Quality Assurance

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ANALYSIS OF QA TRENDS IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE EU, SOUTH-EAST EUROPE, AND BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

Strategic and Structural Development of Quality Assurance in BiH Higher Education 2008-2010

June 2009

LIECHTENSTEIN

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Abbreviations

ADC	Austrian Development Cooperation
BiH	Bosnia and Herzegovina
EHEA	European Higher Education Area
ENQA	European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
EQAR	European Quality Assurance Register in Higher Education
ESIB - ESU	European Students' Union
ESG	Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area
EUA	European University Association
EURASHE	European Association of Institutions in Higher Education
HEI	Higher Education Institution
QA	Quality Assurance
SEE	South-East Europe
WUS Austria	World University Service Austria

Foreword

Since 2001, WUS Austria has aimed at assuring quality in Bosnian and Herzegovinian (BiH) higher education, to a greater or lesser extent, directly and indirectly, in the majority of its projects. International peer review, student evaluations, and regular monitoring of project implementation have been integral quality assurance (QA) mechanisms in projects such as Centre of Excellence Project, Course Development Programme, Brain Gain Programme and Balkan Case Challenge (BH Challenge).

As quality assurance increasingly became the focus and priority of higher education reforms across the European Higher Education Area, WUS Austria initiated more direct and concrete projects. In 2005, WUS Austria in cooperation with its local partner SUS BiH, instigated its first Tempus project aimed at "Strengthening Quality Assurance in BiH Higher Education". From then onwards, a series of international interventions have continually supported the development of quality assurance, as a framework and institutional system and culture. These projects, the outcomes of which are described in detail in the text below, have assisted BiH universities in a gradual, step-by-step installation of quality assurance systems and structures, strategies and policies.

After more than three years of active and direct support to QA development, the BiH universities are displaying heterogeneous needs and priorities. The significance, tacit and formal, given to quality assurance varies from one university institution to another and sometimes even within one university.

The main purpose of the analysis at hand is to try to contextualize and summarize the main trends in the field of QA development at the level of Europe, South-East Europe and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Our experiences in previous projects aimed at developing QA, working with QA staff and university management and lessons learnt during numerous study visits to EU universities have been the basis for the research and analysis at hand. Constant cooperation with QA coordinators and officers from BiH and EU universities has helped us understand the main problems and needs in developing a quality approach and introduced us to various "good practice" examples.

Therefore we thank all the "ambassadors of quality" across BiH universities who exert individual effort to bring QA issues to top agenda priorities on an everyday basis.

Last but not least, we thank the Austrian Development Cooperation and the Liechtenstein Government for their generous and continuous support to the development of quality assurance in BiH higher education.

WUS Austria

Snap Shot of WUS Austria QA projects in SEE

Within the field of quality assurance, WUS Austria supports universities with the introduction of quality assurance measures as foreseen by the Bologna and Copenhagen Process, thus advancing SEE universities towards the European Higher Education Area and international standards in quality assurance and quality control. Quality Assurance projects comprise of the following measures: **(1) setting up of QA systems, where they do not yet exist, (2) capacity building and human resources development, (3) development of QA instruments and their implementation and (4) analysis and strategy/process development.**

Since 2005, two QA projects have been fully implemented in cooperation with all eight public universities in **Bosnia and Herzegovina**:

 - the Tempus project **"Strengthening Quality Assurance at BiH Universities"** (2004-2008), which aimed at capacity building by supporting the establishment and strengthening of quality assurance centers at universities in BIH.

 - **"Structural Development of Quality Assurance in Higher Education"** (2006-2008), financed by the Austrian Development Cooperation and Liechtenstein Government, where the aim of the project was to ensure the transfer of the know-how and expertise from EU experts to the BiH Universities and to provide the BiH universities with the guidelines for QA systems.
There are three ongoing WUS Austria QA projects in BiH:

 - The Tempus project **"From Quality Assurance to Strategy Development"** (2007-2009), where the overall aim of the project is to contribute to a coherent and far-reaching reform of higher education in BiH in accordance with the Bologna Process and with the society and market needs. For this objective to be achieved, universities in BiH need to develop modern, student-oriented strategies, which will pave the path towards the university's long-term goals. However, a "one-for-all" model does not exist. Therefore, each university first needs to conduct a thorough analysis, i.e. assessment of its environment, operations, structure, and results so as to be able to customize and develop a progressive strategy in line with its needs and priorities.

 - **"Strategic and Structural Development of Quality Assurance in Bosnian and Herzegovinian Higher Education in 2008-2010"**, financed by the Austrian Development Cooperation and Liechtenstein Government, which focuses on furthering the development of quality assurance in BiH higher education and it represents the follow up action to previously established QA structures at BiH universities and strengthening of BiH QA Agency.

 - The Tempus project **"The Role of Stakeholders in Quality Assurance Procedures at BiH Medical Faculties"** (2007-2009). The overall aim of this project is to contribute to the harmonization of medical faculties' curricula with EU medical education standards in cooperation with internal and external stakeholders. Specifically, it is planned to produce

an inventory of available knowledge and competencies of medical graduates. A Resonance Committee on medical education is to be established as well as an interuniversity pilot centre for medical training for the introduction of a market oriented approach in medical education reform procedures.

There is one ongoing QA project in **Montenegro**:

 - **"Establishment of Quality Assurance Centers at the University of Montenegro"** (2007-2010), financed by the Austrian Development Agency, which aims at creating a network of four Quality Assurance centers in Podgorica, at the coast and in inland Montenegro. These centers will be provided with the necessary support and equipment. Six staff members will be trained as QA experts. To assure that QA becomes a crucial part of the University of Montenegro, awareness-raising will be realized among the academic staff.

In **Serbia**, two QA projects are being realized:

 - **"Support to the University of Novi Pazar"** (2007-2010), financed by the Austrian Development Cooperation, through which WUS Austria will substantially contribute to institution and capacity building at the newly formed University of Novi Pazar by supporting measures in quality assurance and infrastructure. Improved quality of higher education will finally contribute to the region's economic development.

 - **"Support to Serbian Accreditation Agency"** (2007-2010), financed by the Austrian Development Cooperation, within which institutional building of the Serbian Committee for Accreditation and Quality Assurance (CAQA) will be supported. Currently, a detailed plan of activities is being worked out in cooperation with the representatives of CAQA, primarily aimed at providing insight into the Austrian accreditation system and enabling the key people the exchange of experiences with their Austrian colleagues.

There is one ongoing QA project in **Kosovo**:

- The Tempus project **"Fostering and Developing the Quality Culture at the University of Prishtina"** (2009-2012). The main objective is to further develop the quality culture at the University of Prishtina (UP) at all service levels such as teaching, research, administration and student support services. During this development the perspectives of all stakeholders will be taken into account. The main challenge for the UP is to transform its informal and implicit approaches towards quality into a formal and explicit quality culture.

1. Introduction

This document is meant to present an overview of current trends and forecasts of the future of quality assurance (QA) in European higher education (HE), with a special emphasis on South-East Europe (SEE) and Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH).

It seems that each and every expression in this sentence is imprecise:

When does the future start? The year 2010 is the pre-defined end of the Bologna process, even though it is obvious that the development of the European Higher Education Area will continue, before and after that date. In fact, this report is being written in May 2009. The documents for the Leuven/ Louvain-la-Neuve Ministerial Conference are already available.

The bases of this report are documents issued within the last years. All topics mentioned will be major challenges to one country and its institutions, whereas they are well-solved in other countries.

Where does quality assurance (QA) start? And where does it end? It seems difficult to discuss the future of quality assurance without addressing the future of higher education as such. We have tried to focus as much as possible on quality assurance, though we have also included related topics in higher education management.

In our examination of Europe, **South-East Europe** and **Bosnia and Herzegovina**, we have looked at higher education systems and institution data and desk reviews of a number of reports since 1999, including the last Stocktaking reports 2009, as a final overall picture of the recent development of HE and its QA system.

2. Quality Assurance in EU Higher Education Institutions

2.1. General Trends

In the last 10 years quality assurance has been regarded as one of the basic instruments for the application of new standards and the realization of reforms within the Bologna Process. The Bologna Process, referred to as the process of reform according to the Bologna Declaration, has also changed in the course of the implementation. Today, the reform is focused on the different elements with regard to the heterogenic Europe and HE European movements called the European Area of Higher Education. In this situation, the role of quality assurance in higher education and its **approach varies from one country to another.**

At large traditional universities across Europe, QA has always been present; the quality of teaching and research work reflected through the strong references of individuals, institutes, as well as universities. In such cases, quality has never been an issue. The processes that have been carried out at universities were not embedded within a formal quality assurance system, but were part of an everyday life, without clearly defined procedures and indicators.

With the breakthrough of new technologies and an overwhelming flow of information, new universities were established and even separate study programmes were formed, all of which directly responded to the needs of the society. A market race for a better "selling" of knowledge was created. In such a new environment and for the purpose of an easier implementation of assigned tasks for the integration of higher education institutions in the EHEA, it was necessary **to define the priorities and instruments** which would correspond to current reforms. These priorities were determined and directed toward the establishment of quality systems which were becoming the basic instrument for the management of new processes at new, modern universities.

In accordance with the needs and priorities and with the Berlin Communiqué (2003), ministers have committed themselves to supporting further development of quality assurance at the institutional, national and European level. They have stressed the need to develop mutually shared criteria and methodologies on quality assurance. Furthermore, they have stressed that, consistent with the principle of institutional autonomy, **the primary responsibility for quality assurance in higher education lies with each institution itself** and this provides the basis for real accountability of the academic system within the national quality framework.

Therefore, they have agreed that by 2005 national QA systems should include:

- A definition of responsibilities of the institutions and bodies involved;
- Evaluation of programs or institutions, including internal assessment, external review, participation of students and the publication of results;
- A system of accreditation, certification or comparable procedures;
- International participation, co-operation and networking.

In Bergen in 2005, the European Ministers responsible for Higher Education stated: „Almost all countries have made provisions for a quality assurance system based on the criteria set out at the Berlin Communiqué and with a high degree of cooperation and networking. However, there is still
progress to be made, in particular, regarding student involvement and international cooperation. Further-more, we urge higher education institutions to continue their efforts to enhance the quality of their activities through the systematic introduction of internal mechanisms and their direct correlation with external quality assurance. We adopt the standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area as proposed by ENQA [European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education]. We commit ourselves to introducing the proposed model for peer review of quality assurance agencies on a national basis, while respecting the commonly accepted guidelines and criteria. We welcome the principle of a Eu-ropean register of quality assurance agencies based on national review. We ask that the practicalities of implementation be further developed by ENQA in cooperation with EUA, EURASHE and ESIB with a report back to us through the Follow-up Group. We underline the importance of cooperation between nationally recognised agencies with a purpose of enhancing the mutual recognition of accreditation or quality assur-ance decisions." (Bergen Communiqué, 2005, p. 2)

Ministers of Higher Education from Bologna Process member countries met again in London in 2007 to asses the progress made since they last convened in Bergen in 2005. Some of their conclusions were:

- The Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the EHEA adopted in Bergen (ESG) have been a powerful driver of change in relation to quality assurance. All countries have started to implement them and some have made substantial progress.
- External quality assurance in particular is much more developed than before. The extent of student involvement at all levels has increased since 2005, although improvement is still necessary.
- Since the main responsibility for quality lies with HEIs, they should continue to develop their systems of quality assurance.

They acknowledged the progress made with regard to mutual recognition of accreditation and quality assur-ance decisions, and encouraged continuous international cooperation amongst quality assurance agencies. (London Communiqué, 2007, p. 4)

And even with set guidelines, higher education institutions, ministries and newly established Agencies for quality assurance continue to display different approaches.

To equalize approaches to QA in higher education would mean to equalize the reform process itself. Smaller and newer universities regard such convergence in reform approaches as an opportunity - by adopting most widely used reform approaches they aim at better market positioning. Universities of Applied Sciences are an example of quick, flexible and variable activities. They usually regard QA measures (eg. market analyses, etc) as very important.

With larger and more mature traditional universities in Europe, quality assurance and ESG are well accepted but at the level of teaching, i.e. of the teaching curricula and study programmes which often correspond to market requirements. In this area, there is a tendency of convergence between traditional and applied universities. In some cases, university institutions' foreground task is to promote their teaching curricula, and such promotion is performed through assured licenses. This is usually the case with developed universities. With less developed universities, the significance of institutional and programme accreditation are at the same level and it is often the case that institutional quality assurance is emphasized as being the most important factor. In some countries, QA Agencies are of great importance; still, in other countries there is an undeveloped communication between the agencies and HE institutions.

The Bologna Process Stocktaking Report, 2009, further confirms such observations :"The national reports demonstrate that HEIs in most countries are actively working to establish coherent internal QA systems and aligning them with the external assessment procedures. A number of countries state that they do not prescribe particular mechanisms for internal quality assurance in HEIs but rather require that HEIs create them as they see fit, on condition that the internal QA of each HEI is coherent, effective and fits its purposes. Some countries use ISO, Total Quality Management or EFQM methodologies for internal quality assurance in HEIs."

It is very important to underline that the process of standard QA development, implementation and the usage of standards has its own beginning, but apparently nobody will live to see its end. QA requires a cycle management approach and its development can also be measured and improved. At the **Conference of the European Ministers Responsible for Higher Education, in Leuven and Louvain-la-Neuve, 28-29 April 2009**, the conclusion which refers to the development of QA was: „Higher education is being modernized with the adoption of the European Standards and Guidelines for quality assurance. We have also seen the creation of a European register for quality assurance agencies and the establishment of national qualifications frameworks linked to the overarching European Higher Education Area framework, based on learning outcomes and workload." (Leuven and Louvain-la-Neuve Communiqué, 2009, p. 2).

Different and flexible approaches to QA development lead to different HE development strategies. For the purpose of synchronizing approaches to QA development and providing a common framework, the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) has developed the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG).

2.2. European Standards and Guidelines for Internal QA

This core document (ESG, 2005) lists seven central standards and guidelines for internal quality assurance[1]:

- **Policy and procedures** for quality assurance[1]:
  Institutions should have a policy and associated procedures for the assurance of the quality and standards of their programmes and awards. They should also commit themselves explicitly to the development of aculture which recognises the importance of quality, and quality assurance, in their work. To achieve this, institutions should develop and implement a strategy for the **continuous**

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[1] Emphasis added

enhancement of quality. The strategy, policy and procedures should have a formal status and be publicly available. They hould also **include a role for students** and other stakeholders.

- Approval, monitoring and **periodic review of programmes** and awards:
  Institutions should have formal mechanisms for the approval, periodic review and monitoring of their programmes and awards.

- **Assessment of students:**
  Students should be assessed using published criteria, regulations and procedures which are applied consistently.

- **Quality assurance of teaching staff:**
  Institutions should have ways of satisfying themselves that staff involved with the teaching of students is qualified and competent to do so. They should be available to those undertaking external reviews, and commented upon in reports.

- **Learning resources and student support:**
  Institutions should ensure that the resources available for the support of student learning are adequate and appropriate for each programme offered.

- **Information systems:**
  Institutions should ensure that they collect, analyse and use relevant **information for the effective management** of their study programmes and other activities.

- **Public information:**
  Institutions should regularly publish impartial, objective and up-to-date information, both quantitative and qualitative, on the programmes and awards they are offering.

Following the idea of continuous improvement, it will remain a key objective of HEIs to develop and maintain each of these items.

„In most countries HEIs have established internal QA procedures, although some are much stronger than others. While systems for approval of programmes and qualifications are well developed, it is clear that linking programmes with learning outcomes and designing assessment procedures to measure achievement of the intended learning outcomes are the most difficult parts and will take longer to implement.

Overall, student participation in QA has progressed since 2007; however students often participate in reviews only as observers, they are not always involved in preparing self-assessment reports and they are very seldom involved in follow-up measures." (Stocktaking Report 2009, p. 14)

2.3. *European Standards for External Quality Assurance of Higher Education* (ENQA 2005)

- **Use of internal quality assurance procedures:** External quality assurance procedures should take into account the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance processes.

- **Development of external quality assurance processes:** The aims and objectives of quality assurance processes should be determined before the processes themselves are developed, by all those responsible (including higher education institutions) and should be published with a description of the procedures to be used.

- **Criteria for decisions:** Any formal decisions made as a result of an external quality assurance activity should be based on explicitly published criteria that are applied consistently.

- **Processes fit for purpose:** All external quality assurance processes should be designed specifically to ensure their fitness to achieve the aims and objectives set for them.

- **Reporting:** Reports should be published and should be written in a style, which is clear and readily accessible to its intended readership. Any decisions, commendations or recommendations contained in reports should be easy for a reader to find.

- **Follow-up procedures:** Quality assurance processes which contain recommendations for action or which require a subsequent action plan, should have a predetermined follow-up procedure which is implemented consistently.

- **Periodic reviews:** External quality assurance of institutions and/or programs should be undertaken on a cyclical basis. The length of the cycle and the review procedures to be usedshould be clearly defined and published in advance.

- **System-wide analyses:** Quality assurance agencies should produce from time to time summary reports describing and analyzing the general findings of their reviews, evaluations, assessments etc.

„All countries have introduced external quality assurance (QA) systems including self- measures. The fact that only 15 countries have organised assessment of their QA agency suggests that there is a long way to go before there is clear evidence that all countries are working according to the ESG. Some countries with small higher education systems do not have a national QA agency but they organise external QA and international participation in other ways. Nearly all publish assessment results and carry out follow-up activities" (Stocktaking Report 2009, p. 14)

External quality assurance in the European higher education systems has developed tremendously in the ten years since the recommendation of the European Council in 1998 (ENQA 2008, p. 20). Current areas of major concern are:

- Adoption of the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area "ESG" (ENQA 2008, p. 6)

- Adoption of the Framework of Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area (ENQA 2008, p. 6)

- Use of the learning outcomes approach in external QA (ENQA 2008, p. 84)

- Stakeholder involvement in external QA (ENQA 2008, p. 84)

2.4. European Standards for External Quality Assurance Agencies (ENQA 2005)

- **Use of external quality assurance procedures for higher education:** The external quality assurance of agencies should take into account the presence and effectiveness of the external quality assurance processes.

- **Official status:** Agencies should be formally recognized by competent public authorities in the European Higher Education Area as agencies with responsibilities for external quality assurance and should have an established legal basis. They should comply with any requirements of the legislative jurisdictions within which they operate.

- **Activities:** Agencies should undertake external quality assurance activities (at institutional or program level) on a regular basis.

- **Resources:** Agencies should have adequate and proportional resources, both human and financial, to enable them to organize and run their external quality assurance process(es) in an effective and efficient manner, with appropriate provision for the development of their processes and procedures.

- **Mission statement:** Agencies should have clear and explicit goals and objectives for their work, contained in a publicly available statement.

- **Independence:** Agencies should be independent to the extent that they have autonomous responsibility for their operations and that the conclusions and recommendations made in their reports cannot be influenced by third parties such as higher education institutions, ministries or other stakeholders.

- **External quality assurance criteria and processes used by the agencies:** The processes, criteria and procedures used by agencies should be pre-defined and publicly available. These rocesses will normally be expected to include:

  o   a self-assessment or equivalent procedure by the subject of the quality assurance process;
  o   an external assessment by a group of experts, including, as appropriate, (a) student member(s), and site visits as decided by the agency;
  o   publication of a report, including any decisions, recommendations or other formal outcomes;
  o   a follow-up procedure to review actions taken by the subject of the quality assur ance process in the light of any recommendations contained in the report.

- **Accountability procedures:** Agencies should have in place procedures for their own accountability.

„There has been some progress towards achieving a greater level of international involvement in the critical areas of participation in external review teams and membership of ENQA or other international QA networks, but there is still quite a large number of countries whose quality assurance agencies are not yet full members of ENQA." (Stocktaking Report 2009, p. 14)

2.5.   QA Agencies in Selected Countries

QA agencies provide a stable but increasingly important role in European higher education. Most agencies have a national role, though variations exist. (ENQA 2008, p. 83):

- System with an additional regional dimension (Spain)
- Systems with specialised agencies for different kinds of HEIs (Austria)
- Market system with competing agencies under an accreditation council (Germany)
- International systems (Netherlands and Flanders)

On the following pages, selected external QA systems will be presented. In choosing the examples, we kept in mind the relevance for South-Eastern European countries. Therefore we will present Denmark, Flanders / Netherlands, Bulgaria and Hungary. All information is taken from the review reports in the ENQA database http://www.enqa.eu/pubs_review.lasso.

2.5.1.   Denmark

Denmark was one of the first countries to establish an evaluation system for HEIs at a national level. Denmark greatly contributes to European developments in this field, and promotes the establishment of an appraisal system for quality agencies in Europe.
The Danish Evaluation Institute (EVA) was re-launched in 1999, when it was given a broad mandate to undertake evaluations in primary, secondary and higher education, as well as adult and continuing training. EVA is to:

- Assist in assuring the quality and development of teaching and education in Denmark;
- Advise and cooperate with the Ministry of Education and other public agencies and educational institutions on issues relating to evaluation and quality development in the educational sector;
- Compile national and international experiences of educational evaluation and quality development;
- Develop and renew methods for evaluation and quality development.

The institute itself initiates evaluations and in doing so decides which educational institutions are to be included. It is also a national knowledge centre in the field of quality and quality assurance in education.

2.5.2. Flanders / the Netherlands

In **Flanders**, a formal process of accreditation was introduced as an extension to the existing internal QA in 2004. Responsibility for accreditation in Flanders is held by the bi-national Dutch-Flemish Accreditation Organization (NVAO). In the next few years, Flanders will introduce institutional audits, reducing the extent of programme accreditations at the same time.

External assessments are organised by the two agencies, VLHORA and VLIR. Quality assessments of programmes with an academic orientation are conducted in collaboration with VLIR.

VLHORA was appointed to coordinate the quality assessments of programmes with a professional orientation. In order to ensure the involvement of the HEIs in the development of the quality as

sessment processes, VLHORA established two advisory bodies consisting of QA experts of Flemish HEIs. The costs of external assessments are to be paid by the HEIs.

In the **Netherlands**, the government decided to let the institutions freely choose their quality assessment agency: a market system. NVAO has drawn up a list of recognized quality assessment agencies (including two German agencies), but institutions are not obliged to choose from that list.

NVAO is the **bi-national Accreditation Organization** of the Netherlands and Flanders. It was established by an international treaty and it ensures the quality of higher education in the Netherlands and Flanders by means of accreditation. Currently, NVAO's major task is the (initial) accreditation of higher education programmes both in the Netherlands and Flanders.

2.5.3. Bulgaria

NEAA (National Evaluation and Accreditation Agency) was founded in 1995. The first Accreditation Council started its work by the end of 1996. The study of international examples and the PHARE-BG project enabled it to adopt evaluation and accreditation procedures in line with the European concepts in a very short period of time. In 2004, NEAA became also responsible for post-accreditation monitoring and control.

The Agency's mission is to contribute to the quality enhancement of Higher Education through cyclical institutional and programme evaluation and accreditation in Bulgaria, and through the project evaluation for the opening of new HEIs and their basic units, as well as through post-accreditation monitoring and control, while ensuring the independence and transparency of the procedures and the high competence of all Bulgarian and foreign experts participating in them.

According to the vision, the Agency believes in the principles of transparency and competition for quality improvement, guarantees objectivity and promotes cooperation with ENQA and accreditation agencies within the EHEA.

2.5.4. Hungary

The Hungarian Accreditation Committee (HAC) is one of the earliest bodies of its kind in CEE (established in 1993). It is the only official body in Hungary responsible for higher education accreditation.

The HAC provides initial accreditations for new HEIs, faculties and doctoral schools. Institutions need re-accreditation in an 8 year interval. The Committee also evaluates applications for professorial positions. On programme level, the Committee evaluates education and outcome requirements of new bachelor and master programmes and accredits programmes for an 8 year period.

The first round of institutional accreditations was completed in 2000, and the second round began in 2004. In the second round, the focus was put on institutional governance, management and internal QA, without looking at each programme (which was the case during the first round). Regarding programme accreditation, the HAC began a pilot project with parallel disciplinary accreditation in 2004. All study programmes in two disciplines, history and psychology, were evaluated within a short period of time and by the same visiting teams. By 2007, this was also realised for programmes in law, medicine, pharmaceutics and dentistry.

2.6. Current Trends in Managing QA

The **institutional autonomy** of HEIs is one of the fundamental principles of the Bologna Declaration (1999). But even today, Europe displays a diverse picture. The degree of government interference, especially in public institutions, varies from one country to another (sometimes even on state level).

With the increase of university autonomy, the need for establishing a stronger system of responsibility towards society also grows. The universities, acknowledging the new needs of the society and the market, as well as the more and more complex requests of their users and founders, have to be set up pragmatically, underlining the importance and affordability of their own actions.

The increase in autonomy at the same time means an increase in the responsibility of the university and its members, especially when it comes to ensuring the establishment and existence of all the needed standards, which in turn guarantee the quality and results necessary to society. Therefore, it is of crucial importance to plan and implement reform tasks on the basis of principles which would guarantee that each higher education institution builds a sustainable system of quality assurance. This is at the same time the interest and obligation of students, integrated members of the universities, the universities themselves and the ministries.

Autonomy is a precondition for promoting internal quality (EUA Quality Culture, p. 8). HEIs cannot be held responsible for the quality of units or activities beyond their sphere of influence. But at the same time, HEIs must show accountable behaviour within their sphere.

Autonomy is not a purely juridical question. Proper long-term strategic planning requires stable funding, predictable and fair relations with government institutions, and the possibility to select and develop the organisation's human resources (EUA Quality Culture, p. 8). Regularly and across Europe, this requires constant political lobbying by rectors, deans, presidents etc.

With larger institutions, autonomy usually requires an appropriate internal organisation. Since 1999, many HEIs changed from a decentralised to more integrated organisation (EUA Quality Culture, p. 22). Then, a transparent internal fund allocation is advisable (EUA Quality Culture, p. 36).

In order to ensure the **quality of decision-making**, HEIs should combine soundly internal and external governance. Different stakeholders (most prominently students) should participate in the decision-making process (EUA Quality Culture, p. 8). The results of internal reviews need to be taken into account (EUA Quality Culture, p. 10).

To translate top decision-making into everyday life, HEIs need an **effective administrative structure** and an internal and external **communication** strategy (EUA Quality Culture, p. 8).

„It should be noted that the answers of some countries in the Stocktaking report 2009 suggest that they think internal quality assurance within higher education institutions means only preparing self-assessment reports, without any reference to learning outcomes-based and improvement-oriented internal quality assurance systems. In addition, some HEIs have established a management system and they claim that it is a quality assurance system. However, some of these systems focus on measuring the performance of staff and/or units rather than on implementing ESG. This suggests that there is a need for increasing the focus on internal quality assurance within the EHEA." (Stocktaking Report, 2009, p. 51)

2.6.1. Managing QA

HEIs will develop best where external and internal QA is well-balanced. The European University Association EUA (as representative of Europe's universities) argues that rigid accreditation procedures stand in the way of internal curricula innovation and reform (Trends V, 2007, p. 60). Where HEIs can provide accountable internal structures, external interference sometimes pulls itself back or can be pushed back. HEIs need to develop and maintain an informed and constructive dialogue with the regulatory authorities (Tavenas F., 2003, p. 8)

The EUA Quality Culture project highlights that more autonomous institutions with a more mature and effective internal quality culture apply a less bureaucratic QA approach, being interested in improvement rather than in the mechanistic and controlling aspects of quality monitoring. Less autonomous institutions have a narrow perspective that is confined to accreditation and leads to a compliance-driven and less effective internal quality culture (EUA 2005, p. 14).

QA needs an appropriate administrative structure. QA units tend to be particularly successful where they enjoy credibility through expertise. Taking over only an advisory role and stressing improvement instead of

control can safeguard that the QA unit is not seen as a threat. Reporting to the highest body of the HEI assures that QA is well-respected (EUA 2005, p. 22).

Within the development of internal QA mechanisms, European HEIs invest also in systems for the **management of information**, performance management and resource allocation (Trends V, 2007, p. 59). Services were often added to the scope of activities of QA units (Trends V, 2007, p. 9)

In the past, the implementation of internal QA at HEIs was often realised in three steps (EUA 2005, p. 23):

1. In the beginning, central leadership often takes the role of a "facilitator" allowing diverse practices across faculties.
2. Then, the HEI (i.e. various stakeholders, jointly, under coordination of the central leadership) develop common procedures and standards.
3. Finally, the central leadership develops systematic monitoring and feedback loops into the strategic decision-making. This might require stronger central leadership and a rebalancing of power within the HEI.

In order to develop their internal QA system, HEIs exchange knowledge among each other. Both national and international cooperation is common. Informal contacts have proved to be of major importance. But academic networks are expected to play an important role in the development of QA. (Trends V, 2007, p. 59)

2.6.2. Human Resources

The academic and administrative staffs take the key role in the development of quality in HEIs. Without or against the staff, a quality culture cannot become and stay part of the organisation.
Therefore, throughout all of Europe, HEIs promote staff development. With a set of instruments (continuing education courses, etc.), the academic and administrative staff get support for quality improvement of their activities. When introducing internal QA, personnel development measures are a welcome first step as they make sure that the staff does not regard QA as a threat. (EUA 2005, p. 20)

HEIs also need to prepare for the implications of the EHEA in 2010 (Trends V, 2007, p. 11). With potential employees that are both more mobile and more employable, the competition for the best professors will increase among countries and institutions. HEIs need to enable proper career development if they want to attract the best people for both academia and administration.

2.6.3. Students as Partners

The HEIs of the 21st century clearly make the student the focal point of teaching and learning. This has materialised in the orientation on learning outcomes (Trends V, 2007, p. 8) and in a focus on employability. (Trends V, 2007, p. 7)

Learning outcomes describe what students are expected to know and understand at the end of a learning process. Learning outcomes have become a dominant factor in curricula design and student assessment. Within the Bologna process, learning outcomes are also a key element to the transformation of HEIs into student-centred institutions.

Employability means that graduates should be equipped with competences relevant for the labour market. In order to find a job, graduates need to have

- personal qualities (e.g. initiative, reflectiveness)
- core skills (e.g. self-management, language skills, communication skills)
- process skills (e.g. computer literacy, decision making, team work)

Activities in the continuing education sector (lifelong learning, LLL) can become a special driver in adapting a student-centred approach. As most of participants in LLL measures study part-time, they require from HEIs flexibility and a student-centred approach. (Trends V, 2007, p. 11)

In the last years, HEIs have increasingly invested in student services (Trends V, 2007, p. 9) in addition to teaching and learning. Key challenges are professional staffing, adequate resourcing and the monitoring of the quality of provision. Guidance and counselling services for students typically include psychological assistance services, health promotion, career planning, a job centre, mentoring and tutoring, legal and procedural advice. Academic support services are provided e.g. by international offices, IT centres, libraries, language labs, and tutors. (EUA 2005, p. 26)

Modern HEIs use their students' knowledge in a multitude of ways. Student involvement in decision-making has proved to be most effective where students are organised as a body (EUA 2005, p. 21). HEIs have the possibility to reward those who are active in student representations, e.g. financially or with ECTS credits.

In the future, HEIs will growingly execute student surveys, e.g. entry, exit and cohort surveys. These measures will provide important information for the management of programmes and institutions. For example, the success and duration of the new graduates' job search can provide important feedback on the employability of a programme. In 2008, ENQA stated that graduate survey are still of limited use. (ENQA 2008, p. 86)

Particularly, students with international experience have the possibility to compare host and guest institutions and therefore form an important source of information. (EUA 2005, p. 21)

2.6.4. External Stakeholders

In order to ensure employability of graduates and to build trust in the quality and the relevance of its activities, a HEI needs to strengthen the dialogue with its external stakeholders (Trends V, 2007, p. 11). This dialogue can have various forms such as participation in formal decision-making, participation in evaluation and curricula testing process, etc.
The EUA lists among the external stakeholders (EUA 2005, p. 21):

- National and regional government and legislative bodies
- Professional and statutory bodies
- Employers and industry
- Future students, alumni and parents
- Collaborative and partner institutions

2.6.5. Internationalisation

The realisation of the European Higher Education Area will bring, among other phenomena, an increased mobility of students and staff, and accelerated international competitions among HEIs.

Therefore, the HEIs will develop their international offices. These offices can be a major driver of change and play a significant role in presenting their institution to the international public. Necessary adaptations include a more strategic approach, and the involvement of academic staff in their procedures. (EUA 2005, p. 33)

Joint and trans-national programmes are another area in internationalisation where quality assurance needs to support current trends (ENQA 2008, p. 88). When HEIs jointly deliver programmes and award degrees, or when a HEI delivers a programme in a country outside its country of origin, new mechanisms of quality assurance need to be applied.

2.7. EUA Priorities 2009 – 2019

Preparing the 2009 Ministerial Meeting in Leuven / Louvain-la-Neuve, the EUA has prepared a list of 5 priorities (Rapp, J.M. 2009, p. 3). One of these priorities clearly addresses the topic of quality:

- **Maintaining quality at the heart of the Bologna reforms**. Responsibility for quality is in the hands of the institutions supported by Agencies. Therefore, HEIs need to enhance internal quality and **communicate** their quality culture. This will help to prove accountability vis-à-vis the public. Living the **learning outcomes approach** will play a crucial role in this context. Communication will make the **growing diversity of missions, profiles and activities** of HEIs in Europe more transparent. The discussion on diversity at national and institutional levels still has a long way to go.

The four remaining priorities can be summarised as follows:

- **Consolidation** and communication of the achievements of the Bologna Process (making sure that the reform leads to a sustainable **qualitative change** rather than superficial changes)

- Concentrate on **lifelong learning** (including new educational services for new or returning learners)

- Enhance **European** cooperation

- Continue planning future developments with the **involvement** of the academic community

3. Quality Assurance in SEE Higher Education Institutions

3.1.   Challenges for Quality Assurance in South-East European Higher Education

Modern universities have left the picture of the ivory tower behind them. HE institutions should be integrated and in constant **exchange with the society**. This is true for the organisations as a whole as well as for its key representatives, i.e. the faculty members and top-level managers. Still, the traditional faculty of the SEE has not been open for feedback by students or review by peer professors. Additionally, coming from a state-driven economy, the exchange with human resource managers (as experts for the needs of the labour market) has not been sufficiently elaborated and hence a majority of HE institutions do not yet reflect today's political, societal and economical reality in SEE. Job **requirements for faculty** members have changed significantly in the last years. While professors were asked to act as traditional teachers before the democratic reforms, today's teaching staff is required to provide internationally compatible research-based education using state-of-the-art didactical techniques. Often, this change of requirements was communicated rather implicitly. In addition, where it was made explicit, people lacked accompanying personnel development measures. On top of that, financial needs force professors to take on second jobs outside the HE institutions.

Similarly, the small group of young individuals that aspire to a career in the academic world lack the necessary **role models and mentors** who could pass on state-of-the-art teaching and research skills. At this early career stage, student feedback and peer review could substantially and enduringly influence young scholars in the development of their professional identity. As mentioned before, **personnel development** has become another hot topic in modern university management – especially in combination with quality assurance. There are hardly any organisations that are as strongly based on human resources as universities. This is why personnel development is mostly called in when QA reveals a weak point. In this context, measures of antidiscrimination have become a prerequisite in modern university management.

For several reasons, most HE institutions of SEE still have not succeeded in establishing appropriate **international networks**. In search of partners in Europe and beyond, low quality is of course a key shortcoming, and sometimes just a prejudice that needs to be invalidated. This is why, in the long run, HE institutions of the region will need to come up with internationally accepted certifications or accreditations. A proved and proper in-house QA system is one of the basic prerequisites for these kinds of external QA measures.

Universities in SEE, particularly universities like those in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia and Kosovo, can highly profit from the implementation of QA tools. Unfortunately, compared to other European countries that have also committed themselves to the Bologna Process, the achievements in the higher education area in most of SEE counties were portrayed as weak and low-grade at the Ministerial Conferences in Bergen (2005) and London (2007) and EUA's Trends V. Nevertheless, the last Stocktaking report (2009) demonstrates evident improvements in QA processes across SEE higher education, most notably in Croatia.

On the following pages, we present the status quo in QA development in Croatia, Serbia, FYR Macedonia, Montenegro, and Kosovo. Country by country, we examine national issues before we highlight some of the

selected universities. All information was collected online in March 2009. The sources are the websites of the respective institutions.

3.2. *Croatia*

Croatia's signing of the Bologna declaration in 2001 marked the beginning of the transformation of the Croatian higher education system. The country adopted the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) in 2006. A new act on quality assurance is being planned for adoption in the beginning of 2009, which will implement the suggestions outlined by the CARDS project and align the Croatian QA system completely with the ESG. (National Report: Croatia, 2009, p. 19)

A model of external audit for QA units was created in 2006/07 and tested at the beginning of 2008, as part of a CARDS 2003 project, during which the HEIs' QA units, foreign consultants and QA experts helped improve the external and internal QA procedures. A pilot project of external audit of HEIs' QA systems was successfully carried out at 3 out of 7 Croatian universities (National Report: Croatia, 2009, p. 19). The gathered data on the outcomes of the pilot project was used for the improvement of the following: development of HEIs' strategies, positioning of HEIs, staff development, staff and student mobility, HEIs' internal QA documents and transparency of QA systems, as well as for defining and understanding the differences between ISO and ESG quality assurance standards.

The National Foundation for Science established a call for projects to support the establishment of quality assurance units at Croatian higher education institutions.

Over 2500 new full-time equivalent positions were provided to the Croatian higher education since 2004 and the higher education institutions were autonomous to use these new positions in accordance with their internal strategies. Universities normally used several positions to establish QA offices and centres. (National Report: Croatia, 2009, p. 19)

All Croatian universities and their faculties have established QA units and the rectors jointly adopted an evaluation plan, according to which all existing universities, polytechnics and schools of professional higher education shall be evaluated in the following 4-year period (National Report: Croatia, 2009, p. 22). Higher education institutions autonomously determine which QA system they will use. Most higher education institutions have decided to establish a QA unit which oversees and promotes the QA-related activities, as well as coordinates the implementation of the student surveys (National Report: Croatia, 2009, p. 20). For example, the University of Zagreb wants to establish a quality culture in all areas of academic performance. In 2006, they established a Quality Control Office. The institutional QA regulations assign the following tasks to the QA office:

- initiate and nurture discussions on quality and spread quality culture within the academic and non-academic field
- define the QA standards and criteria for the University's units

- develop procedures for internal and external evaluation, and evaluation methods for various aspects of educational quality and various stakeholders
- coordinate surveys, collect and analyse data and feedback on quality
- recommend on state upgrade
- monitor the acceptance and appliance of recommendations
- examine the causes of long and inefficient studying
- establish a system of internal judgement as a basic postulate for quality control
- collect student feedback and take necessary measures
- initiate and organise personnel development measures
- define the evaluation of teaching quality during the election and re-election of teaching and scientific-teaching professions.

The University of Zadar is also an example of systematic organisation of university QA system and processes. The University's QA organisation consists of the following units:

- Committee for Quality Assurance and Promotion
- Office for Quality Improvement (reporting to the Committee, Rectorate and Senate)
- ECTS coordinators at University units

Although University units are primarily responsible for the quality of their own performance, the Office provides support such as:

- Examining and conducting student and teacher surveys on the organisation and regularity of class performance, i.e. of the overall teaching content
- Informing students on their possibility to effect the contents and methodology of classes
- Performing procedures of teacher evaluation and self-evaluation
- Managing unique documentation on the competencies of staff members
- Designing an action plan for the improvement of studying and monitor its realisation

According to the ministerial "Education Sector Development Plan 2005-2010", external evaluations of HEIs and their programmes will be conducted by the year 2010.

The Republic of Croatia has introduced the system of accreditation of new higher education institutions and study programmes. This accreditation procedure (based on written peer review) accredited 1200 study programmes in line with Bologna principles since 2005. Twenty new higher education institutions have been accredited in the same period. (National Report: Croatia, 2009, p. 22)

The responsibility for the quality of higher education and science lies with HEIs and scientific institutions. External quality assurance is the concern of

- The National Council for Science
- The National Council for Higher Education and
- The Agency for Higher Education and Science

In Croatia, external QA comprises the following processes:

- programme accreditations
- institutional accreditations and evaluations
- audit of QA systems

In accordance with European practice, students are involved in all QA activities and the adopted models are constantly being improved. All HEIs have published regulations on graduate, undergraduate and postgraduate studies that also include criteria on student assessment. Some higher education institutions still need to improve their formulation of the intended learning outcomes, which is a prerequisite for consistent assessment. (National Report: Croatia, 2009, p. 21)

All HEIs have their internal approval processes in place, but they have yet to improve processes of monitoring and periodic review of programmes and awards. Following the introduction of new study programmes in 2005, it is the monitoring and reviewing mechanisms that are being developed at this time. (National Report: Croatia, 2009, p. 21)

The **Agency for Science and Higher Education** (ASHE) was established in 2005. The Agency protects the public interest by keeping the standards of higher-education qualifications and working on the improvement of quality in science and higher education. In cooperation with the academic community and government institutions, the Agency promotes quality culture in higher education and science, based on standards of transparency, dialogue, truth and integration, and in accordance with the best European practice.

During the CARDS 2003 project, the ASHE QA department organized seminars and workshops for the QA units at all Croatian universities, polytechnics and schools of professional higher education, aimed atimproving their internal QA procedures. Students were regularly invited and participated in a number of these seminars and conferences. Agency-trained foreign auditors also participated in the external audit. (National Report: Croatia, 2009, p. 20)

ASHE has approx. 50 employees and is headed by a director and a president of the management board (9 members). It is well-integrated in the European family of quality agencies. ASHE has published a glossary of basic terms and definitions in the area of QA in higher education. ASHE has developed an external audit model and presented it in the manual for audit. The audit consists of 4 phases: planning, execution of audit (including a visit to the higher education institution), reporting and follow-up. It is based on a peer review

that includes trained experts (all the stakeholders). (National Report: Croatia, 2009, p. 21)
ASHE:

- helps HEIs' QA units to improve their internal QA systems and provides expert training and advice on implementing QA systems. (National Report: Croatia, 2009, p. 20)
- provides professional and administrative support in the procedures of evaluating scientific organizations and higher education institutions
- approves new academic programmes
- evaluates QA systems in HEIs
- proves recognition of foreign higher education qualifications
- works on the integration of systems of science and higher education into the international systems and association
- creates and maintains a national database for the system of scientific activity and higher education
- cooperates with other national bodies in higher education

The **National Council for Higher Education** is the highest professional entity responsible for the quality and development of the higher education system. In July 2007, the National Council for Higher Education adopted a 3 year evaluation plan of HEIs (that started in 2008 with pilot projects at 3 different HEIs), which also included the evaluation of some elements of the QA system. (National Report: Croatia, 2009, p. 19)

The Council for Higher Education:

- initiates and develops measures for the improvement of higher education
- plays a crucial role in developing prerequisites for scientific-educational, artistic-educational and educational professions
- consults the Minister on initial institutional accreditations, and evaluations of HEIs and study programmes
- appoints consultants and comments the establishment of new HEIs and study programmes
- evaluates HEIs and study programmes and suggests accreditation results to the minister

The **National Council for Science** is the highest professional entity responsible for the development and quality of the overall scientific system and activities. The Council

- contributes to designing rules and regulations for the evaluation of scientific organisations, and monitors and evaluates these organisations
- Nominates and evaluates scientific centres of excellence
- comments on the establishment of scientific-technological parks

3.3. Serbia

Serbia operates an integrated national quality assurance system complying with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG). The national external quality assurance system is required by the Law on Higher Education (LHE). The Accreditation and Quality Assurance Commission (CAQA) is the only formally recognized body of the National Council for Higher Education (NCHE) responsible for external quality assurance in Serbia (National Report: Serbia, 2009, p. 21). The external quality control covers all HEIs in Serbia (public and non state-owned) and it is carried out on a cyclical basis. (National Report: Serbia, 2009, p. 21)

In Serbia, three bodies hold responsibility for quality in Higher Education:

- Ministry
- National Council for Higher Education (NCHE)
- Accreditation and Quality Assurance Commission (CAQA)

The **Ministry** issues the licence for HEIs (in autonomous Vojvodina the respective government institution).

The **National Council for Higher Education** initiated the creation of the Accreditation and Quality Assurance Commission and provides general guidelines for this body. By law, it is the only body where HEIs can appeal decisions of the Accreditation and Quality Assurance Commission.

The Commission for Accreditation and Quality Assurance (CAQA) was formed in June 2006 as an independent expert body of the NCHE. CAQA is legally responsible for organizing and monitoring the quality assurance scheme for all HEIs in Serbia. CAQA designs standards, protocols and guidelines for the NCHE's approval and publication as bylaws and helps institutions in creating their respective quality management systems. CAQA proceeds quality assurance processes in forms of accreditation and external quality assurance of all higher educational institutions and study programmes according to LHE. CAQA has a policy for the assurance of its own quality. CAQA regularly conducts (once a year) an internal evaluation and continuously produces reports on its work and achievements to the NCHE. (National Report: Serbia, 2009, p. 17)

CAQA issues three types of decisions:

- Positive decision on accreditation (institutional and programme)
- Warning (definition of a quality problem and deadline)
- Negative decision on accreditation (institutional and programme)

The decisions are based on standards and procedures in three fields (all approved by the National Council for Higher Education in 2006):

- Accreditations of HEIs

- Accreditation of study programs

- Self-assessment and quality evaluation of HEIs

The CAQA has not yet been internationally reviewed. To make this work a success some formal obstacles, some red tape and repetitions should be removed and continued involvement of all HEIs and organizations participating in QA system is needed. The internal quality assessment of CAQA will be finished during December and a self-assessment report will be published until January 2009. An external review of the CAQA, according to the Standards and Guidelines for QA in the EHEA is scheduled for 2009. (National Report: Serbia, 2009, p. 17)

The HEIs have a legal obligation to develop internal quality assurance systems. The implementation of the standards for internal quality assurance is in the first place the responsibility of the institutions. Internal quality assurance is one of the themes in the accreditation frameworks. Important elements on which programmes will be assessed for accreditation are whether there is a coherent system of internal quality assurance with clear goals and regular monitoring which leads to continuous improvement. (National Report: Serbia, 2009, p. 19)

All HEIs are obliged to define their strategy and practical mechanisms for self-evaluation and internal quality control as part of their accreditation process. All the accredited HEIs have demonstrated the arrangements in place for internal QA. All the remaining HEI's offering study programmes have to be accredited not later than 2009, so all the institutions will have internal QA fully in place by that date. All the procedures and standards are publicly available in print and the electronic form. The self-assessment report is an obligatory document in the accreditation file of any HEI.
The report should be concise and contain all the details of vital interest for the operation of the HEI relevant to the quality of the education process. All accredited HEIs are obliged to publish the report. HEIs are also obliged to follow up and enhance quality of the programmes and awards. The QA system in Serbia will be in full implementation in a few years and first statistical and other data should be expected after 2009. (National Report: Serbia, 2009, p. 19)

Some of the university institutions have already established preconditions for an easier implementation of all QA procedures. Hence, differences among university institutions are also evident in Serbia.

The Faculty of Agriculture at the University of Belgrade has formed a special Commission for Quality Assurance consisting of teachers, associates, administrative staff and students. The Commission for Quality Assurance consists of four sub-commissions concentrating on specific topics (i.e. teaching process, curricula development and credit points, analysis of effective studies, research work).

The Commission for Quality Assurance is meant to:

- Implement QA standards

- Systematically collect and process data about students, courses, processes etc. and provide data for international benchmarking

- Execute surveys about the alumni's competences among employers, the National Service for Employment and similar institutions
- Manage the regular self-evaluation of the Faculty, accreditation and certification processes

The Belgrade Art Academy had its quality approved by the American Quality Assessors AQA (ISO 9001:2000 in 2001) and by the Serbian National Council for Higher Education (in 2006).

The Academy has developed a set of fourteen strategic papers:

- On QA (QA strategy, QA standards and procedures, QA system, role of students in QA, systematic monitoring)
- On teaching and learning (quality of study programmes, quality of teaching process)
- On other activities (quality of scientific, artistic and professional work, quality of non-curricular support)
- On stakeholders (quality of staff, quality of students)
- On resources (quality of facilities, quality of library/IT, financing)

The Academy has established a QA Commission responsible for the following:

- prepare the Faculty's QA strategy
- announce and promote the strategy to the public
- propose QA measures and procedures to the Faculty Council
- propose to the Faculty Council the definition of a minimum level of working quality, procedures and indicators for its evaluation measures for quality improvement
- organise working procedures for the evaluation process including the data collection
- prepare a draft of the self-evaluation report
- adopt measures for the faculty's quality improvement and enhancement
- perform other work in accordance with the Statute and other AU general acts

University of Niš

The University has established a central Centre for Quality Improvement and **Committees for Quality Improvement at University units**.

The central **Centre for Quality Improvement** has the following tasks:

- Develop a unique QA system for the University
- Communicate and promote the idea of quality culture
- Define quality standards, criteria and indicators
- Develop evaluation and self-evaluation procedures for teaching, research and administrative work
- Prompt, coordinate and organise all QA activities, including the management of self-evaluation procedures
- Gather information from all system users
- Monitor student evaluation and examine the causes of long studying
- Support international cooperation and scientific competitiveness
- Stimulate personnel development

University of Novi Sad

The University's Senate formed a Committee for Quality Assurance and Internal Evaluation of Programmes in 2008. The Committee plans and analyses evaluation procedures, reviews evaluation reports, and represents the University in national QA networks. QA standards and guidelines have been included in the University statute. A separate administrative support unit for QA is planned to be installed.

3.4. Montenegro

In order to meet the European standards, the Ministry of Education and Science of Montenegro has established the Council for Higher Education in accordance with Article 9 of the Law on Higher Education. The Council conducts several activities including the identification of criteria for the evaluation of study programmes from the standpoint of their compliance with professional requirements. The Council also conducts periodic control of the quality of licensed institutions and issues a certificate of initial accreditation, accreditation and re-accreditation. According to the Law on Higher Education, the initial accreditation is issued after evaluating the quality of the study programmes and their compliance with professional requirements and adopted standards. Study programmes and institutions are reaccredited every five years.

Through its involvement in WUS Austria's project "Quality Assurance at the University of Montenegro", financed by Austrian Development Cooperation, which is aimed at developing a university quality assurance system, University of Montenegro confirmed its awareness of the importance of establishing a QA system in order to have a tool for recognition at the institution itself.

This programme aims at creating a university network of QA offices in order to continue capacity building of the University of Montenegro (UoM) by equipping the offices and educating University staff through a number of trainings in order to develop an internal quality assurance structure. Due to the fact that the UoM is spread throughout Montenegro, QA centres are placed in Podgorica, Kotor, Cetinje, and Niksic. These centres are also foreseen to act as integrative factors for university integration in line with the European standards. In addition to this, in course of the project implementation, already gained experiences at the University can be used for the know-how transfer towards the Ministry bodies such as the Council for Higher Education, etc. "University of Montenegro has invested significant efforts in order to provide funding resources for the improvements of internal QA processes. This resulted in the establishment of QA centre dealing with the professional development of staff, promotion of academic staff, etc. which is financed by WUS Austria." (National Report Montenegro, 2009, p.13)

Due to the fact that University of Montenegro has been up to 2006 the only [public] university in the country, there was no need for Rector's conference. QA agency doesn't exist as the separate agency. Council of Higher Education is, in accordance with the provisions of Law on Higher Education, responsible for quality assurance issue. QA issue is going to be treated through the newly established centre for QA at the University of Montenegro, as well as through the Ministry of Education and Science. (National Report Montenegro, 2009, p.3)

However, Montenegro is experiencing a trend of increasing number of private universities. Therefore it is of the utmost importance to link the quality assurance processes, establish uniform administrative databases, develop the common state standards and procedures in accordance with EUA Guidelines and ENQA principles, and building an information system which would support an adequate monitoring system as one of the key instruments of quality assurance processes.

3.5. Kosovo

Since 2001/2002, the University of Prishtina (UP) has established an **Office for Academic Development** that consists of three sub-units and has the goal to promote and apply Bologna principles:

- The **Quality Assurance Unit** develops and implements QA standards and guidelines in accordance with ministerial and European regulations. A central Commission for Quality Assurance (consisting of academic and administrative staff and students) was established to support them. First internal and external assessments have already been realised.

- The central **Unit for ECTS Coordination** provides a network of ECTS coordinators across faculties, aiming to help professors in quoting credits for their subject. Therefore, the unit promotes transparency and integration in the EHEA.

- The LINK Centre for the Support of Students offers services to enrolled and prospect students of the University. Students receive information related to scholarships, events, career possibilities, internships etc. and can enrol in trainings, e.g. in learning skills.

Background of QA at the University of Prishtina

The responsibilities of UP as a public university, for internal quality assurance and control are defined in the Law on Higher education in Kosova (2003), Strategy for development of higher education in Kosova 2005-2015 and the by-laws of the UP (2004).
External and internal quality assurance is a pillar of Bologna process, which the University of Prishtina has been implementing since the year 2001. The University of Prishtina is the first university in Kosova to establish a Quality assurance unit.

In February 2007, the UP Senate made a decision to establish a QA unit, which was set up in October 2007 and operates within the Academic Development Office. The Quality Assurance Unit is charged with assisting academic and administrative units in continuously improving the quality of their services and ensuring that the highest standards are maintained in accordance with Section 7.2 (articles 219 through 234) of UP Statute, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MEST) Guidelines on evaluation of higher education institutions in Kosovo, and ENQA's set of Standards and Guidelines.

The Quality Assurance Committee (QAC) was nominated by the UP. The QAC provides leadership, advising and support in the establishment and implementation of internal quality-driven procedures in line with internal, national and international guidelines. The Committee is a Sub-Committee which reports directly to the University Senate through the Vice-Rector for Academic Affairs and Research.

The term of office of the Quality Assurance Committee is three years.
QAC Structure

The Quality Assurance Committee consists of one Chair (Ex Officio) in the person of the Vice-Rector of Academic Affairs and Research; one Quality Assurance Officer; one Quality Assurance Assistant, eight to nine Academics (each from a different faculty); one Student Parliament Representative and one Administrator.
QAC Terms of Reference

The Quality Assurance Committee is responsible for all internal quality-related matters which aim at the creation, improvement and maintenance of a high-level of academic and administrative services at the University of Prishtina, including the following tasks:

- Promote the creation of a quality culture across the University;
- Advise and make recommendations to the University Senate on issues pertaining to the improvement of quality in both teaching and non-teaching areas;
- Keep under review University, MEST and KAA requirements which have a remit for quality assurance/quality enhancement in the provision of teaching and learning;
- Keep abreast of new international trends and good practise in the context of QA/QI;
- Ensure that appropriate quality-oriented processes and procedures are in place within the University;

- Disseminate information within the University on quality-related matters;
- Keep under review these guidelines.

QAC Operation procedures

- The Committee shall work in a highly consultative manner with the aim of designing, developing and approving all quality-driven policy and procedures in accordance with the University's statute, national and European standards and guidelines.
- Approve the schedule for department/unit quality reviews.
- Approve the composition of the peer-review group.
- Provide assistance on quality-related matters for internal quality review committees.
- Ensure the effective and efficient implementation of QA/QI procedures across departments and units.
- Liaise with faculty-based coordinators and other relevant bodies of the University, in matters pertaining to quality assurance and quality improvement as and when needed.

The Quality Assurance Committee has compiled Guidelines for quality reviews which are fully harmonized with ENQA's Standards and Guidelines. The Guidelines for quality review at the UP are compiled with the participation of eminent experts in the field of Quality assurance in Europe, Dr. Heinz Lechleiter from Dublin City University – Ireland and Dr. Norma Ryan from University College Cork-Ireland, and it will serve to facilitate the organization of internal and external evaluation of the University of Prishtina.

3.6.   FYR Macedonia

After the long debates and preparation process in which weak points of the current legislation in the field of higher education were identified, on 14 March 2008, the Parliament of the Republic of Macedonia, adopted a new Law on higher education (Official Journal of the Republic of Macedonia, 35/2008).

The Law explicitly focuses on the following QA tasks (National Report Macedonia 2009, p.3):

Quality Assurance:

- Strengthened role of the Higher Education Accreditation Board of the Republic of Macedonia and the Agency for Evaluation of Higher Education of the Republic of Macedonia and their convergence into one national body for quality assurance in higher education;
- Involvement of students, as well as participation of employers' representatives (from the economy and from the public sector)in the national Quality assurance system;

- International cooperation in the quality assurance process should be introduced (peer reviewers, other quality assurance agencies and/or relevant associations);
- Membership of the national bodies for quality assurance in the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) is foreseen.
- The Law introduces the necessity for compliance of the national quality assurance system with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area that were adopted by the European ministers responsible for higher education (Bergen Communiqué, 2005).

With the signing of the Bologna Declaration in 2003, the national authorities in the Republic of Macedonia committed themselves to successful implementation of the Bologna principles and objectives. For that purpose the Ministry of Education and Science formed a working group for Bologna follow - up whose main activity is to monitor the implementation of the requirements deriving from the Bologna Process. In the Republic of Macedonia the National team of Bologna promotors functions as the main dissemination tool at national level for presenting the novelties and trends deriving from the Bologna Process. (National Report: Macedonia 2009, p. 5)

The work of the National team of Bologna promotors (Higher Education Reform Experts Team) is financially supported by the European Commission, DG EAC, through the working plan and budget of the National Tempus Office. (National Report: Macedonia 2009, p. 6)

National quality assurance system

The review of the National QA system was undertaken in the framework of a Tempus project Structural Measure SCM-CO11B05. The project partners developed new methodology for external quality assurance in higher education, using the results from 2 reports published by project partners where analyzes of the current situation in quality assurance area in EU and neighboring countries was made, and taking into consideration the local specifics of the beneficiary country. The final version of the methodology was submitted at the Board for Accreditation in June 2007 and was officially accepted in July 2007. The process of Adaptation and implementation of recommended European standards and guidelines for external quality assurance agencies started with establishing an appropriate ICT environment at the Board for Accreditation. As a result, redefinitions of the internal procedures at the Board for Accreditation were made, concerning the transparency of its work. As a tool for improving its quality and transparency, a web site was published (www.board.edu.mk). The web site contains all materials, methodologies, reports and documents produced by
the Board for Accreditation. Registry for Higher education institutions was developed where higher education institutions in the country are listed with complete data about their status, study programs, staff etc. (National Report: Macedonia 2009, p. 21)

Universities periodically review their programmes, in order to standardize them and create curricula in conformity with national requirements and the Bologna Process. Departments organize workshops to revise curricula according to clear guidelines. On these workshops the universities invite representatives from the industry and other higher education stakeholders in order to discuss the needs of the labour market for in-

crease of the number of employability of the graduates. In the process of the periodic review of the study programmes the universities are always aware of the European dimension which should be present in their curricula in order to be more attractive for the potential students. Substantial curriculum changes and new programs are accredited externally by the Accreditation Board. (National Report: Macedonia 2009, p. 27)

South East European University

SEEU's central goals are excellence, equity, transparency and efficiency. The University strives for the highest quality in every faculty and department and sees quality improvement as both an individual and collective responsibility.
Since quality is at the heart of every process that the University undertakes, SEEU develops a quality culture by working on both quality assurance and quality management.

- Quality assurance focuses on academic matters, teaching and learning and links closely with student support services (Library, Student Services, Career Centre etc.)
- Quality management targets the effective development and monitoring of policies and procedures. The University welcomes and positively uses both national and international evaluation and quality accreditation for continuous improvement.

"The intention of South East European University in Tetovo is to comply with European best practices in quality assessment, evaluation, and accountability. The University is developing its curricula, programmes, and quality assurance mechanisms to ensure maximum compatibility with the European Higher Education Area as described in the Bologna Declaration and the statement following the Ministers of Higher Education meetings. SEEU is participating in a European University Association Quality Culture III project and continually keeps up with developments within the European Network for Quality Assurance and other education quality bodies." (National Report: Macedonia 2009, p. 26)

4. Quality Assurance in BiH Higher Education

4.1. Past and Future Milestones in QA reform

- On September 18, 2003, Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) signed the **Bologna Declaration** at the Ministerial Conference in Berlin and thereby pledged to structurally reform its higher education in line with Bologna action plans and principles to the aim of becoming a complementary, integral part of the European Higher Education Area by 2010. With no adequate national laws to guide them, BiH public universities started conducting reform processes on their own, recognizing the Bologna Declaration and subsidiary documentation as international sources of legislation.

- In autumn 2003, within the project by the Council of Europe and the European Commission "Strengthening Higher Education in BiH", the European University Association (EUA) was invited by the seven public universities in BiH (excluding University of Zenica, which was established at a later

date) to undertake **institutional evaluations** of all universities. The methodology was based firstly on a self-evaluation process undertaken by the university itself, followed by an external evaluation. "The self-evaluation reports showed a reasonable level of sophistication in their analysis and presentation which would not have been possible even in 2000. However, despite these improvements, the fundamental issues facing higher education and universities in BiH remain the same and are largely unresolved…
(A) lack of coherence between evaluation procedures and strategic planning was found by EUA to be generalized, to a greater or lesser extent, across all seven universities…An other weakness of the self-evaluation procedure across some of the BiH universities was that the self-evaluation reports, once written, were not widely distributed and discussed within the university…A third generalized weakness of the self-evaluation procedure across a number of universities was the relatively poor involvement of students and student organizations." (EUA 2004, p. 6)

- By mid 2006, **QA offices were opened** at all 8 public universities in BiH. More importantly, QA staff was employed, trained, offices were equipped with modern IT, office equipment and scan stations, and awareness raising campaigns were conducted through a series of seminars, conferences and promotional material. This action was initiated by WUS Austria, Svjetski univerzitetski servis BiH (SUS BiH) and all public universities in BiH through the TEMPUS project „Strengthening Quality Assurance in BiH" (JEP 19074 2004). Subsequently the action was additionally complemented and fortified through WUS Austria's project "Structural Development of Quality Assurance in Higher Education", funded by the Liechtenstein Government and the Austrian Development Cooperation, where the main goals were to further educate QA coordinators and university management through study trips to EU universities and seminars and to develop QA guidelines for each BiH university.
- In July 2007, after several failed attempts (National Report: Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2007), Bosnia and Herzegovina received a new **Framework Law on Higher Education**. Its main goals are to legitimize and accept European strategic objectives and plans, as stipulated in the Bologna Declaration, Lisbon Convention and subsequent relevant documents, and define higher education as an area of special interest for BiH. The Framework Law also fore saw the establishment of two national agencies: Centre for Information and Recognition of Documents (ENIC Centre) and Agency for Development of Higher Education and Quality Assurance.

- In December 2007 the Council of Ministers of BiH adopted seven strategic documents for the implementation of the Bologna Process: the Generic Qualifications Framework for Higher Education, the Implementation Plan for the Qualifications Framework, **Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance**, adjusted to the ESG adopted in Bergen, the **Implementation Plan for the Standards and Guidelines of QA in Bosnia and Herzegovina**, the National Action Plan for Recognition of Higher Education Qualifications, and the Diploma Supplement Model, harmonised with the UNESCO/Council of Europe Model, and a Users' Manual for the Diploma Supplement.

- **The Rectors' Conference of BiH** was founded by an agreement of all universities. In accordance with the Framework Law, the Rectors' Conference of BiH represents common interest of BiH universities and acts as an advisory body for the implementation of the higher education reform process.

- In March 2008, **the Conference of Education Ministers of BiH** was established to the aim of overseeing the implementation of the Bologna Process. The Conference comprises 14 ministers of education from state, entity/district and cantonal levels. (National Report: Bosnia and Herzegovina, p. 4)

- In the upcoming months (June-July 2009), all 8 BiH universities will have finalized another cycle of **institutional self-evaluations** for the purpose of strategic planning of their future development. By the end of the project (January 2010) all universities will have defined new strategies of development. This action was initiated by WUS Austria within a Tempus project "From Quality Assurance to Strategy Development".
- The preparation of the third phase of the European Commission and Council of Europe joint project "Strengthening of Higher Education in BiH" is in progress. The project will be funded by IPA 2007 funds. Envisaged specific
objectives of the project are: 1. to establish/ **strengthen state level institutions** which effectively coordinate and manage higher education reforms for the whole country 2. to harmonise the higher education system by developing and **applying standards and procedures for quality assurance and higher education qualifications** across the country.

4.2 Overview of the Current Situation

4.2.1 Public universities in BiH

Institutional autonomy is the precondition for promoting internal quality. Institutions must have a capacity for long-term strategic planning in order to develop quality monitoring of their activities in a meaningful way (i.e. to ensure feedback into the strategic planning process). This implies a stable funding and legal environment and the capacity for the career management of academic and administrative staff. (EUA 2005, p. 8)

The Framework Law on Higher Education prescribed institutional autonomy and envisaged a six month deadline for introducing models of integration at all 8 public universities in BIH. Specifically, all responsible government levels were given a six month period to align their Higher Education Laws to the new state Framework Law on Higher Education. Unfortunately this task has only partially been implemented.

The current situation in BiH higher education is highly heterogeneous. Universities differ in terms of legislation frameworks, integration and autonomy levels and consequently reform directions and processes.

Table 1 – Overview of university legislation and integration statuses in BiH

University	Responsible government level	Existence of a new Law aligned with Framework Law on HE	Status of integration	Expected date of integration
University of Banja Luka	Republic of Srpska	Yes (July 2006, later amended to fit the Framework Law)	Integrated	
University of Bihać	Una-Sana Canton	Yes (June, 2009)	Non-integrated	December 2009
University Džemal Bijedić in Mostar	Herzegovina-Neretva Canton	No Law	Non-integrated	?
University of East Sarajevo	Republic of Srpska	Yes (July 2006, later amended to fit the Framework Law)	Integrated	
University of Mostar	Livno Canton, Posavina Canton, Central Bosnia Canton, Herzegovina-Neretva Canton, West Herzegovina Canton	No Law	Non-integrated	?
University of Sarajevo	Canton Sarajevo	Yes (December 2008)	Non-integrated	December 2009
University of Tuzla	Tuzla Canton	Yes, July 2008	Integrated	
University of Zenica	Canton Zenica-Doboj	Yes (March 2009)	Integrated	

Legend	
Integrated university[2]	
Non-integrated university, no law	
Non-integrated university; integration foreseen by the new law	

[2] To achieve full university integration, a number of functions and segments need to be integrated; momentarily university integration in BiH higher education mostly encompasses financial integration (abolishment of faculty accounts and centralized coordination of finances based on a single university bank account) and abolishment of a faculty's legal status within a university.

Although sufficient institutional integration and autonomy have not fully been achieved and financial support for reform is lacking, in the last couple of years, especially with the adoption of the Framework Law and the 7 strategic documents, the BiH context and conditions have become more conducive to a quality reform of higher education. Most universities have installed QA systems and structures comprising staff from different university segments (administration, teaching staff, management and students) and levels (university, faculty), communication channels (regular committee meetings) as well as QA strategies and policies. "All public and some private higher education institutions from BiH adopted policies and strategies for the quality assurance and the continuous enhancement of quality" (National Report: Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2009, p. 18). Additionally with the assistance of international stakeholders (WUS Austria, Council of Europe, European Commission), BiH universities have benefited from numerous projects aimed at enhancing internal quality assurance, preparing for external national and international accreditations and raising awareness levels across the university.

The last Bologna Process Stocktaking Report 2009 clearly demonstrates that the reform of BiH higher education has resulted in positive shifts towards the European Higher Education Area but that the reform process will extend well beyond the 2010 deadline. Specific to universities, this means that universities will need to become more responsible and accountable towards both internal and external stakeholders, which will require effective internal quality assurance, new management models and the development of new organisational cultures.

4.2.2 Agency for Development of Higher Education and Quality Assurance (QA Agency)

Pursuant to the Framework Law on Higher Education, the Agency for Development of Higher Education and Quality Assurance (QA Agency) was established in December 2008. As stipulated in the Framework Law on Higher Education, the QA Agency will be competent to (Framework Law on Higher Education BiH, 2007):

- set clear, transparent and accessible **criteria for accreditatio**n of higher education institutions and adoption of norms setting minimum standards in the field of higher education,
- determine criteria for **selection of domestic and international experts** to provide assessment and conduct quality reviews and give recommendation on accreditation of higher education institutions,
- give recommendations on criteria for licensing of higher education institutions and programmes of study,
- **set quality standards**, quality analyses, give recommendations for removal of shortcomings in the quality of studies and higher education institutions,
- **represent Bosnia and Herzegovina in international organisations** for quality in higher education,
- publishing a public competition for election of domestic and international experts for quality assessment and audit and giving recommendations on accreditation of higher education institutions, i.e. their programmes of study,

- giving recommendations to competent education authorities on accreditation of a higher education institution, i.e. a programme of study, on the basis of the opinion of the committee of experts,
- maintaining a state register of accredited higher education institutions.

The Stocktaking findings 2009 identify the external QA system as one of the weakest points in BiH higher education suggesting that much more efforts needs to be placed in assuring a fully functional external quality assurance system operative at the national level and applicable to all higher education. The main argumentation behind such a low grade is the fact that the BiH external quality assurance system is currently being set up and developed.

 "The [QA] Agency was established in December 2008, and now is in the phase of staffing and preparation of internal documents. Criteria and procedures for external reviewing and accreditation, and selection of national and foreign experts, in accordance with ESG, are under adoption. We may say that the stage of implementation of BiH external QA system is at the very beginning." (National Report: Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2009, p. 20)

Another identified weakness is the level of international participation in QA which concretely translates to a lack of international participation in the following four levels (Stocktaking Report 2009, p. 63):

1. Within teams for external review of HEIs and/or programmes, as members or observers
2. national QA agency membership of ENQA or other international QA network/s
3. in the governance of national bodies for QA
4. in the external evaluation of national QA agencies

 "Full membership of ENQA is a very important indication that a national QA agency complies with the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance. Quality assurance agencies from only 22 countries are full members of ENQA; in more than half the countries QA agencies are not full members of ENQA, although the QA agencies in some of these countries have associate membership of ENQA and are striving to fulfil the criteria to become full members." (Stocktaking Report, 2009, p.64)

The QA Agency in BiH, as a young institution, has still not achieved full compliance with ESG and consequently has not applied for ENQA membership yet. Despite its recent establishment, swift progress and strengthening of the QA Agency can be expected in the short-term period. One of the main drivers of progress will be provided within a SUS BiH program entitled "Strengthening BH Agency for Development of Higher Education and Quality Assurance – Creating assumptions for BH QA Agency membership in ENQA", which will be implemented as a sub-project within WUS Austria's project "Strategic and Structural Development of QA in BiH 2008-2010", financed by the Austrian Development Cooperation and the Liechtenstein Government. As suggested by the project title, the main aim will be to prepare the BiH QA Agency for ENQA membership.

Another important international QA network is the European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR). "Bosnia and Herzegovina is the Governmental member in the EQAR and took responsibility of reviewing national QA system against the

ESG (European Standards and Guidelines) in the near future." (National Report: Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2009, p.16) The work on compiling the EQAR was just started in 2008 and the register as yet includes only a small number of agencies. In BiH the Ministry of Civil Affairs has acquired EQAR membership.

4.3   Future Challenges and Priorities

Apart from numerous international policies and documents directing the future implementation of the Bologna Process across European countries such as the Communiqués from biannual ministerial conferences, Trends of European University Association and ENQA reports, one of the most useful sources of guidance for BiH universities is the document "Recommendations for Implementing Quality Assurance in Higher Education in BiH". The document was developed within a joint Council of Europe-European Commission project "Strengthening Higher Education in BiH" in which all BiH universities and state and entity ministries took part. Its concrete context, BiH higher education, makes it more relevant and applicable. It is however important to keep in mind that the Recommendations were developed in May 2007, a month before the adoption of the Framework Law on HE, and that since then the reform processes has progressed. Consequently some of the recommendations have already been (or are currently being) met such as Recommendation 2 – Enhancing capacities for self-evaluation, which was directly addressed through WUS Austria's Tempus project "From Quality Assurance to Strategy Development". Nevertheless, the Recommendations still provide valuable guidance for concrete further enhancement of quality assurance in BiH higher education.

4.3.1   Concrete Aims and Actions

- Implementation of internal quality assurance systems in accordance with ESG and BiH standards
  Potential action plans:

  o   Internal approval of programmes and publication of results

  o   Linking programmes with learning outcomes and designing assessment procedures to measure achievement of the intended learning outcomes

  o   Establishing coherent internal QA systems aligned with external assessment procedure (e.g. curricular review, modification and modernization in line with upcoming national assessment and accreditation of programs)

  o   Defining clear performance indicators, and conducting internal and external benchmarking to the aim of initiating effective performance management

  o   Development of an integrated information system and networking of QA office(s) and all university segments (organisational units)

- Implementation of external quality assurance systems in accordance with ESG and BiH standards
  Potential action plans:

  o   University self-assessment + external review + publishing of assessment results + follow up measures

  o   International peer review of programs

  o   Enhancing cooperation and creating conditions for synergies between university(ies) and BiH

       QA Agency

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