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NATIONAL ROUND TABLE ON QUALITY ASSURANCE IN HE

ROUND TABLE WITH MINISTRIES, QA AGENCIES AND UNIVERSITIES FOR THE
ADJUSTMENT AND REVIEW OF EXISTING NATIONAL LEGAL FRAMEWORKS

Friday, 20th May 2011

Venue: Rectorate, Senate Room, First Floor, Buld. 1 May b.b, Bitola

Introduction to the Legal Basis of Quality Assurance in Higher Education in the Republic of Macedonia

**- Aspasija Hadzisce, Advisor, EU Department, Ministry of Education and
Science of the Republic of Macedonia -**

Respected Rector of the University "St. Kliment Ohridski" in Bitola,
Rector of the State University of Tetovo,
Vice-Rectors, Deans of faculties and members of the Self-Evaluation Commission of
the University "St. Kliment Ohridski",

Dear guests from the European institutions members of the CUBRIK consortium:

- the University of Alicante – Spain,
- the Erasmus University College of Brussels – Belgium and
- the Austrian Quality Assurance Agency

Dear participants to the National Round Table on Quality Assurance in Higher Education,

In name of Mr. Nikola Todorov, Minister of Education and Science, I am pleased to
welcome you on the occasion of this event organized by the University "St. Kliment
Ohridski" in framework of the regional Tempus project on quality assurance in
higher education.

Aware of the importance of the quality of higher education, the Republic of Mace-
donia joined the European efforts in this area in the second half of the nineties of
the last century. Supported by the Tempus Programme, the Austrian Ministry of

Foreign Affairs and other donors, the Republic of Macedonia was among the first countries of South Eastern Europe which developed the quality assurance system based on self-evaluation and external evaluation. The legal basis of the quality assurance system established with the Law on Higher Education adopted in August 2000, paved the way to the process of building a structured national system of quality assurance in higher education. In line with the developments at national and European level, the legal basis was updated accordingly. The system was elaborated into details with the Law on Higher Education adopted in 2008 and amended the same year with the introduction of a ranking exercise involving all accredited universities and the higher education institutions which are constitutive parts of the universities (faculties and academies of arts), to be performed on a two year basis. The ranking of the higher education institutions is to be performed by a legal entity chosen within an open competition carried out in accordance with the Law on Public Procurement. I am pleased to inform you that the first ranking exercise is on-going. It is performed by the Centre for World Class Universities of the Shanghai Jiao Tong University, China.

In 2010, the amendments of the Law on Higher Education also contributed to the quality of higher education. The public higher education institutions are obliged to use 40% of the income acquired through payment of student fees, for fundamental and applied research, for upgrading the scientific-research infrastructure and for training of the academic staff.

The amendments to the Law on Higher Education adopted in February 2011 represent an important step towards increased and sustained quality of higher education. Article 69 of the Law defines the system of quality assurance as a process addressing: the approval and recognition of higher education institutions and study programmes through an accreditation process, assessment of the quality of the higher education processes, the institutional management, financing, academic and other activities covered with the process of evaluation, as well as other activities and mechanisms which support the development of quality.

The evaluation is accomplished by use of evaluation methods (self-evaluation and external evaluation of the institution) and evaluation of the quality of the academic staff. In line with the praxis established in the European Higher Education Area, the quality assurance processes are performed in accordance with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area and the recommendations of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), including the services of renowned international bodies and associations for quality assurance.

External evaluation is performed by commissions covering different areas and fields according to the Frascati Manual. Members of the commissions are at least three professors from internationally renowned universities, with at least three years of experience in external evaluation. One of the members is President of the Commission. The commissions are established by the Accreditation and Evaluation Board.

External evaluation is performed according to criteria defined in the guidelines for quality assurance of higher education institutions and of the academic staff in the Republic of Macedonia, brought by the Minister responsible for higher education.

The outcomes of the quality evaluation are presented in reports, which are publicly available documents.

From February 2011, the structure of the national bodies for quality assurance in higher education has changed. Aiming at establishing a more rational and compact structure, the previous solution of existence of a Board of Accreditation and an Agency for Evaluation will be replaced with a Board for Accreditation and Evaluation in Higher Education. The Board consists of 23 members: 9 professors nominated by the Interuniversity Conference (from the universities which have the highest number of students enrolled in the first year of studies), 2 members of the Macedonian Academy of Sciences and Arts, 1 representative of the Employers Association, 2 members representing the Interuniversity Students' Parliament and 9 members nominated by the Government of the Republic of Macedonia. Among the members nominated by the Government, 6 have to be professors at higher education institutions. The mandate of the members of the Board is 4 years, with the possibility for only two consecutive elections.

The Board members are independent in their work and can not be called off before the end of their mandate, except in cases quoted in Article 70 of the Law. The Minister responsible for Higher Education convenes the constitutive meeting of the Board. The Government nominates the President of the Board. He represents the Board.

The Board is independent in its work and makes decisions in the framework of its domain, based on the principle of professionalism and competences. Main responsibilities of the Board:

- On the basis of the project for establishing a higher education institution and the submitted documentation, decides if conditions have been met for performing higher education activities;
- Decides on accreditation of scientific institutions aiming at performing higher education activities for second and third cycle studies;

- Decides if a higher education institution fulfills the conditions for organizing studies for new study programmes and defines the capacity for studies at the higher education institution;
- Provides accreditation to study programmes;
- On a maximum five year's basis, carries out evaluation of the quality of the educational process, the scientific work, the artistic work and the professional work of the academic staff and the study programmes of the higher education institutions. Based upon the results of the evaluation, the Board decides on prolongation or cancellation of the accreditation;
- Based upon the external evaluation reports, monitors if the accredited higher education institutions which have received license to start the work have fulfilled the necessary conditions. Based upon the outcomes of the monitoring, the Board can revoke the accreditation;
- The Board keeps records of the accredited higher education institutions and of other types of accreditations which have been issued;
- Provides recommendations for improvement of the norms and standards for performing higher education activities.

The Board publishes reports on the external evaluations which are submitted to the Government, the Ministry responsible for Higher Education and to the higher education institution which has been evaluated.

The Board informs the Minister responsible for Higher Education about the approved and the revoked accreditations.

The organization, the working methods, the accreditation and evaluation methodologies, the accreditation standards and other aspects of the functioning of the Board are regulated with a Decree. Upon having received consent from the Government, the Board adopts the Decree.

The Board establishes commissions for accreditation and evaluation, consisting of its' members. In case that there is no member of the Board covering a specific scientific area or field, external experts are nominated as members of the commissions.

The Board is financed according to a special programme of the National Budget and from its own revenues.

The Ministry of Education and Science provides professional and administrative support to the Board.

The amendments to the Law from February 2011 provided fine-tuning of the self-evaluation procedure, too. The self-evaluation results are to be published on the

website of the university, the constitutive unit of the university (faculty or scientific institute) and on the website of the Ministry responsible for Higher Education.

In support to the self-evaluation, the Ministry responsible for Higher Education will establish a State Electronic System for Self-Evaluation. The content, the form and the methodology of use of the System will be regulated by the Minister responsible for Higher Education.

Each university or independent higher education institution submits the self-evaluation report to the Ministry responsible for Higher Education, which prepares an integral report on the self-evaluation results at national level.

In April 2011 the Law on Higher Education was aligned with the Law on Administrative Procedure, bringing to precise regulation in cases of failure of the Accreditation and Evaluation Board to decide upon an application for accreditation within 60 days of the day when the application has been submitted.

Besides the above mentioned amendments of the Law on Higher Education, a number of additional interventions in the Law are aimed at increased quality of higher education: the efforts for increased quality of the academic staff are supported with more elaborated criteria for organization of third cycle studies; the obligation of the academic staff for regular publishing in renown journals and international publications; the obligation for recommendation of basic and additional textbooks and literature accessible to students; the introduction of electronic evaluation of the teachers by the students; the obligation for introduction of 2 first cycle study programmes and 4 second cycle study programmes in English language (aiming at internationalization of higher education), increased possibilities for students to choose elective courses; introduction of the e-index for evidence of students attendance to classes and introduction of an electronic system for evidence of teacher's participation in the education process; the increased number of students as members of the Senate from 10% to 15%; the increased value of practical work of students and the obligation renown experts from practice to run part of different training courses.

Dear participants to the Round Table,

The presented legal basis for quality assurance of higher education in the Republic of Macedonia has enabled development of intensive activities at institutional and national level. With the inputs and the discussions to follow, we will be able to exchange good practice, to discuss and to learn from the diverse expertise and experience present at the Round Table. I wish us fruitful work and successful completion of this event.

Bitola, 20 May 2011