

# ED-AFFICHE

## European Degree Label

### Countries Report



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## ED-AFFICHE – Countries report

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## ED-AFFICHE – Countries report

### 1. Austria

#### **Obstacles**

In Austria, legislation is quite flexible for transnational collaboration. Universities have the flexibility to deal with joint study programmes to a large extent through institutional regulations.

The most difficult item was the diploma format and the issuing thereof, as the obligatory wordings to be mentioned on the diploma in order to be valid in Austria, hamper the delivery of a joint diploma (including “Austrian” text on a joint diploma is problematic for the other partners).

#### **National workshop**

During the national workshop which took part on 11 October 2023, the above limitations concerning the final document (i.e. the joint diploma) were discussed. The Ministry was surprised that this issue hampered the international ambitions of HEIs and **immediately proposed a solution during the workshop.**

According to Austrian legislation, there are two other documents accompanying the diploma (the administrative decision and the master’s certificate). If part of the information on the administrative decision (namely a sentence conferring of the academic degree) is **included in the diploma**, the Ministry considers the law sufficiently followed for the diploma to be legally valid.

As a result of the workshop, the only true obstacle in Austrian legislation was thus resolved pragmatically (without legal changes being necessary) and the item is now color-coded green in the 3.1 Deliverable of ED-AFFICHE.

#### **Follow-up to the national workshop**

As the one true obstacle was tackled during the workshop, no specific follow-up was needed. The Ministry and the HEIs remain in contact should anything else be necessary. In general, the Ministry expressed **willingness to cooperate with the European Commission’s initiatives** and enable their HEIs to be part of those initiatives, as long as they are in line with the Bologna process and respect the principle of subsidiarity and the national competences. They do ask the Commission to paint a clearer picture of the European Degree (Label) first: *“We need more information about this standardized form*



*(set out by the European Commission) in order to be able to answer the question. The principle of subsidiarity must be respected in the field of education. The design of joint degrees has to be based on co-created European criteria, in accordance with the instruments of the Bologna Process. Based on the results of this preparatory work, the Council has to take further decision at each step towards a possible joint degree”.*

## 2. Belgium-Flanders

### **Obstacles**

In Flanders, there are mostly minor obstacles. Art. II.151 and II.261 of the Code on Higher Education stipulate that international joint or double degree programmes that have gone through a European selection process (for example: Erasmus Mundus) are not considered as “new” programmes and as a result do not need initial accreditation. Unlike other Flemish bachelor's and master's degrees, a selection of students on the basis of merits/capacity of the students is allowed for these programmes. **The restrictive Flemish rules on the use of foreign languages in education are (to a certain extent) set aside for these programmes.** Bachelor and master programmes developed within the European Universities Initiative, even though these programmes “as such” have not gone through a European selection process, benefit from the same exemptions, as the context in which they are created (i.e. the European University Alliance) as a whole has gone through a European selection process. The underlying idea between this legislation is that these programmes (or in the case of the European Universities: the context) have already gone through an external reviewing process which guarantees the sufficient quality for the Flemish legislator to ease up some of its own legislation. The obstacles left in the Flemish side are mostly more delicate in nature (democratic access to bachelor and master programmes, tuition fees,...) and thus not easily fixed, or less pressing in nature as **practical solutions can be found by the HEIs** (regulatory framework for students with a lack of study progress, lack of full-credit system which is unfamiliar to most partner-countries,...). That being said, some of those practical solutions are labour-intensive (such as selection of students on the basis of merit/capacity whereas joint strategies on curriculum design require a clear view of the exact number of students that will be studying in a specific track at a specific university) so that the request for legal reform by the HEIs remains.



### **National workshop**

A national workshop was organized with a representative of the ministry on 29 November 2023. As the national workshop took place after the ED-AFFICHE mid-term event on 22 November 2023, this created the opportunity to talk in an informed way not only on the specific obstacles in Flemish legislation for the design and implementation of joint programmes, but also on possible strategies to overcome them, including the possibility of integrating the concept of the European Degree in Flemish legislation.

Overall, the attitude of the Flemish legislator is constructive towards the initiatives of the European Commission. The fact that there is currently a **sandbox in Flemish legislation for programmes created within European University Alliances** and for programmes that have gotten competitive European funding is a living proof thereof. In response to the survey sent to the ministries (see methodology of deliverable 3.1), a similar **constructive attitude was shown towards internationalization of higher education**. The representative of the ministry stated that, *“as ministry they enhance and support all forms of cooperation between Flemish HEI and 'foreign HEIs'. Joint programmes and degrees will enhance the internationalization of programmes. They will create opportunities for students and staff, to exchange, to learn (and to live) together, to join forces (e.g. research projects)”*.

That being said, the workshop did not immediately result in legislative changes or proposals for legislative changes. There are a number of reasons for this:

- On the one hand, the court-specific obstacle list showed that many legal obstacles in Flanders had already been removed in the past.
- On the other hand, the representative of the ministry expressed a concern about the number of sandboxes that are currently in place in the Flemish legislation. Adding the European Degree as a new sandbox is feasible, although the ministry questioned as well if a more sustainable route was needed in which international collaboration in higher education as a whole would be the object of new legislation specifically tailored to the needs of this international environment.
- In their replies to the survey, the Flemish ministry also mentioned that it was currently unclear which legal changes, if any, would be needed for the European Degree if this concept would be



integrated in the current legislation. It depends on the concrete definition and the concrete requirements/criteria that will eventually be chosen for the European Degree, whether or not legal changes are needed. The presumption of the ministry at this point is that, if a European Degree Label would be introduced in Flemish legislation, only minor changes would probably be needed. For the European Degree as a qualification, the response was less clear. **As for the expected verification method for the European Degree (label or qualification), the ministry foresees no real obstacles.** The European Approach is possible in Belgium (even obligatory for the accreditation of joint programmes) and the attitude of the ministry is positive towards it: it improves the quality of joint degrees, and it reduces the work and cost for those who want to organize a joint degree.

### ***Follow-up to the national workshop***

Given the upcoming election in Flanders (June 2024) and the possible change of government at that time, a legal change that would entail moving from sandboxes to sustainable legislation for international collaboration in education as a whole was no longer feasible while this cabinet is in power. The agreement was therefore made that the universities present during the meeting would present their recommendations to the European Commission within their respective pilot projects. Both the ministries and the universities would then await the communication/recommendation on the European Degree. A redrafting of the Flemish legislation on higher education right before such a communication/recommendation is to be issued, was considered premature by most of the participants. All Flemish universities are connected to a working group (VLIR), which is the ideal vessel to continue to communicate between each other on this matter.

### 3. Croatia

#### ***Obstacles***

For Croatia, legal expert reported there were no major obstacles stemming from national legislation regarding transnational joint programmes. In fact, new legislation (2022) removed some of the possible obstacles and, for example, made issuing joint diplomas possible. The New Act on Quality Assurance in Higher Education and Research was introduced to facilitate the accreditation procedure, and the European Approach is fully recognized.



The only small obstacle that was reported back from Croatia was that the high amount of workload and coordination was required when designing joint courses in order to harmonize different academic calendars with partners in the consortium. Any other minor hurdles are a result of different procedures and practices in use at different HEIs.

During the follow-up meeting in January 2024, it was confirmed that in general, Croatian legislation is flexible for joint programmes, and that European Approach can be used, however it is perceived as a costly endeavor.

## 4. Cyprus

### **Obstacles**

The Cypriot legal expert has noted a hurdle concerning accreditation. Specifically, the Cyprus Quality Assurance Agency mandates that they conduct the initial evaluation and accreditation for all programmes.

Another deterrent for students considering studying in Cyprus is the language barrier. Presently, public universities are only permitted to offer first-cycle degrees in Greek according to current legislation. However, at the moment of the consultation, the Department of Higher Education within the Cyprus Ministry of Education, Culture, Sport and Youth has submitted a regulatory proposal to the House of Parliament to address this issue, which is still being deliberated. On the other hand, private universities and institutions of higher education have the flexibility to provide first-cycle degrees in English, making them more appealing for issuing joint degrees.

The representative of the ministry who responded to the ED-AFFICHE questionnaire states that there is the willingness in the Cyprus Government and the Cyprus Ministry of Education, Sport and Youth to remove any obstacles (especially legal ones) and adopt the recommendations of the Council of Europe and the Bologna tools of the European Higher Education Area regarding joint degrees.

This is also shown by the recent developments in the **Cypriote legislation concerning higher education**:

1. **Qualification framework for bachelors:** Traditionally, bachelor's degrees in Cyprus have a duration of four years, while in many other countries, they typically last three years. However,





in February 2023, an amendment was made to allow universities that are part of an alliance to offer bachelor's programmes lasting three years.

2. **Qualification recognition:** The Cypriot Quality Assurance agency has implemented a special policy. If a programme is accredited by the European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR), it is also recognized in Cyprus.

When a new joint programme is established outside of a European University Alliance, it undergoes evaluation at the national level. The **programme must demonstrate its added value** in the respective discipline. To facilitate this evaluation, a committee is established by the Cypriot QA agency, which assesses the programme and determines its feasibility.

#### ***Follow-up to national workshop***

No further developments.

## 5. Czech Republic

### **Obstacles**

Czech legislation is very brief in terms of addressing joint programmes per se. It opens the possibility to conduct them, sets the requirement to do so only on the basis of a valid agreement, and lists several ranges of topics that are usually covered in it. It also allows Czech HEIs to bestow academic titles to the graduates these programmes and last but not least it demands that appropriate identification of the collaborating HEIs is listed either on the diploma itself or in the diploma supplement. What it does not do, however, is defining exemptions for these programmes from standard formal procedures that all regular study programmes have to follow. Therefore, **all the legal obligations that apply to regular domestic study programmes are naturally also applicable to the transnational ones**. This generates all kinds of complicated situations, most of which are connected to the formalities that are usually solved in person by the students (most notably enrolment/registration and all procedures that require signature or limited timelines). Overall, the legislation can be considered as very open in terms of concepts, but could benefit from introducing more “sandbox” areas (elaborated in this document as one of the possible solutions) as well as possible “deregulation” approach once meeting certain criteria (the European Degree criteria for instance or receiving Erasmus Mundus support).



## National workshop

Because of the close connection established even before the ED-AFFICHE project officially started, the first meeting took place already on 8 June 2023 and included Vice-Rector for Quality of Education and Accreditations, Member of the Rector's Board for 4EU+ alliance among others. The meeting was dedicated to the introduction of the activities planned for the following year and identifying possible points of convergence where both institutions could join forces to address them. Following this meeting, the legal obstacles were prepared by CU and commented on by the employees of the Ministry.

Another follow-up workshop happened on 26 September 2023, and its aim was to further discuss concrete legal obstacles identified earlier, this time possibly also addressing the question of **how to introduce the European Degree brand into the legislation**. The main result was the following proposition: since to update the legislation is a lengthy process (conditioned by political support and complex process of validation), more practical and easily implemented solution was discussed – to **introduce the criteria and possibly also the affiliated designs in the form of an internal ministerial guideline**. The most significant advantage of this solution is that it could be adopted very quickly, still serve as a binding norm, but could fall solely into the competency of the ministry to further adapt it once it would be approved. Since the concrete criteria (at this point still a work in progress) could, after being finalized, still develop, this approach could serve as very practical yet easily modifiable baseline of codification.

## Follow-up to the national workshop

Another national workshop is expected to happen in the first half of 2024, aligning with the planned communication of the EC on the topic of European Degree. The expected contents are twofold: First, to **draw from the expertise collected in the ED-AFFICHE consortium** and address the state of the legislation, namely progress with the solution – ministerial internal guideline – described above. Second, to analyze the communication of the EC and to find a common position on the issue to be developed after the ED-AFFICHE project concludes. Since it is the Ministry that also provides funding attached to the European University alliances, it makes sense to deliberate as to which place should the European Degree initiative occupy in terms of national regulation – both initiatives are part of the



European strategy for universities as flagships. For that matter, workshop with National Accreditation Bureau is also planned as the criteria (in their content) predominantly belong into quality environment. It is therefore envisaged that while the Ministry would oversee the concept as such (in terms of codification), the Accreditation Bureau could on the other hand focus on the verification part of the procedure, which would necessitate a process during which the resulting set of criteria (which as of now is still to be provided by the EC) could be embedded into the internal milieu of the institution. This meeting is also planned to occur during the first half of 2024.

## 6. Denmark

### **Obstacles**

Legal expert and national contact point from Denmark reported that the Danish Ministry is well aware of the legal context surrounding transnational joint programmes. It is important to note that for Denmark, the primary obstacles do not lie within the legal framework, which is already somewhat **flexible** and have fully embedded the option of awarding joint degree as part of a joint programme. Rather, the issues stem from the call-/tender regulations disseminated by the European Commission as part of Erasmus Mundus Joint Master programmes. Legal hurdles specified in this regard include the accreditation of new Erasmus Mundus Joint Master programmes – as the academic profile of such programmes must be documented to **address demands of the national labour market**. It is not sufficient to provide a needs analysis of the European/international labour market. An additional obstacle regarding translational cooperation is that **the option of “online mobility” is not recognized by the Danish legislation**, even though this type of learning mobility is common in joint programmes. There are also strict **regulations regarding timing of issuing certificates/diplomas**: the university must issue the degree certificate within a maximum of 2 months upon students passing the final exam/graduation. In three other areas legal challenges have been reported from Denmark as noticeable and cumbersome when implementing joint programmes:

- Teaching in a foreign language is possible only in English, no other language.
- Accreditation of programmes in medicine, veterinarian medicine, dentistry and pharmacy is strictly regulated; programmes must meet the requirements in the recognition directive.



- Tuition fees: national regulation makes it mandatory for Danish universities to charge tuition fee from non-EU citizens. For EU-citizens the HE is free of charge. The solution implemented usually is to charge non-EU students while maintaining the joint programme free of charge for EU-students. For international partners, this is not always easy to accept that access to the programme is free for EU-citizens, if their own country does not entail such a rule.

It is worth noticing that overall, national context and approach is equally important. Although joint degrees are recognized in national legislation and European Approach is possible in Denmark, they are not perceived as something worth pursuing.

### ***National workshop***

Meeting with the Danish ministry took place on 20 September 2023. All attendants were in agreement that the legal issues remaining in the Danish context are as registered by the legal expert and national contact point, which were submitted to the ED-AFFICHE WP3 coordinators. As such, the challenges are not perceived as having roots in legislation in the Danish setting. It has much more to do with cumbersome procedures and systems, some of which stem from EU regulations.

During the workshop it was clear that participants have been somewhat skeptical towards the joint degree delivery criterion (European Degree Label criteria). It was perceived as redundant (joint degree and the label) and nothing with added value which cannot be (and is) equally effectively addressed by Member States (in the form of existing HEI certificates issued as double/multiple degrees).

From participants with some experience in the delivery of joint degrees it comes across as difficult to justify the administrative inconveniences when compared to any “added value” it may bring along – regarded primarily as symbolic.

### ***Follow-up to the national workshop***

A follow-up meeting was scheduled between ED-AFFICHE WP3 coordinators and Danish national contact point for 19 January 2024. The limited enthusiasm regarding the European Degree Label from institutions, rather than the government, still prevailed. Regarding the communication between Danish HEIs and the government, there are frequent interactions occurring at least once a year. Many



issues have already been addressed, but some regulations remain unresolved due to an easy circumvention.

The concept of joint degrees still is deemed as more political than practical, particularly regarding differences between joint and national degrees. European Degree and European Degree Label are still questioned as to whether they are necessary, make sense, bring added value, and whether or not they may add more complexity rather than reduce it. Danish government has a rather distanced stance on the European Degree (Label), delegating decisions to the HEIs themselves. Should the initiative materialize the Danish government would expectedly support national accreditation agencies within EQAR to be given the mandate to issue the label, rather than the European Commission. They advocate for guidelines produced at the EQAR level.

In order for the European Degree Label to work administration of different institutions conducting joint programmes must be aligned. One important consideration is the significance of a common design of certificates to mitigate arbitrariness. Regardless of where or by whom it is awarded, consistency in design is crucial. Even if decisions are made by national agencies, the appearance should remain uniform.

## 7. Finland

### **Obstacles**

From a legal standpoint, Finland demonstrates a **high level of flexibility**, allowing for different interpretations of laws pertaining to joint master's programmes. However, bachelor's programmes can present challenges, particularly regarding student selection, as practices may vary among different countries. Despite the high level of flexibility, there were some areas where legal challenges were reported.

There is a question of whether a student can be certified by the Finnish university if they have never attended any classes at that particular institution. Some countries require that the joint degree title is only awarded to students who have actually **studied in the specific country and institution physically** or at least taken courses of that institution online. In Finland, as depends on the number of degrees



awarded, awarding a joint degree to students who study in the joint degree programme, but did not undertake (physical) mobility to Finland, is delicate.

Additionally, Finnish universities seek a **clear differentiation between a degree and a diploma**, which is not explicitly addressed by the European Commission. Consequently, there is a need to determine who holds responsibility for issuing the diploma and who is accountable for the degree. It was clear from report given by Finnish national contact point that from their perspective, programmes and parchments can be "joint", but a degree is always associated with a single institution.

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Many countries **report obstacles concerning language proficiency requirements**. Finnish law also regulates that, but, typically, these regulations do not extend to joint programmes taught in languages other than Finnish or Swedish, and some of those regulations are left to internal decisions of particular HEI. Finnish HEIs can have English-taught programmes provided that they offer Finnish language programme(s) within the same discipline. HEIs in Finland are not allowed to de-enroll students, and they cannot enforce disciplinary decisions that are not in line with national legislation. For example, it is not legally possible to permanently expel students as a disciplinary measure.

Legal barriers concerning **tuition fees** have been noticeable as well. It is not legally permitted to collect fees from EU and EEC students, nor can HEIs claim the revenue for the tuition fees of non-fees-liable students that is paid to the programme coordinator, which is not in line with other countries' regulations (HEIs can, however, participate in joint programmes that do collect fees, they just cannot collect fees paid by students who are not fees-liable by Finnish law). Moreover, In Finland, HEIs are obliged by law to collect fees from non-EU/EEA students (and students with certain residence permits).

Finland, as well as majority of European countries, reports that there are **restrictions regarding regulated professions** (respective ministries regulate the professions that fall under their jurisdiction).

### ***National workshop***

During the national workshop on 2 October 2023, questions pertaining to competences in matters related to education were discussed and some doubt arose whether member states will limit their prerogatives in this area. As to the introduction of European Degree, **a view of employers and relation to labour market is crucial for Finnish authorities and HEIs.**



Some of the legal obstacles identified for ED-AFFICHE WP3 were tackled during national workshop, e.g. the practice of awarding a degree from a Finnish HEI to all students graduating from a joint programme, irrespective of the fact whether the student has completed any - or a significant part - of their studies at the Finnish HEI in question. The issuing of degrees is related to the Finnish higher education funding system, where one of the performance criteria is the number of degrees awarded. This question will most likely be taken up in the discussions around the **revision of the funding model currently taking place in Finland**.

One obstacle related to the admission of students was discussed. As Finnish institutions practice numerous clauses in all of their programmes, if a Finnish HEI was to be the admitting institution in a programme, it would have to have a defined number of open positions together with admission criteria with which students are rated and either admitted to the programme or rejected. For the time being, the solution is to **follow the rules and regulations of the HEI responsible for the admission process**. But the question remains whether the Finnish system would be acceptable to institutions where there is no numerous clauses. Such restriction when admitting students is not only applicable in Finland.

#### ***Follow-up to the national workshop***

During a meeting with Finnish national contact point for ED-AFFICHE, it was reported that while there are no concrete developments in the area of legal obstacles concerning joint programmes, Finnish HEIs have received insights from the ministry regarding issues related to EU alliances and the European Degree Label. In January 2024, the ministry addressed Finnish Higher Education Institutions involved in alliances, emphasizing that **nearly half of Finnish HEIs are engaged in EU alliances**, exerting at least an indirect influence on higher education in Finland.

Regarding EU alliances and joint degrees, the ministry acknowledged ongoing activities within alliance frameworks. Simultaneously, they highlighted that legal competencies concerning education reside primarily with member states, a point reiterated consistently. While no legal changes are imminent, there is **acknowledgment and recognition of these initiatives**.

An ad-hoc working group has been proposed to discuss EU alliances, with joint degrees likely a focal point of discussion among universities.





There's concern regarding proposed legislation related to joint programmes, particularly the requirement that **tuition fees** cover the full cost of education, which may not fully account for the specific circumstances of joint degrees. Efforts are underway to address this discrepancy.

Issues such as awarding degrees to individuals who haven't physically attended the university raise funding-related concerns. The responsibility for awarding degrees lies with the faculty, and there's recognition of the need for nuanced financing models to accommodate joint programmes adequately.

## 8. France

### **Obstacles**

In France, the main obstacles detected were:

- A joint degree (for national diploma) cannot be issued by a French HEI if the latter is not coordinator of the programme;
- A (national) diploma cannot be issued if it is not printed by the **national publishing house**;
- **Tuition fees** are determined in legislation for (national) degrees;
- Selection for students at bachelor level is not feasible for (national) degrees.

As joint degrees abide by the same rules as national diplomas (as they must be valid in France) the above obstacles hamper the design and delivery of joint degrees. Mostly, French HEIs thus refrain from being part of joint programmes and only engage in double/multiple degrees with an **additional certificate given to the student to communicate the jointness of the programme** if the programme was joint in nature (cfr. opening statement in the report of the national workshop).

Specific (flexible) legislation to support HEIs involved in European University alliances is not in place in France.

### **National workshop**

A national workshop was held on 24 October 2023 to discuss the obstacles in the French legislation. Apart from the Ministry of Higher Education and research and 4 French universities (all part of the Ed-





AFFICHE consortium), Hcéres, the French quality assurance and accreditation agency, was also represented during the workshop.

In the consultation, the criteria for the European Degree (initial criteria list of the Commission communicated at the beginning of the pilot projects) were discussed (see WP 4.2).

As for legal obstacles, the participants agreed that a **change in legislation was needed for criterium no. 2 (joint degree)**, which was indeed obvious from the ED-AFFICHE 3.1 obstacle list where this item was color-coded red. If the European Approach is to be used for national diplomas, strengthening the regulatory framework will also be necessary. In addition, the Ministry acknowledged that the **development of the European University Alliance Initiative was beyond expectations**. The HEIs stressed they needed more flexible legislation to be able to play a full role in their respective alliances. The Ministry promised to organize a forum to better understand the alliances' needs and investigate such changes.

#### ***Follow-up to the national workshop***

A manifesto was drafted by the HEIs and handed over to the government establishing their needs and position on joint programmes. Legal changes have however not happened yet, partially also because of changes in the government (staff) involved.

Discussions are still being organised between HEIs and government officials. A new meeting with ED-AFFICHE members and the ministry took place on 9 January 2024. A subsequent seminar took place in France on 22 February 2024, involving representatives from all French alliances. The purpose of this seminar is **to address obstacles identified within the ED-AFFICHE project through roundtable discussions focusing on specific topics**.

Overall, the preferred way forward for the Ministry appears **not to amend the law for national diplomas, but instead, to explore more flexibility for specific types of (newly created) university diplomas instead**. The idea is to make these alternatives as flexible as possible while maintaining recognition at the same level as national diplomas. To contextualize this approach: in France, a **distinction exists between university and national diplomas**. With such university diplomas, the



presumption is that there can be a greater flexibility to accommodate European degree programmes. A university diploma is not necessarily considered less favorably than a national diploma by students or employers, although **the reputation of university issuing the university diploma is relevant**.

A last important remark is that during these follow-up sessions to discuss the national obstacles, the French Ministry showed interest **into the experiences of other countries**, researching if, and how, they accommodated joint degrees or European University Alliances. A possibility that they will align themselves with the position of other countries is not inconceivable, although it remains essential then **to disseminate the information between member states** how some of them have amended legislation to help HEIs in developing joint programmes.

## 9. Germany

Three German Länder are part of the ED-AFFICHE consortium. As higher education is a competence for the Länder, this means that a single list of legal obstacles for the country cannot be designed. As a whole, the German educational legal landscape is not dissuasive towards international collaboration in higher education. Difficulties such as diverging legislation on tuition fees or diverging accreditation contexts (institutional versus programme-bases) make such **collaboration often quite challenging**.

In general, the attitude of the respective ministries is to wait for the **European Commission to come with a clear proposition**, before any amendments to the law are discussed.

In response to the survey sent out, the Ministry of Baden-Württemberg did note however that they supports HEIs in developing joint programmes. They also acknowledge that it is clear that setting up joint programmes and joint degrees is a challenging endeavor for universities. If they engage in it, they might expect an increase of both international visibility and quality in research and education. The Ministry made it clear that taking into **consideration the university's autonomy** is crucial however while designing legislation to support HEIs in this endeavor.

During an online meeting with some members of the ED-AFFICHE full and associated partners on 20 February 2024, this concern was raised again both by the Ministry of B-W and the University of Heidelberg. Both for the content of the curriculum and for the procedures for quality assurance and accreditation, a concern was voiced to be **aware for political interference in matters that should**



**essentially remain under the autonomy of the universities.** In the survey sent out to the ministries, the Ministry of B-W added: *“We generally support our HEIs in further developing their European and international activities, but we do not indicate a specific direction nor do we push our HEIs to issuing joint degrees rather than double degrees or setting up specific joint programmes”.*

## 10. Greece

### **Obstacles**

The legal framework for joint programmes is set by law 4957/2022, which gives Greek HEIs the right to **organize joint programmes and to award joint degrees together with recognized foreign institutions.**

The evaluation of these programmes lies within the responsibility of the Hellenic Authority for Higher Education (HAHE), according to law 4957/2022, art.101, par. 4. However, a Greek HEI may seek the evaluation services of a foreign Quality Assurance Agency, accredited by HAHE (Law 4653/2020, art. 8, par. 1c).

Moreover, all programmes of the European University Alliance initiative, in which Greek HEIs participate, are **accredited according to the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes**, without applying any additional national criteria. In case a joint programme of a European University alliance is already accredited by a foreign quality assurance agency member of the ENQA, no further accreditation is needed (law 4957/2022, art. 111, par.3). Although positive changes have been made with regards to transnational collaboration, the legislation seems to remain **rigid for programmes outside European University alliances.**

Despite Greek legislation explicitly endorsing the European Approach for accrediting joint programmes, **automatic recognition is not guaranteed in Greece.** The HAHE demands a comprehensive submission of documentation, both in English and Greek, for every joint programme, disregarding the legislative provision for automatic recognition. This requirement poses a significant hurdle in the accreditation process, necessitating **extensive effort to compile and submit numerous documents** to HAHE.



HAHE's insistence on manual submission overlooks both the concept of automatic recognition and the institution's status as a European University, despite legal provisions permitting such recognition. An illustrative case is the Joint Master Programme in Marine Biotechnology developed by the Agricultural University of Athens within the EU-CONEXUS Alliance. This programme attained accreditation through the European Approach and received funding from Erasmus Mundus. Despite having official approval from the Government Gazette (FEK) for the joint master, HAHE mandates the submission of a new dossier containing numerous documents in both English and Greek.

Furthermore, HAHE places significant emphasis on assessing the quality assurance and policy frameworks of each department involved in the joint programme. Consequently, while there are no legal barriers to automatic recognition, HAHE's procedural requirements significantly escalate the workload for achieving accreditation in any joint programme at the national level.

### ***National workshop***

The national workshop in Greece took place on 19 October 2023 and showed that there is willingness from the authority to give more flexibility to joint programmes, but their law is still very much favorable only for those universities which are part of an European University alliance. In the national workshop, participants focused on the existing law 4957/2022, Article 111 about the organization and operation of Joint International Interinstitutional Study Programmes.

- Concerning the limitation in terms of duration of studies, it has been approved that HEIs that participate in European University Alliances may establish, organise and operate Joint International Interinstitutional Study Programmes of short duration of first, second and third educational cycle.
- Matters related to the definition and the process of appointing the administrative bodies, the administrative processes, and the organization of these programmes are freely regulated by the cooperating Institutions participating in the alliance, without restrictions from the provisions of this law.
- First, second and third educational cycle joint programmes, in which Greek HEIs are included, may be certified by the National Higher Education Authority. During their certification, the quality standards of the European Higher Education Area are applied, in accordance with the



European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes. National Certification is not required for joint programmes, in which Greek HEIs are included, as long as they have been certified by any European Certification Authority, member of EQAR.

- Students of first educational cycle study programmes may choose courses or other educational activities provided within the framework of first cycle or short duration joint programmes, in which their HEI participates, in addition to the obligations deriving from the study programme they are enrolled in. Upon the student's request, the successful evaluation in courses or other educational activities may be recognized and counted as part of the required ECTS for successful degree completion, based on the ECTS appointed to each educational activity or course.

### ***After the national workshop***

Currently, universities are **joining forces to create a document to ask clarifications on the flexibility in legislations for joint programmes not provided by European University alliances, demand for funding** (at the moment there are some differences among universities, the ones part of an alliance receive both, national and European funding)

The Greek ministry's responsiveness towards ED-AFFICHE shows eagerness to work on the legislation if the request is coming from the universities.

## 11. Hungary

### ***Obstacles***

It has been acknowledged that thank to the participation of Hungarian HEI in EU alliance, some of the obstacles at the national level have been resolved, although certain challenges persist.

Since July 2020, joint programmes funded by the European Union, the Visegrad Fund, or the Central European Higher Education Exchange Programme are no longer required to adhere to the regulation stating that one-third of the programme's credits must be earned at a specific major within the Hungarian higher education institution. Moreover, it is essential to note that for international joint degrees, the European Approach must be considered during the quality assurance procedure evaluation.



Starting from December 2022, based on changes that began implementation in 2020, Hungarian HEIs have been granted significant authority in establishing and initiating new degree programmes. The law was changed as well to accommodate the accreditation process. Initially, the decree had a limited list of degree titles, which was difficult in an international setting when a common degree title needed to be chosen. The new law makes the list of degree titles open-ended. New degree titles at second cycle level can now be established after the accreditation procedure, making it easier for partner universities from different countries to set up a second cycle degree that works for all of them.

Some of the other obstacles stemming from national legislation persist, like regulation regarding the format of the diploma – it may not be issued only electronically, it must have a paper form. New programmes have to be “defined” by a ministerial decree. To establish a new programme the decree needs to be amended. HEIs can establish new second cycle degree programmes not included in the mentioned decree, however the accreditation procedure must be completed within 3 years. Other obstacles are not perceived as cumbersome or are in the middle of change.

During a follow-up interview in January 2024, the University associated member of ED-AFFICHE confirmed the status quo in Hungary.

## 12. Italy

### **Obstacles**

In Italy, every bachelor's and master's degree is assigned a specific “*classe di laurea*” from a predetermined list. Each “*classe*” outlines the educational objectives and includes a table of ECTS credits in various scientific disciplinary areas, each corresponding to related exam subjects. This structure posed challenges for various aspects of the European Degree Label, such as interdisciplinary studies and certain restrictions on degree titles. Additionally, in Italy European Approach for accrediting and evaluating programmes is currently not possible.

Another obstacle concerns the number of exams required to graduate, which has now been limited to a maximum of 20 in Bachelor's programmes and 12 in Master's programmes.

### **National workshop**



The national workshop, organized in the framework of ED-AFFICHE, took place on 6 November 2023 and has been facilitated by the Accreditation Agency (ANVUR). Challenges in applying the European Approach for accreditation due to legislative complexities have been addressed.

The ministry representative showed motivation in supporting regulatory changes to address obstacles for the implementation of joint programmes, to internationalize the Italian educational system and make the university offerings more attractive.

Regarding the introduction of the European degree into national law, it has been expressed openness to the idea, especially if supported by similar position from other countries.

### ***Follow-up to the national workshop***

On 19 December 2023 two ministry decrees were approved (No. 1648 and No. 1649), signaling significant changes in the educational landscape. One notable revision pertained to the “classe di laurea”. With the introduction of these decrees, rules have become more adaptable, marked by several key enhancements:

- Increased Interdisciplinarity;
- Curriculum Flexibility – students now have more autonomy in structuring their academic paths;
- Simplified procedures for acknowledging credits earned from different degree classes.

Furthermore, the official recognition of extracurricular activities, including open badges and microcredentials, has been established. However, it's important to note that these changes will require a period of two academic years for internal implementation within the universities.

The ED-AFFICHE consortium observed openness in the Italian landscape, in which authorities even seem to be more open on the actual European Degree than the label. In this regard and to facilitate transnational collaboration among universities it has been signaled to the ED-AFFICHE team the forthcoming platform for international educational agreements developed in collaboration between the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, expected to benefit from pilot projects on the European Degree Label.

This openness appears to extend to the adoption of the European Approach as well. The Italian quality and accreditation agency has submitted an application in 2023 to the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR).





## 13. Lithuania

### **Obstacles**

In 2020, a meeting took place between universities that are members of European University alliances and national authorities, however, no changes were implemented. In 2023 the number of Lithuanian universities joining the alliances increased by three, bringing the total to eight in the country. This development has created a **favorable environment for change** and there are already meetings planned between HEIs and authorities.

Lithuanian experts report several obstacles stemming from national regulations. Some of them pertain **to difficulties with conducting interdisciplinary programmes**, e.g. a joint degree is awarded for one discipline only<sup>1</sup>. There is no clarity on what a joint degree or a joint diploma would look like in an interdisciplinary programme. The current regulation of interdisciplinary studies does not reflect the main principles of interdisciplinary studies: programmes are assigned to one main (dominant) field, which must meet the requirements set in the description of the field (and takes 50% of the credits at least), according to which evaluation is carried out and funding is allocated. Lithuania also reports indirect obstacles through **language proficiency requirements** as well as strict requirement regarding **physical mobility**: a significant part of the joint programme must be conducted on the basis of academic physical mobility, during which physical mobility of students is mandatory. There are also regulations regarding **enrolment and selection of students**, e.g. specific admission criteria and admission commission. If the programme was joint and a Lithuanian HEI was responsible for admission, then there are specific rules for the admission of EU citizens which make a joint consortium admission impossible (the process is centralized and anonymous).

### **National workshop**

Meeting with national authorities took place on 3 October 2023. Several items reported to ED-AFFICHE WP3 team as obstacles stemming from national regulations were addressed, e.g.:

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<sup>1</sup>An exception may be made for international joint study programmes that do not meet the classification of Lithuanian studies. After obtaining the permission of the Ministry of Education, Science and Sports, the degree of interdisciplinary studies is issued. However, each field of that programme must meet the programme structure and content requirements as for the major.





- Accreditation (criteria, procedure, time frame) of the programmes

The **European Approach** has some limitations in Lithuania. If the programme has received European accreditation, national accreditation is not required, but approval can be given only in case if the programme meets national requirements, and the university already runs an accredited study programme in the same study field. If the joint study programme field is not implemented by this particular HEI, then full accreditation is required.

- Restrictive national legislation regarding the possibility to create an **interdisciplinary** degree

From 2023, no more than 3 different fields of study can be combined into one programme. Each field should be accredited separately if HEI does not run an accredited study programme in those fields. Assessing the programme's outcomes can be challenging due to Lithuania's practice of preparing learning outcomes for each field independently. Additionally, it is important to note that these fields are not treated equally; the principal study field must account for 50% of the ECTS. For second cycle level programmes totaling 120 ECTS, this translates to 60 ECTS allocated to the major study field, 30 ECTS dedicated to the final work which can pertain to any field, and the remaining 30 ECTS distributed among two study fields.

- Restrictive national legislation regarding the **necessary components** of the graduation diploma and the joint diploma and graduation rules degree

In Lithuania, the Minister approves the requirements for the diploma. A diploma can be issued for a joint programme if it has an acceptable number (no more than 3) of study directions.

- Recognition of **blended/online learning**

100% remote studies are not allowed, only hybrid ones, when at least 10% of the programme is required to be attended on site.

Regarding European Degree as a qualification, it was perceived by Lithuanian authorities as it is too early to introduce it, because most countries are only monitoring the process until the European Degree system is fully ready for introduction. However, the European Degree Label can be a compromise in the transition to the new European education system.



### ***Follow-up to the national workshop***

During a follow-up interview with national contact point in January 2024, it was made clear that in Lithuania in practice, there are several obstacles still to consider. The minimum requirements currently in place are **not fully aligned with international standards**. Additionally, the aspect of physical presence cannot be diminished. The consortium agreement serves as the primary document for providing evidence such as tuition, admissions, etc.

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When discussing European Degree Label and criteria, it was emphasized as important to note that a joint diploma does not automatically imply exceptional quality assurance. The European dimension holds significant importance, particularly regarding joint commitments within the Bologna process. Academic integrity must be rigorously upheld, with stakeholder involvement being a mandatory criterion. The inclusion of EQAR is essential, ensuring both student participation in external and internal quality assurance processes.

## 14. Poland

### ***Obstacles***

Legal experts from Polish associated partners recognized legal obstacles in developing and conducting international joint programmes within three areas:

1. Awarding joint degrees and issuing joint diplomas – one of the major restrictions visible especially when awarding joint degrees, is that it is restricted by national legislation that titles on the diploma must appear in national languages, e.g. in Poland we can only award title in Polish, so for example for second cycle degree it's magister not Master etc. Strict language regulations also concern the diploma itself, as it is considered a public document, it can only be issued in Polish (original), only a copy of a diploma can be requested in a foreign language. If, in accordance with consortium agreement, a joint diploma would be issued by a Polish HEI, it would, as a rule, be issued in Polish. Copies of such a diploma may be made, but in such a case the name of the university is left in its original wording, and the professional title and the result of graduation - in Polish. It seems like the root of the problem lies in the fact, that the way it is written currently, national legislation regarding issuing diplomas, incl. Joint diplomas, can be interpreted as also regulating those joint degrees/diplomas issued by a foreign university. It



would mean that joint diplomas issued by foreign partner should also adhere to Polish national regulations, which is of course almost impossible. The preferable solution here would be concession for joint programmes (deregulation).

2. Development and accreditation of new joint programmes – each joint programme must always be opened and accredited as a new programme, and procedures are often time-consuming, especially when it comes to making any changes in the curriculum between partners. It is evidence that provisions regarding joint programmes have been designed with only national context in mind. A preferable solution here would be to make a consortium agreement the most important legal basis for regulating most aspects of joint study programmes.
3. Conducting joint programmes – a series of obstacles has been noted related to general context and practices of conducting joint programmes: incompatibility of academic calendars (national legislation in Poland regulates it), strictly defined in legislation length of the programmes and minimum ECTS requirements incompatible with European context – e.g. second-degree programme has minimum three semesters and 90 ECTS credits, therefore conducting a second-degree programme that lasts 1 year and has 60 ECTS is impossible, restrictions on studying remotely (online) and restrictions regarding the necessity of physical stay (a foreign student who studies within the framework of joint programme conducted with a foreign entity should be registered as a student only if they are staying at a Polish university for at least one semester of studies (physical stay), legislation regarding regulated professions (educational standards are strict requirement). Preferable solution here would be – concession for joint programmes (deregulation).

The main challenge observed by legal experts was that the legislation and specific regulations pertaining to joint programmes are not that many and they are not too cumbersome, but they are not designed with international cooperation in mind, therefore the legal context is purely national. Mostly, joint programmes should follow the same rules as national study programmes, with some exceptions. The most eminent example of a concession made in national legislation for joint programmes, which clearly demonstrates that such a solution does indeed work and addresses the issue, is the exclusion of joint programmes from the strict requirements regarding the composition of the curriculum. International cooperation requires more flexibility in order to quickly adapt within the same legal



framework. Desired solution is to deregulate (make concessions for international joint programmes in the legislation) and to provide flexibility via consortium agreement. In that way we are avoiding the risk of overregulation, where we would create too many and too specific provisions for just international joint programmes, making international cooperation even more rigid.

### ***National workshop***

A national workshop with representatives from the Ministry of Science and Higher Education took place on 27 October 2023 at the University of Warsaw. Experts from two other associated partners of ED-AFFICHE from Poland – Jagiellonian University and Wrocław University of Science and Technology – were also present on-site and online. Information on legal obstacles, suggestions and arguments from Polish ED-AFFICHE experts were met with great understanding from the representatives of the Ministry, who assured of their full cooperation and readiness to support within their capabilities and to work out best possible solutions within the existing legal framework. Most importantly, a crucial decision was made to continue the established communication on both sides.

One of the most important realizations was made on the **lack of consistent guidance** from the authorities who create the legislation. **Legal regulations do not correspond to the practice** and the experience of HEIs conducting joint programmes. It was made very clear that the goal is **to make the approach more flexible and exempt joint programmes from certain regulations** that render such cooperation more rigid or impossible. Representatives of the Ministry pointed out that the legal regulations for joint programmes were designed mostly taking into consideration that they would be conducted between Polish HEIs, which is not really the case in practice.

As per the **European Degree** and any possibility to introduce it as a qualification – at the moment it is not possible without changing the national legislation. For a broader context it should also be known which member states are willing to introduce such changes and recognize European Degree. It is more of a political decision on a European level rather than only a subject of an internal discussion.

### ***Follow-up to the national workshop***

As a direct result of the national workshop, Polish ED-AFFICHE team met in Wrocław on 18-19 January 2024. The meeting resulted in a comprehensive and detailed proposal for legislative amendments. A document was prepared with existing provisions from national legislation pertaining to joint



programmes, together with a proposal of the changes in those provisions (concrete wording of the amendments the Polish HEIs would like to include) with a thorough explanation of proposed changes. The document was approved by all three Polish HEIs and submitted officially to the Ministry of Science and Higher Education by Prof. Sławomir Żótek, Vice-Rector for Students and Quality of Teaching at the University of Warsaw, and to the contacts in the Ministry as well. The Polish HEIs are currently awaiting the response.

## 15. Portugal

### **Obstacles**

Portugal has taken steps in the recent past to facilitate the European Approach, which can simplify the accreditation procedure for international joint programmes. At present, the absence of a common national regulation for QA means that each institution decides on the QA on its own. This usually results in redundant work and bureaucracy, while also hindering the provision of consistent and comparable data. In general, in Portugal, it is possible to use the national process for accrediting international joint programmes; however, the lack of specific legislation makes this process rather difficult.

## 16. Romania

### **Obstacles**

In Romania, joint programmes can be **organized and accredited using the European Approach**. However, according to Romanian legal experts, the specific requirements of national legislation must be met during the implementation of a joint programmes. Recently, **new legislation has been implemented in Romania for this area of education, bringing a new and better approach to joint programmes and the issuance of joint degrees**. Romanian legal experts reported that, as part of this adjustment of legislation, the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS) set up a **framework methodology that will define a common procedure for the organization and implementation of joint programmes in Romania**. In practice, therefore, the organization and accreditation of joint programmes will have to adhere to this framework methodology.



It was also reported by the Romanian experts that **interdisciplinary programmes are regulated in the law only for doctoral studies**, lacking regulation for other academic levels. For this reason, there is a reluctance to participate in other levels.

No further significant obstacles regarding the implementation of joint programmes were mentioned, apart from broader challenges faced by the Romanian education sector (such as low salaries for educators and inadequate dormitory facilities).

### ***National workshop***

During the national workshop which took place on 9 October 2023, the representatives of the Ministry of Education, the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS) and the National Centre for Recognition and Equivalence of Diplomas (CNRED) all expressed their **support for the development of joint programmes and joint diplomas**. The representatives of the Ministry of Education also expressed their support for European University Alliances and their interest in actively promoting initiatives associated with them.

The concept of the European Degree and the existing outputs of the ED-AFFICHE project were also discussed; however, further discussions and negotiations were postponed until the mentioned framework methodology for the accreditation of joint programmes is finalized.

## 17. Spain

### ***Obstacles***

In the Spanish context, the diploma **must adhere to the requirements of the royal system**, including the incorporation of Spanish references. Additionally, any substantial modifications to a programme, such as the addition of a new partner, necessitate re-evaluation. Legal experts have also highlighted an issue: the absence of an adequate national framework for financial schemes tailored to mobility initiatives associated with joint programmes featuring extensive mobility components.

In September 2021, Spain enacted a [law regarding the organization of joint programmes](#). Before the end of 2023, the Ministry prepared another regulation that specifically addresses **joint diplomas of European University Alliances**, which includes the potential for a digital diploma. This new Royal Decree is still in the approval process.



Under this legislation, Spanish universities gained much more flexibility, for the design, accreditation and delivery of joint programmes. They are permitted to utilize the **European Approach** accreditation system, and can determine the fees, the academic rules and regulations or the parchment in the Consortium Agreement. The ultimate objective of Spanish universities is to attain this flexibility not only for the alliances but for all universities in the country.

The introduction of this new legislation was made possible by several factors. Starting in January 2020, **regular meetings** between universities and the Ministry have been held every three months. It is worth noting that the Under-secretary of the Ministry of Education at that time previously served as vice-rector at the University of Barcelona during the formation of CHARM-EU, and therefore was well aware of the associated challenges.

Discussions regarding greater **flexibility in doctoral education** are ongoing. Additionally, it is important to consider that elections in Spain are scheduled for 25 July 2024, and the continuity of the current policy is uncertain. In the end of 2023 two ministries related with education were merged and until as of today it is difficult to say how it will affect the dynamics of the legal framework transformation towards European Degree.

### ***National workshop***

The national workshop in Spain took place on 13 November 2023 and in Catalunya on 13 November 2023. Amidst a transition period marked by changes in personnel within the ministry, **maintaining continuity may be challenging**. During the meeting the national authority stressed out that there is the need of a clearer position from European Commission, a rollout roadmap to evaluate the changes needed in the national legislation, because it is difficult to commit to something which is undefined.

The stance of the regional government Catalunya is unequivocal. They have made it clear that if the label results in **providing funding**, they prefer not to take on the responsibility of allocating those funds. Currently, funding allocation is contingent upon the performance metrics of universities.

Turning to the realm of digital innovation, Spain confronts a regulatory barrier. **Electronic parchments are currently not allowed**, although there exists a willingness to forge ahead in this area (the proposal





of Royal Decree has been proposed in the end of 2023- but not approved yet). One proposed strategy involves leveraging **university alliances as a testing ground for the introduction of digital diplomas**.

### *Follow-up to the national workshop*

A notable initiative worth highlighting in Spain is the establishment of a **permanent group of Spanish Universities participating in European Alliances**. This collaborative effort brings together members from European university alliances and representatives from the ministry, with the aim of addressing various needs and requirements within the educational landscape.

In conclusion, significant legal amendments were introduced in Spain in the last few years, favoring joint programme consortiums, especially European Universities Alliances, to develop and accredit joint programmes with the flexibility to come to joint policies through Consortium Agreement. There exists a **proactive stance from the ministry towards cooperation with the European Commission** regarding the European Degree label. This willingness to engage reflects a broader commitment to fostering collaboration and alignment with international standards in education.

## 18. Sweden

### **Obstacles**

In assessing the educational landscape of Sweden, several obstacles can be observed. Chief among these challenges is the legislative **framework prescribing the titles and nomenclatures** which should be included within diplomas. Such regulatory constraints pose significant hurdles, particularly within the dynamic context of joint programmes where adaptability and flexibility are essential.

Compounding these complexities is Sweden's current impossibility on utilizing the **European Approach**, further complicating efforts to harmonize educational practices with broader European standards and potentially impede collaboration and alignment with international partners.

Furthermore, a further obstacle is due to the **tuition fee requirements**. Swedish universities are compelled to ask tuition fees for non-European students pursuing first and second degree programmes, whereas students from EU/EEA countries enjoy exemption from such charges. Moreover, at the PhD level, no tuition fees are permissible.





## National workshop

The online meeting with the Swedish authorities concerned was held on 4 December 2023, under the moderation of the Royal Institute of technology (KTH) with the participation of representatives from the Ministry of Education, The Swedish Council for Higher Education (UHR), and the Swedish Higher Education Authority (UKÄ). Although the development and establishment of international joint programmes is formally allowed, including the award of joint diplomas, the practice of developing this type of programmes is currently not fully exploited by the Swedish HEIs. Swedish HEIs are conferred the **authority to self-accredit their own programmes by law and international joint programme don't represent an exception in this sense**. The fact that international joint programmes based on existing national programmes need to go through a process of accreditation, further reduces the interest from the side of Swedish HEIs to be included in this type of partnerships. For the same reason, UKÄ thinks that **imposing the European Approach to Quality Assurance in Joint Programmes as a mandatory criterion will also be perceived as an unnecessary burden**. The attitude towards the establishment of a joint European degree is very diverse within the country. The Ministry has so far not expressed a clear opinion on the matter, which has also been keeping UKÄ and UHR in a standby position. Nevertheless, while UKÄ seems to be more inclined to favor the creation of a Joint European Degree Label, UHR seems to favor the creation of an actual Joint European Degree as a new qualification as the most attractive option for the Swedish HEIs to see an actual added value. Most HEIs in Sweden seem to have adopted an agnostic position on the matter even if they are closely following the developments.

## *Follow-up to the national workshop*

In June 2024 a **national conference on the EUI will be held in Sweden for the first time since the launch of the initiative**. The target group are the Rectors and Vice Rectors of the Swedish universities and it is possible that one of the results will be a clearer national position also on the Joint European Degree initiative.

## 19. Switzerland

### **Obstacles**



Currently, there are no substantial restrictions in Switzerland that prevent the pursuit of national joint degrees. The Swiss policy regarding the recognition of joint degrees aligns with the European approach. However, the Swiss legal system (respectively the [‘Federal Act on the Promotion of Universities and Coordination in the Swiss Higher Education Sector’](#)) does **not actively regulate how Swiss HEIs could issue international joint degrees**. While legal barriers are expected to be resolved through minor adjustments, implementing a joint programme poses a challenge for Swiss HEIs in terms of administrative, financial, and time restraints. At the student administration level, certain difficulties may arise, considering that Switzerland is not part of EU funding programmes (ERASMUS+) and initiatives.

### ***National workshop***

The national workshop in Switzerland was organized on 25 October 2024. Present were representatives of the State Secretariat for Education, Research, and Innovation (SERI), the University of Zurich (Associated Partner in ED-AFFICHE) and representatives of the University of Geneva. During the workshop, potential benefits and drawbacks of joint programmes for Swiss HEIs were discussed, as well as reasons why Switzerland has not yet issued international joint degrees.

According to workshop participants, this form of collaboration at the European level is highly important for Swiss HEIs because it provides international exposure to students and academic staff, while also being one of the ways to support and offer interdisciplinary studies.

In addition to the obstacles mentioned above, which Swiss HEIs should address together with SERI and the Swiss Agency of Accreditation and Quality Assurance, concerns have been raised, for example, regarding the fact that Swiss students may not be as interested in mobility within Europe. Mobility is also linked to concerns regarding environmental issues and sustainability.

Furthermore, the concept of the European Degree Label (EDL) was debated. Workshop participants agreed that **the EDL is important for Swiss HEIs as it promotes mobility and international cooperation with European universities**. The label, along with associated quality assurance standards, could also contribute to the transparency and quality of joint programmes. Participants also agreed that the EDL could enhance the competitiveness and attractiveness of European HEIs, while recommending its promotion within the private sector among future employers.



## 20. The Netherlands

### **Obstacles**

In general, there are no real legislative obstacles that block Dutch HEIs from being part of a joint programme and delivering a joint degree. Difficulties stem a.o. from their accreditation procedure (additional macro-efficiency check on top of European Approach), financing and management of the joint programme (necessity to create certain bodies such as examination committee ([Artikel 7.12](#)), education committee ([Artikel 9.18](#)) and a faculty council ([Artikel 9.37](#)).

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### **National workshop**

A national workshop was organized on November 3<sup>rd</sup> 2023. Present were the two HEIs within ED-AFFICHE, a representative of the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, and NVAO.

During the workshop, these obstacles were discussed, but the Ministry did not feel the need for changes. They underscored the need for the European Approach to be fully implemented in all partner countries, which would alleviate tensions as the criteria for the European approach can be interpreted in a way to ensure qualitative joint policies (such as the creation of examination regulations and bodies), which would also be sufficient for Dutch law.

On a more general note, the Ministry was interested in the European Degree (Label) but had too many outstanding questions on the concept, criteria and implementation to already form an opinion if the European Degree has enough added value to be integrated in Dutch legislation. They stress that the quality of the joint programmes should be the main driver for change, and are awaiting the results from the pilot projects.

### **Follow-up to the national workshop**

The elections took place in the Netherlands after the workshop, meaning that the current cabinet is no longer allowed to make the type of changes that are necessary for a European Degree (Label) to be integrated in the Dutch legislation. It will be for the next government (not yet in place at the time of writing this deliverable) to form a stance on the European Degree (Label).

