

Bridge Project Action 5 – Study visits

Final Report

Introduction:

Action 5 under the Bridge project, study visits to ENIC and MERIC centres, has several objectives:

- to get to know the methods applied for the recognition of joint degrees;
- to make the ENIC and MERIC centres aware of general elements of the Erasmus Mundus Programme in relation to recognition issues;
- to collect information on cases of employability of Erasmus Mundus students in their national context involving EMA representatives;
- to analyse possible examples of cases of Erasmus Mundus students applying for professional recognition in their national labour markets.

Each Erasmus Mundus National Structure involved into the project was responsible for one or two study visits (case of the Italian National Structure) and the Estonian Erasmus Mundus National Structure was in charge of preparing the final report for this Action in order to summarize the activities undertaken as well as the main results and comments concerning the study visits.

The study visits took place between November 2011 and May 2012 and were possible only thanks to the collaboration of the institutions and stakeholders of each visited country (representatives of ENIC and MERIC centres, representatives of ministries of higher education and higher education institutions, representatives of Erasmus Mundus Alumni) that were open to share with us their good practices regarding the recognition of joint degrees, but also the difficulties they encountered.

1. The choice of the countries to be visited

A set of criteria was compiled in order to make the choice of the countries to be visited. By setting up following points were taken into account:

- the results of the questionnaires sent to ENIC and MERIC centres under Action 3 of the BRIDGE project;



- ENIC/MERIC countries with the highest number of students participating in Erasmus Mundus programme;
- ENIC/MERIC countries with the highest number of higher education institutions involved in Erasmus Mundus consortia.

At the beginning Canada, New Zealand, Russia, Australia and USA were selected for study visits – big countries with a relatively high level of participation in Erasmus Mundus programme. Unfortunately due to some organizational issues the visit to Australia had to be skipped and was replaced with a visit to Tunisia, which is rather active in Erasmus Mundus programme, especially in Action 2. At the same time the Israeli ENIC centre expressed the interest against the Bridge project and its activities and asked for being visited as well in frames of the Action 5.

Taking into account all these factors the final choice of the countries to be visited was done as following:

Bridge partner	Visited country
Estonia	Russia
Italy	Israel, New Zealand
Malta	Canada
Portugal	USA
Spain	Tunisia

All visits were conducted according to the initial plan except the visit to the USA. Due to internal changes in the Portuguese Government, it was not possible to realize the visit to the US ENIC centre. But as US ENIC centre’s representatives went to Spain for another meeting, the Portuguese Erasmus Mundus National Structure used this opportunity to meet them personally and discuss the American recognition system and the recognition of Erasmus Mundus degrees. All other discussions (with Erasmus Mundus Alumna as well as with US universities’ representatives) took place via *Skype*.

2. Methodology of the study visits

In order to have coherent and comparable results, all partners previously agreed on the main topics that should be discussed during each study visit, namely:

1. National legislation on joint courses and joint degrees;
2. Information on / examples of joint programmes (courses) delivered in the country (and joint degrees awarded);
3. General knowledge about the Erasmus Mundus Programme;
4. Institutions (in the country, if any) involved in the Erasmus Mundus Programme;



5. Examples of institutions' contacts with ENIC/MERIC centres for questions arising from participations in Erasmus Mundus projects (joint programmes (courses), joint degrees,...); quantification of the numbers;
6. The recognition of joint degrees in the country; actors, procedures, etc. (level of involvement of the ENIC/MERIC centres into the process);
7. Concrete experiences on cases presented to the hosting centre by students or institutions asking for academic recognition and/or professional recognition. Approximate number of cases and details of the most relevant of them;
8. Erasmus Mundus students or institutions asking for academic recognition and/or professional recognition: cases treated by other authorities in the respective country;
9. Possible cases of recognition of non-Erasmus Mundus joint degrees (treated by ENIC/NARIC or by other authorities in the country).

The final report for Action 5 should have been based on these guidelines compiled for the study visits.

In the course of the visit firstly Erasmus Mundus programme, Bridge project and its objectives were introduced to the ENIC/MERIC centres, followed by the interviews with the representatives of ENIC or MERIC centres, the ministries of higher education and higher education institutions as well as with the EMA representatives.

3. Conclusions

The main conclusion that can be drawn, is that Erasmus Mundus programme is not well known outside Europe neither among the higher education institutions nor among the students and the employers. That's the case of the USA, which have a very low level of participation considering the size of its higher education system and high level of internationalization. Atlantis Programme (EU-US cooperation in higher education and training) seems to be better known among the American higher education institutions. Also in Tunisia Erasmus Mundus programme seems to be not that well-known, Tunisian higher education institutions have just a very general knowledge about the programme, but not in details about the three Actions of the programme. In Russia, another big country among the visited countries, there is no lack of information about Erasmus Mundus programme at the moment. That has changed just recently thanks to the Tempus Office and the EU Delegation in Russia, which are responsible for spreading the information about different possibilities for higher education institutions regarding cooperation with the EU. The low participation of Russia in the Erasmus Mundus programme can be rather explained with the still persisting differences in the higher education system, which not always allow a creation of joint programmes.



Nevertheless there are a lot of joint study programmes in the visited countries, which were created in frames of other educational programmes (e.g. Atlantis - USA) or in frames of bilateral cooperation between the universities (e.g. Russia, Canada).

The differences in the higher education systems are another major problem, which hinders the cooperation and creation of joint study programmes. Although some countries joined the Bologna Process (e.g. Russia and Tunisia) and other try to adjust their higher education systems to the standards of the Bologna Process (e.g. USA, Canada), a lot of peculiarities are still preserved (e.g. levels of education, enrolment requirements concerning the degrees received, etc.).

Also the recognition practices of (joint) degrees vary from country to country. There are centralized and decentralized systems, with different actors involved in the process of the recognition. In some countries academic recognition is done centralized by ENIC centres, as in New Zealand (mostly recognition of trans-national recognition cases); in some others (USA, Israel) it is done more decentralized by the higher education institutions themselves. In Russia the academic recognition is done centralized, but by the third body (The Main State Centre of Expert Assessment of Education) and ENIC centre has just an advisory role and acts as an expert in complicated recognition cases. In Tunisia the national legislation allows the recognition of joint diploma awarded by other higher education institutions from Europe as well as the award of international joint degrees jointly by Tunisian and European Universities. There are also agreements on the joint supervision of doctoral theses, which is a very complicated issue in Russia, for example. Doctoral candidates have to pass the joint supervision in order to get joint diploma and degree. To recognize such diploma and degree in Russia, the candidate has to pass again the defence of the dissertation also in Russia. This is a very complicated process, so the higher education institutions are not really interested in such programmes at the moment.

There were no serious problems reported regarding the recognition of Erasmus Mundus double / multiple / joint degrees. Some of the visited countries haven't ever had any queries concerning the recognition of Erasmus Mundus degrees (e.g. Russia). Tunisian MERIC had a case of recognition of joint diploma, which had a number of deficits (no ECTS, no length of the programme, etc.) and that complicates the process of recognition by ENIC and MERIC centres.

The students in general consider their Erasmus Mundus studies as an added value for their later employment, but the joint structure and multiple/joint diplomas create some confusion, especially in the labour market among the employers (US Erasmus Mundus Alumna).

To summarize, there are still some problematic issues concerning the creation of joint programmes, as well as recognition of joint degrees. Despite that almost all contacted persons during the study visits expressed their wish for more information about Erasmus Mundus



programme, its possibilities and perspectives, as the programme seems to be very interesting also for the third countries' higher education institutions due to its impact on the internationalization's process of the institutions.

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Tallinn, 31.10.2012