

ADVISORY GROUP 4 “DIPLOMA SUPPLEMENT REVISION”

Bucharest (Romania) – 22 January 2016

Draft Minutes

List of participants

ALBANIA	Linda Pustina
ARMENIA	Krisitna Tsaturyan
AUSTRIA	Nicole Guthan
BELARUS	Valentina Simkhovich
BFUG Secretariat	Fabien Neyrat
BUSINESSEUROPE	excused
COUNCIL OF EUROPE	Jean-Philippe Restoueix
EI/ETUCE	Agnes Roman
ENIC NARIC President	Claudia Gelleni
ESU	Tijana Isoski
EU COMMISSION	Mette Moerk Andersen
EU COMMISSION	William O´Keefe
EUA	Hanne Smidt
EURASHE	excused
FINLAND	Susanna Kärki
FRANCE	Jean Louis Gouju
ITALY	Maria Sticchi Damiani
The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia	excused
Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee Vice-President	Allan Brun Pedersen
ROMANIA	Antonela Toma
ROMANIA	Catalin Silvestru
ROMANIA	Madaluia Matei
ROMANIA	Cezar Mihai Haj
RUSSIAN FEDERATION	excused
UNESCO	Liliana Simionescu

The representative of Business Europe, EURASHE, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, and Russia were excused.

Welcome and introduction to the meeting

The participants were firstly welcomes by the co-chairs: Cezar Mihai Haj, Romania, and Linda Pustina, Albania. Mr. Sorin Cimpeanu, former Minister of education od Romania and Rector of the University of Agronomic sciences and veterinary medicine, where this meeting took place, welcomed all the participants reminding the importance of the Diploma Supplement in the Romanian education agenda.

His country was proud to host the Ministerial conference in 2012 and he restated its willingness to implement all the key commitments adopted in the Yerevan Communiqué. He shared with the Ministers in Yerevan the conviction that emphasis must be put on democracy and the fight against extremism and radicalization.

Adoption of the Agenda

The co-chairs proposed to put point 5 “Recent developments in Higher Education – General overview for improving the content of Diploma Supplement” before point 4 “Information provided by European Commission, Council of Europe and UNESCO”.

The new agenda was adopted by all participants.

Discussion on the Terms of Reference

The co-chairs recalled that during the last BFUG board meeting in Chisinau (Moldova) a slight change on the Terms of Reference proposed by EU Commission was discussed. The following sentences: “*The Diploma Supplement was adopted within two different frameworks, the Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee (LRCC), and the EU Europass Decision. The revised Diploma Supplement will have to be adopted within the same frameworks. The BFUG can advise on the revised version, but cannot adopt it*” will be removed from the section “Additional remarks” and placed in the section “Purposes and outcomes”. The AG agreed on this change.

Information about the outcomes of the last working period

BFUG Secretariat made a presentation about the implementation of the Diploma Supplement based on the 2015 Implementation Report and on the conclusions drawn by the 2012-2015 working group on Structural reforms. Based on these documents, it was stressed that 70% of the EHEA countries have failed to fulfil all the three main requirements:

- Provide Diploma Supplement automatically
- Free of charge
- In a widely spoken language

The same failing rate of implementation can be applied to the Third cycle Diploma Supplement. The report on *Third cycle* suggested that “*the DS template should encapsulate the specific curriculum of doctoral graduates, specific learning activities, thesis title, publications as well as mobility experiences, transferable skills, international cooperation activities that the student has been involved in and research projects the student has been a part of.*” However, there is no consensus on this issue among the group. In many countries, doctoral studies do not allow credits ECTS, the length of this cycle varies from one a country to another and these studies are research oriented. For all these reasons, it has been preferred not to open this debate now.

The main findings of the *Structural reforms report* outlined three recommendations towards the Council of Europe, the European Commission and UNESCO. They should:

- “*review the Diploma Supplement with a view to ensuring it reflects recent developments in higher education, including the development of learning outcomes and qualifications frameworks, is relevant and up to date for the purposes of mobility and the recognition of qualifications as well as promoting employability and that it takes into account the possibilities for providing up to date information offered by modern information technology, including the digitalization of the Diploma Supplement itself;*
- *ensure the adoption of any revised version of the Diploma Supplement, in identical versions, within the framework of the Lisbon Recognition Convention as well as that of the European Union (Europass) and taking account of relevant developments in other parts of the world;*
- *ensure coherence between a review of the Diploma Supplement and the possible development of a “Doctoral Supplement” within the European Research Area.”*

It was stressed that all three recommendations were incorporated in the Terms of Reference of this AG4. The Group noted the low rate of implementation of the Diploma Supplement. In order to update these data, Romania intended to send a short inquiry to the AG4 members about the current state of implementation. It was also found useful by the group to ask WG1 on Monitoring whether new data regarding Diploma Supplement implementation are available.

Discussion on the main objective:

It was agreed that the major issue that hinders the implementation of the Diploma Supplement was an absence of common understanding, among the users and the labor market stakeholders, on what exactly the Diploma Supplement is and what benefits it could provide to its holders.

Moreover, the template of the Diploma Supplement within the EHEA varies from one country to another since each country is responsible for the national implementation of this tool. This variation increases the doubt about the transparency of the Diploma Supplement.

There is a need to find out a common understanding of the current template: what each of the chapters in the current template is meant for, what kind of information can or cannot be provided within the current DS as it is. These questions will lead to discussing the purpose and use of the DS in order to identify the information it should provide, and what revision may be needed.

It was also suggested to make a practical handbook for holders and users of the Diploma Supplement. This Diploma Supplement user's guide should ensure that all countries use Diploma Supplement in the same way. It would also provide relevant support for Higher Education Institutions.

In order to avoid the overlap and the confusion with the *Certificate Supplement*, it would be useful as well to clarify for the public the use of both tools. The Group agreed that challenging those issues will constitute one of the main objectives of this AG4.

The European Commission insisted on the importance given to the Diploma Supplement as transparency tool to easier access to opportunities for work in the framework of the *Innovation agenda 2020* and particularly within the *Agenda for new skills and jobs*. This *Agenda* aims at reaching an employment target for 2020 of 75% of the working-age population.

In the next meeting, it will be useful to have the opinion of the Business Europe representative, who was excused for this meeting, on the underuse of the Diploma Supplement by the employers.

Concerning the learning outcomes, a broad consensus was that the template of the Diploma Supplement did not present an easily readable format. Many folders and descriptors hinder a correct description and appreciation by the users about learning outcomes effectively acquired by the student.

Since the students are one of the most obvious stakeholders and beneficiaries of the Diploma Supplement, EUA and ESU agreed to prepare a short written contribution regarding the Diploma Supplement in the student use perspective. The European Commission remarked that the "European Commission European skills/competences, qualifications and Occupations (ESCO)" initiative may prove useful regarding a better description of the skills in the template that fits with the expectation of the employers. However, the Council of Europe underlined that the entire notion of learning outcomes encompasses "skills" or "competences" in an employability perspective. The Group agreed as well that the current Diploma Supplement template did not include mobility experiences, non-formal education and prior learning recognition.

The Group agreed that it would not be advisable to create an entirely new template of the Diploma Supplement, and proposed a slight updating of the template.

The Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee representative informed the group that all changes regarding Diploma Supplement template must be submitted to the annual meeting of the Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee. Since the next will take place in Paris (France) on 29 of February 2016, it seems difficult to provide all recommendations to the Committee before this date. However, if necessary, an extraordinary meeting could be schedule.

Agreed tasks for the second meeting

1. The Group wished to be informed about all events of the Innovation agenda 2020 that would support an updating of the Diploma Supplement, improving its utilization among the employers.
2. The European Commission will send all participants the Europass version of the Diploma Supplement and a sample of the current Diploma Supplement's guidelines (available on: <https://europass.cedefop.europa.eu/en/documents/european-skills-passport/diploma-supplement>)
3. Romania will send a short inquiry between AG4 members in order to collect data about the rate of use of the Diploma Supplement at national level.

4. The BFUG Secretariat will ask WG1 on Monitoring if new data regarding Diploma Supplement implementation are available.
5. Since digitalization of the Diploma Supplement is a topic of growing interest within EHEA, the chairs will look into good examples of digitalization by way of preparing this topic for future meetings.
6. The representative of ENIC NARIC network will ask each of its members to send her one or two samples of a particularly useful DS and one or two examples of a DS that could be improved, possibly explaining why. She also indicated that a chapter on the use of the Diploma Supplement for recognition purposes is included in the EAR manual "*European Area for Recognition Manual*" (endorsed by the ministerial communiqué in Bucarest 2012 as a useful tool for mobility) . This manual is available on-line: <http://eurorecognition.eu/manual/> This specific chapter can be circulated at the next meeting.
7. EUA and ESU will prepare a short written contribution regarding Diploma Supplement in the student perspective.

Date and place of the following meetings:

The European Commission proposed hosting the next meeting in Brussels (Belgium) on the first of April 2016. The topic to be discussed will be the objectives and perspective of the Diploma Supplement.

The third meeting on Learning outcomes will be hosted by Albania after 21st June 2016: Albania will confirm the venue and the date as soon as possible.

Romania proposed to host the final meeting of 2016 either in October prior to the BFUG Board or in November prior to the BFUG meeting.

AOB: modification of the Romanian delegation

The Romanian co-chair informed that Daniela Burghila was no longer nominated for this Group, due to reorganization within the Romanian Ministry of Education.