

Welcome and opening of the Launch conference of the MAP-ESG project,
Copenhagen (Denmark)

Dear colleagues, members of the Bologna Follow Up Group, colleagues from the E4 group, and other attendants who share our concern for quality in higher education, from Ministries, rectors conferences, higher education institutions, students organisations, and employers.

I have the pleasure to welcome you to this launching conference of the MAP-ESG project on behalf of four organisations, consultative members of the BFUG, ENQA, ESU, EUA and EURASHE, my own organisation. This EU funded project which has been jointly executed by the four organisations wanted to “map the implementation and the application of the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance”, the ESG as we call them.

As is stated in the Introduction of this joint report, pursuing this action line of QA, one if not the most prominent one, has achieved a lot in the Bologna Process and for the whole framework of quality assurance. At the same time it has increased the cooperation between the four organisations, which then led to the creation of our successful annual European Forum for Quality Assurance and to the establishment of the Register for QA agencies EQAR.

As stakeholders organisations we received our legitimacy from the governments leading the HE reform process, and with this feedback on the examination of the actual use and implementation of the ESG in agencies and institutions, we are complying with our duty to inform the BFUG of our work and report on our findings. That is the purpose of the underlying report, in which we also formulate our recommendations to the Bologna Ministerial conference in Bucharest this year, on the further development of the ESG.

The recognition of the involvement of stakeholders is a specific feature of the European Reform process, and it has been forward looking from the government delegates that they have given such a prominent role in quality assurance and in other action lines to the organisations representing the QA agencies operating in Europe (ENQA), the student population and the broad range of institutions with their full body of management and staff.

It is important to remember what has led us to this task of looking into the use and implementation of the ESG in institutions and QA agencies.

In 2003, the Berlin Communiqué stated that “consistent with the principle of institutional autonomy, the primary responsibility for quality assurance in higher education lies with each institution itself”. The Ministers further called upon “ENQA through its members, in co-operation with the EUA, EURASHE and ESIB, to develop an agreed set of standards, procedures and guidelines on quality assurance, to explore ways of ensuring an adequate peer review system for quality assurance and/or accreditation agencies or bodies, and to report back through the Follow-up Group to Ministers in 2005.” (Bologna Process Ministerial Communiqué (BPMC) 2003)

The four stakeholder organisations (ENQA, ESIB/ESU, EUA and EURASHE), following an increasingly structured cooperation process, have formulated a to the Ministers a proposal for European Standards and Guidelines for QA in the EHEA (European Higher Education Area) that took account of the perspective of quality assurance agencies (QAAs), higher education institutions (HEIs) and students. Since then they have continued to meet regularly to discuss matters related to quality assurance in a framework that has come to be known as the “E4 Group”.

In 2005 Ministers of Higher Education meeting in Bergen adopted the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) based on this proposal.

In the London 2007 communiqué (2.12) the Ministers recognized that the “Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the EHEA have been a powerful driver of change in relation to quality assurance”. It was further said that “all countries have started to implement them and some have made substantial progress” (Bologna Process Ministerial Communiqué, London 2007).

One of the most notable features of the ESG is that they were “designed to be applicable to all HEIs and QAAs in Europe, irrespective of their structure, function and size, and the national system in which they are located

Though innovative and some even said radical, at the time they were developed, the ESG were from the outset intended to be developmental, as it was also hoped that newly emerging national and institutional quality assurance systems would be encouraged to take account of what was considered to be good practice in the field of quality assurance (QA). This explains why after five years of use, both users and stakeholders began to see inconsistencies/discrepancies in some of the ESG, and of course the context of Bologna had changed, with other action lines than QA being further developed, as the QF, the notion of student-centred learning with an emphasis on learning outcomes.

When ultimately the EHEA was established in 2010, the ESG had sufficiently been used and tested extensively in the Bologna signatory countries *to enable us* looked at them afresh. There was also the additional and different use of the ESG than had been intended by ENQA and EQAR. The different parties were open to *consider* whether there was a need for a revision. the ESGs. Also, in a report by ENQA in 2007 already, it was stated that ‘any revision should reflect the needs of higher education more broadly.

The E4, as the authors of the ESG and the founding members of EQAR, felt responsible for continuing the process of enhancing common European approaches to QA. At the beginning of 2010 they agreed that a mapping exercise of the implementation and application of the ESG had become necessary. They decided to carry out a joint project, which would investigate the current state of implementation, and on the basis of the results of their consultations, make a recommendation as to the necessity and scope of a revision of the ESG, after five years of use.

The four organisations, representing the main stakeholders in Q consulted their respective membership, and drew conclusions and recommendations from those consultations.

A Steering Group, with representatives of the 4 organisations, monitored the different stages in the project and the production of the final joint report, which is complemented by the individual reports

of the four organisations as annexes. In order to ensure wider involvement of other stakeholders, the project was assisted by an Advisory Board, consisting of government delegates appointed by the BFUG, and representatives of other stakeholders organisations, representing teachers/academics and employers.

-Apart from this joint report the four organisations each produced their individual reports, which are based on/follow from the method and findings from their own very specific consultations. All four consultations of course fed into the joint report, and where we could not find an agreement on the preliminary conclusions or way forward, we said so openly in this joint report.

Each of the four organisations will have its own follow-up of their consultations, within their own constituencies and stakeholders, but there is a commitment and willingness to jointly continue the work we have embarked upon, namely to contribute to the improvement and further implementation of the ESG, as said before, in close cooperation and consultation with the governments and the other stakeholders.

In this report we also formulate our recommendations to the Bologna Ministerial conference in Bucharest this year, on the further development of the ESG.

I will not speak any longer as the main point of us gathering here is to present the main findings of our consultations, and to discuss them with you, attendants of this conference, so that we can come to conclusions that substantiate our recommendations.

I will give the floor now to the colleagues of the other organisations, who will deal with the other parts of this afternoon programme, the presentation of the findings (ENQA), the panel discussions with the other stakeholders (ESU), and the formulation of conclusions (EUA).

But not without expressing our thanks, on behalf of E4, to the BFUG colleagues and the Secretariat for the support and encouragements we have received during our work, the members of the Advisory Board of government representatives and stakeholders organisations, Education International, Business Europe, the EQAR Director and EQAR's Register Committee.

A word of thanks also towards the European Commission for providing financing for the project. Without this support our work could not have been done at the high level it was executed, certainly from the part of our organisation.

Stefan Delplace, Secretary General of EURASHE

