

Central Asia Education Platform NEWSLETTER

Newsletter #7 July 2017

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Editorial

Dear colleagues,

We would like to warmly thank all those who attended the Second Ministerial Meeting in Astana and for their constructive participation in finalising the Astana Declaration. This document will now serve as the basis for future policy dialogue and strengthened cooperation between the EU and Central Asia in the fields of Higher Education and Vocational Education and Training.

In particular, we would like to express our gratitude to the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan, for hosting this event, and to our colleagues from the Bologna Process and Academic Mobility Center for the excellent cooperation in co-organising all meetings.

A special thanks goes to our delegates from Latvia and Poland for the significant contribution they made to the developments leading to the Declaration. We were delighted to welcome an increased number of EU member states to this most recent meeting. We would also like to highlight the growing engagement and commitment of the Central Asia countries, and thank them for their active involvement in the discussions.

A welcome addition to the dialogue is the role of education in promoting gender equality and preventing radicalisation and violent extremism. This can now be added as a priority area for cooperation and dialogue along with National Qualifications Frameworks, Quality Assurance and Accreditation, employment and labour market needs, innovative teaching methods and financing of education systems.

Details of the meeting and the finalised Astana Declaration can be found in this edition of the newsletter along with links to download the declaration and the



presentations from the event.

You will also find an update on the national meetings on Quality Assurance and Accreditation that are being organised as part of the CAEP framework, the most recent of these being held in Dushanbe at the end of June. The conclusions and feedback from these one-day meetings, including the next meeting in Tashkent this September, will feed into peer learning activities that have been planned for the region over the coming months.

September will also see the 3rd and final peer learning event on National Qualifications Frameworks, following two fruitful meetings in Istanbul and Bishkek, where participants reported the results of their work on NQF, shared best practice examples and recommendations and planned joint activities and action plans.

Meanwhile, we wish you all relaxing summer holidays and we look forward to welcoming you to our events in the coming autumn.

Christian Wagner
CAEP Team Leader

Astana Declaration agreed at 2nd Ministerial Meeting

The Second Meeting of the European Union and Central Asia Ministers for Education was held on 23 June in Astana, Kazakhstan. The event was a great success and concluded with the Ministers and delegates agreeing on the Astana Declaration as a basis for future mutual co-operation in the fields of Higher Education (HE) and Vocational Education and Training (VET).

Also in this issue:

Full report on the 2nd Ministerial Meeting and 4th Senior Officials' Meeting

Highlights of the Astana Declaration

Report on National Meetings on Quality Assurance and Accreditation



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The event was organised by the European Commission and the European External Action Service (EEAS), jointly with the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan and supported by CAEP.



The Meeting was officially opened by Mr. Erlan Sagadiyev, Minister of Education and Science of Kazakhstan; Mr. Roman Vasilenko, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan; H.E. Mr. Peter Burian, Ambassador, EU Special Representative for Central Asia; and Ms. Marjeta Jager, Deputy Director-General, DG International Cooperation and Development from the European Commission.

Joining the Ministers for Education were other Ministry representatives and delegates from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. Attending from the EU were representatives of European Union Delegations and Embassies in Central Asia, Ministers, State Secretaries and other delegates from Belgium, Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, The Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Spain and Slovakia as well as senior experts and specialists in HE and VET.

In his keynote speech Mr. Erlan Sagadiyev highlighted current reforms in the education sector in Kazakhstan, focusing on accessibility, content and academic freedom. He also talked of the importance of developing joint programmes with overseas institutions and the country's plans to become an educational hub for the region, proposing the establishment of a Central Asia Bureau for Bologna Process Principles to promote Bologna reforms in all Central Asia countries.

Mr. Sagadiyev stated he was sure the Astana Declaration would lead to the exchange of best practice and joint



research in effective ways to bring about much needed reforms to the countries' education systems.

Mr. Roman Vasilenko reminded delegates that 2017 marks the 10th anniversary of the adoption by the EU of a regional strategy in Central Asia. With the geopolitical role of the region steadily increasing, education and knowledge are key tools in ensuring stability and security in both Central Asia and the EU. He highlighted the role Kazakhstan can play in sharing their experience of the *Bolashak* programme and the *Nazarbayev University* cluster.

Ms. Marjeta Jager reasserted the European Commission's commitment to supporting Sustainable Development Goal no. 4 and highlighted the work that they are doing to achieve this. She talked about the importance of VET as a driver for economic growth and social development and the concrete steps that the Central Asia countries are taking to develop their systems. VET currently only has an 8% share in the region and a special strategy is needed to integrate it into the wider education system. Ms. Jager concluded by thanking the participating member states for their contributions, especially Poland and Latvia, the key contributors to CAEP, and quoting Erasmus; ***"The main hope of a nation lies in the proper education of its youth"***.

Mr. Peter Burian commented on the importance of Central Asia as the gateway between Europe and Asia and highlighted education as a key priority for the EU's partnership with the region, affirming that investing in the sector was an investment in stability and security.

The first plenary session was opened with a presentation by Mr. Brian Toll, from the Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, on Erasmus+ and other EU funding opportunities in Higher Education

(HE), as well as recent policy developments.

The second plenary session focused on Vocational Education & Training (VET), with Mr. Arjen Vos from the European Training Centre (ETF) reporting on the outcomes of the last round of the Torino Process, and key findings on the progress made in VET in the Central Asia countries.



Ministers and high level representatives from the Central Asia countries presented reviews of the progress being made in their countries in HE and VET and discussed how to strengthen further cooperation.

In **Kyrgyzstan**, the strategic priorities are digital technologies and e-learning, the formation of local educational hubs and the improved quality of education with updating of educational content and linking it to labour market needs. The Deputy Minister emphasized the importance of continued cooperation with the EU and other CA countries in reaching their objectives.

In **Tajikistan** they expect that implementing education reforms according to Bologna process principles will improve the quality and attractiveness of education in the country and expand access and opportunities for their institutions and students. Results can be already seen in the successful cooperation in various Erasmus+ projects.

In **Uzbekistan** deep reforms in the education system have been and are currently being implemented, including the strengthening of its material and technical base, a more flexible system of state educational standards and qualification requirements, the large-scale modernization of the HE system and the addressing of quality in education, with a clear focus on internal quality assurance. There is a growing importance of education in the new national strategy, playing a



crucial role in increasing youth employment and countering radicalisation and terrorism.

As key contributors to the CAEP project, Poland and Latvia both reaffirmed their interest in continuing the mutually beneficial relationship with the region, and Romania, as a relatively new participant in the dialogue, expressed their full support of the project.

The presentations from the meeting can be downloaded here:
<http://events.caep-project.org/astana2017/materials/>

Highlights of the Astana Declaration

The meeting concluded with the agreement of the **Astana Declaration of the Second Meeting of Ministers for Education of the Member States of the European Union and of the Central Asian Countries.**

In the declaration the participating Ministers and delegates reaffirmed their commitment to establishing strong, durable and stable relationship aiming at fostering a prosperous, sustainable and stable, socioeconomic development of the Central Asia region in line with the global commitment to Sustainable Development Goals, in particular to **“ensure inclusive and quality education for all and promote lifelong learning”**.

The document goes on to highlight the achievements of the Central Asia countries to date with regard to the three previously identified priorities:

i. Development of Qualification Frameworks and Standards

It was noted that countries are at different stages of National Qualification Framework (NQF) design and implementation; Kazakhstan has already developed and adopted a framework and is now developing Sectoral Qualifications Frameworks; Kyrgyzstan has developed the concept of the National Qualifications System and discussed various aspects of the NQF; Tajikistan is conceptualising its NQF and has legislated some aspects; and Uzbekistan has developed state educational standards and qualification requirements. In Turkmenistan

discussions on the introduction of a NQF have begun.

ii. Quality Assurance and Accreditation

Activities to improve quality in both HE and VET have been undertaken in all countries; Kazakhstan has introduced independent accreditation of educational institutions and programmes in both sectors; Kyrgyzstan has created the normative framework for accreditation; Tajikistan has set up a centre for methodological support and quality monitoring of VET; and Uzbekistan has implemented a continuous training system and improved the qualifications and certification of teachers. Turkmenistan has also just begun to develop a certification methodology as part of skills evaluation and the introduction of a QA system.

iii. Employment and Labour Market Needs

The countries have all established cooperation between state institutions and employers to increase the quality of education and promote employability of graduates. This is being implemented through discussions of policy issues in Education Councils, the development of occupational standards, or via involvement of employers in the organisation of the educational process, evaluation and certification of skills of learners. Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan have introduced dual or work-based learning, Kyrgyzstan has piloted an apprenticeship scheme and Kazakhstan has already created relevant legislation for a systematic introduction of the dual system approach.

In addition to the continuation of these three themes, new priority areas have been identified as follows:

- iv. Innovative teaching methods;**
- v. Contribution of education to prevent violent radicalisation of youth;**
- vi. Contribution of education in addressing gender inequalities;**
- vii. Effective financing of education systems and education institutions.**

All seven priorities are to be considered when defining bilateral or regional education programmes, notably when defining regional and national priorities for Erasmus+.

The declaration concludes with

delegates welcoming the initiative of the European Commission to extend the duration and funding of the Central Asia Education Platform until March 2019, and expressing their interest to meet in three years to evaluate the success in the EU-Central Asia cooperation on education and to enhance dialogue and exchanges on the agreed priority themes.

The final content of the declaration had been negotiated at the **4th Senior Officials' meeting** on the 22 June, by representatives from the European Commission, the European External Action Service (EEAS) and senior officials from the Central Asia countries and EU member states.

During the event presentations were also made on two of the new priority areas for policy dialogue:

Gender in HE and VET:

Malika Abdulvasiyeva, Gender Expert, led a discussion on the issue of gender equality in education, looking at the obstacles to achieving equality in HE and VET as well as some positive examples of work being done to improve access to educational opportunities for women in Central Asia.

Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE) in the content of education:

Ms. Tarja Mankinen, Head of Development from the Ministry of the Interior in Finland, then gave an overview of the country's strategy for preventing violent radicalisation and the approaches being used specifically in the field of education.

The full Astana Declaration can be downloaded here:

<http://events.caep-project.org/astana2017/materials/>

National Meetings on Quality Assurance & Accreditation

In line with the selection of Quality Assurance (QA) and Accreditation as one of the 3 key themes of the second phase of the CAEP project, the roadmap of activities includes a series of one-day National Meetings on the topic, one in each of the five Central Asia countries.

The aim of these meetings is to support the process of professionalisation and modernisation of education in



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the region by sharing EU expertise in Quality Assurance (QA) and Accreditation, facilitating policy dialogue at national level and exploring opportunities for development in the field.

The first meetings were held in Bishkek in the Kyrgyz Republic and Astana, Kazakhstan in May this year and have led to a series of recommendations which are feeding into peer learning activities on QA and Accreditation in the region.

The latest national meeting saw more than 35 government officials and education professionals gather in Dushanbe, Tajikistan on 30 June, at the Conference Hall of the Academic Council of the Tajik Technical University.



The meeting was opened by Mr. Rakhmatullo Mirboboev, First Deputy Minister of Education and Science, Republic of Tajikistan; Mr. Maciej Adam Madalinski, Head of Operations Sections, EU Delegation; and Mr. Nozim Sidikov, Deputy Head of Department of the Ministry of Labour, Migration and Employment, Republic of Tajikistan. They welcomed the participants and expressed their support in strengthening the dialogue between the EU and Tajikistan on current issues in education. This was followed by representatives of both ministries sharing their views on the current status of QA and Accreditation

in HE and VET in Tajikistan and a lively discussion on the challenges presented by the implementation of internal and external Quality Assurance.

The first session, "Standards and guidelines for Quality Assurance and Accreditation in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) – Latest Trends and Challenges" included presentations on good practice and lessons learned in the practical implementation of QA and Accreditation in both Latvia and Poland. The session was delivered by Ms. Baiba Ramaņa, Academic Information Centre Director, Riga, Latvia and Prof. Ewa Chmielecka, Educational Research Institute, Warsaw, Poland.

The second session saw representatives from HE and VET in Tajikistan discuss good practice and lessons learned in implementing internal quality assurance and looked at the potential for linking QA and accreditation between the two sectors. This was followed by a round table discussion focusing on practical implementation; relevant legislation, the regulatory framework and the institutional setting. As a result of discussions a series of recommendations for next steps in strengthening QA and accreditation at national level was developed by the EU and Tajik colleagues, including the organisation of a Central Asian register of quality assurance experts and the development of self-certification for HEIs.

The conclusions and feedback from the meeting will feed into peer learning activities that have been planned for the region over the coming months, with a kick-off meeting taking place in Istanbul late this September. Topics for discussion will be selected from the outcomes of each of the national meetings, including the next event in Uzbekistan.

"Save the date": Next CAEP events

18-19 September, 2017

Peer Learning NQF 3rd and Final Meeting
Riga, Latvia

26 September, 2017

National Meeting on NQF
Tashkent, Uzbekistan

27 September, 2017

National Meeting on QA and Accreditation
Tashkent, Uzbekistan

11-13 October, 2017

Data Collection Working Group 3rd and Final Meeting
Torino, Italy

23-24 October, 2017

Peer Learning QA Kick-off Meeting
Istanbul, Turkey (tbc)

22-24 November, 2017

Regional Conference "Cooperation between Employers and VET and HE institutions"
Warsaw, Poland

In the next CAEP Newsletter issue #8 (September 2017):

1. Report on Peer Learning NQF and QA Meetings
2. Country Focus Uzbekistan
3. Erasmus+ activities in Central Asia

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