



# Unleash the power of young experts - unused potential of Bosnia and Herzegovina

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Approximately 90% of diplomas<sup>1</sup> gained outside Bosnia and Herzegovina (further in text: B&H) are still not recognized which means that those people cannot contribute to BiH development through its public sector neither they can continue their education in BiH or contribute to the academic development in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

## Why do we need diploma recognition?

As Bosnia and Herzegovina moves towards EU, the need for recognition of diplomas acquired abroad is accentuated. With an aim to increase work force mobility within EU all members ratified Lisbon strategy and Bologna Process and should implement obligations defined in those documents through its own legal system. Those obligations include establishment of the efficient system of foreign diploma recognition. The Lisbon convention, precisely states that this process of foreign diploma recognition should be simplified and inexpensive in order to facilitate diploma recognition and promote student force and therefore the labor force mobility.

However, beside obligations toward EU, Bosnia and Herzegovina should establish the efficient system for foreign diploma recognition for its own benefit. A number of European Countries search for experts and students that completed highly valued schools in order to use their

knowledge in support to its respective countries development. A number of Bosnia and Herzegovina citizens return to BiH after they gained diplomas from worldly recognised schools and that number will just increase by time mostly due to large number of scholarships that international community provides for BiH citizens.

By establishment of efficient system for foreign diploma recognition BiH will benefit in the quality of public service and will raise its academic competitiveness. This policy brief addresses reasons for such high percentage of non recognized diplomas in the current policy. The policy brief is based on research conducted in BiH, Republic of Croatia and Republic of Slovenia in autumn 2008 and in it I will present the main weak points in current Bosnia and Herzegovina policy for diploma recognition and the ways to overcome it. More detailed version of this research can be found in policy study: „The process of foreign diploma recognition in Bosnia and Herzegovina - the gap between regulations and practice“.

## Why is it not happening?

### Expensive and long procedure

Currently in Bosnia and Herzegovina the process of recognition of university diplomas acquired at educational institutions outside of the country is significantly impeded if not at a complete stand-

<sup>1</sup>The exact number of people with foreign diplomas who came back to B&H cannot be determined because of inaccurate statistics.



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Example of average number of scholarships for Master Degree available for BiH citizens every year by different governments	
Country	Number
United Kingdom	5 to 10
Italy	7 to 10
Czech Republic	10 to 20
France	3 to 5
Japan	5 to 7
EU for Western Balkan Region	from 150

still. In some of the cases the diplomas obtained at the prestigious university institutions, such as Harvard or Cambridge, are not recognized in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The main reason for such practice is that the current process of diploma recognition is very long and expensive and it can take a year and in some cases a few years.

Nostrification of my Master Diploma from London University at the University of Sarajevo was a 10 month long process costing a 1000 KM (500 Euros) which resulted in awarding me additional undergraduate degree to my existing one instead of an equivalent master degree. When I filed a complaint an official at the Ministry of Education told me that they are working on cases like mine but that there are only two people assigned to the task and they are 8 years behind, and that the appeal process would take years (story from the Wall of Shame, ACIPS)

Another obstacle in the process of foreign diploma recognition is the length of the procedure and the fee that varies from institution to institution, the fee also depends on the level of study for which the diploma recognition is sought. As an illustration of the fee amount, the nostrification process in B&H is in some cases 12 times more expensive<sup>2</sup> than in Croatia and even more than that in Slovenia.

On the other hand, neither the process duration nor the expenses guarantee that the decision at the end of the process will be positive. Diplomas are evaluated on case by case basis and the result is, in most of the cases, uncertain.

### Mismatched policies for recognition of foreign diplomas

The legal framework that currently regulates the nostrification of the diplomas is different in Federation of B&H and in Republic of Srpska. Therefore, the law that still regulates the nostrification and equivalence of foreign diplomas in

Federation of B&H dates from 1988<sup>3</sup> and is still focused on the process of nostrification and not on the process of recognition.

**The nostrification** is acknowledgment of the foreign diploma equivalence with appropriate qualification in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Criteria's for nostrification are system of education of a country where the foreign diploma is issued, curricula, length of the program and other relevant conditions of the educational program.

**The recognition** of the diplomas is formal confirmation of the quality of foreign educational qualification. Criteria for recognition are just level of skills and competences achieved through the program without the comparison of the educational curricula

The legislation in Republic of Srpska is slightly better but should be significantly improved. Republic of Srpska law has been recently changed and the policy in place is mostly taken from Republic of Croatia. But they still have a number of problems.

"We have problems with some interdisciplinary studies done outside Bosnia and Herzegovina as they cannot be compared and equalized with study programs at our University". (Official from the University from Banja Luka)

### A move forward

The state level policy for foreign diploma recognition rely on the Framework Law on Higher Education which was adopted in July 2007 and it defines the establishment of Center for Information and Recognition of Foreign Diplomas (CIP). From now on the current practices are supposed to be changed with establishment of CIP. However, the law is ambiguous in regard to the role and jurisdiction of CIP and it is not clear if the CIP should issue the recognition document or just a recommendation document for

<sup>2</sup> The average price for nostrification of master level diploma in Bosnia and Herzegovina is 1500KM (750 euros) and in Croatia is 400 Kn (60 euros)

<sup>3</sup> The Law on Nostrification and Equalization of Foreign Diplomas (Official Gazzete of SR B&H 7/88)

Country	length of procedure	average fee for recognition of foreign diploma	available information about the procedure on ENIC web site
Republic of Croatia	3 months	65 Euros	yes
Republic of Slovenia	2 months	up to 17,63 Euros	yes
Bosnia and Herzegovina	2 months to few years	100-800 Euros	no



the recognition of the diploma. Therefore, the final decision to accept the recognition would remain with the Ministries of Education of the RS and Federation, and cantonal and Brcko district Ministries of Education.<sup>4</sup> Following the current practice with extreme long and expensive procedure<sup>5</sup>, issuing recommendations and opinions without actual obligation toward final objective (which is recognition of diplomas) can only contribute to the enlargement of the bureaucratic apparatus in B&H and does not guarantee the achievement of set objectives. Such ambiguous policy is even more unclear since the strategy behind the functionality of CIP and the corresponding guideline policy still do not exist.

### Main obstacles in the policy for foreign diploma recognition

There are several main issues that have been identified through research, interviews with officials in Bosnia and Herzegovina, analysis of existing legislation and comparative analysis of related policies in Republic of Croatia and Republic of Slovenia.

### What should we do about it?

Development of adequate policy necessary for proper functioning of CIP after as well as clear determination of its responsibilities and its functional policy is important. CIP should be the body that informs all relevant stakeholders and

<sup>4</sup> Chevening Alumni B&H, "Analysis of the Newly Adopted BH Framework Law on Higher Education", September 2007

<sup>5</sup> Chevening Alumni B&H, „Izveštaj žstudije slučaja“ o trenutnom stanju na terenu bez postojećeg zakona o priznavanju diploma stečenih izvan B&H“, 2007

Issue	Practice in Republic of Croatia and Republic of Slovenia
Location of CIP and the Agency for development of higher education and quality assurance are in different cities	Experiences from Republic of Croatia show that the cooperation between those institutions are very important and that they often work on the same cases but just at different part of the process.
Terms "process of recognition and nostrification of foreign diplomas" are not precisely defined	Both of terms are used in Croatian policy and are even more expanded in policy of Republic of Slovenia
Current types of recognition prescribed by B&H legislation, law of Federation of B&H and law of Republic of Srpska are not sufficient for all necessary purposes of recognition.	While Croatia has also two main types of recognition the experience from Slovenia showed that these types should be expanded in order to have functional system in place.
Lack of legislation to support foreign diploma recognition (such as equalization of degrees and determination of the process fee)	Croatian and Slovenian systems have shown that, in order to have a functional system, some additional laws and decisions have to be issued or current legislation has to be amended.

Establishment of the process of foreign diploma recognition	Step	What entitles
	The structure organisation of CIP should be divided to administrative part that deals with coordination of information and a Professional Body	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Professional Body should evaluate foreign higher education qualification in accordance with a certain criteria.</li> <li>Academic Recognition Office/Coordinator shall be established on every university, polytechnics or school of higher education for the purpose of performing professional and administrative work concerning academic recognition of foreign higher education qualifications</li> <li>Central Register of recognized diplomas should be a part of CIP</li> </ul>
	Improved process of the foreign diploma recognition	The process of the foreign diploma recognition should be organized in few stages and optimal duration of the procedure should be three (3) months
	Develop basic criteria for recognition of foreign diplomas	<p>The evaluation should be conducted based on the four basic legal conditions in their entirety for the positive recognition of education, namely that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the certificate was issued upon completion of a state-approved education programme</li> <li>the certificate refers to an official level of education that is available within the state-approved higher education system</li> <li>the education programme is accredited</li> <li>the institution issuing the certificate is accredited</li> </ul>
	Develop types of recognition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Recognition of education with a view to access to further education</li> <li>Recognition of education with a view to access to employment</li> <li>Decision on the use of foreign titles</li> <li>Assessments of certificate and diplomas of Bosnia and Herzegovina.</li> </ul>
	Conduct information and public campaign	It would be necessary to organise the educational seminars and trainings for all stakeholders that would be part of the new process of the recognition of foreign diplomas.



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completed her Master's Degree in Public Policy at King's College London, UK. In her 14 years career she has been working on the development and implementation of public policies in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Western Balkan Region, United Kingdom and Germany supported by international organisations including UNDP, UNIFEM, IPPF -Brussels, DFiD, Save the Children Norway, NDI, Policy Exchange Think Tank London, Arts Council London, European Commission-Brussels, Robert Bosch Stiftung, European Fund for Balkan and others. She has been also working in public sector namely with Court of B&H for War Crimes, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of B&H and Ministries of Education in B&H. Her public policy expertise is related to health, education and environment domains. As an expert she has evaluated project proposals for European Commission in Brussels. She is currently engaged with Council of Ministers of B&H as a consultant and she works as National Public Policy Trainer for UNDP.

public about the process. The consequences would be that universities will keep their function in assessing the diplomas for the purposes of study continuation but the whole process will be coordinating by CIP. The existing pool of university experts will be used for assessment of different diplomas which will reduce potential expenses. This option would create the most efficient system with least sources needed for its implementation.

### How to achieve this policy option

Policy Recommendation: the role of CIP should be coordinating in close cooperation with universities and relevant educational institutions. This policy option is very much dependant on legislation, rules, and procedures that have to be developed to clarify the role of CIP and all steps in the process of foreign diploma recognition. Here are the practical recommendations on how this policy option can be achieved:

### It is all up to us!

The establishment of the process of foreign diplomas recognition in Bosnia and Herzegovina has been postponed for very long time. Bosnia and Herzegovina just loses with this practice. Finally, the Center for Information and Recognition of Documents from the Domain of Higher Education is about to start its work. The positive side of this delay is that we now have number of experiences and lessons learned from our neighboring countries, Republic of Slovenia and Republic of Croatia, who had the same educational system as Bosnia in Herzegovina in recent past. Therefore, their experiences are extremely valuable in development of the Bosnian and Herzegovina policy of foreign diploma recognition. If taken forward presented policy option will make the process of foreign diploma recognition successful, effective and efficient. It is argued that resources are available; however they need to be coordinated and un-locked. By establishment of the successful process of diploma recognition Bosnia and Herzegovina will benefit. The huge power of young experts will be released and will finally have an opportunity to serve Bosnia and Herzegovina on its path of sustainable development.

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