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The European Qualifications Framework: The road from consultation to Recommendation

European Qualifications Framework (EQF) conference

Budapest , 27-28 February 2006

Check against delivery



Distinguished guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen:

I am delighted to be here in Budapest. I would first like to say that I am very grateful to you, **Mr Magyar** for hosting this event and organising it jointly with the Commission.

You showed your enthusiastic support for the development of the EQF by volunteering in London last June when we launched the consultation process.

And I am of course also grateful to our Austrian colleague, **Mrs Gehrler**, for supporting this event as the current president of the Education Council and also for your intention to report on the results of this conference to the informal meeting of Ministers of Education which will take place mid-March in Vienna.

Austria and Hungary have strongly supported both the Bologna and Copenhagen processes, which have been a source of the EQF initiative. And both of you have provided very substantial contributions in response to the consultation process.

Finally, I also want to thank those here in the room – and I guess that will be the majority – who have contributed to the responses to the **public consultation process**.

The number and the quality of your responses confirms my view that a good consensus is growing around the need for a European Qualifications Framework.

Not only do we have a strong mandate from the European Council, the ministers of education and the social partners, but there is a genuine demand from stakeholders as well.

As we prepare our draft recommendation on EQF, we will use the contributions we already received and of course also the results of the discussions here in Budapest.

The overall feedback is supportive and constructive, but I can assure you that we will also take into account critical remarks and suggestions.



Our Lifelong Learning Experience: Obstacles!



- within and between countries
- between education and training systems
- to use competences acquired in non formal and informal settings

Political background

Let me tell you why I believe the EQF is important. Firstly, it will help us achieve the ambitious goal of modernising our education and training systems.

This is absolutely necessary if we are serious about promoting growth and jobs in the context of the Lisbon agenda.

Just last week, the Education Council reaffirmed the role of lifelong learning in ensuring competitiveness and social cohesion.

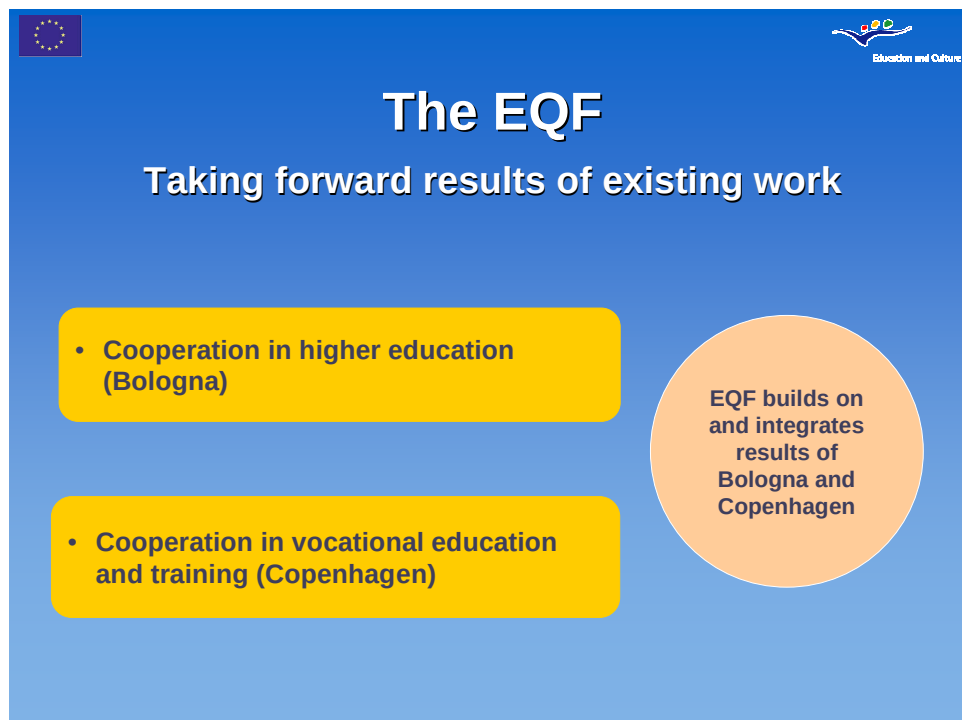
The Commission and the Council share the same views on this issue: it is true that we have made substantial progress in recent years; however, a lot more still needs to be done.

The title of the Commission's recent progress report on the renewed Lisbon strategy states the situation clearly: "It is time to move up a gear".

Unfortunately, the situation today is that although there is a widespread commitment to **lifelong learning**, our citizens still face too many **obstacles** when they move between countries for learning or work.

Also, mobility between different branches of learning –between the vocational education and training sections and the university world- is not easy because knowledge, experience and qualifications are not mutually recognised.

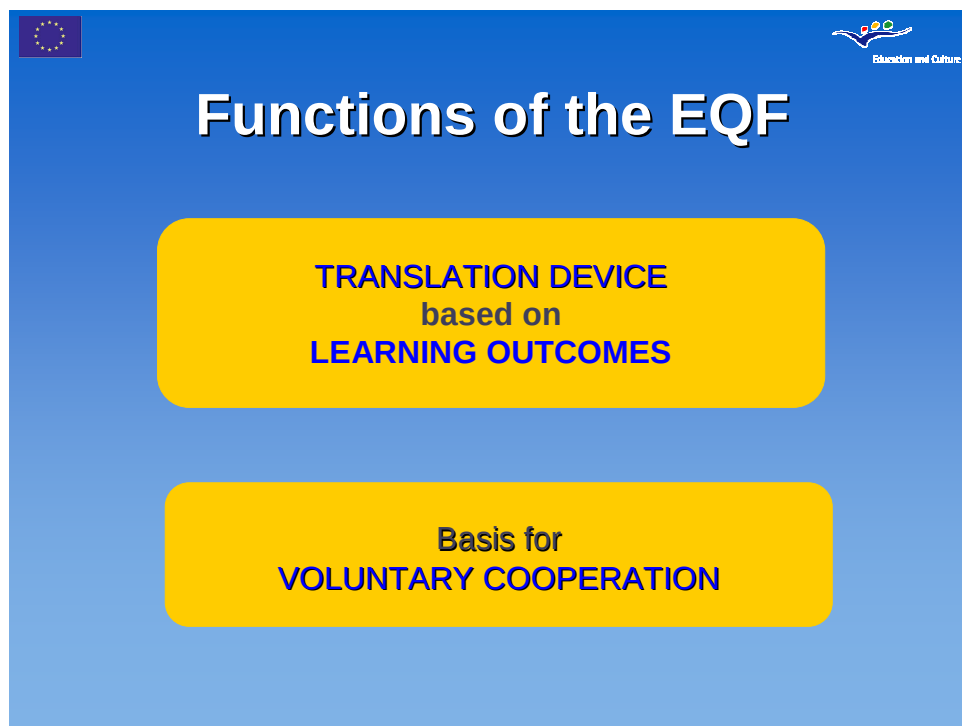
This is inefficient and makes it difficult for citizens to learn and develop their skills.



A broad framework for qualifications, if properly developed and implemented, can help to tackle this.

We are not starting from scratch. Much progress has already been made thanks to the **Bologna** process for higher education and the **Copenhagen** process for VET.

But the time has come to bring together and build on the key results of these two processes. In this way, the EQF becomes a major contribution towards realising lifelong learning opportunities at all levels.



Main principles

Ladies and gentlemen,

Now I would like to recall the main principles of the EQF and address some of the questions that were raised in the consultation process.

In essence, the framework we are proposing is a **translation tool** that will allow people to compare and transfer qualifications and serve as a **basis for voluntary co-operation**.

The EQF will make systems and qualifications more transparent and facilitate the work of Member States, employers, trade unions and other actors.

Here I must clarify what the EQF is not: it is not a means to replace or to harmonise national qualification systems. We can't do this and we do not want to do it.

The EQF is simply a reference point to facilitate communication and provide a better understanding of each other's systems and qualifications.

For the same reason, the EQF is not a blueprint for the development of national qualification frameworks. The tool is designed to increase transparency and to facilitate communication at the **international level**.



The crucial role of national stakeholders in realising the EQF

- **EQF needs strong national commitment**
- No single model for national qualification systems
- Many countries develop National Qualifications Frameworks

Given these principles, it is clear that the EQF will not have any practical impact without the active **support and commitment of national and sectoral stakeholders**.

If the EQF is a framework for co-operation; we can propose the framework, but you will have to do the co-operating. In other words, it is your responsibility to link your respective systems to it.

When it comes to qualification systems in the Member States, the picture is not uniform.

Some countries already have national qualification frameworks. Many are working on them or considering them. And a few countries have announced clearly that it is currently not their intention to develop a national framework.

We are aware of this pattern and I can reassure you that the model we will propose is going to be compatible with all these different situations.

Since the beginning, the EU approach in education and training has always been to support a **gradual** and voluntary development in line with national needs. We will not change our traditional approach for the EQF.

One point on which we can easily agree, I am sure, is that Europe has a great variety of education and training systems which have developed through time and according to national circumstances.

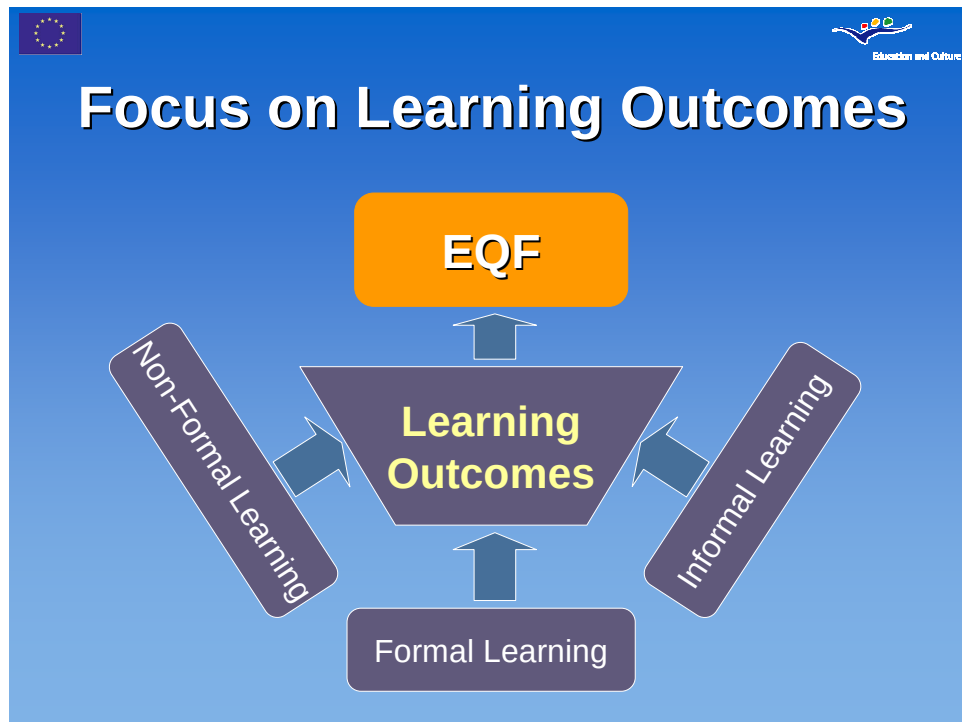
This means that navigating between them – understanding how a qualification received in one country should be interpreted in another country – is not easy; but we are here in Budapest to discuss how we can make it easier!

Our answer is to develop tools that are neutral with respect to the diversity of qualification systems across Europe. This will safeguard their specific character and traditions.

This is one of the main reasons why we have chosen the **learning outcomes** approach.

The EQF establishes the principle that it is the result of learning that matters, not where or how the learning took place.

I am happy to note that this approach was strongly supported by the replies received after we proposed it in our consultation paper last year.



Thanks to the focus on learning outcomes, it should be easier to establish mechanisms for the recognition of learning which has taken place outside the traditional forms of education and training, for example through professional experience.

Several EU Member States already have concrete systems and experience with the **validation of non-formal and informal learning** and we will build on their experience.

I am convinced that the use of learning outcomes will facilitate mobility not only between Member States, but also between different education systems in a more general sense.

This will be a real contribution to putting **lifelong learning** into practice. Those people who want to pursue their careers in different education and

training systems will have a tool that helps them build on their existing qualifications.

Another item which came out very clearly in the consultation process is that the European Qualifications Framework should be a **voluntary** instrument.

So let me say very clearly again that this is the Commission's approach.

Mutual trust is the mainstay of our proposed framework. The EQF works when one country decides to relate a particular national qualification to a specific EQF level and when this decision is trusted by another country.

Here I would like to add one simple thing. No matter how good and comprehensive the proposed framework will be, it will never substitute trust.

Trust develops over time and its main ingredients are transparency, agreement on basic principles and the recognition that open and fair co-operation benefits everyone.



The slide features a blue background with a white title 'Focus on end users' at the top center. In the top left corner is the European Union flag, and in the top right corner is the logo for 'Education and Culture' with the text 'Education and Culture' below it. The main content consists of four yellow rounded rectangular boxes stacked vertically, each containing a bullet point. The bullet points are: 'Individual citizens', 'Learning providers', 'National education and training authorities', and 'Sectors and social partners'.

- Individual citizens
- Learning providers
- National education and training authorities
- Sectors and social partners

End users

So, let me spell out for you the concrete benefits the EQF will bring for individual **citizens**, for the **labour market**, and for **education and training systems**.

- It will help **individuals** to use their qualifications, and thus their experience and skills, in other countries and systems.
- It will help schools, training institutions, and universities to place their learning services which they offer in a European context.
- It will give **sectors, employers and trade unions** a transparent reference point relevant to the labour market.
- Finally, it will benefit national **education and training systems** by making it easier for policy makers to see how their systems work both at the national and international levels.

The development and implementation of the EQF is quite a detailed technical matter where the bulk of the work will need to be done by you here in the room, **the stakeholders, policy-makers and experts**.

I would particularly like to thank those experts who have provided valuable assistance and advice to the Commission in all the development work done so far, including of course our colleagues in Cedefop.

Without your expertise and hard work, we would not have the solid basis for progress which we have today.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I believe that one fundamental aspect of the quality of education and training systems is that they are transparent and provide access to learners who have previous experience in other systems.

I am convinced that once in place, the European Qualifications Framework will help to make this openness possible. In this way, it will also be an important step towards providing lifelong learning opportunities for all.

The development and implementation of the EQF is a challenging task and we all still have a lot of work to do ahead of us.

But I am sure that the discussions of today and tomorrow will help the Commission to present, this year, a proposal for a recommendation that will serve the needs of the end users.

I look forward to seeing the results of your discussions!

Thank you very much.