

**DECLARATION OF INTENT  
BY THE BALTIC STATES AND THE BENELUX MEMBER STATES  
ON THE AUTOMATIC MUTUAL RECOGNITION OF HIGHER EDUCATION DEGREES**

We, the Ministers in charge of Higher Education of

- the Republic of Estonia, the Republic of Latvia and the Republic of Lithuania (hereafter: 'the Baltic States'),
- the Flemish Community of Belgium, the French Community of Belgium, the German-speaking Community of Belgium, the Grand-Duchy of Luxembourg and the Kingdom of the Netherlands (hereafter: 'the Benelux Member States'),

adopt the following declaration of intent:

**HAVING REGARD TO:**

The fact that in each of the Baltic States and the Benelux Member States, the UNESCO/Council of Europe Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region, signed in Lisbon on 11 April 1997, has entered into force;

The importance of automatic recognition of qualifications, as repeatedly emphasized in the context of the Conferences of Ministers of the European Higher Education Area in the Bologna Process, namely as follows:

- "We are determined to remove outstanding obstacles hindering effective and proper recognition and are willing to work together towards the automatic recognition of comparable academic degrees, building on the tools of the Bologna framework, as a long-term goal of the EHEA" (Bucharest Communiqué, 2012);
- "By 2020 we are determined to achieve an EHEA where our common goals are implemented in all member countries to ensure trust in each other's higher education systems; where automatic recognition of qualifications has become a reality so that students and graduates can move easily throughout it" (Yerevan Communiqué, 2015);
- "In order to further develop mobility and recognition across the EHEA, we will work to ensure that qualifications from other EHEA countries are automatically recognized at the same level as relevant domestic qualifications" (Paris Communiqué, 2018);

**WHEREAS:**

The Heads of State or Government, at the meeting of the European Council of 14 December 2017, called on the Member States, the Council and the Commission to continue their work with a view to "promoting cooperation of Member States on mutual recognition of higher education and school leaving diplomas at secondary education level in the appropriate framework";

The Recommendation of the Council of the European Union of 26 November 2018 on promoting automatic mutual recognition of higher education and upper secondary education and training qualifications and the outcomes of learning periods abroad (hereafter: 'the EU Council Recommendation') calls, inter alia, on the EU Member States to take the necessary steps to achieve automatic recognition of higher education qualifications by 2025;

**OBSERVING THAT:**

The Benelux Member States and the Baltic States have both concluded mutual agreements in their own constituencies on the automatic mutual recognition of higher education qualifications, in the sense of the glossary annexed to the EU Council Recommendation<sup>1</sup>, in a legally binding manner, namely:

- The Decision M (2015) 3 of the Benelux Committee of Ministers concerning the automatic mutual generic level recognition of higher education degrees, as supplemented by the Decision M (2018) 1;
- The Agreement among the Government of the Republic of Estonia, the Government of the Republic of Latvia and the Government of the Republic of Lithuania on the automatic academic recognition of qualifications concerning higher education, signed in Vilnius on 18 June 2018;

The fore-mentioned agreements are based on mutual trust in the higher education systems of the countries concerned, which is built upon convergence in external quality assurance in higher education and the fact that there were no substantial problems within these regional partnerships with regard to the recognition of each other's higher education qualifications;

These mutual agreements between the Benelux Member States and between the Baltic States are the first in Europe to realize the automatic mutual recognition of higher education qualifications in a legally binding manner, and that, in doing so, the Benelux Member States and the Baltic States are at the forefront of the Bologna Process and of the realization of the European Higher Education Area;

**IN THE FORESIGHT THAT:**

Such automatic mutual recognition can be achieved more easily within regional partnerships than directly aiming for agreements applying to the European Higher Education Area as a whole and that, in order to achieve the automatic recognition within the European Higher Education Area, a step-by-step approach is therefore appropriate;

The cooperation between existing regional partnerships among each other is due to increase the number of European countries that apply automatic recognition of qualifications steadily;

**DECLARE HEREBY THEIR INTENTION:**

To expand automatic recognition of higher education qualifications, by upscaling its application from recognition among the Benelux Member States on the one hand, and among the Baltic States on the other hand, to the level of mutual recognition between the Benelux Member States and the Baltic States;

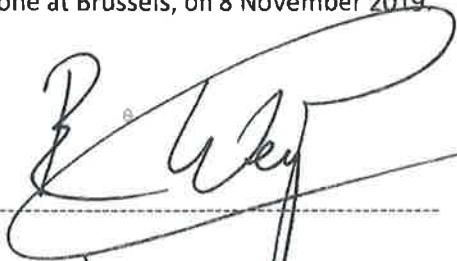
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<sup>1</sup> The glossary annexed to the EU Council Recommendation describes the notion 'Automatic mutual recognition of a qualification' as follows: "The right for holders of a qualification of a certain level that has been issued by one Member State to be considered for entry to a higher education programme in the next level in any other Member State, without having to go through any separate recognition procedure. This shall not prejudice the right of a higher education institution or the competent authorities to set specific evaluation and admission criteria for a specific programme. It does not prejudice the right to check, if the qualification is authentic and, in case of an upper secondary education and training qualification, if it really gives access to higher education in the Member State of issuance or, in duly justified cases, if the granted qualification meets the requirements for accessing a specific higher education programme in the receiving Member State."

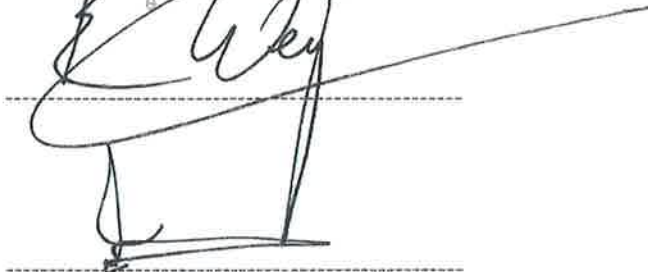
To explore possibilities to underpin these arrangements in the legal format of a multilateral treaty;

To examine the possibility of extending this cooperation scheme to other countries and regions at a later stage, provided that the quality assurance mechanisms of potential new adherents comply with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area and that there are fully functioning national qualifications frameworks, aligned with the European Qualifications Framework for Life Long Learning and the Framework of Qualifications for the European Higher Education Area.

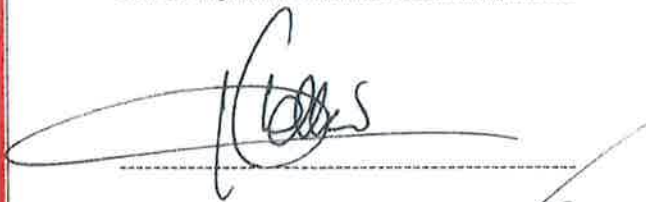
Done at Brussels, on 8 November 2019.



B. WEYTS



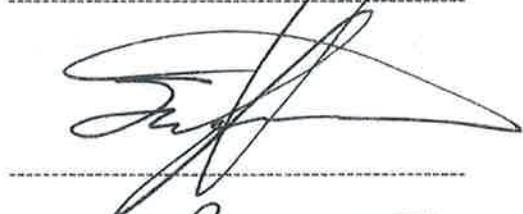
V. GLATIGNY



H. MOLLERS



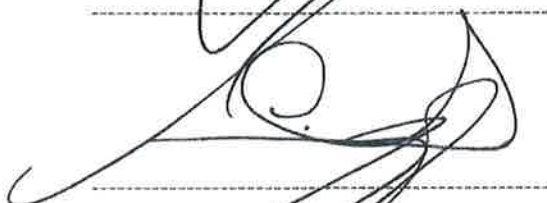
M. LAIDMETS on behalf of M. REPS



I. ŠUPLINSKA



V. RAZUMAS



C. MEISCH



I. VAN ENGELSHOVEN

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List of signatories:

**BELGIUM**

**FLEMISH COMMUNITY**

**Mr Ben Weyts**

Vice-Minister-President of the Government of Flanders, Flemish Minister for Education, Sport, the *Vlaamse Rand*, and Animal Welfare

**FRENCH COMMUNITY**

**Ms Valérie Glatigny**

Minister of Higher Education, Adult Higher Education, University Hospitals, Child Protective Services, Houses of Justice, Youth, Sports and the Promotion of Brussels.

**GERMAN-SPEAKING COMMUNITY**

**Mr Harald Mollers**

Minister of Education and Research

**ESTONIA**

**Ms Mailis Reps**

Minister of Education and Research

Represented by Secretary-General **Mr Mart Laidmets**

**LATVIA**

**Ms philol. Ilga Šuplinska**

Minister of Education and Science

**LITHUANIA**

**Mr Valdemaras Razumas**

Vice-Minister of Education, Science and Sport

**LUXEMBOURG**

**Mr Claude Meisch**

Minister of Higher Education and Research

Representative of the Luxembourgish presidency of the Benelux Committee of Ministers

**THE NETHERLANDS**

**Ms Ingrid van Engelshoven**

Minister of Education Culture and Science