Council of the European Union

Brussels, 8 May 2025
(OR. en)

8672/25
ADD 2

Interinstitutional File:
2024/0079 (NLE)

EDUC 135
SOC 255
JEUN 64
DIGIT 81
ENV 309

NOTE

From:	General Secretariat of the Council
To:	Council
Subject:	Draft Council Recommendation on a European quality assurance and recognition system in higher education *- Adoption* *- Statement by Estonia*

Delegations will find attached a statement by Estonia in relation to the above-mentioned subject.

ANNEX

STATEMENT BY ESTONIA

Council Resolution on a joint European degree label and the next steps towards a possible joint European degree: Boosting Europe's competitiveness and the attractiveness of European higher education

and

Council Recommendation on a European quality assurance and recognition system in higher education

Estonia reiterates its strong commitment to internationalisation of higher education and supporting the development of joint programmes that strengthen Europe's competitiveness and foster cooperation among our higher education institutions. We are convinced that all joint programmes - when upholding the core values of the European Higher Education Area, including academic freedom, institutional autonomy, and the rule of law — must be treated with equal respect and recognition.

In the context of the proposed European degree, particular attention must be given to the needs and interests of smaller language communities. **Estonia is firmly committed to preserving and promoting higher education in the Estonian language.** While internationalisation and the use of English bring important benefits, we must ensure that Europe's rich linguistic and cultural diversity is protected. For Estonia, safeguarding Estonian-language higher education is not just a policy choice — it is a matter of national identity, democracy, and societal resilience, particularly in the context of today's evolving security challenges. It is essential that smaller systems and institutions are not placed at a disadvantage by frameworks that do not sufficiently consider their specific contexts.

We also reiterate the importance of full and effective implementation of the quality assurance systems we have jointly developed under the Bologna Process. Estonia does not see the added value of introducing a new cross-institutional quality assurance framework. We believe it will add unnecessary complexity and administrative burden. Instead, we call for a strong institutional approach to quality assurance firmly grounded in the existing tools and frameworks, with national accreditation results automatically recognised when launching joint programmes. This will help to reduce bureaucracy and support the goal of automatic mutual recognition of qualifications.

The ways to further strengthen mutual trust in national quality assurance systems should as well be rigorously tested, the feasibility study to be done not only for the proposed European degree, but also for alternative solutions to achieve the goals. Therefore**, Estonia supports an open and pragmatic approach, without predefining outcomes.** We believe the proposed joint European degree should be explored alongside alternative solutions that promote effective cooperation among higher education institutions, while respecting national contexts. Any new initiative must be inclusive, ensuring that all national systems and higher education institutions — regardless of size — are empowered to participate and benefit from our common measures. Europe's strength lies in its diversity, and the goal must be to build a competitive, cohesive, and future-proof higher education system that benefits all.

Estonia remains committed to a European Higher Education Area based on mutual trust, academic freedom, institutional autonomy, inclusiveness and respect for diversity. These values must continue to guide us as we move forward together.