



Vlaanderen
is onderwijs & vorming

Automatic recognition of
qualifications

*The BENELUX experience
in higher education*

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EUNEC Conference, Sèvres, 16 May 2019

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SETTING THE SCENE: BENELUX

BENELUX mission statement

The Benelux is a transnational cooperation between Belgians, Dutch and Luxembourgers. We are committed to a region without borders, because this creates more prosperity, mobility, security and sustainability for all. The Benelux is therefore the ideal testing ground to promote European integration.

SETTING THE SCENE: BENELUX

- Benelux area (ad hoc cooperation) vs **Benelux Union** (treaty based).
- **Legal instruments:** decisions, agreements, recommendations, recommendations, directives.
- Decision of the Benelux Committee of Ministers on mutual automatic recognition of the level of higher education degrees M (2015)3 of 18.05.2015 is the first Benelux Decision in the field of education.



SETTING THE SCENE: BENELUX

Why a Benelux **Decision**?

- **Strong enough to guarantee the right of citizens** to automatic recognition of their degree
- Relatively **light-weight procedure** without heavy Parliamentary procedure



POLITICAL RATIONALE

1. Expression of mutual trust in each others' quality between five closely interconnected education systems (3 Communities of Belgium, Netherlands, Luxembourg) all aligned to the **European Higher Education Area (Bologna Process)**
2. Background: common commitment to instruments of EHEA: UNESCO/COE LRC, ESG for QA in EHEA and to lesser degree QF for EHEA (in 2015)

POLITICAL RATIONALE

3. Expansion of partial arrangements for automatic recognition:

- between NL and BE/FL
- between the 3 Belgian Communities
- semi-automatic recognition practice in LU of other EU HE qualifications.

SCOPE OF THE DECISION

1. **Level** of degrees

- 18.05.2015: **Bachelor and Master**
- 25.01.2018: **short cycle/associate degree + Ph.D.**

= ALL HE degrees

2. **Automatic** (vs procedural) recognition

= legal right for the citizen

SCOPE OF THE DECISION

3. **Generic** (vs specific) recognition

= recognition of level

4. **Academic** (vs professional) recognition

= seen from angle of value as learning qualification

LESSONS LEARNT

- Shared commitment to European transparency instruments was helpful as extra support but not key factor for success.
- Above all it was the confidence in each others' quality without requiring 100 % identical systems, standards, checking etc. that made the Benelux countries “jump into the water” together!

LESSONS LEARNT

What were the success factors?

1. Legal right making the instrument more powerful/relevant
2. Spill-over effect from generic to specific recognition
3. Spill-over effect from academic recognition to the world of employers in the Benelux area
4. Strong support of (interconnected) academic community – no autocratic Governmental decision – Governments were “pushed” by Rectors’ Conferences to take the political step

= 4 FACTORS OF **TRUST** creating a genuine **Benelux Higher Education Area**

= **MODEST** start in 2015 and expand in 2018

LINK TO EEA AND SCHOOLS

Can this model be extended to school education?

- EU Recommendation on automatic recognition of 2018 in line with UNESCO/COE Lisbon Recognition Convention => **qualifications giving access to higher education** (indirect link with SE) – LRC principle of fair recognition/”substantial” differences
- Obstacles: wider divergence in structures and length of compulsory education – national Governments less keen to give up subsidiarity
- “Solution”: **trust in decisions at school level** for taking up responsibility for smooth progression between grades for students coming from other school systems.

