



Comment to the AQ expert statement on EA accreditation of the joint MA Political Science – Integration & Government (PoSIG).

This comment is the result of a consultation process between the EuroPS partners and was organised by its Executive Director, Franz Kok, between 9 February and 24 February 2017.

The consortiums in general appreciates the work of the external expert panel and feels well understood in its ambition to develop a new quality of multilateral joint degree collaboration in a big consortium. The conditions regarding the not met 1.3-criteria where foreseeable and are mostly solved in the meanwhile. The recommendations to all other European Approach criteria are helpful and part of the already started preparation of the PoSIG implementation and further project applications for extension of the network (with partner from Serbia and Montenegro) and quality assurance activities planned along the implementation.

After consultation with the relevant accreditation bodies in all relevant countries a positive expectation of all members of the consortium was motivating to start the EA accreditation activities. But the legal environment for the EA implementation in the related six countries are more challenging than expected. The issues related to the legal status and implementation prospects of the EA accreditation results where unexpected even by several of the Ministries involved. As Political Science specialists it was not surprising to us to find ourselves in the role of an actor within a “Europeanization agenda” in the field of higher education, being one of the first examples to show the manageability of the EA based on the Yerevan declaration 2015. This experience was shared with the AQ team and the experts panel: our case might be also an example allowing conclusions for the further development of the EA approach and its practicability.

Because of its singularity of a multilateral and integrated joint degree program the EuroPS consortium is planning to apply for a continuing Erasmus+ capacity building project substantially building on the recommendations of the AQ experts panel (Quality Assurance of multilateral Joint Degrees - QAmuJD project).

1.3. Cooperation Agreement – the standard is not met

Legal environment for national implementation of the EA accreditation:

As the external experts pointed out there are several different standards and procedures about the implementation of the EA results in the related countries. While FYROM has formally signed the Yerevan declaration but so far did not implement it (a new law on higher education is in preparation since 2015) all other countries should have easy implementation procedures available for the implementation of the EA results (also because AQ is ENQA/EQAR member). After the preparing contacts with representatives of all related national accreditation bodies and the presentation of the PoSIG program at the CEENQA conference at 15 May 2016 in Cracow all relevant accreditation representatives have agreed to use the EA accreditation results for the national implementation of the PoSIG program. The members of the consortium therefore were awaiting the results of the AQ board decision to forward it to the national accreditation bodies to be implemented based on their national rules and regulations.

Ratification of partnership agreements (PA) (AQ-statement p.15-19):

The consortium fully accepts the condition about the proof of the signature of all members of the consortium under the partnership agreement if this partner should be included in the EA accreditation and to deliver this signed PA until Beginning of May 2017.

Because of the changed HE law in Slovenia the University of Slovenia was waiting with it's signature to avoid legal conflicts between the PA and the new regulation. We can inform the panel that the University of Ljubljana is in the process of internal confirmation of the PA agreement which is behind the time plan since the implementation of the new university law in Slovenia caused several uncertainties about the responsibilities of the universities in the accreditation process.

At the University of Sarajevo the internal legal office has agreed to the conditions of the PA and the document is now on the way of the internal multi stage approval within UNSA.

Regarding the time plan for the national accreditation and implementation of the PoSIG curriculum the AQ expert panel defined to fulfil these conditions latest until the start of the academic year

- 2017/18 by the Universities of Salzburg and Ljubljana.
- 2018/19 by the other EUP at Western Balkan.

The consortium is fully accepting this condition for the participation of single member of the consortium.

The AQ expert panel has looked at the consortiums PA in very much detail, focusing on all aspects of the organizational requirements for the PoSIG implementation. This is partly due to the long experiences of the members of the panel with inner-University-processes and their knowledge about the complexity of regulations Universities developed for their internal governance. The panel therefore recommends further clarifications whether the PA-regulations are in harmony with the internal regulations of the signing Universities. These clarifications should be made especially regarding the following details:

- selection and registration of students,
- the appointment of the Master theses supervisors and the members of the Examination Boards for the defence of the theses,
- the content of the diplomas.

Given the broad and deep experience of the members of the experts panel their scepticisms regarding the PA-regulations and their compliance with partner Universities internal rules and governance is understandable. But nevertheless, **the consortium cannot see a concrete argument or example showing a conflict between the PA-regulations and the internal rules of any member of the consortium.**

The development of the PA is the result of an intensive negotiation between all EUP at two Coordinators Boards in February 2016 in Salzburg and in May 2016 in Ljubljana. Between these meetings several versions (at least 5 different drafts) where circulated and each coordinator was responsible for the internal countercheck of all details of the PA with the internal experts and offices at the partner Universities. The coordinator of the supporting Erasmus+ capacity building project in that time visited all partner Universities to support the local coordinators in their internal negotiation and decision making. As pointed out at the site visit several regulations of the PA resulted out of the consortiums need to include regulations of EUP and to avoid opting out positions on such details (as for example the nomination of examiners or the valuing of the MA thesis and the MA thesis defence with ECTS credits). Finally, before signing the agreement it had to be checked with various bodies at the single EUPs (i.e. faculty, office for curriculum development, quality assurance, legal office, finance, etc.). **The PoSIG curriculum and the EuroPS PA therefore are prepared very solidly and the consortium cannot see points of conflicts between these documents and the internal regulation at EUP.**

Regarding the diploma issuing regulation especially in Slovenia, Albania and Kosovo the consortium will specify its policy following the recommendations out of the national implementation of the EA accreditation.

The AQ expert panel required a more detailed regulation on the intended student and staff mobility within the PA. The consortium agreed to develop such instruments and to use the opportunities of the Erasmus+ programme for fund raising activities addressed to students, staff and the participating institutions; EUPs internal capacities for these funds are limited and therefore it was difficult to come to binding regulations on this within the PA. Parallel the consortium successfully could apply within Erasmus+ Credit Mobility (E+ CM) and are already implemented regarding student- and staff mobility since 2016. The E+CM agreements between the members of the consortium were signed parallel to the PA and a continuation of this activity is planned.

Nevertheless, the pointed issues will be part of the internal evaluation starting with the implementation of the PoSIG program and the work of the consortium boards. It is also planned to apply for another Erasmus+ project for capacity building following the call 2017 focused on the quality assurance of the whole program, specifically it's implementation at local EUP (including the possibility to expand the consortium with partners in Serbia and Montenegro) and it's joint management and governance (the before mentioned QAmuJD project).

2. Learning Outcomes

2.1. Level – NQF

The National Qualification Framework (NQF) in Austria is fully in line with the European Qualification Framework (§ 3 of the Austrian NQF-law that fully adopts the EQF). Hence if PoSIGs learning outcomes are in line with the EQF they are in line with the Austrian NQF.

Learning outcomes of PoSIG are mainly based on the European Qualification Framework on which relies also National Framework of Qualification in Kosovo (http://akk-ks.net/uploads/national_qualifications_framework.pdf pp. 36-37). The descriptors of National Qualification Framework for level 7 are divided into three parts. Part one which is knowledge – highly specialised is compatible with the part one of the descriptors of LOs in PoSIG named Competence in the field of study. The second descriptor of NQF is compatible with the second and the third descriptor of LOs in PoSIG. The third descriptor of NQF is compatible with the fourth descriptor of LOs in PoSIG (SER EA 2.1).

Learning outcomes of PoSIG were developed by taking into consideration the European Qualification Framework where it is based also the Framework for Higher Education and Qualifications in Albania. Learning outcomes are mainly measured by the three basic divisions which are: Knowledge, competencies and skills. There is a specific Law for the Framework of Higher Education and Qualifications in Albania, which was introduced in 04.03.2010 with number 10 247. http://www.sociale.gov.al/files/userfiles/Legjislacioni/LIGJ_Nr.10247_date_04.03.2010_PER_KORNIZEN_SHQIPTARE_TE_KUALIFIKIMEVE.pdf

The learning outcomes of PoSIG are in line with the European Qualification Framework to which in turn the DECREE on the national qualifications framework in higher education, adopted by the Government of the R. Macedonia (Official Gazette of the R. Macedonia N.154 from 30.11.2010), is aligned. The text of

the Decree in English can be found at the following link http://mrk.mk/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/Appendix_1_Decree_for_the_NQF_HE.pdf

The learning outcomes of PoSiG are in full alignment with the European Qualification Framework, which in turn is aligned with The Framework for Higher Education Qualification in BiH issued by the Higher Education Accreditation Agency of BiH. In addition to this, all SSST programs of all three cycles are fully accredited by the United Kingdom Quality Assurance Agency.

More specifically, PoSiG's first ILO "competence in the field" is connected to these regulations and the example of BiH shows how it is mirrored in the statement provided by FHEQ of BiH that cites:

- ✓ "systematic understanding and comprehensive knowledge of theories in his/her field of work or learning, some of which are at the forefront of the field and can provide the basis for scientific research as well as for originality in developing news applied ideas usually in the context of research work".

PoSiG's "competence in methods" correlates to the FHEQ BiH statement which outlines:

- ✓ "capability and knowledge to thoughtfully and critically apply knowledge and understanding and ability to solve problems within new and under researched areas that are related to his/her field"
- ✓

PoSiG's "competences of judgment" is related to the following FHEQ BiH statement:

- ✓ "capability to apply conceptual and abstract thinking related to judging different methodologies, formation of critical thinking and offering alternative solutions";
- ✓ Capability to use interpersonal skills and team work skills and use them in different learning and professional contexts, demonstrate leadership and initiative taking and further contribute to development".
- ✓ "ability to transfer knowledge and assess the presentation of research outcomes, form judgments on the basis of incomplete or limited information and connect them to social and ethical responsibilities related to application of such knowledge";

PoSiG's "competences of action" is mirrored in the following FHEQ BiH statement:

- ✓ " capability to transfer knowledge and ideas using appropriate language and develop practical solutions and adequately present them to public and non-specialized audiences";
- ✓ "Capability to raise his/her knowledge on the higher level and continually develop personal skills and competences through individualized learning";

2.3. Achievement

The joint MA thesis supervision is based on a joint thesis seminar (with joint syllabus). It will be part of the QAmJDMA project to develop and use structured Maharae Portfolios for accountable and utilizable measures for the quality of the supervision tools.

3.1. Curriculum

Language:

The intention of the EuroPS consortium regarding the language requirements was to define low barriers for teacher cooperation within the Western Balkan region (also crossing the Albanian/Serbo-Croatian gap of the younger generation of scholars) and to develop a platform for Western Balkan competences available for students from outside the region. To require also at least one Western Balkan language from students from outside the region would be contradictory to that goal. At the same time this would allow the inclusion of a broader spectrum of courses at Western Balkan partner Universities. It will be a good opportunity of the Coordinators Board to recognize such courses and make them available for PoSIG students on individual basis. The consortium will take this recommendation into account.

Focus also on polity/policy with inclusion of law and economics competences.

The AQ expert panel's recommendation to focus more on polity/policy aspects and include law and economics competences in the teaching program will be a subject of the Coordinators Board in May 2017 deciding about the course program of the next academic year. It is seen that this might contribute also to the labour market relevance of the PoSIG curriculum.

The intended inclusion of partner Universities from Serbia and Montenegro into the EuroPS consortium could be a good opportunity to widen also the focus of the PoSIG curriculum in these directions.

It will be a decision of the Coordinators Board to which extends the integration of courses in law and economics will be planned for the later course programmes and how the QAmuJD project might be used to build up an environment for teacher trainings in these fields.

Nevertheless students will have the opportunity to take courses from these fields within their "Additional Courses" (24 ECTS credits). The coordinators board will consider whether to come up with respective recommendations to PoSIG-students.

Collaboration between Western Balkan partners

A planned activity within the Erasmus+ project EuroPS is the joint teaching of EuroPS-/PoSIG-teachers in so called Seminars of Excellence (SoE). These activities are planned for the spring term 2017 and will take place in Sarajevo, Prishtina and in Tirana. SoE will be collaborative teaching activities of local EuroPS partner together with colleagues from other EUP. These SoE will be the opportunity to come up with plans for further local collaboration.

Meanwhile the partners in Prishtina already have defined a written contract about a local cooperation as recommended by the panel. The EUP in Tirana and in Sarajevo haven't done so yet. But the experiences with the SoE in spring 2017 will give an opportunity for such conclusions. In fact, such local collaborations can be an excellent strategy to develop an academic profile and especially to come up with PoSIG-specializations in one town so to attract PoSIG students to come there. UET and UniTIR already cooperate in various projects in higher education and regularly exchange staff within the Faculty of Social Sciences. Common workshops and conferences are also organised. SoE are coorganised by both universities. A contract can be signed if necessary.

3.2. Credits &

3.3. Workload

The expert panel recommends to step back from a model in which every course is assigned 6 ECTS credits. In fact, we already had this discussion within our consortium, even though with a slightly different motivation: Therefore, it should also be possible for a single EUP (or a local cooperation of two EUP) to come up with a module consisting of more than three courses to sum up to 18 credits (like in

the expert's review: e.g. 3+3+4+8 or 4+4+4+6). Anyway, all EUP have to offer a student's workload per term of 30 ECTS fitting into the structure of the curriculum.

It is planned to ask students both *a)* in the course evaluation questionnaire about the actual time needed to complete a course (ex post on the course evaluation questionnaire, many years of experience in doing so at the University of Salzburg) and *b)* in a general student survey about the appropriateness of the workload calculated for courses, modules and the whole curriculum. The results of these evaluations will be discussed in the Coordinators Board and might lead to respective adaptations.

Furthermore, the planned project QAmuJD should – based on evaluation and monitoring data – aim at a better tuning of workload and learning outcomes (as it is intended in the ECTS users guide 2015).

4.1. Admission requirements

As mentioned before: The development of admission requirements in the PoSIG curriculum and in the PA is a result of an intensive negotiation between all EUP at two Coordinators Boards (CB) in February 2016 in Salzburg and in May 2016 in Ljubljana. Between these meetings several versions (at least 5 different drafts) were circulated and each coordinator was responsible for the internal countercheck of all details of the PA with the internal experts and offices at the partner Universities. Never the less it is possible, that the implementation of the admission requirements will show problems not foreseen.

The admission process therefore will be part of the planned QA by the Quality Board (QB) from the beginning and observations might give inputs to the planned QAmuJD project.

The final competence for decision in this issue always is in the hands of the consortiums CB but the operative level here is the selection Committee of the Coordinators Board. The coordinators in the SC and the CB representing a EUP have to follow also the internal rules of the University he/she is representing to guarantee the implementation of the joint decision where they do not encompass the competences to act in the name of their University.

Because of the intensive consultation process in front of the jointly found rules and regulations in the PoSIG curriculum and the PA it is expected to have well performing structures available.

If the PoSIG implementation shows weak elements or not solvable single cases the rules and regulations will be improved in a joint process.

The AQ expert panel required a more detailed regulation of the intended student and staff mobility within the PA. The consortium agreed to develop such instruments and use the opportunities of the Erasmus+ programme of the EU for fund raising activities addressed to students, staff and the participating institutions because the partner Universities internal capacities for these funds limited and it therefore was difficult to come to binding regulations on this in the PA. Such sources already successfully could be found within Erasmus+ Credit Mobility and are implemented regarding student- and staff mobility since 2016.

4.2. Recognition of courses

The AQ expert panel's recommendation will be followed already in the first call for PoSIG applicants. It will include a detailed information about the available courses for students at PLUS an ULju accepted under the condition to complete courses from BA level (min. 15 ECTS methodology standard).

5 Assessment

5.1. Learning and Teaching

As mentioned on several occasions and as also summarized in the experts review assessment procedures are firstly determined by local regulations. These local regulations cannot be overruled. But as it is for the didactical approaches – and assessment has to be seen as a part of didactics (assessment determines how students learn) – teachers can be trained on modern, Bologna-conform didactics and hence assessment methodology and can only be asked to adopt these technics. Although a lot of training has already taken place and will further take place in spring 2017 (EuroPS quality tour) and although this whole issue is part of the teaching handbook further capacity building will be needed (as it is for all higher education institutions; teacher development will always remain a duty of higher education management). Relevant activities will also be part of the planned QAmuJD project.

5.2. Assessment of students

The EuroPS consortiums agreement on the assessment of students in the PA is the result of an intensive negotiation between all EUP at two Coordinators Boards in February 2016 in Salzburg and in May 2016 in Ljubljana. Between these meetings several versions (at least 5 different drafts) were circulated and each coordinator was responsible for the internal countercheck of all details of the PA with the internal experts and offices at the partner Universities. Nevertheless it is possible that the implementation of the assessment requirements will result in problems not foreseen so far. The assessment of students therefore will be part of the quality monitoring (in responsibility of the Quality Board). The respective observations will be a crucial input to the planned QAmuJD project.

The final competence for decision making always is in the hands of the consortiums coordinators board. But the operative levels are the coordinators of the EUP attended by a student (single course recognition, issues of examination etc.). In all these responsibilities the coordinator of a single EUP has to follow also the internal rules of the respective University to guarantee the implementation of the joint decision where they do not encompass the competences to act in the name of their University. Because of the intensive consultation process in front of the jointly found rules and regulations in the PoSIG curriculum and the PA it is expected to have well performing structures available. If the PoSIG implementation shows weak elements or not solveable single cases the rules and regulations will be improved in a joint process.

6 Student Support

A student handbook was in discussion before. Our consortium should and will indeed implement the expert panels recommendation and come up with a student's handbook. A first basic version should be finished by summer 2017, still within the scope of the Erasmus+ project EuroPS. This basic version is to be enhanced based on the experience of the first PoSIG study year.

7 Resources

7.1. Staff

The AQ expert panel's recommendation about train-the-trainer workshops and Seminars of Excellence are part of the Erasmus+ Credit Mobility plan for staff in spring term 2018 and 2019 and could be intensified with the planned Erasmus+ QAmuJD project. Inputs planned regarding the teaching of methodology, MA thesis supervision, policy/polity inputs to the course programme and the inclusion of teachers from departments applying for EuroPS membership and accreditation as PoSIG partner (there are concrete plans about this with partner from Serbia and Montenegro).

7.2. Facilities

The AQ expert panel's recommendation about the availability of the PoSIG eLearning environment (eLibrary, Anti-Plagiarism software, Moodle, Mahara etc.) is part of the planned implementation. Only the availability of these resources for all students, staff and University departments involved allows the implementation of the shared standards of teaching, learning, assessment and MA thesis supervision and is the necessary precondition for joint SoE and teacher mobility.

8. Transparency and Documentation

The recommendation of the AQ expert panel regarding the technical and individual support of academic mobility will be provided within the call for applicants and the student support data at the website of the EuroPS consortium.

The transparency regarding the course evaluation shall include the Students Board who is in charge for representation of the students interests and is supervising the Coordinators Board as well as the Quality Board. Because course evaluations need also a consistent few to the students & teachers contribution to the course this should be in the hand of responsible acting persons. Nevertheless, teachers can publish the results of their course evaluations on their own responsibility and use the joint Moodle platform for this. This might encourage other teacher to follow this example.

9. Quality Assurance

"The expert panel recommends specifying on how each of the EUPs will actively contribute quality processes following the PDCA quality cycle."

Although some quality assurance processes have to be organised by on central quality manager local EUP-quality managers are in charge for the appropriate adoption of these processes. Even more crucial is their role to agree with the local coordinator if any measures regarding quality issues have to be taken; mainly based on evaluation and monitoring results. All quality managers gather in the Quality Board, reviewing evaluation and monitoring results, summarizing and reporting them to the Coordinators Board.