Legislative alignment with the ESG: the path towards meeting the Bologna Process key commitment on quality assurance in the Western Balkans

Ministerial and QA agency representatives' meeting in conjunction with the kick-off meeting of the SEQA-ESG2 project

Brussels, 8-9 March 2023
Fondation Universitaire Stichting, Rue d'Egmont 11, 1000 Brussels, Belgium
On-site (non-hybrid) event

Quality assurance is a key feature in developing mutual trust and in increasing mobility and fair recognition of qualifications and study periods throughout Europe. As stated in the Paris Communiqué[1] by the Ministers of Higher Education in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) in 2018, quality assurance is and remains one of the pillars of the EHEA. Having a quality assurance system in compliance with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the EHEA (the ESG[2]), with regular external quality assurance performed by EQAR-registered agencies, is therefore a key commitment of the Bologna Process.

Several countries in Westers Balkans[3] do not yet have an independent quality assurance agency or the agency is not yet in compliance with all aspects of the ESG. To foster the implementation of this key commitment in the region, the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) and the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR[4]) organise a meeting of ministry and QA agency representatives with responsibility for higher education in the Western Balkans, titled 'Legislative alignment with the ESG: the path toward meeting the Bologna Process key commitment on quality assurance'. Ministry and QA agency representatives of Slovenia and Croatia are also invited, due to the shared characteristics of quality assurance and higher education systems and their experience in supporting national QA agencies to reach ESG compliance.

The meeting will be held on 8-9 March 2023 in Brussels, Belgium. It **aims to promote the importance of the ESG as a shared European commitment and discuss the conditions needed to achieve this.** Special attention will be given to discussing the role the legislative framework to support this. Furthermore, the meeting hopes to build bridges, and stimulate sharing

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[1] See here:
http://www.ehea.info/media.ehea.info/file/2018_Paris/77/1/EHEAParis2018_Communique_final_952771.pdf
[2] See here: https://www.enqa.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/ESG_2015.pdf
[3] Six countries in Southern and Eastern Europe referred to as the Western Balkans in the EU enlargement policies: Republic of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Kosovo (This designation is without prejudice to positions on status and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence), Republic of North Macedonia, and Republic of Serbia. Note: Kosovo is not in the EHEA but are committed to aligning with the ESG.
[4] EQAR manages the EHEA's official register of quality assurance agencies that have demonstrated compliance with the ESG, with registered agencies feeding into the Database of External Quality Assurance Results (DEQAR). EQAR feeds its expertise back to its members, i.e. European stakeholder organisations and national ministries of higher education, and as such contributes to the SEQA-ESG(2) policy dialogues.

of experience between quality assurance and higher education systems in the wider region. The meeting will be held in conjunction with the kick-off meeting of the SEQA-ESG2[5] project, to link the discussion to the upcoming activities on this in four countries that are partners in this project, two of which are from the Western Balkans (Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Ukraine).

The first round of the SEQA-ESG project was implemented in years 2020-2022 and aimed to support QA agencies and national authorities in six countries (Albania, the Czech Republic, Malta, Moldova, Montenegro, and Slovakia) to create an ESG-compliant QA system. The upcoming second round, SEQA-ESG2 will bring together QA agencies from another four countries in reaching the same goal. To meet the objectives of this meeting, ministry and QA agency partners from the first round of the project will be invited to join the meeting and share experience in overcoming obstacles when addressing system/legal, organisational and practice-related challenges in complying with the ESG. Ministry representatives from Azerbaijan and Ukraine will be invited to shadow the meeting due to their QA agencies' involvement in SEQA-ESG2.

Agenda

Attendees:
Ministry and QA agency representatives of the Western Balkans, and Slovenia and Croatia
ENQA representatives
EQAR representatives
Representatives of ministry and QA agency partners in SEQA-ESG1 and 2
Ministry representatives of Ukraine and Azerbaijan

Chaired by Douglas Blackstock, President, ENQA

Day 1 – Wednesday, 8 March 2023

From 13.30 on	Welcome coffee
14.00-14.10	**Welcome** Douglas Blackstock, President, ENQA Colin Tück, Director, EQAR
14.10-14.30	**About ENQA and its role in QA policy making in the EHEA** Anna Gover, Director, ENQA
14.30-14.40	**Aims and objectives of the meeting**

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[5] ENQA, as the designated stakeholder organisation of quality assurance agencies in the EHEA, remains committed to supporting agencies to maintain and enhance of the quality of European higher education, as well as to contribute to transparency of their work throughout Europe. In this regard, ENQA's work on promoting the relevance of the ESG is vital, be it through coordination of reviews against the ESG, policy work with the European-level stakeholders, publication of thematic analyses, and coordination of projects that support agencies in reaching compliance with the ESG, such as SEQA-ESG.

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	Goran Dakovic, Head of Agency Reviews, ENQA
14.40-15.20	**Key requirements on reaching the ESG compliance** Jolanta Silka, Board member, ENQA Presentation (20 minutes) Q&A (20 minutes)
15.20-15.45	*Coffee break*
15.45-16.15	**State of implementation of the key commitment on external QA across the EHEA, with special emphasis on the countries of the Western Balkans** Colin Tück, Director, EQAR Tina Šarić, Director, Education Reform Initiative South-East Europe (ERI-SEE) Presentation (15 minutes) Discussion (15 minutes)
16.15-17.30	**Roundtable: key challenges in reaching compliance with the ESG in Western Balkans** Five-minute input from each ministry representative of the Western Balkans country, followed by the discussion of 30 minutes Moderated by: Sandra Bezjak, Acting Director, ASHE, Croatia, and member of ENQA Agency Review Committee
17.30	End of Day 1
From 17.30	Reception

Day 2 – Thursday, 9 March 2023

9.00-9.30	**Keynote: Frameworks for international cooperation: trends and challenges** Enora Pruvot, Deputy Director for Governance, Funding and Public Policy Development, European University Association (EUA) Presentation (15 minutes) Discussion (15 minutes)
9.30-10.00	**A need for legislative alignment with the ESG? Reflections from the ministry representative of Slovakia** Peter Ondreička, Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport, Republic of Slovakia Presentation (15 minutes) Q&A (15 minutes)
10.00-10.30	*Coffee break*

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in meeting the ESG

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Quality Assurance in Higher Education

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10.30-11.10	**World café** Moderated by Goran Dakovic, Head of Agency Reviews, ENQA **Participants choose two out of three stations (each 20 minutes):** 1. **Managing expectations on EQA: stakeholder involvement in building a fit-for-purpose QA agency** Stela Guvir, Head of Public Relations and International Cooperation Office, ANACEC, Moldova 2. **Engagement of peer-review experts, including students, for the provision of EQA** Lawrence Azzopardi, Head Accreditation, Licensing, Validation and Quality Assurance, MFHEA, Malta 3. **Addressing the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance Processes of HEIs as described in Part 1 of the ESG** Martina Vidláková, Head of Quality Assurance and Evaluation, National Accreditation Bureau for Higher Education, Czech Republic
11.10-11.35	**Independence of QA agencies – presentation of analysis** Franci Demšar, Director, SQAA, Slovenia Presentation (15 minutes) Q&A (10 minutes)
11.35-11.55	**Brainstorming on opportunities for collaboration** Discussion on mutual learning experience through staff mobility, sharing of expert databases, etc. Moderated by Goran Dakovic, Head of Agency Reviews, ENQA
11.55-12.00	**Conclusions** Douglas Blackstock, President, ENQA Magalie Soenen, Incoming Director, EQAR
From 12.00 on	*Farewell lunch*

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Kick-off meeting agenda for SEQA-ESG2:

Thursday, 9 March 2023

Attendees:
Representatives of QA agencies (partners in SEQA-ESG2) and their respective ministries
ENQA representatives

13.30-14.00	**Welcome and introduction of all project partners** Moderated by Anna Gover, Director, ENQA
14.00-14.20	**Project objectives, timeline and expected outputs/outcomes** Goran Dakovic, Head of Agency Reviews, ENQA
14.20-15.00	**Project management and communication through Smartsheet; project finances** Alexis Fabregas, Project Officer, ENQA
15.00-15.30	*Coffee break*
15.30-16.15	**Guide of content for the national policy counselling visits; creation of system action plans** Discussion on the draft document Goran Dakovic, Head of Agency Reviews, ENQA
16.15-16.45	**Peer learning workshops** Discussion on the concept and schedule Alexis Fabregas, Project Officer, ENQA
16.45-16.55	**AOB**
16.55-17.00	**Conclusions** Goran Dakovic, Head of Agency Reviews, ENQA
From 17.00 on	*Participants are invited to join ENQA's Brussels Networking Event* *ENQA's Brussels Networking Event is an opportunity to hear more about ENQA's work and to network with other higher education stakeholders and policymakers based in Brussels, as well as the ENQA Board and staff.*