointed by the Faculty Council of the higher school training the doctorand. Training for a Doctor's educational and academic degree can be also handled by such scientific research organisations as the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, the Academy of Agriculture, etc. in the scientific specialities these organisations have been accredited for. The Doctor's degree is conferred on doctorands who have passed the examinations featured in the curriculum and have defended their dissertations under the requisite conditions and order of the Academic Degrees and Titles Act.

According to the amendments to the Higher Education Act, the Bachelor's degree studies provide for basic comprehensive training, thus giving direct access to the labour market. Actually training for Bachelor's degree is one of the key issues of the higher education policy of the Bulgarian Ministry of Education and Science. Curricula content foresees comprehensive theoretical knowledge together with practical skills and ability for theoretical and practical process and phenomenon modeling. The purpose is to increase both the adaptability and the mobility in compliance with the changing conditions for the realization of the graduates.

As to the Master's degree training, it is oriented towards in-depth fundamental knowledge with profile oriented studies in a given interdisciplinary speciality. The purpose is to achieve better comparability of the education level with the research one.

5. Recognition of degrees and periods of study

Recognition of degrees and periods of study is covered by the stocktaking exercise. Please add any comments, reflections and/or explanations to the stocktaking report.

An important legal initiative facilitating the unification of criteria for recognition of higher education diplomas issued abroad is the adoption of the Law on the Ratification of the Convention on Recognition of Qualifications Concerning Higher Education in the European Region (Lisbon Recognition Convention) /SG 25 – 28 March 2000/. The ratification of the Lisbon convention complements the existing legal basis in respect of elaboration of secondary legislative measures concerning the criteria and procedures for recognition of

qualifications, concerning higher education.

In compliance with the Lisbon Recognition Convention amendments to several acts of the secondary legislation regarding recognition of documents certifying secondary and higher education acquired as well as periods of education completed were promulgated. The Council of Ministers adopted an Ordinance on the State Requirements for recognition of higher education acquired or periods of education completed in foreign higher schools. By virtue of the Ordinance the procedure for recognition of higher education are organized and carried out by the Ministry of Education and Science and decisions on recognition is made by a Commission established by the Minister of Education and Science, comprising 10 members – persons holding high academic ranks in the basic scientific fields and 2 representatives of the Ministry of Education and Science.

According to Article 11 of the Ordinance:

“(1) The recognition of higher education acquired in foreign higher schools shall be accomplished upon comparing the data of the documents presented and of the requirements approved for obtaining higher education in the same and/or in a similar speciality in Bulgarian higher schools.

(2) The following indicators are taken into consideration in recognising higher education:

1. enrolment;
2. duration of the studies;
3. total horary of the studied subjects;
4. proportion between the horary of the studied subjects that provide the fundamental, the special, and the specialized education;
5. theoretical/practical horary ration;
6. graduation requirements.”

Furthermore, in compliance with Art. 17, Par. 1 and 2 of the same document, the National Information Centre for Academic Recognition and Mobility (ENIC/NARIC-Bulgaria) support the activities on recognition of higher education. The Centre is officially positioned with an Ordinance of the Minister of Education and Science dated 2000.

In view of recognition of a study period of higher education the most important step was the official implementation of the ECTS and the Diploma Supplement in their capacity of measures supporting mobility and assisting recognition in Europe. With the texts of the Higher Education Act adopted by the Bulgarian Parliament on June 4 2004 (State Gazette issue 48/04.06.2004) both the ECTS and the Diploma Supplement were legally introduced. Accordingly, the secondary legislation was updated thus providing the legal framework for their practical implementation. That secondary legislation consists of the Ordinance on the state requirements on the content of the basic documents issued by the higher education institutions, adopted with Council of Ministers Decree N 215 as of 12.08.2004. At the same time the Diploma Supplement has been promoted by different means (including seminars at national and university level, information brochures, meetings etc.) in order to assist the higher education institutions with these activities. Thus, as from 2005 the graduates will receive the Diploma Supplement automatically issued in one of the widely spoken languages in EU and Bulgarian. The second document is the Ordinance N 21 for the implementation of a system for credits accumulation and transfer within the higher education institutions (State Gazette issue N 89/12.10.2004)

6. Doctoral studies and research

6.1. Give a short description of the organisation of third cycle studies

(For example, direct access from the bachelor level, balance between organised courses, independent study and thesis)

According to the current legislation (last amendments to the Law on Higher Education, SG issue 48/04.06.2004) only Master's degree qualification give access to Doctoral studies. The higher education institution may train for the third degree in a listed scientific specialities for which it has been accredited for. Doctorands are trained according to individual curricula (including training and research activities) and should prepare and defend a dissertation. The training is carried out under the guidance of a scientific supervisor appointed by the Faculty Council of the higher education institution training the doctorand. Training for a Doctor's educational and academic degree can be also handled by such scientific research organisations as the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, the Center for agrarian studies in the scientific specialities these organisations have been accredited for. The Doctor's degree is conferred to doctorands who have passed the examinations featured in the curriculum and have defended their dissertations under the requisite conditions and order of the Scientific Degrees and Scientific Titles Act.

Admission to doctoral studies - National graduates with Master's educational and qualification degree may continue their education in the third degree /Doctor's degree/. Training in a doctoral program shall be carried out in a given scientific speciality. Candidates are also requested to submit the following documents:

- a letter of request
- a curriculum vitae
- other optional documents, certifying their interests and scientific achievements.

There are no special compulsory preparatory programs/courses leading to these studies. Enrollment for Doctor's degree studies is based on success in written and oral competitive examination in the relevant scientific field and an examination in foreign language proficiency. Successful applicants are those who have been granted an average of at least "very good" /5.00/ in the field of specialization and at least "good" /4.00/ in foreign language. Applicants are selected by a special commission according to the competitive examination results, Master's degree level of achievement, recommendations, personal research results etc. The Faculty Board handles the proposal of the commission and has powers to take the final decision. Selected applicants are registered by an Order of the Rector of the higher education institution, or by the Director of the scientific research institution respectively. A doctorate could be followed at two higher education institutions, some of them being Europeans ones.

6.2. What are the links between HE and research in your country?

(For example, what percentage of publicly-funded research is conducted within HE institutions?)

Over the last 10 years a huge effort has been made to re-integrate research and higher education in Bulgaria. As a result many research centers are established within the structures of the Higher education institutions. The staff of these research institutes has become university staff and thus have become active in teaching. They are becoming an essential part of the doctoral studies and research. Students in turn can carry out their thesis research in the facilities of these institutes.

Approximately half of the public funding allocated to research is spent in the higher education sector.

At the same time some of research institutes continue their work independently, per example

The Bulgarian Academy of Science.

Under the stipulations of the Law on Higher Education the organisation and governance of research is among the priorities of the Higher schools and is encouraged. Higher schools are entitled to plan and conduct joint research projects with other higher schools, scientific organisations and institutions, depending on their interests and the interests of research. Research work is an integral part of the activities of faculty members. Research work is conducted also by the specially appointed persons, as well as by the students, doctor and doctoral candidates and trainees engaged in specialised studies and is financed with subsidies from the state budget and additional funds.

7. Mobility of students and staff

7.1. Describe the main factors influencing mobility of students from as well as to your country (For instance funds devoted to mobility schemes, portability of student loans and grants, visa problems)

With the 2004 amendments of the Law on Higher Education Bulgaria gave the HE institutions opportunity to sign on their own contracts with international higher schools that concern mobility of students and academic staff. This is a great factor leading to better and more opportunities for students and teachers to explore mobility schemes.

The main obstacle for outgoing student mobility is the insufficient financial support available for student grants. Universities are not rich enough to set aside significant support funds, so availability of national support funds for student grants become very important.

With Decision of the European parliament and the Council of Ministers, Bulgaria is among the 30 European countries included in the second phase of SOCRATES II programme. responsible for the coordination of the programme is Bulgarian Human Resource Development Center and its specialized structure Socrates Agency.

The finances for the implementation of the Programme run up to 1 850 000 000 Euro for all activities and a seven years period - 01.01.2000r. - 31.12.2006r.

7.2. Describe any special measures taken in your country to improve mobility of students from as well as to your country

Bulgaria participates in Erasmus Students' mobility programme, part of the Socrates Programme as well as in Leonardo da Vinci programme. At present, the Programmes supports not only students' mobility, but also promotes the European dimensions to the study programmes in order to improve the quality of education of both 'outgoing' and 'incoming' students throughout Europe.

ERASMUS Students' mobility programme requires signed bilateral agreements on students' mobility between the Bulgarian higher institutions. The Bilateral agreements are initiated on Faculty or Department level and are signed by the Rector or a person authorized by him/her.

Bulgaria is also initiating steps towards signing a Memorandum of understanding with the European Commission concerning Bulgarian participation in eLearning and Erasmus Mundus Programmes for 2005 and 2006.

The Higher education institutions and students organizations are entitled to sign on their own

experiences contracts with international higher schools that concern mobility of students or academic staff. This is a great factor leading to better and more opportunities for students and teachers to explore mobility schemes.

7.3. Describe the main factors influencing mobility of teachers and staff from as well as to your country (For instance tenure of appointment, grant schemes, social security, visa problems)

The Bulgarian government signs bilateral mutual agreements for teachers exchange on mutual basis. In some of the agreements it is provided that the exchange will be based on merit of competitiveness and Bulgarian teachers and staff are managing quite well in the scheme.

The Law on Higher Education stipulates an opportunity for teachers to get one year of leave that can be used in cases when teachers are using different mobility schemes.

There are possibilities for financial support through national fund for exchange under the Erasmus programme. The main hindering factor for mobility of outgoing teachers from Bulgaria is the financial support for mobility grants.

7.4. Describe any special measures taken in your country to improve mobility of academic teachers and staff from as well as to your country

The mobility of the academic teachers is provided by special funds held by the government, but there is a need of greater financial support for mobility grants.

8. Higher education institutions and students

8.1. Describe aspects of autonomy of higher education institutions

Is autonomy determined/defined by law? To what extent can higher education institutions decide on internal organisation, staffing, new study programmes and financing?

The autonomy of the higher education institutions is determined in Art. 19 and the following of the Bulgarian Law on Higher Education. HEIs appear to independently govern their organisational and administrative structure, content and the forms of studies, main directions of research. HEIs select staff and students. Yet, admission of students to any new programme can start only after receiving a license from the licensing commission. The HE institutions have autonomy over management and governance, autonomy over academic matters, including programmes and curriculum and autonomy over financial matters.

Universities are free to spend their income as they decide, and not according to budget items set by the Ministry; the ability to raise their own income and spend it as they decide; the ability to build up reserves; the freedom to borrow money; the freedom to decide how many students to admit and how much to charge them as fees. Universities enjoy a fair amount of freedom. They receive funds from the Government as a block grant, which they are free to spend as they wish (that is in contrast to many systems around the world where they receive line item budgets which require them to spend fixed amounts on different items); they are free to raise their own funds and spend those as they wish without limit

Another important characteristic is the autonomy of the HE institutions to recruit academic staff and to enroll students.

8.2. Describe actions taken to ensure active participation from all partners in the process

Representatives of students organizations, academic staff, teachers and employers are participating in different expert working groups elaborating legal acts concerning the Bologna

process. Thus their experience and opinion is bared in mind when elaborating a more favorable and effective mobility schime.

Another important opportunity is that the Minister of education and science forms a team of experts to examine, report and take actions in cases officially reported by independent students organizations.

8.3. How do students participate in and influence the organisation and content of education at universities and other higher education institutions and at the national level?

(For example, participation in University Governing Bodies, Academic Councils etc)

Under the last amendments of the Law on Higher Education - SG 48/2004, art. 72, students participate in the organization of education in universities and express their common interest through a special students body called Student Union. Students representatives in the general assenbly of the university is about 15% /and often more/ from its members. Such Student Unions are established all over the country in alssmost all HE institutions. Their activities are finnced by the higher education institution and include representaship in the governing body of the university. Bulgarian students are represented also in the Academic Board of the Higer education institution and participate in the activites of the faculty boards. The oprortunity for the sutdents to choos different study courses during their education reflects upon the content of education at Universities.

On national level the students and doctoral candidates are represented by National Representation of Student Councils. The National Representation of Student Councils is made up of the Chairpersons or the delegated representatives of all higher schools` Student Councils. The Council exprese the students interest related to organization and content of higer education in Bulgaria.

Another opportunity for participation of students is the National Council for Student Affairs that is established as an advisory body to the Minister of Education and Science. The members of the National Council for Student Affairs are appointed at an order of the Minister of Education and Science and include four representatives of the National Representation of Student Councils and three representatives of national student organisations.

9. The social dimension of the Bologna Process

9.1. Describe measures which promote equality of access to higher education

The Bulgarian students are eligible for different scholarships including such granted upon educational achievments, other granted on social basis. The social schime includes also oportunities for usage of different kind of social support: dormitories, transport support, cantines.

Up to this moment in the bulgarian legislation does not exist a scheme providing the promotion of student loans. Nevertheless the Minisrty of Educartion and Science has worked out a draft of a Law regarding scheme for students credits which should be ratified by the National assenbly. This Law provides that students in Bulgaria will be able to get credit conditioned only upon high educational results and permission from the rector of the higer education institution.

At the moment 7 Bulgarian banks are providing students loans and the interest is favurable for the students - about 10%. Still the loans are not enogh explored by the Bulgarian students. Limited possibilities also exist to receive subsidies for covering living costs also.

The access to higher education has been broadened through establishing new units spread all over the country. On the other part, this practice induces a decrease of the quality of

students' preparation. This trend imposes the necessity of measures to be taken in order to optimize the net of the high schools in the country.

Another initiative is the development of different forms of distance learning. Distance learning was introduced in 1995 with the Law on Higher Education. In practice there have been established a National Centre for Distance Education and a net of 4 regional and 16 supplementary Centres for Distance Education as well as 4 Master programmes and more than 50 post-graduated courses for qualification.

The lack of legislative regulation is a serious obstacle for the development of new methods of distance learning. Till now more than 3 000 students have been trained in different courses and programmes organized by the distance education centres (DEC). The existing problems could be overcome through introducing educational standards.

10. Developments in lifelong learning

10.1. What measures have been taken by your country to encourage higher education institutions in developing lifelong learning paths?

In the context of LLL conditions for greater diversification of educational specialities have been created together with full-flesh compatibility of the educational programs with customers' needs. Variety of forms of education have been offered to those wishing to continue their education.

The policy of the Bulgarian government concerning human resources is a component of the overall social policy directed towards building up of a society of learning and knowledge, towards broadening the European cooperation in education, research, culture and technology, in free movement of workers.

The most important achievement is that Bulgaria has established opportunity for passing from one cycle of education into another and from one educational programme into another. The doctoral studies are also regulated by the Amendments of The Law on Higher Education.

The Law on Higher Education was being amended with the purpose to overcome the unfavorable trends in the system of higher education in 1999. As from the academic year 1999/2000 all studies have become subsidized by the state budget. Conditions for gradually regulation of the enrollment were created. (The number of the dropouts in the system of higher education varies within 5% to 7%). Several legislative changes have been adopted to facilitate the tuition for Doctor's Degree: the possibility for enrollment upon Bachelor degree completed, the cancellation of the minimal fee of education during the last two years of the Doctor's Degree studies, the withdrawal of the age-limit for enrollment and the provision of scholarships for Doctor's degree students amounting of the two minimal salaries.

10.2. Describe any procedures at the national level for recognition of prior learning/flexible learning paths

Bulgarian legislation lacks an effective procedures for recognition of prior learning and special rules establishing flexible learning paths. Still the higher education institutions are entitled to decide which results or exams taken in previous forms of study will be recognized upon applying for a certain cycle of study.

11. Contribution to the European dimension in higher education

11.1 Describe any legal obstacles identified by your country and any progress made in removing legal obstacles to the establishment and recognition of joint degrees and/or joint study programmes

There are no specific legal obstacles for joint degrees in our legislation but it is also not specifically encouraging or promoting joint degrees, therefore practical awarding of joint degrees may be difficult. Nevertheless the need to develop legislation with a view of joint degrees is well understood and the legislation could be amended.

11.1.1. Describe the extent of integrated study programmes leading to joint degrees or double degrees

The interest towards establishing of joint degrees is growing, yet the practice is not widespread. Just a couple of double degree programmes exist in Bulgarian Higher education institutions. There are some joint study programmes both nationally and internationally, but they usually result in awarding just one degree/diploma.

11.1.2. How have these programmes been organised? (joint admissions, mobility of students, joint exams, etc.)

There are still not enough examples of good practices in the field of organization of programmes awarding double degrees or joint degrees in Bulgaria. There are only a couple of such programmes established in Bulgaria.

11.2. Describe any transnational co-operation that contributes to the European dimension in higher education

Bulgaria participates in Socrates and Leonardo da Vinci Programme, and also has overtaken steps forward future participation in eLearning and Erasmus Mundus Community/2005 and 2006/ Programmes concerning education and training.

In some higher education institutions international peer review is used in review of the programmes to be implemented.

11.3. Describe how curriculum development reflects the European dimension (For instance foreign language courses, European themes, orientation towards the European labour market)

1. In a great number of Bulgarian higher institutions there are programmes on European studies and there are quite a great number of universities that award master degrees on European studies. There are particularly developed modules covering study related to European themes in different kinds of programmes such as law, political sciences, economics, management, etc..

2. Foreign language courses are a compulsory part of the study programmes at all levels - bachelor, master and doctoral in many Bulgarian higher education institutions.

12. Promoting the attractiveness of the European Higher Education Area

12.1. Describe actions taken by your country to promote the attractiveness of the EHEA

Many Bulgarian Higher education institutions are organizing and participating in seminars and other kinds of information activities to promote the achievements of Bulgaria towards the Bologna Process. The HE institutions participate in educational fairs and release materials related to Bologna issues and the European higher educational area.

13. Concluding comments

13.1. Give a description of your national Bologna strategies

The Bulgarian approach in meeting the Bologna process trends could be characterized by legal initiatives oriented towards improvement of the national legal framework in compliance with the principles of the Bologna declaration, as well as with setting up of new priorities for higher education development, including measures for their practical implementation. The on-going reforms in the sector are also deeply influenced by the process of country's preparation for accession to the European Union. Since 1998 Bulgaria is in a process of active approximation of the national educational legislation with the *acquis communautaire*.

The main concern is to ensure the adaptability of the education system towards new challenges, as well as to guarantee sustainable system development in compliance with the objectives of the European Higher Education Area and capable to provide valuable and competitive knowledge and skills.

13.2. Give an indication of the main challenges ahead for your country

With regard to the further development of the Bologna process, the Bulgarian academic community faces several basic objectives:

- Quality assurance of all programmes in compliance with the labor market and European dimensions of education
- Innovation in teaching and learning methods including lifelong learning tendencies
- Raising the scope of academic autonomy by entrusting more responsibility to higher education institutions
- New schemes of funding higher education institutions, resources allocation and student support
- Research activities under business initiatives and private funding
- Improvement of evaluation procedures transferring a part of evaluation criteria to achievements measurement.