



MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND CULTURE

CYPRUS

ASEM CONFERENCE

“Quality Assurance and Recognition in Higher Education: Challenges and Prospects”

Limassol, Cyprus, 6-7 December 2010

Conclusions- Recommendations

The history of the ASEM education process started in 2006 during the 6th ASEM summit in Helsinki, Finland, when the heads of State and Government of the 27 EU and 16 Asian ASEM member countries together with the European Commission and the ASEAN Secretariat agreed to establish “a continued dialogue and exchange of best practices on questions related to education and training”.

The first ASEM Ministerial Meeting for Education was held in Berlin in 2008, where the Ministers for Education met to discuss various aspects of ASEM higher education cooperation (ASEMME1), such as mobility of students, staff and researchers, structural academic cooperation between Asia and Europe, education and industry cooperation as well as lifelong learning.

The second Ministerial meeting took place in Hanoi, Vietnam (ASEMME2) in May 2009. The discussions of the Ministers mainly focused on quality assurance, credit transfer and recognition in the ASEM area as well as on sustainable human resource development for ASEM future needs. During this meeting, the Ministers agreed to establish a rotating ASEM Education Secretariat (AES) and welcomed Germany’s offer to host the ASEM Education Secretariat for the following four years.

It was during the 2nd ASEM Meeting of Ministers Responsible for Education in Hanoi that Cyprus announced its intention to organize the Conference on Quality Assurance and Recognition. It appeared, during both Ministerial Meetings, but also from ASEM country

reports, that quality assurance issues are of utmost importance when it comes to higher education cooperation between the two regions. Also recognition of credits and degrees are considered very important for ensuring high-quality study and research opportunities and for improving the attractiveness of higher education institutions.

The Conference has taken place in Limassol, Cyprus, 6th – 7th December 2010. Around 100 experts from 20 ASEM member countries, the ASEAN University Network, the European University Association, the European Commission and the ASEM Education Secretariat attended the Conference. The Conference aimed at enhancing the dialogue between Europe and Asia on quality assurance and recognition matters, and to provide an opportunity for the exchange of experiences, knowhow and good practices amongst Senior Officials and Experts. As derived from all presentations, panel discussions and parallel sessions of the Conference, **quality assurance** is vital for making Higher Education more attractive and trustworthy. In order to accomplish quality assurance at national level, many countries in Europe have established quality assurance agencies accredited by the European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR) and based on the European Standards and Guidelines. EQAR was set up in 2008 and it is the major new body in the European context regarding quality assurance in higher education. Regardless of its European origin, EQAR is open to agencies operating both in the European Higher Education Area and worldwide who can demonstrate their compliance with the European Standards and Guidelines. Asian countries have also created similar quality assurance bodies, such as the Asia Pacific Quality Network (APQN) and the ASEAN University Network (AUN), which aim at the enhancement of quality assurance in higher education in the Asian region.

The participants of the Conference have raised the issue of the necessity of further development of a ‘**quality assurance culture**’ in both Europe and Asia. Higher Education Institutions may have established internal quality assurance mechanisms, however, there is a long way towards achieving a sense of a ‘quality assurance culture’. With the intention of augmenting quality assurance in ASEM countries, the participants recommended the further development of **ASEM Quality Assurance Networks** in order to ensure high quality education provision from Higher Education Institutions both in Europe and in Asia. Moreover, the establishment of a mutual framework in which Asia and Europe will follow the **same principles** on quality assurance issues, will also be supportive to this effort.

Globalization, and increased academic and professional mobility are making mutual **recognition** and cross-border quality assurance increasingly important. In Europe particular emphasis is given to learning outcomes in the description of qualifications, as recognition agencies follow the principles of the Lisbon Recognition Convention. In Asia, recognition bodies are being established. SEAMEO Regional Centre for Higher Education and Development, and the Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA) have, since 2008, been coordinating the establishment of the ASEAN Quality Assurance Network (AQAN). Having mobility of students and staff, between Asia and Europe, as the main goal to be achieved, the participants of the Conference considered that we should move forward to the establishment of **joint recognition strategies between ASEM countries**. This will enhance the cooperation between Higher Education Institutions in Asia and Europe, and also promote mobility of students, academics, and researchers which will lead to the augmentation of a multicultural dialogue, and the exchange of experiences and good practices between the two regions.

Several **recommendations** were made by the participants regarding **quality assurance and recognition in ASEM countries**, and the steps that should be taken to improve these sectors in both regions. The Conference agreed on the following recommendations:

1. Experts from quality assurance and recognition agencies from Asia and Europe should meet and develop **common principles** of quality assurance and recognition to be followed by both regions.
2. Subsequent to setting these principles, all stakeholders should raise awareness of the existence of such standards and guidelines by **organizing related Conferences**.
3. **Networks** of quality assurance and recognition agencies of both regions should be established.
4. **Training seminars** should be planned for Higher Education Institutions officials in Asia and promote collaboration between Higher Education Institutions in ASEM countries.
5. The **ASEM Education Secretariat** was asked to coordinate these activities and to convey the results and recommendations of the Limassol Conference to the SOM and the Ministerial Meeting in Copenhagen.